

# Planning with all your Senses – Learning to Cooperate on a Regional Scale

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**Abstract:** “Planning with all your senses” is an experience as well as advice. This paper is based on the hypothesis that the stimulation of the basic senses and an appeal to beauty and emotions may contribute a great deal to the output and outcome of regional governance. This also helps learning, which is essential in planning in the context of dynamic urban landscapes. Therefore, taking the human senses as well as learning processes into account should be a part of creative governance.

The paper explores two cases of facilitation of regional cooperation in Germany. The region of Bonn/Rhein-Sieg/Ahrweiler has – after the German capital was moved to Berlin in the 1990s – successfully combined the restructuring of the region’s economic basis with the development of new regional planning procedures. The planning and implementation of the first part of the “Regionalpark Saar” was a creative process of cooperation using the “low impact” philosophy developed by the SAUL network (SAUL – Sustainable and Accessible Urban Landscapes, funded by the European Regions Interreg III B Programme).

The first part of the paper recalls some basic facts that have to be taken into account when thinking about planning in the context of governance. In part two, a set of basic rules for facilitation on a regional level will be spelled out, because some characteristics are different from working at the urban level. These basic rules will be illustrated in two case studies; one from the Bonn region and one from the Saarland, which will lead to the conclusions about “planning with all your senses”.

## 1 Planning in the Context of Governance

Over the last 30 years, planning has undergone several conceptual changes. Communication with key players has always been a part of city planning to a certain extent, as Klaus Selle (2000: 69ff.) points out. But in the pre- and post-war times, this was the job of the city’s chief planning officer. The plan as a product of expert work was the focus. In the seventies, the demand for a more democratic society also had its effects on planning, with advocacy planning and

public participation in planning procedures being established (Healey 1997, Selle 2000). After this “communicative turn”, part of the attention turned back towards the institutional changes needed to support the new structures of planning for moving from an authoritative expert role of planning to an interactive model of different groups and stakeholders being part of the planning game (Stein 1995). This can be seen as a necessary part of the change in the predominant notion of the public sector’s role in society: moving from the “modern” conception of the “welfare state”, which has to secure the well-being of every citizen, to the “post-modern” conception of the “enabling state”, creating a framework for the interaction and negotiation between individuals and groups. In this context, planning is again looking at its role and new kinds of plans, especially at visual elements and pictures that may support goal-setting as well as the debate itself.

None of the former elements have been completely dropped. They all remain to varying degrees in today’s planning processes. The new style of planning, which is aware of its need of the knowledge, resources and commitment of various people and institutions, goes along with the post-modern concept of integrating government into governance structures and methods or vice versa. Communicative, interactive and conceptual principles are applied to governance-style planning, which includes informal as well as formal procedures.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) sees a close interrelation of governance with the regional level. It defines governance today as “the organization and administration of regional authorities and

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### Governance-style planning

- From plan to process to process + product (plan, project, picture)
  - communicative + interactive + conceptual principles
  - informal + formal procedures
-

institutions on the most varied levels as well as the corresponding processes of decision-making, cooperation and the exertion of influence.” (OECD 2001, after Thierstein/Gabi 2004: 34). Thus, planning needs affect process design and facilitation of regional cooperation. Based on a case study from Northern Italy, Fedeli (2004) points to the necessity and importance of process design and facilitation in interrelated planning procedures between various local communities. The example also shows the need for people and institutions to learn how to cooperate on a regional scale.

