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

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Abstract

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). Thus, the provision of data and methods are vital requirements for improving 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.

1. The Alpenrhein Valley: A Retrospect and Contemporary Trends of Development

The Alpenrhein valley is a meeting point for the cantons of Graubünden and St. Gallen (CH), the principality of Liechtenstein (FL) and the federal state of Vorarlberg (A). The Alpenrhein valley is an approximately 90 km long alpine valley, which stretches from south to north and builds the boundary between the western and eastern Alps. The valley's name derives from the river Rhein that discharges into the Lake Constance. Despite of early industrialising processes (19th century), the valley's settlement structure was shaped by a rural character well into the 20th century. During the last decades, however, dramatic changes were performed in the economic as well as settlement structures. On the one hand, the old industrial structures were strongly affected, which resulted in a crisis of the textile industry, an increase of the engineering industry and incipient tertiary processes. On the other hand, the rural settlement structures were transformed by urban and suburban expansion.

For one thing, the Alpenrhein valley can be described as a heterogenic region that historically was relatively small-chambered and crossed by national as well as since 1995 by EU-borders. For another thing, the different parts of the valley have various things in common. First, the Alpenrhein valley can be described as geographic unit, which is dominated by the river Rhein. Second, the geopolitical location of the Swiss parts of the Alpenrhein valley (St. Gallen, Graubünden) and the Austrian part of the valley (Vorarlberg) is characterised by a topographic border location, when considering the positions in each nation state. Thus, the capital cities Bern and Vienna are geographically and mentally remote from the region. Third, the whole valley was relatively early characterised by industrialising processes and in the European context the Alpenrhein valley still plays an important economic role as it locates various globally leading enterprises. Finally, the research area as a whole is shaped by uniform and unique settlement structures. The settlement structures in the Alpenrhein valley are often referred to as *Zwischenstadt*, which means compaction, on the one hand and fringing, on the other hand. Momentarily the Alpenrhein valley inhabits 450.000 people, the majority of which live in the lower or northern part of the valley.

In this context, the language or rather the dialects or idioms of the Alpenrhein valley have to be mentioned. The language in this region takes on a connective as well as a separating character. On a linguistic level the German speaking parts of Switzerland do not have much in common with the Italian and French speaking parts; Vorarlberg and its linguistic connections to the rest of Austria has similar weak ties. Although the different parts of the Alpenrhein valley share a common standard language, the local idioms greatly differ from each other and mutual understanding seems to be difficult (FRITSCHE *et al.* 2007).
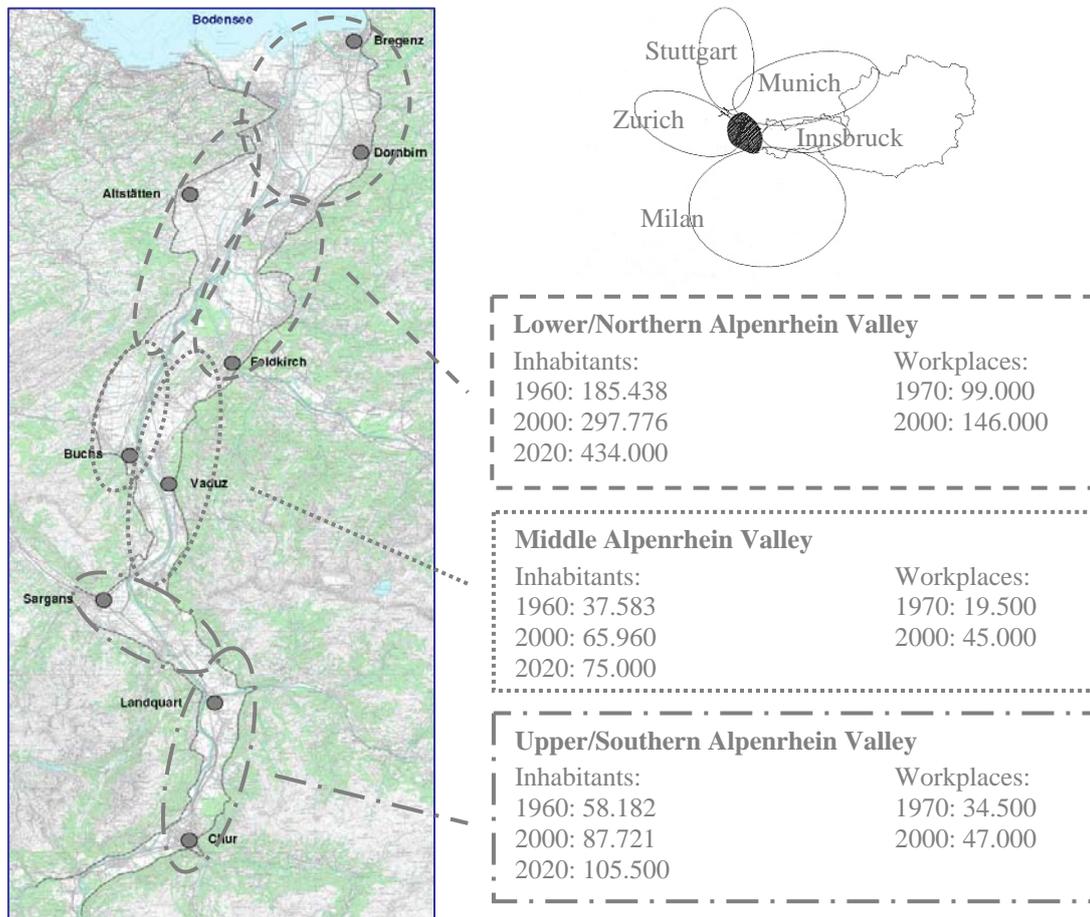

Fig. 1: The Alpenrhein Valley (BROGGI 2006, ZAFFIGNANI 1997, own draft)

At this point it has to be mentioned that Switzerland and Liechtenstein are politically and economically very close. Both states use, for example, the same currency (CHF), as they are not part of the European Union. Moreover, their close bonds are strengthened by multiple bilateral contracts. So, for instance, passport controls at the border do not exist. In contrast to this, the Austrian part of the valley takes on an "outsider's position", when looked at the three countries from this perspective. It is however possible that the three countries move closer together when Switzerland and Liechtenstein join the Schengen Agreement in November this year.

