

## Establishing functional interrelations and political governance: on the way to a cross-border metropolitan region of Szczecin

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## Bericht

# Establishing functional interrelations and political governance – On the way to a cross-border metropolitan region of Szczecin

JÜRGEN ARING

### Abstract

*The formation of a cross-border metropolitan region of Szczecin has passed the first stages, but it is still a long way to go. One of the reasons for a slow step-by-step-development is the "burden of history", meaning the new definition of the German-Polish border after World War II and the long-lasting charged relationship between the two countries. With the radical changes in Europe in 1989/90, Poland's entry into the EU in 2004, and the opening of the labor markets, this situation improved considerably. In fact, since these events the cross-border functional interrelations (labor market, housing market, shopping, crafts and services, foreign direct investments) have prospered. Similarly, the development of institutional arrangements shows progress. Within this process, however, realizing concrete projects in the local and regional context is much easier than the coordination of interests on the large scale of states and nations. An important step in the development process of an institutionally stipulated cross-border metropolitan region occurred in 2010, when different local and regional actors on the Polish side joined for a metropolitan initiative.<sup>1</sup>*

Cross-border-development; (cross-border) metropolitan region; functional interrelations; regional governance; European integration

### Zusammenfassung

**Funktionale Verflechtung und regionale Governance – Schritte auf dem Weg zu einer grenzüberschreitenden Metropolregion Szczecin**

*Die Bildung einer grenzüberschreitenden Metropolregion Szczecin ist seit den 1990er Jahren auf den Weg gekommen, doch im Vergleich mit grenzüberschreitenden Metropolregionen an der Westgrenze Deutschlands stehen Verflechtung und Integration noch am Anfang. Eine Ursache der vorsichtigen, schrittweisen -Entwicklung ist die „Last der Geschichte“ nach 1945. Mit den radikalen Veränderungen in Europa in den Jahren 1989/90, die in den Beitritt Polens in die EU im Jahr 2004 und einige Jahre später zur Öffnung der Arbeitsmärkte mündeten, haben sich die Chancen für eine grenzüberschreitende regionale Integration erheblich verbessert. Etwa seit 2004 zeigt sich eine wachsende funktionale grenzüberschreitende Verflechtung bei Berufspendlern, am Wohnungsmarkt, beim Einkaufsverkehr, in Dienstleistung und Handwerk sowie bei Direktinvestitionen. In ähnlicher Weise zeigt die Entwicklung der institutionellen Regelungen Fortschritte, insbesondere bei der Realisierung regionaler Projekte. Schwieriger gestaltet sich die großräumige Governance, weil aus dem Blickwinkel der Nationalstaaten andere Interessen in den Vordergrund rücken. Einen wichtigen Schritt in der Entwicklung einer institutionell festgelegten grenzüberschreitenden Metropolregion markierte das Jahr 2010, als sich verschiedene lokale und regionale Akteure auf der polnischen Seite einer grenzüberschreitenden, metropolitanen Initiative anschlossen.*

Grenzüberschreitende Entwicklung; (grenzüberschreitende) Metropolregion; funktionale Beziehungen; regionale Governance; Europäische Integration

<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on research carried out during the search for partners for the ImeG (Initiative for cross-border metropolitan regions of Germany) in the years 2011/2012. Apart from the analysis of literature and planning documents interviews with experts were conducted. In this regard I want to thank Marek Dutkowski, Stanislaw Dendewicz, Lilly Wolny, Petra Schmitt and Frank Segebade for their information and reflection.

## The burden of history

The Polish-German cross-border metropolitan region of Szczecin has yet to pass the stage of simply being an idea or a concept. The functional and political reality still shows a different picture, even though the situation improved step by step since the end of the cold war in 1989/90. Throughout socialism, Poland and the GDR celebrated an official friendship, but it had no direct effect on the population in the border-regions. Today, the Europe Agreement in 1994 and the foundation of the Euroregion 'Pomerania' in 1995 can be seen as first steps of a new policy. Poland's entry into the European Union in 2004 was a fundamental premise for further integration and the institutional co-operation within cross-border networks. However, in everyday life the working population had to wait for free cross-border transition until Poland and Germany opened their labor markets in 2007 and 2012, respectively.

The institutional improvements supporting a stronger integration in the cross-border metropolitan region went hand in hand with a learning process in both population and politics. People had to get over the history of nationalism, feelings of superiority, war, destruction, persecution, and relocation. These were traumatizing events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and deeply burned into the collective memory of Poles and Germans.

