



RURAL DEPOPULATION AND PUBLIC SERVICE PROVISION IN GERMANY

How is public service provision in depopulated,
rural regions in Germany organized and what
can be learned from good practices in this field?

Bachelor Thesis



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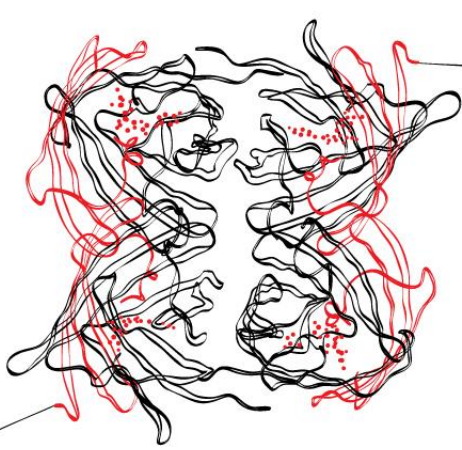
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Abstract

The topic of this paper is the organization of public service provision in rural regions in Germany that are facing a decrease in size and a change in structure of their population. The decrease in population is due to rural depopulation. Especially young people are moving away from villages to urban centers, looking for better job opportunities. The change in population comes from the demographic change. Higher life expectancies and lower birth rates lead to an increase in the average age and elderly people are in need of different infrastructure and services than are the young. As a consequence the provision of public services is harder to maintain for the state and is in need of adaptation to the changed requirements. To do so many innovative projects already exist, initiated, managed, financed and supported by different actors or through their cooperation. The main actors generally involved are state, market and civil society. Their relationship and shifts in responsibility are captured under 4 labels, socialization, privatization, active citizenship and social entrepreneurship. Public services are categorized into technical, retail, social and cultural infrastructure. For each type of infrastructure two projects are introduced. The paper is aiming at analyzing the organization of the projects regarding the actor involved and the strategy used and identifying certain patterns necessary for good transferability. The main findings accordingly are that active citizenship is the main form of organization in the projects. The civil society is taking over tasks of the state through own initiative. Furthermore the importance of the cooperation of all three actors is underlined. All actors have certain tasks they can execute best while good coordination and communication is important in a successful project. For a successful project and in the transfer process the two afore mentioned aspects are important as well, as are the local situation and the utilization of this situation.

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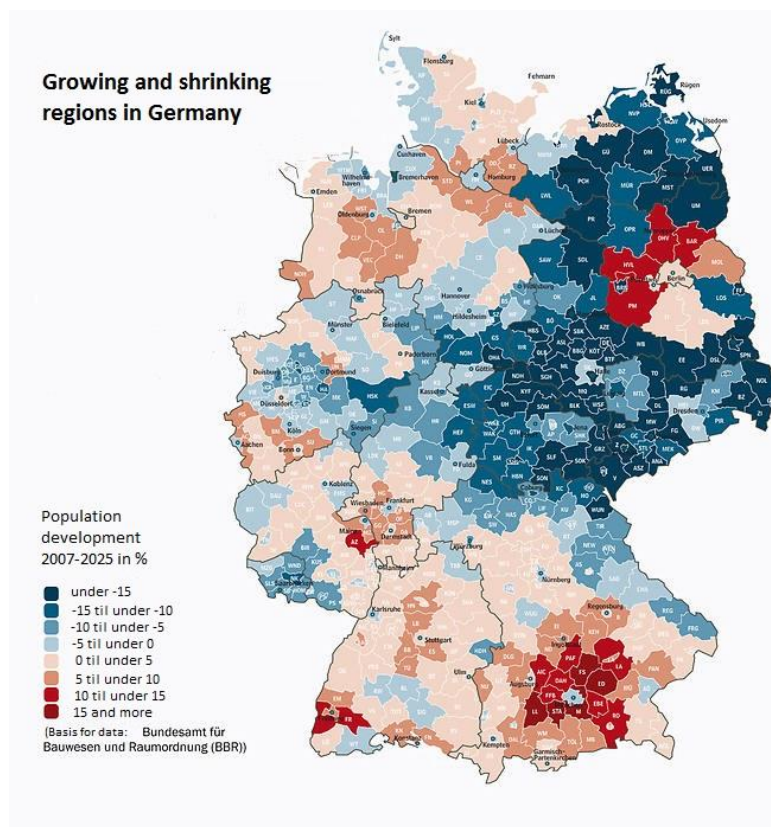
1. Introduction

