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Strategic Regional Planning

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Strategic Regional Planning

1. New answers to well-known regional planning questions – framework conditions and the need for further development

Those with political and administrative responsibility for achieving positive regional development for – and with – the people who live in their regions are facing ever more complex and fast-moving challenges. Relevant catchphrases include adapting to the effects of demographic change, climate change, services of general interest and economic upheaval.

Regional planning operates at a supra-local and trans-sectoral level to offer holistic integrated solutions for spatial development. With its fund of regionally specific knowledge and information, it provides comprehensive and broadly based inputs to all important spatial development issues. Based on analyses, evaluations and prognoses, regional planning is thus particularly able to provide interdisciplinary and balanced suggestions for solving the complex planning challenges of the present day.

According to § 1 Para. 2 of the German Federal Spatial Planning Act, regional planning is guided by the principle "of sustainable spatial development that brings social and economic demands made on space into harmony with ecological functions". Social justice, the protection of natural resources and economic development prospects are taken equally and intergenerationally into account.

Challenges for regional planning

Spatial planning topics and processes face particular challenges that emerge from this approach, especially when combined with demographic change, the threat to the comprehensive provision of services of general interest, the increased ecological burden – especially in terms of climate change-, economic development prospects and a lack of public funds.

The long-term, supra-local and supra-disciplinary nature of both the conditions and effects of services of general interest, in particular, has consequences for the way in which they may be protected. Safeguarding them from social, ecological and economic perspectives demands close cooperation between academic disciplines and planning. The situation is further complicated by procedural challenges posed by monitoring, public participation, communication and the environmental assessment of plans. The interactions and concepts of regional planning often lead to complex, confusing representations that are only understood in part, if at all, by those who are involved. This can result in a lack of understanding of the relevance and necessity of regional planning, mainly because regional planning is far too seldom responsible for implementation. It is those implementing rather than those developing concepts that are usually seen as the problem solvers.

Planning departments, usually well-equipped both financially and in terms of personnel, tend to perform self-confident. However, consideration of future needs and demands often reveals their limitations. Due to the disciplinary optimisation of single object planning and the limited coordination with other needs that results, sectoral planning is often unable to cope satisfactorily with complex challenges related to the com-

mon good and sustainable and balanced development. A strengthened and problem-oriented regional planning involved in implementation could be of help here. However, the regional planning of today is often unable to tackle implementation because of a lack of opportunities, legitimation and strength.

Despite its broad knowledge base about regional interactions, developments and challenges, and its balanced supra-disciplinary action concepts, regional planning regularly comes under political pressure. Increasing deregulation, liberalisation and sectoralisation increase the pressure for justification, leading to demands for the planning system to be simplified and even for a planning layer to be abolished. In addition, calls for transparent decision-making processes are becoming ever louder and there is growing doubt about the effectiveness of regional planning and about the acceptability and applicability of its concepts. At the same time, the resources necessary to satisfy demands for the participation and involvement of various interest groups and actors are not available, or are not made available.

This is the background against which the working group "Tasks of Strategic Regional Planning for Sustainable Regional Development" (Strategic Regional Planning) tackled the question of the form regional planning must take in order to work closely with politics, administration and population and to provide added value compared to sectoral planning. In essence this involves a newly shaped regional planning that focuses on strategic content and goals with intensive interfacing between regulatory and developmental tasks, always asking how this can enable a more successful shaping of the future.

2. A newly shaped "Strategic Regional Planning" offers solutions and prospects for strengthened regional planning

Strategic Regional Planning principally involves providing orientation and determining a long-term, strategic direction for regional development. Thus a successful planning process requires, more than ever, new and intensive interfacing between:

- Guiding principles/goals/visions
- Concept/plan and
- Implementation, set up to be longer lasting and more process-oriented than in the past.

