

Cross-border governance: a catalyst for low carbon city-regions? - Experiences from the German-Polish border region -

1. Borderlines and cross border activities

During the last two decades borders within Europe have been more and more open. But they will remain as lines of explicit separation also in future. In consequence cross border activities in general as well as cross-border initiatives for developing new strategies and implementing new policies and measures will face specific challenges. These are first and foremost differences in language and culture (including and reflecting mentalities and ethnic structures), living standards and economic structures, administrative resources, abilities and responsibilities and interests of actor groups for stabilisation or change (cp. Grimm/Leistner 2002).

At some borders, like those in this article focussed German-Polish-border (Figure 1), additionally specific historical experiences minimise the willingness of cooperation by prejustice and low trust.



Figure 1: the German-Polish border region

All cross-border activities have to deal with these challenges. Enforcing cross border interaction like flows of people, goods (including waste), capital, ideas or relevant preconditions (e.g. infrastructure like motorways, railways etc.) implies finding specific ways of cross border governance (cp. Pikner 2008). In consequence lower effectivity and higher inefficiency is to be expected, also for creating low carbon city regions.

2. Potentials for mitigation and adaptation

For all regions in Europe reducing emissions and supporting energy efficiency is a general accepted political target (cp. EU Gothenburg strategy). For reaching these objectives additional to international and national efforts regional and local are necessary.

Potentials for reducing CO₂-emissions and supporting energy efficiency are given by cooperation. Cooperation is one overall accepted way for solving problems in spatial development and environmental planning. By definition cooperation means collaboration in a complex way by developing and implementing common visions, targets, projects and establishing information and participation networks (Bischoff/Selle/Sinning 1995).

In general potentials of cooperation are

- creating win-win and Kaldor optimum situations,
- broadening strategic options and learning opportunities, and
- enlarging access to resources.

Especially in cross-border regions this supports bypassing bottlenecks in resources and creates preconditions for mitigation and adaptation.

Examples for different types of interaction in cooperation are informal networks, project activities, formal and informal cooperation between twin cities, informal and formal regional development and sectoral planning, development and use common infrastructures, public transport systems or energy supply. In this context learning from each other allows avoiding mistakes in mitigation and adaptation strategies and innovation.

Proximity and density of actors are supportive factors for cooperation (Grimm/Leistner 2002, Weith 2009). In consequence cities and urban regions are in advantage in cross border activities. Therefore at the German-Polish borderline the regions of Szczecin, Frankfurt / Oder and Slubice, Guben and Gubin as well as Görlitz and Zgorzelec are of specific interest.

3. Cross border interplay in planning and environmental policy

For realizing the potentials for cross border cooperation formal or informal governance arrangements are to be realized. In relation to problems and challenges in border regions specific forms of coordination have to be arranged. Focussing on spatial and environmental development types of integrative and sectoral policy as well as formal and informal activities in multi-level arrangements are to be discussed. This includes reflections about administrative responsibilities, financial options, networks and civil society activities.

During the last few years formal spatial planning activities at the national level and the regional level (German Länder as well as Polish Voivodeships) develop only step by step. A common commission for spatial planning is established and has initiated visions for a common cross-border development (updated two times). Although the existing visions do not reflect climate change aspects directly, several targets for supporting structures for sustainable spatial development, e.g. in settlement development, transport or environmental improvement are discussed (Knippschild 2006). Up to now problem of interplay between

administrative planning structures exist, reflecting the differences between the German and the Polish spatial development and planning system.

On the subregional level for several years several Euroregions are established. After an emphatic phase on initiation currently cooperation seems to be more and more difficult.

Cross-border sectoral planning on national and regional level in regard to energy and traffic evolves slowly. Whereas main motorways are under construction or completed, the improvement of the railway system made only slow progress. Reasons are to be seen in differing interests of national actors on both sides in combination with strong hierarchical sectoral planning systems. In tendency this slows down cross border initiatives. EU regional policy initiatives like INTERREG are to be seen as potential door-openers for activities in future.

Currently the most important activities can be seen on the local level. As described later, common projects, city development visions up to cross-border infrastructure projects are realized. In contrast several projects have failed because of lacking local acceptance. Examples are local cross border tramway in Frankfurt/Oder – Slubice. Especially sectoral planning in combination with investments seems to be problematic in such governance arrangements.

4. First steps towards Good Practice

Currently reducing carbon dioxide emissions and supporting energy efficiency is not a primary target for cross border activities. But several initiatives at the German-Polish border region exist, which are first steps towards further contributions for reaching the objectives of sustainability.

One example on local level is the common sewage works of the German City Guben and the Polish city Gubin (formerly one city). With this model it is shown in general that also complex cross-border infrastructure development, like energy supply, is possible.

