

# SLOW CITIES: SUSTAINABLE PLACES IN A FAST WORLD

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**ABSTRACT:** *This article examines the Slow Food and Slow City movement as an alternative approach to urban development that focuses on local resources, economic and cultural strengths, and the unique historical context of a town. Following recent discussions about the politics of alternative economic development, the study examines the Slow City movement as a strategy to address the interdependencies between goals for economic, environmental, and equitable urban development. In particular, we draw on the examples of two Slow Cities in Germany—Waldkirch and Hersbruck, and show how these towns are retooling their urban policies. The study is placed in the context of alternative urban development agendas as opposed to corporate-centered development. We conclude the article by offering some remarks about the institutional and political attributes of successful Slow Cities and the transferability of the concept.*

**T**his article examines the Slow Food and Slow City movements as alternative approaches to urban economic development. We analyze the movements from the perspective of urban regime theory and argue that the Slow City agenda represents a viable model for alternative urban development that is especially sensitive and responsive to the complicated interdependencies between the goals for economic development, environmental protection, and social equity. Following the recent discussion about alternative economic development strategies (Imbroscio, 2003; Rast, 2005; Stone, 2004a), we aim to advance the understanding of unorthodox approaches to urban development and heed the call by Imbroscio (2003) to focus on strategies for local economic vitality that contribute to more equality and community stability. In addition, we aim to explain the Slow City cases as approaches to urban development that do not merely focus on community-based economic development, but also on issues of sustainability and social equity. From our perspective, the Slow Food movement created the ideological platform for a city-based spin-off that constitutes the grassroots local implementation of the principles associated with livability and quality of life.

Founded in 1986, the Slow Food movement has grown into an international association with local chapters worldwide. In contrast, the Slow City movement is mainly a European concept with member towns primarily in Italy, Germany, Norway, and England. Even though Slow Cities are primarily a European phenomenon, the movement can provide U.S.-based urban scholars and planning practitioners with ideas about how to implement and pursue an alternative urban

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development agenda. The movement's underlying assumptions are rooted in local sustainability and address the interdependencies between the environment, the economy, and equity: a good example of Campbell's "three-E" framework (Campbell, 1996).

Slow Food's and Slow City's agendas are to promote sustainability and conviviality. The Slow Food movement is focused on countering the loss of local distinctiveness as it relates to food, conviviality, sense of place, and hospitality. The Slow City, or *Città Lente*, movement—a spin-off from the Slow Food movement—aims to protect and enhance urban livability and quality of life. Slow Cities are places where citizens and local leaders pay attention to local history and utilize the distinct local context to develop in better and more sustainable ways. More generally, both movements focus on local distinctiveness and explicitly link the three E's of sustainable urban development. Their goals represent ideas about how to grow cities in a more conscious and "slow" way and constitute, as we will argue in this article, an alternative, more inclusive, less corporate-centered urban regime.

We first review the literature on alternative urban development and urban regime theory. We then examine the Slow Food and Slow City movements as case studies of alternative urban development. In particular, we draw on the examples of two Slow Cities in Germany, Waldkirch and Hersbruck, in order to illustrate how the cities are retooling their policies to include slowness and conviviality. Lastly, we offer a critical discussion about the potential of these cases to constitute alternative urban regimes and their application to the broader urban context.

The research for this article was conducted during field work in two German Slow Cities in September 2004. The towns are Hersbruck and Waldkirch and are located in the states of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. We selected these two towns because they represent the first two Slow Cities in Germany and were among the first towns outside of Italy (where the movement started) to adopt the agenda and become certified. The other German Slow Cities are either recent additions (e.g., Überlingen) or have not developed extensive Slow City agendas (e.g., Schwarzenbruck). In addition to a set of telephone interviews in January 2004, we were able to follow up with on-site, semistructured interviews with about 20 key informants in both cities. The interview partners ranged from elected officials, planning staff members, environmental nonprofit representatives, to small business owners. In addition to the interviews, we were also able to visit many significant sites and events in the two towns, which gave us the opportunity to become participatory observers. Other data sources include secondary literature on the slow food movement, on the cities' histories, planning documents, online resources, and newspaper articles. The limitation of this case study approach is that we were not able to examine and compare the implementation of the Slow City agenda in other countries (such as the U.K., Italy, Norway), even though such a comparison would be highly interesting as we would then be able to highlight differences resulting from various political and bureaucratic contexts. Slow Food and Slow Cities have received limited attention in the urban affairs literature (Beatley, 2004; Knox, 2005) and some from a more journalistic point of view (Honoré, 2004). Thus, an in depth analysis of the two German Slow Cities will further our understanding of "slowness" in the broader sustainability discussion in the urban context.

