

# Framing Regional Development: A reflection on the use of language in regional development – examples from Austria

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Received: 17 March 2024; Revised: 28 May 2024; Accepted: 30 May 2024; Published online: 7 June 2024

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**ABSTRACT:** Examining the narrative of rural development, this paper investigates to what extent stories, language or images form consolidated images of a region and how these assist or inhibit regional development internally and externally. Thematically, the discussion incorporates questions of regional development concerning the security of livelihood, discrepancies in living conditions, demographic shifts, outward migration, and condition of infrastructure. The backdrop of this study predominantly consists of case studies in Austrian LEADER regions which were supported through the current structural fund period. The aim was to examine “felt disadvantage” in peripheral rural regions. Upon reflection, this was contextualized to framing. In accordance with (anticipated) regional development the future questions to be answered are to what extent „Deep Frames“ (e.g. “Our situation is bad!”) are doubly counterproductive in regard to both development capacity of a region and also negotiation tools when working with external partners (e.g. fiscal equalization negotiations with state and nation) who are growing to question the subjective interior portrayal more and more.

**KEYWORDS:** regional development, framing, rural development, linguistic turn, narrative

**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:** Heintel, M., & Wanner, A. (2024). Framing Regional Development: A reflection on the use of language in regional development – examples from Austria. *Central European Journal of Geography and Sustainable Development*, 6(1), 71–83. <https://doi.org/10.47246/CEJGSD.2024.6.1.4>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The connection between language, everyday language or the conscious and unconscious use of language in a regional development context has not been given much attention in either research or practice. Although the linguistic turn successfully found its way into geography and spatial sciences in the late 1960s (see Christmann, 2016; Slasze & Pütz, 2007) it is only in recent years that the possible impacts of language on regional level of action has gained more attention. This concerns both the use of language on communal level from an anthropological point of view as well as the powerful effects of language on regional development as a whole. A further less investigated aspect is that of proactive use of language in regional governance.

## 2. KEY ISSUES & LITERATURE REVIEW

This is one reason why there has been very little literature on framing and regional development up to this point in time. Initial approaches concerning framing and regional development tend to be found in urban planning and development studies (see Cilliers et al., 2015; Goldstein et al., 2015 or Webb et al., 2018). It was not until the 2020's that framing and regional development were also connected to the

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development of rural or rural peripheral areas. On the one hand, framing or reframing was classified analytically by pointing out the issue of labeling underdeveloped regions as such and thus depriving them of development opportunities. On the other hand, the potential for development in terms of reframing the regions was highlighted (see Guenther & Ledger, 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2022; Roberts & Guenther, 2021).

The EU structural fund policies have given the importance of language a boost since the 1990s. To some extent, this also introduced an investigation of negative connotations in regional development questions. The discussion on the designation of assisted areas in connection to the European structural fund policies is one example. According to this approach a region is “thankful” to be an assisted region, as it implies that it is entitled to monetary contributions and assistance. In exaggeration this means the aim is to be eligible for assistance and not to be self-sufficient and lose access to funding. Regions linguistically positioned themselves as “under-funded” to claim assistance. It is a premise to be below European average. What reaps results monetarily (here again also with regard to fiscal equalization negotiations or specific grants for regions at a state level) also continuously reinforces a questionable image in people’s minds within and outside of the region.

What is linguistic reflection generally about? The scientific paradigm concerns the rejection of the creation of universal truths according to objectivity of science. Simply put, every word can have a different meaning, depending on content, association, emotion, attribution and stories. Concerning deconstruction this means *there is “no truth, just the interpretation of facts”* to loosely quote Nietzsche. It can therefore not be assumed that every person has the same objective understanding of a matter. Language and reality are subject to diverse perspectives. Regional development is in strong relation to regional policy. Actors of regional development as well as those from politics and policy both claim governance – albeit with very different motives. The systematic reflection on impacts of language on regional development has to date only been touched upon. The consequences of the use of language in regional development remains largely un-researched.

Rural exodus, shrinking, brain-drain, vacancy or aging – are all terms which are often and widely used in the undifferentiated and generalized descriptions of rural peripheral areas. These descriptions are given externally via the media but also internally, when mayors use such vocabulary to describe their “rueful existence” in hopes of financial gain and emotional attention from the EU, nation, states, capitals, or the general public. Internally and externally an image is strengthened and negative descriptions are accepted without question. In utter exaggeration: In this manner the province is made into a province.

In Austria 30% of political districts and 40% of the municipalities are categorized as „shrinking regions“. They are portrayed as losers, who do not meet the performance requirements. Many feel alone and abandoned and see themselves as unimportant, weak and powerless. Insult can quickly morph into anger towards those who leave (Hiess & Rosinak, 2018). Do these metaphors of stigmatization hold their own against differentiated views on regions?

Even in regions where depopulation is the prognosis for the future, the discourse should be questioned. Especially so for a country like Austria where on average social security is a given and there are relatively small distances between centres and peripheries when compared internationally. How are images of disadvantage – be it individual or societal – influencing the design and planning of the present and the future? What does this mean for the future associative life, civic society’s local engagement or local infrastructure in all its subsections?

