Transdisciplinarity and the fruitful interplay between social science and science of history

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Transdisciplinarity and the fruitful interplay between social science and science of history

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Abstract: On the basis of a research project on the history of the china manufacturer and touristic entrepreneur Ernst Wahliß, who lived and was active in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the late nineteenth century, the article reflects how interdisciplinary cooperation between historical science and an intervention-oriented social science in the framework of transdisciplinary research design can lead to scientifically interesting results and social impact in a local community. This contribution follows two objectives: the first point of emphasis is being placed on the content side of the aforementioned research project. The results of the historical research are presented and their connection to relevant topics today is discussed. As a second point, this article provides methodological descriptions and reflections regarding the project. In the introduction, the historical starting point and the inter- and transdisciplinary aims of the project are delineated. In section two and three an insight into the theoretical basis and methodical approach of the research is provided. In section four central results elaborated by the interdisciplinary team are reported. The story of Wahliß certainly has to be considered in its specific historical and local context, but it also incorporates “universal” aspects, such as investment and enterprising actions as an instrument of intervention into social systems.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Martina Ukowitz, trained in German and Italian Philology, social philosophy and group dynamics, is working as a social scientist with a transdisciplinary approach (participatory intervention research). The main content focus lies on social and organizational dynamics. The research on Ernst Wahliß is related to broader research activities in the field of regional development and to an ongoing work on the theory of inter- and transdisciplinary research.

Werner Drobesch, trained in History and German Philology, is working as economic and social historian with an emphasis on history of the Habsburg monarchy (fifteenth to nineteenth century) and Austria (twentieth century). The research on Ernst Wahliß is related to research activities in the field of economic history (industrialization, agrarian revolution) in the Alpe-Adria-region and entrepreneurs’ history.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Where research and innovation processes go along with each other and research has the intention to intervene into society provoking reflection and societal transformation, an inter- and transdisciplinary approach is promising. This contribution deals with cooperation between social sciences and historical science in a transdisciplinary research context in the field of regional development. A special view on the story of the entrepreneur Ernst Wahliß and his enterprising actions in the late nineteenth century in Austria forms the background of the research. Studies on successful companies and their owners are usually focused on presenting them as individuals who shaped economic life and they are portrayals of advances due to their enterprises. However, the political and cultural background, as well as the social conditions and the areas of conflicts regarding this issue, which are the inevitable consequences of enterprising actions, are not mentioned. Using the example of the china manufacturer and touristic entrepreneur Ernst Wahliß, the implications, which may result from enterprising activities are revealed.
conflict dynamics in times of changes and their inevitable consequences, as well as tensions between cooperation and competition. These specific elements of Wahliß story can be abstracted to general phenomena in regional development that apply both in the nineteenth century as well as today. Section five of the contribution finally focuses on a methodological reflection of the research process, pointing out that cooperation between historians and social researchers can be challenging, yet extremely interesting and fruitful—not only in analysing historical developments, but also when considering problems of the present.

Subjects: Social Sciences; Tourism, Hospitality and Events; Development Studies; History; Cultural Studies

Keywords: transdisciplinarity; interdisciplinary cooperation; economic history; intervention research; social dynamics; regional development

1. Context and intention of the research on a great investor in the late nineteenth century

In Carinthia in southern Austria in the second half of the nineteenth century, tourism began to develop as an economic sector. The prestigious summer stays, called “Sommerfrische”, have become an increasingly important status symbol in society back then. They formed the quiet, relaxing counterpoint to the lively, restless life in the cities. In the course of this development, Lake Wörthersee was in the vanguard of Carinthian tourism, attracting not only guests, but also investors who expected to receive financial gain from their involvement. These included the Viennese porcelain manufacturer Carl Ernst David Wahliß. He became a figurehead who played a decisive role in the emergence of tourism on the Wörthersee in the late nineteenth century. Of the, for that time, enormous investment only little is left today. Even the name of this pioneer of Carinthian tourism is almost forgotten. This is one reason to awaken the memory of him. In a research project his activities and his contribution to Carinthian tourism, but also the tensions and areas of conflict that resulted from it, are investigated. The results form the basis for a documentary film (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ernst Wahliß and his wife Anna.
The research project is designed as inter- and transdisciplinary research, which has the intention to “mediate” between the past and the present (Ukowitz, 2012). There are three fields of activities. The central research perspectives are first the historical exploration of the economic and social environment and the activities of Ernst Wahlilß in Carinthia. The second field of activity and research perspective lies on the significance of Wahlilß’ engagement for the regional development, especially focusing on the question of how innovation happens in regional development. In this part of the project, the past is used for comparative introspection (Winiwarter & Knoll, 2007) and the question is treated, which of the dynamics are known also in the present. The third field of activity is the production of a documentary film as an accompanying and supporting activity and communicative platform for the inter- and transdisciplinary research project.

The research and the production of the film are interactive processes, involving selected representatives from the tourism sector and the local population. In this sense the project is an alliance between science, culture and tourism. The project sees itself as a research and intervention project, which not least aims at reflecting development dynamics together with stakeholders, thereby seeking to contribute to sustainable regional development. The documentary film is a medium which the research uses as an intervention as well as a medium for the dissemination of research results. It provides a sounding board for reflection on current circumstances and it will contribute to the development of a common understanding concerning the background of current challenges (that are shaped also by the historical developments). In this sense, the research project and the resulting film are relevant for Carinthian tourism: The Wörthersee region is presented as a cultural region with a great tradition. For the first time the emergence of the “Sommerfrische” is illustrated in a film that also spans a bridge into the present.

