Kleinstadt Akademie

Pilotphase

German Small Town Academy –
Pilot Phase

**Empowerment of
Small Towns through
collaboration, consulting
and networking**

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Empowerment of Small Towns through collaboration, consulting and networking

The contents of this report reflect the views of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the publisher.

Contents

Picture: BMI/René Bertrand

Dear readers,

Small towns in Germany are home to more than 24 million people. They are places with their own identities. As anchor points of public welfare and services, they contribute significantly to the German Federal Government's goal of achieving equal living conditions in all parts of Germany.

At the same time, small towns face demographic, economic and social challenges and often need support in their development.

In 2018, the BMI therefore launched the initiative „Kleinstädte in Deutschland" [small towns in Germany]. With this initiative the BMI aims to strengthen smaller cities as residential and business locations. A crucial part of it is the idea of setting up a Small Town Academy. The projected institutionalization of the Small Town Academy is currently being prepared utilising a pilot phase as a novel method. The pilot phase offers a framework to review the contents

and methods of small-town development for their future implementation in the programme of a Small Town Academy.

The innovative pilot-phase approach is presented in this brochure. I very much hope that this will create momentum toward other European countries, to build an open network through which more small towns can learn for their urban development, from each other, with each other, for each other.

Your

Volkmar Vogel
Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI)

Picture: Schafgans DGPh

Dear readers,

According to surveys, the Corona pandemic has stirred many people's desire for a life outside of the big city. The areas surrounding cities have always been particularly popular with families as a place to live. According to a BBSR study, this trend has recently been reinforced by the high real-estate prices in the growing cities. Digitalization as accelerated by the Corona crisis has helped working from home to break through. It is still unclear whether rural areas can benefit in the long term. What is certain, however, is that the Corona crisis is highlighting the benefits and potentials of small towns as attractive places to live and work. We should seize this opportunity.

At the BBSR, we have been analysing the development of small towns on the basis of comprehensive statistics for many years now, including for the federal government's urban development reports. Results from the programme Experimental Housing and Urban Development (ExWoSt) and pilot projects of the National Urban Development Policy provide impulses for planning practices. Studies examine the effects of joint federal and state urban-development funding in cities and municipalities and compile examples worth imitating.

We would like to use the results of our research for the development and institutionalization of a small-town academy. This Small Town Academy is aimed at providing the more than 2,000 small towns in Germany with a purpose-built platform for urban development to network, exchange experiences and offer advanced training. A period until 2023 has been earmarked for this purpose. The academy aims to pool knowledge and create strong networks for small-town development using a variety of digital and analogue formats. The policy of promoting equal living conditions receives another building block in this manner.

This publication shows the ideas behind the Small Town Academy, what issues we associate with it and how you can benefit from it as someone in a responsible position in municipal government or as a member of local political bodies. I wish you interesting reading!

Your

[signature: Markus Eltges]

Dr. Markus Eltges
Head of the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR)

Small Towns

Across Europe, small towns shape the settlement structure to a considerable degree. As the place where a third of the population live and work, they also enjoy great popularity in Germany. High quality of life, a positive attitude, close social ties and security are only some of the qualities attributed to them by people of all generations. Small towns are diverse and offer a wealth of possibilities. What's more, the current debates about digital transformation and the changes caused by the corona pandemic might lead to a new perception of small towns. Options for working from home, teleworking and multi-locality, as well as the role of small towns as business locations for small and medium-sized companies are crucial factors. In Germany, about one in three companies that are 'hidden champions' and market leaders in innovation products or services in Europe or even worldwide comes from a small town.

There are different views in Europe and in Germany as to how to best define small towns. What is clear, however, is that small towns are an specific settlement type that is characterized by similarities that can be represented in different types (such as small towns in peripheral and central location), as well as by heterogeneity and diversity. Moreover, it is mainly the local people who make their small towns what they are, often with substantial self-motivation. It is not only for these reasons that small towns have a logic of their own that should guide both the way urban development is practiced and scientific considerations.

In order to support small towns, their urban communities and their independence, the Federal Ministry of Interior, Building and Community (BMI) and the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) have launched the innovative experimental trial project "Pilotphase Kleinstadtakademie" [Small Town Academy pilot phase].