## ALTERNATIVE URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES AND REGIMES

The Slow Food and Slow City movements can best be analyzed using the theories developed in the political economy literature about alternative economic development agendas and urban regimes. The leading explanation about the process and content of mainstream urban development in the United States focuses on the dominance of business interests and the dependence of public policymakers on corporate-centered/mainstream economic development policies. Imbroscio calls the former the "external economic dependence" and the latter the "internal resource dependence"

of urban public officials (Imbroscio, 1997, p. 34). Cities are compelled to pursue corporate-centered economic development strategies because they need to enhance their city's economic standing in an increasingly competitive and global environment. Peterson drew attention to this dependence in his "city limits" theory (Peterson, 1981) and Stone and others have added to this discourse by examining the political struggles engaging business interests and public officials in urban regimes or growth machines (Logan & Molotch, 1988; Stone, 1989).

Urban regime theory in particular enhances the perspective by adding a political dimension and argues that "the relationship between popular control of government and private control of the means of production, distribution, and exchange is a fundamental dichotomy in society that tends to play out in favor of business interests" (Davies, 2004, p. 275). As a result, alternative—more equitable, democratic, and sustainable—approaches are not put forward because of a lack of representation from groups other than business interests.

Imbroscio and others have challenged the deterministic view of corporate-centered urban development programs (Imbroscio, 1997, 2003; Rast, 2005; Williamson, Imbroscio, & Alperovitz, 2003). Imbroscio in particular offers an interesting research agenda that challenges scholars to develop "alternative ideas about the nature of city economies and how to promote their vitality" (p. 275) to demonstrate that alternatives are feasible and that urban regimes can be reconstructed (Imbroscio, 2003). He presents six elements of an alternative economic development regime. These include strategies to increase human capital and community economic stability, to provide for proper accounting of development costs and benefits through public balance sheets, the development of asset specificity, economic localism, and lastly the development of alternative institutions. Combined, these strategies would decrease the dependence of public officials on outside resources and corporate interests because each would increase the endogenous economic capacity of a specific urban locale.

Corporate-centered or mainstream approaches to urban development have distinct characteristics (see Table 1). Related to physical and economic development planning, such approaches typically involve large-scale projects—sometimes referred to as mega projects (Altshuler & Luberoff, 2003)—such as downtown revitalization at the expense of more community-based development. They are motivated by a perception of global competition between cities for private investments. Often these projects are fairly homogenous and similar in nature and are illustrated by nondescript office parks and mixed-use urban developments or suburban fast food and franchise shopping places that create a geography of what Ritzer calls "islands of McDonaldization" (Ritzer, 2003, p. 122). As a result of the focus on the single imperative of economic progress, corporate-centered strategies often do not benefit marginalized groups and contribute to declining urban equality (Imbroscio, 1997). The economic development planning literature points to the examples of smokestack chasing and the associated supply-side policies such as tax incentives for private companies and an economic development planning practice that is merely focused on place promotion and marketing (Levy, 1990; Rubin, 1988).

Other policy arenas such as food production and provision are also affected by tendencies of corporatization. The literature on food systems provides us with some interesting points about the intrinsic nature of corporate-centered strategies: Murdoch and Miele (1999), for example, pair globalization and standardization with the industrialization of food and show how even the specialized, crafts-oriented organic market is moving toward a more corporate-centered strategy. Industrialized food is often associated with lower quality (i.e., unsafe), with notions of the unnatural and inauthentic, and is highly standardized and often out of season and out of place. The fast food industry would be one example that would also have many negative urban outcomes such as sprawl and public health concerns. In contrast, alternative food systems are associated with being more localized and specialized both in terms of the way they are produced and consumed

(Murdoch & Miele, 1999; Murdoch, Marsden, & Banks, 2000). The inclusion of food systems is relevant here because of its influence on Slow Food and Slow City movements and its connection to urban development and planning (Campbell, 2004; Vallianatos, Gottlieb, & Haase, 2004).

