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The "Crystal Growth" of Sustainable Regional Development – The example of the Lake Constance Agenda 21

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Abstract

Implementing sustainable regional development by institutionalising a structure of responsibility can be compared with originating the growth of a crystal by introducing a nucleus in a chemical solution. This is the experience to form a regional Agenda 21-process in the international Lake Constance- region. In this case the nucleus has been the decision from top down to institutionalise 13 contact points within the region to create a working structure of the agenda 21- process. Now it is interesting to analyse the difficult types of organisation between public and private activities resulted from this decision. It throws light on distinctive interplay between top down and bottom up as well as between public and private actors in each subregion.

The paper shows the different solutions found in the thirteen subregions of the Lake Constance- region according to the respective situation. Further more, it describes the different self-images and modes of performing the tasks. The empirical observation of the process is a work in progress. Out of it, some results towards personal and institutional requirements on an actor's network for sustainable regional development can be expected.

Key words: regional policy, sustainable regional development, subsidiarity, transborder cooperation

Introduction

The interplay between top down and bottom up activities as a precondition of success of regional development is part of the theoretical mainstream. But how the interplay will work in detail often can be supposed as the 'black hole' of the theory. Now it is part of the growing discussion about 'regional governance'.

Until now, in most cases the interplay has been described as a kind of public and private - partnership. The public activities are referred to as the 'top down' -part of the co-operation and the social activities are seen as the bottom up- level of the partnership. But much more than the dualism between private and public activities the principle of subsidiarity seems to determine the regional networking as the bottom up- level has to be seen as a conglomerate of public and private activities. There are no simple explanations of how the different levels within the public administration work together. In our case the actors on a higher political level started a process of diffusion of tasks and responsibilities.

The chemical solution - a short description of the region

The Lake Constance- region shows lots of activities towards an integrated regional development. Such a 'saturated solution' is a precondition for Crystal's growth.

On the one hand the subregions shows a lot of activities: The federal state Vorarlberg uses the Austrian discussion about endogenous regional development and make an intensive effort to develop the region in limitation against the main part of Austria 'behind the Arlberg'. The Eastern Switzerland also looks for new approaches as it shows – for example – the development concept of Appenzell Ausserrhoden. Also the City of St. Gall influences the national discussion about the Local Agenda 21 by working out a short version of the Agenda 21 from Rio de Janeiro adapted for the specific needs of Swiss Cities and villages. And on the northern shore of the Lake Constance the number of Local Agenda 21- decisions is one of the highest within Germany.

On the other hand the border region lists a lot of transborder activities towards an integrated regional development. The beginning of the activities originates from problems of water pollution. For this reason the transborder co-operation around the Lake Constance began at an early stage. Different networks of actors emerged and lots of them became institutionalised within the International Conference of the Lake Constance- Region (IBK). Additionally the region became subject of some research projects on the EU level initiated by universities and consultancies or by a private foundation of the environmental NGOs around the Lake Constance. All together these activities creates – together with the political 'mainstream' supporting the sustainability discussion – the saturated solution for the growth of a regional Agenda 21.

Introducing a nucleus – a short description of the process

1. The International Lake Constance Conference (IBK) started the regional Agenda 21 with a preliminary survey on the adequate topics and procedures. People from all topics and a lot of institutions took part in the prestudy.
2. The main focus in the phase of beginning was on networking. The program also was initiated from top down. Within the starting phase the responsible steering group realised the necessity of a regional based working structure.
3. In a next step the regional Agenda 21 started the working process with an annual main focus on a specific topic. The first topic has been 'sustainable development in economy and transport', the second topic now is about 'living spaces, land use and prospects on development'.
4. In parallel the steering group stimulated contact points in each subregion. They introduced a network of responsible actors within the public administration by

sponsoring the subregions with complementary resources out of the EU's INTERREG III- Programme of transborder co-operation. This kind of 'institutionalising from top down' was authorised by the subregional heads of government.

The growing of the crystals – the distribution of responsibility

With the decision of the steering group, the growing of the crystals started: Originally the responsibility for the new tasks was dedicated to the executives of the respective department of environment in each subregion. During one year the task trickled through institutions and instances, until the responsibility met the adequate actor. The term 'adequate' in this case means a combination between institutional setting, personal qualification and commitments as well as the dominating political bias within the subregion.

