

Transformation Processes and Cross-Border Cultures – a Milieu-Sensitive Approach toward Fractures of Decline and Growth

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Abstract. The article deals with the management of the complexity and dynamics of urban and institutional transformation of cross-border entities. That these are often characterized by parallelism and fractures of shrinkage and growth, by rapid change and stubborn persistence, is seen as an obstacle to the development and social cohesion that the EU sees as a precondition for the competitiveness of places. Based upon research in the twin towns of Frankfurt an der Oder and Słubice, which dealt with cross-border urban development and university cooperation, we suggest in this article that utilizing the heuristic concept of “KnowledgeScapes” allows a better understanding of factors supporting or hindering development. Turning the concept around to actively further context-oriented building of communicative capacities, it could help to enhance opportunities which are particular to border situations. In two case studies, the authors found that “misfits” and barriers existing on an institutional level and between different milieus may be a driving force for learning processes, and could be encouraged by providing institutionalized and milieu-sensitive opportunities for contact and discourse in urban development.

1. Introduction

It was one of the EU's goals in the Lisbon accord of 2000 to speed up the development of the knowledge society as a basis for economic growth and wealth-based social cohesion. Taking up the challenge presented by the different speeds of development that threaten the homogeneity of development, and that would eventually lead to greater disparities in Europe, was among the major targets of this agenda for the future. However, many data indicate that since then, and despite considerable effort, the socio-economic and cultural rifts produced by the different paths and paces of transformation in Europe are deepening, rather than being levelled out. Whereas there exist dynamic centres of excellence and openness toward the adaptation of new knowledge as a basis for social and economic growth, other regions are seemingly driven by parallel developments of growth and decline, leading to a polarization that results in closing out innovations, and these regions falling further behind on the track toward the knowledge society.

The department of the Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning (henceforth IRS) researching the "coevolution of knowledge and space" considered that looking at scenarios of rapid transformation, and at locations where extreme socio-spatial and cultural contrasts meet, could lead to an enhanced understanding of the reasons for these differences in adopting knowledge as a driving force. However, as an institute dedicated to practical and governance-oriented basic research, the expectation was also that understanding factors which further and inhibit knowledge based development would lead to results that could be turned into policies, and promising forms of governance.

The paths in the development toward the knowledge-based society are manifold and complex, as the German postunification transformation is showing. It was an early postunification assumption that it would probably take a decade to develop a homogeneous east-west balance with respect to knowledge-based governance. Some even thought that the new eastern states (*Länder*), exposed to rapid institutional modernization and supported by the most up to date infrastructures, might overtake the west and turn out to be the locomotive of knowledge-based change. Two decades later, as shrinking cities (Oswalt 2004) and brain-

-drain (Matthiesen 2004) rather indicate a slow-down of development, especially in the peripheral eastern regions, it has become apparent that this is not the case. Institutional transplantation and good infrastructure are not sufficient to kick-start an enhanced use of knowledge in development. Physical factors, such as distances to centres, or the availability of natural resources are playing a role. But the post-unification experience in Germany shows that openness toward knowledge and innovations is rather based upon a mix of cultural factors. The social history of regions (Fichter, Jähnke, and Knorr-Siedow 2004; Lange, Büttner and Matthiesen 2003; Schmidt 2004) seems to be as important as current specific milieu structures or the connectivity of actors and their milieus within a region, and toward global development. Thus it is not beyond expectation, that despite a concentration of post-unification public investment and consumption subsidies in the east, growth has appeared only in certain spots. Development was much more positive where a culture of knowledge and innovation has embedded development policies; and where reserve and a structural conservatism had remained dominant, innovations have often been fended off.

However, a look at eastern Germany's post-unification development shows more than just regional differences. As transformation takes place, former homogenous milieus are separating into often rather smaller innovative sectors, and those uncoupled from development. There is a close social and spatial proximity between the different speeds of development, and growth and decline. With respect to knowledge as a driving force, Germany has developed into a highly differentiated landscape of high urban hills and mountainous ranges of metropolitan regions (Kujath and Schmidt 2007), and of large plains and deep valleys falling off toward the peripheries. And whereas mountainous knowledge ranges are interlinked across some southern and western borders (such the Basel triangle; Cologne, Aachen, Maastricht and on toward Lille), such peaks of knowledge are rare along the eastern borders, particularly along the German-Polish border. Looking at neighbouring Poland, the indications are the same. As major metropolitan regions and narrow transit corridors are becoming knowledge nodes, peripheral Poland is losing out (Kuklinski 2004).

Border regions are especially prone to becoming uncoupled from knowledge-based development as they are often peripheral from both

countries' perspectives. Whereas in the first postsocialist decade, high transaction barriers impeded cross-border action – despite efforts at building joint Euro-regions – since the lowering of the physical borders, the cultural inhibitions to interchange are becoming more important in determining whether borders are remaining places of division and low activity, or whether they can be turned around into becoming bridges of interculturally enriching communication and of wealth generation based upon a proactive use of knowledge.

This article focuses on two case-studies carried out in the Polish-German twin towns of Słubice and Frankfurt an der Oder, a typical point of interchange for two otherwise rather peripheral regions – eastern Brandenburg and the western Polish border region of Lubusz voivodeship. The thematic focus is on (a) urban development and planning, and (b) an outstanding case of international university collaboration, and the pitfalls and opportunities encountered in enhancing the knowledge cultures “at the border.” From our perspective, these cases are of a paradigmatic importance for understanding the different paces of opening up to knowledge-driven development and incorporating the border as a positive element of added value through incorporating difference and proximity. Whereas managing the urban region of Frankfurt an der Oder and Słubice is an opportunity to understand the challenges of postsocialist normality along the border, the Collegium Polonicum is one of the outstanding models for a cross-border knowledge-space developing in Europe.

