

# **CENTROPE - 15 years after Reflections and perspectives**

Network Conference of Spa-ce.net

**“From SMART Cities to SMART Regions in  
Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe”**

22.– 23. November 2018, Bratislava (Slovakia)

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22.11.2018

# Contents

- Introduction, timeline
- Methodology
- Visions
- Branding
- First results

# 15 years of CENTROPE



## CENTROPE - Initiative, Project, Region, Brand, Vision

- Kittsee 2003 – declaration of the joint initiative – „Building an european region“
  - St. Pölten 2005 Political memorandum „We grow togherter, Together we grow“
  - Vienna 2006 Political memorandum „We shape the future“
  - Bratislava 2007 Memorandum „Ready for take-off“
  - Győr 2011 „Region without borders“
  - CENTROPE Summits – Bratislava, Brno , Pamhagen 2012
- Project Interreg III.A. (Authors – Austrian Consortium Centrope, eco plus, europaforum wien, regional consulting, wibag, wwff) SR ?, CR? H?

1989	Fall of the Iron Curtain
1995	Austria's EU entry
1997	Austria's Schengen entry
2002	Austria introduced EURO
2003	Kittsee Centrope declaration
2003 - 2006	Interreg IIIA project "Building a European Region"
2004	Slovakia's EU entry
2007	Slovakia's Schengen entry
2007	Opening of Austria's A6 highway
2008	Cross-border bus line 901
2009	Slovakia introduced EURO
2009 - 2012	Centrope Capacity project (OP CE)
2011	Opening of Austria's labor market
2012	Opening of Bridge of Liberty
2015	BAUM Urbanistic study
2017	BAUM 2020 project - opening of office

## CENTROPE partners

### Austria

- Region (federal states): Burgenland, Lower Austria, Vienna
- Cities: Eisenstadt, St. Pölten, Vienna

### Czech Republic

- Region: South Moravia
- City: Brno

### Hungary

- Region (county): Győr-Moson-Sopron
- Cities: Győr, Sopron

### Slovak Republic:

- Region: Bratislava, Trnava
- Cities: Bratislava, Trnava



## TASKS:

- Binding co-operation framework
- Development of vision & strategy
- Identification of added value
- Mobilization of stakeholders
- Strategic coordination
- Realization pilot projects
- PR & Marketing

# Methodology

1

Desk  
research

2

Knowledge  
gaps

Formulation  
of RQs

3

Interviews

Document  
analysis

Publication  
metrics

## Vision 2015 (reconsidered in 2017):

- Labour market restriction in Austria has been lifted.
- The economic growth of the CENTROPE is slightly decelerated, the region seems to be affected by economic crisis.
- 
- Intensification of cooperation between “old” and “new” EU member states continues.
- Communication and cooperation among the actors and bodies of CENTROPE goes on.
- **„Good but not enough good to keep up“**  
The feeling of common regional identity, social cohesion within the region, feeling of togetherness is still rather mediocre/weak and unprofiled. („CENTROPE is no more than cluster of regions“ – Neue Zuercher Zeitung, 10.12.2011)
- Despite of the media coverage of all the main CENTROPE events, the public remained rather unattached and the feedback is scarce. Decision-making processes are still not fully harmonised. Synergetic effects of common Central European „planning culture“ are not utilised.
- Business forces prefer to be related rather to the TWIN-City Brand than to CENTROPE. CENTROPE is vague, slow and „old-fashioned“.
- Main concern is that CENTROPE is still perceived as rather more scientific or in best case political concept and necessary business-driven attention is lacking.

## • CENTROPE Vision 2015 (\*2005-6)

- “we grow together, together we grow”
- Enthusiasm of 2000s (5% p.a. growth)
- Top-down approach, built on cooperation between governments
- Bold goals, weak roadmap
- Did not overcome political/academic character and did not penetrate into public
- Absence of third parties (NGOs, private sector)

## • CENTROPE Strategy 2013+ (\*2012)

- Outcome of CENTROPE CAPACITY
- More realistic objectives, reflects past turbulent years
- Remains a top-down initiative
- Lists concrete initiatives
- Acknowledges the challenges of potential brain drain or excessive orientation on automobile industry
- Uses term governance, but without defining it

