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„Individual agency in regional economic development:
Governance entrepreneurship in peripheral towns“

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List of abbreviations

ACI	Actor-centred institutionalism
EU	European Union
EUROSTAT	European Statistical Office
GT	Grounded Theory
KMO	Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin
LAG	Local action group
LEADER	Actions for the development of the rural economy [Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale]
NACE	Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community [Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne]
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics [Nomenclature des unités territoriales statistiques]
ÖROK	Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning
PCA	Principal Component Analysis
PCI	Problem-centred Interview
R&D	Research and Development
RIS	Regional Innovation System(s)
RQ	Research Question
S3s	Smart Specialization Strategies

List of articles

Paper I

Döringer, S. (2020): Individual agency and socio-spatial change in regional development: Conceptualizing governance entrepreneurship in: *Geography Compass*, 14 (5), e12486. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12486>

Paper II

Döringer, S. (2021): 'The problem-centred expert interview'. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge in: *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 24 (3), 265-278.
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Paper III

Döringer, S. (2020): Governance entrepreneurship in regional economic development: Individual agency in Austria in: *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 7(1), 550-567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2020.1842801>

Abstract

Why some places experience economic growth while other struggle with downgrading processes despite facing similar preconditions and challenges is one of the most pivotal research questions in economic geography. Against the background of increasing socio-economic disparities on different scales across Europe, the scientific discussion on uneven development is currently gaining momentum. In this context, scholars increasingly argue for a focus on micro-level processes and human agency in order to gain a deeper understanding of change processes in regional economic development. This dissertation addresses this claim by concentrating on the specific role of entrepreneurial individuals in decision-making processes in towns undergoing peripheralization processes. It scrutinizes local governance arrangements and individual agency in regional economic development, demonstrating how entrepreneurs advance socio-spatial change. Thereby, it takes an actor-centred perspective, focusing on the interrelation of entrepreneurial individuals from economic and political spheres in order to understand how and to what extent individuals might gain influence in governance.

The thesis aims at contributing to an explanation of individual agency in local economic development against the background of structural developments by providing theoretical, methodological, and empirical advancements. It draws upon the process-oriented concept of peripheralization, emphasizing both the multi-dimensionality of downgrading processes and the importance of entrepreneurial agency. Against this conceptual background, it advances to review political entrepreneurship approaches, highlighting the role of individual agency for change, namely that of institutional and policy entrepreneurship. By connecting these theoretical strands to an analytical governance perspective, it develops the framework of governance entrepreneurship, pointing to the role of individuals in local decision-making processes (*Paper I*). Being concerned with questions regarding the ways in which to approach the action orientation of entrepreneurial individuals methodically, the dissertation also offers a methodological approach towards revealing implicit knowledge dimensions of entrepreneurial individuals by introducing a combination of qualitative interviewing methods (*Paper II*). Empirically, it sheds light on structural processes of peripheralization in small towns in Austria in order to gain an overview over the socio-economic conditions shaping the entrepreneurs' actions (*framing text*). Building upon this, it scrutinizes the actor constellations and governance arrangements of two selected towns in Austria more deeply (*Paper III*). The comparative case studies illustrate the ways in which entrepreneurial individuals influence local decision-making processes and alter governance arrangements by establishing horizontal and vertical pipelines, combining informal and formal practices, pursuing individual legitimization, and promoting regional rescaling. Beside these relational dimensions of governance entrepreneurship, the investigation also unfolds a temporal dimension distinguishing between long-term governance transition and short-term governance shift. Based on these findings, the

dissertation proposes a middle-range theory and finally discusses some practical implications for local governance in the context of peripheralization. Ultimately, the results of this thesis contribute to the ongoing discussion of agency in regional development by conceptualizing and scrutinizing governance entrepreneurship in the periphery. However, many further scientific efforts will be required regarding insights into agency and peripheralization – theoretically and empirically. Hence, the dissertation concludes with a critical reflection and a discussion of avenues for further research.

Kurzfassung

Warum manche Orte trotz vergleichbarer Voraussetzungen und Herausforderungen Wirtschaftswachstum aufweisen, während andere mit Abstiegsprozessen kämpfen, ist eine der zentralsten Fragen in der Wirtschaftsgeographie. Vor dem Hintergrund zunehmender sozioökonomischer Disparitäten auf unterschiedlichen Ebenen in Europa, gewinnt auch die wissenschaftliche Debatte um ungleiche räumliche Entwicklungen gegenwärtig an Bedeutung. Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler plädieren in diesem Zusammenhang zunehmend für einen Fokus auf die Mikroebene und das dort vorhandene Handlungsvermögen („agency“), um dadurch ein tieferes Verständnis über Wandlungsprozesse in der regionalen Wirtschaftsentwicklung zu erhalten. Die vorliegende Dissertation greift diese Forderung auf und konzentriert sich dabei auf die spezifische Rolle von Schlüsselpersonen („entrepreneurial individuals“) in Entscheidungsprozessen in Kleinstädten, die von Peripherisierungsprozessen betroffen sind. Die Arbeit untersucht lokale Governance-Arrangements und das Handlungsvermögen von Einzelnen in der lokalen Wirtschaft und zeigt auf, wie diese sozialräumlichen Wandel fördern. Dabei wird eine akteurszentrierte Perspektive eingenommen, die auf die Beziehungen von Schlüsselpersonen aus Politik und Wirtschaft fokussiert, um zu verstehen, wie und in welchem Ausmaß Einzelne Governance beeinflussen können.

Ziel der Dissertation ist es, das Handlungsvermögen Einzelner in der lokalen Wirtschaftsentwicklung vor dem Hintergrund struktureller Entwicklungen zu erforschen und einen theoretischen, methodologischen und empirischen Beitrag zu leisten. Sie stützt sich dabei auf den prozessorientierten Theorieansatz der Peripherisierung, der sowohl die Multidimensionalität von Abstiegsprozessen als auch die Bedeutung der Handlungsfähigkeit von Akteuren betont. Vor diesem konzeptionellen Hintergrund wird ein Literaturüberblick über politische Entrepreneurship-Konzepte gegeben, die das Handlungsvermögen von Schlüsselpersonen als einen Faktor für Wandel unterstreichen: nämlich Institutional Entrepreneurship und Policy Entrepreneurship. Durch die Verknüpfung der beiden Ansätze mit einer analytischen Governance-Perspektive wird der Analyserahmen Governance Entrepreneurship entwickelt, der die Rolle von Individuen in lokalen Entscheidungsprozessen hervorhebt (*Fachartikel I*). Ausgehend von der Fragestellung, wie man sich der Handlungsorientierung von Schlüsselpersonen methodisch annähern kann, bietet die Dissertation aufbauend auf der Kombination zweier qualitativer Interviewmethoden zudem einen methodologischen Ansatz, mit dem es möglich wird, sich impliziten Wissensdimensionen von Entrepreneuren anzunähern (*Fachartikel II*). Empirisch werden zunächst strukturelle Prozesse der Peripherisierung in österreichischen Kleinstädten näher beleuchtet, um sich so einen Überblick über die sozioökonomischen Entwicklungen zu verschaffen, die die Handlungen der Schlüsselpersonen prägen (*Rahmenschrift*). Aufbauend darauf, werden Akteurskonstellationen und Governance-Arrangements in zwei österreichischen Kleinstädten tiefergehend untersucht. Die vergleichende Fallstudie zeigt anschaulich, wie Einzelne

lokale Entscheidungsprozesse und Governance-Arrangements beeinflussen, in dem Sie horizontale und vertikale Verbindungen etablieren, informelle und formelle Praktiken kombinieren, individuelle Legitimation anstreben und sich um eine regionale Reskalierung bemühen. Neben dieser relationalen Dimension von Governance Entrepreneurship eröffnet die Untersuchung auch eine zeitliche Dimension, die zwischen einem längerfristigen und einem kurzfristigen Governance-Wandel unterscheidet (*Fachartikel III*). Aufbauend auf diesen Erkenntnissen, wird eine Theorie mittlerer Reichweite erarbeitet und zudem werden praktische Implikationen für lokale Governance im Kontext von Peripherisierung diskutiert. Indem Governance Entrepreneurship in der Peripherie konzeptionell bearbeitet und tiefergehend erforscht wird, leisten die Ergebnisse dieser Dissertation einen wichtigen Beitrag zur laufenden Debatte über „agency“ in der Regionalentwicklung. Dennoch braucht es weitere wissenschaftliche Arbeiten in Hinblick auf lokale Handlungsmöglichkeiten und Peripherisierung - theoretisch und empirisch. Eine kritische Reflexion und ein Ausblick auf weitere Forschungsmöglichkeiten bilden folglich den Abschluss der Dissertation.

1. Introduction

Why towns and regions show distinct development patterns despite facing similar structural preconditions and socio-economic challenges has long been one of the most pivotal research questions in economic geography and regional studies. This debate on uneven development has recently gained momentum against the background of increasing socio-economic disparities across Europe (Iammarino et al., 2019; Musil, 2013). The concentration of political power and economic growth in urban centres is challenging peripheral areas with fewer employment opportunities to counter depopulation and to find regional development opportunities (Grillitsch and Sotarauta, 2019). Recent theoretical approaches discuss these uneven developments under the relational and process-based concept of peripheralization, rejecting an understanding of peripheries as static entities. Rather than seeing peripherality as a structural consequence and thus regarding local actors as powerless, it acknowledges the agency of actors in these places (Kühn, 2015).

The discourse on regional economic development has long been dominated by a focus on innovation performance and economic growth. However, these structural and growth-oriented approaches increasingly fall short of explaining spatial unevenness and divergent developments of towns and regions. By highlighting industrial structures, capital, and resource endowments as factors of economic success, they downplayed the importance of institutional contexts, socio-cultural characteristics, and individual capabilities for regional development. In the quest for a more comprehensive understanding of the ways in which these aspects might shape and influence regional trajectories, scholars increasingly argue for a deeper analysis of human agency and governance (Grillitsch and Sotarauta, 2019; Beer et al., 2019; Herrschel, 2011). Moreover, acknowledging place characteristics and actor networks is considered a prerequisite for developing place-based approaches in regional development and utilizing local capabilities more efficiently in practice (Iammarino et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Pose and Ketterer, 2020).

Based on this growing interest in micro processes of regional economic development, the concepts of institutional entrepreneurship and policy entrepreneurship are gaining increasing attention in the current debate. These approaches are concerned with the investigation of entrepreneurial agency and can be applied to explore the role of individuals (or groups of individuals) for exploiting opportunities and stimulating socio-spatial change (Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Leick, 2017; Battilana et al., 2009). Within these strands of literature, entrepreneurial agency has mainly been discussed in terms of prospering central areas (Jolly et al., 2020; Sotarauta et al., 2021; Miörner, 2020; Benneworth et al., 2017), while agency in peripheral areas has attracted comparatively little attention, with some exceptions (Plüschke-Altof and Grootens, 2019; Leick, 2017;

Beer, 2014; Granqvist, 2011). This is somewhat surprising, as entrepreneurial activities and their potential impetus for the sustainable development of peripheral areas experiencing social, economic, and political transformations might be particularly worthy of investigation. The thesis addresses this research gap by focusing on entrepreneurial agency and decision-making networks in peripheral towns and conceptually drawing upon entrepreneurship and governance. It argues for a focus on entrepreneurial individuals in local decision-making processes, as individual resources and personal networks are considered central aspects of small-scale governance arrangements (Döringer, 2020c).

Departing from the viewpoint that peripherality is not predetermined by a remote location, but socially produced by different actors (Kühn, 2015; Herrschel, 2011), the dissertation directs attention towards the agency of entrepreneurial individuals from economy and politics in small towns dealing with processes of peripheralization. Although scholars and practitioners broadly stress the importance of individuals in central positions, they can still be considered as “factor X” in local development (Gailing and Ibert, 2016). As conceptual and empirical information about agency in local decision-making is still scarce, this dissertation sets out to look beyond the surface and to explore the ways in which entrepreneurial individuals can influence local economic development and might contribute to redirecting peripheralization. How do they exert agency in governance when endeavouring to make the local economy more innovative and competitive? To what extent do they rearrange local governance arrangements when reaching for new processes and projects against the background of peripheralization?

1.1 Research aims and questions

This thesis examines the specific role of entrepreneurial individuals within local governance arrangements in peripheral towns in Austria. It aims at a detailed understanding of entrepreneurial agency under processes of peripheralization by considering structural conditions as well as micro processes. Thereby, it takes an actor-centred perspective, focusing on the interrelation of economic and political actors in order to understand how and to what extent individuals can gain influence in governance and contribute to regional economic development processes. It is argued that the reorganization of governance might constitute a crucial task for actors in small towns for the purpose of reacting to emergent socio-economic challenges and mobilizing scarce resources. In doing so, the thesis does not intend to evaluate these processes nor to assess whether the economic development should be considered successful or not. It much rather strives towards accentuating local perspectives and perceptions in order to gain a deeper understanding of the inner logics, routines, and practices that are performed in local contexts (Lagendijk, 2007).

The dissertation combines different conceptual strands and considers literature from the neighbouring disciplines of political science and sociology, seeking to enrich the ongoing debate in economic geography. The socio-spatial approach of peripheralization constitutes the conceptual framework of this dissertation, pointing to the structural dynamics of peripheries, but also opening up the perspective on the agency of actors in these places. Against this theoretical background, it combines a governance perspective with insights from policy and institutional entrepreneurship literature to explain how entrepreneurial individuals might influence local decision-making in the context of peripheralization. It thus develops a middle-range theory of governance entrepreneurship in order to contribute to an explanation of the constitution of human agency in regional economic development. Hereinafter, the thesis refers to the term individual agency as a specification of human agency, in order to emphasize the research interest in entrepreneurial individuals.

Against the background of this research aim, this dissertation is concerned with an overarching research question:

- *How can entrepreneurial individuals gain individual agency and to what extent can they gain influence on economic development processes in peripheralized towns?*

This main research question (RQ) is divided into four further sub-questions addressing the structural conditions of peripheralized towns on the one hand, and the agency of entrepreneurial individuals on the other:

- *RQ 1: What are the structural preconditions of small-sized cities in Austria and which of these cities are undergoing processes of peripheralization?*
- *RQ 2: Who are the entrepreneurial individuals in regional economic development and how do they influence local governance?*
- *RQ 3: How can the role of entrepreneurial individuals in governance be investigated and reconstructed empirically?*
- *RQ 4: How do entrepreneurial individuals modify governance arrangements and to what extent can they influence processes of peripheralization by doing so?*

By answering these research questions, the thesis aims at contributing to the literature in a conceptual (RQ2), methodological (RQ3) and empirical manner (RQ1/RQ4).

1. The conceptual aim of this thesis is to broaden the perspective on agency in regional economic development and to contribute to the conceptualization of the way in which entrepreneurial individuals can influence processes of local economic development. Therefore, it proposes a sensitizing framework of governance entrepreneurship (*Paper I*) that is further elaborated in the course of this dissertation based on empirical insights (*Paper III*). It aims at supplementing the

established concepts of policy and institutional entrepreneurship in order to provide a more comprehensive framework for ascertaining individual agency in regional development. It focuses on changes in governance by highlighting the individuals' perceptions and relevancies that find expression or manifest in the choice of partners, actions, and practices.

2. The methodological goal is to develop a qualitative interviewing approach in order to reconstruct the position of an entrepreneurial individual in local governance and to understand the logics of decision-making from within. To this end, the thesis combines two interviewing approaches and develops the problem-centred expert interview, which enables us to capture the implicit knowledge of experts by reconstructing individual perceptions and orientations. By providing a fruitful methodical approach for situations whenever human agency forms part of the investigation, this combination also contributes to the interdisciplinary debate on qualitative interviewing (*Paper II*).
3. The empirical aim is twofold: Firstly, the thesis aims to capture the diverse processes of small town peripheralization in Austria through a quantitative approach. This serves to gain an overview over the structural conditions of small towns and to identify towns undergoing peripheralization. It elaborates a typology of towns showing a nuanced picture of socio-economic peripheralization and centralization (*framing text*). In doing so, the thesis contributes to the contemporary discourse on peripheralization (Kühn, 2015) and to the emerging debate on small-sized cities (Knox and Mayer, 2013; Servillo et al., 2017). Secondly, this thesis aims to provide in-depth insights into the role of individuals in local governance in order to contribute towards the increasing body of literature dealing with agency and regional economic development (e.g., Grillitsch and Sotarauta, 2019; Jolly et al., 2020). By taking an actor-centred perspective, it strives to explain how and to what extent entrepreneurial individuals might influence governance and subsequently shape trajectories of regional development. Based on a case study comparison, it ascertains the relational and temporal nature of local governance entrepreneurship and its relevance for coping with peripheralization processes (*Paper III, framing text*).

While the quantitative analysis provides an overview over the structural conditions of small towns in Austria, the comparative case study focuses on the governance arrangements in the local economies of two towns. Both towns initiated economic development projects in order to address emergent challenges of socio-economic peripheralization. These investigations have entrepreneurial arrangements that initiate and coordinate the implementation of creative labs as starting point. Creative labs are an emerging phenomenon in rural regions, combining functions such as co-working, co-creation, or design thinking (Mariotti et al., 2021; Schmidt, 2019). As these hubs serve as socio-spatial setting for knowledge building and creation, they are considered

to foster local innovation networks and entrepreneurial activities in peripheral regions (Fuzi, 2015). In doing so, they are seen as indicators of changing preferences and a rethinking of local economic development. The actor networks behind these initiatives serve as a point of departure for the empirical investigation.

1.2 Overview of the articles

This thesis encompasses three articles, which were published in peer-reviewed journals. All papers are single-authored and were written over a four-year period (2017 to 2020). The articles are the main part of this dissertation, focusing on different research questions. As the articles build on one another, they are ordered according to a specific logic. Table 1 gives an overview of the articles constituting this dissertation with respect to research questions and aims, theoretical underpinnings, methodical background, the main findings, and the overall contribution.

- **Paper I** (Individual agency and socio-spatial change in regional development: Conceptualizing governance entrepreneurship) takes an analytical governance perspective and reviews the literature on policy and institutional entrepreneurship. By connecting these strands of literature, it introduces the analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship as starting point for the empirical investigation.
- **Paper II** ('The problem-centred expert interview'. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge) presents a novel methodical combination that has emerged due to the specific epistemological interest of this dissertation, focusing on individuals and agency. This paper merges two qualitative interviewing methods and develops the problem-centred expert interview, moving beyond the explicit dimensions of expert knowledge. It discusses the means of conducting and analysing this type of interview and critically reflects upon its practical application according to the overall inquiry of this dissertation.
- **Paper III** (Governance entrepreneurship in regional economic development: Individual agency in Austria) compares processes of governance entrepreneurship in two small-sized cities in Austria. It exposes distinct relational changes in governance, reveals the temporal dimension of governance entrepreneurship, and proposes a middle-range theory. *Paper III* draws upon the analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship presented in *Paper I* and the interviewing approach introduced in *Paper II*. Based on this, it provides in-depth insights into individual agency and governance change in local economic development in Austria.

	Paper I	Paper II	Paper III
Title	Individual agency and socio-spatial change in regional development: Conceptualizing governance entrepreneurship	'The problem-centred expert interview'. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge	Governance entrepreneurship in regional economic development: individual agency in Austria
Research Question	How do entrepreneurial individuals contribute to socio-spatial change processes in local and regional development?	How to methodically approach the implicit knowledge of entrepreneurial individuals that is crucial for exerting agency?	How do entrepreneurial individuals influence decision-making in small towns? To what extent do they alter governance arrangements in doing so?
Aim	Identifying conceptual gaps of individual agency in governance, developing a framework and relating it to existing entrepreneurial approaches	Proposing a qualitative method for investigating the implicit dimension of expert knowledge and for theory-building	Investigating governance entrepreneurship under conditions of peripheralization in order to develop a middle-range theory
Theoretical background	Governance, policy, and institutional entrepreneurship	Sociology of knowledge, expert interview, problem-centred interview	Governance entrepreneurship
Methods	In-depth literature review	Methodical combination	Comparative case study, documentary analysis, qualitative interviews
Main Findings	The various shapes of agency in regional development are revealed. However, knowledge of governance changes is still sparse. Based on the review, a framework of governance entrepreneurship is introduced.	The implicit knowledge dimension offered by interviewees might be explored successfully by applying and reflecting upon the problem-centred expert interview.	The changes made in governance reveals relational and temporal dimensions. Cross-generational governance entrepreneurship might be a crucial condition for sustainably dealing with processes of peripheralization.
Contribution	Theoretical	Methodological	Empirical & theoretical

Table 1: Overview of the three papers constituting this thesis

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This framing text introduces the broader theoretical and methodical framework underlying this dissertation. It summarizes the specific findings of each paper and presents further results that have not yet been covered by the papers. The present framing text consists of six sections and is organized as follows: Section 1 is the introductory chapter presenting the research interest and questions. It also delineates the three articles constituting this dissertation. Section 2 extensively discusses the theoretical concepts that informed this research and introduces an analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship. Section 3 explains the research design of the dissertation and outlines the epistemological and ontological perspectives underlying this research. It also discusses the methodological background and describes the quantitative and qualitative methods that were applied. Section 4 presents and discusses the central findings of this dissertation and closes with a synthesis. Section 5 summarizes the results by answering the operational research questions. It furthermore proposes some policy implications and reflects upon the limitations of this study by elaborating on further avenues of research. Finally, the three articles constituting the dissertation are provided.

2. Theoretical background

The following sections provide an overview over the theoretical strands of the dissertation, which are grounded in approaches of peripheralization, governance, and non-corporate entrepreneurship. The concept of peripheralization stresses the multi-dimensionality of uneven development serving as conceptual basis for the empirical analysis of small towns. Moreover, peripheralization aims to facilitate a processual understanding of peripherality by emphasizing the social making of peripheries and the role of agency. The thesis takes up and deepens this perspective by concentrating on the local actors and exploring the role of governance arrangements and individual agency for the development of peripheral towns. In doing so, it aims at explaining how individuals might influence decision-making processes in the context of peripheralization. To this purpose, it connects an actor-centred governance perspective to the concepts of policy and institutional entrepreneurship, which highlight the role of individuals for overcoming institutional barriers and initiating change processes. The following theoretical discussions result in an analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship that provides a guiding sense of reference for the empirical inquiry.

2.1 The socio-spatial concept of peripheralization

Uneven development has long been a phenomenon that attracted the attention of geographers asking why some places prospered while other struggled to do so. In economic geography, polarization theory emerged as a critique of neoclassical theories in the 1950s (Myrdal, 1957; Hirschman, 1958). In contrast to neoclassical theories, which see inequalities as a transitory state while markets strive towards equilibrium, polarisation theory highlights the differences between regions by focusing on the mechanism causing inequalities. It links growth in core regions to the decline in non-core regions due to the outflow of human, physical, and financial resources (Maier et al., 2006). Along similar lines, centre-periphery models try to explain the dependency of “centres” and “peripheries” on different scales. *A general theory of polarized development* (Friedman 1967) constitutes a landmark text in this debate limiting the argumentation not to economic aspects, but also underlining the societal and political aspects of uneven development processes.¹

Marxian geographers rediscovered the concept of uneven development in the 1980s, emphasizing its role in capitalist development. Harvey (1982), who is one of the most

¹ Centre-periphery models are in fact rooted in the Latin-American dependency school of thought originating in the 1960/70s. Dependency theories primarily attempt to explain the emergence of peripheries in terms of exogenous factors and strive to conceptualize the exploitation of the periphery by the centre (Maier et al. 2006).

prominent representatives of this school of thought, explained that the course of accumulation would depend on the extent to which uneven geographical and temporal developments induce opposition. Smith (1984) extends this conception of capitalism by reconceptualising issues of nature and space with a critique of capitalism, while Massey (1984) took an even more radical approach in her book *Spatial Division of Labour* by drawing upon on locality studies and the relationship between global and local processes (Phelps, 2008). Whereas the concept gained only little attention in the 1990s and the subsequent years, spatial unevenness has recently begun to be addressed once more as a central research issue in economic geography and regional studies (Peck, 2017; Phelps et al., 2017).

Contemporary scholars advocate engaging with uneven development, as socio-economic disparities tend to be exacerbated in Europe, endangering economic progress, social cohesion, and political stability (Iammarino et al., 2019; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). As spatial unevenness has been affecting regions and towns across different scales and spatial contexts, the dichotomy of prospering agglomerations and structurally weak rural peripheries increasingly fails to describe the complexity of demographic, social, and economic dynamics sufficiently. Spatial indicators such as distance, accessibility, and density no longer reflect the ongoing socio-spatial processes adequately. Hence, scholars call for a more process-oriented and differentiated perspective emerging under the notion of peripheralization, transcending the prevalent static perspective on peripheries, which often equates them with border regions or remote rural areas.

2.1.1 A multidimensional and actor-centred perspective on peripheralization

The conceptualization of peripherality has been a recurring topic in spatial research. Copus (2001) made an early attempt to question the conventional spatial models of peripheral disadvantages (e.g. increased transport cost, absence of agglomeration effects) and suggested supplementing the understanding of spatial peripherality with the concept of “aspatial peripherality”. This concept also takes “soft factors” (Copus, 2001: 549) such as communication infrastructures, social capital, business networks, or institutional structures and global linkages into account. These regional characteristics can enhance or hamper the capacity of peripheral places to overcome spatial disadvantages and to maximize regional potential. Herrschel (2011) draws upon the distinction of spatial and aspatial peripherality by Copus (2001) and combines both in the concept of “composite peripherality”. By introducing this term, he considers peripheries not merely as the result of geographic distance from a core, but also as the result of an exclusion from political networks. Hence, inter-personal and institutional linkages such as power relationships, dependencies, or mutual trust are considered an important asset for overcoming marginalization.

Recently, the notion of peripheralization, which is closely connected to these initial considerations about peripherality, has gained prominence (Keim, 2006; Kühn, 2015; Lang, 2012; Crone, 2012). As it unveils relational, processual, and temporal aspects of

spatial unevenness, peripheralization emerges as a fuzzy concept that is difficult to analyse. While the term “periphery” often denotes a static spatial entity, peripheralization describes the production of peripheries through social relations having various implications. Despite its complexity, there is considerable consensus that peripheralization can basically be defined as the gradual weakening of places as an outcome of socio-spatial inequalities (Keim, 2006; Wirth et al., 2016; Danson and De Souza, 2014).

Kühn (2015) and his colleagues moreover highlight the multidimensionality of peripheralization, referring to theories of economic polarization, social inequality, and political power and differentiating between social, economic, political, and communicative dimensions. According to them, the phenomenon entails multiple facets, such as out-migration, economic decline, socio-political exclusion, or stigmatization.² Being closely linked to each other, these dimensions can develop a self-reinforcing dynamic (Döringer et al., 2019). For instance, decreasing job opportunities might trigger out-migration and commuting, while the often-resulting loss of young and skilled people in turn might cause problems for local enterprises in their attempts to hire qualified workers. However, these dimensions can also appear separately and do not necessarily cause a downward spiral. As actors are crucial for producing peripheries, peripheralization tendencies can also be reversed or redirected over time (Leick and Lang, 2018; Kühn, 2015).

The latter aspect is further accentuated by the relational and actor-centred perspective on peripheralization that draws attention to the agency exercised by local actors. Seeing that power is unevenly distributed over different scales and that actors in core regions tend to have control over agenda setting, an exclusion from central networks and resources might be a consequence for peripheral places. Similar to Herrschel’s (2011) concept of “composite peripherality”, Kühn (2015: 370) underlines that “actor networks matter” for peripheral places as they provide the possibility for actors to improve their position within the socio-spatial system. Hence, peripherality should not be seen as a destiny and actors should not be depicted as powerless or receptive (Willett and Lang, 2018). Instead, one should pay more attention to the actors’ capacity to challenge peripherality. To date, knowledge about agency and the options available for actors in places experiencing peripheralization is still scarce, excepting a few studies focusing on regions facing economic, political, or demographic upheavals (Cocks, 2013; Leick and Gretzinger, 2018; Plüschke-Altof and Grootens, 2019).

Due to its multi-dimensionality and its process orientation, the concept of peripheralization enables us to focus on different aspects and spatial contexts. Meanwhile, an increasing number of empirical studies in urban and regional research elucidates the versatility of this concept (e.g. Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013). The wide array of

² By linking different dynamics and processes, it also serves as a fruitful approach to enrich and contrast the international discourse on shrinking cities conceptually (Döringer et al, 2019).

studies covers, for instance, infrastructure degradation in rural regions (Naumann and Reichert-Schick, 2013), urban development and polarization in Central and Eastern Europe (Ehrlich et al., 2012; Matznetter and Musil, 2020), or political dependency and power structures in shrinking cities (Kühn et al., 2016). Very recent studies also concentrate on discursive elements of peripheralization (Willett, 2020; Willett and Lang, 2018; Pfoser, 2018). Willett (2020), for instance, investigates the communicative dimension of peripheralization in non-core regions in the USA and the UK. She highlights the potential incorporation of the general public into economic knowledge systems in order to create new narrative accounts within a peripheral economy.

2.1.2 Small-town peripheralization

As outlined before, the concept of peripheralization can be applied for various spatial entities such as regions, cities, or urban districts. This thesis focuses on peripheralization of small towns in rural areas of Austria. Particularly in sparsely populated and peripheral areas, small towns play an important role as regional centres, fulfilling social, cultural, and economic functions. As they are closely interlinked with their surrounding area, their development also has implications for their hinterland (Servillo et al., 2017). Surprisingly, smaller urban settlements have long been underrepresented in literature compared to other spatial entities such as rural areas, bigger cities, or metropolitan regions (Bell and Jayne, 2009; Mayer and Motoyama, 2020). However, research on smaller cities has recently begun to receive increased attention, with economic characteristics (Kaufmann and Wittwer, 2019; Meili and Shearmur, 2019), demographic development (Wolff et al., 2021; Smith, 2017), or their importance for spatial planning (Porsche, 2020; Prieb, 2019) being examined.

Due to processes of urbanization and industrialization, economic activity and production have become increasingly centralized and large cities have become centres for research and development (R&D) and thus for knowledge and innovation. While agglomeration areas could profit from the rise of knowledge economies, these developments have often taken place at the expense of smaller towns. In modern economies, towns outside core areas might be seen as disadvantaged, having less access to knowledge sources or facing difficulties to attract highly skilled workers (Lorentzen, 2013; Weck and Beißwenger, 2014). However, scholars also suggest that the development of small-sized cities should be studied beyond their purely economic aspects and apart from growth-oriented approaches. These scholars stress the specific social, cultural, and environmental characteristics and the potential of this spatial type (Knox and Mayer, 2013). Meili and Shearmur (2019), for instance, have discovered that smaller towns could favour the emergence of entrepreneurial political-economic networks, in turn leading to a better political understanding of the particularities of the local economy.

Although research on agency and economic development in these smaller urban places is still insufficient, scholars state that the entrepreneurial freedom and flexibility

of actors in small towns might be higher than broadly assumed (ARL, 2019). This dissertation addresses this claim by exploring entrepreneurial agency in small towns undergoing peripheralization. It thus refers to the concept of peripheralization in a twofold way. On the one hand, the concept serves as the theoretical foundation for a quantitative analysis elucidating the structural multidimensionality of small-town peripheralization in Austria. On the other hand, a relational and actor-centred understanding of peripheralization opening up the perspective of agency serves as a starting point for exploring the role of entrepreneurial individuals qualitatively. Yet it is not the intention to overemphasize local responsibility and the role of individuals in small towns. Instead, this thesis underlines the complexity of agency by considering external structural factors and internal social processes. It focuses on the micro scale and investigates the ways in which entrepreneurial agency might unfold within local decision-making processes and how it might influence governance. Particularly under conditions of peripheralization, local governance arrangements must be capable and flexible enough to react and to deal with emerging socio-spatial challenges. Resourced and efficient local governance is not only considered crucial for maintaining and creating a liveable environment and enhancing territorial competitiveness, but also as a central promotor for place-based policy approaches (Rodríguez-Pose and Ketterer, 2020).

2.2 Governance and actors of local development

Governance is a broad concept that covers a wide range of phenomena and different meanings. The notion originally appeared in contrast to traditional political coordination procedures formed by a hierarchical government. Scholars diagnosed a shift from "government to governance" in policy making during the early 1990s, due to the increasing complexity of challenges requiring a common coordination of actors across different scales and sectors (Rhodes, 1996; Kooiman, 2003). Generally, governance can be understood as a system in which a variety of actors from different domains of political and socioeconomic life are engaged in public decision-making processes (Denters, 2013). It refers to hybrid arrangements of actors and different forms and mechanisms of decision-making (Benz, 2004).

It is essentially possible to distinguish between a normative and an analytical understanding of governance, albeit that the approaches often overlap and cannot always be clearly separated from each other. A normative understanding of governance is frequently associated with "good governance" (Rhodes, 1996), fostering the effective and democratic coordination of places. In an analytical sense, the concept is applied to investigate and characterize political processes and arrangements between non-governmental and governmental actors on different scales (Benz et al., 2008; Kooiman, 2003). The thesis draws upon an analytical approach to governance to support an unbiased perspective on the local activities and the specific shapes of governance in small towns.

In the past, studies on governance have been framed primarily within institutional literature. A focus on “regulatory coordination” (Mayntz, 2004) or “institutional thickness” (Amin and Thrift, 1995) stressed the role of institutions at the expense of actors. Additionally, the “institutional turn” in the 1990s intensified this imbalance of interest in favour of institutions in social sciences (Cocks, 2013). Meanwhile, governance literature shifted from an institution-oriented to a more processual and action-oriented understanding, accentuating the role of actors and interactions in policy-making. Scholars extended the perspective in order to explain how public decision-making is driven and formed by corporate and individual actors from the governmental and non-governmental sphere. These actors (e.g. agencies, organizations, associations, or individuals) have specific capabilities, perceptions, and preferences, which are shaped by their organizational background (Mayntz and Scharpf, 1995; Scharpf, 1997).

The shift towards an actor-oriented understanding of governance also allows a clearer distinction between the terms of “governance” and “institution” (Gailing, 2014; Peters, 2011). While governance refers to societal actions and processes, institutions denote the structures that frame these actions (Diller, 2016). Institutions are broadly defined as structural preconditions that enable or restrict activities of organizations and individuals but do not fully determine them. Literature generally distinguishes between the formal and informal nature of institutions. Formal institutions comprise legally determined and codified rules, laws, or regulations, while informal institutions refer to uncoded norms, values, or beliefs (North, 1990). Governance arrangements cannot replace institutions, but they can supplement them and make them “smoother” (Fürst, 2007) by taking an intermediary position between governmental structures and institutions. This conceptual distinction is of great importance for this dissertation, as it argues the distinction between institutional entrepreneurship and the concept of governance entrepreneurship, which is introduced later.

The concept of governance has been broadly discussed in geography and is widely applied in urban and regional research. In a geographical context, governance is related to various spatial attributes, such as “urban” (Pierre, 2005), “local” (Stoker, 2008; Denters, 2013), or “regional” (Fürst, 2007), of which each entails different conceptual nuances. The concept of regional governance particularly highlights the relational perspective on spaces and is therefore considered as a useful analytical lens for investigating actors and processes of economic development in small towns that are closely interwoven with the surrounding region. Regional governance constitutes itself in manifold ways and can include hierarchical, competitive, or network-like patterns of coordination. It can be directed in a horizontal, but also in a vertical way across different levels and is characterized by varying degrees of institutionalization, including formal and informal interaction (Willi et al., 2018b). Based on a socio-spatial understanding of regions, it is defined as the joint coordination of local and regional development,

shaped by governmental and non-governmental actors and embedded in institutionalized structures within a functional space (Willi et al., 2018b; Fürst, 2004).

The thesis draws upon this understanding of regional governance in order to reveal the variety of actors and complex interactions contributing to decision-making in peripheralized towns. This analytical perspective on regional governance points to an inter-organizational coordination and self-regulation, which emerges in complex situations demanding the cooperation of governmental and non-governmental actors. The shift from hierarchical modes to more networked modes of governance has become evident in different spatial contexts in the last decades and is indicated by the passing on of tasks and duties to non-governmental actors. This redistribution of responsibilities allows non-governmental actors to gain more importance in regional development and to place their perceptions and visions onto the public agenda. However, novel constellations of actors and the increasing involvement of non-governmental actors can also lead to an unclear distribution of responsibilities or cause imbalances in the local power structure (Ayres and Stafford, 2014).

Although observing a general trend of political modernization towards network-oriented governance, governance can occur in many shapes on the local scale. The spatio-temporality inherent to governance is reflected upon specific and dynamic actor arrangements, which in turn are constituted through different actor compositions and practices in a region (Crouch, 2005). These arrangements are shaped exogenously by supra-local developments and structural factors, but also endogenously by the actors themselves (Arnouts et al., 2012; Döringer, 2020c). In order to understand why and how actors change these structures within governance arrangements, it is crucial to understand how actors exercise entrepreneurial agency in governance arrangements. The next chapter describes the concepts of agency as well as institutional and policy entrepreneurship by outlining their conceptual origins and contemporary importance in economic geography.

