

Competition and Regional Governance

New Approaches to Ecological Sustainable Development in
Germany – Experiences from 18 Regions

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1. Introduction

The EU's rural development policy follows the overall orientations for sustainable development in line with the conclusions of the Gothenburg European Councils (June 2001) to which a new emphasis on protecting the environment and achieving a more sustainable pattern of development is added.

In order to support this policy, the German Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture initiated a nation-wide competition called „Regionen Aktiv“. The development and implementation of Integrated Development Plans, carried out by local partnership networks in 18 “model-regions”, has been funded according to this program. In this way, the aim of the program is both to improve the quality of rural areas and the chances of democratic participation in local policy networks. Regionen Aktiv also serves as a pilot project within the framework of the National Sustainability Strategy. The implementation of the main goals: integrating environmental issues, establishing of regional partnerships and capacity building occur through the use of market instruments such as competition and financial incentives.

From a theoretical point of view, a triple integration process is necessary for regulating and implementing Ecological Sustainable Development:

- multi-actor integration: a horizontal integration of governmental organisations (politics, administration, authorities) and non-governmental organisations for a cross-sector and cross-border cooperation,
- multi-level integration: a vertical integration of different levels (EU, national, regional and local level) and
- multi-generation integration: an integration regarding time-scales, such as the establishment of durable, decentralised and adaptable steering structures for Ecological Sustainable Development, and an ability to forecast the long-lasting effects of interventions.

Based on the experiences of the 18 German model-regions collected by the authors during a mid-term evaluation, this paper presents some perspectives and problems of this triple integration process and the use of competition in order to integrate environmental issues within regional policy and governance structures.

In chapter 2, some general aspects of regional governance and its impact on the triple integration process will be presented. The main elements of *Regionen Aktiv* are shortly described in chapter 3, while chapter 4 focuses on the results of the progress concerning the triple integration process initiated by *Regionen Aktiv*. Finally, we will discuss these results in the concluding chapter 5.

2. Regional Governance

“Governance” is one of the scientific “catch-words” of the last decade and it is used – and often abused – in several different contexts with a large variety of meanings. If the focus is set on the political system, the meaning of “governance” strongly depends on the topic of scientific interests or political practice. On the one hand, political scientists analyse the coordination problem between international, national and local governments within democratic political systems by using the term “multi-level governance” (cf. Bache 2004). On the other hand, development aid policy calls for “good governance” in democratisation processes. A “spirit of democracy” must be implemented in societies in order to support the formation of any kind of legitimated political steering (cf. Ginther 1995).

As regards scientific research on regional political development, governance is therefore not homogenously employed and there is no consensus at all within the scientific debate on what regional governance really is (for an overview on the scientific discussion of regional governance in Germany see Benz 2004). However, there seems to be some agreement on the point that regions are becoming more and more important for political decision-making and regional networks including state and non-state actors are supplying – maybe even replacing - political executives and their bureaucratic administration by transferring these decisions into actions (cf. Lawrence 2004).

Within this paper “regional governance” is generally defined as the institutionalised process of making *and* executing political decisions within a commonly agreed geographic territory, not mentioning whether this process is run within the legal political system, a more or less legitimised policy-network including state and non-state actors or a single authority. Moreover, the regional boundaries are not precisely defined and “region” does not necessarily mean a legally delimited, bureaucratic established and

commonly agreed unity. The definition only emphasises three core elements included in every concept of “governance” - political institutions, decision-making and the execution of decisions – and combines it with an open territorial definition.

In general, the implementation of regional partnerships as new *political institutions* aims more or less explicitly to improve regional political action, including both political decision-making and the execution of these decisions. As mentioned by Hanf and O’Toole (1992: 166), “modern governance is characterized by decision systems in which territorial and functional differentiation desegregate effective problem-solving capacity into a collection of sub-systems of actors with specialised tasks and limited competence and resources”. Accordingly, multi-actor partnerships including state and non-state actors in *policy networks* seem to be the only solution for improving the quality of political action.

Another important result of modernization processes is *decentralisation*, which signifies – in terms of governance - ‘bringing-decisions-to-people-affected-by-them’. For the political system, a transfer of decision-making competencies from national to local level, integrating it through *multi-level governance* structures and processes, seems to be the only solution (cf. Hooghe and Marks 2001). Finally, a third basic criticism of political decision making nowadays can be seen in the fact that there exists a limited time perspective, short-term benefits are maximized by ignoring long-term costs. Again *multi-actor multi-level policy networks* including civil-society actors as the “social conscience” are assumed to be an improvement for regional governance by widening the limited time perspective of politicians normally bound to election terms.

One can easily recognize that the three aspects mentioned here supporting regional partnerships as a political alternative are highly related to the basic principles of sustainable development (described in Chapter 4). From the viewpoint of sustainable development, such kind of networks have some visible advantages for regional governance: they are capable of producing more effective solutions by processing more relevant information, of taking a greater variety of values into account, of raising the acceptance of decisions, and of being more flexible to adapt to changing situations (cf. Scharpf 1993). Obviously, the concept of sustainable development implies an increase of complexity (and therefore the need to process more information), of participation

(and therefore the need to raise the acceptance of decisions) and of handling dynamic processes (and therefore the need for rapid adaptation to change).