2. A Border Region in Transition – and Shrinking?

The region of Frankfurt an der Oder and Słubice has been in constant transformation since the end of the Second World War. However, whereas Frankfurt an der Oder soon became one of the fourteen district capitals of the German Democratic Republic and “rose out of the ruins” (as the GDR’s national anthem had it) as the proud “City of Semiconductor Works,” Słubice, once the smaller “Damm-Vorstadt” across the river, remained more of an underused transit-post until 1990. But from a knowledge perspective, Frankfurt an der Oder also never made it beyond a certain threshold. While its population grew until the

early 1980s, and the town offered housing and all basic amenities for production workers, the knowledge-intensive basic semiconductor research was carried out in the republic's southern centres. With respect to urban life and cultural institutions, "except for a rich musical life, nothing outside of the mainstream happened ... Berlin's attractions probably lay too near." As early as during the mid-1980s, the population of some 87,000, which at one stage was planned to rise to over one 100,000, started to shrink, and since the 1990s the decline has drastically accelerated. The town currently has a population of about 67,000, and estimates for the 2020 population vary between an optimistic 54,000, and a mere 44,000 with a dramatically growing proportion of the elderly.

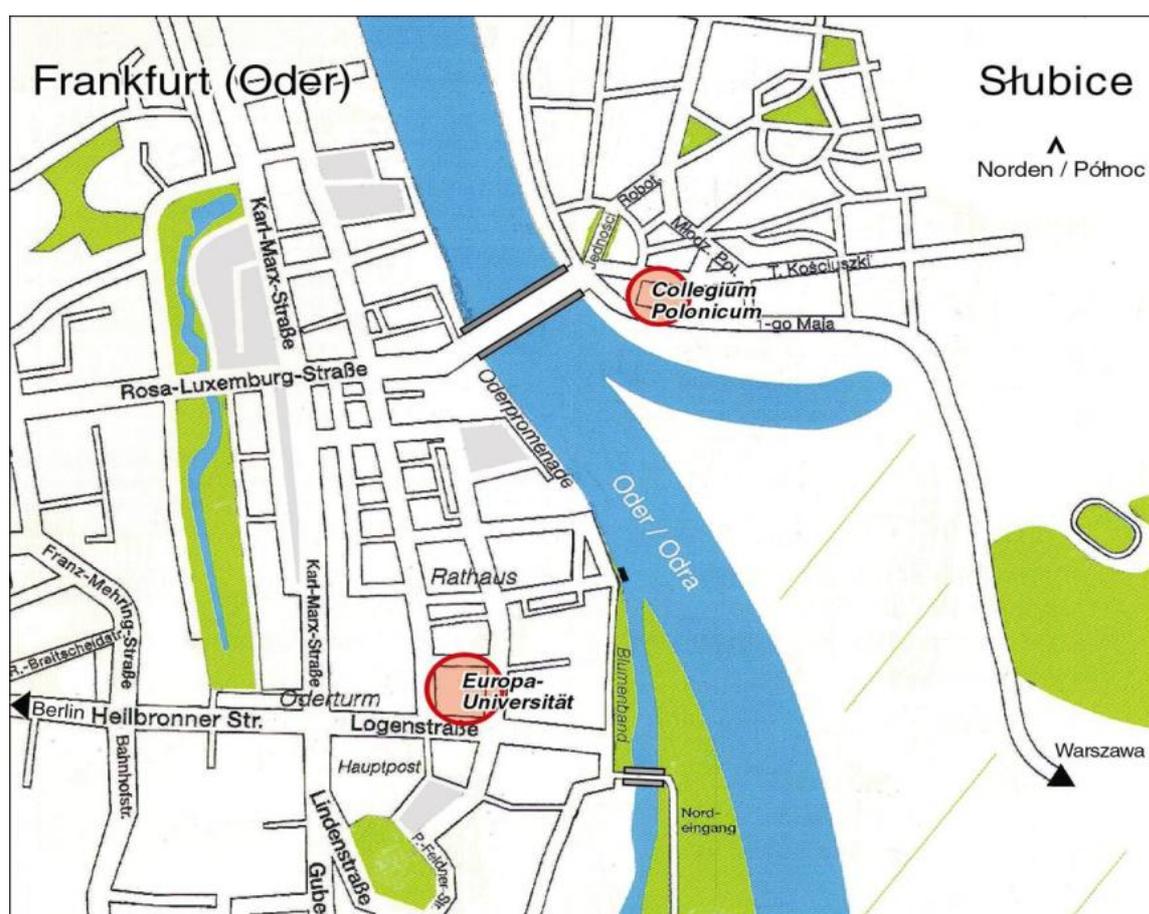


Figure 1. Map of central Frankfurt an der Oder and Słubice.

Source: Leibniz Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning

After German unification, Frankfurt an der Oder received a heavy blow in the loss of its district capital status and the crashing of its semiconductor industry. Thousands were sent into redundancy and through the rotating doors of no-exit training schemes. Since then the local unemployment rate has remained near 20 percent, although many active technical personnel have left.

2.1. Postunification Hopes for a Turn – Back to the Industrial Future?

The materially well cushioned east German transformation path perpetuated the notion held by many – residents as well as politicians – that possible development had to be centrally induced through government initiative, rather than as a result of civil self-governance. At around the turn of the millennium, the Communicant semiconductor facility promised a turnaround from decline into growth – back to into an industrialist future. When it failed to materialized at a great loss of public funds and private hope in 2003 (O’Brian 2004), it became apparent that the Brandenburg approach of putting the political emphasis on grand single-issue options had led away from other opportunities, and that the milieus that carried these had been partly marginalized (interview 4)¹.

