1. Research topic

All partners of the ReSOURCE project deal with the use of ecological and cultural potentials for the benefit of general development. The IOER would like to interpret this challenge as a problem of the coordination of sectoral policies, e.g. environmental and economic policy, in the context of an actor and institution based analysis. On the one hand policy coordination or integration has been dealt with mainly in the context of governments at European, national or local level. On the other hand research on regional development as a rule concentrates on the aspect of the cooperation of municipalities among each other and with other regional actors without particularly highlighting the sectoral coordination. Against this background the IOER would like to analyse the problem of sectoral policy coordination in a regional and multi-level governance setting. Here, the responsibility for policies and the concernment by policies is often spread among many actors, so the interplay of actors is crucial.

Often a lack of sectoral policy coordination is assumed e.g. because of the fragmentation of administrations. In a multilevel governance setting this can be amplified through the intra-sectoral cooperation between actors at various political levels (“vertical columns”). However, the literature on sectoral policy coordination states that it is the easier to coordinate sectoral policies the smaller the area concerned is (Spehl/Naschold). So policies can e.g. be better coordinated at urban level than at national level. Indeed, the smaller a town the less differentiated is its administration: in very small towns the mayor is responsible for almost everything. These advantages of small areas and administrations may be compensated when regional development activities are useful. Then cooperation of a wide range of actors in a regional and multi-level governance setting is required which, again, makes everything more complicated.

2. Objectives

The main objective of the theory based research is to understand sectoral policy coordination in the mentioned regional and multi-level governance setting. The study draws on the example of the after-use of old mining potentials in order to provide research based advice for regional, national and European actors in the public and private sphere dealing with the ecological and cultural renewal of old industrialised regions. Against this background the main research question is: How does the interplay of the actors function regarding the sectoral policy coordination? Further questions are: How has the interplay developed? Which instruments of coordination have been used (e.g. working groups, regional development concepts)? What did hamper or support sectoral policy coordination? As a precondition to answer these questions the ecological and cultural potentials, the status of their use as well as the related actors must be identified.

3. Theoretical background

Generally, the research project follows the framework of actor-centred institutionalism used in policy research. It conceptualises policy processes as “driven by the interaction of individual and corporate actors endowed with certain capabilities and specific cognitive and normative orientations, within a given institutional setting and within a given external situation” (Scharpf 1997, 37).
Starting point of the investigation is that policy formulation and implementation is executed on the basis of an intensive division of labour involving many actors (Fürst 1991). Between the many public activities or policies there are often interdependencies which can be overlooked. Therefore coordination is needed. The aim of coordination is on the one hand to better utilise positive side effects (e.g. to use old mining potentials for tourism) and on the other hand to minimise negative side effects (by reducing or altering the activities) (Baars, Baum und Fiedler 1976). This increases the effectiveness of the whole policy. The biggest effect can be achieved with the integration of the policies.

Regarding the role of small and medium-sized towns: Unlike cities with a well-developed sectoral administration, small towns have little administrative capacity for planning and control. The smaller the town, the more administrative staff has to play multiple roles. On the one hand that means that towns have only limited capacities for planning. On the other hand this might make it easier to coordinate policies. Moreover, the size of small towns guarantee that they can be well managed and comprehended. The greater comprehensibility of institutional and non-institutional structures in small towns is considered an advantage. It permits more detailed knowledge of problems, greater flexibility in taking action, shorter lines of communication, and more direct contact between actors (Rüdiger 2004).

As indicated, things become more complicated when action is required at the regional level through governance. Le Galès (1998) defines governance as „a process of coordination of actors, social groups and institutions in order to attain appropriate goals that have been discussed and collectively defined in fragmented, uncertain environments.” Here, as generally in the literature on regional development, the term fragmentation does hardly refer to the lack of sectoral policy coordination but to the wide range of actors in general.

4. Methods

The research project follows a multiple-case study design (Yin 2002) with two cases. It is not clear yet whether the two cases predict similar results or contrasting results for predictable reasons. Methods to be used are: analysis of documentations and archival records, focused interviews and direct observations.

References

Baars, B.A.; Baum, K.B.; Fiedler, J. (1976): Politik und Koordinierung, Göttingen
Spehl/Naschold: source will be given later