The New City and the New Countryside

A NEW PARADIGM ?

Urbanization no longer meaning moving to the cities—and rural life no longer meaning being precarious, endangered, in decline ?

This panel discussion ist meant to explore how „on-the-ground urbanization“, digital connectivity, and new spatial models are - finally - reshaping the relationship between cities and rural areas.

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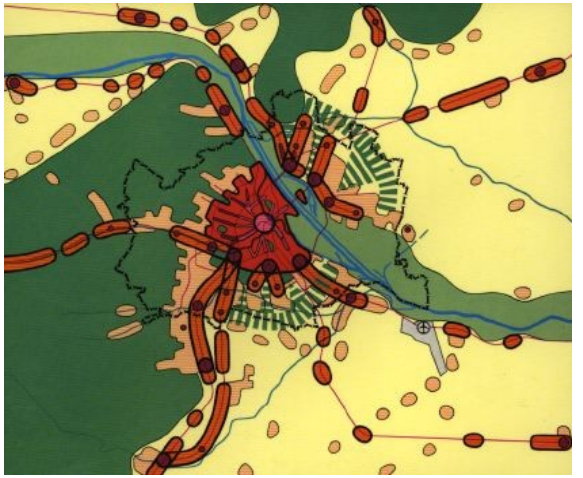
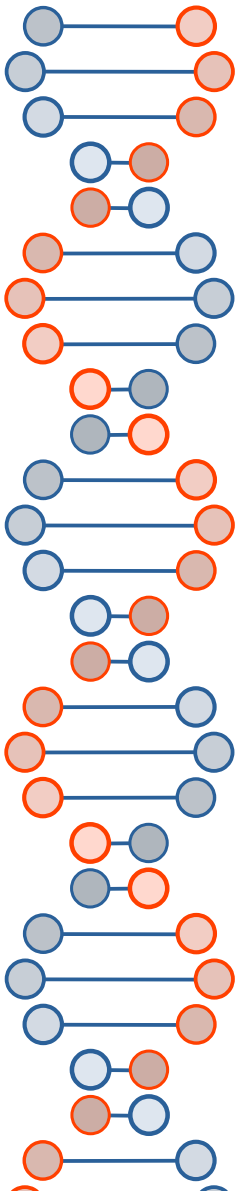


Nineties Vienna „Space of Flows“ planning

Richard Rogers original Parc BIT plan 1994 …… from my personal archive !



Idea of this Panel

- **By linking highly specialized urban knowledge systems with vibrant rural and small-town “front ends,” a win-win dynamic emerges: cities are relieved of demographic pressure, while rural areas gain vitality, services, and future-oriented relevance.**

- **Drawing on Austrian examples and international perspectives , the session ia meant to discuss how this new synthesis can take shape in physical space —sustainably, scalably, and with a high quality of life for both city and countryside.**

“In Situ Urbanization” – UN DESA

https://desapublications.un.org/policy-briefs/undesa-policy-brief-104-situ-urbanization-key-leaving-no-one-behind (2021)

- 80% of people living in poverty reside in rural areas.
- Despite progress, significant development and income disparities between urban and rural areas persist.
- Traditional urbanization often leads to rural exodus, urban overcrowding, and the emergence of slums.
- An alternative to traditional urbanization is needed.

Why In Situ Urbanization (ISU)?

- An approach to rural development in which rural areas become more „urban“ without people having to migrate.
- **Expansion of non-agricultural job opportunities**
- **Improved infrastructure (transportation, education, healthcare)**
- **Stronger economic ties with surrounding regions**
- **Goal: Raise living standards to urban levels without losing rural identity.**

Idea: Reduce poverty and inequality, alleviate migration pressure on cities, and promote geographically and demographically balanced development

Description 1 : The Case of Japan

- **After World War II: land reforms, mechanization, strong government support.**
- **Farmers became landowners, and productivity rose.**
- **Many households became part-time farmers with income from non-agricultural activities.**
- **Health, education, and transportation played a central role.**
- **Result: Higher incomes than in urban households and balanced regional development.**
- **(Lots of parallels to Austria)**

2nd Example: China

- Since the 1970s: **The emergence of 20,000 small towns and over 100 million non-agricultural jobs.**
- Township and Village Enterprises (TVEs) as the engine of development.
- Factors:
- **High population density and infrastructure („Village“ and „Small Town“ in China is different from European concepts!!)**
- **Family-run businesses, Township enterprises and Big Capital merge (Example „Shein fast fashion village“ Guangzhou with 5000 factories)**
- Political framework (e.g., the **hukou system** which classifies citizens as urban or rural residents, controlling access to social services, employment, and mobility.)
- Result: *Massive poverty reduction and structural transformation of rural areas. But also extreme long labor – times and tough work conditions.*

