No 12 | January 2017

IRS AKTUELL
Newsletter for Social Science-Based Spatial Research

New Paths for Rural Regions

Spatial aspects of innovation processes – concepts and theory

From local supply to renewable energy – new ideas for rural communities

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New Paths for Rural Regions

The academic year 2015, which was devoted to the future viability of cities, has come to a close. The idea behind it was not only that the large conurbations need sustainable concepts for ecological, social and economic development, but also that answers to urgent questions about the future for all of society can be sought and found in the cities themselves. The current edition of the "IRS aktuell" newsletter dares to propose a change of perspective: can rural areas, in particular peripheral and structurally weak regions, also be the source of innovation and offer solutions to social challenges?

Demographic change, structural economic change, climate change and energy transition – rural areas seem to be affected by many important transformation processes without being able to influence them. They suffer from migration of young, well-qualified people, feel the effects of an ageing population particularly acutely and they are becoming the places where conflicts over renewable energy are being played out. The feeling of powerlessness for communities in structurally weak rural regions seems simultaneously to be a reality, a prejudice and a stigma. "Of course, the big challenges that these areas are facing cannot be denied", says Prof. Dr. Gabriela Christmann, head of the "Dynamics of Communication, Knowledge and Spatial Development" research department.

But the particularly pressing nature of the problems and certain freedoms have also given many of the local stakeholders the impetus to explore new avenues and look for innovative solutions. These solutions are as diverse as the stakeholders who initiate them and the problems on the ground: in one municipality, traders are organising a cultural week that is intended to contribute to a change of identity in the area. In another municipality, farmers and residents are coming together to create a bio-energy village. In a third, a social enterprise is making an open-access laboratory available in which anyone can use technologies that are otherwise difficult to access.

The local contexts and constellations of stakeholders in the municipalities and the social processes and courses of the innovation projects are the subject of the current lead project in Christmann's department. The article that begins on page 6 of this issue provides an insight into the six municipalities, the design of the study and the initial observations from the project, which has been running since the beginning of the year 2015. A separate article is devoted to bio-energy villages (beginning on page 8).

Innovation as a research topic is also a central focus of the IRS beyond its work on rural areas. In the past, academics from Prof. Dr. Oliver Ibert's "Dynamics of Economic Spaces" research department and from Christmann's department have carried out detailed research into the process and spatiality of innovation and into social innovations. The particular conceptual features of the context of rural space for innovation are the topic of an interview with Christmann and Ibert that begins on page 3 of this issue. ■

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The Spatial Specificity of Innovation Processes

At the IRS, innovations are analysed from the particular perspective of spatial social research. The process of innovation – from the initial idea, via communicative development, through to implementation and dissemination – is placed explicitly in the context of locations of knowledge genesis, spatial migration processes and local conditions for the various stages of the process. Prof. Gabriela Christmann and Prof. Oliver Ibert gave an interview on this spatial specificity of innovation processes and the particular features of rural areas as locations for innovation.

Where does the academic concept of innovation have its origins?

Oliver Ibert: The concept of innovation now has a career stretching over 100 years. Schumpeter used it to explain why economic development is not linear but cyclical. In doing so, he conceptualised the observation that economic processes sometimes do not simply strive to achieve states of balance. He thereby provided a narrative for the fact that companies and entire industries can tank and new ones emerge. This rather economic concept of innovation subsequently diffused into other social areas: thus, for example, new ways of living such as flat sharing or changes in the political-administrative sector are regarded as innovations. We can see that this concept has a long history and that its attraction is increasingly growing down to the present day.

Gabriela Christmann: The term innovation has come to be used very widely, including for social changes. Now it is not only technical and economic changes, but also political, cultural and social changes that break with existing routines and are considered as innovations. Accordingly, not just researchers, engineers and entrepreneurs are actors of innovation, those in politics, administration and civic society can also play an important part in developing and implementing something new. Their contributions to innovative solutions for example to the challenges of demographic change to insufficient provision of technical and social infrastructure or to social cohesion are often referred to as social innovations. The term social innovation has increasingly gained acceptance in innovation research in the social sciences since the 1990s and it can be used on the one hand for social projects and on the other for new social processes that go along with technical, economic or political changes.

What do models about the spatiality of innovations show?

Oliver Ibert: Economic geography has accepted the concept very quickly and attempts to explain why the dynamic of innovation is not only distributed unevenly over industries, but also spatially. The connection was only understood implicitly at first: an uneven innovation dynamic results from uneven distribution of industries in space. The classic example is the decline of old industrial regions and the rise of those shaped by high-tech. It was also soon realised that highly innovative industries are also very flexible spatially and can settle almost anywhere. The more fundamental an innovation, the less it depends

on pre-shaped location factors. Last but not least, there is of course extensive literature about territorial innovation models dating back to Marshall – these attempt to understand the spatial contextual conditions of innovations so they can be specifically developed.

