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The New EU-Programme
'Urban_Link Graz-West' (Community Initiative URBAN II)

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a. Introduction

We would like to thank the European Commission and above all the Styria House most warmly for the opportunity of presenting Graz's new URBAN programme as part of this major event.

As mentioned by the Mayor Mr Stingl and Town Councillor Mr Josel, we were already able to gain a great deal of experience during the last Structural Fund period with regard to developing, submitting and implementing EU-assisted urban development programmes, experience which, incidentally, we will be able to make very good use of in another programme under the second URBAN initiative, the DG TREN CIVITAS Initiative Trendsetter programme.

The URBAN_link Graz West programme is currently in the start-up stage of implementation. So much – but by no means all – of what we are going to tell you about today will only be taking shape in several years' time. But the programme already has a two-year history. This is perhaps one of the special features we would like to highlight.

First of all, however, we would like to go back even further and acquaint you briefly with the main historical events that have left their mark of the project area. This is important for an understanding of the content of the programme.

Then, as mentioned just now, we will present the extensive groundwork that preceded the programme.

Next we would like to touch on previous urban development programmes in Graz. These programmes illustrate how significantly the EU has contributed to urban development in Graz since Austria's accession.

And finally, after these rather extended 'starters', we will present the 'main course', Graz's new URBAN programme and some of its highlights. We will try to explain what we feel is so special with regard to the EU's innovation objective.

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b. Graz, 1850

If we look back to the 19th century we see a very rapid development of the city of Graz, particularly as of around 1840. This tremendous expansion was not only in terms of population figures – the number of inhabitants, approx. 50,000, tripled between this date and the end of the century – but also in terms of physical spread and economic significance. In the east of Graz, the location of the historical Old Town and all three universities, this development took place along the more well-ordered lines of urban development plans in the *Gründerzeit* of the late nineteenth century.

In the west of Graz, above all along the newly installed railway line connecting Graz and Vienna, on the other hand, there evolved an extensive belt of industry and commerce. Companies were attracted to set up in the area in the 19th century thanks to the large amount of land available between the then independent municipality of Eggenberg and the city of Graz, and the particularly favourable situation in terms of transport. The factories needed large amounts of raw materials, both for production and energy supply. The main energies, wood, coal and other raw materials, were supplied and delivered by two railway companies, the former K&K Südbahn and Graz Köflacher Bahn. Alongside the prospering factories and business enterprises, the area was also well suited to the Reininghaus brewery that required a lot of land.

As the industrial landscape moved towards heavy industry in the early 20th century and as a result of the influx of workers, the traditional residential areas began to develop in the immediate vicinity of the industrial and commercial plants. Large, as yet vacant areas were used for housing projects in the nineteen-sixties and seventies, but equally so for detached houses and allotment gardens.

Slowly spreading from the original core of settlement around the Eggenbergs' baroque palace, the west of Graz evolved into a production and working-class district. The effect of the work processes came to be the formative influence on the make-up of this area and still is today.

c. The west of Graz in transition. Processes and structures

The change in work processes in the last decades of the twentieth century, and the restructuring of branches of industry in the wake of incipient globalisation trends brought about **stagnation and upheaval** for the west of Graz.

- Large production plants were shut down or relocated increasingly large parts of their facilities to countries with lower wages.
- At the same time, modernised production cycles require less space.
- Rising unemployment, industrial waste land, a lack of urban appeal and public green spaces, pollution caused by poor separation of modes of transport between residential areas and the remaining industrial plants are the results of this change.

These are the factors that are the problem indicators of what is today the URBAN II area.

The **advantages of the area**, on the other hand, were disregarded.

- For example, the west of Graz stands out for its valuable natural spaces in a characteristic link-up of town and country.
- It is directly adjacent to a practically untouched greenbelt recreational area.
- Historically significant buildings and centres provide a good basis for identity building.
- Large unused areas could be used for new developments without conflicting with existing facilities.
- Two railway lines, little used as yet, provide a good link to the rest of the region and give the location extraordinary advantages.

The latent trend towards restructuring also gave rise to many opportunities in recent years. Inspired by the vacant areas no longer needed by industry, land owners, entrepreneurs, citizens and politicians generated a large number of project ideas of varying scale and degrees of implementation. Some of these projects contrasted sharply and competed with each other, the vast majority were in any case exclusively in the partial interest of their promoters. What was missing was an overall view of a viable development of the area as a whole, in relation to existing potentials, the needs of the local inhabitants, and the possibilities of implementation.