The aims of the research are first, reconstructing the story and elaborating the crucial points of the developments which range up to the present, second, raising awareness among residents for the crucial points in the historical development and the consequences for the present and third, inspiring discussion among residents and the involved regional institutions. One hypothesis lying beyond is that a comparison between the past and the present could induce learning processes which are the basis for sustainable decision-making in the future. This contribution reports on the results of the research, but it slightly emphasizes the methodological dimension—since in the background there is the scientific interest concerning inter- and transdisciplinary knowledge integration and the involvement of stakeholders.

2. Theoretical background—Transdisciplinary framework and historical analysis
An inter- and transdisciplinary approach serves as a communicative and methodological framing for the research. A historian, a social scientist, local historians working outside the academic sphere and persons engaged in the cultural sector are approaching the story and its consequences jointly but from different perspectives. In philosophy of science and science studies a transdisciplinary approach is commonly called Mode 2 Science. Central characteristics of Mode 2 Science are the co-production of knowledge by scientists and representatives of different societal systems, the design of the Agora as a social space for generating and negotiating knowledge, the heterogeneity of the stakeholders and their prospects, the generation of contextualized and socially robust knowledge (knowledge related to application contexts), and a context-sensitive, epistemologically eclectic approach (Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2008).

It is a major concern of a transdisciplinary paradigm, to anchor scientific research in concrete, often socially small-scale research contexts. A case-related empirical, but also intervention-oriented approach is central since research has the intention not only of generating knowledge, but also of problem solving and contributing to self-enlightment of social systems. This means that the people involved learn about their own situation with the researchers support. This learning also comprises the creation of options for future activities. With this approach, the research is following the understanding that transdisciplinary research means problem-oriented cooperative research between researchers from various disciplines and with stakeholders from outside academia (Hirsch Hadorn
et al., 2008; Pohl, 2008). In inter- and transdisciplinary research an accompanying methodological reflection of the processes is particularly relevant, because the tradition of that approach is comparatively young and methodological as well as theoretical discourses are fruitful.

The research on Ernst Wahlß brings together a social scientist’s approach and the historical perspective. The subject matter of history as an academic discipline is the analysis of past events, the opinions and ambitions of human beings, as well as the achievements made by this race—by whatever means—given the opportunity of tracing their influences on the human race and its environment. Consequently, human beings, insofar as they have left evidence behind, are placed at the centre of scholarly interest and are considered as the central “objects” of historical studies. In this respect, the remains of a certain time period, in particular, as well as the material that was formed during that era, can therefore be considered preserved substances which convey significant information about the past.

The major problem regarding the academic research of past times, which is the focus of all methodological considerations since Johann Gustav Droysen’s “Grundriss der Historik” (author’s translation: Outline of History, Droysen, 1868), is the banal circumstance that the past in itself is no longer accessible. Only manufactured products that have survived to the present day, allow individuals to make statements about the past (Brunner, 1985). These sources that may be taken as the remains of past times provide information about occurrences and circumstances from which they emerged. Yet their contents are not entirely reliable. Since, in reality, the transmission of these sources is incomplete, the final result can, in the best case, only be a collection of fragments which, as such, cannot be considered a single unit or as a history of a certain time. However, history’s epistemological interest is directed towards such entities in its academic research of the past. This means that initially, correlations must be made accessible to receive an overall picture by the use of different hypotheses. These hypotheses can be linked together to a well thought-out context, but they can also be influenced by the beliefs and moral values of the person applying them (Evans, 1998).

At the same time, the “understanding”, which Droysen considers as the characteristic procedure of historical cognition, is also ascribed an essential role. Therefore, “the provided information for the historical research […] is not the past, since it has already passed, but rather the things in the here and now that did not pass yet, be these memories or remains of what has been and what has happened” (Droysen, 1868). With this statement, Droysen suggests that historians may approach the past empirically, so to say without the use of any unfounded conjectures. For historians, “understanding” implicates the following tasks: First, the classification of the individual source material into a broader context than that from which it originated. Second, the making of a detailed picture of the circumstances of life of certain eras from which the source emerged. And third, there is the explanation of single incidents and their terms, as well as their evaluation according to standard procedures of contemporary times. Leopold von Ranke formulated this target: “Ich wünschte mein Selbst gleichsam auszulöschen, um nur die Dinge reden zu lassen.” (author’s translation: I wished I could extinguish my Self so to speak, to allow just the things to speak) (Ranke, 1860). The aspiration of the science of history, together with the results of such an understanding for present academic statements, stands and falls with the possibility of examining historical sources. This possibility of examination is insofar given, as the sources are generally accessible for the sighting and the interpretation of them.

This also applies to the modern historical scientific approach in the context of the “Annales School” and its attempt to couple history to human sciences, as well as Jörn Rüsen’s concept of historical culture as a “practically effective articulation of historical consciousness in the life of a society” to better understand the individual’s relationship to his past (Rüsen, 1983, 1986, 1989). Thus, the culture of history incorporates a cognitive, political and aesthetic dimension. These three dimensions are interwoven within the public history culture, that is, the way in which society interacts with its history, and they interpenetrate. This involves the integration of actions and beliefs, which result from the findings of historical scientific research, into the individual orientation of life.
Within the transdisciplinary framework and through the embedded qualitative social research the historical methodology is integrated into an interdisciplinary approach. Historical sources and contemporary perspectives are combined.

3. Project design, methods and interdisciplinary integration

As outlined above the project design and the communication settings are based on the principles of transdisciplinary research and the approach of Intervention Research (Dressel, Berger, Heimerl, & Winiwarter, 2014; Heintel, 2005; Pohl & Hirsch-Hadorn, 2006; Ukowitz, 2012). The aims of research, which are mentioned above (reconstruction of the story, identification of crucial points from our perspective today and awareness-building and discourse among residents) impact on different dimensions of knowledge: Systems knowledge is generated, which is knowledge about the topics under discussion. It is mainly the historical research and partly the qualitative social research providing this kind of knowledge. The second one is target knowledge, i.e. knowledge about the possible consequences of the results and the aims of next steps, and thirdly, transformation knowledge, that is knowledge about the possible ways and the subsequent means in which consequences could be drawn. The dimensions of target and transformation knowledge are deployed especially through stimulating reflection on the significance of the historical developments for the present day.