While –before World War II – Szczecin was a prospering bourgeois German city located in one day's traveling distance to Berlin, after the war it became a Polish city located at the Western border, far away from the capital Warszawa. A new population from Eastern Poland was relocated to Szczecin, but these new inhabitants had no links with the bourgeois character, the history of the city, and the German hinterland. According to several respondents, it lacked national confidence in the loyalty of Szczecin – in spite of the 'Polonization' of the former German city. On the one hand, Szczecin was now the border city at the Western socialist frontier; on the other hand, the border was not acknowledged until the treaty of Warszawa in 1970. Therefore for, long time Szczecin was perceived as a city

that could be lost to Germany again. It took until the German reunification in 1990 to ultimately confirm the international state of the Polish-German border. The experiences on the German side of the border were similarly complex and charged, although the official GDR-rhetoric of socialist friendship administered otherwise.

The weight of the Polish-German history in the border region is quite heavy and still affects the relationship. However, respondents on both sides of the border emphasize that the relationship has improved considerably over the last two decades. Knowledge and experience substitute for obsolete stereotypes resulting in better cross-border cooperation.

## Spatial Structures

Today, the metropolitan area of Szczecin comprises the region of the West Pomeranian Voivodeship on the Polish side and

the counties of Uckermark and Vorpommern-Greifswald on the German side of the border. It measures up to about 30,000 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to 2.077 million people, 81 % of which live in Poland and 19 % in Germany. The region is quite large, but outside of the urban parts of Szczecin rather rural and only scarcely populated. Apart from the coastal area of the Baltic Sea, this is also the case on the German side. The population density averages at about 70 inhabitants per square kilometer, but there are strong differences between the urban and rural areas. Around Szczecin (405,000 inhabitants) there are only a few semi-large cities, namely Stargard Szczeciński (70,000), Świnoujście (40,000), and Pasewalk (17,000) (see Map 1).

As the region is large in size, the distances within the region are quite long as well. It is about 113 km from Szczecin to the port city of Świnoujście, about 149 km to



Map 1: Szczecin: location and distances

the German city of Greifswald, and about 150 km to the large neighbour Berlin. Via motorway it takes about 1¼ hours to the center of Berlin, by train it takes 2-3 hours. Due to this bad connection by train, there is a Polish business working an inexpensive minibus connection between Szczecin and the airports of Berlin.

The population of the metropolitan region shows a slight shrinking process, which is forecasted to intensify in the future. It is stronger on the German side and less distinct on the Polish side. Due to the beginning suburbanization, Szczecin's hinterland registers a growing population.

Economically, Szczecin has undergone an extensive transformational process since the fall of the iron curtain. The shipbuilding industry, which had been an important economic driver during socialist times, broke down during the 1990s. Neither shipbuilding nor the port have specific economic relevance for Szczecin anymore. However, Szczecin is an important location for higher education. Altogether, more than 50,000 students are enrolled at the different institutions in the city.

The fact that Poland joined the EU in 2004 had a very positive impact on Szczecin's economic development, especially on the labor market. Up to this year the number of persons employed decreased both on the Polish and on the German side, but since 2004 there is strong growth on the Polish side and slight growth on the German side. Accordingly, unemployment has declined, particularly in Poland.

### Functional Interrelations

In reality there are still only a few functional interrelations, but their number is increasing progressively.

- According to experts the labor market counts about 1,000 Polish commuters who cross the border from East to West on a regular basis. In contrast, there is almost no commuting in the opposite direction, although the number of jobs is higher on the Polish side. Evidently, the differences between West and East in terms of salary and costs of living are still quite distinct leading to the result

that solely commuting from Poland to Germany is lucrative.

- In the housing market the stream of people flows in the same direction. Since 2004, about 1,000-1,500 Poles have moved to the German side of the border benefitting from lower real estate prices. This is especially the case for the German villages in the immediate environment of Szczecin, where many of the newcomers have settled.
- Cross-border-shopping is interesting for both Poles and Germans. Stories about Poles buying certain goods in Germany and Germans driving to Poland to shop are often told, but the exact amount is not yet quantified. The same is true for services in the household.
- In crafts and services many Polish companies take advantage of the labor cost-difference by offering their services in Germany comparatively cheap. Consequently, there is little knowledge of German craftsmen and service providers in the Polish market. The increasing economic interrelations in the cross-border region are supported through conventions and exhibitions organized by the chambers of commerce.
- Cross-border Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows in both directions. Since 2004 increasing German direct investment has been registered on the Polish side in the metropolitan region of Szczecin – especially in free enterprise zones. The predominant share of these direct investments is not from the border area, but originates in the Northern federal states of Germany. The size of FDI from Poland to Germany is lower. It ignores the immediate border area of Germany and focuses on the markets in Western Germany.