The guiding principles and goals should be derived from specific regional challenges and are to be generalised to the extent necessary to make them easily communicable. They provide the basis for planning concepts with which planning requirements can be tackled, for instance through a regional plan. Implementation of the concepts should be clearly related to the guiding principles and goals.

This three-step and closely interlinked planning process is termed *Strategic Regional Planning* by the working group. Seen as a comprehensive planning process, strategic planning includes the formulation of aims, goal-oriented and conceptually supported management, and implementation.

Of course, actors from planning must be aware of the ever-diminishing management possibilities that result from growing tendencies towards deregulation, liberalisation and sectoralisation in a field of action that is ever-less possible to determine. They must nonetheless provide a convincing concept. This demands the trans-sectoral definition of challenges and goals, as well as the identification of priority fields of action. Such a process can only be successful when it is combined with monitoring and controlling, and comprehensive participation and communication. Aims and goal-oriented manage-

ment should not be statically aligned. They demand on-going observation, monitoring and – if necessary – adjustment.

Regional planning has in the past often focused too strongly on regulation at the expense of development. It is now necessary to make clear the importance of its concepts for all spatially related activities and for the long-term well-being and daily life of the actors concerned. Only then it will be justifiable for regional planning to demand greater involvement in the shaping of regional development and only then the significance and acceptance of the discipline will grow.

Strategic Regional Planning should provide answers to regionally specific challenges. This involves formulating the necessary guidelines, demonstrating development prospects and alternative courses of action, and, where possible, initiating or facilitating the resulting development steps. Of particular importance is designating implementation steps, launching flagship projects, and being directly responsible for the individual tasks.

In various European and German regions, planning structures and processes have been developing that allow elements of this approach to be included in concrete forms of governance in recent years. Significant parts of strategic planning are the tasks, sponsors, processes, content-related elements and their prospects. Based on this understanding of planning and taking into consideration European and national case-studies, the working group has developed *Strategic Regional Planning* as a comprehensive and action oriented planning approach.

3. What is strategic regional planning and how does it work? – Function and content

Strategic Regional Planning includes management elements and is organised as a process. Even this short definition reveals that development and regulatory tasks are considered and that active implementation plays a role. According to a modern understanding of planning, it is necessary for development tasks to be at the heart of the discipline and to implement these in a cooperative process with partners. One organisation alone will hardly be able to implement, for instance, all components of general interest services. Further, questions of climate change, reducing land utilisation or regulating large scale retail store developments have shown that conflict management is always required when land use is involved. The regional level consequently needs regulations such as those that exist in the aims and policies of spatial planning; in the absence of alternatives these should continue to be binding. Informal processes are often insufficient in this context as they are unable to penalise inappropriate action. This can only be dealt with by the policies and binding goals of spatial planning. They further have the advantage of offering transparency and planning security for all participants: a clear framework is provided, equality of treatment is guaranteed and the danger of non-transparent negotiation processes is significantly reduced.

How Strategic Regional Planning works – the process

Regional planning is concerned with complex tasks and large spaces. In order to communicate the necessary goals and implementation steps and to involve the relevant actors, the process level is of particular importance. With self-determinable content matter, through close interlinking between guiding principle and concept, and with decision-making and participation structures, *Strategic Regional Planning* can provide important foundations for direct responsibility and involvement in implementation.

For efficient *Strategic Regional Planning*, priority fields of action should be identified, bearing in mind tasks and available resources, and then concepts should be actively implemented. In order that tasks are performed successfully, the relevant actors need to be brought together and discussion between them has to be moderated. In this way the chances of solving problems quickly and transparently are increased. *Strategic Regional Planning* finds an important and prominent role in this process through formulating and addressing priority fields of action with clear tasks for implementation. Applying some of these will be its own responsibility.

It will further become necessary for *Strategic Regional Planning* to monitor, check and at times redirect the working of the concepts and implementation steps. *Strategic Regional Planning* must communicate the process and allow partners to participate in formulating goals and concepts. Only in this way it can be made credible that regional responsibility is being assumed and that concepts are being dynamically adapted to the needs of those concerned, at least within the limitations set by the development task and the regulatory framework. Monitoring and controlling combined with comprehensive communication and public participation allow the successful performance of these tasks.