In the social science part of the project, the generation and the interpretation of research data as well as the formulation of background theories are methodologically based on qualitative research and intervention research (Froschauer & Lueger, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 2010; Heintel, 2005). The settings for feedback and communicative validation of the interim results of the research process are designed with reference to methods of group dynamics and systemic organizational development (Königswieser & Exner, 2001). Both approaches are suitable because they address the emancipatory aspect of research as well as the process orientation. Research in this sense aims not only at describing social realities by research: it is a participative process of reconstructing these realities from the perspective of the involved researchers and of the stakeholders from outside academia. Apart from the scientific impact, reflecting realities and eventually changing them is a desired effect.

Also within the context of the historical work, a central role is assigned to methodology. The science of history as an approach arose in connection with the development of the understanding that there exists a variety of sources from the past that all together can, in methodical terms, be considered as the one major concept of “historical sources”, and that, on the basis of these, new findings can be made and new knowledge be gained. Therefore, it is understandable that History, if viewed in a larger picture, is a science that was and is defined by the availability of sources and the approaches to these (Evans, 1998). For this reason, the presence and accessibility of documents or sources, is a necessary pre-requisite for the research of historical issues.

With regard to methodology, Johann Gustav Droysen distinguishes between: heuristics (= the finding and typology of sources), the verification (of sources) and the interpretation of them (Droysen, 1868). The study of sources becomes an essential part of every general scientific method in which the systematic heuristic is considered a crucial task. This means: Initially, the body of facts is to be surveyed, whereby the kind of content and the message of the source need to be examined (“historical-critical method”). The reliability of the source material is to be brought into question. This has to be followed by the selection of important and unimportant information. On the basis of the sighted material, further methodological questions are to be developed and reassessed. This again is followed by the attempt to organize the large number of amorphous facts with regard to the methodological question(s), to the finding of interdependences, to research motives for the changes in, or the holding on onto of, traditions and to the placing of the results into an overall context. The occurrences, courses of actions, intentions and plans of the players are to be worked out in order to be able to reconstruct their actions (= “verification of sources”).

In practice this means that in the first project phase historical research was conducted by evaluating archive and printed sources and relevant literature, as well as a first series of interviews. The qualitative in-depth interviews were used on the one hand for the reconstruction of history from different perspectives, on the other hand reactions to the story of Wahliß were obtained through the interviews, and pressing current topics were identified. In a second series, short interviews were conducted in the municipality of Pörtschach. These interviews were intended to raise awareness of the topic in the municipality.

In the project, various groups of interviewees were involved. The first group was made up of persons, who know much about Wahliß and the history of Lake Wörthersee, such as local historians. The second group comprises members of long-established families in Pörtschach, who still live in their ancestral home. The last group consists of people, who know less about the local history, e.g. representatives of local institutions and other residents. The contributions of the individual residents differed remarkably between the two groups, not least because of the different levels of historical knowledge. The interview with a local non-academic historian, for example, mainly dealt with historical facts and archive materials and enriched the collected historical data. The focus in interviews with the descendants of Ernst Wahliß and other old families of Pörtschach, however, was placed on the individual family histories and the stories they told about the other families. Another dimension of the interviews dealt with problems of today. The interviewees were asked to list what they like about Pörtschach, which developments they disapprove of and where they see problems. In general, it can be stated that the main focus in the interviews was placed on present topics.

Interim results of the research and the interviews and first scenes of the documentary film were presented in a public evening event. This event was conceptualized as a feedback setting. During the discussion between researcher, film team and the audience, people had the opportunity to react to the content so far elaborated, and could point out key aspects. The perspective of the audience was integrated into the ongoing research. In a final workshop the results and the possible consequences were discussed with representatives of the municipality and the regional tourism institution.

We also confronted them with historical facts, which were recounted to them in short “scenes”, and took note of their reactions. During the public evening event historical photographs and midterm results of the enquiry were presented and the audience was invited to ask questions and comment on the material.

The project design and the methods should foster participation of stakeholders and interdisciplinary integration. Interdisciplinary integration, often described as a methodical step done at the end of the core working phase in transdisciplinary projects (Pohl & Hirsch-Hadorn, 2006), started very early, during the phase of defining the research interest, the designing of the process and the preparation of the data collection. The analysis and interpretation of the data were carried out first individually and afterwards in joint team meetings in the interdisciplinary team. The objective was to relate the different perspectives of history science and of social science research to each other and to benefit from that for hypothesis building and the designing of the documentary film. The cooperation between history and social science is characterized by joint planning and financing, division of labour during the analysing phase and mutual influence—explicitly, promoted by joint project meetings, but also implicitly e.g. by reactions to draft versions of texts—and finally by joint hypothesis building and drawing of conclusions. Transdisciplinarity can appear in wide range of variants. Whilst there are projects in which collaborative planning for the whole research process is realized (Healey, 1997), in this project the problem framing was performed by the scientific team and the stakeholders were involved as interview partners and as a resonance group. Decision-making about the aspects to be addressed more deeply was strongly influenced by the stakeholders through their reactions to the historical facts and the topics they addressed explicitly during the interviews. But the final decisions about the research process were made by the research team.
4. Research results—A mirror of inter- and transdisciplinary cooperation

