



Statement and Interview with the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns on the CIVITAS Initiative and CIVINET German language area Carried out in September 2014

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Background information on the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns

Approximately 65% of all Austrian people and 71% of all jobs are located in Austria's agglomerations. The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns is the representation of local stakeholders from about 252 cities and bigger towns.

The association was founded on September 24, 1915. Besides Vienna and the state capitals, all towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants are being represented in the Association of Cities and Towns. The smallest city member accounts for about 1,000 inhabitants.

Membership in the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns is on a voluntary basis. Apart from the Association of Austrian Municipalities which represents the smaller towns, the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns gives advice and negotiates with the federal and state governments and is explicitly mentioned in the federal constitution (Art. 115(3) B-VG).

In addition to the principal task to represent the interests of local government, the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns fulfils the role of a networking platform and gives its members the opportunity to exchange experiences. The executive office, the central committee and all the other 40 technical committees and working groups come together twice a year. Representatives of members' cities come together, discuss and explore current topics that are of concern and elaborate common positions. Once a year the general assembly, the so called *Städtetag*, takes place.

www.staedtebund.gv.at

Short biography: Senior senate council Mag. Dr. Thomas WENINGER, MLS
Secretary-General of the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns

Thomas Weninger holds the position of Secretary-General of the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns since 2006. He studied political sciences at the University of Vienna and started his career at the Institute of Advanced Studies (IHS). He then was research assistant at the Institute of Conflict Research (IKF) and the Documentation Centre of Municipal Science (KDZ Centre for Public Administration Research). Between 1993 and 1994 Thomas Weninger was General-Secretary of the Austrian Association of Political Sciences (ÖGPW).

Following this, he moved to the magistrate department of Vienna in 1994 to work in the coordinating office in the area of European integration and international affairs. Additionally, he was from 1997 to 2007 responsible for the TINA Vienna Transport Strategies GmbH (Transport Infrastructure Needs Assessment), a company of the Vienna Holding AG.

Between 2003 and 2004 he was the chair of the magistrate development for knowledge management and coordination. In 2004, he became responsible for working on the EU strategy and economic development for the magistrate department 27, finances, economic development and the Vienna public services. Alongside working, he acquired his Master in Legal Studies at the Danube University Krems. Thomas Weninger was born in 1963. He is married and is the father of two children.



Dr. Thomas Weninger © Wilke



Statement of the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns

Cities account for about 70% of all CO₂-emissions in Europe. Transport is one of the main contributors to these CO₂-emissions. This fact is proven by the federal climate protection report 2014 and a study by the VCÖ (Verkehrsclub Österreich – Association of Transport and Mobility in Austria) which show that Austria accounts for the third highest CO₂-emissions in the EU per capita. At the same time, Austria ranks best in Europe with respect to people shifting to rail.

From a city's perspective, there is no question that mobility patterns are changing. This new mobility has to be encouraged and supported – CIVITAS is a good support in this regard. CIVITAS focuses on sustainable mobility and serves as a place where information about projects, funding opportunities and experiences can be exchanged. Even though the local conditions always differ from each other, there is an opportunity to learn from other projects. The so called 'encounter zone' is a good example for making use of such best practices from other European countries.

As is happening in the Committee on Transport of the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns, CIVINET allows for the exchange of such ideas and projects. Especially, when it comes to European funding opportunities, it is exciting to hear and learn from successful strategies that other cities have made use of. You get to know each other, can converse about difficulties and learn from each other, as was happening in Graz at the „OPEN EYES – OPEN MIND – OPEN SPACE - CIVITAS politicians speak out – CIVITAS Exchange Tour“ on March 12, 2014. Members from all participating countries come together at these events. This year's event showed again a lively exchange between CIVITAS cities from countries such as Slovakia, Denmark, Hungary and the UK. Again, it was evidenced how important these exchanges are in order to gather ideas for each participant's measures and to receive moral support from each other. The majority of these measures led to far-reaching changes in people's travel behaviours and the support of the public sector and the non-motorized transport in the respective cities.

CIVITAS projects also fulfil the roll of giving feedback to the European Commission itself. This way, the European Commission gets a more accurate impression of what cities really desire and need. In connection with an urban agenda, a European-wide city policy that is currently aimed for, tailor-made solutions for urban needs are requested.