In contrast to corporate-centered approaches, alternative agendas address normative goals of equity and democratic representation of grassroots efforts. Such agendas may aim at creating “alternative economic spaces” (Leyshon & Lee, 2003). The budding community economic development movement represents a good example here (Simon, 2001). Typically, community economic development is focused on smaller-scale areas such as neighborhoods and it attempts to benefit groups that have traditionally been left out of the mainstream economic system (homeless, minority, immigrants, etc.). Programs may have different areas of emphasis such as the community, the economy, or on development (Boothroyd & Davis, 1993). The two movements discussed in this article—Slow Food and Slow City—represent such alternative agendas. Slow Food’s emphasis on the way food is produced and consumed and its normative goal of promoting organic, seasonal, traditional, and distinctive food highlights characteristics such as high quality, asset specificity, sensitivity to local history and culture, as well as crafts orientation and sustainability. Local sensitivity and authenticity seem to be an important component of the alternative agenda. According to Clifford and King (1993), authenticity is about the “real and the genuine” that “hold a strength of meaning” (p. 14). Illustrating authenticity and its connection to place, they note the example of Wensleydale cheese, a handcrafted cheese from United Kingdom’s North Yorkshire area:

Why is it important to makers and gourmets that this cheese continues to be made in this valley and not the next? Amongst the reasons to do with the need for jobs, comes also an understanding that cows of this place, eating grass in this valley, with expertise built here over generations combine to create a food which is particular, authentic, and good. Its making brings dignity and pride to the place, since the people who make it are experts, the people who grow the grass to feed the cows are implicated in this. The relationships breed culture and identity which has meaning for the people who live and work here and for those who chance upon it or make it their destination. The landscape that is created and sustained by this activity is one in which mixed grass, wild flowers, barns have a real role and sustain a landscape plotted and pieced with interrelationships (Clifford & King, 1993, p. 15).

This quote illustrates how the creation of a local product glues together the local economy, employment opportunities, and the area’s environmental assets such as cow pastures that are vitally important for the production of a locally distinct product. It is out of these connections that alternative spaces emerge.

Sustainable urban development falls into the realm of alternative urban development agendas. Its goal is to protect a city’s environmental assets while at the same time fostering profitable and fair economic development. Also known as the “three E’s” of sustainable development, this normative view combines environmental sustainability with notions of economic growth and social justice. The three E’s refer to the environment, the economy, and equity in society. As Campbell (1996) notes, finding a balance between the three E’s is not easy in practice because of various conflicts associated with relationships between the goals. For example, providing economic opportunities for a wide range of people (Campbell cites the example of creating jobs in resource extraction industries in rural areas) can often be in conflict with environmental protection (i.e., the fight to protect endangered species in rural areas that are economically dependent on extractive industries). With its normative orientation, the concept of sustainability from a three-E perspective fits the alternative agendas. If we take Imbroscio’s challenge to examine alternative approaches to urban development and analyze their potential to reconstitute the urban regime,

**TABLE 1**

**Comparing Corporate-Centered to Alternative Urban Development Agendas**

Agendas	Corporate-centered/mainstream	Alternative
Characteristics	Homogenized Single imperative Inequitable Industrial Standardized Corporate Unsustainable Copied Low quality Replicable Insensitive to local history, culture Fast	Idiosyncratic/asset specific Multiple imperatives Equitable Craft Customized Grassroots Sustainable Authentic High quality Asset specific Sensitive to local history, culture Slow
Examples	Urban mega projects Smokestack chasing Industrial food systems	Community economic development Slow City Slow Food

Campbell’s notion of the interplay between the economy, the environment, and equity provides us with a useful framework to examine the Slow Cities. Table 1 outlines the main characteristics of the two regimes—corporate-centered and alternative—and describes examples for each.

Corporate-centered urban development is not only confined to the United States. It is also common practice in European countries such as Germany. In their growth machine examination of European Union urban development programs, Leitner and Sheppard (1999) state that “local development, in cities and regions, is receiving much more attention, but in a way that promotes neoliberal goals. Recent policies attempt to reinforce the positive aspects of competition” (p. 236). These policies are also driven by political and economic elites. In thinking about the theory’s application to the German context, Molotch (1999) notes that “in Germany, fiscal redistribution is strong, but the country also has robust business groups as well as decentralization of land-use authority in the Länder—two circumstances encouraging growth machine dynamics” (p. 252).

Imbroscio’s call for more research on alternative ways to promote urban economies has sparked an interesting debate (Davies, 2004; Imbroscio, 2004; Stone, 2004b). Stone criticized Imbroscio for taking for granted that ideas can generate alternative regimes such as more community-based regimes or regimes driven by locally rooted small businesses rather than by large corporations (Imbroscio, 1998). Stone contends that political struggles—and not ideas—create viable urban development alternatives. He also laid out the elements that constitute a strong urban regime which include a well-defined agenda with congruent goals, which is supported by a cross-sector coalition. This coalition supports the effort with its resources, and through its cooperation the coalition facilitates follow-through actions. Stone goes further to say that this is all “reinforced by auxiliary means, typically involving an interpersonal and interorganizational network, and may also include side payments in various forms” (Stone, 2004a, p. 10).