The project focuses on a changed strategic approach: true to the principle "urban development by, with and for small towns", topics are explored in a variety of formats, instruments and methods that the inhabitants of small towns consider relevant, as well as their administrations, civil institutions, politicians and companies. The aim is to give small towns the opportunity to articulate, develop and find common solutions for their concerns and needs.

The time for the establishment of a Small Town Academy has come. Small towns assume key stabilization roles in the polycentric settlement systems of Germany and Europe. Many people associate their home and identity with them. They are characterised by a specific urbanity and contribute to societal cohesion. While in many places, housing shortages and resource competition are constantly increasing the pressure to become more livable, healthier, greener and more communal, small towns offer their own solutions. As a place for example for "hidden champions", they not only contribute to economic development but realize their potentials in housing, culture, education and social affairs.

With their qualities, small towns play a key role as residential, employment and supply locations for the creation of more equal living conditions in rural and urban regions. However, with increasing attention, it quickly becomes apparent that there is a lack of specific support for sustainable small-town development. The major social megatrends – digitalization, migration, a changing climate and demographic change – also represent particular challenges for small towns. The specifics vary from town to town and require responses adapted to each local situation. At the same time, small towns as an independent city type must be examined systematically, while an active planning and implementation culture needs to be initiated that recognises the diversity and specific needs of small towns.

The Small Town Academy, which is to be institutionalised from 2023, will combine a wide range of exchange, consulting and networking formats that generate innovation in and knowledge of urban development in small towns and allow municipalities to identify and exploit their potentials. In the pilot phase (2019 to 2022), small towns are involved in the development all aspects of the Small Town Academy, from the structure, to the formats, to the outline of the programme itself. If nothing else, small towns are given an audible and visible role on the stage of urban research and planning practice, thus taking into account their societal significance in Germany and Europe.

Depending on location and urban history, small towns differ greatly in terms of urban morphology, economic function well as social and cultural significance.

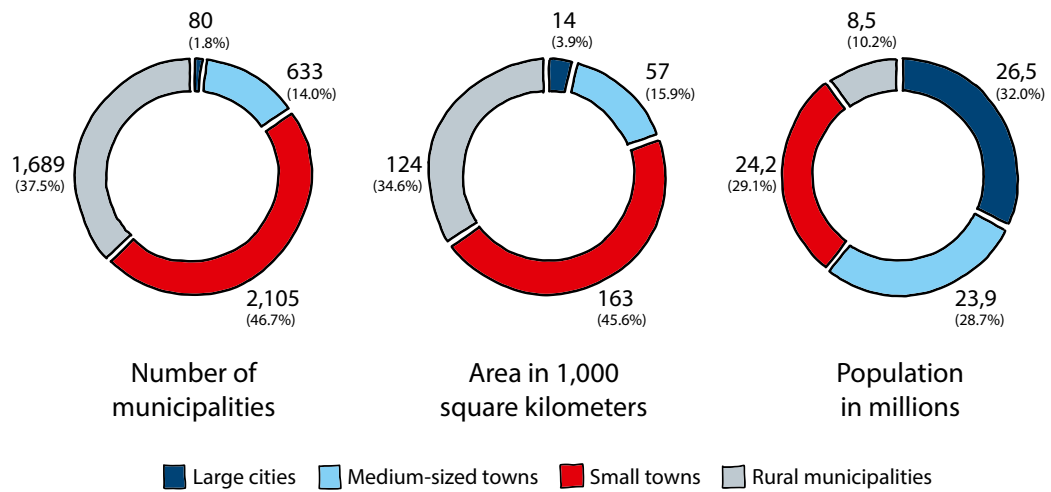Picture: Urbanizers

5

Picture: Urbanizers

6

Picture: Urbanizers

7

The Diversity of Small Towns in Germany

Small towns (in red) by number, area and population in relation to other settlement types in Germany 2018.

Source: Spatial Monitoring System of the BBSR

	Number of municipalities	Area in 1,000 square kilometers	Population in millions

Legend: ■ Large cities ■ Medium-sized towns ■ Small towns ■ Rural municipalities

Of the 4,507 cities in Germany, almost half are small towns (2,105). This is where just under a third of the population lives and works: With 24.2 million residents, almost as many people live in small towns as in the 80 major German cities.[1] In terms of area and number, they are even the dominant city type (as of 2018). However, they and the people living there have not yet received attention in politics, administration and research. For too long, urban research has focused on large cities and conurbations. In the meantime, small town research is mostly based on individual case studies, often in the context of investigations of rural and demographically, socio-culturally or economically fragile areas.

