Editors:

ARL — Academy of Regional Sciences and Regional Planning, Hanover
BBR — Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning, Bonn
IfL — Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography (IfL), Leipzig
IOER — Leibniz Institute of Ecological and Regional Development, Dresden
IRS — Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning, Erkner (near Berlin)

Responsible for the 2008 edition:

BBR — Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning
Wendelin Strubelt (Ed.)

Guiding Principles for Spatial Development in Germany

With 44 Figures and 6 Tables
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Wendelin Strubelt
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For the third time, the five leading German research institutes for spatial planning and policy – beyond German universities – offer an international audience a focused overview over their engagement in scientific analyses and political counselling.

This time we have concentrated our papers around the topic of the development and the formulation of guiding principles, concepts, or visions – in German we use a term not yet well known in international contexts, *Leitbilder* – for spatial planning and policy. For the non-German audience it might be important to know that, within the German context, we are dealing with a rather complex federal system.

On the one hand, this complexity results in a very fragmented structure of formal and legal duties and actual decision-making beyond any established hierarchical assumptions for administrative efficiency. On the other hand, this form of a cooperating and competing political system with its different constituencies and bureaucracies allows for or supports different views to be developed and presented. Faced with such a fragmented national structure, the analysis of spatial planning and policy needs to carefully differentiate between the various levels of decision-making and the interactions between them. With the contributions at hand, we have assumed to cover this complex picture.

In this regard, this book reflects the use of concepts or visions – *Leitbilder* – for spatial planning and policy at the different federal levels. This includes the European level or cross-border relations at the macro level and the micro level of the local community as well. It includes rather theoretical reflections about the “philosophies” behind such concepts as well as the very concrete analysis of local concepts required by local communities with different historical traditions and backgrounds. It includes analyses about the physical background of urban planning and the concepts providing means of cooperation needed for spatial planning and policy along national borders.

Thus, the reader may find a lot of information and analyses from a very complicated field of policy-making, of conceptual framing of spatial development. Perhaps this picture of federal interacting seems strange to foreign readers, but it may provide valuable insight, especially if we take into consideration that such complicated interaction will comprise our future. On account of the necessary interactions in a Europe of regions, this implies the absence of a strict or single national and supra-national authority. The fading away of strict structures and the rise of fragmented structures throughout might very well be our future.

This book is a common endeavour of the five German institutes for spatial planning and policy. Again, it intends to strengthen the position of German spatial analysis in the international contexts. It is in the hand of our readers whether we succeed.
2 What is a „Leitbild“?
Some Reflections on the Origin and Use of the German Expression
Horst Zimmermann

2.1 Purpose and Structure of the Paper

The German government document of 2006 on “Leitbilder und Handlungsstrategien in Deutschland” was the result of two years of professional and political discussion (BMVBS 2006a: 1). The author was part of that process and, having analyzed much earlier processes of forming similar policy documents on spatial planning (Zimmermann 1966), felt stimulated to document the differences and similarities in dealing with such concepts.

The central concept is that of „Leitbild“ (plural “Leitbilder”), which dominates title and substance of the document of 2006. The paper therefore tries to lay open the roots of that concept first (B), and in particular to point out its both empirical and normative elements. The example of the new growth Leitbild of 2006 is then used to show how scientific arguments and political intentions can be kept separate in a fruitful new way (C). From this starting point, the new Leitbild generation of 2006 is then analyzed as to its content and function (D). The paper ends with a critical note on the use of the Leitbild notion as such (E).

The field of visions and concepts in spatial planning is very wide, and to fill it completely could easily lead to an entire book. Therefore, it is necessary to point out what the author did not intend to do. First of all, no international comparison of the use of such concepts in practical spatial planning was meant to be carried out. The specialist will easily be able to point out that in some country and at some point in time the applied concept bears quite some similarity to a Leitbild. Second, it was not planned to embed the German development in the wider planning theory literature. Instead, the intention is (1) to lay open the roots of the somewhat specific German expression of “Leitbild” (with the somewhat special nature already to be gathered from the difficulty of translating the term adequately into English), and (2) to demonstrate how, by continuous use of the term, a modern content has been given to it, helpful to the German discussion, exemplified by the Leitbild “Growth and innovation”. This narrow perspective was chosen due to the fact that the entire

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1 For details of this document see the other contributions in this volume. – All literal quotations from German sources are translations by the author.