In Frankfurt an der Oder innovative projects to strengthen the development from within the local civil society – owner- and neighbourhood-driven renewal, attempts at bundling smaller-scale investments locally (interviews 1 and 9) – were never embraced by the majority of decision-makers as possible core initiatives for a diversified future. Even the energetic establishment of a university – Viadrina European University – that really took off as an element of growth, inviting young people, academic knowledge, and considerable public and private investment to the region, was for a long time hardly seen by the majority of urban decision makers as a robust stepping stone on the way to turning the town toward a knowledge-oriented future. Thus neither the Collegium Polonicum – a unique and real cross-border collaboration between

¹ Quotations from interviews translated by the authors.

Viadrina and Poznań University – nor the cultural concept of a transnational location, “Slubfurt,” promoted by the artist Kurzwelly were seen as more than peripheral options. With their profile (law, economics, humanities, and cultural sciences) these new institutions were neither well enough linked to the past, nor to the neoindustrialist mainstream visions of the town’s future.

Developments that lay outside the industrial path and cultural concepts played an astonishingly small role in determining the town’s habitus. Considering that for more than a decade, a turn back to an industrialist future had seemed less likely than a postindustrial and knowledge driven future, the response to the concept of a “university and transnational double town” (Stadt Frankfurt an der Oder 2005) remained vague and had almost no urban planning consequences.

2.2. Knowledge Relations across River and Border

During the period of state socialism, “the officially emphasized cross border friendship was restricted to official administrative contact and some folklore” (interview 3), and except for the short period of thaw, the barriers in fact rose, because from the mid-1970s onward, the Poles were officially pronounced “unsafe comrades” in the socialist camp. Also after 1990, Frankfurt an der Oder’s relations with Słubice and the rest of the region across the river “have hardly been pursued proactively and with persistence” (interview 1). The same, however, applies for Słubice, which even after 1990 “had much less room for manoeuvre ... due to the centralist government system in Poland, and a feeling that local collaboration was not really encouraged by Warsaw” or by the German side (interview 4). Although there was a general understanding that the future lay in opening the borders, old established reservations and disbelief in possible win-win opportunities of cross-border initiatives have led to official cooperation remaining mostly formal (interviews 1 and 2).

The persistence of the closure against the Polish “other” was not only felt in official contact, but surfaced openly during the so-called “war of buns.” The quarrel was whether the cheap but undeniably good Polish bread rolls should be sold across the border in Frankfurt an der

Oder. But although the notion dominated in Frankfurt an der Oder that one should buy German goods so long as Germans were unemployed at such high rates, the cheap Polish market across the bridge, and incidentally near the Collegium Polonicum, boomed with German customers. And indeed, while growth rates in low-income Słubice had steadily risen since 1990 due to informal service initiatives, from car repair to cross-border dentistry, Frankfurt an der Oder's economy remained in a relative stalemate. Informal options either had no basis in the residents' repertoire of action, or else were subdued by formalities and plastered over by public subsidies. Also the rejection of a tram connection across the border bridge, suggested by the mayor, in a 2002 referendum could be interpreted as a signal of harsh closure – or insecurity – in the confrontation with new opportunities. In 2000, Frankfurt an der Oder's harsh milieu structures even made it into widely debated literature (Mendling 2000). The probably over-accentuating documentary *Neuland* (Newland) provided a show of arrogance and “self-protection” – proving most of all that east-west German stereotypes were as heavily grounded in the local milieus as German-Polish resentments – with a continuing threat of self-acceleration.

3. A Milieu-Sensitive Look at Two Different Urban Milieus

3.1. Case Study: Urban Milieus in Policy and Planning

In the first of our two case studies, the focus is on Frankfurt an der Oder and the role that milieus and their specific knowledge play in urban and cross border development. Relating to the debates about evidence-based (Faludi 2006) and milieu-oriented planning, urban actors from policy makers to planners, administrators and researchers, as well as members of civil society were asked what the role of professional and everyday milieus is in filtering expert planners' knowledge to become the foundation of action in the local political realm.

One assumption was that milieu influences and the respective tacit forms of knowledge often beat the logics of professional networks and expert knowledge, regardless of any grounding in evidence, as experts see it. The other assumption was that there are drawbacks as well as identifiable opportunities related to the dominance of milieus which can be utilized in a better grounded and more promising development discourse.

Cross-Border Perception in Policy and Planning

For a long time, urban planning in Frankfurt an der Oder has virtually turned its back on the river and the border. In a striking contrast to the international hype over waterfronts, town planning strangely treated parts of the historic inner city and the waterfront as an urban periphery, while peripheral panel estates were upgraded long after the risks of a shrinking population had become evident. For many years, rehabilitation projects and new developments happened either in a low key fashion or, like the planned new semiconductor factory, located toward the outskirts or along traffic infrastructures – following development concepts of the growth-oriented pre-unification period. Urbanity and vivid mixes in the centre were not on the decision makers' minds, and even “support for those private owners and investors who wanted to bring urban life back to Berisinchen [the nineteenth century city centre extension] was muffled” (interview 4). Many of these decisions have a basis in either “objective” reasons, among them the availability of state rehabilitation funds only for earmarked “programme areas,” or external investors' demands. But to an astonishing degree, decisions were taken that seem to contradict evidence, reason, and state-of-the art professional planning knowledge.

“... Germany has a really well established theoretical and practice-oriented system of planning. All types of information are available ... There are the German professional organizations and there is thematic discourse. The problem starts when that is overlaid by local interests, against which we as planners are not able to argue – given the concrete power structures. ... We have for a long time done the wrong things, although we professionals knew better ...” (interview 1).

