

Urban-Regional Trialogue on Regional Land Use Management

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Spatial sciences agree that ground and soil are scarce, not renewable resources and not interchangeable economic goods. The use of land has to meet a wide range of usually contradictory demands. There is hardly any scope of action where the complexity of ecological, economic and social demands are so highly conspicuous as when dealing with finite resources and at the same time meeting the necessary requirements for settlement areas. Different kind of actors with their various conceivabilities is requesting soil in a certain location for their own needs.

The economical and considerate use of resources, especially of not renewable ones, is one of the fundamental principles of sustainable action. In Germany the area used for settlement and transportation infrastructure build after World War II is of the same amount than in all centuries before. In the period of 2002-2005 this "consumption of land" is 114 hectares per day. It is a social and political concern that this unabated high consumption of land, as it occurred now, is impossible in the long run and that we have to find new ways to deal with the areas for settlement and transportation infrastructure. Doing this we have to deal with a whole bundle of multi-actor and multi-level problems relevant to spatial planning. The used planning approaches and the existing balance of power between cities, regions, local stakeholders and interest groups seem to be inadequate to face the problem of sustainable land use.

The FLAIR project

The research project "Land Use Management by Innovative Regional Planning", called FLAIR by the German acronym, is facing these complex problems on the use of land in a shared-power environment on the regional scale. FLAIR is part of the main research and design programme REFINA by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The project partners of FLAIR are mapping this shared-power environment the project is working on in their partnership: A body by public law which is responsible for regional planning in the considered region ("Regionalverband Südlicher Oberrhein"), a research Institute on spatial planning (Institute for the Foundations of Planning at the University of Stuttgart) and a private consultant on spatial planning as a kind of link to economic and municipal interests (pakora.net – Network for towns and regions).

The considered Region Southern Upper Rhine is located in the South-West of Germany along the river Rhine which is also the border to France. It is among the wealthier regions within Germany. The Region has about 1 million inhabitants, who are unequally spread across the Region. There is a disparity of a growing, prosperous and densely populated valley of the river Rhine and the Black Forest in the east, with smaller settlements, a more rural population and tendencies of shrinkage of towns.

Looking at the main tasks and challenges of the Region Southern Upper Rhine, the question is how to sustain prosperity and economic growth in the region as a whole. Because of demographic changes this aspect will get more and more important in the future: population projections show that in a few years the total amount of the population of the region might switch from growth to stagnation or even decline. I.e. there will be shrinking parts, especially in more rural areas of the Black Forest. But demographic change also means a tremendous aging of population, i.e. an increase of older, retired people and a decrease of younger people and work force.

Furthermore the polarity of a densely populated west and rural areas in the east of the region demand differentiated approaches of how to manage growth and decline at the same time and often in neighbouring communities. For some of the communities this will lead to a shortage of land designated and appropriate for settlement and traffic uses, while others have an oversupply and vacancies especially in the town centres, while land claims at the periphery go on.

It is the aim of FLAIR is to provide politically and practically adequate strategies of high relevance to stimulate an update of regional planning tools and build up an innovative land use management.

The FLAIR approach: 'Problems-First'

Traditional planning approaches concentrated on mainly formal methods and instruments run the risk of ready-made solutions. The intended interventions in formal planning procedures focus on the provision of spaces by forbidding or allowing certain uses of land. These narrowing down to land claims are crucial reasons, why spatial planning is not as effective on land use management and on Brownfield activation as it is thought to be. Hence, we have to take into account different actors and various approaches to planning and land use management on various scales. Within the FLAIR project this multi-actor and multi-layer environment will be considered in the research design on three different and parallel layers (see figure 1):

- the frame setting layer: Setting of problems, which are an overall framework of further developments in the region,
- the municipality layer: Communities' characteristics and demands in particular regarding Brownfields,
- and the regional layer with its two functions to coordinate the conflicting demands of single municipalities and to cope with the regional impact of the frame setting layer to stimulate regional development.

