

RURAL RESTRUCTURING
AND CONFLICTING
DEFINITIONS OF THE RURAL
(PROBLEM) IN EAST
GERMANY

Lutz Laschewski

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BTU Cottbus–Senftenberg
Lehrstuhl Sozialwissenschaftliche Umweltfragen
Erich Weinert Str. 1
Postfach 10 13 44
03046 Cottbus

Homepage: <http://www.tu-cottbus.de/fakultaet4/de/sozialwissenschaftliche-umweltfragen/>

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Rural restructuring and conflicting definitions of the rural (problem) in East Germany

Lutz Laschewski

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Rural restructuring and conflicting definitions of the rural (problem) in East Germany

*Lutz Laschewski**

**BTU Cottbus–Senftenberg, Lehrstuhl Sozialwissenschaftliche Umweltfragen, Erich Weinert Str. 1, Postfach 10 13 44, 03046 Cottbus*

Email: Lutz.Laschewski@b-tu.de

Abstract

Rurality" or "rural life" has not mattered much as a concept in public and political as well as scientific discourses during the 1990s. In recent years, it has experienced a remarkable resurgence. This paper tries to investigate this phenomenon. Therefore, major trajectories of rural change in East Germany since 1989 are briefly described, and rural discourses in selected policy arenas are explored. It is argued that the notion of rurality is differentiated across different discourse arenas.

While the notions of rurality are not independent from each other, they do not form a coherent worldview. This fragmentation of rural discourses reflects the increasingly hybrid reconstitution of the global countryside. Paradoxically, the notions of rurality do not reflect this hybridity, but they mostly seem to remain in traditional ways of thinking and largely draw on widespread rural images of village, peasantry, cooperation and natural beauty. The resurgence of rurality in public debates is also an expression of a progressing German integration, in which the East-West divide and the narrative of post-socialist transformation are more and more replaced by new political agendas and new framings of problems and causal relations.

Keywords: Discourse, Rural Restructuring, East Germany, Agricultural Policy, „Energiewende“, Demographic change, Rural Idyll, Rurality

Introduction

Despite the fact that the German unification has brought about the most significant economic crisis and fundamental changes in living conditions for East German rural areas, "rurality" or "rural life" has not mattered much as a concept in public and political as well as scientific discourses during the 1990s. On the one hand post-socialistic transformation was perceived as a fundamental, unanimous and non-spatially differentiated process. On the other hand, in the high times of the neoliberal Zeitgeist, West Germany Agricultural Policy reframed the policy agenda from a social towards "competitive farm business" agenda.

In persona, the agricultural minister Borchert, who came into power 1993 following the Bavarian peasant Ignaz Kiechle, represented this new policy focus. Symbolically, this policy shift was reflected in the official terminology - the main policy objective was not anymore on the preservation of peasant farming ("bäuerliche Landwirtschaft"), but the support of farm entrepreneurs ("landwirtschaftliche Unternehmer").

Beyond agriculture, West Germany's main policy addressing rural areas before the German unification had been the so-called „Zonenrandförderung“ - one of these untranslatable German neologisms - which focussed on the border regions to the neighbouring socialist states, in particular alongside the German-German border. It is clear that after the German unification this policy became obsolete.

In recent years, the concept of "rural" has experienced a remarkable resurgence in the political, public as well scientific discourses. However, in this paper, it is argued that the notion of rurality is differentiated across different discourse arenas.

In the following, firstly, the idea to study rurality as discourse is briefly elaborated. Then, a short summary of major social changes and development trajectories in rural East Germany is given. It is argued that the social diversity in as well of rural spaces has increased. The increasing diversity is reflected in the diversity of public and policy arenas, in which rural has become an issue. Four main rural discourse formations are outlined

Rurality as a discourse

Discourse analysis addresses the linguistic, identity and knowledge base of policy (Feindt und Oels 2005, pp. 163). It starts from the premise that our knowledge, discursive (speaking, writing), and non-discursive practices (that what we do) are structurally connected. Thus, discourses represent the knowledge and understanding of the reality. However, discourses not simply reflect the reality, but construct reality in the way that facts are interpreted and practices are defined and legitimised.

This paper builds primarily on a discourse analysis approach by Jäger, which is based on a Foucaultian concept of discourse (Jäger 2001). Discourse is understood as an institutionally formed practice of speaking (ibid, 82). This approach emphasises the notion in Foucault's analysis that a discourse is both a mode of production, as well a linguistic practice (Foucault 2008,2012). So to say, what is said is dependent on the regulated context, where and when something is and can be said. The rules of a discourse may exclude and include actors, create discursive events and define discursive forms, which regulate what can be said and how and when something has to be said. Discourse analysis is relevant not since they are expressions of interest-based social practices, rather discourses are linked with concrete actions and the exertion of power (Jäger 2001, pp. 82).

Like Foucault, Jäger calls this interaction between discursive and non-discursive practices 'dispositive' (Jäger 2001, pp. 106). A dispositive can be understood as a triangle of discursive and non-discursive practices and their reification or visibility in form of physical objects. In addition, Keller (Keller 2011, p. 66) distinguishes for both discursive, and non-discursive practices between practices of discourse production and practices of discourse effects. In this sense, a policy field can be understood as a dispositive that combines discursive and non-discursive practices as well their reification in a political discourse that is linked to a set of political instruments and objectives. The important consequence of this is that the totality of dispositive helps to define the boundaries of a discourse. The production of discourse can only be understood in relation to discourse effects and vice versa.