2.3 Agency and the concepts of institutional and policy entrepreneurship

There is a long-standing debate on agency, which has been engaging social scientists for almost a century. As the question whether individuals can act independently is an essential topic for different strands of research, there have been various attempts to theorize and investigate agency. *The Dictionary of Human Geography* defines human agency as “the ability of people to act, usually regarded as emerging from consciously held intentions, and as resulting in observable effects in the human world” (Gregory et al., 2009: 347). For Emirbayer and Mische (1998: 963), agency is defined as the “action or intervention to produce a particular effect” and a “temporally embedded process of social engagement” that demands the actor’s capacity to reflect on the past and to consider the future. In this definition, they capture the temporal element of agency and

propose that behaviour is simultaneously oriented towards the past, present, and future. In this sense, agency must be seen as inter-temporal, since present activities and strategies of actors are always affected by former experiences and expectations as well as the future-directed aim of creating opportunities (Garud et al., 2010; Steen, 2016). As the structural contexts of actions are influenced by temporal and relational factors (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998), agents can never be fully knowledgeable of all structural elements surrounding them.

2.3.1 The debate on agency and structure

The term agency is closely related to the question whether individuals have the freedom to act or are constrained by structural forces. The sociologist Anthony Giddens has essentially shaped the discussion on the duality of structure and agency in the last decades and has influenced the agency discourse in economic geography. The structuration theory of Giddens (1986) suggests bridging the dualistic concept of structure and agency. He defines structure as “the medium and outcome of the contingently accomplished activities of situated actors” (Giddens, 1986: 25). Even though the structures guide or constrain actors’ practices, they do have the ability to reflect on their actions and their position within the social system. This self-reflexivity and consciousness enables them to alter their own practices and the structural conditions (Giddens, 1986). Nevertheless, scholars criticized Giddens’ approach for downplaying the interrelation of agency and structural conditions and giving selective attention either to “agency” or to “structure” (Emirbayer and Mische, 1998; Jessop, 2001).

Paasi (2010: 2300) made an early attempt to discuss the term “agency” in a socio-spatial context, taking a social constructivist view on regions. He diagnosed the “fragmented complexity of agency” related to region building by understanding regions as produced and shaped through different forms of agency exerted by a range of actors with various organizational backgrounds and personal interests. Meanwhile, the debate on agency is widely acknowledged and further conceptualized in geography (Garud et al., 2007; Sotarauta and Beer, 2017; Benneworth et al., 2017). Economic geographers strive, for instance, to examine agency in the context of industrial path development and path creation (Feldman, 2014; Steen, 2016; Dawley, 2014). Very recent papers also elaborate on a conceptual refinement by differentiating between the various forms of agency which entrepreneurs might exercise. Scholars of evolutionary economic geography, for instance, suggest distinguishing between the terms “firm-level agency” and “system-level agency” (Isaksen et al., 2019; Trippel et al., 2020; Isaksen and Jakobsen, 2017). Firm-level agency refers to economic entrepreneurs promoting new firms or innovations in existing firms, while system-level agency is defined as “actions or interventions able to transform regional innovation systems [RIS] to better support growing industries and economic restructuring” (Isaksen et al., 2019: 48). The latter sheds light on public actors who promote ideas, move beyond organizational boundaries, and are thus able to transform the structure of an RIS. With its close link to the evolutionary RIS

approach, the conceptualization of these two types of agency is strongly bound to corporate actors, such as firms and universities.

Grillitsch and Sotarauta (2019) propose the “trinity of change agency” typology comprising economic entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship, and place-based leadership. They point to the importance of human agency (of individuals) and consider these three types of “transformative agency” as main drivers of regional change. They propose interrelating those concepts when exploring why some regions are more successful in exploiting “region-specific opportunity spaces” (Grillitsch and Sotarauta, 2019: 714) than others. The term denotes that which might be possible in regional and local development considering the limits and potential of regional preconditions (Sotarauta et al., 2020). Very recently, the term “maintenance agency” (Jolly et al., 2020: 177) was introduced in order to contrast the notion of “transformative” or “change agency” (Sotarauta et al., 2021: 92). It captures activities that aim at preserving existing practices in order to maintain the regional development trajectory (Jolly et al., 2020; Henderson, 2019). Very recent papers also take behavioural accounts into consideration for explaining agency in regional development (Huggins and Thompson, 2019b; Benner, 2020; Huggins and Thompson, 2019a) by assuming that human agency is spatially bound and that the spatial environment shapes forms and types of agency. However, it must be borne in mind that in turn, human agency of individuals and collectives also affects varying social and economic outcomes. In doing so, agency contributes to the creation of particular regional development trajectories over time (Gertler, 2010).

Based on this conceptual discussion, this dissertation argues for an integrated analysis of entrepreneurial individuals in regional economic development by considering supra-local structures as well as agency. Focusing on transformative agency in peripheral places and keeping in mind its temporal dimension, entrepreneurial concepts dealing with individual agency are discussed hereinafter and the framework of governance entrepreneurship is introduced.

2.3.2 Institutional and policy entrepreneurship

Recently, approaches concerned with the agency of individuals have been receiving growing attention from scholars interested in regional development and socio-spatial change (Döringer, 2020c; Gailing and Ibert, 2016). Concepts such as leadership (Beer, 2014; Sotarauta et al., 2017; Beer et al., 2019), brokerage (Kauffeld-Monz and Fritsch, 2013; Leick and Gretzinger, 2020), policy entrepreneurship (Perkmann, 2007; Willi et al., 2018a), or institutional entrepreneurship (Leick, 2017; Sotarauta and Pulkkinen, 2011) highlight the importance of actors as well as their potential towards creating or maintaining sustained development. In this context, local actors are seen as crucial for activating endogenous capacities and as an essential factor influencing our understanding of the ways in which learning, policy innovation, and institutional renewal might unfold in a region (Stimson et al., 2011; Tödtling, 2011). The following section

explains the approaches of institutional and policy entrepreneurship, stressing the importance of individuals for promoting institutional and policy change (Leick, 2017; Willi et al., 2018a; Lovell, 2009).

The term “entrepreneurship” has its roots in economic theories concerned with market-related innovations. In its Schumpeterian origins, the entrepreneur is an “individual human being with a strong will and the (practical) knowledge to spot opportunities” (Weik, 2011: 417; Schumpeter, 1961). Entrepreneurs “map unknown terrain” (Weik, 2011: 470) and are characterized by unconventional and innovative approaches. Entrepreneurship concepts moving beyond market-related innovations draw upon these initial characteristics but set out to explain the role of individuals or groups of individuals for political and institutional change processes. In the following discussion, the concepts of institutional entrepreneurship and policy entrepreneurship are presented, characterizing entrepreneurs as engaging in strategic actions and contributing to processes of change. By connecting these concepts with an analytical governance perspective, this dissertation develops the framework of governance entrepreneurship as presented in *Paper I*.

The notion of institutional entrepreneurship was originally intended as an approach to reintroduce agency into institutional analysis. As the institutional approach emphasizes institutions as sets of stable rules and regulations, it has often been criticized for its limited capacity to explain institutional change. In institutional theory, the relation of structure and agency has been discussed as “the paradox of embedded agency” (Holm, 1995), referring to the tension between institutional determinism and agency: How can actors change those structures which actually frame their actions and behaviour? The seminal contribution *Interest in agency in institutional theory* of DiMaggio (1988), reacted to this gap by setting out to explain how actors contribute to institutional change and highlighting the role of agency (Kalantaridis and Fletcher, 2012). According to DiMaggio (1988: 14), “new institutions arise when organized actors with sufficient resources see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly”. By looking at institutions as objects of change, this approach sheds light on the “activities of actors who have an interest in particular institutional arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or to transform existing ones” (Maguire et al., 2004: 657).

As institutions – understood as embedded in space and giving structure to regional activities – are a central issue of study for economic geography (Gertler, 2010), it is not surprising that institutional entrepreneurship also gained attention from economic geographers (Bathelt and Glückler, 2012; Garud et al., 2007). Institutional entrepreneurs endeavour to change the “rules of the game” through the mobilization of resources (Levy and Scully, 2007) and the combination of specific strategies (Leick, 2017). They can either be organizations or (groups of) individuals and can be part of the political, economic, or civic sphere (Perkmann and Spicer, 2007; Battilana et al., 2009). However,

not all agents involved in change can be described as institutional entrepreneurs, as two essential characteristics must be present: Institutional entrepreneurs initiate divergent changes from existing institutions and actively contribute to the implementation of these changes (Sotarauta and Pulkkinen, 2011; Battilana et al., 2009).

The theoretical advancement on institutional entrepreneurship of Battilana et al. (2009) gained particular prominence in economic geography. The authors derive two enabling conditions favouring the likelihood of actors to engage in institutional entrepreneurship: field characteristics and the actors' social position in an organizational field. In institutional theory, a field is generally defined as a structured system of social positions constituting the environment in which organizations operate (Garud et al., 2007). The enabling conditions are considered to mutually affect each other and to be closely interwoven. In terms of field characteristics, it is argued that the degree of fragmentation and the degree of institutionalization might affect the emergence of institutional change in a field. A heterogeneous field with fragmented groups might give rise to contradictions that in turn can trigger the reflective capacity of actors. A low degree of institutionalization might imply higher uncertainty of institutional order, which is also likely to provide leeway for strategic action. Second, Battilana et al. (2009) maintain that the social position and the related resources (e.g. formal authority, social capital) of actors play a crucial role in convincing other actors to support institutional change. Thus, Battilana (2006) sees the social position that actors occupy as a precondition that influences agency. This approach however overlooks the fact that actors may shift their social position in a field (or arrangement) when striving for changes that move beyond their sphere of influence. The approach of governance entrepreneurship addresses this conceptual gap by pointing out the possibility of individual legitimization.

Only a decade ago, Sotarauta and Pulkkinen (2011: 100) stated that "there are no explicit studies on institutional entrepreneurship in the context of regional innovation systems (and more broadly on regional development)." This has changed today and empirical research on institutional entrepreneurship has attracted remarkable interest in economic geography (Döringer, 2020c). Most studies now take on the conceptual lenses of economic path development and regional innovation systems (Miörner and Trippel, 2017; Sotarauta and Suvinen, 2018; Sotarauta and Mustikkamäki, 2015; van den Broek et al., 2019). Only a few studies consider broader challenges of regional development, for instance by examining how institutional entrepreneurs cope with demographic change affecting the local economy (Leick, 2017).

A similar concept, however emerging from another strand of literature, is that of policy entrepreneurship, explaining how new ideas get onto the policy agenda. Policy studies provide various concepts dealing with policy dynamics, of which some are frequently linked to policy entrepreneurship, such as the punctuated equilibrium model (Baumgartner and Jones, 2010), the advocacy coalition framework (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993; Sabatier, 1988) or the multiple streams model of Kingdon (1995).

Particularly Kingdon's (1995) model, introduced in his seminal work "Agendas, alternatives, and public policies", is often used to explain how change is brought in policy (Edler and James, 2015). He defines policy entrepreneurship as a form of policy advocacy, conceiving entrepreneurs as agents who are "willing to invest their resources in return for future policies they favour" (Kingdon, 1995: 204). Policy entrepreneurs are likely to initiate policy change, when the streams of politics, problems, and policy are coupled and a policy window opens. As policy entrepreneurs must be able to recognize this window and to launch their proposals in the right moment, policy entrepreneurship points out the temporal dependencies of policy change (Kingdon, 1995).

Policy entrepreneurs are considered to be purposeful, but also opportunistic organizations (Perkmann, 2007), teams, or individuals (Mintrom and Norman, 2009) who desire to bring about change in policy visions, instruments, and measures. In order to do so, policy entrepreneurs employ different strategies, such as framing problems, building teams, mobilizing networks, or leading by example (Boasson and Huitema, 2017; Mintrom, 2019). In the past, literature on policy entrepreneurship has focused primarily on skills and strategies of policy entrepreneurs, while downplaying the contextual factors that mediate entrepreneurial activities. Recent publications strive to fill this gap and suggest a broader contextualization of the actions of policy entrepreneurs (Green, 2017; Zahariadis and Exadaktylos, 2016).

In contrast with institutional entrepreneurship, the concept of policy entrepreneurship has received less attention in geography and regional studies. The few economic geographers dealing with the concept of policy entrepreneurship primarily consider innovation policy, for instance with the implementation of a novel European research program by policy entrepreneurs (Edler and James, 2015), or with the introduction of new service innovation policies (Henderson, 2019).

The presented entrepreneurial concepts emerge from different strands of literature, but share many similarities, shedding light on transformative agency, entrepreneurial activities, and induced changes. Both strands show a tendency to focus on success stories, starting with the identification of a policy or institutional change and then reconstructing the processes in retrospect (Henderson, 2019). Beside these similarities, there are differences between the concepts. Institutional entrepreneurship literature is concerned with forms of entrepreneurial outcomes focusing on introducing, altering, or dislodging formal and informal institutions (North, 1990). Thereby, it highlights the embedded nature of agency by pointing to enabling field conditions (Battilana et al., 2009). On the other hand, policy entrepreneurship literature originally focused on the adaption and introduction of new policy goals and instruments stressing the temporal and relational aspect of policy making (Boasson and Huitema, 2017; Galanti, 2018). By paying attention to different mechanisms and outcomes of change processes, these two bodies of literature could potentially complement each other. However, research in policy studies as well as economic geography is still in its infancy when it comes to

differentiating and linking policy and institutional entrepreneurship (Galanti, 2018; Döringer, 2020c; Bakir and Jarvis, 2017). What can be said is that both approaches tend to overlook the influence of entrepreneurial activities on decision-making structures which have not yet manifested visible outcomes for the public.

2.4 Towards a framework of governance entrepreneurship

Studies on policy and institutional entrepreneurship display a variety of entrepreneurial strategies applied by individuals in order to attain policy or institutional change. *Paper I* provides an in-depth review on policy and institutional entrepreneurship literature concerned with local and regional development. The results indicate the importance of governance modifications (Döringer, 2020c), showing that the entrepreneurs build coalitions or forge alliances between various governmental and non-governmental actors (e.g. Klein Woolthuis et al., 2013; Catney and Henneberry, 2016). In doing so, they shape (new) practices and forms of interaction that might also contribute to changes in governance arrangements.

However, as the studies often concentrate on the entrepreneurs and their strategies for introducing or altering (new) policies and institutions, these studies tend to focus on institutional and policy outcomes but overlook underlying changes. It is argued that entrepreneurs might also contribute to the modification of more fluid decision-making structures or, in other words, of governance arrangements. These changes in governance, in turn, might play a crucial role in establishing individual agency and influencing regional development processes (Döringer, 2020c). By arguing that the most direct and intuitive form of agency – defined as “the ability of people to act” (Gregory et al., 2009: 347) – unfolds in social interaction between individuals, a third category of entrepreneurial agency is proposed that is denoted as governance entrepreneurship. While concepts such as institutional entrepreneurship and policy entrepreneurship (or leadership) are closely linked to a normative bias focusing on success stories (Henderson, 2019), governance entrepreneurship sets out to open our eyes for a fresh and unbiased perspective on socio-spatial changes.

Recently, a few scholars also pointed to this research gap, arguing in favour of a further analysis of changes in governance and stressing different nuances in their conceptual approaches (Pattberg, 2017; Willi et al., 2018a; Boasson and Huitema, 2017). In line with these scholars, this dissertation strives for a conceptualization of governance entrepreneurship describing changes in governance. Drawing upon a governance perspective and the review of policy and institutional entrepreneurship literature, the thesis elaborates on a framework of governance entrepreneurship that conceptually supplements the approaches of policy and institutional entrepreneurship. Governance entrepreneurs might share personal characteristics and abilities with institutional and policy entrepreneurs, including, for instance, creativity, persuasiveness, or charisma

(Cocks, 2013). The novelty, however, lies in a more nuanced perspective on entrepreneurial outcomes and hence in a better understanding of socio-spatial changes in places. In doing so, it contributes to the claim of taking a differentiated and temporal view on entrepreneurial outcomes (Green, 2017). It moves beyond the scope of policy and institutional entrepreneurship by asking how entrepreneurial individuals obtain the social position they hold in an actor constellation and how they establish networks that enable them to influence and alter policies and institutions. It thus also shifts the attention to non-governmental actors in governance and the question of the means through which these actors might establish agency. The latter question in turn leads to questions concerning the legitimacy of entrepreneurial agency (Olausson and Whilborg, 2018).

Paper I suggests an analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship (that is further developed by empirical evidence in *Paper III*). It draws upon actor-centred institutionalism (ACI) and literature on institutional and policy entrepreneurship and operationalizes three dimensions of governance change (Döringer, 2020c):

1. **Actor composition:** The first dimension sheds light on changes in the number and composition of actors in governance arrangements. This might imply the inclusion or the exclusion of actors or the structural modification of networks in governance.
2. **Interaction modes:** The second dimension opens the view on change in forms or modes of interaction between the governance actors. This might comprise changes in organizational structure (e.g., hierarchical, networked, or competitive structures) or the degree of formalization.
3. **Scales of action:** The third dimension pays attention to the spatial expansion of governance arrangements that might go beyond administrative boundaries. Changes in actor composition or modes of interaction might also be accompanied by a spatial (re-)construction of governance.

Thereby, governance entrepreneurship is proposed to supplement the established concepts of institutional and policy entrepreneurship. The three types of entrepreneurship are considered complementary concepts for explaining individual agency by distinguishing between the associated changes:

- **Institutional entrepreneur:** initiates institutional change and breaks down a status quo by introducing, changing, or removing institutions (Battilana et al., 2009)
- **Policy entrepreneur:** promotes policy change, develops new policy instruments, and readjusts or substitutes existing policies (Mintrom and Norman, 2009)
- **Governance entrepreneur:** induces or strives for governance change by contributing to a modification of governance arrangements.

The concepts of policy, institutional, and governance entrepreneurship might interrelate in drafting different roles that one or more individuals can take simultaneously or at different stages (Döringer, 2020c). Governance entrepreneurship might approach some of the “unanticipated changes” caused by policy and institutional entrepreneurs (Sotarauta and Pulkkinen, 2011: 101). It indicates underlying or incremental changes, which might also lead to broader and more visible institutional and policy changes over time. For instance, interaction modes can evolve as formal or informal institutions providing regularity of behaviour. Thinking these three concepts together might also be a useful avenue to approach the logics and temporalities of regional development. Figure 1 integrates these three approaches into the conceptual model of actor-centred institutionalism (ACI) (Scharpf, 2000; Scharpf, 1997) in order to illustrate the mechanism of institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship in processes of change (see *Paper I*).

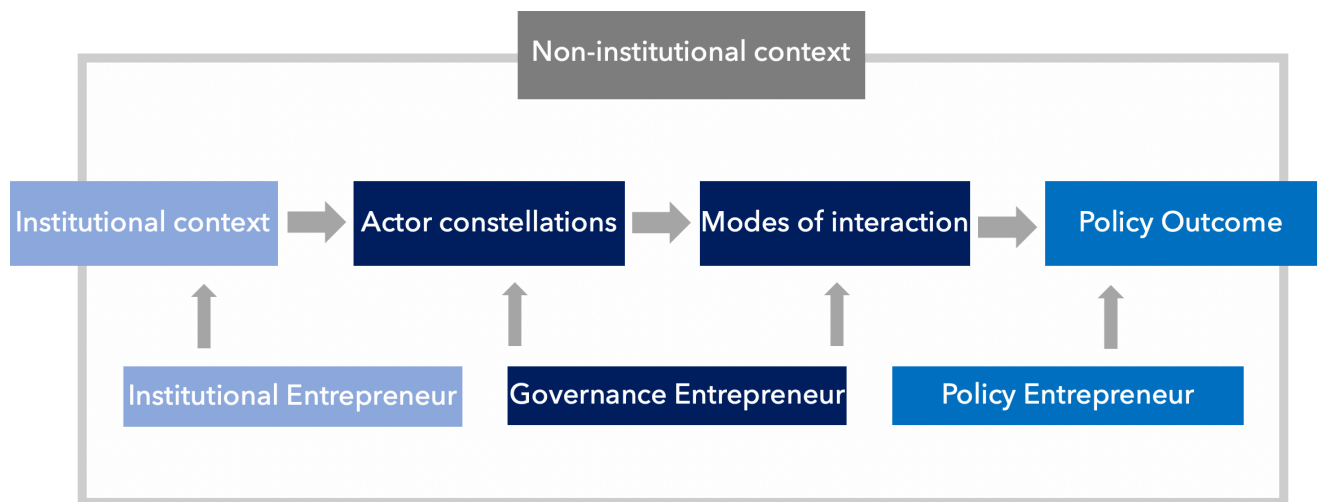


Figure 1: Entrepreneurial roles in change processes (own elaboration based on ACI by Scharpf, 2000)

Based on the theoretical strands discussed in this chapter, this dissertation sets out to explore individual agency and governance entrepreneurship in towns undergoing peripheralization processes. Thereby, the socio-spatial environment of small towns provides an interesting scope for investigating individual agency in governance under conditions of peripheralization. Peripheral towns struggling with processes of social, economic, and political downgrading processes are often associated with a weak network-building capacity of actors (Kühn and Weck, 2013; Wirth et al., 2016). On the other hand, studies also demonstrate that small towns – against all structural odds – might provide a fruitful environment for entrepreneurial activities and strategies (Lorentzen, 2013; Mayer and Motoyama, 2020; Meili and Shearmur, 2019). With this in mind, this thesis aims to explore empirically how entrepreneurial individuals might rearrange local governance when seeking to advance economic change in peripheral towns. However, before presenting and discussing the results of the thesis, the following section frames it by describing the underlying research paradigm and explaining the research design.

3. Research paradigm and design

This chapter frames the dissertation within the underlying paradigm in philosophy of science and presents its research design. At the core of any research paradigm are the elements of epistemology, ontology, and methodology. It is important to have a firm understanding of these philosophical branches, as they define the basic assumptions, beliefs, and norms on which the researcher builds a scientific project. Epistemology defines the meaning of knowledge and the ways in which it is to be attained. It affects the ways in which researchers approach a phenomenon and how they will uncover knowledge. Ontology describes that which is assumed as existent in nature or the real world and provides orientation regarding the interpretation of the gathered material. The third element of methodology is concerned with research design and specifying the choice of methods, as well as the procedure of analysis and interpretation (Bryman, 2016).

3.1 Ontological and epistemological foundations: Hermeneutics

This thesis draws upon the philosophical school of thought of hermeneutics³, which emerged as a critique of the paradigm of positivism that has long been dominant in science. Initially, hermeneutics originated in theology, referring to the interpretation of religious texts and aiming at discovering the objective meanings of words. The hermeneutic tradition that constituted *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences) in contrast to *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences) dates back to the 19th century and was driven by the philosophers Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. Schleiermacher and Dilthey argued for hermeneutics as an approach that aims at understanding the writer's point of view and interpreting words in the context in which they were written.⁴ In the 20th century, the paradigm was further elaborated referring to hermeneutical phenomenology or reflexive hermeneutics. This can be traced in several famous writings including Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) and Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Wahrheit und Methode* (*Truth and Method*) (Schülein and Reitze, 2020; Babich, 2017). Moreover, Max Weber refers to the hermeneutic tradition and its critique of positivism by introducing the notion of *Verstehen* denoting "emphatic understanding" that continues to be relevant in modern social sciences. This concept stresses an interpretative understanding of human action to achieve a causal explanation of its outcomes (Bryman, 2016; Outhwaite, 1987).

³ Similar philosophical premises are also discussed under the term "interpretivism" in the Anglo-American literature, comprising elements of hermeneutics, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism (Bryman, 2016).

⁴ The origin of hermeneutics is still evident in methodical hermeneutics, which denotes a qualitative systematic procedure to interpret texts.

Contrary to philosophical paradigms such as positivism or empiricism, hermeneutics does not depart from the ontological assumption of an external reality existing independently from the observer (Bryman, 2016). Rather, it points out that the research objects in social sciences are phenomena which are socially constructed and temporally and spatially variable (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Hence, social scientists – unlike natural scientists – cannot address their research objectives as “real” in a positivist sense. Instead, they acknowledge the variety and complexity of a social phenomenon in order to approach its meaning. This meaning can be generated through a reflexive process of interpretation and reconstruction (Blotevogel, 2015; Outhwaite, 1987). Thereby, hermeneutics requires both self-awareness and awareness of others. This is denoted as the principle of “double hermeneutics”, elucidating that the interpretation of a social phenomenon by a researcher is always already pre-interpreted by people (Johnston and Sidaway, 2015). Table 2 sketches out different research paradigms in geography in order to elucidate the epistemological, ontological, and methodological peculiarities of hermeneutics.

	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology
<i>Empiricism/Positivism</i>	Reality is observable and exists independently from the researcher	Knowledge is derived from experience, discovering general laws	Quasi-experimental, quantitative methods
<i>Critical Rationalism</i>	Distinguishes between the physical, subjective, and objective world	Knowledge through logical hypothesis testing	Explanation founded on empirically based theories
<i>Hermeneutics</i>	Reality is socially constructed and experienced by humans	Understanding and reconstructing texts and actions	Exploration and interpretation of social environments, mostly qualitative
<i>Critical Theory/Structuralism</i>	Patterns of reality cannot directly be acknowledged by observation	Observations must be based on “right” theories in order to give rise to knowledge, indicates normativity	Empirical research is directed by constructed theories, qualitative and quantitative
<i>Human-ecological paradigm</i>	Humans and society are part of nature	Reflexive knowledge on a normative basis	Transdisciplinary, quantitative and qualitative

Table 2: Five philosophies of science and their implications (own elaboration based on Blotevogel, 2015; Johnston and Sidaway, 2015)

The epistemological interest of hermeneutics can be characterized as idiographic in nature, aiming at understanding a specific social phenomenon instead of striving towards generalization. Hermeneutical philosophy emphasizes the circularity of understanding. It signifies that new insights on a phenomenon can only be achieved in terms

of the “hermeneutic circle”, signifying an iterative process of understanding and interpretation. Hence, hermeneutics requires a flexible research approach as well as further specification in the field (Schwandt, 2014; Blotevogel, 2015).

It is in the nature of science that societal developments and new generations of researchers challenge previous ways of philosophical thinking. Consequently, paradigms and theories are constantly refined, rejected, or transformed. In the 20th century, several paradigm shifts occurred in geography, lending a fragmented structure to the discipline and causing the co-existence of “dominant paradigms” (Kuhn, 1970). Johnston (1986) identifies four main strands of philosophy in Anglo-American human geography and distinguishes between empiricist, positivist, structuralist, and humanistic approaches. Since then, the plurality of approaches in geography has increased, and radical approaches, feminist approaches, or postmodern approaches such as post-colonialism and post-structuralism must be added to its paradigm scheme (Aitken and Valentine, 2006; Johnston and Sidaway, 2015). These more recent approaches increasingly move from the “margin to the centre” of contemporary geography and essentially shape the identity of the discipline (Schurr and Weichhart, 2020).

Johnston (1986: 5) characterises humanistic approaches as philosophies “whose epistemology is that knowledge is obtained subjectively in a world of meanings created by individuals and whose ontology is that what exists is that which people perceive to exist”. Thus, it is evident that humanistic (and some postmodern) approaches in geography are closely linked to the scientific paradigm of hermeneutics, which attempts to understand the reason for human behaviour and to capture the complexity of life. Particularly since the 1970s, the concern for the individual has been rising to prominence in humanistic geography and has evolved further through the introduction of concepts such as human agency or the method of interpretation (Smith, 2009). Whereas humanistic approaches are of little significance in physical geography, they play an essential role in human geography due to their interest in social actions, behaviour, and institutional systems. This is particularly evident in cultural or social geography, while studies in economic geography have been mainly rooted in structuralist (and realist) approaches (Johnston, 1986).

Although the debate on structure and agency in contemporary economic geography is dominated by structuralist approaches, the increasing interest in human agency and behaviour (Huggins and Thompson, 2019b), biographical approaches (Butzin and Widmaier, 2016), and narratives (Willett, 2020) might also bring more attention to hermeneutical approaches in the future. In order to understand how, why, and to what extent human individuals shape regional development, Grillitsch and Sotarauta (2019: 717) argue that we “need to zoom in also on the ‘subjective’ stories of individuals and grasp their perceptions, intentions, and change strategies.” This doctoral thesis en-

gages with this claim by adopting a hermeneutical perspective and focusing on entrepreneurial individuals, their action orientation, and the effects of their actions, in order to understand and conceptualize their contribution to local economic development.

When concentrating on the micro scale, one might be at risk of overlooking the structures that are constraining or favouring human action. Critics address the danger of an isolated view on humans by the notion of *epistemic fallacy* (Outhwaite, 1987). Being aware of these critical voices, the scope of this dissertation is not limited to human actions but is also concerned with the socio-economic and institutional contexts of small towns. The primary goal of this dissertation, however, is the reconstruction and interpretation of individual agency in the complex process of economic local development. Consequently, the emphasis rather is on an in-depth understanding and explanation of human actions than on judging or evaluating social practices.

3.2 Methodology: Grounded Theory

As outlined at the beginning, the ontological and epistemological foundations of research also affect methodological considerations. This thesis is oriented towards the methodology of Grounded Theory (GT) as proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1994) and its underlying hermeneutical premises. Since its first presentation in the book "The discovery of grounded theory" in 1967, GT has developed in many directions, each underpinned by different epistemological and ontological premises (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2008). Generally, the methodology of Grounded Theory attempts to bridge the gap between empirical research and theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Through its comparative procedure, Grounded Theory allows us to construct a theoretical understanding by identifying patterns derived from primary data. In GT, data is gathered and analysed alternately until theoretical saturation is attained and the adequate scope and density is reached for the research purpose of developing a theory. Grounded Theory thus follows the concept of theoretical sampling, i.e., that the selection of interviewees is not predefined but guided during field research by the emerging theory (Döringer, 2021; Strauss and Corbin, 1997). By calling for a high degree of self-reflexivity concerning the researchers' assumptions and behaviour, this procedure shares certain methodological premises with the hermeneutical circle, although the founders of GT did not explicitly refer to it.

By inductive reasoning and comparison, GT breaks down and interprets empirical data in order to form a set of theoretical codes. Due to its inductive nature and efforts towards theory building, there are misleading claims that GT can only be applied if the researcher is "theoretically blind" for the phenomenon which is to be researched. However, GT explicitly stresses the importance of prior theoretical knowledge that enables the researcher to pay attention to certain aspects in order to understand the phenomenon (Bowen, 2006). For this purpose, GT refers to so-called "sensitizing concepts" giving the researcher a general sense of guidance in empirical inquiry (Blumer, 1954). It

was thus considered an adequate methodological foundation for examining the role of individual agency in local governance, which is still in its conceptual infancy. By studying institutional and policy entrepreneurship, it could be demonstrated that governance change is currently still under-theorized. The analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship refers to this research gap and served as a sensitizing concept for preparing the topics of the interview guide. It is important to note that this framework is not predictive in nature, but merely opens the view for different dimensions of governance change.

GT is often criticized for lacking representativeness in its empirical findings and for its inability to generalize due to its limited sample number. However, it would be wrong to conclude that GT-based research cannot contribute to theory building. One may argue that this criticism neglects the merits that emerge within a detailed examination for the purposes of theory building. Relying on a bottom-up view of the relation between structure and agency, this thesis can provide an in-depth understanding of entrepreneurial individuals in governance within a particular geographical context. Based on the empirical evidence gathered in the field, it strives to identify theoretical patterns in order to develop a middle-range theory (Merton, 1968) of governance entrepreneurship. Thereby, it provides an explanatory type of theory that intermediates between structural developments and entrepreneurial actions.

3.3 Methods and data

This section explains the specific quantitative and qualitative methods applied in the course of the research for this dissertation. It starts with a cluster analysis providing an overview of the structural preconditions of small-sized cities as well as a basis for identifying and selecting peripheralized towns for the case study analysis. Secondly, it introduces the case study design and the procedure of selecting town A and town B⁵ as empirical cases. Thirdly, it explains the specific method of problem-centred expert interviews that was developed and discussed in *Paper II*.

The thesis draws upon a comparative case study design, which is the “most rewarding research strategy [...] for uncovering causal patterns of explanation” (Pierre, 2005: 449). Case studies are considered a useful methodical approach when investigating “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1984: 23). In geography, it has been a widely applied tool to analyse and contrast national, regional, or urban developments and to reveal similar as well as distinct patterns. Contemporary comparative research in geography increasingly adopts a relational and contextualized understanding of

⁵ The names of the towns were replaced by pseudonyms. Due to the limited number of actors included in small-town development, this was necessary to guarantee anonymity of all persons interviewed or mentioned.

places (Krehl and Weck, 2020). This study relates to this understanding by taking a processual and relational perspective on peripheralized towns. In doing so, it aims at filling the gaps in the theoretical understanding of entrepreneurial individuals in regional economic development and contributing to the nascent debate on governance entrepreneurship with insights from Austria.

3.3.1 Gaining overview: Principal component and cluster analysis

Principal component analysis (PCA) and cluster analysis were applied in order to identify and contrast the socio-economic development of small-sized cities in Austria. This methodical combination is frequently applied to develop spatial typologies, as it reduces the complexity of a phenomenon and reveals hidden patterns (Giffinger and Suitner, 2015; Herburger, 2020). The procedure included three methodical steps that can be briefly explained as follows:

1. Initially, a principal component analysis (PCA) was conducted, reducing the complexity of the data set. This was done to detect patterns in the data and to facilitate the interpretation of the cluster results in the further course of the research process. PCA is a specific form of factor analysis that “tries to explain the maximum amount of total variance” by transforming the variables into linear components (Field, 2013: 667). The technique of factor rotation is used to discriminate between the components. The orthogonal rotation *Varimax* was chosen – a frequently used rotation method in the context of PCA – maximizing the sum of the variances of squared loadings and trying “to load a small number of variables highly on each factor” (Field, 2013: 681). In doing so, the factors (hereinafter denoted as components) can be interpreted more easily.
2. Second, the hierarchical clustering of Wards was used. This method generates homogenous and realistic clusters and thereby helps to identify the appropriate number of clusters for the next step. It links clusters that optimize the error sum of squares, as this criterion minimizes the total within-cluster variance (Cleff, 2019).
3. Based on this, k-means clustering was applied for classifying the clusters, as it facilitates better results than hierarchical clustering. Unlike Ward’s method, k-means clustering is a partitioning method that requires a decision on the number of clusters (Cleff, 2019). Based on the pre-defined number of clusters it successively (re-)assigns the cases in order to minimize the within-cluster variation.

The sample includes 131 small-sized Austrian cities with between 4.000 and 20.000 inhabitants and holding the administrative status *Statutarstadt* or *Stadtgemeinde*. The criteria for defining a small-sized city differ in literature, for example with reference to the number of inhabitants or population density. This sample selection took place according to a frequently used definition by scholars classifying towns between 5.000 and 20.000 inhabitants as small-sized cities (Hamdouch et al., 2017; ARL, 2019). However,

as the Austrian settlement structure is very rural in its form, towns with between 4.000 and 5.000 inhabitants were also included in the sample. These smaller towns are often located in peripheral and thinly populated areas and fulfil important administrative, social, and economic functions for their hinterland. Moreover, only municipalities holding the administrative status of *Statutarstadt* or *Stadtgemeinde*⁶ were considered, as there are several so-called *Großgemeinden* in Austria, which are larger settlements constituted through the fusion of villages.

The selection of variables used for PCA and the subsequent clustering is theory-driven and grounded in the concept of peripheralization (Kühn, 2015; Kühn and Weck, 2013). Ten variables displaying demographic and economic development were selected and summarized according to PCA (see table 3).⁷ Initially, the variables were *z-transformed* in SPSS in order to gain standardized variables and to avoid a predomination of variables in the components. Before calculating a PCA, outliers were eliminated from the sample, as they would heavily affect the results of the PCA (Bülow, 1996). By boxplots, one extreme and multidimensional outlier was detected. As the outlier was also identified by the single linkage clustering method, it was excluded from the further analysis. In the next step, the sampling adequacy for the PCA was verified using the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) criterion. According to literature, the KMO value should be greater than 0.5 in order to prove the appropriateness of the sample. The KMO test reports a value of 0.685, which indicates that the sampling is adequate to apply PCA. The diagonal of the correlation matrix in Appendix 1, table 1.1, also provides the KMO values for the individual variables, showing that all values were also greater than the acceptable limit of 0.5 (Field, 2013; Backhaus et al., 2015).

⁶ Some municipalities with more than 4.000 inhabitants, for instance in Vorarlberg, have not been considered in the cluster analysis, as they do not have the administrative status of city.

⁷ All data could be obtained from register-based statistics via Statistics Austria's Statcube.