Changing municipalities or regions are especially hard hit. Which historic, economic and socio-cultural contexts define imagination and narrative of regional development and which lines of tradition do they follow? How can a municipality with a history of mining grow into a service-oriented tourist destination? How can municipalities with traditions of external dependence on, for example largescale infrastructure, be led to stronger self-determination? How can municipalities that have followed the Floriani-principle up until now, be given more autonomy without continuously falling victim to deregulation principles?

Questions like these are increasingly the subject of a variety of events<sup>1</sup>, process support or concept development and in connection with proactive regional development. Furthermore, factors inhibiting future development need to be critically questioned in order to categorize and retrieve one's own potentials in rural regions.

### 2.1. Are we in need of a new language?

The Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (ÖROK)<sup>2</sup> is currently working on this theme in the implementation of the Austrian spatial development concept (ÖREK). They conclude that language used to describe regions with declining population and the corresponding phenomena are predominantly filled with negative connotations. The constructed public opinion of these regions facilitates a downward spiral. Regional policy and planning need appropriate methodology from outside the usual repertoire. Communication science and psychology can enrich the methodological toolbox (see Dax et al., 2016). In current regional development projects, there is an increasing contemplation on linguistics and wording. This pulls regional development into the framing context.

The question posed is which relations the development of a region is embedded in. According to Goffmann<sup>3</sup>, *framing* describes the embeddedness of a theme within a specific environment of meaning. Continuing, Goffman says *frames* are fundamental cognitive structures that direct perception and reality. Generally, these frames are not consciously developed. Moreover, they are subconsciously adopted during communication processes. Simplified, frames provide and direct thematic structures towards certain perspectives and information processes. Wehling (2016) adds that framing not only influences the process of language learning but also our perception.

So, what is the meaning of words such as shirking, withdrawal, dismantling, loss or problematic regions in regional development? Repetition of these terms result in so called “deep frames”, pictures or metaphors that reinforce value judgements, regardless of empiric evidence. The consequences are fatal. These “metaphors for demise” lead to regions being internally and externally perceived in accordance with these terms. If a region is associated with emigration, it is often described as a “dying region”, which prescribes a direction of perception. The fact that many people move out of these regions to pursue their education is usually completely disregarded. This view is often absent in society and being able to partake in new opportunities is obscured by this point of view and not valued regionally. Frames thus influence both language diffusion and perception. But who wants to live in a dying region and accompany it palliatively?

### 2.2. Depopulating regions? Seeking new “framing”

Is rural exodus becoming a rural curse? Regions where depopulation is taking place are for example often said to lack employment opportunities, even if this is inconsistent with the acute lack of skilled labour in these exact regions. This implies the exodus from one's own region just as much as a signal of lacking perspectives for potential incomers. Numerous Austrian regions have shown that the most sought-after workforce for business owners is the local workforce. Regional connectivity and associated loyalty to the employer are a relevant asset for small and medium enterprises. Frequently, workforces are lacking as they moved into greater urban areas or were not well assisted in changing over from local education to local employment. Reversely it is difficult to attract outsiders when negative imagery is associated with certain regions.

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<sup>1</sup> Dialog-Workshop: „Regionen mit Bevölkerungsrückgang – Perspektiven für einen Image-Wandel“, Friedersbach 2018, <https://www.zukunftsraumland.at/veranstaltungen/9523> (Accessed: 02.07.2018); ÖREK-Impulstreffen, Wien 2018, <https://www.oerok.gv.at> (Accessed: 02.07.2018); „Gutes Leben auf dem Land? Imagination, Projektion, Planung, Gestaltung“, Halle 2018, <http://www.dorfatlas.uni-halle.de> (Accessed: 02.07.2018); Dialogveranstaltung der ÖREK-Partnerschaft Strategien für Regionen mit Bevölkerungsrückgang „Den Blick um 180° wenden“, Gmünd/Kärnten 2018, <https://www.oerok.gv.at/raum-region/oesterreichisches-raumentwicklungskonzept/oerek-2011/oerek-partnerschaften.html> (Accessed: 18.09.2018)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oerok.gv.at> (Accessed: 30.05.2024)

<sup>3</sup> [http://luhmann.uni-trier.de/index.php?title=Goffmann:\\_Framing](http://luhmann.uni-trier.de/index.php?title=Goffmann:_Framing) (Accessed: 04.03.2019)

Depopulating regions are not automatically poor regions with weak economic performance. In Austria some peripheral rural regions (e.g. Upper Styria, Waldviertel, and lower Carinthia) have higher absolute and relative growth of GDP/inh as top urban regions. Comparing regional income levels should also be conducted with a stronger differentiation. Consequently, inward self-image and outward public image in regions with strong economic performance should not be linked to demographic developments (see Hiess 2018).<sup>4</sup>

When speaking about regional identity, the attributes given by people or media of a region gain importance (Baumfeld, 2011). From a regional development perspective, the question derives which story, which narrative a region will tell in future.