We start our analysis by examining the Slow Food movement as the ideological platform of the Slow City movement. We examine the ways in which Slow Food provides the philosophical basis for the alternative Slow City agenda. We then explore the two case studies and the ways in which Waldkirch and Hersbruck respond to Campbell’s three-E challenges. We finish by applying Stone’s conceptualization of a strong urban regime and critically question some of the Slow City assumptions.

## THE SLOW FOOD MOVEMENT

The Slow Food movement was founded in 1986 by an Italian food writer who was alarmed by the opening of a McDonald's restaurant next to the Piazza di Spagna in the heart of Rome. The movement's goal is to protect the "right to taste" (Slow Food, 2004) by preserving almost-extinct traditional food products, raising the awareness of the pleasures of eating (including the social aspects of sharing a meal), taste education, and paying attention to traditional agricultural methods and techniques among other initiatives.

The Slow Food movement touches on important aspects that keep local community economies vital. In particular, Slow Food is locally grounded through its goal of maintaining the viability of locally owned businesses such as restaurants and farms. At the core of the movement is the concept of "territory." Slow Food emphasizes local distinctiveness through the connection to the specificity of a place as expressed by traditional foods and ways of producing and growing produce such as wine, cheese, fruits, and vegetables. In the words of Carlo Petrini (2001), the Italian food critic who spearheaded the resistance against McDonalds, the concept of territory is a "combination of natural factors (soil, water, slope, height above sea level, vegetation, microclimate) and human ones (tradition and practice of cultivation) that gives a unique character to each small agricultural locality and the food grown, raised, made and cooked there" (p. 8). Slow Food's understanding of territory connects the environmental aspects of a place to the culture and the history of people who inhabit the territory and have utilized it for generations for traditional food production. The Slow Food movement is organized locally into "convivia." By mid-2005 there were 83,000 members that were organized into 800 convivia in 50 countries, including 140 local chapters in the United States, 53 in Germany, and 360 in Italy.

One example of the Slow Food program that highlights the importance of territory is the so-called "Salone del Gusto," a biannual fair that showcases products made by local artisans. At the fair, consumers can taste and buy products thereby gaining an awareness of what certain localities produce and how it tastes. The Salone is financially and politically supported by the Regional Authority of Piedmont in Italy. In 2004, the movement held its fourth Salone in Turin and the next is scheduled for October 2006. The event highlights the diversity associated with different territories and aims at educating the public about the product's taste and heritage.

Slow Food implicitly aims to connect the three E's of sustainability. Its programs focus on creating an "aware consumer" who would in turn support local small farmers and local business owners. Through such local consumption practices, it is argued, people can give local producers the opportunity to derive an income, thereby helping to maintain the equity part of the three-E triangle. Slow Food promotes environmentally sound production through organic farming and by raising awareness about the dangers of genetically modified products and their threats to biodiversity.

Two Slow Food programs in Italy showcase how the three E's are connected. The first program is related to Slow Food's efforts to promote small, locally owned restaurants in Italy. These restaurants, known as *osterias* and *trattorias*, serve traditional local cuisine, are mostly family owned, have simple service and a welcoming atmosphere, serve good-quality food, local wine, and most importantly charge moderate prices. In essence, they are "everyday places" (Petrini, 2001, p. 52). The movement began to highlight the importance of osterias to urban life as a response to McDonald's expansion in Italy. Unlike in other Western European countries, McDonald's started in Italy in the cities and bypassed small towns in the countryside where osterias and trattorias still existed. Slow Food saw the opportunity to support these smaller restaurants as an alternative to fast food places. A guidebook (*Osteria d'Italia*) to the various establishments is published by Slow Food giving the consumer information about opportunities to savor local dishes. Promoting osterias, it is argued, supports small business owners and preserves local cultures and traditions.