2 The author is grateful to an unknown referee who pointed out that in several instances the earlier version could have led to a wider expectation than the author had intended to meet.
What is a “Leitbild”? volume happens to be dedicated to “Leitbilder”, so the foreign reader might be interested in the origin and development of this expression.

2.2 A Term and its Historical Role

The roots of the Expression “Leitbild”

For a foreign reader with some knowledge of the German language, the key term „Leitbild“ in relation to the spatial dimension, as it is used in the influential government document of 2006, must be puzzling. It does not correspond directly to any English equivalent. It is also not very common and definitely not very old in the German language. The authoritative German dictionary Brockhaus circumscribes Leitbilder exclusively as rather personal ideas of man (Brockhaus 1990: 249) and not as political items.

At least in its spatial relation, the origin of the use of this term can be traced down precisely. E. Dittrich asserts that he first used the term in a lecture in 1953 (Dittrich 1953; according to Dittrich 1962: 2; see also Storbeck 1982: 212). He circumscribes Leitbilder as „mental formative principles, which bring all the social context elements together for a given historical epoch “ (Dittrich 1962: 6; SARO 1961: 51). What is meant becomes clearer when he refers to the more general and non-spatial Leitbild of the social market economy, as it was introduced by A. Müller-Armack (Dittrich 1962: 16; SARO 1961: 67) and which was very influential in shaping Germany after World War II (see below).

To develop such a very general concept and to position it high up in a politically relevant setting has to be understood in connection with the historical background of the 1950s and early 1960s. Politically, one wanted to move away from the Nazi ideology, in this case from „the postulates of a holistic spatial research and spatial order“ (Wurzer 1962: 4). Therefore it probably seemed helpful to refer to an overarching concept which contrasted with the concepts of the previous era. But at the same time this discussion occurred in a particular historic phase and under given methodological perceptions. The notion of an „order“ as some guiding principle was typical for this time, not least in the form of the „social market economy order“ as mentioned before. To develop the notion of such an „order“ involved strong value judgments. The discussion is therefore not purely scientific, but is heavily interwoven

3 This is the more astonishing as the similar term “Leitmotiv” is directly used in English (This aspect I owe to Manfred Sinz).
4 However, Dehne says that „presumably“ the term Leitbild has already been used in the early 19. century, but he does not quote here (Dehne 2005: 608).
5 Dittrich himself had held a non-influential post in the academic planner scene during the Nazi period. But he was then one of the few who turned away immediately, and he was apparently the only one who admitted, for instance, that there had been a racist motive behind the settlement policy of the Nazis in the East (Leendertz 2008: 15-17).
with political statements or at least implicit political assumptions of the authors. This does not provide problems as long as the discussion occurs between scientists and politicians, with both sides adding identifiable elements into an amalgamated product. What is disturbing in this context is the scientific interpretation of the way in which a Leitbild is derived. In the quoted sources, Dittrich clearly has the feeling that he, as a scientist, can develop such a Leitbild, not noticing that his personal value judgments enter the outcome and determine the result decisively. The methodological problem is: Ten other scientists would have developed ten other forms of Leitbild with respect to spatial conditions in Germany at that time. The normative content becomes evident when he says (in a twisted way, also in German): „If confronted with a task, one must be able to say what one wants, and not only, what one could want privately (without bearing special responsibility), but what one, when being responsible, must desire, or ought to desire, as being ‚in order’ “ (Dittrich 1962: 3). What clearly emerges from this reasoning is the message that the scientist is supposed to develop and introduce value judgments in the statements he gives on political issues.

All of this may sound artificial to a foreigner, but it is necessary to understand how science was dealing with political issues at that time. A scientist then often believed that in his function as a scientist he was able to make better value judgments than others, a notion which, in the Popper tradition of science, has been given up long since. And it remains to be seen how the new approach of 2006 avoids – or does not avoid – this pitfall.