Besides reflecting the harsh realities of economy, location, and political structures – which are outside of the realm of local politics

– Frankfurt an der Oder’s post unification urban development greatly reflects the strengths and weaknesses of different landscapes of local and supralocal milieus that influence the professional debate. On one hand, some of these milieus are the holders of formal and informal power, while others, indeed, are excluded. On the other hand, their influence on development is dependent on the degree of interconnectivity of their respective knowledge-repertoires and their ability to forge coalitions. Controlling different repertoires of knowledge – expert-knowledge, everyday-knowledge and institutional knowledge (Matthiesen 2004) – in a local overlay, they influence the urban development discourse in a way that even well placed and empirically grounded professional arguments only come to bear to a limited degree. But apart from professional knowledge being outplayed by “strong” unitary milieus, it also happens that culturally based concepts – such as those formulated in the “Slubfurt” metaphor of a joint urban region – are outplayed in power games.

Weak Civil Roots

Because Frankfurt an der Oder had been a town of a constant inner German immigration since the end of the war, the local milieus are characterized by “weak roots” (interview 1). More than 90 per cent – calculated from a survey conducted during 1980s – of the residents had come as refugees, or seeking labour. The newcomers “often found it difficult to accommodate themselves ... This may be one possible reason for the persistent inward closure of the various milieus and the juicy intermilieu conflicts ... never solidly established, they were mostly related to the workplace, which then broke away” (interview 1). After the “turn” of 1989 and deindustrialization, despite the material cushion of the German social transfer system, a great many were factually excluded from economic advancement and societal recognition, and even more felt so. While many key positions in the economy were taken over by a new wave of migrants from “the West,” a still-limited new middle class arose, leading to a pattern of socially and spatially segregated milieus.

There is only a relatively small group of urban decision makers and people active in the urban discourse: “Less than 100 people, including party activists, some professionals, and a limited number of cultural

actors [*Kulturschaffende*] who often show up ... not many in a city of over fifty thousand.” Especially important among them is the so-called semiconductor milieu that has undergone a change from being a defensive and closed milieu, hesitant toward any new development options during the 1990s, to an interestingly persistent and influential group. A third group, and probably the best interconnected, represents the wider cultural and scientific realm, including parts of the research staff of the university, and cultural actors like the Slubfurt initiative in their centre.

“The semiconductor milieu, if it can be called that, has taken a lot of the pre-unification structures to where they are today” (interview 3).

Ironically, after many technical personnel had left, it was the administrative bureaucratic part of the semiconductor milieu – in collaboration with those entrepreneurial specialists who developed small high-tech companies from the bankruptcy assets (Lange and Büttner 2005) – that strongly supported the move for reindustrialization. After having infiltrated the newly established postunification institutions of urban administration, university management, and some innovative start-ups, this milieu for a long time was strong through its informal influence, paired with a formal representation in the administrative, economic, and political networks. After being a blockading factor in many respects for over a decade, this milieu of persistence has partly converted to a new openness to the oncoming concept of the solar city.

Other active urban milieus, especially that of the university, have found it hard to become grounded in the town. Torn between the city which often understood them as antagonistic – racial aggression being only the tip of the iceberg of signals perceived – and the attractions of Berlin, they often succumbed to the “brain-train” (the express to Berlin), and remained part-time residents. Cross border milieus, outside of obligatory planning networks, began to exist after the border physically opened, but are small and usually highly dependent on very active individuals, and not embedded or cross-cutting into any other milieus.

Within the game being of influenced by the struggling “entrepreneurs of power” (interview 3), the everyday knowledge of resident milieus – like those non-organized residents living in the large housing areas – was easily excluded from the urban discourses, except for rare, but crushingly outspoken public debates in periods of planning conflict. They showed up during the debate about the tram link across the bridge

to Słubice, and they featured in the difficulties of communicating about the partial demolition of panel-blocks within the federal programme of urban regeneration (*Stadtumbau*), which was long dominated by the tactic of withholding information from the residents “whose dwellings were to be demolished – out of care that people would be overstressed, or because planning mediation was overpowered by egotist political games.” Professional planners’ advice about the integrating capacity of participatory practices was neglected in the face professional advice from within the administration and from outside advisors (interview 2).

An Approach Toward Integrated and Communication-Oriented Planning

Time has softened some of the formerly strict milieu-boundaries, with help from the influence of certain individuals’ personal engagement – such as the university president, who has engaged in urban debates – and under the influence of methodical changes in the planning procedures, stemming from integrated planning becoming more state-of-the-art in Germany. But at least as important are structuring interventions from outside, which induce learning processes. The federal and state Socially Integrated City programmes – although not wholeheartedly adopted by the urban actors as a programme, which has made funding physical development more difficult – have left their traces in supporting an understanding of the interconnectedness of urban actors by “forcing” them to cooperate in order to acquire subsidies for their projects. The state of Brandenburg’s demand for Integrated Urban Development Concepts – under the name of INSEKs – has further encouraged collaboration within the town and across the border, as a long-term vision for the urban region was mandatory for acquiring state funds for urban regeneration. These elements of urban policies have helped to overcome the autistic path dependencies of the various milieus that still are to be found in Frankfurt an der Oder – as they are represented by “eastalgia” (nostalgia for the old system and structures) and cultural dissidence. After over a decade, a new sphere of milieus, partly grounded in the old, but more open toward active encounter than self-defence seems to be slowly emerging.