2. Aims of the Paper

The paper proposed tries to give details about the connections between the concepts of regional identity, spatial orientation and perception with socio-cultural as well as economic topics. As the research process is rather young, the paper provides first provisional results of an ongoing research process. Firstly, the paper offers a theoretical framework of the concepts of regional identity and

perception. Furthermore, the significance of political borders in cross-border regions for a common regional identity is discussed. The main part of the proposed paper focuses on two sides of identity - the socio-cultural side and the economic side. First, the socio-cultural part deals with the Alpenrhein valley as a construct in the perception of the population. The study is based on the detection of group- or generation-specific identities within the region. The leisure orientations and the identity of adolescents from the Alpenrhein valley are compared to statements of regional policy-makers and their perception of the valley. Second, the economic part deals with the identities and orientations of market protagonists. The activities of this group of protagonists are strongly influenced by spatial nearness and a common socio-spatial embedding. Based on the fact that the whole Alpenrhein valley looks back on a long tradition of industrialisation, contemporary economic structures and the unity of the economic area Alpenrhein valley are discussed.

3. The Concept of Regional Identity

In recent years, the concept of regional identity has become quite popular. This concept can be seen in terms of "Regions of Europe" and thus the moving together of people and regions (PAASI3 2001). Despite an extensive debate in the field of geography, the practical relevance of regional identity is still vague and a common definition is missing in the academic discussion (HARD 1987, BLOTEVOGEL *et al.* 1987). BLOTEVOGEL, HEINRITZ and POPP (1989) define regional awareness, which might be a better term for regional identity, as the totality of spatial attitudes and identifications which focus on a middle spatial scale. Attitude, in particular, defines the latent willingness of being able to react to an object in a certain way. On the one hand, space defines the framework for human action; on the other hand, actors structure the physical space surrounding them according to their own wants and needs. The concept of regional awareness can be structured as follows (BLOTEVOGEL *et al.* 1989, HILFIKER 1992):

- perception of the region – cognitive dimension
- regional relatedness / sense of home – affective dimension
- regional action-orientation – conative dimension

Space seems to be the material basis for the creation of a frame of reference (KRÜGER 1987, JUNG 2003). According to HARD (1987) the spatial impact of identity evolves in a structuring of the earth's surface according to questionable patterns: *"Identity does exist, but as soon as it [identity] is being described, you cannot hold onto it anymore."* (PRISCHING 1994, own translation) Awareness is reduced to spatial conditions and therefore can hardly include communication, networking and other social acts. Furthermore, the connection between perception, assessment and action is not guaranteed. For this reason, an empirical investigation cannot conclude from one category to another. Moreover, the quality of the actors' statements is strongly influenced by their interpretation of the region. In this context, BLOTEVOGEL, HEINRITZ and POPP (1989) distinguish between three types of identity:

- "identity of a place" – cognitive emotional representation of a spatial section in the awareness of individuals or the subjective experienced identity of a spatial section
- "identity with a place" – individual mental representation and affective occupation of space
- "socio-spatial identification" – common awareness of a social system evoked by territorial boundaries; symbolic meaning of physical-spatial elements and/or explicit spatial relevance of organisations

HARD (1987) defines communication as a non-spatial phenomenon because communication no longer is influenced by spatial boundaries - face-to-face contacts are hereby viewed as an exception. However, it cannot be a solution to look at regional identity without any spatial considerations. It is argued that spatial dependency exists, although this may not be verbally communicated by actors (BLOTEVOGEL, HEINRITZ, POPP 1989, 1987, ASCHAUER 2000). But the mere focus on physical aspects of regional identity can be compared to geo-determinism (WERLEN 1992). Thus, the applied spatial concepts, which are labelled as "container space" by various authors (WERLEN, REUTLINGER 2005, HARD 1987), have to be reconsidered. HARD (1987) proposes not to conclude from space to identity but rather from identity to space - therewith space becomes a so called lebensraum (BAHRENBERG 1987, WERLEN 1992, PAASI3 2001). In this context regional identity becomes a social process through which regions are defined (PAASI3 2001, 2003).

> *"Regional identity is, in a way, an interpretation of the process through which a region becomes institutionalized, a process consisting of the production of territorial boundaries, symbolism and institutions."* (PAASI 2003)

Societal change has modified the basis for identity constitution and the development of a sense of home (JUNG 2003). WERLEN (1993) suggests that contemporary cultures and societies are difficult to pin down on a specific spatial unit and that the geographic order is replaced by the chronographic order.

4. The Concept of Perception

The concept of perception is based on the assumption that every object has its specific and inflicted character. This character is established through experiences made in the past, thus the character is underlying a learning process. Expanding this concept by immaterial issues means that actors are influenced by social conditions and that these influences affect the perception and orientation of the actors (HILFIKER 1992, SHAMAI, ILATOV 2004). Thus, the variety of perceptions of one region is based on the variety of social identities. The spatial perception of a person is not a reaction to objective realities but has to be regarded as a subjective and partially individual process.