There is a little village with 99 inhabitants and an area of 4.04 km² in the middle of Bavaria in the district of Regensburg (BMELV, 2011). Despite the general trend of people moving to the cities and the image of unattractive living conditions in rural villages, Haidenkofen is full of life. In their village the citizens actively participate and engage themselves to preserve their village and keep its attractiveness high. Almost everyone is a member of one of the five village associations, which address the needs of the youth and the elderly, aiming to conserve the original nature and landscapes around and preserve the traditions of the village (BMELV, 2011). Haidenkofen is an outstanding example of how the active participation of the inhabitants can save a village from extinction. The citizens contribute to infrastructure provision, and through their engagement are more bound to their village what results in less depopulation. In their innovative and creative solutions for today's problems of villages they rely on sustainable energy sources for own demand as well as a source of income. The focus on the preservation of old architecture and the nature is another source for the good reputation and why Haidenkofen is a model for other villages with few inhabitants (BMELV, 2011).

Rural depopulation and demographic change – that are two problems many villages all over Europe have to deal with. These processes have diverse implications for the rural population, their daily routine and their standard of living in the regions. One of these implications is the worsened provision of public services. Technical infrastructure becomes more expensive, the last retail infrastructure, supermarket, village shop, post office or bank, closes down, social and cultural offers decrease. Economically it is problematic to operate in small, depopulated villages, for the market and for the state (Küpper, 2011). Only to satisfy minimum standards set by the government, municipalities keep up some services. However if their financial situation worsens, they even stop providing these few services (Maretzke & Bau, 2009). In order to deal with the arising problems innovative and creative approaches are necessary. New forms of organization, new actors and new strategies are sought; solutions that are appropriate and modern are requested. Germany has many regions dealing with the problem of rural depopulation. But as numerous as the problem regions are as numerous are the projects and initiatives addressing the problem of public service provision. This paper looks at good-practices, analyzes their structure of organization according to the actors and the strategies involved and evaluates what can be learned from them by other regions.

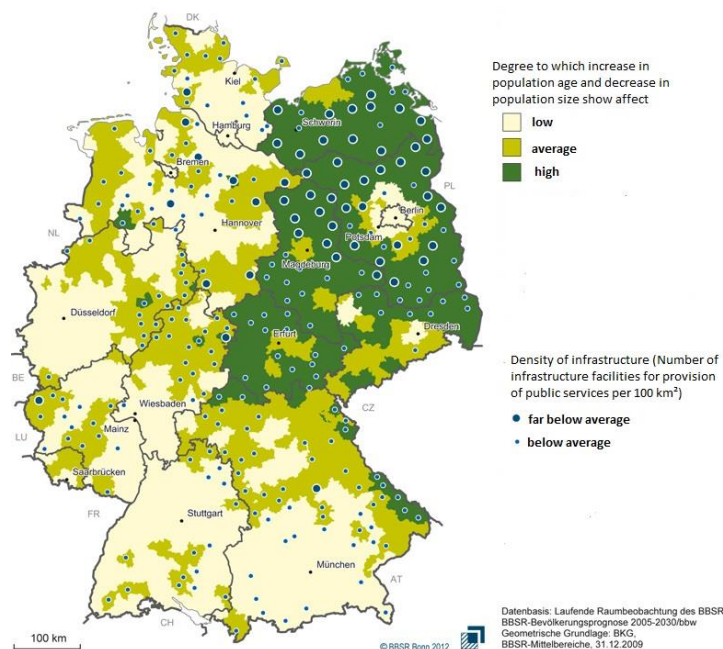
The two mutually supportive processes, rural depopulation and demographic change, lead to a decrease of inhabitants and a change in societal structure in rural and peripheral regions. Demographic change is a long-term process, occurring in Germany already for some decades, its impact is worsening the situation in anyways disadvantaged regions (Kocks & Gatzweiler, 2005). Demographic change involves the decrease in birthrates and the increase in life expectancy. This means the population is shrinking and aging. Until 2050 Germany is expected to lose around 8 million people (Weber & Klingholz, 2009). Furthermore the average life expectancy for men and women will increase to 81,0 and 85,7 years until 2030 (Länder, 2011). The most affected states in West and East Germany respectively are Hessen and Thüringen. Hessen in total lost more than 3% of its population between 2005 and 2008 and the population of people younger than 45 years only amounts to 52% (Kröhnert, Kuhn, Karsch, & Klingholz, 2011). Thüringen lost 5,7% of its population and only 46,4% are younger than 45 years (Kröhnert et al., 2011). This leads to a change in the social and cultural environment in Germany (BertelsmannStiftung, 2004). The challenges arising thereof reach far and call for changes of political, economic and social structures (BertelsmannStiftung, 2006). But not all the regions in Germany are similarly affected. In Map 1 it is shown what regions will have to face shrinkage while others are still growing.