The simple question remains: “Which story should school children in region XY learn, keep and pass on?” It is a question that is not insignificant for our own biography. Is it a story of demise, or does it require a differentiated story about origin with physiographical resources and specialized successful crafts or regional pioneers to name but a few examples that would be fitting for local stories.

A story is a type of representation. The attributed narrative is a method to convey circumstances and lessons. From an anthropological perspective and in narrative theory, a narrative describes a statement based on a story that conveys both content and subtext. Its function is to categorize experience.<sup>5</sup> It is not about inventing something that does not exist. Moreover, it is about shining a light on additional facts. It is about a narrative that from an anthropological point of view assists in categorizing experiences beyond biased imagination. Content, frames and subtext allow differentiated nuances that keep a door of opportunity open and selectively reach out to potential incomers.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO EXAMINING DISADVANTAGES

In order to demonstrate “felt” disadvantages, a combination of methodological approaches was applied. Based on the „English Indices of Deprivation“<sup>6</sup> a disadvantage index was developed in Austria for the first time, which was calculated in reference regions (Pinzgau in Salzburg and Waldviertel in Lower Austria). This approach primarily concerns defining the thematic dimensions and selection of indicators for the best possible representation of the disadvantaged areas, whereby six areas with 24 indicators were identified to form the Multiple Deprivation Index (MDI) for these questions (see Heintel et al., 2017; Springer et al., 2020):

- > Disadvantage in income & housing (e.g. low income, high housing costs, real estate prices);
- > Disadvantage in employment (e.g. youth unemployment, old-age unemployment, commuting distance, labour force participation rate);
- > Disadvantage in health (e.g. density of specialists, density of general practitioners, density of pharmacies);
- > Disadvantage in education (e.g. level of education, early school leavers, NEETs men/women);
- > Disadvantage in social affairs & care (e.g. pensioner households, care recipients, ATM density);
- > Disadvantage in finances (e.g. debt, tax revenue).

Based on the findings, a differentiated picture of the region could be presented. Simply put, where are the strengths (despite a negative self-perception and negative framing) and where are the actual weaknesses, which can now also be confirmed. This type of diagnosis now represents the starting point for further steps of possible targeted intervention in regional systems as is also discussed elsewhere (Hooton, 2022). In a next step, these are formed in a participatory process with regional stakeholders and incorporates multiple feedback loops. The intention of this intervention research (Krainer & Lerchster, 2012) is to understand or reclassify communication and deep frames. Another reframing process can follow. This usually consists of developing new frames and a positive image for the future of the municipality or region developed with a broad participatory foundation.

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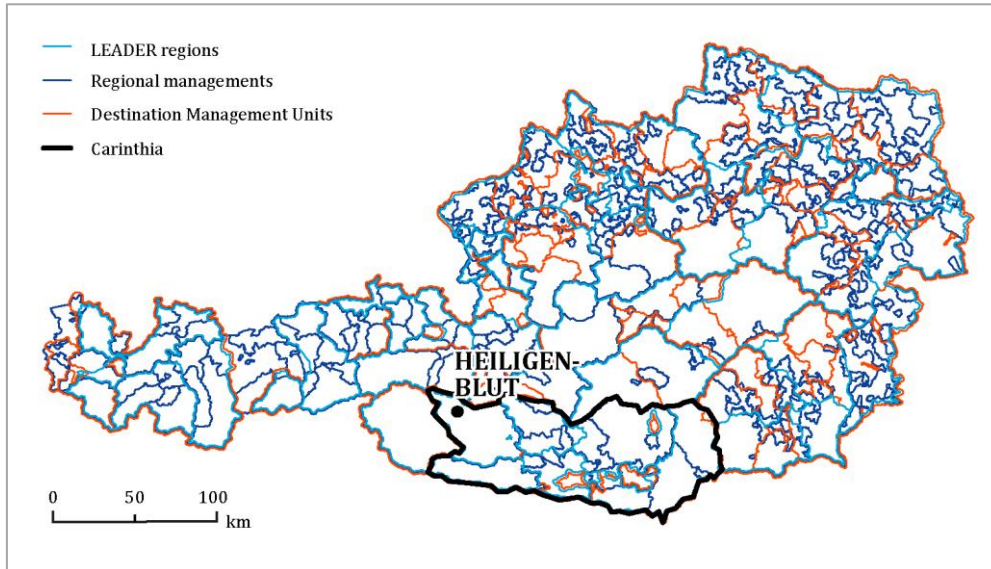
<sup>4</sup> <https://www.zukunftstraumland.at/aktuell/247-slides-hiess> (Accessed: 02.03.2019)

<sup>5</sup> <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Erz%C3%A4hlung> (Accessed: 13.02.2024)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-indices-of-deprivation> (Accessed: 13.02.2024)