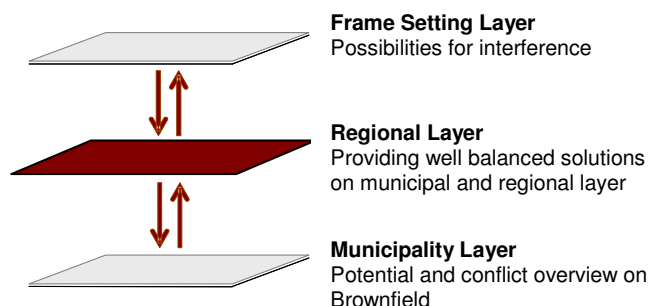


Fig. 1: FLAIR approach of different layers

The FLAIR project concentrates on the land use problems which are touching these three described layers. By focusing on problems, instead of methods and instruments, it almost automatically gets relevant to the way other actors are looking and deciding on spatial issues like politicians, economists, inhabitants, aso. do. Furthermore, solutions are more adequate. Because of this particular methodological starting point of the FLAIR approach can be described as 'Problems-First'.

A quotation of Ackoff shows the direction: "We fail more often because we solve the wrong problem than because we get the wrong solution to the right problem."

Usually we tend not to take a close look at the problems, but solve "the wrong" problem instead. As a kind of reflex planners very often start with:

- Solutions ("Let's make a project").
- Methods or instruments ("It's part of the environmental impact assessment anyway").

- Aims to be achieved (“It has to be sustainable”).
- Theories we know (“Theory of gravitation”).
- Procedures of planning process (“Public involvement”)
(see Schönwandt and Jung 2006)

All of these aspects are important and cannot be missed in spatial planning, but it is not guaranteed, not even likely, that we can solve the problems, if we don't take them as starting point. That means: we cannot get a consistent planning process from the problem to the solution, if we miss the definition of the problem.

The importance of the problem definition as starting point for planning becomes obvious, if one takes the following into account (see Koppenjan and Klijn 2004, 116ff):

- Problems are not “evident” and only quite none “objective” identifiable situations, but depend on the perceptions of the participants: hence they are always “socially constructed”.
- In a problem situation the perceptions of the participants can diverge substantially.
- Uncertainties regarding contents are not only caused by the complexity of the problem, but also by the diverging perceptions of the participants involved.
- If participants' conclusions proceed from very different perceptions, and if they are not willing or not able to reflect these differences in the problem perception then the probability increases that their communication and interactions become a “dialogue of the deaf” (see DeLeon 1988, van Eeten 1999).

Concerning this an urban-regional trialogue focuses the problems and the agreements between a diversity of actors and stakeholders to close the gap between planning and implementation. It is an approach to work in a shared-power environment to solve spatial problem.

Setting of the problem

Within the project FLAIR we set the problems in viewpoint of different actors in a wider range on spatial planning (settlement structure, mobility, education, medicine, trade, aso) as starting point. The main challenge is, that there are no fix, obvious problems but they are relevant and given to different points of view, depending on the actor and his specific role (see figure 2).

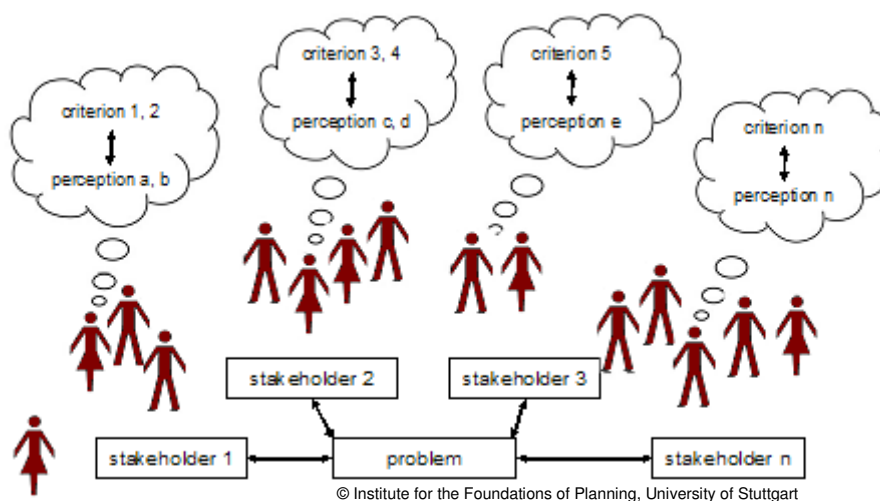


Fig. 2: Different perceptions of a problem

Problem-setting and what we call the forward and backward shift of the problem are the keywords here. Important are developments and tendencies, which "hit the ground" (Sassen), i.e. which are relevant to space, land use and the management of land use.

As a first step within FLAIR the frame setting layer and its different subject-specific levels are analysed, like healthcare (e.g. health infrastructure and locations of hospitals, the trend from cure treatment (funded by the state) to privately paid wellness...), traffic, demography, social infrastructure and so on. Spatial relevant changes and developments within these levels are sought.

