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Facing the Divide

Polarisation – In search of new answers

Immigration – How cities respond

Peripheralisation – Not all rural areas affected

Justice – The urban-rural balance in focus



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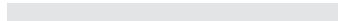
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Social polarisation in space – In search of new answers

That social disparity is on the rise in our society is largely no longer a matter of dispute. Many analyses and studies even speak of social polarisation, meaning that opposition is increasing while the centre ground is being lost. This social divergence is also spatially evident. Whether it be within urban neighbourhoods or between city and countryside, inequalities are becoming more pronounced. The IRS researches socio-spatial polarisation from a variety of perspectives and, through policy consultation, assists in the search for possibilities for restoring balance. This themed issue examines both of these aspects.



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Social polarisation forms in relation to inequalities in income and the unequal distribution of wealth, through the division of the labour market into sectors according to qualifications and income, or through segmentation of the housing market into different areas by price and supply. A new line of social polarisation can currently also be discerned in the handling of migration: while cosmopolitan, urban academics and business representatives espouse a liberal-minded immigration society and the controlled immigration of qualified workers, among the rather sedentary segments of the population threatened by decline in many rural spaces there is a strengthening of xenophobic and right-wing populist positions that advocate for the limitation or discontinuation of international migration. Out of this polarisation, new social conflicts are currently arising in structurally weak cities, for which no political solutions have yet been found. The contribution to the recently completed lead project of the research department "Regeneration of Cities and Towns" (► [page 8](#)) expands upon the topic of migration and polarisation.

Polarisation takes place at various levels. On the one hand a new opposition between "metropolis" and "province" is appearing between urban and rural spaces. At the same time, social segregation and displacement continues to advance within individual neighbourhoods in large cities. In their research, the department "Regeneration of Cities and Towns" has thus far focused on the concepts of peripheralisation and marginalisation with regard to socio-spatial processes of decline. Small and medium-sized cities and regions at the rural periphery are becoming isolated, as populations decline and age due to the emigration of its qualified workforce, the closure of infrastructure such as schools and railway stations, and their increasing dependence on decision-making centres in economy and politics (► [page 15](#)). Within cities their arises a growing concentration of low-income households in "problem areas", which are often characterised by poor spatial location, substandard infrastructure, and qualitatively poorer housing stock (► [page 12](#)). Such areas are often so-called "arrival neighbourhoods", i.e. districts that become the target areas of migrants and which must therefore make arrival and integration possible, while simultaneously managing the challenges of newly introduced diversity.

These forms of socio-spatial inequality have been researched for decades and are regularly described in spatial-development reports and the federal government's reports on poverty and wealth. For a long time, spatial policies in Germany have, coming from a liberal-market perspective, paid little attention to the increasing spatial inequality. Only since the rise of the right-wing populist AfD in the most recent municipal, state, and national elections has the equality of living conditions anchored in the German constitution been rediscovered by politics, leading to a search for ways in which "neglected spaces" and spaces in which many people feel subjectively abandoned can once again be more strongly integrated into the economic and political system. To this end, the Federal Ministry of the Interior has employed a new commission for "Equal living conditions" in building and housing, which should submit concrete suggestions next year for the support of these regions.

Metropolis and province – A new opposition?

To speak of an opposition between city and countryside is a simplification and exaggeration, since there are quite different development types for urban and rural spaces. Nevertheless there is an observable trend in Germany towards a polarisation of urban metropolises and rural provincial towns that is also reflected in election results.

While many structurally strong metropolitan regions and university towns are growing, many structurally weak rural areas are shrinking, especially in eastern Germany. This spatial polarisation is intensified not only by internal migration resulting from rural depopulation, but also by international forms of migration. The 2017 spatial development report established that educationally motivated and early-career migration, migration for work, and refugee migration are reinforcing the trend towards spatial disparities, as these overwhelmingly draw younger people to the already burgeoning cities. Structurally weak regions fall behind in the competition for migrants, and disparities are further compounded by a general shortage of skills.

New answers: Managing immigration in structurally weak spaces

In the meantime, spatial-development policy and research institutions closely connected to policy have developed ideas of how to counter socio-spatial polarisation. In the 2017 spatial development report, for instance, as well as in a position paper of the Academy for Spatial Research and Planning (ARL), a more pronounced regional management of international immigration in rural areas has been discussed. This should relieve the burden on conurbations, help maintain under-utilised infrastructure such as schools and train stations, and counteract the shortage of skilled workers. In a contribution to the Heinrich Böll Stiftung's special committee on "Spatial Inequality", Dr. Manfred Kühn of the IRS research department "Regeneration of Cities and Towns" developed initial ideas on the implementation of such a strategy. A historical precedent was provided in the tradition of the enlisting of Huguenots for the "peopling" of depleted rural spaces in Prussia.

The federal states could put in place more decentralised immigration policies and thus provide stimulus for immigration to structurally weak towns and regions. To this end, special funding programmes would need to be provided for new businesses and for the employment of immigrants in such regions as have a demand for skilled labour, for example in trade and care professions. Programmes to further private house ownership could also make a contribution. "Residential property is not only much more prevalent in rural areas in comparison to cities, it also reinforces the connection of immigrants to their place of residence. Small, rural settlement forms with house and courtyard, workshops, stores, garages, and gardens introduce special structural open spaces for self-employed tradespeople. These open spaces are increasingly rare in the booming metropolises", says Kühn.