## *2 Basic Rules for Facilitation on a Regional Scale*

Most principles for the design of communicative planning processes in an urban context also apply to the regional scale. Still, a few topics must be stressed when looking at the regional level. This is mainly due to the fact that a conurbation or city-region, even less than a municipality or the whole array of stakeholders related to urban planning, cannot be regarded as one organization. Public planning always has to create the system it is working together with, and this system has to define its objectives every time it is meeting. Thus, the basic request for setting up a communicative planning process is to design a reliable concept for communication and moderation. The promoters of the process (Fiedler et al. 1998) need to make sure that there is transparency, accessibility and rhythm in the setup. Everybody should know what is going on. The stakeholder needs to be sure of the personal integrity and frankness of the people in charge, so that they can trust in what is going on and know that no relevant parts of the process are hidden from anybody involved. The second main aspect is accessibility. The rules of accessibility define who may bring his ideas, needs and fears to the process and at what time. Since facilitation processes do need the great public debate as well as the creative working atmosphere of a small group, periods of exclusion are inevitable in order to attain commitment and reliable results, such as contracts and agreements. From the very beginning, this should be made clear in order to help people establish their own schedules of participation. The rhythm of the process design is important, because people wish to know how the process will progress. If they miss one of the steps of the process, they may like to have another chance. In addition, if people have made new contacts in the course of the process,

they may like to meet these people again (which, of course, is one of the core ideas within governance methods).

Cooperation must provide more real benefits than just a feeling of moral well-being. Hence, process design and the contents of the planning process should support useful partnerships for day-to-day work. Information is a “currency” which is highly esteemed!

A broad base is helpful in various ways. It makes a process less dependent on single persons or institutions, and it helps to bring different points of view into the process, helping to produce solutions that have been thoroughly scrutinized. Building up informal as well as formal networks is essential to extend the base. And, within these networks you have to establish strong ties. Voluntary commitment can be a strong tie, too, if there is a minimum of influential supporters from various fields.

To recognize problems that can actually be solved means to concentrate on things one can really do within the given framework or with a realistic extension of the given timeframe. Very often, planners and politicians try to apply cooperation and communication to problems of a magnitude or kind not suited for this planning method. This may be due to a very positive and enticing starting atmosphere – but from a professional point of view, it is necessary to focus on topics that can bring about results in a reasonable amount of time. Trying to cooperate for the very first time and at the same time trying to solve the biggest problem you ever had creates a perfect opportunity for not achieving what you want.

Cooperation on a regional scale tends to be a rather abstract matter. Moreover, it often seems to contradict interests of the local communities. Fears of losing self-steering capacity or of being outrun by the neighboring communities prevail. Therefore, hands-on experience on a local level is crucial: discuss and develop the ideas and concepts on a regional level, and provide examples on the local level that people can really see, touch, live with and be proud of.

To sum up, all these basic rules contribute to the creation of a “field of energy” (Stein and Trommer 2001: 23). Creating a field of energy means to follow some rules as well as recognizing that this is far more than just rules: building up mutual trust in small steps, sharing success with all persons involved, creating a sense of ownership in everybody taking part, providing opportunities to be proud of. That may mean being proud of ones beautiful local museum, of locally produced tasty apples or of just being a

part of a big success story. Thus, creating a field of energy also means to integrate pleasure and emotions.

### 3 *The Bonn Region: a Story with Apples*

Bonn was the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany after World War II. In 1991, after unification with the former German Democratic Republic, the German parliament decided to move the capital to Berlin. At that time, a loss of about 15,000 jobs in government, lobbies, press, the diplomatic corps and supplementary services in the region was predicted. Eighteen communities, to a high degree dependent on government-related business, were considered part of this region. Citizens, as well as the local politicians and businessmen, were afraid of the expected destabilizing effects on the real estate market, the heavily subsidized cultural institutions and business life in general.

Twelve years later, none of these have turned out to be true. Quite the reverse, these 18 communities are part of a region where the number of residents and employed persons has grown remarkably. The number of successful business start-ups exceeds the failures, and the unemployment rate is much lower than the German average. The number of apartments and dwelling units has grown in the region by 18 percent and in Bonn by 12 percent (numbers taken from Trommer 2004: 43). This follows the general settlement pattern in Germany, where smaller communities situated outside the core in city-regions grow more or grow faster in comparison to the core city.