Small town is not small town. Each has its own character, shaped by things like its location, its socio-demographic development and urban morphology, its urban functions, economic linkages and cultural aspects. This contradicts the prevailing narrative of the small town as a uniform type of urban settlements. For example, the 925 small towns far off medium-sized and large cities (peripheral or very peripheral location) face other challenges than the 1,187 small towns in their immediate vicinity (central or very central location).

Especially demographic change[2] has a markedly different impact on small towns. Small towns in a central location are gaining population, on average, and have to respond to the growing demand for housing, technical infrastructure and social facilities. In rural areas, on the other hand, they are faced with the task of maintaining or reconfiguring infrastructure and supply functions, as well positively managing an

Small towns in the German spatial-planning system

In Germany, there is no official definition of city and municipal types. For this reason, BBSR distinguishes between the municipalities and municipal associations according to the categories of large city, medium-sized city, small town and rural communities for its statistical analyses.[3] Simplified, the definition is based on the basis of the population of the municipality and its central function according to federal-state planning.[4] If a municipality has between 5,000 and 20,000 inhabitants or at least a basic central function with medium central partial function (i.e. it covers the daily to upmarket demands of the population for various infrastructures, e.g. in the fields of education, health and commerce), it is considered a „small town".
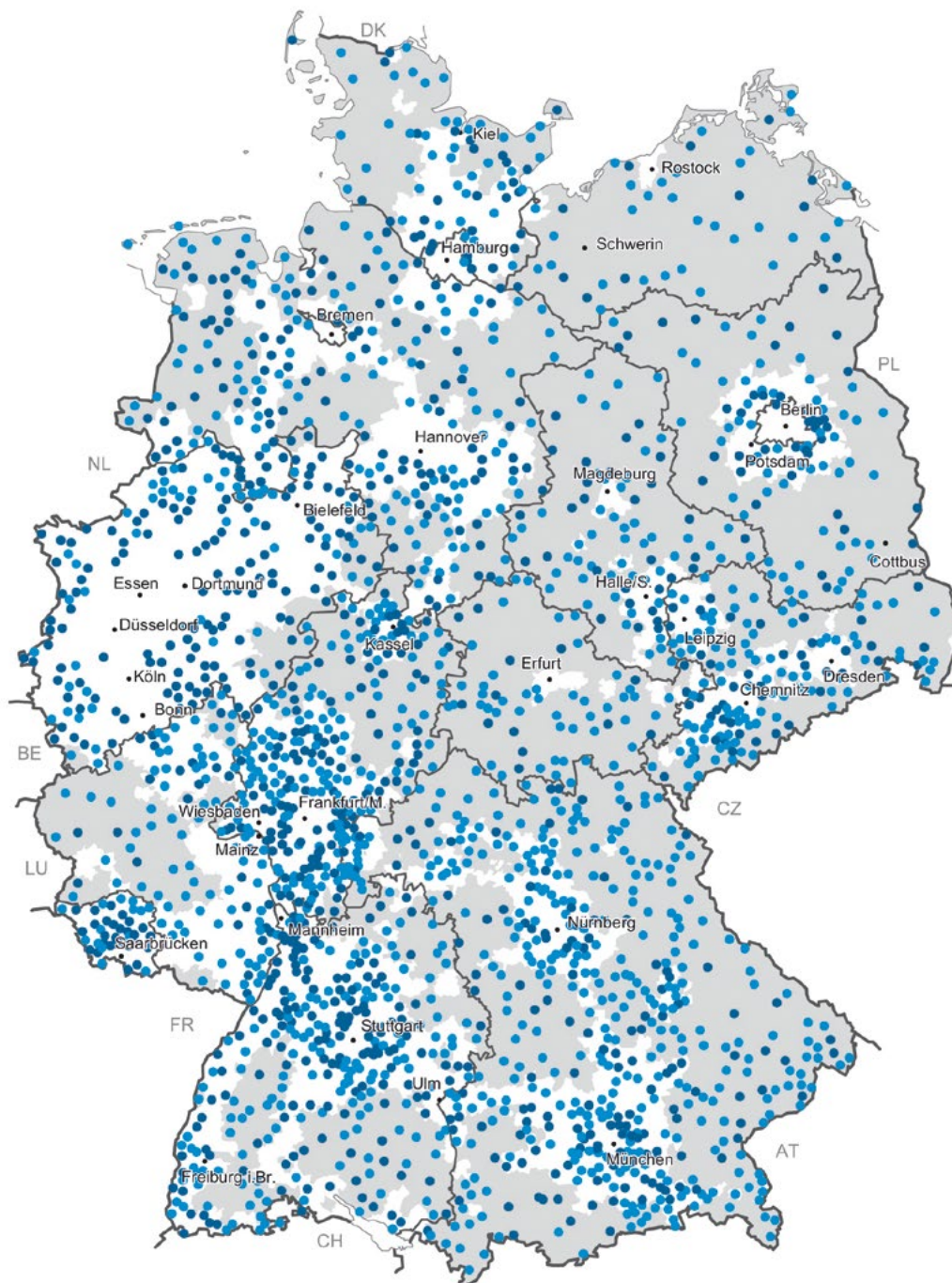
Distribution of small towns across Germany