In addition, not only changes within but also mutual dependencies between these levels are analysed. For example: due to demographic changes the number of pupils will decrease in the nearer future. This will affect schools in particular in rural areas where some schools might be closed. As pupils have a great share of the use of public transport in rural areas, this will affect public transport as well (see figure 3).

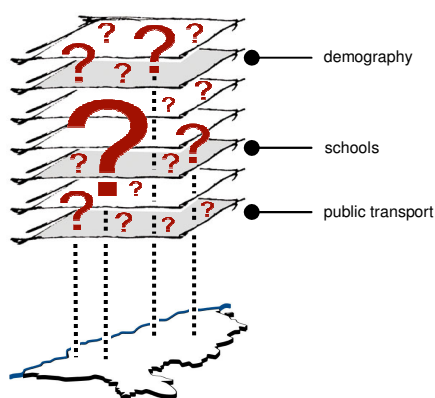


Fig. 3: Identifying complex spatial problems by analysis of multiple levels

Parallel to the frame setting layer the municipal layer is analysed. Based on an potential and conflict overview on Brownfield in ten pilot municipalities the communities' characteristics and demands in particular regarding Brownfields are analysed and adjusted to the frame setting layer. By doing so transferable clusters of problems regarding land use management are identified. These clusters will be in a scale right between local, regional and national/ supra-national responsibility. To define new approaches between these scales of responsibility to set up a land use management is the third layer within the FLAIR project (see figure 4).

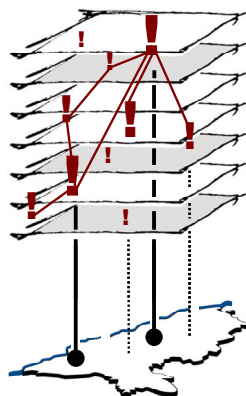


Fig. 4: Multiple levels analyses hitting the ground

Modes of interventions

One might ask for what reasons the partners of the FLAIR project propose a different approach to a planning task which refers uniquely to spatial planning. Research activities of the Institute for the Foundations of Planning, University of Stuttgart, led to the conclusion, that important issues underlying each planning process affect the outcomes of spatial planning: planning approaches and the (common) modes of interventions.

Regarding land claims one can find a variety of approaches how to steer and to deal with the development of settlement and traffic infrastructure and consequently reducing land use consumption. Spatial planning approaches are mainly focused on an overall reduction of land use consumption (quantitative aim), zoning regarding the decentralized concentration (aim of spatial distribution) and infill development respectively provision of spaces on sites of minor ecological quality (qualitative aim). Most of these approaches lack of success in practice and implementation.

Within FLAIR not a certain spatial approach but the problems, respectively the diverging problem perceptions of the stakeholders involved, are the starting point in order to survey the barriers to the implementation of land use management.

Infill development is one of the major goals of German spatial planning and nearly all actors support this idea. Nevertheless, Greenfields are still favoured as these sites are more attractive, because they are easier to develop, bear less risks etc. There is a variety of barriers hampering infill development and hence hampering the reduction of land claims, most of them barely unknown.

A closer look to different actors and stakeholders helps to widen the focus of potential solutions which are usually focused only on a small number of mainly public actors to overcome the gap between planning and implementation and between long-term and short-term objectives. Heidemann calls this arena-agenda-interrelation (Heidemann 2002, P-22). The actors in the arena set the agenda (and the point of view) to work on. Like for instance Decision makers (community, mayors, ...), Individual actors (home owners or tenants, ...) or Institutions like developers, banks, building companies.



Fig. 5: Modes of Interventions (Heidemann 2002 R-8; R-9; R-86; modified)

Due to the FLAIR approach Problems-First we assume that spatial solutions are not sufficient to solve spatial problems, but additional interventions have to be taken into account. Spatial planning has four modes of interventions to its disposal (see figure 5):

1. Provision of spaces (e.g. zoning in housing areas or business districts, green belts).
2. Construction and maintenance of facilities on these areas (e.g. houses, parks, roads).

3. Adjustment of organisations operating in or with this facilities (households, companies, public authorities).
4. Influence on behaviour of actors (use of land and facilities like roads only for motorised traffic or mixed used, environmental-friendly or -harmful behaviour etc.).