As we will see, this proposition has some important implications for the following analysis, when we look at the state of research with regard to rural discourses. Perhaps, the most prominent discussion of rural discourses is that of Frouws (Frouws 1998), who studied the 'contested re-definition' of the Dutch countryside. The context of this analysis has been the formulation of new policy plan for the design of Dutch territory (the non-discursive practice) having in mind a rurality as a concrete space that is co-produced by man and nature. Frouws distinguished three different discourses - the agri-ruralist, the utilitarian and the hedonist discourses - that all three express different propositions about current processes, relevant policy objectives and measures to be taken. His paper has been subject to major review by (Hermans et al. 2010), who scrutinised the linkage of these rural discourses to different notions of sustainability. Both papers focus on different meanings of sustainability and rurality expressed by groups of actors within a single policy arena, that is agricultural policy and land development. In this sense, we may speak of a 'real' rural discourse, in the sense that the concept of rurality is the core to be defined.

However, if the introductory statement is true that 'rurality' has not mattered much as a concept in German public, political and scientific discourses during the 1990s, then, the question arises, whether it is correct to speak of rural discourses. Rather, one might think of rurality as a concept, which is a discursive element of other discourses. It is also possible that the concept of rurality is linked to particular discursive positions that is the ways, how (groups of) actors are enmeshed in divers discourses and may formulate a more or less coherent world view (Jäger 2001, p. 99).

At this stage, it is useful to reconsider early constructivists writings in rural research by the Belgian sociologist Marc Mormont, who at the time provided a critical review of rural sociological research arguing 'rurality' should be considered as a 'category of thought' (Mormont 1990). Firstly, he described 'rurality' as a binary, dualistic conceptualisation (or framing) of the spatial organisation of society. Under some conditions the rural-urban dichotomy is a useful category to distinguish spatial diversity of social phenomena. Historically, as Mormont argues, the prominence of the concept of rural-urban divide is related to industrialisation. However, according to this view, industrialisation processes creating the rural-urban divide are not the dominant social forces in (post-)modern societies anymore. Indeed, many rural researchers support the idea that rural-urban linkages become more divers and also rural areas are increasingly differentiated (e.g. Murdoch et al. 2003). Instead, Mormont argued further, there are multiple social movements and social projects targeting rural spaces, all of which think of 'rural' in different ways. Thus, we have to distinguish between processes, which take place in 'rural' space, defined in a geographical sense, and 'rural' as an idea and or project, which people have in mind (independently, if these projects target rural spaces in the geographical sense).

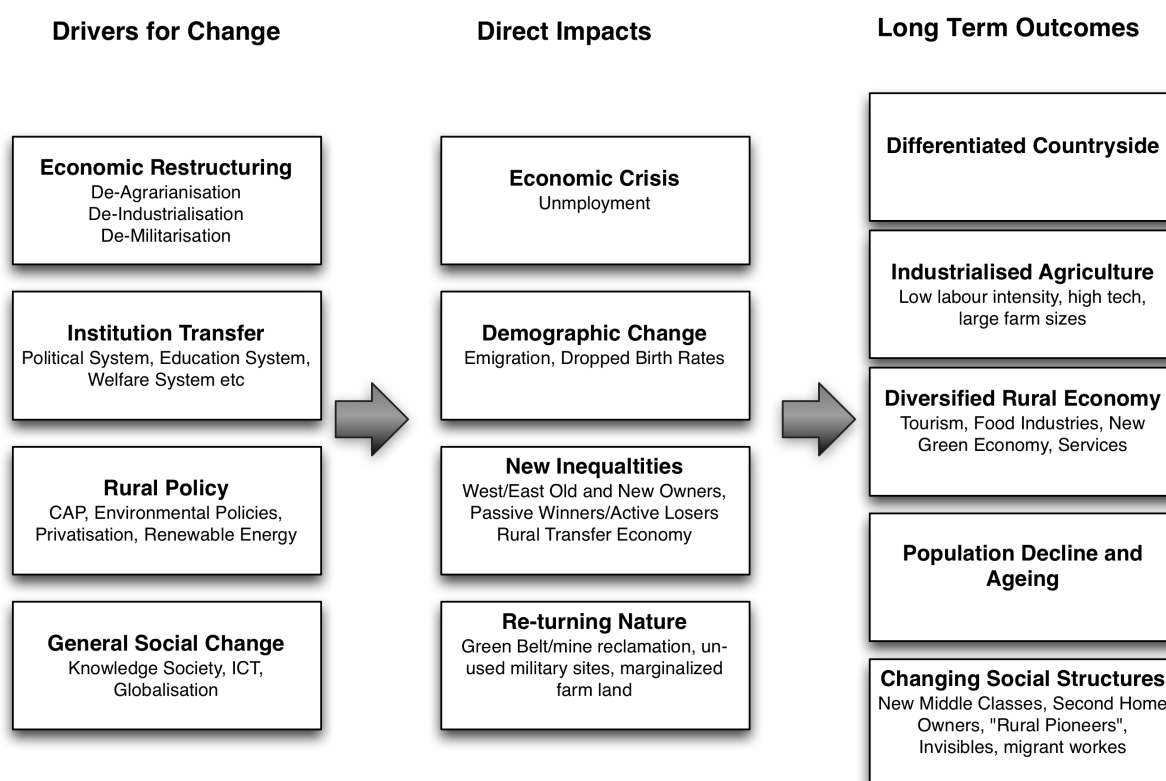
Subsequently, the concept of 'rurality' may be a discourse or an element of discursive element in different public, policy and scientific discourses. It can be loaded and connected with rather different meanings and social practices. For an anti-capitalist group, the rural can be associated with egalitarian and non-monetary modes of social organisation, for nationalists, the land may be related to ethnic symbols and cultural roots and serve as a paramilitary training ground, for liberalists, the rural may be a refuge for individual freedom and protection from state control, and, of course, negative associations of the rural are possible as 'province', culturally backwardness and so forth. Finally, discourses and different discourse positions may make use of, but also can ignore this concept in expressing its view.

