

Supra-regional Partnerships – What can they Contribute to Innovative Regional Development

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1 ABSTRACT

Supra-regional partnerships are a new kind of cooperation between urban and rural areas respectively between central and peripheral areas with the demand to promote growth and innovation in every subregion. The approach has its roots in the first spatial concept of Germany called “Growth and Innovation”. Within a demonstration project of spatial planning from 2007 to 2010 seven regions in Germany tried to implement and perform supra-regional partnerships. Within a phd-thesis at the TU Darmstadt four model-regions were analyzed to see, if supra-regional partnerships can fulfill the requirements and what kind of preconditions must be given. Particularly the role of structurally weak regions and shrinking regions within such partnerships was analyzed. The results show, that the very different approaches of supra-regional partnerships in the model-regions can produce synergistic effects and innovative approaches to deal with the respective effects of structural and demographic change. The paper discusses the question, which aspects of structural and demographic change are relevant at the supra-regional level and how supra-regional partnerships can give answers to the challenges.

2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Regional development gets more and more complex. The impacts from different levels (EU, national, regional, local) and from the different sectors (economy, social, political etc.) causing conflicts and opposing developments. The increasing complexity and dynamic of development makes it difficult to use planning instruments and to steer from outside. The steering of spatial development will be increasingly done by the affected actors in networks and cooperations (regional governance). In Germany the first spatial concept “Growth and Innovation” picks up among others the issue of regional governance. The spatial concept aims for supporting economic growth and innovation in every region. Because of their special advantages metropolitan regions are seen as an important engine of growth and innovation but it is seen too, that there are regions outside metropolitan areas with contributions to growth. At the same time there are structurally weak regions needing support to use their own strengths and to be innovative. Within the spatial concept urban-rural-partnerships at the supra-region level are expected to bring different requirements together. Urban-rural partnership means partnership between metropolitan and rural areas, between central and peripheral areas.

Compared to regional cooperation as we know it some issues are new. First of all there is the large-scale approach. Normally regional cooperation has a common frame like a historic region, a physical region or a functional region. This offers a common basis with shared mindset and values to generate reliance between different actors in a cooperation (cf. Benz 2004: 23; Diller 2002: 40). These stakeholders are not associated in institutions but have a system of rules which offers capability to solve collective problems (cf. Benz 2004: 19; Fürst 2004: 50ff.). A large-scale approach of cooperation means that more actors from different cooperation cultures will have to develop collective ideas and aims for a large region which in some cases – as the case studies show – transcend state borders. Furthermore the spatial concept explicit asks for partnerships between metropolitan regions and peripheral rural areas respectively structurally weak areas (BMVBS 2006: 11).

This aspect is new in view of the fact that cooperations predominantly occur between regions with similar structures i.e. within urban areas (city and hinterland) or within rural areas (e.g. LEADER-initiatives, Regionen aktiv) (cf. ARL 1998; BBR 2002; Fürst 2004: 61; Hillgardt 2002). In the literature (Hahne 2007; Keim 2006; Leber et al. 2006) the question was discussed if metropolitan regions and peripheral rural regions can cooperate with mutual benefits. In particular it was questioned if such a partnership will occur voluntarily. Zimmermann (2007: 215) explains that there are no stimuli to integrate peripheral and structurally weak regions at a voluntary basis.

The document of the spatial concept “Growth and Innovation” gives information about the expectations concerning supra-regional partnerships. Thus it is aimed to pick up and advance existing potentials for

growth and innovation by means of supra-regional development strategies. The other side is to offer development perspectives to stabilize and strengthen structurally weak regions (BMVBS 2006: 8). These are very common approaches and tasks which have to be translated to the regional / supra-regional context. That implies that relevant actors agree on questions like what are relevant potentials of the respective region and how can they be enhanced (strategy development). With the background that participation in regional discussions and networks is generally voluntary it is an important question who considers the matters to be important, takes these issues on the agenda and who promotes the process (cf. ARL 1998: 5; BBR 2002: 9f.; Diller 2002: 38f.).

3 STUDY DESIGN AND CASE STUDIES

The authors of the spatial concept link supra-regional partnerships to the issue of regional governance (BMVBS 2006: 8, 13). Benz (2004: 15) explains that regional governance describes a new perspective on regional cooperation and networks, it is looked at the modalities of governing, steering, managing and coordinating (process related aspects) and at the structural, functional and instrumental aspects of governing, steering, managing and coordinating.

