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**Environmentally focused cooperation projects as a stimulus for the
development of old industrialised regions**

**Case studies in Eastern German regions in which small and medium-sized towns
predominate**

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Abstract

Old industrialised regions in which small and medium-sized towns predominate are amongst the most deprived areas in Eastern Germany. This article investigates the extent to which large-scale, environmentally focused cooperation projects may offer a stimulus for the development of these regions. Analysis of case studies shows that the projects investigated have indeed had a considerable positive impact on regional development. In bringing together players with little or no experience of working together before, the projects enhanced the scope for action at regional level in particular. Due to positive learning gains in the fields of cooperation and the environment, the effects achieved go far beyond the projects themselves. This success can be primarily put down to the exceptional situation in the regions under review, effectively a “state of emergency” brought about by such large-scale, environmentally focused cooperation projects and acting as the driving force for regional action. Recommendations concerning regional development and policy are made on the basis of findings from the projects.

Introduction

The old industrialised regions in the new Federal Länder in which small and medium-sized towns predominate belong at pan-German level to the regional types with the greatest structural weaknesses. They were particularly affected by the socioeconomic transition that took place following the Reunification of Germany, and not least as a result of ecological shortcomings caused by industry, show only a minor potential for self-sustained development. These special problems are accompanied by a relatively low capacity to solve problems by the municipalities and counties concerned. There are trends towards intermunicipal competition, towards using traditional development approaches to catch up on creating “hard” locational factors and towards a low degree of environmental orientation. The overall result of this is a special challenge for all political and administrative levels to seek effective strategies to develop these problem regions.

As a development strategy going beyond the generally prevalent solutions to the problems, the use of large-scale, environmentally focused cooperation projects in particular appears interesting. With the aim of closing existing gaps in research, this article deals with the question of whether large environmentally-focused cooperation projects in old industrialised regions of Eastern Germany in which small and medium-sized towns predominate can provide a major thrust for development. Statements with a theoretical basis on the type of project follow the empirical findings from the case examples examined. Then, topical conclusions are drawn and recommendations given.

Large-scale, environmentally focused cooperation projects

Large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects are defined here as strategically-applied projects with explicitly worded environmental goals intended to stimulate sustained regional development. They rely on targeted cooperation between a larger or smaller number of regional players and, as unique, time-limited tasks would require major joint efforts by the participating regional players. In this sense the environmentally focused cooperation projects outlined here, as well as the traditional large-scale projects in the field of industrial settlement, transport infrastructure and urban development, could assume the significance of large-scale projects for the regions in question.

So far, the current academic debate regarding project-orientated planning in general and large-scale projects in particular (cf. e.g. Keller/Koch/Selle 1996 and 1998, Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung 1999 as well as Bunzel/Sander 1999) deals only marginally with large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects. One outstanding exception to this is the International Building Exhibition (IBA) Emscher Park. Its much-discussed concept consisted of combining diverse decentralised projects and the decentralised “Thousand Flowers” (Ganser/Siebel/Sieverts 1993, p. 118) by means of a defining umbrella of shared guiding ideas to form a “bouquet”, or a large-scale project. It should be noted that the IBA Emscher Park was held in the very urban Ruhr conurbation. This refers to the actual focus of the academic debate on large-scale projects. It is dominated by discussion of spectacular projects of national and international significance which, due to their characteristics, concentrate on urban agglomerations, through to “global cities”. Typical current examples, in addition to the case studies of integrated major urban planning projects on inner-city wastelands (cf. e.g. Häußermann/Simons 2000, Koll-Schretzenmayr 2000 and Basten 1998), are in particular the case studies about temporary “festivals” (cf. Häußermann/Siebel 1993) such as EXPO 2000 in Hanover. It was one of the “major events which showered into cities or regions like meteorites in order to create local momentum” (Müller/Selle 2001, p. 7, translated by H.L./G.L.).

