Social Geography and spatial planning
On people and life-world rationality in the planning process

Peter Weichhart, Salzburg

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues,

First of all I want to thank you for your invitation and the kind introduction. Right at the beginning I want to beg your pardon for my bad English.

„What about people in regional science?“

T. HÄGERSTRAND, 1970

In 1969 at the ninth annual meeting of the Regional Science Association, the Swedish geographer Torsten HÄGERSTRAND shocked his colleagues with the irritating question where people had their place in regional science and spatial planning. He asked, "What about people in regional science".

On second thought, however, this question is quite ambiguous and allows diverse answers.

„What about people in regional science?“

HÄGERSTRAND’s message certainly primarily implies that regional science and planning should turn towards people at last, their values, basic needs and problems: "What about people in regional science?"
“What about people in regional science?”

However, we may also arrive at the interpretation that the actors in the planning process themselves should be scrutinised closely: "What about people in regional science?" Because it is people who make regional science and planning, people who pursue their own interests, who are embedded in social processes and group structures and who cultivate their personal preferences, animosities and idiosyncrasies.

In today’s lecture I want to concentrate exclusively on the second aspect of HÄGER-STRAND’s enquiry and so I am going to restrict myself to the question: What does the system of spatial planning look like from the perspective of current subject-centred social geography?

Strictly speaking, regional planners do exactly what social geography based on action theory in Benno WERLEN’s sense intends to investigate: They make geography. And moreover, they claim to perform their activities most professionally in such a way that the results of their regionalisations would lead to optimum "spatial structures" in conformance with the intended goals. That’s why planners and their activities are highly interesting subjects of social geographic investigations. Actually, we should regard them as significant actors in the processes characterising everyday regionalisations. Their high relevance results from the fact that by virtue of their authority, they are empowered to exercise considerable influence on the activities of other geography makers. Hence, they should have a high degree of control of authoritative as well as allocative resources or they should be capable of defining such systems of resources or at least play a part in organising them.

In most cases, the question concerning the effects of spatial planning on the status of the respective “everyday regionalisation” is answered by means of an analysis of institutions, which attempts to determine the effectiveness or “success” of spatial planning by comparing goals, measures and consequences. This method is employed, for instance, in the various reports on spatial planning published by the authorities or ministries responsible for planning. It is only too obvious that such reports pronounce structural and institutional aspects. Planning processes and the individual actors involved are kept dark.

In the following I will try to make such comparisons with the help of some specific examples from the Austrian federal state of Salzburg. When we investigate the system of spatial planning we should present, interpret and explain the actual patterns of action, the “definitions of situation” (in the sense of K. POPPER) and the individual processes of the actors’ perception and assessment. In this context we may also turn to the question if the planning practice agrees with the necessary rationality and objectivity of a scientific or professional system of actions.

This attempt is not an easy task. Furthermore, I must confess that I cannot offer you any comprehensive "research results". I just want to point out the problems associated with such an approach and I am going to discuss the kinds of results we may expect. Acquiring the necessary data certainly represents the greatest difficulty. In order to be able to reconstruct the course of development of a planning process from an actor-oriented perspective, the observer himself must be involved in the process. He or she has to participate, or rather he has to “plunge” into the depths of activities and he has to be able to watch the motives, views, perceptions and interpretations of the participants either at first hand or to reconstruct them from original sources. In short, the observer himself must be part of the process under investigation.
In addition, the participating observer is on the horns of a dilemma because he cannot make direct use of the results of his analyses for his research work. We must be aware that the objects of investigation are his colleagues at the same time. That’s why there are many restrictions for reports or publications on this topic because the publication of results would cut off the observer from his sources - and would make him socially an outcast of his trade. No one will ever get any further inside information or have access to any non-official documents if it gets known that this information is scientifically analysed and published, possibly compromising the informant or pointing out weaknesses of the system.

Well, I assume that direct personal contacts are not too intense between spatial planners of the Netherlands and their Salzburg colleagues so that here in Nijmegen I may tell you some tales without too many risks.

