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**A Socio-Economic and Institutional
Portrait of Bremerhaven**

A case study from a
local government research perspective

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This paper has been developed as part of the research project “The Ecological Modernisation of Structurally Disadvantaged European Maritime Port Cities”, carried out by the University of Hull (UK), in collaboration with the University of Applied Sciences in Bremen (Germany). The study investigates whether climate change can offer new opportunities for cities to induce economic modernisation and development, to enhance their social structures and to improve their external images. The two port cities Bremerhaven (Germany) and Hull (United Kingdom) have been chosen as case studies due to similar socio-economic structures and developmental challenges.

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1. A socio-economic and institutional portrait of Bremerhaven as background for a wider research perspective

The study “The Ecological Modernisation of Structurally Disadvantaged European Maritime Port Cities” investigates whether climate change can create new opportunities for selected cities to induce economic modernisation and development, and to improve their social structures as well as their external images. Due to resemblances in their socio-economic structures and to similar developmental challenges, the two port cities Bremerhaven (Germany) and Hull (United Kingdom) have been chosen as case studies. Both cities are confronted with declining industries, such as fishing and ship building, facing at the same time opportunities for emerging sectors such as the offshore wind industry.

The project addresses the following three questions:

- How do structurally disadvantaged maritime port cities react to climate change as well as to the challenges and opportunities resulting from climate change? Which are the similarities and differences?
- How relevant are local policy makers, the economy, or civil society actors to the creation of economic or marketing strategies?
- Does the appearance of new climate policy alliances facilitate ecological modernisation?

The project is designed as transdisciplinary collaboration project of political scientists, geographers, sociologists and natural scientists with stakeholders from both cities, including local governments, administrations, associations and enterprises.

As for Bremerhaven, the research will address the municipal strategy “Klimastadt Bremerhaven” (Climate City Bremerhaven), which has been developed by the city, the local economy and civil society. The following three areas are of particular interest:

- the economic development of the offshore wind energy industry;
- the city’s climate policy instruments and activities;
- the city’s participation in regional as well as supra-regional networks.

The following analysis of the socio-economic development of Bremerhaven and its political and institutional structures was carried out as a preparation for consecutive research steps that seek to address the research questions using a comparative approach.

The working paper documents first, the essential knowledge on the local government of Bremerhaven and its constitutional situation within the German state of Bremen, and second, recent findings on its socio-economic dynamics, drawing on results of research on urban and regional development in Germany. Besides its contribution to the research questions of the project, the paper is obviously worth to be published independently as a collection of basic scientific knowledge relevant to further studies on local governments and regional development.

2. Institutional frame conditions

Bremerhaven is situated in the North-western part of the Federal Republic of Germany at the mouth of the river Weser which flows into the North Sea. Belonging to the Free Hanseatic city of Bremen, one of the three so-called city states in Germany, it forms an enclave in the state of Lower Saxony. Bremen bought the land to found Bremerhaven from the Kingdom of Hanover (nowadays Lower-Saxony) in 1827 to overcome serious problems caused by the silting of the Weser. Until today, the seaport of Bremerhaven is the most important economic factor of the city (BIS 2013).

With only 500 000 persons entitled to vote, the city state of Bremen (consisting of the two cities Bremen and Bremerhaven) is by far the smallest state in Germany (Probst 2011). However, as a state, Bremen is characterized by some institutional particularities if compared to other municipalities. These can only be understood in the context of German federalism. First of all, Bremen has its own government and parliament and the same executive and legislative powers as, for instance, the neighboring state of Lower Saxony, including representation in the states chamber at federal level (Bundesrat¹) (Kropp 2005). The state parliament (Bremische Bürgerschaft) is comprised of 83 delegates, 15 of them are elected in Bremerhaven (Bremische Bürgerschaft 2013b). There is a five percent clause in each of the two cities for the election of the state parliament. This enables smaller parties to gain seats in the Bürgerschaft if they are able to gain five percent in one of the two cities, often making Bremen to a “test area” for new political movements (Probst 2011). The Bürgerschaft is dealing with, for instance, education in the state, social policy, cultural issues or economic issues (Bremische Bürgerschaft 2013a, c). At the same time, municipal and state characteristics are extremely blurred in Bremen because the state constitution also provides the legal framework conditions for municipal tasks (cf. BremLV). For example, the state parliament also works as a city council for Bremen (called Stadtbürgerschaft), meeting without the members of parliament coming from Bremerhaven when dealing with municipal tasks (Land Bremen 2012; Prigge et al. 2001; Prigge et al. 1999).

