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Editorial

The interplay of gender and migration in Europe's remote and economically weak rural regions: Introduction to a special issue

1. Introduction

Selective out-migration of young adults from remote and economically weak regions to prosperous urban areas is a chief cause of ageing and depopulation in many parts of rural Europe (Woods, 2011). Even if the 'rural exodus' of young people is well-researched, it is less noted that young women and men leave rural places at different stages of their lives and for different reasons. The gender-specific differences in the migration patterns can lead to a distortion of the sex structure of the young adult population with "deficits" of women in the countryside and "surpluses" in the cities. Such unbalanced sex structures of the population in the younger age groups have been identified in remote rural regions in many industrialised countries, for instance in Austria (Fischer and Weber, 2014), Germany (Wiest and Leibert, 2013), Ireland (Ní Laoire, 2001), Norway (Dahlström, 1996), and Spain (Camarero and Sampedro, 2016), but also in Australia (Alston, 2004) or Canada (Walsh, 2013). In a planning political context, the loss of young women is supposed to exacerbate existing problems in economically underdeveloped, sparsely populated and remote regions. Female skills shortages, the perforation of social networks and social erosion have been highlighted as negative consequences for rural development (Fischer and Weber, 2014; Wiest and Leibert, 2013). Explanations for the outflow of young women from rural areas refer to basic societal and economic changes related to a gendered reappraisal of territorial structures and upcoming new gender roles (Wiest, 2016). In this context, it is necessary to consider gender both as an independent determinant of migration and a lens through which the (dis-)advantages of rural living are perceived and evaluated. Grimsrud (2011) for example argues that the traditional notions of femininity and masculinity in rural regions not only increase out-migration and hamper return migration but also influence who stays and who moves in. Accordingly, the selectivity of staying, out- and in-migration consequently stabilises and perpetuates the traditional rural gender cultures (Jones, 1999). Studies have shown that young women perceive rural communities to some extent as more intrusive, constraining and controlling than young men (Haugen and Villa, 2006) even in the Nordic countries that are presumed to be more gender-equal than any other part of the developed world. On the other hand, fundamental societal changes including new gender roles, provide new forms of spatial everyday life practice and new requirements of the living environment with impact on migration decisions of young people (McDowell and Massey, 1994; Leibert et al., 2015). To give an example: the particular local framework conditions of remote rural places with long distances to work places, child-care facilities or schools make the organisation of the everyday tasks of a double earner family often impossible.

Primary reasons for prevailing migration patterns in rural Europe are the profound economic and structural changes connected to a shift from manufacturing to the service economy brought about by globalisation. Since rural labour markets used to be based chiefly on the contracting primary and secondary sectors, the insecurities that characterise the occupational situation of all young people in Europe are exacerbated in structurally weak areas. Against this backdrop, many rural places become increasingly difficult to live in for the youth, especially since educational and professional opportunities tend to be more and more concentrated in the urban centres (Farrugia, 2014). Since girls in Europe often show higher educational ambitions and a better performance in formal education, they are, as a consequence, often more mobile. This idea is picked up in most of the contributions in this issue. However, the transformation of the economy characterised by de-industrialisation, de-agarisation and the growing importance of the service sector may also lead to a "feminization" of rural labour markets. In some parts of Europe these processes are also connected to the transformation of rural areas into residential and family-oriented "consumption countrysides" (Forsberg and Stenbacka, 2013). In other words: Even if many rural regions may be "unlivable" for school leavers and young professionals, others may be increasingly attractive places for young women and men to settle down and start a family.

The papers in this special issue address the question how gender influences the interregional mobility of young adults who have grown up in remote and economically weak rural regions. This question is considered in three different national contexts – Germany, Hungary and Sweden – as well as from different research perspectives. The authors highlight the rising female labour force participation of women, the transition from industrial to post-industrial economies, the growth of the information society and new frameworks for social relations in a globalizing world as important reasons for changes in gendered migration patterns on the macro-level. Before introducing the specific research focus of the five papers gathered in this special issue, the subsequent sections aim at placing the individual studies into the following broader contexts:

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- A consideration of the impact of the institutional and cultural setting for encouraging or discouraging spatial mobility of young women, with an emphasis on national peculiarities;
- A description of some macro demographic trends in rural Europe with a particular focus on the three countries covered in this special issue that point to markedly different socio-economic framework conditions.

2. The impact of cultural and institutional settings in the national context

Beyond local opportunities and deficits, institutional and cultural settings in the national context are supposed to have a considerable impact on the migration behaviour of young women and men in Europe. This aspect is considered in the following with a particular focus on differences between the age when young women and men are leaving the parental home and prevailing family models.