LYNCH (1960) assumes that regional protagonists continually modify the image of their surroundings in order to cope with the complex everyday impressions. Protagonists act according to specific patterns, which could also be called mental maps. Mental maps seem to be an adequate method for picturing individual images of constructed space (SCHLÖGEL 2003). Yet, it is not enough to map geometric spatial orientations because maps leave the impression that only the shown spatial information is of any relevance (KLÜTER 1987). MALLOT (2003) describes mental maps as a cognitive sense of location. The individual perception of space does not correspond to the physical space. What is more, cognitive maps are modified with each new piece of information. Cognitive mapping, therefore, is an everyday process and takes place everywhere; through this process subjective images of the surroundings are constructed. These subjective images are a vital part for our understanding of space (DOWNS, STEA 1982). Summing up this discussion, the conception of a region in the minds of the actors builds or should build the basis for regional development processes (ARING *et al.* 1989). Thus, the spatial perceptions and orientations of the inhabitants of a certain region should find stronger consideration in regional spatial policies.

5. Borders and their Significance for Regional Identity

Borders are an important factor for regional identity and spatial orientation in the Alpenrhein valley. In this context the characteristics of borders have to be analysed. LEIMGRUBER (1994) provides a first answer: *"A border is a line that either materially or mentally parts two sides from each other."* (own translation). WERLEN (1993) ultimately sees boundaries as an organising principle; thus physical or cultural similarities are brought together at different levels of scale. Equally, uniform spatial phenomena are summarized to higher-ranking spatial units. However, contemporary globalising processes begin to dissolve existing boundaries. In the context of globalisation, borders are arbitrary and from a cultural point of view borders can hardly be drawn anymore (IVANISIN 2006). In contrast to this, the borders of regions mark symbolic or material units (WERLEN, REUTLINGER 2005).

A border functions as a separating force when spatial differentiation rather than regional similarity is emphasized. The political attitude may add to this and may complicate or hinder exchange across the border (LEIMGRUBER 1994). MEUSBURGER ascribes separating boundaries the potential power to damage economic ties or other activities. Besides this, border zones have the potential to establish and encourage multifaceted cross-border exchange and ties. LEIMGRUBER (1994) suggests that the following points have to be considered in a new geography that looks at borders as connective zones:

- The differences at both sides of the border have to be perceived by the population (image of space).
- The potential for new contacts has to be discovered by the population (information exchange).
- Based on this, the population has to make a positive decision about the uptake of new connections (action decision).
- The population must be enabled to put the positive decision into practice (operationalisation, legal opportunities, and means of transportation).

The nature of the border, for example its permeability or its separating force, as well as factors like the exchange of information, the individual possibilities, mobility, infrastructure or the psychological willingness of the population, are central for decision making processes. Consequently, the real boundaries are often manifested in the minds of the population and are demonstrated in their spatial orientations. The protection of identity, however, must not be equated with separation and encapsulation of the region.

6. Research Setting and Method

The project applies a diverse set of methods deriving mainly from empirical social research. Thus, a mixture of partially quantitative but mainly qualitative research methods is applied. This methodical mixture seems adequate for the integrative character of the research question, which includes a range of different actors (i.e. market protagonists, social actors). The field research, in a first step, is based on various interview techniques - such as structured and semi-structured interviews, narrative interviews as well as guideline-based interviews. In addition to this, questionnaires are implemented in order to reach a wider range of regional protagonists and to formulate more quantitative statements. In a second step, participative methods such as workshops and group discussions aim at bringing together different regional actors. This makes it possible to include the actors' "maps in minds" into the research process. Furthermore, social geographic mapping work and the production of so called "mental maps" play a major role during the process of data collection.

7. Social Protagonists and their Impact on the Constitution of the Alpenrhein Valley

7.1. A Socio-Cultural Approach

The questions if regions and their corresponding identities can be produced or if regional awareness can be created are at first answered by the numerous examples of so called "designer regions". These regions are not clearly definable because they do not represent units of the earth's surface but represent the expression of socio-cultural actions (BLOTEVOGEL 2000, WEICHHART 2000). IPSEN (1994) claims that *"Regional identity can be the result of political instructions"* (own translation). Politics uses but also misuses the subjective sense of home as well as regional identities (MITZSCHERLICH 1997). Indeed, *"The image making policy has a lot to do with marketing."* (SÜSSNER 2006) At the same time politics is influenced by individuals who are not satisfied with the existing regional circumstances. Consequently, sense of home, regional identity or regional awareness do not develop on their own but are based on the intentions of certain protagonists (PRISCHING 1994). This connection is affirmed by the interviews with different policy-makers in the Alpenrhein valley. Nevertheless, some restrictions have to be made. A sense of home, for example, could not be prescribed by law but is the result of social communication between the protagonists (PRIEBS 1987). The relation of space and identity is underlying a dynamic process and thus the development and transformation of identity is mainly based on the political dialogue about space (KEITH, PILE 1993 in MITZSCHERLICH 1997). Evidence that underpins this thesis is found in the historical development of the Alpenrhein valley. During the past centuries the borders were continually repositioned under the different regimes of power. These changes were manifested in the perception of the population. Generally, it is difficult to define which factors make up identity and if collective action influences politics (PAASI1 2001, PAASI 2003).