Small towns 2018 by size
- ● 10,000 up to 20,000 inhabitants
- ● 5,000 up to 10,000 inhabitants

Spatial location
- ☐ central
- ▨ peripheral

Source: Spatial Monitoring System of the BBSR Geometry: municipal conglomerations (generalised borders), 31.12.2018 © GeoBasis-DE/BKG Author: A. Milbert

100 km

© BBSR Bonn 2020

ageing and declining population. Despite a good economic situation in Germany as a whole, here these negative demographic developments lead to an imminent reduction of the supply and centre function. The conditions for small towns are therefore very different. Because they often have few resources and little scope, small towns need fundamental support in order to deal with the major transformation processes, like social or digital change, to find their place in a changed world. Because whatever their situation, small towns always are in regional to global competition, for young people, families, jobs, purchasing power, and more.

More facts and figures about small towns in Germany (only in German language):
https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/veroeffentlichungen/izr/2018/6/Inhalt/inhalt.html

Urban development by, with and for small towns!

Picture: Mathias Burke

The Idea of the Small Town Academy

Urban development by, with and for small towns!

Building on the findings of previous research fields of the German federal government and corresponding to the specific needs of small towns, the idea arose to establish a Small Town Academy. Small towns should[5] no longer merely react to prearranged programmes and funding, but should have the opportunity to express their concerns and ideas in a self-determined manner. The Small Town Academy should enable them to learn with each other and to work on their future viability as places with a high quality of and a special attitude to life. As a learning organisation,

it aims to offer small towns space and time for exchange and innovation, flexibly adapting to future requirements. With technical and financial support and by embracing the commitment of the locals on the ground in a spirit of citizen science, it will offer municipalities an opportunity to develop their own ideas, to plan their own projects and to assist one another.

"Urban development by, with and for small towns" is the programmatic core of the Small Town Academy. The Academy needs to be conceived, discussed and operated from the inner logic of small towns and their specific potentials. The German small-town landscape is diverse, the local

