Strengthening local economy: An example of universities supporting sustainable transformation of urban neighbourhoods

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3. A scientific approach to strengthen local economy

4. Strengthening local economy – Examples
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   2. Leverkusen Rheindorf

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1. Introduction

- Societal challenges force regions to think about sustainable development
  - energy efficiency/climate change
  - migration
  - change in urban development
  - ...

- Universities can play different roles in regional sustainable transitions

- Pflitsch and Radinger-Peer (2018): two dimensions can be used
  - depth: As to depth universities’ roles can be “comprehensive, involving diverse actors and approaching sustainability with a holistic perspective”
  - autonomy: the roles can be “autonomous, the university defining its own focus and priorities through interacting with a broad range of regional actors”
2. The problematic of local economy (1/2)

- All economic activities related to the development of a certain urban district (Birkhörzer 2000:24)
  - Small or very small firms: retail services, bars and restaurants, handicraft, social and household-oriented services
  - Placed in and are highly connected to local neighbourhoods
  - Upgrade the neighbourhoods` living conditions

→ Fulfil functions: supply people with everyday commodities, offer opportunities for work, be a place for communication
→ If local economie works well it upgrades the neighbourhood and there is a sustainable positive transformation on economic and social level
2. The problematic of local economy (2/2)

Urban districts lose their previous functions in city structures

Finding new functions: problematic and long-lasting

Economic + social problems

Own Illustration
3. A scientific approach to strengthen local economy (1/3)

Transformative science

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Project model created by NIERS and SO.CON

Urban Living Labs (ULL)
3. A scientific approach to strengthen local economy (2/3)

1. Interdisciplinarity: deprived neighbourhoods often are „multiple burdend“
2. Analysis before action: necessary conditions for initiating concrete measures
3. Practice-oriented approach: research should get it´s questions from local actors
4. Participation-oriented approach: Measures should be developed in participatory processes and effects should be discussed with local „experts“
3. A scientific approach to strengthen local economy (3/3)
The Project model used by NIERS and SO.CON

Own illustration
4. Examples (1/3)}
4. Examples (2/3)
Solinger Nordstadt

Funding phase: 2015-2018

- Firm survey, document analysis + SWOT analysis
- Positioning "trade and service location for expanded daily needs"
- "Commercial neighbourhood manager": creating a network and implement the developed vision
- The networking and expansion of the network is an ongoing task

Problem analysis → Vision development → Experiments → Learning and expanding

Own Illustration
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4. Examples (3/3)
Leverkusen Rheindorf

Funding phase: 2015-2018

Firm survey, statistic data, SWOT analysis + identification of the relevant actors: face-to-face interviews

transforming the image of the quarter+ "one whole Rheindorf"

“commercial neighbourhood manager” + support a merging of the northern and southern part of Rheindorf

it is still an ongoing process the final result is still open

Problem analysis
Vision development
experiments
Learning and expanding

Own Illustration
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5. General Conclusion

- General trends force structural adaption processes
- Neighbourhoods lose their previous functions in city structures and the process of finding new functions usually is a long-lasting and difficult one
- This process is accompanied by economic and social problems, ecological and health problems often come on top
- Strengthening local economy is an important part of a positive transformation
5. Conclusion of research/work (1/2)

• Same model for different quarters leads to a successful approach to strengthen the local economy
• The continuous interaction of local participants with an interdisciplinary research team has proven to be a promising concept
• Local actors could be motivated to engage and participate in the activities
• Measures were a result of co-design and co-production: "bottom-up procedure“
• Information and knowledge about the neighbourhood could be improved by the continuous combination of analysis and activity
• Neighbourhood differ from each other and so do their problems.
• Continuous reflection of scientific methods and selected measures
• Finally the individual situation
  • could be improved
  • their potentials could be identified and strengthened
  • an image improving process could be started
5. Conclusion of research/work (2/2)

- Universities can give impulses for sustainable development
- Can be seen as a side product of research
- In this case universities do not play the role of a change agent for sustainable regional development but they give pinpricks, the higher the number of these pinpricks the higher the effects for regional sustainability.

**BUT:**

- Long-term external evaluation would be necessary to properly assess the success of the projects.
- It remains open which factors were decisive for the (previous) success in the three projects.
- Further research is necessary for a better understanding of the determinants for success or failure
- Is the improvement for the neighbourhood durable even if funding ended?
Thank you for your attention!