

## Regional Economy and Civil Society



I should first explain my concept of regional economy because it means more than just any economical activity in a region.

Regional economies generate the main percentage of their added value within itself, so people act and deal together; they are cooperating, communicating and bartering.

Furthermore regional economies are structured based on a differentiated land use system, so that the settlements, the agricultural areas, the woods, the recreation zones and even the protected nature are part of the landscape mosaic. And this mosaic is developed based on subtle differences in the soil, water, habitat and location.

In the German discourse this association is often laughed at because it seems romantic. But I am convinced, it is the result of civil society in rural areas, where different people have to share the space and have to adapt their differing interests to the different potentials of their heterogeneous landscape.

The alternative is a large scale enterprise area where only one land use form is established and that is not done by citizens but by seasonal employees.

---



Besides I think sustainable land use can only be guaranteed by people living in the landscape and participating in the landscape usage. The trend in politics is to steer sustainability with data and laws and I think that will not work at all. In German we say: “Wo kein Kläger ist, ist auch kein Richter” – you could translate it as: If there's no claimant, there's no judge.

I think we need to bind people in the landscapes with regional economies - to have civil societies that can guarantee the sustainability. But the globalization marked conditions still tend to concentrate energy, people, goods and services in agglomeration areas. Regional economies in many parts of the world are still being destroyed by the socioeconomic dynamics.

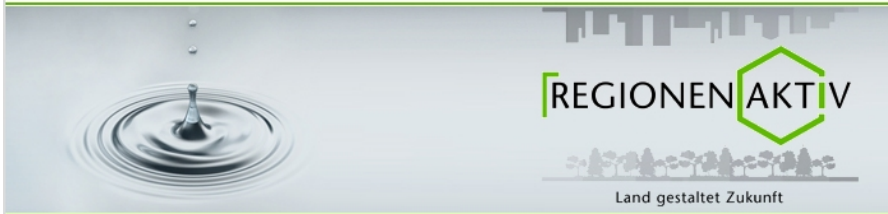
That's why today we have to re-hypothesize the thesis and should say: If there is still a vivid regional economy, it is growing because of a special civil engagement. There are working people in the economic sphere but their work has a political dimension.

However, I think that the future of regional economy is both a field of civil society and of sustainable landscape development and the research work that is done in this field is mostly insufficient.

Now I'd like to distinguish three different ways of bringing forward regional economies and discuss which is the most effective.

---

deutsch | [english](#)



[Home](#)  
[Regionen Aktiv](#)  
[Begleitforschung](#)  
**[Ergebnisse](#)**  
[Links](#)  
[Kontakt](#)  
[Impressum](#)



**Berichte, wissenschaftliche Arbeiten und Artikel und Vorträge - als Download oder zum Bestellen**

**übergreifende Berichte sowie Berichte einzelner Module:**

Elbe, Sebastian (Hrsg.) (2008):  
**Land-Stadt Kooperation und Politikintegration für ländliche Räume. Zentrale Ergebnisse und Handlungsempfehlungen der Begleitforschung Regionen Aktiv 2007 bis 2008.** Aachen.  
[Download \(Abstract\) >>>](#) oder [Bestellung >>>](#)

Elbe, Sebastian; Günter Kroës et al. (2007):  
**Synthesebericht der Begleitforschung Regionen Aktiv 2004-2006: Zentrale Ergebnisse und Handlungsempfehlungen.** Göttingen.  
[Download >>>](#) oder [Bestellung >>>](#)

Begleitforschung Regionen Aktiv (2007):  
**Zentrale Handlungsempfehlungen der Begleitforschung 2004-2006 – Standpunkte-Papier. Empfehlungen an Politik und Verwaltung (EU, Bund und Bundesländer).** Darmstadt.  
[Download >>>](#) und [Download \(english version\) >>>](#)

Böcher, Michael et al. (2008):  
**Regional Governance und integrierte ländliche Entwicklung – Ergebnisse der Begleitforschung zum Modell- und Demonstrationsvorhaben „Regionen Aktiv“.** VS Verlag. Wiesbaden.  
[Bestellung >>>](#)

Benz, Arthur; Anna Meincke (2007):  
**Regionalwissenschaftliche Theorieansätze – Analyse der Governance Strukturen.** Abschlussbericht Modul 3 und 4. Hagen.  
[Download >>>](#)

Kroës, Günter; Ute Middelman; Katrin Weiß (2007):  
**Die ökonomische Analyse des Regionen Aktiv Ansatzes.** Abschlussbericht Modul 6. Dortmund.  
[Download >>>](#)

The first was an initiative by the government. We all know European aid programs like ELER or LEADER. It is a jungle of instruments and loads of scientists and administrators are busy optimizing on them. And of course there is a lot of money in it.

In my experience, these instruments often do not strengthen the civil societies in rural areas because they don't give them enough scope for their own decisions and because the dynamics of acting are totally different from the procedures in the programs.

There are many rules to observe and in the end the drawing persons, institutions and communities are more weakened than they were before. The programs establish a strange thinking in the regions that makes people more and more dependent on other structures and it often paralyses self organization – so in the end even the economic success can be challenged.

So I believe it would be better to give only a tenth of the money for economic input to the communes but to guarantee it for a longer time and to let them decide by themselves how they want to support their regional economy. I know that's utopia, but it is a nice one as far as I can see.