The position of President of the Senate (the government of the city state) corresponds to the position of a Prime Minister in most other states of Germany, while the senators are cabinet members similarly to ministers in other states. The Social Democrats have been the major governing party since 1946. Since 2005, Jens Böhrnsen has served as President of the Senate and Mayor (Probst 2011).

The city of Bremerhaven is the second, administratively independent city in the state. It has an own, very particular, municipal constitution called *unechte Magistratsverfassung* (Walter-Rogg et al. 2005). Due to its particular legal situation within the “two-city-state”, Bremerhaven is sometimes considered as the “freest municipality” (Sheerer 2003: 110) in Germany since state control is perceived to be rather weak compared to the situation in other German states. The municipal legal framework foresees a strict separation of executive and legislative powers (cf. VerfBrhv). The city council of Bremerhaven (Stadtverordnetenversammlung) is the supreme decision-making body and consists of 48 delegates. The Magistrate is only an executive body that cannot initiate legislation. Members of the Magistrate are elected by the city council; currently there are 11 members: 5 full time members and 6 voluntary ones. Legislation of the city council has to be directly implemented by the administration (Probst 2011). In December 2012, 3153 people were employed in the administration of Bremerhaven (Bundesagentur für Arbeit 2013). The administration is divided into 11 departments which comprise the portfolios for the members of the Magistrate (Stadt Bremerhaven 2013c).

¹ For further information on the *Bundesrat* cf. Patzelt 2005; Schmidt 2003.

Examples are, for instance, the department for education and cultural issues or the environmental department which deals with waste disposal laws, the protection of species, laws relating to water, and hazardous waste inquiries (Stadt Bremerhaven 2013a).

As in the city state, the Social Democratic Party has been the principal governing party in Bremerhaven for a very long time. After 12 years of a Grand Coalition, Bremerhaven is governed by a red-green coalition since 2011. The mayor of Bremerhaven is Melf Grantz (SPD) (Stadt Bremerhaven 2013b). As there is no five percent clause for the municipal elections in Bremerhaven anymore, there are now 11 parties and groupings represented in the city council². The years of the Grand Coalition strengthened especially the Greens (+10 % from 2007-2011), but also other smaller parties at the left and right of the political spectrum. One example for this is the extreme-right German People's Union which constantly held seats in parliament until 2011 and has now merged with the National Democratic Union that only gained one seat in the 2011 elections (Probst 2011; Stadt Bremerhaven 2011).

Mayor direct competences of the city include police and education. Thus, the main areas of local self-government in Bremerhaven, as in all German local governments, are tasks related to local and regional development and planning (Hellermann 2000) and the operation of public institutions and enterprises (Püttner 1999). These are, in the case of Bremerhaven, mainly the municipal waste management company Entsorgungsbetriebe Bremerhaven and Seestadt Immobilien which manages the public sector real estate.

Further important factors characterizing the situation of Bremerhaven are, first, the relation to the state and its "capital" Bremen, and, second, the relation to the regional hinterland, separated from Bremerhaven by the state border between Bremen and Lower Saxony.

Instructive for the relation between Bremerhaven and Bremen is the port policy for the two ports in the city state. For a long time, the port of the capital Bremen had been given priority, despite Bremerhaven's direct and more advantageous location at the deep water shipping channels. Even though the port of the daughter city Bremerhaven is its economic core today, the port still belongs administratively to the territory of the city of Bremen and is controlled by Bremen's municipal harbor authority, the Hansestadt Bremisches Hafenamtsamt (cf. HafetrG). This clearly shows the strong orientation of the states' institutional structures towards Bremen's interests. This situation is an issue of permanent discussion between both cities. The situation within the regional context is characterized by a demand for strong cooperation with the neighboring rural district (Landkreis) Cuxhaven and its municipalities. However, aspects of regional cooperation are often also influenced by the two state governments of Lower Saxony and Bremen. As an instrument for improved and close cross-border cooperation, the so-called Metropolitan Region Bremen-Oldenburg, North-West Germany has been established in 2005, with Bremerhaven, Bremen and the Landkreis Cuxhaven as members, among others (Metropolregion Bremen-Oldenburg im Nordwesten e.V. 2010).