# Corpus analysis

CENTROPE 2015				CENTROPE 2013+				Differences	
Rank	Occurrence	Word	%	Rank	Occurrence	Word	%	Position*	Occurrence*
1	370	CENTROPE	1,42%	1	335	CENTROPE	1,53%	0	35
2	209	region	0,80%	2	154	region	0,70%	0	55
3	172	European	0,66%	33	34	European	0,16%	-30	138
4	134	co-operation	0,51%	4	83	co-operation	0,38%	0	51
5	116	Region	0,45%	44	30	Region	0,14%	-39	86
6	115	regions	0,44%	8	73	regions	0,33%	-2	42
9	97	development	0,37%	3	116	development	0,53%	6	-19
10	94	research	0,36%	15	50	research	0,23%	-5	44
12	89	cross-border	0,34%	5	78	cross-border	0,36%	7	11
15	65	market	0,25%	37	32	market	0,15%	-22	33
16	62	regional	0,24%	14	53	regional	0,24%	2	9
19	58	common	0,22%	12	62	common	0,28%	7	-4
21	56	new	0,21%	21	45	new	0,21%	0	11
23	54	activities	0,21%	17	49	activities	0,22%	6	5
25	52	Vienna	0,20%	19	47	Vienna	0,21%	6	5
27	50	labour	0,19%	23	42	labour	0,19%	4	8
29	48	transport	0,18%	11	65	transport	0,30%	18	-17

## Branding and Identity:

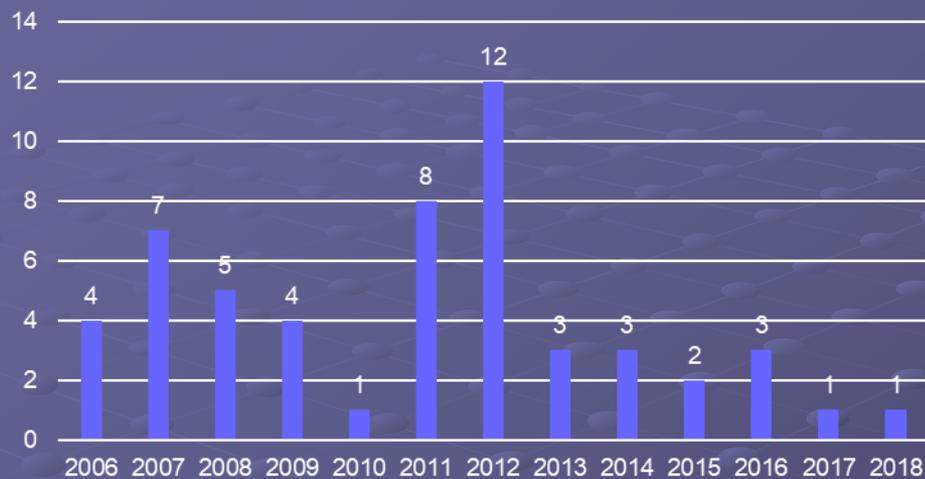
- CENTROPE name and brand - schoolchildren competition back in 2002
- The name CENTROPE is sticking the both basic semantic characteristics of region – CENTRAL and EUROPE together. Under this name the first cross-border Interreg III A project has been launched.
- The name CENTROPE has been widely used in scientific, research circles as well as in media. However, the business reflection is rather weak and the knowledge among the inhabitants is not so deep as intended. One of the few exceptions is Raiffeisenlandesbank Niederoesterreich Wien referring to CENTROPE as the main area of its activities.

## Marketing outcomes:

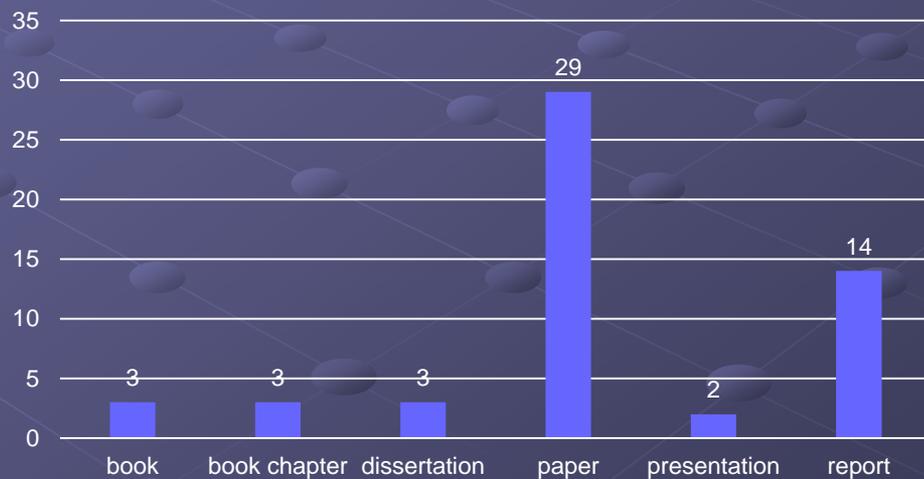
*4 x 100.000 Readers, Add-In  
Der Standard Special Centrope (4 x Enclosure  
as download in Czech, Slovak, Hungarian)  
21.000 x Centrope in Internet  
7 Video clips (1.000 DVDs)  
3 Kino spots (starting Mid December)*