Components and variables	Description
<i>Component "Demographic development"</i>	
Population development 2009-2018	Change of inhabitant number in %
Migration balance 2011-2018	Calculation by absolute numbers
Share of working-age population (20 to 64-year-olds) 2018	Corresponding to total population
Share of over 64-year-olds 2018	Corresponding to total population
Development of employees at place of residence 2009-2018	Change of employee number referring to place of residence %
<i>Component "Economic Centrality"</i>	
Development of persons employed at place of work 2009-2018	Change of employee number in %
Development of in-commuters 2009-2018	Change of in-commuter number in %
Development municipal tax per capita 2009-2018	Tax paid by local companies to municipalities, based on number of employment opportunities and gross wage
<i>Component "Knowledge Intensity"</i>	
Share of highly educated employees at place of work 2018	Employees with bachelor's degree or higher at place of work
Share of employees in knowledge-intensive branches* 2018	Calculations are based on a definition of Eurostat (NACE 2-digit level), employees of branches from (medium) high-tech manufacturing branches and "knowledge based services" were accumulated, refers to place of work

* for a detailed list of branches see Appendix 1, table 1.2

Table 3: Components and variables of PCA and cluster analysis

Finally, the PCA retained three components of the ten variables reflecting the multidimensionality of the concept of peripheralization: demographic development (A), economic centrality (B), and knowledge intensity (C) (see table 3). Each of the components displays *Eigenvalues* greater than 1 and commonly they explain 75,4 % of the variance (see Appendix 1, table 1.3). Only variables that load highly positively or negatively on a respective component were selected. This was done in accordance with literature that suggests that only loadings with a value higher than 0.4 should be interpreted (Stevens, 2009: 333).⁸ The rotated component solution in Appendix 1, table 1.4, gives a detailed description of the variables and the respective components onto which they load.

After identifying the components, clustering was conducted according to Ward's hierarchical method, to find the appropriate number of clusters. The results of this clustering are often visualized according to the "elbow method" by means of a scree plot, depicting large changes in the distance coefficient by showing a jump in the graph and

⁸The variable "share of population of over 64-years-olds" shows a negative component loading of -0.870, as there is a negative correlation with the component "demographic development".

thereby giving a hint about the optimal number. However, for this sample the graph did not clearly indicate the optimal number of clusters to retain, and so the *Mojena* test statistics was additionally applied, providing a more formal test (Mojena, 1977; Backhaus et al., 2015). It is a very useful decision procedure for hierarchical clustering drawing upon statistical stopping rules. Based on the Euclidean distance coefficient, the procedure calculates a standardized fusion coefficient, which serves as a measure to compare and decide upon the optimal number of clusters. Significance values between 1.8 and 2.7⁹ were considered entailing cluster solutions with five, six, or seven groups (Backhaus et al., 2015) (see Appendix 1, table 1.5). Finally, a five-cluster solution was chosen, providing a useful typology of small-sized cities against the theoretical background of peripheralization.

Based on the five-cluster solution, k-means clustering was carried out, facilitating an optimal allocation of cases (Cleff, 2019). The one-way analysis of variance approved that homogeneity within the clusters and heterogeneity between the clusters is given, as the cluster mean square is higher than the error mean square. The analysis indicates that the component demographic development has the highest ratio of explained variance (F-value 69,595) and thus has the strongest influence on separating the cluster groups (see Appendix 1, table 1.6). Additionally, a discriminant analysis was conducted confirming this solution with a probability of 96,9 % of all cases being correctly classified.

The resulting typology reveals heterogeneous patterns of socio-economic centralization and peripheralization of 131 small towns (plus one outlier) in Austria and proposes five different cluster types (see section 5.1). The cluster mean values of the components and variables can be found in Appendix 1, table 1.7. One of these types includes towns undergoing multidimensional peripheralization processes, which were subjected to further qualitative exploration.

3.3.2 Setting the scene: Media research, expert interviews, and documentary analysis

In order to select peripheral towns for the case study, the next step consisted of a media search as well as a number of exploratory expert interviews. Local newspapers and municipal magazines constituted a very important resource for selecting the cases and gathering information about local projects and initiatives. After preselecting two towns, exploratory expert interviews took place with representatives of the respective federal states and regional development agencies. These interviews aimed at gaining an overview of the institutional embedding and finding out more about the economic development of these towns.

⁹ The literature suggests different significance levels: Mojena (1977) suggests a value of 2.75, while Backhaus et al. (2015) recommend values between 1.8 and 2.7 based on their own research experience.

The selected towns show similar structural preconditions on the one hand, and different governance arrangements on the other. They are included in the cluster group “multidimensional peripheralizing towns”, showing tendencies of demographic and economic downgrading. Town A and B and their hinterland are shaped by an industrial history in steel production. Additionally, the towns are characterized by rather remote locations in the pre-Alpine areas of Lower Austria and Styria, at a greater distance from larger cities. Despite these structural disadvantages, both towns display entrepreneurial potential through their implementation of initiatives in regional economic development, such as the establishment of creative hubs promoting collaboration and innovation. The realization and organization of these hubs serve as the starting point for investigating the governance arrangements of local economic development.

The on-site research started with the analysis of documents including policy papers, strategy documents, and protocols providing information on the development of the towns under consideration (see Appendix 2, table 2.1). The documents provided important facts for reconstructing the local processes and for contrasting individual opinions and perceptions with the written strategies and plans.

3.3.3 Moving beyond explicit knowledge: Problem-centred expert interviews

The selection of the interviewees relies on the principle of theoretical sampling as proposed in Grounded Theory (Birks et al., 2019). This sampling strategy implies that the collection of the subsequent data sets is based on the developing theory. This thesis included different iterative sampling strategies in order to gain an understanding of the inner logics of decision-making networks in the towns (Döringer, 2021). The interview partners were recruited on the principle of information gathered in the media reports, and on recommendations or passing references in preceding interviews. Finally, the interview sample comprised 21 interviewees that were responsible for local decision-making and could provide internal or external insights on the processes (see Appendix 2, table 2.2). It also included persons who were not directly involved, but were being informed about the ongoing processes in order to avoid a biased perspective on the process, which could arise by talking only to the local group sharing a collective view (Bogner et al., 2018). The sample size followed the principle of theoretical saturation in order to restrict the data volume to a manageable size (Birks et al., 2019). The number of persons included in the sample reflects the limited range of persons who have detailed knowledge about local governance arrangements and who overview the internal processes in the respective towns.

The conceptualization of the interview guide was based on the idea of combining the theory-generating expert interviews of Bogner and Menz (2009) and problem-centred interviews (PCI) of Witzel (2000) in order to elicit the perceptions and action orientations of individuals shaping governance arrangements (Döringer, 2021). *Paper II* introduces this novel methodical combination denoted as *problem-centred expert interview* and discusses its epistemological and methodological implications. The two qualitative

interviewing approaches share similar methodological premises in emphasizing the perspectives and relevancies of the interviewees and aiming at developing new theoretical models and concepts. However, the theory-generating expert interview and PCI also address different aspects of interviewing that are complementary and mutually supportive for divulging implicit knowledge of entrepreneurial individuals (Döringer, 2021). This kind of knowledge, which is also denoted as interpretative knowledge, involves the personal relevancies, perceptions, and viewpoints of the interview partners that can decisively contribute to structuring decision-making processes. As this knowledge is presented in a rather implicit manner by the interviewees, it does not exist *a priori* but must be revealed in the process of interpretation (Bogner and Menz, 2009).

The theory-generating expert interview discusses the analysis of interpretative knowledge. It highlights inductive theory building by an interpretation and generalization of the qualitative material. PCI stresses the personal perspectives of individuals and supports the investigation of personal experiences and opinions by providing a specific research design. As does the theory-generating interview, the PCI argues for developing theories by merging deductive and inductive reasoning during data inquiry and analysis (Witzel and Reiter, 2012). While the theory-generating expert interview is not linked to a specific interview design, the PCI provides an interview design including a narrative beginning and precise follow-up questions drawing upon on different questioning techniques. The PCI guide is not intended as rigid questioning scheme, but as a flexible and open interview guide that allows for thematically structured interviewing. The interview guide compiled for this dissertation started with an open-ended question inviting the interviewees to explicate how the process around the creative hubs emerged and to describe the actors involved. In the second part, the follow-up questions picked up theoretical considerations and preceding interview statements (Döringer, 2021).

The interview lasted between 40 and 90 minutes each and were conducted face-to-face on-site. Only one interview was conducted via a Skype call. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to interpret the data in detail. During the transcription of the interviews, it was possible to become acquainted with the data and to get familiar with the material providing the basis for further interpretation. As the interview partners have been guaranteed anonymity in order to build trust, the names of all towns, projects, and individuals mentioned were replaced by pseudonyms. The data analysis was conducted according to the coding procedure of Grounded Theory and was started during the fieldwork following the principles of the hermeneutic circle.

The coding procedure is driven by a general awareness of subjectivity and self-reflexivity during analysis and interpretation. In the first step, open coding was applied, and sequences of the interviews were picked in order to interpret the data. In doing so, the interview data is broken down into smaller units and manifold interpretations are produced and categorized. After this time-consuming procedure, axial coding was done

in order to abstract the codes into categories. Finally, selective coding refines the categories and relates the main categories to each other in order to derive a theoretical model (Strauss and Corbin, 1997; Belgrave and Seide, 2018). To illustrate the coding process, table 4 sketches out the procedure by providing two selected categories. Linking and bringing these categories together is one element that contrasts analysis according to Grounded Theory with the frequently applied qualitative content analysis of Mayring (2000).

Citation	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
<i>We have not been defining our responsibilities, such as, you have to do that, you have to do this, or something like this.</i>	mutual trust, equality of members, informal overtaking of tasks	individual responsibility	Informalizing practices
<i>I would say that non-commitment is not the correct expression, because each one feels very committed, each does whatever has to be done.</i>	personal engagement, "feeling commitment", enables flexibility		
<i>Then we spoke to the mayor and asked: do you think that the city council could help us just a bit?</i>	seeking for (political) support, informal addressing of mayor	direct, informal way of communication	
<i>After they had debated and finished fighting their battles, they decided: okay, this is only going to work if we stuck together.</i>	informal conflicts, lessons learned from debating		

Table 4: Example of the open, axial, and selective coding process

By being aware of individual stories and condensing perspectives, a detailed reconstruction of local governance arrangements was possible through the application of the problem-centred expert interview. Additionally, the analysis helped us to draw up a qualitative actor network illustrating the positions and relationships of governance entrepreneurs within the networks (see *Paper III*). The contextual knowledge provided through the quantitative analysis, as well as the media research and the exploratory interviews furthered the contextualization of these findings. Finally, expert interviews with external actors reflected upon the interim results and enabled us to discuss more robust policy implications.

4. Research context

Before presenting the main findings of this dissertation, the following chapter gives an overview of the spatial, economic, and political context in Austria. This is done to frame and contextualize the empirical investigation within a broader national and regional context. First, this section illustrates the socio-spatial disparities within Austria and the conditions of small towns in particular. Second, it sketches the specific structures of regional development and governance based on the federal system in Austria. Third, it focuses on the two selected towns and outlines their respective location and socio-economic development.

4.1 Socio-spatial disparities and the role of small towns in Austria

The rise of socio-spatial disparities on different scales all over Europe is evident also within Austria (Iammarino et al., 2019; Musil, 2013). It primarily is larger cities such as Vienna, Graz, Innsbruck, Salzburg, or Linz that concentrate population and offer a large variety of attractive jobs and education opportunities. One of the main drivers of population growth is the agglomeration area of Vienna, which comprises more than 2,8 million people and also displays a strong economic performance based on R&D activities (Görgl et al., 2020; Musil and Eder, 2016). In contrast, rural regions and towns rather tend to experience depopulation and job loss. This particularly becomes evident in the Austrian border regions located along the former iron curtain and in the “inner peripheries” in mountainous areas, struggling with demographic change and the out-migration of younger people (Humer, 2018; ESPON, 2017).

In non-core regions, smaller towns serve as important anchor points for the rural population by providing a wide array of functions. They take up a crucial role in the spatial system by supplying services of general interest and serving as regional nodes for labour and economy (Humer, 2018). These towns, however, do not represent a homogeneous group; instead, this spatial type displays highly heterogeneous patterns of demographic and economic development. Figure 2 is based on own calculations showing spatial patterns of population growth and decline in small towns and districts in Austria. It illustrates that towns located in core areas tend to profit from their proximity to bigger cities with a growing population. In contrast, towns located, for instance, in peripheral border areas or in traditionally industrial regions of Austria tend to towards a stagnating or decreasing number of inhabitants.

Small towns in Austria 2009-2018

Population development of towns and districts

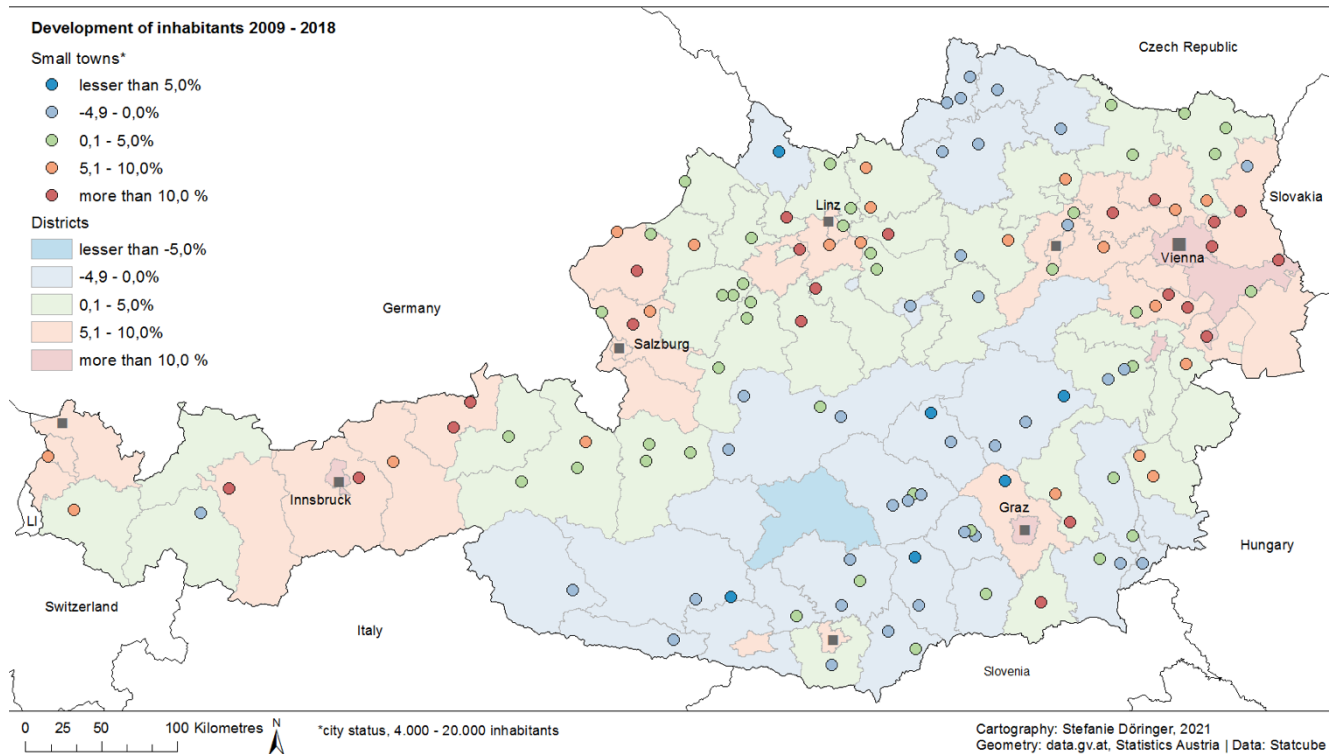


Figure 2: Population development in small towns and districts in Austria 2009-2018

Despite the relevance and variety of small towns, there has barely been research for Austria explicitly concerned with the economic development of this specific spatial type. This is quite surprising, as one can recognize growing interest in this topic in other smaller European countries, such as Denmark (Lorentzen, 2013; Sørensen et al., 2010) or Switzerland (Meili and Mayer, 2017; Kaufmann and Meili, 2019). Instead, economic development in Austria has mainly been investigated on a district level, for instance by Palme (1995) or Eder (2019), revealing the regional heterogeneity of economic development. Districts in Upper Austria and Styria, for instance, have a long tradition as industrial locations and have been experiencing structural transformation processes and economic renewal in the last decades. In contrast, winter and health-related tourism and associated services shaped the economic structure of many districts located in the Alpine regions of Western Austria. Again, the picture is different in the areas located along the eastern borders of Austria including parts of Lower Austria and Burgenland. These spaces are associated with structural weakness shaped by their location near the former iron curtain. Having long been cut off from transport routes and economic connections, the economic consequences for these areas can be felt until today (Palme, 1995; Eder, 2019). However, there also is evidence that the conditions of these regions have improved in recent years, as has been established in the study of Giffinger and Kramar (2012), referring to the economic development of towns situated close to the Czech border.

4.2 Regional development and governance in Austria

During the last decades, different phases of regional economic development have been evident in Austria as has also been the case for other European countries. In the 1960s, regional development focused primarily on external approaches (building infrastructure, settling firms, etc.) in order to overcome regional disparities. As a response to this top-down regional development approach that was widely considered as unsuccessful, endogenous approaches to regional development were formulated in the late 1970s. The idea of endogenous regional development stresses the importance of mobilizing local potential and fostering local actors (Tödtling, 2011). While this approach initially aimed at the development of rural regions that were considered lagging behind, the spatial focus shifted towards structurally weak industrial regions in the 1980s (Heintel, 2004; Gruber et al., 2018). Since the 2000s, regional development has been characterized by an innovation-oriented policy approach highlighting economic cluster strategies, networking, and cooperation. Currently, this paradigm is supplemented by the European strategy of *Smart Specialization (S3s)*, which can be considered a place-based approach facilitating entrepreneurial processes in order to increase regional competitiveness (Gruber et al., 2018; ÖROK, 2016).

Aside from these general trends, economic development of small-sized cities in Austria is embedded in a complex and integrated system of regional development across different levels. Regional development generally takes place at the national, federal, regional, and local level (municipalities and towns) in the federal state of Austria (Gruber et al., 2018). In Austria, legislative authority is held by the federal states for spatial and regional development, while the national scale only plays an informal and strategic role.¹⁰ Each federal state has its own spatial law setting out individual thematic priorities in regional development. The regional scale itself is comparatively weakly formalized in Austria, albeit that some federal states have recently implemented formal instruments to strengthen regional planning. The federal state of Styria, for instance, has passed a new regional development law (*Regionalentwicklungsgesetz*) in 2019. The law aims at greater regional self-responsibility and increased regional competitiveness by strengthening the institutional structures and allocating financial resources to the regions. On a local scale, the approximately 2.100 Austrian municipalities command over a wide range of administrative and financial resources. Framed by the respective federal law, the municipalities and towns enjoy great autonomy in local planning and are in charge of local economic development. Due to this organisational structure, local politics and particularly the mayors oversee a wide array of local responsibilities and have great freedom of action in decision-making processes (Humer, 2018; Gruber et al., 2019; Fassmann, 2018).

¹⁰ On the national scale, the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (ÖROK) acts as a strategic, but informal organisation coordinating spatial and regional development.

Regional authorities support the towns and municipalities in local economic development by providing strategic orientation, administrative structures, and funding. Regional development agencies particularly play a crucial role in Austria in supporting actors on the local scale in terms of regional economic development. Regional development agencies (*Regionalmanagement*) were first established in the 1980s and still play an integral, formalized part in the institutional system of rural areas in Austria. By operating as a coordination and management platform, the agencies fulfil an intermediary function between the municipalities and the federal state in terms of regional development (Heintel, 2018). When Austria joined the European Union in 1995, the regional scale gained further importance through different approaches, including a significant increase in financial means and the institutionalization of existent regional development processes, such as European Territorial Cooperation instruments or the LEADER programme. The latter is a co-financed EU funding programme, which supports the development of rural areas through a bottom-up approach. In Austria, the LEADER concept has been applied in 77 regions during 2014-2020. The projects are conducted by Local Action Groups (LAGs), constituted by actors from the local private and public sectors (Heintel, 2004; Heintel, 2018).

As described above, the federalist state of Austria is characterized by devolved structures and decentralized policy-making. Such decentralized structures are considered to facilitate the emergence of entrepreneurs and initiatives on a local scale by offering local communities opportunities toward autonomous action. In contrast, centralized states are deemed less likely to support the emergence of local activities, impeding the development of locally based strategies by rather exerting hierarchical modes of governance (Sotarauta and Beer, 2017; Stimson et al., 2009).

4.3 Regional context of town A and B

This chapter describes and contextualizes the two towns that are the subjects of the comparative case study. As mentioned before, cluster analysis indicated that these two towns were undergoing multidimensional peripheralization processes. Information given about these towns draws on literature as well as on media and documentary analysis.

4.3.1 Context of town A

Town A is located in the pre-Alpine region of the federal state of Lower Austria, which can be characterized as an inner-peripheral area. The iron and steel industry is one of the key branches dominating the economic structure of the region. It has a long standing in the region and has been shaping the identity of the region over several centuries. The regional economic structure is dominated by a few international companies and a broad range of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Additionally, the region shows a high founding rate of one-person businesses compared to other rural regions (Bauer et al., 2015). However, town A and its hinterland experience a high rate of out-

migration among young people (Bauer et al., 2015). The strong industrial sector on the one hand and the continuous population decline on the other have led to an increasing loss of skilled workers. Particularly the SMEs in the industrial production sector have been facing an increasing loss of skilled workers over the last two decades.

Town A had a population of around 11.300 inhabitants in 2018. Since the Second World War, the population of town A had remained fairly constant over several decades. However, the population has slightly decreased in recent years, as continuous out-migration has led to a negative migration balance. In 2018, for instance, town A recorded an absolute population loss of about 80 people. Despite this development, town A does not show a significantly high elderly population, which might be due to the comparatively high fertility rate. The population share of over-64-year-olds amounted to 21,1% in town A (2018), which is slightly above the average of 20,1% in Lower Austria (Statistics Austria, 2020).

The region in which town A is located displays a very heterogeneous picture in terms of topography and physical connectivity. On the one hand, several towns and municipalities enjoy good accessibility, being located along main national transport routes. On the other hand, some municipalities, including town A, are located in pre-Alpine side valleys and are characterized by a low accessibility regarding road and railway routes. While the well-connected places of the region are better positioned to exploit their spatial advantages, the infrastructural deficits of town A can be seen as an unfavourable factor in terms of economic competitiveness. Although some initiatives aspire to develop the public local transport system, motorized private transport dominates the transportation system of the region (Bauer et al., 2015).

In the 1990s, the city centre of town A was heavily affected by structural changes in the retail and commerce sector. The consequences of this development became evident through a high property vacancy rate, which continued to increase until the beginning of the 2000s. To address these challenges, the city started a strategic city development and inner renewal process in 2015, including political decision-makers, representatives of the retail sector, property owners, and residents (Municipality of Town A, 2015). In the course of this process, the city appointed an inner-city coordinator, who is responsible, among other things, for surveying vacant properties and organizing negotiations with the different stakeholders.

4.3.2 Context of town B

Town B is located in the Alpine area of Eastern Upper Styria, which is considered one of the industrial centres in the federal state of Styria. Eastern Upper Styria is shaped by a long history in iron workmanship dating back to ancient times, later augmented by the steel industry. The steel industry has characterized the economic structure of the region since the 1960s. Today, highly specialized enterprises are particularly active in metal production and processing (Friedl et al., 2019; Hiess et al., 2014). The biggest of

these is an international steel company, employing 1.100 people at its plant in town B. Recently, a quarter of the jobs have been cut due to the COVID crisis in 2020, which severely hit the economic development of the town. The town also holds tourism potential due to its pre-Alpine location and its historic city centre. Whereas it has been a tourism destination in former times, this now only plays a marginal role in the local economy. However, some initiatives were started to reactivate the potential of receiving day tourists (Friedl et al., 2019).

Although the region displays some of the highest gross added value statistics in Austria due to its strong industrial economic base, it is struggling with depopulation and the consequences thereof (Hiess et al., 2014). Whereas the rise of the steel industry in the 1960 and 1970s had led to an increasing in-migration of workers in the region, the town has been experiencing nett outmigration in the past decades. The population of town B peaked in 1981 with over 9.000 inhabitants (referring to the municipal territory after the Styrian municipal structural reform).¹¹ However, the population has been decreasing by 11,3 per cent between then and 2018. In terms of future population development, a further decline of 4,7% is predicted for the period until 2030 (Federal State of Steiermark, 2016). Additionally, the town displays a relatively high share of over-64-year-olds, comprising 23,8% of the total population, compared to the Styrian average of 20,3% (Statistics Austria, 2020).

Town B is located in an Alpine valley displaying larger spatial distances to bigger cities such as Vienna and Graz. It exhibits good accessibility by motorised private transportation, but weak supra-regional accessibility by train, revealing deficits regarding the connections to the metropolitan region of Vienna and the Pan-European corridors. This problem is currently addressed by a large Austrian rail infrastructure project which is expected to be completed in 2026 and which aims at fostering the integration of the region into the international rail transport infrastructure (Hiess et al., 2014).

As the historical city centre offers a broad retail structure, the town is considered a regional retail centre in contrast to other towns in the region with a predominantly industrial economic base. The local retail and service economy is very active and organized, especially in the form of an advertising community and the tourism association. However, the city centre has been affected by a high rate of retail property vacancies during the last decades. To address this problem, a retail vacancy platform has been established a few years ago. In 2018, the town started a city renewal process (*Regiobranding*) to improve the technical infrastructure and to enhance the city centre. Due to these

¹¹ Historically, Styria had shown a very small-scale municipal structure. Therefore, the local government conducted a municipal structural reform in 2015. The aim was to reduce costs and to bundle administrative and infrastructural resources by merging municipalities. In the course of this structural reform, town B was merged with two small villages. All statistical data mentioned in this dissertation refers to the current municipal territory of town B.

investments and other general socio-economic developments, the town has only limited financial resources available.

5. Results and discussion

This chapter synthesizes and discusses the findings of this thesis. In order to arrive at a systematic picture of small-town peripheralization, it starts out with presenting an as yet unpublished typology of small towns in Austria in section 5.1. The findings demonstrate their multi-faceted socio-economic development and has served as the empirical basis for selecting the towns investigated through the qualitative case study. Section 5.2 summarizes the results published in *Paper III*. It provides findings of the case study on individual agency in peripheral towns in Austria and proposes a middle-range theory of governance entrepreneurship. In addition to the results of *Paper III*, section 5.3 of this framing text broadens the perspective on entrepreneurial individuals by empirically drafting the interrelation of governance, policy, and institutional entrepreneurship. Finally, and in accordance with the overarching research question, section 5.4 provides a synthesis of the findings, bringing together and reflecting upon on governance entrepreneurship and peripheralization.

5.1 Peripheralization and small-sized cities in Austria

The clustering procedure presented in chapter 3.3.1 is based on a multidimensional understanding of small-town peripheralization, differentiating between the dimensions of demographic development, economic centrality, and knowledge intensity. It can be demonstrated that the development of small towns in Austria is not uniform in development but comes in different shades. The sample of small-sized cities in Austria originally included 132 towns, whereas the Styrian town of Eisenerz, with its long-standing industrial tradition, has been identified as an outlier and thus excluded from the analysis. It has lost two thirds of its population during the last decades and had a share of 39,3% of over-64-year-olds in 2018, which lies significantly above average. The remaining 131 towns have been grouped into five cluster types that are described hereinafter. The geographical location of the types is displayed in figure 3. A list of towns and cluster types is also provided in Appendix 1, table 1.8.

1. **Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity** (23 towns): This type is characterized by a comparably high knowledge intensity and a stable economic development. These towns also show an increasing population number and a comparatively young population structure. They are mainly located in the wider agglomeration area around Vienna. An example would be the city of Tulln an der Donau, located about 30 km from Vienna. It has a significantly high share of employees in knowledge-intensive branches (60,2%), hosting a wide array of academic educational and research facilities associated with universities in Vienna. Other towns with a knowledge-intensive economic base are located in Upper Austria (e.g. Vöcklabruck or Ried im Innkreis), which might be due to a

high regional concentration of innovative firms of the high- and medium-tech sector.

2. **Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality** (17 towns): This group of towns mostly experiences population growth and shows a strong economic performance, while having a comparatively low economic knowledge intensity. These towns are primarily located within the agglomeration area of Vienna and the central area of Upper Austria and hereby might benefit from the overall positive economic dynamics of these areas (Maier and Trippl, 2011; Tödtling and Trippl, 2013; Isaksen and Trippl, 2017). Successfully performing economic towns can also be found scattered in the Alpine area of Western Austria, examples of which would be Schwaz in Tyrol or Hohenems in Vorarlberg.
3. **Centralizing towns regarding demographic development** (20 towns): These towns can be considered as residential locations, offering their inhabitants an attractive place to live. They notably display a high population growth rate and a balanced age structure, while their economic base is comparatively weak, and their share of knowledge-intensive sectors lies beyond the average. Many of these towns are located in the core area around Vienna, Graz, and Salzburg, benefiting from agglomeration dynamics and migration flows. The small town of Neusiedl am See in Burgenland stands out as a good example, as it is one of the fastest growing towns in Austria due to suburbanisation processes taking place in the city of Vienna (Görgl et al., 2020).
4. **Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development** (29 towns): These towns are heavily affected by population decline and demographic change. The share of population over 64 years of age is significantly above the average, compared to the centralizing cluster types. On the other hand, these towns show a stable economic performance and an average share of the knowledge-intensive economy. Most of these towns are located in peripheral parts of the federal states of Lower Austria (e.g. Zwettl, Scheibbs) or Carinthia (e.g. Friesach, Hermagor). Some of these towns, for instance Bruck an der Mur or Judenburg, are also situated in the classically industrial regions of Upper Styria. Additionally, this group includes traditional tourism destinations in Upper Austria experiencing a stagnating demographic development, such as Gmunden, Bad Ischl, or Bad Aussee.
5. **Multidimensional peripheralizing towns** (42 towns): A multidimensional process of peripheralization characterizes this, the largest group of towns, showing a disadvantageous development in all three components. These towns have a stagnating or decreasing population and display tendencies of ageing and out-migration. They are also characterized by a decreasing number of employees and in-commuters, as well as a weak performance in knowledge intensity. This

cluster type includes old-industrial towns in Upper Styria such as Mürzzuschlag or Kindberg as well as towns located in the rural and structurally weak region of Eastern and Southern Styria (e.g. Fehring, Fürstenfeld). Some of the peripheralizing towns are also situated in the Alpine areas of the federal states of Salzburg and Carinthia (e.g. Schladming, Völkermarkt) or in the northern border regions of Lower Austria. Towns such as Retz, Gmünd, or Schrems, located in Lower Austria close to the Czech border, are still trying to recover from their peripheral and isolated situation during the iron-curtain period (Giffinger and Kramar, 2012).

The multi-dimensional concept of peripheralization proves itself a useful concept to conduct a PCA and cluster analysis. The findings illustrate that small towns in Austria are demographically and economically diverse and thereby confirm the findings of scholars highlighting small-town diversity in demography and economy in other national contexts (Hamdouch et al., 2017; Russo et al., 2017). Moreover, the typology of small-town peripheralization demonstrates that towns are not necessarily centralized or peripheralized in all dimensions but reveal multi-dimensional combinations. Some towns experience a successful economic performance under the simultaneous trend of depopulation, while other towns, in turn, witness population growth and reveal a comparatively weak local economic base. Thereby, the findings also demonstrate that a weak performance in one dimension does not inevitably accompany an overall downgrading process. Hence, dimensions of centralization and peripheralization might co-exist in small towns.

Furthermore, the typology of peripheralization displays some geographical patterns that might be explained by centralization and peripheralization processes encompassing a wider space. Towns located within urban areas often seem to benefit from the economic dynamics and demographic development of the bigger core cities (Meili and Mayer, 2017). On the other hand, small towns in rural and thinly populated areas tend to be more severely and more often affected by demographic change and processes of economic decline. This result also confirms the close socio-economic relatedness between small towns and their hinterland (Lorentzen, 2013) and the importance of linkages to neighbouring centres (Meili and Mayer, 2017). However, the analysis also reveals towns experiencing the opposite development, undergoing processes of peripheralization despite a central urban location or developing better than their peripheral location would suggest. Hence, the analysis shows that spatial-geographical factors might play a role in the peripheralization of small towns, but do not fully determine the performance of these smaller urban settlements.

The typology gives a robust overview over the socio-economic development of small-sized cities in Austria and provides insights into their various trajectories and challenges. It points to the need of acknowledging small towns as a unique spatial type that do not necessarily follow the economic logics of bigger cities (Mayer and Motoyama,

2020). A quantitative approach, such as PCA and cluster analysis, however, can only point out the structural dimensions of peripheralization. To address these limits, the findings of the typology serve as a starting point for further qualitative investigation, aiming at an in-depth understanding of the specific endogenous potentials and socio-political processes of small towns. In order to explain how political-economic decision-making takes place under conditions of peripheralization, one town in Lower Austria and one town in Styria belonging to the type of multidimensional peripheralizing towns were chosen for deeper investigation by means of a qualitative case study analysis.

Small towns in Austria 2009-2018

Typology of peripheralization

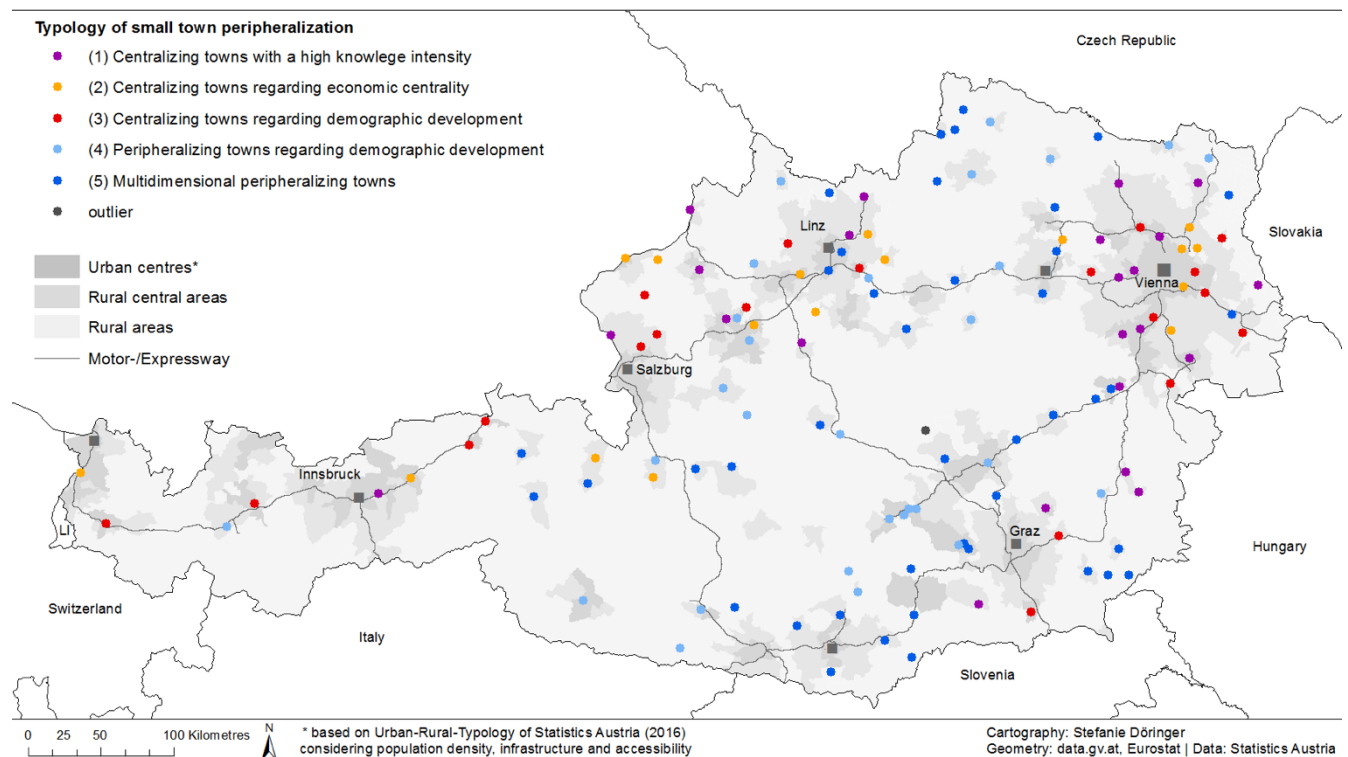


Figure 3: Typology and geographical location of small towns 2009-2018

5.2 Governance entrepreneurship in town A and B

The following sections summarize the results presented in *Paper III* and illustrate the cases by adding unpublished citations from the interviewees on the local and supra-local scale. By contrasting the governance arrangements of the two towns, the investigation reveals similarities but also differences concerning the underlying shapes of local governance and the specific roles of entrepreneurial individuals within these settings.

5.2.1 Governance composition and networks

In the early 2000s, a loss of skilled workers became evident for the firms located in town A and its hinterland, triggered by the persistent out-migration of younger people. To

address this emergent problem, the local enterprises became active in regional development. Their first activity was the foundation of a regional education and networking platform in 2009, which was primarily driven by five bigger companies. In 2015, a regional job fair association followed, which was initiated by the owner of a medium-sized enterprise in the region. One year later, the idea to realize a creative and innovation hub called Alpha-Campus emerged. After a feasibility study was conducted and financed by means of LEADER funding, a 9.000 m² vacant industrial building located near the city centre was selected for establishing the Campus. It was opened in 2018, starting with co-working spaces, and it is planned that functions such as working, experimenting, education, and housing will be added in future.