Yet, before dealing with the contents of concrete planning processes, I would like to demonstrate briefly by example of the Salzburg state planning which persons and groups are involved in these processes. Who are the makers of spatial planning? But first of all, let me outline the Austrian system of spatial planning and its functioning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agents, levels and instruments of spatial planning in Austria, with special reference to the Federal State of Salzburg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agents</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State government municipalities, “Sozialpartner”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State parliaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional spatial planning assoc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal councils</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spatial planning system in Austria, with special consideration of Salzburg

In Austria, spatial planning is assigned to the scope of competence of the federal states. There does not exist a uniform body of law at the national level that may be compared, for instance with Germany’s Federal Act on Spatial Planning. Only specific sectors fall within the competence of the Federation, such as forestry, railroads, national road administration or education. The Austrian Conference on Regional Planning (ÖROK) represents the only institution at the national level, however, it can only give non-binding guidelines.

Even though the autonomous legislation on spatial planning shows great similarities at state level, the details differ widely among the federal states. The laws are executed by the planning authorities of the respective state governments. State planning and some parts of regional planning fall within their scope of competence and they function as supervising authorities for other parts of regional planning and planning at the local level.
According to the Salzburg Spatial Planning Act of 1992, the foundation of regional planning associations became binding. It is their goal to contribute to the solution of supra-local problems. Above all, they are obliged to set up regional development programmes. You must bear in mind that Salzburg is a relatively small federal state with about 520,000 inhabitants living in 119 municipalities. The average number of inhabitants amounts to approximately 2,500 a municipality (These numbers do not include the City of Salzburg with about 150,000 inhabitants.) 16 regional planning associations have been established, the smallest of which comprises three municipalities. These regional associations are defined by the Salzburg Regional Development Programme, which was decreed in August 1994. The activities of these regional planning associations, however, lie within the scope of competence of the municipalities. Up to now, only 8 of the planning associations (out of 16) have been realised, only 4 of them have started working and only 2 of them have elaborated legally valid regional development schemes.

These facts should clearly demonstrate that in Austrian law on planning, the municipalities have an extraordinary position because it is at the local and municipal level where the basic decisions on spatial planning such as the zoning of the specific sites take place. The essential agents at this level are the municipal councils consisting of the elected local politicians. They are advised by private-enterprise spatial planners - mostly civil engineers.

In consequence of this special sphere of competence and the high degree of autonomy at the municipal level, most decisions relevant for the particular land-use are within the discretion of the municipal council. The municipal administration and the mayor represent the building and planning authorities of first instance. Looking at this situation from the positive side, we may concede that spatial planning takes place at the lowest level of public administration and thus close to the citizens involved. The other side of the coin, however, shows that the mayor and the municipal council are elected by exactly these citizens (and want to be re-elected, of course). That is why this closeness may also involve implications that frequently produce quite negative effects on the planning process.

Here at the local level we find the most significant planning instruments. In Salzburg we may distinguish three planning stages which are closely connected with each other, namely the spatial development scheme, the land-use plan and the building regulation plan. The spatial development scheme serves as a strategic instrument. It defines the intended development of population and economy, goals for open space and recreation, settlement development, the functional development of building land, traffic development, the organisation of the built infrastructure and the infrastructure relating to social, health, culture and economy sectors.

According to law, the elaboration of the spatial development scheme also demands public participation and co-operation which is controlled by the supervising authorities. The spatial development scheme serves as basis for the subsequent drawing up of the land-use plan and building regulation plan. The concrete zoning of sites marked in the land-use plan and the building regulation plan have to be in accordance with the goals put down in the spatial development scheme.
Generally speaking, the Salzburg system of spatial planning is characterised by a strict hierarchy of binding laws and decrees. The Spatial Planning Act defines all the provisions, procedures and instruments that have to be employed at all three planning levels.

Starting with the Salzburg State Development Programme, we may recognise a clear, deductive relationship between the contents of the various programmes. If, for instance, according to Goal A4 (p. 39) of the Salzburg State Development Programme states in that "the new zones for shopping centres above 1,000 m² sales space are to be restricted to central places of the levels A, B and C", such a zoning is not allowed in the land-use plan of a municipality of level D.

This example may demonstrate that on the whole, the system of spatial planning in Salzburg is marked by a rigid formal structure characterised by a large number of provisions. Their implementation is subject to complete supervision through the authorities responsible. Accordingly, we might assume that we are confronted with a strictly rational action system in which each single decision may be reconstructed by an external observer.

As I have already pointed out, this planning system provides the municipalities with extensive competencies.