"Arrival neighbourhoods" in cities

New developments can also be seen in dealing with "arrival neighbourhoods". For a long time, urban districts such as Berlin-Kreuzberg, Cologne-Mühlheim, or Essen-Katernberg were considered predominantly as "problem cases". High rates of fluctuation, low incomes, and high welfare dependency among the population of these areas were seen as symptoms of a downward spiral to be counteracted by an upgrading of the neighbourhood and better social diversification. However, a perspective is evidently gaining ground that seeks to recognise the contribution that these areas are making to furthering integration in society as a whole (► [page 8](#)). Social scientists and local representatives are demanding that the above-average burdens on arrival neighbourhoods be counterbalanced by significantly increased and cross-ministerial support.

Gentrification and marginalisation in the cities

The polarisation of cities is not only driven by the increasing concentration of low-income households, however. It is also supported – so to speak, "from above" – by the development and proliferation of islands of affluence. Gentrification processes have become less a peripheral phenomenon than a "mainstream" occurrence in urban development, acquiring broad swathes of the inner city. What is problematic is the appreciation in value of these areas above all due to the fact that the neighbourhoods affected are those that in the past preserved affordable living space for lower- to middle-income earners. With increasing rent, these places of retreat are being lost and marginalised households are largely being displaced into areas to a large extent already characterised by poverty. In Germany, this usually applies to old housing areas with significant migrant populations, as well as peripheral large housing estates on the city outskirts. Traditionally poor areas are currently becoming the focus of gentrification processes, and low-income households are being crowded out. Conversely, levels of poverty at the urban fringes are increasing (► [page 12](#)). In summary, growing wealth in urban centres contrasts with increasing poverty at the margins.

More resources for disadvantaged spaces!

How can policy confront this? In fact, dealing with problematic neighbourhoods has been part of the routine for many German cities at least since the introduction of the "Social City" programme in 1999. Handling gentrification has also long been a topic of urban planning. By means of urban-development funding or through designating certain milieus as protected areas, the appreciation in value of neighbourhoods near the inner city and the displacement of low-income households has been worked against for decades.

Nonetheless a current study by the Berlin Social Science Center (WZB) titled "How fragile is the social architecture of our cities?" attests to the growing socio-spatial divide. In German cities, poorer people are living with increasing concentration in certain residential neighbourhoods. In eastern German cities in particular, the dynamic with which segregation processes have developed in the recent years is "historically unprecedented". This situation clearly demonstrates that the approaches thus far applied to neighbourhood development are not in a position to effectively oppose developments in the housing and labour markets. In nearly all large cities, therefore, new approaches are currently being

sought that focus on stronger city-wide intervention. The spectrum of proposals reaches from the boosting of communal housing associations and the introduction of a "new common utility" to the tightening of tenancy-law regulations, supporting social housing, and a reform of labour-policy mechanisms. The demand for a "right to the city" has become a central issue of many citizens' initiatives and has even attracted increasing attention at the political level.

Research at the IRS has to date indicated that peripheralised spaces are not in the position to achieve a reversal in trends alone, as they are typically confronted with the greatest problems while being equipped with the scarcest of resources. It is precisely these disadvantaged spaces that require more resources if they are to tackle these problems structurally. New welfare-state policies are therefore being sought for that will improve the framework conditions at the macro level and support the handling of new socio-spatial polarisation processes in the cities through knowledge transfer. ■

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How do cities respond to immigration? Regeneration, disparity, and the benefits of migrant neighbourhoods

As a result of large-scale forced migration in 2015 and 2016, it became clear how differently German cities deal with the issue of migration and integration. While in a few cities it led to xenophobic and racist riots, other large, medium-sized, and small cities requested that more refugees be allocated to them. The social reaction ranged from practising a culture of welcome to arson attacks on refugee shelters. It almost appeared that no other social issue caused as much division as that of how to deal with migration.

Photo: Felicitas Hillmann



How do cities deal with immigration and with migration-related diversity? When does migration lead to urban regeneration, and when does it magnify existing problems or create new ones? The scientific investigation of the area between these two possibilities is at the heart of the lead project "Urban Regeneration Practices, Migration and the Production of Socio-Spatial Disparities in European Cities (UrbanReg)" (2015-2018) researched by the IRS department "Regeneration of Cities and Towns". More concretely, the project examines how European cities handle the demands of migration and integration, whether the newly arising diversity intensifies or counteracts existing socio-spatial inequalities, and what kinds of spaces migration creates.

The scientific consideration of the relationship between urban development and migration is a complex endeavour. Researchers must take into account that cities are variously bound together via international migration paths and networks and position themselves differently towards migration. When considering case studies, they must also keep the entire urban level in sight in order to recognise disparities between different city neighbourhoods. Finally, neighbourhoods characterised by migration merit in-depth consideration, as there are typically only a few per city, but they take on an important integration function for the entire city.

The majority of cities in Europe have in recent years sought to gain new inhabitants, but were only able to attempt to attract these through indirect measures – "soft mechanisms", such as the creation of special housing offers for high earners, internationally oriented study programmes, or the organisation of festivals to showcase their urban culture. These cities predominantly hoped for new arrivals or visitors equipped with resources (whether they be financial capital or education) and received support from business-related departments in the city administration to reach such groups. At the same time, they faced the challenge of handling the existing mixture of long-established and recently arrived inhabitants. In doing so, they were required to implement national regulation on immigration, for example by absorbing refugees.

With regard to attitudes towards those migrants that did arrive, an important fault line now exists not between poorer and richer, or smaller and larger cities, but rather between those with or without prior experience of immigration (or those with a high level of migration-related diversity and those without). It is also less the number, and much more the quality of the combination of present and arriving populations that appears to be the decisive factor in where cities stand with regard to migration and integration. In Germany, the handling of migration-related and cultural diversity has long been practised in many municipalities and cities, for example through institutionalised mechanisms such as integration concepts, migrant advisory boards, and interfaith dialogue, often in conflictual forms.