It is important that individual tasks, results and processes involved in decision-making and implementation are oriented on functional spaces with primary consideration not being given to strict administrative boundaries.

Strategic Regional Planning goes beyond the definition and description of guiding principles and goals and represents the further development of classical regional planning. Based on the idea of long-term planned regional development, it should use available instruments and resources to design or influence an implementation concept. This involves proposing implementation steps, initiating concrete measures and flagship projects, and involving important actors.

Figure 1 shows the main building blocks of regional planning as known in Germany today. Contents, structures and implementation are highlighted because *Strategic Regional Planning* develops innovations and specifics particularly for these components. This becomes especially clear through a comparison of the contents of development and regulatory tasks, and consideration of the deficits that exist today.

Figure 1: Building blocks of regional planning in Germany

Traditional regional planning	CONTENTS	STRUCTURES	IMPLEMENTATION
Development task	Spatial analyses Identification of development potentials	Participation and cooperation Discussion of guiding principles Regional conferences	Sectoral concepts (e.g. regional retail concept) Hearings/Participation in funding programmes Expert reports on sub-regions Cluster initiation
Regulatory task	Regional planning goals and principles Regional plan	Formal, legitimated decision-making structures e.g. Planning association Public sessions Principle of countervailing influence	Spatial observation Monitoring Achieving goals
Deficits	Vision Guiding principles Action concepts	Strategic partnerships Governance	Implementation concepts

Source: authors' illustration, graphics: ISB, RWTH Aachen

Figure 2: Building blocks of *Strategic Regional Planning*

Strategic regional planning	CONTENTS	STRUCTURES	IMPLEMENTATION
Added value Future prospects	Vision Guiding principles Action concepts	Direct democratic legitimation Involvement of civil society Networks Strategic partners Governance	Flagship projects Implementation projects (e.g. spatial planning contracts) Involvement of relevant sponsors Sponsor of implementation tasks Budget for projects
Development task	Spatial analyses Identification of development potentials	Participation and cooperation Discussion of guiding principles Regional conferences	Sectoral concepts (e.g. regional retail concept) Hearings/Participation in funding programms Expert reports on sub-regions Cluster initiation
Regulatory task	Regional planning goals and principles Regional plan	Formal, legitimated decision-making structures e.g. planning association Public sessions Principle of countervailing influence	Spatial observation Monitoring Achieving goals
Deficits			

Source: authors' illustration, graphics: ISB, RWTH Aachen

The content of *Strategic Regional Planning* is made up of regulatory and development tasks, both of which must be acted upon with equal commitment (Figure 2). *Strategic Regional Planning* formulates visions, guiding principles, goals and concepts for management and implementation, and thus takes on a vital role in active regional development. Spatial, SWOT and actor analyses provide a basis, and elements of classical regional planning such as the formulation of goals and principles of spatial planning are included.

Goals and principles of spatial planning are drawn from visions, guiding principles and development prospects. The latter may also and indeed, in the interests of communicability, transparency and acceptance, be applied to justify and clarify regulations, the contents of regulations and the amount of regulation. It is a good idea in this context to concentrate on essential, i. e. strategic, elements in order to reduce complexity of communication and aid communicability.

