

# REPORT OF THE FIRST WORKSHOP OF THE RSA RESEARCH NETWORK ON ECOLOGICAL REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

## 'Towards a common understanding of ecological regional development'

Leibniz Institute of Ecological and Regional Development, Dresden, Germany, 11-12 June 2010



Ecological problems are among the most pressing challenges our global society faces. From noise and air pollution to climate change and the threat to biodiversity – quality of life and even the existence of man is in danger. While ambitious aims of environmental protection have been formulated at many political levels, e.g. the United Nations with the Agenda 21 of the Rio de Janeiro Conference in 1992, implementation in many fields lags strongly behind. At the regional level, too, (short-term) economic development still seems to dominate the agenda in practice and academic work.

The RSA has already taken some steps towards redressing this balance. In 2005 an annual conference was dedicated to the topic 'Sustainable Regions' – a selection of papers was published in a special issue of *Regional Studies* in 2008 (vol. 42/9). In recent years, a gateway on issues of ecological regional development at the RSA annual conferences has attracted growing interest. There is also a RSA research network concerned with "Green Regional Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Governance (GRIEG)". However, while addressing an important issue, it has a relatively narrow focus.



*Bernhard Müller welcoming the participants at the IOER in Dresden (Foto: IOER)*

Against this background it was time to initiate an RSA network dealing with ecological regional development and to provide a basis for establishing and fostering research and discussion in this field. The topic is explicitly kept very broad to get people involved and things going. In the future there may be more than one network on more specialised ecological topics. Accordingly, the first workshop invited a wide range of themes. Nevertheless, the overarching idea of the first workshop was to discuss 'towards a common understanding of ecological regional development'.

The workshop was hence divided into two parts. The first, general part offered the usual sessions. The second was conducted in the form of a World Café with ensuing panel discussion of the table hosts. All in all, the workshop gathered more than 35 participants from around 15 countries, including leading scholars in the field. It was organised at the

Leibniz Institute of Ecological and Regional Development (IOER), Dresden/Germany, by Prof. Bernhard Müller (Director of the IOER), Gerd Lintz (senior researcher at the same institute), and Prof. David Gibbs (University of Hull). In the search for common ground, a list of basic literature was compiled beforehand on the basis of the recommendations from many participants.



*The participants of the workshop (Foto: IOER)*

The first session in the general part of the workshop dealt with climate change as one of the major environmental challenges. While Dora Almassy mainly addressed the efforts of regions to mitigate climate change, Gerard Hutter focussed on regional planning for climate change adaptation. Matteo Puttilli examined the significance of renewable energies for local development. The second session highlighted the role of the natural environment as a basis for regional economic development. Marek Degórski started off with a comprehensive basic analysis. Manfred Walser followed, presenting a study on the economic valuation of regional natural resources and ecosystem services. Manuel Woltering then talked about the economic impact of tourism in German national parks.

In order to accommodate all speakers, two parallel sessions had to be held on each of the workshop days. On Friday afternoon this was the case for a session on cross-border issues in ecological development and on regional policies and companies. The former dealt with the challenges of environmental cooperation across the Ukrainian borders (Olha Lucash, modelling approach), the Czech-Saxon borders (Jan Slavik, institutional approach), and the borders of Luxembourg (Christian Schulz, institutional approach). In parallel Alastair Greig investigated the role of strong and weak sustainability in ecological regional policy. Robert Kudłak focussed on the motivations and implications of corporate environmental responsiveness. Gerd Lintz discussed a local environmental management approach called Ecoprofit.



*Matteo Puttilli, DITER – University of Torino, on the role of renewable energies (Foto: IOER)*

Friday ended with the examination of ecological development in special regions. Angel Burov reported on the role of socio-spatial networks in peripheral rural areas in Bulgaria,

while Julia Affolderbach and Roger Hayter outlined sustainable development issues in a resource-dependent part of British Columbia. As a complete contrast to that, Iris Belle highlighted the problems of integrated regional development of the agglomeration of China's Tianjin Binhai New Area.

The first session on Saturday concentrated on the ecological perspective in a more narrow sense. Olaf Bastian and Wolfgang Wende pointed out the role of landscape services as a tool for supporting ecological regional development. How to strengthen urban ecosystem services for ecological regional development in urban regions was the topic addressed by Jürgen Breuste. Gerlind Weber analysed the factors for the successful creation of urban green belts.



*Listening to Dora Almassy, Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe, Szentendre/Hungary (Foto: IOER)*

The second session addressed social aspects of ecological development and the particular situation of city-regions. Rob Krueger and David Gibbs pointed out that internalizing the environment often means externalizing people. The economic analysis of Alain Thierstein showed the relevance of the emerging polycentric mega-city regions for sustainable spatial development. Then Tassilo Herrschel asked whether 'greening economic development' really provides a new substantial focus for city-regional policy and governance.

Two short parallel sessions on the role of energy as well as infrastructure and spatial planning rounded off the conventional part of the workshop. While Massimo Merighi explained that energy security has been so far a neglected argument for the pursuit of a low-carbon economy, Peter Wirth showed how eastern German lignite areas have been revitalised by rehabilitating the landscape after the closure of the mines. Jost Wilker dealt with the economic value of green infrastructure in urban quality of life. Sustainable spatial development in Luxembourg was discussed by Constance Carr.



*Lively debates at a table of the World Café (Foto: IOER)*

The organisers were looking forward to the special part of the workshop which was conducted in the form of a short World Café to get every participant involved in discussion and to elicit facts, opinions, and recommendations. First, Bernhard Müller and David Gibbs gave a short introduction, summarizing the workshop so far and asking in particular about the meaning of the terms of space/region/territory, ecology and development, the relevance of topics, the difference between the positive and normative scientific approaches, the challenge of integrating environmental aims into economic development, and the significance of the bottom-up and top-down approaches.

The participants of the World Café experienced a very lively debate at five tables, hosted by David Gibbs, Tassilo Herrschel, Gerd Lintz, Christian Schulz, and Sophie Wolfrum. The subsequent panel discussion, chaired by Bernhard Müller, started with the table hosts reporting on the table discussions. According to the interests and the ideas, these discussions followed quite different routes. The stimuli found a selective response. All participants shared the feeling that ecological regional development with its many sub-themes is an important field of research. The participants confirmed that there is confusion about the use of technical terms. The discussion on terminology should be intensified and terms used more consciously. All in all great interest was raised for the next RSAN workshop.



*The panel in discussion with the participants (Foto: IOER)*

Many detailed remarks are to be analysed and brought into preparations for the next RSAN workshop. The next workshop will be held at the University of Hull, organised by David Gibbs. According to the concept of the Research Network, it will mainly deal with the implementation of ecological development. It will be preceded by the RSA Winter Conference on the topic of “Regions and the Environment” in November 2010. It is very much in line with and complementary to the aims of the network. Several members of the network are engaged as organisers and speakers.

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