Given the short period of free cross-border traffic, the development of interrelations between the regions on both sides of the border are still in a primary phase. According to a study by MAACK (2010), however, it has noticeably accelerated in both directions between 2004 and 2009. Generally, the current system of interrelations is still asymmetric and reflects the

differences in labor costs, market prices and capitalization between Poland and Germany.

### Institutional Arrangements across the border

Hand in hand with the formation of cross-border functional interrelations, institutional structures and cooperation reaching abroad were set up. But while politically it was a quick and easy job to establish new structures, it takes some time to vitalize the arrangements.

The political-administrative multi-level system leads to two versions of governance: "small-scale local and regional governance" and "large-scale governance of states and nations". Through projects and every-day activities the former can lead to quick pragmatic success, especially in terms of topics that catch wide interest such as tourism, culture, and ecology. This was also the case for the cross-border metropolitan region of Szczecin, where, since 1995, the Euroregion Pomerania has been working successfully in the areas of culture, leisure, economics, tourism, and regional politics as well as implementing a Polish-German youth office. Moreover, cooperation for trans-regional projects was quickly established. The regional planning administrations collaborate formally in an "Oder-Partnership" and through a work group "Traffic, Spatial Geography, Infrastructure, and Transport" as well as intuitively when it comes to concrete projects and events.

In contrast, the development of large-scale governance structures is more difficult. The officials mainly comprise federal and national representatives, who put the focus on large-scale politics, trans-national relations and the respective national interests in general. In the process it becomes apparent that in the Polish urban system, the city of Szczecin plays only a minor role. Warszawa and Poznan are important, as well as Gdansk and Wrocław. Poland is interested in connecting the national traffic infrastructure to the European transport corridors. Institutionally, the search for the "central partner", which does not exist in the German multi-level

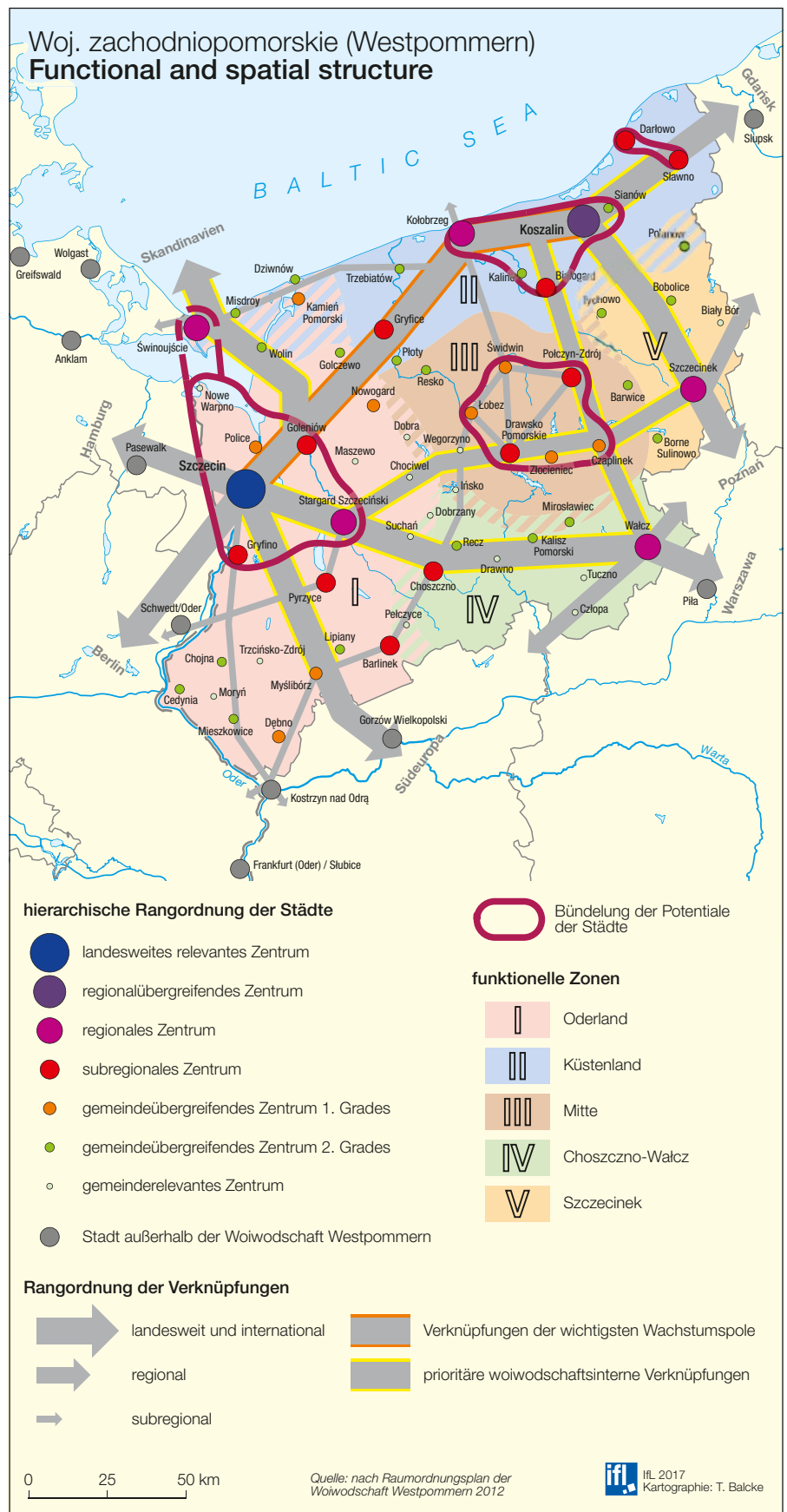
system of federation, federal states, counties and self-administrated municipalities, so far ended unsuccessfully. The partners on the German side are the national government as well as the federal states of Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Berlin, each focusing on different points of interest. Due to their rural deprivation Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Brandenburg quickly perceive Poland as a competitor (in terms of ports, central places ...), whereas Berlin seeks partners on the same level and rather looks on metropolises. Hamburg, Copenhagen, and Warszawa. All in all, the metropolitan area of Szczecin is – hindered by ignorance and opposing interests – not yet benefitting from cross-border large scale governance. In this regard, experts call for patience and time, use the spatial asymmetries as excuses, and demand all actors to work together and move ahead.