At the IRS, an understanding of innovation has been developed that is related to both processes and space. What makes this combination so special?

Gabriela Christmann: In our conception of innovations, we combine the observation that an innovation must go through several specific process stages in its development, from an initial idea to a widely accepted solution to a problem, with the indication that each process stage has its own spatial connections. If we stay with the example of flat-sharing communities, "Kommune Eins" in Munich – the first well-known community – initially represents an extremely local phenomenon. But the flat-sharing community only became an innovation when it freed itself from these local conditions and turned into a mass phenomenon in lots of different places. The specific must develop into the general in other locations. Moreover, we see innovation as something that gets its character as an innovation from the attribution of the involved actors, in other words it is socially constructed. We make use of concepts of communicative constructivism here and thus of a constructivist approach to social innovation.

Oliver Ibert: For example we summarised the development of an idea into a marketable innovation in a project on innovation biographies which show precisely which locally pressing problems spark which ideas, when and where they develop further and spread spatially. We are particularly interested in the supporting conditions that must be in place at a particular location to turn pressing problems into ideas. The most important is the freedom for experimentation – spatially, financially, culturally and politically. Then there is a good chance that the right people will come together in the right place.

Free space in rural regions can also be of an intellectual nature because one is not confronted with the mainstream immediately and therefore with certain ways of thinking, as you are in centres.

Does that also apply to innovations that do not address local problems at all but global ones, such as in the pharmaceutical industry?

Oliver Ibert: Certainly. Even if the issue is not local, such as the development of a new active ingredient, local irritations very often provide the impetus. For example, we analysed an innovation biography in which a physicist in the development department of a pharmaceutical company discovered a mistake in the widespread understanding among pharmacists of how an active ingredient was delivered. He suggested a different approach, which was implemented by his company as an innovation. The crucial fact was the practical work in a specific place. Which place it is – a laboratory, a rural community undergoing demographic change, a city district or a university campus – could hardly be more diverse.

Can we conclude from this that innovations can have their origin almost anywhere? Then why are certain types of space regarded as more suitable for innovation than others?

Oliver Ibert: In the formation phase, innovations are actually only linked to space in a very limited way. When the process moves on to further dissemination of the new practice, technique or method, to some extent you need a ready supply of expertise, capital and commitment from people with different perspectives. This means that centres have an advantage when it comes to the success of an economic innovation – the last steps in the innovation process are frequently the most visible. We repeatedly observed this shift from the periphery, where an idea can certainly come about, to the centre where the last steps are taken, the patents registered and the value creation occurs.

Rural areas are regarded as rather remote from innovation, perhaps precisely for that reason. Which characteristics nevertheless suggest that something new can be developed there?

Oliver Ibert: One significant advantage is the free space that peripheral areas have to offer. They facilitate "garage situations" in a metaphorical sense: you can make use of a space, an area or a building at little cost. This creates opportunities for experimentation. In large cities, this free space is increasingly rare, even in Berlin it is now becoming difficult. However free space in rural regions can also be of an intellectual nature because one is not confronted with the mainstream immediately and therefore with certain ways of thinking, as you are in centres – for example when it comes to economic innovations. Distance from centres can provide a certain freedom in thinking and action, which is what some companies allow themselves by having branches away from established agglomerations of headquarters.

Gabriela Christmann: If, by contrast, it comes to innovations in community development, you must consider that for example in structurally weak rural regions economic productivity is low, career opportunities are in short supply and well trained people who for example would have the knowledge required to implement a new idea typically move away. That is a disadvantage of those regions. On the other hand, structurally weak rural regions are characterised by various problematic situations and by such pressing problems that the local people there are compelled to find solutions for their lives in the country. To put it another way, necessity is the mother of invention. This can particularly be observed on different actors in regions with rural characteristics.

Oliver Ibert: A more recent development is the fact that even in rural areas participation in global communities via the internet has become a matter of course. This also encourages the foundation of enterprises that require the exchange of specific knowledge, such as user-driven innovations that are embedded in communities. However, I think that the advantage of digital global networks is greater for cities than it is for the countryside. If you have access to the same information wherever you are and participate in the same communities, the proximity to differing and divergent contexts becomes even more important. Big cities have a significant advantage here.

Do rural areas perhaps encourage a particular type of innovation, in the social area for example?

Oliver Ibert: Certainly, extremely capital-intensive and highly technical innovations, such as in pharmaceutical development or high-tech industries, are very difficult in rural areas. The need for infrastructure and personnel is less easily met away from large cities. On the other hand, there are starting points for social innovations in many rural areas.