Thus, the re-emergence and growing popularity of rurality as political and public concept primarily means that public and policy issues are framed in form of an urban-rural divide. If Mormont's view, that industrialisation processes creating the rural-urban divide are not the dominant social forces in (post-) modern societies anymore,

is correct, then, a framing in terms of an urban-rural divide is either particularistic, contingent or wrong. One can think of the agrarian rural discourse nowadays as a particularistic one, since agriculture is not anymore the dominant economic activity in rural areas, and its activities are only loosely connected to other spheres of rural life. Sometimes the urban-rural divide is not the only possible way to frame spatial diversity in a binary geographical category. An alternative, dominant spatial frame in the unified Germany is the West-East divide, and further, the South-North gap.

In the following, after a brief summary of major social changes in rural East Germany, three political and a media discourses are sketched, in which rurality has re-emerged as an important discursive element.

Figure 1: A condensed model of rural change in East Germany since 1990



Source: Own graph.

Post-socialist rural change in East Germany

This section summarises main social changes in rural East Germany in the past two decades. More detailed descriptions have been published elsewhere (e.g. Laschewski 2009b,a; Laschewski und Siebert 2004; Laschewski et al. 2002; Siebert und Laschewski 2001). Figure 1 provides a brief overview of fundamental economic and institutional changes and processes, and the immediate and long-term outcomes they were connected with. Here, only some of many developments are mentioned.

Drivers for social change after 1990

1. The German Unification has meant a fundamental shock for East German rural economy, which was built on three pillars. An extended agricultural sector employing about 845 thousand people, and thus a large majority of people living in villages and small towns, the industrial sector, which has been established mainly in rural towns, (including the mining sector), and finally the military forces. The GDR has been the region with the highest density of soldiers in the world. About 700 soldiers were allocated in East Germany about half of which are members of the Soviet Army. The peaceful withdrawal of the Soviet Army is probably the least known success story in the difficult process of the German unification.

In addition, about 30 thousand so-called "Border soldiers" were employed at the inner German border. Despite the fact that the Soviet Army has tried to maintain rather disconnected from locales, its sheer size - in particular in less populated areas - meant that the local labour markets were significantly impacted. All these sectors declined dramatically after the German Unification. With regard to industries the German policy tried to maintain some industrial cores, which only occasionally were situated in rural areas, such as brown coal mining in the Lusatia region south of Berlin.

2. German Unification also meant an almost complete abolishment of existing institutions. They were replaced by regulations according to West German and European law. This institutional transfer has been both a blessing - since new rules had not been found, but were quickly available - but also a curse. Since even the tiniest rule changed, the institutional knowledge of East Germans was degraded, and everyday routines were destroyed. In face of the economic crisis this provoked additional stress for East Germans, who had to adapt and to re-organise almost any aspect of everyday life. This supported a feeling of being displaced in its own country of many.

However, institutional transfer has not been a process in one direction. Firstly, new regulations did not work straight away, but it took some years until administrative and legal procedures started to function sufficiently. These were the high times of entrepreneurial actors in all spheres of the society, which often produced creative solutions, but also terrific failures.

3. Agricultural employment shrunk by about 80 per cent within three years after the unification. Due to high cost, the project of re-establishing family farms was started with only little enthusiasm and the main financial support to start-up new farms stopped in 1997 (but not the financial support for existing farms in general). In the end, it has been the well-trained and well-organised managing elite of the former

cooperative and state farms who successfully established most new farms or remained managers of the successors of former cooperatives (Küster 2002). They also learnt to play the politics quickly and were able to mediate and even modify political programs as well as privatisation policies in their favour. The strongest opposition against capping of EU direct payments to the farm sector during several EU negotiations since 1999 was found in the German delegation, which was protection the interest of the large East German farms until today. Similarly, the large East German farms also managed to gain some privileges in the process of privatisation of state owned agricultural land.