#### 4. CASE STUDY: HEILIGENBLUT AT THE FOOT OF THE GROßGLOCKNER

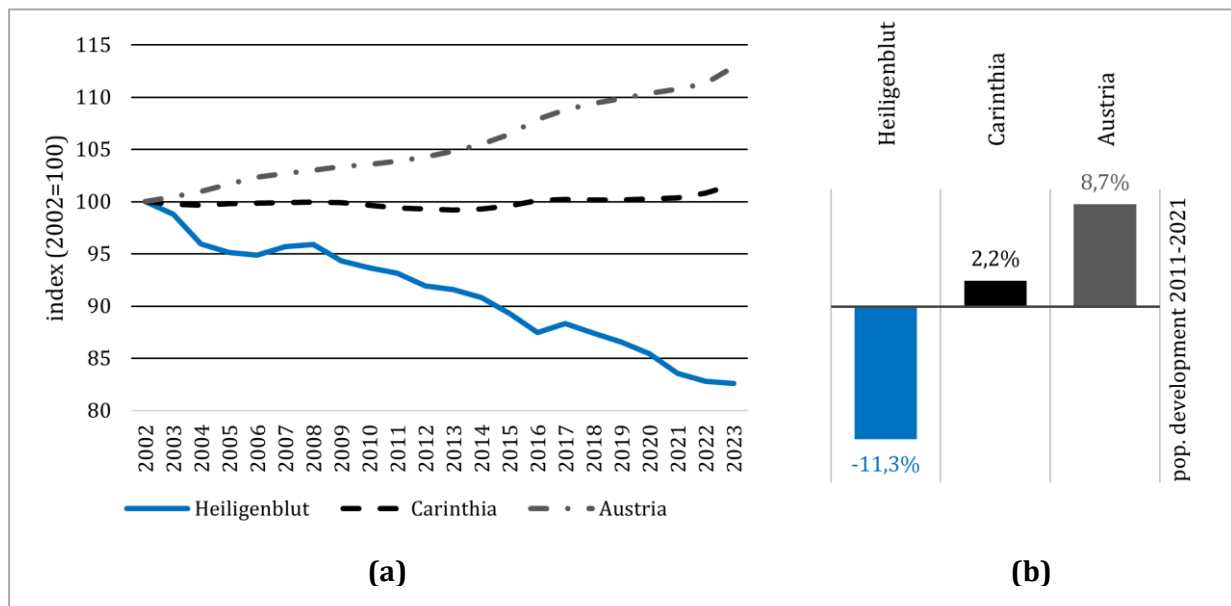
Heiligenblut is located in the Austrian federal state Carinthia, in a peripheral side valley, surrounded by the national park Hohe Tauern<sup>7</sup>. Heiligenblut is one of 19 municipalities which together form a LEADER region<sup>8</sup> and can thus profit from regional funding and measures of the European funding instruments. It is part of the destination management organization “Hohe Tauern – die Nationalparkregion in Kärnten” (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Heiligenblut location, destination management units, and regional development.

Source: Ebenstreit D., 2024; Geodata BEV 2022.

To position this case study, it is vital to understand current demographic and economic developments, which have and continue to influence tourism development in the area. Compared to population developments in Austria and the federal state Carinthia, Heiligenblut is characterized by a drastic and continuous decrease in population (Figure 2).

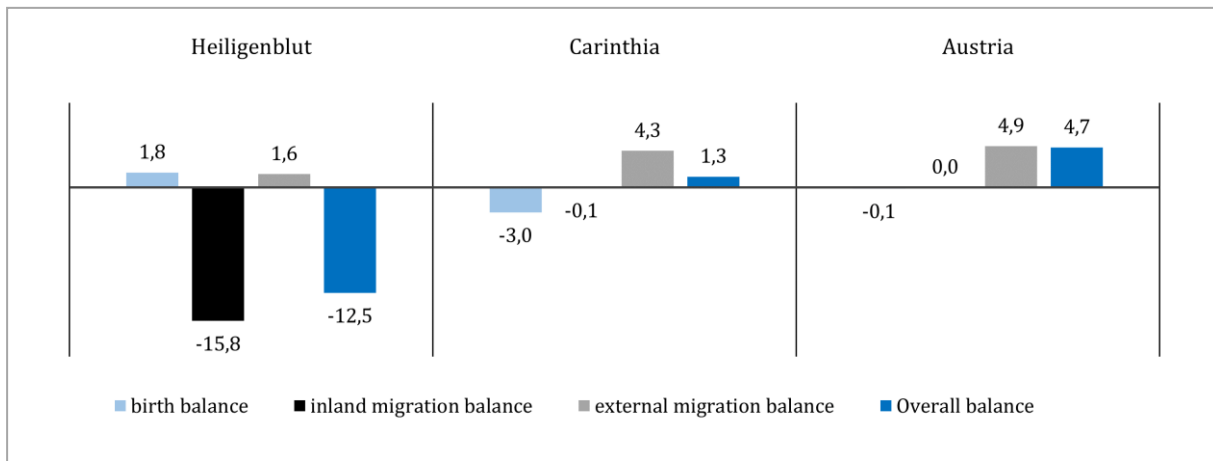


**Figure 2.** Population development index 2002-2023 (a), and National comparison of population development 2011-2021 (b).

Source: Own illustration, Ebenstreit D., 2024; Statistik Austria 2023a.

