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East German Cross-Border Regions 2020

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Motivation

Despite the progress they have made to restructure and modernize, Eastern German regions today still lag clearly behind most regions of Western Germany. For this reason there is a need for a specific East German Innovation Policy. This has led the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung of BMBF) to supplement federal innovation programs in support of East Germany with a Regional Foresight exercise.

Unleashing Innovative Potential with Regional Foresight

In recent years, regional initiatives and activities have gained great significance due to the adoption of holistic approaches to dealing with employment and structural adjustment to local economies.

In the 'new' German Länder numerous regional and local initiatives and alliances endeavour to overcome the immediate problems caused by structural change and develop a regional profile better shaped to meet the challenges of the future.

Such regional initiatives and alliances are usually characterised by a high level of motivation, strong commitment and deep knowledge of current problems. In some cases they are characterized by broad participation of citizens and stakeholders. In general they are doing pioneering work in the field of structural policies.

A recent initiative on 'Regional Foresight in German Border Regions' funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung or BMBF) was concerned with the exploitation of the potential of regional foresight in the cross-border regions of Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic.

'Aufbau Ost' and the Development of Eastern Germany

When Germany celebrated its unification on 3 October 1990, large sections of East German economy were highly unprofitable. 'Aufbau Ost' is a programme for economic recovery in East Germany¹. Literally it means 'Development of Eastern Germany' and the German Government funds research projects which focus on specific issues that affect the new federal states.

¹ <http://www.tatsachen-ueber-deutschland.de/597.0.html>



In particular the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR) coordinates and supervises projects, which thematically focus on Regional Development, Location Development, Housing and Building².

Since 1999 the Federal Ministry of Education and Research or BMBF has been supporting regional alliances in the new German Länder³. The focus is on the development of 'Entrepreneurial Regions' through regional competencies, activities with a high innovation potential and a high technological content.

As a result in the eastern states of Germany a modern economic structure is emerging that is geared towards the future.

The intention of this BMBF initiative was to introduce the concept of 'Regional Foresight' into the vision for 'Aufbau Ost' and lay the foundation for regional innovation strategies with the broad objective of foster growth and employment through trans-regional cooperation.

Cross-border Innovation Strategies

Under the title 'Border Regions – Regional Foresight and Innovation Development in Eastern Germany' a conference was organised by the BMBF in 2004-2005 focusing on how regional forward-looking initiatives in three Eastern German cross-border regions could make a valuable contribution towards innovation and act as a springboard for joint strategic action.

The geographical focus was on **Upper Lusatia, Havelland-Fläming** and **South Thuringia**.

The main question was whether 'Regional Foresight' a relatively new tool for the management of innovation at regional level, could contribute to the development of the regional innovation system.

In the context of this initiative the term 'Border Region' was taken literally and referred to regions at the eastern border of Germany. However it also had a more figurative meaning in that it also referred to regions in which an economic divide act as a specific barrier to development. On this basis the following border regions were analysed:

- **Upper Lusatia (Oberlausitz):** Situated in the border region close to the new EU member states Poland and the Czech Republic, it represents a border region with a relatively low level of economic development, yet a high level of planning activity some of which is trans-national in nature.
- **The Havelland-Fläming:** This region is close to the major conurbation of Berlin and is characterized by its proximity to a highly developed metropolitan area.
- **South Thuringia:** This region borders the 'old' federal states of Hesse and Bavaria. It thereby represents a border

situation with great proximity to Western German regions.

The survey conducted on regional foresight processes in the border regions of East Germany, pointed out commonalities and differences in the effectiveness of innovation and cross-border strategies, especially when these were carried out as a complement to conventional problem solving strategies at regional level.

Broad Participation Needed

It became clear that in the three analysed regions the aims of most of the foresight initiatives dealing with innovation strategies could not have been effective without the commitment of a broad range of actors from industry as well as citizens.

Although the individual situation of these border areas differs substantially from one region to another, all hitherto conducted foresight initiatives resulted in the revitalisation of common potentials on both sides of the border.

In **Havelland-Fläming** it was emphasised that regional foresight initiatives made a constructive contribution to achieving the aims of the innovation strategy. It was also made clear that regional foresight initiatives could be of significant importance for shaping a shared vision of the future for the border region. The:

- Exchange of experience,
- Implementation of common projects and
- Mobilisation of civil society,

Enables the:

- Reasonable and economical administration of financial resources,
- Avoids duplication work and
- Evokes a sustainable political will.

In **South Thuringia** the use of regional foresight in planning activities was considered to have a very progressive influence on the development of innovation strategies. This was especially true for the implementation of so-called 'Lead Projects' which enjoy great visibility at regional level. Regional foresight was considered a good tool for developing cross-border cooperation. It was observed that region both lose and gain from a geographical situation of sharing a border with one or more of the 'old' federal states. A common, cross-border orientation is of central importance in optimising this situation so as to enhance advantages and mitigating the disadvantages that arise from the cross border economic divide.

Regional foresight planning in **Upper Lusatia** and **Lower Silesia** was especially welcomed by actor and other stakeholders. These regions had positive experiences in cross-border cooperation using foresight for the development of common strategies. Their impression of the effectiveness of applying regional foresight in planning innovation strategies was very positive.

² <http://www.bbr.bund.de/english/aufbau-ost/>

³ <http://www.unternehmen-region.de/en/index.php>

There were however some points of criticism concerning the use of foresight and its appropriateness.