Picture 1: The region and its subregions



The results are

.... in the German administrative districts:

- ⇒ Bodenseekreis: From an early stage in the subregion exists a well established co-ordination structure as a result from a competition between regions ('Regionen der Zukunft') which has been the national implementation of the Habitat II- Conference in Istanbul by the German Ministry of Transport, Building and Housing. The thirteen cities and villages had institutionalised a contact point within the public authorities of the administrative district which also could take the tasks of the regional Agenda 21.
- ⇒ Landkreis Konstanz: Initiated by the agrarian administration of Baden-Württemberg the 'Modellproject Konstanz' is a institution to support rural development activities. The organisation is financed by public subsidies and is now after finishing the first phase of trying out, transformed into a public- private Ltd. The tasks of the Lake Constance Agenda 21 are part of the terms of reference of the limited company.
- ⇒ Landkreis Ravensburg: A similar solution was chosen in the administrative district of Ravensburg where also a limited company exists which is founded and financed by the public sector. As well the main tasks of the Ltd. is the rural development in the field of agriculture, nature protection and tourism and just as in Konstanz a supervisory board has been established which consists of the relevant public and private actors.
- ⇒ Landkreis Lindau: Here the contact point remained within the public authorities and shifted to an other administrative unit which also coordinates projects of transborder co-operation within the INTERREG- Programme of the EU. As a specific part of the tasks are shared with the responsible for the Local Agenda 21 of the city of Lindau.
- ⇒ Landkreis Sigmaringen: Also in Sigmaringen the tasks stayed within the public authorities. During the first year the head of the Department of Environment remained responsible which allowed only limited commitment. At the moment a new collaborator is employed and learn the ropes.

.... in the Federal State of Vorarlberg: From an organisational point of view Vorarlberg chose the most convenient solution to institutionalise the contact point. The Federal State has established an 'office to solve problems of future development' which settles directly under the Head of Government (Landeshauptmann). The offices has to create and implement campaigns to different problems and to enable a broad discussion about trends of the future.

.... in the Principality of Liechtenstein: The Principality of Liechtenstein has to be seen as a particular case. As an autonomous nation a 'regional' contact point has the status of a national responsibility for example to consult the national policy towards the Rio+10- summit in Johannesburg. Therefore the establishment of such a contact point is a 'work in progress' as part of the national strategy of sustainable development. Until now the main actor is responsible for environmental problems within the national administration.

... and in the cantons of eastern Switzerland:

- ⇒ St. Gallen: The canton of St. Gall chose a 'international solution', integrating the contact point of the Lake Constance Agenda 21, the responsibility for the Swiss participation on the INTERREG III Programme of the EU and all questions around the 'Convention of Alpine States' in one central office.
- ⇒ Appenzell Ausserrhoden: Since a few years the canton commissioned a private consultancy to manage the canton's secretariate according to the Swiss programme to promote the Mountain regions. Also the contact point became part of these task.
- ⇒ Appenzell Innerrhoden: The canton chose the 'classical' solution giving the tasks of the contact point to the cantonal administration of ecology.

- ⇒ Zürich: The canton Zurich first realises the tasks in its own administration. After a few month they agreed on a division of labour with the protestant Academy of Boldern where the same issues has been discussed. Now an association has been founded to meet the tasks of the contact point and the cantonal administration restricts itself on implementing the issues within the public sector.
- ⇒ Schaffhausen: In the canton of Schaffhausen the contact point is attributed to the public administration where one of the 'fathers of the Lake Constance Agenda 21' works. He strictly follows his own strategy to implement the concept of sustainability as deep-rooted as possible within the cantonal politics.
- ⇒ Thurgau: The canton Thurgau seems to be the 'black hole' in the Lake Constance Agenda 21. Despite agreeing and co-financing the structure of regional contact points until now no such a point has been institutionalised. The problem can be seen in the administrative responsibility: the unit responsible has no capacities and less interest, another department interested in the task is not responsible. There is no solution how to break the blockade.

The quality of the crystals: a lot of differences

How the crystals looks like – according to colours, symmetry, stoniness, purity and so on - depends from the quality of growth and no crystal looks like another. As well the characteristics of the contact points differ in a wide range.

On the one hand we can see differences emerging from the different national political cultures meeting in the transborder region. For example the decision of the municipal council to start a local agenda 21- process nearly is a must in Germany and many communities came to such a decision until now. In the Swiss part of the region we only find a few communal decisions, but the policy from both sides of the lake do not differ in the same way. Another example is about the civil commitment: in the South of Germany the term 'civil commitment' describes a political programme which can be compared with an local agenda 21- process and is supported by the respective Ministry of Social Affairs. In Switzerland such efforts are part of the political culture where the electorate act as the sovereign in a 'democracy of concordance'.

