

Chapter 9

Socio-Economic Regeneration Initiatives and Strategic Governance in Old Industrial Towns Outside of Agglomerations

Thilo Lang

9.1 Introduction

In recent years, the concept of governance entered the debate about urban development. In particular, urban governance is often seen as a key to regeneration. The understanding of governance adopted here focuses on the processes of decision-making. Thereby the idea of governance is centered on the inclusion of other actors, besides traditional government, in the management of urban development. The applied understanding of governance places focus on ‘strategic’ forms of decision-making, that is, long-term visions and short-term actions linked to socio-economic regeneration. This understanding – which will be referred to as strategic governance – implies forms of coordination and partnership between public and private actors in a purposeful and collaborative way.

This chapter looks for forms of strategic governance in old industrial towns, drawing on a recently finalised empirical study conducted by the author. It is not so much the visioning process which is of interest in the context of this chapter but the relation between action (in the form of local initiatives), and forms of strategic governance.

In the first part, I discuss the processes of transformation and decline and how they relate to the overall global trends. The chapter also introduces a debate about urban governance. Particular emphasis is given to the links between processes of decline and local responses in terms of strategic governance. In the second part, I present a recent study about socio-economic regeneration in old industrial towns in England and Germany. In the final part, I discuss the findings of this study focussing on the role of local initiatives in urban governance and the role of strategic forms of governance for local regeneration.

T. Lang (✉)
Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, 04329 Leipzig, Germany
e-mail: mail@thilolang.de

9.2 Issues of Local Development

9.2.1 *Responding to Processes of Transformation and Decline*

In Western Europe, there is a strong connection between writings about urban decline and those about economic restructuring in old-industrialised areas. In the globalised economy, only a few global cities and metropolitan regions are said to be the “control points of the global economic system” (Dicken, 2003, p. 240). Within the international system ‘networked’ cities and agglomerations (especially capital cities) are said to be the number one location for headquarters of multi-national companies and big national enterprises or sub-contractors, in particular in the financial sector. Consequently, current processes of internationalisation and global inter- and intra-firm relations tend to concentrate much of the world’s most important trading activities in a relatively limited number of sub-national regions or agglomerations (Beaverstock, Smith, & Taylor, 1999; Scott & Storper, 2003).

Current tendencies of globalisation are likely to promote concentrated economic and demographic development in some metropolitan regions, which are thereby dominating national urban systems. There seems to be a selective concentration of growth potentials in a smaller number of regions (Krätke, 1990, p. 7). Amin and Thrift suggest that capital cities and core metropolitan regions can derive competitive advantage from the presence of many organisations in economic, political and cultural life (Amin & Thrift, 1995, p. 105). Developing local response to persisting socio-economic problems by providing local job opportunities is an important aspect of the quality of life in a region. However, forms of response are probably different in old industrial towns outside of agglomerations, which cannot profit from the development advantages of metropolitan regions (Dicken, 2003, p. 240; Cheshire, 1998, p. 106).

In terms of the management of uneven development, Painter and Goodwin point out that local governance can only be effective if it is part of a multi-scale system of regulation. As the causes of uneven development at least partly lie outside the local sphere of influence, local governance at best “can influence only the local half of the (unequal) relationship between global flows and local conditions” (Painter & Goodwin, 2000, p. 43). Local governance might have some possibilities to mitigate the social consequences of uneven development. In general, however, the contribution of local governance although seen as vital is limited in its stabilising capacity in a multi-scale mode of regulation.

9.2.2 *Urban Governance as a New Phenomenon?*

Also the ways in which towns and cities are governed have changed. It is said that instead of hierarchical government the focus is now on governance with more actors involved. Purely public modes of government are said to be more and more unable to respond to processes of decline (Denters & Rose, 2005a; Elander, 2002). Instead, new forms of governance are said to provide better ways to combat decline because

they are constructed on the principle of partnership with its potential synergies. Dealing with urban problems in partnership with the public and the private sector theoretically joins up the strengths of different actors involved in urban regeneration. Governance is often seen as something better than government and is used to describe modern and effective ways of steering urban development. However, it is very unclear how such new modes of governance can help to cope with decline and in what way they can be better in terms of social inclusion and fighting unemployment.