Over and above the wide-ranging possibilities to mobilise money, players and media, factors that speak for the implementation of projects are, for example, the clear goals, the comprehensible procedures and the time restrictions. The larger these projects become, the more their implementation becomes dependent on private investment decisions, and the more the projects take on the nature of “meteorite-like” events, the more the advantages of project-orientated planning are however countered by disadvantages and risks. In addition to financial incalculability, a diagnosis and a fear of in particular the loss of a longer-term urban and regional development perspective, the loss of political and administrative market distance and controllability, as well as the loss of democratic participation and control.

The academic literature implies that large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects, such as the IBA Emscher Park, are better suited than traditional types of large-scale project to use the advantages of project-orientated forms of planning to counter the

opposing disadvantages and risks, and hence to contribute towards sustained development. But the academic literature available does not sufficiently explain what actual significance large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects have for old industrialised problem regions in the new Federal Länder in which small and medium-sized towns predominate. Hence, it seemed justifiable to search there for instructive projects and regions and to implement our own empirical surveys in the form of case studies. In order to use differences to detect commonalities, case examples were intentionally selected which differ considerably from one another with regard to the project and regional characteristics.

EXPO 2000 reference region Saxony-Anhalt

After five years of preparation, the EXPO reference region Saxony-Anhalt, in which medium-sized towns predominate, presented itself to the public in 2000. The large-scale environmentally focused cooperation project was a decentralised element of the EXPO 2000 Exposition in Hanover, which took place under the motto “Mankind - Nature – Technology”, and the manner of thinking and approach of which heavily leaned on the IBA Emscher Park. Consequently, in contrast to in Hanover, there was no temporary “festival” on an enclosed exhibition complex. Rather, the idea behind the exhibition was to make the whole reference region an “exhibit” for sustained “metamorphosis” – the official topic of the project –, using a large number of long-term projects. Of the 34 main projects presented, 31 concentrated on the urban triangle of Dessau-Bitterfeld/Wolfen-Wittenberg. In 2000 Dessau, the largest of the towns, had almost 85,000 inhabitants.

The region, which is in many ways in turmoil, reveals the tensions caused by the concentration of mining, industrial, cultural and natural landscapes in a very small area. Open cast lignite mining, as well as chemistry and the energy industry, determined regional developments for more than 100 years and also reshaped the historical park and agricultural landscape of the Dessau-Wörlitz garden realm in the Northern part of the urban triangle. Since the changes that took place in 1989/90, the entire region, then considered an ecological disaster area, has undergone a profound structural and image transition. The positive impact of the noticeable progress of redevelopment of the ecological damage

contrasts with the negative effect of conspicuously high unemployment rates. In 2000, the rates in the region as a whole were 24 % and in the Bitterfeld county were as high as 26 %. In the course of the regional structural and image transition, an astonishing spectrum developed of innovative, strongly project-orientated forms of planning and cooperation. The regional efforts to gain recognition as a reference region of EXPO 2000 were of major significance. The underlying impetus for this was given by the “Industrial garden realm” project (cf. Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau 1996 and 1999) and from Bauhaus in Dessau, whose ten-year project commitment ended in the EXPO presentation year 2000. The idea of the Industrial garden realm – that was linked with the varied history of the triangular urban region – made the two opposing elements of garden realm and industry the basis for the task of carefully renewing the landscape in accordance with the criteria of sustained environmental design. Some of the 16 main projects of the Industrial garden realm were included in 1995 in the process of EXPO preparations, in the course of which they were modified, added to and also largely implemented.

With EXPO 2000 Sachsen-Anhalt GmbH, which operated from 1995 to 2000, the Land, i.e. “from above”, created a quantitative and qualitative goal achievement potential which had never before been present in the region in such a shape. After the EXPO company had been established, the EXPO activities “from below” of the Bauhaus and other institutions became less significant. The official estimates (cf. EXPO 2000 Sachsen-Anhalt GmbH 2000) presume that the investment mobilised by the EXPO projects from the beginning of 1997 to the end of 2002 will reach a total volume of roughly DM 1.4 billion. Of these, roughly 60 % were accounted for by public and roughly 40 % by private investments. Roughly 70 institutional organisations and more than 4,000 individuals were involved in implementing the projects. Project agreements with a loose formal framework were used to define the many cooperation relationships. There is consensus that projects that can be used in the long term have been achieved to a degree, at a speed and at a quality, which would not have been conceivable without EXPO within the “regular” regional framework. The end of the EXPO presentation year 2000 posed questions as to the degree to date of achievement of objectives and the continuation of the process of sustained regional development under “normal conditions”. In particular the positive impact of the investment made in the course of EXPO, the jobs created and the improved location qualities were