In some (mostly, but not only, West German) cities there exist neighbourhoods that are clearly characterised by migration and where migrant economies and cultural innovations have become attractions for tourism, such as the migrant-influenced neighbourhood of Berlin-Kreuzberg. In addition, translocal and transnational networks provide for further immigration to cities, and for their global interconnection. Populations with a migrant background (meaning that a person or one of their parents was born with foreign citizenship) have of late comprised the majority population in individual cities, such as in Frankfurt am Main. Among younger age groups this has in many places been the case for some time already. The inflow of further migrants has the potential to increase social and spatial polarisation: while on the one hand many refugees,



Photo: Felicitas Hillmann

along with labour migrants, have become trapped in conditions of low pay or welfare dependency and live in part in spatial concentration, at the same time the number of highly qualified and rather wealthy immigrants is also increasing, potentially contributing to gentrification and displacement processes in urban neighbourhoods.

In their lead project, the researchers from the department "Regeneration of Cities and Towns" considered four cities: Bremen, Genoa, Leipzig, and Manchester. All four cities have clear regeneration strategies at their disposal, as well as a relatively high proportion of migrant inhabitants. They are each situated in a different national planning system, though, and provide examples for a particular migration history. Bremen represents the large, West German cities characterised by migrant workers. Leipzig, by contrast, was tied to the GDR's contract-worker scheme and experienced the most pronounced immigration of all East German cities after 1990. Manchester exhibits a plethora of ethnic communities that have belonged to British society since colonial times and which have contributed to the formation of minority-based policy. Genoa is a representative of many cities in southern European countries that have recently experienced large-scale immigration from outside the EU (i.e. Africa, Asia, and also Latin America). The four cities were carefully examined from the perspective of migration-led regeneration practice. Various characteristics of the local governance of migration were thus uncovered that had emerged in the cities in the course of about a decade as the result of migration-related policy and everyday practice.

Among the central findings of the lead project was that the two German cities both rely relatively strongly upon formal integration policy measures. Action is frequently initiated ("top down") by politicians and administration, whereby – especially in West Germany – it is possible to fall back on years of preliminary work done in civil society. Both cities rather emphasised in their programmes the positive sides of an increase in diversity and employed a series of urban-policy mechanisms. Among these are included programmes for international students, housing offers for the highly qualified, urban-district based integration programmes, the intercultural opening of the city authorities, and the support of migrants' advisory boards and self-organised migrant bodies. They plan, in addition, a series of social programmes for marginalised sections of the population.

The example of Bremen-Gröpelingen clearly demonstrates the Janus-faced nature of so-called "arrival neighbourhoods": once a city district repeatedly absorbs new arrivals, it is easier for them to have ready the infrastructure they require for initial integration, but there is a chance that residents cannot be incorporated long term in their development. These districts run the risk of becoming permanent transit points whose integration services remain unappreciated by the remainder of the city. Gröpelingen is an example of how unequal development in inner cities can continue steadily for decades – and where the service of countless proactive integration programmes serve only to maintain a level already achieved. Existing segregation lines remain intact in Gröpelingen. "Successful integration" is often only visible later in other city districts, namely those where "successful" migrants have moved in.

Leipzig, the other German city investigated, has through its robust university landscape and affordable living space managed to attract a disproportionate number of younger people, partly from elsewhere in Germany (internal migration) and partly from other European countries. In



Photo: Felicitas Hillmann

the case of Leipzig, there has been an intensification of existing inequalities resulting from forced migration, for example in the large housing estate of Grünau. The residential estate was transformed into an "arrival neighbourhood" as affordable living space was available here for the arriving refugees.

The relatively similar methods of handling migration through urban policy and planning in German cities contrasts strikingly with the management methods used in the selected international case studies. In these, the ("bottom-up") activities of civil society on the ground were of much greater significance, while a tailored city-wide strategy was lacking. Diversity was in each case accepted by the city administration if it could conform to their marketing strategies. In city districts such as Longsight in Manchester, or in several of the streets of Genoa's old town, migrant economies dominated that, together with laissez-faire policy, augmented the pre-existing segregation. For their part, the city administration somewhat ignored such existing migration-related tendencies towards marginalisation.

This was either done by eschewing any specific approaches to urban development approaches, or – contrastingly – by abolishing existing measures as part of austerity measures (Manchester), or the administration effected piecemeal programmes that were largely initiated and sustained through the efforts of civil society (Genoa).

Existing segregation was intensified in both cities by the housing policy and the behaviour of landlords. In the British example, housing programmes for the middle class displaced the ethnic minorities from the neighbourhoods in which they had until then been living. In the Italian example, socio-spatial inequality was amplified by the rental of available living space in the old town to migrants, above all in the lower, darker floors of the palazzi.

In all four cities, inequalities were intensified in each of the neighbourhoods in which disparities were already apparent. Whoever or whatever was perceived by the urban community as problematic – the "arrival neighbourhoods", the migrants, or the inequality – depended in each case on the description of the problem in the media, but also on the extent to which urban policy and civil society endeavoured to create alternative concepts. ■

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Pushed to the margins – Polarisation in Halle (Saale)

Poorer people are living with increasing concentration in certain residential areas. This is the clear finding of a series of studies that the IRS has carried out since 2012 in the city of Halle (Saale) in Saxony-Anhalt on behalf of the city administration. For 2011, 2014, and 2017, municipal statistical data was evaluated in order to identify small-scale changes in the social composition of residential areas. The analysis focused on the one hand on the issue of whether certain areas in Halle were characterised particularly by social problems, and on the other investigated whether the gap between these areas and the city average was narrowing or widening.