To analyze case studies the unspecific concept of regional governance has to be concretized concerning the context of supra-regional partnerships (cf. Benz 2004: 21). The political science distinguishes into polity, politics and policy (Benz 2004: 19). Another differentiation is to look at institutional context, actor constellation, problems and content of politics and the practice of steering and coordination (Benz 2004: 22). Looking at regional governance also space is relevant (territorial vs. functional approach, cf. Fürst 2003: 442f.). Following these basic principles four categories of research questions were developed: structure and rules of supra-regional partnerships, actors and actor constellations, content and area (Pennekamp 2010).

The case studies were selected out of a demonstration project of spatial planning (Modellvorhaben der Raumordnung MORO). This MORO was announced in 2007 and seven model-regions implemented supra-regional partnerships within this project from 2008 to 2010. Four model-regions out of seven were selected to analyze the aforesaid research questions particularly with focus on the role and participation of rural and peripheral resp. structurally weak regions. So one important criteria for the selection of case studies was an active role of these regions within the partnerships. The selected model-regions were:

- Supra-Regional Partnership North Germany / Metropolitan Region Hamburg (Großräumige Partnerschaft Norddeutschland/Metropolregion Hamburg) (MORO North)
- Cooperation and Integration in the Northeast (Kooperation und Vernetzung im Nordosten) (MORO Northeast)
- European Metropolitan Region of Nuremberg (Europäische Metropolregion Nürnberg) (MORO Nuremberg)
- Knowledge – Cooperation – Innovation (Wissen – Kooperation – Innovation Frankfurt/Rhein-Main – Mittelhessen – Rhein-Neckar – Westpfalz) (MORO KCI)

In March/April 2009 seventeen expert interviews were realised and additional documents were exploited (until September 2009) to get data and information about the projects. These data represent an intermediate result as the demonstration projects were ongoing after the survey.

The spatial structure in the area of the demonstration project „Supra-Regional Partnership North Germany / Metropolitan Region Hamburg” shows a high proportion of rural areas (75%), parts of it in peripheral and very peripheral situation. The core of the region is Hamburg as very central urban area, around Hamburg and along an axis to Kiel and Lübeck are central urban areas (BBSR 2009; fig. 1). An analysis of growing and shrinking regions shows that Hamburg and its hinterland and the areas along the central axes are growing such as the districts Nordfriesland and Bad Doberan too (Data 2006, BBR 2009). Nearly all districts in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania and the district of Cuxhaven are shrinking. The map of growth share¹ shows

¹ The analysis of growth share shows the share of every subregion in Germany to the overall growth in Germany (1994-2003). The subregions in the 1. and 2. Quartile can be seen as growth engines with a very high and high share to the overall growth. Additionally some subregions in the 3. Quartile are shown as potential growth engines because of their positive growth trend within the analyzed period. At the other side of the scale the subregions with heavy structural problems are shown as region with the need of stabilization. More about the method and results in (Kawka 2007).



that only Hamburg and the districts Pinneberg und Stade have a high share and can be named as growth engines. And it shows that some districts in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania have a positive share to the overall growth (3. Quartile) (Kawka 2007: 41; fig. 1).