The actor network of Alpha-Campus includes various types of actors across the local, regional, and national level. In the centre of the network there are two men playing powerful and crucial roles: Tom Winter, an enterpriser associated with a family-run firm and the main initiator of the project, as well as the mayor of town A, who has professional experience in the economic sector. Winter is characterized as a visionary, a mediator, and a strategically active person. His engagement is driven by the individual pressure to act on behalf of his own firm but also by an action orientation directed towards the future. He strives for integrative and sustainable economic development with a view to improving regional performance to the benefit of future generations. The following statement of Winter outlines this:

I believe that this visionary way of thinking ahead - "what will be possible?" - is even higher than the pressure that has brought us to the point we are currently at. So, we want to think about and act towards the future, for the next generation, and this drives us even more than does the pressure that is on us right now (interview A9).

Thus, in the past years his behaviour has changed from a rather competitive to a cooperative mode of action, in order to address the loss of skilled workers (interview A7). Winter is considered a governance entrepreneur, as he takes a central position in the local network and is essentially involved in (re-)organising local governance arrangements. He has close personal contacts to politicians on the national scale, as well as to international research institutes and to the mayor of town A. Interviewees describe the latter as an ambitious and idea-driven politician (interview A10). His action orientation is guided by his wish to improve the performance of town A and the region. In his function as mayor, he does not only have formally legitimized power but can also draw upon a good reputation and the trust of economic stakeholders. He plays a crucial role as a bridge between economy and politics and is also identified as governance entrepreneur.

In town B, the implementation of a city renewal process was the pivotal impetus for bottom-up local development. The project aimed at decreasing the local retail vacancy

rate and creating a more attractive city centre. It can also be regarded as the triggering factor for the development of the creative lab Cospace. In 2009, a local investor bought a 16.000m² former industrial complex. Initially, a handful of business ventures moved in, establishing an informal cooperation network. Finally, in 2018, Cospace was founded as a multi-functional creative hub including functions such as production, co-working, and co-creation.

The actor network of Cospace is more locally oriented and includes a smaller number of actors than that in town A. The developments associated with the creative lab are driven bottom-up and were initiated by a very small group of individuals from the non-governmental sphere: the investor who finances the project and the initiators Michael Taler and Maria Brunner. Taler and Brunner are located at Cospace with their own small businesses. They aspire towards further innovative projects in local development. Taler considers the former vacant industrial area a “space of opportunity”. There, he wishes to realize ideas he had developed during his professional career in the IT sector. His actions are driven by the willingness to become creative and to contribute to the improvement of the local living and working environment. He is considered the creative *head of the project*:

For a relatively long period, he (Taler) was engaged internationally and has learned how “business-out-of-the-box” functions. To a certain extent, he now lives these principles here. He is the secret father of this project (interview B3).

Brunner has previously been a long-standing member of the municipal council. As she wanted to gain more opportunities and personal appreciation beyond political government structures, she laid down her political responsibilities. She and Taler appreciate the opportunity of spontaneity and flexibility when realizing entrepreneurial projects in the small town beyond formal political structures:

With us, much happened according to gut feeling. Whether that is right or wrong is hard to say (laughs). If you asked me how that happened? It simply happened by doing! Some things we simply decided upon. I said: yes, that could work! (interview B4).

The mayor of the town welcomes the initiative of non-governmental actors in local development and supports the activities of Cospace. He facilitates a network-oriented governance structure by taking a mediating role and is open for suggestions from outside the political arena. In town B, Taler, Brunner, and the mayor can be identified as a group of governance entrepreneurs altering local governance arrangements and practices in an incremental way. The governance networks of town A and B and the respective positions of the actors involved are illustrated in greater detail in *Paper III*.

5.2.2 Relational dimensions

The analysis of the case studies revealed four relational dimensions of governance entrepreneurship, including the (re-)combination of horizontal and vertical pipelines, (in)formalization, individual legitimization, and regional rescaling (*Paper III*). Thereby, similarities between the entrepreneurial behaviour in town A and town B could be identified. However, differences in the entrepreneurial individuals' means of addressing relational dimensions of governance entrepreneurship could be identified due to individual preferences and relevancies.

Horizontal and vertical pipelines

Firstly, the entrepreneurial individuals establish or reactivate horizontal and vertical channels to actors located outside the own milieu in order to pool resources and knowledge anchored in different spheres and across various levels. In town A, Winter and the mayor could draw upon established economic and political contacts for a successive expansion of the Alpha-Campus network. They aimed for a careful inclusion of actors from different spheres who could promote the project or grant the necessary financial or administrative support. For instance, the entrepreneurial individuals endeavoured co-operation with local schools in order to coordinate and match their efforts to promote apprentice training opportunities for students. Moreover, they operated across governmental levels and promoted (new) vertical connections to accelerate proceedings and the flow of resources. Generally, governance levels seem to be strongly interwoven in Lower Austria. Multi-level networks and political contacts to higher levels are seen as inherent to local policy-making by interviewees on different governance scales (interview A2, A11, A12). Thus, it is often actors from the economic sphere that bridge the gap between local aspirations and external financial or organizational support by directly addressing the representatives from higher governance levels and showing a high degree of persistence (interview A7, A9).

This behaviour is also evident in town B, albeit to a lesser extent and with more concentration on the local scale. Connections to higher governance levels seem to be of lesser importance in the small Styrian town than in town A (interview B6, B9). The entrepreneurial individuals of town B draw mainly on personal contacts and networks across different fields on the local scale, such as politics, economy or local media, to promote the process.

Although I'm no longer the municipal spokesperson for culture, I still do know a person or two, so that one can decide these things without much ado (interview B5).

Then I called an acquaintance of mine, who makes furniture, and said, 'we've got an exhibition space for you' [...] Then we saw, next to him, that there was some room for art. So, I called an acquaintance who works at a newspaper, and said, 'we've got some exhibition space for paintings' (interview B4).

On the other hand, the findings of town B do not only indicate inclusion processes but also the exclusion of non-local persons from the network. They are excluded from information flows within the Cospace group (interview B8) when they are considered to be jeopardizing the power structures of the network.

(In-)Formalizing

Second, the case studies show that entrepreneurial individuals tend to informalize processes beyond governmental structures when they introduce and negotiate novel ideas. Informal interaction modes in a back-stage governance setting offers individuals more flexibility and leeway to discuss their projects. They refuse discussions with conservative actors and rigid institutions that are perceived as limiting when implementing their ideas. Particularly in the beginning, the entrepreneurial individuals of town A prioritized practices taking place in an informal, but regular setting:

We have not been defining our responsibilities, such as, you have to do that, you have to do this [...], it emerges when we meet each other. We truly regularly meet each other. Sometimes at 7.00 o'clock in the morning, then we drink a coffee in a cafe in the city and then again, we define the next steps [...] (interview A8).

In the further course of the projects, the entrepreneurs also attempted the formalization of processes by establishing associations such as the Alpha-Campus association, comprising 40 enterprises, or when interacting with federal government:

We have now reached the phase in which we want to know where the project [Alpha-Campus] really fits in according to the provincial government. Their basic positive reaction should now be turned into a written statement of consent, which should accordingly be binding (interview A8).

In town B, interactions are limited to a small network and are oriented towards the local scale. The entrepreneurs of town B prefer informal practices based on mutual trust. As the local residents show a dislike of formal strategies and procedures, there are no immediate aspirations to formalize the network. The mayor created a lateral governance structure that enables the entrepreneurial individuals to become active within this setting (interview B6, B8).

Individual legitimization

Third, the dimension of individual legitimization could be gleaned from the empirical material. The results for both towns demonstrate that individuals with a non-governmental background aspire towards upholding close contacts with political leaders to compensate for their lack of formal legitimacy and to anchor their interests in the policy agenda. These results confirm the findings of previous work on entrepreneurship and leadership, revealing entrepreneurial dependencies on formal power (Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Leick, 2017). What is more surprising, is that the entrepreneurs also

unfold strategies of individual legitimization in order to increase their own agency in decision-making. Winter, for instance, has held multiple official positions in different organizations over time. He has thus accumulated power by multiplying his network and gaining formal authority in different realms. Furthermore, in both towns, novel leadership positions (e.g., supervisory boards, steering committees) were created during project implementation and then held by the entrepreneurial individuals themselves. These newly found positions enabled the non-governmental entrepreneurs to guarantee the further realization and implementation of their aims, based on a formal albeit non-elected position. In the interviews with representatives of higher governance scales, processes of individual legitimization are considered relatively unproblematic. The initiatives of non-governmental individuals are welcomed on the regional and federal scale, the argument being that political or administrative actors in small towns do not always have the time and resources to focus on this kind of work (interviews B9, A11).

Regional rescaling

Finally, the entrepreneurial individuals contribute to a spatial expansion of individual agency and local action spaces. The individuals of town A endeavour to bring about the regional rescaling of their network. This is reflected through different approaches. Winter and the mayor contribute their interest in the regional LEADER association, thus adding to the regional strategy. To bundle resources, the developments within the Alpha-Campus structure are associated with a regional education and networking association. Moreover, they aim at establishing a regional network of creative hubs in the future.

Together, we feel obliged to contribute to the advancement of this region, and we have accomplished this with the Alpha-Campus, which in my opinion fits this regional strategy (interview A7).

Whereas the entrepreneurs of town A upscale functions and ideas onto the regional scale (interview A11), the individuals in town B are reserved regarding the involvement of regional organizations and the inclusion of higher governance scales. However, the inclusion of an external consultant in the city renewal process and Cospace signify the gradual, cautious opening of town B. The entrepreneurial individuals describe a rather competitive relationship between town B and the neighbouring towns (interview B3). This might also partly be caused by the specific status of town B in the region, its being one of the smaller towns. The regional scale is primarily addressed for financial support, for instance through a programme called *Start-up Cityregion*. This was initiated by the regional development agency, linking a regional start-up initiative and the reduction of urban property vacancies (interview B1, B2). Even though the objects of the regional programme match the project orientation of Cospace, the entrepreneurial individuals are not interested in actively connecting with the other towns involved:

Start-up Cityregion was conceived as a supra-regional project in which other towns of the region are involved and I don't know at all whether this is happening, but the larger the whole thing is, the more inflexible does its apparatus become, so I actually don't pay attention to that. [...] In truth, we are now busy with our own matters (interview B4).

This also illustrates how much work such an active network management would require from the entrepreneurial individuals (Ayres, 2017) and points to the fact that the engagement and willingness of public actors are also necessary to anchor such processes regionally. To outline the complex processes described above more vividly, figure 4 provides a timeline giving an overview of the milestones in regional economic development and governance changes in town A and B.

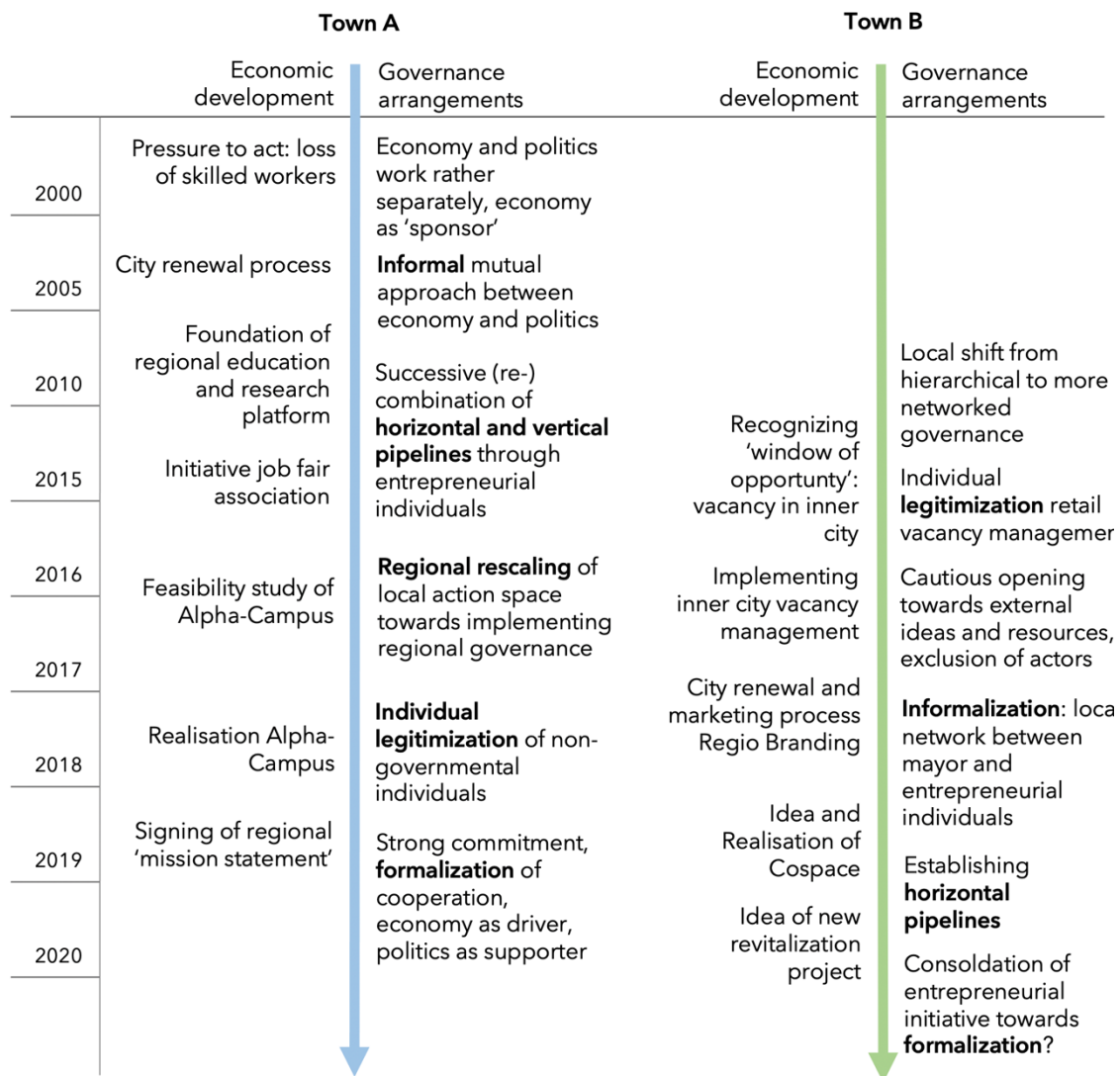


Figure 4: Timeline - economic development and governance in towns A and B

5.2.3 Temporal dimensions

As explicated in *Paper III*, the in-depth analysis furthermore revealed not only the relational, but also the temporal dimension of governance entrepreneurship and socio-spatial change. Based on the empirical insights, one can differentiate between a long-term governance transition and a short-term governance shift in town B. In town A, the networked governance arrangement increasingly consolidates, whereas the governance arrangement in town B is closely related to single individuals and thus tends to be more fragile.

A long-term governance transition can be identified for town A, driven by different groups of entrepreneurial individuals in different phases. These entrepreneurial groups can be identified as “generational units” of governance change (Döringer, 2020b). This notion is inspired by a concept suggested by Lippmann and Aldrich (2016) defining generational units as groups of individuals who shape collective memories at a certain time and place by providing a socio-cultural framework. Around the turn of the millennium, a group of entrepreneurs recognized the need for a reaction to out-migration and the persistent loss of skilled workers. At the time, politics and economy acted rather separately and firms exhibited competitive behaviour in terms of recruiting skilled workers (interview A2, A5, A10). This prospective pioneering generation of entrepreneurial individuals developed partnerships and encouraged negotiations between economy and politics. The current entrepreneurial individuals, notably including Winter and the mayor, can be denoted as a consolidating generational unit encouraging the constant exchange between politics, economy, and educational institutions by successively extending the network and (re-)combining horizontal and vertical pipelines (interview A1, A4, A7) (Döringer, 2020b).

In contrast, the findings regarding town B indicate a short-term governance shift showing a project-oriented governance arrangement highly dependent upon the involved individuals. The case of town B shows a bottom-up local governance change, driven by non-governmental individuals. Although this local governance process is currently only organized very informally, there is evidence that the bottom-up activities in town B might be formally anchored in the future. However, at this stage it is still unclear whether the entrepreneurial group will consolidate or split up in the event of a change in political representatives or a weakening in the commitment of the entrepreneurial individuals (Döringer, 2020b).

5.2.4 Middle-range theory of governance entrepreneurship

A central aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the development of the nascent concept of governance entrepreneurship by developing a middle-range theory (Merton, 1968) drawing upon generated data. The case analysis reveals different theoretical components of governance entrepreneurship that are presented in *Paper III* and are summarized in this framing text. Based on these emerging components, a local model of governance entrepreneurship is proposed, linking and contextualizing the

theoretical elements. By means of the middle-range theory presented here, the overarching research question of this thesis is addressed: The model presented in figure 5 explains how entrepreneurial individuals gain agency in local governance and thus might contribute to changes in regional economic development.

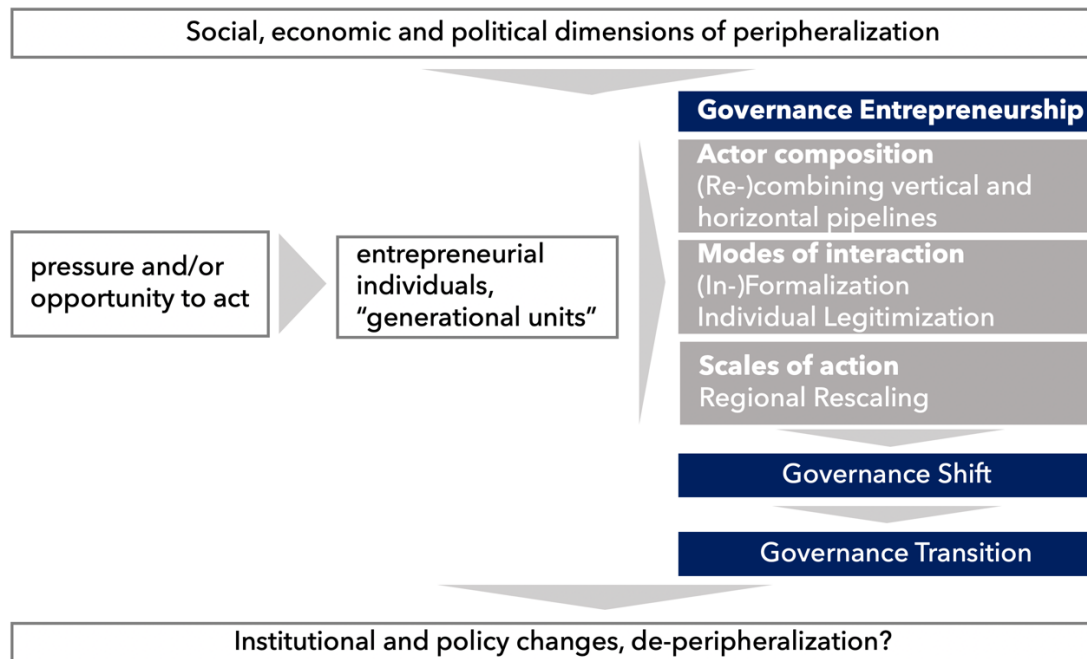


Figure 5: Middle-range theory of governance entrepreneurship in peripheralized small towns

The theoretical model of governance entrepreneurship in peripheral towns shows that entrepreneurial individuals are prompted to act, either by personal pressure and/or through the recognition of a "window of opportunity" (Kingdon, 1995) to realize entrepreneurial activities. In the latter case, the individuals do not necessarily feel an individual need for action, but their activities are triggered by an intrinsic motivation. The analysis revealed that governance entrepreneurs rely upon different approaches, namely the (re-)combination of horizontal and vertical pipelines, (in-)formalization, individual legitimization, and regional rescaling, to modify governance arrangements and to establish or broaden their agency. Particularly the implementation of vertical pipelines and regional rescaling contribute to and accelerate external flows of knowledge, power, and funding that are urgently needed by peripheral towns to unleash and expand not only endogenous, but also exogenous resources. These might unfold in different temporalities, resulting in a short-term governance shift or in a long-term governance transition over time. Governance entrepreneurship can be considered as a crucial, albeit rather hidden condition to adapt better to local challenges of peripheralization. Over time, the induced governance changes might result in more visible outcomes or manifest in policy or institutional changes that might in turn contribute to processes of de-peripheralization.

This dissertation introduces the concept of governance entrepreneurship to supplement the theoretical approaches of institutional and policy entrepreneurship. This concept might serve as a useful analytical category for further research, making a fresh view on the underlying processes of socio-spatial change possible. In addition to the in-depth analysis and the local theorizing of governance entrepreneurship in peripheral towns, the next chapter focuses on the interrelatedness of policy, institutional, and governance entrepreneurship.

5.3 Interrelation of institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship

While the previous chapter summarizes the findings presented in *Paper III*, this chapter addresses additional empirical findings concerning the interrelatedness of institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship. The conceptual *Paper I* makes a first attempt at reflecting upon the underdeveloped interrelatedness of institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship (Döringer, 2020c). The implications of this theoretical consideration could also be observed in the field research. The empirical analysis of town A provides some first evidence that these three transformative forms of agency are related and can intensify each other. Whereas the entrepreneurial activities in town B do not indicate that an institutional change processes has taken place by now, institutional, policy, and governance changes are evident in town A. The case of the entrepreneur Tom Winter illustrates that individuals might simultaneously take two or more entrepreneurial roles in the processes: he acts not only as governance entrepreneur, but also as policy entrepreneur by striving for new regional economic policies, and as an institutional entrepreneur by promoting institutional changes.

Tom Winter can be identified as policy entrepreneur because of his contribution to industrial path renewal in the regional economy, for instance by initiating and developing the regional networking platform and the collaborative and creative hub of Alpha-Campus. Steel-producing firms are an important factor for economic performance and play a crucial role for the local identity. Alpha-Campus combines this traditional heritage of the steel industry with new forms of labour and digital resources (interview A5, A7). The creative and innovation lab can be considered the spatial manifestation of this socio-cultural renewal, increasing the attractiveness of the region for skilled workers and ensuring a future-orientated development of industrial firms in the region. Thus, the campus does not only address the loss of skilled workers by offering training opportunities, but also blends new forms of digital work and traditional production methods (Döringer, 2020a).

Winter and the local industrial firms in general managed to gain further importance in regional development during the last years and contributed to more far-reaching institutional changes in the region. Formally, this change can be noticed in the focus of the regional LEADER strategy. In former periods, cultural and touristic projects shaped the

regional development agenda. In the current funding period, measurements dedicated to the steel-producing firms and young entrepreneurship were brought to the fore and anchored in the regional strategy (Döringer, 2020a). These developments have been essentially triggered by Winter and the mayor of town A who actively contributed to the establishment of the current LEADER strategy and managed to include the interests of regional industry in regional development (interview A2, A3, A9, LEADER protocols/strategic document).

Winter also contributes to institutional change processes primarily evident in terms of informal practices. The majority of interviewees refer to a “cultural change”, establishing a collective way of “thinking in networks” as a specific characteristic of this small-sized city (interview A6, A7, A10, A11, A12). The interviews reveal that pioneering entrepreneurs have fostered a cautious opening between politics and economy in the past (interview A10), which was continued and strengthened by the current generational unit (interview A3, A4). Winter can be delineated as one of these institutional entrepreneurs, as he does not only take a central position in the local governance network, but also contributes to the further institutionalization and anchoring of the economic-political network. He induced the establishment of a formal commitment of cooperation between representatives from politics and economy, and of regional agencies. This commitment is stipulated in a mission statement signed by politicians and entrepreneurs for the jointly driven economic renewal and modernization of the region (Döringer, 2020a).

The long-term governance transition identified in town A and discussed in the previous chapter, 5.2.3, might be closely interlinked with these processes of institutional and policy change. Governance changes turned out to be a crucial condition for the successful and sustained introduction of new policy approaches in the case of town A. Moreover, governance changes, such as the founding of new networks and the integration of new actor groups, manifest in institutional change over time, establishing consensual network thinking and the norm of cooperation, for example. Table 5 summarizes and lists the main activities of Winter while acting as governance, policy, and institutional entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurial roles	Strategies and activities
Governance Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - fosters regional network of economy and establishes firms as central actors in local and regional governance - is involved in including new actors in governance, e.g. schools - establishes vertical and horizontal axes, often based on personal, informal contacts
Policy Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - prompted concrete projects and measurements to address the loss of skilled workers and to initiate economic renewal - contributes to a sustained implementation of policy instruments by establishing organisational structures such as Alpha-Campus
Institutional Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - integrated local economy into regional development strategy and funding - actively promotes "network thinking" - co-initiated signing of a mission statement aiming for cooperation between different regional actors

Table 5: The entrepreneurial roles, activities, and strategies of Winter

5.4 Discussion

The dissertation aimed at exploring the agency of entrepreneurial individuals in local economy in peripheral towns in Austria. The final discussion is concerned with the overall research question, asking: *How can entrepreneurial individuals gain individual agency and to what extent can they gain influence on economic development processes in peripheralized towns?* Ultimately, governance entrepreneurship can be seen as one type of transformative agency (Tuominen and Lehtonen, 2018), contributing to processes of "de-peripheralization" (Döringer, 2018; Leick and Lang, 2018).

With its focus on individuals, this dissertation also argues for a deeper understanding of those personal motifs that guide entrepreneurial behaviour and constitute agency. The profile of the entrepreneurs identified in the focal towns confirm the widely acknowledged personal characteristics and abilities associated with entrepreneurship in literature (Petridou, 2018; Cocks, 2013). They are creative, persistent, and willing to devote their private time to their projects. While these non-contextualized attributes explain little about the constitution of individual agency and its interrelatedness with structure (Gailing and Ibert, 2016), insights into individual perceptions and orientation lead to a deeper understanding of the social-economic mechanisms in the small towns (Lagendijk, 2007). As agency is spatially bound and socially embedded (Huggins and Thompson, 2019b), processes of peripheralization also shape the abilities and perceptions of the entrepreneurs. In this context, one anticipated finding is that unlike that which is often attributed to people in peripheral places in literature (Kühn and Bernt,

2013), the entrepreneurs in the peripheralized towns do not feel powerless or left behind (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). In contrast, they are confident of their local knowledge and eager to activate and re-contextualize the physical and social resources available in the small towns. Thus, they pick up trends that have emerged in urban contexts, such as co-working and co-creation, and adapt and contextualize them in a place-sensitive way. The collaborative, creative labs established in both towns vividly demonstrate the ways in which the entrepreneurs utilize physical assets and social opportunities, thereby providing significant momentum towards experimenting with new collaborative and digital labour environments. This positive attitude towards change seems an essential condition for entrepreneurial activities in the periphery.

The institutional and social environment of small towns seems to provide a fruitful environment for entrepreneurial individuals. The social and physical proximity of communities within smaller cities might support the activities of entrepreneurial individuals by promoting mutual trust and facilitating certainty about desired results. Particularly at the beginning of a project, the actors seem to benefit from short decision-paths and a manageable number of stakeholders when they navigate through decision-making structures and seek allies. Although the number of involved actors is comparatively small compared to bigger cities, both towns seem to have achieved the critical mass of actors that is necessary for the implementation of entrepreneurial activities. The small size enhances the interaction between diverse actors, supporting face-to-face contacts between heterogeneous groups of entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurial individuals of both towns connect with a variety of actors with different institutional and economic backgrounds to realize their goals. Hence, it can be confirmed that social proximity and the smallness of a town also support spillover effects among entrepreneurial groups and generational units operating in different fields of activity (Meili and Shearmur, 2019).

Governance entrepreneurship focuses on the rearrangement of governance constellations and practices, and illustrate how individual agency is established within these settings. The participation in networks is considered an important task to address downgrading processes and to change the role of a periphery in a socio-spatial system (Herschel, 2011; Copus, 2001; Kühn, 2015). The dissertation reveals that both the inclusion in supra-local networks and the expansion of local networks seem to be crucial tasks for entrepreneurs in the periphery. In town A and B, horizontal connections across sectors are used to guarantee consensus among the participating actors and to multiply local resources. On the other hand, town A shows how vertical pipelines facilitate the (re-)inclusion into powerful decision-making networks on higher governance scales. Primarily built on inter-personal, informal linkages, these identified pipelines serve as crucial accelerators to acquire support for entrepreneurial activities by building important connections to people on higher governance levels. By reshaping, extending, and activating networks, governance entrepreneurship paves the way for

addressing two urgent problems often associated with peripheralization, namely thin organizational and institutional structures (Trippel et al., 2016) and an exclusion (or the threat thereof) from political decision-making networks (Herrscher, 2011).

Governance entrepreneurship also reveals how entrepreneurs establish individual legitimization and gain power in local networks in order to establish an influential “social position in a field” that is often expected as a precondition for institutional or policy entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009). As individual agency also depends on societal position (Grillitsch and Sotarauta, 2019), entrepreneurial individuals aim to reconfigure their social position in terms of their entrepreneurial endeavour. The study confirms that entrepreneurial legitimacy follows its own logic consisting of informal and formal elements (Olausson and Whilborg, 2018; O’Toole and Burdett, 2004). In addition, it was found that informal legitimacy based on trust is particularly important in the starting phase, in order to gain support among the local community and ensure entrepreneurial flexibility. However, the individuals also tend to legitimize their position formally in the ongoing process, as it seems difficult to implement and secure entrepreneurial projects in the long term without a legal mandate or formal authority. This complex constitution of entrepreneurial agency also raises issues concerning questions of legitimacy of non-elected entrepreneurial individuals in regional development that might be worthy of further investigation.

Furthermore, the inquiry into governance entrepreneurship in small towns also makes it evident that agency may not only appear through individuals but also through places (Holmen and Fosse, 2017). The dimension of “regional rescaling” identified in town A particularly demonstrates how governance entrepreneurs might contribute to the repositioning of a town in the regional network by reaching out to supra-local actors. By realizing entrepreneurial activities and aiming for an influential social position, the governance entrepreneurs might not only exert individual agency, but also increase the agency of a place *per se*. This idea might be closely related to what Grillitsch and Sotarauta (2019: 714) mean with the notion of “region-specific opportunity spaces”. By their activities, governance entrepreneurs do not only exploit individual agency, but might also extend the local opportunity space of a place by elaborating the effectiveness of actor constellations and coordinating economic development at a regional level (Beer et al., 2019; Kaufmann and Wittwer, 2019). By their networking activities and the rearrangement of actor constellations, they furthermore bring unknown physical, human, and financial resources to the fore, from which the peripheral towns might profit altogether. In turn, the illumination of spatial potentials might increase the likelihood of other entrepreneurial activities succeeding and of a further expansion of “region-specific opportunity space”.

This is closely connected to the question of building up entrepreneurial structures and ensuring the success of entrepreneurial efforts over time. The cautious renewal of gov-

ernance practices might be an essential strategy towards securing entrepreneurial imprints and is deemed to facilitate sustainable local development. Town A demonstrates how entrepreneurial potential has been rising and accumulating across generations. Succeeding generations can draw upon the social heritage of parental generations (Buenstorf and Klepper, 2009; Huggins and Thompson, 2019b). Acknowledging entrepreneurial legacy and further developing it through individual experience might constitute a vital task for entrepreneurs in order to guarantee learning, not only on an individual, but also on a collective level. Thereby, processes of participation and co-creation should also be fostered in local development. Since densely grown networks might be at risk of preserving entrenched structures and hampering processes of renewal, a certain degree of heterogeneity within networks is considered essential for stimulating learning processes and enabling future-oriented development.

This dissertation focuses on political forms of entrepreneurship, particularly governance entrepreneurship, and argues that these forms of transformative agency are crucial for small towns in order to adopt sustainable economic development acknowledging socio-cultural peculiarities. Governance entrepreneurship explains the modification of networks and the creative use of social resources to deal with processes of peripheralization. To address emergent economic challenges successfully, including the intensification of digital work and the raise of knowledge economies, a more integrated view on economic development is needed, encompassing social, environmental, and cultural dimensions. Adaptive and efficient governance structures are thus considered a key element to enhance the vitality of small towns and to develop places sustainably.

6. Conclusion

This dissertation investigated the role of entrepreneurial individuals in governance and regional economic development in small towns undergoing socio-economic peripheralization, in order to contribute to one of the most pivotal questions in geography: Why do towns develop differently despite facing similar structural preconditions and challenges? Starting with a quantitative analysis, the dissertation gathered insights on the heterogeneous structural conditions of small-sized cities in Austria, identifying towns experiencing processes of peripheralization. After having illustrated the socio-economic diversity of towns in Austria by means of a cluster typology, it set out to scrutinize issues of individual agency in local governance. Based on an analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship, a comparative case study analysis was conducted, disclosing relational and temporal aspects of individual agency in local decision-making. It demonstrates how individuals from economy and politics re-arrange governance over time and build connections inside and outside the towns in order to mobilize resources and knowledge. Thereby, the findings underline not only the importance of individual agency in regional economic development but demonstrate the temporal nature of agency that become evident across entrepreneurial generations. The latter aspect particularly proved itself a crucial asset for socio-spatial change, paving the way for collective learning and facilitating processes of de-peripheralization against the background of increasing socio-spatial inequalities. This final chapter summarizes the findings of the dissertation by answering the research question, presenting policy implications, and concluding with critical reflections and avenues for future research.

6.1 Answering the research questions

At the beginning, this dissertation posed four operational research questions referring to the framing text and the three papers. These four questions will now be answered, summarizing the main results of this doctoral thesis.

RQ1: What are the structural preconditions of small-sized cities in Austria and which of these cities are undergoing processes of peripheralization?

This question addressed the emerging scientific debate on multi-dimensional peripheralization and was aimed at contributing to a more nuanced perspective on small towns and their socio-economic development. Focusing on demographic and economic dimensions, the cluster analysis presented in the *framing text* revealed five types of small towns in Austria showing different patterns of centralization and peripheralization. It displays a differentiated picture of small-town development, revealing that processes of centralization and peripheralization can also manifest simultaneously within a city. While towns located in agglomeration areas frequently experience population

growth and economic prosperity, towns in remote areas are instead affected by depopulation and economic downgrading. These multi-dimensional peripheralized towns are primarily located in border regions and the inner peripheries of the Alpine region. However, the results also show examples contradicting these patterns and providing evidence that a remote location does not necessarily cause a downward spiral. The findings provide interesting insights about the heterogeneous development of small towns and might encourage further investigation on small-town development in Austria. However, the quantitative analysis is limited to structural dimensions associated with processes of peripheralization. To broaden the understanding of the multifaceted concept of peripheralization and to understand how de-peripheralization or re-centralization might emerge, it is necessary to take an actor-centred perspective and to investigate socio-political processes within the towns.

RQ 2: Who are the entrepreneurial individuals in regional economic development and how do they influence local governance?

This question is concerned with the theoretical debate on individual agency and socio-spatial change processes. Inspired by practical observations and academic voices arguing that individuals play a key role in regional development processes, the aim of *Paper I* was to illuminate the role of entrepreneurial individuals in regional development from a conceptual viewpoint. The literature review on institutional and policy entrepreneurship on the local and regional scale showed that the debate regarding entrepreneurial individuals in economic geography is comparatively new, focusing primarily on prospering spaces. Albeit that the number of publications concerned with this topic is still relatively limited, the review confirmed an increasing interest in the agency of individuals (or groups of individuals) in recent years. It also proved the variegated nature of actors from the political, economic, and civic sphere engaged in entrepreneurial activities. The literature on institutional and policy entrepreneurship makes us aware of the diverse practices and strategies of entrepreneurs. However, as the studies set out to investigate institutional and policy changes, they tend to overlook the underlying changes in governance arrangements induced by entrepreneurs while attempting to reach institutional and policy goals. The in-depth review showed that the governance dimensions of actor composition, interaction modes, and space of action might be particularly worthy of further empirical investigation. Hence, these three dimensions served as sensitizing framework of governance entrepreneurship for the empirical inquiry. Furthermore, the review addresses the conceptual interrelatedness between institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship, which might be further considered in terms of understanding human agency regarding socio-spatial change.

RQ3: How can the role of entrepreneurial individuals in governance be investigated and reconstructed empirically?

The dissertation aims at exploring individual agency and revealing how entrepreneurial individuals might contribute to change. Therefore, it was considered essential to reflect upon the epistemological interest concerning entrepreneurial individuals and the knowledge dimensions that shape individual agency, in order to apply an appropriate methodical approach. Striving to investigate implicit knowledge, a combination of theory-generating expert interviews and problem-centred expert interviews was developed, as this opens up the possibility of moving beyond explicit knowledge and of generating insights into personal perceptions, orientation, and relevancies that guide entrepreneurial actions. By introducing the problem-centred expert interview, this cumulative dissertation also contributes to the interdisciplinary methodological debate regarding qualitative interviewing. This methodical combination presented in *Paper II* offers a fruitful interviewing approach when individual agency forms part of the empirical investigation.

RQ 4: How do entrepreneurial individuals modify governance arrangements and to what extent can they influence processes of peripheralization by doing so?