“Ironically the attempts by the town’s upper echelons and fearful power preservationists to keep up their steering capacity by fending off

public debate and experimental innovations as irrelevant, has led to exactly the opposite to their desired results. Today, in an atmosphere of little trust, the politicians and planners find it difficult to control because they are lacking access to other than their own milieus. Not providing space and opportunity for urban discourse has not empowered them, but led to a competition of milieus and new arrangements, that may render knowledge-based urban planning more difficult” (interview 4).

For realizing the now-evident opportunities – solar industry and university capacity in a more than just virtual Slubfurt region – new spaces and time allocations should be agreed upon. Learning from across the fence – in this case from university collaboration – should be encouraged on the side of town development. Lateral learning (Bueren, Bougrain, and Knorr-Siedow 2002) in projects of integrated planning should be pursued across milieu barriers in an institutionalized development discourse. If this is to become more than negative coordination (Scharpf 1998), the instruments of integrated and actor-oriented planning should be placed centrally for the development of a cross-border vision of Slubfurt, from its present highly virtual quality to a more down-to-earth reality.

3.2. Case Study: Academic Milieus in Polish-German University Cooperation

With the inauguration of a joint Polish-German university, the “Collegium Polonicum” (CP) in Słubice, its founders aimed to send a special signal in this precarious border situation. Under the specific conditions of the border region, the CP not only functions as a university, it also takes on an important role within the process of Polish-German convergence. In addition to its academic assignment, the CP acts as a centre of contact and communication with a multitude of initiatives² that are targeted at the academic realm, as well as at the regional population, to foster cross-cultural understanding in the region.

The Polish-German university is a joint foundation of the Viadrina European University in Frankfurt an der Oder and Adam Mickiewicz

² For example, within the EU Interreg programmes.

University in Poznań (AMU). It is situated in Słubice in a privileged location directly visible across the river from Frankfurt an der Oder. The new building was opened in 1998, long after the first joint Polish-German study courses started in 1993 without a space of their own. In running the university, many actions needed to be carried out without much of a legal or institutional basis, and on the grounds of informal agreements based on trust. After a long period of debate concerning the legal status of this cross-border university, finally in 2002, a governmental agreement between the German state of Brandenburg and Poland was signed. As the CP has no legal status of its own, and has no budgeting rights, the joint university is – in principle – fully dependent on its two founding universities, Viadrina and AMU. Everyday affairs are managed by a joint committee consisting of members from both parent universities. The institution has a self-declared target to not only to contribute to academic teaching and research, but to become active on all institutional levels in Polish-German collaboration (see Wojciechowski 2005, 21-22).

It was thus of prior interest to find out what the challenges of practical everyday university cooperation are, and how the set benchmarks of collaboration are met. Because it is here that the different national educational systems and the knowledge culture have to find their interface, and on this level that the differences show themselves. This cooperation shows all the signs of being a “laboratory” (Wojciechowski 2005, 25) that enables research about the cross-cultural institutional learning processes in the realm of the European higher education system – especially with regards to the opportunities and problems involved in establishing a joint collaboration between Polish and German academic institutions. By researching the interactions that are taking place between the different knowledge and learning cultures, universally accepted knowledge can be generated, knowledge which is transferable to other cross-border university collaborations.

Institutional Misfits – Causes of Conflicts and Opportunities for Learning

As with urban development and collaboration across borders and milieu boundaries, cross-border discrepancies between institutions – institutional “misfits” – are central in influencing the collaboration within

Table 1. *Institutional misfits*

Kind of misfit	Example
Misfits within <i>formal</i> (codified) institutions	National educational system University law Organizational structures Labour law Social security system Curricular arrangements
Misfits within <i>informal</i> (noncodified) institutions	National and regional knowledge cultures Value systems and norms Administrational routines Work and learning structures Forms of communication Behaviour in conflict situations Mentalities

the university realm, and hindering the emergence of an inclusive knowledge-utilization culture.

Misfits and Institutional Learning in Polish-German University Collaboration – Empirical Findings

As early as the beginning of the cross-border collaboration to set up the joint university, institutional misfits presented a considerable stumbling block, when a joint legal agreement was to be signed as the founding document for the CP. The reason lies in the different forms of responsibility for higher education in Poland and Germany, that is, within the realm of formal institutions. As the responsibilities for universities in Poland lie with the central government and in Germany with the federal states, negotiations had to be arranged between levels of different political and administrative status. Especially on the Polish side, this problem of communication between different levels across borders was perceived as problematic, and the representatives of the state of Brandenburg were not accepted on an equal footing. “For some time, the Polish side requested ... the presence of at least the German foreign minister. But the German side did not concede to this demand ...” (interview 5). This misfit between the formal systems of institutions

considerably prolonged the debates about the final contract. In the end it took over ten years, until finally a governmental agreement could be signed between Poland and the German state of Brandenburg, in which all rights and responsibilities of both sides with respect to the joint university were agreed upon. To the present, this agreement is singular within Polish foreign policy.

But misfits also exist within the everyday practices of the university, because of the different educational systems; it is a constant challenge to find working “solutions in the field of organization, legal regulations, modern communication techniques, labour law, finances, and – last but not least – in the culture of everyday work” (Wojciechowski 2005, 21-22). Thus, long before the official governmental agreement was signed, problems regarding the everyday running of affairs had to be solved. As early as 1997, and outside of any routine practice, wireless data links had to be established across the national border (Fitzner 2005) in order to link up the computers. Also for problems of labour law unconventional solutions were found: German staff working at the CP – on Polish territory, and in an organization under Polish law – are on one hand benefiting from the same status as Polish employees, but also retain the benefits of the German labour and social security systems. A complicated system of income subsidies had to be developed for Polish employees, in order to absorb the drastic income differences between Germany and Poland. During the early years, when certificates permitting employment across the border were almost unheard of, German ABM employees³, officially working in Frankfurt an der Oder, contributed to the CP by (illegally) crossing the border. “Both administrations knew about this, but kept silent” (Wojciechowski 2005, 24). The actors speak of “passive cooperation,” which made things possible long before Poland’s accession to the EU (interview 5).