In difference to other coordination principles ('market' and 'hierarchy', cf. Powell 1990), *networks* can be described as durable bargaining constellations linking formally independent actors in strategic dependency due to repeated interaction, that are stabilised by trust in the reliability of each member and institutions regulating among other things the process of making and executing decisions (cf. Meyer 2005). According to these typical elements, several specific co-ordination problems occur, concerning the production of trust, the management of network communication, the balance of positive and negative co-ordination, the limitation of power influences, the regulation of voluntary membership, and the institutionalisation of rules (cf. Meyer and Baltes 2004).

As a summary of her findings during about twenty years of research on this issue, Mayntz (2003) stated three key determinants for durability and effectiveness of network governance:

- *A strong state to ensure the functionality of self-regulation in policy networks:* Most policy-networks act 'in the shadow of hierarchy' with the threat of state-intervention as a uniting force to co-operation. In such a constellation, the existence of powerful political authorities as 'guardians of public welfare' is an essential requirement for effective self-regulation.
- *A strong, functionally differentiated, and well-organized civil society:* Since modern societies are characterized by social differentiation and, as a result, increasing complexity, citizen interests have to be represented by corporate actors. Moreover, 'to make negotiation with opposite interests and with state authorities both necessary and meaningful, interest organizations must be sufficiently autonomous and resourceful' (Mayntz 2003: 5). Obviously, the existence of such organizations is an important precondition for the existence of policy-networks.
- *A common identity of network members:* Any kind of collective action is in need of 'at least a minimal sense of identification with, and responsibility for, the greater whole, in short, a common identity' (Mayntz 2003: 5). In other words: while social differentiation leads towards individualisation of single elements,

probably even towards atomisation, society needs some integrative forces such as, for example, cultural identity to stabilise the existing community.

Later on (Chapter 3.3), we will discuss how these three aspects influence the “Regionen Aktiv” competition and its resulting political institutions in the 18 model regions. A short introduction to “Regionen Aktiv” therefore follows.

3. Competition “Regionen Aktiv” and Data Sources

As a result of the FMD- and the BSE-crisis and the increasing political pressure caused by the WTO-negotiations, the EU-Enlargement and the mid-term-review of the Agenda 2000/CAP, a radical change of agrarian policy (“Agrarwende”) has occurred in Germany, giving the consumer perspective priority over producers` interests and focusing not only on agriculture but on rural areas as a whole.

In order to support this policy, in autumn 2001, the newly formed Federal Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture (BMVEL) initiated a nation-wide competition called “Regionen Aktiv”.

‘Regionen Aktiv’ focuses on three main objectives: strengthening rural areas, creating additional sources of income, focussing on creating a consumer perspective and providing nature-friendly and environmentally compatible agriculture. To achieve these goals, the development and implementation of Integrated Development Plans (IDP), carried out by local partnership networks including the key rural interest groups in “model regions”, has been funded in line with this program.

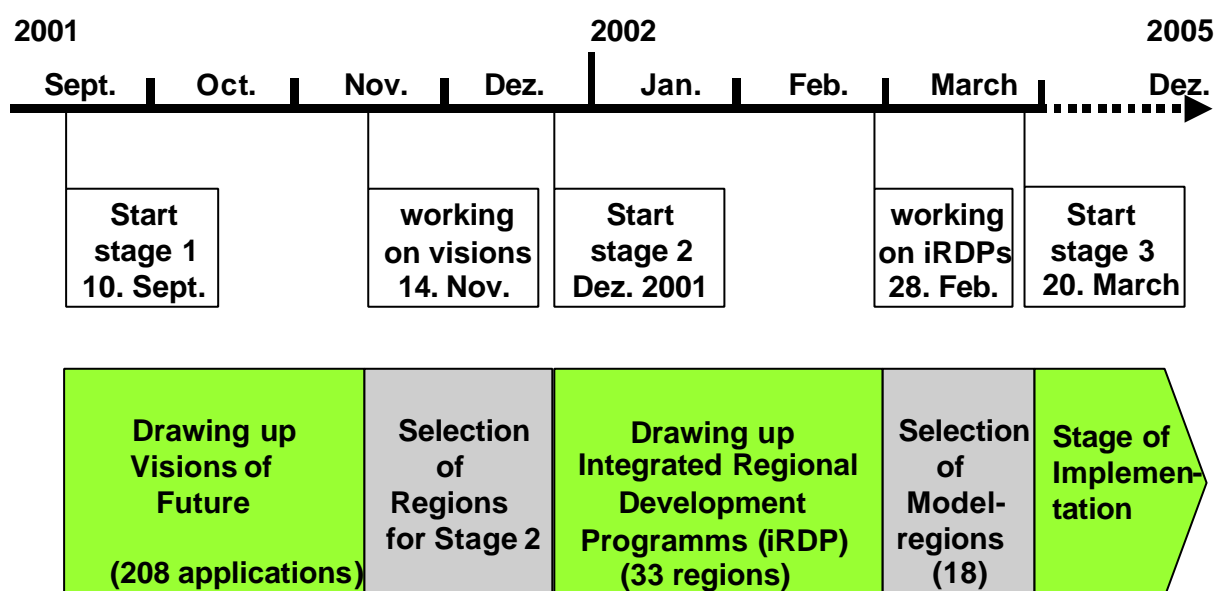
Regionen Aktiv also serves as a pilot project within the framework of the National Sustainability Strategy and was Germany's contribution to the World Summit on Sustainable Development ('Rio +10') in Johannesburg in Aug/Sept 2002. At goal level, the environmental dimension represents one of three main aims of Regionen Aktiv to be achieved. In addition to the one aim of providing nature-friendly and environmentally compatible agriculture, in whose title the environment is directly mentioned, environmental issues should also form an integral part of the two further goals. The goal of strengthening rural areas and creating additional sources of income should, for example, be achieved through the enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage for

tourists or through product marketing. The landscape conservation needed to achieve the above can be carried out by farmers, who, in turn, receive a further source of income.