Leisure time plays an important role for regional identity because leisure orientations and habits take place on a voluntary basis and are freely chosen by the protagonists. At this point however, mobility patterns and the pressure to consume are not accounted for. Leisure activities, for example, are more likely to take place within "identification places" than outside these places (LINDSTAEDT 2006 in WOLF 1988). Through this context, the crucial connection between need satisfaction within a region and regional identity is given.

7.2. Adolescent Protagonists and their Leisure Orientations

The following account presents the first results of an ongoing research process. In a first step, adolescents from the different parts of the Alpenrhein valley (St. Gallen and Vorarlberg) have been interviewed. A first profile of the examined group of protagonists draws the following picture: 35% of the interviewees spontaneously combine specific spatial units like their place of residence, the Alpenrhein valley or the nation state with the concept of home. The importance of social connections to family members and friends is highlighted by about 30% of the adolescents. It is remarking that about 10% of the examined group, but mainly the juveniles from the Swiss part of the valley, refer to the Alpenrhein valley as their home. The group discussions show, however, that mental bonds are mainly restricted to the own part of the Alpenrhein valley. The mental maps and the maps about leisure drawn by the adolescents show that different perceptions of "my region" exist. Five out of six Austrian juveniles draw their own place of residence in the centre of "their region" in the Alpenrhein valley. Generally, it has to be emphasized that Austrian adolescents have pronounced ties to Vorarlberg. For them the river Rhein functions for the most part as a borderline. In contrast, the Swiss pupils do not perceive the Rhein as a border but use the whole Rhein valley for their leisure activities.

Swiss juveniles show a different perception than Austrian juveniles do because of their habit of using leisure places in the Austrian part of the valley.

In general, the pupils define their environments in the Alpenrhein valley very differently from each other. Although many point out their own place of residence as very important, this place cannot be equated with the absolute centre: *"The sense of home must not end at the border; I have, for example, relatives in Mäder [Vorarlberg]. As I like to be there, this also counts as home."* (group discussion 2007, own translation) Additionally, it has to be mentioned that cross-border perception and awareness exists mainly in those places in which the infrastructure across the border has good quality. Adolescents from the Swiss part of the Alpenrhein valley partially show a strong orientation to Austria. This, however, does not prove the existence of a common regional identity. In their leisure time juveniles often build groups and thus are isolated from other juveniles; exchange with other adolescents is often quite limited: *"One meets Austrians ... but we hardly have contact because we are together with our own friend*s." (group discussion 2007, own translation) The planning of leisure time commonly is quite short termed and thus the potential for a direct promotion is small.
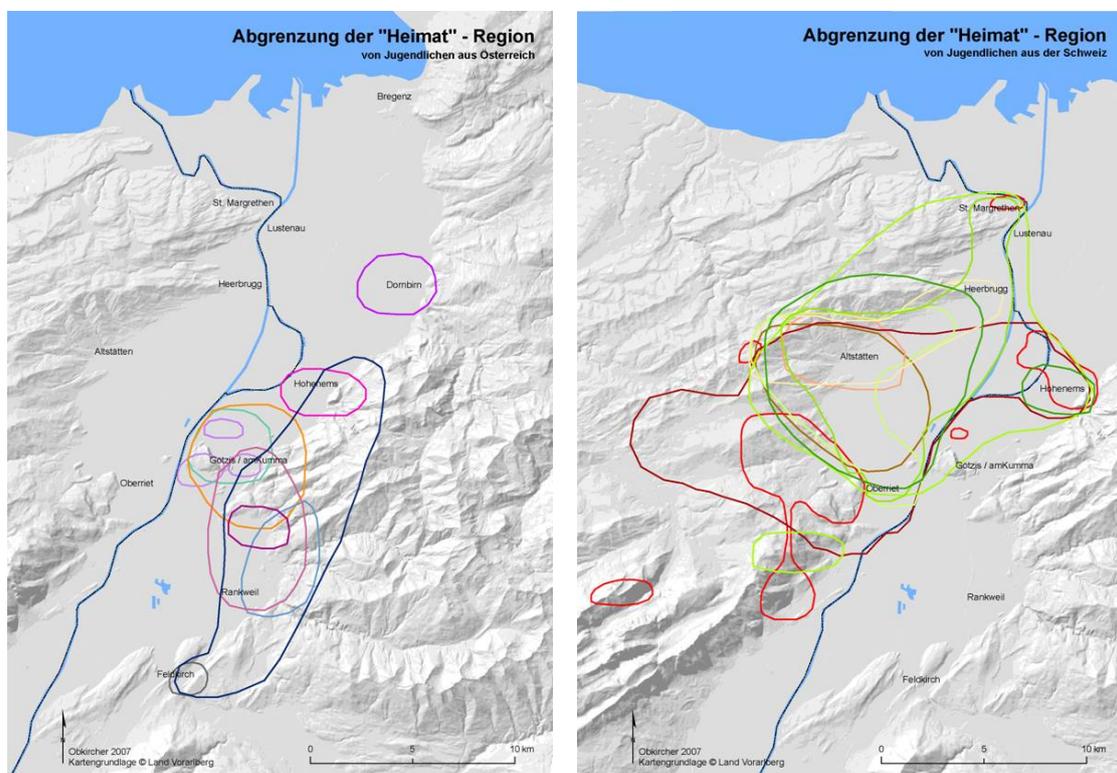

Fig. 2: Definitions of „My Region": Austrian versus Swiss Adolescents (OBKIRCHER 2007)

The fact that the Alpenrhein valley builds a natural unit across the river does not impress the examined group. Especially the Austrian pupils do not know very much about the Swiss part of the valley. When asked if they would refer to themselves as people from the Alpenrhein valley (= "Rheintaler") a clear "no" is pronounced. Their environment is defined by their federal state or beyond that by the nation state. However, without any social ties every place with a sense of home degrades to a mere place for living. The language or better the various dialects in the Alpenrhein valley stress the answers of the juveniles. For the interviewed adolescents it is generally very important to use the same dialect as their friends. This however, according to the interviewees, is not possible in the Alpenrhein valley: *"The last time we were in the disco in Thal [Vorarlberg] a guy from Switzerland tried to talk to us but it*

was so difficult to understand him." (group discussion 2007, own translation) Perception and awareness of a region are central factors for a common future. Today it is often wrongfully thought that a common regional identity weakens the local identity. However, this is a question of scale and both kinds of identity can coexist. Indeed, experience has proved that strong ties at the local level are important for cooperation at the regional level because the population seems to be more tightened (ZECH 2007).