Gabriela Christmann: Also in our project frameworks we have primarily observed social innovations. Here it becomes apparent that the "innovations" go back to "old" concepts, such as the development of village stores for local supply. You might therefore refer to this type of innovation as "retro-innovation". But that does not change the fact that these "village stores" go far beyond the old corner shop, as they are complex, multi-functional centres that often serve simultaneously as a meeting point, post office, bank and temporary medical practice. Here it becomes apparent that social innovations – perhaps more than technical or economic innovations – tend to be new combinations of familiar elements rather than entirely new entities. But that applies not only to innovations in rural regions, but also in cities, as the example of multi-generational living illustrates. ■

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Oliver Ibert is the head of the research department „Dynamics of Economic Spaces" and professor for economic geography at the Freie Universität Berlin. A pivotal element of his research in the last couple of years has been the focus on the spatiality of innovation processes. In the context of several lead projects of his department he investigated sources and paths of innovation and the territoriality of generating knowledge.

Innovations in Rural Municipalities

The term innovation is usually associated with new technical developments, expensive laboratories in large companies and development clusters in conurbations. Setting up a communal village store in a structurally weak rural region, on the other hand, is not widely regarded as an innovative step by the general public. In academic circles, however, new practices or approaches to social problems are considered to be innovations. In one of its research projects, the IRS "Dynamics of Communication, Knowledge and Spatial Development" research department is placing these social innovations in the context of rural communities in structurally weak regions that are regarded as remote from innovation. The first empirical findings of the project, which has been running since the start of 2015, reveal the enormous challenges facing the communities– but also the creativity of the search for solutions away from well-trodden paths.

Klockow in the Uckermark region of the German federal state of Brandenburg is a village with a long history. It was a feudal estate, at certain times part of Brandenburg, at others part of Pomerania, and it was repeatedly a battlefield in the Thirty Years' War. The recent past is mainly associated with rearing sheep: in the GDR period, Klockow was the largest sheep rearing location in central Europe; in addition to the state-owned company, there was also a high school and a vocational college. The German unification brought an end to the company – several hundred jobs were lost, social infrastructures could not be sustained and the image of a prospering village disappeared.

While the history of Klockow is unique, many rural communities in Germany are facing similar challenges. Demographic change and structural economic transformation have sent many rural regions into a downward spiral in which migration and structural deficiencies feed off one another. "Below-average economic productivity, low professional prospects, inadequate provision of technical, social and service infrastructure and a limited social life have reinforced the impulse to move away, especially among young, well-qualified people", says Prof. Gabriela Christmann, head of research department and the "Innovations in Rural Municipalities" project. Migration in turn has a negative impact on the economic prospects of the regions, which severely limits the scope for action of local stakeholders from areas ranging from politics to civic society. "We can see this phenomenon very strongly in the new federal states of Germany, of course, but also parts of Hessen, Rheinland-Pfalz and Lower Saxony are finding them-

selves confronted by it, in the context of individual regional developments", says Christmann.

Resignation would be understandable for villages like Klockow in view of what seems like the almost impossible task of breaking out of or even reversing the downward spiral. "This reaction is actually widespread among residents and political stakeholders on the ground and is exacerbated by a certain stigmatisation of the regions", explains Christmann. "And yet we repeatedly observe contradictory signals: villages and individual village residents start projects in which they experiment creatively with new ideas and practices and respond to the pressure to take action with an innovation." In Klockow, for example, the project "Lebens-Energie für das Dorf" ("Life Energy for the Village") has been running since 2012, in the course of which businesses, local government, politicians and residents of the village have worked together to set up a village workshop and a village kitchen with local seasonal vegetables, among other things. The project won a "Land Reclaimers" award from the Robert Bosch Foundation and is both a tangible and a conceptual counterpoint to the downward spiral of recent decades.

Klockow is one of six communities being examined under the project. The five other communities are characterised by innovations either also in the field of "food supply" (Frankershausen, Hessen) or in the fields of "bio-energy villages" (Schwarzatal, Thüringen; Treptitz, Saxony) and "art, culture and identity" (Kyllburg, Rheinland-Pfalz; Plessa, Brandenburg). Beyond the specific regional contexts and the various social innovations, the academics involved are looking for differences and common ground in relation to the key figures involved, the constellations of stakeholders and the social processes in which the innovation in the development of the rural community is taking place. As a result, the project is making a contribution to innovation research: there is a need for empirical research into stakeholders, conditions, processes and courses of innovations, particularly in communities in structurally weak rural regions, says Christmann. "The project is also devoted to the research area of rural spaces, which is still neglected in research in Western Europe in comparison to cities, in particular in relation to transformation processes and specifically innovations."