The early role of the Leitbild in Spatial Planning

From what was said before, it is evident that a Leitbild is a concept which is positioned high up in the goal-instrument-hierarchy. Very influential in developing this hierarchy was a document from 1961, both powerful and, for spatial planning, influential - the report of the Expert Committee for Spatial Order (SARO 1961), commissioned by the federal government. In its terms of reference, the government explicitly demanded the Committee to specify a Leitbild, as all future government activities with spatial implications would have to be oriented towards it (SARO 1961: 7). As to the aforementioned separation of science and political intention, it is noteworthy that the SARO experts were not only scientists, but half of the ten members had been delegated from various ministries. The SARO report set out by defining two tiers of Leitbild, plus two additional steps.

The societal Leitbild

The Committee defined as top of the hierarchy a societal Leitbild with three elements: freedom, social balance, and security. They correspond closely to what had been formulated for the social market economy by Walter Eucken (Eucken 1952/1990). He had developed his famous set of concrete principles for a market economy against the background of a separate chapter on “Freedom and order” (Zimmermann 1994: 138). According to the SARO Committee, one element of this societal Leitbild is the Leitbild of Spatial Order.
What is a “Leitbild”?

The Leitbild of Spatial Order (Raumordnung)

Raumordnung is one of the most intensively discussed concepts in German spatial planning philosophy, especially if contrasted with Raumplanung. The latter is easy to translate as spatial planning. But what is in comparison meant by Raumordnung? Dittrich, whose ideas clearly entered the SARO report, fiercely argues that „spatial order“ (Raumordnung) must never be confounded or mixed with „spatial planning“ (Raumplanung), not to speak of such technical matters as planning instruments (Dittrich 1962: 3). Unfortunately it is very difficult to translate „Raumordnung“ in a meaningful way. A very helpful volume on German-English planning vocabulary (Turowski 2002: 103) translates it in the same way as Raumplanung, namely by “spatial planning”. Consequently, this meaning, which Dittrich attributed to Raumordnung in explicit confrontation to Raumplanung, is supposed to convey something more elaborate. Raumordnung is definitely not implying the empirical setting in a given spatial situation, as the geometrical understanding of the word „Ordnung“ could suggest. It is a more philosophical notion, related to a Leitbild as the guiding principle, which in turn fills „Ordnung“ with its non-empirical content6. This is similar to the use of the word “Ordnung” in relation to the social market economy as the central concept of the German “Ordnungstheorie”, for which again there exists no adequate English translation. The term “Leitbild” itself is, with respect to spatial planning, translated as “perspectives” (Turowski 2002: 101) in the German-English planning vocabulary volume, which is probably as close as one can get to its meaning, though the German word “Perspektiven” also exists and is free of philosophical connotation, being closer to outlook or – well – perspectives in the usual English meaning7.

The Principles of Raumordnung

From the Leitbild of spatial planning so-called principles of Raumordnung have been derived at a later stage. In the present federal law 15 such principles have been laid down. All fields of spatial activities are to be “developed”, “secured”, “balanced” etc. Looking at them more closely, these finally are tangible fields of policy with – still rather general – directions into which policies are expected to move. In SARO (1961: 54-63) the respective 14 items are called the details of the “Leitbild der Raumordnung.”

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6 Recent use of the term Raumordnung is more down-to-earth. Sinz (2005: 863) sees it as the position where “development perspectives beyond individual places and policy fields” are laid down.

7 For the recent use of the term “perspectives” see below section D I. – A translation of “Leitbild” as “vision” does not seem focused enough on intended activities. The Webster dictionary (Webster 1989: 1597) interprets the nearest meaning of “vision” as “the act or power of anticipating that which will or may come to be: prophetic vision; the vision of an entrepreneur”.
The Level of Plans and Instruments

Leitbilder and principles then are intended to guide the development of the concrete planning procedures at the federal, Länder and local levels and the execution of such plans. Whether the respective plans then are already called instruments, or whether the instruments implement the plans, is a matter of further definition.

This hierarchical structure of the argument is by no means only of historical importance. The presently valid federal law in this field is called „Raumordnungs-gesetz des Bundes“ of 1997 and was last amended in 2004. It contains (1) a so-called Leitvorstellung, which clearly corresponds to the word Leitbild, and (2) principles of Raumordnung, which “are to be applied in the spirit of the Leitvorstellung” (§ 2 (1)). The Leitvorstellung itself refers to the three-pillar version of sustainability, which is a modern type of high-ranking goal and thus means some progress in rendering the concept more tangible. – What is interesting in this context is the fact that in § 18 of this law the federal government is supposed to develop “Leitbilder”, and with the document mentioned in the beginning that is exactly what it did.