3rd Case: Sri Lanka – “Rural First”

- Very low rural-to-urban migration despite a growing economy.
- Free education and healthcare, affordable public transportation.
- High quality of life in rural areas, minimal regional disparities.
- Result: Spatial equality and fewer incentives to migrate.
- **What do all three have in common?**
- *A holistic approach rather than purely technological solutions. * Universal healthcare * Free or affordable education * Good transportation infrastructure * Promotion of non-agricultural activities*

GIANT DATA CENTERS AND DARK FACTORIES ARE LIFE-KILLING „ANTI-PATTERNS“ (**my frustration with Rem Koolhaas!*****) and have nothing to do with ISU !!!! (Lets talk about „Edge AI“ and „Village OS“ later !)***

The real crux of the matter:

The concept is appealing, but not trivial:

1) **Infrastructure** (broadband, mobility) (this is usually the focus)
2) A critical mass of **committed people**
3) New governance models (lot of self governance and participation required)
4) Funding beyond traditional funding models
5) **Risk of "half-baked urbanization" without real urban quality and loss of rural qualities**
   (historic example of Soviet „Monotowns")

A need to go deeper ...

- **So …..In-situ urbanization is more than just a matter of „urban / regional planning“.**
- **(Of course, it cannot do without spatial planning, but it will fail if spatial planners do not understand this „more“ better).**
- **It is a cultural project:**
- **How can people live in a highly connected way while remaining rooted in their local communities?**
- Or to put it even more pointedly:
- **How do we bring the quality of the city to the countryside without destroying the quality of the countryside?**

A Tentative Typology of In-Situ Urbanization

- **1.** Infrastructure-driven ISU **(Urbanity arises from access—not from density. Broadband – Mobility – Energy infrastructure**
- **2.** Knowledge- and institution-driven ISU **(Urbanity arises from connection to knowledge systems.) Hybrid universities, telemedicine, digital culture**
- **3.** Production- and supply-driven ISU **(Urbanity arises from local value creation at a high technological level) (Automation, makerspaces, circular economy) (spans from dense „company villages“ to post industrial bio - economies)**
- **4.** Socio-ecological ISU **(Urbanity arises from genius loci) (eco-villages, bioregions, commons & governance, cultural heritage – the PLACE is leading)**
- **5.** Morphological ISU **(Urbanity arises from „Leapfrogging cities“ and proximity) (Otto Wagner’s “unlimited metropolis,” polycentric cities, village centers 2.0, Otterpohls „garden ring villages“ reviving Ebenezer Howards „garden city“)**