Regarding the principle of subsidiarity, this strong position of the municipalities must certainly be considered as progressive and beneficial for the citizens. On the other hand, you are correct in supposing that any sort of local egotism is supported. It actually encourages this kind of parish-pump policy (for which Italian spatial planners have coined the suitable term of "campanilismo"). Due to the powerful position of the municipalities, the effectiveness of regional and state planning is strongly reduced.

We have to mention still another institution that plays an important role in issues of spatial planning in Salzburg. It is the so-called Board of Planning Experts, which has the task to advise the state government. It meets every two weeks and consists of 12 experts in the fields of building and housing, agriculture and forestry, trade and industry, tourism, energy supply, transport, water supply, nature and environmental protection, social and cultural issues and national defence. As, however, the representatives are nominated by political interest groups, this board does not constitute so much a body for professional assistance, but rather a political institution.
It may seem that this board is in a rather weak position when we consider its legally defined scope of competence which is restricted to advising the state government. In fact, however, its "recommendations" which pertain to all levels of planning are nearly always followed by the state government.

Let us now turn to the various agents of spatial planning and planning policy.

**Who are the agents in the process of spatial planning?**

... all human subjects, who are competent of making decisions on location and land-use. In other words:

all "geography-makers".

Basically speaking, all those people who may exercise some influence on land-use and location decisions participate in the process of "geography-making". Or, as Benno WERLEN has put it, this includes all subjects (individuals) who are in the position either to decide on location and land-use or who influence such decisions. The system of spatial planning may then be regarded as a subset of "geography-making". It comprises those decisions that are made on the grounds of legal provisions and within the framework of authoritative responsibilities. These decisions aim at the control and steering of processes of everyday regionalisation.

In the previous diagrams I have tried to point out the actors involved according to planning institutions. If, however, we adopt a perspective centring on the individual actor’s relationships to interest groups, we will arrive at the following simplified classification: The agents most affected are those natural or legal persons who possess rights of ownership or of utilisation of land. Above all, those owners are most relevant who want to utilise their land economically as production factor and who intend to realise specific projects which demand specific zoning of building land.
Similar direct impacts on vital interests may be observed on people who are affected in a narrower sense: neighbours, citizens’ initiatives, NGOs. Due to their neighbourhood to the project locations they generally anticipate disadvantages either for themselves or for their clients which may arise from the realisation of utilisation interests. That’s why they might fight these projects.

Official and semi-official interest groups that actually have nothing to do with the planning system strongly join in. The association of industries and trade unions, representatives of employers and employees, chambers and other trade organisations: All these groups articulate their yeses and noes for specific projects. They frequently try to exercise heavy influence on the planning process and demand specific variances of solution. Only too often they are not concerned about issues on location but rather about a specific kind of project.

All three groups mentioned so far ask for professional assistance of private-sector services provided by lawyers specialised in law on spatial planning, building and land-use, by civil engineers and architects, or by private and university experts all of them earning their money with such clients. They then act as legal advisers of these interest groups and have to represent their clients’ interests.

Public administration, too, has a services sector of its own. There are a great number of people involved: Just think of the managers and employees of the municipalities, sectoral government officials, who work as senior or as official planners, district governors and officials of other authorities who are responsible for the procedures of project approval and last not least the managers of the regional planning associations. All these persons concerned fulfil specific duties which - theoretically speaking - should be carried out impartially and should guarantee the execution of legal regulations and provisions in planning procedures without siding. These agents, who also function as control authorities, should ensure certainty of the law in the field of spatial planning. (We know a very cynical definition of this term: Certainty of the law is when the powerful may be certain to get their right in any case. As an example will demonstrate later on, this definition is only too true).

Looking at it more closely, the sphere of “policy” may be divided into most disparate and controversial fields that are characterised by highly diverse interests and that influence each other. The policies pursued by the municipalities, the political parties and by the state - they all may arrive at diametrically opposite views and goals on issues of spatial planning.

Finally we must not forget a body of agents, who should actually be mere observers and reporters, yet exercise considerable influence on planning processes: I’m referring to the mass media.

Summing up, all these groups are involved in processes of spatial planning because of specific intentions. We must be aware, however, that there exist numerous mutual interrelations and interactions between these groups. Each of them tries to influence and use the other one for its own purposes.
And to tell you the truth: none of them is primarily interested in spatial planning.