- Some actors expressed frustration that broad-based participation of citizens and actors alone 'did not necessarily create jobs in the region'.

- Some felt that the visionary nature of a foresight initiative 'was not always compatible with the actual mood in the Upper Lusatia region'.

Importance of Foresight in the Field of Policy-making

These surveys and discussions lead to the conclusion that Regional Foresight is:

- A medium for dialogue involving citizens and private industry,
- A tool for regional planning,
- Sensitive to the effects of mega-trends on regional development,
- Supportive of active, society-oriented commitment of the region for the region,
- An appropriate way to increase the effectiveness of planning for regional innovation activity.

In spite of the increasing importance of foresight in the field of policy-making, foresight activities analyzed in this initiative have not yet reached the same degree of integration or complementarity and interrelation as other instruments for the development of regional innovation systems. This is due to the fact that in some regions foresight activities are hardly visible and networking of key actors barely occurs if it happens at all.

In the regions we have analyzed there is a clear need for a supporting framework for these activities, one that applies on the European level as well as on the level of the region. More precisely there is a need for mobility and funding instruments and programmes within a network of actors involved in foresight. Thus, the actors in society and industry will be able to proactively face up to and react to the accelerated technological change and to the challenge of globalisation.

Recapitulating the following needs have been identified. There is a need for:

- An efficient and effective interregional and if possibly EU-wide network of foresight activities,
- The development of a coherent supporting framework that guarantees the systematic use and optimal implementation of foresight processes,
- The identification and mobilization of all relevant actors at all levels of governance levels.

Better Linkage and Consolidation of Foresight Engagement Required

During the conference that was part of the BMBF initiative on regional foresight in East Germany's border regions, a wide

range of foresight activities were identified that stimulate and project the systematic anticipation of socio-economic and technological developments. A great variety of different actors were identified that participate in and contribute towards the activation of endogenous development potentials through processes such as identity building. With participatory approaches such as regional foresight it is possible to achieve not only the systematic integration of existing public and private initiatives, but also the bottom-up development of regional strategies concerning the future.

Nevertheless it was felt that public decision makers, small and medium sized enterprise in the region as well as actors from research and science could be better linked. It was felt that science-industry links are of particular importance. By re-examining the role of each of the both public and private sector players, by establishing synergies between activities and by taking advantage of complementarities among initiatives at European, national and regional level, a reinforced partnership among all those involved should be achieved.

Regional Strategic Intelligence Empowered by Cross-border Mutual Learning

The project focused on the stimulation and optimization of innovation activities in 'border regions'.

The central characteristic of border regions is the convergence of economic, social and cultural contexts in a single region. This creates the potential for conflict and obscures opportunities for innovation.

Particularly for East German regions bordering on Eastern Europe, EU enlargement offers vast possibilities. However these are often difficult to appraise. Regional actors must be mobilized to include these opportunities in their strategic planning.

A large number of East German foresight projects give rise to the assumption that regional foresight in a cross-border context is an effective instrument for transnational, cross border and interregional democratic processes of civic participation in thinking, debating and shaping the local future.

Regions in 'border-like situations', which are not necessarily located at geographical borders, but have historical, interregional links, through migration or commuting flows, could learn from these examples. Just as in the case of technological innovation, the new opportunities lie at the interfaces of disci-

plines, the meeting of different cultural and socio-economic spheres can lead to 'social' innovation.

The process of developing common visions and future strategies in cross-border and transnational regions is broadly promoted by interregional prospective and strategic initiatives that concurrently consider the many aspects of European integration at the local level.

While integrating global mega trends and already acquired know-how on technological, market-relevant and regional developments, regional foresight can be used to elaborate approaches to and visions for developments which promise to have the biggest impact on decision-making in a given region.

By stimulating a socio-political dynamic, relevant trends can be recognized and harnessed for the benefit of the region. This obviates the need for the implementation of a highly participatory process such as regional foresight.

These comparatively independent regional strategy-relevant processes are aimed at linking key actors of a region such as decision-makers, scientists, enterprise representatives and project promoters in completely new constellations and they encourage more extensive co-operation.

Foresight for Social Innovation

In order to create a climate in which innovation can occur and innovation systems evolve, existing structures and established knowledge must be continuously challenged.

Foresight as a tool for 'social innovation' is inextricably linked to a path towards more open societies in which every community and every generation develops its own vision and periodically defines anew where it wants to go and what its future is going to look like.

By incorporating strategic foresight in planning and by using regional analysis combined with participative or interactive methods for collecting future relevant information and vision-shaping, cross-border regions in particular may facilitate immediate and future decisions and common activities.

This does not mean that we should replace established planning methods. It means that we should add new dimensions of decision-making and communication to existing methods, thereby supplementing the activities of the regional actors, broadening their horizons and increasing their strength.

Sources and References

Innovation Support Initiative for East Germany of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research - (BMBF):
www.unternehmen-region.de

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About the EFMN: Policy Professionals dealing with RTD, Innovation and Economic Development increasingly recognize a need to base decisions on broadly based participative processes of deliberation and consultation with stakeholders. One of the most important tools they apply is FORESIGHT. The EFMN or European Foresight Monitoring Network supports policy professionals by monitoring and analyzing Foresight activities in the European Union, its neighbours and the world. The EFMN helps those involved in policy development to stay up to date on current practice in Foresight. It helps them to tap into a network of know-how and experience on issues related to the day to day design, management and execution of Foresight and Foresight related processes.