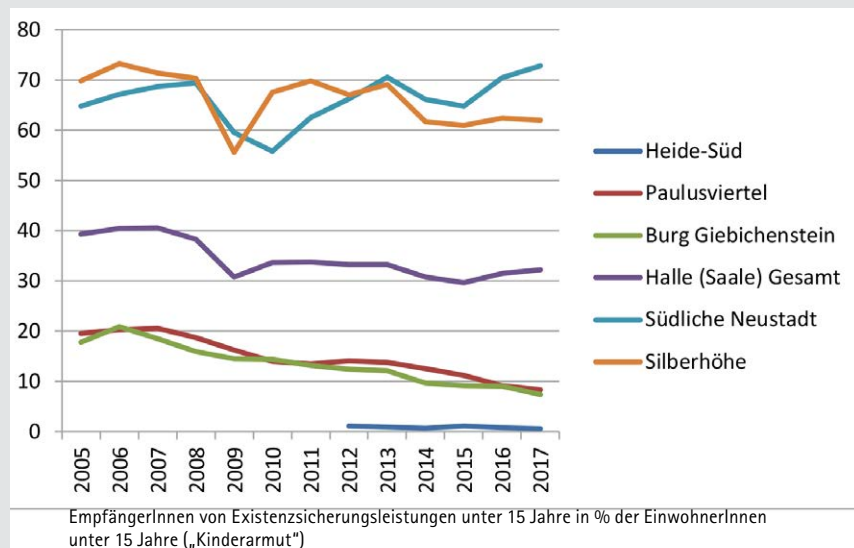


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Two statistical methods were employed in the evaluation of data: the tiered approach to index calculation and, from economic geography, the method of trend analysis. On this basis, three groups of indices were generated that depict the status and development of individual quarters in comparison with one another.

A central finding of the analysis is that the social structures of the city's various districts continue to diverge. Problematic situations are thus intensifying above all in those areas that already demonstrate a high concentration of socially disadvantaged inhabitants. This is predominantly true for the prefabricated high-rise neighbourhoods of Neustadt, Silberhöhe, and Heide-Nord. At the same time, the proportion of welfare recipients is falling in less densely built-up areas such as Kröllwitz, Dautzsch, or Heide-Süd, as well as in the gentrified urban districts Paulusviertel and Burg Giebichenstein. Here one finds a positive development dynamic coming together with an already-existing low intensity of social problems. These developments can be illustrated by means of the indicators "unemployment", "child poverty", and "welfare supplements" (see graphs).

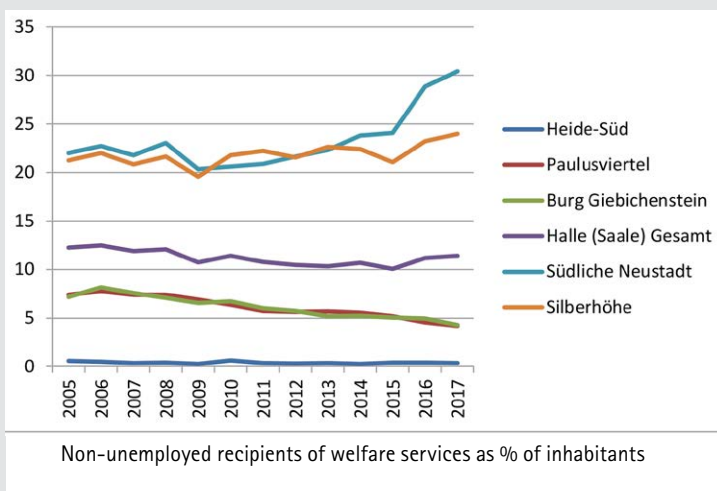
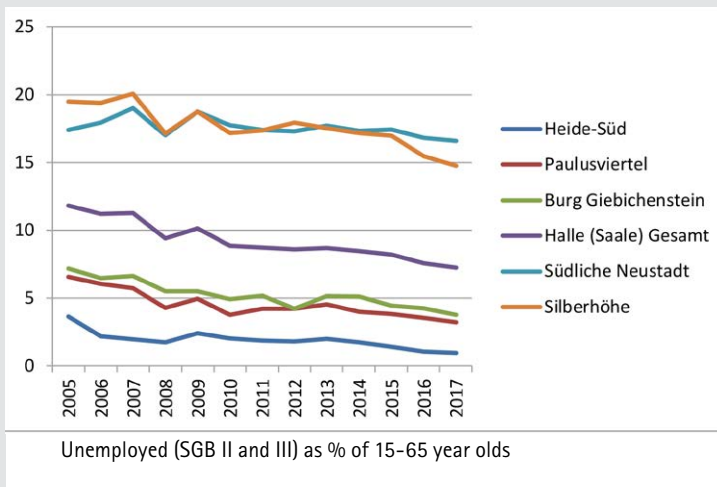
The following development are thus clear to be seen. Firstly, the rate of unemployment is falling in all of Halle's districts, as is the total number of unemployed in the city. The trend varies very much between the districts, however. While there are, for example, hardly any unemployed in Heide-Süd (2017: 0.97 %), in the prefabricated high-rise areas around one in six of all between the ages of 15 and 65 are without work. The number of unemployed has decreased here, but the difference in comparison with the city as a whole remains large.



