

Culture and Culture Industries in the Ruhr area: A Successful Strategy for Innovative Regional Development?

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Innovative Regional Development

The proposed paper addresses the contribution of culture and culture industries to regional development in old industrialized regions. The need for innovative regional development strategies in these regions is very high, because traditional strategies have not been successful. But how to arrange and build up innovation in a milieu, which as a rule, is not innovative? (see LÄPPLÉ 1994, HÄUSSERMANN / SIEBEL 1994, KUJATH 1998) It is difficult to promote innovative milieus in old industrialised regions. Bottom-up approaches to benefit from endogenous potentials are difficult to build up in regions, which are dominated by actors, who are not innovative in general (see GRABHER 1988, LÄPPLÉ 1994).

Discussions about innovative regional development strategies and systems (see e.g. BRACZYK / COOKE / HEIDENREICH 1998) focus on the analysis of the socio-economic field, the organisation and perspectives of regional economies, building up regional cluster as a concentration of innovative economic activities or questions of regional governance. I suggest to add the promotion of culture industries to this approach.

The Role of Culture and Culture Industries

Culture in an old industrialized region: a contradiction? Asking people about the relation between culture and old industrialized regions some years ago, the answer would have been negative. However, recently attitudes are changing. More and more tourists are spending some days in former steelworks which are now formed with coloured lights (may be the Völklinger Hütte in the Saarland or the Landschaftspark Duisburg-Nord in the Ruhr Area). The former industry scenery changes and is putting a new image on the region. Could it be a strategy to set all the former steel works in blue, red or green colours? A coloured scenery of industrial cathedrals as an innovative strategy for the region? Anything but that! Exchangeable strategies are contradictory to the idea of creative, endogenous cultural identity and these short introduction should only show one aspect of the contribution of culture and regional development in old industrialized regions.

Why focussing on culture and culture industries? Since the mid-1980s West European urban planners and policy-makers made use of art, heritage and other cultural resources to attempt to create jobs and wealth in regions. They developed policies and strategies making use of diversity, uniqueness and vibrancy of urban and regional cultures to attract more tourists, to support the development of media firms, to improve the images of their cities and regions, all in the context of increasingly competition for inward investment. Additionally in the last years many projects have shown their influence: the success of the new Guggenheim-Museum in Bilbao, the flagship 'Zeche Zollverein' in Essen, the Albert Dock in Liverpool or the new media industries attractions in the harbour of Cardiff are only some remarkable examples of the current development. They are the empirical proof that culture and culture industries can play an important role in an urban and regional context, especially in an old industrialized environment. Is it necessary to formulate flagship-projects to act as catalyst for urban and regional development? What is the impact of culture and culture industries on regional development strategies in regions, which are lagging behind? And how to build up a regional strategy for the promotion of cultural and culture industries in such regions?

The paper will argue that regional promotion strategies strengthening the culture industries need to focus on a long-term and regionally orientated perspective. Key recommendations for implementing process-orientated strategies should be

- the integration of the culture industries as an action field in regional development concepts;
- the exploration of existing culture industries profiles;
- the development of ideas and projects;
- the formulation of flagship-projects (e.g. the new Guggenheim-Museum in Bilbao) to act as a catalyst;
- the development of a communication network to link important actors.
- (see also GNAD 2000: 176)

It will be difficult, even for old industrialized regions, to focus only on the development of endogenous potentials, e.g. the culture industries, which can only be one part of a whole regional development strategy. Exogenous support, in form of financial public support by the nation state, the funds of the European Union and the regional policies, has to concentrate on and develop regional „networking“ in these regions (see also KUJATH 1998: 34). Culture industries can function as one part of an holistic regional approach.

Literature

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