To put it very plainly, private-sector spatial planners basically intend to get the job, follow their profession and earn money.

The planners employed as civil servants are primarily occupied with guaranteeing the proper execution of administration and do so by executing the relevant laws and regulations - and make careers into the bargain. The really dynamic actors, who start the process and keep it going, are the land-owners or persons authorised to dispose of the land on the other hand and the politicians on the other hand.

The land-owners and pursuers of projects are basically interested in utilising their resources and in making profits and yield. They consider spatial planning as public control which represents nothing else but one of the opposing forces that aim at hampering the realisation of their intentions.

The politicians’ basic motivation may be seen in keeping and increasing their power. As regards our political system, they need success in elections to achieve these aims. They want to plan, to change the world according to their intentions. Everyday regionalisation, of course, fits into this pattern - it is not the aim, but the means to an end. It is also a source of acquiring money for the budget of the municipality.

Interest groups perform lobbying in order to pursue their members’ or clients’ specific interests. They try to influence the course of the planning process if specific regionalisations or location decisions are contrary to the group interests.

In the case of those people who are immediately affected by location decisions, their basic motivation to act lies in justified or unjustified fears of negative effects on the quality of life at their residential and working locations. Only in rare cases do they intervene actively in planning processes in order to demand changes of existing systems of resources.

The mass media participate in the process because they want to rise the circulation, to gain economic success or because they represent specific ideological-political position.
I hope this review on the primary intentionalities behind the planning processes has demonstrated that we have to be prepared for a logic of action that surpasses the algorithms of decisions on location and on land-use by far. In other words: If we want to comprehend and explain the planning system and its dynamics, it is not enough to analyse it as planning system, but we have to consider the rationality of reasoning and interpretations that are related to the primary or actual intentionalities of the agents. If we do so, we will also be able to solve and understand the obvious logical contradictions, inconsistencies and even absurdities that mark concrete planning cases again and again and which make it so difficult to comprehend spatial planning as rational acting.

Let’s now consider three practical examples as proof of this thesis:

**Case 1: Determining the location for a gymnasium in the Flachgau region.**

Northern part of the city of Salzburg and suburban area

The Salzburg core region represents Austria’s most dynamic region of economic development and population growth. Up to 1996, the northern part of this planning region had been highly deprived in the education sector. There did not exist any long-term form of a gymnasium that pupils aged between 11 and 18 might have attended. Only at Neumarkt, a municipality on Lake Waller, pupils could attend the senior classes (from 15 to 18) of such a school. Junior pupils of this area who wanted to attend such a school had to commute to the City of Salzburg. In 1993 the educational authorities decided to establish such a school in this region in order to end this unsatisfactory situation. As this type of school represents a highly significant element of bound centrality, it might have seemed only logical that the location decision was to be made in accordance with the legally valid principles of state development planning.

The formulation of these principles is completely clear and leaves no doubt. The Salzburg Development Programme as well as the Regional Development Programme of the Sal-
zburg core region definitely state that schools of higher education have to be located in central places not lower than level B.

Structure of central places: planning goals

The realisation of this planning principle would have meant that the school had to be built either at Neumarkt or at neighbouring Straßwalchen because the alternative location of Oberndorf was considerably worse-suited for various reasons. It was a complete surprise when the educational authorities presented their decision in favour of the municipality of Seekirchen, even though the senior classes of such a gymnasium had already existed at Neumarkt and the school bus system had been optimised for this location.

Considering the logic of action within the planning system, this decision is completely incomprehensible and does not make any sense: The state government and the educational authorities decided on a location which contradicted those guidelines which had been decided on and decreed by the very same politicians. An official of the state planning authorities, who had pointed out this discrepancy in an internal note, was set under severe pressure by the director of personnel who threatened with consequences according to the Civil Service Regulations if "agitation" did not stop.