Connecting the environment with social and economic aspects is the central idea of Slow Food's other program that is called the Ark of Taste. This program aims to protect almost-extinct fruits, vegetables, and traditional products or dishes through cataloging and promoting them. To be incorporated in the Ark's catalog, a product has to fulfill five requirements concerning the quality of the product. Ark products have to be connected to a specific territory (e.g., through the use of local ingredients and/or the use of traditional local practices). They also have to be linked environmentally, socio-economically, and historically to a specific locality, and must be made in limited quantities by small producers, as well as being at risk of real or potential extinction. One example that highlights the intimate connection between the environment and the local economy is the case of wine production in the Italian region Cinque Terre. The region is known for its steep terraced hills along the Mediterranean coast of Northwestern Italy. Wine production on these steep hills became almost extinct and the cultural landscape was in danger. Slow food promoted the protection of the vineyards by emphasizing the quality of the locally produced wine, the so-called *Sciacchetra* wine. Higher quality means higher prices for the wine, which in turn makes it worthwhile for young people in the villages to become vintners. This made it more appealing to younger generations to continue caring for the vineyards and thereby cultivating the landscape. They were in turn supported by training courses about how to increase the quality of their wine.

The Slow Food movement was formed out of a struggle against the proliferation of corporate-centered dynamics—that is, the expansion of fast food restaurants—in countries such as Italy that have traditionally been more attached to the origins and the local embeddings of food (Parrott, Wilson, & Murdoch, 2002). We have outlined the major components of the Slow Food movement because it created important ideas and incited the creation of a progressive network of small towns—Slow Cities or *Città Lente*—that set out to follow an alternative urban development agenda. The ideas of the Slow Food movement constitute the ideological basis for the Slow City movement, which we will describe in the next section.

## THE SLOW CITY MOVEMENT

While the Slow Food programs address the notion of place through the concept of “territory,” the Slow City movement provides an explicit agenda of local distinctiveness and urban development. The movement was formed in October 1999 by the mayors of three Italian towns and is closely related to the Slow Food initiative. Worldwide, there are more than 40 cities that have been certified as Slow Cities (Cittaslow, 2005). The majority are located in Italy (in particular in the regions of Tuscany and Umbria), but towns in Germany (Waldkirch, Hersbruck, Schwarzenbruck, and Überlingen), Norway (Levanger and Sokndal), and the United Kingdom (Ludlow, Diss, and Aylsham) are now calling themselves Slow Cities. To become a member, towns have to be smaller than 50,000 inhabitants and comply with a list of criteria covering environmental policies, urban design, support for local products, conviviality, and hospitality. Each Slow City has a distinct flavor and Beatley notes that “while the towns in *Città Slow* are pursuing a variety of different goals, what unites them, what they have in common, is a desire to protect the unique and distinctive aspects of their communities” (Beatley, 2004, p. 335).

To become certified as a Slow City, towns typically have to compile an application to a committee. A committee of representatives from other Slow Cities (so far such a committee was limited to Italian representatives) also visits the aspiring town and gains a first-hand impression of how the applicant fits with the Slow City philosophy. Such a process of course favors those applicants that already have a well-developed repertoire of programs and policies that fit with the Slow City criteria. Thus, to become a Slow City, towns must already have a well-defined alternative agenda.

The Slow City criteria are easily related to the three E's framework for sustainability. Environmental measures such as air-quality control, waste management, light pollution control, and

alternative energy sources are aimed at protecting the town's environmental assets. Some of the criteria are also concerned with economic growth through the production and consumption of local products. For example, the Slow City agenda suggests to conduct an annual census of typical local products, to conserve local cultural events, to develop local markets in the city's interesting and prestigious places, the development of organic agriculture, programs to increase the local gastronomic traditions, and initiatives to encourage the protection of products and handicrafts of the local area. Equity concerns are not directly addressed in the list of criteria, but they are implicated indirectly through the focus on local products and the resulting economic opportunities. It is in this point—the focus on local products—that the Slow City ideas distinguish from definitions of sustainability. While sustainability agendas are mostly motivated by issue of resource use and consumption, Slow Food and Slow Cities utilize local products as mediators of local economic, social, and cultural distinctiveness and sustainability, with resources and environmental quality only part of the concern.

We describe here the initial efforts of two German towns—Hersbruck and Waldkirch—in establishing themselves as Slow Cities. Hersbruck became the first German Slow City in May 2001 and a year later Waldkirch joined the movement. Hersbruck has 12,521 residents and is located about 30 km East of Nuremberg. Waldkirch is slightly larger, with almost 20,000 residents, and is set in the Black Forest about 15 kilometers North of Freiburg. Both cities were founded between the 9th and the 10th century and have traditionally served as central places along important European trading routes (in the case of Hersbruck between Prague and Nuremberg and in the case of Waldkirch between the Black Forest and Schwabia) (Stadt Hersbruck, 2002; Stadt Waldkirch, 2000; Stadt Waldkirch, 2004). The two cities are part of the agricultural and recreation hinterlands for the larger cities Nuremberg and Freiburg and enjoy a close connection to these urban centers both in terms of commuting patterns and trade. Today, their economies are diversified into services and manufacturing, but agriculture still plays an important role both in terms of local economic development and in how it characterizes the cultural landscapes.

