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"The Divergence Of Rural Regions in Germany"

Aim of the paper:

In this paper the demographic dynamics and structures of rural regions in Germany from 1991 until 2002 (with future prospects) are analysed. First they shall be differentiated from urban regions. After that focus is set on the differentiation within the rural regions – and the similarities by classifying them. The aim of this paper is to analyse the demographic differences as well as similarities of German rural areas and to examine the different causes that underlie them. For this, types of rural areas are classified using demographic and socio-economic indicators. It is supposed that those rural regions with a similar demographic structure also show socio-economic similarities. These structures of the types can help explaining the differences between the regions. It thus shall be pointed out that there are significant differences between the types of rural areas on several levels, which will grow in future. Therefore the future regional demographic development will also be shown. As an outlook the effects and consequences of the German diverse spatial development for planning and policy-making shall be discussed.

Demographic background and theoretical focus:

Germany is a country with large parts being urbanised, and fewer rural/low densed regions. Nevertheless more than 27% of its population live in rural areas (22.5 Mio.). The lowest densed regions are found in the North Eastern part of Germany, with densities less than 50 inh./qkm. In other parts of Germany the rural regions are more dispersed, often being located near to agglomerations. This is not true for large parts of Eastern German rural regions, with many of them located quite peripheral. This causes further problems in terms of regional development.

The main past demographic trends in Germany are the long-term fertility decline, a rising life-expectancy and international migration. This resulted in an ageing of the population. But these processes had also a spatial effect, resulting in different regional patterns. Furthermore, these patterns are shaped by internal migration between the regions, which are selective and have strong, sometimes opposite effects on population dynamics and regional development. A

unique event was the German unification with enormous demographic effects, amongst it the sharp fertility decline and the out-migration to the Western part. In Eastern Germany the spatial demographic system changed rapidly, with a redistribution of its population.

This stresses the fact that the demographic structures of rural regions in Germany show remarkable differences, which correspond with the socio-economic situation. The *population dynamics* pattern show population decrease as well as increase, with in- or out-migration. Especially Eastern German rural regions had suffered a strong natural decrease, unlike some Western ones. *Demographic projections* expect that the disparities within the regions will grow as well as the redistribution of the population, depopulation of peripheral areas, and ageing in most regions. Some of them will switch from rural to suburban, but some will also lose main parts of its population by natural decrease and out-migration. Shrinking regions lie next to increasing ones.

Other differences can be found by analysing the *age composition* in rural regions. The ageing process has regional impacts, too, leading to different patterns in age composition. Nowadays rural areas are still younger than agglomerations. This will change in future with rural areas ageing faster than other area types because of age composition effects and lower fertility. Again, Eastern German regions will be ahead of this trend with a far more rapid ageing compared to the West, where rural regions age slower than the rest.

The *sex ratios* in rural regions show also differences, with peripheral regions where we can note a big surplus of mostly younger men, caused by selective, mainly female migration.

Migration is another important factor of regional differences. International as well as internal migration even in rural regions is showing different structures and causes, especially when analysed by age. Taken the East-West-contrast into account, there are several dimensions with many differentiations noticeable.

Finally, interesting differences can be found by looking at the *fertility* level and structure within the rural regions (below-average in Eastern Germany, rather high in West, and changes in life course).

Consequences of these growing regional disparities between the spatial categories, but also within them, are wide-spread and effect many parts of policy-making and planning. More and more demographic change (above all: shrinking and ageing in peripheral regions) are subject of the discussion in scientific community as well as in public and media. Especially the problem of the provision of infrastructure in low densed areas is discussed. Adaption strategies are developed in order to react properly and in-time to these demographic trends, trying to learn from other countries with very low densed regions or depopulation problems.

Methods and Data:

Regional data from 1991 until 2002 is used from the Federal Statistical Office and the Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR). The latter also provides with regional demographic projections data available which are used (until the year 2020). Some socio-economic indicators will also be analysed (source: BBR). Regional level of analysis are the German "Kreise" (counties, NUTS-3-Level). To differentiate the regional types, own spatial rural types are classified by differing similar socio-demographic structures within the rural areas using a cluster analysis.