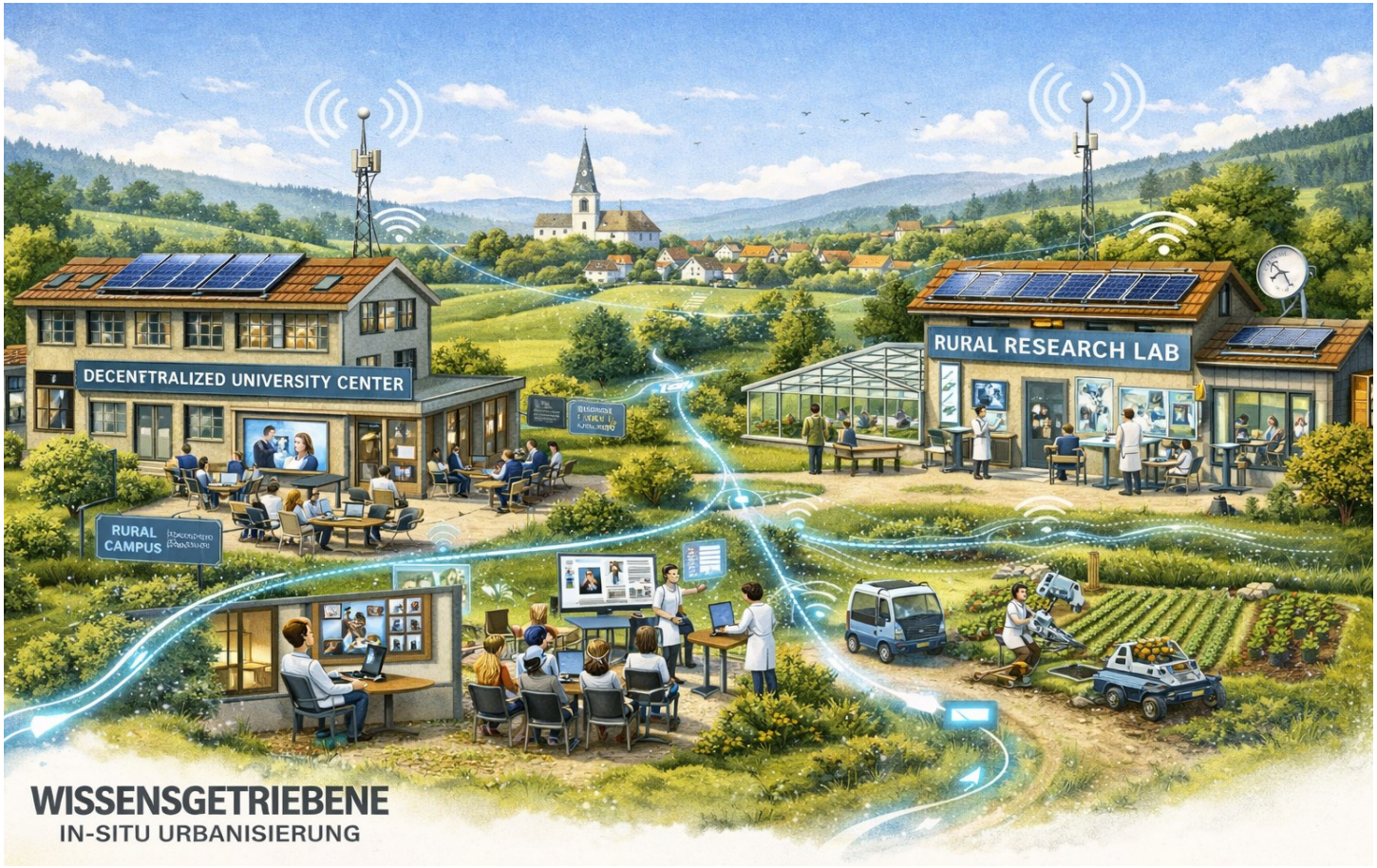
1. Infrastructure-driven in-situ urbanization

Infrastructure-driven in-situ urbanization

Logic:

- **Urbanity arises from access—not from density.**
- **Drivers:**
- *Broadband / digital networks*
- *Mobility (rail, micro-public transit)*
- *Energy infrastructure*
- **Examples:**
- Work-from-home villages
- Telemedicine hubs
- Rail-supported settlement axes (“string of pearls”) → Example „Tram region“
- **Planning question:**
- 👉 Where does infrastructure immediately create new lifestyle options?

2. Knowledge- and institution-driven ISU



Knowledge- and institution-driven ISU

- **Logic:**
- Urbanity arises through connections to knowledge systems.
- **Drivers:**
- Universities (hybridized)
- Hospitals (decentralized and expanded)
- Cultural institutions (distributed)
- **Examples**:
- Village University / distributed learning centers (*The case of Rottenmann)*
- Satellites of research institutions (Reality Labs)
- Regional health hubs (example Austrian „Gesundheitsviertel“ Waldviertel)
- **Key point here:**
- 👉 Rural areas as “front ends” of the knowledge society