This question sets out to delineate the way in which individual agency is established in local governance and to describe how these processes influence regional economic development. Through a case study analysis of peripheralized towns in Austria, it could be shown that governance entrepreneurship has a relational and a temporal dimension. Entrepreneurial individuals with an economic and political background seek to rearrange governance by (re-)combining horizontal and vertical pipelines, intertwining informal and formal practices, pursuing individual legitimization, and promoting regional rescaling. Moreover, the temporal dimension of governance entrepreneurship points to the fact that sustainable governance transition is rooted in entrepreneurial imprints of the past. Current generations of entrepreneurial individuals can essentially profit from the social and institutional heritage of pioneering generational units. Ultimately, governance entrepreneurship can be understood as a human resource and an effective strategy towards obtaining and expanding individual agency in decision-making processes. Beyond the expansion of individual agency, governance entrepreneurs might also open and expand regional opportunity spaces by unveiling and tapping into the unexploited human potential of peripheral regions. Consequently, governance entrepreneurship might constitute one crucial type of transformative agency needed to re-direct processes of peripheralization over time.

6.2 Policy implications

After elaborating on the theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions of this dissertation, it is important not to lose sight of the practical implications that can be

derived from these findings. Drawing from the results of this research, there are lessons to be learnt for policy-making and for peripheralized places.

The multi-dimensional challenges of peripheralized towns and regions, such as out-migration, economic decline, or political dependencies, require an integrative and comprehensive effort of politicians, firms, and citizens. In Austria, local policy makers and particularly mayors are endowed with broad political responsibility and decision-making capacities. As the case of town B vividly shows, the style of leadership of the mayor is crucial for stimulating entrepreneurial activities and enabling change processes. Creating a networked environment and being open-minded to entrepreneurial ideas from non-governmental actors is a crucial factor in the development of alternative paths in local economy. For policy makers, this implies having to overcome risk-averse behaviour and moving beyond the interests of their own party (Petridou and Mintrom, 2020). Elected authorities however also have the duty to continue reflecting upon the kind of entrepreneurial activities that are to be supported and on the persons and organisations who are to receive support.

Related to this, it could be shown that non-governmental entrepreneurs not only seek to legitimize their practices (Leick, 2017), but also to legitimize themselves within decision-making networks, in order to overcome their lack of formal authority. This raises conceptual, but also practical questions regarding the democratic legitimacy of influential individuals that act beyond holding elected offices or administrative positions (Döringer, 2020b). In order to prevent that democratic practices recede into the background and avoid the threat that the opportunistic behaviour of specific actor groups define the path of a region (Connelly, 2011; Leick, 2017), it is important to critically reflect upon issues of legitimacy in local and regional development. Linked to this, political and administrative representatives should take care to coordinate and integrate entrepreneurial activities with governmental strategies, to prevent non-governmental entrepreneurship from establishing or consolidating parallel or concurring decision-making structures.

Aside from this, obtaining entrepreneurial imprints seems to be one of the major tasks towards facilitating the sustainable development of towns. Two aspects are deemed essential for securing entrepreneurial activities. First, a certain degree of formalization is needed to overcome processual fragility and reliance on individuals and to prevent the waning of earlier achievements. As entrepreneurship largely draws upon informal structures, this might prove a fuzzy task, because rapid institutionalization or formalization might impede entrepreneurial dynamics and creativity. Therefore, intermediate steps ensuring network stability are necessary on the one hand and guaranteeing enough entrepreneurial flexibility is needed on the other. Second, it might prove vital that places and communities begin to develop an entrepreneurial heritage over generations. The notion of generational units that was gleaned from the empirical material

elucidates the importance of cross-generational efforts and continuity to enable sustainable development. This might also necessitate the active communication of entrepreneurial activities to the public and open governance networks appealing for participation in order to create a stimulating environment that encourages entrepreneurial successors.

Emphasizing individuals' perceptions and practices in peripheral places facilitates acknowledging the specific opportunities and the variety of entrepreneurial approaches offered by peripheries. This is regarded a key task for supra-local policy-making. An actor-oriented perspective contributes to a richer knowledge base for developing place-sensitive policies (Iammarino et al., 2019) that "are expected to respond to time-specific, region-specific and actor-specific opportunities as well as the constraints of each place" (Sotarauta et al., 2021: 4). By scrutinizing micro processes and shedding light on the perspective of local actors, the study not only reveals local opportunities and challenges, but also delivers information about how those are perceived by the local residents. In doing so, it acknowledges entrepreneurial diversity and individual strategies of peripheral places and questions the urban bias, which is often prevalent in literature, regarding economic development and innovation (Mayer, 2020; Shearmur and Doloreux, 2016).

Based on this, the thesis finally argues for an increase in experimental approaches towards policy-making that complement certain established place-based approaches of the EU, such as S3s or LEADER. The case studies illustrate that entrepreneurial individuals draw upon a mixture of public funding and private financial resources to realize their ideas. However, they also reveal the effort associated with external funding that might discourage entrepreneurs to utilize such structures. These deficits could be addressed, for instance, by fostering experimental projects, by allowing low-threshold access, and by minimizing bureaucratic barriers. Moreover, during the implementation of experimental projects, admitting failure should also be a legitimate option (interview B9). Another approach might include rural labs, in which new practices and forms of co-creation and innovation are tried out in peripheral places. These laboratories facilitate experimentation and creativity by promoting exchanges between scientists and local residents and are deemed to contribute to sustainable regional development (Zavratnik et al., 2019).

6.3 Limitations and further research

This dissertation aims at providing a deeper understanding of socio-spatial change by introducing the concept of governance entrepreneurship into the discussion on transformative agency and regional development. By adopting an actor-centred approach to peripheralization and focusing on entrepreneurial individuals and their perceptions, this thesis does not attempt to provide ready-made answers to questions or to gener-

alize on the development of peripheralized towns and regions. While this could be regarded as a limitation, the value of this research lies in scrutinizing governance arrangements and developing an empirically grounded conception of individual agency and peripheralization. However, much more work is required to understand processes of agency in the periphery. Therefore, governance entrepreneurship is recommended as a promising subject of future research and further theory development.

First, further comparative research on governance entrepreneurship is needed to reflect upon the complexity and interrelatedness of structure and agency and to shed light on questions regarding, for instance, the ways in which non-governmental actors gain individual agency in different spatial contexts and spheres of action. The typology of small towns presented in this dissertation shows that processes of peripheralization and centralization are multi-faceted, which also calls for further cross-comparative research shedding light on external factors and structural conditions influencing entrepreneurial individuals. This might not only imply the further investigation of cases within different countries, but also the comparison of countries with more strongly centralized government systems in order to find out how institutional conditions shape local forms of governance. This might in turn result in a deeper understanding of the complex interrelationship of structure and agency. Moreover, the concept of governance entrepreneurship might not only be of interest in terms of regional economic development, but also in a wider sense in terms of urban development or planning. In planning, non-governmental actors and particularly civil movements are gaining increasing importance. Governance entrepreneurship might foster a better understanding of the mechanisms enabling (groups) of individuals from the non-governmental sphere to influence policy-making and to obtain agency in public policy.

Second, this thesis highlights the temporal dimension of entrepreneurship and agency in change processes, which surprisingly has received limited attention to date (Jolly et al., 2020). The thesis argues for a process-oriented perspective on entrepreneurship and regional development. However, additional long-term studies are needed to obtain further evidence regarding the ways in which governance changes are rooted in the past and on how processes of change have taken place over time. Hence, sketching out temporal trajectories might also illustrate the (re-)interpretation and further development of entrepreneurial achievements over time. This kind of study could be informative regarding the institutionalization over time of former entrepreneurial activities and regarding the question why governance arrangements undergo renewal. On the other hand, there might also be cases in which the achievements of pioneering generational units have vanished, as there were no successors to take up their entrepreneurial heritage.

Third, and related to this, the temporal view on entrepreneurial agency and the notion of generational units seems to have potential for further theorizing in terms of regional economic development. In this context, the concept of generational units (Lippmann

and Aldrich, 2016) or the heritage theory (Buenstorf and Klepper, 2009; Klepper, 2011) might provide interesting conceptual approaches. The claim is that the experience of prior generations is crucial for the success of contemporary entrepreneurial activities. Heritage theory argues that the inherited routines and competences of a parental firm are crucial for the success of its entrepreneurial spin-offs. This might be particularly interesting in the context of entrepreneurship in the periphery (Habersetzer et al., 2020). By highlighting the characteristics of the local firms rather than structural forces, it sets out to explain why economic entrepreneurship also occurs outside a core region. This idea might be further transmitted to the debate on institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship in relation to regional development, in order to investigate how social heritage influences action orientation and stimulates entrepreneurial activities across generations.

Fourth, it is important to note that this dissertation does not conceptualize a normative approach to governance entrepreneurship in the first instance, as it intends a self-reflexive and open-minded view on the perceptions and action orientations of entrepreneurs in peripheral places. However, this does not imply that the changes observed in governance and regional development are necessarily all considered “good”, which would also raise the complex question of “good for whom?”. The dissertation does not propose clear-cut answers to the question of best transforming governance against the background of peripheralization, nor does it endeavour to predict how small-sized cities are to be developed successfully. However, the concept bears potential for being used as an evaluative approach, for instance in combination with the concept of good governance (Rhodes, 1996). By combining the concept of governance entrepreneurship with a normative perspective and including indicators such as citizen empowerment (Connelly, 2011) or co-creation, it might be a useful concept for investigating the effectiveness and sustainability of governance changes.

Fifth, the analysis of the interrelation between institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship could be another promising avenue for further research towards achieving a more comprehensive understanding of individual agency and socio-spatial change. The thesis argues that these three transformative types of agency correspond to and affect each other mutually. These roles can be taken up by individuals (or by groups of individuals) and may occur simultaneously or linearly in the regional development process (Döringer, 2020c). However, as mentioned at the beginning, research about the interrelationship of different types of entrepreneurship is yet nascent (Grillitsch and Sotarauta, 2019; Bakir and Jarvis, 2017). Linked to this, governance entrepreneurship might also contribute to the lack of research on failed institutional or policy entrepreneurial attempts (Henderson, 2019; Petridou and Mintrom, 2020). As policy and institutional entrepreneurship literature mostly starts from successful and obvious achievements or changes and then looks backward (Boasson and Huitema, 2017; Petridou and Mintrom, 2020), it tends to overlook “unsuccessful entrepreneurs”

or “entrepreneurial work in progress”. By focusing on underlying structural transformation processes, governance entrepreneurship might entail insights on why things did not work out.

Finally, a point is addressed that moves beyond the purpose of this study but is considered of high importance for further investigation. The analysis of the case studies reveals a prevalence of male entrepreneurs when it comes to arranging and steering governance structures in towns. While women are occasionally mentioned as an important target group of the initiatives in the towns, they are obviously underrepresented in the economic decision-making processes themselves. Departing from this observation, a more gender-sensitive approach is claimed for analysing institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship in order to question gender inequalities in political entrepreneurship and to identify potentials of and barriers against female entrepreneurship in the periphery. In peripheralized towns and regions, where out-migration of younger female persons is often an evident problem (Wiest, 2016), the mobilization of diverse people for entrepreneurial activities is of particular importance. Yet, institutional and policy entrepreneurship literature remains silent on the role of female entrepreneurs in regional development. It is important, however, to further acknowledge the diversity of entrepreneurial activities and to enhance an understanding of the impact of cultural and institutional environments on entrepreneurship from a gender-sensitive perspective. How do socio-spatial developments and institutions shape gender differences in entrepreneurial activities? To what extent do socio-spatially reproduced norms, expectations, or unwritten rules constrain women’s access to entrepreneurial activities? Emphasis should be placed on a gender-sensitive perspective in entrepreneurship studies in order to gain an improved, contextually and spatially differentiated understanding of social access to entrepreneurial opportunities.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Quantitative data sources, test statistics, and typology

	Dev. population 09-18	Mig. balance 11-18	Share over 64-year-olds 18	Share working age 18	Dev. employees/residence 09-18	Dev. employees/work 09-18	Dev. in-commuters 09-18	Dev. municipal tax/capita 09-18	Share high education 18	Share knowledge intensity 18
Development of population 09-18	,706 ^a	-0.693	0.557	0.087	-0.457	-0.080	0.046	0.284	-0.099	0.079
Migration balance 11-18	-0.693	,705 ^a	-0.459	-0.008	-0.105	0.061	-0.031	-0.091	-0.009	-0.104
Share over 64-year-olds 18	0.557	-0.459	,687 ^a	0.591	0.055	-0.154	0.152	0.047	0.008	0.001
Share working age 18	0.087	-0.008	0.591	,793 ^a	-0.122	-0.011	0.031	-0.137	-0.057	-0.009
Development of employees/residence 09-18	-0.457	-0.105	0.055	-0.122	,878 ^a	-0.206	0.164	-0.139	0.050	0.078
Development of employees/work 09-18	-0.080	0.061	-0.154	-0.011	-0.206	,541 ^a	-0.931	-0.197	-0.234	0.013
Development of in-commuters 09-18	0.046	-0.031	0.152	0.031	0.164	-0.931	,511 ^a	0.080	0.267	-0.091
Development municipal tax p. capita 09-18	0.284	-0.091	0.047	-0.137	-0.139	-0.197	0.080	,645 ^a	0.188	0.007
Share higher education 18	-0.099	-0.009	0.008	-0.057	0.050	-0.234	0.267	0.188	,635 ^a	-0.505
Share knowledge intensity 18	0.079	-0.104	0.001	-0.009	0.078	0.013	-0.091	0.007	-0.505	,503 ^a

Table 1.1 Anti-image correlation matrix

Manufacturing industries NACE Rev. 2 codes - 2-digit level	
<i>High-technology</i>	
21	Manufacture of basic pharmaceutical products and pharmaceutical preparations
26	Manufacture of computer, electronic and optical products
<i>Medium-high-technology</i>	
20	Manufacture of chemicals and chemical products
27 to 30	Manufacture of electrical equipment, Manufacture of machinery and equipment n.e.c.
Knowledge-based services NACE Rev. 2-digit level, Knowledge-intensive services (KIS)	
50 to 51	Water transport, air transport
58 to 63	Publishing activities, motion picture, video, and television programme production, sound recording and music publishing activities, programming and broadcasting activities, telecommunications, computer programming, consultancy and related activities, information service activities
64 to 66	Financial and insurance activities
69 to 75	Legal and accounting activities, activities of head offices; management consultancy activities, architectural and engineering activities; technical testing and analysis, scientific research and development, advertising and market research, other professional, scientific and technical activities, veterinary activities
78	Employment activities
80	Security and investigation activities
84 to 93	Public administration and defence, compulsory social security, education, human health and social work activities, arts, entertainment and recreation

Table 1.2 Economic branches considered for the variable "Share of employees in knowledge-intensive branches", based on NACE Rev. 2 of Eurostat, 2008

Component*	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4,021	40,209	40,209	4,021	40,209	40,209	3,792	37,923	37,923
2	2,038	20,385	60,594	2,038	20,385	60,594	2,095	20,950	58,873
3	1,482	14,817	75,411	1,482	14,817	75,411	1,654	16,538	75,411
4	,906	9,063	84,475						
5	,658	6,579	91,054						
6	,420	4,204	95,258						
7	,209	2,090	97,348						
8	,158	1,578	98,925						
9	,057	,570	99,495						
10	,050	,505	100,000						

*Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 1.3 Total variance explained by components

Appendix

Variables	Component		
	1	2	3
Development of population 09-18	0.938	0.009	0.195
Migration balance 11-18	0.910	0.108	0.088
Share over 64-year-olds 18	-0.870	-0.060	0.034
Share working age 18	0.769	0.082	-0.090
Development of employees/residence 09-18	0.742	-0.020	0.292
Development of employees/work 09-18	0.112	0.941	0.065
Development of in-commuters 09-18	0.211	0.928	0.134
Development municipal tax/capita 09-18	-0.194	0.537	-0.392
Share high education 18	-0.119	0.165	0.836
Share knowledge intensity 18	0.277	-0.103	0.799

Table 1.4 Rotated component matrix of variables (z-score)

Cluster Number	Coefficient	Distance	Mojena Sig. Level
130	0.002673	801.2556	-0.49504
129	0.00822	800.9416	-0.49495
128	0.014744	800.5723	-0.49483
127	0.031869	799.6035	-0.49453
126	0.052009	798.4649	-0.49418
...
10	99.3361	5044.83	1.242171
9	108.4926	6429.387	1.402306
8	118.8392	8195.695	1.583256
7	135.0075	11384.54	1.866018
6	151.85	15262.35	2.160572
5	179.1533	22753.98	2.638073
4	208.1125	32329.26	3.144532
3	239.4925	44598.4	3.693327
2	310.3202	79530.25	4.932014
1	390	130820.3	6.325512

Table 1.5 Agglomeration schedule of Mojena test statistics

Components	Cluster		Error		F	Sig.
	Mean	df	Mean	df		
	Square		Square			
1 Demographic development	22,373	4	,321	126	69,595	,000
2 Economic centrality	15,978	4	,524	126	30,465	,000
3 Knowledge intensity	18,827	4	,434	126	43,376	,000

Table 1.6 One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)

Appendix

Components and variables	Cluster				
	1 Centralizing towns - knowledge intensity	2 Centralizing towns - economic centrality	3 Centralizing towns - demographic development	4 Peripheralizing towns - demographic development	5 Multi-dimensional peripheralizing towns
1 Demographic development	,28342	,89185	1,38914	-,84452	-,59457
Dev. population 09-18	7,06%	8,74%	12,15%	-1,14%	-0,92%
Migration balance 11-18	10,58	9,78	12,66	3,87	3,16
Share over 64-year-olds 18	19,95%	18,09%	17,45%	22,75%	22,34%
Share working age 18	60,40%	61,57%	62,07%	59,38%	59,49%
Dev. employ/residence 09-18	10,38%	14,31%	17,71%	3,16%	3,43%
2 Economic centrality	-,18221	1,27504	-,58216	,67689	-,60647
Dev. employees/work 09-18	6,74%	24,31%	2,06%	12,54%	-4,40%
Dev. in-commuters 09-18	6,79%	35,34%	-0,35%	18,57%	-6,10%
Dev. municipal tax/capita 09-18	23,51%	40,52%	24,98%	39,95%	36,47%
3 Knowledge intensity	1,35763	-,52299	-,24657	,43664	-,71585
Share knowledge intensity 18	54,18%	38,78%	40,14%	51,01%	36,99%
Share high education 18	17,59%	11,77%	13,31%	12,76%	10,78%

Table 1.7 Cluster mean values of components and variables

Appendix

ID	Town	Federal State	Population 2009	Cluster type
1	Eisenstadt	Burgenland	12844	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
2	Jennersdorf	Burgenland	4241	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
3	Mattersburg	Burgenland	6932	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
4	Neusiedl am See	Burgenland	6785	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
5	Oberwart	Burgenland	7083	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
6	Pinkafeld	Burgenland	5483	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
7	Hermagor-Pressegger See	Carinthia	7136	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
8	Ferlach	Carinthia	7369	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
9	Althofen	Carinthia	4657	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
10	Friesach	Carinthia	5201	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
11	St. Veit an der Glan	Carinthia	12808	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
12	Radenthein	Carinthia	6341	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
13	Spittal an der Drau	Carinthia	15828	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
14	Bleiburg	Carinthia	4012	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
15	Völkermarkt	Carinthia	11328	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
16	Bad St. Leonhard/Lavanttal	Carinthia	4660	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
17	St. Andrä	Carinthia	10384	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
18	Feldkirchen in Kärnten	Carinthia	14283	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
19	Waidhofen an der Ybbs	Lower Austria	11545	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
20	Haag	Lower Austria	5400	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
21	St. Valentin	Lower Austria	9284	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
22	Bad Vöslau	Lower Austria	11266	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
23	Berndorf	Lower Austria	8732	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
24	Ebreichsdorf	Lower Austria	9617	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
25	Traiskirchen	Lower Austria	17301	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
26	Bruck an der Leitha	Lower Austria	7692	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
27	Hainburg a.d. Donau	Lower Austria	5891	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity

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57	Fischamend	Lower Austria	4738	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
61	Schwechat	Lower Austria	16349	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
28	Deutsch-Wagram	Lower Austria	7724	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
29	Gänserndorf	Lower Austria	9906	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
30	Groß-Enzersdorf	Lower Austria	9340	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
31	Zistersdorf	Lower Austria	5512	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
32	Gmünd	Lower Austria	5582	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
33	Heidenreichstein	Lower Austria	4155	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
34	Schrems	Lower Austria	5671	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
35	Hollabrunn	Lower Austria	11450	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
36	Retz	Lower Austria	4222	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
37	Horn	Lower Austria	6518	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
38	Korneuburg	Lower Austria	12220	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
39	Stockerau	Lower Austria	15406	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
58	Gerasdorf bei Wien	Lower Austria	9989	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
40	Langenlois	Lower Austria	7247	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
41	Melk	Lower Austria	5287	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
42	Ybbs an der Donau	Lower Austria	5670	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
43	Laa an der Thaya	Lower Austria	6221	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
44	Mistelbach	Lower Austria	11018	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
45	Poysdorf	Lower Austria	5532	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
46	Wolkersdorf/Weinviertel	Lower Austria	6681	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
47	Gloggnitz	Lower Austria	5991	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
48	Neunkirchen	Lower Austria	12233	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
49	Ternitz	Lower Austria	14864	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
50	Herzogenburg	Lower Austria	7844	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
51	Neulengbach	Lower Austria	7723	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
52	Traismauer	Lower Austria	5969	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality

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53	Wilhelmsburg	Lower Austria	6517	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
59	Pressbaum	Lower Austria	6847	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
60	Purkersdorf	Lower Austria	8946	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
54	Scheibbs	Lower Austria	4216	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
55	Tulln an der Donau	Lower Austria	14642	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
56	Waidhofen an der Thaya	Lower Austria	5733	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
62	Groß Gerungs	Lower Austria	4686	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
63	Zwettl	Lower Austria	11336	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
64	Altheim	Upper Austria	4826	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
65	Braunau am Inn	Upper Austria	16250	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
66	Mattighofen	Upper Austria	5584	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
67	Eferding	Upper Austria	4002	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
68	Freistadt	Upper Austria	7430	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
69	Pregarten	Upper Austria	4953	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
70	Bad Ischl	Upper Austria	14066	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
71	Gmunden	Upper Austria	13137	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
72	Laakirchen	Upper Austria	9461	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
73	Grieskirchen	Upper Austria	4848	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
74	Kirchdorf an der Krems	Upper Austria	4068	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
75	Ansfelden	Upper Austria	15706	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
76	Enns	Upper Austria	11276	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
77	Perg	Upper Austria	7696	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
78	Ried im Innkreis	Upper Austria	11424	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
79	Rohrbach-Berg	Upper Austria	5572	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
80	Schärding	Upper Austria	4978	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity

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81	Bad Hall	Upper Austria	4826	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
82	Bad Leonfelden	Upper Austria	4079	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
83	Gallneukirchen	Upper Austria	6253	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
84	Steyregg	Upper Austria	4714	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
85	Attnang-Puchheim	Upper Austria	8919	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
86	Schwanenstadt	Upper Austria	4240	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
87	Vöcklabruck	Upper Austria	11913	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
88	Marchtrenk	Upper Austria	12164	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
89	Neumarkt am Wallersee	Salzburg	5781	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
90	Oberndorf bei Salzburg	Salzburg	5550	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
91	Seekirchen am Wallersee	Salzburg	9722	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
92	Bischofshofen	Salzburg	10270	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
93	Radstadt	Salzburg	4803	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
94	Sankt Johann im Pongau	Salzburg	10692	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
95	Mittersill	Salzburg	5414	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
96	Saalfelden/Steinernen Meer	Salzburg	15893	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
97	Zell am See	Salzburg	9559	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
98	Deutschlandsberg	Styria	11363	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
99	Frohnleiten	Styria	6921	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
100	Leibnitz	Styria	11192	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
101	Eisenerz	Styria	5111	outlier
102	Trofaiach	Styria	11420	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
103	Bad Aussee	Styria	4899	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
104	Liezen	Styria	7979	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
105	Rottenmann	Styria	5488	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
106	Schladming	Styria	6836	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
107	Voitsberg	Styria	9705	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
108	Bärnbach	Styria	5619	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns

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109	Köflach	Styria	10365	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
110	Gleisdorf	Styria	9655	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
111	Weiz	Styria	11092	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
112	Zeltweg	Styria	7300	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
113	Judenburg	Styria	10412	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
114	Knittelfeld	Styria	12862	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
115	Spielberg	Styria	5288	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
116	Bruck an der Mur	Styria	15957	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
117	Kindberg	Styria	8524	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
118	Mürzzuschlag	Styria	9205	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
119	Hartberg	Styria	6593	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
120	Fürstenfeld	Styria	8321	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
121	Fehring	Styria	7383	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
122	Feldbach	Styria	12920	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
123	Imst	Tyrol	9455	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
124	Hall in Tirol	Tyrol	12540	Centralizing towns with a high knowledge intensity
125	Kitzbühel	Tyrol	8200	Multidimensional peripheralizing towns
126	Kufstein	Tyrol	17111	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
127	Wörgl	Tyrol	12343	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
128	Landeck	Tyrol	7691	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
129	Lienz	Tyrol	11960	Peripheralizing towns regarding demographic development
130	Schwaz	Tyrol	12875	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality
131	Bludenz	Vorarlberg	13778	Centralizing towns regarding demographic development
132	Hohenems	Vorarlberg	15107	Centralizing towns regarding economic centrality

Table 1.8 List of small towns including federal state, population number and cluster type

Appendix 2: Qualitative data sources

Documents
<i>Town A</i>
LEADER Strategy
Demography check in behance of LEADER 2015
Masterplan city renewal 2015+
Journal of regional network platform 1/2018
Protocol LEADER meetings 08.2015, 02.2016
Mission statement on regional development
Local newspaper „ <i>Tips</i> “ 10.2018, 2.2019, 8.2019
Local newspaper <i>NÖN - Niederösterreichische Nachrichten</i> 7.2018, 7.2019, 8.2019, 12.2019
Online news platform: <i>orf.at</i> 11.2018
Local newspaper <i>stadtlandzeitung</i> 5.2019
Local newspaper <i>meinbezirk.at</i> 11.2018, 10.2019
<i>Town B</i>
Regional prognosis of population development in Styria 2015/16 (Regionale Bevölkerungsprognose Steiermark 2015/16)
Economic strategy for Styria 2020 (Wirtschaftsstrategie Steiermark 2020)
Guidelines for the greater region of Upper Styria (Leitbild der Großregion Obersteiermark Ost 2014+)
Regional development legislation Styria (Regionalentwicklungsgesetz Steiermark 2018)
Netzwerk, Zukunftsraum, Land Project Description
Wirtschaftsnachrichten 10/2018
Town B city newspaper 3/2017, 2/2019
LEADER report of LAG
Local newspaper <i>Meine Woche Mürztal</i> 1.2019, 10.2019
Local newspaper <i>Kleine Zeitung</i> 5.2019, 6.2019, 9.2019
Local newspaper <i>Obersteierische Rundschau</i> 10.2019
Local newspaper <i>meinbezirk.at</i> 11.2018, 01.2019, 05.2019, 10.2019

Table 2.1: Documents and media articles

Interview No.	Pseudonym	Professional position and type of organization	Date of interview
Town A			
A1 ¹	Martin Huber	Office of Federal Government	1. March 2019
A2		Spatial planner	5. March 2019
A3		Spatial planner, former LEADER region	3. April 2019
A4		LEADER region	4. April 2019
A5		Project manager Alpha-Campus	11. April 2019
A6		Regional education and research platform	3. May 2019
A7		Entrepreneur, job fair association	6. May 2019
A8	Tom Winter	Mayor	21. May 2019
A9		Entrepreneur	12. June 2019
A10		Retailer, Inner-city development	19. June 2019
A11		Regional development agency	22. October 2020
A12		Inner city development, nearby town	22. October 2020
Town B			
B1 ²	Michael Taler	LEADER region	13. March 2019
B2		Regional development agency	1. April 2019
B3		External consultant	7. June 2019
B4	Maria Brunner	Entrepreneur	17. June 2019
B5	Maria Brunner	Entrepreneur	17. June 2019

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B6		Mayor	1. July 2019
B7		Investor	28. July 2019
B8		External innovation manager	29. October 2019
B9		Office of Federal Government	21. October 2020

¹The interview numbers A1, A2, A3 (...) correspond to interview numbers W1, W2, W3 (...) in *Paper III*.

²The interview numbers B1, B2, B3 (...) correspond to interview numbers K11, K12, K13 (...) in *Paper III*.

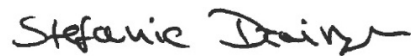
Table 2.2: Interview partners

Statutory Declaration

I herewith declare that I have personally composed the present thesis without the use of any other than the cited sources and aids. Sentences or parts of sentences quoted literally are marked as such; other references are indicated with the full details of the publications concerned.

The thesis in the same or similar form has not been submitted to any examination body and has not been published. This thesis was not yet, even in part, used in another examination or as a course performance.

Furthermore, I declare that the submitted written (bound) copies of the present thesis and the version submitted on a data carrier are identical in content.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Stefanie Döringer' with a stylized flourish at the end.

Stefanie Döringer, June 2021

Paper I

ARTICLE

WILEY

Individual agency and socio-spatial change in regional development: Conceptualizing governance entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Although scholars and practitioners increasingly highlight the role of individuals in initiating socio-spatial change processes in regional development, there is still little conceptual and empirical knowledge concerning this phenomenon. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to gain a deeper theoretical understanding of entrepreneurial individuals in local and regional governance and to provide a more comprehensive framework for investigating individual agency and socio-spatial change. In concepts of local and regional governance, the role of individuals has been overshadowed by the focus on institutional and organizational structures. Policy and institutional entrepreneurship literature stresses the importance of individual capabilities for identifying windows of opportunity and promoting policy and institutional change. However, it reveals some shortcomings concerning the influence of entrepreneurial individuals in governance itself. By combining both strands of literature, the concept of governance entrepreneurship is introduced here. It accentuates the role of entrepreneurial individuals in initiating change in local and regional governance by establishing or transforming actor constellations, interaction modes, or decision-

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making territories. Finally, the interrelatedness of the concepts of institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship is discussed in order to gain a deeper understanding of these different types of transformative agency.

KEYWORDS

governance entrepreneurship, institutional entrepreneurship, key individuals, local governance, policy entrepreneurship, regional governance, socio-spatial change

1 | INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic transformations that take place in cities and regions all over Europe (Iammarino, Rodriguez-Pose, & Storper, 2018) not only exacerbate spatial disparities but also raise the complexity and fragmentation of local and regional governance arrangements (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008). In regions undergoing socio-spatial transformations, the local actors simultaneously have to deal with increasing challenges and with decreasing financial and human resources. In this context, scholars, practitioners, and journalists have been noticing the role of entrepreneurial individuals in change processes (Cocks, 2013; Gailing & Ibert, 2016; Rothhaas, 2018). Particularly in peripheralized regions, traditional organizations with rigid structures increasingly seem to fail to react adequately to emerging pressures and fall short in meeting local demands (Sotarauta & Suvinen, 2018). Thus, the individual engagement of politicians, service professionals, or community activists receives increasing attention in the context of socio-spatial change processes on the local and regional level.

Against this background, the question “how [and by whom] influence is gained in modern governance emerges as crucial” (Sotarauta, 2010, p. 397). However, until now, governance literature has focused mainly on the role of institutions and collective decision-making processes, whereas there had been little theoretical attempt to integrate the role of entrepreneurial individuals into local and regional governance. Although the shift from traditional forms of government to more networked modes of governance included a wider perspective on state and non-state actors shaping complex processes of interaction (Pierre, 2005; Gupta et al., 2015), knowledge about the possible influence of individuals on local and regional governance has thus far remained superficial. On the one hand, this could be due to the dominance of conceptual frameworks focusing on the role of institutions in governance research (Cocks, 2013). On the other hand, it could also be due to pragmatic reasons, as “interaction-oriented policy research would be impossible if explanations had to be sought at the individual level in every case” (Scharpf, 1997, p. 12).

The concept of entrepreneurship (Schumpeter, 1961), apart from other approaches such as leadership (Sotarauta, 2016) or brokerage (Leick & Gretzinger, 2018a; Sabatier, 1993), however emphasizes the role of entrepreneurial individuals (or groups of individuals) in decision-making and processes of change (Gailing & Ibert, 2016). Policy and institutional entrepreneurship are central concepts in policy research as well as in organizational and management studies and have particularly received broad attention in studies focusing on (trans-)national changes in the environmental, economic, or health sectors (Huitema & Meijerink, 2010; Levy & Scully, 2007; Mintrom & Luetjens, 2017; Mintrom, Salisbury, & Luetjens, 2014; Reimer & Saerbeck, 2017). Urban and regional research has long remained rather silent on policy and institutional entrepreneurship, but recently, scholars have increasingly begun to draw on these concepts to investigate the role of entrepreneurial individuals in regional economic development (Mörner & Tripp, 2017; Sotarauta, 2017; Sotarauta & Suvinen, 2018) or urban regeneration (Catney & Henneberry, 2016; Cocks, 2013; Svensson, Klofsten, & Etzkowitz, 2012).

Indeed, the concepts of policy and institutional entrepreneurship provide some interesting insights into understanding the ways in which entrepreneurial individuals may shape socio-spatial change on the local level. However, these concepts reveal some limitations in explaining the role of entrepreneurial individuals in local and regional development, as they tend to generalize processes of change and thereby overlook the ways in which entrepreneurial individuals change the governance system itself. By taking an actor-centred perspective on governance (Benz, 2010; Kooiman, 2003; Scharpf, 2000) and critically reviewing the literature on policy and institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Kingdon, 1995), the paper argues for a more differentiated perspective on individual agency in socio-spatial change processes. The envisaged contribution of this paper is twofold: First, it aims for a deeper understanding of the less obvious, underlying changes made by entrepreneurial individuals in local and regional governance. Therefore, it introduces the concept of governance entrepreneurship, in addition to policy and institutional entrepreneurship. Second, the paper wants to go beyond a descriptive level of presenting the “who” and the “how” and provide a more comprehensive framework for analysing the roles of entrepreneurial individuals in socio-spatial change. For this purpose, the three concepts of institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship are linked by discussing their correspondences and differences.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: The next section critically discusses the concepts of local and regional governance, policy entrepreneurship, and institutional entrepreneurship in order to gain a more nuanced view on individual agency in local and regional development. Based on these insights, the following section develops the concept of governance entrepreneurship and discusses its interrelation with policy and institutional entrepreneurship. Finally, the conclusion draws attention to the conceptual value of the framework and provides an outlook onto the potential for future research.

2 | THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | An actor-centred perspective on local and regional governance

In the literature on regional development, the importance of governance has been widely acknowledged (Kim & Jurey, 2013), as it allows us to observe the complexity of the interactions of diverse institutions and actors on local as well as regional levels. This paper draws upon an analytical governance perspective that understands local and regional governance as a system in which a variety of actors from different domains of political and socio-economic life is engaged in public decision-making processes (Benz, 2010; Denters, 2013; Fürst, 2001). Thus, it looks beyond institutional boundaries and searches for processes and relations through which actors coordinate their actions and exchange resources to promote defined policy objectives (Pierre, 2005). Hence, governance is marked both by horizontal connections and by hierarchical, competitive, and cooperative modes of interaction, all of which can lead to positive as well as negative outcomes (Fürst, 2004).

The local and regional governance concept and its characteristics are not clearly defined, and operationalization is rather rare (Willi, Pütz, & Müller, 2018). However, a heuristic model that is often combined with a local or regional governance perspective is that of actor-centred institutionalism (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995; Mose, Jacuniak-Suda, & Fiedler, 2014). The model is used here to operationalize an actor-centred perspective on governance and to interrelate the terms of institutions, policies, and governance. It refers to “strategic actions and interactions of purposeful and resourceful individual and corporate actors and to the enabling, constraining, and shaping effects of given (but variable) institutional structures and institutionalized forms” (Scharpf, 1997, p. 34). The model distinguishes between noninstitutional factors (such as demographic change, economic transformation, or digitalization), institutional factors as well as actors, and their interaction modes (see Figure 1). Specific combinations of these elements lead to different policy outcomes comprising goals and instruments. Noninstitutional and institutional factors influence actors but do not fully determine them in their actions (Scharpf, 1997).¹ Institutions are understood as structural preconditions, which in turn are defined as formal and informal systems of rule that guide the behaviour of actors. In this sense,

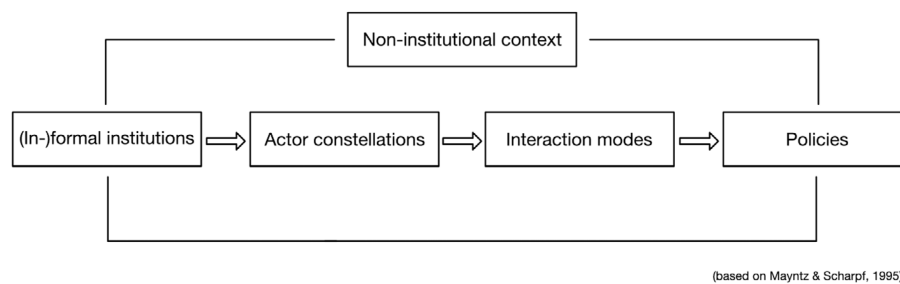


FIGURE 1 The actor-centred institutionalism

formal institutions can include, for instance, laws and public regulations (e.g., planning documents, community strategies, or agreements), whereas informal institutions refer to norms, values, or beliefs (e.g., growth-oriented development; North, 1990; Pattberg, 2017).