Although the city's decision-makers realised that it was necessary to draw up new development objectives and make the necessary decisions, it was not possible in the prevailing circumstances and with the means of local regional planning alone to implement the action required for sustainable development. However, the decision to take advantage of technical colleges, a new institution in Austria, as impetus for development in the west of Graz was a significant step in the right direction.

d. 1999: Communication oriented urban development

Finally, Graz local council passed a resolution in 1999 to implement a new kind of initiative for the west of Graz that went beyond regional planning, in order to develop a holistic concept founded on as broad a consensus as possible. Accordingly, the council commissioned the urban development department with a two-and-a-half-year project for an "urban development initiative for Graz-West".

The aim is ".....comprehensive, networked planning that carefully harmonises and incorporates traffic and general infrastructure, green and recreational spaces, work and business, housing, culture, and further training." The result was also to include a financial estimate and be able to give binding answers in the interest of the city to potential investors and land owners.

Public scepticism towards planned change is well known to anyone involved in such processes. Unfortunately, it is usually based on negative experience with actual or supposed results of planning measures and leads people to believe that such measures are designed to give advantages to other individuals or groups at the expense of the local setting: the "high-ups" syndrome!

In order to avoid this accusation, the project managers therefore elaborated and initiated a **communication-oriented development process** between institutional, commercial and local interest groups. For this purpose, they collected and documented all the projects that had been worked out so far, evaluating them with regard to status and implementability and, above all, communicating in more than 200 informational talks. The sum of insights gained in the process not only supplied a wealth of detailed knowledge but also revealed important connections, possibilities and impossibilities. The exchange of information promoted an understanding of network connections among both "actors", "affected parties" and "decision-makers", and thus became the foundation for the goal of integrated use of this area of development that would be able to achieve consensus. In order to harmonise particularly difficult issues but also extremely divergent interests during this lead-in process, several colloquiums, some public, were held with the participation of external experts. In this way it was possible to develop a viable instrument for public planning and transparent decision-making processes.

Thus, in the run-up to securing the URBAN programme, the Graz-West project constituted strategic planning in preparation for decision making, catering for a maximum range of interests. The implementation-oriented effectiveness of the project is now being secured by

the EU-assisted urban development programme URBAN_link with the same focus as Graz West. Building on the lead-in decisions under the Graz West programme, it is possible to implement the focal measures that conform to the urban development objectives but also those following EU objectives with the aid of the funds available from URBAN_link.

e. 1995: EU accession – URBAN as an instrument of urban development in Graz

With Austria's accession to the European Union, the city of Graz too gained the opportunity to participate in urban development subsidies. This is of special importance to Austrian cities, particularly as the federal government does not provide any funds for the implementation of urban development programmes, as is the case in Germany, for example. Urban development is also more of a footnote among the federal institutions, too.

One year after accession, the city of Graz applied for its first EU programme. In accordance with the objectives of the Community initiative URBAN I, a programme was developed that focused on inner-city development and urban renewal. Under the heading 'Gries – Ein Bezirk lebt auf', an integrated overall programme was implemented between 1996 and 2001. The aim was a general improvement of the quality of life and housing in an inner-city area of Graz. The programme comprised more than 50 separate projects.

The key projects included the revitalisation of the historical Bad zur Sonne, swimming baths dating from the 19th century, construction of the Oeversee park based on participation planning, construction of the Augartensteg footbridge as a result of a citizens' initiative, construction of a senior citizens day care centre in Albert-Schweitzer-Gasse, redesigning of the north of Griesplatz square together with local businesses, and renovation of the "Koloniale" building in Nikolaiplatz square, that is now the centre of Styrian economic politics. Perhaps less visible, but equally effective were social and job market projects that (in a snowball effect) united numerous, mostly independent project sponsors.

The city of Graz had some Euro 4.3 million of subsidies from the European Fund for Regional Development and the European Social Fund for these projects. From the Austrian side, the city of Graz put up approx. Euro 7.2 million and Styria Province put up Euro 3.6 million. A survey conducted in 2001 revealed that the URBAN programme triggered private and public investments totalling approx. Euro 100 million.

Parallel to this, an urban pilot project was implemented in the adjacent Jakomini district between 1997 and 2001, for which Euro 1.7 million were available from the European Fund for Regional Development. The programmatic title of the pilot project was e.l.m.a.s (ein leben mit allen sinnen), which translates as "living with all one's senses". In an innovative approach, the aim was to highlight and promote the importance of local cultural sponsors and institutions in terms of the positive development of the district.

f. 2000-2006: Urban_Link to the future: The URBAN II programme for the west of Graz

When the opportunity arose in 1999 to participate in a new round of URBAN, the path was chalked out for selection of the project area, and the development area in the west of Graz was fixed as the URBAN II programme area. Taking into account the specifications of the European Union and building on the results of the preparatory communication process, it was possible to propose an integrated holistic programme with the aid of which the main development objectives can be achieved and key pioneering projects implemented. The URBAN II programme in Graz was approved by the European Commission in October 2001.

