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**Paper for Workgroup “Evaluation of Regional Development Projects”**

Voluntary regional cooperation within the Region of Starkenburg, Germany  
Evaluation of the Implementation phase

- Abstract -

Initiated through the national competition "Regions of the Future", lead by the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung, BBR), the five participating territorial authorities forming the Region of Starkenburg<sup>1</sup> decided in spring 1998 to implement a regional Agenda 21 process in addition to the Agenda 21-Processes on the municipal and district level in the region.

When starting the cooperation process central elements were the integration and further development of existing projects as well as the initiation of new projects in the following seven fields of action.

1. "Traffic Relations"
2. "Conservation and Development of the Man-Made Landscape"
3. "Culture and Cultural Heritage"
4. "Sustainable Economic- and Employment Situation Development"
5. "Material and Energy-Flow"
6. "Education and Public Services"
7. "Process Management and Administrative Cooperation"

With close coordination between politics, administration and regional stakeholders it was agreed that the selected pilot projects should fulfil the following criteria a) sustainability/future potential, b) cooperation/solidarity, c) regional significance, d) feasibility and e) exemplary function.

With its concept Starkenburg attained a second price in the competition and presented its process at the URBAN 21 Exhibition, the global conference on urban future which took place in July 2000 in Berlin.

The Region also became member of the network “Regions of the Future” which was founded by the Federal Minister of Transport, Building and Housing succeeding the homonymous competition in summer 2001. Moreover, Starkenburg was again selected as a model region.

Highly motivated through the success reached so far, the cooperation partners decided in 2001 to establish more formal and binding organisation structures. After detailed examinations of different partnership models it was decided to found a special purpose association (“Zweckverband”).

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<sup>1</sup> These are the South Hessian districts of Bergstraße, Darmstadt-Dieburg, Groß-Gerau, the Odenwald District and the City of Darmstadt

After the formation of the “Zweckverband” the former process of regional development with its strong ties to the Agenda 21 was carried forward at first. The implementation of different projects in the above mentioned fields of action was continued and projects and results were presented in regional fairs and exhibitions. Coevally the constitution of the bodies of the “Zweckverband” took place.

After the establishment of the new legal form the discussion on the role and function of the “Zweckverband” was resumed. A program of action was drafted on working level and presented to the responsible bodies for discussion. But disunity on advantages and disadvantages of the regional cooperation – especially concerning the question of mandatory tasks (“Pflichtaufgaben”) – and a growing self-interest of different cooperation partners lead the former harmoniously going process into a crisis.

In summer 2005 the Section of Environmental and Spatial Planning of the Technische Universität Darmstadt therefore decided to carry out an evaluation of the cooperation process and its results so far. A mix of different evaluation methods was used to estimate the efficiency and the effectiveness of the regional cooperation in Starkenburg. A comparative case study was also part of the examinations. The process and the results of this evaluation could be presented as well as an estimation of the impact the evaluation had on the further development of the regional cooperation process in Starkenburg.

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