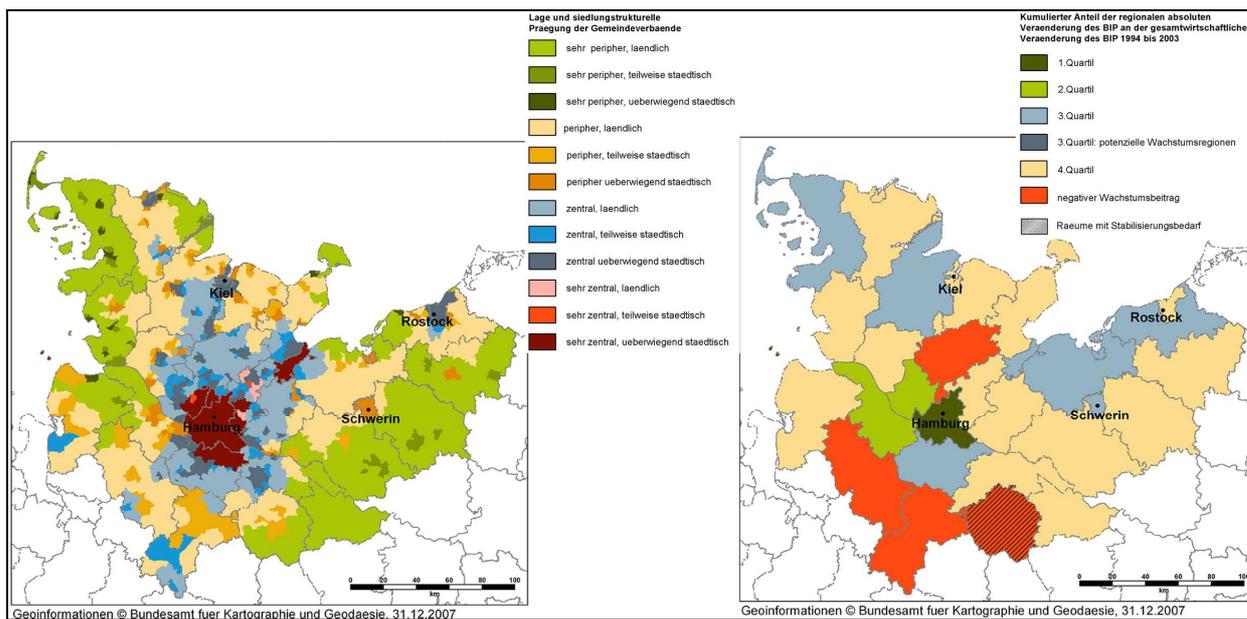


Fig. 1: Spatial structure and growth share in the model region MORO North

The spatial structure in the area of the demonstration project “Cooperation and Integration in the Northeast” is stamped by the centre Berlin/Potsdam with a narrow central urban hinterland and a very high proportion of peripheral areas which are often rural areas. Only Rostock is another central urban area (BBSR 2009; fig. 2). The center around Berlin is shrinking while some districts in the hinterland, the district Bad Doberan and the city of Potsdam are growing areas. The other subregions are shrinking. (Data 2006, BBR 2009) Further there is to notice that Berlin has a negative growth share and is not the growth engine within the supra-regional partnership. This function take the districts Oberhavel and Teltow-Fläming (2. Quartile) (Kawka 2007: 41; fig. 2). So growth impulse have to come from the region outside the metropolitan core.