² Results of the 2011 election in Bremerhaven: SPD: 33.1 % (16 seats); Greens: 22.6 % (11 seats); CDU: 20.0 % (9 seats); BIW – Bürger in Wut: 7.4 % (3 seats); Die Linke/The Left Party: 4.6 % (2 seats); FDP: 3.3 % (2 seats); Pirates 2.2 % (1 seat); NPD 2.2 % (1 seat); B+B – Bremer und Bremerhavener Wählergemeinschaft 1.5 % (1 seat); Für Bremerhaven 1.3 % (1 seat); RRP – Rentnerinnen- und Rentner-Partei 1.3 % (1 seat), PdB – Partei der deutschsprachigen Belgier 0.6 % (Stadt Bremerhaven 2011).

3. Socio-economic situation

The German population census counted 108 156 inhabitants in Bremerhaven in May 2011. However, estimates indicate that the number is declining (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen 2013e). In 2010, the GDP amounted to 3.74 billion Euros in Bremerhaven which means 32 925 Euro per capita (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen 2013b). This was above German average (30 532 Euro/per capita), but below the average of the city state Bremen (39 920 Euro/per capita) (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2013b).

For a better understanding of the socio-economic situation of Bremerhaven, a brief reference to the present research on regional disparities in Germany is useful:

Pohlan and Wixforth's study (2005) analyses the development of 111 German cities on the basis of the following five indicators: population development 1995–2002 (in %), percentage of population older than 64 years 1995–2002, number of employees within the scope of national insurance 1995–2002 (in %), gross value added per person in 2002 (in €) and number of welfare recipients per 1000 people in 2002. The social scientists identify six clusters of cities and confirm the long discussed North-South division at the Rhine-Main "border" in terms of economic and budgetary performance (Friedrichs et al. 1986). Moreover, an East-West division has emerged since the breakdown of the GDR (Pohlan/Wixforth 2005). Neu (2012) confirms these findings by stating that municipalities that are confronted with both declining population numbers and high unemployment rates are situated predominantly in the Eastern part of Germany. Pohlan and Wixforth (2005) explain that these developments also result in the deterioration of institutional capacities of already declining areas.

Another study conducted by Prigge and Schwarzer (2006) broadly confirms these findings, but also highlights the persistence of structural problems in the Ruhr area. They identify four clusters of large German cities (with more than 500 000 inhabitants) and places Bremen and Hamburg in a cluster that is characterized by an average economic development. Pohlan and Wixforth (2005), who exclude the cities belonging to the city states because of methodological reasons, show that the Northwest of Germany is predominantly characterized by a cluster of cities with economic problems and shrinking populations.

Since socio-economic developments are closely linked to institutional factors, the literature on the position of municipalities within the German budgetary system has to be mentioned, too: Not only in recent years have local governments increasingly been in financial crisis (Hansmann 2011; Junkernheinrich 2010). Moreover, an increasing divergence of sub-regions can be observed. The latest figures on municipal finances published by the leading municipal associations in Germany predict an overall revenue surplus of 4 to 4.5 billion Euros at the local level. On the other hand, 2012 resulted in a new "record" for local cash credits: nearly 48 billion had to be borrowed. Moreover, social security expenses are still on the rise – rather independent from the economic situation. This is one of the reasons for a decline of more than 10 per cent in municipal investments in 2012. (Deutscher Städtetag 2013; DStGB 2013).

Lots of municipalities faced a severe loss in revenue in recent years, resulting from economic recession in the financial crises in 2009. As a reaction, municipalities had to reduce their personnel and so-called non-obligatory or "voluntary" services, including important components of the much appreciated "local welfare state".

As one cause of the ongoing crisis, the German local government's financial system is under discussion: German local governments are basically dependent on three types of income. Being connected to local employment levels (income tax) and the economic situation (sales and trade taxes), the first two types of revenues fuel local competition within regions and are

dependent on economic growth. Thus, they are reinforcing the polarization between prosperous and declining municipalities. The third type of revenues, grants, is able to compensate for such economic inequalities to some degree, but at the same time tends to reduce local autonomy. Discussions to change the system started more than a decade ago, but could not resolve the problem until now (Landberg et al. 2010).

This characterization of the general debate on the socio-economic development of German municipalities allows understanding the situation existing in Bremerhaven.

Here, two recent studies include Bremerhaven and present detailed data: The first cluster analysis is a project called “Wegweiser Kommune” which is based on data of the year 2008, but now includes data up to 2011 (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013b). The second one is part of a project on the socio-economic development of Germany and is funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) (Neu 2012). Marc Neu is actually working on both projects, but the two studies neither use the same data, nor are they in any sense dependent upon each other.