Workshops

Regional conferences — On-site exchange of experience — Tandems

Innovative learning formats

Future workshops — Local and regional — Pop-up labs

Internet platform

Exhibitions

Digital — SMALL TOWN ACADEMY — Analog

Empowerment through collaboration, consulting and networking

Virtual libraries

Publications

Literature — Event information

Reports — Working papers

Nationwide

Secretariat — Meetings and conferences

Interactive workshops (left side) are a key format within the elaborate setup of the Small Town Academy (right side).
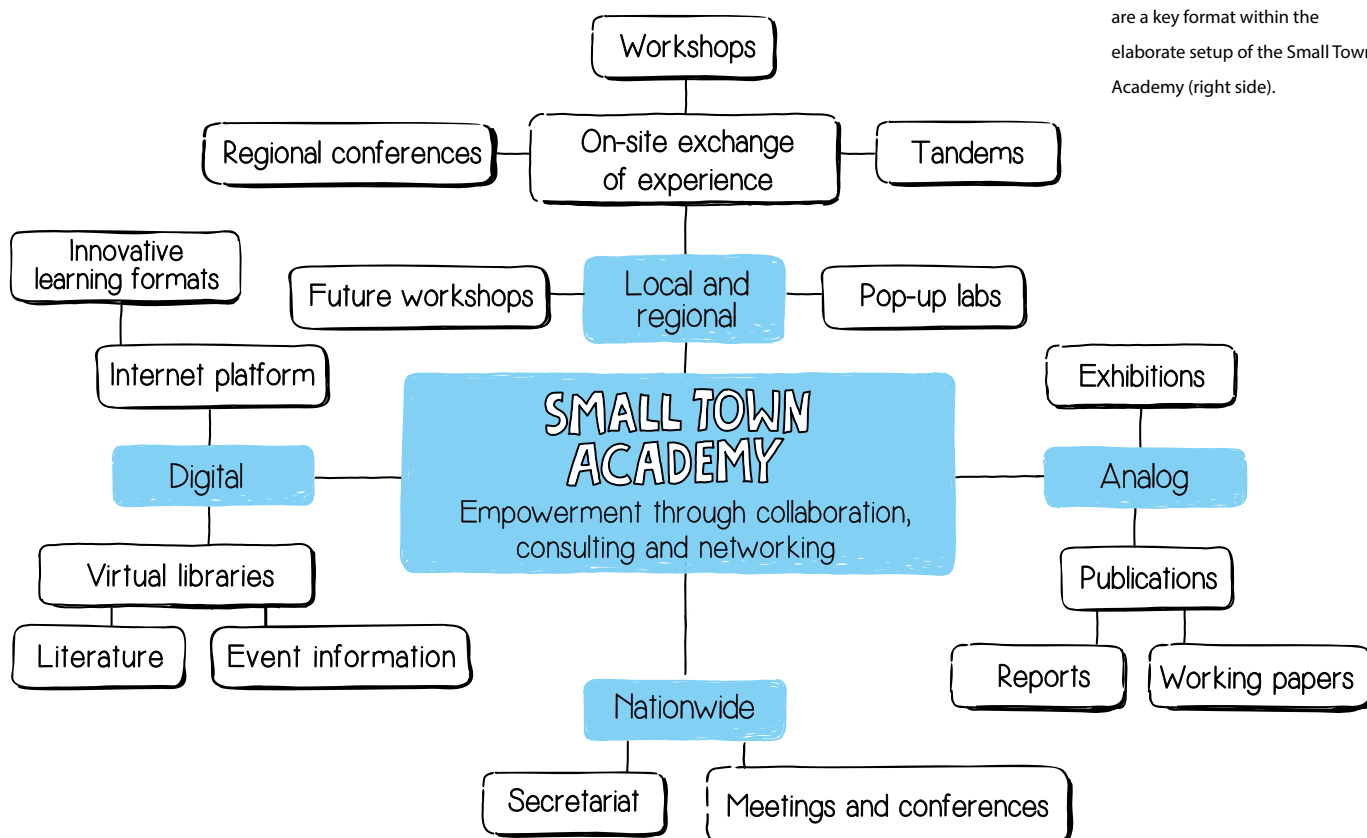
Source: Urbanizers

situation is often fundamentally different despite similar challenges. The Small Town Academy will use this diversity and provide custom-tailored support, taking into account the staff and time constraints on the ground, with a variety of solutions for knowledge transfer and the exchange of experiences. Analog and digital, centrally as well as locally and regionally organised formats will be used to meet the various needs of small towns. The focus always remains on the direct exchange among all participants, for example in projects in small-town development or in the form of mayor tandems, but also in numerous event formats, from temporary workshops to regional and national conferences. Virtual libraries, digital-learning formats and exhibitions are also in planning.

With these offers, the Small Town Academy will connect the various actors of small-town development from politics, administration, science, business, civil society and practice across federal-state boundaries. In this manner, it strengthens the ideas of collaborative small-town development, in which knowledge is co-produced and new forms of cooperation become possible. The work of the Small Town Academy is transparent: all findings are made available to the general public. By embedding it in political structures, it also aims to move the small-town city type out of the political and social attention gap and lend it a louder voice in discourse and practice.

The Small Town Academy During the Pilot Phase

What will small towns demand of a Academy? What are key contents and what formats of knowledge transfer and experience-sharing are required to convey them? What kind of structure makes it possible to stabilize the Small Town Academy and promote German sustained small-town development?