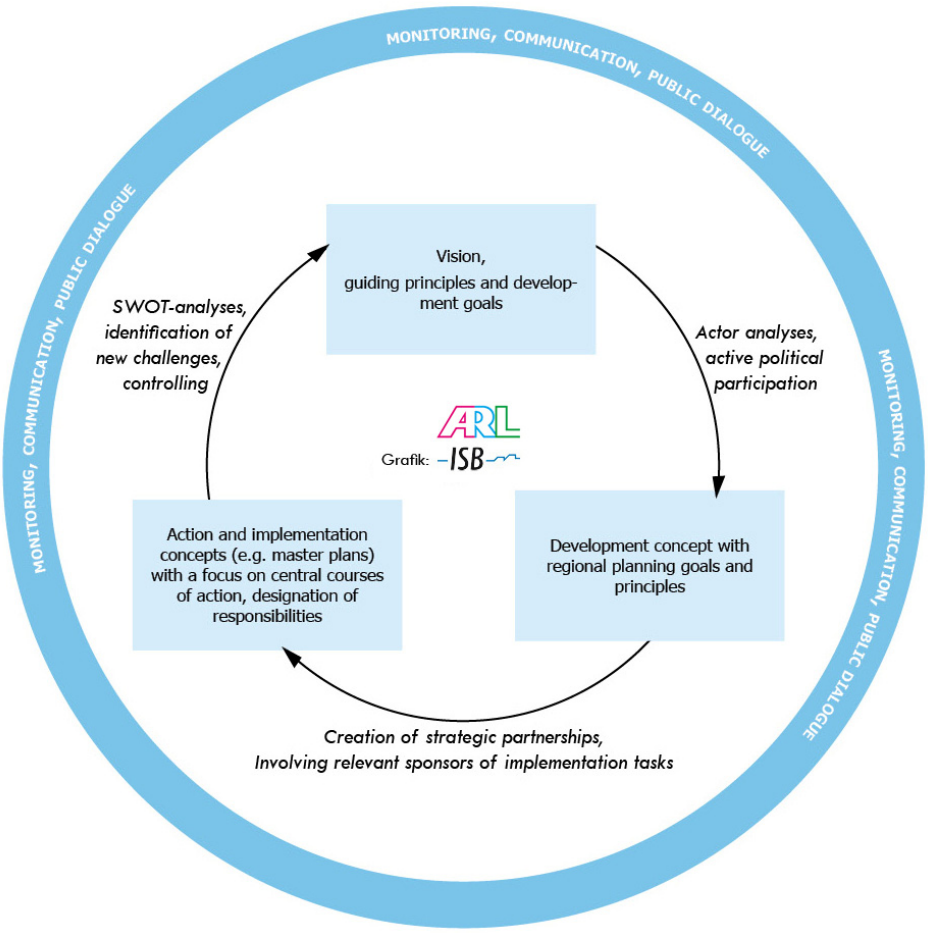
A *Strategic Regional Planning* that aims to gain acceptance demands above all the participation of those who are affected. They must be included in the formulation of visions, guiding principles and goals. Also required is the active cooperation of partners and allies who should implement the measures necessary for the region and provide finance. This is facilitated by the early and active involvement of all actors and people concerned in the formulation of a guiding principle or development vision. Decisions that are to be met by a legitimate political body are more likely to be accepted as binding if those affected are able to politically influence the decision-making body as directly as possible.

The essential new element of *Strategic Regional Planning* is, however, the clearest possible, ideally direct, involvement in implementation. This is important in terms of acceptance and perception, because normally those who directly implement measures are seen as being effective and helpful in tackling problems. Goal oriented implementation must be based on monitoring and control so that performance can be assessed and adjusted. In addition, involvement in implementation makes involvement in budget setting necessary. The best would be an own control of a dedicated budget. This can be achieved within the framework of projects and measures intended to promote the economy and can go as far as sponsorships, especially for specific infrastructure developments for transport, social or economic policies, or spatial design. Of central importance is that the tasks and processes of regional planning aim to tackle future challenges as modern, goal and actor oriented planning. Additional and new instruments and competences will be required to achieve this, but it must also be determined whether certain elements or the level of detail of today's regional planning is no longer necessary. In this context a review of tasks should be conducted.