The global aim of URBAN_link Graz West is to initiate a development that meets the demands of prospective urban development:

With a view to the information society in the 21st century, the goal is to ring in a process of change for the extensive monofunctional industrial belt west of Graz main railway station to become a district of new, modern and sustainable urbanity. The actively promoted involvement of the public in planning and decision-making processes is intended to ensure a balance of the interests of economy, ecology and social matters and lead to lasting success of the project.

The programme area totals some **700 hectares** (that is 5.8 % of the area of the city of Graz), it is part of four districts and the home of **approx. 32,000 inhabitants** (approx. 13.5 %). Building on the characteristic natural potentials, the favourable location and special history, the aim is to focus the available spaces, companies and facilities into a district with specific qualities. The main aspects will be expanding the technical college area into a public district zone, creating a link between training and the business world by means of set-up initiatives favouring innovation-oriented companies and – as a condition for this – dismantling urban structural barriers. The exchange of knowledge and practice between companies, the technical college, but also the local population is aimed to help strengthen and develop human resources. Further training schemes catering for future everyday demands are intended to facilitate this change.

Under the overall programme, numerous, intermeshed projects will make their contribution to urban development in the period up to 2006/7. These projects are oriented towards three programme priority.

Priority 1: Development of information society potentials

It is planned to implement projects aimed to improve underlying structural conditions, to develop and strengthen human resources, and to promote innovation-oriented economic development.

The starting point for the planned projects is (further) expansion of the technical college centre. The aim is to open up the centre for the local public to a feasible extent. In close collaboration with the courses offered at the technical college and the local business world, the project plans to create a start-up centre for company founders in the area of the former Reininghaus brewery, and another start-up and impetus centre focused on human technology ('knowledge city').

In order to promote company start-ups, but also to support more environmentally friendly methods, funds will also be made available for company investments and pinpoint consulting services. Furthermore, it is planned to implement projects for human resource qualification and general development of the necessary human resource potential.

Priority 2: Sustainable district development

This section is focused on projects dealing with mobility, leisure space design and sustainable building, living and working.

In order to consolidate transport facilities in the west of Graz, the aim is to support construction of the planned underpass in Alte-Post-Straße and adapt it to modern development requirements.

(Note of explanation: A railway crossing in this area cuts the project area off from the surrounding areas; the current gate closing times amount to approx. 6 hours a day and must be extended even further as of 2004.)

Parallel to this, it is planned to elaborate and install safety measures in a public participation process for an adjacent road which will have a higher traffic load due to the underpass project. The aim is to also to promote the extension and expansion of the pedestrian and cycle path network.

In a cooperation between a private enterprise and the city of Graz, a new, multi-shell acoustics test hall will be modified so that it can be used by the cultural institutions styriarte, steirischer herbst and Graz 2003 as a venue catering for the highest acoustic demands. This

will give the west of Graz a new cultural focus. The hall, erected according to principles of construction biology, will be fitted with the largest in-facade photovoltaics unit in Austria and has already been under construction since the start of 2002.

Priority 3: Communication accompanying the process

The main focus, running through the entire programme, will be to continue the Graz-West process of communication begun in 1999 and to ensure public participation in decision-making processes. A group of Austrian and foreign experts are currently drawing up a communication and public participation strategy for the full duration of the programme. A dedicated URBAN infopoint is planned to serve as a central contact and information office and, at the same time, to constitute the main base for a planned district monitoring system in which data on the district will be collated and made available.

Technical Assistance

Standard Technical Assistance goes to round off the programme measures. The available funds will be used to procure data, supplementary studies, funding of accompanying monitoring of the overall programme, evaluation and exchange of information with other European cities, and publicity measures.

7. Prospects and summary

Similar to previous programmes, implementation of the URBAN_link Graz-West programme will entail important development impetus for a district in Graz. Thanks to the particular orientation of the programme objectives, if successful, we can expect to gain insights into the opportunities held by forward-oriented, integrated development measures. The work process, running for several years, will in any case induce key actors in the city of Graz to join forces, strengthening them in concert. The financial efforts of all partners will be channelled and thus amplified. Thanks to entrenchment of all measures in the public awareness we can hope to achieve a high level of acceptance and consensus. Exchange of information with other European partners, accompanying monitoring of goal achievement and comparison during the evaluation phase will add value to the programme that is hard to achieve among local actors with other means. And finally, the assistance provided by the European Commission will strengthen the partnership between local authorities and the European Community.

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