For the BMBF-project, Neu uses two factors to analyze the 439 administrative districts and administratively independent cities in Germany: the social demographic status and urban job centrality. The study is based on data of 2006. To find out whether there are regional concentrations of disadvantaged municipalities, eight socioeconomic and demographic indicators are analyzed: population development 1999–2006 (in %); percentage of population under 18 years, percentage of population older than 64 years, percentage of SGB II-recipients (a basic jobseeker’s allowance³), underemployment rate, net equivalent income (average of the years 2003 to 2006), job centrality, and population density. Neu identifies six distinctive clusters of cities and districts. The results confirm the north-south divide and significant differences between Eastern and Western Germany.

Here, Bremerhaven is assigned to of cluster 6, as one of 23 “socio-demographically severely underprivileged cities”. The cluster is characterized by exorbitant high underemployment rates (22 % in average) and very high percentages of recipients of SGB II unemployment benefits (20.6 % in average). Naturally, the income is far below the average. Cluster 6 faces population losses and an aging population. Only job centrality is higher than in the German average, but the two other city clusters still have considerably higher numbers. Table 1 shows Neu’s results for the German average, cluster 6 and Bremerhaven.

| Table 1 | population development in % 1999–2006 | population younger than 18 years. in % 2006 | population older than 64 years in % 2006 | SGBII–rate in % 2006 | underemployment rate in % 2006 | net equivalent income in Euro (monthly average of 2003 to 2006) | job centrality ⁴ in % 2006 | population density in people per km ² 2006 |
|-------------|--|--|---|----------------------|--------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|--|
| Deutschland | -0.7 | 17.1 | 20.4 | 10.5 | 12.7 | 1376 | 47.2 | 507 |
| Cluster 6 | -5.4 | 13.2 | 22.7 | 20.6 | 22.0 | 1179 | 58.4 | 1014 |

³ The German welfare system distinguishes between unemployment benefits paid by social insurances and welfare paid to everybody in need, but at a considerably lower level. Here, the second type is meant.

⁴ Job centrality: Number of employees with a job of mandatory social insurance at the working place in proportion to the population aged 15 to 64 years.

| | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|----------|------|------|
| Bremerhaven | -5.5 | 17.0 | 21.5 | 25.1 | 24.1 | 115 8 | 56.6 | 1495 |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|----------|------|------|

The table emphasizes the severe problems Bremerhaven is confronted with. For instance, the SGB II-rate of Bremerhaven is even higher than the average of cluster 6: While the national rate was 10.5 per cent in 2006, it was 20.6 per cent in cluster 6 and 25.1 per cent in Bremerhaven. Only the percentage of young people in Bremerhaven is as high as the average in Germany. Thereby, Bremerhaven is an exception in cluster 6 which only has 13.2 per cent of inhabitants under 18 years old, while Bremerhaven has 17 per cent.

“Wegweiser Kommune” is a project of the German Bertelsmann Stiftung, a private operating non-profit foundation that focuses, among other issues, on research on political, social, and economic issues. The foundation considers itself to be an “engine” that initializes reforms and develops possible solutions for societal challenges. 2951 municipalities are part of the study which includes all municipalities with more than 5000 inhabitants (reporting date: 30.06.2012).

Just like Neu the authors pooled different indicators in two major factors: socio-demographic status and urbanity/business location. The study uses nine starting indicators, but today includes far more data. The first starting indicators are quite similar to the ones chosen by Neu: population development 2001–2008 (%), population density (inhabitants per km²), percentage of population aged 65 to 79 years (%), percentage of population younger than 18 years (%), SGB-II-rate (%), purchasing power of private households (in average, Euro), percentage of single-person-households (%), percentage of highly qualified at the place of work (%) and the place of residence (%) (Wegweiser Kommune 2012a). The analysis identified 9 demographic types of municipalities, distinguished by their rural or central character, size, and economic and social dynamics.

Bremerhaven is counted among the “type-9 regions”, containing 264 rapidly shrinking municipalities facing strong pressure to adapt. Most of these municipalities are situated in Eastern Germany and have less than 25 000 inhabitants; however the cluster also includes cities such as Lübeck, Gera, and Wilhelmshaven in addition to Bremerhaven. Municipalities in this cluster have an aging and shrinking population, small households, low purchasing rates, and income poverty is widely spread. As already stated above, these municipalities often face financial problems as well (Wegweiser Kommune 2012b).

So, how do the figures for Bremerhaven actually look like? The public budget in Bremerhaven amounts to 639.5 million in 2013 which signifies an increase of 13.3 million compared to 2012 (Magistrat der Stadt Bremerhaven 2011). This corresponds to 5903 Euro/per capita. The public deficit of the city state is approximately 20 billion Euros, so about 30 000 Euro/per capita. The amount of new net debts per year is decreasing in Bremerhaven. Nevertheless, the city still built up around 83 million Euros of new debts in 2012 (Bund der Steuerzahler Niedersachsen und Bremen 2013).