4. Finally, it should not be ignored that general social processes have transformed these initial changes during the last two decades. Presumably, the most important change in everyday life and the economy is the rapidly growing availability and relevance of information and communication technologies. One has to recall that according to the official statistics in 1990, only 17,2 per cent of all GDR households had an own telephone connection. Today, despite East German regions are still lagging behind, more than 90 per cent of all households have a telephone, mobile phone(s) and/or internet access (Statistisches Bundesamt 2014).

Immediate impacts

1. The economic shock in 1990 created an unprecedented labour market crisis (not only) in rural East Germany. In 1990, the East German labour force was about 6,5 million people. German policies tried to mediate the social consequences of this crisis by expanding early retirement measures to an extent that almost all (a total number of about 800 thousand), who were at the age of 55 or more and working in a company that had to reduce staff were more or less 'forced' to retire. Also, a second labour market of about two million people was created to reduce unemployment, to qualify employees and support local communities, who benefited the most of these measures. However, despite all these measures unemployment skyrocketed from zero to over 25 per cent and maintained on a high level. Thus, to a great extent, the rural economy became and remains a transfer economy till date, in which local consumption is strongly dependent and influenced by unemployment aid, employment measures, and pension regulations. In the face of persistent labour market crisis labour unions outside of the public sector continued to be weak, and in particular rural labour markets remained largely unregulated. East Germany became the "Wild East", where existing legal labour market regulations were difficult to be enforced.

2. For large parts of the young generation – for young women more than for young men – the only opportunity was to emigrate to West Germany (or even further). In face of the crisis young women postponed the birth of the first child. The impact of the combination of this behavioural change and emigration was a sharp drop of the birth rates after 1990. In Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the most rural federal state in East Germany, the number of born children dropped from about 23,000 in 1990 to 8,934 in 1994. It has however stabilised at a level between 12 and 13 thousand born children per year (Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden 2014b).

3. The unification process created a couple of social inequalities between West and East Germans, old and new (land) owners or employed and unemployed. The metaphors of “passive winners” and “active losers” have been used to characterise the fateful character of the individuals’ repositioning in the post-socialist order (Brauer et al. 1996). A part of this story is that in many villages a handful of highly subsidised farmers occupied all the land, while a large share of the rural population tried to survive with low paid, and insecure jobs, and to make a living through a combination of work income, household subsistence and social welfare payments. While the downsized and increasingly efficient agricultural sector rapidly became a symbol of successful transformation, the rest of the rural economy remained a picture of misery (Laschewski und Siebert 2001).

4. For environmental management and nature protection the unification process and the economic crisis has meant a window of opportunity. Nature protection has been the only realistic option to make use of sudden abundance of mine reclamation land and un-used and for other civil purposes now unusable military sites. Also, environmental policies were rated highly on the public policy agenda. In May 1987, a few years before the unification, Klaus Töpfer became the first Minister for Environment, Nature Protection and Nuclear Safety for West and later the unified Germany, who later became the Executive Director for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). At the same time Environmental Policy started to become a core policy area for the European Union in the forefront of the Earth summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

In the early years after the unification, many National Parks, areas for nature protection and biosphere reservations were newly established or extended in rural East Germany (Urfei 2002). Agricultural decline reduced pressure on marginal land, and offered opportunities for extensive farming, re-naturation and, in particular, the restoration of fenland. The formerly fenced German-German border turned into a new “green belt” right in the centre of the unified Germany, and in 1996 the wolves celebrated a highly symbolic as well as controversial return to Germany on a military training site in Upper Lusatia. Since the wolves population has quickly grown in a

countryside, which in the last century has been continuously violated for brown coal extraction and military purposes (Laschewski 2009a).

Long term outcomes

After more than 20 years, the institutional, natural and spatial conditions have increasingly differentiated the East German countryside. Economic development trajectories differ between Western regions, which are closer to West Germany, and Easter parts at the Polish and Czech border, regions with potentials for intensive agriculture and less favoured areas, regions with high tourist potentials or post-mining landscapes, rural areas close to main motorways and agglomerations, and poorly accessible regions. The federal states have followed different economic strategies, and the public money for economic restructuring and investments into public infrastructure was also unevenly allocated.

The agricultural sector has turned into a high-tech, low labour intensive industry that only contributes a small share to the rural economy both with regard to GDP as well as employment. Most rural regions have rapidly turned into a low-paid service economy. Where tourism potentials existed tourism has become the main employer. Well-paid industrial jobs are rare.

The continuing labour market crisis has been the basis for high level of net emigration from most rural areas. Between 1991 and 2011, the five new East German Länder Brandenburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pommerania, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt and Thuringia lost almost 2 million inhabitants, which is about 15 per cent of the population. Only in the state of Brandenburg, which surrounds Berlin was the population loss considerably lower, since it benefits from Berlin's urban sprawl.

Since migration is stratified with regard to age structures, this net migration in combination with the low birth rates, and an extended life expectancy, have contributed to a rapidly aging society. On average, East German rural areas are more negatively affected by population decline and ageing. This has triggered a debate about future provision of public services, but also about the availability of qualified labour force. At the centre of the debate are health services, since on the one hand ageing – and in particular, the rapidly growing share of the very old – is expected to increase the demand for health services, and at the same time the available qualified labour force appears to shrink and the attractiveness to work and life in remote areas is decreasing. This is reflected in the symbolic debate about succession problems of “Land Doctors” in the countryside.