In the following, selected aspects that turned out to be points of interest are reported on. The structure of the text shows how historical research and interpretation are taken up by a social science view. The way the topics are selected is strongly driven by the transdisciplinary intention. That means, decisions were made on the basis of the statements in the interviews conducted with people in Pörtschach. The main topics mentioned in the interviews were then presented in the form of short essays. The short pieces of text have the intention to open up a reflective space for stakeholders—in this case residents and people working in responsible positions around the Wörthersee. This special form of presentation, which focuses rather on general aspects than on a reporting of detailed analysis and interpretation of the underlying data material, was selected to anonymise the qualitative data. Among the interviewed persons were representatives of the municipality of Pörtschach, descendants of the Wahliß family as well as descendants of the family of his big competitor in the region. In the interviews people frankly addressed today’s problems that are partly linked to persons engaged in Pörtschach nowadays. Since research intents to facilitate reflection not taking into account mutual assignments of blame, we firstly concentrated on finding a neutral way of presenting the problematic aspects. Secondly, we wanted to point out the dynamics which can be considered as triggers for certain (social) situations. Theoretic considerations and references to the results of similar research projects foster a better understanding of a situation. With the intention to learn deductively from individual cases (Krohn, 2008) we focused on deducing essential and typical elements of each situation.

Six topics revealed as relevant during the inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue. Each section starts with the historical narrative, which is followed by the social science elaboration. The latter focuses mainly on social dynamics and questions of systemic organizational development.

4.1. When something new arises, conflicts are to be expected

In 1882, the touristic commitment of the china manufacturer and retailer Ernst Wahliß began at Lake Wörthersee when he acquired the property of the “Wörthersee-Seebad-Actiengesellschaft” (author’s translation: Wörthersee-Lido Co.Ltd) (Müller, 1955). This laid the foundation for his involvement in the tourism sector. The energetic and well-funded person of Wahliß was primarily responsible for, from this point of time onwards, significant upturn during the following two decades, not only in Pörtschach, but also around the lakeside. At first, he vigorously converted the existing buildings in Pörtschach which he had purchased. Additionally, he had new villas built. In 1901, the whole complex of buildings already provided 286 beds (Cur-Zeitung, 1901; Neue Freie Presse, 1900). In the area of the hotel complex he had noble green spaces built. Wahliß always tried to offer his guests a broad range of entertainment. In this manner, the restaurant was equipped with a dance and lecture hall, as well as with a music room and a reading room. To ensure that his guests were not missing out on anything, the hotel complex provided additional facilities such as a bazaar, a hair salon and an atelier for the exhibition of photographs. Moreover, it was equipped with bath houses and one swimming pool, where guests could take a massage. The guests were given the opportunity to rent boats or to go across the lake by steamship, which is why a landing-stage had been built. Wahliß endeavoured to make his villas the “meeting places of the fine world” (Bade-Etablissements, 1898). For this reason, he organized appropriate entertainment programmes with concerts and dancing parties.

In 1891, he widened his activities in the touristic branch and bought Schloss Velden (Günzl, 1992). This purchase seemed to be lucrative because at the time Velden was considered a growing health resort. Immediately, he began with the modernization works of the building. Inside, Schloss Velden was rearranged into a modern luxury hotel. Gradually, the complex was expanded over the years. Additionally, one wooden public bath with cubicles, as well as two separate baths—one for women and one for men—were built in the course of these works. In their hotel rooms, too, the guests were not to miss out on anything. For this reason, every room was equipped with a telegraph connection and each floor provided a “water supply system with the best drinking water” (Frick & Viertler, 2001). Furthermore, electric light was available, wherefore also a power utility was built. With this advanced...
equipment, which was in no way inferior to the ones of the noble sites in Bohemia and the northern Adria, the Schlosshotel increasingly attracted financially strong guests who visited Velden for their well-being. The summer retreat in the Schlosshotel, which opened from May to October, was in no way inferior to the one in Pörtschach. On top of that the guests were also provided with a leisure time programme and were free to rent boats for “explorations” on Lake Wörthersee. The park of the Schloss offered a “Lawn”-tennis- and croquet court, as well as a bowling alley. Billiards could be played in the coffee house where the most important national newspapers were also available. Additionally, there was a bookshop and a lending library where guests could find a great choice of the latest reading matter in German, French, English and Italian. Finally, “events” such as military concerts or dancing parties were organized for the guests (Cur-Zeitung, 1897), just like in Pörtschach.

The innovations that Wahliß brought into the region as an investor, represented a major development step, but they also led to irritation and to rejection on site. When something new arises, this initiates a process of transition and uncertainty. It is a time of instability and insecurity. Transitions are always crisis periods (both in a positive or a negative sense) and therefore likely to cause conflicts. This applies to individuals on a personal level as well as to organizations or a local community. It opens up a phase in which new things have to be allowed and tested and sometimes the old have to be disbanded.

In times of change, people see themselves in a field of tensions and contradictions. Often historical asynchronies can be observed, that means, individuals, groups, organizations etc. converge with their different levels of development, different experiences and horizons. This makes it necessary to mediate between the existing and the new. People react differently to new developments. Some are very fast (often too fast) and willing to support, adopt and follow new ideas. Others need more time to adjust to a new situation, or generally resist or react critically to the new. The new can be seen as an opportunity, but it is also a degradation of what already exists (it is not wanted any more, or at least not in its current form). This can be considered as an affront.

Depending on how the new is introduced, conflicts of loyalty may also result from it. With his projects Wahliß created new jobs in the region, which previously were not available. It can be assumed that those persons who found themselves on the payroll of the investor, judged the activities as positive ones. Conversely, there were certainly some people who saw it ambivalently and who saw themselves as victims of the development. Wahliß had bought plots of land at the lakeside at a time when landowners had no idea of the potential they held. Many must have been astonished by the successful implementation of the tourism project and possibly they asked themselves if a higher price for the land could have been achieved. So there were people who had directly benefited from the investor’s engagement, and those who saw themselves devalued and their previous activities at risk—an initial situation of this sort leads to ambivalence and tensions within social structures. The situation escalates even more if the new comes from the outside.