3.1. *Stages of the Competition Regionen Aktiv*

The eighteen model regions were chosen in a two-tier selection process. During the first stage, regions were asked to develop a joint vision for the future development of their region. In December 2001, an independent jury comprising representatives of the key interest groups for rural development at federal level chose 33 regions out of a total of 206 submissions. In the second stage 33 Regions were asked to concretise their joint vision in an Integrated Development Plan (IDP). In the third stage, the chosen 18 model regions were allocated the funding necessary in order to put their IDPs into practice (2.1 Mio Euro per region on average).

Figure 1: Phases of ‘Regionen Aktiv’



The model regions will be implementing their innovative ideas and providing useful examples of integrated rural development and successful rural-urban connections until the end of 2005 (cf. BMVEL 2002).

3.2. *The 18 Model Regions*

The administrative and political definitions of the selected regions are diverse: For example, one of the 16 German federal states (Saarland) is participating, while another region (Schwäbische Alb) only represents a single one of the 323 districts ('Landkreise'). Several participating regions are not identical with administrative definitions and some of them include parts not only from different districts but also from different federal states (Eichsfeld, Lübecker Bucht, Weserland). In sum, the structural diversity of the model regions is as large as possible in Germany. This is demonstrated by many other indicators such as the region's economic structure, labour market development, tourism and income.

Figure 2: 'Regionen Aktiv' Model regions



3.3. *The Principles of Implementation*

Beside its main content objectives ‘Regionen Aktiv’ is based on further principles regarding implementation. These are described in more detail according to the determinants of network governance: strong state, strong civil-society and common identity (see chapter 2) .

Table 1: Determinants of Governance and implementation principles of Regionen Aktiv

Determinants of Network Governance	Implementation Principles Regionen Aktiv	Topics
A strong state to ensure the functionality of self-regulation in policy networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Programme-based instead of project-based funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Federal Ministry provide the framework for the overall project ▪ Model regions act in the shadow of hierarchy
A strong, functionally differentiated, and well-organized civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership principle instead of top-down steering ▪ Regional Budget 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnerships between state and non-state actors ▪ self-assessment / selection of eligible measures ▪ Funding for independent decisions
A common identity of network members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Durability: of the implemented structures and topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ structures should be continued on a permanent basis

1. *Programme-based instead of project-based funding*: Agreements between the Federal Ministry (BMVEL) and the model regions provide the framework for the overall project. The Federal Government’s role is thus limited to setting the goals of the competition and to prescribing a set of minimum requirements as regards decision-making structures and self-assessment mechanisms (cf. BMVEL 2002). Nevertheless the regions are acting ‘in the shadow of hierarchy’. The aim is an improvement of funding for rural development without waving control, using ‘Management by Objectives’ and not the bureaucratic approach of ‘Input Controlling’. To assess their achievements and highlight the more detailed aspects of project management, the regions are required to set up a support and self-assessment system (learning regions) (cf. BMVEL 2002).

2. *Partnership Principle instead of top-down steering*: While the regions can select and implement the measures they estimate to be appropriate to achieve the goals of the scheme, they must ensure that the respective social groups are included in planning, implementation and assessment of the regional development process and in the distribution of available funding. Partnership networks must be formed between the actors, municipalities, regions and non-state actors. Examples are readily available in existing forms of regional cooperation such as Agenda 21, round table meetings and local action groups (LEADER¹) (cf. BMVEL 2002: 6). The regional partnerships are the key actors for the implementation of the new steering approach (necessity of common identity and strong civil-society).

There are two levels of partnerships: the horizontal partnerships between local partners in the region and the vertical partnerships between BMVEL and the regions.

3. *Regional Budget*: Every model region disposes of its own budget (2.1 million euros on average) provided by the BMVEL during the period from 2002 to 2005. The Integrated Development Plans (IDP) are binding for the allocation and the use of funding. The promotional spectrum is extremely broad-based, ranging from soft measures like regional management or promoting education and soft skills to hard measures like promoting investment or infrastructures and regionalised agri-environmental measures (cf. BMVEL 2002).
4. *Lasting ability*: Regionen Aktiv should not be seen as a support programme in the classical sense, supporting projects whilst in operation, and ceasing to when the programme closes. The partnership structures initiated in the model regions should be continued on a permanent basis so that they are able to contribute to the development of the regions after Regionen Aktiv has been discontinued.

Following the principles of subsidiarity and decentralisation, the 'Regionen Aktiv' competition shifts competencies into the regions to governance structures (regional partnerships). Because of the new program-oriented steering approach the partnerships

¹ LEADER+ is one of four so called „EU Community Initiatives“. The aim is to foster rural areas through integrated development plans and cooperation among the relevant actors in Local Action Groups.

are capable of selecting measures they deem appropriate to achieve their goals and the regional budget gives them the possibility to finance their selected measures.

3.4. Data Sources

The paper depends on three main data sources and information bases. The first experiences dealing with the conception stage and the implementation of “Regionen Aktiv” were made in two research projects at the Institute of Spatial Planning, University of Dortmund (IRPUD) (Elbe, S., G. Kroës and D. Schubert 2004a / 2004b).