<sup>7</sup> <https://hohetauern.at/en/> (Accessed: 24.04.2024)

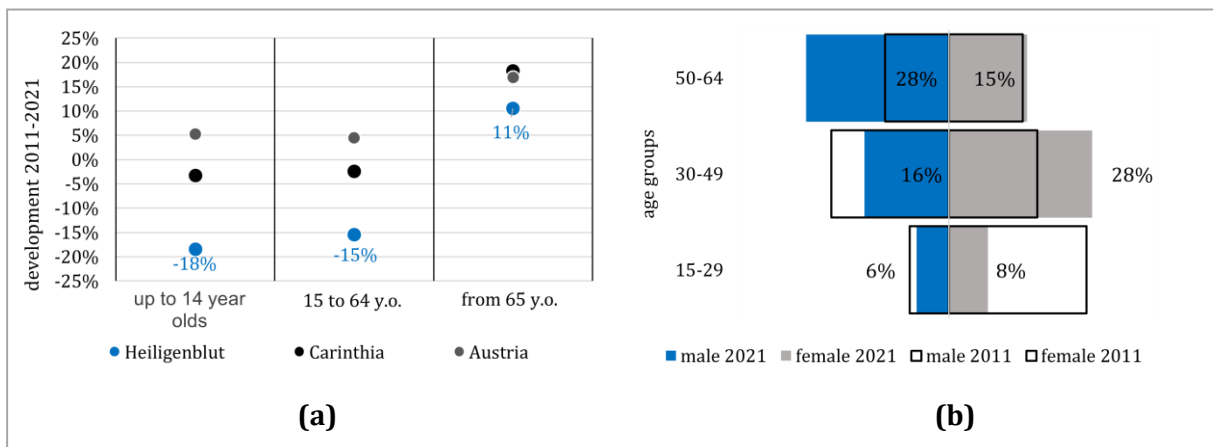
<sup>8</sup> <https://rm-kaernten.at/lag-grossglockner-moelltal-oberdrautal/> (Accessed: 24.04.2024)



**Figure 3.** Components of the population balance and overall balance per 1,000 p.e.; average from 2017-2021.

Source: Own illustration, Ebenstreit D., 2024; Statistik Austria 2023b.

The negative population developments are a result of the negative internal migration balance, determined by migration within the rest of the country (see Figure 3). Younger age groups were especially hard hit and decreased greatly between 2011 and 2021. For many economic sectors, such as touristic accommodation and gastronomy, these developments are especially devastating. Losing younger age groups is one of the reasons the employment situation in tourism, in addition to current global issues is extremely precarious in Heiligenblut (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Comparison of the development of age group shares 2011-2021 (a), and Age distribution of employed persons in accommodation and gastronomy 2021 with comparative values from 2011 (b).

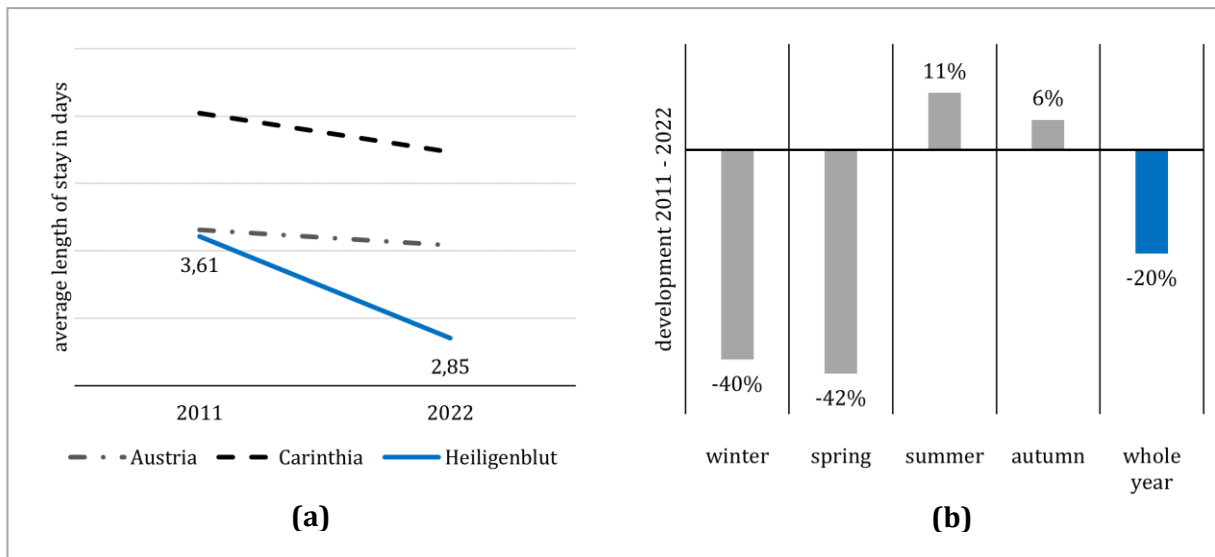
Source: Own illustration, Ebenstreit D., 2024; Statistik Austria 2023c.

Furthermore, a shift towards shorter stays is affecting Heiligeblut negatively. This trend is an Austria-wide phenomenon, but Heiligenblut is especially affected due to its peripheral location and poor accessibility. The overnight stays between 2011 and 2022 demonstrate a strong negative development, specially in winter and spring seasons which showed decreases of up to 42% (see Figure 5).