Beyond the changing demography, the social stratification in rural areas has changed significantly. New (non- agrarian) middle classes, mostly employed in the service

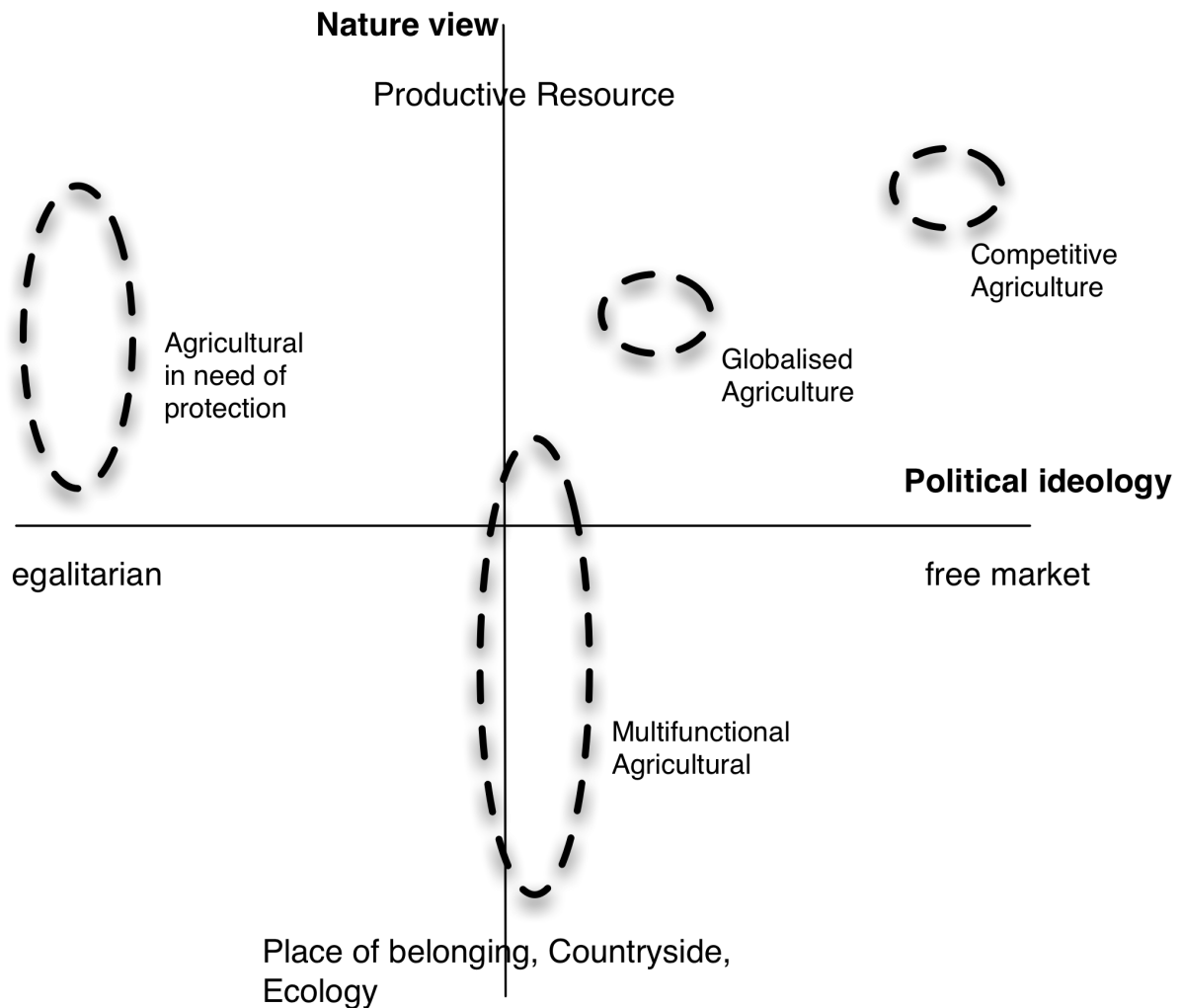
sector, emerged. Multi-locality is a widespread way of living, both of rural people temporarily or continuously working elsewhere in urban areas, in West Germany or even abroad, as well as urban dwellers maintaining a second home even in the remotest most remote parts of the countryside. Often, these forms of living provide the basis for people that decide to start a new business in the countryside as individuals or in cooperation with others. These actors have often acted as innovators and have been discussed as "Rural Pioneers." Long-term unemployment also contributed to a social disembedding by large parts of the population. These socially excluded have been attributed as the "superfluous" (Bude und Willisich 2007).

Agro-Nature Discourse

During the 1990s, Germany society and German politics were preoccupied with issues such high unemployment, the increasing state deficit and the changing role of a unified Germany in a changing world order. Whereas environmental problems had encouraged the debated about the direction of farming in the 1980s, the rural became a subordinated political concept. Here, I want to focus on finding, which were addressed by the research group "AgChange", led by Peter Feindt. This group studied agricultural policies in Germany as a contested discursive field (Feindt et al. 2008). According to their analysis two types of framings structure the discursive field of agricultural policy: the nature view and the political ideology. With regard to the nature view the authors identified a polarity reaching from, a focus of nature as a place of belonging, countryside and ecology, on the one hand, to, a perception of nature as resource on the other hand. Similarly, political ideologies are described as being polarized between an egalitarian view on the one end, focussing on the social integration of agriculture, and a market liberal, competitive paradigm.