### The Institutionalization of the Metropolitan Region of Szczecin

The institutionalization of the cross-border metropolitan region of Szczecin as a whole is also just beginning. During the first decade of the 2000s the “metropolitan region of Szczecin” was the issue of many talks and essays of discourses on metropolitan regions without yielding concrete results (see Map 2).

As late as 2010 MAACK wrote a relative critical note:

“Szczecin has not met the expectations and opportunities to develop into the role as an urban center for the entire German-Polish region. As the political work in the municipality of Szczecin still lacks continuity, long-term strategies are difficult to execute. It was not until 2008/2009, when the city finalized the process of finding a general concept for the City of Szczecin that started Szczecin to intensify its cross-border cooperation. As a result Szczecin has not come closer to the goal of becoming a center or even metropolis for the entire German-Polish region. Even though, since 2004 parts of the development in the areas of economics and labor have been positive and the opening of the border has increased the possibilities of cross-border



Map 2: Woj. zachodniopomorskie (Westpommern): functional and spatial structure

cooperation, the important milestones on the path to a completely merged cross-border region have failed to appear in the investigation period" (MAACK 2010, pp. 52-53, translation by author).

Making regional arrangements and intensifying cooperation is a long lasting process, proceeding slowly step by step. The year 2005 can be seen as a starting point of an arrangement of the Metropolitan Region of Szczecin by founding the "Local Government Association for Regional Cooperation", which had the goal to put Szczecin into the national metropolitan discussion (HAMANN 2010, p. 79). In 2009 it was renamed to the "Association of the Metropolitan Region of Szczecin" (Stowarzyszenie Szczecińskiego Obszaru Metropolitalnego SSOM).

28 April 2010 marked the next important step with an agreement on the "Launch of a joint investigation about integration in the cross-border metropolitan region of Szczecin – Polish side" ("Porozumienie"). In this document, the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, the association of the metropolitan region of Szczecin, the city of Świnoujście and Association of the Polish municipalities of the Euroregion Pomerania agreed on the formation of a metropolitan region. This agreement only comprises actors on the Polish side of the metropolitan region, whereas the German side is not involved. It puts the focus on five priorities (WOJEWODZKA ZACHODNIOPOMORSKIE AND PARTNERS 2011, p. 2):

- For Poland in general Szczecin takes on a leading position in cross-border cooperation with Northern Germany and Scandinavia.
- Intensification of cooperation between the metropolitan regions of Szczecin and Berlin.
- Formation of requirements for the development of the role of a metropolitan region through active cooperation and partnership with cities and municipalities in Scandinavia, especially with the metropolitan region of the Øresund.
- Set-up of an institute of Nordic affairs in Szczecin.
- Development of a network of cooperation among the cities of the Baltic Sea.