emphasised, without however ignoring the fact that they have not yet led to a noticeable reduction in the unemployment figures in the reference region. Added to this is that action was primarily taken at the level of the highly heterogeneous individual projects, and hence the focus was more on the radiation effects of outstanding, national and internationally-recognised “lighthouses” of regional development, whilst “quieter” projects and the tasks of creating the project association, as well as developing effective regional structures with a future perspective, were placed in the background by comparison.

The EXPO “lighthouses” include above all the two major environmental and symbolic projects to design the landscape which is to succeed the mining industry, namely the transformation of the Goitzsche cultural landscape near Bitterfeld and the Ferropolis diggertown in the former Golpa North open-cast mine. Besides the modernised, auto-free neighbourhood of Piesteritz in Wittenberg, further EXPO “lighthouses” include the completed new building of the Vocational School Centre in Bitterfeld and the new building of the Federal Environmental Agency under construction in Dessau as the two largest low-energy buildings in Germany. The directly visible and perceivable architectural, urban planning and landscape design solutions in the neighbourhoods and mine successor landscapes are particularly successful, as are the other main projects of the reference region. Over and above the achievement of sociocultural goals, another primary aim here was to use current techniques and technologies of ecological redevelopment and building. This undisputedly contributed towards creating a heightened awareness of such ecological approaches in the region.

The current goal in the region is to continue the process of sustained regional development, and in doing so to create effective regional structures with a grass roots future perspective. This process is to be supported by creating or recreating regional and supra-regional cooperation relationships, as well as establishing effective regional management.

Model-Urban-Ecology municipal association planning game

Six neighbouring communities in South Western Saxony with a total of roughly 77,000 inhabitants, including the five small towns of Aue, Lauter, Lößnitz, Schneeberg and Schwarzenberg, as well as the municipality of Schlema, participated in the Model-Urban-Ecology municipal association planning game. Only a few months prior to the start of the planning game, lasting from December 1994 to December 1995, the communities were listed in the Saxon Land development plan together as a municipal association with the function of a middle centre with partial higher centre functions. The association is situated peripherally close to the Czech border in the lovely landscape of the Western Ore Mountains. In the traditional mining and industrial region, in which silver mining was started back in the Middle Ages, uranium mining operated between 1945 and 1990 by Wismut AG left the most severe environmental damage.

After the changes that took place in 1989/90, uranium mining was ceased and many industrial operations were closed. This caused massive economic problems, in conjunction with corresponding redevelopment measures, as well as major improvements in the environmental situation. At the initiative of mayors who were willing to cooperate, the Land Government sought out possibilities to support the newly-established association of towns. The idea arose to implement the first Model-Urban-Ecology intermunicipal administrative planning game as part of the experimental housing and urban planning of the then Federal Ministry for Regional Planning, Building and Urban Development, after two Model-Urban-Ecology municipal administrative planning games had already taken place in the medium-sized towns of Schwabach in Bavaria and Altenburg in Thuringia. The intention was to test how much urban ecology could be achieved with prospects of success through joint effort by the communities involved (cf. Schmidt-Eichstaedt 1996 and 1997).

The planning game, which aimed to provide relevant findings, encourage discussions on necessary measures and to issue and implement the appropriate rulings, brought the local communities together for the first time in this form. During the one-year project duration, under the leadership of a project group of the Technical University of Berlin six specialist seminars and three conferences were implemented which also gained attention at a supra-regional level. Supra-regional experts and representatives of Federal and Land authorities participated, but the focus was clearly on the targeted activities of the local administrations.

The local public was however hardly involved. In the course of the planning game, the participating communities concentrated on preparing to draft a joint preparatory land-use plan aimed chiefly at space-saving planning and the correction of considerable excessive allocations, as well as at preparatory measures to intensify further cooperation.