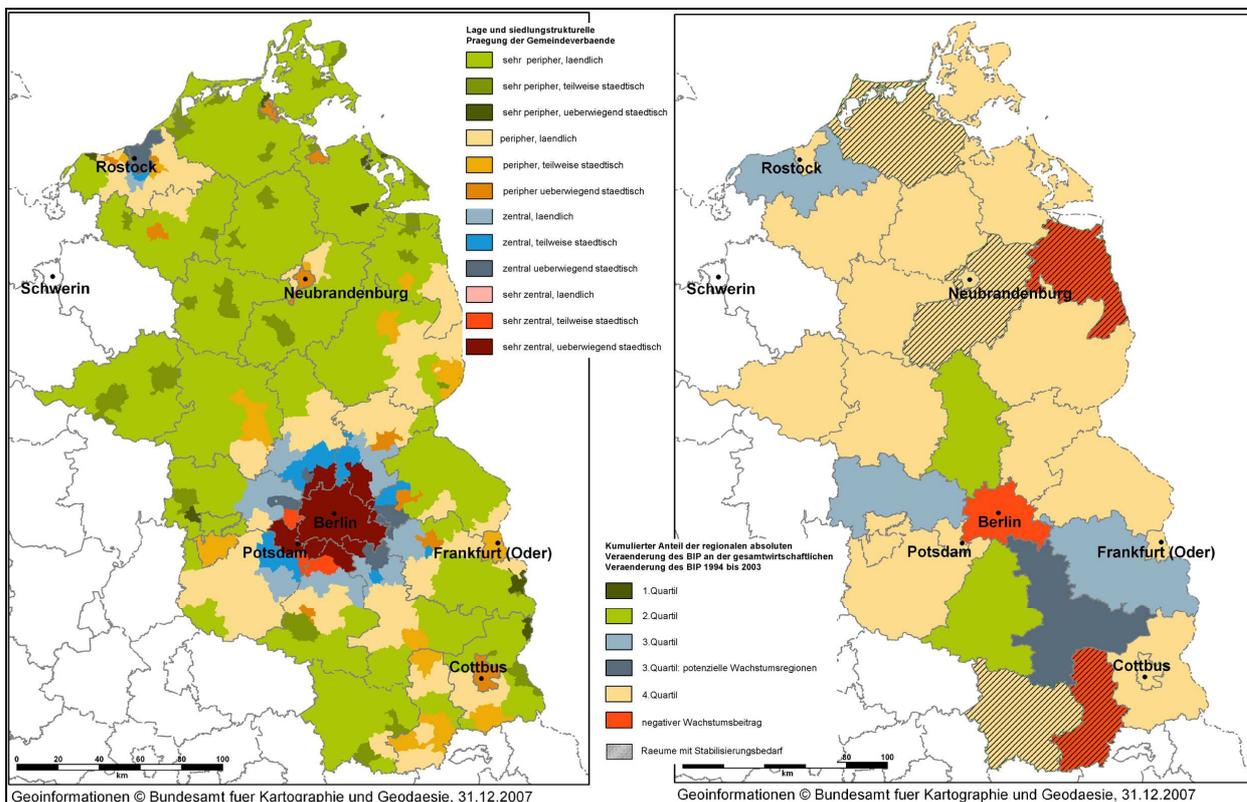


Fig. 2: Spatial structure and growth share in the model region MORO Northeast

Within the supra-regional partnership „European Metropolitan Region of Nuremberg” there are only a few very peripheral areas in the north and east. The center is build by the cities of Nuremberg, Fürth, Erlangen and Schwabach and its surrounding districts with an axis to Ansbach and a second axis to Bamberg. The share of rural areas is high (74%) (BBSR 2009; fig. 3). The development dynamic shows two parts of the region, the subregions in the west and south are growing, parts of the subregions in the northeast and east are shrinking (Data 2006, BBR 2009). Three districts and two cities in the northeast have a negativ growth share. The district and city of Bamberg and Nuremberg can be seen as growth engine (2. Quartile) (Kawka 2007: 41; fig. 3). Within this partnership the structural strong and weak regions correlate not to the spatial structure (core-periphery).