The authors have identified four different political paradigms: "Agricultural in need of protection", "multifunctional agriculture", "competitive agriculture" and "globalised agriculture" (ibid, pp. 289). All these models differed with regard to the nature view as well as with regard to the political ideology (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Agricultural Policy Paradigms in the discursive field of agricultural policy in Germany



Source: Feindt et al. (2008, p. 299), translation by the author.

- (1) The "Agricultural in need of protection" paradigm may be understood as the old political paradigm, which calls for the state to protect agriculture for market forces and market failure. Protection is part of a social contract to ensure the productive function of agriculture, the provision of safe and affordable food.
- (2) The "Competitive Agriculture" paradigm may be understood as the opposite political model to the first paradigm, which sees subsidies as inefficient, and focuses on state failure rather than market failure.
- (3) The "Globalised Agriculture" focuses on the protection of consumers rather than on agricultural producers. Market failure may occur to information asymmetries between producers, retailers and consumers, and the concentration of market power.
- (4) The "Multifunctional Agriculture" paradigm is paying particular attention to the multiple production and ecosystem services connected with agricultural production.

The concept of rurality is only relevant in paradigms (1) and (4), in which rural livelihoods are explicitly mentioned. However, both paradigms differ with regard to the beneficiaries and the nature view. While the "Agricultural in need of protection" paradigm sees the farming community as the main beneficiary and focuses primarily on the production function of agricultural, the "Multifunctional Agriculture" paradigm also addresses the interests on non-agricultural actors and emphasises more strongly the non-productive, environmental services functions of farming.

For the other two paradigms "rural" is not a relevant concept. Thus, the disappearance of "rurality" as guiding political concept during the 1990 may be seen in connection with the domination of the (neo-liberal) "Competitive Agricultural" paradigm during this period. Thus, today agricultural policy is not rural policy per se, since the dominating political discourse refers to a de-localised vision of a high-tech agriculture, for which the local context socially as well as environmentally is mainly perceived as constraint.

Thus, it is not surprising that agriculture has increasingly become the object of public protest even in the poorest and remote parts of rural East Germany. The main topics are currently the animal welfare and mass production, land grabbing and the "maizing" of arable land, due to the intensification of biogas production and intensive cattle breeding.

The analysis of conflict structures often points to two discursive positions. One, which focuses on economic pressure and calls for producers' economic freedom, and the other, which challenges the "industrialisation of agriculture" and emphasises the localised nature of farming, negative externalities of agricultural production and calls for alternative agricultural model, where farming is integrated in rural development, and a focus quality of rural life (Laschewski et al. 2014).

Demographisation of the Rural

The policy field of spatial planning in Germany is institutionalised in very specific manner. Spatial planning is at first a task of the regional states (the Länder). However, the federation is responsible for infrastructure of national importance, coordination and also convergence. According to the German Basic Law the "Federation shall have the right to legislate [...] if and to the extent that the establishment of equivalent living conditions throughout the federal territory or the maintenance of legal or economic unity renders federal regulation necessary in the national interest" (Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, Art. 72 (2)).

This objective shapes spatial policies in several ways. (1) It functions as guiding principle for German system of spatial planning (Raumordnung), which foresees the

cooperation between federation and the Länder for the establishment of spatial plans for all relevant spatial developments. These spatial plans are the main instruments to coordinate regional infrastructure developments between the states, and to shape the activities of the autonomous self-governing municipalities. (2) Spatial planning has a strong focus both on uneven economic development, but also on the provision of equivalent public services ("Daseinsvorsorge"). (3) Generally, the federation is not allowed to finance tasks of the Länder or municipalities. Thus, since 1967 the constitution defines the joint task for the improvement of regional economic structures as legal basis through which the federal government is allowed to co-finance investments in business relevant infrastructures or to support regional development. Currently, financial support is allocated on the basis of the concept of "structural weakness", which is defined on the basis of income and employment indicators. According to this definition in the current financing period all of East Germany and a few West German regions are target areas for measures financed through this joint task (BMWI 2013).

In 2006 a special issue of the journal "Politik und Zeitgeschichte" was published titled „Ländlicher Raum“ (Rural Areas), in which the authors tried to send a common dramatic message: the rural, even further, the rural crisis is back! This publication is particularly noteworthy, since this journal is issued as an insert to the newspaper "Das Parlament" which is distributed by the German Federal Parliament. Thus, it is highly recognised in the political process.

This publication has been remarkable also for some further reasons. It marked a return of a dichotomous urban-rural framing of spatial developments, which seemed to have vanished out of the spatial planning debate. In two conceptual papers the authors discussed this dichotomy referring to a centre-periphery approach, arguing that society is spatially more or less hierarchically ordered, and that the concentration of power is increasing (Keim 2006; Neu 2006). The message is that rural areas are subject to a process of peripherisation, which is understood as an incremental weakening and/or disconnection of socio-spatial developments from dominant centralisation processes (Keim 2006, p. 3). Despite the fact that the authors say that urban areas may also be subject of peripherisation processes, the provided evidence and the underlying message is clear: rural areas appear generally to be subjects of peripherisation processes. In a dramatic account a further paper even diagnoses the collapse of the rural society (Hauss et al. 2006).