The second pillar of information is based on the ongoing work of the authors and results from continuous consultancy and advising at both federal level and in some single regions through workshops, interviews etc. The third pillar includes documents from the model regions (Integrated Development Plans, Annual Report 2003, Mid-Term Evaluation), the final report of the scientific company research (2002-2003) (Knickel et al 2004) and major results of the EU-Initiative LEADER (Tödtling-Schönhofer, H. Lukesch, R. et al. 2003 / 2004). Further information on the evaluation methods used and the information available are presented in Meyer & Elbe (2005).

4. Sustainable Development and “Regionen Aktiv”

Sustainable development emerged into the global political discussion through the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, also called the Brundtland commission, in 1987 under the definition that: “Sustainable Development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs“ (cf. WCED 1987, Chap. 2, S. 1) At the 1992 United Nations conference on Environment and Development, the decision was taken that the United Nations would fully commit themselves to making Sustainable Development their central programme (cf. SRU 1996, Tz 3, S. 2). Sustainable development is thus generally understood to be the long term survival strategy of the world community through the integration of ecology, economy and social issues, as laid out in Agenda 21, the Rio conference’s main resolution. An interim report concerning the implementation of Agenda 21 was drawn up in Johannesburg 10 years later.

The main stipulation outlined in Agenda 21 is that civil society participate in the implementation of sustainable development (cf. Kapitel in der Agenda 21). Sustainable development is not, due to its complexity and its specifications and consequences regarding the whole of society, a programme which can be carried out and defined top down by the state. It rather represents a negotiation process between the state authorities (the government) and civil society. Agenda 21 laid down the necessity that these different state and non-state actors (governmental and non-governmental organisations) work together, and their involvement in decision-making processes as well as their active participation in carrying out the decisions made call for new operational structures (governance structures). In Agenda 21 this negotiation process and a corresponding brief concerning its shaping is described with particular regard to the regional level.

The central challenge for these governance structures is that extensive social integration be used as the basis for sustainable development. This social integration can be subdivided into three dimensions (cf. Meyer 2002):

- Target Integration (integration of ecological, economical, and social targets): The questions for this paper are: are environmental issues to be taken into consideration when weighing up the values of the three goal-areas in the Regionen Aktiv competition? If so, which aspects are to be considered and when?
- Territorial Integration (multi-level and multi-actor integration): The questions here are how and by which means are the environmental issues to be included in the appreciation of values by the regional partnerships? Which instruments (participation procedures, competition) are to be employed for this?
- Time Integration (multi-generation integration): Finally one must ask what kind of time-scale should be established in order to gauge the effects of the decisions taken? In what way were long term environmental effects considered in (short term) economic decisions? The time-scale for the effects of the decisions taken must be taken into account. In particular, long-lasting environmental effects should be considered in relation to the short-term economic investments made mostly within the support framework. One must therefore consider what kind of contribution the Regionen Aktiv competition and the projects initiated by the competition could

make to long-term regional environmental development. Due to the fact that the three dimensions influence each other, they cannot be clearly separated from one another. In spite of these difficulties, the following article intends to, using the example of *Regionen Aktiv*, present some perspectives and problems of this triple integration process and the means of participation and competition to integrate environmental issues within regional policy and governance structures.

4.1. *Target-Integration*

Target integration signifies the integration of ecological, economical, and social goals, offering the chance to include environmental and social aspects in business decisions and to legitimate business action from a social and environmental policy view (cf. Minsch 1993:9). *Regionen Aktiv* is an adequate example of this as it seeks to integrate the environment into the support programme instead of being specifically environment oriented. At the same time, one should reflect upon where, at which level (programme level / ministry and regional level / model regions) and when (programming or implementation) environmental issues are to be taken into consideration.

Regionen Aktiv and the integration of the environment

At *programme level* (ministry), environmental issues were taken into consideration on the one hand, when defining the aims of the competition (see above) and on the other hand, during the selection process of the model regions.²

At goal level, the environmental dimension represents one of three main aims of *Regionen Aktiv* to be achieved. In addition to the one aim of providing nature-friendly and environmentally compatible agriculture, in whose title the environment is directly mentioned, environmental issues should also form an integral part of the two further goals (see above).

² One can differentiate between two areas when referring to the examples presented by *Regionen Aktiv*, one area being processes, the other, projects. The processes comprise all forms and procedures of the steering process of the developments in the region, from communication, assessment and decision making procedures to the advisory bodies responsible for steering that region. The projects are therefore the “physical” output of the processes and are concretely supported projects.

As well as integrating the environmental issues at target level, it was also possible to integrate environmental organisations at programme level into the process as part of the selection of the model regions. The jury choosing the model regions was made up of representatives from relevant rural actors at national level, including representatives of ecological farming and nature conservation. After the selection was completed, the jury was transformed into an advisory board so that the environmental organisations are still included in the implementation process through the allocation of the performance and quality reserve. (For details please refer to the Territorial integration chapter.)

During the implementation process evaluation and the allocation of so-called performance and quality reserve linked to it were the main steering instruments at programme level.

Table 2: Possibilities of environment integration at programme level

	Contents	Processes
Programming	Aims of the competition	Jury: Selection of the model regions
Implementation	Evaluation (Mid-Term Review 2003, Progress-Report 2004)	Advisory council: Decision on performance and quality reserve

The integration of environmental issues at *model region level* was effected, analogous to that at programme level, when the aims of the Integrated Development Plans (IDP) were created. The IDP had to assimilate the framework laying aims of the programme level (the ministry) and concretise them for the respective region. The central instrument in the implementation phase is the choosing of projects. Since Regionen Aktiv supports the regions' programmes (IDP) and not their single projects, criteria for the project selection had to be devised and defined within the IDP.