In historical perspective it is interesting that the Leitbild (or Leitvorstellung as the synonym) was not introduced in the first federal law of 1965, though the content of the pertinent § 1 was roughly the same as that of the next law of 1989. It was only in the latter that the term Leitvorstellung appears in § 1, which means that the Leitbild approach had even gained strength in the meantime.

2.3 The Recent Connection of the Leitbild Discussion with Theory: The Example of the “Growth and Innovation” Leitbild

A new Type of Discussion Process

As other contributions in this volume spell out more precisely, the federal government together with the Länder started a process which led to the Leitbild document of 2006. In the following it will be pointed out how the new document deals with the challenges which became visible from the past example: How has the scientist – or more precisely the theory of the time – been integrated in the process? How has the problem of value judgments been treated in this context? Such questions will be dealt with by looking at the example of the new growth Leitbild.

The basic document mentions two years of scientific and political discussion, together with analyses by the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR) in Bonn (BMVBS 2006a: 1). At the heart of the process was Manfred Sinz in the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Development (BMVBS). At all stages of this process he summed up the latest stage of the process, brought the intermediate results to the professional public and monitored the discussion process through several workshops, internal discussions etc. (see for instance Sinz 2006 and Aring and Sinz 2006).
To turn to the “Growth and innovation” Leitbild as one example of the new approach, this process started with the geographical presentation of past trends and driving forces, drawn and presented by the BBR in an analytical empirically-based way. In the subsequent workshops it became evident that the underlying regional economics had substantially changed over the past years.

From Convergence Theory to new Economic Geography

The theoretical framework for the previous decades of spatial planning had been the convergence theory\(^8\). Its essence can be illustrated in a metaphor. The agglomerations can be visualized as spilling over, so to speak. Labour and land are scarce and therefore expensive. The opposite is true for structurally weak peripheral regions, because these factors of production are available in overabundance there and thus are very reasonable in price. Consequently, these factors rush towards the peripheral regions. The economic result is first a narrowing of factor proportions and then of factor prices, both “converging” to the same levels. For spatial planning, this theoretical perception meant a great advantage, because the objectives of regional equalization and of furthering national growth were in harmony. If the poor regions were supported by regional policy, this was, from the perspective of this theory, at the same time good for national growth, because those regions were supported where growth tended to move anyway\(^9\).

Since the 1990s a new perspective developed in regional economics. Paul Krugman and his New Economic Geography are quoted most often, but Grossman/Helpman should also be mentioned (Zimmermann 2004). In this view, an agglomeration is no longer seen as an accident during economic growth processes, to be amended soon by convergence. Instead, agglomerations are natural outcomes of the growth process, so to speak. The central argument is decreasing cost of transportation, for goods and services, and above all for information. This lower transportation cost allows many production processes to now occur in one place, whereas before they had to be spread over the country in order to lower the transportation cost. In addition, the regional concentration allows profiting from economies of scale. This in turn permits higher salaries for high-quality workforce, thereby further improving effectiveness and efficiency in agglomerations. Results from other disciplines, like the sociological research in “creative milieus” or the scientific results for the knowledge economy, have corroborated the basic hypothesis. This states that it is the modern agglomeration (defined spaciously) which is at the heart of future growth chances in high-income societies, and this can happen even if this agglomeration itself does not grow at a given point in time. Though growth also occurs in other regions and though the agglomeration process cannot go on ad

\(^8\) For the following see Zimmermann (2004).

\(^9\) The convergence theory has been said to still hold between EU member countries, but not inside the larger member countries (Puga 2001), for which Germany can serve as example.
Infinitum, there seems to be widespread agreement on the great importance of these regions for growth.

For spatial planning, this result is disillusioning. Helping the poor regions is no longer simultaneously policy for national growth. Instead, the money has to be earned in the agglomerations (and other growth regions) first, which therefore have to be observed and supported in spatial planning. Only then can help for the poor regions be provided, and on purely distributional grounds.

**From Analysis to Political Statement**

These scientific results were entered into the discussion process for the new Leitbilder. They showed that sticking with the previous “equalisation-first”-philosophy would be very costly for the country in the long run.