The researchers in the six communities under examination are currently carrying out focussed ethnographic studies so that they can analyse the contextual conditions and constellations of stakeholders in the municipalities and the social processes and procedures in innovative community development projects. In doing so, they are bringing together data from documents, problem-centred interviews, participatory observations and standard surveys. An important part is also being played by the reconstruction of the stakeholders' social networks and of the participation processes in the generation of innovative projects", says Christmann.

The findings to date have shown the researchers how varied the new ideas for rural areas can be. In a similar way to Klockow, for example, a multi-functional village store in Frankershausen is supplying residents with food. The "one-stop shop" provides goods and services for everyday needs and also provides employment opportunities for people with disabilities and a social meeting place in the village. Unlike Klockow, in Frankershausen it is a social enterprise (Stelllenwert gGmbH) that has turned an idea into a functioning project, rather than an alliance of key local figures. The project in Treptitz, in turn, is the result of the residents' sense of community: when all of the individual sewage plants of the village had to be modernised to meet the latest EU standard, they installed a communal sewage plant for the entire village at short notice and laid a local area heating pipeline from the biogas plant of a farmer in the vicinity at the same time. As they carried out the work themselves, the costs were kept under control and the level of identification with the communal project is high. "In order to implement the project, the residents of Treptitz also had to break down resistance in the local council", says Christmann. An entire village organising its waste water disposal communally and independently while generating bio energy locally and using it very cost-effectively is unique in Germany – and it is an outstanding example of the innovative capacity of rural communities. ■

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Energy Transition and Willingness to Innovate in Rural Communities

The energy transition in Germany is a process with enormous affects on rural space, as the decentralised use of renewable energy sources must primarily be carried out there. Some communities are using this dynamics to pull the strings on their own and make use of the process. They are establishing bio-energy villages, for example, and are thereby also tackling their structural deficiencies such as emigration or the lack of economic prospects. Dr. Tobias Federwisch and Dr. Matthias Naumann are giving an interview on their research into bio-energy villages.

How old is the idea of turning a village into a bio-energy village?

Tobias Federwisch: It is a comparatively recent phenomenon. The first bio-energy village in Germany was established in 2006 in the community of Jühnde in the district of Göttingen. But it was quickly joined by others. Currently there are 119 recognised bio-energy villages and others that are on the way to becoming one. They can be found throughout Germany, although most of them are in Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg. The federal competition of the same name has certainly helped to draw attention to bio-energy villages and encouraged stakeholders to imitate them.

So can it be called a successful concept?

Matthias Naumann: The idea of the bio-energy village, irrespective of the number of villages, can certainly be considered a success insofar as it has stimulated a debate of the energy supply in rural areas. Not all positive examples are easy to emulate – but they certainly provide inspiration.

Is the "creation" of a bio-energy village actually the expression of the process dynamic of the energy transition or an expression of communities' internal willingness to innovate?

Naumann: The decision of the federal government for an energy transition has quite clearly reinforced initiatives for exploring new ways of energy supply that were often already present in villages. The dynamic of the energy

transition and local innovations therefore are mutually depending on each another.

Federwisch: I have a similar view and I would not play off the two aspects against one another. The energy transition has certainly made a significant contribution to the creation of bio-energy villages. Institutional framework conditions were created that have facilitated action in this area. However, over the decades awareness has developed that alternative energy concepts are necessary. The willingness of communities to innovate and take a step in the direction of a bio-energy village also draws on this.

If bio-energy villages are seen less as the expression of a desire to restructure the supply of energy ecologically and more as a way to improve the prospects of structurally weak regions, what are the expectations at the start of such projects?

Federwisch: One of the core basic conditions of bio-energy villages is the desire to achieve independence from fossil fuels. At the same time, the desire for independence from large energy companies and consideration of one's own energy resources and value creation chains in the local and regional context also play a part. In this connection, economic and social objectives are also expressed in bio-energy villages, along with ecological ones. People are looking for an economic basis for the village.

Naumann: But here we also come across contradictions in the implementation of bio-energy villages. Especially in the regions in which projects relating to an alternative energy supply can offer a new development opportunity to villages with huge structural economic and demographic problems, the resources do often not exist. That applies to the municipalities, but also to higher administrative levels that are short of human and financial resources.

The success of a bio-energy village can extend to other areas of development – ideally, now that money is available, by maintaing or renovating municipal facilities.

So who usually takes the decision to become a bio-energy village?

Naumann: Usually there are enthusiastic individuals on site who are pushing the inception of a bio-energy village. But experience shows that the better the network of these stakeholders is, the better are their chances. This includes contacts with the political sphere and the government at district and regional level as well as access to technological expertise.

What impact does the decision to become a bio-energy village have on people in the respective communities?

