

Restoration, Governance and Regional Development in the South of Leipzig

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Abstract

In the region south to Leipzig, several surface mines and its associated infrastructure as power and briquetting plants had to be closed due to economic reasons after the German reunification. In the following years, the open holes altered into lakes with significant touristic and conservation potential: beaches, harbors and protected areas were created. The living quality of the region underwent an overall improvement.

This study aims to depict the current situation of this post-mining region considering the last 15 years and represents the notions of six local stakeholders of the governance sector. By means of semi-structured interviews, respondents described success factors and challenges in the regional development. Based on this, the landscape transformation is assessed on the basis of the sustainability concept.

The potential sustainability of the transformation is critical both in consideration of short- and long-term consequences: besides the pure technical and ecological aspects, the social dimension is a significant factor for a successful restoration (Metcalf et al 2015; Berkner, Thieme 2005). Also, restoration outcomes lie the basis of the further development of the region. Experts expect the lakes to exist for many thousands years (Berkner, Thieme 2005), creating a long-term influence.

This work contributes to the up-to-date limited knowledge of social aspects in mining restoration processes. It opens up insight into one post-mining region, which strives to transform into a touristic destination and describes factors facilitating and challenging such a transformation.

Key words: pit lakes, governance, success factors, sustainability

Introduction

In the past, the region south of Leipzig belonged to the most polluted areas in Europe. Dust, chemicals, and noise deteriorated the environment; recreation areas were lacking; residential buildings and infrastructure facilities were decaying (see, for example, Kabisch, Linke 2000). After the German reunification, surface mining economy closed down and an enormous transformation altered the landscape; giving rise to several lakes. Besides public safety and environmental aspects, that needed to be ensured, also the living quality for the residents was restored.

While studies on ecological and technical aspects of restoration processes are numerous, publications considering the social and economic dimensions are limited (Kabisch 2004). However, as the impacts of the restoration on the local population are extensive and the success of the restoration depends on social aspects, the human 'side' needs to be acknowledged. This fact is supported by academic results (for example Baker et al 2014; Metcalf et al 2015).

Following to what was said, this paper investigates the trajectory of the region depicted by six local experts and thus contributes to an increasing interest in the social dimensions of restoration by describing the process from a governance point of view.

Methods

Using semi-structured interviews, six local experts illustrated the current situation and development in the region. Four experts represented municipalities (Borna, Großpösna, Leipzig, Markkleeberg) and two respondents associations (Kommunales Forum Südraum Leipzig, Tourismusverband Leipziger Neuseenland). At the beginning, the intention of the study was to focus on stakeholders acting close to the former open pit Espenhain. These actors belonged to various spheres and were chosen in agreement with Prof. Dr. Andreas Berkner, head of the Regional Planning Department of West Saxony. However, during the study a re-arrangement took place as a close connection to other lakes and a potential conflict situation between municipalities was identified. Thus, business representatives were omitted and instead, the cities Leipzig and Borna added. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed.

Results

Tab. 1 and tab. 2 give an overview of success factors and challenges in the region. Named by all interviewees, the horizontal cooperation between policy makers revealed to be the most important success factor. Also, vertical cooperation between politics, owners, users and stakeholders of other sectors, as business or NGO is crucial. Further, certain special conditions distinguish the studied region from other post-mining landscapes: the allocation of funds by means of administrative agreements shared between national state and the corresponding federal state facilitated the implementation of many projects. The planned application of the city Leipzig for the Olympic Games in 2012 caused the creation of the Canoe park Markkleeberg, currently being one of the unique selling points in the region.

*Table 1 Success factors. Middle column: number of references in six interviews.
Own translation.*

Success factor	#	Example of statement
Cooperation	6	'Without cooperation we would not be where we are right now.'
Special conditions	4	'Applying for the Olympics was a gift.'
Approach of governance	4	'We are learning something new every day.'
Work across levels	4	'It is not possible to think only within one term of office.'
Human approach	3	'There was an euphoria in the early 1990ies.'
Ownership structure	2	'If a lake is owned by one municipality, less agreement is needed.'
Planning preconditions	2	'We have good planning documents.'

Success factor	#	Example of statement
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and earliness
 With similar weight, the approach of governance (flexibility, good negotiation and being open to uncertainty) as well as the work over temporal and local levels is needed to ensure a sustainable transformation. Other success factors, mentioned more seldom, were the ownership structure and the planning preconditions and earliness.