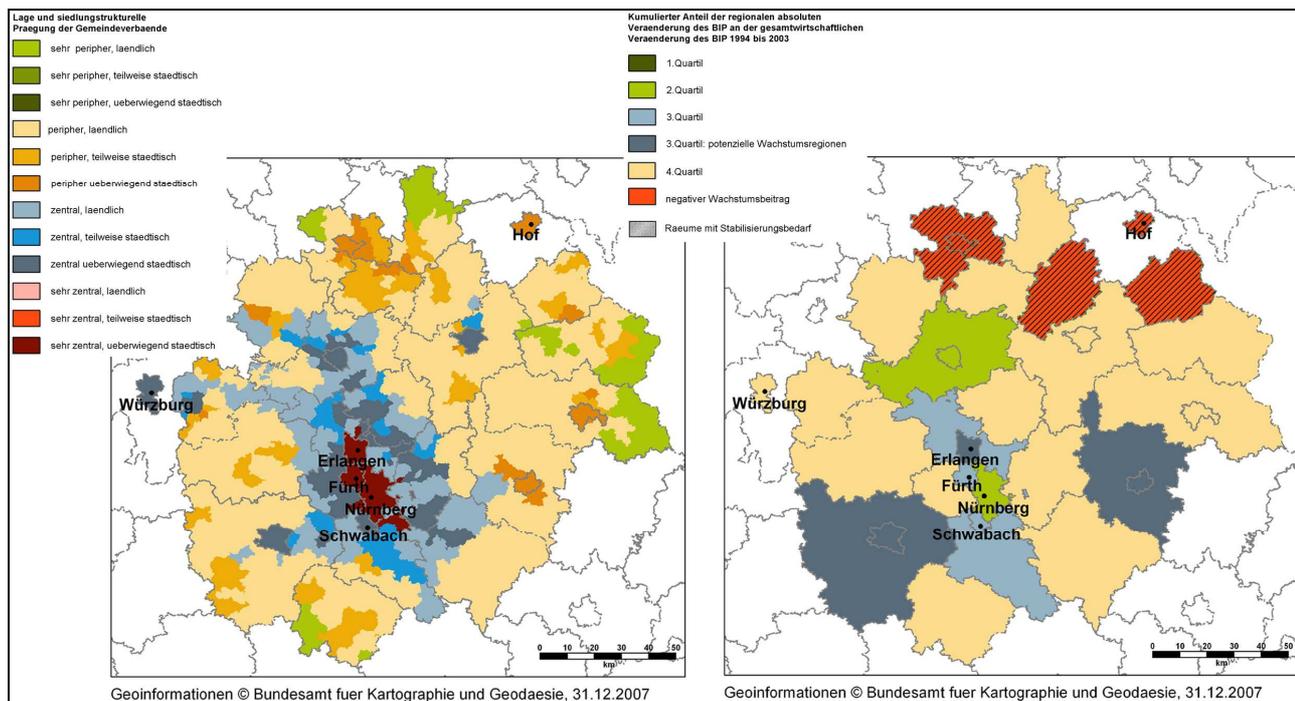


Fig. 3: Spatial structure and growth share in the model region MORO Nuremberg

The area of the supra-regional partnership “Knowledge – Cooperation – Innovation” represents a central and very central region with only few perhiperal areas on the fringe. Every type of situation (peripheral, central) has a proportion of rural areas. The very central area stretches linear from North to South through the polycentric region (BBSR 2009; fig. 4). Within the partnership there are three districts and two cities which are shrinking. A big part of the model region is growing particularly the cities Mainz and Wiesbaden with their hinterland, the Rhine-Neckar district (surrounding Heidelberg and Mannheim) and the district Hochtaunus in the north of Frankfurt/Main (Data 2006, BBR 2009). Looking at the growth share one can see that Frankfurt and the Rhine-Neckar district are growth engines (1. Quartile) together with Heidelberg, Mannheim, Wiesbaden and Aschaffenburg and the districts in the north of Frankfurt (2. Quartile) (Kawka 2007: 41; fig. 4). The data show a partnership with a large core which is structurally strong and only a few structurally weak subregions on the fringes in the east and west