Federwisch: I have noticed that even a cautious expression of ideas relating to a bio-energy village can set off huge waves in a village. This ranges from euphoria, via scepticism, to rejection. But even if a democratic decision is taken in favour of a bio-energy village, it will not be a sure-fire success. The protagonists are confronted with technical, infrastructural, legal, political and economic problems that they usually have not thought of.

Naumann: Setting up a bio-energy village is always a process in which, of course, existing conflicts in the village are brought to bear as well. However, the success of a bio-energy village can extend to other areas of the development of the village – ideally, now that money is available, by maintaining or renovating municipal facilities. On the other hand, project failures can strengthen feelings of lack of prospects.

What other effects does the creation of bio-energy villages have on regional development?

Naumann: As bio-energy villages can create new economic prospects for rural areas and promote social par-

ticipation, they also contribute to a re-evaluation of regional development. In other words, common perceptions of areas with no opportunities must be questioned. But that goes along with a less idealised perspective on rural areas, which are increasingly becoming locations for power and heat generation. As far as energy supply is concerned, cities are thus becoming more dependent on rural areas. Ideally a network will be created between "smart cities" and "smart rural areas".

In which areas of spatial social research is there a need for further research into bio-energy villages?

Naumann: The current conflicts about planning, setting up and extending power plants using renewable energy – especially wind energy – show that, in addition to technical and economic feasibility, issues of economic and political participation are also important. Who benefits from bio-energy villages, who does not? How can bio-energy villages be embedded into an overarching strategy for rural areas? Which structural conditions are crucial to the success of bio-energy villages? How do bio-energy villages shape discourses about "rurality"? ■

The "Institutional Change and Regional Public Goods" and "Dynamics of Communication, Knowledge and Spatial Development" IRS research departments are addressing bio-energy villages from various perspectives. While the former is investigating the villages in both its lead project and the EnerLog project from the point of view of institutional change in energy transition, they are also being analysed in the lead project of the latter research department (along with topics such as local supply) in relation to innovation processes, as examples of innovation in rural areas.

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Matthias Naumann has been a research associate in the research department „Institutional Change and Regional Public Goods" until the end of 2016. In several projects he investigated – among other topics – new organisational forms and conflicts in the context of the energy transition in Germany. Above that, his research focuses on infrastructural and institutional change and regional development, city politics and critical approaches to human geography.

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Regenerating the Local Economy in Rural Areas

Even 25 years after unification, rural regions in East Germany are still confronted with a structural weakness in the local economy. One of the keys to regenerating the economic situation in communities can be a stronger networking of local stakeholders from the politics, public administration, economy and civil society, who together are looking for new ideas and concepts. The "Crowd Production" project in Bischofswerda intends to initiate such a participatory change process. Therefore social scientists and economists are cooperating with practice partners from the fields of politics and business.

Bischofswerda is a district capital in the Oberlausitz region of Saxony between Dresden and Bautzen. Here, the project partners of "Crowd Production" initiated a participatory change process to regenerate the local economy. The project was a cooperation between the IRS, Fraunhofer Institute for Production Systems and Design Technology (IPK) and the company TOP Heidenau. "In order to achieve a revitalisation of this sort, it is not only necessary to generate technology chains and coordinate economic developments, Bischofswerda also needs a regional development strategy to develop ideas for lighthouse projects that are to be generated through various governance arrangements", says IRS researcher Dr. Tobias Federwisch. The aim of the "Crowd Production" project was therefore not only to introduce concrete structural economic initiatives, such as consolidating system suppliers in the region, but also to achieve the integrating and identity-forming effect that comes from networking local stakeholders from various social spheres.

The „Crowd Production" project focused not only on generating technology chains and coordinating economic development, it rather intended to achieve the integrating and identity forming effect that comes from networking local stakeholders vom various social spheres.

"As a first step, we prepared a so-called potential analysis as part of the IRS sub-project to provide academic support to the activities in Bischofswerda", says Federwisch. He developed a "profile" with data on urban development, specific urban discourses and identity anchors. In addition, he conducted 20 interviews with key figures to determine their interests, perceptions of problems, visions and problem-solving approaches. On this basis, the project partners and the town council planned

a future workshop for Bischofswerda in 2016. The actors came together at this event, shared their visions and development scenarios and prioritised them. "While it was in progress we were doing research on the future workshop and the innovative projects that were planned there and afterwards being developed in topic-based project groups to precise packages of measures. The results of the process, from the potential analysis, via the future workshop, through to the project groups, was presented in a public exhibition for local residents.

"For us as social scientists, however, it is not only interesting to see the ideas and concepts that the town comes up with, but also how this process is carried out from a communicative point of view", concludes Federwisch. "We are precisely observing the social processes of the 'in situ' progressing genesis of innovation in the future workshop, and the emerging governance arrangements." In doing so, the project's participants identified supporting and hindering factors for participatory change processes and derive recommendations for action in municipal practice. The project was financed in the "Twenty-20 Forums" scheme that is part of the "Partnership for Innovation" programme run by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research.