In comparison to the success factors, descriptions of challenges in the region were more heterogeneous. Interviewees agreed in particular on the serious financial situation with money missing for planned projects and decreasing funds in the future. Combining these two facts over long-term might exacerbate the situation. Challenges based on natural conditions as the quantity and quality of water and discharge especially during flooding conditions are openly communicated, acknowledged and overcoming them is imagined relatively easy by some experts. One issue, considered to be more challenging, are inter-municipal conflicts, as for example, the question of motorboat use on lake Zwenkau. This case is often named and assessed to be difficult to solve. Plus, some respondents named a general deterioration of the atmosphere of pro-active and constructive policy making. Also, the engagement of the population is degrading. Adding a decreasing 'need for action', this complex of challenges might weight harder than professional risks as the above mentioned natural conditions. Interestingly, half of the respondents named the extent of the German and EU legislation and bureaucracy as hindering a faster development and implementation of projects.

Table 2 Challenges. Middle column: number of references in six interviews.
 Own translations.

Challenge	#	Example of statement
Decreasing funds and budget	5	'We will have more and more problems to [financial] maintain the things [which we created].'
Natural conditions – quality and quantity of water	4	'With groundwater (...) quality we have new problems, which we thought to be already solved.'
Inter-municipal conflicts	4	'There are contrary opinions of municipalities on the use of the lakes.'
Bureaucracy / Legislation	3	'One gets partly drowned in formalities.'
Engagement of the population	2	'There is an approach of being a 'protest citizen'.'
Need for action decreases	1	'There are less real troubles now.'
Approach to governance	1	'There is a regress in how we communicate and argue.'

Discussion

Following, the interview results are discussed on the base of the sustainability concept. It is a normative concept aiming to consider and fulfill rights and demands of all and in particular vulnerable groups over long-term. Often used is the so-called three pillar model, which demands to balance the ecological, social and economic dimensions within one generation (intra-generational) and within a longer time frame (inter-generational). Thus, sustainability implies a temporal and a spatial transferability (Paech 2006).

Examining both the interviews and other resources, a clear aim to balance various dimensions can be found (interview data; Berkner, Thieme 2005). Tourism, jobs and the quality of living for the local people are striven to be harmonized. However, a number of examples reveal difficulties. So is the Floßgraben, a brook connecting Lake Cospuden with the water ways in the city of Leipzig, in a controversial position as it is on the one hand an important part of the touristic water way system and on the other hand a figurehead for local nature conservation. Also, in general, tensions between

inhabitants and tourists as well as a differentiation of the population itself can impede local governance and development.

In comparison to other locations, as the Spanish case As Pontes, described in Pérez-Sindín, Hähnel (2016), the social openness and public acceptance in the Saxon case is higher while the centrality is lower than in Spain.

Differently, long-term consequences and trends were largely omitted in the interviews. Only one interviewee gave details about future financial risks and difficulties. She expressed the fear that facilities, which have been created during the transformation process, will need to be closed again due to lacking municipal budgets. According to her, towns and villages keep problematic issues at the back of their minds without approaching the issues as potential problems. They are steamrolled by smaller, current tasks, which they need to manage, so their approach is to ‘handle a potential problem at the point, when it is a real problem.’ Other potential long-term trends as population aging and decrease and its connection to the transformed landscape were not described. As ignorance grows with an increasing time horizon and the future does necessarily evolve linearly, the lacking reflection of the long-term development can be justified to a certain point. In contrast, the “greatest potential influence for shaping the future may often be precisely over those time scales where our gaze is most dim” (Lempert et al, 2003, p. xvii) and thus, supportive work by various institutions as the District Offices, Planning Associations or the Federal State and research is recommended to anticipate the future.

Conclusions

The landscape transformation is assessed by all interviewees positive. Hence, a consistency among those institutional actors can be concluded. Such a consistency represents a positive base for the further regional development. Also, all respondents highlighted the importance of cooperation between policy makers. This comprehensive cooperation is especially striking considering the large spatial and temporal extent of the landscape transformation process.

Differently, challenges of the regions are viewed more heterogeneous. On the one hand, open acknowledged and communicated problems exist. On the other hand, some interviewees highlighted less obvious trends, as a worsening of the atmosphere of pro-active and constructive policy making between stakeholders, decreasing engagement of the population and less urging problems.

Considering the sustainability of the transformation, it can be stated that balancing ecological, economic and social aspects is one goal of the local governance. The implementation of such a balance is naturally complicated and does not proceed without conflicts and tensions. The results from this study indicate a relative high equilibrium among the ecological, social and economic dimension.

However, the majority of interviewees did not elaborate long-term questions and developments. Only one respondent acknowledged and described potential future financial straits and lack of human and time resources. Accordingly, support by external institutions and research is recommended to anticipate the future.

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