Considering the conditions presented in Figures 1-5, the local stories can be classified. If „stories“ are perceived as historic practice, as in historic anthropology, then this can be applied to the context of regional development. According to this perspective, everyday realities are formed, carried, changed, and destroyed by actors. Questions are directed at concrete “doing”, “making” and “expressing” of events and configurations as well as their perception. The everyday material of human life is alterable and can alter historic processes depending on how it is being framed. This also incorporates interests and emotional



profiles in their practical effect and implementation but also in the medial symbolic-ritualistic prerequisites and mediation. Situational links are formed.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 5.** Development of the length of stay in days in the tourism seasons 2011 – 2022 (a) and Development of overnight stays by season between 2011 and 2022 (b).  
Source: Own illustration, Ebenstreit D., 2024; Statistik Austria 2023 d.

To gain greater insight we return to the previously posed questions concerning municipalities with traditions of external dependence on largescale infrastructure and external influences and how they can be led to greater self-determination. Starting position and research topic from a historic anthropological perspective are the long-term historic practices of municipalities with very vocal and involved actors.



**Figure 6.** Heiligenblut town center with Großglockner in background.  
Source: Heintel M., 2023.

Heiligenblut<sup>10</sup> am Großglockner (Figure 6) is a peripheral municipality that has been affected by numerous structural changes and as a result has been given a lot of bad press. Quotes such as “Town centres need new life. What to do with the vacant buildings? How does one bring people into town centres? Politicians are looking for answers.”<sup>11</sup> Or „At some point the picture-perfect image is a thing of the past: 1.105 residents in Heiligenblut, but currently, only 12 live in the town centre permanently, the

<sup>9</sup> [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historische\\_Anthropologie](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historische_Anthropologie) (Accessed: 13.02.2024)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.heiligenblut.gv.at> (Accessed: 30.05.2024)

<sup>11</sup> Kleine Zeitung online (Accessed: 02.06.2024)

others are in the periphery. After hours and when the guests have left, life also leaves the town. At a special event hosted by the state on the future of town centres, mayor Josef Schachner pointed out the issue..."<sup>12</sup> dominated the headlines.

The initial position of Heiligenblut am Großglockner however is not actually that bad – one might assume. The municipality sits at the foot of the highest mountain in Austria (Figure 7), next to the national park Hohe Tauern. It is a pilgrimage site, ski area and starting point of the Großglockner High Alpine Road. It is a fulcrum and hub for a variety of activities for many target groups.



**Figure 7.** Großglockner, Summit 3 798 m.

Source: Heintel M., 2023.

Analysing the situation from a social anthropology perspective, historic events of heteronomy influence the representative external effects (e.g. through name and politically steered events) as well as media reports and ultimately the ability of self-determination.

The first wave of heteronomy came with the arrival of royalty in the alps, who coming from the city used local mountain farmers and their local knowledge as porters and guides. The royals often immortalized themselves in the naming of famous routes. The names are iron clad for certain routes, such as the Pallavicini Trough on the Großglockner's north side, which to this day and despite climate change and changing ice conditions is still a notorious Ice/Boulder combination tour amongst alpinists. Standing in the spotlight to this day are the royal conquerors and not the local peasantry. The Salmhütte<sup>13</sup> was the first mountain hut built in the eastern Alps and constructed during the first ascent of the Großglockner. It stands as a royal witness of the historic developments that have occurred since.

The event that changed Heiligenblut the most drastically and permanently was the construction of the Großglockner High Alpine Road under the national socialist's motorization policies for job creation in the 1930s. Roughly 3.200 were employed locally for the construction. The connection to Salzburg caused a sudden jump in tourism and in motorsport activity and quickly changed the idyllic farming image at the end of this side valley in the eastern Alps. The instrumentalization of these products furthered the heteronomy.

Construction of the Magaritzensperre below the Pasterze, the largest glacier of the eastern Alps, in 1953 was a further large scale infrastructure project which required external workers. Additionally, the

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.kleinezeitung.at/kaernten/oberkaernten/4159793/Kaernten\\_Ortszentren-brauchen-neues-Leben](http://www.kleinezeitung.at/kaernten/oberkaernten/4159793/Kaernten_Ortszentren-brauchen-neues-Leben) (Accessed: 24.09.2018)

<sup>13</sup> The first hut located at the start of the modern-day ascent to the peak of Großglockner was built in 1799 as part of the first attempt to summit the mountain. Construction was financed by Prince-bishop Franx Xaver von Salm-Reifferscheidt. The structure was the first alpine hut in the Eastern Alps (see Ute Strimmer: Der Berg ruft. Spartanischer Luxus. In: G/Geschichte. No.2/2017, pp. 30-33; p. 32)



water is pumped or directed, regardless of water levels, along 11,6 km of waste diversion tunnels into the reservoir in Mooserboden in the Kapruner Valley (from Carinthia to Salzburg!). It tunnels its way through the watershed of the Alpine divide between the Drau (close to Osijek/Croatia on the Drau) and Salzach/Inn (by Passau at the Danube). This way, precipitation from both sides of the main water and weather divide of the Alps can be collected.<sup>14</sup> The water sources are cut from Heiligenblut and transferred to the other side of the Alps.