Although governance mechanisms have always existed in the sense of controlling and directing, scholars generally use the term ‘urban governance’ to discuss the changes within the urban political scene of steering a city towards a broader involvement of private actors. There is a baseline agreement about these directly observable trends (Denters & Rose, 2005b). But there is an ongoing debate as to how to explain or understand these changes (Bevir & Rhodes, 2003). In recent decades, city governments have been said to be less and less able to manage urban development. Governing cities has become more difficult and those involved in urban government have been increasingly under pressure to adjust the urban political scene to more and more challenging development preconditions (Kearns & Paddison, 2000, p. 845). In this sense, most scholars see governance as a direct response to economic and social change and their consequences for policy agendas and policy networks (Healey, Cars, Madanipour, & de Magalhaes, 2002, p. 6; Denters & Rose, 2005a). There are at least three main points which are brought forward in this context (Healey et al., 2002; Kearns & Paddison, 2000; Newman & Verpraet, 1999):

1. processes of economic globalisation, structural economic and technological changes have lead to a loss of urban governments’ control over urban economies. At the same time inter-urban competition has tightened (Krätke, 1990, p. 8), and attempts to develop a city’s distinctive culture have been done to improve city’s competitiveness in global markets;
2. national governments have become less able to assist cities in development problems. Neoliberal reforms have led to erosion of the welfare state in many European nations, despite rising social problems caused by enforced processes of structural change;
3. growing complexity and diversity of social life has revealed socio-spatial polarisation and social exclusion, often in the form of marginalisation of excluded people in particular neighbourhoods.

Another widespread notion is about a shift in the practice and mechanisms of regulating urban development, from the traditional understanding of authoritarian government towards governance as a process-based and cooperative government practice. The reasons for these shifts in the urban political scene might be seen not only in the rationality of local actors and organisations but also in the promotion of by national policy – in particular in Great Britain – or in the demand of other stakeholders such as private enterprises or NGOs to play a more active role in the planning process (Healey et al., 2002). These changes are often seen as a

direct reaction to altered socio-economic conditions. The connected problems, such as social exclusion or economic decline, are unlikely to be managed through state led planning, traditional welfare policies or pure market means. In many countries, activating the voluntary sector to replace or complement social services became an issue. So too did more managerial and cost-effective practices of municipal services provision, leading to new forms of cooperation and privatisation (Denters & Rose, 2005a; Elander, 2002, p. 191).

9.2.3 Challenging the Governance Concept

The term governance is commonly understood as comprising strategic elements and the coordination of a multitude of actors and activities in a wider whole. However, many descriptions of governance are rather idealistic than empirically grounded. In various contexts, urban governance has been used as a normative model to promote the inclusion of civic actors as resource mobilisation strategy or to de-emphasise the influence of local governments (Pierre, 2005, p. 453). The policy network-based conception of urban governance as heterarchy, as explained by Jessop and Rhodes, appears to be too limited because in reality it cannot account for most of the forms of governance (Lowndes, 2001, p. 1962). The dominant patterns in partnership relations in the British new governance are said to be hierarchical, not coordinating and competitive (Davies, 2004, p. 582). “With a few exceptions, partnerships are bureaucratic, hierarchical and non-productive” (Davies, 2001, p. 14). It is just a logical consequence that most of the writings describing governance as a normative model also include the notion of ‘governance failure’ (Jessop, 1998, p. 43; Healey et al., 2002, p. 20; Coaffee & Healey, 2003). This discussion supplies arguments for an increasing role of local government. The governance debate, however, turns away attention from local government despite rising demands. Communal reforms in Germany (Gabriel & Eisenmann, 2005), for example, indicate increasing power of local governments. Maybe within the more complex world of governance the role of local governments has been changing towards enabling, coordinating, sub-contracting, controlling and legitimating. Maybe cooperation and innovation within local government are more important than outside of local government (Lang, 2005). There is surprisingly little research about these issues.

Urban governance cannot be understood as referring to one simple overall and integrative whole as dominant coordination mechanism. It is more like a collective name or container for a broad range of different approaches to deal with urban development – with the multi-actor, multi-sector approach as a uniting element. In reality, systems or arrangements of local governance are fragmented into different themes (e.g., culture and economic development), individual and collective interests as well as organisational and formal settings. Even single theme, such as socio-economic regeneration (which is the central policy field tackled in this chapter), is unlikely to be affiliated with one single coordination mechanism. Thus it is very unlikely that government will lose its role in the new forms of governance; it is just the relation between different actors which has been the object of change (Pierre, 2005,

p. 453). The reasons for these changing relations cannot automatically be seen in the demands of interest groups to play a bigger role in urban development; neither are changing forms of governance a purely local response to socio-economic challenges. New forms of local governance also reflect the given structure of national contexts and higher level policy interventions.