This planning case will only gain sense if we include the local and party-political background as well as the primary motivation of the decision-makers into our interpretation. At the time being, the conservative People’s Party held the majority in the municipality of Seekirchen and thus constituted the mayor. Jörg Haider’s right-wing FPÖ (which would mean Liberal Party in a literal translation, but is no liberal party at all) was second in power and occupied the vice-mayor’s chair. At a very early stage of discussion on the location of the school, this vice-mayor added a political touch and argued that the mayor was incompetent because he was not even capable of obtaining the allocation of the school to this municipality. The mayor belonging the People’s Party was forced to react, of course, and sought the support of the State Governor and of the president of the Salzburg educational authorities, both belonging to the mayor’s party. Their decision was made easier because the mayor of the competing municipality of Neumarkt was not highly motivated to fight for the gymnasium. He was member of the rival Social Democratic Party, which traditionally favours secondary modern schools. Therefore, Neumarkt’s mayor had been acting with very little enthusiasm and had never earnestly played his trumps. So we
may conclude that in this case a high-ranking allocation decision had been influenced in a
desired way by exclusively party-political tactics.

**Case 2: The "Dehner" Case**

The municipality of Thalgau is located in the eastern part of the Salzburg core region. In
this map of the Salzburg Regional Development Programme it is marked with a green
symbol which characterises central places of level D. Originally, this municipality had
been chosen for the higher level C by the official planners. This, however, would have
meant a higher growth rate of residential population and consequently increased activities
in the building sector. The municipality protested strongly against these intentions of the
planning authorities and finally achieved re-classification back to level D. Among other
reasons, this was made possible because of the high-ranking party-political position of the
mayor then in office who generally kept a strict rule and had a lot of influence - which
sometimes led to disadvantages for the neighbouring municipalities.

Some years later, in the beginning of 1995, the Bavarian "Dehner" company, which holds
a chain of garden centres, was most interested in opening up another shopping centre in
Thalgau. The store should have covered a shopping space of nearly 3,000 square metres
and the company also wanted to set up the Austrian headquarters to service the chain
stores already existing. A suitable site in the industrial zone of Thalgau was available and
100 to 130 new jobs were to be created. The local politicians were highly interested in the
realisation of this profitable project and so was the state government. At first, explicit
support was also given by the member of the state government responsible for spatial
planning who was a member of Jörg Haider’s FPÖ.

Unfortunately, things turned out to be more complicated. Due to Thalgau’s classification
as a central place of level D, retail enterprise with a sales space of more than 1,000 square
metres was not possible in this municipality. This size is restricted to central places of the
levels A, B and C. It really was an unpleasant situation. Yet, in the beginning all agents
involved were convinced that the affair could be settled in a satisfactory way and informal
negotiations began under the participation of politicians and higher sectoral officials.

In order to understand the following events, you have to know that at that time the Sal-
zburg State Constitution demanded a concentration government. Provided a political party
reached a specified number of mandates, participation in the government was automati-
cally granted. Since the time Jörg Haider was elected leader of the FPÖ, this party has
employed concentration governments unscrupulously to pursue a policy of opposition from
the government bench.

The stage was set for additional actors. The press had started to report on the case - in the
beginning in a very positive way - and had given all those involved a pat on their backs
because of their efforts to create new jobs. The discussion in the mass media, however, had
aroused the suspicion of the commercial gardeners. The representatives of this trade sud-
denly realised that Dehner’s garden centre would grow into a serious competitor. They
lodged a heavy complaint with the member of the state government responsible for plan-
ning, who immediately realised the chance to make opposition policy. From one day to the
other, he changed his mind completely, and launched an effective counter-campaign in the
press. The line of arguments now ran that local small- and medium-sized enterprise had to
be protected against foreign companies. A short time afterwards, this group got unex-
pected support by the Chamber of commerce and Industry which is closely linked to the
conservative People’s Party. Its members suddenly realised that Dehner’s did not only sell
flowers, pot plants and bushes but also gardening equipment and tools. The responsible
representative of this chamber started heavy attacks against the project and argued that the
allocation of such a mega-retailer of that line had to be prevented at all costs. (Just for the
sake of completeness: this gentleman runs a business of the same line and would have been directly affected by this case.)

You see, suddenly we are dealing with an entirely different problem. The subject of discussion was no longer whether the municipality of Thalgau represented the proper and legally permissible location for Dehner’s enterprise but rather how to misuse a planning procedure in order to get rid of an annoying competitor.

In any case, the municipality of Thalgau as well as those members of the state government belonging to the People’s Party and the Socialist Party insisted on the project. In order to solve the problem, the regional planning association was declared competent for decision. Its members were asked to give a recommendation. The managing board decided to appoint an expert for a study which should include proposals for the future structure of centrality of the planning region.