The Swiss adolescents are more likely to show awareness for the region and positive ties across the river. On the contrary, the Austrian adolescents hardly perceive the "other" side of the Alpenrhein valley. In this context however, the political border does not play a major role in the perception because the interviewed pupils do not feel restricted by the border. The impression that the neighbour is difficult to reach leaves stronger impacts than the existence of the political border: *"It is complicated to get into Switzerland und to be honest we don't really know how to organize this ... here it is much easier."* (group discussion 2007, own translation) Due to the lack of information and offers adolescents are not motivated to cross the border and furthermore develop the impression that their neighbourhood cannot be easily reached. The fact that the Swiss part of the valley offers hardly any possibilities for leisure activities for adolescents is one of the main reasons why the Swiss leisure orientation is concentrated stronger on the Austrian part that vice versa.

The river Rhein and especially the old creeks and river channels are important and connective elements in the region Alpenrhein valley. Adolescents from both sides of the border use these places in their leisure time and do not feel disturbed by the fact that two nation states meet at exactly this place. Finally, the subordinate role of the border for the perception of the juveniles in the region has to be emphasized again.

7.3. Policy-Makers and their Regional Identity

One of the interviewed policy-makers, Manfred HELLRIGL (2007), critically questions the importance of a regional identity in the Alpenrhein valley: *"Who is interested in a common regional identity? Generally, it is difficult for one commune to look across the border. It is already problematic to consider everything within the own commune."* (HELLRIGL 2007, interview, own translation) According to HELLRIGL the communities compete with each other because their own identity could be endangered. Only a few communes in the Alpenrhein valley have a common overall concept. However, Martin ASSMAN (2007) claims that a common identity is an advantage for communities. For example, different projects or decisions about locations could be managed more easily. Thus, different communities take on different roles and administrative sovereignties.

According to Austrian policy-makers, one of the main problems in the Alpenrhein valley is that the various parts of the valley are perceived differently in their own nation states. The eastern parts of Switzerland have another value for Switzerland than Vorarlberg has for Austria. The Swiss part of the Alpenrhein valley has a rural character, whereas Vorarlberg has a more urban character. For Austria the Rheintal valley takes on a central function, whereas Switzerland concentrates on Zürich, which lies outside the Alpenrhein valley. The questions whether the inhabitants of the different regions of the Alpenrhein valley perceive their place of residence as central or peripheral or whether the whole region is taken into the centre are vital. SCHLEGEL puts it that way: *"The centre is where I am home. It is a disadvantage if the common centre is perceived as a border region."* (SCHLEGEL 2006) Therefore, the inhabitants should orient themselves at the border region in order to strengthen the quality of life within the region. A holistic view of the Alpenrhein valley is vital because the adolescents in the region will grow up and use the whole region as a place for making a living. Urban and regional

planning strategies have to consider this holistic view and have to set a course, for example in the field of cross-border mobility. A common concern could initiate collective processes and perspectives. Thus, regional planning will become a major factor for a common regional awareness and identity. In this respect, developing the river Rhein as a common mark for identity would be essential because the creeks and river channels of the Rhein already have an attractive and connective character. According to the perception of the juveniles, regional identification is based on social and communicative processes. Corresponding initiatives could revitalize the Alpenrhein valley as a constructed region and could help to establish a common identity. A reactivation of certain parts of the river could function as a means to encourage regional identity processes.

The interviewed adolescents, and here mainly the Swiss adolescents, have partially internalised the Alpenrhein valley as one region. If the reason for this internalisation is based on consume patterns or on other factors does not play a major role in this context. However, the willingness to define oneself as a person from the Alpenrhein valley ("Rheintaler") is far more important. The political borders play an inferior role, whereas emotional distance plays a superior role. Emotional nearness is lacking because hardly any information about the counterparts within the valley are available.

The interviews with policy-makers in Switzerland and Austria have shown that awareness exists about the necessity of a common regional identity. Unlike the adolescents however, the political administrative protagonists are bound to the political units within the Alpenrhein valley and thus are hardly able to act on a cross-border level. To sum up, the perception of the Alpenrhein valley greatly differs between the adolescents and the policy-makers in the region. Contemporary projects show how difficult it is to work together across the border.
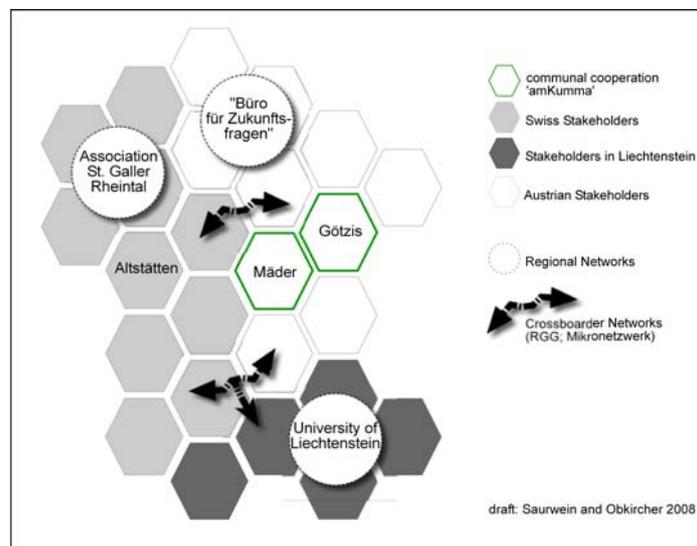

