

Preface

The political and economic face of Europe has changed dramatically over the past fifteen years. Most notably, the division into a western and eastern bloc has been overcome. The eastward enlargement of the European Union in May 2004 aims to ensure peace, security, prosperity and stability on the continent. Moreover, in many Central and Eastern European countries, a new and modern knowledge-based society is replacing the traditional economic model based on industrial production. This opens up new socio-economic perspectives and ensures that these countries will be potent players and competitors in the European economy.

At the same time European integration poses a serious challenge. In Central and Eastern Europe, the transformation from totalitarian states and centrally-planned economies to western democracies and market economies has caused dramatic shifts in economic, social and ecological development. It became clear at an early stage that this transformation has a spatial dimension. Thus, while some regions have been able to take advantage of the new situation, others have been seriously weakened by structural change. Many cities and regions which prospered during an era when political priorities were focused on industrial development have suffered rapid economic decline. Unemployment, social problems and environmental damage were some of the consequences which now place a heavy burden on the development of these areas.

In the late nineties the Dresden-based Leibniz Institute of Ecological and Regional Development (IOER) initiated a research project on the future of industrialised cities and regions undergoing structural change (FOCUS). It was conducted in the framework of the Network of Spatial Research Institutions in Central and Eastern Europe, coordinated by the IOER. The objectives of the project were to analyse the problems of transformation in affected regions, to compare the strategies which have been or are currently applied in order to deal with the problems, and to initiate a wider discussion on the challenges related to the topic.

With the support of the EU Community Initiative INTERREG II C, designed to encourage interregional cooperation and the exchange of experience, research teams from eleven countries were involved in the project: Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Ukraine. In 2000, the Leipzig Declaration of the Network of Spatial Research Institutions in Central and Eastern Europe became an important milestone in international discussion about the future of industrialised cities and regions undergoing structural change.

This book highlights the major results of the FOCUS project which from 1999 ran over several years and in the mean time has resulted in concrete pilot projects in a number of Central and Eastern European countries. Eleven country reports are presented. They largely refer to the situation in the late nineties and the beginning of the new century, and are placed into the framework of the current state of discussion.

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