3. Production- and supply-driven ISU

Production- and supply-driven ISU

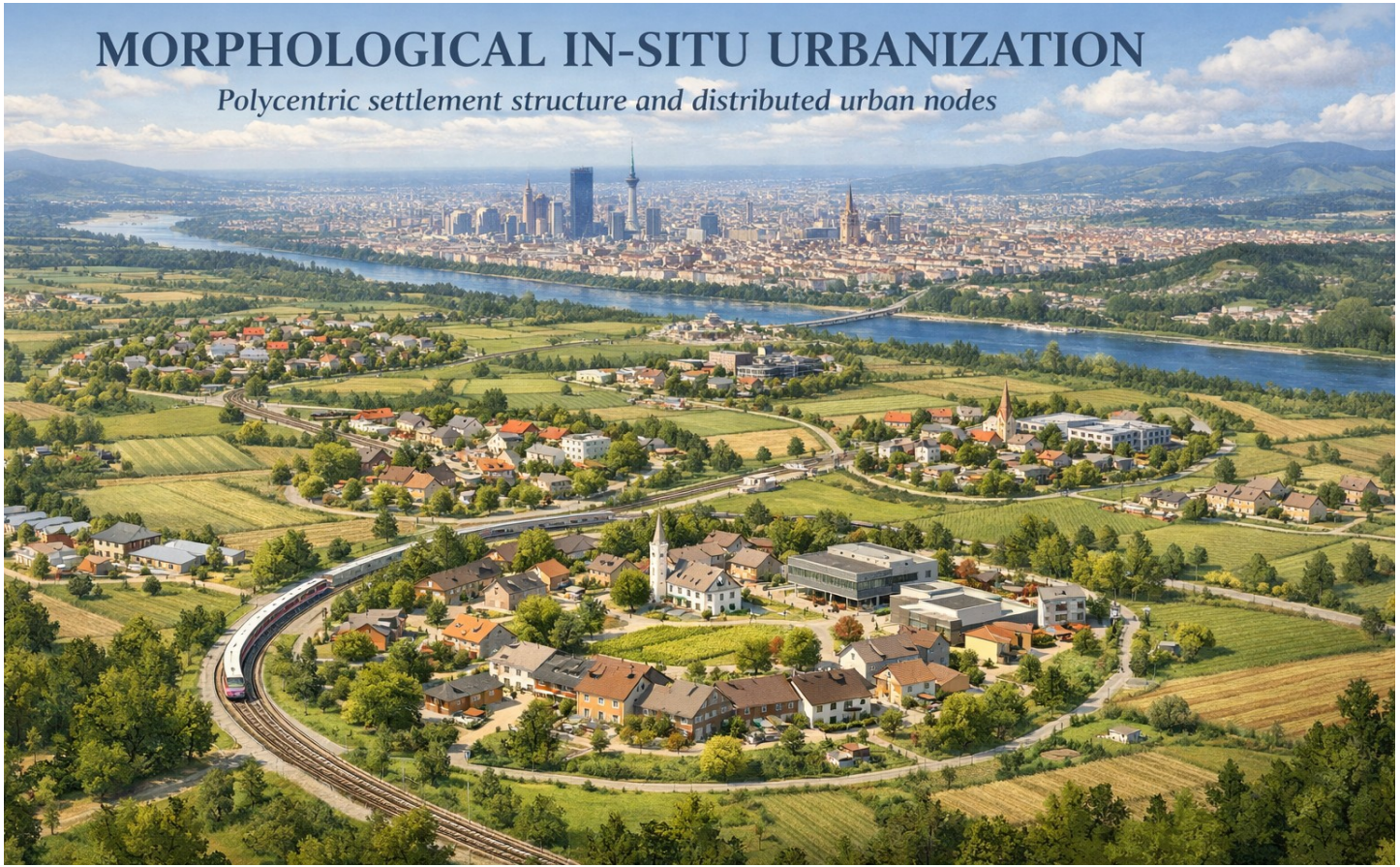
- **Logic**:
- **Urbanity arises from local value creation at a high technological level.**
- **Drivers:**
- Embedded Automation as opposed to industrial automation
- Regional circular economy
- Digital manufacturing
- **Examples:**
- Makerspaces / FarmLabs / Container Factories
- Regional food ecosystems and value chains
- Distributed clustered micro-industry
- **Key departure from traditional planning:**
- 👉 Work is no longer city-bound → Production can return „home“