The data-analysis of “Wegweiser Kommune” indicates an average population loss of -9.1 per cent for “type-9 regions” from year 2001 to year 2008, but for Bremerhaven it was just -3.5 per cent. However, in the same period the German average was only -0.83 per cent. (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013a; Wegweiser Kommune 2012b). After all, the decrease in population is slowing down in Bremerhaven: The Seven-year trend indicated a population loss of -8.3 per cent from 1997–2003, -6.5 per cent from 1999–2005, and -3.7 per cent from 2005–2011. The city actually gained some 1.34 per cent of the total number of inhabitants in 2012. This is the first increase since 2002 (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen 2013a).

In addition to these demographic trends, economic dynamics within the city are a cause of concern. Bremerhaven has been extremely hit by structural crisis because of its dependence on declining industries such as shipbuilding or fishery, and on sectors like harbor activities in which the restructuring of work processes has resulted in severe job cuts. The total turnover of the sea-fishing market in Bremerhaven gives evidence on the developments. In 2000, 107 659 tons were transshipped, but the number decreased till 2008 to 20 649 tons (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen 2013c). As a result, Bremerhaven has experienced a persistent pattern of above-average levels of unemployment, with 21.2 per cent of unemployed people in Bremerhaven in 2011.

Likewise, the SGB II-rate in 2008 was 7.8 per cent in Germany and 23.2 per cent in Bremerhaven. This term is nearly three times as high as the German average and provides evidence for the severe economic as well as social problems Bremerhaven is facing. Unfortunately, the percentage of children (under 15 years) and youth (15-17 years old) living in poverty is even higher: 32.3 per cent of the children and 26.1 per cent of the youth did receive welfare benefits according to SGB II in 2011. The German average for children was only 14.9 per cent in 2011 viewing a slight decrease in recent years (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2012). At least, the numbers in Bremerhaven are also decreasing slightly since 2008. In 2007, 40.8 per cent of the children and 28.1 per cent of the youth lived in poverty. (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013a).

Nevertheless, Bremerhaven functions as a regional center, both economically and in regard to the labor market. Bremerhaven is a destination for commuters as the indicator of job centrality shows: The number of employees with a job of mandatory social insurance contributions in Bremerhaven is higher than the number of those people living in Bremerhaven (ratio 1.4). The Zensus 2011 showed that 56.5 per cent of the working population in Bremerhaven also lives in Bremerhaven, but 43.5 per cent are commuters that are only working in the city (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen 2013f). Moreover, the percentage of highly educated people living in Bremerhaven was lower than the percentage of highly educated people working in Bremerhaven (6.7 % to 5.6 % in 2008). Nonetheless, these values are still below the German average rates for highly educated people (8.2 % and 6.3 %) (Wegweiser Kommune 2012b).

In recent times, the labor market in Bremerhaven is characterized by positive developments. Employment grew about 10.5 per cent in the period of 2000 to 2011. At the same time, the German average was only +4.5 per cent (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2013a). The significant increase in Bremerhaven is caused by new jobs in the service sector (+18 %) while there are less jobs in the manufacturing industry. Today, the number of the working population is growing above-average (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen 2013d). Currently, Bremerhaven has a working population of 50 990 people (as of Mai 2011), expressed as a percentage: 47.4. Thereof, 44 050 are employees (88.3 %), 2710 are civil servants (5.4 %) (Statistisches Landesamt Bremen 2013f).

The distribution of income is quite heterogeneous in Bremerhaven. As the unemployment and poverty figures already suggest, Bremerhaven has a rather high amount of households with an income lower than 1000 Euro/month: 16.5 per cent in 2011. At the other end of the income distribution 12.4 per cent have more than 4000 Euro/month. However, the numbers were even worse in 2007: 17.0 per cent did belong to the households with a low income, only 9.8 per cent to those with a high one (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013a).

The project Wegweiser Kommune gives some general advice of how "type-9 regions" should respond to the findings. In short, a radical repositioning is needed. For this purpose, the municipalities need to take stock of what their performance and competitiveness is truly like. Then, they have to support and initialize citizens' commitment, model projects and

experimentation clauses to try to stabilize the city centers. All this should be done in regional and inter-municipal cooperation. Naturally, these measures cannot solve the dilemma of necessary, comprehensive action and shrinking financial room for manoeuvre (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2013a).

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To institutional frame conditions

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