Partnerships representing the relevant actors and including representatives of the environment and nature in the regions had to be created with regard to the decision making processes. The central duty of these partnerships was to make the decision as to which projects should be supported, thus also including the practical implementation of

the project selection system. The evaluation, in which both areas are regarded as objects of investigation, constitutes the link between contents and process.

Table 3: Possibilities of environment integration at model region level

	Contents	Process
Programming	Aims of the IDP	Formation of the regional partnership
Implementation	Project selection, Evaluation	Evaluation and vertical partnership with Ministry

Conclusions and appraisal

At *programme level*, environmental issues were established within the aims of the Regionen Aktiv competition by the ministry. It was shown that the competition procedure (for the best concepts) lent itself well to reaching the devised aims effectively and efficiently. This is demonstrated in the fact that the regions were forced to act as competitors and were thus pushed to develop the best implementation concepts (IDP) possible. Adherence to standard solutions was simply not sufficient; innovation was therefore required and even spurred by the competition.

A negative aspect of the two-tier selection process was the amount of effort needed simply to participate. There have hardly been only few systematic investigations asking if and how many of the “losing” regions in this type of competition are building on their previous efforts and continuing to work although they have not been granted financial support.³

The introduction of the performance and quality reserve signified a further incentive for the regions to “measure themselves up against each other” without being sanctioned for it. The chosen regions received this performance and quality reserve on top of what they had already been allocated. Its introduction as a further component of the competition contributed to maintaining the “tension” needed in order to be able to implement the

³ Brocks, Silke; Katrin Weiß (2003): The instrument of competition as initiator of regional cooperation The evaluation of the „Regionen Aktiv“ competition regarding its effects on the regions not funded as model regions. For a theoretical standpoint see Arthur Benz: „Leistungswettbewerbe in der regionalen Raumentwicklungspolitik“. In: DISP 157, 2004 (forthcoming).

competitions in the regions, in spite of the problems⁴ that arose in practice during the 2003 Mid-Term Review. The jury's and advisory council's appraisal will be discussed in the next chapter.

At *regional level*, project selection represents an instrument crucial to the consideration of environmental issues. The project selection systems developed by the regions contain criteria fundamentally related to the environment. In many cases the criteria were formulated according to the three pillars of sustainable development: Economy, Ecology and Social issues. It is important to note that only the quality of the project selection system was taken into account during the selection of the model regions and not its content. As regards environmental issues, one should not have to examine the criteria in too much detail as the inclusion of the issues should already have been ensured during the setting of the goals and should thus lead to their being taken into consideration during project selection.

Up to now, there are 646 projects documented in the Regionen Aktiv database (www.modellregionen.de). The projects have to subscribe to nine category groups. Table 4 below contains a short analysis.

Table 4: Projects and their link to the environment

Link / relation to the environment	direkt	partly	little
⇒ Nine groups to index each project (done by the modelregions; multiple nomination possible)	agri-environmental measures	conservation and care of cultural heritage	Public relations
	renewable raw materials	regional/direct marketing	Regional management
	regenerative energy	tourism	Information and communication technologies
Number of projects	143 (22%)	462 (72%)	306 (47%)

⁴ The high input required during the preparation phase in the regions, methodical difficulties when assessing and comparing the regions, lack of transparency of the assessment procedure.

In some regions, an internal region-wide competition was introduced for the best projects. This was implemented to supplement the project selection and ran analogously to the nationwide competition. As a result, public acceptance within the regions was raised and good ideas were supported.

Beside the project selection the regions were also required to produce an evaluation system specific to their region. However, only a small portion of the regions actually held itself to this obligation, so that the evaluation had to be conceptualised centrally at programme level for the 2003 Mid-Term Review and the 2004 Progress Report. The reports were formulated by the regions themselves following the guidelines set by the Ministry. In a second step these 18 reports were centrally assessed. The performance and quality reserve was then allocated by the advisory council on the basis of this assessment. This approach resulted in the idea of evaluation as a learning tool for the regions being undermined by this centralisation. It also caused a certain amount of disapproval on the part of the regions.

The evaluation however also offers a great potential for assessing how far environmental issues have been taken into consideration. (cf. Elbe et al. 2004c). In the case of *Regionen Aktiv* this potential was not exhausted also the evaluation being centralised.

4.2. Territorial Integration

Sustainable development must be supported by different social groups with diverse interests. New forms of governance which include governmental organisations (Government), the civil society and NGOs into political decision processes are therefore needed. Territorial integration includes

- multi-level integration: a vertical integration (Partnerships) of different levels (EU, national, regional and local level) and
- multi-actor integration: a horizontal integration (Partnerships) of governmental organisations (politics, administration, authorities) and non-governmental organisations for a cross-sector and cross-border cooperation.