4 Place-based (socio/ecological/cultural) ISU

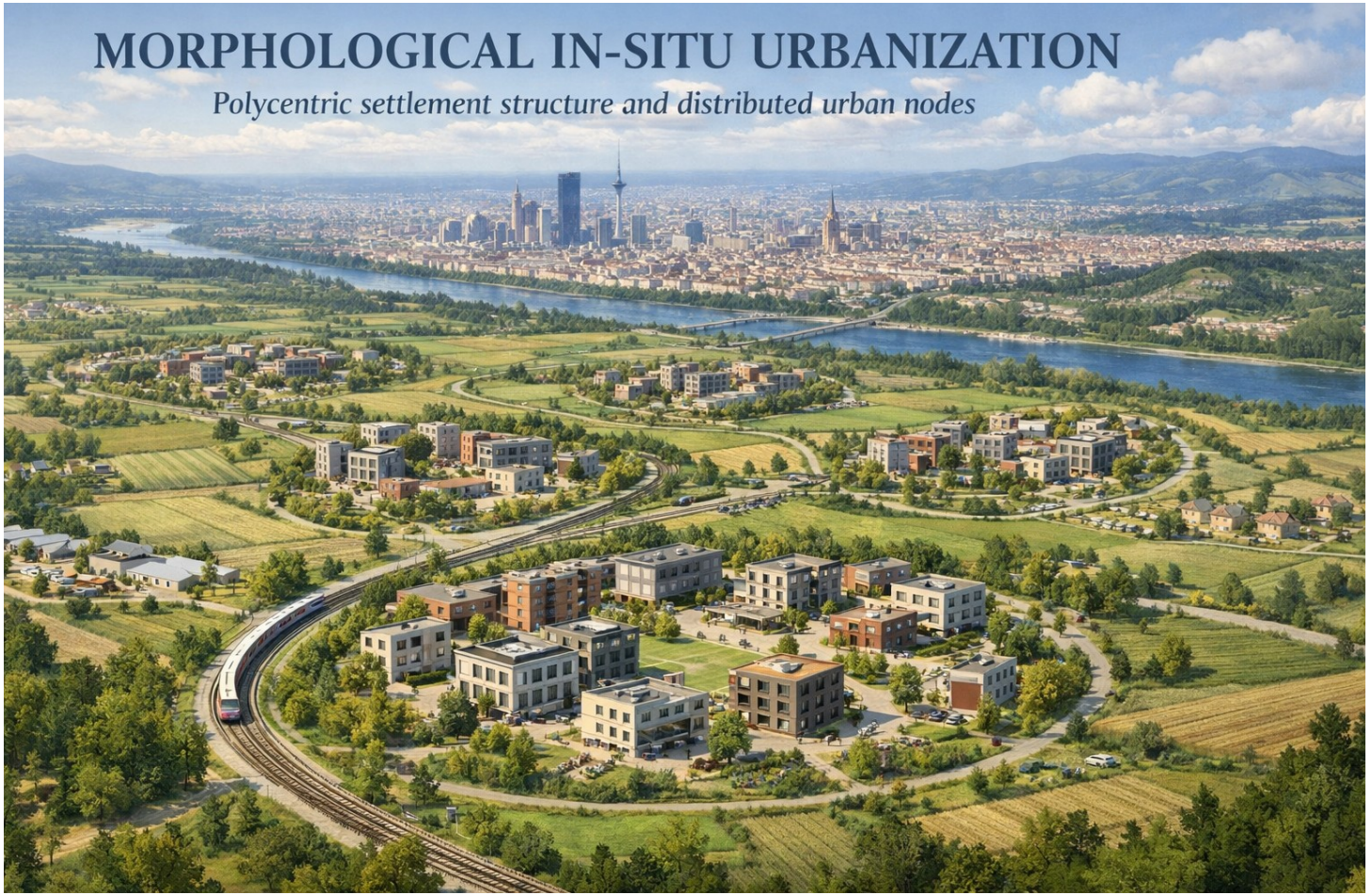
Place-based (socio/ecological/cultural) ISU

- (***Place creates intelligence)***
- **Logic**:
- **Urbanity arises from contextual knowledge and quality of life.**
- **Drivers**:
- Human–nature interfaces
- Commons (self-managed shared infrastructures)
- Local governance
- **Examples**:
- Regenerative villages (Village OS), „smart villages“ like **Stanz im Mürztal (must see!)**
- Community-based supply (from CSA to CSX !)
- Bioregional systems (Enhancing the Bioregional Operating System – Possible Planet Lab)
- **Key argument:**
- 👉 Complex problems are location-bound – solutions are too

5. „Morphological“ ISU – variant 1



5 „Morphological“ ISU 2 – more „Otto Wagner“



„Morphological“ ISU

- **Logic:**
- **New functions generate new spatial forms.**
- **Drivers:**
- Re-polycentrism * Rural Densification without metropolization
- “Village Centers 2.0”
- **Examples:**
- Revitalized town centers and „Multifunctional buildings“
- Seestadt Aspern as „daughter city“
- GardenRing Villages and Fab Cities/Regions (Hamburg)
- **Otto Wagner reference:**
- 👉 “Places” as distributed nodes in the infinite metropolis

The coupled transformation

- **These types are not alternatives, but overlapping layers.**
- And above all:
- **In-situ urbanization only truly occurs when the city and the countryside are conceived as a functionally coupled system.**

We are not urbanizing the countryside.

We are de-concentrating (distributing, virtualizing) the city, deeply respecting what makes us heathy and alive, natural and cultured landscape, the spirit of places

Thus we create a new form of settlement: we might call them „Global Villages“