During the pilot phase (2019 to 2022), these questions are addressed by BMI, BBSR and secretariat together with selected small-town associations, during which the Small Town Academy is developed in an innovative process in terms of programme and organisation.

The main tasks in the pilot phase include:

- the creation and support of a small-town network

- the development of innovative and evaluation of existing formats of knowledge transfer and experience-sharing

- identification of topics and fields of action, as well as

- the creation and development of a sustainable organizational model.
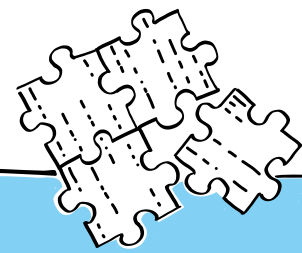
Small Town Academy as a project in the German research and funding landscape

BBSR as a federal research institution, subordinate to the BMI, is dedicated to the topics of building, urban development and housing. The results of its research programmes support the decision-making of the federal government and its departments as scientifically sound advice. In recent years, BMI and BBSR have increased their interest in the issues of small towns. The "Small Town Academy Pilot Phase" builds on these efforts and is aimed at raising awareness for the social significance and economic potential of small towns, and for their challenges, in the political domain and the professional public.

The project has innate connections to European regulations. The „Small Town Academy Pilot Phase" also refers, among other things, to the New Urban Agenda 2.0[6] that promotes the resilience and sustainability of cities and reduction of inequalities. It also answers to the New Leipzig Charter[7] established in November 2020 as the new guideline for integrated urban development policy. Within the framework of the European value model and the common good the Leipzig Charter adresses new challenges like demographic change, digitalization of all spheres or the increase of inequality between cities and countryside. The „Small Town Academy Pilot Phase" also is a balance-oriented spatial development project.

Approach

The research approach during the pilot phase is based on three principles:

Include everyone

All stakeholders in small-town development – from politics, academia, administration, civil society and practice – are actively involved in the development process from the very beginning. They become experts, researchers and developers. Programme and organisation of the Small Town Academy are developed taking into account the perspectives of all participants.

Work together

Mayors, political representatives, small-town researchers, city machers and citizens work out the structures and contents of the Small Town Academy together. Depending on the research interest pursued, they come together in varying constellations in order to discuss (partial) issues of the Small Town Academy, trial individual formats and set priorities. The stakeholders meet on an equal footing.
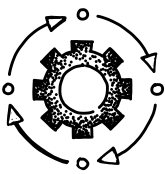
Develop gradually

An approach in stages is formative for the Small Town Academy. Planning and design phases allow for successive programmatic development and ample discussion of questions. Sample projects, experiments and innovative approaches mark the trial and action phases. The results are assessed in evaluation and reflection phases. Adaptation requirements will be integrated in subsequent planning and design phases.

Programme

Topics, programming, formats and structures of the Small Town Academy will be developed and qualified in the pilot phase through numerous activities:

Project calls and model projects

Annual project calls are used to support model projects where interested small-town networks can creatively engage with key issues of nationwide small-town development. The associations develop and test content and methods that can later be integrated into the Small Town Academy and passed on to other small towns.

Creation of publicity-relevant media

Publications, reports and flyers spread the idea of the Small Town Academy and promote attention for small towns in general. An corporate design gives the Small Town Academy recognition value.

The test character of the pilot phase becomes clear both in working formats and in the structure of the Small Town Academy.

Picture: Mathias Burke

Project calls

Project calls are calls for tenders by the federal government, which are addressed to municipalities throughout Germany. After a successful application, they receive financial support for their model project. In 2019, BMI and BBSR supported projects on the topics of "Big Small Towns" and "Housing" (grants of up to 62,500 euros per model project). In 2020, small towns were able to pursue freely chosen topics under the title "Small town development – innovative, diverse, sustainable" (grants of up to 400,000 euros). An innovative methodological approach bases on the inherent potentials and strengths of the applicant cities is among the key criteria. The advisory board of the Small Town Academy oversees the selection process and acts as jury in the final stage.

Picture: Urbanizers

Creation of an internet platform with a virtual library

An internet platform with a wide range of information and conferencing solutions will form a core of the future Small Town Academy. A virtual library will offer a comprehensive range of on-topic event information and media. Digital learning and networking opportunities also promote knowledge transfer and exchange.