4.2. New ideas and money coming from the outside—a powerful intervention

Ernst Wahliß’ activities began when Carinthia was in a severe economic crisis (Rumpler, 1992). While the industrial era found its way into Bohemia, Moravia or Austria, economic modernization stagnated in Carinthia. The once major position of its steel and coal industry—this was its leading economic sector—was a thing of the past. This economic stagnation had not failed to leave its mark on the demographic and social development. The social structures remained almost unchanged. A necessary dynamic element was missing through the weak presence of the bourgeoisie and the factory working population. The modern era came only slowly. One part of the modernization process was the extension of the railway network. Carinthia’s railway connected the country with the national and international railways and the economic market. A second part of this modernization was the tourism sector, which hotels in Carinthia also benefited from. Due to the railway connection, guests that came from distant regions were able to arrive at the summer retreat domicile much faster than in the times when they had to travel by carriage. A third part that can be considered as a modernized element is the postal and telegraphic service which soon increased. The largest growth rates in
terms of telegraphic services were recorded in the tourist destinations Pörtschach and Velden (Drobesch, 2014). Guests needed to receive and send messages as soon as possible, if business required it. Nevertheless, at the time, the tourism was not yet an economic factor.

Within this framework Ernst Wahliß began his activities in Carinthia. The townscapes of Pörtschach and Velden were, first and foremost, shaped by his initiatives. He was considered a pioneer and a man who created two modern health resorts. Additionally, the innovative travel connection through the railroad line from Marburg via Klagenfurt to Villach—from as early as 1864/from 1864 onwards—also made Lake Wörthersee a popular summer resort for guests who came all the way from distant places (Neue Freie Presse, 1900).

It can be observed that in companies, but also in municipalities or regions, major development steps are advanced by newly added or foreign influences, or by new staffing of key positions. In tourism enterprises, for instance, it can be observed that the younger generation after takeovers in family enterprises, not least through their partners, who are not burdened by tradition, finds it easier to implement innovations than their parents’ generation. This was confirmed by various results of research on regional development processes (Heintel, 2012) and the statements of the interviewees in Pörtschach concerning the chances and risks of new ideas brought in by “new forces”.

Innovations arise more easily, where the familiar meets the unfamiliar. Under very routine and stable conditions they do not succeed as easily. As social structures, family enterprises like other enterprises or municipalities, have a system of value and norms. Family members, staff and citizens all citizens more or less obey that normative system. Over time, traditions of thought are developed and a certain culture and mentality arises. The smaller the social unit is, the denser and more binding is the value system (and the stronger it is sanctioned, if someone does not conform). To a large extent the prevailing tradition of thought determines what is possible and what not, what is allowed and what not. As a part of a system it is more difficult to look and to think beyond the edge of the system and more difficult to develop new ideas compared to an outside position. It is also more difficult, to get new ideas heard within a social system (“The prophet in his own land is not heard,” says a proverb). The latter may have to do with internal competition—before a direct, local competitor can reap the rewards, they are ceded to the “experts” from outside.

External interventions are an opportunity, but they also represent a risk. The tensions that arise when something new takes place are even stronger when the new goes hand in hand with a powerful occurrence of something “unfamiliar”. The reactions to it, the diverse individual and social dynamics are understandable. Again, all depends on a successful mediation between what is introduced from outside to a municipality or an organization on the one hand, and the status quo on the other.

A positive development for everyone involved may be a common goal, which social systems try to approach. Willingness to talk and to empathize with other positions is a basic condition. Of course good ideas may run the risk of being discussed to death and to be worn down between the different interests. Sometimes carefully pondered but decisive steps are needed, oriented at a common welfare, (sometimes even without consensus). Keeping the consequences for all parties in view is testimony to a responsible approach.

4.3. Stories of success and stories of conflicts

The story of Carl Ernst Wahliß and his activities around Lake Wörthersee can be read as a success story, but also as a story of conflicts (Schwarz, 2010). His activities encouraged the well-established landlords and hoteliers in Pörtschach to modernize their businesses in order to remain competitive with other catering companies. This resulted in a push for modernization. Wahliß got into a state of competition, in particular with Georg Semmelrock-Werzer. Both hoteliers tried to outdo each other in aiming to provide their summer guests with the latest and best facilities and activities (Rogy, 2002) (Figure 2).
However, disputes soon arose between Wahliß and the local community, and, above all, with its mayor, Georg Semmelrock-Werzer. The prime reason for these controversies was the use of footpaths. The owners of villas, of whom Wahliß was also one, saw no reason why they should make the paths through their grounds accessible to the public. The consequence of this was a dispute with the local community that continued for almost a decade (Rogy, 1999). The longer the quarrel lasted, the fiercer it was carried on by both parties. Thus, Semmelrock-Werzer oftentimes refused to grant building permits of villas to the hotelier Wahliß, while Wahliß, on the other hand, had all paths on his grounds blocked. The quarrel climaxed in 1887 when Wahliß published an explanation in which he declared himself enraged about the attitude of the local community, and especially that of Pörtschach’s mayor, Semmelrock-Werzer (Wahliss, 1887).