Map 1: Growing and shrinking regions in Germany (Weber & Klingholz, 2009)



Rural regions in general face higher shrinkage rates, while the East of Germany is especially affected (Weber & Klingholz, 2009). From 1991 to 2008 1,1 million people left the new federal states to make a living in the old ones (Länder, 2011). The repercussions are higher for rural and peripheral regions, as demographic change is paired with rural depopulation. Rural depopulation implicates that people are moving away from the villages into cities and urban centers, due to more possibilities and opportunities in the cities. Especially young people leave the villages behind and move to the cities. Potential parents move away, villages are not only losing current but also possible future citizens.

Map 2: Need for action in the provision of infrastructure due to demographic change (Weber & Klingholz, 2009)



In map 2 (Weber & Klingholz, 2009) it is shown which regions in Germany are affected most by both an increase in population age and a decrease in population size. The graph is based on data from 2009 and it shows that the processes of rural depopulation and demographic change taken together have the highest impact on the regions in the East of Germany. Additionally the density of infrastructure is incorporated, serving as a measure to where public service provision is hard to conduct on an appropriate level. Again we see that East Germany is dealing with a significantly lower density of infrastructure (Weber & Klingholz, 2009). In the district Greiz in Thüringen one village lost 88% of its population. This is an extreme and exceptional case and comes from the initial low population size of the village. All over the district Greiz a population development between -29% and +41% was registered by Kröhnert et al. (2011). They also found that the smaller the village the higher the average age. In only

14 out of 196 small villages retail infrastructure exists (Kröhnert et al., 2011). But even though the East is affected to a higher degree, also Western rural regions are dealing with challenges regarding public service provision in depopulated rural areas. Many small villages in the Vogelsbergkreis in Hessen are struggling with missing retail infrastructure. Only 37 out of 128 small villages still have a supermarket, village shop or similar facilities, half of them have offers in the gastronomical sphere and 84 possess cultural infrastructure (Kröhnert et al., 2011).

The more people are moving away, the higher the costs for the people staying, regarding infrastructure and network costs (Kocks & Gatzweiler, 2005). This as well as the hindered availability of other services can be again reason for people to move to the cities, leading to a vicious cycle (Kröhnert et al., 2011).

In the framework of the welfare state it is the state's responsibility to allocate public services to everybody. Under the changing circumstances however the state is less and less able to fully comply with this task. In the existing literature a shift from a providing to a guaranteeing state is described (Kersten, 2006). It is still the responsibility of the state to guarantee for the provision but it cannot be the only provider anymore. The market and civil society are two actors that are asked to take over certain parts of the provision. All over Germany are different projects and initiatives being generated, some of them from above, as the state delegates tasks to civil society and market. Competitions and the search for model regions in particular fields leads municipalities and citizens to act upon the state's request in order to receive support and funding. An example here is the 'Aktionsprogramm Daseinsvorsorge' by the 'Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung' (BMVBS, 2012). In other places the citizens themselves take over the initiative, using tools offered by the market or by civil society to find solutions to the problems they are confronted with. For example in the project DORV the citizens of Barmen started their own village shop. The idea was born out of the daily problems they encountered. It makes use of market mechanisms as well as new forms of organizing civil society (Engelhart, n.d.). In the context of the change in whole Germany it cannot be a long term strategy to concentrate on countering shrinkage. Instead the best strategies are the ones focusing on adaptation of infrastructure, accepting the decrease in the number of population and even looking for chances of innovation, utilizing shrinkage. Improving the accessibility and flexibility of infrastructure, reducing and/or combining it, offering temporary and/or mobile provision, or focusing on either decentralization or

centralization of it are all viable adaptation options (Hahne, 2009). They will be referred to again in the theory section.