Realisation of various events

In nationwide, regional and local formats, the stakeholders of small-town development come together, discuss questions of direction and institutionalization, and test formats for the future Small Town Academy. The instruments range from workshops, experience workshops, mayoral forums, expert and association discussions to national conferences.

Preparation of a special expert report

A special expert report gathers and assesses learning and sharing modules for cooperative small-town development and contemplates their further development. They will be tested in the pilot phase and integrated into the syllabus of the Small Town Academy.

Development of a sustainable organizational model

Together with experts, the prerequisites for the later institutionalisation of the Small Town Academy is laid out. Efficient organisational and financing models are developed and created.

Establishment of an advisory board

A technical advisory board accompanies the pilot phase as a consultative, formative and decision-making body. It is made up of representatives from small-town research and science, politics, academia, administration, professional associations and networks.

Organisation of the secretariat

A scientific monitoring agency establishes the secretariat of the Small Town Academy and develops the necessary processes and structures. It takes over the administrative management of the research project, takes care of the technical and organisational management of the programming, evaluates the activities in the pilot phase and ensures the transfer of results. Together with regional cooperation centres and educational institutions, it plans and carries out the programming of the Small Town Academy during the pilot phase.

Discard

Plan + Shape

Evaluate + Reflect

Implement

SMALL TOWN ACADEMY

Practice · Science · Administration · Policy · Civil society

Internet platform
Virtual library
Webinars

Project calls

Publications
Model projects
Workshops
Panels · Expert reports
Secretariat · Advisory board

Expert meetings
Conferences

Evaluation

Structures
Topics
Formats
Contents

Organizational model

Act + Test

Adapt

A joint process
of all protagonists.

Practice Insights

Learning from Model Projects

Self-selected topics, nationwide cooperation and innovative methods: The model projects supported in the pilot phase shed light on the ideas of the Small Town Academy and test them in the real world. This not only generates visible local successes, but also important insights for the development of the future Small Town Academy.

In the model projects, the small-town associations creatively dedicate themselves to innovative projects in their urban development. Possible topics range from inner development to tourism, from governance and education to climate justice or digital transformation. The associations consist of at least four small towns each, which differ as much as possible in terms of location, area, population and economic development. This ensures the transferability of the results to other small towns in Germany.

With future workshops, mobile coaching and consulting teams or digital-training solutions, the small-town associations organise their project work. Together with a project agency and scientific support, they share experiences. In doing so, they test networking and transfer formats, which can later be passed on to the Small Town Academy.

Picture: Felix Köhler

Together with three other small towns, Mücheln (Geiseltal) is realizing the first model project of the Small Town Academy.

A practical example: Attractive Living in a Small Town – Change through Digitalization and Mobility

Major societal disruption, such as digitalization, presents small towns with major challenges to which they can only react with limited financial and human resources and a lot of creativity. At the same time, they must create modern housing and mobility opportunities in both peripheral and central locations, so as to maintain their attractiveness as places of residence and living.

The cities of Mücheln (Geiseltal) (Saxony-Anhalt), Laucha an der Unstrut (Saxony-Anhalt), Bad Lobenstein (Thuringia)

and Rodewisch (Saxony) approach these topics as part of their model project. They want to use the opportunities offered by digitalisation to show their specific potential in housing and mobility. In cooperation with Merseburg University of Applied Science, they develop a database with demographic spatial base data and carry out comprehensive analyses. In this manner, they identify possible solutions for high-quality living and residential conditions that are precisely adapted to the needs of their respective urban communities. Duration: 2020 to 2022

Advisory Board for the Small Town Academy: Independence and Self-Determination

The Advisory Board, which was set up in 2019 and will remain in place throughout the pilot phase, has a consultative, formative and decision-making role during the pilot phase. On the one hand, it sets the focus in terms of content, selects pilot projects and advises on the programmatic direction of events. On the other hand, it supports BMI, BBSR and the scientific monitoring in matters of institutionalization.