What are the reasons for this surprising development? Looking at the “hard facts”, the development strategy set up by the region has proven successful. The very moment the “Bonn-Berlin decision” was taken in 1991, the 18 communities rapidly joined forces and agreed on constructing a new future based on “five pillars”. Science, technology and research, international cooperation, federal institutions and sustainable spatial development were among the guidelines. The indemnities paid to the former capital, designed to help the region create a new economic base, were directed into flagship projects carefully spread over the region (Aring 2003; Kunzmann 2004). Cooperation was organized on an entirely voluntary basis, with a group of local planning officials forming a common planning task force (*Regionaler Arbeitskreis Planung, Entwicklung, Verkehr* – Regional Working Group for Planning, Development and Transportation).

One of the first steps taken by the region was to investigate the future of the housing market. Both the private sector and the public sector in the region expected it to get into trouble. Using some of the indemnities, the 18 communities commissioned a study about the future of the housing market. It included an analysis of the housing stock, a prognosis of future needs and consultancy concerning the measures necessary to adapt the region’s housing market to future developments. In fact, this study showed that if all the measures based on the Bonn-Berlin Treaty would succeed, there would be growth in jobs and residents. And it clearly pointed out the need for adapting the housing stock to the requirements of a modern, globalized society.

Eventually, this led to a mental turn-around in the region: from a depressed mood into building new trust in the future. Even if some did not join this movement immediately, others did. New housing was constructed, adding new elements to the formerly family-home dominated market, and was accompanied by a regional discourse on appropriate environmental qualities. New market segments for new groups of residents were developed. The growth prognosis was fulfilled in much shorter time than predicted.

These hard facts need to be explained by a look at the so-called soft side of the process. The housing market study was interwoven with a regional discourse designed by an external facilitator in close cooperation with the regional planning task force (Stein 1996). For the first time in the region, this discourse included face-to-face contacts as well as a series of public debates, bringing together planning officials, politicians, real estate agents, real estate developers, land owner and tenant associations, environmental activists and state-level officials. In a later phase, project-centred working groups were established to discuss and enhance the qualities of local projects. A regional award gave a stimulus for new qualities in architecture and housing policies. This brought the subject to the local newspapers and into every family.

At a very early stage, the regional planning task force started joint marketing campaigns which helped to create added value for the participating communities. Illustrating the turn-around of the mood in the region, a common Website was created called “moving-to-bonn”. On this platform, the communities and the active building companies presented their local projects and building opportunities. The region presented its philosophy and cooperation in the context of competitions for sustainable development and of international conferences such



Figure 2: A story with apples.  
(Photo: Ursula Stein)

as the world conference on urbanism, *Urban 21*, in Berlin. Real estate developers doing business all over Germany were overheard telling the story in other regions, describing the Bonn region as a best-practice-model for regional cooperation that also meets the needs of project development.

After seven years of work in the fields of housing and transportation, the region decided they were “capable of tackling hard problems.” It took up the topic of retail shopping and town center development. Twenty-eight communities joined the process, using creative funding: the prize money from the Sustainable Development competition was used together with some funding from the two federal states concerned. Each community wishing to participate had to pay a certain sum of money, based on the number of residents. Integration of private sector and civil society was organized in a similar way to the housing market study. But, new working methods were added too. For the first time, joint sessions of neighboring local councils’ Building and Development Committees were organized to discuss conflicts that resulted from investors’ proposals. In general, the study did very little number crunching, but focused on the development of “regional common-sense” and conflict-clearing procedures. The study was completed

in 2003. By now, a major part of the region had discussed the subject and decided to join the regional strategy on a voluntary basis. In early 2005, all but four of the 28 city councils have decided to adhere formally to the regional contract on common principles for cooperative clearing procedures in retail development.

Now, what about the apples? Sigurd Trommer, chief planning officer of Bonn, presented his broad collection of experiences and insights from regional cooperation in one of the last volumes of *disP* (Trommer 2004). Core topics are building up mutual trust, open organization and alliances, external moderation, careful staging and the art of setting appropriate goals. In the context of this paper, special attention should be given to yet another aspect. All along the unfolding of the regional cooperation, the persons in charge took care to include not only rational, but also personal and emotional elements into the process.