At the time when the representatives of the local community had sent a plan for regulations to Wahliß saying that he was required to build a public way on his property, the quarrels escalated. The building of a public way would have meant the destruction of his gardens, which he had laid out at great financial expense. The differences between both parties were provisionally smoothed through the mediation work of the president of Carinthia. Wahliß agreed to assign several ways to the local authority, which consequently assured him, in a written consent, it would not demand any more land of his property. In return, Wahliß offered to permit access to anyone into his park, on condition that visitors should make a small financial contribution for the preservation of the gardens. Yet the local authority declined this offer. Thereafter, he decided to charge all park visitors an entrance fee, with the exception of his private guests. Only then was the local authority willing to make the contribution, so that all park visitors were granted free access (Wahliss, 1887).
This quiet situation only lasted for a short period, and the quarrel over the paths was still not finished. In 1889, disputes started anew when Pörtschach’s town mayor, Georg Semmelrock, pointed out to Wahliß that the fences and stockades on his grounds were built too close to the roadside. Consequently, Wahliß was accused of not having respected the legal minimum spacing of two metres. Wahliß informed the local community that he had now employed the services of a lawyer. This was done primarily because he had no understanding left for the complaints being made just about his fencing. He had assumed that the representatives of the local community could not intend to start new quarrels about the fencing, after all the past arguments about the right of way across his grounds. Nevertheless, the disputes only ended after the death of his opponent Georg Semmelrock-Werzer in 1894 (Müller, 1955).

Conflicts are played out between (individual) persons, but the causes of conflicts are mostly located in people-independent conditions. The historical research hardly allows any conclusions about the personality of Wahliß and Werzer. One can imagine that both were strong personalities, maybe they were pugnacious characters, maybe they felt no sympathy for each other—whatever it was, a major cause of the conflict lay in the basic constellation of the situation: One powerful external intervention triggers ambivalences and conflicts of loyalty and challenges the opposition to strike back.

Recriminations in the one or another direction fall short in such situations. The consequence of such an initial situation and a balanced distribution of power in the case Wahliß-Werzer (and in many other conflict situations too) is a good decade of “feuding” with reciprocal demonstrations of power and disputes relating to access roads and passageways and property boundaries. From the outside it is easy to note how useless this is, if you find yourself in this situation, it is not so easy to go into a reflective distance and thus take the first step to get out of the conflict dynamics (especially because you cannot be sure that the other party involved will follow). But it is an essential first step to emerge from the conflict dynamics and to communicate in a further step about the conflict.

The historical facts are relevant, because such conflict dynamics are also known in present times. A good example is given by the countless disputes between neighbours that make work for district courts. A second aspect, which affects a social system in a more hidden way and which can have serious consequences, could also be related to the history of Wahliß: long-lasting conflicts, whether they are kept alive or kept hidden, carry tensions into social systems, eventually leading to a split into sub-groups. Wahliß-sympathizers and people who have benefited from the developments could have been regarded as traitors. One consequence deriving from that, are conflicts of loyalty, as already stated above.

Long-lasting conflicts can engrave themselves in the collective memory (Halbwachs, 1967). Tensions continue to act, especially when a conflict has been resolved, without being truly solved. In the case of Wahliß and Werzer the conflict ended with the death of one of the protagonists. Negative experiences may still be anchored in the collective memory, a certain ill-feeling remains, which may adversely affect the further developments, even over generations. This is especially true if the dynamics cannot be addressed directly. In the case of Wahliß and his engagement a story of success with an ambivalent aftertaste can be observed.

4.4. Local politics and the difficult question of “what is the common good?”

Wahliß has appeared in Pörtschach not only as an investor and entrepreneur, but also through his involvement in local politics. Wahliß himself held no political function, since he lived mostly in Vienna, but he was represented by a confidant in the local municipal council—during the period when Georg Werzer was the mayor of Pörtschach.

From the temporal distance of over a hundred years one might ask how is it possible to make reasonable municipal policy in such a constellation, But the question is relevant also in present times: How successfully can local politicians act, given only a vague idea of what might be the common good and within the tensions between individual interests, occasionally founded upon
economic power? The history of Wahliß and his activities shows that doing local politics, especially in smaller communities, is a very difficult level of political engagement and mayors who are often exercising their functions advocationally, at best need to possess diverse skills and a high (also emotional) endurance and a thick skin (Heintel, 2012). In addition to the complexity of many issues that requires expertise and routine in dealing with specialized knowledge of various origin, topics nowadays tend to become increasingly more difficult to manage because of the interdependencies regarding contents and institutional contexts. The narrow leeway in decision-making and action at the local level (and the great influence of economic criteria on decisions) is a challenge just as the social proximity of mayors and city councils to the local people is, what makes it difficult to make decisions and implement them. Everybody knows each other, people are connected through friendship or family ties. If (individual) interests are formulated in the community, they do not belong to an anonymous group of people, they “have a face”. That has advantages, because the important issues and concerns are easier to grasp. But it also has disadvantages, because rejections are much harder and are perceived more clearly as (personal) offence than in a larger and more anonymous social fabric.

In this challenging initial position process competence is of growing importance for municipal decision-makers. The point is to see problems in their interrelation and moderate different perspectives. This counts for the consideration of what is meant by a common good (or more pragmatically: what strategic objectives are to be followed) and for the implementation of measures.

4.5. Generational change and succession in family businesses

Ernst Wahliß—born on 1 March 1837 in the Saxon city of Oschatz—came from a Protestant dyer family. His family gave him the pieces of advice which made him a successful entrepreneur at a later point in his life (von Wurzbach, 1885). Step by step he worked his way up and became an entrepreneur, more specifically he acted as a representative for the Bohemian china factories and hotel complexes in Pörtschach and Velden. His life was a success story. He exploited every opportunity he had to turn china into a mass-produced good, which as time went by, larger numbers of individuals were able to afford. In the late 19th century, china tableware became a standard feature of the (petit) bourgeois food- and decoration culture. The corporate philosophy was, on the one hand, to produce a large range of cheap products and, on the other, to manufacture luxury articles, too. China tableware from his collection was presented at several international exhibitions. Nevertheless, he was not able to impart this entrepreneurial knowledge to his eleven children. According to Wahliß’ will, his wife was made the sole heir of the ca. 8–10 million Kroner (~ 4.7–5.8 million Euro) of the estimated capital after his death at the age of 64 years on 19 July 1900 (Klagenfurter Zeitung, 1900). In the course of the lawsuit about his estate, a division between the widow and the children was made. The children, who were still alive, continued their father’s work, but not as successfully. The two eldest sons, Hans Carl and Erich David, took over the corporate management of the china producing company (Neue Freie Presse, 1900). The youngest son, Gerhard Martin, lead the company in Teplitz for a short amount of time before he decided to study medicine (Teplitz-Schönauer Anzeiger, 1915). The hotel complexes at Lake Wörthersee came into the possession of his daughters. In Pörtschach, one half of the ownership right was transferred to his daughter Anna Elizabeth, the other half to his youngest daughter Elfriede Louise (Grundbuch Pörtschach, xxxx). The Schlosshotel Velden was given to Katharina Maria. She continued in the hotel business for several years until she resigned from her office (Grundbuch Velden, xxxx; Günzl, 1992).