9.3 Case Study: Socio-Economic Regeneration in Eastern Germany and Northern England

9.3.1 A Comparative Study of Local Regeneration Initiatives in Old Industrial Towns

The study is about local actors’ response to problems of inequality and unemployment. Policies to combat these problems are usually connected to concepts of socio-economic regeneration in England and economic and employment promotion in Germany. The research identified eight local socio-economic initiatives aiming at job creation and investigated their relation to local governance arrangements. In each of four old industrial towns, one social and one formal economy initiative was selected for further analysis (Fig. 9.1). Socio-economic initiatives were defined as non-routine local projects or schemes with a clear objective towards job creation. Such initiatives often focus specific local assets for the formal or the social economy. Examples of socio-economic initiatives range from the promotion of local economic networks to business incubators and community enterprises.

In Northern England and Eastern Germany, four old industrial towns have been selected for case studies. These towns with between 10,000 and 70,000 inhabitants

Towns	Town character	Social economy	Formal economy
Barrow-in-Furness (Northwest)	Isolated industrial town at the fringe of the Lake District national park	Community Action Furness (CAF)	Encouraging Entrepreneurship (E2)
Blyth (Northeast)	Former coal mining and harbour town outside of the Newcastle travel to work area	Briardale Community Resource and Training Centre	Community Enterprise Centre (CEC): business incubator
Schwedt (Brandenburg)	GDR new town based on petrochemical industry	Local Initiatives for Local Activities (LILA)	Biofuels Initiative: industrial development programme
Wolgast (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern)	Remote one-industry-town based on a privatised GDR naval shipyard	Production-school: integration of young unemployed	Centrepoin: start-up support office

Fig. 9.1 Towns and initiatives under study

are located outside of the main agglomerations and are characterised by similar socio-economic challenges. The economic base of all towns is rooted in their industrial past. To date, the local economy does not provide employment on a satisfactory level. Unemployment and social deprivation have risen to serious problems and call for regeneration activities. Both regions, England's North and Germany's East have been characterised by continuing population loss and long-term socio-economic deprivation as well as processes of physical decline in the last decades.

Despite differing reasons for processes of industrial decline and socio-economic impacts, the towns are comparable in the need to respond to these processes.

Comparative study approach was applied to examine common themes rather than produce independent in depth narratives. Most urban governance studies have examined the impacts of particular forms of governance. Gissendanner (2003) looked at particular initiatives and posed the question to what extent their emergence can be explained with the existence of specific forms of governance or with other factors. Governance is seen as a way of managing urban development including other actors besides traditional government. The empirical part of the research has been mainly based on semi-structured interviews with 29 key actors and executives of the selected initiatives. Reputational analysis combined with a snowball survey served as a basis to identify and rank key actors in local socio-economic regeneration.

9.3.2 Classifying Relations from the Governance Perspective

Inspired by the utilised theoretical perspectives and the categories which emerged during the interpretation of the interviews with key decision-makers and the initiatives' executives, the selected initiatives were classified along the following dimensions: 'structures', 'origin' and 'norms'. Following the theoretical debate on governance and partnership, differences between the initiatives were expected because of their structural relation to individuals and organisations, who were playing an important role in local governance arrangements. This relation can be seen as particularly intense, if the initiative's origin is directly linked to such arrangements. Following the new institutional research perspective, the initiatives were finally analysed in terms of their normative acceptance among key decision-makers. Hence, mainly from the governance's point of view, the selected initiatives can be classified along three dimensions:

1. *structural dimension*, initiatives may be integrated in local governance arrangements via their management level or via their responsible bodies (+), or they may run parallel to these structures without major links (-);
2. *origin dimension*, initiatives' origins can be closely linked to (+) or be completely outside of local governance arrangements (-);
3. *normative dimension*, in terms of contents, objectives and ideological background, initiatives may be accepted by key decision-makers and supported as an explicit part of, or closely related to local strategies (+), just tolerated or even disapproved (-).