Fig. 3: Networks of Policy-Makers in the Alpenrhein Valley (OBKIRCHER, SAURWEIN 2008)

Sustainable regional development makes it necessary to include young local protagonists from the Alpenrhein valley into planning processes. The concept "Alpenrhein valley" has to become part of the everyday life of the actors within this region. Otherwise the Alpenrhein valley as a cross-border region cannot exist. At the moment, juveniles do not feel included into regional planning processes. In this context, bottom-up processes have to be initiated. Participative methods may help to include the experiences and perceptions of the local actors into planning processes. Regional identity is an essential part of cross-border orientation and vice versa.

8. The Alpenrhein Valley: A Prospering Business Location in Europe

8.1. Industrialisation in the Alpenrhein Valley

In the Alpenrhein valley first industrialising processes started during the 1780s. The industrialisation was mainly based upon the textile industry as well as family-run small and medium-sized enterprises (SME), which both characterise the region up until today. The Swiss Alpenrhein valley and the Austrian Alpenrhein valley were involved in a complex relationship containing cooperation and competition at the same time. At the beginning of the industrialisation the textile industry rested mainly upon the regional agricultural production of flax and thus the production of linen. In the middle of the 18th century the import of cotton brought a major boom to the textile industry in the Alpenrhein valley. Over many years this blooming industry employed more than 50% of the population in Vorarlberg through mass wage labour, which partially was done from home. The fast introduction of mechanic labour during the 19th century goes back to various individuals - like F. M. Hämmerle, F. M. Rhomberg, Christian Getzner or Carl Ganahl. From the 20th century onwards the engineering industry slowly began to establish parallel to the textile industry and soon gained a strong foothold in the region. Up until the 1970s, however, the textile industry remained the leading industry in the Alpenrhein valley. The last decades of the 20th century were characterised by far-reaching structural changes of the valley's economy. Responsible for these changes were the worldwide recession as well as massive globalisation processes, which resulted in a crisis of the textile industry on the one hand and an increase of the engineering- and capital goods industries on the other hand. Whereas in 1975 56% of all industrial sectors were part of the textile industry, in 2005 only 11% of all industrial sectors belonged to this once so blooming industry. What is more, during the last four decades the Alpenrhein valley was seized by tertiarisation processes, which resulted in a major growth of the non-productive industries. Since then, the following industrial sectors were able to steadily increase their production shares: the engineering industry and iron- and steel industries (from 11% to 55%), the food- and luxury food industries (from 10% to 19%) and the chemical- and synthetic industries along with the paper- and wood-working industries (from 9% to 15%) (AMT DER VORARLBERGER LANDESREGIERUNG 2007).

8.2. Contemporary Economic Structures

Despite the far-reaching structural changes the region was put through during the last decades, the Alpenrhein valley can still be referred to as an important European economic area. In 2006 nearly 146.000 workplaces were located in the lower Alpenrhein valley, which account for 61% of all the workplaces in the valley (BROGGI 2006). This cross-border economic area can be characterised by a massive inter-regional exchange of employees (commuters). The direction of this exchange, however, is mainly from Vorarlberg to Switzerland and Liechtenstein. As a result, a major lack of skilled workers is hitting the Austrian part of the Alpenrhein valley. Liechtenstein, for example, employs nearly as many people (30.000) as the country has inhabitants (35.000). A higher income and a lack of local employees and skilled workers in Liechtenstein and Switzerland are the main reasons why people commute from Vorarlberg to the neighbouring countries.

	CH	FL	BRD	Total
1991	9.729	3.968	1.245	14.942
2001	6.004	5.210	1.185	12.401

Tab.1: Frontier Commuters from Vorarlberg to Switzerland (CH), Liechtenstein (FL) and Germany (BRD) (WIRTSCHAFTSKAMMER VORARLBERG 2007)

Momentarily the Alpenrhein valley locates a variety of highly modern, production-oriented enterprises, which successfully operate in market niches and are worldwide leaders in the production of specialised products (WIRTSCHAFSSTANDORT VORARLBERG 2007). Examples for these so called global players are the *Zumtobel AG*, the *Doppelmayr Seilbahnen GmbH*, the *Julius Blum GmbH* or the *Hilti AG*. Many of these regional enterprises show a high innovative ability in the global market and thus remain family-led small and medium-sized enterprises.