The historical research suggests that Wahliß was a very skilful entrepreneur with a sense for doing the right things at the right moment. The long-term building up of successors and the transfer of the business to the next generation were less successful. It is surprising that Wahliß obviously hadn’t made special provisions regarding his successors.

Family businesses are very special organizations that can draw much strength from the interaction of familial and organizational logics. At the same time family members have to cope with great challenges and conflicting requirements, arising from the family system and the business (Simon,
Moreover, family members often tend, more than other employees, to be completely absorbed in the business. The latter applies especially to tourism, where during the season the personal and the professional sphere strongly interlock, and the private to a certain extent always is on display. Interviewees in the project said that the total appropriation by the job is one reason not to be an entrepreneur in tourism and not to continue a family business. The generation that had engaged excessively in the 1960s and 1970s, is not seen as a role model. For that reason enterprises were not taken over by the next generation but dissolved. The interviewees admitted that these might be examples for a general change in the attitude towards work, as working hard was accepted more in the past. Anyhow, regarding the future of the service sector they see the necessity to think about ways of gaining a better work-life-balance.

4.6. Change or perpetuate—On dealing with historical buildings

One result of the increasing tourism in the late nineteenth century was the circumstance that numerous villas—one of them owned by Ernst Wahliß—and hotels were built in Pörtschach and in Velden as manifestations of a sophisticated building culture or—as Schloss Velden—as an expression of the newly prevailing taste. Simultaneously, another architectural style emerged during this time, referred to as “Wörthersee architecture” (Müller & Kramer, 2009). It was closely related to Romantic Historicism. These buildings were designed to reflect the “emotional desire of the educated bourgeois owners for the reviviscence of feudal conditions” (Deuer, 2003) and thus provided all the comforts of the contemporary times. They were planned both by local architects, and by those trained in Vienna. The buildings not only offered accommodation, but were also meeting places for social events during the summer season. Some of these villas were constructed with an “individual combination of local and imported elements” (Deuer, 2003) and were not only simply imitations of other styles from previous years. In this way, unique architectural pieces that met the standards of the time were developed.

Besides the many private villas, also the monumental “Parkhotel” in Pörtschach, which was built on the initiative of Ernst Wahliß, and the reconstructed Schlosshotel in Velden, were classed among these prominent buildings. Both hotels were considered as the “answers to multiple-roomed monarchical villas” (Deuer, 2003). Schloss Velden, whose exterior had been reconstructed following its purchase by Wahliß in the course of the renovation works, was an “epoch-spanning symbol for leisure time culture during the summer time” (Deuer, 2003). A converse fate was bestowed on the “Parkhotel”, which was demolished in 1960 and replaced by a “new hypotrophic construction in the style of ‘Emmentaler cheese’ which was typical for the time” (Deuer, 2003). Not only had the original “Parkhotel” disappeared from the overall appearance of the townscape, but so did the numerous villas. Many of them were left to ruin or they were deprived of their architectural and historical authenticity. And the ravages of time gnawed on several buildings still in existence since people were and are still not aware of the cultural heritage that was left by Wahliß and his contemporaries.

Being curious, bringing about changes, creating something new while abandoning the old is part of human nature. But it is challenging to undergo the transitions between perpetuation and change. The processes are often conflicting. Deciding what should stay and what should be abandoned, is not an easy one. Especially when economic pressure or tempting financial offers from investors are on hand. (That’s often the case when dealing with historic buildings.) In the discussions that have been conducted within the film and research project, mainly regret was expressed that again and again historic buildings around the Wörthersee were gradually neglected, that they were sold to investors and demolished to make room for modern buildings. It seems that this history has been repeated several times over the past hundred years. One example with a certain symbolic power is the Parkhotel. Many people dislike the new building that was built in 1960. People who were involved in the reconstruction admit that back then there was too little awareness of the value historical buildings might have. Today, however, there are also some good examples which prove that historical as well as modern aspects can be successfully integrated in one building. One of them is a historical building at the lakeside in Pörtschach which has been adapted as a bathhouse with a modern SPA area. The historic building structure remained almost unchanged.
5. Conclusion: History and intervention-oriented social science, an interesting and fruitful interplay

In a final workshop a small group of stakeholders discussed key findings of the research, and lessons learned were exchanged. Moreover, it was discussed to what extent and with which orientation further activities could make sense. The main focus of the discussion was on the challenges in the cooperation between tourism institutions, municipalities and hotels and the question how innovative ideas can be developed and bear fruit in a region. Our dialogue partners were complaining about the difficulties they have to face in their engagement and the ignorance of many people—the complaining again strongly reminded of the historical dynamics identified during research. In direction of further activities, people agreed to go on with building bridges between historical facts and relevant issues in the present. A project group was constituted to develop the idea of an interactive Wörthersee Museum that could be set up in the form of an ICT-based virtual guide, but also “physically” in an attractive location on Lake Wörthersee. The initiative mainly depends on gathering the necessary financial resources. Especially the question of dealing with historical buildings is of great concern: several months after the end of the project a citizens’ initiative aiming at protecting historical buildings was initiated in Pörtschach.