Dimensions	Type A	Type B	Type C	Type D
Structural dimension	+	-	-	-
Origin dimension	+	+	-	-
Normative dimension	+	+	+	-
	E2 Barrow	Briardale Blyth	CAF Barrow	LILA Schwedt
	Biofuels Schwedt	CEC Blyth	Centrepont Wolgast	Prod.schule Wolgast

Fig. 9.2 Types of socio-economic initiatives

When we group the eight analysed initiatives, following the above dimensions, we obtain four types of relations between local initiatives and urban governance (Fig. 9.2):

1. *type A* – structurally integrated initiative with overlaps in terms of key actors and organisations, having unambiguous support of central decision-makers and originating within the local governance arrangement, that is, Encouraging Entrepreneurship (E2) initiative in Barrow and Biofuels Initiative in Schwedt;
2. *type B* – initiative originating in the inner circle of local governance, having broad support but only indirect links to key actors and organisations, that is, initiatives are performed outside of the central decision-taking structure, that is, Briardale Community Centre and Community Enterprise Centre (CEC) in Blyth;
3. *type C* – initiative is supported content-wise in general, but originates outside of the local governance arrangements without any overlaps with key actors or organisations, that is, Community Action Furness (CAF) in Barrow-in-Furness and Centrepont in Wolgast;
4. *type D* – initiative’s origin has nothing to do with local governance arrangement, content-wise support is ambiguous and there is no structural integration, that is, Local Initiatives for Local Activities (LILA) in Schwedt and Produktionsschule in Wolgast.

In particular type D and, to a lesser degree, type C initiatives have difficult standing in local governance and are thus hindered in their regeneration activities. Projects and initiatives which do not originate in an environment closely linked to the local governance arrangements need to fight for recognition among local actors. Such recognition is easier to gain, when there is content-wise support. Among the

eight initiatives, there is no example where initiatives originating outside of local governance arrangements got structurally integrated. None of the executives in type C and D initiatives or the organisations they belong to play an important role in local governance arrangements.

9.3.3 Specific Forms of Strategic Governance

In England, Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are expected to take the strategic lead over urban development and also socio-economic regeneration (ODPM, 2005). Thus, they are expected to play a key role in local governance. But both, Furness Partnership and Blyth Valley Strategic Partnership are rather unimportant when it comes to major decisions.

In Blyth, the LSP makes decisions on “some of the softer sort of community side or things like that. (. . .) It’s not the real decision-maker (. . .) on economic stuff in Blyth Valley” (local community representative). But it would certainly be the arena where community activists bring in their ideas to get support, “I took my project to the partnership meeting and said this is what we plan to do.” In Barrow-in-Furness, the opinion about ‘Furness Partnership’ is exactly the same.

In Barrow, the main actors of the regional Northwest Development Agency (NWDA), the urban regeneration company West Lakes Renaissance and the local business development agency Furness Enterprise are all involved in Barrow Task Force which “coordinates the overall strategy (. . .) of all the agencies – national and regional and local – for Barrow”. The group decides about projects, sets priorities for overall regeneration and puts the case for funding. The task force was put in place to address problems within economic development and “the action that needs to be taken to stabilise the Furness economy”.¹ In the task force, traditional actors (such as councillors, the leader and executive officers) are just members among others. The group has been established and chaired by the NWDA, which reports to central government. In Blyth, all these strategic functions can still be seen as a core element of the local council’s work.

In Germany, there is nothing similar to these partnerships and task forces. In both German cases, decision-making is dominated by public policy with the mayors as central figures. In Schwedt, in terms of infrastructure and industrial projects, the collaboration with Industrie und Handelskammer Nord (IHK Nord) might be seen as a positive example of collaboration with private actors. As an informal coordination group of the sub-regional chamber of commerce, IHK Nord unites important local business actors.²

The group counts nine members and meets every couple of weeks to discuss major problems of urban and regional development. The aim of this informal cooperation is to strengthen Schwedt’s role as industrial location and to coordinate the communication with the Land Brandenburg. Gradually, the group became very important for local governance and is nowadays probably the most important forum for decision-making in Schwedt. “Of course it is important. Well, somebody must generate the ideas. Somebody must stand the initiatives and must confirm their

importance. And this cannot be the politician” (key decision-maker in local administration). The aim to install a similar forum in Wolgast in form of a round table has not been realised so far. A new attempt has been initiated by the local agency of social affairs, Sozialagentur, in form of a strategic task force uniting all actors in the field of economic development. Generally, however, decision-making in Wolgast is very traditional. Cooperative elements are restricted to coordination with the county council and within the public policy coordination unit (Stabstelle).

