

The Development of Local Sustainability in the Rural Region Kautzen, Lower Austria – Driving Forces and Conditions of Success at the Transition to Sustainable Development – a Case Study

In the 80-ies the peripheral rural municipality of Kautzen in the north of Lower Austria was one of Austrian pioneers regions, which has undertaken concrete steps in the direction of a local sustainability.

According to elements of theories of modernization, innovation, and regulation typical “take off-factors” for a sustainable development are analysed for this Austrian municipality, with the perspective to find generalizations for constellations for a sustainability path.

Some special relation of local power could be identified for starting the sustainability process

Basically, Kautzen was successful in the field of renewable resources and stabilizing and creating of (additional) agricultural incomes. Local value added could replace imported fossil energy. But the economic goals were not accomplished altogether roughly on the scale, which would have led to an effective social stabilization.

The calculated CO₂ reduction in the field of heating in Kautzen was accomplished by about two thirds on insulation and energy-saving measures. From this the outstanding meaning of services, communication and advice is seen in this process.

However, big successes over many years reduced the consciousness of risks of projects. The failure to hedge risks for pioneer projects stopped the (sustainable) development. The break down of a big project resulted in huge personal debts of many activists and ended the spirit of innovation. The coalition of forces triggering the sustainability process faded. The social basis became too narrow.

Generally the approach was centred economically and that was to restricted to overcome crisis.

But was this path at least successful in regional development? Going on a sustainability path is connected to many complex problems, in some way general development indicators can deteriorate even for a certain time. It is possible in peripheral regions that despite great efforts the distance to benchmark regions nevertheless remain the same. But if no efforts are made, then the distance would enlarge still further.

In mid term Kautzen had no favorable performance along usual regional indicators although Kautzen ecologically had performed well at renewable energies.

The analysis in this basic innovation process is based on:

- The identification of stakeholders for changes (farmers and local providers)
- Development of “Social capital”
- Factors for general readiness for innovation and tolerance of alternatives
- Conditions of cooperation of protagonists of conventional institutions and outsiders
- Diffusion and demonstration effects
- Multiscale analysis - impulses from outside (e.g. village renewal)
- Moments of democratization and activation (of women)