As the governance perspective is generally problem orientated, a variety of state and non-state actors with different backgrounds are included in policy processes interacting or collaborating in specific constellations (Fürst, 2004). These actors interact in different forms of organization, such as hierarchy, networks, or concurrence. Actors are characterized by specific action capabilities and orientations. In this context, the term capabilities refers to all action resources (e.g., social, physical, and financial) that support or limit competencies and participation of actors in policy processes and enable them to influence the outcome of a given interaction. The action orientation of actors influences their perceptions and preferences, which are based on beliefs and values (Mayntz & Scharpf, 1995; Scharpf, 1997). Although Scharpf (1997) conceptualized his model for both individual and corporate actors, the focus of his explanations is on the interaction of corporate actors, such as organizations or associations. However, he concedes that one must be able “to revert to the individual level whenever it becomes empirically necessary to do so” (Scharpf, 1997).

By taking an interaction-oriented perspective on policy research, actor-centred institutionalism gives equal weight both to the interactions of purposeful actors and to the formal and informal institutions surrounding them (Scharpf, 1997). In this context, institutions are defined as the rules and regularities that constrain but also enable the actors in a governance system. However, the model particularly emphasises the importance of purposeful actors and their behaviour for understanding processes in public decision-making. As the actor constellations and interaction modes are influenced but are not fully determined by institutions, it can be assumed that these specific constellations (and interactions) themselves can become a central object of change pursued by the actors involved. In general, institutions are seen as more persistent over time, whereas governance arrangements are considered to be more flexible. Following this argumentation and defining governance as a system of various state and non-state actors that are engaged in public decision-making processes, governance arrangements and interactions should not be seen as an institution and must thus be addressed separately to achieve a more comprehensive explanation for socio-spatial change.

2.2 | Sketching out the specific role of individuals in local and regional governance

Four characteristics of governance processes on the local and regional scale are outlined in order to show why investigating entrepreneurial individuals² in governance contributes to a deeper understanding of socio-spatial change processes on the local scale. First, local and regional governance networks often include a relatively small number of stakeholders, and interactions are often based on trust, social proximity, and face-to-face contacts between a limited number of actors (Beer, 2014). Second, it is often individuals that provide an important impetus for place-based

polices (Baumgartner, Pütz, & Seidl, 2013; Leick & Gretzinger, 2018b) or the creation of place-sensitive visions for the future (Garud, Hardy, & Maguire, 2007; Garud & Karnøe, 2001) by providing their ideas, knowledge, or personal networks (Mayer & Baumgartner, 2014). Third, local and regional decision-making processes are embedded in multi-level and multisectoral governance structures. As governance-related local policymaking takes place in multiactor networks that cross traditional vertical and horizontal jurisdictional boundaries and cut across state and non-state spheres, individuals have the advantage of being more flexible and faster in navigating through complex and changing actor constellations than organizations or associations (Catney & Henneberry, 2016; Denters, 2013; Sotarauta, 2017). Individuals holding different political or societal functions may particularly act as intermediaries between different groups of actors or function as catalysts between the local and the national level. Fourth, non-state actors from civil society or economy with individual objectives increasingly emerge on the local and regional governance stage and influence decision-making processes (Uitermark & Duyvendak, 2008). In general, the range of individuals included in decision-making processes is more diverse on a local level than on a national government level, as the accessibility to local policymaking is low threshold compared with the national scale (Denters, 2013).

2.3 | The concepts of institutional and policy entrepreneurship—Definition and limitations

In the quest for a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of entrepreneurial individuals in socio-spatial change processes, the next chapter discusses the institutional and policy entrepreneurship literature. Before discussing both strands of literature, the term entrepreneurship, which is central for both concepts, is explained briefly. The term entrepreneurship originally emerged in the field of economics, viewing entrepreneurs as innovators that recombine resources to open new markets or introduce new technologies (Schumpeter, 1961). Policy and organization sciences, however, delineated the concept of entrepreneurship much more broadly by focusing on changes in the public and political sphere. Among different notions of agency, entrepreneurship is the concept that addresses the personal capabilities and attributes of individuals as well as their embeddedness in environmental contexts and institutional settings (Gailing & Ibert, 2016; Galanti, 2018). From this angle, entrepreneurs are characterized by the ability to purposefully alter the structures in which they are embedded. As a minimal definition, entrepreneurship thus describes a type of transformative agency (Tuominen & Lehtonen, 2018) that highlights the perception and realization of opportunities by purposeful individuals (Schneider, Teske, & Mintrom, 1995).

Despite these similarities, policy entrepreneurship and institutional entrepreneurship originated in different strands of literature, which leads to different implications concerning the changes intended by entrepreneurial individuals. Whereas the concept of policy entrepreneurship emerged from the multiple streams model proposed by Kingdon, 1995 as an explanation for policy change, the literature on institutional entrepreneurship is closely associated with DiMaggio's (1988) reintroduction of actors' agency in institutional analysis. Kingdon (1995) introduced the term policy entrepreneurs based on the multiple streams model that involves the three streams of problems, policies, and politics within the policy process. Only when these streams come together, policy change may occur. Policy entrepreneurs are defined as actors who recognize the concurrence of these streams and "are willing to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, money – to promote a position in return for anticipated future gain" (Kingdon (1995), p. 179). Mintrom and Norman (2009) specify potential targets of policy entrepreneurs and define them as key individuals who strive to initiate policy change and take advantage of "windows of opportunity" to promote new ideas. The entrepreneurs' strategies are manifold and range from defining problems and building coalitions to leading by example in order to introduce or adapt policies (Mintrom & Norman, 2009).

In contrast, the term institutional entrepreneur refers to "change agents who initiate divergent changes [...] that break the institutional status quo in a field of activity" (Battilana et al., 2009, p. 67). They mobilize resources, power, and competences and aim at transforming established institutions, removing existing ones, or introducing new ones (Levy & Scully, 2007; Weik, 2011). As DiMaggio stated, these "new institutions arise when organized actors with

sufficient resources see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly" (1988, p. 14). Accordingly, institutional entrepreneurship refers to the breaking of institutional status through the introduction of new and changing institutions or the removal of prevailing institutions, which are understood as formal rules or laws, or as informal norms and values (Battilana et al., 2009; Weik, 2011).

A considerable number of literature reviews show that within the broad base of studies on policy and institutional entrepreneurs, two questions have been dominating the debates so far: Who are the entrepreneurs and how do they change policy or institutions (Brouwer & Huitema, 2017; Christopoulos & Ingold, 2011; Garud et al., 2007; Mintrom & Norman, 2009; Pacheco, York, Dean, & Sarasvathy, 2010)? In this context, the special interest of the literature lies in the variety of applied strategies, such as framing, theorization, collaboration, or lobbying (Pacheco et al., 2010). The institutional conditions under which these entrepreneurial strategies may be successful has however attracted less attention in earlier literature. Although conceptualizations have been proposed to classify structural and institutional factors, there is still no systematized knowledge about the relation between context and agency (Zahariadis & Exadaktylos, 2016).

As noted, the concepts of policy and institutional entrepreneurship originated in different strands of literature. Meanwhile, however, the distinction between policy and institutional changes has become blurred in conceptual and empirical entrepreneurship literature. Petridou, Narbutaitė Aflaki, and Miles (2015) and Green (2017) also draw attention to these shortcomings and argue for a refinement of the concept of entrepreneurship to specify the range of changes initiated by individuals. Bakir and Jarvis (2017) attempt to outline the linkages between policy and institutional entrepreneurship and propose comprehending institutional entrepreneurship as a part of policy entrepreneurship, when policy entrepreneurs seek to implement and translate ideas and policies into formal rules or established practices. However, both concepts should rather be seen as mutually affecting each other because institutional change can represent a crucial moment in policy change, and changes in policies, in return, can have an effect on institutions (Galanti, 2018).

2.4 | Empirical evidence: Institutional and policy entrepreneurship in local and regional development

In the following section, the theoretical discussion is supplemented by an in-depth review of empirical studies dealing with institutional and policy entrepreneurship in local and regional development. The aim of this review is to take an actor-centred perspective and to read between the lines in order to identify changes induced by entrepreneurial individuals. Table 1 offers an overview of five selected entrepreneurship studies in urban and regional development, illustrating the contextual factors mentioned above (noninstitutional and institutional), the actor constellations, the interactions, and the changes described. The studies introduce a variety of entrepreneurial individuals that emerge in the state and non-state sphere and range from local officials to religious leaders and private contractors. Compared with articles dealing with institutional or policy entrepreneurship in the national or international perspective, the number of papers dealing with the local or regional scale is rather small (e.g., Bernhard & Wahlborg, 2014; Frisch-Avram, Cohen, & Beeri, 2018; Leick & Gretzinger, 2018b; Sotarauta, 2017). The case studies that are discussed here were selected for two reasons: First, they discuss the role of entrepreneurial individuals considering (non-)institutional contexts from a local and regional perspective, and second, they unfold the variety of socio-spatial changes regarding decision-making and interaction processes.

The noninstitutional contexts presented in the studies can be classified as fundamental and/or complex challenges (Battilana et al., 2009). Cities and regions have to deal with economic transition, which includes phenomena such as deindustrialization or new emerging economic paths (Cocks, 2013; Miörner & Trippel, 2017); furthermore, they struggle with environmental disasters, such as floods (Böcher, 2015), or attempt to make a shift in planning principles (Klein Woolthuis, Hooimeijer, Bossink, Mulder, & Brouwer, 2013; Petridou, 2018). The selected studies describe the institutional context to varying degrees, referring to institutional and organizational thin and thick structures. The study of Petridou (2018), for instance, systematizes the relation of institutional preconditions and personal

TABLE 1 Overview of case studies on policy and institutional entrepreneurs in local and regional development (own elaboration)

Reference and theories	Contextual factors		Entrepreneurial individuals		
	Noninstitutional	Institutional	Characteristics	Interactions	Changes
Böcher, 2015	Socio-economically weak region, natural disasters, tensions of tourism/environment	Existing concepts for regional flood prevention, intensive political debates, and (supra-) national funding	Charisma, persuasiveness, acceptance, political experience, expertise, and anticipation	Establishing multilevel actor networks and building alliances	Establishing regional governance, expansion of actor spectrum, regional policy change through introduction of new environmental plan
Regional governance, policy entrepreneurship					
Cocks, 2013	Deindustrialization, economic, and population decline	Many economic regeneration initiatives on different scales and national funding	State actors Creativity, confidence, and eloquence/ideological motivation	Cooperation, negotiation Public and private horizontal networking and multilevel contacts	Policies and governance Changing governance practices, new governance tools (comparative biddings approach) and modes (horizontally organised "task force"), new regeneration policies
Urban governance, leadership, and entrepreneurship					
Klein Woolthuis et al., 2012	Change in planning towards more sustainability	Top-down planning approach, thinking ahead, multilevel planning, and sustainable development as multiactor phenomenon	State actors Persuasiveness, knowledge, and profit seeking	Cooperation and negotiation Collaboration, lobbying, and negotiation	Policies and governance Implementation of environmental governance, inclusion of private actors, and introduction of new formal and informal institutions (sustainability)
Institutional entrepreneurship					
Miörner & Trippi, 2017	Established economic paths, rapidly growing new path of digital game industry	Diversified regional innovation system but lack of educational agencies and support for emerging industries	State and non-state actors Expertise, organisational, place-specific knowledge, persuasive power, and personal interest	Cooperation and negotiation Negotiation and consensus, networking, cooperation, and convincing superior levels	Institutions and governance Introduction of new policy programmes on local and national level, adaption of informal institutions, and new private initiative

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Reference and theories Path dependence and policy/institutional entrepreneurship	Contextual factors		Entrepreneurial individuals		Changes
	Noninstitutional	Institutional	Characteristics	Interactions	
Petridou, 2018	Planning process for vision plan in growing municipality	Former weak vision plan and high autonomy of public officials	Non-state actors Legitimate power, creativity, and persistence/individual motivation	Cooperation, and negotiation, and consensus Consensus and team building	Policies, institutions, and governance Draft of planning document, shift towards broader participation in planning
Policy entrepreneurship			State actors	Consensus	Institutions and governance

resources and strategies. Whereas formal institutions, such as concepts or support structures, are illustrated quite vividly, and informal institutions, such as planning cultures or traditions, are rather mentioned implicitly in the studies.

Entrepreneurial actors broaden or reorganize actor constellations in governance arrangements both vertically and horizontally. The horizontal expansion of the actor spectrum is achieved by the activation and inclusion of state and non-state actors in the policymaking process. Within these processes, it can also be noted that individuals, for instance, from industry and commerce, extend their reach towards policy fields that otherwise may have been regarded as belonging to public actors (Klein Woolthuis et al., 2013). In a similar vein, personal multilevel actor networks play a crucial role in the acquisition of support and attention for entrepreneurial actors or in the mobilization of resources (Böcher, 2015; Klein Woolthuis et al., 2013; Svensson et al., 2012). Entrepreneurial individuals reorganize actor constellations horizontally by activating, mobilizing, or convincing partners across different levels of governance (Böcher, 2015; Miörner & Trippel, 2017). By doing so, they often draw upon their personal networks and skip levels vertically or break with hierarchical structures in order to get resources that are not available on the local scale.

Related to the above, the review further shows that entrepreneurial actors tend to use cooperative modes of interaction rather than hierarchical modes. Building coalitions, establishing networks, and initiating partnerships turned out to be among the central strategies of entrepreneurial individuals (Böcher, 2015; Cocks, 2013; Miörner & Trippel, 2017). The entrepreneurs initiate or adapt temporal, flexible, and situational cooperation between state actors, between non-state actors, or between state and non-state actors. Additionally, Petridou (2018) reveals that in a participatory planning process in Sweden, the public bureaucratic actors rather strive towards consensus and team building than towards coalition building, which in turn is often achieved by actors in more conflictual situations. In total, there is evidence that entrepreneurial individuals attempt to overcome hierarchical patterns in decision-making processes (Frisch-Avram et al., 2018) and accelerate new horizontal and vertical networks. However, the extent to which these shifts can lead to permanent changes in the interaction modes of actor constellations in governance remains unclear.

The conceptual weakness of policy and institutional entrepreneurship studies addressing different effects and changes becomes more evident when focussing on empirical studies. The term “change” remains rather fuzzy and ambiguous in entrepreneurship literature. The studies reveal a multifaceted, multiscalar, and processual picture of changes ranging from formal and informal institutions and policies to new paths of development. Miörner and Trippel (2017) provide a nuanced perspective on changes of institutional and structural support structures in Sweden. They mention the multidimensionality of change processes, referring to institutional, organizational, industrial, and policy changes. Nevertheless, it seems that there is much more work required to specify changes in terms of entrepreneurial effects.

Ultimately, the studies reveal that policy or institutional changes on the local and regional scale often accompany a change in governance or, in other words, coincide with a relational change in public decision-making processes. Entrepreneurial actors initially make a situational change of governance arrangements (constellations and modes) in order to expand their agency in governance when striving to achieve policy or institutional change. Within an existent field of governance, this includes the change of traditional procedures to new modes of interaction, for example, towards building consensus in participatory processes (Petridou, 2018) or the introduction of new tools, for example, a comparative bidding approach (Cocks, 2013). However, this can also lead to more expansive effects and a fundamental change of governance, such as the implementation of new governance territorialities, that is, regional governance (Böcher, 2015) or fields of governance, for example, sustainability (Klein Woolthuis et al., 2013). Nevertheless, these aspects are conceptually still underdeveloped in literature, and little is known about the contribution of entrepreneurial individuals to governance changes. The paper argues that these aspects must be further theorized and classified, as this might be an important step towards offering a more comprehensive view on individual agency on the local and regional scale.

2.5 | Linking policy and institutional entrepreneurship and governance

Studies on policy and institutional entrepreneurship have been exploring complex policy processes involving various actors, different scales, and different strategies. Nevertheless, little attempt was made to systematize policy and

institutional entrepreneurship in terms of governance. About 15 years ago, Crouch (2005) has made a first conceptual step forward with his theoretical discussion of institutional entrepreneurship and governance, concluding with a neo-institutionalist research programme towards pursuing institutional change on a national level. Despite the recent claims of some scholars of studying policy and institutional entrepreneurship with a governance perspective in mind (Green, 2017; Sotarauta & Pulkkinen, 2011), only a few studies on entrepreneurship explicitly take into account territorial governance concepts. These concepts may include (trans-)national governance (Boasson & Huitema, 2017), multilevel governance (Catney & Henneberry, 2016; Perkmann, 2007), and urban or regional governance concepts (Böcher, 2015; Lowndes, 2005).

Recently, some authors suggested introducing the term governance entrepreneurship in order to reflect upon on the increasing range of actors involved in policymaking (Boasson & Huitema, 2017; Pattberg, 2017; Willi, Pütz, & Mayer, 2018). Pattberg (2017), for example, uses governance entrepreneurship for explaining the relevance of organizations in the transnational institutionalization process in the field of climate change. In his study, he defines governance entrepreneurs similarly to (informal) institutional entrepreneurs as “those individuals, groups of individuals and organizations that [...] aim at altering or diffusing norms and cognitive frameworks, worldviews or institutional logics” (Pattberg, 2017, p. 1439). The working paper of Willi, Pütz, and Mayer (2018) is also important to note, as it reveals the need for further conceptualization of entrepreneurship in regional development processes. It conceptualizes the term governance entrepreneurship as a subcategory of policy entrepreneurship. Based on the empirical results, the authors distinguish between the “realizing governance entrepreneurs” that contribute to regional development processes by implementing ideas and projects and the “enabling governance entrepreneurs” that rather influence processes indirectly by creating awareness of regional challenges. Although these studies deal with the term governance entrepreneur and take up elements of both governance and entrepreneurship concepts, they do not offer a conceptual contribution explaining how entrepreneurial individuals specifically influence and shape governance processes themselves, as they remain very close to the concepts of policy and institutional entrepreneurship.

2.6 | Synthesis

The theoretical discussion indicates the variegated influence of individuals in local and regional processes of change, as well as a further need for conceptualizing these different types of individual agency. By theorizing local and regional governance, the interlinkages of institutions, actors, and policies could be illustrated. Because actor-centred institutionalism takes into account the role of institutions for public policy processes but also points to the importance of actor constellations and interactions, it enables us to pay closer attention to and differentiate between the various changes caused by entrepreneurial individuals (Green, 2017). The discussion on policy and institutional entrepreneurship further revealed that the two approaches lead to interesting insights but also display some conceptual limitations regarding the analysis of the variety of processes of change. It has been demonstrated that the distinction between policy and institutional changes has diminished and, additionally, that there is a tendency to overlook changes in governance itself. Therefore, the paper argues for a third category, designated as governance entrepreneurship, that supplements the concepts of institutional and policy entrepreneurship in order to provide a more comprehensive framework for the analysis of socio-spatial change.

3 | DISCUSSION

3.1 | Framing the concept of governance entrepreneurship

The first research aim was to develop a more differentiated perspective on the agency of individuals in socio-spatial change by combining the theoretical lenses of local and regional governance, as well as policy and institutional

entrepreneurship. In order to meet this aim, the concept of governance entrepreneurship will now be introduced and explained. Local and regional governance changes can be facilitated either externally or internally by contextual factors or actors involved in the system (Arnouts, Van der Zouwen, & Arts, 2012). The term governance entrepreneurship sheds light on governance changes caused internally by entrepreneurial individuals. The findings of the in-depth review illustrate that governance entrepreneurship might occur as an underlying and enabling action when individuals in fact aim at policy or institutional change. In this case, governance entrepreneurship may rather be an unanticipated outcome (Sotarauta & Pulkkinen, 2011), as the entrepreneurs do not inevitably intend changes in governance in the first instance. However, it might be assumed that individuals may also aim at governance change in intentional actions. Governance entrepreneurship might be a crucial action for private actor groups, for example, economy or civil society, that are previously not authorized by an official position. This could imply, for instance, that individuals aim to establish a central position or formal function in decision-making processes in order to increase their impact and to articulate their needs. Governance entrepreneurship might also be strived for by established individuals with formal authority in order to further broaden their agency or to gain more power in a certain field (Cocks, 2013). This argument can be related to Boasson and Huitema (2017, p. 3), who describe one aspect of structural entrepreneurship as “acts aimed at enhancing governance influence by altering distribution of authority and information.”

Building upon on the theoretical reflections, three conceptual dimensions of governance entrepreneurship can be identified: Governance entrepreneurs are characterized by the capacity and the willingness to transform actor constellations (a), interaction modes (b), and decision-making territories (c) in order to increase their agency.

First, the change of actor and network constellations can lead to a greater variety of actors, where actors from different fields take part in the decision-making process (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018). This could also imply new balances of power, such as the appropriation of policy fields by new actor groups. When dealing with economic and structural transformation processes, it can, for instance, encourage new partnerships between economic and political actors or produce a juxtaposition of these groups. Apart from actor inclusion, the possibility of exclusion of actors also exists, if strategic aims are not shared and tensions arise (Nieth, 2019). Furthermore, entrepreneurial individuals on the local and regional level can achieve the vertical expansion of the actor spectrum based on personal contacts and networks to superior levels (Miörner & Trippel, 2017).

Second, in terms of interaction modes, it could be observed that entrepreneurial individuals primarily tend towards cooperative interaction, the expansion of networks, or situational governing coalitions. This observation is also in line with Willi, Pütz, and Mayer (2018, p. 11) and their characterisation of the enabling governance entrepreneurs, which they describe “as highly networked, persistent in negotiations and able to operate across governmental levels and economic sectors.” By using strategies such as networking to strive for policy or institutional change, entrepreneurial individuals can also cause more permanent changes in interaction modes, for instance, from hierarchical governance to a more networked mode of governance. This can furthermore continue in flatter organizational structures and a more lateral governance regime (Frisch-Aviram et al., 2018) with greater openness towards participation.

The third dimension that might play a crucial role when investigating socio-spatial changes of cities or regions is rescaling. This aspect contributes to the change or the emergence of (new) decision-making spaces. New spatial references for policymaking and new governance territories, such as regional governance, can arise beyond administrative borders through the establishment of new constellations of actors (Böcher, 2015). In regions struggling with demographic and economic challenges, the territorial expansion of governance networks can increase the power and agency of local actors. Entrepreneurial individuals can contribute significantly to these processes in defining objectives (Willi, Pütz, & Müller, 2018) and shaping practices of regional governance.

Additionally, governance entrepreneurship and its manifestations seem to have different temporal dimensions that might be further conceptualized. The actions of governance entrepreneurs can cause a temporal situational shift in governance arrangements, for instance, when the capacity of the given actor constellation is not adequate to address an emerging challenge. However, it can also be assumed that governance entrepreneurship might lead to a deep and fundamental transition in governance arrangements that manifests as a new local or regional governance system.

3.2 | Combining policy, institutional, and governance entrepreneurship

In linking policy, institutional, and governance entrepreneurship, the second aim of the paper is addressed. The three concepts are considered as equal and complementary tools for explaining the influence of entrepreneurial individuals in socio-spatial change, as each of these concepts refers to different types of individual agency in regional development. Table 2 provides a summary and a simplified classification of said entrepreneurial roles, based on strategic and spatial dimensions.

Policy, institutional, and governance entrepreneurship share a number of key features. Each of the approaches focusses on individuals, their ideas, resources, and their capacity for recognizing and taking opportunities in moments of uncertainty (Schneider et al., 1995). The three concepts can be characterized together as the capturing of forms of “transformative agency” (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2019; Tuominen & Lehtonen, 2018) because they focus on individuals that realize and take emergent opportunities in order to change a status quo instead of reproducing or preserving it. From a regional perspective, the agency of entrepreneurial individuals is defined by various environmental contexts and institutional settings, which constrain their actions but also offer them a variety of opportunities (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2019). However, as individuals have a selective perception of potential opportunities and preferred actions of realization, they reflect upon different types of transformative agency.

Originating from different strands of literature, the concepts of institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship address these different types of transformative agency. Institutional entrepreneurship emphasizes the paradox of embedded agency (Garud et al., 2007) by focusing on the capability of individuals to change formal and informal institutions (such as rules, beliefs, and norms), although these institutions guide their perceptions and actions. Policy entrepreneurship stresses the temporal aspect and highlights the ability of individuals to recognize emerging “policy windows of opportunity” and to link problems, policy ideas, and politics (Mintrom & Norman, 2009). Governance entrepreneurship, in contrast, delineates the ability to recognize structural flaws, gaps, and potentials in governance arrangements and practices. Based on this knowledge, governance entrepreneurs, for instance, implement and change actor positions, networks, or forms of coordination. In contrast to the former two concepts, governance entrepreneurship also explicitly includes a spatial dimension of agency, when individuals affect rescaling processes by drawing upon individual relationships across territories and administrative borders and establish new governance networks. By doing so, they do not only raise their own opportunities but also broaden the “region-specific opportunity space” (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2019, p. 11).

It is anticipated that the concepts have certain correspondences and that they mutually affect each other, as each of these types of transformative agency complement and continuously shape each other. Figure 2 takes up the model of actor-centred institutionalism in order to illustrate the interrelatedness of policy, institutional, and governance entrepreneurship. An example might be the inclusion of new actor groups from different domains in governance that accompanies the availability of increased social or financial resources. As a result, new opportunities for

TABLE 2 The roles of entrepreneurial individuals: Strategic and spatial dimensions

Entrepreneurial roles	Dimensions of socio-spatial change	
	Strategic dimension	Spatial dimension
Policy entrepreneur	Seeks to promote policy change, creates new policy instruments, and realigns or replaces existing policies (Kingdon, 1995)	Administrative space
Institutional entrepreneur	Aims at initiating institutional change and breaking institutional status by introducing new institutions or changing and removing existing institutions (Battilana et al., 2009; Weik, 2011)	Institutional space
Governance entrepreneur	Intends or causes a shift in governance by implementing or transforming governance arrangements	Action space

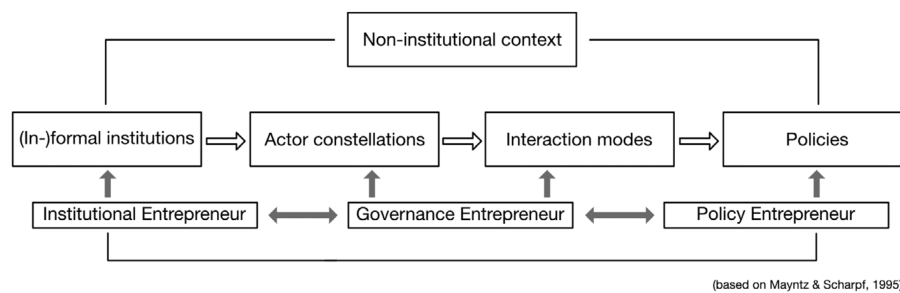


FIGURE 2 The role of entrepreneurial individuals in actor-centred institutionalism

policy entrepreneurship can arise, leading to new policy outcomes, which have not been considered before (Mörner & Trippel, 2017). Furthermore, as mentioned before, governance entrepreneurship can potentially involve profound transformations, for example, when a certain field transforms from a hierarchical to a more cooperation-oriented governance system. In the long term, this change in governance might also lead to an institutional change, when cooperation has been established as a regional norm that guides the behaviour of actors when dealing with emergent regional challenges.

It is furthermore important to note that individuals can take different entrepreneurial roles at different stages, so that governance entrepreneurs might become policy entrepreneurs or institutional entrepreneurs, and vice versa. For instance, policy entrepreneurs that aim for policy change may also simultaneously act as institutional entrepreneurs when they try to manipulate institutions in order to open windows of opportunity to promote policy instruments (Galanti, 2018). By taking multiple roles simultaneously or consecutively, individuals enhance their opportunities and might extend their individual agency. Following this argumentation, it is obvious that these three conceptual categories can overlap in practice and do not aim at describing static functions of individuals (or groups of individuals) but rather at outlining different flexible roles. By doing so, the framework helps to reveal how socio-spatial change emerges from the interaction of these three types of entrepreneurial individuals.

4 | CONCLUSION

The main objective of this article is to provide a more comprehensive framework for the analysis of individual agency in socio-spatial change by introducing the concept of governance entrepreneurship and linking it with the concepts of policy and institutional entrepreneurship. Bringing together these three types of transformative agency (Tuominen & Lehtonen, 2018) supports a deeper understanding of individual agency in socio-spatial change. The proposed framework provides a temporal and relational perspective on socio-spatial change that takes into account the engagement and relation of different entrepreneurial individuals over time. By doing so, the paper contributes to the recent discussion on individual agency and change processes in local and regional development. It also addresses the exigency of further conceptualization (Gailing & Ibert, 2016; Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2019; Sotarauta, 2017).

The concept of governance entrepreneurship is built upon a combination of an actor-centred governance perspective (Scharpf, 1997) and institutional and policy entrepreneurship literature (Battilana et al., 2009; Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom & Norman, 2009). It stresses an underrepresented form of transformative agency in emphasizing the importance of changes in actor constellations, modes of interaction, and decision-making territories. Although these changes might be more subtle and moderate in nature than policy and institutional changes (Pattberg, 2017), it might be assumed that a suitable adaption and development of governance is a crucial factor for the successful implementation of new institutions and policies and a sustainable local and regional development. Hence, investigating governance entrepreneurship might also offer a better understanding of the reasons why attempts towards policy and

institutional change tend to succeed or fail. Additionally, the governance entrepreneurship perspective might benefit the exploration of unanticipated changes that may not originally have been intended by entrepreneurial individuals. The importance of unintended outcomes has been mentioned frequently in policy and institutional entrepreneurship literature (Battilana et al., 2009; Sotarauta & Pulkkinen, 2011). However, no further explanation and classification of these outcomes has been given, and little is known about its effects on socio-spatial change processes. Considering these analytical values, it has to be stated that the term governance entrepreneur does not indicate any normative standpoint but rather serves as an analytical concept for further empirical research to direct and to differentiate the perspective on individual agency and socio-spatial change.

The paper also indicates that further in-depth studies and a systematic comparison of entrepreneurial individuals in governance processes are needed in order to gain more knowledge about the unknown “factor X” (Gailing & Ibert, 2016) in local and regional development. Further empirical research is necessitated to conceptualize, for instance, a typology of governance entrepreneurs that systematically takes into account the different dimensions of governance change (e.g., degree of formality and direction of communication). Additionally, much conceptual and empirical work is still required to investigate the interrelatedness of institutional, policy, and governance entrepreneurship. It is thus suggested that the proposed framework has great explanatory potential concerning the overarching question why, despite comparable structural and institutional preconditions, some cities and regions manage to initiate socio-spatial change processes, whereas others fail to do so.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Through this assumption, the model strives to overcome the dichotomy of structure and agency that has been discussed as the structure–agency paradox in policy sciences (Giddens, 1984).

² It must be highlighted that organizations or associations may also be initiators of change processes. It is not intended to reduce regional development to the actions of single persons but rather to shed light on their contribution to socio-spatial change.

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Paper II

'The problem-centred expert interview'. Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Expert interviews are a widely-used qualitative interview method often aiming at gaining information about or exploring a specific field of action. This paper wants to move beyond the focus on explicit expert knowledge by emphasizing the experts' individual perspectives that affect social practices in a field of action. The paper addresses the investigation of this implicit, interpretative expert knowledge by developing the 'problem-centred expert interview'. This approach merges the theory-generating expert interview that discusses the social relevance of expert knowledge and the problem-centred interview (PCI) that offers a dialogic-discursive interview procedure investigating individual perspectives. By drawing upon an empirical study in human geography, the paper demonstrates how one could conduct and analyse this methodical combination in research practice. The following discussion shows that, despite some pitfalls, the combination appears fruitful for divulging implicit expert knowledge and understanding the inner logics of decision-making processes. The paper concludes with an outlook on possible fields of application.

KEYWORDS

Expert interview; problem-centred interview; grounded theory; qualitative interview; key agents

Introduction

The expert interview as a method of qualitative empirical research has been a widely-discussed qualitative method in political and social research since the early 1990s. Mainly cited in the European literature (Gläser & Laudel, 2004; Kaiser, 2014; Meuser & Nagel, 1991; Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019), it aims at exploring or collecting data about a specific field of interest. Meuser and Nagel (2009) describe the expert interview as a qualitative interview based on a topical guide, focusing on the knowledge of the expert, which is broadly characterized as specific knowledge in a certain field of action. Social scientists debate intensively about the criteria for being reckoned as an expert, the definition of expert knowledge, or the considerations for being recognised as a good or bad expert (Gläser & Laudel, 2009). Although the term 'expert interview' reflects on a plurality of methods, emphasizing different methodological and epistemological aspects, there are some key issues on which most of the authors agree. Experts are considered knowledgeable of a particular subject and are identified by virtue of their specific knowledge, their community position, or their status (Kaiser, 2014).

In general, qualitative interviewing emphasizes the importance of investigating experiences and perspectives of the interviewees for developing a better understanding of social reality (Edwards &

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Holland, 2013; Flick, 2018). Although the expert interview is methodologically situated in the qualitative paradigm, in practice, individual relevancies of experts tend to be overshadowed by the researchers' interest in collecting information about a particular social field (Bogner & Menz, 2009; Mattissek et al., 2013). Since individual perceptions and orientations of experts are seen as essential for shaping social practices in a field of action, social scientists argue for a broader understanding of expert knowledge that goes beyond technical data and facts by highlighting the implicit dimension of expert knowledge (Bogner & Menz, 2009; Froschauer & Lueger, 2002; Meuser & Nagel, 2009; Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019). Revealing the implicit dimensions of expert knowledge might be of interest for different strands of research, for example, when experts' power or influence in a certain field are being investigated or organisational conflicts are being examined.

Although many research questions necessitate a more differentiated view on the dimensions of expert knowledge, the practical questions and overall implication of investigating implicit dimensions of knowledge have not been discussed in much detail yet. Having come across these methodical challenges during my research on the investigation of *key agents*, I wish to introduce and discuss the *problem-centred expert interview*. Therefore, the paper combines the *theory-generating expert interview* by Bogner and Menz (2009), which distinguishes between different kinds of expert knowledge, with the *problem-centred interview* (PCI) by Witzel (2000), which supports the exposition of individual experiences and opinions by providing specific interview techniques. In order to demonstrate the practical application and analytical potentials of this methodical combination, the contribution draws upon an empirical example from human geography, investigating the role of *key agents* for socio-spatial change processes.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: First, methodological and epistemological principles of both interview methods are outlined, and the approach of the *problem-centred expert interview* is derived. Subsequently, the paper presents an empirical example of the *problem-centred expert interview* within my PhD research project. After exposing the theoretical background and epistemological interest of my research, experiences of conducting and analysing *problem-centred expert interviews* are reflected upon. Finally, the paper discusses the challenges and the added value of the methodical combination, before concluding with an outlook on possible fields of application.

Combining theory-generating expert interviews and problem-centred interviews

The epistemological interest in expert knowledge

Based on the existing literature, Bogner and Menz (2009) distinguish three types of expert interviews according to their epistemological functions. The first type is the *exploratory expert interview*, which is frequently used to gain knowledge and orientation in unknown or hardly known fields. This helps to structure a complex field and to generate first hypotheses. In this context, interviewees can either be part of the field of interest or serve as an external source of knowledge by providing contextual knowledge about the target group. The second type is the *systematizing expert interview* that is also related to the *exploratory expert interview* (Bogner & Menz, 2009). This type of expert interview aims at the structured and comprehensive collection of expert knowledge in order to achieve a high level of data comparability (Gläser & Laudel, 2004). Both types are characterized by their focus on *technical* and *processual knowledge*. *Technical knowledge* relates to highly specific knowledge of a field, for instance, on technical applications, information, or data. Bogner and Menz (2009) contrast this to everyday knowledge, describing it as educational knowledge and classifying it as the specific knowledge advantage of experts. In contrast, *process knowledge* captures knowledge that is based on practical experience and the institutional context of actions. In this sense, *process knowledge* emerges due to the position of the person in a process and comprises knowledge about interactions, routines, or social practices (Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019). The third type defined by Bogner and Menz (2009) is the *theory-generating expert interview* that serves as a starting point

for the envisaged methodological development of *problem-centred expert interviews* and is explained in the following.

The theory-generating expert interview

According to Meuser and Nagel (1991), experts can be defined as persons who are responsible for the development, implementation, or control of a solution, or persons who have privileged access to people or decision-making processes. The *theory-generating expert interview* draws upon these considerations and describes experts as persons with specific knowledge who hold a certain status or exercise a function in decision-making processes in a particular field of action (Bogner & Menz, 2009, 2018). Thus, 'their action orientations, knowledge and assessments decisively structure, or help to structure, conditions of actions of other actors' (Bogner & Menz, 2009, p. 54). Following this definition, expert knowledge has a socially relevant dimension as it practically shapes and determines a field of action.