9.4 The Results: Strategic Governance and Local Initiatives

9.4.1 The Role of Initiatives in Local Governance

In Encouraging Entrepreneurship (E2) in Barrow and Briardale Community Centre in Blyth, the main partners are the key players in local decision-making. The Community Enterprise Centre in Blyth and the Biofuels-initiative in Schwedt also have their origins in local governance arrangements, but the main cooperation structures include further organisations and actors. From the beginning, in Blyth Valley Borough Council, CEC has been seen as an important initiative to achieve strategic regeneration objectives, “we need the Community Enterprise Centre to be part, a ‘major’ sort of ‘part’ on delivering a step change, a transformational sort of change” (regeneration officer). In practical terms, however, cooperation with regional and national support agencies such as Business Link, Princess Trust and Social Enterprise Northumberland have been crucial for the success of the idea.

A key difference between these ‘integrated’ initiatives and the other four initiatives is that the ‘non-integrated’ initiatives first had to fight for recognition, “In the very early days, it was very hard to even get into the town hall, talk to them. (. . .) Suddenly 4 years along the line, 1997, we were still there. So, then they realised what we were setting up and what we were doing (. . .). So, we gradually started to get invited” (staff of social initiative). LILA (Schwedt) is well networked on different spatial levels in women related working groups. The main contact person for LILA to discuss general development questions is the council’s equal rights representative, who, however, plays a marginal role in local governance. Community Action Furness in Barrow is included in its own networks of support and works and is, to certain degree, independent of local actors. The most important cooperation partners of CAF are outside of Barrow. CAF received most of its support from big national charitable trust organisations. Also the initiatives in Wolgast are linked to partners outside of the local governance context. Centrepoint is integrated in a regional network of similar initiatives with its headquarters in Rostock. Main ideas originate in this network, which also maintains international contacts. Via their sub-regional section, Produktionsschule is well connected with a national youth charity organisation. Initially, there were links to organisations in Denmark which developed similar initiatives. There are further plans to set up a sub-regional business advisory council to extend their production activities.

Not all executives of the selected initiatives see their work in a wider urban regeneration context. The managers of the social economy initiatives perceive their work via social impacts but do not follow general objectives of urban regeneration. These initiatives are less integrated in the system of urban governance, whereas there is a clear recognition of the formal economy initiatives. Three out of the eight executives have been recognised as key decision-makers. Having links to (and between) key decision-makers might help successful implementation of initiatives but cannot be seen as precondition for their establishment. There is a number of successful socio-economic initiatives which at the outset were not linked to key decision-makers or organisations involved in local governance (such as Centrepoint in Wolgast or CAF in Barrow). Having these links by integrating key actors in the initiative's organisation structure is no guarantee for an integration in local decision-making and better support on the local level (as with LILA in Schwedt).

9.4.2 Regeneration Agencies, Strategic Governance and Local Initiatives

In each of the four towns studied, there was space for non-state-led local initiatives to develop. This could be seen as a sign of a non-authoritarian mode of state regulation which is prevalent in Germany and in the United Kingdom. In some cases, these initiatives emerged with the clear support of or in cooperation with key individuals involved in local socio-economic governance. In this respect, local initiatives might also be regarded as an output of complex interactions of a multitude of state and non-state actors on different vertical levels (local, regional, national, European). This becomes visible when we look at the involved actors (and funding streams) of the eight initiatives studied.

In some cases, particular forms of governance may encourage or support the formation of new projects or initiatives. In many more cases, however, local initiatives are the outcome of the work of particular agencies (such as Furness Enterprise in Barrow or Sozialagentur in Wolgast) or community organisations (such as the women's association in Schwedt, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) association in Wolgast and Churches Together in Barrow).