These political decisions cannot be assigned to one specific level of political institution, but require horizontal and vertical linkages of policies. Local action for sustainable

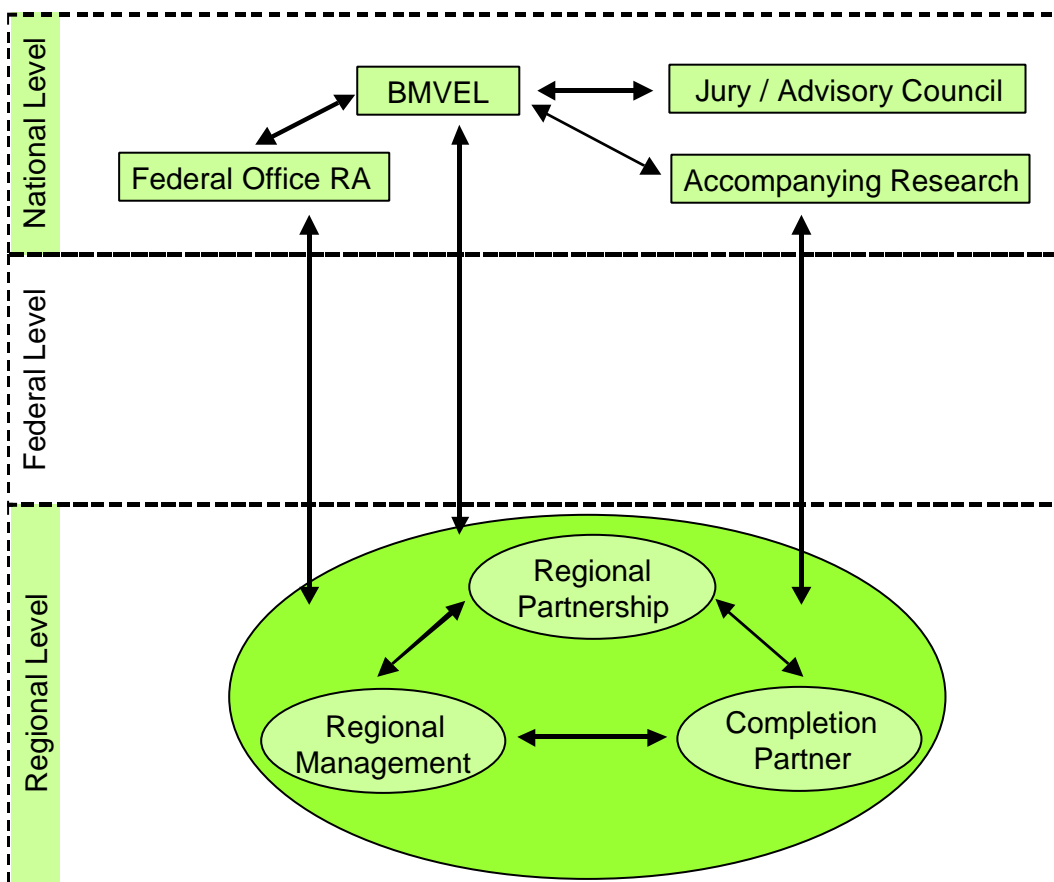
development has to be framed by national regulations, which in turn have to be harmonized with global agreements. New institutions responsible for the organisation of such a comprehensive decision process *integrating several territorial levels of political action* therefore have to be developed within the political system. (cf. Meyer 2002)

Regionen Aktiv and the integration of the environment

An essential part of Regionen Aktiv is its partnership principle. The aim of Regionen Aktiv was and still is to offer support to networks of partnerships at all levels of the political areas concerned (Governmental and non-governmental actors).

One must however differentiate between the horizontal partnership on national level for steering the programme level of Regionen Aktiv and the regional partnerships which control the developments in the 18 model regions as well as the vertical partnership which exists between the national level, the federal states (Bundesländer) and the model regions.

Figure 3: Structure of Regionen Aktiv



The *horizontal partnership at programme level* (national level) was first initiated through the jury. The members of the jury represent(ed) a very wide range of social actors from rural areas at a national level. Not all of the members of the jury became part of the advisory council after the model regions had been selected. The jury and the advisory council consist of one representative from each of the following institutions.

Table 5: Members of the Jury and the Advisory Council

Area	Jury	Advisory Council
Nature conservation	DNR: Dachverband der Deutschen Natur- und Umweltschutzverbände	DVL: Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege BfN: Bundesamt für Naturschutz
Farming	ABL: Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft	ABL: Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft
	DBV: Deutscher Bauernverband	
	AGÖL: Arbeitsgemeinschaft ökologischer Landbau	
Local and district authorities	Deutscher Landkreistag	Deutscher Landkreistag
	Deutscher Städte- und Gemeindebund	
Sciences	Fachbereich Landwirtschaft, Fachhochschule Weihenstephan/Triesdorf	Fachbereich Landwirtschaft, Fachhochschule Weihenstephan/Triesdorf
Handcraft	Zentralverband des deutschen Handwerks (ZDH)	
Trade	Firma tegut	
Nutrition	Fachgebiet Ökologische Lebensmittelqualität und Ernährungskultur; Universität Gesamthochschule Kassel	
Voluntary	Deutscher Landfrauenverband (dlv)	
Consumer	Bundesverbandes der Verbraucherzentralen und Verbraucherverbände	

Within the *horizontal partnerships at regional level* (model region) the incorporation and the active cooperation of central actors (including those representing the environment) was successful in all 18 of the model regions. It was required at programme level that at least 50% of the actors be NGOs. It must also be stated that whilst the partnerships are made up of many relevant actors, the economy sector is still under represented (Trade, Banks, Handcraft) The weighting of single groups of actors varies with the central issues and perspectives of the respective model region.

Germany's federal system sets the condition that the essential competencies in supporting the rural sector remain within the federal states (Bundesländer). This is especially the case for the EU financial support system, in which one "EU region"

represents the equivalent of a federal state. Regionen Aktiv's *vertical partnership* comprises the cooperation of the federal level, the federal state and the model regions (regional level.)