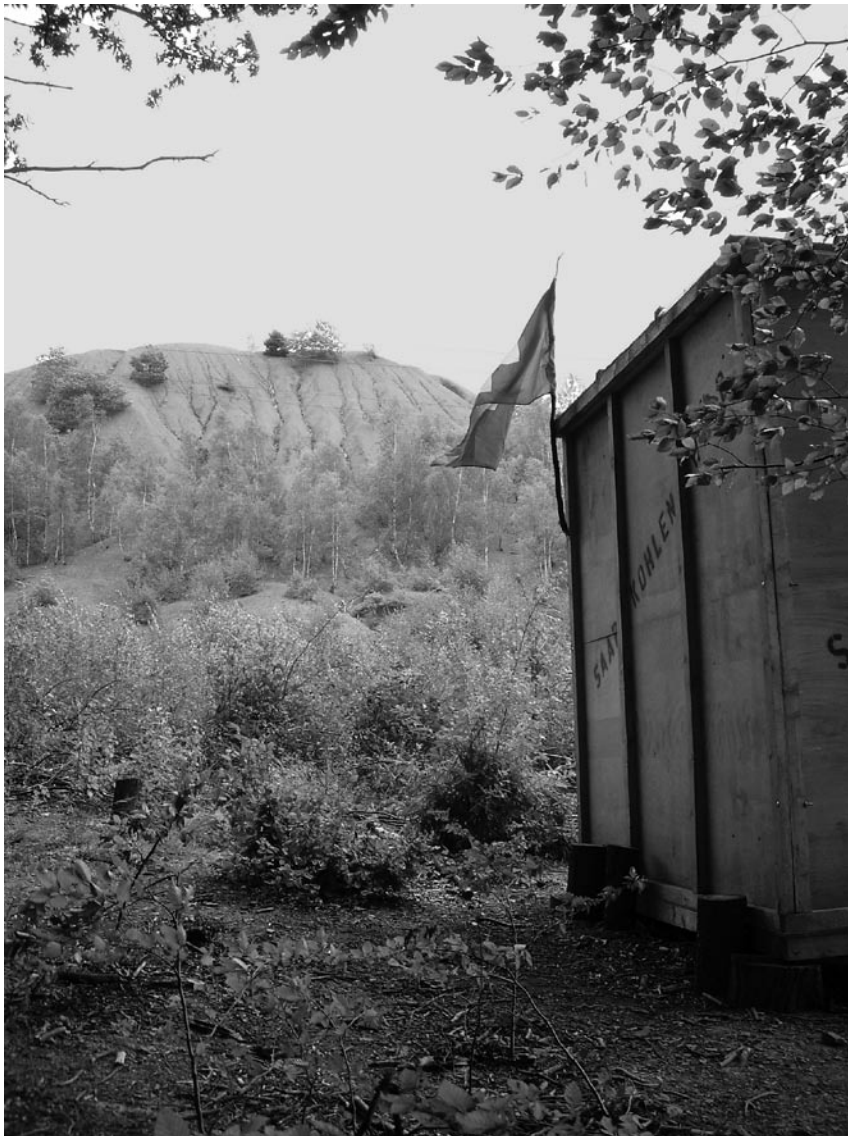
The meetings of the mayors and working groups as well as the public events are organized in different places all around the region. These are highly valued opportunities for the municipalities to welcome guests from the region and to show their local “treasures” such as venues in old city halls, beautiful museums or the new universities of applied science (the latter are

part of the flagship projects in the restructuring of the region). Every year during the housing-market study and later in less regular intervals, “regional information and discussion events” were staged, bringing together people from all the groups actively involved or just interested in what is going on. On each of these occasions, subjects of general interest and results of common projects were presented and discussed, often in the presence of representatives from the state level. These public meetings on common issues have become high points of the region. Stakeholders attend even if they are not directly concerned by the subject, because they “want to know what is going on” or “want to meet all the others we have come to know.”

