

## **Visions or projects: urban regeneration strategies in Cottbus and Görlitz (Eastern Germany)**

The leading question of this paper is: how are urban strategies able to reconcile differences between long-term visions and short-term action and between whole-city-frameworks and area-based interventions. Which approaches are suitable to overcome the gap between visions and projects? This question will be discussed by two empirical cases of strategies for urban regeneration in the post-socialistic context of Eastern Germany. The city of Cottbus represents an urban planning type with a focus on visioning process. The city of Görlitz represents an urban planning type with a focus on project-implementation. The paper is a first provisional result of the research project "Strategic urban planning – approaches for regeneration of shrinking cities in Eastern Germany". The project is founded by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, it began in May 2007 and will run to April 2009.

### **1. Concepts of Strategic planning**

At the end of the 1990s, planning theory proclaimed a "revival of strategic planning" (Salet, Faludi 2000) in Europe. Strategic urban planning is often seen as a suitable approach for the regeneration of cities in decline (Albrechts 2004, Sartorio 2005: 28). Among the most popular examples of managing the change of former industrial cities into post-industrial, service- or knowledge-based cities through strategic urban plans in European cities were Barcelona, Manchester, Glasgow and Rotterdam. In addition, urban regeneration theory and practice in the United Kingdom is based substantially on the concept of strategic planning as an approach that integrates visions and action (Roberts, Sykes 2000). Although a uniform theoretical concept of strategic planning has yet to emerge, strategic urban planning is primarily associated with two main elements: visions and projects.

#### ***Strategic visions***

(Germany: "*Leitbilder*") are seen as important tools for building consensus and guiding action, particularly at the beginning of planning processes. They are useful for the integration of diverse actors and representatives from various areas of public responsibility. Strategic visions differ from staged image campaigns in that they are based on social negotiation and participation processes involving different actors. Visions determine long term goals for the city as a whole. Visions require local political consensus regarding important location factors or significant economic branches of the city (ex. as "cultural city", "university city", "water city" or "steel city"). In cities which have experienced de-industrialisation and which must undergo a process of re-defining their identity, local conflicts between old industrial elites and innovators can potentially block the building of consensus on vision (Friedrichs 1993). Using the example of the former steel-town Pittsburgh, in the American "Rustbelt", agreement on a new vision was identified as an important factor of success for managing structural change from an industrial city to a service-based city (Kunzmann 1993).

#### ***Strategic projects***

are meant to generate visible results which serve for the actors involved, and thus avoid the implementation problems of comprehensive planning. Projects can be positive symbols for the structural change of cities. They are designed to be short term, are directed towards selected urban areas, and furthermore, actors, methods of financing and the tactics to be used are all clearly defined. Strategic projects can thus also be understood as "key projects", if they are intended to provide an impulse for private investment. "As experiences in many

cities have proven in the past, they (strategic projects) are able to play a key role in the regeneration and transformation of urban areas.” (ISOCARP 2007).

Summing up, it may be said, that concepts of strategic planning attempt to find a “third way” between comprehensive and incrementalistic planning, or rather between large master plans and small steps. This is done to avoid both the lack of results of vision-based discourses, on the one hand, and the actionism of projects, on the other. In Germany this hybrid type of planning became famous thanks to the example of the Emscher Park International Building Exhibition (1989–99) and has been labelled “perspectival incrementalism” (Kilper 1999:139).

## 2. Approaches of strategic planning in Eastern Germany cities

Since 1989, most cities in Eastern Germany have been confronted with de-industrialisation and suburbanisation. Middle-sized cities are more concerned by urban shrinkage processes than large-sized and small-sized cities. In spite of theoretical assumptions and practical models, currently in Eastern Germany strategic urban planning is more an exception than the rule. Some cities either carry out extensive visioning processes, some define incremental strategic projects. Scarcely of them do both: combining long-term visions and short-term projects. This paper refers to the cases of Cottbus and Görlitz.

A comparison of both cities is justified on the basis of the following commonalities:

- the post-socialistic transformation process since the reunification of Germany;
- middle-sized towns with a shrinking number of population that has - or will - fall below 100.000;
- the peripheral location outside of the metropolitan regions Berlin and Dresden at the Eastern border of Germany;
- the demographic decline since 1989, resulting from lower birth rates, outer immigration and suburbanisation;
- the strongly shrinking employment base since 1989, resulting from de-industrialisation;
- the high degree of empty flats, resulting from the decay of inner cities until 1989 and the dominance of large housing estates at the urban periphery.