*8 Music groups Centrope-sound (2.000  
CDs)  
1.400 Youth, 6 Concerts  
200 Yachtsman + Audience  
3.000 Centrope-Folder  
4 political events  
1 website: Info-Platform*

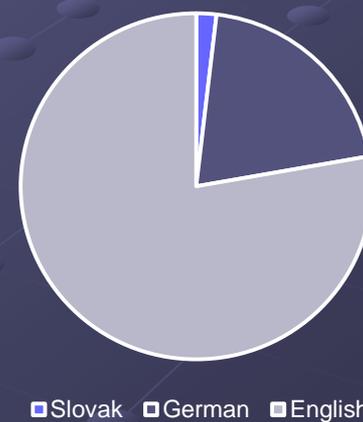
### Number of publications by year



### Number of publications by document type



### Number of publications by language



## Project METRONET respondents quotations (2011):

*„I guess that there is a lot of perspective for example in culture and education, especially between Czech and Slovak part of CENTROPE. The relations remained very close and friendly, even after dissolution of former Czechoslovakia, e.g. mayors of borderline municipalities on the both sides organize each summer the common meetings and happenings which are extremely popular on both sides.“ (Brno)*

● ***The situation in the Slovak-Austrian border has been dramatically changed during last decade.** Many Austrian entrepreneurial groups invested their money in the Slovak projects, they bought Slovak properties and companies. This overturned even the mutual commuting balance: once, in the 90ies, more than 6000 people commuted daily from Slovakia to Austria. Now the ratio is more or less balanced, young people from those borderline municipalities (Kitsee, Wolfsthal, Hainburg) got used to dine in Bratislava.“ (City of Bratislava)*

● ***The expectations of crossborder cooperation were really high, but not everything has been fulfilled.** Regarding initiative CENTROPE, I think this is mainly focus on exchange of information, discussions and feedback, but the real impact on the daily life within the region is rather low. CENTROPE was never a part of daily life, neither in municipal nor in commercial field. If you compare that with the impact of marketing Brand Twin City (Vienna - Bratislava), the distinction is obvious, the companies would rather feel to be associated with Twin City Brand“. (Bratislava region)*

## What is Centrope?

- “Very ambitious initiative with many stakeholders, very relevant issue, also historical background with the fall of the iron curtain...regions in Central Europe are aiming at working so closely together... there is this big initiative starting from Kittsee in 2003 and then following EU funded projects to implement this initiative.”
- “The idea is quite great, because some of the regions from 4 different countries are really close together. You have 4 cities – Vienna, Bratislava, Brno and Gyor on Hungarian side. So 4 different cities which are more or less the stars of the region and behind these 4 stars you have the common region, but from 4 different countries. It is quite a compact region.”
- “That is tricky...you hear word Centrope especially in politics talking about this big territory with Bratislava, Vienna, Brno and the Hungary part, because there is no word for this very functional related territory, so Centrope is somehow trying to define this area. So for me when I am talking about the border region starting from Brno, Bratislava, Vienna to the Hungarian part Sopron and Gyor, is for me today Centrope.”