The *theory-generating expert interview* holds an analytical and interpretative perspective in order to outline interrelations in the empirical data and to develop theoretical approaches. It stresses inductive theory development based on empirical data and thereby aims at revealing *interpretative knowledge* (Bogner & Menz, 2009, 2018), which is defined as subjective relevancies, viewpoints, or perspectives on which experts draw when enforcing their orientations. *Interpretative knowledge* is predominantly implicit and comprises, for example, decision-making practices or action orientations. *Interpretative knowledge* does not exist *a priori*, but is developed through the 'act of abstraction and systematization' of qualitative interview data (Bogner & Menz, 2009, p. 53). Only during analysis does it become evident whether a statement of a respondent has to be interpreted in the professional or private context. Therefore, Bogner and Menz (2009, p. 53) argue for integrating the individual methodologically and highlighting the importance of personal orientations and perceptions, in order to enable a rich investigation of *interpretative knowledge*. However, in a more recent publication, the authors accentuate that experts are not addressed as 'private persons' in the first instance, but rather as representatives of a specific group, e.g., public officials or functionaries (Bogner et al., 2014; Mergel et al., 2019).

The authors do not only debate the definition of experts, but also discuss the interaction structure in expert interviews. They focus on the potential roles and strategies of the interviewers that are shaped by the expectations and perceptions of the interviewees. The interviewer can be seen, for instance, as a co-expert when the expert assumes that the interviewer is familiar with the field and its practical conditions. In contrast, other types are characterized by a more asymmetrical interaction, for instance, when the interviewer is considered a layperson who is naïve about the field of research. On the one hand, this can lead to a broad access of information, as the interviewee is encouraged to explicate the answer. On the other hand, the expert might address issues and provide explanations that are already well known. Furthermore, the researcher might be identified as a potential critic, for instance, because of his or her institutional, organizational, or scientific background. The interviewee may feel criticized by the questions of the interviewer and may doubt his or her objectivity, which can lead to a limited willingness to answer questions (Bogner & Menz, 2009; Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019).

According to Bogner and Menz (2009), the *theory-generating expert interview* is not linked to a specific interview design or technique. Instead, the authors propose selecting the interview design in accordance with the actual research needs and remaining flexible during the research process. However, they suggest making use of an interview guide that allows for open, but thematically structured interviewing.

The problem-centred interview

The second interview method that is presented here is the *problem-centred interview* (PCI) that was originally developed by Witzel (1982, 2000). It is a widespread qualitative research method

that has been internationally received since its English-language publication ‘*The Problem-Centred Interview: Principles and Practice*’ in 2012 (Murray, 2016; Shirani, 2015) and has been frequently used in different research disciplines, such as sociology (Vogl et al., 2019), political science (Reiter, 2014) or pedagogics (Leder, 2018). PCI is a qualitative face-to-face interview method that draws upon central principles of qualitative research such as openness, flexibility, and process orientation (Flick, 2009). It is meant to be an egalitarian dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee in which the research question or the ‘problem’ is refined jointly (Murray, 2016). The approach combines two seemingly contradictory sources of knowledge, as it gives equal right to the previously accumulated theoretical and empirical knowledge of the researcher and to the individual knowledge and personal experiences of the respondent. Witzel and Reiter (2012) argue for an iterative process, combining inductive and deductive reasoning, when applying PCI. Based on a sensitising theoretical framework, the researcher should actively encourage participants to tell their stories. By doing so, the method additionally accommodates the preconditions that shape the interviewees’ orientations and opinions (Scheibelhofer, 2008).

PCI presupposes a specific research design and tools¹ for conducting interviews. In general, it draws upon an interview guide that comprises a narrative beginning in the first phase and precise follow-up questions in the second. Its purpose is not to establish a rigid question–answer scheme, but rather to support the researcher with a thematic framework that serves as an orientation to the premeditated research questions. PCI thus facilitates a systematized comparison of the collected data. The interviewer starts with an open-ended question in order to stimulate a narration structured by the individual’s concerns (Scheibelhofer, 2008; Witzel & Reiter, 2012). After the interviewee had finished the narrative episode, the interviewer moves on to *general* and *specific explorations* as well as *ad hoc questions*. Through *general explorations*, researchers aim to enquire after aspects and details that are of potential research interest but have not been mentioned by the interviewee yet. On the other hand, *specific explorations* refer directly to the interviewees’ account in order to gain further insights into the interviewees’ opinions. These questions and statements are based on knowledge that was gained beforehand or that emerges during the narrative part. They thus follow a predominantly deductive logic. Witzel and Reiter (2012) distinguish between three *specific exploration* strategies: *mirroring*, which strives for cognitive structuring and validation, *comprehensive questions*, which aim at clarifying meanings or interrelations, and *confrontations*, addressing the specification of contradictory statements by the interviewees. Additionally, the authors propose making use of *ad hoc questions*, which comprise additional aspects or keywords, ensuring the comparability of the interviews. As these questions may disrupt the dialogue in terms of content, the authors suggest asking them at the end of the interview. Combining an open narrative beginning with a more structured interview section enables the researcher to remain receptive towards the gathered information, as it encourages the interviewees to describe individual perspectives, to clarify previous statements, and to revise misguided assumptions of the interviewer.

The dialogic-discursive structure of the PCI thus emphasizes the situational co-production of social reality by the interviewer and interviewee in the context of the interview situation. This assumption contrasts PCI with the biographic-narrative interview (Rosenthal & Loch, 2002; Schütze, 1983) that also starts with a narrative section, however presuming that the structure of narratives represents the structure of social reality. These premises are reflected in the communication structure of both approaches: While in narrative interviews the interviewer primarily acts as engaged listener directing the interviewees’ narration as little as possible, in PCI the interviewer gradually changes from listening to intervening in order to guide the interviewee on thematic aspects (Mey, 2000; Scheibelhofer, 2005). By stressing the interviewee’s perspectives, but also enabling the researcher to address specific topics, PCI provides appropriate approaches for reconstructing the implicit dimensions of expert knowledge considering a certain research focus.

The problem-centred expert interview

The methodological and epistemological backgrounds of *theory-generating expert interviews* and PCI will now be discussed in order to explain the analytical value of combining the two methods. Both methods are based on similar methodological and epistemological premises. Both the *theory-generating interview* and PCI highlight the perspectives and opinions of the interviewee and aim at formulating new theories by systematizing and interpreting individual statements. Thereby, the objective of the *theory-generating expert interview* is the ‘communicative opening up and analytic reconstruction of the subjective dimension of expert knowledge’ (Bogner & Menz, 2009, p. 48). The authors emphasize inductive theory building by an interpretative generalization of the qualitative data. In turn, the epistemological logic of PCI argues for developing theories by intertwining deductive and inductive steps when conducting and analysing the interviews. Deductive elements can be found in the interview guide that draws on theoretical concepts and heuristics. On the other hand, PCI follows inductive logics when describing the interviewer as a ‘well-informed traveller’ that stays open-minded to the interviewees’ perspectives and willing to reformulate his or her previous assumptions (Murray, 2016). Although the theory-generating interview argues primarily for an inductive procedure, Bogner and Menz (2009) include the option of combining inductive and deductive elements as was suggested for PCI. Against this background, both methods can be connected to the methodology of Grounded Theory (GT) aiming at (middle-range) theory building based on qualitative interview data (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

Witzel and Reiter (2012, p. 21) refer to the possibility of applying PCI in the context of expert interviews. According to the authors, ‘the PCI corresponds perfectly with the interest in investigating the interpretive dimension of expert knowledge [...] as long as it considers the specific role of the respondent in the conversation.’ Conversely, Bogner and Menz (2009, p. 74) mention PCI and state that the two interview methods focus on different epistemological interests. They emphasize that ‘the difference of the procedures lies in the role of the interviewee in the conversation, which is determined by specific epistemological interests and so is more a matter of practical research requirements than of criteria related to method’. The combination of these epistemological perspectives serves as a promising starting point for moving beyond the experts’ role as representatives and taking into account their personal opinions and experiences. As expert interviews represent a very popular research method in various disciplines, a problem-centred approach offers potential for many kinds of research, since it is interested in the implicit dimensions of expert knowledge. The following table outlines selected elements of the *theory-generating expert interview* and the PCI, which are central for defining the methodological and epistemological background of the *problem-centred expert interviews* (see Table 1).

Revealing the *interpretative knowledge* in expert interviews is a quite elusive research target. By combining *theory-generating expert interviews* and PCI, we might move a step closer to this objective, since both methods offer useful approaches and instruments for moving beyond explicit expert knowledge. While the *theory-generating expert interview* contributes to the analysis of the social relevance of implicit expert knowledge, PCI highlights individual perspectives by providing an interview technique that encourages the interviewees to unfold their personal relevancies and perceptions.

In the following section, an empirical example is discussed in order to show the practical application of the *problem-centred expert interview*. The insights are based on my PhD research

Table 1. Elements of the problem-centred expert interview.

Theory-generating expert interview	Problem-centred interview (PCI)
Defines and discusses the term ‘expert’	Highlights the individual perspective
Distinguishes different types of expert knowledge	Provides a specific interview design and set of questions
Aims at inductive theory development	Enables comparability of gathered data
	Proposes inductive-deductive theory building

in human geography, which focuses on *key agents* in regional economic development and their influence on socio-spatial change.

An empirical example of the problem-centred expert interview

The idea for combining *theory-generating expert interviews* and PCI developed from the research interest of my PhD thesis. My thesis focuses on outstanding, entrepreneurial individuals from politics, economy, and administration, but also from civil society, so-called *key agents*, who take up an exceptional role in socio-spatial change processes in regional economic development.² The overall aim of my research is to develop a local theory in order to contribute to the nascent conceptual discussion of *key agents* in human geography. Exploring the individual agency of *key agents* in socio-spatial change processes requests for an in-depth understanding of the social relevancies of involved actors in regional decision-making processes. In order to identify *key agents* and to understand how and to what extent *key agents* can influence regional development processes, it seemed necessary to look beyond explicit expert knowledge and to gain understanding of the personal perceptions, orientations, and thoughts that lead to their exceptional influence.

Theorizing key agents

Key agents and their pivotal roles in decision-making and change processes are widely discussed in several disciplines, for instance, in political sciences, sociology, organizational and management studies and, only recently, in human and economic geography. Against the background of the structure-agency debate (Giddens, 1984), several conceptual strands focus on *key agents* (or agents of change), including, for example, leadership (Normann et al., 2017; Sotarauta, 2016), political entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009; Mintrom & Norman, 2009), and brokerage (Christopoulos & Ingold, 2011; Leick & Gretzinger, 2018).

What connects these various types of theoretical concepts is the fact that they offer an analytical perspective on individuals or groups of individuals that are deemed to make ‘the’ difference within policy, institutional, or organizational change processes. They manage to influence decision-making processes decisively, by having special characteristics, capabilities (e.g., persistence, creativity, persuasiveness), and knowledge (Petridou et al., 2015). While experts are characterized as having the knowledge and the position ‘to structure a particular field of social action in a meaningful way’ (Bogner et al., 2018, p. 655), *key agents* take an ‘outstanding’ structural and social position that allows their opinions to be heard over those of others. This does not imply that their power is necessarily tied to a professional or official position in decision-making processes. *Key agents* might also be non-state actors drawing on private resources, ideas, and targets (e.g., engaged persons from a civil movement). They often behave rather subversively in shaping and transforming fields of action beyond established decision-making structures and formal procedures (Battilana et al., 2009; Beer, 2014). Based on these theoretical foundations, it can be concluded that every *key agent* can be defined as an expert, but not every expert that is interviewed can be identified as a *key agent*.³

Although it is widely acknowledged that *key agents* and informal processes in decision-making processes are difficult to grasp empirically (Ayres, 2017), the methodological approach seems to have played a subordinate role in literature dealing with *key agents*. The studies mention methods, such as (semi-)structured interviews or quantitative surveys, rather incidentally. However, lately a growing number of authors dealing with *key agents* claim to ‘zoom in also on the “subjective” stories of individuals, and grasp their perceptions, intentions, and change strategies’ (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2019, p. 14) which drive their actions.

In order to understand and to conceptualize the emergence and action of *key agents*, I choose to draw upon the *theory-generating expert interview* that points to the implicit dimension of expert knowledge as a starting point for theory building. However, the *theory-generating expert interview* does not provide a specific research design that supports the exploration of these knowledge

dimensions. The interview design of PCI, however, enables researchers to approach these implicit dimensions of expert knowledge by accentuating the biographical experiences and personal opinions of interviewees. I now wish to reflect upon and discuss the practical application of this methodological combination.

Research design and theoretical sampling

The research project is based on a comparative case study design contrasting socio-spatial change processes and their *key agents* in two Austrian small-sized cities. The research design is based on the principles of theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) including different iterative sampling strategies. In the beginning of my research, combined different methodical approaches comprising a media and documentary analysis and explorative expert interviews (e.g., with representatives of federal state government or regional agencies) (Bogner & Menz, 2009; Kaiser, 2014) in order to explore interesting socio-spatial change processes in regional development and to select the first case study. In the next step, a local ‘gatekeeper’ was contacted in order to acquire further contextual information about ongoing projects and to get access to the local actor network of the first city.

However, in this paper, I want to focus on the *problem-centred expert interviews* conducted during my fieldwork with experts in one of the small-sized cities. Following the definition of the term ‘expert’ by Bogner and Menz (2009, p. 54), the sample should include persons, who ‘decisively structure, or help to structure’ the social relevancies in a field of action by their action orientation and knowledge. Hence, the interviewees can be distinguished from ‘laypersons’, because they have a specific knowledge that enables them to shape the regional development process, for instance, as initiators, supporters, or preventers, albeit to different degrees (Bogner & Menz, 2018). Initially, the experts were successively recruited by a snowball sampling technique, based on statements of preceding interview partners. The experts provided information about those who were involved in the process and who could provide further insights about it. This was a crucial procedure which was necessary to understand the inner logics of the decision-making process. After the first coding sessions, I additionally decided to contact persons who had been mentioned by the interviewees rather incidentally or who were known from regional media reports, for instance, because they previously had been engaged in the process. This was done to avoid a biased perspective on the process which could arise by talking only to a specific group of experts who might share a collective view (Bogner & Menz, 2018, p. 259). Finally, the interview sample included persons that have or have had responsibilities in decision-making and having specific knowledge that structures the process. It also included the *key agents* themselves. The sample thus comprised interviewees with different institutional and organisational backgrounds in regional development, e.g., politicians, entrepreneurs, regional development officers, but also involved and engaged citizens, such as a tax consultant, a retired farmer, or an investor.

I repeated this procedure for the second case study. Striving towards local theory-building, I chose to conduct the second part of the fieldwork in a city with similar socio-spatial preconditions and challenges to those of the first. This enabled me to focus on the individual agency of *key agents* and to contrast their influence in decision-making processes.

Conducting problem-centred expert interviews

Before going into the field, I developed a heuristic framework pointing out to re-search gaps concerning *key agents* and individual agency in regional development. This ‘sensitising concept’ (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) provided a broad and open perspective on actor constellations and interactions modes in regional development and served as basis for developing the topical guide. Drawing upon the principles of PCI, the interview included an open-ended question in the beginning and follow-up questions, which allow to introduce thematic aspects in the interview course in a flexible way.

Witzel (2000) proposes beginning the PCI with an opening question that will place the focus on the matter of interest and stimulate the participant to relate his or her individual perspective on this issue and to give an account of according experiences. Guided by my research interest, I adapted the interview design presupposed by PCI and started with an individual opening question in order to generate contextual information about each expert's background. This was done to get an idea of the individual's formal and/or social position and his or her tasks and responsibilities in the process. This question was particularly important with reference to experts of whom I could only collect vague information beforehand.

In the next step, I continued the *problem-centred expert interviews* with an open-ended question that invited the interviewees to describe the regional change process from the beginning until the current day. The objective of this question was to prompt the interviewees to reconstruct the economic development process and to mention the roles of process-associated persons by telling a coherent story. In order to support the narrative structure and the comparability of the narrations, a temporal specification was included. Guided by my research interest, I was particularly interested in the interviewees' perspectives on actor constellations and (in-)formal governance processes that drive the changes in regional development. In order to avoid influence, I phrased the question in an indirect and open way (Meuser & Nagel, 2009):

IV: 'Could you please tell me how the process [...] emerged from the early beginning (or the first idea) until today, and who was involved?'

IP: 'The topic has a long history, about twenty years ago, when there has been a loss of skilled workers [...] Back then, we started with developing a job fair, which was not always a common way [...].'

While the narrative beginning at first appeared unconventional to some experts, in most cases it gave impetus to a narrative episode, encouraging the experts to reconstruct the process based on personal explications of actor relations and interactions. By this narrative impetus, the respondents were triggered to include the role of other people (and possible interview partners) in a quite natural and vivid way. As interviewees told their stories chronologically, it was possible to consider the temporal dimension of the process and to retrace the point of appearance of actors. Based on the data thus generated, I obtained first evidence of those who considered themselves to have taken a central position or who was considered to be an important part of the process. This helped me to contact further experts: The interview partners mentioned whom they considered as essential for the process in an explicit way ('*It is the economy, that is to say, Tom Winter, who drives this process*') or in a more implicit way:

'[...] However, we could not find a national programme that fitted our regional demand and then we had a meeting and the mayor and Tom [entrepreneur] said that they had an idea for establishing a regional innovation hub [...].'

After the experts had finished their narrative sequence, I continued with open-ended questions comprising *general and specific explorations*. Starting with the technique of *general explorations* that focused on selected episodes of the narrative section, the objective was to learn more about the interviewee's position and his or her relationship with and connection to other important actors within the process. The questions aimed at gaining more information about the expert's involvement or previously mentioned persons involved in the process:

'Earlier, you mentioned that the other entrepreneurs had been sceptical about your initiative. How did you handle this?'

'You mentioned Mr. Fisher in the beginning. Can you tell me more about how he had been involved in the implementation of this project?'

The latter question requires proceeding cautiously since asking about 'third persons' (and potential interview partners) can be a sensitive issue in the communicative situation, demanding a mutual basis of trust. When interviewers are supposed to be external critics (Bogner & Menz, 2009), talking about other persons could be particularly awkward.

During the interview situation, I also drew upon *specific explorations* involving *comprehensive questions* and *mirroring*.⁴ These techniques facilitate a deeper understanding of interviewees' statements by yielding to alternative perspectives on previous reports (Mey, 2000; Witzel & Reiter, 2012). *Comprehensive questions* were used to clarify vague statements and invited the interview partners to explicate their point of view, for instance, about interaction modes between different (groups of) people:

'So, would you say that entrepreneurs used to interact more competitively about 20 years ago than they do today?'

On the other hand, the technique of *mirroring* proved to be particularly useful for testing ad hoc hypotheses or hypotheses derived from previous interviews:

IV: 'So, it seems as if politics and the economy work by common agreement to handle the regional challenges.

IP: 'The coordination works out very well, in fact. [...] However, for me as an entrepreneur it is very important that we as entrepreneurs do not want to be manipulated politically.

The *ad hoc questions* at the end of the interviews included evaluation questions (Bogner et al., 2014), for instance, asking the experts about their assessment concerning further challenges to the process.

Although the presented type of questions suggested by Witzel (2000), cannot always be clearly separated from each other in practice, the conceptual distinction enables the researcher to draw upon a variety of questioning techniques, including narrative-generating, implicit, or concluding questions and statements. This allows for a flexible and varied application of questions during the interview situation and an interactive creation of *interpretative knowledge*.

Analysing problem-centred expert interviews

Expert interviews that aim at revealing *technical* and *processual knowledge* would usually apply procedures of systematic textual analysis, such as the qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2000), which aims at reducing and summarizing evident interview data according to predefined research objectives. The *theory-generating expert interview* however tends rather to follow an interpretative approach that aims at inductive theory building based on the data that was gathered. Its conceptualization builds on considerations of Glaser and Strauss (2017), proposing inductive theory formulation. Similarly, PCI mentions an inductive-deductive approach following the principle of theoretical sampling and aiming at generating theories. Drawing upon on these considerations, my research was oriented towards the principles of GT. Below, I want to focus on the process of open and axial coding to illustrate the analytical value of the data generated by the *problem-centred expert interviews*. Findings were developed gradually and empirically grounded in a problem-centred dialogue between the research interests on the one side and inductive reasoning of the empirical material on the other.

The open coding process starts during fieldwork and designates the breaking down, examining, and labelling of the data with codes. This is done by asking conditional questions relating to the material, which serves as foundation for further interpretation (Belgrave & Seide, 2018). By scrutinizing the interpretative dimension of expert knowledge, I aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the experts' orientations and unveiling why, how and to what extent experts shape the process and respectively might be acknowledged as *key agents*. As individual perceptions, motifs, and aims guide the interactions of experts, these can be considered as implicit decision-making maxims in a field of action (Bogner & Menz, 2018). The following example illustrates the coding process of implicit expert knowledge (see Table 2). In this context, it must be highlighted, that the distinction between different kinds of expert knowledge represents a result of an analytical process and not a characteristic of the knowledge itself (Bogner & Menz, 2018). Depending on the research

Table 2. Example of coding *interpretative knowledge*.

Citation	Open coding Interpretative Knowledge
'We are a network of three people [mayor, entrepreneur, regional chairman]. [...] We have not been defining our responsibilities, such as, you have to do that, you have to do this, or something like this, it emerges when we meet each other. We truly regularly meet each other. Sometimes at 7.00 o'clock in the morning, then we drink a coffee in a cafe in the city and then again, we define the next steps.' [Interview Mayor]	informality and exclusivity of group, self-consciousness of being part of this network recognizes (regional) challenges, mutual trust, equality of members, dissolving hierarchies? need of 'spatial and cognitive proximity', continuity, (need of) persistence, voluntary engagement beyond 'official' labour time → high personal motivation? meetings are in public and are not hidden → convinced about 'doing the right'? 'hands-on' attitude, taking responsibility

focus, the statement could also have been interpreted, for instance, in terms of *process knowledge*. In order to divulge the implicit dimensions, I coded the sequences line-by-line.

By focusing on *interpretative knowledge*, one can reveal those relevancies that guide the actions of the expert and structure social practices in the regional development process. The selected statement of the mayor (who could have been identified as a *key agent* in further research course) shows that he recognized a regional pressure to act. In order to tackle the challenges, he draws upon a flexible and informal, but exclusive group of people based on trust and persistence. The *interpretative knowledge* proves to be as essential in the further research course in order to explain why some experts emerge as *key agents* who are able and willing to change or renew a field of action. Thereby, the experts' actions and experiences must be interpreted against the background of the contextual conditions that influence their actions (Witzel & Reiter, 2012). When talking to experts, this implies consider information about the organisational or institutional background of the interviewees and the (in-)formal procedure of decision-making. The prior documentary analysis or the explicit *process knowledge* offered during the interviews enables to contextualize the statements in terms of the professional sphere. On the other hand, the statements about personal biographical experiences (that were primarily mentioned in the narrative sequence) turned out to be a very useful source for explaining the experts' motives, resources and intention.

In the quest of developing a local theory of *key agents* and their role in regional economic change, I went across the interviews in order to explore similarities and differences and to develop linkages between the data. I contrasted the codes and initial categories to see how the individuals' orientations and perceptions differ in terms of the regional development process and to work out characteristics and behaviour that might be attributed to *key agents*. This step is orientated towards the technique of axial coding by Glaser and Strauss (2017). Additionally, I was also able to directly relate the statements of the experts to each other and to interpret the different perspectives on the decision-making process, as the experts talked about the same events. By doing so, I could ascertain, for instance, whether interactions between individuals are perceived in a unilateral or reciprocal way and whether experts share perceptions about forms of interaction. Thus, I could not only merge the reconstructed experiences, but also sketch out the position of the experts in the network. As experts represent 'a complex interdependence of knowledge and power' (Bogner & Menz, 2018: 656), it is challenging to reconstruct their position in a field of action. In my research, the experts' position and the power they exert is less determined by formal authority by virtue of their professional positions but constructed through social interactions (Smith, 2006). By gaining an understanding of the experts' intentions and interactions, in regional economic development, I could grasp how and to what extent experts structure decision-making processes and gain further evidence of potential *key agents*.

In the last step, I contrasted the processes and involved actors of the first case study with the interpretations of the second case study in order to strive for a local theory of *key agents* in regional economic change processes. It thus, became evident, that *key agents* in regional development

accumulate and exert a high degree of relational power, enabling them to increase their individual agency. To reach their targets they rearrange governance arrangements by developing horizontal and vertical axes and altering interaction modes.

Pitfalls and potentials of the problem-centred expert interview

Based on my experience with conducting and analysing *problem-centred expert interviews*, I want to discuss the pitfalls and potentials of merging the *theory-generating expert interview* and PCI. Although investigating *key agents* represents a specific case when conducting *problem-centred expert interviews*, the lessons learned are of interest for all expert interviews moving beyond the explicit dimensions of expert knowledge.

First, this ambitious style of interviewing may give rise to a number of pitfalls in the interview situation. This might be the case, for example, when the shift from a rather open and narrative style to a more structured interview style becomes complicated or experts grant less time for the interview than was announced beforehand. Switching between different interview styles generally is a thorny situation in PCI, as the ‘communicative roles are not consistent’ (Scheibelhofer, 2008, p. 408). In terms of expert interviews, the respondents might be experienced in talking and presenting their concerns and interests. Some experts offered wide-ranging explications in the narrative phase but made less time available for the interview than was announced beforehand. In this case the interviewer must consider whether to focus on the narrative accounts or to bring the explications to a close and switch from the time-consuming narrative part to the follow-up questions. Before moving into the field, researchers should reflect upon such interviewing priorities in order to be prepared when the interview course does not proceed as intended.

Second, PCI supports the capturing of the implicit dimensions of expert knowledge and its influence in decision-making by reconstructing individual perspectives through the specific mix of questioning techniques. Interviewer and interviewee leave the question-answer scheme (Witzel & Reiter, 2012, p. 20) and the experts are encouraged to recount societal processes. In my interviews, it could be observed that the initial narrative component stimulates the experts not only to describe, but also to reflect upon the process and to include personal relevancies and explanations. Additionally, and in contrast to narrative approaches (Rosenthal & Loch, 2002; Schütze, 1983), the discursive-dialogic procedure of the PCI enables the interviewer to focus on specific aspects of a phenomenon through follow-up questions. These questions allow for an alternative view in order to deepen aspects mentioned by the interviewees or to examine ad-hoc hypotheses. The above-mentioned techniques of *explorations*, for instance, proved very helpful to elicit personal opinions when experts who were experienced in being interviewed tended to rely upon familiar ‘standard stories’. This specific interview setting offers new perspectives on the dialogic creation of implicit expert knowledge and enables us to reconstruct action orientations and patterns regarding not only professional, but also personal experiences. The *problem-centred interview* thus provides a useful approach to generate implicit and tacit expert knowledge based on the interview material.

Third, the methodical combination of *problem-centred expert interviews* contributes to a deeper understanding of a social field of action and thereby supports theory-building. The topic-oriented interview design of the PCI facilitates to compare and to relate interview statements about specific aspects and to investigate the social relevance and political effectiveness of the implicit dimensions of expert knowledge. By contrasting and bridging the reconstructions of the individual perspectives, a ‘multifaceted portrayal’ of local decision-making processes and actor relations emerges. As a result of this, one can detect the inner logics and patterns of decision-making processes and reconstruct the position of an expert in a field of action. Bringing together the analytical knowledge conceptualization of *theory-generating expert interviews* (Bogner & Menz, 2009) and the interview design of PCI (Witzel, 2000) thus constitutes a promising methodological approach for (local) theory-building and developing typologies.

Conclusion

The reason for combining *theory-generating expert interviews* and PCI was my specific interest in *key agents*, which could only be insufficiently addressed by existing interview approaches. In my inquiry, the methodological combination of *problem-centred interviews* proved itself to offer a fruitful approach for investigating the implicit dimensions of expert knowledge and integrating the experts' professional as well as personal experiences in the search for explanations. The *theory-generating expert interview* takes into account the specificity of interviewing experts and the complexity of expert knowledge, whereas the PCI highlights the individual perspective of interviewees and provides a supporting interview design combining an open narrative beginning with a topical guide. Since the two interview approaches show similar methodological premises, it offers the possibility of an inductive, code-based, and theory-generating analysis in accordance with the principles of GT.

Despite its challenges mentioned above, the *problem-centred expert interview* represents a promising approach for investigating and analysing the increased complexity and informality of decision-making processes (Kaiser, 2014). The combination addresses a constructivist perspective, understanding expert knowledge not only as exclusive knowledge limited to the insights of science or disciplines, but also as practical, local knowledge emerging from professional as well as private experiences (Meuser & Nagel, 2009). Against this background, the methodical combination presented above is recommended whenever the individual agency of experts forms part of an investigation. In this context, it might be of interest in a variety of research fields such as policy analysis, organizational and management studies, or applied social research.

Notes

1. Additional to the interview guide, it is proposed that a short questionnaire, recording devices, and a postscript also be used in PCI in order to support the interview procedure.
2. Although scholars increasingly highlight the role of individuals for initiating socio-spatial change processes in regional development, there is still little conceptual knowledge concerning this phenomenon in governance literature, as the agency of individuals has been overshadowed by the focus on institutional and organisational structures.
3. In this context, it must be stated that the definition of the term 'expert' as it was proposed, for instance, by Meuser and Nagel (2009) is derived from the sociology of knowledge discussing methodological implications. The term 'key agent', however, summarizes a variety of theoretical concepts and approaches from different strands of literature (e.g., sociology, management studies and political science), focusing on different strategies and outcomes of key agents.
4. Confrontations, as suggested by Witzel (2000), were not applied in the expert interviews, since I considered targeted questions and comprehensive questions sufficient. Additionally, such strategies might have compromised the course of conversation, as shifting from an open narrative beginning to confrontative questions can also result in a defensive attitude from respondents (Scheibelhofer, 2008).

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Paper III

Governance entrepreneurship in regional economic development: individual agency in Austria

Stefanie Döringer 

ABSTRACT

Scholars increasingly highlight the role of individual agency for economic development in areas facing socioeconomic transformations. Based on an analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship, this paper explores how entrepreneurial individuals influence local decision-making and alter governance arrangements when implementing new economic development projects. It provides a case study analysis of two peripheral towns in Austria in order to gain a deeper understanding of individual relevancies and behaviour in regional economic development. The findings demonstrate how entrepreneurial individuals (re)arrange governance by (re)combining horizontal and vertical pipelines, mixing informal and formal practices, seeking individual legitimization, and promoting regional rescaling. The analysis also reveals the temporal nature of governance entrepreneurship and suggests differentiating between a long-term governance transition and a temporary governance shift. Overall, the paper provides a middle-range theory of governance entrepreneurship that might contribute to a deeper understanding of agency in regional economic development.

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, the literature on economic geography has disclosed a reinforced interest in individual agency and behaviour in regional development (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020; Huggins & Thompson, 2019). The engagement of entrepreneurial individuals can play a crucial role in coping with socioeconomic transformation processes and promoting economic development, as traditional organizations with rigid structures often seem to fall short of reacting adequately to emergent socio-spatial inequalities. Researchers dealing with these microlevel dynamics in regional development draw upon different conceptual approaches, such as place leadership (Beer & Clower, 2014), policy entrepreneurship (Perkmann, 2007; Willi et al., 2018) or institutional entrepreneurship (Leick, 2017), to reveal the specific roles of individuals for path

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development. Beer (2014), for instance, focuses on the relationship between leadership in rural communities and governmental power in a small town in Australia, while Leick (2017) highlights the importance of institutional entrepreneurs in German regions facing demographic change. This microlevel perspective allows taking a sensitive and realistic view on decision-making in regional development considering structural preconditions as well as agency.

Despite a growing body of literature dealing with individual agency in regional economic development, there is little knowledge of the ways in which individuals generate influence in governance and innovate governance arrangements. Although changes in governance might be less obvious to the public eye than changes in policies or institutions (Pattberg, 2017), the question of how influence is gained by entrepreneurial individuals in governance emerges as crucial for explaining regional development and gaining an in-depth understanding of it. The modification of governance might be of particular relevance for actors in peripheral places who struggle with demographic, economic and political downgrading processes, hereinafter designated as peripheralization. This notion no longer considers peripherality as a spatially given 'fate', but as a socio-spatially constructed, multidimensional process (Kühn, 2015). In doing so, it opens a fresh perspective on local governance actors and networks for influencing the conditions of peripheries. As governance in peripheral places is often based on a limited number of actors and face-to-face contacts, the relevancies and aspirations of entrepreneurial individuals can essentially shape the choice of governance elements and modes. Hence, governance at the local scale is less a rational procedure than a complex interplay between individuals, networks and behavioural patterns embedded in a multi-scalar process (Sotarauta, 2010).

Against this background, this paper sets out to scrutinize more closely the extent to which entrepreneurial individuals from politics and economy influence local economic decision-making processes and thereby might affect or alter governance arrangements *per se*. It presents novel results from an empirical analysis conducted in two towns in Austria that have been challenged by demographic and economic peripheralization processes. The case study focuses on the implementation of creative hubs, which function as spatial settings for working and innovation in the towns, involving a range of heterogeneous actors (Schmidt, 2019). These hubs can serve as fruitful catalysts for establishing new partnerships between firms, strengthening networking practices and developing entrepreneurial activities in peripheral regions (Fuzi, 2015). Based on this, creative hubs can facilitate overcoming the innovation barriers often associated with peripheral areas, such as thin institutional structures or the insufficient availability of knowledge organizations (Eder & Tripl, 2019; Tripl et al., 2016).

This paper takes an analytical perspective on governance, emphasizing local perspectives and interrelations, in order to explain how entrepreneurial individuals can shape local decision-making and contribute to the constitution of (new) governance arrangements over time. The case study draws upon and further develops conceptual considerations about governance entrepreneurship that are derived from the concepts of policy entrepreneurship (Mintrom & Norman, 2009) and institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009). The analysis of the case study exposes a variety of relational governance changes and reveals the temporal nature of governance entrepreneurship. Drawing upon these findings, the overall aim of this paper is to develop a middle-range theory (Merton, 1968) of governance entrepreneurship.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Next the concept of local governance and the approaches of policy, institutional and governance entrepreneurship are briefly explained and discussed in the context of peripheral places. Based on this, the analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship is introduced before the methodical approach of comparative case study analysis is explained. After presenting the two cases, the paper discusses the relational and temporal dimensions of governance entrepreneurship and derives a middle-range theory. Finally, the paper concludes with a critical reflection on the findings.

GOVERNANCE AND ENTREPRENEURIAL INDIVIDUALS

Throughout this paper, the term ‘local and regional governance’ will refer to interactive decision-making in regional development driven by a variety of individual and collective actors from different spheres (Denters, 2013; Fürst, 2004). The respective characteristics of governance reflect upon historical and spatial contexts and can take many shapes (Crouch, 2005). In the last decades, a transformation from a traditional, hierarchical governance system to an increasingly networked form of governance has become evident. Networked governance that is characterized by a diversification of actors with varying power resources seems to be more flexible in supporting knowledge development and addressing complex challenges on the regional level (Ayres & Stafford, 2014).

Political decision-making increasingly takes place as a diverse, temporal and fluid set of arrangements including both formal and informal governance practices. Informal practices provide some advantages for entrepreneurial individuals, because they can choose from a set of governance elements that are less constrained by rule-based, formal settings. Informal negotiations help to clarify goals and to create commitment among different stakeholders, which is required for setting a sustainable policy agenda (Ayres, 2017; Klijn, 2014; Svensson, 2019). For entrepreneurial individuals it might be crucial to navigate between formal ‘front-stage’ and informal ‘back-stage’ governance in order to reach their objectives. The term ‘front-stage’ vividly depicts the visible formal roles and settings of governance based on codified rules, while ‘back-stage’ refers to complex negotiations and rule-altering arrangements between the actors (Klijn, 2014). These characteristics of governance raise important questions about the ways in which entrepreneurial individuals (re)interpret local governance arrangements, and how they thus influence them. However, the governance literature remains rather silent on explaining how entrepreneurial individuals and behaviour contribute to the coordination of regional development.

In contrast, the concepts of institutional and policy entrepreneurship emphasize the role of (groups of) individuals for development and change processes. The concept of institutional entrepreneurship is strongly anchored in the literature on institutional theory and focuses on the embedded nature of agency and institutional change (Battilana et al., 2009). Institutional entrepreneurs mobilize resources, power and competences and aim at breaking with an existing institutional status quo or introducing new institutions. Studies on institutional entrepreneurship include a variety of outcomes that refer to changes of formal or informal institutions, such as rules and programmes, but also to norms and values (North, 1990). The literature on policy entrepreneurship focuses on the innovation of policies (Mintrom & Norman, 2009), defining policy entrepreneurs as ‘opportunistic actors’ (Christopoulos & Ingold, 2015, p. 479) who invest their resources to promote political goals, visions or instruments.

