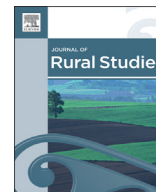




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Migration and everyday discourses: Peripheralisation in rural Saxony-Anhalt from a gender perspective

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ABSTRACT

An important feature of rural Eastern Germany is the negative population development in combination with strong and very selective out-migration. In the rural regions of the federal state Saxony-Anhalt the effects of a demographic shrinking process and female migration have been shown especially clearly. Since spatial discourses and courses of action connected with the production of rural peripheries are a mirror reflection of social conditions, the selective migration of young women directs one's attention towards possible correlations between uneven spatial developments and gender questions. Considering the fact that employment of women is socially rooted and an exemplary provision with childcare facilities benefits the reconciliation of family and work for young families, the pronounced shortage of young women in the new German federal states seems remarkable at a first glance. Against this backdrop the paper highlights different aspects of peripheralisation processes like stigmatisation, disconnection and migration against the backdrop of the economic transformation and regional discourses. The focus is on explanations for gender-specific migration pattern and the everyday-life perspective of young women. Especially the underlying implicit social communication patterns, expectations of young people's actions in rural areas and the migration decision of young women with narratives of leaving and returning are considered.

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1. Female migration and peripheralisation

Many studies on rural migration processes in Europe have shown that mobility patterns are gendered with women leaving rural areas at higher rates than men (e.g. Corbett, 2007; Dahlström, 1996; Glendinning et al., 2003; Bonifacio, 2014; Camarero and Sampedro, 2008). The main explanation for this are the changes in the working world over the course of the transition from industrial to post-industrial societies in conjunction with increasing female educational orientation and labour participation (e.g. Corbett, 2007; Walsh, 2014; Rasmussen, 2011). The finding that particularly highly-qualified young women prefer to reside in urban centres due to better career perspectives and better possibilities to combine work and family is related to this. Considering the supposed attractiveness of city centres for young women in the reurbanisation debate as well as the female migration from rural areas, the impact of changing gender roles is to be highlighted. In this respect it has also been assumed that the spread of 'non-

traditional' family forms and the pluralisation of living arrangements stimulate the trend towards the city (Buzar et al., 2005). Beyond functionalist explanations dealing with the defacto options for action such as the accessibility to workplaces and apprenticeship positions as well as supply offers in a rural and urban context social constructivist approaches highlight that spatial constructs are partially linked to gendered representations. Individual and social identities in rural societies are – among others – negotiated with respect to defining what a rural man or a rural woman is (Berg, 2004, p. 137). Studies dealing with gendered rural spaces have usually identified images which are determined by traditional male activities and symbols for example Bye (2003, 2009) for the hunting culture in rural Norway or Greig and Martino (2012) for male-dominated rural labour markets in Canada. With its economic structures, the distribution of gender roles within the family as well as public life, local politics and club cultures rural societies has been considered to be oriented more towards traditional male role models (Dahlström, 1996; Greig and Martino, 2012; Walsh, 2014; Grimsrud, 2011; Little 1997). Dahlström for example observed in her study on rural areas of Scandinavia a growing cultural gap between modern, mobile young women and the rather more

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traditional young men. This situation in which “the young men may be left behind as losers [and] become marginalised” was characterised as “male periphery” (Dahlström, 1996, p. 270). On the other hand recent studies highlight that representations of rurality are also related to new femininities and masculinities. Baylina and Berg for example showed this for representations of the rural in Spanish lifestyle magazines (2010). Also Forsberg and Stenbacka observe an ongoing feminisation of the rural in conjunction to a pluralisation of male and female identities in rural Sweden (2013). Against this backdrop, the question arises as to what extent societal changes related to the transition of gender identities are also connected with diverse representations of rurality. In order to shed light on those possible interrelations the pluralisation of the category ‘gender’ should be noted as well as the fact that simple dichotomies of masculinity and femininity do not reflect the social realities adequately. The same applies to the diversity in social representations of the ‘rural’ in everyday life perceptions as well as in academic discourses (Halfacree, 1993; Berg, 2004).

Since the lack of young women has been reported especially for declining, remote rural communities the focus of this contribution is on ruralities related to depopulation processes, out-migration of economically active groups and discourses about shrinkage, which match with the conceptualisations of peripheries (Kühn and Weck, 2013). Here the out-migration of young women directs attention towards possible correlations between differing spatial developments and gender questions.