The federal states were involved neither in the conceptualising of Regionen Aktiv nor in the selection of the model regions. The main reasons for this are a) that, were this the case, there would be a foreseeably higher amount of coordination required and b) that the federal states could influence the planning of the competition. Moreover, the participation of the federal states in the case of Regionen Aktiv was not necessary technically as only national money from the Ministry was put at Regionen Aktiv's disposal and therefore no mixed financing was established.

Conclusions and appraisal

It must be kept in mind that the minimisation of the jury to an advisory council within the *horizontal partnership at programme level* has nominally strengthened the environment aspect although the influence of the advisory council only essentially stretches to the allocation of the performance and quality reserve. A disadvantage of this reduction is that the jury members could have acted as multipliers, broadening the discourse on the theme of rural development. The ability to negotiate of committees, which is greater within the advisory council, however contradicts this, as it does within the regional partnerships. Furthermore, one must ask which incentives could be introduced in order to be able to maintain the standard of participation and cooperation of the members of the jury.

The environmental organisations form part of the decision making processes within the *horizontal partnership at the regional level* through this partnership. They are co-responsible for making decisions about, for example, project support and the assessment of the state of the implementation. Here, the environmental organisations are obliged to commit themselves in a goal-oriented manner in order to make themselves heard in the search for a decision.

One must however ascertain that, within such partnerships, the paradigm followed is not sectoral but intergrational. The environmental organisations must be open to compromise. The paradigm can thus be changed from "protected areas in single areas"

to “protection of the whole area.” Bottlenecks can occur when dealing with such negotiation processes in the form of lack of resources and sometimes qualifications of actors. These lead to the fundamental questions of how well the steering of regional development processes can occur through voluntary work or which cooperative structures are necessary when working with professionals.

Within the *vertical partnership* the efforts made to involve the federal states intensively failed at the beginning of the programming and during the implementation of the competition. The potential for such cooperation was not sufficiently exploited. On the contrary, the federal states not being involved resulted in the model regions being partly ignored and sometimes blocked by their government. Later on however, constructive cooperation was achieved due to the federal states being more strongly involved (through the model regions) and due to increased information (also through the Ministry).

4.3. *Time-Integration*

As mentioned in the Brundland-definition, time integration signifies a multi-generation integration. Its aim is the establishment of durable, decentralised and adaptable steering structures for Ecological Sustainable Development, being able to forecast long-lasting consequences of interventions. This means that incorporation must occur on the *time-dimension*, with the requirement that a long-term perspective be included when making political decisions in the present.

Regionen Aktiv and the integration of the environment

Regionen Aktiv’s aim is to support partnership networks and governance structures at all levels of the political areas concerned (horizontal and vertical partnerships). Because of this, Regionen Aktiv requires that one should not only invest in “hardware”, for example, infrastructure, but also in “software” (capacity building). The regions should become learning regions through experiencing how to self help with education and qualifications. The endogenous potential of a region should be activated through the use of the region’s own initiatives.

The initiation of the partnerships in the model regions occurred through the competition and the financial help that came with it. Some regions were able to draw upon similar past initiatives, for example, LEADER. Other regions were taking part for the first time. New partners however had to be integrated in both cases in order for the requirements laid out at national level to be fulfilled.

The initiation and construction of the governance structures represent the first step, the second and more difficult step is however their continuation on a permanent basis. The declared aim of the competition is nevertheless to assure the continuation of the governance structure on a permanent basis after the end of the year 2005, when support is withdrawn. Whether the partnerships still exist on a one to one basis after this date is in this case irrelevant. The structures themselves do not exist in their own right, the idea is much more about integrating the structures created through the competition into the regions' already existing structures, so that the region's themes are well anchored.

Conclusions and appraisal

A great amount has been achieved regarding regional governance (horizontal and vertical partnerships). One must now ask how the partly parallel structures constructed within the regions can be synchronised with the established, institutionalised and official structures. The integration and synchronisation of both types of structure presents a general problem as formal and politically legitimated decision and informal structures (partnership) have to be integrated and be transformed into governance structures - something which in turn requires a new division of power. A further example of this can be seen in the Local Agenda 21 initiatives in Germany. These are, in many cases, developed and put into practice parallel to and even isolated from the political decision making bodies. As these Local Agenda 21 initiatives do not, as opposed to the Regionen Aktiv, dispose of their own budget, the implementation of projects is almost completely impossible. This causes frustration and the process is often discontinued.

The stimulation of endogenous development processes during the application stage of Regionen Aktiv can be deemed to have been successful. 206 applications were submitted in total. It was a requirement that the regions make use of their own initiative and this was fulfilled.

One can however observe a different picture when considering the continuation of the structures on a permanent basis, as one must ask how these will be continued after financial support has been withdrawn. What incentives and competencies would still be available to the regional partnership if it did not have any budget of its own? This could lead to dissolution of the partnerships and the same could happen to regional management. In the past, the structures were financed completely by Regionen Aktiv and most regions hope for a final public funded grant in the future. However, momentarily only three regions have developed a funding concept such as financing regional management using private funds (membership fees, income from marketing).

Regarding the development of rural areas one must take into consideration the fact that although there exist 18 regional partnerships in the model regions, Regionen Aktiv has no umbrella organisation. There is also a lack of systematic interlocking with other initiatives in rural areas such as LEADER or Agenda 21. The island might work well but integration doesn't.