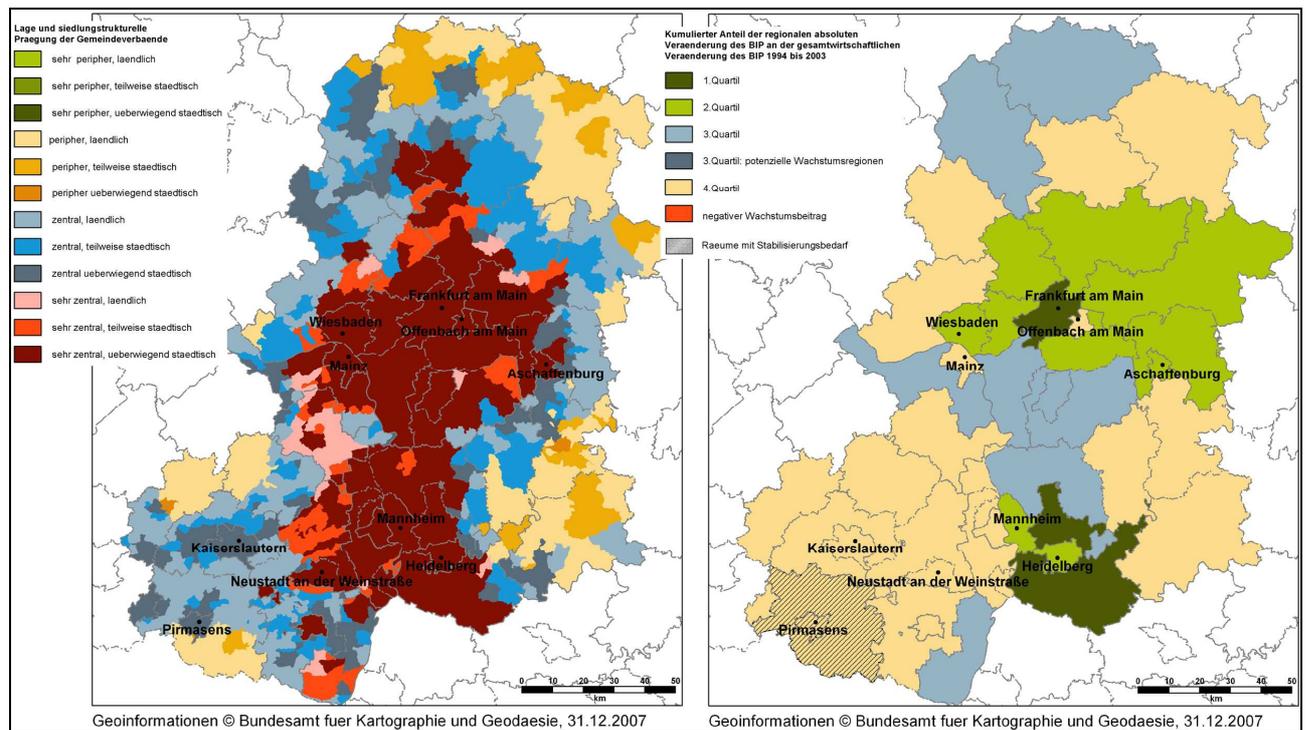


Fig. 4: Spatial structure and growth share in the model region MORO KCI

4 SUPRA-REGIONAL PARTNERSHIPS – SOME RESULTS

Growth and innovation are widespread headwords and a lot of issues are relevant thinking of promoting regional development for growth and innovation. One interesting question was what kind of issues is relevant at the supra-regional level. Therefore the different projects within the model-regions were analyzed and sorted by their main topics. The results show a large range of subjects like cluster promotion in several sectors, regional economic cycles, the issue of qualified employees (demographic change), networks between sciences and economy or traffic and logistic concepts. So e.g. there are two projects in MORO North to improve the accessibility: “Heranrücken” which aims for a better connection from peripheral regions to Hamburg and “Brückenschlag” which tries to develop concepts how to take benefit from the new Fehmarnbelt-Crossing. One project in MORO Northeast tries to get goods traffic from street to railway (“Häfen und Hinterland”). Projects to promote cluster-concepts are e.g. the energy cluster in MORO Nuremberg or the food industry cluster in MORO North. Regional economic cycles are central in projects like “Aus der Region für die Region” (MORO North) which aims for the strengthening of regional economic cycles and a higher awareness for regional products in urban and rural regions, and “Regionale Wirtschaftskreisläufe” (MORO Nuremberg) which tries to bring together regional initiatives under an umbrella brand called “Original Regional”. To share knowledge and promote innovation and regional cooperation is the intention of the networking project “Life Science” in MORO WKI. In doing all these projects the actor-oriented effects take center stage in every analyzed model region which means the creation and encouragement of networks and cooperation. The effects of new contacts and networks are of high importance for the experts polled. They explain that by new contacts and networks within the supra-regional context new capabilities and resources get free.

One important point of the demonstration project is the effect of pushing discussions about regional development and its preconditions within a supra-regional context. Some experts explained that this brought very new perspectives (spatial and functional) and so far a chance for innovative processes.

The model-regions found very different approaches how to initiate and implement such a partnership. The examples show, that there is not one adequate way to do this but the context within the regions is of high importance and influence. So in MORO Northeast it was crucial to start with a little circle of actors to define the general ideas and then to ask further stakeholder to participate in the projects. This is an ongoing process, e.g. at the time of the survey stakeholder from Berlin were missing. In contrast the situation in MORO North made it important to engage a broad range of stakeholders from all over the region to define ideas and develop projects so they organized workshops in different subregions.

The analyzed partnerships have different organisation structures depending on the situation of the respective metropolitan region. The leadership has been taken by actors from the federal state planning (MORO North, Northeast) or from the metropolitan region (MORO Nuremberg, KCI). All partnerships have steering committees to coordinate and decide about projects and activities. These steering committees are composed of the partners who founded the partnership. In two model-regions additional stakeholders get involved in the steering committee like politicians and economic stakeholders. The metropolitan regions Hamburg (MORO North) and Nuremberg finance a project management. The different projects within the model-regions have their own project manager. In MORO KCI this is respectively one of the partners, the other model-regions engage further stakeholder to be project manager.

4.1 Rural, peripheral and structurally weak regions in supra-regional partnerships

Actors of rural regions represent very different opinions concerning supra-regional partnerships – from enthusiasm (that's what we were waiting for) to rejection (that's not worth to discuss). A consequence is that most rural districts act by their own way. Some are active and try to develop projects with metropolitan partners, some are passive like "wait and see" and others are negative. Within the analyzed model-regions there was no correlation between the location (peripheral or central) or economic structure (structurally weak or strong) and the engagement. And with exception of Nuremberg the rural regions have no mutual strategy how to be a partner to metropolitan regions within a supra-regional partnership.

In every analyzed model-region actors from rural regions participated in the first steps of the partnerships like brainstorming and development of concepts for the partnership. Often it were representatives from the regional level (regional planning authorities, regional initiatives). In the different projects of supra-regional partnership participates a wide range of actors from rural and urban regions.

The experts emphasize that rural areas should take an active role within such a partnership, they should define their strengths and potentials and they should formulate their expectations to the metropolitan region or the metropolitan partner. Therefore two things have to be given: The actors in rural areas have to know strengths and potentials concerning such a partnership and internally discuss relevant topics. This means that there must be regional forums to find, define and bargain these topics. "Where regional forums are missing to bargain such topics collectively it is more complex to develop regional capacity to act. In fact there are single key actors to create adequate problem sensibility and to make an issue out of it in their institutions or networks. This can generate a regional discussion but there can be high barriers to initiate and organize such discussions." (Fürst 2003: 441) The second condition is that metropolitan regions must be open for the "proposals" from the rural areas. At least a general willingness to engage in dialogue on the part of metropolitan actors and the willingness to accept rural areas as independent economic areas is necessary. As the experts say such a cognition is growing slowly in Hamburg. In Nuremberg this was the basis for the first cooperations in the 1990th which are the roots of the metropolitan region and the supra-regional partnership. In Berlin this cognition is missing and in the Rhine-Main/Rhine-Neckar area this issue was not relevant for the demonstration project.