### **Connecting the Environment with the Local Economy: Hersbruck**

The programs, policies, and activities of these two German Slow Cities exhibit a strong emphasis on connecting the three E's. For example, in Hersbruck local environmental protection groups have formed strong coalitions with farmers, city government, and small businesses to protect traditional pasture land and orchards, and to link this protection with regional and community economic development to create income opportunities for local residents. The city-owned pastures (*Hutanger*) were traditionally used by herdsman who were employed and paid by city government and who would take cattle owned by local residents out for grazing (Deutsches Hirtenmuseum Hersbruck, 2005). Typically the pastures were located just in between the city's border and the agricultural fields and provided open space for the adjacent urban areas. The pastoral landscape became emblematic of the community and served multiple purposes: Tall standing oak trees and various fruit trees (apples, cherries, etc.) provided not only shade for the cattle and wildlife habitat, but also fruit that would be auctioned off during harvest season to the locals. The trees and bushes would provide habitat for birds, insects, and other wildlife. Hersbruck's pastures were used until the late 1960s and early 1970s. By that time, however, the industrialization of food production as well as more efficient uses of barns for keeping the cattle inside all year put an end to the tradition of taking the cattle to communal pasture lands. The *Hutanger* subsequently were neglected and orphaned. Some would even be turned into trash dumps or housing and industrial subdivisions. Consequently, not only open space was lost but also the knowledge about the traditional uses of the land, one-of-a-kind heritage fruit trees and, most critically, the connections between protecting

and using the land for cattle and fruits that in turn provided economic opportunities for the local population.

A local environmental group that started to raise attention about the blight of these pasture lands in the early 1980s is now an important component of the Slow City coalition within Hersbruck. The group's strategy of working to revive and protect the pastures is intimately connected with the goal of enhancing and strengthening the local economy. For example, they formed a network of local farmers who now sell their products directly from the farm (*Bauerngemeinschaft landwirtschaftlicher Direktvermarkter*). The group conducted the first regional fair of local products (similar to Slow Food's Salone del Gusto) in 1998 (Naturschutzzentrum Wengleinpark, 2000). Since then, such a fair is held every year in a different village in the region.

Another program in Hersbruck involves the protection of heritage apple trees. The goal is to produce and market organic apple juice by using the fruit trees in the local orchards and pasturelands. The juice is produced and marketed regionally. A third initiative aimed at linking the cultural landscape with community economic development is a project that promotes the use of local produce in traditional region-specific dishes in restaurants. Twenty-nine farmers and 17 restaurants formed a group of suppliers and gastronomic producers. The farmers supply the restaurants with their seasonal products and the restaurant offers a special menu that also identifies the producer by name and location for the consumer. A plaque at the restaurants' front door indicates their participation. Parallel to this project are efforts to educate children about food and taste. Over a 2-year period, children are involved in a local cooking school where they learn how to prepare and serve food. Through this approach, Hersbruck ensures that the next generation of its citizens is knowledgeable about local traditions and the connections food provides with the locality and territory. The program seems to be effective because some of the participating children have apparently criticized their mothers for serving frozen pizza at home. A third project that connects the environment with the local economy derives from a group that formed to discuss and implement better uses of local woods. This group promotes the use of local wood varieties for alternative energy production (in the form of wood chip heating systems), house building, and furniture.

Hersbruck's efforts in being a Slow City show how cities can connect the three E's in a way that pays attention to local histories and cultures and connects environmental protection with community economic development. The projects, moreover, demonstrate how a town can build local distinctiveness through the revival and protection of local traditions in a forward-looking way.