The long-lasting governance structures offer great potential for the integration of environmental issues. Together with the pressure of the competition's requirements it was necessary to talk issues over with other actors in the region. It was, in some cases, the first time that earlier "opponents" such as nature conservationists and farmers came together to discuss common issues, and as a consequence, a constructive cooperation emerged from earlier reticence.

In addition, the activation of the endogenous potential strengthens the position of the environmental sphere. Natural and cultural heritage presents, especially in the countryside, the greatest potential. This potential must be transformed into products for tourism or into the marketing of local foods. LEADER+ demonstrates that enhancing the natural and cultural heritage is a topic that must be carried into the future. 76 of the 148 German LEADER+ regions are operating following this idea, as well as a third of all LEADER+ regions in Europe.⁵

⁵ For more Details see www.europa.eu.int or www.leaderplus.de. Four topics exist in total: 1) the use of new know-how and new technologies to make the products and services of rural areas more competitive, 2) improving the quality of life in rural areas, 3) adding value to local products and 4) making the best use of natural and cultural resources (cf. COM 2000: C139/8)

5. Conclusion

The three “T” aspects – target, territorial, and time-integration – seem to be the common understanding of sustainable development, irrespective of different connotations or main emphasises. Thus, projects aiming to support sustainable development can be judged by their contribution to these three aspects of social integration. Furthermore, their interventions should lead to durable progress – and this is the linkage to the microperspective on impact sustainability. To sum up: an evaluation of sustainable development has to measure changes of social integration on target-, territorial-, and time-scales. Sustainable improvement of actual integration structures and processes on a societal level requires political programs with sustainable outcomes and projects at microlevel. Moreover, newly implemented structures need to be continuously adaptable to changing societal conditions (innovation-oriented sustainability). (cf. Meyer 2002)

In *Regionen Aktiv*, environmental issues were not only taken into consideration at *content* level through *target integration* but also at process level (territorial integration). At programme level, environmental issues were ensured by the ministry. The competition procedure and the rivalry of the competitors contributed essentially to the fact that the aims for the environmental issues at regional level (through the regions) could be ensured in the IDPs and also during project selection.

The environment is represented within *the processes* in the jury/advisory council and as an actor in the regional partnership. It thus also carries the decision on the allocation of financial support. In the case of integrated paradigm, the environment must be open to compromise, something which is not required in the case of sector paradigm. Such negotiation processes necessitate specific qualifications and sufficient resources. „Effective participation requires careful planning of the involved actors. Necessary are for example realistic objectives, knowledge of the institutional framework, sufficient resources, access to information, internal support, and early participation“ (cf. WWF 2005: 46). The availability of voluntary resources in the model regions represents a central bottleneck. It poses the fundamental question of how far development processes can be governed through voluntary work, and which structures are necessary in order to cooperate effectively with professionals.

It also became clear that the participation of social actors at programme level as well as the vertical partnership between the ministry, the federal states and the regions offer a lot of potential. With the creation of the jury however, this potential was only made full usage of until the selection process of the regions began. “Early involvement of environmental actors in the planning process is crucial. “Main decisions are often taken in the beginning of the process” (cf WWF 2005: 45).

After the selection, certain reasons (the large amount of coordination involved, the ability to act without broad and systematic participation), and the open ended question of how much influence the vertical partnership had on how the programme changed, outweighed other factors and led to the situation of the potentials not being exploited. Due to this, the opportunity of a wider social discourse and of a higher acceptance of the goals was omitted. „The effective participation of environmental actors especially at the national and regional level is a central precondition for a successful funding of environmental aspects within the programmes as well as the integration of the environment into “non-environmental” funding areas“ (cf. WWF 2005: 46).

Evaluation can be seen as the link between content and process. The evaluation serves as an instrument for a continuous learning process and is able to provide a systematic assessment of how much environmental issues are actually being taken into consideration (cf. Elbe et al. 2003c). In the case of *Regionen Aktiv*, the assessment was carried out centrally by the ministry. This is common in these kinds of initiatives, as the results of the financial support are of main interest to the financier. The central evaluation also became necessary when the model regions did not fulfil the requirement of drawing up their own evaluation system. This central evaluation can be seen as, on the one hand, having a positive outcome because of the fact that an evaluation was at all introduced as a steering instrument, but on the other hand, it proved negative, as the centralised guidelines triggered bottlenecks and disapproval on the part of the regions.

Regionen Aktiv's competition procedure and the introduction of an evaluation can be deemed as appropriate as the theme of the competition is to plan a model whose aim it is to produce innovative contents as well as testing and introducing new methods of financial support.

Time-integration, in connection with the governance structures (the partnerships) initiated by the competition, offers the greatest potential for taking environmental issues into consideration: long-term environmental issues need adequate long-lasting partnerships. The requirements of the competition engendered the need for the participating actors to search for constructive solutions together. In most cases, apart from a few who declined at the beginning, cooperation was so successful that a lot was achieved with regard to governance structures in the model regions. The question of whether and how the continuation of the work on a permanent basis is to be organised after the financial support is withdrawn in 2005 is still open. How will the synchronisation of formal, politically legitimated decision and steering structures (Government) with the informal structures come about (Governance)? How will the reallocation of power be organised? What kind of position of worth will environmental issues take on after this reshuffling has taken place? What kind of incentives and expertise will remain in the regional partnership after financial support has been cut?

Finally, the activation of the endogenous potential of the regions strengthens the position of the environment. The biggest potential in the countryside is its natural and cultural heritage. One must turn this potential into tourist products and market local produce. One can sell products but not potential.

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