The societal impact of transdisciplinary projects varies depending on the circumstances of their formation. Generally the impact is the deeper the more people are concerned with and effected by something. In contract research this tends to be more the case than in research projects that are initiated by a scientific team. If there is no real pressure of suffering from a situation and no clearly defined social system, e.g. an organization, which is addressed, it’s more difficult to involve stakeholders into a project. In the case of the project on Ernst Wahlß it’s the question, why contemporary residents should care about that specific historical episode, which was challenging the research team. Since there are places in Pörtschach named after Ernst Wahlß and since there is a monument in one of the parks, people expressed their interest in knowing more about Wahlß and his engagement. It was general educational interest. Some residents said that they would be curious to see the results of the comparison between the past and the present.

The making of the film was a helpful vehicle to communicate the historical knowledge generated during the project and to raise awareness among residents. Although it can be stated, that historical research more and more comes into contact with media products, the willingness to start such experiments in the academic sphere still is not really widespread (Raphael, 2010). To a certain extent this is comprehensible, because the cooperation with a film team opens up an additional field of activity that goes beyond the purely scientific realm. Its a matter of organizing knowledge transfer.

It could be observed that the individual stakeholders perceived the researcher’s work in different ways. Some of them adapted themselves to the new historical findings and commented on them directly. Other interviewees replied with an astonished “Oh, that’s an interesting parallel!”, and even others just smiled before they went on with their description of current problems. It could be observed that until then, various parallels between history and current developments or problems have not been detected by many stakeholders. During the discussions, however, people started referring to these parallels, and it seemed that the researchers’ notions have raised public awareness.

From the researcher’s perspective we had the impression that the project facilitated a better understanding of the difficulties people have to face when they engage in municipal development. In the final workshop, representatives from cultural initiatives and regional institutions addressed these problems directly by describing the difficulties they face when balancing conflicting interests. The group seemed to have gained new motivation to continue with the initiatives, form new cooperations and start new projects.

A methodological reflection of the interplay between the two scientific perspectives anchored in the project also leads to the not yet sufficiently processed issue of integration of different stocks of knowledge in transdisciplinary processes (Holbrook, 2013). Since the 20th century more cooperation...
also between historical science and other disciplines like sociology, psychology or political sciences and more attention for interdisciplinary transfer can be observed (Raphael, 2010). Still it is challenging to really integrate the results deriving from the different approaches and a focus on this process is important. Whilst in large scale projects often a cooperation management is provided that also cares about interdisciplinary integration, in smaller projects researchers have to design and to carry out the integration processes on their own. Elaborated concepts of integration that are very complex and time consuming can’t be adopted during this kind of projects. Especially smaller projects (shorter duration, less financial resources, less project staff) often have to confront the challenge that interdisciplinary cooperation is carried out among partners that are not familiar with inter- and transdisciplinary work. Interdisciplinary integration in this case is sustained by an open attitude, trust, and a strong willingness to communicate and cooperate.

Since in an inter- and transdisciplinary cooperation different aspects of research are combined in one and the same project, as a result different dimensions of findings and insights can be described. These specific circumstances, however, can cause difficulties for researcher regarding the academic outcome. Especially transdisciplinary research does not always allow the individual researcher to pursue discipline-specific knowledge goals in depth. Therefore, it is crucial to direct the scientific focus on one common topic following it in more than one individual project. In this sense the project on Ernst Wahlß can be seen as an element in a series of research activities.

On the disciplinary realm the subject matter of history as an academic discipline was addressed and significant information about the past could be gained. In the field of economic history, the conclusion is that the activities of one entrepreneur (in the sense of the ideas of Joseph A. Schumpeter, 1987) can establish innovative economic segments—even in a crisis region. With the help of modern economic approaches and activities, Wahlß was able to create the basis for the rise of a new economic branch—despite the resistance of the old economic elites. This resistance against innovations by traditional persistent forces can be explained by the fact that innovative ideas may threaten existing patterns of action and structures.

From social science perspective, the story of Wahlß and the results of the qualitative interviews with residents gave interesting insights into the social dynamics in communities in times of change. Participative research in the field of regional development focuses not only on research, but also on development. The project on Wahlß gives deep insights into the field of tension between economic cooperation and competition. The high complexity of the decision-making process and implementation—even on a regional level—is made evident and gives fruitful input for further projects on the significance of social dynamics in regional development processes. The reference to historical parallels opens up even further perspectives for this research.

Regarding the transdisciplinary outcome, in the sense of a critical examination of history, following Nietzsche (1870/1999), the happenings around Ernst Wahlß provided an impulse in Pörtschach (and beyond) to get into communication about currently relevant topics. The story offers a background for this reflection. In the best case it is a collective reflection and discussion, since that increases the chance of practical results and effects. Furthermore, the historical background makes it possible to look at issues, problem constellations and background dynamics from a distant, emotionally relaxed perspective. Transdisciplinary Intervention Research places an issue and encourages discussion of it. To a certain extent the story of Ernst Wahlß has a catalytic function which makes it possible for current dynamics to be detected, made discussed and understood. The historiographical perspective opens an extra dimension of understanding of current dynamics in the region. In this sense the past is used for comparative introspection (Winiwarter & Knoll, 2007). The inter- and transdisciplinary context of research provides new and deeper insights into historical developments and present time challenges and it motivates stakeholders to plan subsequent initiatives. The interdisciplinary cooperation between history and intervention-oriented social science has revealed itself as useful and inspiring—for researchers and for stakeholders from outside academia.
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