It is frequently argued that young adulthood is an increasingly individualised phase of the life course, in which most young women and men have replaced traditional expectations and taken for granted identities by the pursuit of a biographical project and an ethic of individual self-actualisation (Farrugia et al., 2014). Such biographical projects often entail geographic mobility. However, a basic pre-condition for the out-migration of young people from rural places are real or perceived opportunities to set up an independent household. Important determinants at the macro level are the conditions on the labour market, the availability of housing, and the institutional setting of the welfare state of the country under consideration. Beyond that, parents' resources, the strength of family ties, as well as values and beliefs about the 'correct' timing and sequencing of life trajectories, play a vital role (Billari, 2004). In 2014, the average age of leaving the parental home in the European Union was 25 for women and 27 for men. There are, however, distinctive differences between the respective EU countries, both concerning the timing of leaving the childhood home and the gender gaps between the average ages of women and men. Europe is, generally speaking, characterised by a north/south- and west/east-divide in the timing of leaving the parental home. In Southern and Eastern Europe, young people leave the parental home rather late, especially in Italy, Malta, Slovakia and Croatia. Young Scandinavians, on the other hand, leave their childhood home in their late teens or early 20s and rarely co-reside with their parents in their 30s. The average age of leaving home is also below the EU average in Austria, Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK (Eurostat, 2015). European countries differ in the living arrangements of young women and men after they leave the parental home as well. This transition is closely linked to family formation in some countries, whereas young people prefer to live alone or with roommates before moving in with a partner in others. Living alone is quite common for young people in their 20s in the Nordic Countries, the Netherlands and – to a lesser extent – France and Germany, but rare in the Mediterranean countries and Central and Eastern Europe (Iacovou and Skew, 2011).

The roles the state assigns to women, especially mothers, is another explanation for diverging female migration behaviour between the respective European states (Morell and Bock, 2008). Access to work for women and the financial means to form and maintain an independent household without support from the family of origin or the need to depend on a male breadwinner are supported to a different degree by the state. A country's "gender culture" is first of all reflected in the dominant cultural family model(s), the gendered division of labour within the family and the family-employment nexus (Pfau-Effinger, 2012) There are also regional "gender contracts" (Forsberg, 1998) in addition to the national "gender cultures", even in relatively homogeneous unitary states like Sweden. These gender contracts are at least partly connected to the economic history of a region. Places where gainful employment was common for married women in the past are frequently characterised by above-average female labour force participation rates to this day (e.g. McDowell and Massey, 1994 for the UK; Sackmann and Häussermann, 1994; for Germany). The 'male breadwinner model' is based on a strict division of labour with the husband as earner and the wive as stay-at-home mother. The individual model, on the other hand, does not favour a specific family form and division of labour in the family. Both partners can be earners and/or carers (Sainsbury, 1996). In a nutshell, the 'male breadwinner model' by trend discourages independent spatial mobility and full employment of women while the 'individual model' encourages or is at least neutral vis-à-vis female employment and hence also spatial mobility. The trends towards urban living has amongst others been related to an increasing female labour participation, the growing significance of double-earner families and the challenges to reconcile private and family life (Van den Berg, 2013). Concerning the case study countries presented in this issue, Sweden and the other Nordic countries are often cited as the ideal type of "women friendly" welfare states (Sainsbury, 1996) which actively support working women and the equal sharing of household chores and child-rearing (Thévenon, 2011). Western-Germany, on the other hand, was for a long time considered to be the poster child of the male breadwinner model (Pinl, 2003); the recent trends are, however, diverging. Saxonberg (2013) for example interprets the 2007 family policy reforms in Germany as "degenderizing", i.e. promoting the elimination of gender roles.

In contrast, a "*return of domesticity*" has been noticed in the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) after 1990. Fodor (2011) argues that gender-related values are more conservative than in most countries of Western Europe. This is, for instance, reflected in opinion polls that show that the inhabitants of the CEE-countries are more likely to think that women should be housewives and mothers and that men should have more right to a job than women in tight labour markets. In some cases, a re-familiarisation of family policies has happened in the form of an explicit political agenda aimed at strengthening the model of separate gender roles with male breadwinners and stay-at-home mothers. Women were encouraged to leave the labour market when they have children by means of generous family leave for mothers and limited access to childcare. The Czech Republic and Slovakia, but also Hungary are the most obvious examples for this trend (Saxonberg and Sirovátka, 2006; Saxonberg, 2013). The result is a large employment gap between mothers and women without children connected to a discrimination of (potential) mothers on the labour market (Glass, 2008; Glass and Fodor, 2011). These political decisions are supposed to lead to an increased dependence of (potential) mothers on their families and possibly an immobilisation due to low labour force participation rates.

Against this backdrop, various aspects of the local living situations in Europe's rural areas are reflected in prevailing demographic processes. The following section presents some basic demographic development trends as an overall frame for the interpretation of female migration biographies and female migration decisions as analysed in the contributions to this special issue.

3. Demographic development and migration pattern in rural Europe

The most important drivers of regional demographic and