The special issue is also remarkable with regard to another aspect. While the authors refer mostly to empirical evidence generated in rural East Germany (in particular the North East of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern) the conclusions are drawn for rural areas in general. Notwithstanding, if this is generalisation is appropriate, the centre-periphery/

urban-rural framing can be seen in another context, which is the end of the post-socialist transformation discourse in East Germany. In the light of this shift, the formerly dominating East-West divide is continuously replaced by other discourses. The political agenda is shifting from a perspective of catch-up modernisation process in East Germany to a more general view on uneven spatial development. The East German rural crisis is not anymore linked with post-socialist transition, but spearheading a new, general phenomenon - the peripherisation of rural spaces. Indeed, the terms "transformation" and "post-socialism" do not even appear anymore as concepts to explain the uneven spatial development.

The drivers for this newly emerging discourse on spatial inequalities at the beginning of the new century are in two fold. One the hand it is the vain endeavour to close the development gap between West and East Germany. It has become apparent that the historically unparalleled attempt to rebuild East Germany infrastructure and to force the economic recovery by transferring an incredible amount of estimate 1.2 trillion € between 1990 and 2010 (Blum et al. 2010, p. 80) will – despite huge progress - eventually fail to completely close the gap.

The general economic downturn in Germany around the year 2000, and the rapidly increasing state deficit, combined with the perception of an increasing underinvestment in West German infrastructure triggered a debate, how much conversion can be afforded and how much inequality is justifiable? In Germany, since, as mentioned earlier, providing equivalent living conditions is a constitutional state objective, this is a sensitive issue. In face of the state budget constraints, this political consensus was questioned, when a study about the demographic consequences suggested, that in there would be a growing consensus that it would be almost impossible to maintain a sufficient public infrastructure in remote rural regions (Krönert et al. 2006, p. 37).

Barlösius and Neu have called this demographisation (Barlösius und Neu 2007, pp. 86), a kind of discourse, which directly links development potentials with demographic projections. According to this discourse rural decline appears inevitable since the trajectories of population change are based on fundamental long term changes, which cannot be easily changed. Thus, since this demographisation discourse neglects the action spaces and room to manoeuvre, it has come about as a justification not to act and even to withdraw public support (ibid., p. 88).

The counter-discourse to the (neo-liberal) demographisation discourse may be called "Land Innovation", which stresses the potential of local communities to act, and calls for the development of new ideas, instruments and policy support for rural communities (e.g. Beetz 2007).

The Energy Turn and New Rural Infrastructure Discourses

In 2000, the governing red-green coalition decided to boost the renewable energy sector. The new Renewable-Energy-Law substantially increased feed-in tariffs for energy from solar, water, biomass or geothermic sources. This measure in conjunction with additional support for energy saving and research as well as Development provided the basis for a rapid increase of energy production based on renewables. Since, the share of renewable energy has increased from just over 6 per cent in 2000 to over 22 per cent of total electricity production at the beginning of 2012.

The major project of the "Energiewende" (energy turn) as Conrad Kunze puts it "begins in the countryside" (Kunze 2012, p. 7). It is a major project - to use Hilary Tovey's terminology - acting "on" the rural (Tovey 1998). However, traditional rural images played a significant role in the political discourse. The most prominent image has been the energy village, a vision of energy autarkic rural communities. A second image is the return of the productivist model of agriculture turning the farmer into energy farmers ("vom Landwirt zum Energiewirt").

The "Energiewende" has been a rather technical project. So, it took some time to realise that. Despite broad public support, the social realities in rural areas created many obstacles, and social as well as ecological outcomes have been sometimes at least ambiguous. Suddenly, the engineers of the "Energiewende" had to realise a new - essential rural sociological knowledge - that the social rather than the technical complexities in rural areas determine the progress as well the outcomes of this restructuring process.

(1) Small communities often lack capacities to act collectively, and social capital has to be created to set up models of community energy like the bioenergy villages.

These energy models have to be embedded in heterogeneous social contexts and are shaped by social conditions (e.g. ownership structures) and communication processes (Kunze 2012, pp. 138; Li et al. 2013, p. 727; Ruppert et al. 2008).

(2) The energy farmer has quickly been confronted with increasing scepticism both in the public as well in the farming community itself ("food or fuel" debate), protest against increasing negative externalities (in particular the increasing maize production "Vermaisung") (Trojecka 2007; Zander et al. 2013).

(3) Many new energy plants, in particular windmills, have been confronted with strong local opposition. This stubborn rural response has quickly been defamed as a general unwillingness of new rural middle classes ("not in my backyard", NIMBY) opposing any type of change. It is only recently that a more differentiated picture is

evolving, which takes local actors' concerns more seriously and acknowledges the relevance of planning procedures as well as distributive effects of such plants for its acceptance (Rau et al. 2011; Walter und Gutscher 2013). Often energy plants are perceived as unfair, since the profits are shared only by the investors, while the costs such as a changing landscapes, loss of property values and lower income from tourism are shared by many (Rau et al. 2011, p. 45).

