The use of informal instruments in German spatial planning

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Rise of informal planning approaches since the 1980s

- Background: Rise in the number of conflicts occurring over the use of land and the increasing complexity of planning procedures.
- Effect: A steady growth in interest in the use of informal approaches to planning; as far as possible, they aim to eliminate or resolve conflicts consensually and on a co-operative basis prior to the initiation of formal and legally binding planning procedures.
- Processes and instruments of spatial planning that are not legally formalised, standardised or directly legally binding.
- Characterised by a high degree of flexibility, adaptability, transparency and a focus on achieving a consensus.

Prof. Dr. Axel Priebs, Valencia 2022
Informal instruments in spatial planning

- Anchored in § 14 of the Spatial Planning Act; stand alongside the formal instruments, but are also linked to them
- can prepare the development of formal instruments (plans) (e.g. regional vision processes)
- can support the implementation of formal instruments (plans)
- strengthen the persuasive power of spatial planning ("persuasive instruments")
- can promote creativity (competitions)
- can deal with or resolve conflicts (moderation function)
- communicate spatial planning issues and objectives
Examples of informal instruments (esp. on the regional level)

• Regional conferences on spatial development; supra-regional, regional and inter-municipal networks and cooperation structures, regional forums
• Regional development concepts (non-binding)
• Contractual agreements, in particular for the coordination or implementation of spatial development concepts and for the preparation or implementation of formal spatial development plans
• Regional action programmes on current action requirements
• Spatial monitoring and making the results available
• Advising municipalities, other public bodies and agencies
Example: Regional development concepts (non-bining)

- Very wide range of examples
- planning regions, parts thereof or cross-border
- Cross-cutting or with different focal points
- partly complementary to formal programmes, partly stand-alone
- partly in connection with EU funding (e.g. LEADER regions)
Example: Co-operating centres, city networks and city alliances

• Not every centre (especially in periphery areas can offer everything),
• syergies of networks (avoiding public parallel investments in sports, culture, hospitals, etc.)
• Voluntary agreements between neighbouring municipalities (complementary profiles instead of competition)
• city networks (in Germany, promotion of model projects by the federal government in the 1990s)
Example: Conflict moderation in large-scale retail trade

• In recent decades, there has been strong competition between municipalities for the establishment of large-scale retail businesses.
• Danger to spatial structure and development
• Informal coordination between planning authorities and municipalities on regional retail development goals
• Regional retail trade concepts (e.g. for the Greater Hanover Area)
• Agreements to resolve conflicts
Example: Spatial observation

- Early warning system
- Preparation of figures and data, e.g. with graphics and short reports
- Possibility of "agenda setting"
- Can arouse political interest, preparation of further activities
Thank you for your attention!

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