In this paper existing solutions for the provision of public services will be analyzed by looking at projects. The projects will be presented according to the main actors and the strategy used. They will be classified according to the type of public service they address, including technical, retail, social and cultural infrastructure. However not all projects can be classified into one type solely, in many cases more than one type is addressed. Analyzing the existing structure is important for possible future studies aiming to give better recommendations on how to secure the provision of public services in rural areas appropriately. Right now there are many separate initiatives, different approaches on how to tackle the problem. With a better understanding of their composition it is easier to reflect on their effectiveness. The topic is of high relevance in German regional planning policy and discussions of the changing understanding of the welfare state and citizens' responsibilities. In order to address the topic of this paper first of all the main research question together with clarifying sub-questions will be introduced. After that the main concepts will be depicted, using the existing body of literature. Before the projects will be presented and categorized in the types of infrastructure they concern, the methodology of the paper and the selection process of the projects will be explained. In the conclusion the findings will be summarized and it will be referred to the requirements of transferability.

2. Research Question

This paper aims to analyze the problem of and the existing solutions to public service provision in rural areas in Germany that cope with depopulation. The main research question to be addressed is:

‘How is the provision of public services in depopulated, rural regions in Germany organized and what can be learned from ‘good practices’ in this field?’

In order to do so innovative projects addressing the provision of public services will be analyzed. It will be reflected upon the actors involved, the strategies used and in what way they relate to the different categories of public services.

Hence the following sub-questions need to be answered:

1. ‘What actors are involved in the provision of public services in depopulated, rural regions in Germany?’
2. ‘Which actors are involved most in what categories of public services in depopulated, rural regions?’
3. ‘What strategies are the actors following to secure public services provision in depopulated, rural regions?’

3. Theory

In the following section the concepts regarding the problem as well as the ones necessary to structure the solutions will be discussed. The findings by already existing literature regarding this topic will be included and the framework for analyzing the projects will be derived thereof.

3.1. Public service provision

The concept of public service provision in the countryside is central for this research. Understanding the background and legal and organizational structure in Germany is necessary to analyze the projects appropriately. Public service provision is legally anchored in the spatial planning law of Germany. It says ‘the provision of public services and infrastructure, especially the accessibility of facilities and offers of basic services for all sections of the population is to be guaranteed in order to secure equal opportunities in subspaces, as well as in sparsely populated regions’ (ger.: „Die Versorgung mit Dienstleistungen und Infrastrukturen der Daseinsvorsorge, insbesondere die Erreichbarkeit von Einrichtungen und Angeboten der Grundversorgung für alle Bevölkerungsgruppen, ist zur Sicherung von Chancengerechtigkeit in den Teilräumen in angemessener Weise zu gewährleisten; dies gilt auch in dünn besiedelten Regionen.“) (BMVBS, 2012). Still it is not the German government that is mainly responsible to guarantee provision of public services. The subsidiarity principle is applied here. ‘Subsidiarity is a policy principle stipulating that decisions should always be taken at the lowest level possible or closest to where they will have their effect, for example, locally rather than nationally, and through private rather than public action. Subsidiarity implies a hierarchy that begins with the family and extends to the local community or church, municipality, region or province to the different levels of central state administration.’ (Foundation & Smerdon, 2009). In the provision of public services the private actors are not seen as primary actors. It is the task of the municipalities and the governments of the federal

states to act first on the provision of public services (BMVBS, 2012). Nevertheless an increased participation of private actors is desirable, in line with the principle of subsidiarity.

Under the term public services generally services and goods important for the daily life, addressing basic needs that have a great impact on the standard of living of citizens, are included. These services can be arranged in categories to have a clearer structure. In this paper they will be organized into different types of infrastructure, technical, retail, social and cultural infrastructure (Kocks & Thrun, 2005).