Since the 1970s Heiligenblut has been buried under the floods of tourists – at least on nice summer days. The masses are difficult to manage at a local level and can be a great hindrance, even though they contribute to business and income for some. An atmosphere of ambivalence has developed, as the town appears desolate in the morning and evening hours.

The sale of the ski area Großglockner-Heiligenblut to the Schröcksnadel-Group<sup>15</sup> was the most current step towards external dependency. Through the sale the ski area was “kept alive”, thanks to saviours from the “outside”.

During the Covid-19 pandemic the municipality of Heiligenblut was the only Carinthian municipality which was shut off from the outside world during the first lockdown. This decision was made on federal state and municipal level and when word reached the municipality, they found themselves entirely unprepared. In an excerpt from an interview given by the mayor to the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF): “The decree issued by district governor Klaus Brandner was not agreed upon, nor was there any prior information, said Schachner [note: Mayor of Heiligenblut]. I consider Heiligenblut to be in a state of emergency, because the whole thing came as such a surprise. The quarantine presents us with an almost unsolvable task, tears are flowing in the municipal office.”<sup>16</sup> External dependency, lacking self-determination and image-loss towards the winter sport community and as a tourism destination in the context of the pandemic fit very well into the narratives and discourses of the time.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 the daily newspaper with the highest circulation (the “Kronen Zeitung”), ran the headline: “Heiligenblut in Orban’s shadow – Hungarian oligarch spreads his wings in the Tauern”<sup>17</sup>. It turns out that Viktor Orban’s clan now owns two central hotels in Heiligenblut, which are currently empty. Presently, this is the last story revolving around the development of Heiligenblut – very fitting for the overall narrative presented.

A sidenote on this story: The most beautiful part of the ski area, the “Fleisslam” with lifts and tunnel connection to the surrounding Heiligenblut ski area, will close during the 2024/2025 season. Renovation work is needed and pending. It appears that the development of the municipality of Heiligenblut is a never-ending story.

There is a plethora of questions arising from such stories for regional development. On the one hand, they offer explanations of the relation between actions. On the other hand, they offer the opportunity to proactively bring forward participation demands in future.

In regard to section three and the select data and graphs on the thematic context of tourism and regional development the following must be stated: In terms of methodology, Heiligenblut has laid two foundations. On the one hand, it has made empirical data available and processed it – creating an evidence base. On the other hand, Heiligenblut has reflected on their own local development, which has produced the stories of dependency presented. The combination of narratives with empirical data in this approach should be emphasized, as it is rarely applied in regional development to date. The knowledge required to serve as a basis for decision-making concerning further strategies and options for action exists and is available to the community.

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<sup>14</sup> [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stausee\\_Margaritze](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stausee_Margaritze) (Accessed: 25.03.2019)

<sup>15</sup> Anm.: „Die Sitour Management und Vereinigte Bergbahnen halten etliche Skigebiete und Tourismusunternehmen. Einige davon: 80 % an der Großglockner Bergbahnen Touristik GmbH, 50 % an der Großglockner Hotel und Infrastruktur GmbH (GBT Ski-Holding GmbH in Heiligenblut).“

[https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter\\_Schr%C3%B6cksnadel](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peter_Schr%C3%B6cksnadel) (Accessed: 13.02.2024)

<sup>16</sup> <https://kaernten.orf.at/stories/3038975/> (Accessed: 13.02.2024)

<sup>17</sup> Kronen Zeitung 01.01.2023, cover & pp. 32-33

Nonetheless, even though this basis exists, the ability of the local council and other stakeholders (such as Hohe Tauern National Park or landowners) to act, appears to be limited. From an analytical point of view, there are several possible explanations for this:

1. Municipal finances: The municipal budget is sufficient to fulfil public tasks, but is generally tight and offers incredibly limited opportunities beyond their basic tasks. For example, purchasing vacant properties in the town center for owner-occupation, interim use or conversion usually fails due to a lack of financial resources, but also due to differing opinions within the municipal council at the time of decisions.

2. Lock-in effect: Despite knowing the historical context of external dependency, it is not possible to escape it. The reasons for this are also complex (see points 3 and 4). It appears that there is no collective decision-making power at municipal level, as the conditions and interest are very heterogeneous and diverge greatly.

3. Stress of suffering theory: Many agricultural and forestry landowners earn a lucrative (additional) income by temporarily renting out their own huts as accommodations. This is still a lucrative business and makes collective commitment to the village center or the community as a whole fade into the background for these landowners. This observation clearly demonstrates the dependency on the outside world. Conversely, the suffering is too low at an individual level to move past personal need and seek action for the collective.

4. Ability of regional stakeholders to act: Due to the heterogeneous interests of the stakeholders involved and the points mentioned above, a collective approach in terms of a joint strategic and future local development cannot to be expected currently. Cooperation within the Hohe Tauern National Park and between the federal states of Carinthia, Tyrol and Salzburg could also be improved.