The relevant activities of these organisations led to LILA, Produktions-schule and CAF, but were not linked to particular forms of governance as the agencies are not necessarily well networked in local governance arrangements as the example of Sozialagentur in Wolgast shows. In other cases, the traditional council was instrumental for the emergence of particular initiatives (most noticeable in Blyth Valley).

A widespread view is that cooperative forms of governance (such as strategic partnerships) make it possible to access the innovative potential of a multitude of actors in urban governance. Is there any proof for such notions? Compared to the power of particular agencies to initiate and set up new initiatives, local forms of governance seem to play a marginal role in supporting the emergence

of local socio-economic initiatives. In all towns there are cooperative elements of decision-making for local socio-economic regeneration.

The identified forms of strategic governance (LSPs, task forces, regeneration initiatives and round tables) are usually dominated by the public sector, in Germany clearly by the local councils. In none of the identified forms of strategic governance, a direct link has been identified to any of the studied initiatives. This also applies to the local strategic partnerships, which did not really lead to policy outcomes in terms of local initiatives.

All towns show cooperative elements of local governance, however, there is clear dominance of public actor-based decision-making. Blyth shows the highest degree of interaction with non-council actors in terms of community involvement, Schwedt in terms of local industry, Barrow in terms of public agencies and partnerships and Wolgast in terms of the relation to the county council. These different orientations are, to a degree, in line with favouring different kinds of local initiatives. If local governance arrangements are mainly based on a close relation between public actors and business actors, there might be a local preference for business initiatives. If they are based on the integration of communities, there might be a preference for community initiatives. The main supporting criteria for the emergence of socio-economic initiatives would then be the basic orientation of key actors in local decision-making or the paradigms they are following (e.g., community led regeneration in Blyth or industrial development in Schwedt).

9.5 Conclusions

The understanding of governance as it is referred to in this chapter excludes normative implications and is built upon empirical findings about a widened field of public and private actors involved in urban development. This understanding of governance denies innovation, creativity and experimentation as an integral part of governance. Urban governance can be seen as a form of managing urban development including other actors besides traditional government. Then, decision-making must be seen as multi-actor, multi-sector and not as purely based on state authoritarian mechanism. Such understanding implies a view of organisations as institutions relying on processes, formal rules, informal practices and on influences of individual actors as well as on the overall structures and specific local cultures.

It should be an objective of urban regeneration to leverage response to local problems in all possible ways. Hence, it is important for all levels of policy-making to acknowledge the regeneration potentials of non-state initiatives. However, the development of local initiatives aiming at a reduction of socio-economic deprivation and social inclusion cannot be seen simply as installation of some forms of strategic governance by pulling together a number of different actors (e.g., local strategic partnerships). As part of more complex local governance arrangements, these forms of strategic governance may help horizontal communication and collaboration between a number of involved actors and vertically with the regional and the national authorities. Nevertheless, none of the analysed initiatives in the mentioned

study can be regarded as the output of such forms of strategic governance. However, it must be considered as potentially helpful for the successful implementation and operation of local initiatives. It may also help receive support from individuals or organisations linked to local governance arrangements.

In contrast to Germany, there is a wealth of strategic processes and strategic partnerships in the United Kingdom, although with very little impact. The numerous guidelines and directives imposed by the central state probably must be regarded as counterproductive and hampering local regeneration rather than supporting it. In particular, the idea of compulsory partnerships must be criticised as ineffective. It is not sufficient to create new forms of strategic governance when it comes to supporting local socio-economic initiatives. Factors of success must be related to other issues – mainly in the institutional sphere (Lang, 2008). Strategies for local regeneration, putting the main emphasis on creating new forms of governance, are likely to fall short in terms of producing policy outcomes. There are some arguments for a positive relation between specialised agencies and socio-economic initiatives as well as between general (normative), orientations and projects fitting the local agenda. Hence, the debate about specific forms of strategic governance seems to be over-emphasised in the context of local regeneration. Instead, it might be helpful to investigate the role of local mobilisation strategies and specialised agencies with a clear task towards concrete local regeneration activities.

Notes

1. Source: nwda-cms.amaze.co.uk/DocumentUploads/012003BarrowED.doc (NWDA Press Release 21 January 2003).
2. Originally, the group was installed by the former owner and manager of the local paper mill. When he came to Schwedt in 1993, he complained about the poor infrastructure. In 1995, the coordination group was installed to move things forward and fight jointly for better infrastructure.

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