**Graphic 1: location of Cottbus and Görlitz**



Source: IRS 2007

## **2.1. Cottbus**

### **2.1.1. A brief profile of the city**

Cottbus (105.000 inhabitants) is located 140 kilometres southeast of Berlin in the state of Brandenburg near the touristy area of *Spreewald* and the border to Poland. It is the second largest city in Brandenburg and the centre of the region Lausitz. Mainly based on the connection to the railway system and the upturn of local textile industries, the city grew rapidly during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Population increased from 9.300 (1858) to 40.000 (1900). In 1939, more than 55.000 inhabitants lived in the city. The Second World War was a decisive event for Cottbus. Parts of the town were destroyed; a lot of people left the city subsequently. In 1952, Cottbus became a district capital of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The city advanced to the centre of the Lausitz brown coal mining area and the national energy production of the GDR. This attracted a large number of workers. For them, large housing estates were constructed right outside the city during the 1970's and 1980's (where today 73 percent of the city flats are located). Cottbus was a growing and young city during the four decades of socialism. In 1976, Cottbus reached the magic number of 100,000 inhabitants. The zenith of population development with 121.000 was climbed in 1989, the year of the fall of socialism and the iron wall.

Since 1990, the city has had to cope with a deep demographic, economical and physical change. As of 2005, Cottbus has lost nearly 20 percent of its inhabitants and jobs. The current demographic base of 105.000 inhabitants will go on shrinking to expected 95.000 in 2020. De-industrialisation leads to high migration rates of mostly younger people. But Cottbus is beginning to transform into a centre for services, science and administration in Southern Brandenburg. In 1991, the Technical University was founded with today about 950 employees and nearly 5.000 students. Besides that, a part of the Technical College of higher education Lausitz is also located in the city. Both make Cottbus to the second largest scientific centre in Brandenburg (after Potsdam). Cottbus attracts tourists mostly because of the nearby *Spreewald* and the *Branitz Park*, a famous English Garden created by Prince Pückler.

### **2.1.2. Strategies for urban regeneration**

#### **Strategic vision**

A strategic aim of the comprehensive "city development concept 2010" in Cottbus was to improve its negative image as former centre of the Lausitz mining area and energy industry to a service-based, university and educational, technological and green city (Stadt Cottbus 1997).

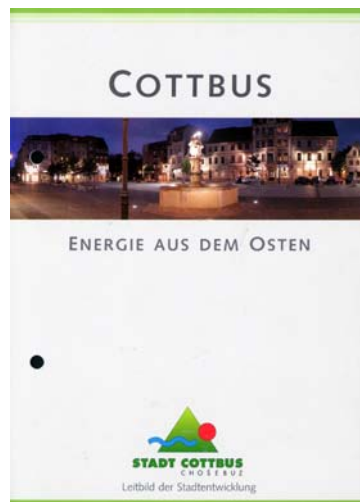
In 2001/2002, Cottbus city planners have managed an extensive process to find new visions for the future city development. About 100 citizens and representatives of economy, politic and administration have participated. The process has been initiated and managed by the mayor of the city. He has convened a commission of seven personalities, leading representatives of the university, a secondary school, private traders and public politics. Each personality managed a working group during more than one year with special topics: city and region, economy and tourism, education and science, culture, sports and youth, politics and administration, social city and quality of life, landscape and environment. The working groups have tried to define strengths and aims of each topic. The result was a *Leitbild der Stadtentwicklung*, titled: "Cottbus - Energy from the East" (Stadt Cottbus 2002). This *Leitbild* has been published in a brochure and distributed to the citizens. Main visions have been:

- "Cottbus is the centre of living and working between Berlin and Dresden";
- "Cottbus develops to a scientific and technological region";
- "Cottbus is a city of education and science";
- "Cottbus is the prince-Pückler-city" and a "city of sports";

- “Cottbus will be a city of communication”;
- “We are a city to live”;
- “Cottbus is one of the greenest cities of Germany”.

These visions have been criticised to be very broad. Indeed, the commission had problems to focus the results of the different working groups, which have been worked mainly on their own. A further reason for this is, that the city today has a diverse economic structure, mainly basing on energy technology, university and tourism. But all of these sectors have been seen as not strong enough to define a unique strength of Cottbus as “energy city”, “science city” or “park city”.