When the first event was planned, the working group reflected on how to add some regional flavor to the meeting. One mayor proposed

bringing apples from his home town, renowned for fruit production, and another from a wine producing area offered to bring red wine. On the day of the conference, big baskets filled with apples were placed at every door of the auditorium and everybody was encouraged to eat apples. All day, the air was filled with the delicate scent of the apples. At the end of the conference, the mayors from the Ahr offered red wine from their communities. Thus, participants could continue to discuss and meet in a relaxed atmosphere. These two elements – apples and wine from the region – have since that time become an emblematic element of all the public regional meetings. They clearly appeal to the elementary senses of the people and add a touch of personal well-being.

Figure 3: The “Saarbrücken Refuge”.  
(Photo: Ursula Stein)



#### 4 SAUL Saarland: a Story with Performing Arts and Hands-on Experience

The SAUL Project on Sustainable and Accessible Urban Landscapes is a trans-national partnership project partly funded by the European Union’s Interreg-III B Program for Northwest Europe. Its main objectives are to recognize and demonstrate the vital role of socially inclusive open spaces in the sustainable development of metropolitan regions and to develop both a trans-national and a regional process of learning, the “learning region” approach ([www.saulproject.net](http://www.saulproject.net)).

Under the auspices of the Saarland Ministry for the Environment, the “Regionalpark Saar” was chosen to be the project taking part in SAUL. It was prepared by Planungsgruppe agl in the late 1990s (Hartz 2003; Hartz and Kestermann 2004). The pilot project “Saarkohlenwald” is concentrating on a forest situated adjacent to the main city of Saarbrücken. The forest is surrounded by seven smaller communities. The forest is open space for the residents of the surrounding cities as well as being a feudal heritage, part of it having been a ducal hunting reserve in the 18th century, and part of the industrial heritage, because ponds and slagheaps from the coal mining era of the 20th century are scattered throughout the forest. The concept for the development of the first regional park project is centered around the idea of wilderness being placed right before the gates of the city. The core of the forest will be taken out of economic use, giving way for new images of the forest and for wilderness experiences. The elements of feudal and industrial heritage are being transformed into parts of the new “spatial



Figure 4: Melodies from a slagheap.  
(Photo: Ursula Stein)

vision”, allowing for individual use and interpretation of open space.

The creative core of the partnership organization is called the *Initiativgruppe* (Initiative Group). On a voluntary basis, the mining company and its spin-offs, who were charged with cleaning up and reusing the brownfield areas, are working together with representatives of the city of Saarbrücken, the regional agency of the city region, the regional agency for professional education and Saarforst, the state-owned company operating the state forest, and last, but not least, the Ministry of the Environment. Projects are designed to meet both the needs of the general public and of the different institutions. For example, the former coal mining company has to ensure that the slagheaps will not present a danger to the public. Instead of being planted with shrubs and trees and closed to the public as in many years before, the slagheaps now will keep their bare and strange appearance and will be transformed into places of art, landscape meditation and observation of the development of the region. Thus, the duties of the company are combined with the needs of a concept to enhance the living conditions of the residents in the area, creating assets for new economic development after the end of the mining and steel era in the region.

After having set up the general framework of detail projects to be carried out by the individual partners, a systematic study helped to explore the potential of involving local people in the planning and implementation. Two interesting projects were carried out in summer 2004: “*Sternwege im Saarkohlenwald*” and “*Sieben Räume – Sieben Träume*”. In the “*Sternwege*” (Star Paths) project, an open invitation was sent through newspapers and local associations of all kinds to the residents of one neighboring town at a time. Their task and opportunity was to choose the main path leading from their community to the Neuhaus hunting lodge in the very heart of the forest, which had been transformed into an activity center based on urban

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#### *Planning with all one's senses*

- Ears to listen to all the arguments
  - Tongue to find the right words
  - Eyes to see the perspectives in the long run
  - Nose to smell the right moment for action
  - Hands ... on!
  - Sense of what is possible
  - Sense of humor
  - Sense of pleasure
- 