Maybe our federal government made similar objections. However they started to organize federal competitions, where regions should participate as corporate bodies with a clear approach for regional development.

One was “Regionen aktiv”, initiated by the first green minister for consumer protection some years ago. Another was the competition of bio energy regions and there were quite a lot more.

The duration of the programs is often too short because they have to fit in between two elections, so they often lasted about three years and if they are to be continued they would be totally modified.

---



But it takes much longer to restore regional economic power, even when the framework is driving the economy in the opposite direction.

And you also need a strong local basis; there must be people cooperating and they must have a clear concept of what could be an economic future for their region.

In other words: These programs should at first strengthen the civil society before giving them money to build shops, to buy machines or to establish slaughterhouses. This would mean such a program would have to be established for at least 20 years!

And the point is that I know actors in civil societies who would engage in such programs but they are different from the recipients of the current aid.

But the main problem for me is that even though such initiatives have been started the whole political mainstream still supports the opposite way of global industrial concentration in the use of land and energy.

So we have a conflict in goals and in Germany there is no discussion about that.

---



credits freedom of information legal privacy policy


# Designs of the time 2007

Tuesday 22 March

Site Search


- home
- what was dott 07?**
  - who was dott 07?
  - about north east england**
  - the robert stephenson centre
  - a new approach to design
  - north east high tech - then and now
- dott 07 festival
- dott debates
- dott blog
- energy
- food
- health
- movement
- school
- vital signs
- map of projects
- contact us
- publications
- best links

## A New Approach to Design



Programme director John Thackara shares his views on a new approach to design.

## About North East England



### About North East England

Stretching from Northumberland down through Tyne & Wear and County Durham to Tees Valley in the South, North East England has a strong heritage around design and innovation.

Tyneside is one of the birthplaces of the modern age. Here, key aspects of the industrial revolution were born that changed the world. Innovations from the North East paved the way for technological developments in transport, communications and mass production which today we take so much for granted.

An abundance of natural resources initially stimulated the growth of industry on Tyneside. Coal had been mined in the area since the fourteenth century; this stimulated the development of the world's earliest railways in the North East during the 1700s. Coal also enabled the development of industries like chemicals, glass and soap which were demanded by the growing population of industrial Tyneside.

The expansion of industry in the region was driven by such great industrial pioneers as George Stephenson, William Armstrong, Charles Parsons and Joseph Swan. George Stephenson (1781-1848) is often referred to as the 'Father of the Railways'. In 1824 George, with his son Robert, formed an engineering business and workshop in Forth Street Newcastle, specifically for the building of locomotives. Their innovations culminated in the construction of Stephenson's most famous locomotive, The Rocket.

Dott 07's office is located in one of the industrial sheds, now named [The Robert Stephenson Centre](#). "The first rail in the railway age" sits next to the web team's office.

The second approach is an English one. I don't know much about it but a design student in Berlin made me aware of it. She wanted to find out if product design could contribute to regional development and she realized that in Great Britain some designers are already working on that.

From what I saw on their website they're trying to establish new partnerships between rural and urban places, going into the schools, supporting the urban gardening movement and above all trying to find innovative solutions for better conditions in the regions.

There are new materials, new technologies and new consumer interests that may give mental and financial scopes for establishing them in the regional economic sense— and there is a vision of a new manufacturing culture between tradition and industry.

In a time of a demographic crisis the people in the regions might be interested in finding out if this can work.



By the way, the design student tried something similar in Germany. She used willow to create a new material and made crates from it for gardeners selling their produce directly to the public at the market.

That material may lead to a new substantial usage of the willow that was an important tree in the past, which now is almost forgotten despite its use as an energy source.

She presented her results to the public and the people were quite interested. I truly appreciate these efforts from a professional group that usually has nothing to do with regional economic development. The normal case for a designer is to do his job for an industrial purpose. To leave this framework is at least respectable.

But to be honest – I don't know if it actually is possible to generate manufactured local products by designers that anybody can buy. Maybe that's why designers are step by step becoming regional managers, so their whole professional profile is changing.

---





My last example: The Bavarian milk farmer Romuald Schaber wrote a book called “Blutmilch” – Blood Milk. It tells the story of his political fight for fair milk prices in Europe.

He managed to find partners all over Europe so today there is a European Milk board, trying to establish more strict milk quota in the European Community.

He argued that if the quota would be just about 5-7 % lower, the prices would suddenly rise and the farmers would breathe again. The consumers would not bear the main disprofit and the milk industries and the European milk farmers would have a chance to survive.

I couldn't verify his reasoning but that's not the issue I'm talking about here – it's the political character of this engagement.

The initiative is not one of the government's and it is also different from the self organized and spontaneous action of the designers'. It is an attempt to establish new rules for a local production that is sold on a big market.

Meanwhile these farmers have tried to bring a “fair” milk called “Faironika” on the market. Whether they will succeed remains an open question.

By the way, you are not allowed to indicate the region, where the milk cows were grazed. You can only name the place of the creamery. That is a success of the milk industry. They argued it would be an unfair advantage if the small farmers could advertise with local brands!

---

Now I'd like to complete and compare the different ways of bringing forward regional economics with you.

Are there other strategies you could add?

And where do you see the best chances to succeed?