



SEBco WP5: Final draft recommendations

Motivation

SEBco has the ambition to draw general conclusions and give recommendations for transnational policies, as it is laid down in the project application (Annex III.5):

“In this WP... written and internet sources will be exploited, and current research as well as experience across the other 4 WPs and from partners' daily work will be evaluated to generate well-founded conclusions and recommendations for transnational policy-making in line with the project rationale.

The policy paper with conclusions and recommendations for transnational policy options will be approved by the partners and put forward to international relevant bodies. It will be brought especially to the knowledge of VASAB, serving as an input to their long-term development strategy of the BSR which they have been recently assigned with by CBSS.”

This will have to be done until Christmas 2007, as it has been discussed during the final conference.

As a main source for these conclusions and recommendations, Prof. Kunzmann / DE and Nordregio / SE have delivered two strategic papers. They have their value as such and will be available for download at <http://www.sebco.eu/>.

This „Policy Paper“ will take up arguments from both strategic papers and give very few, easily understandable recommendations. We think that most of these are not only valid for the South Baltic Arc, but also elsewhere in the BSR.

Project partners are invited to comment on this paper until Dec 14 (Friday) to karl.schmude@vm.mv-regierung.de, with CC to jens.masuch@lgm.de

**Against the “metropolis fever”:
Medium-sized towns are vital for the future of the Baltic Sea Region
Policy paper for discussion**

Conclusions from project work in IR3B SEBco
and recommendations for transnational policies

Version for comments from SEBco partners
06 Dec 2007

1. Introduction

The coastal regions along the South-Eastern shore of the Baltic between Lübeck, Gdansk, Kaliningrad and Riga are characterized by sharp inner- and interregional disparities. As a consequence, the conference of ministers responsible for spatial development in the Baltic Sea Region, VASAB 2010 (<http://www.vasab.org/>), called for a common effort to enhance regional development in this zone already in 2001.

In the years 2002-2005, the Interreg III B project South Baltic Arc (<http://www.south-baltic-arc.org/>) established a transnational cooperation which was continued by the Interreg III B project SEBco (<http://www.sebco.eu/>) in 2006-2007.

SEBco has made a contribution towards enabling medium-sized cities to become motors for regional development.

This document presents some selected conclusions and recommendations for transnational policies. They are backed by the project work, by the experience of the project partners and by two expertises which have been commissioned by SEBco (Gloersen / Dubois / Schmitt 2007 and Kunzmann 2007). These expertises take up the international debate; they will be available for download at <http://www.sebco.eu/>.

Conclusion 1

Large growth regions are an obsolete model for Europe's future geography.

The theoretical concept of the Pentagon, i.e. a large "winner" region against large "loser" regions of globalization in Northern and Eastern Europe, is highly questionable. Instead, Europe's future economic geography will most probably show a less clear picture.

The successful Nordic economies are only one evidence that geographic location is not more than one of several success factors. Competitive enterprises may be located far away from what is being tagged as the "European core".

Transnational Recommendations

- Spatial planning and spatial research should better explore the potential of medium-sized towns, instead of designing small Pentagons for Eastern Europe or for the Baltic Sea Region (e.g. "Potential European Global Integration Zones" in ESPON project 2.4.2).
- Spatial planning and spatial research should devote more attention to those facts which speak against the metropolis rationale, e.g. the competitive power of Nordic economies, the "loser" status of Ruhr-Rhein agglomeration and Berlin. Most probably not mass, but quality will decide about the future competitiveness of regions.
- Future territorial cooperation projects and ESPON should focus on those development factors and stakeholders which are proven by evidence to stimulate growth – in all types of regions and towns.

Further reading

Gloersen (2006): Let's say farewell to the Pentagon-model. – Journal of Nordregio 03/2006, p. 11. Download: <http://www.nordregio.se/Files/jon0603.pdf>

Gloersen / Dubois / Schmitt (2007): SEBco – The role of medium-sized towns for spatial development. – Discussion paper, updated 12/11/2007.

[Especially recommendations no. 2 "Focus on processes rather than on trends" and no. 3 "The under-estimation of medium-sized towns in statistics"]

Krätke / Heeg / Stein (1997): Regionen im Umbruch. Probleme der Regionalentwicklung an den Grenzen zwischen „Ost“ und „West“. Campus Verlag.

[Stefan Krätke created the term "Leopardenfell" (leopard's fur) to describe the future economic system where several towns – large or small – show a high growth. Their distribution is more or less at random, like the spots on a leopard's fur. This model is a sharp contrast to the "blue banana", the "pentagon" and other models which argue in favour of large macro-regions.]

Conclusion 2

The current political focus on metropolises negates growth impulses from medium-sized towns.

The current political focus on metropolitan growth in Europe (“metropolis fever”) is detrimental to polycentric development. If this agenda is successful, a further policy-driven concentration of resources in the large cities (“metropolises”) will accelerate the market-driven trend and lead to an aggravation of regional disparities.