The Advisory Board meets twice a year. It has its own bylaws and elects its own chairpersons. So on a small scale, it trials the future self-determination and independence of the stakeholders in the future Small Town Academy. The members take on the role of multipliers: they communicate the activities of the pilot phase in their own networks, establish contacts with potential cooperation partners and anchor the idea of the Small Town Academy in their respective areas of responsibility. In addition, the interdisciplinary combination of the Advisory Board strengthens cross-departmental cooperation and ensures the inclusion of divergent perspectives in the programming and organisational development of the Small Town Academy.

Exploratory workshop "Small Towns and Digital Transformation" Discuss the small town of tomorrow together

When it comes to the future of the cities of the world, digitalization concepts usually are mentioned first. The concept of a smart city combines, for example, a wide range of solutions aimed at making our cities more efficient, mobile or greener. But such concepts for digital transformation are subject to a strong scaling effect. Small towns in particular need more than a simple transfer of metropolitan ideas, since products and solutions for the European metropolises often do not fit or have unintended, often even adverse effects.

In the course of the exploratory workshop, representatives of small-town development discuss which subtopics, methods and instruments of digitalization are relevant for sustainable small town development. Comprehensive broadband coverage, location-independent work, eGovernance, know-how and software for digital civic participation and inter-municipal cooperation are just a few of many important defining factors for a successful future for small towns.

Various experts are invited to the exploratory workshops. In the pilot phase, they are used to identify topics that are relevant for small-town development and therefore for the Small Town Academy. They offer a wide variety of perspectives and provide important insights for the development of the pilot phase[8].

Interested in small-town development?
All the news about this research project can be found at (only in German language):
www.kleinstadtakademie.de

Glossary

Federal Ministry of Interior, Building and Community – BMI
The Federal Ministry of Interior, Building and Community (BMI) is a supreme federal authority in Germany. Its business areas include civil protection, integration facilitation, sports promotion, security issues as well as construction, city and housing.

Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development – BBSR
The Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (BBSR) is a departmental research institution under the portfolio of the Federal Ministry of Interior, Building and Community (BMI). The Federal Ministry request both research and development services as well as science-based services.

Leipzig Charter
The "LEIPZG CHARTA on Sustainable European Cities" is a document of the member states of the European Union in which the ministers responsible for urban development have agreed on common principles and strategies for urban development policy.

New Urban Agenda
The New Urban Agenda is the central outcome of the UN Conference "Habitat III" of 2016 on housing and sustainable urban development. The non-binding agreement makes clear demands pertaining to the future development, function and design of cities and is a guideline for sustainable and integrated urban development.

Initiative "Small Towns in Germany"
The initiative "Small Towns in Germany" [original: Kleinstädte in Deutschland], founded in 2018, bundles, coordinates and expands the BMI's existing programmes and activities for small town development. The aim is to strengthen the functionality of small towns in both rural areas and conurbations.

Research programme "Experimental Housing and Urban Development"
The research programme "Experimental Housing and Urban Development" [original: Experimenteller Wohnungs- und Städtebau] (ExWoSt) is a program of the BMI and is supervised by the BBSR. In the form of research fields, studies, initiatives and pilot projects, the federal government promotes innovative planning and measures for important urban-planning and housing-policy issues. From these experiences, cues for the further development of urban planning and housing policy are derived and the transfer of knowledge is supported.

ExWoSt research programme "Potentials of Small Towns in Peripheral Locations"
The ExWoSt research field "Potentials of Small Towns in Peripheral Locations" [original: Potenziale von Kleinstädten in peripheren Lagen] of the BBSR on behalf of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety focused on the special situation of small towns in peripheral locations, the stakeholders on the ground and urban society. In eight small towns, development potentials were identified and future strategies were developed in a process shared by politics, administration, business and citizens.

Small-town network
A small-town network is an association of at least four small towns, ideally with supra-regional distribution across Germany. Within the framework of the Small Town Academy, it applies for funding with a project. Through the cooperation of several small towns across several regions, approaches and solutions for small-town development are generated throughout Germany.

Model projects
A model project is the project submitted in response to a call for projects of a small-town network that is supported within the framework of the Small Town Academy. In it, model solutions are developed for a subject and/or approaches are trialled by the network.

Publication Notes

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Footnotes

1   As of 2018. BBSR (unpublished).

2   BBSR (2018): Kleinstädte in Deutschland. Urbanität. Vielfalt. Perspektiven. Hintergrundinformationen zum Kongress, p. 4.

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