The "Energiewende" is an on-going project. According to the energy concept of the current German government, by 2050 renewable energy shall contribute about 80 per cent of the gross electricity production. Even if increasing energy efficiency is taken into consideration, it is apparent that this project will significantly shape and restructure rural areas in the years to come. Beside the construction of even more and bigger energy plants, the energy grid has to be reconstructed and new landlines must be built to transport energy from the new energy production sites to the urban centres.

Thus, in this discursive field, the main issues are local acceptance and planning procedures. While the perception of the "stubborn" or NIMBY rural is close to a political agenda that is looking for fast track, top-down planning procedures, in which not too much effort is spent in endless participatory process, the alternative village and rural cooperation view is calling for even more and better participation.

Rural Idyll

Earlier this year media analysts were stunned about an „unbroken success“ of the printed magazine „Landlust“, which is celebrating a rural image and a rural lifestyle, which seems to be aesthetic, problem free and peaceful (WDR5 2013). It is not so much the existence of this update variant of the rural idyll, which is surprising, but its quantitative success. „Landlust“ has increased its sales within 8 years from zero to over 1 million copies. In 2012, it sold more copies than the famous political weekly magazine „DER SPIEGEL“. This increase is taking place in a market environment that is suffering from declining circulations and reporting closures of magazine titles as well as printing houses (Meedia 2013b).

Beyond its own success, "Landlust" created a market niche for epigones such that the total market has already increase far beyond 1,5 million sold copies per edition with 4 to 5 million readers (Meedia 2013a). At the same time, other regional media formats like the NDR - a regional television programme provider - production "Landpartie" attract great interest too. According to media analysts the readers of Landlust are mostly middle class and with up to 75% women. Almost 80% of the Landlust readers own or have access to a garden. They rate good food, gardening

and wellness significantly higher than the average of the population (Landwirtschaftsverlag 2013). Part of the success of these new medias is that they combine a new rural aesthetic with practical lifestyles, among which gardening and cooking (but not hunting and fishing) are central.

With regard to the content these new "Land" oriented printed and TV media formats construct a counter position to technology, by focussing on deceleration, enjoyment and wellness. On the other hand, it appears to be an upgrade of what used to be the "family" or "Landfrau" pages at the end of the weekly farmers' magazine. Thus, it does not seem to be very much of a surprise that "Landlust" is published by the Landwirtschaftsverlag Münster, a publisher owned by the farming community, which specialises on specialists books, weekly newspapers and monthly magazines for farmers and also hunters.

Discussion

In this paper it has been argued that concept of rurality has experienced a remarkable resurgence in the political, public as well scientific discourses. However, the revival of rurality does not seem to constitute a single discourse, rather rurality has become a discursive element in different discourse fields and policy arenas.

In the agriculture-nature discourse field rurality is an element of particular discourse positions, which seek to re-localise agriculture, and highlight its ecological and social, local embeddedness. It is of little relevance in those discursive positions that are built on a perception of nature as resource and favour market-oriented solutions.

In the field of spatial planning with regard to public services the re-emergence of a notion of urban-rural divide appears to be part of wider process, in which the uneven spatial development is not anymore framed according the historical East vs. West / post-socialist vs. capitalist divide. Thus, the reasons why rural East German are not picking up economically are not anymore seen in different historical paths. Instead, they are seen in general processes of peripherisation. Since this peripherisation processes are continuing the worst scenarios studied in rural East German are not seen as being an expressions of a post-socialist tragedy anymore. Rather, they appear to spearheading a trend, which will eventually reach many other rural areas, too. The demographisation discourse is a special variant of this view, basically arguing that the development potentials of remote rural areas will be substantially reduced by population decline and ageing. In this view, approaches to develop and even to service such areas are futile, and subsequently a planned regression is required.

The major German project of the “Energiewende” has had and will further have a substantial impact on many rural areas. Notions of rurality are available in two main discourses about the involvement of rural actors in these processes. The first, the community energy discourse is strongly referring to rurality in the sense of a classical *Gemeinschaft-Gesellschaft* dichotomy and seeking to built on and revitalise, but at the same time modernise presumably “traditional rural” actors and images such as villages, farmers and co-operatives. The second, the “stubborn” or “NIMBY” rurality discourse sees rural actors more as a hindrance to “Energiewende” and more or less directly calls for less participation and favours of fast-track planning procedures.

Finally, the new idyllic “Landlust” public media discourse stylises rurality as an almost problem and work free zone and way of living centred around home, quality food, gardening and a specific new rural chic.

The notions of rurality are not independent from each other. However, they do not form a coherent worldview. Thus, this fragmentation of rural discourses reflects the increasingly hybrid reconstitution of the global countryside, in which heterogeneous entities are aligned in a variety of ways (Woods 2007, p. 495). Paradoxically, the notions of rurality do not reflect this hybridity, but they mostly seem to remain in traditional ways of thinking and largely draw on widespread rural images of village, peasantry, cooperation and natural beauty.

The resurgence of rurality in public debates is also an expression of a progressing German integration, in which the East-West divide and the narrative of post-socialist transformation are more and more replaced by new political agendas and new framings of problems and causal relations.

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