Medium-sized towns, which are under pressure for various reasons especially in the former socialist countries are in danger of decline, despite their potential as development motors.

Transnational recommendations

- Medium-sized towns in the development shadow of metropolises should better make their common voice heard in international debates.
- Regions which are characterized by the absence of large metropolises should take a more active role in this debate, instead of waiting for possible metropolitan growth effects to trickle down.
- Existing lobby groups in the BSR (e.g. CPMR, BSSSC, VASAB, BDF) should raise their concern in debates with national governments and the EU-COM.
- Decision-makers on all levels should challenge development models which follow the metropolis rationale (e.g. German metropolitan regions / “Metropolregionen”) more openly. They will have to be confronted with international evidence.
- Decision-makers on all levels will have to actively develop the growth potential of medium-sized towns, instead of looking anxiously towards the real or would-be metropolises.

Further reading

Gloersen / Dubois / Schmitt (2007): SEBco – The role of medium-sized towns for spatial development. – Discussion paper, updated 12/11/2007.
[Especially recommendation no. 1 “SEBco SMESTOs and the prevailing European territorial discourse”]

Kunzmann (2007): Medium-sized towns, strategic planning and creative governance in the South Baltic Arc. – Discussion paper, updated 12/11/2007.
[Especially chp. 4 “Territorial capital of medium-sized cities in metropolitan peripheries” and chp. 5 “Strategic planning in and for medium-sized towns”]

Conclusion 3

Partnerships between neighbouring municipalities can be essential for “enlarging” medium-sized towns.

SEBco WP1 has verified the need for medium-sized towns to reach an understanding with their surrounding municipalities. This is true for the “daily business”, such as public transport, waste management etc., but also for a more efficient external marketing towards investors and tourists.

These partnerships can be essential for “enlarging” medium-sized towns.

Transnational recommendations

- Medium-sized towns have to unite with their surrounding municipalities. Only in doing so, they have a chance to “put themselves on the map”.
- Decision-makers on all levels, spatial planning and spatial research should actively work for an understanding of cities not within their administrative boundaries, but in functional areas. The concept of “functional urban areas” (FUA) developed by ESPON may show the way.

Further reading

Kunzmann (2007): Medium-sized towns, strategic planning and creative governance in the South Baltic Arc. – Discussion paper, updated 12/11/2007.
[Especially chp. 5 “Strategic planning in and for medium-sized towns” and chp. 6 “Medium-sized towns and creative governance”]

Conclusion 4

More long-distance partnerships are needed between concrete stakeholders based on content

For universities and private business, it is self-evident to look for cooperation partners according to a very specific need, and to pick the most suitable partner – even if this means to cover large distances.

European integration offers new possibilities for public administration to do the same. Often enough, international cooperation can show alternative ways of solving problems.

Transnational recommendations

- Stakeholders in medium-sized towns have to look with caution for the best possible partners. Geographic proximity can only be one of several decision factors.
- Stakeholders in medium-sized towns have to seize internationalisation not as a threat, but as a key survival strategy in times of globalisation.
- Regional administrations should support “their” stakeholders in the search for international contacts.

- Spatial planning and research should be more critical with the concept of “city network”. The attention should be devoted to concrete stakeholders and their interests, not to abstract regional entities or to public administration alone.

Further reading

Gloersen / Dubois / Schmitt (2007): SEBco – The role of medium-sized towns for spatial development. – Discussion paper, updated 12/11/2007.
[Especially recommendation no. 4 “Understanding polycentricity as a motivating tool to strive for synergies”]

Kunzmann (2007): Medium-sized towns, strategic planning and creative governance in the South Baltic Arc. – Discussion paper, updated 12/11/2007.
[Especially chp. 5 “Strategic planning in and for medium-sized towns”]

Conclusion 5

For regions which are characterized by medium-sized towns, the secondary transport network is quite important.

In the debate about large-scale transport infrastructure and TEN-T, the important role of secondary transport connections tends to be forgotten.

It may be even more important for a given region to enhance transport connections inside the region with the aim of creating a larger regional labour market, than having an even faster link between the main regional centre and the national capital.

Transnational recommendations

- Decision-makers on higher levels should enter an international exchange of experience about a wise balance of priorities for transport infrastructure investments. Current cost-benefit analyses which tend to guide investments to metropolitan regions should be charged from a polycentric point of view.
- Decision-makers on higher levels should use the chance of revitalising neglected secondary rail infrastructure more actively. An international exchange of “best practice” can support this and may help avoiding costly failures.

Further reading

Gloersen / Dubois / Schmitt (2007): SEBco – The role of medium-sized towns for spatial development. – Discussion paper, updated 12/11/2007.
[Especially recommendation no. 5 “Alternative approaches of transport infrastructure projects”]