Another interesting question is what kind of contribution rural areas can provide within supra-regional partnerships. Thinking about growing rural areas one can imagine that there are connecting factors to metropolitan regions. But what about structurally weak rural areas and peripheral areas? The experts advise against general designation of contributions of peripheral or structurally weak regions. The kind of contribution depends on economic structures and development paths. Within the analyzed model-regions the projects depend on potentials in agriculture and food industry (production, development of marketing and service), energy industrie (energy production, service), logistics (availability of land, logistics hub), and small and medium sized businesses (cluster, sector networks, qualified employees).

A further aspect in the spatial concept are strategies to stabilize structurally weak and peripheral areas by supra-regional partnerships. All experts agree that supra-regional partnerships are not qualified to balance disparities. They see effects concerning a stabilization therein that these areas get new impetus for development and new chances e.g. by transfer of information and knowledge within networks. Some requirements to become operative are the accessibility and "docking" institutions e.g. businesses, organisations, institutions, offerings.



4.2 Regional value added chains as an issue in supra-regional partnerships

One issue in the partnerships was the implementation of supra-regional value added chains. Particularly MORO North and MORO Nuremberg have special projects called “Aus der Region für die Region” (From the Region for the Region, North) and “Original Regional aus der Metropolregion” (Original Regional from the Metropolitan Region, Nuremberg).

A value added chain in a narrower sense describes the way of a product or a service from production to processing to merchandising to consuming as a sequence of value-adding steps. This can be a supply chain or companies cooperating together. Within a regional value added chain most of the steps are provided in the region to hold a predominant part of the added value in the region. Regional value added chains in the broader sense include cooperation with institutions and actors from politics, administration, sciences and civil society. Another expression for this is “value added partnership” (Schubert et al. 2008).

By developing regional value added chains the different potentials and strengths within the region and of the different partners can be linked and this can create multiplier effects (Hahne 2006; Raab et al. 2009). Regional value added chains and value added partnerships often are an issue in rural areas associated with the concept of endogenous regional development. Urban areas try to promote business networks e.g. with cluster concepts, which are in some respects similar strategies. The projects within the model-regions do not aim for creation and initiation of new value added chains. The supra-regional partnership can be seen as a meta-layer which combines different initiatives in the subregions. The actors of the supra-regional partnerships try to pick up existing approaches in the subregions and promote them.

In the project “Aus der Region für die Region” the initiators want to strengthen the regional economic cycles, the rural areas and the relationship between rural and urban areas. The economic relations between the metropolitan region Hamburg and the partners in Northgermany shall be improved and the valuation of agricultural products, of manual products and services from the northgerman area shall be increased. An important task is to establish a contact network to develop regional marketing strategies for regional products. Further tasks are to analyze the potential to develop a regional campaign, to collect and spread informations and to attain stakeholders in every subregion to promote the idea. It is interesting that the initial process came out of the metropolitan region. The idea was not without controversy, it was smiled on within the metropolitan region and not taken seriously by some actors. But the initiators were successful in feeding the issue among others into the climate debate and together with the impetus of the demonstration project the political support could be secured. At the time of the survey they had first contacts to interested regional initiatives in rural areas in Northgermany.

The label “Original Regional” in the region of Nuremberg was implemented already in the 1990th. So the supra-regional partnership didn't have to start such an initiative but it picked it up to improve and enlarge it. But the experts told that in the beginning in the 1990th the idea to promote regional production and regional consuming was smiled on too and often not taken serious by actors of urban areas. The label “Original Regional” addresses different value added chains. The food industry is a relatively advanced example as e.g. major customer like Siemens (canteen) or the clinical center of Nuremberg have commitments to take 40% of their goods (food) out of the region. Other issues and ideas for value added chains are “energy”, “milk” or “wood”. One important aspect within the demonstration project is to develop common quality criteria (e.g. what is “regional production”). It is not always easy to convince the different regional initiatives in the subregions to take part within the label “Original Regional”. The initiatives fear to loose their singularity which is part of their success so far. So as the project of MORO North before the supra-regional partnership acts as a meta-level to coordinate the different initiatives without making one new approach out of it.