From then on the story, already a muddle, developed truly bizarre traits. As the company willing to establish was pressing, the expert was asked to deliver a short-term preliminary report on the results in order to enable a quick decision. The detailed results were clear and plain. The expert recommended to upgrade two municipalities of the region to level C, namely Thalgau and Saint Gilgen. The permission for the establishment of Dehner’s seemed to be granted.

In the following discussion between the protagonists involved- and during its continuation at a local inn - it became quite obvious that in reality the mayors present were not interested in regional planning issues, but in quite different matters. Especially the line of argumentation pursued by the mayors of some neighbouring municipalities clearly demonstrated that they sought nothing but revenge for the “sins” the previous mayor had committed and the new one should pay for them. The discriminations of former times were fastidiously listed. Never should Thalgau draw any advantages from the establishment of Dehner’s if they could prevent it. (Just as an aside: The opponents belonged to the same political party and since then I understand the degrees of comparison of "enemy" - "deadly enemy" - "party colleague"). There was no voting, the case was adjourned, the state government could not arrive at a decision.

The mayor of a neighbouring municipality would have liked a higher degree of centrality for his own municipality. By chance, he is a high state official and - what an irony - he is the head of the planning authorities responsible for local planning. Being a lawyer by profession, his scientific knowledge of centrality and regional planning was not too profound, I dare say. Nevertheless, he launched negative statements on the quality of the expertise in the mass media trying to disqualify the data base as insufficient. Two other officials of the department declared their solidarity with their colleague and by rejecting the expert’s recommendations, used the case to carry out a long-smouldering personal controversy with the expert. One has to be aware, however, that it had been the same planning officials who had urged the higher level of centrality for Thalgau when elaborating the Salzburg Regional Development Programme only a short time before. Now, as it fit the current situation, they opposed their own proposals vehemently.

Some months later the crucial meeting of the regional planning association took place. The draft of the expertise was finished, the data estimated for the preliminary report had been verified by a new empirical data collection and the recommendations were repeated. The voting, however brought the expected result: The expert’s recommendations were rejected and Dehner’s project was dropped.

I am sure that this example has demonstrated that there exist diverse realities that may get connected. Regionalisation and location issues serve as mere sheeting on which conflicts are carried out. And behind these conflicts we discover completely different motivations and intentionalities.
Case 3: Airport Center

This face is most prominent in Salzburg. It is quite a well-done portrait of Mr. Ludwig Bieringer, a distinguished member of the Austrian Federal Council and mayor of the Salzburg suburban municipality of Wals-Siezenheim. In former times the importance of this municipality rested on its farmers growing vegetable, but during the last three decades it has changed into a suburb of Salzburg with more than 10,000 inhabitants. In the course of suburbanisation, a great number of city functions have been transferred to this municipality. Mr. Bieringer pursues an aggressive policy for establishing business and enterprise. He is one of the main actors in a planning case that has become a symbol of spatial planning in Salzburg. I am referring to the so-called Airport Center, a typical shopping centre.

A joint-stock company, behind which we detect one of the largest Austrian insurance companies, counted on potential yields by erecting a large suburban shopping centre. A subsidiary company elaborated a suitable project. A location situated immediately at the border to the City of Salzburg was found soon and an agreement was quickly reached with the mayor.

There remained only one small problem: The spatial planning provisions did not allow a shopping centre - in this case with an intended sales space of about 30,000 square metres - at the location envisaged. On behalf of the company involved, an able lawyer found the solution. Due to an unfortunate formulation in the law concerned, the sales space was set in relation to the total floor space of the building. The whole complex had only to be enlarged to a total usable area of 120,000 square metres - and the Airport Center was not a shopping centre any longer. As such a sufficiently large building would only need the mayor’s approval, it was no problem to adapt the project accordingly by means of some additional offices, separate store areas, restaurants and even a big hotel - all of them covered by one roof. This trick made the lawyer’s line of argumentation possible stating that the Airport Center was not a shopping centre at all. Consequently, it was not admissible to apply provisions in force on shopping centres to the project concerned. Due to this legal situation, then absolutely clear, construction started immediately - without official permission. Within a few days the largest building site of western Austria developed.
Naturally, the legal advisers and spatial planners of the state government regarded the matter from a different view. They demanded the immediate suspension of building work and the enforcement of spatial planning procedures. In return, the lawyer of the project operators threatened to file a suit for the state government’s liability for financial loss of 80 (eighty) million schillings (that is more than 5.8 million euro). Confronted with this sum and after careful consideration, the state government was forced to agree with the operators’ interpretation of the law to be on the safe side.