In this regard, demands about the intra-regional development (nature, urban framework, upgrading of the transport infrastructure, local traffic, technical infrastructure, development of commercial zones, fostering of clusters, tourism) are formulated. Predominantly the focus is put on upgrading the infrastructure and modernizing the economic framework in the region, as well as connecting functionally and physically with other metropolitan regions (Berlin, The Baltic).

In this process of institutionalization, the sparsely populated and economically weak German part of the metropolitan region has not played a significant role, yet. That does not mean, that the German part is being ignored, but currently it is only connected informally. For a couple of years the city of Szczecin has initiated a cross-border conference in which actors from both sides of the border take part.

The concepts for the spatial structures in the metropolitan region are developed by the regional planning office at the executive of the regional assembly of the Voivodeship (Urząd Marszałkowski). The focus is put among others on strengthening the urban hinterland, on upgrading the traffic infrastructure, and on cooperation between Szczecin and Świnoujście.

Much points to the fact that in the process of institutionalizing the metropolitan region of Szczecin, it will take more time for the participants to find their roles. Representatives of the different authorities in the multi-level system argue from their specific points of interest and positions concerning the future of the cross-border metropolitan region of Szczecin. This clearly illustrates that further discussions within the region are necessary, which is quite normal for complex governance-processes. The formation of a cross-border metropolitan region of Szczecin has passed the first stages, but it is still a long way to go.

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## Резюме

ЮРГЕН АРИНГ

### Формирование функциональных взаимосвязей и политическое управление – на пути к трансграничному метрополитенскому региону Щецин

Формирование региона Щецин (*Szczecin*) началось с 1990 г., однако по сравнению с трансграничными районами на западной границе Германии его связи и интеграция находятся ещё на начальной стадии. Причиной осторожного, постепенного развития является после 1945 г. «исторический груз прошлого». В результате радикальных изменений в Европе в 1989-90 гг., приведших к вступлению Польши в ЕС в 2004 г. и спустя несколько лет к открытию рынков труда, значительно улучшились шансы трансграничной региональной интеграции. Примерно с 2004 г. отмечается растущая функциональная трансграничная интеграция маятниковых трудовых миграций, на рынке жилья, в приграничной торговле и услугах, а также в области прямых инвестиций. Подобным же образом происходит развитие институциональных механизмов, в особенности при реализации региональных проектов. Крупномасштабное управление реализуется сложнее, поскольку с точки зрения национальных государств на переднем плане находятся другие интересы. В 2010 г. был сделан важный шаг в развитии институционально оформленного трансграничного метрополитенского региона, когда различные местные и региональные акторы с польской стороны присоединились к соответствующей трансграничной инициативе.

Трансграничное развитие; (трансграничный) метрополитенский регион; функциональные связи; региональное управление; Европейская интеграция.

## Résumé

JÜRGEN ARING

### Établissement d'interrelations fonctionnelles et d'une gouvernance politique: exemple de la région métropolitaine transfrontalière de Szczecin

Si la création de la région métropolitaine transfrontalière de Szczecin est en marche depuis les années 1990, l'interdépendance et l'intégration n'en sont qu'à leurs débuts en comparaison avec les régions métropolitaines transfrontalières à l'ouest de l'Allemagne. L'une des causes de ce développement graduel et prudent reste le «poids de l'Histoire» depuis 1945. Avec les changements radicaux survenus en Europe dans les années 1989 et 1990, qui ont abouti à l'entrée de la Pologne dans l'UE en 2004 et à l'ouverture des marchés du travail quelques années plus tard, les opportunités d'intégration régionale transfrontalière se sont nettement accrues. Depuis 2004 environ, on observe une interdépendance transfrontalière fonctionnelle croissante à diverses échelles: employés faisant la navette entre leur domicile et leur lieu de travail, marché immobilier, déplacements liés aux achats, investissements directs et secteur des services et de l'artisanat. De la même manière, le développement des réglementations institutionnelles progresse, en particulier en ce qui concerne la réalisation de projets régionaux. La gouvernance à grande échelle s'impose en revanche plus difficilement, car du point de vue des États nationaux, d'autres intérêts priment. L'année 2010 marque une étape importante dans le développement institutionnel d'une région métropolitaine transfrontalière; les différents acteurs locaux et régionaux côté polonais se rallient alors à une telle initiative.

Développement transfrontalier; région métropolitaine (transfrontalière); relations fonctionnelles; gouvernance régionale; intégration européenne