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European "RurInno" Project: Research about and with Social Enterprises

In large parts of Europe, structurally weak rural regions are facing similar problems. Economic productivity is low, as is the availability of jobs for qualified people. At the same time, educational and cultural opportunities cannot be provided in these regions to the same extent as in conurbations. Both of these factors lead to continuous migration, especially of young, well-qualified people. These problems are so firmly entrenched that a downward spiral has been set in motion and the regions are threatened to some extent with losing their connection with social and economic developments in Europe.

"Promoting social innovations is a strategy for counteracting the problems", says Dr. Ralph Richter, research associate in the "Dynamics of Communication, Knowledge and Spatial Development" research department. Social enterprises play an important part in this, supporting social innovations by, for example, coaching young people in the development of entrepreneurial ideas and thus providing development impetus in structurally weak areas.

"But we have realised that social enterprises sometimes have large problems of their own in terms of professional development and networking with the political sphere, public administration and funding organisations because of their limited time and financial resources", says Richter. This the starting point for the European research project "Social Innovations in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: How Social Entrepreneurs Foster Innovative Solu-

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tions to Social Problems" (RurInno). It brings together researchers and practitioners from two research institutions and four social enterprises working in rural areas, who are pursuing three objectives together: first, promoting knowledge transfer between research and practice; second, improving empirical knowledge of conditions for social innovations in rural areas; and third, increasing the visibility of the work of social enterprises in politics and society.

"We are therefore researching both with and about the enterprises and thereby increasing practical and theoretical knowledge about social innovations and social enterprises", concludes Richter. The RurInno project, which was approved as part of the RISE funding line under the Marie-Skłodowska-Curie programme of the EU, enables the project partners to exchange personnel through secondments adding up to a total of 50 months. In addition, a series of knowledge transfer workshops is being funded in the project. ■

This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 691181.

RurInno

PROJECT PARTNERS RURINNO

Academic partners

- Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS) (Coordinator)
- Institute for Innovation Management (IFI), Johannes Kepler University of Linz

Non-academic partners

- OTELO eGen (Austria) develops young people's technical knowledge in open technology laboratories
- Nidzica Development Foundation NIDA (Poland) supports small rural businesses with financial advice
- Stevia Hellas (Greece) advises small producers in cultivating and marketing the alternative sugar plant Stevia
- Ballyhoura Development Ltd. (Ireland) addresses social inequality in the countryside by running programmes to integrate the unemployed, for example

Social Enterpreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analysing Innovative Trouble-shooters in Action (RurAction)

The Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space has successfully applied for a research and training network in the highly competetive „Marie-Skłodowska-Curie" programme of the European Union. Fourteen research institutes and social enterprises from seven European countries, coordinated by the IRS, will offer a structured doctoral training on social entrepreneurship in structurally weak rural regions. The doctoral candidates will conduct research guided by the question of which innovative solutions the social entrepreneurs can offer to tackle the economic and social downward spirals in these regions. The project will run for four years and has a budget of 2.5 million Euros.

Structurally weak rural regions are faced with major social and economic problems. In comparison to urban or intermediate regions, predominantly rural regions are economically less productive and they provide a less extensive scope of desired goods and services. As a consequence, the regions experience a loss of inhabitants, especially of young and highly skilled people. Thus, downward spirals are set in motion that further reduce economic opportunities and prevent rural regions from overcoming their structural deficits. The RURACTION ("Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action") research and training network focuses on socially innovative solutions to these rural problems developed by social entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurs are understood as practitioners who create and implement social innovations by entrepreneurial means. The question arises under which conditions they operate, how they organise solutions, how they network and empower residents, which impacts they actually have on rural development, and how they can be supported in their problem-solving activities.

The European Commission identifies the subject of social innovation in rural regions as a research gap. RURACTION will fill this gap. The research and training network brings together highly acknowledged academics and very experienced practitioners from social enterprises to contribute their expertise in this field (e.g. with spring schools, autumn skills seminars and cross-sectoral secondments). It strives to achieve excellent research results and aims at qualifying early stage researcher as equally scientifically and practically skilled experts for social entrepreneurship and social innovations in rural regions – be it in order to conduct further research in this complex scientific field, to professionally support and promote initiatives of existing social entrepreneurial organisations, and/or to professionally start their own initiatives and social enterprises. ■

PROJECT PARTNER RURACTION

The project started in December 2016. The RURACTION project team consists of the following academic and non-academic partners