The solutions found in the everyday practices of the CP worked well most of all because a high level of trust between the Polish and German partners. But additional misfits in the informal realm, and in the different knowledge cultures, also contributed to misunderstandings and problems in negotiations. Within the university bodies – such as the standing committee dealing with everyday management – widely dif-

³ Long term unemployed working in publicly paid nonprofit jobs.

fering patterns are followed in solving problems by the Polish and the German contingent (interviews 5 and 6). While the German deputies address problems openly at the conference table, this raises eyebrows on the Polish side. According to Polish customs, conflicts are usually not addressed directly in official debates, but first an understanding is sought in informal communication, such as over a coffee in the cafeteria (interviews 5 and 7).

Especially during the early years, neglecting such culturally based differences made many negotiations difficult. It was understood as a necessity to address possible solutions as early as the procedures were developed, in order to minimize the dangers of culturally based conflicts. Thus decisions are only taken by consensus in the standing committee, and not by majority vote. The debate is centred on finding joint solutions, and continues until no further objections are aired. This type of procedure, sensitive to cultural differences and the trust established in the learning processes, has resulted in improvements in the climate of negotiations over the years (interviews 5 and 6).

Different knowledge cultures are also found in academia. The students also have to face the challenges of intercultural difference on a daily basis (Hiller 2006). German teachers and students often notice the reserved behaviour of Polish students in class, while the Germans appear more aggressive and communicative. These differences are understood as rooted in the different educational traditions on either side of the border: while the Polish system is based on learning in a strictly preformatted environment, the German educational system is rather dedicated to reflection and communicative learning. These differences appear as atmospheric factors in the classroom, and also in evaluations of teachers. As a response to these differences, courses on intercultural communication have recently been started for all newcomers to the university.

Learning Processes and Approaches to New Knowledge Cultures

The areas of conflict which derive from the institutional and cultural misfits emerge in the practice of daily collaboration within the university. But at the same time, it becomes obvious that the unconventional and innovative solutions can also only develop in close interaction

between members of different educational systems and knowledge milieus. In order to reach the set objectives, there is a need to devise new solutions, and to engage in joint learning which can also lead to an orientational set of knowledge for other cross-border collaborations among European universities.

An empirical example will be used to illustrate how such an inter-cultural process of convergence – as a hybrid form of different knowledge cultures – can emerge. In this excerpt from an interview, representatives of the CP's management answer the question of how communication is built up in bilateral negotiations, and in joint university courses:

“Well, first there was an attempt to reach multilingual communication. We do have a management strategy at the CP that everybody talks in their mother tongue. That is, we Germans talk German, and the Poles speak Polish. But both sides need to be sure that the other side understands, or if they don't, that the other keeps on requesting clarification until they do understand. And then we thought that this should be a model for teaching, which means that we do not, in the first place, request that everybody speaks Polish perfectly. But students should be able to follow a Polish lecture roughly, and be able to ask questions. That's a passive [capacity to master the other language]” (interview 6).

This solution, which was initiated for practical considerations in order to facilitate intercultural communication by allowing an understanding of matters to grow, sounds plausible, because often a joint lingua franca proves insufficient when not all concerned are highly proficient in this third language.

We here make an attempt to analyse this solution, and to unravel the deeper meaning and the possible qualities of such a strategy. The interviewees' assumption is that such a solution is related to a number of predeliberate learning processes, and that first outlines of a new knowledge culture are emerging, as this bilingual solution implies the following:

1. An *understanding* that communication in an intercultural context is limited when it takes place in a language other than the mother tongue, especially when it comes to discussing culture-related matters.

2. A *recognition* of the differences between and differentiation of cultures, which is best expressed through one's own language. Such

a bilingual strategy also implies sensitivity concerning existing asymmetries between cultures, which may find expression in the form of the dominating language.

3. An *acceptance* of distance and obscurity. This means that it is being accepted that not all aspects of another culture can be fully understood, and that further intercultural communication needs to develop reflexive knowledge and awareness of one's own "cultural lens," by interpreting social actions in this process.

Learning processes which further intercultural creativity in communication design, are connected to the emerging new knowledge cultures in terms of

- the *multitude* of European cultures; this leads toward an intercultural understanding which accepts difference and the opportunities arising out of European cultures;

- the *asymmetries* in bilateral collaboration; access and knowledge are developed about the chances of overcoming existing or perceived asymmetries, and how cultural differences can be made productive;

- *ambiguity*; It is possible to *learn tolerance toward ambiguity*. This means that possible diversions arising from the non-understanding of the other culture can be endured and taken into account for a while, without becoming the basis for stereotypes and prejudices.

This opens up opportunities for innovation and a new connectivity between different cultures. A new way of dealing with difference emerges: the need for homogenization and assimilation is exchanged for an acceptance of diversity and its use as a potential for creativity.

4. Conclusion

During the empirical phase, the relations between the actors and their role in formal communication in targeted and strongly structured networks and – at the same time – in the informality and fluidity of milieus, has been researched and interpreted as a landscape of knowledge and as different configurations of knowledge cultures. This heuristic concept of the "KnowledgeScape" (Matthiesen 2007), leading from

data collection to knowledge and understanding, has – from our perspective – been highly successful in determining the factors explaining the openness and closedness of actors in reaching their professionally set goals. Identifying which role “formalized” professional knowledge and tacit knowledge play in integrating different perceptions of others, or to split off the other from ones own perception in urban development and university collaboration, has also shown that this approach incorporates a strong proactive element as well. It has been shown that overcoming misfits in institutions and cultures requires both – the supporting skeleton of formal institutions, and the courage to allow an openness of weak milieu structures to develop, and the recognition that in both types of organizations observed, the main emphasis should be on allowing the paradox of institutionalizing the weak ties to happen in order to strengthen the rationale of strong ties (Granovetter 1973).