## Milestones

- “one of the milestones was the declaration of Centrope, the second milestone was the start of when the Europa Forum Vienna started to manage the project, when also in Bratislava, the House of Centrope was established and then they had their own funds for smaller trans-national projects-this was the very important milestone as well, but I think the last 7-8 years I did not hear of Centrope very much any more”
- “This memorandum in Kittsee, this Centrope strategy which was past the conference in Panhalm in October 2012. And between that are the different pilot actions, like the ‘infrastructure needs assessment tool’ INAD which is this publication and the regional development report on the development and then tourism and culture, there is this [tourcentrope.eu](http://tourcentrope.eu) that is still active and driven by Slovakian, Tatiana Mikusova. The last milestone is in my opinion missing, this would be Centrope coordination office, which I think was a task of this EU funded project but failed.”
- “The kick off in Kittsee, the positive agreement about Interreg – these 2-3 project, and also, in the first years more, now it is less, the annual political conference”

## Successes

- professionalisation of public administration
- Better understanding in the region
- “I think the biggest success was to create this image at all, which is still very much alive. Also the activities may not be very much alive as we heard before, but to create a label for such a diverse region, cross-border, multinational, multifunctional and so on, is, as itself, is for me the biggest success, that it is still alive.”
- “Actually, after this division of Europe that the regional and local politicians and administrations started to work closely together and started to communicate on official conferences, workshops, exchanges and expert exchanges, there were some soft factors you cannot count, but in the background you can still have profit from. For example for other projects it is easier to call someone in Bratislava or development partner, we know some people there, they can help us and the other way around.”
- “Even if there are low cooperation fields, there is also the brand Centrope and the focus is that I am the member of this Centrope region...”
- “one of the biggest success was to starting to deal with this whole territory. From the historical point of view this was not so easy, you know Benes decrees, Hungary-Austria history border is not that easy, I think Slovak-Austria was not a big problem. But at the end you have the topic between Hungary and Slovak people along the Danube with the border and the water topic, you have the difficulties between the Czechs and Slovak people because of history, so I think it was really mutig, really strong and good idea to have this difficult parts of the region together”

## Limitations

- cultural differences, feeling small, dominance of Vienna “what Austrian says must be true”, being put on front of already agreed thing

- “I can remember there was Centrope Map of the whole Centrope and with all different languages and also English, but there was just the picture of Michael Haupl, the mayor of Vienna, not of the colleague from Bratislava. I don’t know from Hungary, and it was just Michael Haupl, the mayor of Vienna, big big Centrope region”

- “Financial resources were not enough.”

- “...budget could not be prolonged over the years, maybe that was the main limitation. Also other limitation came from the common funding structure for Interreg, which in my opinion even became more bureaucratic and more formal. It is still harder to realize [implement] things, you need 70 or 80% for formal administration...”

- “What I very often hear, but I don’t think is a limitation, in language, but I think this you can manage, by English or translating. But rather stronger is the legislation in the country, in Austria, we have 3 federal provinces and others are centralized states...”

- “The not active willingness of the political side to bring in the relevant resources and pushing from the political side of this initiative.”

- “the fact that you would have need a lot of political power and courage to get forward. And I miss it, there was not this strong force behind the project. I this was the biggest mistake, there should be some kind of ongoing program, common agenda, closer cooperation”

## Key actors

- “...the key actors were of course the political leaders of regions and cities involved.”
- “I think the local administration for a while, federal states involved and the offices, planning companies that were tasked to do the activities mainly.”
- “then, the experts in various fields and also some players from chambers of commerce, companies not that much. ”
- “In the beginning it was easier, because of the political side they really pushed it more, you had the Europaforum Vienna more-or-less secretariat and more-or-less really pushing the different action fields and now more-or-less the only working group is mobility where some things, some workshops happen”

## Main message and future of Centrope

- “still it makes sense, it has a meaning”
- “geography is excellent, but potential is not used”
- “As it is now I see no future, because there are not enough people, resources and ideas involved in the project.”
- “Still to get rid of the borders in the head, because they still exist in so many minds, especially in audiences that are not experts, especially regular citizens and so on, very often their worlds end at the national border and initiatives like Centrope can really help a lot to resolve that. ”
- “That your cooperation with your immediate neighbors is necessary and very relevant. That you cannot...there are lots of cooperations in the globalized world, maybe geography is not important anymore, but still many issues maybe you can only solve with your really direct neighbors”
- “The message is clear. Cooperation is important. And not only bilateral cooperation, but you have four different nations and they really want to bring it to a close cooperation, this really really would be a great thing because the potential is here.”

## Conclusions:

- Formally not alive much anymore, lot of potential still
- Lack of political leadership (other priorities, no common vision, no money)
- Success in outer rather than inner dimension
- Corporate Identity of CENTROPE is reduced to visual style, other elements (communication patterns, behaviour, values) are lacking
- Waiting for new impulse

Thank you for your attention

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