Moreover, the good infrastructure in the Alpenrhein valley helps to attract new enterprises to the region. Advantages of the business location are, for example, the geographic position of the region in the centre of Europe, the good connections to international and regional airports, the high educational level of employees, the high quality of life, competitive enterprises, the low unemployment rates and the stabile financial policy. In contrast to this, the lack of skilled workers, as mentioned above, and the lack of open space for the foundation of new enterprises are often described as handicaps for further regional economic development. In addition, the different business conditions in the various nation states function as impeditive factors for common regional development in the Alpenrhein valley. These differing framework conditions may hinder economic exchange across the border. An entrepreneur from the Austrian part of the Alpenrhein valley describes the situation as follows:

> *"The relation to the Alpenrhein valley, as near as it may be, is meagre and weak – this is due to the fact that Switzerland has its own laws and the Swiss people isolate themselves. We have great difficulties to work there [in Switzerland] because the Swiss law tells us that our employees only can work for 90 days in Switzerland. Networks from Switzerland to Vorarlberg are generally blocked and not encouraged. However, during the last years we tried and also achieved to deliver goods to Switzerland. Thus, the Swiss market has gotten rather important for us but we opened up this market by ourselves. In spite of this, we still meet blockades from the political as well as the economic sides."* (NÄGELE 2008, interview, own translation)

At present, another dominating force within the region is competition. The various territorial sections of the Alpenrhein valley compete with each other for international companies that want to set up a branch in the region. A recent example is the rivalry between the cantons of St. Gallen and Graubünden over the company *Espros Photonics* (WIRTSCHAFT REGIONAL 2008).

8.3. The Alpenrhein Valley as a Cross-Border Economic Area?

The above discussion has shown that the Alpenrhein valley is rarely perceived as one integral cross-border economic area by the local market protagonists. The various national and EU borders that cross the region act as separating forces and hinder the overcoming of the long-established boundaries. Although local policy-makers often argue that the Alpenrhein valley already is one integral economic area, the perception of the local market protagonists is, however, far more important for the establishment of the Alpenrhein valley as one cross-border economic area. Economic networks that overcome the existing boundaries within the region are signs for bottom-up as well as top-down perceptions of the economic area. Looking at these economic ties could be a first step in analysing the acceptance of this region as one integral and functionally linked system.

At the political administrative level the Alpenrhein valley is often referred to as one cross-border economic area. Various initiatives at this level try to establish and encourage the connections within the region. One example for a cross-border initiative at the political level that goes beyond the

Alpenrhein valley and focuses on the whole region around the Lake Constance is the "International Lake Constance Conference" (*Internationale Bodenseekonferenz, IBK*). The "International Lake Constance Conference" is a cooperative association between the federal states and cantons of Baden-Württemberg (BRD), Bayern (BRD), Schaffhausen (CH), Zürich (CH), Thurgau (CH), St. Gallen (CH), Appenzell Ausserrhoden (CH), Appenzell Innerrhoden (CH), Fürstentum Liechtenstein (FL) and Vorarlberg (A). This conference aims at establishing the Lake Constance region as an attractive living- and working space as well as a cultural and natural unit. Furthermore, regional togetherness is tried to encourage. Another initiative within the Alpenrhein valley is the regular "Employer Alliance Meeting" (*Arbeitgeberverbandstreffen*) between the Chamber of Commerce of Vorarlberg (A), the Chamber of Labour of Vorarlberg (A), the Chambers of Labour of Rheintal (CH), Rorschach (CH), Sargans (CH) and Werdenberg (CH) and the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Liechtenstein (FL). One major result of these regular meetings was the formation of a collective school in the Alpenrhein valley. The "International School Rheintal" opened in 2002 and is according to Michaela WAGNER, Industrialist's Association Vorarlberg, quite popular within the region. Two protagonists at the political administrative level, Michaela WAGNER (A) and Andreas FRANK (CH) from the Employer's Association Rheintal, have one common vision about the economic area Alpenrhein valley:

> "We have a common concern on both sides of the Rhein. We have to reduce the boundaries - primarily in the minds. [...] We have a vision. In order to exist in Europe in the long term, we have to growth together across the Rhein. Each on its own is too small. Europe sizes its regions with a half to one million inhabitants." (ST. GALLER TAGBLATT 10.04.2007, own translation)

In contrast to the hopes and wishes at the political administrative level the local market protagonists hardly perceive the Alpenrhein valley as one functioning economic area. The research process offers first evidence that cooperation and teamwork among enterprises in the Alpenrhein valley are restricted to their immediate surroundings, mainly in their own nation state, and hardly engage the whole valley. A local entrepreneur of the Austrian part of the Alpenrhein valley puts it that way:

> "The Alpenrhein valley as a concept, and this is my opinion, does not exist. On the one hand, there is Vorarlberg as an economic area with a good international image. On the other hand, there is the concept of the Lake Constance region with the city Friedrichshafen as an economic area, which has become quite established. The concept of the Alpenrhein valley as a unity, however, does not exist because it [the valley] is always looked at separately. What does really originate from the Alpenrhein valley? Okay, there is the enterprise Hilti in Liechtenstein but this is Hilti from Liechtenstein and not Hilti from the Alpenrhein valley. The label Alpenrhein valley has to be fostered before it can take effect." (NÄGELE 2008, interview, own translation)

However, some local entrepreneurs try to cultivate the Alpenrhein valley as one region. For example, in July 2008 three enterprises from the federal state of Vorarlberg (*Giko GmbH, Blum GmbH, and Doppelmayr Seilbahnen GmbH*) and three enterprises from the canton of St. Gallen (*SFS AG, Leica Geosystem, and Sieber Transport AG*) present the first so called "Comic + Co Enterprise-Festival" (*Komik + Ko Fabrik-Festival*), which is a cross-border cultural event and takes place in the individual enterprises. Aims of this festival are the strengthening of the cross-border ties between the different

enterprises and the raising of awareness within the population for the Alpenrhein valley as a functioning cross-border region.