4.1. Cognitions from a Milieu-Sensitive Approach to Urban Development and Cross-Border Transformation

In both case studies, the milieu-based interpretation of cultural codes and the milieu-related interpretations of difference have been found to lead to a wide range of misfits – language, institutions, and routines codes need to be debated in a joint space in order to allow a joint understanding to be developed, which can then lead to a rational interpretation of the differences, and to a joint understanding. This leads to the assumption that a clear understanding of the landscape of milieus together with their cultural grounding is a vital part of the evidence that needs to be considered when developing a rationale of development, or – as others call it – evidence based planning (Faludi 2006). Especially across national borders, and with regards to knowledge as a structuring element of milieus and networks, it becomes evident that the common understanding – or the myth, as it often is – of knowledge as a liberator from stereotypes needs to be re-evaluated.

The findings of both case studies suggest that the development of a milieu-spanning and promising knowledge culture that can become a foundation for institutional development based in different forms of knowledge (Matthiesen 2004) as it is embedded in different milieus, is

rarely a large design, but rather a small-scale and tentative development. It happens in the intermediary spaces and niches between cultural milieus before it reaches the organizations as such, and needs to be given experimental space along with strong network ties. We have found that a socio-spatial (re)construction of the communications between border space and knowledge space happens in small steps, as a coevolutionary and dynamic process between spatial development, the interactions within and between milieus, and the emergence of new knowledge and cultural understanding. These processes, however, rarely develop in a linear and straightforward manner. Instead they are characterized by halting and even backward turns, if they are not supported by strong milieus that have the ability and the backing in local society to let them carry on experimental paths, and spread the knowledge they have found to be of importance to bridge intercultural difference. *New* knowledge cultures contain a refund or newly found combination of knowledge forms, that each have strong roots in the different cultures. And these can be brought to bear as elements of a new quality in cross-border collaboration and urban development in twin-cities with different cultures and milieus. They are manifest in new action routines, habituations, and sets of rules, which together contribute to the construction of social and spatial reality. We assume that this development takes place as a coevolutionary process. In figure 2, the “triple helix” represents a tentative attempt to visualize this coevolutionary process, and to describe it from a theoretical and conceptual perspective.

Over time, the following steps can be conceptualized:

1. Borders as socially constructed spatial structures have influence on the interactions and actions in the border space;
2. Interactions and actions reproduce themselves as new modes of action – also isolated within certain milieus;
3. Repetitive actions lead to new milieu-embedded and more generally approved codes of conduct, and routines or habits.
4. During this process, new explicit and implicit knowledge about interrelations between milieu, actions, and space, and the importance of an open culture of knowledge – in other words, an acceptance of and seeing the benefits of other types of knowledge and understanding – emerges and is jointly adopted;

