

BLOCKIERTER WANDEL?

Denk- und Handlungsräume für eine
nachhaltige Regionalentwicklung

Blocked Transition?

Creating New Thinking
and Action Space for
Sustainable Regional
Development

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1 Objective

The overall objective of the project is to identify the blockages in spatial relationships in order to initiate and enhance processes of socio-ecological transformation. Dichotomies which form and obstruct spatial relationships will be scrutinized and investigated within a socio-ecological “bridge-concept” (first aim). Relations of hierarchy and governance linked to the identified dichotomies will be made negotiable for regional actors through the development of mediation concepts (second aim).

The region where the river Mulde flows into the river Elbe was chosen as the area of investigation. It is part of the Unesco Biosphere Reservation “Mittlere Elbe” and a site of the World Cultural Heritage in Saxony-Anhalt. This region has been heavily influenced by decades of an extreme environmental pollution through industries and by the rapid socio-economic changes in the 1990ies. Numerous natural and social sciences projects have already been performed in this region, which will embed this project into a broad basis of knowledge. Proceeding from the paradigm of a sustainable spatial development we see the necessity to understand “regions” as an entity of material-physical, socio-cultural and economic space. This is why in scientific consideration the reciprocal relations between social and physical-ecological concepts of space come to the fore and in the practical design of space the mutual relationship of the regional natural conditions, the various forms of economy and the political strategies appears in the field of vision.

Particularly in the mediation of these dimensions on scientific and practical level the difficulties of scientific approaches to “space” and practical regional concepts become evident. The separation of “nature-“ and “culture-rooms” which has been systematically introduced into scientific comprehension leads to errors and generates problems: Both, the fact, that the physical dimension of space has unconsciously been produced by socio-economic development and the fact, that ecological standards have to a great extent been defined politically, remain invisible. On the other side, it is widely ignored that nature simply is not calculable, predictable and exploitable.

So far, trials to counter the ecological and social consequences of this way of appropriation of nature by sustainability research and action stayed captivated by dichotomic patterns: nature – culture, production – reproduction, using – protecting nature, theory – practice, natural sciences – social sciences, man - woman, thinking – feeling etc. According to our hypothesis the dichotomies forming the spatial relationships are embedded in relations of hierarchy and governance supporting their continuation, although processes of hybridization are clearly progressing (Latour 1998).

The development of new, hybrid forms of man-nature relationships can only be followed up constructively under the condition, that hierarchy and governance are enclosed into a scientific discussion.

Under consideration of the actor-network-theory (Latour 1998), feminist theories in regional and planning sciences and the concept of “Vorsorgendes Wirtschaften” (Caring Economy, Biesecker/Mathes/Schön/Scurrrell 2000) the existing regional and interdisciplinary knowledge will be worked on.

Guiding questions are:

- Which dichotomies are central for spatial relationships?
- Which hierarchy and governance relationships are hidden within them?
- Which conflicts and blockages have to be solved to achieve new forms of mediation concepts and negotiations?

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- Which methodological elements have to be developed to meet these new demands?
- Who has to be involved into the process?

2 Scientific goals

The project is based on three hypotheses:

- a. Processes of dichotomisation block the socio-ecological transformation of spaces. They extrude, exclude and devalue actors, patterns of behaviour and institutions, necessary for socio-ecological transformation.
- b. The central analytical category “gender” is appropriate to direct the view on the processes of dichotomisation, fundamentally linked with processes of hierarchisation.
- c. Socio-ecological transformation of spaces can be initiated through the discovery and development of interspaces and new interrelationships.

One of the main goals of the project is the investigation of a “bridge-concept” for a socio-ecological transformation of spaces. With the help of such a theoretical concept it will be possible to mediate the disciplinary and common knowledge as well as the various patterns of behaviour in a dialectical way, not being stuck to dichotomic schemes anymore. This may serve to make hierarchy and governance structures accessible for democratic performance. The second important goal is the development of actor-orientated forms of negotiation and participation. These methods can be described as following:

- They are based on the theoretical reflection of the “bridge-concept”, referring e.g. to new governance patterns and to the practical experiences with the current existing habits and forms of negotiation in the region.
- With the help of such a concept, blockages can be discovered and made visible. This opens options for actions beyond “either or nor”.
- The concept aims at integrating the “unseen” and the “unvoiced” in socio-ecological transformation processes.
- To achieve this, institutional settings and public forums will be realised, which allow participation on the basis of equal rights.
- Special procedures of co-operation and participation could be elements for new forms of negotiation.

3 Relation to the political goals of the Programme Socio-Ecological Research (SÖF)

Addressing socio-ecological relationships, conflicts and blockages in the face of changing demands on the utilisation of space is original socio-ecological research. It focuses on the reasons for conflicts between society and nature out of natural and social sciences’ perspectives in order to make them subject of an open discussion. Furthermore, it presumes a developable interrelationship between human beings and nature.

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The project “Blocked Transition” is located in the thematic field of “socio-ecological transformation in spatial relationships”, but also tackles aspects of the utilisation of space. Taking into account the problem of discrepancy of structural change and socio-ecological transformation questions are raised, concerning the reasons for an ongoing unsustainable regional development (problem orientation). On the theoretical level this happens by analysing the disciplinary patterns of rationality, which not only form the different approaches to “space” but also show common structural conditions. Following this idea, it can be said that, there are dichotomic patterns and related hierarchies throughout all disciplines (interdisciplinary). Moreover, the consideration of processes of decision making and learning of regional actors as well as the dialogue orientation of the project need the following: Science has to be able to listen and to query its own comprehensions and strategies (transdisciplinarity and process orientation).

Following these aspects, the perspective of gender has a central position in the project: Because feminist theories address and deal with patterns of hierarchy, marginalisation and exclusion, hidden behind the process of dichotomisation, they offer fruitful impulses for the analysis and synthesis in this project. Besides the critical potential the gender dimension also implies a constructive one: It represents a cross section to all fields of sciences, routines and activities. This justifies its intrinsic interdisciplinary approach, which is of the outmost significance for the development of the aspired “bridge-concept”.