Nevertheless, at this point the thesis is formulated that an evidence base in combination with the processing of regional histories can provide an excellent basis for action and strategic reorientation of regional development. This is not (yet) the case in Heiligenblut. Elsewhere, such as in neighbouring Pinzgau in Salzburg, this approach seems to have been successful (Heintel et al., 2016).

## 5. DISCUSSION: REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS NEW STORIES

Storytelling is a reflection on the disputes of the past while also being an opportunity to process future development options. Stories are suitable, because optimally they combine emotion, information, entertainment, and tension. They function as information carriers as they subconsciously follow known and learnt patterns. They evoke emotions and form images in the mind.

Stories of the countryside with different connotations continue to top current best seller lists such as Alina Herbig's<sup>18</sup> „Niemand ist bei den Kälbern“ (“Nobody is watching the calves”) or Vea Kaiser's<sup>19</sup> „Blasmusik-Pop“ (“Brassmusic-Pop”). Going back in literature, Peter Rosegger described the changing country quite well 120 years ago. Perhaps some rural regions need to become a bit more urban to improve their communication connectivity abilities into central areas and give due consideration to the growing trend of urbanization of lifestyle in rural regions.

In regional development these stories are precious contributors to content for discussions and create (often controversial) dialogues. They offer a link, continuation and development. This is where the untapped potential lies. Regional development is interdisciplinary and found on different level of action, from public administration to bottom-up processes. The impacts are aimed at multiple scales ranging from EU-target areas to local projects. The quality and length of the process is very diverse and managed through governance-arrangements (see Heintel, 2018). These governance arrangements with joint work across levels of control and in which regional actors play a large role are the communicators of these stories.

The Network for Future Rural Space (Netzwerk Zukunftsraum Land) (LE 2014-2020) seeks discourse with regional businesses to step up to their role as disseminators in communication<sup>20</sup>. They see framing the discourse of a region as being about a new discourse in which new and positive terms are used in

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<sup>18</sup> Herbig, Alina (2018): *Niemand ist bei den Kälbern*. Zürich-Hamburg: ARCHE (in German)

<sup>19</sup> Kaiser, Vea (2014): *Blasmusik-Pop*. Köln: KiWi (in German)

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.zukunftsraumland.at/download/1479> (Accessed: 17.03.2019). (in German)

communication. Together regional and economic development can provide strengthened imagery such as “crisis region”, “depopulation region”, “backwards” with a new perspective that incorporates prospects. It is the small and medium enterprises that are important for communication as they are often the hub between education, employment, and regional development.

How can a self-image or the image of self or foreign perception be changed? How can we stop “regional complaining”? In each and every case it is important to reflect upon the historic context. How can development in my region be portrayed? Which actors have had an important role to play? Why am I feeling disadvantaged? What am I communicating, and how? It is crucial to think about the deep frames and the conscious use of language. The conscious use of everyday language is especially important. It can also be helpful to contextualize the internal view into empiric evidence to bring stories closer to facts. If this is achieved here and there, new stories with a variety of positive connotation can be told.

Whether the cup is half full (an opportunity) or half empty (a disadvantage) is a very subjective interpretation of a given situation. Concerning intentioned future developments, it is helpful to use language concerning regional conditions in a diversified and assertive approach to address issues in desired regional development.

To quote a mayor in southern Burgenland: „When someone finishes school, we can wave them goodbye.” Such statements obscure the outlook on the real-life scenario and perspectives of the youths as well as any form for proactive municipal developments, especially regarding educational offers for those who are leaving – maybe only temporarily. You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink. This saying describes the regions’ situation quite well. It is a continuous challenge to be reflected upon.

## **6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is great potential in framing and reframing in regional development and in conclusion to the presented research they can be summarized in three steps:

1. Understanding previous developments and the status quo: The basis for this first step is empirical evidence on regional data and indicators that enable the economic, social, demographic etc. situation in the past and currently. The deliberate collection, identification and discussion of common language images can assist in overcoming barriers to development and path dependency (e.g. when starting a reframing or strategy process or at the beginning of a project).

2. Develop a vision: Developing strategies in the context of regional development is a complex task; especially when it comes to bringing the diverse perspectives and backgrounds of the various stakeholders together. The targeted use of linguistic images can help to quickly identify a common thread and then deepen it. The development of narratives in the sense of a normative orientation and governance of a region can have a unifying effect and contribute to a sustainable positive attitude in the region, within the population and among relevant stakeholders. It also strengthens communication in both horizontal and vertical governance of regional development.

3. Communicate the vision, mobilize people and spread a spirit of optimism: Often the development of a region relies on people taking action and acting on the aims of the vision. A well-chosen frame can help make development goals tangible and make an intention relevant when they create an interface with individual value structures. “Translators” (e.g. intermediary service providers) can assist by translating empirical evidence and derived visions into linguistic images that can be heard by a regional population and therefore also tangible and connectable.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The authors thank the reviewers for their valuable comments.

## **USE OF AI TOOLS DECLARATION**

The authors declare they have not used Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in the creation of this article.

## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

All authors contributed equally to this work. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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