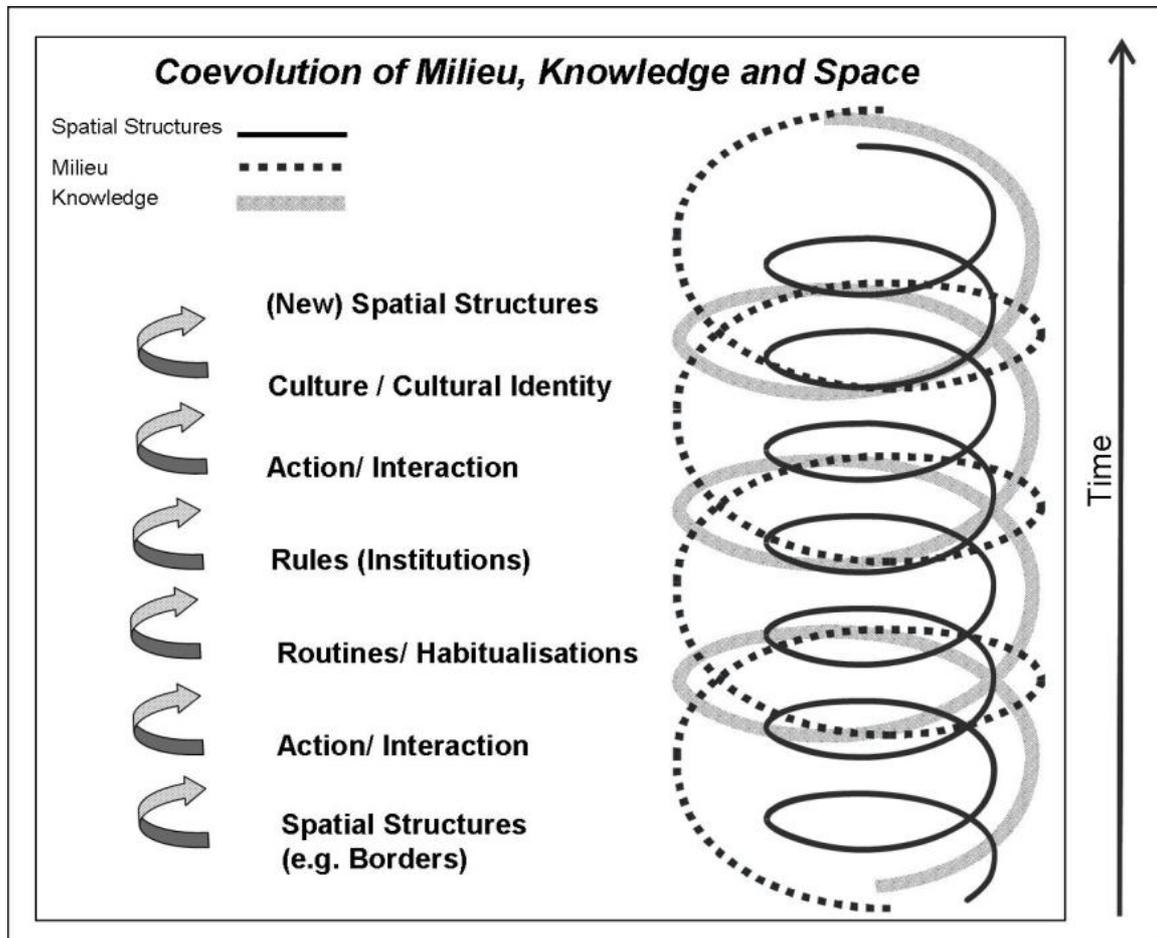


Figure 2. Coevolution of milieu, knowledge, and space.

Source: adapted from Fichter-Wolf (2008)

5. The new routines or habits already incorporate new informal rules (institutionalizations), which can also find their expression in experimental formal and codified institutions – such as plans and regulatory agreements in urban development, or contracts and joint curricula in university life.

6. New informal and formal institutions are established across the boundaries of existing institutions and spatial borders. In urban development, a cross-border understanding of an urban region finds its institutional framework and network structures; and at the same time in cross-national cooperations between universities, new approaches to a new knowledge culture can emerge, which reaches an even wider European level; and borders can change their meaning from social

constructions of division to socio-spatial structures with an especially enriching character.

In the empirical processes of the two case-studies, this concept – far from being understood as normative – served as a methodological tool of reconstructing processes between the formality of networks, and the informality and infinity of milieus. The understanding of steps and actions as they became apparent in the interviews and observations, could be systematically analysed in their relations to the coevolution of space, milieu, and knowledge.

4.2. On the Role of Knowledge in the Process of Socio-Spatial Coevolution

The role of knowledge has a specific value in this conceptualization of coevolutionary processes. Within processes of intercultural interactions, knowledge in its different forms serves as a system of filters (Meusburger 2006, 286ff.), as specific forms of knowledge influence the process of intercultural understanding in different ways. Systematic expert knowledge – for example, professional and often highly sectoral expertise, management knowledge, language capabilities, and so on – is accumulated in often long periods of learning, usually cannot be transferred ad hoc from actor to actor, and comprises an important part of the culture of professional milieus. This preunderstanding functions as a filter because it provides the basis for the understanding of new information that “fits,” or the outright rejection of misfits. Another filtering system – often known as symbolic knowledge (s.b.) – refers to, for example, religious or ideological convictions, cultural traditions, socially constructed memories, as well as stereotypes and prejudices. This – mostly implicit – knowledge, which is also often called “tacit knowledge,” is acquired during socialization and acts in the form of belief systems (Sabatier 1993) as a filter: the concrete form of these knowledge forms within individuals – and backed up or questioned by their milieu – determines whether new information fits the visions and habitus of the actor, or is emotionally barred. However, it seems to be decisive for the social construction of reality in space that these different filters – and additional ones of a more physical nature, such as a river can easily be

imagined – do not function in isolation. Only through their interdependence, determined by space and milieu, do they influence how “information” (or images) are consciously and unconsciously processed, and evoke mental associations.

It is thus of the utmost importance for intercultural learning and for the balance between the necessary embeddedness one has in one's own milieu, and one's openness toward the other, where (undisclosed) previous knowledge can be accessed in a border situation, that is, how new knowledge can be integrated into one's own knowledge repertoire. The empirical findings have shown that this happens in “soft” processes of arguing and bargaining, and by engaging in conflict regulation rather than in formalized forms of network cooperation through regulatory agreement. Providing the spatial and temporal opportunities for such social processes, between the formal network structures and the informality of milieus, the conscious development of translatory rules and the development of on-going trust, has been found to be especially vital in this context. These processes as a whole determine the dynamics of interaction between the actors across borders, and it becomes obvious that a balance should be kept between integrating the basic milieu knowledge and providing the – often external – expert knowledge necessary to break through the dangers of milieu closures. At best, and over time, the opportunities then develop for hybrid mixed forms of different knowledge cultures and specific institutional arrangements.

As our case studies suggest, these processes can show up in a cross-border “knowledge space” – in urban development as well as in joint university environments. However, it will not be one unitary or homogeneous construct, such as a designed-from-above European knowledge space, but rather the result of a mix of different but open cultures that engage in a coevolutionary process on the grass roots level of different milieus, but supported by the central state and suprastate institutions.

Interviews

1. Group interview with urban planners, town administration, and external advisor, Frankfurt an der Oder, May 2006.
2. Local politician involved in social policy and urban development, January 2007.
3. External planning consultant for the town of Frankfurt an der Oder and the state of Brandenburg, June 2007.
4. Interview with urban planner, area manager in Frankfurt an der Oder after 1990, and member of the teaching staff of the Collegium Polonicum in Słubice.
5. Member of the steering committee, Collegium Polonicum in Słubice, May 19, 2005.
6. Member the management, Viadrina European University in Frankfurt an den Oder, December 15, 2005.
7. Lecturer in a bilateral study course, Collegium Polonicum in Słubice, December 12, 2006.
8. Discussion with a member of the Polish-German management staff during a conference at the Collegium Polonicum in Słubice, February 22-24, 2007.
9. Interview DGB Berlin, Brandenburg.

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