The first meeting within the network showed the main differences between the subregions. Valued as significant has been:

- the self-image of the actors and the level of discussion (which topics dominate the public opinion)
- the degree of implementation and controlling of local agenda 21- processes
- the terms and definitions especially on an instrumental level
- the transparency with respect to different roles and the responsibility assignment

Especially the very unequal state of the art of local agenda 21 processes was said to make crucial the exchange of information and applicable knowledge between the actors within the network.

On the other hand differences not only exist between national cultures but also between subregions within the same national culture as it can be seen in the description of the different ways of performing the tasks in each subregion.

In general we can distinguish between different kinds of subregions. Some of the cantons and administrative units are convinced that the idea of sustainability can help to solve problems of further development. They try to implement as many elements of the concept as possible and spend some resources for it. Even before the Lake Constance Agenda 21 has started they established additional structures to promote an integrated regional development. Other cantons or administrative units accompany such processes 'complaisantly observant' to look for realisable goals which has been fruitful in other parts of the region. They take part actively from time to time and are interested

in the exchange of ideas. The third kind of cantons and administrative units restrict themselves on a minimum of additional activities. They only take part in the regional agenda 21- process because they had been argued into the participation. In this case some political pressure emanating from the institutionalised transborder co-operation can be stated.

But the process of regional agenda 21 itself has to be seen as a learning process. In the first one and a half year, seven meetings of the contact points took place and most of the actors has been involved. Beneath the above mentioned discussion about the differences between the national and subregional several other topics has been dealt with: A collection of tasks of the contact points concerning different target groups at the individual, communal, subregional and regional level has been worked out. A draft for a 'quality management of sustainable regional development' has been discussed; it consists in three parts (indicators for sustainability projects, indicators for processes of local agenda 21 and indicators for the development of the region) and will be developed further. An internal collection of background information is going on and the new main topic 2002/2003 has been created by the contact points. Looking over the seven meetings as a thread three main topics can be stated:

- to develop a common understanding of the own role as a service provider
- to intensify the exchange of experience beyond the national borders
- and to develop a strategy of establishing the contact points over the long term

Here starts the main question of further accompanying the process. If we look at the network of actors originating from the process of regional agenda 21: How to enlarge the degree of regional involvement and how to integrate the contact points into other networks of regional development in the region. The critical point will be whether it is possible to reach a stage of 'mainstreaming' which allows the contact points to proceed their activities after finishing the INTERREG 3- subsidies?

The Lake Constance Agenda 21 – a best practice for Regional Governance ?

Regional science, too, has been conducting a discussion of a new understanding of leadership at regional level for some time. At this level, too, a change from *government to governance* can be detected. Various authors have even asked the question as to whether regional governance may at present not even constitute the new paradigm in regional science. What, however, must be specifically understood by this new paradigm? And how does it manifest itself in real life?

Regional governance means weakly institutionalised, network-oriented modes of co-operation between regional actors to achieve common goals of regional development. However, these networks do not exclusively consist of the "classic" groups of actors within the political and administrative system but also refer to the interaction between politics, administration, the economy, associations, and social groupings. Within these networks, new political issues are now being placed on the regional agenda, and new, often innovative products can be realised with ease. Regional governance now seems to be the magic word which serves to promote the process of long-term sustainable development at regional level, too.

The example of the Lake Constance Agenda 21 is a case in point: here, an intermediary network of a wide variety of actors from the most diverse sectors has evolved and has been successfully involved in the promotion of sustainable development in the Lake Constance Region in the last three years. Numerous innovative projects have matured in this network during that period. The network also shares responsibility for the fact that an increasing number of communities and regions integrate the objectives of sustainable development into their own development objectives.

The question now arises as to the reasons behind the development of such a governance structure in the international Lake Constance Region. To sum up, three different reasons can be adduced:

1. the awareness in the region of the necessity of long-term environmentally sound development, which particularly manifests itself in the issue of keeping Lake Constance clean;
2. the long-standing existence of numerous intermediary organisations which deal with ecological issues;
3. the making available of substantial resources in terms of finances and personnel for the initiation and execution of the Agenda 21 process.

In analogy with other initiatives where new network and governance structures emerged at regional level, the crucial impulse for the Lake Constance Agenda 21 was not given bottom-up, but top-down: if other initiatives were often launched with competitions, such as the competition "Regions of the Future" and "Bioregio", the decisive impulse for the emergence of the Agenda network was the decision of the International Lake Constance Conference to make available appropriate funds for such a process, and to finance the process for the first five years. The intriguing thing now is the question as to whether the structures and processes that have been developed will be able to be continued even when the considerable public finances are no longer available, or whether the entire network and all the initiatives will collapse as soon as no money and no jobs are left to co-ordinate the process. This will be seen in the coming year.