Secondly, the gap between city districts widens considerably with regard to non-unemployed recipients of welfare services (or "supplementers"). This mostly relates to people who are indeed in employment, but who are on such a low income that it requires supplementing through the job centre. This is the case, city wide, for 10-12% of inhabitants, a very high figure in comparison to the German average. In Südliche Neustadt, the figure rises to above 30%! The problem of unemployment from the early 2000s has apparently developed into a problem of low wages. In the gentrified areas, on the other hand, these figures are receding, while in Heide-Süd the problem simply does not exist.

A similar development is observable, thirdly, in relation to child poverty. Here, too, the prefabricated high-rise neighbourhoods reach peak values of 60 to 70%, while the share in gentrified inner-city areas has seen a continual reduction. In wealthy suburbs this issue hardly exists.

What are the reasons for these developments? In qualitative investigations carried out through the lead project "Urban Policies on Peripheralisation" (2012-2014), as well as in third-party funded research by the department "Regeneration of Cities and Towns", it was possible to identify a series of macro trends that exacerbated the impoverishment of Halle's large housing estates. Among these are, on the one



hand, the gentrification of inner-city areas. As can be seen in the graphs, building upgrades have clearly led to a displacement of socially disadvantaged groups, who are increasingly less able to afford living in the inner city and are pushed to its margins. In the large housing estates, this has gone hand in hand with the privatisation of housing stocks to financial investors. In this case a "Harz-IV business model" has arisen in which investors generate a return by renting flats at low rates to welfare recipients. In recent years this trend has been intensified by the arrival of refugees: it is above all in the impoverished regions of the city that the proportion of inhabitants with foreign citizenship has substantially increased. In the prefabricated high-rise neighbourhood Südliche Neustadt, for instance, the figure has risen from 10.1% (2005) to 28.3% (2017) of inhabitants. As the majority of refugees are without work, this leads to an increase in levels of impoverishment.

In summary, trends can be observed in Halle (Saale) that clearly contradict the much proclaimed model of "social mixture". The actual development can rather better be described as polarisation, in which the realities and opportunities of life for inhabitants of different city districts continue to diverge ever further apart. ■

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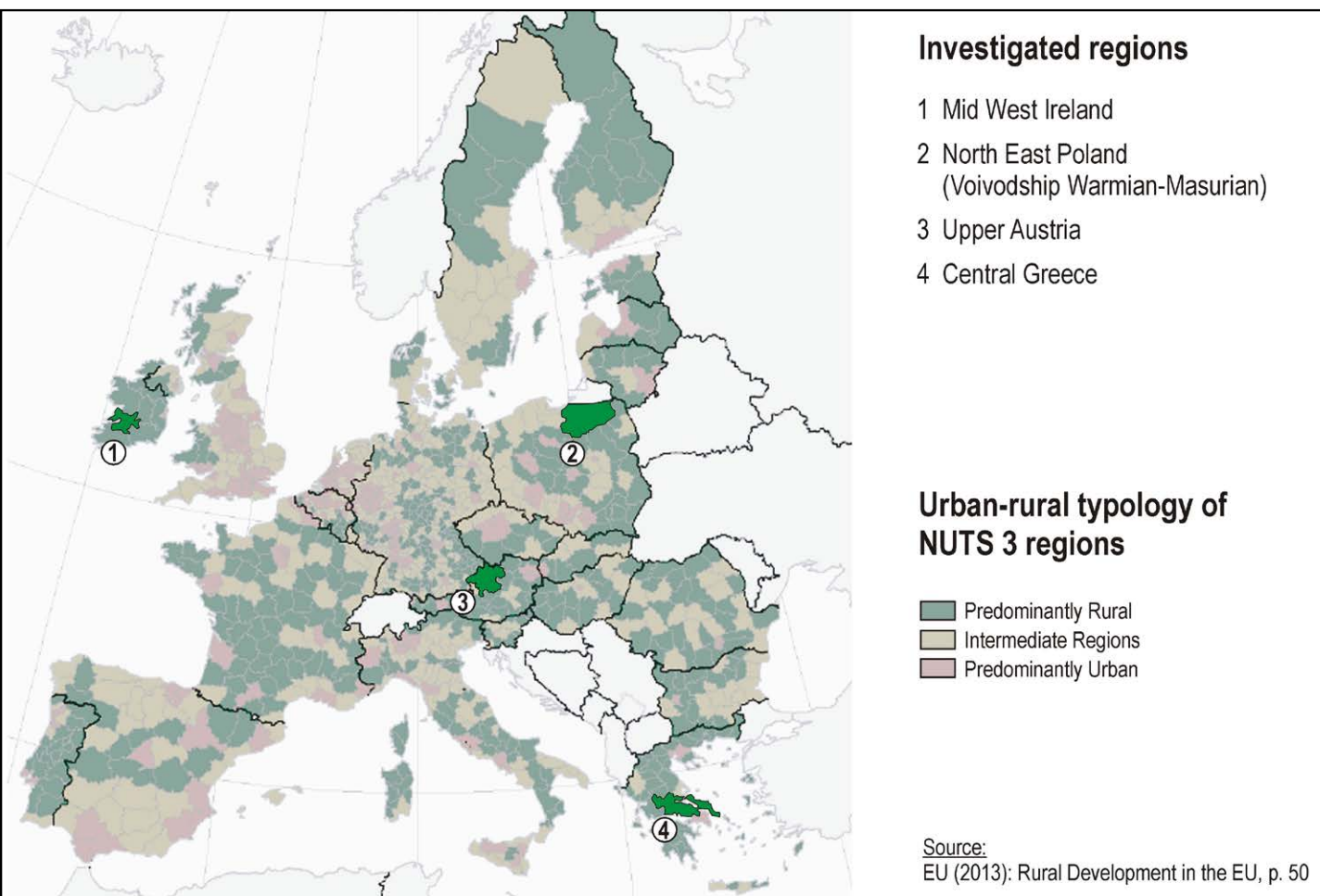
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Not all the villages are dying off: Observations in four European countries