Due to the learning effects and improved regional awareness, the Model-Urban-Ecology municipal association planning game led to considerable improvements in the relations between the regional players. Shortly after the planning game, a cooperation agreement was already concluded on the basis of which the joint preparatory land-use plan was pushed on further. The offices now intensively share their knowledge. Available subsidies were used in order to launch the process of establishing regional marketing and to establish an office with a regional advisor. The communities of the town association, which now calls itself “Silver Mountain”, have even made it their long-term goal to form one community. The joint activities go beyond the impact anticipated on the basis of being allocated as a municipal association. With the intercommunity cooperation initiated and strengthened by the planning game, economic goals are clearly in the foreground. Even if as a result of the project environmental aspects have found greater emphasis in the awareness of those concerned, and certainly improvements in the region's environmental situation have been achieved, the Model-Urban-Ecology municipal association planning game was not a national case model from an ecological point of view. As was to be expected, the project had no direct economic impact.

Area around Leipzig in the Green Ring

The Green Leipzig Ring is located in the North West of Saxony close to the border to Saxony-Anhalt, and is formed by the City of Leipzig – with almost 500,000 inhabitants the second-largest city in the new Federal Länder after Berlin – as well as twelve surrounding communities with a total of approximately 100,000 inhabitants. Since suburbanisation processes did not get going with any speed until after the changes of 1989/90, and on the whole have been rather selective, the communities of the outlying areas have retained their small-town and even village character to an unusually high degree. The surrounding area benefits from the City of Leipzig, which is the centre of the Leipzig-Halle-Bitterfeld

agglomeration area and the economic development of which was relatively positive in an Eastern German comparison after the changes.

In addition to ongoing economic problems, the Leipzig region has noticeable, if distinctly reducing deficiencies in the field of landscape and local recreation. For one thing, open-cast lignite mining and obsolete industrial plants left massive environmental and landscape damage which had to be cleaned up. For another, suburbanisation pressure and large-scale projects, such as the building of motorways, the expansion of the airport and the building of the new trade fair complex made a coordinated, supra-spatial approach to shaping and retaining the landscape necessary.

It is this rather regional environmental problem which the Green Ring particularly tackles. The Green Ring was established in 1996 at the initiative of the City of Leipzig as a relatively weakly institutionalised cooperation community and led to a new quality of cooperation in the region. The most important body of the community is the open Town-Surrounding Area Conference, in which the most important decisions are taken by the mayors in a consensus. The content-related work is largely carried out in six topical working parties. The Green Ring was given its character as a project above all by the so-called Environment Declaration (cf. Grüner Ring Leipzig 1999). In it, the members of the Green Ring listed highly concrete goals. They comprise, for instance, reforestation, revitalisation of waters and the establishment of hiking paths and are to be achieved by 2005. Together, a comprehensive, detailed concept of action was established containing the 26 key projects. These include amongst others the creation of an association system between the attractive lakes being created at the south of the Green Ring.

Further concepts and reports have now been drawn up with the support of the Federal Land of Saxony, but also many concrete measures have been implemented. Thus, from 1997 to the beginning of 2000 almost DM 8 million flowed into ecological revitalisation of industrial wastelands. Considerable amounts of further funds have been spent, for instance on bike trails, and on the (re-)forestation of more than 140 hectares of land. Added to this is the drafting of topical hiking and cycling maps. As parts of a decentralised project of EXPO 2000 in Hanover, five projects have been particularly pushed forward. In addition to the tangible and coordinatedly planned improvements to environmental and recreational quality, positive changes to the environmental and regional awareness were observable both with those directly involved in the Green Ring and among the population. The positive

cooperation which has come into being between the surrounding communities and with the City of Leipzig is continuing on the basis of confidence-building and learning effects, and continues to have an impact as a positive example beyond the Green Ring. From an economic point of view, there were certain direct job effects, but the improvement is likely to be in terms of “soft” locational factors in the medium and long term.