Elements of *Strategic Regional Planning* – Products and process steps

Strategic Regional Planning involves activities and achieves results (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Functioning of Strategic Regional Planning, process steps and (in boxes) products



Source: authors' illustration, graphic: ISB, RWTH Aachen

The results are constituted by the *products* of *Strategic Regional Planning* and may be characterised against the background of management instruments and terms currently much in use, also in public administrations:

- Based on a spatial (SWOT) analysis, the definition of long-term *visions, guiding principles and development prospects* for a region,
- Building upon this, the formulation of a *development concept* for spatial development with a *focus on central courses of action* (strategic components) and the *use of spatial planning goals and principles* to regulate measures related to land-use,
- An *action and implementation concept* with a designation of responsibilities that takes into account resources and organisations involved in implementation.

To achieve these products a number of process steps within the framework of *Strategic Regional Planning* are necessary:

- Of central importance for all process steps are *monitoring, communication* and *public dialogue,*
- *Actor analyses* in order to identify the fields of action of all involved (including *Strategic Regional Planning*) and *active political participation* even in controversial discussions,
- The *creation of strategic partnerships* and *involving relevant sponsors of implementation tasks* within the framework of the action and implementation concept or in the course of its preparation,
- Based on monitoring and controlling, the *identification of new challenges.*

Process steps and products of *Strategic Regional Planning* are principally always interconnected. The products should never be viewed as single products; the same is true for the individual process steps. While formulating visions, guiding principles and development prospects, possible courses of action should already be considered, as the formulation of goals that cannot be managed or implemented will result in a strategic plan that leads nowhere.

Strategic Regional Planning considers cross-sections of various materials that then contribute towards the corresponding products or results. These may be classical planning tools such as regional plans or master plans, but new products may also emerge. Similarly, *Strategic Regional Planning* involves particular processes that contain classical, familiar planning steps, but that also go beyond these.

4. Our Goals – Conclusion

Strategic Regional Planning is conceived as a building block system consisting of:

(a) Products (functional elements): visions, guiding principles and development prospects, a development concept with spatial planning goals and principles as well as action and implementation concepts, and

(b) Process steps (processual elements): SWOT and actor analyses, communication and participation, the creation of strategic partnerships, and monitoring and controlling.

Products and process steps of *Strategic Regional Planning* are closely interconnected and mutually dependent on one another as a closed loop system. The process can, however, be entered into at any stage. Ideal-typical for the process is to start with a SWOT analysis, the results of which can then be a useful basis for the formulation of guiding principles. In this way, the products and the reasoning behind them – continually accompanied by monitoring, active communication and public participation – can be presented transparently and logically.

In the light of the organisational diversity, the specific challenges of the regions and the various political majorities in the German states and regions, there cannot be only *one* solution. It is thus not necessary that every product and every step of the building blocks of *Strategic Regional Planning* will be employed. This makes *Strategic Regional Planning* attractive for every region, whether it is a dynamically expanding metropolitan area or an economically disadvantaged rural area. Each region can find its own place or look for a useful next step to help it achieve its objectives.

Some products and process steps have proved themselves over many years and are today part of regional planning routines. What is new is the interlinking of the processual components “contents”, “structures” and “implementation involvement”, whereby the latter is of much more significance than it is the case in Germany. The close inter-

linking of these three elements permits far better goal and implementation oriented management of regional development than it has been possible in the past. Transparent and directly legitimated decision-making structures and a direct involvement in implementation allow decisions to be made more quickly. The effectiveness of planning concepts and the efficiency of administrative action are also increased. The result over all is the more successful shaping of regional development policy.

Aktuelle Positionspapiere aus der ARL

www.ARL-net.de ("Quicklinks - Positionspapiere")

Nr. 84 **Strategische Regionalplanung = Strategic Regional Planning.** Deutsche und englische Ausgabe. Positionspapier aus dem Arbeitskreis „Aufgaben einer strategischen Regionalplanung für eine nachhaltige regionale Entwicklung" der ARL. Hannover, 2011.
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