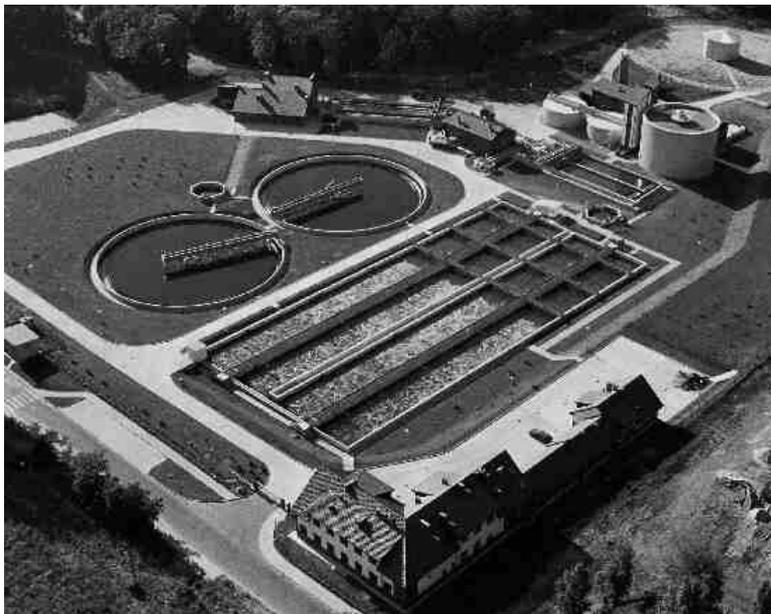


Figure 2: Common sewage works in Guben/Gubin

An additional example for direct and indirect emission reductions and energy savings are the use of vacant flats in Frankfurt/Oder by Polish families (see also Penn-Bressel 2009). Whereas in Poland a high demand on affordable apartments exists, in many German border cities flats are unused.

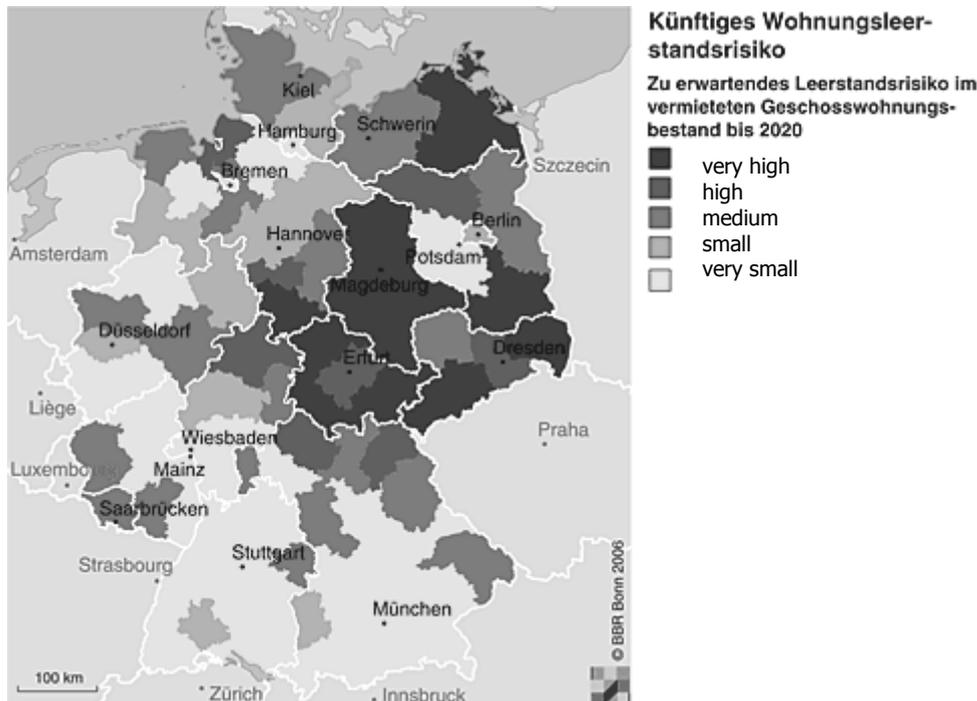


Figure 3: Apartment vacancies in Germany (Source BBR 2007)

An interesting initiative can also be seen in a currently discussed integrated metropolitan regional strategy of Szczecin, including parts of Mecklenburg - Western Pomerania. Optimized spatial structure can lead to a low carbon city region in future.

5. Perspectives

For the future different ways of cross-border activity and in consequence cross-border governance arrangements are to be developed to support solutions for an energy efficient and low carbon city-region. This refers to integrative spatial development strategies as well as to sectoral planning activities on different spatial levels.

Up to now at the German-Polish borderline only in some projects all potentials of cross-border governance for creating low carbon city regions are used. Furthermore one important aspect will be supporting - and realizing - formal and informal cooperation structures.

Cooperation can be realized in different institutionalized forms. Every type of cooperation is connected with specific strengths and weaknesses (see e.g. Weith 2009a). Only ongoing interplay between formal institutional arrangements and informal activities reflecting governance and government supports successful process management and avoids blockades in path dependency structures.

For enforcing cross-border cooperation first steps of activities have to focus on informal cooperation as a “starter”. This reflects also the importance of civil society actors as well as changing state functions from hierarchy to organisation of collective problem solving processes (Heidbrink/Hirsch 2007:19).

For realizing the potentials of cross-border governance for generating low carbon city regions multi level governance and government structures in parallel are to be established (cp. Perkmann 2007). In combination with bottom-up and top-down activities an ongoing process of searching for new opportunities is to be organized.

Strong hierarchical organised sectoral planning structures need windows of opportunity for creating cooperative structures (cp. Fabian / Stoll / Kubica 2006). INTERREG projects about European Transport corridors could be one opportunity for this.

Only in this complex way cross-border governance is able to support developments towards a low carbon city region. Successful interaction, especially in this context, depends foremost on the initiatives and capacities of the various actor groups and organisations in border regions (cp. also Pikner 2008).

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