Impact analysis and success factors

The large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects examined have not yet or only relatively recently been concluded, so that some of their impact cannot yet be assessed, or only in tendential terms. There is however no doubt that all three projects have set off with somewhat differing points of emphasis a very positive development impulse in the respective regions, the impact of which reaches beyond the content and timeframe of the projects. The evaluation of the large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects in the observed problem regions is accordingly positive. They were without exception recommended by the interviewees of a wide range of groups of regional players as a successful model for managing and remedying comparable regional problems.

Interestingly, the clearest commonalities and successes of the surveyed case examples, with their highly differing characteristics, were less the actual improvements to the environment and environmental awareness, than rather the strong motivation and mobilisation effect in the field of regional cooperation activity. Thus, in the course of planning and implementation of the large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects, players came together who presumably would never or at least not so quickly have got together in this form and with this agenda. The additionally diagnosed learning effects which speak in favour of expanding and anchoring the cooperation relations beyond the projects under consideration are particularly important for the development of effective regional structures with a future perspective.

The environmental impacts were more diverse than the cooperation impacts. In the Model-Urban-Ecology planning game, for instance, the difficult economic situation of the region in conjunction with the not quite so evident environmental problems were likely to be the cause of a rather weak, region-related environmental orientation. Stronger than in the region of Leipzig, in contrast, in the EXPO reference region especially improvements in

the environmental situation also played a major role for economic development. Measures of global environmental protection should not be lacking because of ambitions of the World Exposition.

The direct impacts of the large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects on the economy and the labour market were relatively minor. The greatest longer-term effects from an economic point of view can be anticipated in improvements to the “soft” locational factors. Further positive effects of the large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects were different in nature. They contributed, for instance, to giving the observed problem regions a new identity and a better image, to increasing regional familiarity and to strengthening the players' regional awareness and to developing and establishing new, unusual ways of thinking and problem solving. Added to these are confidence-building and learning effects, for instance when dealing with superior political and administrative levels, in acquiring and consolidating subsidies, as well as in wording and increasing the quality requirements for future activities.

On the whole, the approach of the large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects thus takes on a major significance as a problem-solving strategy in the problem regions observed. When looking for factors which have contributed towards the success of the project, first of all virtually no common design elements of the highly different case examples are recognisable. Also, the design elements of the IBA Emscher Park, which many have stressed as a recipe for success, have obviously not been applied globally. The commonality of the case examples which is decisive to the success of the project can consequently not be ascertained at the level of the individual design elements. The vital commonality is, rather, the creation of a temporary “state of emergency” as a driving force for a development which would not have been possible within the “regular” regional framework. The promising state of emergency is to be understood as an exceptional stage-managed regional situation with the aid of which those intended extraordinary effects can be achieved. The state of emergency may be created depending on the region and the set of problems in different manners with a different number of factors and combinations of

factors. The design of the state of emergency must therefore by no means be in line with the ideas prepared and implemented during the IBA Emscher Park.

Since the regional type examined has only a limited amount of its own funding and administrative staff, the implementation there of large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects, and hence also creating the promising state of emergency there without the factor of financial and staffing support by the Federal Land in question, the Federation or the European Union, is in general inconceivable. In the case of the Leipzig Green Ring, the city also helped support the neighbouring surrounding territory.

Hence the creation of a state of emergency supported with public funding was vital for the success of the large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects. Added to this were further interesting factors which proved helpful, but in individual cases not absolutely necessary for achieving the goals. Thus, for instance, the success of the EXPO reference region orientated along the lines of the success of the IBA Emscher Park was based on design elements which could not be found in the other case examples, or not in this form. The idea here is to temporarily establish a professional organisational structure “from above” (by the Federal Land of Saxony-Anhalt), to establish special institutions (EXPO 2000 Sachsen-Anhalt GmbH), to form regionally anchored “roots” of project implementation (“Industrial garden realm” project, Bauhaus Dessau), to realise major new construction projects (low-energy buildings in Bitterfeld and Dessau) and symbolic projects (Ferropolis diggertown) and to stage-manage a media event (EXPO presentation year 2000). In particular the Model-Urban-Ecology municipal association planning game clearly showed in contrast that it is also possible to create a state of emergency with far fewer design elements and to achieve positive regional development progress.