Figure 5: Planning with the human senses.

forest and wilderness concepts. It was necessary to take decisions about the paths, because, according to the wilderness idea chosen for the future of the central part of the forest, the forest management will no longer maintain all the existing paths. Some of them will vanish in the long run, and some will be maintained. By inviting local people to decide which path should be maintained and marking these with a star symbol, opportunities arose to talk about historic events and relics and local customs associated with the forest. In each of the four Star Path actions carried out in 2004, between 40 and 80 persons participated, creating a relationship between traditional milieus such as hiking clubs and Catholic parish choirs and the ideas of the regional park.

“Seven Spaces – Seven Dreams” was the title of another participatory project that brought the stories and ideas of residents from the communities to the urban forest and back again into the communities. Seven wooden boxes built by young people from a professional training center served as a symbolic space for the dreams and ideas. They were first placed in the seven towns around the forest, where volunteers collected stories, ideas and items brought by residents during opening hours. The boxes were then placed in the forest, where activities by local groups continued to attract people and make them think about the forest. The stories and ideas will be collected for a common documentation that can serve as a stock of ideas for future action.

In connection with these activities and with visits from other SAUL partner regions, artists performed a variety of events in the forest and on the slagheaps: Poetry readings, music, and unusual settings such as a flock of goats grazing in the surroundings of one of the wooden boxes, ironically called the “Saarbrücken Refuge” and adorned with a flag from Switzerland. Housewives hosted teatime sessions for their fellow citizens, school teachers brought their classes to paint one of the boxes and have some wilderness experience. All this may have helped make people think about the forest as a part of their personal living space that offered plenty of opportunities.

All these elements illustrate the low impact philosophy used by the initiative group and developed within the SAUL partnership. It means to use small and precise interventions, rather in line with the philosophy of acupuncture than in line with the ideas of complete comprehensive planning. The post-modern landscape has lost the mono-functional and unambiguous char-

acter of landscapes of modern times. It now is open to individual interpretation and to multiple uses. It can be experienced individually and ambiguously. Hence, the planning philosophy includes the idea of temporariness, since some of the installations can easily be removed, and it follows the idea of openness.

The elements of the Saarkohlenwald SAUL project also illustrate the cooperative strategy, which tries to involve a maximum of stakeholders, having them bring in their specific needs and resources on different spatial levels. After this effort to “go public” in summer 2004, the mayors of the affected communities backed up the project in public debates for the first time, quoting the positive echoes they had received from the citizens. Cooperation, though, does not emerge from thin air. It needs to be planned, encouraged and learned. Creative activities that relate extraordinary experiences to this process help turn this into a positive feature.

### *5 Conclusion: Planning with all your Senses*

Both case studies draw not only on intellectual properties and efforts, they also creatively use a broader set of factors, including emotions, atmosphere, and new perspectives and experiences that appeal to the human senses. In both cases, planners, facilitators and promoters of the process used their ears to listen to all the arguments. They have used their tongues to find the right words. They have used their eyes to see new regional perspectives in the long run. They needed their noses to smell the right moment for action. And there were projects designed to touch, to get a hands-on experience of what is going on at the regional level.

And beyond these five basic human senses, there are more complex senses that contribute to creative governance-style planning, too. Planners have to have a sense of what is possible. They have to have a sense of humor, because there are still many things which do not work well and which will never work well – and they need a good deal of humor to go through all of this. And everybody involved should be allowed to follow his sense of pleasure, too, because working and facilitating in a regional context should also be fun. It makes sense to use your senses as a creative potential in city-region governance!

### Note

This paper was presented for the first time at the Italian-German colloquium "Creativity and Urban Governance in European City Regions" in 2004. The author's reflection on the subject of this paper is partly funded by the Gottlieb Daimler- and Karl Benz-Foundation in the context of an interdisciplinary research scheme on "Zwischenstadt" ("cities without cities") called "Amidst the edge – on the way to qualifying metropolitan landscapes".

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