### **Connecting to Social Sustainability: Waldkirch**

While Hersbruck's Slow City efforts exemplify the prospects for connecting environmental with economic goals, Waldkirch provides a good example of how a city can propagate social sustainability and underpin its economy with considerations for the socioeconomic well-being of its community members (i.e., equity). One early project in Waldkirch has involved the revitalization of a house that formerly served as a residence for homeless and whose public space turned into an auto junk yard in a neglected and run-down neighborhood. Waldkirch's city government spent about 900,000 Euros for the renovation of the house that is now known as "Red House" because of its bright red façade. Today, the structure functions as a community meeting place, houses the office of a neighborhood social worker and a community kitchen that serves meals to the neighborhood, and functions as a center for the community. Since the fall of 2003, a farmers' market takes place once a week in front of the house and provides fresh fruit and vegetables, bread, and fair trade products. Since the "Red House" opened, neighborhood crime and vandalism has been reduced and neighborhood residents of all ages and ethnic groups have built stronger

social networks, according to Waldkirch's director of community development. To connect the social efforts with economic opportunities for the residents, Waldkirch initiated a program that provides job opportunities for residents who have been long-term unemployed. The kitchen in the "Red House," for example, serves as an employer. Other opportunities for employment are at a secondhand shop and in various service-oriented activities (e.g., lawn care, window cleaning, courier services, home remodeling, moving services, etc.). Through providing a neighborhood with a physical setting around which to build social networks and by giving unemployed residents the opportunity to work, Waldkirch is beginning to be able to connect equity with economic goals.

In addition to the "Red House" project, Waldkirch emphasizes the protection and creation of social sustainability in other areas of urban life. For example, a strong sense of place in Waldkirch's city center is maintained by the tradition of conducting the main farmers' market on the prominent central square. Twice a week, the market attracts local residents as well as visitors from outside. Because the local square is automobile free, vendors and visitors use the square without being disturbed by cars. Market visitors typically take time to sample produce and to interact with friends and acquaintances. Such "habitual movement around significant places" (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 46) produces increased identification and a strong sense of place and Hargreaves argues that this in turn produces "social sustainability." Social sustainability maintains a "sense of belonging, ownership and identity" (Hargreaves, 2004, p. 64) with the urban environment, a goal that is central to the Slow City movement. Waldkirch's efforts in sustaining local identity extend beyond the market and into neighborhoods whose sense of place is threatened because they are losing vital functions such as small local shops, post offices, or bank branches. Such places function as "third places" (Oldenburg, 1999, 2002) and provide the social glue for a community. Waldkirch is one of several pilot communities for a state-sponsored project that aims at rebuilding a sense of local community and social networks. This project, roughly translated as "*Quality of Life through Proximity*" (Lebensqualität durch Nähe), aims at building local consciousness for the connection between quality of life and the availability of services and products that are locally produced and sold. Waldkirch will build projects and programs around three elements of the project that are aimed at building social networks and a sense of place, a lifestyle and food production and consumption that is sensitive to the locality, and the location and security of local jobs.

### **Slow Cities as Alternative Urban Regimes?**

The programs in these two German Slow Cities illustrate the possibilities of implementing an alternative urban development agenda that focuses on the intersections between the economy, the environment, and equity. The various strategies work toward increased community economic stability, the development of asset specificity, and economic localism and therefore corroborate with the strategies outlined by Imbroscio and others (Imbroscio, 2003; Shuman, 1998; Williamson et al., 2003). The programs seem to present viable alternatives to the corporate-centered strategies and incorporate the characteristics displayed in Table 1. Given the discussion above, a crucial question is whether the Slow City movement can present a viable strategy for achieving alternative urban development and reconstitute urban regimes. To answer this question, we have to discuss critically the ways in which the two German Slow Cities have become members of the network and the actors who are supporting the efforts.

Both Slow Cities had implemented a number of progressive urban development strategies *before* they became certified as slow cities. In fact, when interviewed, the mayors and planning staff in both towns mentioned that their Slow City applications showcased the mix of programs and policies already in place, and without the existence of these programs they would probably not have been certified as Slow Cities. In the case of Hersbruck, extensive efforts were already underway to protect the pasturelands and to promote the local woods and forestry products. In Waldkirch,

the Local Agenda 21 process had already initiated discussions about issues of sustainability long before the town became a Slow City. The Agenda 21 process, however, limited the discussion to theoretical considerations, and according to interviewees, the Slow City membership has now turned this process into a more forceful action program. Given that the two towns had already developed alternative agendas, it will be difficult for other towns that have not yet developed alternative development strategies to become members of the Slow City movement. In Hersbruck and Waldkirch, the Slow City status now provides a unifying theme to already existing alternative urban development strategies. The Slow City certification also adds an official stamp of approval to the various efforts that were already underway.