It can seem a law of nature that rural areas should become increasingly isolated – in terms of infrastructure, economics, politics, and culture. But this blanket diagnosis is contradicted by important findings. “Peripheralisation” – the gradual worsening of supply and participation opportunities in certain areas – does not occur of its own accord: it is a politically malleable process, and it certainly does not occur in the same way or to the same degree everywhere. In a comparative study of rural areas in Austria, Ireland, Greece, and Poland, researchers at the IRS have come to the conclusion that in three of the four EU countries investigated there are, at most, slight tendencies towards peripheralisation.





influence and worsening access to shopping facilities, schools, and doctors, and whose younger population moves away. Rural and spatial studies has found a term for this socially accountable process: peripheralisation. To what degree is rural space affected by this process?

There is of course no single rural space. While many rural communities situated far from the cities are losing inhabitants and supply of services, the wealthy suburbs of larger cities are profiting from the inflow of people, an expansion of infrastructure, and the arrival of business. Even comparing at the European level, the diagnosis of "peripheralisation" does not appear readily applicable. The trend in population, for example, is more negative in rural regions of Germany (-2.6% between 2011 and 2015) than in the rural regions of all 15 western EU countries (-0.1%). So is the tendency towards peripheralisation observed in Germany also occurring in other European countries, as is often claimed?

Researchers at the IRS department "Dynamics of Communication, Knowledge and Spatial Development" and Johannes Kepler University Linz have pursued this question within the framework of the EU research project "RurInno" in fieldwork lasting several weeks in Austria, Ireland, Greece, and Poland. Among other things, the researchers were interested in the political participation of rural communities, access to goods and services, and transport accessibility. The investigation reveals that, surprisingly, it is the communities in Ireland as a predominantly rural country, that show a reduction in opportunities for political and social participation, whereas, by contrast, there was little evidence of peripheralisation in rural areas of the other countries studied.

The periphery is not a specific place. Spaces become peripheral as a result of policy and administration becoming centralised, the supply of services dwindling, and infrastructure such as public transport withdrawing or being withdrawn. Politically, socially, and economically marginalised regions are thus created whose inhabitants suffer from increasing loss of

services, and transport accessibility. The investigation reveals that, surprisingly, it is the communities in Ireland as a predominantly rural country, that show a reduction in opportunities for political and social participation, whereas, by contrast, there was little evidence of peripheralisation in rural areas of the other countries studied.

Austria

Interviews with decision makers in rural communities suggest that rural regions of Austria have comparatively good opportunities for political co-determination and organisation. One community investigated had, for instance, gained an education campus offering primary through to vocational education providing the general qualification for university entrance. The problem of shops dying out was repeatedly mentioned in interviews, but did not largely coincide with the observations of the researchers. Disused local shops are the exception. Statistical reports confirm a high density of retail outlets when compared internationally, although it is true that the number of local shops is in decline even in the Alpine republic. With regard to accessibility, we find no indications of a disconnection of rural communities. "Of the four European regions under examination, rural Upper Austria was the single example in which we could do without a rental car and were able to circulate well by bus and train", says project member Dr. Ralph Richter. To be sure: even in rural Austria, many younger people are migrating to the larger cities. In interviews it became clear, however, that a return, for instance after the completion of further education, was an obvious option for many.

Ireland

Although Ireland is comparatively rural, it is here that clear signs of peripheralisation of the countryside were visible – in terms of policy, supply of services, and infrastructure. The island nation's political system is strongly centralised. Local political and administrative structures are widely lacking. The political remoteness of the "rural hinterland" is of course nothing new, but can be traced back to the era of British foreign rule. Peripheralisation means, furthermore, that important utilities such as post offices, police stations, bank counters, and even churches have been closed. To halt this decline, vacant churches have often been rechristened as concert halls. Lastly, the inaccessibility of many places via public transport is emblematic of the marginalised status of many Irish rural communities. Without a car of one's own, an Irish countryside dweller is stranded. Nevertheless, life in the country remains an ideal for many Irish citizens. Although younger people are drawn to study in the cities or abroad, many return to the countryside at the latest to start a family.

Greece

In Greece, too, policy and public administration are centrally organised. The local administration primarily seeks to implement government programmes and directives. Local and regional decision makers whom the researchers interviewed were, astonishingly, less interested in forming independent plans. Public utilities such as schools, public administration, and policing all suffer from cuts in public spending. "Nevertheless, this drawback affects city and countryside equally and has not, from our observations, led to a withdrawal from rural areas", says Richter. There is also no lack of privately run shops, bars, and services in Greek communities – only the money to take advantage of them, as the empty premises often show. The owners manage with the assistance of family members and negotiate rent reductions, which are granted for lack of alternatives. Public transport is based upon a well-developed bus system and even smaller villages are reachable via scheduled services. Aside from the traditional, centralised administration, there are no signs of a transport disconnection of rural regions. On the contrary, through tourism and food production these regions are proving to be of much support in the wake of the economic crisis. In addition, rural communities have profited in recent years from an increased return of residents from the cities as a result of the crisis.