Nevertheless today's spatial planning in general is still focused on intervention (1) 'provision of space' (zoning). The provision of spaces is mainly done by the typical instruments of spatial planning: Planners use their regional, comprehensive or local plans to provide zones i.e. assign different uses to different spaces by plans of different levels or different legal basis; additionally are to mention central places, green belts and so on. Architects, landscape architects or transport planners concentrate on the 'construction of facilities', like buildings, parks or roads (intervention (2)). Planners often disregard a high potential to regulate the use of spatial structures by 'adjusting organisations' (3) and 'influencing the behaviour of actors'(4).

But behaviour influences space to a high degree: decisions of where to settle, which mode of transport to use, how to use the environment and natural resources etc. are based on these behaviours of organisations and actors. By the interventions (3) and (4) the arena of actors is extended: not only public actors are focused but also private (and public) users of spaces and facilities. So these fourth mode of intervention is the interlink of spatial planning to other space related disciplines. Stakeholders outside spatial planning business are acting in this mode (to convince people to be voted, to produce in order to sell products, aso) and so spatial solutions on land use management have to launch into this mode of intervention. Urban-regional dialogues take a hand in here.

Activating Brownfield potentials by 'Strategic Planning Procedures'

By the query of spatial conflicts, reference cases and community analyses, the FLAIR partners want to ask the most relevant questions by using a problem-based approach rather than dealing with "the usual suspects" (Capitaine Louis Renault in "Casablanca"), and identifying the main complex spatial problems of our model region.

By the help of the overviews of Brownfield potentials and conflicts in the participating communities in a quantitative and qualitative way this will be the input for 'Strategic Planning Procedures' to generate a kind of pilot solutions for exemplary spatial problems by using the intervention on influence on behaviour.

Strategic Planning Procedures are a sort of mixture between architectural competitions, which are aimed to have a big variety of solutions for a problem, and expertises, where mainly one solution is developed very detailed.

Strategic Planning Procedures can be used for complex, long-term planning processes, not for everyday routine, as they are too laborious. Strategic Planning Procedures demand different organisational conditions like:

- Create a temporary planning organisation, consisting of an interdisciplinary task force, which meets regularly apart from daily routine.
- Work on different problem scales and planning levels.
- Build teams (usually three) to compete against each other in a "contest of ideas".
- Work in a defined temporal rhythm.
- Integrate local stakeholders in the discussion and decision on spatial problems and solutions.

Within the research project FLAIR two so called Strategic Planning Procedures will be carried out. There will be different planning teams in each procedure competing with each other in a 'contest of ideas' and to develop strategies how to activate Brownfield potentials and reduce the consumption of Greenfields. The teams involved in the Strategic Planning Procedures have the task to identify barriers on the activation of Brownfields and suggest

solutions of how to activate Brownfield potentials. This contest of ideas leads to a wide spectrum of potential solutions and take the adjustment of organisations as well as the influence on behaviour into account in order to create innovative strategies for the activation of infill Brownfield potentials as core of a land use management.

The outcomes of these Strategic Planning Procedures are in the first instance specific and situational, so they cannot (and they are not intended) be transferred one-to-one. For every planning task, community and region, we have to use a different mixture of instruments. However the findings of these Strategic Planning Procedures are aimed to prove their feasibility of implementation and their transferability to other communities and regions.

These Strategic Planning Procedures are used as pilot actions within FLAIR to combine solutions on the frame setting layer and the municipality layer on a regional scale by help of the “right” mode of intervention in a shared power environment. The pilot actions for activating Brownfields are one pillar of the intended land use management. Together with the potential and conflict overview (for the pilot communities) and a governance strategy based on the mode of intervention they are urban-regional dialogues on regional land use management.

Conclusions

The FLAIR project offers an innovative implementation-orientated approach to spatial planning: not the methods, instruments or theories are the starting point to reduce land claims but the socially constructed spatial problems – as complex spatial planning tasks – are put into focus. Strategic Planning Procedures will be carried out in order to develop strategies how to activate Brownfield potentials and establish a land use management.

So FLAIR introduces a problem based, multi-actor and multi-level approach to regional governance and planning and proposes an update of the traditional instrument by involving a wide range of actors on an adequate mode of intervention.

The FLAIR approach intends to provide more adequate strategies of high political and practical relevance and furthermore stimulate an update of regional planning tools (the so called Regional Plan) and an innovative land use management.

As a result an improvement of the methodical approaches used within the planning process on regional level is expected. Furthermore the transmission of these objectives into the land-use plans on community level should be strengthened and – if necessary – be supplemented by additional, informal but flexible instrument to safeguard sustainable ecologic and economic development within the region.

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