### Graphic 2: vision of Cottbus – brochure title



Source: City of Cottbus 2002

It was intended by urban planners to transmit the *Leitbild* into concrete action and to prioritise measures. But this did not happen in Cottbus until today. The main reason for that gap is a personal challenge of main politicians. A new mayor and the leading administrative officers were elected in 2002. These new actors did not want to continue the work of the predecessors. Obviously, the result of the *Leitbild* was not convincing enough and the social process not committing enough to survive a personal change of actors. In 2006 a new mayor was elected again. But he doesn't intend to take up the *Leitbild*-process of 2002, because it is seems now too far away and a lot of actors are gone in the meanwhile. Instead, his administration wants to work with annual changing topics, e.g. science, culture and sports.

### **Strategic projects**

In 1995, Cottbus was the first city to organise the Federal Gardening Exhibition in Eastern Germany. This event attracted more than 2,3 million visitors to the city. Looking back, the Gardening Exhibition is seen as an important impulse for the physical renewal of the city and the mobilisation of the citizens. But this impulse didn't find a continuation by the strategies for urban regeneration in the following years. A large shopping centre, which was planned in the inner city since 1999, was delayed and finally given up by the investor in 2004. Although some new or renewed buildings within the inner city have been constructed, which could act as symbols for the change of Cottbus - e.g. the new library of the university or the cultural centre in a renewed power station - our interviews with local experts of politics and planning indicate, that they don't try to define strategic projects. Planning in Cottbus is more orientated on traditional land-use plans, comprehensive development concepts and sectoral programs as physical “*Stadtumbau*” and economic promotion.

## 2.2. Görlitz

### 2.2.1. A brief profile of the city

Görlitz (57.000 inhabitants) is the easternmost town of Germany, located in the State of Saxony at the border to Poland between Dresden and Berlin. It is described as “one of the most beautiful cities in Germany” by the head of the German Foundation for monument conservation. Its medieval city structure, which has been preserved almost entirely, contains nearly 4.000 valuable monuments from the Gothic, Renaissance, Baroque, Classicist and late 19th century eras (“*Gründerzeit*”). During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city grew from 30.000 (1860) to 81.000 (1900) inhabitants. Görlitz advanced to the economical, political and cultural thriving centre of the Prussian Lausitz. This blossoming went on until the 1920<sup>th</sup>, basing on services (administration, banks, courts, hotels, shops) and a growing wagon building industry.

Görlitz survived the Second World War almost without damage. With the establishment of the border between Germany and Poland in 1945, the City of Görlitz, which is built on both sides of the River Neisse, was divided into a Polish part, Zgorzelec (ca. 36.000 inhabitants), and a German part, Görlitz (ca. 63,000 inhabitants). Görlitz lost its former function as a regional centre. Since 1945 both halves of the city developed independently of each other until 1989.

Because of the immigration of many refugees after the war, the city population of Görlitz reached its peak of 101.000 in 1951. During the GDR-era, Görlitz began already to shrink. In 1965, nearly 89.000 inhabitants lived in the town. Until 1989 the number went down to 77.000. In spite of this demographic decline, large housing estates have been constructed right outside the city during the 1970's. As a result, within the historical city of Görlitz at least 2.000 flat were empty in 1989.

In contrast to its rich historical and cultural heritage, presently Görlitz is one of the most shrinking cities in Eastern Germany. The population has decreased more than 24 percent between 1990 and 2005. The city administration predicts a future population size of 46.400 inhabitants in 2020. Nearly 40 percent of the flats in the old town are empty - this is one of the peak values in Eastern Germany. The city suffers under serious problems of economic decline. More than 30 percent of jobs have decreased between 1997 and 2005. Today nearly 24 percent of inhabitants are jobless. Görlitz is a shrinking and poor city - which beautiful physical heritage is much too large for present inhabitants.

### 2.2.2. Strategies for urban regeneration

#### **Strategic visions**

After reunification of Germany in 1990 and in regard to the planned integration of Poland into the EU in 2004, the city marketing strategies in Görlitz have tried to define a long-term vision of a “bridge city” in the trans-national co-operation between Germany and Poland. The city development concept defined the label: “Görlitz – culture city and urban pearl of Europe” (Stadt Görlitz 1998). Simultaneously, the *Leitbild* “European City Görlitz/Zgorzelec” was “proclaimed” in 1998 by the mayors of Görlitz and Zgorzelec (Stadt Görlitz 2005:47). The long-term aim has been, to grow the separated parts together to a twin city. But politics of Görlitz and Zgorzelec haven't initiated a social process to anchor this vision. A research project, financed by the German Ministry of Research and managed by extern scientists during 2002 to 2004, tried to initiate a social process to anchor the *Leitbild* “European city” on a broader social base. In result, the report of the project describes big difficulties to participate local elite's and citizens in the process. What is more, much inhabitants of Görlitz don't share the political aim of integration and are rather afraid of it (Neumann 2005:45).