The miraculous space increase of AirportCenter

Since then we have got a shopping centre in Salzburg which is provocatively advertised as the largest, most splendid and most eventful one all over western Austria, but which, officially speaking, is not a shopping centre at all. Up to this day, the complex has expanded by MacDonald’s, a megaretailer for electronics, a Megaplex cinema with 2,200 seats including restaurants and a large gambling hall. This latest complex alone represents an investment of more than a thousand million schillings (about 73 million euro). By the middle of 1998, the number of retailers including the entertainment industries had doubled as compared with their original number.

But the story goes on.

In the spring of 1998, the operators started an additional project. A building market was erected with a sales space of 16,000 m² and plans were made for another building housing a furniture market with a sales space of 15,000 m², a second electronics market and a catering wholesaler with a sales space of together 40,000 m². All these constructions did not have any approval of the authorities as regards proper land-use zoning. According to the land-use plan, the plots were designated as "residential land in a wider sense" permitting retail trade only for building material. The new firms, however, represented specialist markets, which, according to the Salzburg Regional Development Programme, may be approved of only in central places from level C upwards, which does not apply to Wals. Nevertheless, the building was finished and one of the biggest Austrian building market operators started with its equipment. We must not forget that in the branches of building markets and furniture retail business, a fierce competition has been going on. Only those occupying the best locations and being able to keep up with the Postfordistic dynamics of concentration, will survive. Hence, permission granted by the authorities or not - one could not care less: On December the first in 1998, the mega building market was opened.
That’s how facts are accomplished.

The other agents of the Salzburg spatial planning system were irritated, disconcerted and polarised by the events. The operators involved and the mayor were determined to push through the project at all costs. The project operators were supported by the powerful lobby of mayors affiliated with the People’s party and - very cautiously - by all members of the state government. We have to bear in mind that some hundreds of jobs and a high yield of taxes were at stake. The firm had already invested about 11 million euro in stock and logistics and threatened to file a suit against the state government. There was also the danger that the firm might move to adjoining Bavaria where it would have been most welcome. The Social Democratic members of the government openly sided with the project because the employees of retail megastructures are generally more committed to unions than those of traditional, smaller-sized retailers. The entrepreneurs’ wing of the conservative People’s Party, which is also very powerful, reacted most angrily and threatened not to support the state governor, a party colleague, in the oncoming election if he granted subsequent permission to the project. In the following, however, the officials of the planning authorities were signalled by members of the state government to find an adequate solution in compliance with law. In this situation the project operator’s resourceful lawyer discovered the magic spell of "teleological reduction".

To explain his argumentation in very simple terms: If the legislator had anticipated in 1994 when the State Development Programme had been decreed, which definition of large-sized retail business would be used in the amendment of the Spatial Planning Act of 1998, the specialist markets would have been excluded from the provisions of centrality. These provisions would have been applied only to shopping centres in a narrow sense. That is why it would not be any problem to grant subsequent approval to both, the building market and the furniture one. These brilliant arguments were adopted by the planning authorities and a positive official report was drawn up. From this day on, all insiders counted on the definite and satisfactory settlement of the affair.

It was expected that the municipality’s proposal for the rezoning of the land would be granted at the government sitting on the 15\textsuperscript{th} of December, 1998 (the date is important as you will see). All things seemed to run smoothly - up to the time when another group of agents entered the stage: the mass media.
Even before, the mass media had not been too friendly about the case. On the 14th of December, the day before the crucial governmental sitting, the Salzburg Regional TV channel broadcasted a very critical report on the BauMax case in the evening news. As a special gag, the TV channel carried out an (TED) opinion poll. The viewers were invited to call the station whether the building market should be granted subsequent permission. The result left no doubt: two thirds of the callers made it clear that the grant should not be given. You have to keep in mind that shortly two months later elections at state and local levels would take place. Under these auspices and under the pressure of the TED result the proposal on rezoning was rejected to everybody’s surprise on December the 15th. Austria’s largest building market remained unapproved.