The following figure tries to point out the differing perceptions about the Alpenrhein valley as a cross-border economic area between the political administrative actors and the local market actors:
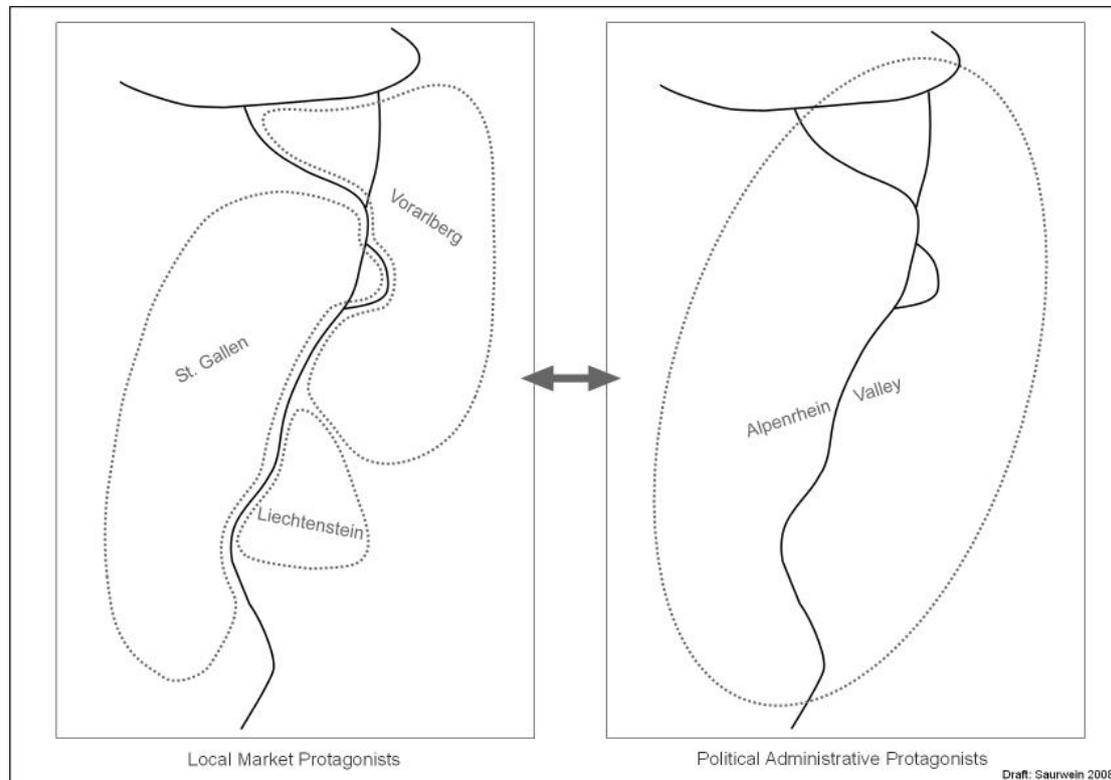

Fig. 4: Perceptions of the Alpenrhein Valley as an Economic Area: Local Market Protagonists versus Political Administrative Protagonists (SAURWEIN 2008)

To sum up, a discrepancy in the business location's perception by the different levels of protagonists - political administrative protagonists versus local market protagonists - is detectable. Whereas the actors at the political administrative level tend to perceive the Alpenrhein valley as one business location, the actors at the local market level tend to perceive the valley as a conglomeration of rather disconnected business locations. In addition, at the political administrative level numerous initiatives are trying to connect the three nation states in the Alpenrhein valley. At the local market level, however, cross-border initiatives are rare or even lacking. This may be traced back to the fact that working across the border is often hindered by the differing framework conditions between the nation states. Furthermore, the numerous frontier commuters, the loss of locally trained workers to the neighbouring states as well as the competition for international enterprises stir up antagonisms between the different parts of the Alpenrhein valley. Thus, the "bottom-up" perception of the valley as an economic area is lagging behind the "top-down" perception. The question remains if it is possible or even reasonable to establish the Alpenrhein valley as one internationally visible business location:

> "The economic area of Liechtenstein, Vorarlberg and St. Gallen is in its early stages - at best. Spatial nearness, similar structures, good connections between the enterprises and regular contact between the political actors are not enough to overcome the boundaries. Similarity alone does not give wings." (WIRTSCHAFT REGIONAL 2008, own translation)

In order to successfully establish one economic area across the Rhein, it is necessary to include the protagonists "at the bottom" of the region, i.e. local market protagonists, clubs and societies, into regional planning processes. What is more, image campaigns, regional branding initiatives and regional marketing have to be promoted across the Alpenrhein valley in order to stimulate regional identification processes among local market protagonists and other social groups.

9. Conclusion

To sum up, the proposed paper gives first evidence that multiple regional identities and spatial orientations can be found in the cross-border region Alpenrhein valley. These differing regional identities and spatial orientations are investigated according to different local groups of protagonists. Adolescents and entrepreneurs of the Alpenrhein valley are opposed to political administrative actors or policy-makers. The diverse identity and orientation patterns of these groups hint at the fact that the Alpenrhein valley is not commonly perceived as one static region. On the contrary, the different actor groups partially perceive the Alpenrhein valley as a unity and partially only perceive certain territorial sections within the Alpenrhein valley. These rather conflicting views are not advantageous for joint regional planning strategies. If common regional development and common regional marketing really are desired, the conceptions, associations and images of the "bottom-up" protagonist (i.e. adolescents and entrepreneurs) have to be harmonized with the perceptions of the "top-down" protagonists (i.e. policy-makers). Especially the perceptions and orientation patterns of the "bottom-up" protagonists have to be considered for regional planning or marketing processes. Otherwise, the constructed region "Alpenrhein valley" may not be accepted and thus may not be revitalized by the regional actors.

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