A third notion that is closely linked to institutional and policy entrepreneurship, but which is still in its conceptual and empirical infancy, is governance entrepreneurship. Scholars use the term in slightly differing manners, applying different nuances in their conceptual approaches (Boasson & Huitema, 2017; Döringer, 2020a; Pattberg, 2017; Willi et al., 2018). Overall, the notion of governance entrepreneurship shares the above-mentioned characteristics of policy and institutional entrepreneurship, but focuses on the role of entrepreneurial individuals (or groups of individuals) in implementing or transforming the governance arrangements themselves. Governance is often considered as an enabling or hindering condition for individual and collective actors (Henderson, 2019), predefined by external or exogenous factors occurring beyond the direct reach of the actors involved in governance. Governance entrepreneurship, however, points to the internally initiated changes in governance (Arnouts et al., 2012) that can be considered as underlying mechanisms of more far-reaching policy and institutional changes over time. Against this background, these changes might be classified as rather

unexpected outcomes of entrepreneurial activities (Sotarauta & Pulkkinen, 2011), revealing the more hidden and emergent dimensions of influential agency that are often overshadowed by formal authority and institutional power (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020).

Governance entrepreneurship might be of particular importance for places affected by peripheralization and challenges such as selective out-migration, economic decline or stigmatization (Kühn, 2015). Traditional decision-making structures often fall short of reacting adequately to these challenges (Sotarauta & Suvinen, 2018), as they might be too rigid or inflexible. Governance of peripheral places is often associated with a small number of actors and dense networks that tend to be averse to risk, and affect entrepreneurial activities negatively (Mayer & Baumgartner, 2014). As administrative and financial resources are also often scarce in these places, the proactive role of political decision-makers and the willingness to cooperate with other actors become even more important. Particularly the participation of non-governmental actors (from economy or civil society) in governance might be of vital importance to broaden local agency by establishing linkages to new groups of actors and non-local decision networks. The modification and adaptation of existing governance arrangements are considered an essential factor in dealing with peripheralization and promoting alternative paths of development.

THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF GOVERNANCE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In order to analyse individual agency in governance in regional development, an analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship has been introduced (Döringer, 2020a), which will be applied in the presented research. It defines governance arrangements as a temporary stabilization of decision-making structures that can, however, be modified and rearranged by the (groups of) individuals involved. Thereby, the framework does not claim that entrepreneurial individuals solely control local decision-making processes, yet it does argue that individuals can contribute to economic development outcomes by individual agency as well as through the collective agency they jointly constitute. It points to three relational dimensions that might be subject to changes brought about by governance entrepreneurs: actor composition, interaction modes and scale of action.

First, governance entrepreneurship might manifest itself in a change in actor composition and number of actors. This might imply the inclusion of individuals or organizations across different spheres that have not been involved in decision-making processes before. Besides, entrepreneurial individuals might also strive to include actors on higher governance levels to compensate for structural flaws (Svensson, 2019) or a loss of local resources and assets. It can be assumed that governance entrepreneurship could also imply the exclusion of actors if they endanger or hamper entrepreneurial activities (Leick & Gretzinger, 2018a). However, knowledge about the concrete modification mechanisms of actor composition in local governance is scarce to date.

Second, governance entrepreneurs might contribute to changes in modes or forms of interaction. Studies on policy and institutional entrepreneurship frequently highlight the importance of networking and cooperation for entrepreneurial individuals (Reimer & Saerbeck, 2017; Sotarauta, 2010) without explaining the wider implication of these strategies for the governance arrangement itself. In terms of entrepreneurial activities, hierarchical modes of interaction are often seen as a hindering factor, giving one or a few actors with formal authority the possibility to make decisions without the approval of others. Recurring dialogue-oriented interaction between entrepreneurial individuals might accelerate the transformation of a hierarchically organized governance structure to a more networked form of governance. Related to this aspect, governance entrepreneurs might also adapt organizational forms of interaction by mixing informal 'back-stage' and formal 'front-stage' practices (Ayres, 2017; Klijn, 2014).

The third dimension stresses the spatial perspective of governance entrepreneurship by pointing to the scale of action. It is assumed that the extension of an actor network or the modification of governance modes can also have spatial implications that goes beyond administrative borders and might, for instance, contribute to the establishment of regional governance. Entrepreneurial individuals that are capable of considering issues of scale are able to broaden their individual agency (Mintrom & Luetjens, 2017), but also to contribute to an extension of the 'region-specific opportunity space' (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020, p. 11). Focusing on scale of action as the object of governance change addresses a thus far under-researched spatial aspect in the literature on entrepreneurial individuals (Gailing & Ibert, 2016).

Overall, the paper considers governance entrepreneurs to be individuals who exercise choices and recombine governance elements which in turn might contribute to a change in local governance arrangements. The aim is to contextualize and explain the behaviour and interaction of entrepreneurial individuals in local governance. In order to do so, the relational dimensions guide, but do not limit, the analysis in advance. The analytical framework is sufficiently broad to provide a perspective on the nexus between the dimensions and to consider further aspects or characteristics of governance entrepreneurship.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts an interpretative qualitative methodology and is based on a comparative case study design in order to understand the inner logics of decision-making and individual agency in two towns in Austria undergoing socioeconomic peripheralization. The comparative design allows this study to contrast individual agency and governance patterns in comparable cities facing similar challenges. Towns A and B were selected because they share two criteria.¹ First, they are located in peripheralized Austrian regions (Eder, 2019) and have been confronted with socioeconomic transformation during the last decades. Second, both towns started several initiatives and projects involving the implementation of an innovation and working hub in order to address socio-spatial challenges. Creative hubs are an emerging phenomenon in rural areas combining functions such as collaborative manufacturing, co-creation and digital procedures. These projects are selected as representative examples of contemporary bottom-up-initiated problem-solving that translates urban trends of co-working and co-creating into a non-core, rural context. Dealing with innovation and working hubs might also indicate changing relevancies and aspirations of the local professional community.

Field research in these towns drew on interviews with representatives from the regional level as well as on a local media analysis. The on-site empirical enquiry comprised a documentary analysis, including information about the local development and particularly the creative hubs (e.g., concepts, protocols), and in-depth face-to-face interviews. The interviews were conducted with 18 interviewees from politics, economy and administration who were recruited through the snowball sampling technique (see Appendix A in the supplemental data online). This follows the principle of 'theoretical sampling', which describes an inductive procedure in interviewee selection based on the alternating collection and analysis of data (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). The sample size reflects the limited number of individuals who have (or have had) a responsibility and could give in-depth insights into the decision-making and development process.

The analysis focuses on entrepreneurial individuals as well as the interrelations and networks they form with other actors. The methodical approach supports the focus on personal relevancies in order to reconstruct the individual agency and role of individuals for changing governance arrangements and patterns. In order to elicit personal perceptions and intentions (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020), a methodical combination of problem-centred interviews (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) and theory-generating expert interviews (Bogner & Menz, 2009) was elaborated and used during field research (Döringer, 2020b). This qualitative interview combination starts

with a narrative beginning and follow-up questions focusing on thematic aspects, while particularly the initial narrative accounts encourage the interviewees to reveal their perspectives.

The case study aims at local theorizing and is oriented towards the principles of Grounded Theory, enabling researchers to develop a set of theoretical concepts grounded in the empirical data. In doing so, the analytical framework presented above served as a 'sensitising concept' (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) that guided the research without predefining it (Bowen, 2006). Keeping the general research interest on governance entrepreneurship in consideration, the principal research technique was inductive reasoning, and theoretical categories were developed gradually in accordance with the empirical material.

A CASE STUDY COMPARISON

In contrast with mainly centralized systems, decentralized systems such as the highly federalized state of Austria are deemed to foster the emergence of local initiatives (Sotarauta & Beer, 2017). The regional development system in Austria is based on a complex composition of administrative levels, devolving responsibilities on different levels. After Austria joined the European Union in 1995, the regional scale gained importance, a process that was institutionalized by the LEADER programme and regional development agencies. The municipalities have self-governing rights and enjoy a high degree of autonomy in planning and local development matters (Humer, 2018).

Town A and Alpha-Campus

Town A is a small-sized city in the federal state of Lower Austria located in a pre-Alpine, rural region representing a population of about 11,000 people (the linear distance to Vienna is about 120 km). The population has decreased in recent decades, primarily because of out-migration (the 2001–19 total is –401; Statistics Austria, 2020). In the past, the town had been confronted with housing and retailing property vacancies in the inner city, which could be successfully addressed through a large-scale inner-city development process involving various actors from politics, the economy and civil society. Town A has a long tradition in steel production driven by a few major companies, and a broad range of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) affected by labour-market and economic transformation. Out-migration and the loss of skilled workers in the industrial sector are two of the main challenges for the political and economic actors. In the last funding period, the LEADER action group has also addressed these challenges, since the industrial companies are proactive participators in regional development.

In recent years, the idea of an innovation hub linking functions such as working, research, education and housing has developed among the local entrepreneurs. The idea of the innovation hub called Alpha-Campus emerged from the long-term economic transformation of the region, which dates from the year 2000, when the loss of skilled workers became clearly noticeable for the regional enterprises (interviews W7 and W9). The project started out with a feasibility study conducted in the course of a LEADER project in 2016 in search of an appropriate location, before its realization started in 2018 in a vacant 9000 m² former industrial building located near the city centre. Two key initiatives in regional economy preceded the implementation of Alpha-Campus: a regional education, research and networking platform, founded in 2009 and driven by five regional major companies (interview W6), and a regional job fair association, which was started in 2015 by Martin Huber, the owner of a medium-sized enterprise located in town A (interview W7).

All interviewees displayed a high degree of self-confidence and the endeavour to define objectives of development within the region, as higher governance levels and programmes addressed the local needs only insufficiently. The interviews revealed a culture of collective 'network thinking', which was particularly evident in economic cooperation guiding the individuals'

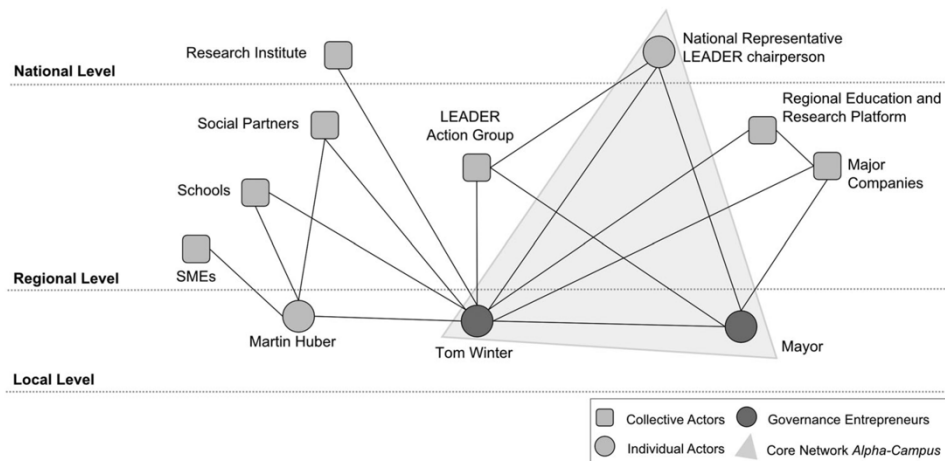


Figure 1. Network of Alpha-Campus.

behaviour (interviews W4, W6 and W9). Hence, various governmental and non-governmental actors from different levels were involved in the creation of Alpha-Campus. However, a small steering group consisting of three actors headed the project: the mayor, a national representative and Tom Winter, a local entrepreneur (interviews W3, W4, W7 and W8) (Figure 1). The exclusive ‘advocacy coalition’ (Mintrom & Norman, 2009), defined as a group of actors from different spheres sharing the same political aim, draws upon grown mutual trust and the sharing of beliefs and targets.

The mayor of town A enjoys trust among different groups in the local economic sector and is described as idea-driven, ambitious and open-minded towards the concerns of the regional enterprises (interviews W4, W7 and W10). The latter attribution might also be traced back to his former job experience in a regional innovation centre and his established industry contacts. The national representative lives in the region and has multiple functions, as he also is chairperson of the LEADER region (interviews W4 and W7). The entrepreneur Tom Winter essentially developed the idea of Alpha-Campus and is considered the main driver of the process by all the interviewees. He is head of an international, family-run firm in the automotive sector, which has a long regional tradition. His predecessors have already given an impetus for regional development projects in the past, albeit rather taking the role of ‘regional development sponsors’ (interviews W2 and W3). In general, the entrepreneurial individuals associated with Alpha-Campus have occupied different kinds of positions over the years and have formed relations to a large range of people. Based on their different backgrounds, these individuals can bundle heterogeneous social and financial resources. However, in terms of socio-structural characteristics, the ‘small, fine network’ (interview W8) appears to be very homogenous, being a group of middle-aged, well-educated men from the region.

Town B and Cospace

Town B is a small-sized city in the Alpine region of Styria. It has about 8200 inhabitants (the linear distance to Vienna is about 105 km). The total population has declined continuously in the last decades (the 2001–19 total is –659; Statistics Austria, 2020). The city itself has only limited financial resources available due to different necessary investments in its social and technical infrastructure in the recent past. The biggest employer is an international steel company, which employs about 1100 people at its plant in town B. The inner city has been suffering from a high rate of retail property vacancies, which is addressed by a retail vacancy platform. Against

this background, a city renewal process called Regio Branding was initiated about two years ago in order to address these vacancies and to create a more attractive city centre.

This inner-city development induced a few locals to develop the idea of Cospace: a multi-functional hub combining working, design thinking and co-creation. The formerly vacant industrial building of about 16,000 m² that houses the project is situated a walking distance between the local railway station and city centre. After a local investor had bought the building in 2009, a few businesses and retailers have moved in and established a loose form of cooperation. The broader process of the establishment of Cospace started in 2018. The entrepreneurial individuals did not feel any personal pressure to act, but wanted to take the window of opportunity to develop the vacant building and to create space for founders, start-ups and firms. In the interviews, the initiators described themselves as creative and lateral thinkers, a perception which the mayor labels with the term 'Town B Sprit' (interview K16). They stressed the culture of 'honest collaboration' in the city and the authenticity of their projects. An interesting contradiction in the interviews was the local dislike for formal strategies. The latter, however, became increasingly evident in municipal policy-making, for instance during the city renewal and marketing process. In contrast, they underlined that their action was driven by spontaneity instead of strategic considerations (interviews K15 and K16).

The steering group of Cospace encompasses three people: Michael Taler, the owner of a small-sized information technology (IT) retail enterprise located in the Cospace complex, and Maria Brunner, a tax consultant and owner of the industrial building (Figure 2). The main driver of the project, Michael Taler, one of the first tenants in the building, advises the local retail association and has initiated a variety of projects in the city for several years. The other interviewees considered him the 'creative head of the project' (interviews K13 and K17). Due to his contacts within local retailing networks, he also assumed the task of managing the vacancies in the inner city in 2017. During his professional career, he initially worked for international IT enterprises and established his own business concepts later on. He was eager to realize his ideas by applying trends, such as digitalization and flexible working, and intends to give young people an economic perspective in the town. Taler distances himself from formal political processes and party politics (interviews K13, K14 and K15). Brunner, who is also located at Cospace and is primarily responsible for the financial and funding processing, supports him. She was a long-standing member of the municipal council, but wanted to obtain

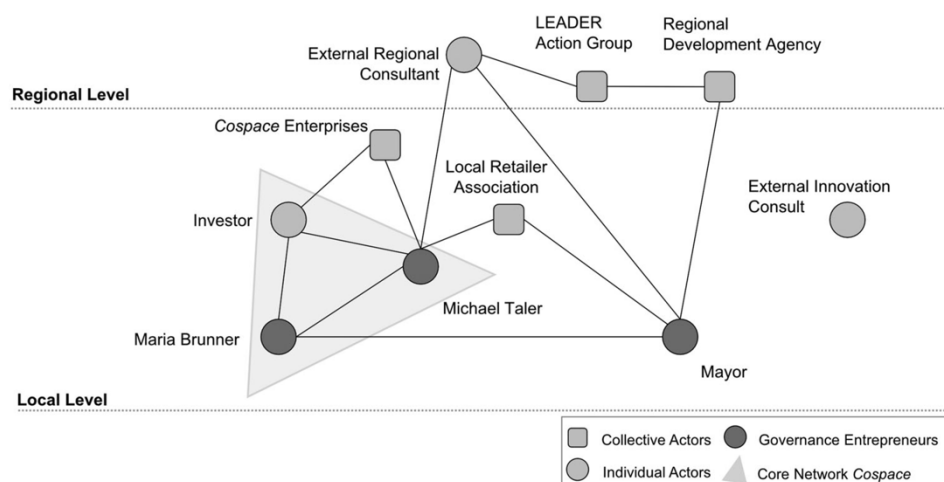


Figure 2. Network of Cospace.

more flexibility (interview K14). The investor of Cospace, who uses one part of the building for his own company, highlighted that the business-friendly environment in the town motivated him to invest in the vacant industrial building. While Taler and Brunner provide the conceptual ideas of Cospace, the investor affords the financial resources (interview K17). The enterprises that moved into Cospace during the last years have been operating in various industrial and trading sectors and have been flexibly cooperating with each other by sharing or combining specific services or products.

The mayor of town B, who has held his position since 2009, stimulates a networked governance arrangement allowing non-governmental actors to engage in decision-making processes. He takes a mediating role, bringing people together and finding common ground for different actors. The entrepreneurial ideas of Cospace are regularly coordinated with the mayor (interviews K15 and K18). He welcomes the entrepreneurial initiatives but tends to operate in the background of Cospace. The following statement sketches the mayor's assessment of the developments in town B:

We are unique, and what is happening now is unique, too. We have really accomplished much through *Regio Branding*, and at *Cospace*, where people meet up, where teams are being formed, and design thinking is taking place. This is something that we wouldn't have conceived of a few years ago, and I include myself in saying that. (interview K16)

DISCUSSION OF GOVERNANCE ENTREPRENEURSHIP: RELATIONAL AND TEMPORAL DIMENSIONS

The analysis reveals that in both cities the political and economic sectors jointly committed themselves to developing the regional economy, while the involvement of broader civil society currently plays only a minor role in the initiatives (interviews W8 and K15). Despite these similarities, the underlying causes that triggered the entrepreneurial individuals to initiate the projects differ in the two towns. In town A, the loss of skilled workers was perceived as 'pressure to act', which prompted the individuals to become active in regional development. In the case of town B, the relevant actors recognized urban vacancy as a spatial resource and adopted this 'window of opportunity' (Kingdon, 1995) to realize their ideas.

Relational dimensions

The analytical framework of governance entrepreneurship allows taking a critical view on relational changes that might be induced by governance entrepreneurs distinguishing between the dimensions of actor composition, interaction mode and scale of action. Against this background, four central theoretical components of governance entrepreneurship could be gleaned from the empirical material: the (re)combination of horizontal and vertical pipelines, (in-)formalization, individual legitimization and regional rescaling.

Actor composition: (re)combining horizontal and vertical pipelines

The first dimension sheds a light on changes in actor composition and reveals how entrepreneurial individuals combine and establish horizontal and vertical channels of communication called *pipelines*² to selected actors located outside of the own milieu in order to accelerate flows of resources and knowledge.

While the network core of Alpha-Campus in town A is exclusive, the extended network is open and inclusive, comprising a variety of enterprises, schools, social partners and organizations that provide social, administrative or financial support and resources (interview W5). Tom Winter and the mayor both mobilized existing contacts in economy, politics and the sciences.

They also established new axes of power across horizontal and vertical boundaries. Winter emphasized, for instance, the purpose pursued by the economic sector of integrating secondary schools in the regional innovation network in order to connect enterprises and students at an early stage of their education. Thereby, he could build upon the efforts of Martin Huber, who had already managed to maintain close contacts with schools due to his engagement in the job fair association. Before the efforts of the entrepreneurs, the ‘ecosystem “school”’ and the ‘ecosystem “economy”’ (interview W9) had long remained separated. Entrepreneurial activities were aimed at a dialogue-oriented exchange of information between enterprises and schools, which has been reinforced over time through grown personal connections between the individuals involved (interviews W7 and W9). Although politics and economy cooperate very closely in town A, Tom Winter and Martin Huber both clearly distance themselves from party-political interests. While stressing that they do not want to be co-opted politically, on the one hand, they highlighted the importance of coordinating their entrepreneurial activities with political leaders, on the other: ‘We have had mayors from different parties, but we always have the commitment of the town ...’ (interview W9).

The network of Alpha-Campus can also draw upon political and economic support across different governance levels. Winter significantly contributed to these connections by leveraging his contacts and building vertical pipelines to higher levels of governance. Nevertheless, the inclusion of new actors takes place gradually in order to guarantee a successful integration (interviews W5 and W7). In doing so, the entrepreneurial individuals in town A also reveal an advanced capacity for network management (Ayres & Stafford, 2014).

The network around Cospace was mainly established through the personal contacts of Michael Taler. Beside close connections to the economic sector, he also, for instance, has a good relationship with local media representatives (interviews K16 and K18). Political or administrative actors have played only a minor role in the development of Cospace. The steering group finds it cumbersome to explain their ideas to the members of the municipal council, as their activities have not always been well understood in the past (interviews K14 and K15). Vertical axes primarily develop through connections of an external regional consultant or of the mayor. The mayor, for instance, addressed the regional scale in order to obtain funding through the regional development agency, albeit that the impetus to connect on the regional level was provided by Maria Brunner: ‘Then I said to the mayor: You have to call Mr. Schmidt from the regional development agency, we need an appointment. Let us explain our project to him and see what happens’ (interview K15).

The interviews in town B provided evidence that individuals have also been excluded from the local economic network. This was the case, for instance, when differences arose concerning responsibilities as well as the orientation of the project between the locals and an external innovation consultant, which caused the power structures of the network to come under pressure. In contrast, the regional consultant who now advises the initiators of Cospace managed to build trust by empowering them and their ideas. He provides his expertise in project development, for instance, in terms of establishing co-working and design thinking, but leaves the strategic decisions to the locals (interviews K13 and K18).

In both cases, the findings reveal that entrepreneurial individuals change governance arrangements by altering and (re)combining connections ranging across horizontal and vertical boundaries. The individuals draw upon elements and fragments of existing partnerships and networks, but also form new actor relations in order to broaden their agency. In town A, the horizontal alliances foster a local support system, while the multilevel governance connections allow for a rapid transfer of local project ideas and a straightforward acquisition of external support (interview W8). In town B, the network of Cospace crosses multiple local spheres, but does not aim at vertical integration. In both towns, the implementation of horizontal and vertical pipelines is based on personal contacts primarily resulting from multiple positions and functions

of individuals. Actors are included in the network when perceptions and aims are shared, when they are needed to implement the aim of the project, or when they support the realization of a project by providing support and expertise. In contrast, the case of Cospace shows how actors are excluded from the network when beliefs diverge and targets of the initiators are compromised (interview K18).

Modes of interaction: (in-)formalization and individual legitimization

The second dimension of governance entrepreneurship sheds a light on changes in modes of governance interaction. The results of this case study suggest that both towns embody characteristics of networked governance that enable individuals from the non-governmental sphere to participate in local economic development. These results can be linked to findings of the policy and institutional entrepreneurship literature that highlight the importance of networking and the establishment of coalitions for entrepreneurial individuals when they strive to create or alter policy instruments or institutions (Brouwer & Huitema, 2018; Leick, 2017).

In terms of organizational forms of interaction, the entrepreneurial individuals of Alpha-Campus prioritized informal practices instead of existing formal governance arrangements, particularly in the design phase, when they framed ideas or set up the further agenda. Informal connections and meetings were preferred for contacting policy-makers at higher levels in order to obtain administrative or financial support. Within the core network group of Alpha-Campus, roles and tasks have been distributed flexibly during the implementation process within a 'back-stage' setting (Klijn, 2014), with meetings often taking place beyond regular working hours:

We have not been defining our responsibilities, such as, you have to do that, you have to do this, or something like this, it emerges when we meet each other. We truly regularly meet each other. Sometimes at 7.00 o'clock in the morning, then we drink a coffee in a cafe in the city and then again, we define the next steps. (interview W8)

However, over time, the locals strived to transform the entrepreneurial partnerships and networks into explicit formal structures (interviews W2 and W9). Recently, the Alpha-Campus association was founded, comprising a group of 40 regional enterprises. The enterprises pay a membership fee and provide financial support, on the one hand, and can take advantage of the infrastructure and offers of the Campus, on the other (interview W7).

In town B, the processes around Cospace are organized very informally and characterized by incremental decision-making. During the leadership period of the former mayor, local government was long rather hierarchically organized. The current mayor ensures horizontal structures and encourages an informal, networked governance setting that enables the entrepreneurial individuals to promote alternative strategies for economic development. Although there are currently no aspirations to formalize the process, it can be observed that the entrepreneurial coalition is consolidating. Recently, they started to develop a new revitalization project, which aims at combining a sustainable and social pop-up-store concept in a formerly vacant building in the town (interviews K15–K17). The project idea is based on the same established informal arrangement and distribution of responsibilities as is Cospace.

The cases uncover phases of informal and formal governance practices. Particularly in the design phase of entrepreneurial activities, the locals demonstrate an intuitive form of agency (Sotarauta & Suvinen, 2018), showing a tendency to draw upon informal options. The findings in town A document that the entrepreneurial individuals prefer an informal alliance-building process in the initial phase, supporting the creation of visions and the formulation of common targets. In this phase, formal structures are bypassed because they are seen as constraining factors in decision-making. However, in the ongoing process of implementation, the individuals

strive to set up formal organizational structures (e.g., associations) in order to anchor new practices and positions. Whereas an advanced stage of formalization can be observed in town A, the findings suggest that town B might be in an earlier phase, drawing on informal networking and cooperation. However, as the entrepreneurial initiative in town B tends to consolidate in the development of new projects, the arrangement might become more formalized. Additionally, there are proposals to appoint a formal Cospace management (interview K2).

As non-governmental individuals often hold an informal network position primarily associated with the social capital of actors (Battilana et al., 2009), entrepreneurial individuals often strive to uphold close contacts to political actors in the centre of decision-making processes in order to compensate for their lack of legitimacy (Mintrom & Norman, 2009). The results of this case study confirm these observations, as the entrepreneurial individuals from the economic sector in both towns cultivate close contacts to the mayors in order to embed their projects in local policy-making.

Besides, the two cases reveal processes of individual legitimization of the involved entrepreneurs by creating and implementing new leadership positions linked with power and formal authority, for example, as chairperson or vacancy coordinator. By taking up these positions, entrepreneurial individuals from the economic sector can influence the distribution of power and bring about the formal legitimization of their activities. Through this process, the individuals gain official authority in decision-making processes and thus increase their agency.

Scale of action: regional rescaling

The third dimension focusing on the scale of governance reveals the process of *regional rescaling*. In the case of town A, the entrepreneurial individuals strive for a regional embedding of local initiatives. Tom Winter and the mayor argue for wider exposure of Alpha-Campus in a regional context and conceptualize it as one of several regional locations setting different organizational and technological development priorities. In future, Alpha-Campus will be coordinated by a regional education platform in order to share resources. In 2019, the targets and principles of the regional economic development were also formalized by means of a mission statement. The document was signed by representatives of economy and politics (interview W9) and will guide the future decision-making processes in the region. By doing so, the entrepreneurial individuals increase their individual agency, but also rescale the 'opportunity space' (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020, p. 11) of the town by bundling institutional resources that are sparsely distributed in peripheral places. In town A, the individuals have been establishing a regional governance network by including the enterprises of the region, embedding the project in regional development strategies and connecting it with existing initiatives. Furthermore, there is evidence that town A also shapes the development of surrounding towns by transferring local attitudes and orientations into the region.

In town B, in contrast, the regional scope plays only a subordinate role in entrepreneurial efforts, as the individuals explicitly orient their activities towards the local scale. The regional scale primarily played a role in project funding, as a small proportion is financed by the regional development agency within a regional programme called Start-up Cityregion, aiming at the renewal of inner cities by creating space for founders in vacant buildings (interview K12). In some respects, the interviews even provided evidence that competitive behaviour dominates the relation between town B and the other cities of the region. Asked about regional embeddedness, Michael Taler explained that he is not interested in manoeuvring through the political and administrative regional 'jungle of interests' (Sotarauta, 2010):

Start-up Cityregion was conceived as a supra-regional project in which other towns of the region are involved and I don't know at all whether this is happening, but the larger the whole thing is, the

more inflexible does its apparatus become, so I actually don't pay attention to that. ... In truth, we are now busy with our own matters. (interview K14)

Although the locals are of the opinion that town B takes the idea-generating role for the surrounding cities, the initiators do not intend at this stage to establish the project on a regional scale (interviews K14 and K18).

Temporal dimensions

The case analysis also revealed interesting findings concerning the nexus of the relational dimensions, pointing to a temporal dimension of governance change. In town A, there is evidence of long-term *governance transition*, while in town B the findings initially suggest a short-term *governance shift*.

Governance transition in town A

A consolidated governance network can be observed for the economic field in town A. Over a long period, the entrepreneurial individuals formed local and regional cooperative governance arrangements based on the commitment of politics and economy in order to address challenges of peripheralization. Whereas about 20 years ago there still had been little interaction between these two groups, and the economy acted separately from politics, the relationship has been changing since that time (interviews W2, W3 and W10). Meanwhile, the roles have become clearly divided between the partners: the economic actors drive the entrepreneurial activities, while the policy decision-makers operate in a supporting role (interviews W1 and W4). The foundation of the regional platform, job fair association and Alpha-Campus can be identified as crucial milestones in these developments (see Appendix B in the supplemental data online).

When the entrepreneurs started the Alpha-Campus initiative in town A, they could draw upon established partnerships and networks provided by former generations of entrepreneurial individuals to realize their idea of a regional working laboratory and innovation hub. In this sense, governance entrepreneurship in town A is characterized as a long-term and collective *governance transition*, driven by various entrepreneurial individuals from politics and economy in different phases. These generations have established a regional way of network thinking (Sotarauta & Suvinen, 2018) and constructed a common local narrative serving as an informal regional institution (Beer, 2014).

Currently, the formalization of Alpha-Campus and the associated entrepreneurial activities of Tom Winter and the mayor deliver an essential component to this governance transition. The governance entrepreneurs establish various horizontal and vertical pipelines to a large array of people that might serve as fundamental resources for future entrepreneurial generations. These findings confirm the observation of Sotarauta and Mustikkamäki (2015, p. 12) that the final implementation of entrepreneurial activities 'involves a series of interrelated decisions and actions' that crosses many spheres and levels. In other words, in town A the entrepreneurial individuals are 'handing over the baton' from one 'generational unit' to the next. This paper delineates 'generational units'³ as groups of entrepreneurial individuals who take different roles in governance arrangements, but jointly contribute to the transition of governance at a certain time and place. In the case of town A, one can identify a pioneering 'generational unit' that connected political and economic actors and initiated the inner-city development about 15 years ago (interviews W3 and W10), and a consolidating 'generational unit' currently strengthening and broadening the economic development efforts (interviews W2 and W7).

Governance shift in town B

The findings in town B suggest evidence of a governance shift, defined as an initially short-term, project-oriented creation of governance arrangements and modes in the field of local economic development (see Appendix B in the supplemental data online). In town B, governance

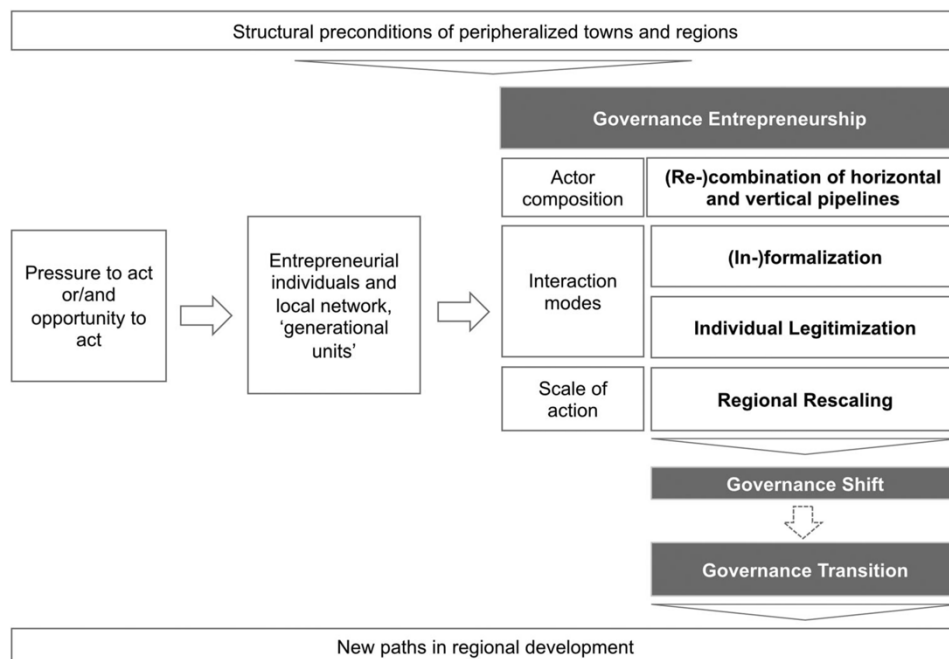


Figure 3. Middle-range theory of governance entrepreneurship.

entrepreneurship takes place less strategically than in town A, and in a more implicit and uncodified way. The findings indicate an initial change in 'how things are done' and exposes tendencies towards a cautious opening of the town, starting with the commission of an external consultant for the city renewal process and Cospace. While the political leadership created a fruitful environment for bottom-up initiatives, the locals used this opportunity for entrepreneurial activities, arranging informal responsibilities for the realization of Cospace. However, it seems that the entrepreneurial group is consolidating in order to give future impetus in local economic development through further revitalization projects. This newly founded arrangement might lead to a more profound governance transition if an increased degree of coordinated activity could be realized over time. In this sense, the temporal perspective on governance change might indicate that the governance arrangements in town B might be in an earlier phase than those in town A.

Middle-range theory of governance entrepreneurship in peripheralized towns

The main objective of this comparative case analysis is to develop a middle-range theory aiming to explain governance entrepreneurship in regional development. Figure 3 provides a middle-range conceptualization, summarizing the main findings and contextualizing the relational and temporal theoretical components discussed beforehand. It sketches how governance entrepreneurship might take place in peripheralized areas and how it might influence regional development. It can be concluded that beyond the establishment of horizontal pipelines on the local scale, it is the implementation of vertical pipelines and regional rescaling that contributes decisively to the mobilization of (external) human capital, financial resources and knowledge in peripheral places. Governance entrepreneurs in the periphery also show a preference for informal practices in a 'back-stage' setting (Klijn, 2014) in order to guarantee flexibility when negotiating in favour of locally developed ideas. Processes of formalization and individual legitimization are

in turn prioritized in the further course of project implementation to ensure the integration in institutionalized settings and political agendas.

CONCLUSIONS

This comparative case study contributes to the emerging literature dealing with agency and regional development (Benner, 2020; Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). It takes a relational and temporal perspective explaining how and to what extent governance entrepreneurs might influence governance arrangements and, subsequently, paths of regional development. The case analysis reveals different shapes and temporalities of governance entrepreneurship. In town A, ‘generational units’ of governance entrepreneurs can be identified, transforming governance arrangements by altering actor compositions, interaction modes and scales of action. In contrast, the governance patterns and entrepreneurial behaviour in town B provide evidence for an initial governance shift progressing incrementally while being highly dependent on the engagement of single individuals.

Governance entrepreneurship might contribute to more place-based and tailor-made solutions overcoming horizontal and vertical boundaries and leading to a greater acceptance of the local community. However, these activities can also cause a pooling of decision-making competences of a few individuals pursuing a specific economic agenda. By occupying multiple functions and through entrepreneurial legitimization, individuals from the economic sphere can accumulate a high degree of power, leading to a one-dimensional or too narrow-minded perspective on regional (economic) development (Leick & Gretzinger, 2018b).

This paper aims neither at evaluating local governance structures nor at assessing whether economic change processes succeed or fail. Much rather it strives to overcome the focus on success stories in economic geography (Henderson, 2019) by highlighting the locals’ perspectives and relevancies in order to understand economic development processes in peripheral places. It intends to detect changes in actor compositions and interaction modes amidst an open-ended regional development process in order to improve the theoretical understanding of self-reflexive individuals in local economic development and of their influence on such development (Sotarauta, 2010). Future investigations could, however, also aim for an integration of normative concepts (such as ‘good governance’) in the framework of governance entrepreneurship in order to advance an evaluative approach.

NOTES

¹ All interviewees were guaranteed personal anonymity for the sake of building trust and gaining in-depth insights into the local networks and power relations surrounding the projects. The names of all cities, interviewees and projects were therefore replaced by pseudonyms.

² The wording of this theoretical component is inspired by the economic geography concept of *global pipelines* by Bathelt et al. (2004).

³ The notion is inspired by the historiographical concept of ‘generational units’. Recently, this term has also begun to be used in the literature dealing with economic entrepreneurship denoting ‘generational units’ as subgroups within generations (Huggins & Thompson, 2019). They shape collective memories through space and time by providing a cultural and structural framework that influences future entrepreneurial action (Lippmann & Aldrich, 2016).

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