So far it was science. In the discussion process the political side responded by developing schemes which indicated a way to further national growth. One of them was the definition of “European Metropolitan Regions” in Germany. As much as can be said against their large number and the realistic potential of some of them, developing the scheme certainly was one way of demonstrating that the growth objective was taken more seriously than before.

But what was more important and new was the fact that, based on the fact finding of BBR and the results of the theoretical discussion, the political side drew up a normatively complemented Leitbild-graph. It constituted what policy wanted to achieve in the long run, accepting some deficiencies, mainly in eastern Germany, and focusing on agglomerations and on the additionally defined growth centres outside metropolitan regions (sorting them out was an achievement of BBR). On the whole, the example of the growth Leitbild of 2006 demonstrates how the scientific content can be kept separate from the political statement, with the one permitting a sound format of the other.

**2.4 2006: A Modern Version of a Leitbild**

**The Documents**

The result of the Leitbild discussion in the early years of the millennium were various documents of BMVBS, prepared and sometimes (co-)authored by BBR. The decisive document was that of June 30, 2006 (BMVBS 2006a), adopted that day by the Standing Conference of Federal and State Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning (MKRO). Its heading was “Leitbilder und Handlungsstrategien für die Raumentwicklung in Deutschland”. A somewhat popularized version was published the same year in German and English under the – somewhat different – title “Perspektiven der Raumentwicklung” (“Perspectives of Spatial Development in Germany”, BMVBS 2006b), though in the German text the term Leitbild is still used extensively.
Towards a new Type of Content

New efforts to redefine the meaning and substance of Leitbild had been under way for some years. The old definition, which had been contained in the federal law between 1989 and 1998, was apparently too vague to serve modern spatial planning. In an overview article of 1995 in the Handwörterbuch der Raumordnung Lendi had brought together the thinking of the time, including the critical points of vagueness and missing scientific basis. He defines Leitbild as a situation which is meant to be in the future and is to be aimed at by concerted action (Lendi 1995: 624). Ten years later in the next edition of the Handwörterbuch der Raumordnung Dehne follows a similar approach, mentioning the critical points of vagueness and non-scientific elements (Dehne 2005: 611-612). As to the argument of not being scientifically based, he adds quotations that this might even lead to mental manipulation and cites Theodor Adorno, who supposed that the concept of Leitbild “even has a soft military sound” (Dehne 2005: 612 on Adorno 1967).

Regarding content, Dehne explicitly mentions two items. One is the long-existing demand for similar living-conditions in all regions of the country. The second is sustainability, with all of its three “pillars”, the economic, social, and ecological sustainability. Looking at this more closely, the similarity of living conditions is contained in the social aspect of sustainability, which in turn is in considerable conflict with the other two, especially the economic sustainability (Zimmermann 2003). Sustainability also had become the content of the Federal Law on Spatial Planning after its 1998 revision.

Much can be said against the vagueness of this new Leitbild (now called – synonymously – Leitvorstellung in the law), as can be said against the concept of sustainability as such (Zimmermann 2003). But at least it is connected to a wide range of literature based on environmental momentum, and it is no longer a semi-philosophical reasoning focused on spatial planning alone. – This three-fold sustainability is, last not least, at the same time the structural basis for the now valid version of the Leitbild documents.

Contents and Structure of the 2006 Leitbilder

Other contributions in this volume deal with individual elements of the new Leitbilder. Therefore, only some overriding remarks follow here. The first relates once more to definition. The basic document refers to the “Leitvorstellung” in the federal law and then, without further comment on definitions, moves on to three “Leitbilder”, thereby connecting itself explicitly to a German tradition of having a Leitbild at some place near the top of the goal-instrument-hierarchy.

But what is called Leitbild in this document could as well be termed three objectives or goals, and this would simultaneously provide a clear meaning of the heading of that document. “Objectives and action strategies for the spatial development in Germany” would be easily understood without having to look up the word “Leitbild”. The English reader is saved from this necessity, because in its unofficial translation of the heading of the basis document the Ministry calls
2.5 Concluding Remark: „Leitbild“ – what for?