In addition, both towns have social-democratic mayors. In both cases, the mayors have served the towns for a long time and have gained the trust of the residents as well as the city council members. In addition, the towns have a strong sense of community and they possess a wealth of civic organizations (ranging from active churches to influential environmental groups). Hersbruck, for example, has more than 150 local clubs, of which about 70 are dedicated to local culture and heritage (Zalas, 2005). The civic organizations are equal partners in the Slow City process and in many cases have played catalytic roles in starting the projects long before the city officially applied for membership in the Slow City network (such as the “quality of life through proximity” program that was started by the protestant church, and the pasture project that was started by the local chapter of Germany’s largest environmental group). In addition, both towns—due to their healthy economic status as medium-sized market towns near successful larger cities (Nuremberg and Freiburg)—have a strong small business community from which the Slow City movement is drawing leaders. Restaurant owners, small business owners, and the local utility executives are working hand in hand in furthering the Slow City ideas. Imbroscio labeled such a regime the “petty bourgeois” and argued that it constitutes a viable alternative to the corporate-centered regimes that are typically less focused on the local economy (Imbroscio, 1998, p. 242).

## CONCLUSION

We argue that the Slow City regimes discussed in this article represent a rather strong alternative urban development regime due to the fact that these towns are small, fairly affluent, in close proximity to larger cities that can also provide economic opportunities in the form of jobs and customers, and their populations are rather homogenous (as opposed to more heterogeneous demographics that are more typical of U.S. or U.K. towns). In contrast to so-called shrinking cities in other parts of Germany that are affected by population decline (Shrinking Cities, 2004), Hersbruck and Waldkirch enjoy economic prosperity. These socioeconomic aspects support a more cohesive regime formation and maintenance and may also free the towns from pressures to attract any kind of outside corporate-centered economic development in the sense political economists such as Peterson, Stone, Logan, and Molotch have debated.

Following Stone’s urban regime elements (Stone, 2004a, p. 10), we can note that the Slow City movement defines a set of congruent goals that are concretely defined through the set of criteria that aspiring towns have to address and practice if they want to join the network. Congruency is achieved not only through the alignment of the projects along Campbell’s three-E framework, but also through the ways in which the Slow City movement responds to the motivations of its supporters. Slow City as a label can have a powerful marketing effect for the two towns. They are using their membership to advertise the virtues of their towns to outside audiences such as tourists and businesses. The more substantive goals of environmental protection, economic localism, and sustainability satisfy grassroots environmental groups and the locally rooted business community. Thus, congruency is achieved through the multiple ways in which the Slow City status can be interpreted and applied by the various supporters for urban development purposes.

Such congruency also corresponds to Stone's second element of a strong urban regime, the cross-sector coalition that pursues an agreed-upon agenda. In both towns, Slow City ideas and programs are supported by a cross-sector coalition. City hall in both cases provides resources in support of programs and efforts. In both cases, however, we realized that broad-based citizen engagement was lacking. The Slow City agendas were typically supported by a coalition of political, economic, and environmental organizations, but they have yet to obtain grassroots citizen support. The groups, however, cooperate and are following through with events and programs that are aimed at reaching local citizens. Lastly, we observed that the Slow City regimes were supported by strong interpersonal relationships within the towns that facilitated the bridging of different motivational interests (such as economic and environmental). In addition, Slow Cities are certified every 4 years. This implies that the local initiatives have to continue to foster and support their alternative agendas, which in turn ensures continuity of the development agenda.

Even though cities with more than 50,000 residents are not able to apply for Slow City status, the ideas and goals of the movement are not limited to only small towns. Rather, they can be—and are—applied both in small neighborhoods and communities (as has been demonstrated through cases around alternative food supply in U.S. neighborhoods as well as large cities such as Portland, Oregon that are committed to promoting sustainable urban development). Beatley states that the “slow cities philosophy and politics—one that celebrates unique people, histories, culture, and economy—might apply to any community, regardless of size, though in Italy it is an initiative of smaller towns. When asked whether Città Slow, in its present restriction to cities of 50,000 or less, is anti-city, Mayor Saturini appears to leave much room, saying ‘bigger cities can be slow in something.’ Large cities, he seems to accept, can equally find ways to express the philosophy of Città Slow” (Beatley, 2004, p. 334–335).

In conclusion, we have shown that the two German Slow Cities are practicing alternative urban development strategies that contest corporate-centered development patterns. What distinguishes the Slow Cities from other towns that pursue alternative agendas in some way or another is the cohesiveness by which a group of public and private actors are supporting a comprehensive alternative urban development agenda. By gaining such wide-ranging support, Hersbruck and Waldkirch are examples for how alternative ideas—in this case ideas originating from the Slow City and Slow Food movements—can generate alternative community-based and locally driven regimes that promote urban development strategies aimed at rooting the local economy and promoting local and environmentally sensitive development strategies.

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