Technical infrastructure hereby includes for example water, electricity and gas networks as well as public transportation. In this category the problem arising in depopulated rural areas for the inhabitants largely comes from the underflow of minimum utilization. A major problem is the high costs. The fix costs of these services often amount up to 80% of the total costs while the costs depending on the number of users only adds up to 20% (Kocks & Gatzweiler, 2005). This means the fewer users a network has, the higher the fees become for the individual user. Similar is the problem regarding public transportation. Fewer people mean fewer potential users, making it uneconomical to uphold frequent traffic to and in peripheral regions. Furthermore almost every household has its own car for mobility. Still the absence of public transportation has an immense impact on the households without cars, as well as children, teenager and elderly people that cannot revert to the usage of own cars. To guarantee their independence new solutions to increase the mobility have to be applied.

Retail infrastructure refers to supermarkets or other facilities of local supply, like post offices, banks but also administrative services. In small villages these infrastructure establishments close down one after the other out of reasons of affordability and efficiency. For private businesses it is often not profitable to operate in these remote areas. However the increasing elderly population, especially in rural regions, does not possess the necessary mobility to reach facilities in the next bigger village or town (especially in regard to the aforementioned decrease in public transportation). A local village shop, a bank, post offices – these are important functions to uphold the attractiveness of a village and keep the village life active.

Social infrastructure includes education facilities, health care as well as services for the young and for the elderly. Due to the changing structure in rural society, resulting from rural depopulation and demographic change, the existing infrastructure is not appropriate anymore. The older generations need different infrastructure than younger ones. So an adaptation of

infrastructure could entail an increase in elderly homes together with a decrease in kindergartens or schools. Nevertheless the existence of schools and kindergartens are also important location factors, families choose their region to live in according to the infrastructure provided for children. Besides that similar problems with the underflow of utilization, fewer users and unprofitability as in the other infrastructure categories are to be observed. Degraded health care is an issue as more and more medical practices close down even though the elderly are heavily dependent on them and their easy accessibility.

Cultural infrastructure comprises theaters, libraries but also restaurants or pubs (Euregia, 2012). These are also part of the basic needs and services citizens are entitled to. Though not as vital as some of the other examples they contribute to the quality of life and a village's attractiveness. When things like theaters, cinemas, local libraries but also restaurants and bars close down the village is missing places where citizens meet, communicate their experiences and exchange opinions and ideas. These can be termed 'third places' after Oldenburg who defines a third place as 'public place that hosts the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work' (Oldenburg, 1999). An active citizen life can help in stabilizing the population size and increase citizens' contentment. Cultural as well as social infrastructure are important in generating social capital, the interaction of inhabitants and especially between the generations contributes in more and better relationships in the village.

3.2. Actors

The different actors involved in the provision of public services may be categorized as state, market and civil society. In a German context the concept of public service provision is a tool of governmental legitimation, as it is included in German Basic Law. It is linked to the concept of spatial equivalence in Germany. The concept of spatial equivalence changed to the aim of cohesion of regions. To secure equal opportunities in rural and peripheral regions and by aiming at social inclusion of everyone, public services should be provided for socially acceptable prices and within reasonable distances (BMVBS, 2012). In the following section it is outlined what the actors roles are and how their relationship changed in current provision of public services.

The **state** aims at failsafe delivery and acceptance of its citizens in public service provision while at the same time being interested in efficiency (Warner & Hefetz, 2008). The image of the state changed from one of a providing to a guaranteeing state (Kersten, 2006). Until

recently it was mainly seen as the state's task to provide any kind of public services but under the changing circumstances and in the light of rural depopulation and demographic change the state cannot execute this task on its own anymore (Evers, 2005). The state provides the overall framework but no longer all the public services directly. In this framework it is necessary to grant more responsibility and autonomy to local actors so they can use own strategies to answer to local needs (Evers, 2005). For the purpose of including market and civil society as potential providers the state uses coordination, stimulatory and control functions while its main role is taking over the financing (Küpper, 2011).

The **market** plays an important role in the retail infrastructure. Generally any kind of retail infrastructure facilities are following market mechanisms, being subject to competition. But also in other parts the state is using competition and other market based concepts for providing public infrastructure. The market ideals of competition and profit maximization can contribute to public service provision by making it more efficient (Warner & Hefetz, 2008).