The Austrian city Graz participated together with Stockholm, Lille, Pécs and Prague in 2002 in the CIVITAS TRENDSETTER which was 1 out of the 8 winning projects resulting out of the CIVITAS call from the European Commission. In total, 12 million € were invested in the city.

Funding coming from the EU totalled to 4,2 million €. Such amounts are also interesting for other cities!

Interview with Dr. Thomas Weninger

The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns is a founding member of the CIVINET German language area. What motivated you to take this position as a founding member?

CIVINET provides a good opportunity to acquire information in your own language. There are a few members that made good experiences with CIVITAS. In accordance with its own role, the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns would like to disseminate information about CIVITAS to its members in order to convince more people of the CIVITAS case. Through the CIVITAS Activity Fund means of co-funding for sustainable mobility projects can be retrieved 2014 and 2015. These are important opportunities for our members in order to complement municipal budgets with EU funding.

As a communal association of, in total, 252 Austrian cities and bigger towns the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns is one of the most important voices for city's needs. How can both, the European CIVITAS Initiative as well as the national and regional CIVITAS networks (CIVINET), support this national exchange of interests and experiences?

Successful projects and satisfied city dwellers are the best promotion for the assignment of EU funding. In connection with an EU-wide policy for cities (urban agenda), the EU must neither overlook big infrastructural projects nor city initiatives that are urgently needed. Through the CIVITAS networks information about these projects are even better communicable.

Just as much as the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns the CIVINET German language area is aiming to support environmentally-friendly and human-oriented solutions with respect to urban transport. What do you think are the advantages for members of a national or regional CIVITAS network as the CIVINET German language area is?

One of the undeniable advantages lies in the overcoming of language barriers. CIVINET does a tremendous amount of work interpreting and bringing the EU a lot closer to the German-speaking cities. Furthermore, cities of these countries demonstrate similar features, e.g. historically evolved inner cities that are listed as historic monuments. These are confronted with similar challenges, which is the reason why an exchange can be particularly tangible and problem-oriented.

The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns makes its voice heard through its representation in the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) as well as the Committee of the Regions (CoR). It supports, just as much as the CIVINET German language area, the construction of a common future urban transport in Europe. Where do you see potential synergies in order to push forward this common goal?

Future urban transport is based on sharing and, of course, environmentally-friendly modes of transport. Thus, it is oriented around a completely different form of mobility than the one that most of us grew up with. It requires a lot more efforts until the necessity and advantages of such kind of mobility become clear to everybody. It is noticeable that some segments of society are already rethinking this, with sometimes, actually, being en vogue. However, the huge majority of people will only reconsider their behaviour if a well thought-through system of push and pull strategies is being applied. In particular in these quite recent areas the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns puts its hope in the exchange of experiences. A mutual learning process means an invaluable push for innovation, since we don't have to make experience anew and again.



Cities are facing the challenge to reduce the share of motorized individual transport and to shift to more environmentally-friendly modes of transport. The Austrian Association of Cities and Towns has proactively compiled a list of propositions in order to satisfy these prospective requirements. Making public transport and bicycling more attractive is one of the most central claims. What can the CIVINET German language area add to these in order to implement your plans?

Apart from the already mentioned exchange of experiences, CIVITAS is also an important voice in the direction of the EU. In connection with the intended urban agenda it is very important to collectively and forcefully report about the urban challenges and positive experiences to the EU. That way, these voices can make sure to be heard at the EU. CIVINET is a contribution to this motto: 'achieving more together'.

Concluding this interview, we would like to ask you whether you have suggestions to the European CIVITAS Initiative and the corresponding national and regional CIVITAS networks (CIVINET)?

With respect to the requirements from the EU White Paper on transport 2011 and the increasing traffic volume in cities freight logistics in cities is of great concern for the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns.

Also, international experiences with new legal possibilities in public spaces (e.g. encounter zones), alternative propulsion systems or the impacts of modern technologies (e.g. driverless vehicles) are still interesting.

Finally, the majority of German-speaking cities have historically evolved inner cities with all the structural components and consequences on modern mobility requirements that are implied by this. One of the most crucial interests of the Austrian Association of Cities and Towns is to facilitate a conversation about the consideration of these evolved urban structures in light of the presently increasing traffic volume, public transport and the revitalization of city centres with the goal of ensuring their attractiveness and competitiveness against other parts of the city, specifically, in the periphery.