The case examples, finally, also contain information on dysfunctional factors which put the success of the project at risk. Problems, as with the EXPO reference region, may occur by virtue of influence “from above” which is too strong and patent recipes being applied which are imported without much thought. Not least, there is a risk of observing the regional development impetus, which was initiated under exceptional conditions, as “self-movers” and thinking too late about their continuation under normal conditions.

Conclusions and recommendations

The guiding ideas brought into the foreground with these considerations on the production and use of states of emergency may be used as the programme in particular for the studied regional type to systematically search for new regional solution strategies. These are regions which in view of the selective demand existing for space are subjected to only relatively low development pressure. This situation is perceived on the one hand as a threat, but on the other hand it opens up opportunities for elaborating alternative development approaches, which expand the spectrum known at present and which are adapted to the region-specific qualities and shortcomings.

The project type of large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects can be reasonably and effectively adapted to the problem regions observed here, and is in fact, because of the more favourable relationship between advantages and disadvantages of project implementation, rather better able than traditional major projects to contribute towards sustainable regional development. In some cases, however, this is successful only as a result of certain conflict-laden topics taking precedence with the environmentally- and cooperation-orientated approach of the regional players being removed and the emphasis being shifted to other regional development approaches.

The overall positive effects linked with the use of large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects in old industrialised problem regions of Eastern Germany in which small and medium-sized towns predominate suggest a recommendation that this regional development approach should be further developed and deliberately used as a regional development strategy to a greater extent. The guidelines for action that are vital to the success of a project can here only be, in the extant region-specific framework, to create a temporary state of emergency as the driving force for the intended development. Hence, on the one hand a clear action direction is provided. On the other hand, for the design of the state of emergency there are virtually no fixed rules and certainly there is no overall patent recipe.

Rather, there are a surprisingly large number of conceivable alternative factors and combinations of factors aimed to reasonably and effectively design a state of emergency.

These alternatives can be at best limitedly derived from the previous academic discussion related to major projects. Even the “Thousand Flower” approach of the IBA Emscher Park did not provide universally applicable solutions. Accordingly, the demands on the participating regional players and the political and administrative levels supporting them increase. They are called upon to develop and interpret the required ideas and visions for creating the state of emergency, taking account of the endogenous potential extant in the regions in question. Five basic orientational aids for taking this path can be derived from the above information:

1. The creation of the state of emergency and its public support with finance and staffing generally belong together in the case of the region type observed of old industrialised problem regions of Eastern Germany in which small and medium-sized towns predominate. Both measures can only be regarded as reasonable and effective if they achieve positive regional development progress which would not have been achieved under normal conditions, and if they remain effective in the long term once the state of emergency is over.
2. The stage-managed state of emergency is to be adapted to the region-specific qualities and shortcomings. The principles of openness and flexibility apply when selecting and combining the individual design elements. Dysfunctional results are to be anticipated if patent recipes are applied which are imported without much thought and influence “from above” is too strong, so that initiatives “from below” and concepts that are tailored to regions do not become effective. If conceptual ideas are taken on board which are alien to the region, in particular the differences are to be taken into account which exist between Eastern and Western German regions, between regions in which small, medium-sized and urban areas predominate, and between regions with a tendency to shrink, stagnate and grow.
3. With all the alternative designs of the state of emergency, one should particularly ensure that the environmental and cooperation orientation as a “trademark” of the project type observed of large-scale environmentally focused cooperation projects is secured and promoted. In this way, goals should be enhanced which clearly take a back seat in traditional major projects in the field of industrial settlement, transport infrastructure and of urban planning.

4. The trends induced under the conditions of the state of emergency have no self-sustaining status. Rather, it should be clarified at a very early stage which possibilities exist for them to continue under the anticipated conditions of the normal situation, and on this basis to initiate the process of establishing effective follow-up structures.
5. There are also no patent recipes for designing the follow-up structures. Helpful elements that can be used, built on and developed on are, in addition to professional regional management, in particular the regional cooperation relationships and networks, as well as the regional concepts and plans. If it is possible here to achieve a reasonable, effective combination, the positive impulses of the stage-managed state of emergency open up paths for comprehensive regional development planning and the development of effective regional structures with a long-term perspective.

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