### **Strategic projects**

The renewal of the heritage in the inner city since 1990 and the foundation of the campus-college Zittau/Görlitz in 1992 have been the most important strategic projects in the 1990<sup>th</sup>. Since the beginning of the new century, urban planners in Görlitz have put their main emphasis on one strategic project: the application for the title “European Capital of Culture 2010”. In 2001, politics of Görlitz and Zgorzelec have reached the decision for the application. In 2003 a local association was founded to support the application. In 2006 Görlitz and Essen (Ruhr area) have been elected as German candidates for “European Capital of Culture 2010”. The application of Görlitz has carried under the title “From the middle of nowhere to the heart of Europe” (Stadt Görlitz 2005).

**Graphic 3: application for “European Capital of Culture 2010”**



**Source: City of Görlitz / Zgorzelec 2005**

It has based on five key projects, which should be realised until 2010:

- the “bridges park” at the river Neiße, to create a new city middle of Görlitz and Zgorzelec;
- the “frontiers of arts”, a dialogue of artists from Germany and Poland;
- the exhibition “Via Regia”, which focus on the trans-continental trade and traffic in history;
- the “stony chronicle” of European architecture within the inner city of Görlitz;
- the “Berzdorfer Sea”, a youth project on a former mining area as an example of a changing post-industrial culture.

The application was supported by most political actors and based on a broad acceptance by the inhabitants in Görlitz. Many people have been mobilised, because they felt proud, that their marginalized city was now in the centre of public interest by national and international media. They hoped for new impulses from visitors, tourists and investors. In April 2006, the jury has decided that Essen got the award (beside Pécs in Hungary and Istanbul in Turkey). That Görlitz was not successful, leads for the time to a big disappointment by many actors.

But a result of the failed application is, that driving actors are nowadays looking for new ways to realize the five projects of the application. A first success may be, that the exhibition “Via

Regia" will be supported by the state of Saxony. Meanwhile, because of the project the idea of a "culture city" has taken place in many heads. Main driving actors of this idea are the cultural mayor, the members of the city council, the director of the theatre and the members of the cultural city association. This group wants to push the idea of a "culture city" to a long term vision. But a local conflict has begun to arise with some other antagonists, who instead want to prefer the (industrial) economy and don't belief on culture as an economic factor for regeneration. So today it seems open, if "culture city" will be in future a new vision for Görlitz to regenerate the city.

### 3. Conclusions

Taking the cases of Cottbus and Görlitz, the following points may be made in qualifying the theories of strategic planning:

- The relationship between strategic visions and projects can't be understood as one-sided and deductive: strategic projects may be derived from visions, but visions may although be derived from projects.
- A mutual *interplay* of visions and projects is necessary to integrate differing demands. The comprehensive city development concepts in Cottbus und Görlitz don't integrate these levels. For implementation, these concepts define long lists of measures, but no strategic projects with priorities.
- The case of the interrupted *Leitbild*-process in Cottbus shows, that visioning processes are primarily able to commit the actors directly involved. Obviously, in that case the visioning process and the visioning result were not strong enough to survive a changing of actors. This may be interpreted, that visioning processes should be seen as equal as or rather more important than visioning results.
- The case of the "proclaimed" vision "European city" in Görlitz / Zgorzelec by politicians shows the implementation problems of non-accepted visions. Without social processes, visions are more or less worthless. Obviously, in border regions exists a big gap between formal political visions and informal attitudes of inhabitants.
- The unsuccessful application for "European capital of culture 2010" of Görlitz shows the enormous mobilising effects of strategic projects in shrinking cities to create new self-confidence inwards the city and new images outwards. In spite of the failure of the project, a success of the application may become, that many local actors have learned to see culture as an important factor for urban regeneration. Without this project, the vision of a "culture city" wouldn't have been established so much in the shrinking city of Görlitz. Today it seems to be open, if this post-industrial vision is able to create economic impulses for the city to convince those sceptics, who farther hope to attract new industries.
- Finally: strategic visions and projects can't reverse long-term demographic and socioeconomic shrinking trends in cities in short times. They can, however, contribute to a symbolic transformation of shrinking cities and regions by opposing the resigned images of decline with positive images of regeneration and thus embody post-industrial structural change.

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#### Author:

Dr. Manfred Kühn  
IRS - Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning  
Flakenstraße 28-31  
D-15537 Erkner near Berlin  
Email: kuehnm@irs-net.de