None of the two projects did an evaluation on effects for the regional initiatives and subregions. But as other studies show, regional value added chains can bring economic advantages for the region particularly in respect of income and labour (e.g. Hoffmann 2007; RKW-Kompetenzzentrum 2009; Schubert et al. 2008). In peripheral or structurally weak regions these effects are important to stabilize the development (keeping labour, promoting small enterprises). Another intended aim is to initiate learning processes in urban areas about regional and seasonal products, sustainable consum etc. In the light of the climate discussion additional aspects get important like short distances, production conditions or CO₂ balance.

4.3 Some constraints and requirements for supra-regional partnerships

An important requirement is that all actors be on a par. As said above there are little experiences with partnerships between structurally strong and weak regions and to work together being on a par within the cooperation was one of the most mentioned challenges. The demonstration projects show the difficulties in practice. Only the metropolitan region of Nuremberg has rules of cooperation which bear this request in mind. Within the council of the metropolitan region every delegate (mayor, district administrator) has one vote independent of the size of the municipality or district. The delegates from rural areas know and trust that the mayor of Nuremberg e.g. doesn't want (and is not able) to enforce own projects, the principle is decision-making by consensus. The demonstration projects which install new partnerships don't have such rules and have to discuss how to work together. The building of a common basis of trust and mutual ideas for the big region needs time and causes conflicts. Particularly the experiences of the MORO KCI show how important the "team building" at the beginning of a supra-regional partnership is. After having conflicts in the initial phase the four partners got together in some internal workshops to work out the common purpose, the division of work, responsibilities and so on. Experiences in the MORO North too show the difficulties to develop a feeling of mutuality and responsibility within such a big region covering different states. And particularly actors of rural areas often don't have a common point of view of their areas. Therefore the MORO North has one project called "Position beziehen" (to take position) to discuss the importance and relevance of rural areas in supra-regional partnerships. The demonstration project gave initial impulse to discuss such issues and to bring urban and rural partners from structurally strong and weak regions together.

If these discussions are fruitful and successful they can be the basis to realize relevant critical factors of economic development in a broader spatial and functional context – in future as well concerning the demographic change. But it is clearly to emphasize that there are constraints too particularly for peripheral and structurally weak regions. First of all there must be an acceptable accessibility to agglomeration areas to create linkages and integration. Very peripheral regions need other strategies to develop their potentials. Additionally every subregion needs knowledge about what the potentials and strengths are and how to bring them into a partnership (including some ideas what kind of complementation could be interesting for the partners). Especially peripheral and structurally weak regions need stabilization strategies to define what effects they expect and how these can occur. On the other side the growing subregions must be open for and ready to accept the integration of structurally weak areas in the partnership even though they cannot make essential contributions to the development of the whole region.

It is not possible to reduce regional disparities by means of supra-regional partnerships, the demand that the regional balancing between strong and weak regions should more and more take place in supra-regional partnerships (Lutter 2006: 449) cannot be fulfilled.

5 CONCLUSION

To build partnerships at the supra-regional level follows the cognition that networks and cooperation get more and more important for regional development. Relevant aspects at the supra-regional level are questions of accessibility, traffic and logistics, the promotion of supra-regional value added chains, cluster and the promotion of SME's and the sharing of knowledge and experiences within projects. The model-regions had very different approaches how to initiate and implement a supra-regional partnership. Therefore the context within the regions is of high importance and influence. There is not one way to organize a supra-regional partnership but it seems to be important and successful to secure broad support in politics and economy e.g. by integration of stakeholders within a steering committee.

Supra-regional partnerships are very ambitious and need such a broad encouragement especially in politics and economy. It remains to be seen if after the first motivation in the demonstration projects the partnerships will last. In the metropolitan region of Nuremberg this is not the question but in the model-regions which initiated new partnerships between metropolitan regions and districts and regions outside this is an ongoing process. Peripheral and structurally weak regions can take benefit from supra-regional partnerships if they fulfill some requirements particularly they must know what they need from other partners and what they can offer to other partners. That calls for analyzing the situation and creation of development strategies – normally these regions will need promotion to do this.



The extension of regional value added chains to supra-regional value added chains by combining metropolitan and rural areas is a promising approach. It contributes to a mutual valorisation of each potentials and productivities. New contacts and networks can free new capabilities and resources. But as such effects are hardly measurable it is difficult to examine if supra-regional partnerships really can create these effects.

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