

## Excursion of the Knowledge-Network „Innocité” Lower Austria

Identity and a clear image, these are characteristic features of successful cities. We found three examples in Lower Austria and organised a bus-excursion on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2009.

About 40 participants took part and we were very proud to also welcome our partner from Salzburg.



Our group with the vice mayor of Amstetten (first row, second from the right)

Amstetten – the city positions itself as a shopping mall for the region  
Waidhofen/Ybbs – successfully filled empty spaces with new shops and gastronomy

Haag – has a clear image as an active city full of cultural life

### **Amstetten – the capital of the district**

Our first stop, Amstetten is a middle sized town with about 23.000 inhabitants. It has some retail agglomeration on the edge of the city, mainly covering furniture, hardware stores and car retail. The city center is offering goods of medium-term demand. The main square and the main streets have been remodelled during recent years. The #1 guideline in this respect was the barrier-free design. The goal was to make the public spaces as user-friendly as possible. Especially pedestrians and cyclists were taken into consideration. The street, sidewalk, parking spaces – everything is on one level, only materials of the pavement change.

Amstetten has an inner city shopping mall with 70 shops. The mall also provides almost half of the parking spaces in the inner city. The main square

and the connecting roads also have shops and on the main square a market takes place twice a week.

After the installation of the shopping mall, visitor streams in the town shifted. The surrounding streets showed a better development than streets that are farther away. Nevertheless the shopping mall brings more customers into the city. The shop owners formed a city marketing association, where the shopping mall takes also part in. Various events and advertising activities are organised together.

Currently, the city is planning to improve the communication between citizens to improve the community-spirit in the town.

### **The second stop of the day: Waidhofen/Ybbs.**

The town is situated in a valley in the South of Lower Austria and has about 11.500 inhabitants. It has a very old historical city center. 2005 Waidhofen faced the challenge that about one third of the shops in the center were either empty or the owners were about to retire. Shop owners, gastronomy, town officials and city marketing were brought together to form a package of activities to tackle the challenge. That was not an easy process and needed many meetings and face-to-face talks to form a group that could work. The clear direction and goal of development was also important. Lower Austria organizes a big exhibition about historical topics every year. That draws many visitors to the hosting towns. Waidhofen was one of these towns in 2007 and wanted to present an attractive city with shops and restaurants/bars to cater the visitors.

The package of activities to reach that goal was:

- Introduction of an additional promotion instrument for economic development. Under certain conditions, the town supports rental cost for the first three years of a newly opened shop. That brought the rental prices down to a sustainable level in the inner city
- Consulting for house owners to improve the offer (building quality)
- Active promotion for renting the empty shops by the city marketing management
- Consumer friendly parking regulations and very reasonable parking fees

Until 2009, 36 new shops opened in the city center. There are practically no empty shops left.

The conclusion of the activists after five years is:

- It is absolutely crucial that all participants of the process go in the same direction – they had one coordinator, who was responsible to keep the communication flowing and was organising meetings etc. A professional network has to be built up.
- It is very important to include all “players” in the city center into the process. Also the inhabitants who live in the city center must not be forgotten. Compromises have to be found.



Stroll through the historic city center of Waidhofen/Ybbs

### **Haag – a center of culture for citizens and visitors**

The town of Haag has about 5.000 inhabitants. It is a small town with a very attractive but also very small main square in the city center. The main square and the church are situated on a hill.

1995 the theatre club KIM started to play in an old cellar in a Restaurant on the main square. Also cinema and live events with artists from the region and from Vienna were organized. 1998 the idea for a summer stage on the main square was born.



Free standing public stand on the main square of Haag (temporary construction)

Two architects designed a free standing stand for the audience, which won design awards. This stand is made of wood and is built up every year for the "Theatre Summer" in August. The financing of the stand was supported by the Urban Regeneration Programme in Lower Austria and the city of Haag. From the beginning, Haag could attract a large audience, because the leading actors on stage vary every year and usually have famous names in Austria. In 2009, 18.000 visitors saw 36 stage events on the main square of Haag. Before the year 1999, the city center in Haag was very quiet in the summer months. This temporary, but yearly event could revitalise the square in a sustainable way. Houses around the square were renovated. New inhabitants came in, currently the last empty house on the square is remodelled and another 23 flats will be created there. In 2006 the surface of the square and the lighting was renewed by the city. Many inhabitants of Haag were sceptical about the idea of the "Theater Summer". After ten years, people don't want to miss it any more. The club still organises the event, one person works full time on the project.