Poland

The researchers encountered a well-developed public administration in rural Poland. For instance, the district (powiat) investigated in north-east Poland, numbering around 32,000 inhabitants, is divided into four municipalities, each of which has access to a local council, administration, and full-time mayor. The state is organised in a strict hierarchy with four tiers from the local to the national level. Nevertheless, even at the lowest of these levels there is organisational leeway, for example in educational policy. A complete withdrawal of the state has, however, also not been observed by the research team. On the contrary, the nationalist PiS government pursues rather countryside-friendly policies, and considers rural areas an important anchor of Polish identity. Just as a certain proximity between citizens and administration has been preserved in rural Poland, so too does a dense network of school locations seem to persist. Even smaller locales have access to primary schools, though these are partly dependent on the support of parent initiatives. Lastly, to date almost every village has a bus

connection, even if there have been cutbacks here in recent years. At the same time, the researchers observed efforts to improve the accessibility of rural centres to rail and motorway networks.

Comparing these four European countries, peripheralisation as it occurs in many rural areas in Germany only appears at a similar level of intensity in Ireland. The precise causes of this are diverse and not yet fully examined. For the time being it should be noted that rural spaces are by no means isolated everywhere in Europe, and that European countries organise the relationship of city and countryside – of “the centre and the periphery” – in a variety of ways. It is therefore worth taking a critical look at the assumptions that have been taken for granted in the public debate about the “neglected countryside”. ■

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Justice as a value and practice

New paths for urban-rural balance in the project "ReGerecht"

In Juli Zeh's social novel *Unterleuten*, a rural community living in the fictional Brandenburg village of the book's title is divided over a wind-energy project. There are the profiteers and the excluded, newcomers and long-time residents, pragmatists and ideologues old and new. Continually present are the excessive and, in fact, mutually exclusive demands of the city on the countryside, that it provide everything from unspoiled holiday idyll to bioenergy production. What seems virtually unattainable in the book's literary escalation – a just balance – is no simpler to achieve in true-life conflict situations. In the project "ReGerecht", the IRS has recently joined in the search for feasible solutions to bring about balance and justice between city and countryside.

Photos: Rainer Fuhrmann/stock.adobe.com,
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On 1 October 2018, the project "ReGerecht – Integrative development of a fair balance of interests between city, suburbs, and rural areas" began with funding from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF, three plus potentially two further years). The project aims to better understand the interwoven relationships and possible conflicts between city and countryside in the use of land for relaxation, housing, agriculture, energy, and infrastructure, to name a few examples. More particularly it seeks to find, in collaboration with practitioners in methods of communal and regional planning, a functional, just balance in resolving conflicts of usage. The necessary knowledge is to be developed in a transdisciplinary "co-design process" with actors practising in the planning region of Westmecklenburg (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern), for example in moderated workshops. In a further step, the findings will be transmitted to other regions and scientifically analysed.

Responsible for the co-ordination of the project is an IRS alumnus, Associate Prof. Dr. Thomas Weith of the Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF) in Müncheberg. Other scientific institutions participating in the consortium besides the IRS are the Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) in Leipzig and the Media Centre of the Technische Universität Dresden (with the involvement of T-Systems Multimedia Solutions). Contributing to ReGerecht as actors from spatial development are the state capital Schwerin, the Department for Spatial and Land-Use Planning Westmecklenburg, and the Association for Rural Development Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, supported by the Federal Association of Rural-Development Organisations. At the IRS, the project is housed within the department "Institutional Change and Regional Public Goods", headed by Dr. Ludger Gailing, and assisted in the project by Andreas Röhring and Eva Eichenauer. In the following interview, Thomas Weith and Ludger Gailing speak about their collaboration in the ReGerecht project.

Mr Weith, Mr Gailing,
how did you arrive
at this project idea and
the consortium?

Weith: At ZALF we have a long record of scientific and practical experience in research on the topic of sustainable land management and the interrelationship of city and countryside. In the BMBF's framework programme FONA (Research for Sustainable Development), for example, we have two major joint research projects. Concepts such as "the interrelationship of city and countryside", "land-use conflicts", and "land management" are continually present here. Such approaches contain many implicit considerations on balance and equality, but to date nobody had explicitly placed the topic of "regional justice" on the agenda, even though it has long been an unresolved issue. When the announcement for the funding measure "Stadt-Land-Plus" appeared, with which ReGerecht is being financed, we had an opportunity to tackle the topic. It was then a matter of proven competence and experience with collaboration in looking for a co-operation partner.

Gailing: Thomas Weith approached me and at the IRS we were very interested in the project. With its research on energy infrastructure and energy justice, the department "Institutional Change and Regional Public Goods" was well suited to joining the project consortium, and it is these sub-topics that we will investigate in ReGerecht. The issue of justice is currently a very important one in energy infrastructure. To put it simply, renewable energy is mostly generated in the countryside and used in the cities. This is significantly different to, for example, water infrastructure. When a new sewage treatment plant is built, those living nearby are also the users. They are connected to and supplied by it. High-voltage pylons and windmills are, by contrast, built within view of people who are often not

What is justice, then?
Do you have a definition
that you are working from?

the beneficiaries. This generates conflict and raises the issue of justice. By explicitly addressing the topic of justice in ReGerecht, we create a chance to better understand such conflicts. This is something of a unique selling point, and it hasn't seemed to hurt the success of our application.

Weith: Firstly, we are not dealing with justice in an all-encompassing sense, but instead with the concrete issue of how, in the context of city and countryside, a balance of interests can be brought about in land-use conflicts that the participants feel is just. We thus have no complete definition of justice. For our partners in practice, the postulate of equality in living conditions is naturally a very important reference point. As researchers, we have a somewhat broader view that takes in a wide range of lines of discourse, from the political and social sciences, but also from philosophy. Of particular importance to us is the discussion of equality in planning research, but also that of environmental justice coming from the USA and the European discourse on energy justice. Of course, to be of practical use such abstract concepts have to be broken down. In the ReGerecht project we seek to work with partners in practice to develop an idea of justice that is workable for them.