The new version of Leitbild, as laid down in the basic document (BMVBS 2006a), constitutes a positive development from SARO and Dittrich as well as from later statements based on their ideas and often wording. Looking back it was a notion lacking clarity methodologically, originally formed by a scientist (E. Dittrich) alone, and then jointly by scientists and ministry delegates in the SARO group. It now has proceeded to an explicitly political statement of a political body, and at the same time it is based on solid empirical investigation.

The final question is, however, why the term Leitbild (or its equivalent of Leitvorstellung in the federal law) still seems necessary. Alright…maybe the vague notion of sustainability could be connected with this – equally vague - heading.

That change to the better had started earlier, namely with a document of the ministry of 1993 (ORA 1993). That had already gone from the single multi-faceted notion of a Leitbild to five separate Leitbilder for five policy fields like settlement structure, environment, transportation etc.
This does not do much harm, because more stringent discussions and any focused political program can do without it anyway, working instead immediately with concrete well-described subjects in a specific field. Whether or not these can then be subsumed under any of the three “pillars” of sustainability, is more a matter of word games than a direct derivation of any substance. The author has the impression that German spatial planning would lose close to nothing if the term Leitbild was replaced by “goals”, “objectives”, “perspectives” etc., to be followed by instruments, action plans etc. Scientists would then take these objectives as political statements and would, instead of pretending to provide them, simply discuss them – as this paper did with the term Leitbild!
References


14 What is a “Leitbild”??
Introduction

With discussion on the “Concepts and Strategies for Spatial Development in Germany” put forward by the Standing Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning in Germany (the MKRO), the burgeoning importance of growth areas and metropolises as engines of growth and dynamic performers has become unmistakably clear. However, alongside these regions, there are also numerous rural regions and other more peripheral areas in Germany, located outside the more narrowly drawn boundaries of metropolitan conurbations which, from the perspective of regional economy and economic geography, are currently displaying positive and sustainable development, thus contradicting the more generalised impression of such regions as “areas of shrinkage and population depletion” (cf. BBR 2005: 85ff.). These areas exhibit major potential for growth in tandem with rising population and employment numbers and a high level of gross value added. These regions should also be made the subject of attention and of funding in the future, in the context of securing parity of living conditions in order to support existing positive trends.

Comprehensive spatial planning at the federal level has recognised the potential of such regions to contribute to macroeconomic growth. In the document “Concepts and Strategies for Spatial Development in Germany” (cf. Secretariat of the standing conference of state ministers with responsibility for spatial planning in Germany (MKRO) at the Federal Ministry for Transport, Building and Urban Affairs (BMVBS) 2006), which places the vision of “Growth and innovation” on a par with the other two visions of “Ensuring services of public interest” and “Conservation of resources, shaping of cultural landscapes”, it is clearly stated that, even outside metropolitan regions, there are other regions and locations which make a major contribution to economic growth and display a distinct and sustainable development profile complementing the metropolitan regions (cf. ibid.: 12). Federal-level spatial planning also recognises the need to target resources on supporting such growth areas since they may well rank internationally as centres of innovation and of specialist technological excellence (cf. ibid.: 15). Moreover, the graphics illustrating this vision do indeed depict possible “growth areas outside the more narrowly drawn boundaries of metropolitan conurbations” (cf. figure below).
What options exist for supporting and enhancing existing engines of growth, and for initiating similar developments in other regions? It is precisely to investigate such matters and to develop concrete proposals for developing and assisting such areas – in a reworking of the concept of endogenous regional development, so to speak – that the Federal Ministry for Transport, Building and Urban Affairs (BMVBS), working in partnership with the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR) within the programme entitled “Demonstration projects of spatial planning”, has called upon the services of the research project on “Factors underlying successful engines of growth beyond metropolitan areas”.¹

¹ The project was undertaken between October 2006 and October 2007 at the chair of regional development and spatial planning at the University of Kaiserslautern by Prof. Dr. Gabi Troeger-Weiß, Dr. Hans-Jörg Domhardt, Christina Kaltenegger and Andreas Hemesath. The project team was supported by Jens-Uwe Staats of the Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs (BMVBS) and by Dr. Rupert Kawka of the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR). Detailed findings have been published (in German) in: Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Wohnungswesen (BMVBS) / Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung (BBR) (ed., 2008): Erfolgsbedingungen von Wachstumsmotoren außerhalb der Metropolen, Werkstatt: Praxis, No. 56, Berlin/Bonn.