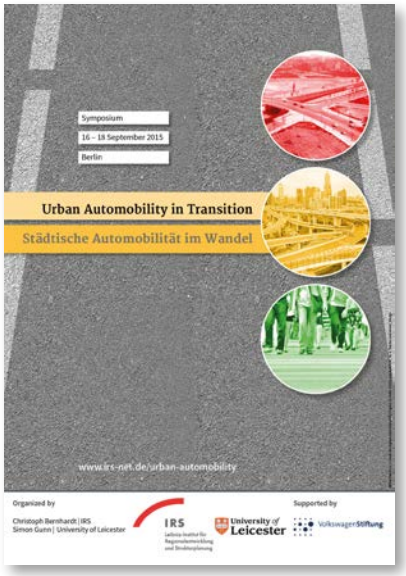
Project Consortium (Beneficiaries)

- Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS) (Germany)
- Adam Mickiewicz University in Pozna (Poland)
- Roskilde University (Denmark)
- Ballyhoura Development Ltd (Ireland)
- University College Cork - National University Of Ireland, Cork (Ireland)
- Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde e. V. (IfL) (Germany)
- University of the Aegean (Greece)
- Otelo Egen (Austria)
- University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal)
- Technische Universität Berlin
- Institute for Innovation Management (IFI), Johannes Kepler University of Linz

Project Partner

- OTELO eGen (Austria) develops young people's technical knowledge in open technology laboratories
- Nidzica Development Foundation NIDA (Poland) supports small rural businesses with financial advice
- Stevia Hellas (Greece) advises small producers in cultivating and marketing the alternative sugar plant Stevia
- Ballyhoura Development Ltd. (Ireland) addresses social inequality in the countryside by running programmes to integrate the unemployed, for example

Symposium
The Car and the Modern City



The cities of Europe and North America underwent a fundamental change in the 20th century. One significant factor in this was the rise of the car from a niche existence in technical feasibility studies to a mass means of transport. Traffic not only affects the built city, but also forms of living and working and urbanisation strategies in policy and planning. This change and the cultural effects of the interplay between urban traffic planning and urban development was the topic of the symposium "Urban Automobility in Transition", organised by the IRS department for Historical Research together with the Centre for Urban History of the University of Leicester in Berlin, which was supported by the Volkswagen Foundation. "The aim was to bring together an international and interdisciplinary network of researchers under the banner of 'Automobility and the modern city' to discuss both technical aspects and aspects of building and social spaces", say the IRS organisers PD Dr. Christoph Bernhardt and Dr. Harald Engler. Along with the various focal points in terms of content, the breadth of examples – from North America, via a comparison of the GDR and FRG, through to other cities in Europe and Asia – was a concept for the event intended to provide an understanding of the international circulation of expertise on traffic and urban planning beyond national boundaries.

The keynote lecture by Brian Ladd (University at Albany, State University of New York) addressed the question of American traffic planning as a model for planning in Europe and denied the stereotype of the "Americanisation" or "Los-Angelisation" of traffic. The American planning model was frequently "countered" in Europe by a historic city that was integrated into the planning – even if the quality was variable. In other issues, too, local or national contexts often took precedence over the way on which automobility influenced urban development. In Sweden, for example, safety issues played a large role because the number of accidents jumped in the 1950s as a result of mass mobilisation, reported Per Lundin (Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg). One of the five sections of the event, which was held over several days, was also devoted to questions of safety and risk. The individuality of the examples became clear in the comparison of car manufacturing cities: Harald Engler compared car manufacturing cities in the GDR and the FRG, other contributions were devoted to examples from Japan and Poland. Last but not least, the symposium put the insights gained from historical developments into a current context in the "New forms of mobility" section, by examining new types of sharing and community thinking and the challenges posed by the increase in bicycle traffic. ■

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Climate Protection and Energy Transition: New Initiatives in European Cities

In 2008, a number of cities in Europe joined forces on the initiative of the European Commission with the aim of exceeding the EU targets on reduction of CO2 emissions by 2020. The cities have organised themselves into a so-called "Covenant of Mayors" – which now has 6,000 members representing around 200 million residents and making the Covenant an important player in multi-level governance in the area of sustainable urban development in Europe. "Initiatives like this that connect local and regional stakeholders in the European context but circumvent the national level are becoming ever more relevant in Europe in political terms", says Prof. Kristine Kern, who is one of eight independent advisers in the "Experts Advisory Group" of the Covenant.