Gailing: A useful distinction is still that between procedural justice and distributive justice, which still also plays an important role in the discourse surrounding energy justice. The former is concerned with the fair sharing of decision-making processes, the latter with fair results. What is exciting is seeing how the two interact with one another. At the regional meetings at which new wind-energy areas are designated, for example, the smallest communities are often not represented, and it is sometimes these areas that are selected as being suitable for use. Injustice in procedure can thus certainly be connected to unjust outcomes. In this example it is also very clear that the topic of justice has a spatial dimension.

Is justice not also an
emotive topic, especially in
connection with urban-rural
opposition?

Weith: It is precisely the attempt to make this subject non-emotive that this project strives for. Until now, two questions have been posed around topics such as "who is advantaged or disadvantaged?" and "who is guilty?" To pursue these questions is not especially oriented towards finding solutions. We want to give the search for a just balance a solid standing, and not in the sense of abstract, point-based evaluation and rating systems that represent a black box for practitioners. We want to work at the level at which political decision makers are in dialogue. Political decision makers don't count up points; they ask "is this a just balance?"



Photo: Stephan Walochnik/stock.adobe.com

In addition, we'll be supported by software called "Maptionnaire", with which one can carry out online, map-based surveys on spatial issues. This will help us to understand where in fact conflicts of land use are occurring. Here we are touching on a fundamental question that ReGerecht also examines: what actually is spatial-use conflict? How can it be investigated, processed, and visualised? Simply because two differing uses of space meet at a property boundary, and one is able to represent this on a map, doesn't mean we have a conflict in spatial use.

Your work focuses first of all on the planning region of Westmecklenburg. Why?

Weith: A stipulation of the call for bids was that a growing region with more than 40,000 inhabitants should be investigated in the first stage. This should include at least a city centre, and the surrounding area and rural space, and present the corresponding problem areas. This already delimits the search. In the planning region of Westmecklenburg there is the particular challenge presented by the city of Schwerin, which is seeking to finalise its city-countryside concept as part of a regional spatial-development programme. Here there is the expectation that we provide support. Wismar, just a stone's throw away from Schwerin, already has such a concept in place.



Photo: Frank Hamm/flickr.com

Gailing: Indeed, with Schwerin and its surrounding communities striving for a shared concept, exactly those issues that we wish to investigate have been placed before us. In addition, the region is a hotspot of the energy transition: there are many wind-energy projects in place. At the same time, in 2016 the federal state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern approved its first citizens' and community participation law, which rules that local residents must be stakeholders in the wind farms. We don't know how well this law functions in practice, though. There are thus many practical challenges presented that provide an opportunity for us to develop something new.

Work on the ReGerecht Project is "transdisciplinary". What does this mean?

Weith: Transdisciplinarity is an approach that especially comes into its own in the BMBF's "socio-ecological research". This means that one takes real-world problems as the starting point of research and works together with partners in practice to find solutions. There is thus no previously determined, narrow focus with questions defined academically in advance, but rather a thematic focus that is developed step by step. This also means that the academic side does not come with a pre-packaged solution, after the motto "I have a solution and am looking for a problem".

Gailing: "Transdisciplinary" means that we do not cross only the boundaries between disciplines, but that academic and practice-oriented perspectives are given equal weight in the course of research. Nevertheless, at the same time, we can naturally bring our academic expertise to the process and work on relevant scientific issues. But there is then more need to transmit these, as the practice-oriented actors won't be

Is there nevertheless
a research interest here in
the stricter sense?

reading our peer-reviewed articles. On the other hand, just by working with a concept like "justice" we are already quite close to the conversations people have in practice.

Weith: Yes, of course, but this depends on the academic discipline of the researcher involved. For myself, as a trained planner and landscape researcher it is interesting that there has thus far been little done on norms such as justice, although norms are much spoken about in planning practice.

Gailing: For us, energy and infrastructural justice are the decisive research discourses. These concepts are currently discussed, for example, in human geography. In the case of energy justice, the most relevant issue is often: what happens if the energy system is transformed and energy is thus made more expensive? Can poorer households no longer pay their energy bills? That is the social dimension. We want, by contrast, above all to examine more closely the spatial dimension of energy justice.

The aspirations of ReGerecht seem
very broad and comprehensive.
What can realistically happen in the up
to five years of funding? And what is the
role of transfer regions?

Weith: We have defined the topic very broadly, but in concrete the work will naturally become more specific. In such a problem-led project, one must ask: what can be determined beforehand and where does one need to remain open? The processual element can be established in advance. It is with content that one needs to remain open minded. As regards transfer: this is what the two additional years of funding in the three-plus-two model is intended for. To date we have roughly identified a few regions with similar spatial structures and problem areas that might be suitable for knowledge transfer. We will begin discussions in 2019.

Gailing: We shall see what topics the work will end up concentrating on. It could be that the preparation of the urban-rural concept for Schwinin will take up much of the project work, or possibly the implementation of the citizens' and community participation law. Or indeed, in the spirit of the transdisciplinary research process, something else entirely.

Thank you very much for talking to us!



The ReGerecht team shortly before the start of the project, at the Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF) on 27 September 2018

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Ludger Gailing is the acting departmental head of the research department "Institutional Change and Regional Public Goods" and principal investigator of its lead projects. His research is concerned with the geographies of the energy transition, with the analysis of socio-materialities and governance forms in relation to public goods and infrastructure, as well as with the institutional transformation of regional management and planning.



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