This situation required prompt reaction from the political actors. On February the 3rd, 1999, just a few weeks before the elections, the state parliament passed an amendment of the Salzburg Spatial Planning Act. Actually, its drawing up would have fallen into the scope of competence of the planning authorities, but they had not even been informed and were completely taken by surprise. This amendment practically laid down the general suspension of building activities for new shopping centres. Consequently, the following positive effects were reached: The entrepreneurs’ wing of the People’s Party was calmed down, the matter was removed from the agenda beyond election time and the already existing structures were consolidated. In addition, the approval or rejection of the proposed rezoning was postponed.

As soon as elections were over, hectic negotiations between the diverse actors were conducted. The project operators of BauMax offered a compromise: Apart from paying a considerable fine, they would reduce the sales space from 16,000 m² to 12,000 m². The state government accepted the “offer” and granted all the required permissions subsequently. At the end of July the building market was formally opened a second time.
Apart from serving as entertainment - what may these examples demonstrate?

**Conclusions I**

*Reality of the planning system has little to do with the claimed rationality of an action system based on expert knowledge. Due to the agents' individual primary motivations, nearly any decision may be accomplished in spite of all the formalised procedures, provisions and agreements.*

First of all we have to state that the reality of spatial planning and spatial policy has very little to do with the professionality, rationality and objectivity usually assigned to this system of actions. On the contrary, we have to realise that the agents in this system behave in a way only too human. I am referring to all the imperfection, weaknesses, irrationality, deceitfulness, egoism and unpredictability that characterise everyday reality of human actions. We have got a modern law on spatial planning, which should be suitable to have a thorough grasp of the problems concerned and to solve them adequately. We have procedures, we have instruments and we have the institutions for the management of the procedures. Yet taking a closer look and considering the reality of planning processes, all these thoroughly rationalised, highly standardised and professionalised systems relations may be interpreted in nearly any way.

**Conclusions II**

*If we want to explain land-use systems and location decisions or to make prognoses of them, it will be necessary to consider the individual human actors, their subjective cognitions, emotions, egoism, and the "subjective logic" of their argumentation.*

Secondly, if we want to explain and forecast the structures and development of land-use systems and location decisions, it is evidently not sufficient to do so on the grounds of the ostensibly rational algorithms of planning actions. In none of the three cases I have presented to you as examples, the final results of location decisions may deduced from law and rationally defined rules of the planning system. The gymnasium should have never been located in Seekirchen, Thalgau should have been upgraded and the Airport Center should have never been built. All these projects have been realised, nevertheless. Apparently, the dynamics of everyday regionalisations and geography-making may be adequately analysed and reconstructed only if we consider the subjective contexts of action of the individual actors: their subjective cognition, emotions, egoism and logic.

The example of Wals has shown that the ego-trip of a powerful mayor combined with the brilliance of a highly specialised lawyer and their urge for self-realisation may overrule all the strictly defined and highly formalised procedures of the planning system. Thus we may conclude that even in the case of the formally and legally defined system of spatial planning, we have to consider the human dimension of geography-making. That is why I propose to pursue an action-theoretical and subject-centred approach when we try to explain the processes of regionalisation. If we accept that it is one of the tasks of social geography to give such explanations, we shall try to do so by applying concepts that allow us to trace the human teleological background and the intentionalities of the respective agents.
As regards the planning system, I assume that such an approach could also offer some possible conclusions and therapeutics.

**Conclusions III**

Spatial planning should be conceived as a system of social interactions between individual actors. For better understanding, it should be analysed in terms of action theory. As a regulatory system for optimising "everyday regionalisations", it should be developed to a consensus-oriented process of communicative interactions.

The system of spatial planning should be conceived not only as an institutional structure with legally defined formal rules, but also as a system of social interaction between the individual agents. In order to arrive at a better understanding of the functioning of the system, it seems necessary to analyse it in terms of action theory, which allows us to grasp the dynamics of intentionality and context-specific evaluations of the actors involved. I think this is a precondition if we want spatial planning to develop from a formally institutional structure based on laws and decrees towards a consensus-oriented process of communicative interactions between the relevant actors.

As far as I know, the planning system of the Netherlands has a very long and successful tradition of such a consensus-oriented approach which accepts the actors’ primary motivations. I am sure it may serve as a most positive example. In Austria, I suspect, we still have a lot to learn and it will be a long way to Tipperary. But I am convinced we should follow the route.

Thank you for your kind attention and patience.