The main focus of the Covenant was and still is energy policy: the ambitious targets are to be achieved by increasing energy efficiency and using renewable energy sources. The "Mayors Adapt" movement, which was organised in a similar way, created a network of cities to address issues of adaptation to climate change. Besides the avoidance of climate-damaging emissions, the adaptation of infrastructures and policies in relation to climate change are to be focused here. In autumn 2015, the two initiatives amalgamated in Brussels to form the new "Integrated Covenant of Mayors on Climate and Energy" in order to create synergies from complementary areas of action. The member cities are committed to activities with three overarching aims: achieving the global warming target of less than 2°C by means of post-fossil strategies, developing regional and local resilience strategies to counter the unavoidable effects of climate change and increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.

The role model of the Covenant within multi-layered governance was the topic of a workshop on the eve of the ceremony. The Committee of the Regions and the Covenant invited academics and practitioners to combine theoretical and empirical analyses on the role of cities in EU climate and energy policy with experience from several sample regions. At the workshop, Kern gave a lecture entitled "Climate governance in the EU multi-level system: the role of the cities". ■

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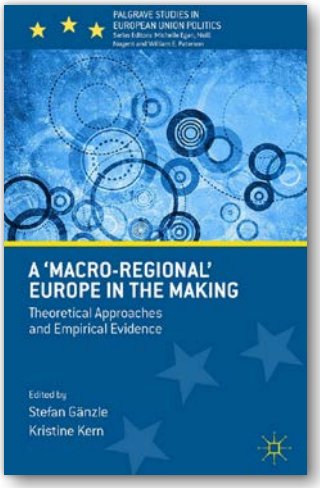
International Workshop on "Water Recycling"

Climate change, mega-cities and new forms of consumption – the scarcity of water as a resource is increasing in many countries of the world. The reuse of purified waste water (water recycling) may be one way to address the problem of water shortages. However, the ecological and the institutional conditions for this vary considerably from one region to another. The workshop "The Governance of Water Re-Use. International Experiences and Future Perspectives for Research and Action", organised by the IRS at the headquarters of the Leibniz-Association as part of the research project "Development of integrated land management through sustainable use of water and materials in North-East Germany (ELaN)", which is sponsored by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, examined the current state of recycling purified wastewater. Experts from Germany, France, Israel,

the Netherlands, Spain and Cyprus presented current research initiatives on the topic, the legal framework and specific projects involving water recycling in each of their countries. Dr. Ross Beveridge, Dr. Timothy Moss and Dr. Matthias Naumann presented results from the ELaN project and conceptual considerations to link the debate about the re-use of purified waste water with questions about its spatial characteristics and political negotiation. Participants in the workshop agreed in view of the increasing attention that water recycling is currently attracting – for example from the European Commission – that spatial and environmental research in the social sciences should address the topic more intensified in the future. ■

Recently appeared
A 'macro-regional' Europe in the Making: Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Evidence



Almost ten years ago, some of the neighbouring countries of the Baltic Sea arranged a close transnational cooperation to tackle economic and political challenges together. The Eastern European expansion of the European Union implicated that the region consists entirely of EU member states, with the exception of Russia. With access to the coordination structures and financial support of the Community, there is a chance that the cooperation agreement becomes more vigorous than the previous separate bilateral and multi-lateral initiatives in the region. Although the cooperation agreement was initiated by the member states, in 2009 the association virtually moved itself entirely under the patronage of the European Union by forming a macro region approved by the EU institutions. This strategic cooperation ultimately led to the "EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region". "The process is exciting to such a degree as the newly created macro region does not lead to new institutions, does not make any new EU legislation necessary and should not create any new subvention funds", says Prof. Kristine Kern, co-editor of the collection of essays "A 'macro-regional' Europe in the making". The tactic of the countries consisted in achieving more efficient use of existing funding sources on a European, national and regional level through coordination.

The initiative of the neighbouring countries of the Baltic Sea of setting up a further macro-regional level of governance, in addition to the national and European levels, brought a number of imitators to the scene. In subsequent years, macro regions were created in the Danube area (2011) and at the Adriatic and Ionian Seas (2014). A further strategy for the area of the Alps is about to be ratified. This trend towards macro-regional networking is addressed by Kern, together with Prof. Stefan Gänzle, in the collection of essays. The authors set the projects in the context of theories on multi-level governance and Europeanisation, and present empirical findings on the issues of the effect and success of the new control structures. "We pose the question as to whether the macro-regional strategies are actually useful instruments in networking policy and practice on a supra-national, national or regional level and whether the goals of social, economic and territorial cohesion can be achieved by that", says Kern. Each of the macro-regional initiatives is also presented and analysed in an individual contribution.

GÄNZLE, Stefan; KERN, Kristine: A 'macro-regional' Europe in the making: theoretical approaches and empirical evidence. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 280 p. (Palgrave studies in European Union politics)

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IMPRINT

IRS AKTUELL No 12, January 2017
ISSN 0944 7377

Publisher:

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The contributions in this newsletter are a co-product of Jan Zwilling and the reseachers of the IRS.

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