



Spatial Orientations and Regional Identities in the Alpenrhein Valley – Sustainable and Cross-Border Regional Development from an Actor-Centred Perspective

The Alpenrhein valley is characterised by diverse interrelations and can be seen as a region with several centres. The valley's spatial changes are on the one hand dominated by political and economic parameters and on the other hand by the decisions of local actors. **The main assumptions** are that particularly in border regions regional identities and spatial orientations play a major role in everyday (supply, mobility, free time, culture) as well as economic life (workplace and location) and that these factors influence the chances of putting sustainable regional development into practice to a great extent. However, only a limited amount of data is available when analysing regional identity and orientation patterns (i.e. of actor-groups). Furthermore, practical methods (i.e. indicator systems and monitoring instruments) that ensure a stronger consideration of these themes in political decisions or economic life are lacking. The provision of data and methods are vital requirements to improve the acceptance and implementation chances of sustainable development concepts at local and regional levels as well as in cross-border contexts. In order to assess these topics in an integral way it is necessary to include socio-cultural and economic dimensions.

The socio-cultural dimension deals with the Alpenrhein valley as a construct in the perception of the population. The basis of this study is the detection of group- or generation-specific identities within the region. In a next step the impact of regional identities and spatial orientations on the conditions, the potential and the boundaries of cooperation are discussed. Moreover, regional branding, regional management and image as well as inward communication, unique selling points and outward impressions are analysed in the context of regional identities. **The economic dimension** deals with the identity and orientations of the market protagonists whose actions are influenced by spatial nearness and a common socio-spatial embedding. In a first step regional cooperation as well as the existence of a "creative" milieu in the Alpenrhein valley are analysed. Both are characterised by trust, a local basis of knowledge as well as a higher potential for innovation. The study is on the one hand based upon the local and regional conditions and on the other hand upon the analysis of the economic climate and the attractiveness of the location. In the process of data collection "soft" location factors play a major role because qualitative more than quantitative research methods help to understand perceptions and to explain spatial activity-patterns.

The overall aim is to assist the actors in the region by providing them with relevant practical results. First, the basis for "soft" data is improved through a cross-border geographic information system that helps to visualise perception, awareness and integration spaces of different actors. Second, the awareness of the population for sustainable cross-border cooperation is enhanced by putting an emphasis on participative methods such as workshops, "round tables", discussion panels or "interactive" exhibitions. Third, the results aim to assist the development of control and indicator systems, which enable an adequate consideration of orientation and identity patterns in common regional developments. In the long term, policy makers are given the possibility to install a continuous monitoring of the region. To sum up, it is the aim to position the Alpenrhein valley as one region within "the heads" of the different regional actors and to weaken long established "maps in minds".