Taking the increasing disparities in spatial development within Europe into account, the process of peripheralisation implies declining possibilities for many inhabitants of remote rural regions to participate in important areas like work, health or education and restricted options for organising their lives. Furthermore, economic backwardness and lacking social commitment could result in constant dependencies on transfers from richer areas. Therefore peripheralisation has been described as a relational trajectory of unequal spatial developments which takes place on different scales and implies a cumulative reinforcement of negative processes (e.g. Kühn and Weck, 2013, p. 25, Berndt and Liebmman, 2013, p. 218). The loss of economic and institutional players’ capacity to act in conjunction with the increasing impossibility to secure the quality of life for the population are characteristic features (Beetz, 2008, p. 11). Beyond socio-economic structures, the term also refers to societal perception and labelling. In particular the stigmatisation of areas due to the production of negative self and public images must be treated as an important aspect since negatively connoted semantics not only have a descriptive character, but also produce relevant expectations that have an influence on human behaviour (Kühn and Weck, 2013, p. 39; Beetz, 2008). In order to explain reinforced structural deficits, it therefore seems necessary to include the discursive labelling of certain areas or certain groups of the population (Barlösius and Neu, 2008, p. 23; Beetz, 2008, p. 13). Meyer and Miggelbrink highlight in this context the necessity of a subject-centred and reflexive foundation to better understand the process of peripheralisation (2013, p. 215).

Against this backdrop the contribution addresses the impact of gender issues in the frame of the peripheralisation debate in shrinking areas of the German federal state Saxony-Anhalt: Here the effects of population losses and female out-migration are particularly striking within Germany as well as within Europe. Dealing with conceptions of the rural that involve aspects of marginality, stigmatisation and periphery this subject seems, at first glance, to be in significant contrast to notions of a rural idyll (Cloe and Little, 1997).

The structure of the paper is as follows: After introducing the socio-economic development in rural Saxony-Anhalt after the German reunification as an example of a peripheralisation process

the aspect of gender-specific migration is analysed to give explanations for a particular demographic developmental path (section 2 and 3). In this context the disproportionately high rate of migration among young women is considered as a specific, gendered-spatial practice. Beyond the analysis of a standardised questionnaire and small-scale statistical data, the everyday-life experience of young women with narratives of leaving and returning is at the centre of attention to uncover implicit and explicit societal communication patterns connected with the production and reproduction of Saxony-Anhalt’s rural peripheries (section 4). By considering migration data, individual migration biographies as well as everyday discourses to shed a gendered light on peripheralisation, the paper refers to an understanding of space as socially constructed by practices, representations and everyday life (Halfacree, 2007).

2. Rural regions in Eastern Germany – peripheralisation tendencies in the centre of Europe

Since the German reunification the eastern federal states of Germany have been affected by a strong decrease in population. Especially the rural and formerly industrial areas have experienced an outstanding population decline mainly due to the out-migration of young groups of the population, in particular young women. The extreme and selective migration was closely related to the socio-demographic framework conditions of the labour markets. Due to the massive downsizing of jobs over the course of the transition from a planned economy to a market economy in the 1990s many career entrants were confronted with the compulsion to migrate to avoid unemployment. In the federal state of Saxony-Anhalt the demographic effects of this socio-economic transition were especially distinct (Fig. 1). While the region was a significant location for the chemical and heavy-manufacturing industries during the German Democratic Republic, deindustrialisation and the restructuring of the agricultural industry have been clearly reflected in economic and demographic shrinking processes. The extreme downsizing of jobs following this transformation has not yet been counterbalanced by new jobs in other economic sectors and still determines the image as a low-wage state with “low salaries and hard work” (MZ, 11 April 2012). In addition to wage gaps between eastern and western Germany, youth unemployment was one of the central topics in the labour market politics of the entire country for many years. At 10.4% the unemployment rate in Saxony-Anhalt seems very moderate in comparison to other regions in Europe. Nevertheless, it is still (besides Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania at 10.5%) one of the highest quotas of the German federal states (Western Germany 5.8%, Eastern Germany 9.5%, Labour Market Report by the Federal Labour Office June 2014).

Also low spending capacities which are an indicator for the material well-being of the population and the economic power of a region point to structural deficits within Germany. Saxony-Anhalt has been the federal state in Germany with the lowest spending capacity per inhabitant for many years (17336 Euro per inhabitant 2014, Fig. 1). Even recent trends reveal that the pronounced socio-economic differences between Eastern and Western Germany tend to even out, considerable intranational and intraregional disparities gain in importance.

The fact that long-term unemployment is consolidating and significant parts of the population are dependent on transfer payments and low-paid precarious jobs particularly in remote rural regions in Saxony-Anhalt can be considered as manifestation of peripheralisation. Many rural communities in Eastern Germany have found themselves in a vicious circle of deindustrialisation, downsizing of jobs, migration and a sinking demand for goods and products. Day-care centres, schools and shops have been closed and local public transport has been reduced to a minimum making

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