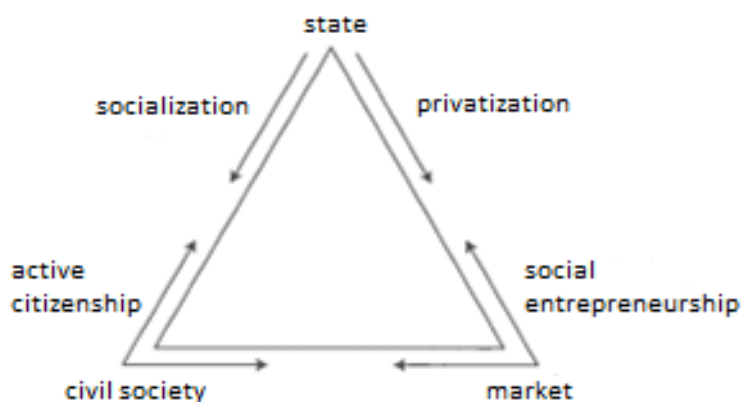
The **civil society** is commonly defined as 'the social arena that exists between the state and the individual and the household. Civil society lacks the coercive or regulatory power of the state and the economic power of the market but provides the social power or influence of ordinary people' (WHO, 2001). The social capital is an asset only the civil society can bring to the provision of public services (Evers, 2005). Furthermore the inhabitants of a village know best what they require and where improvement of public services is necessary. Their participation in the planning and structuring phases is helpful as it also increases the public acceptance for solutions (BMVBS, 2012). But civic engagement is of value in every aspect of public service provision, the existence of active citizens and the willingness to engage in the village life often means the difference between the survival and extinction of a village; people are the 'everything-or-nothing' factor (Weber & Klingholz, 2009).

The **relationship** of state, market and civil society and especially the shift in responsibilities and tasks in regard to the provision of public services can be characterized in a triangle. Steen, Bruijn and Schillemans (2013) introduce a triangle which demonstrates the changing relationship between the main actors (see Figure 1). First of all the triangle visualizes in what way the actors are correlated, market and civil society on the bottom of society and the state above. As mentioned before there is a paradigm shift in the conception of the state in progress. 'The traditional clear cut separation of market based, state based and civil society

bound service units becomes insufficient' (Warner & Hefetz, 2008) the mixture and the changing relationship is important in explaining the actors in public service provision.

The arrows in the triangle are demonstrating that a change in relationship can either come from the top, initiated by the state (top-down) or from the bottom, initiated by either market or civil society (bottom-up) (Steen, Bruijn, & Schillemans, 2013). Society and societal structures are less controllable for government on all levels and the variety of regions, problems and local actors makes a top-down planning more complicated (Franzen et al., 2008).

Figure 1: Changing relationship between state, market and civil society (Steen et al., 2013)



According to the New Public Service theory (Warner & Hefetz, 2008) the government is taking over the roles of enabling civil society to participate and managing and controlling the markets. For securing a good and adequate provision of public services a mixture of all three actors is preferable. 'The change of public service provision in the light of scarce public finances will only succeed if task sharing between state/municipality, economy and civil society can be organized anew' ('Der Umbau der öffentlichen Daseinsvorsorge wird angesichts der knappen, öffentlichen Mittel nur gelingen, wenn die Aufgabenteilung zwischen Staat/Kommune, Wirtschaft und Zivilgesellschaft neu organisiert werden kann') (Küpper, 2011). While market mechanisms are adding efficiency to the process the ideals of partnership and collaboration for the provision of public services is equally important (Warner & Hefetz, 2008). The shift in the relations does not solely lead to the increase of importance of one actor at the expense of decreased importance of another (Steen et al., 2013). The distinction between public and private provision is not as easy anymore, instead a mix of providers has taken over and proceed with 'integrating markets and planning to ensure efficiency, service quality and citizen satisfaction' (Warner & Hefetz, 2008).

With **socialization** the state is actively conferring tasks of public service provision to the civil society. It still follows hierarchical structures as civil society is authorized by the state. An example would be when the local government is assigning the administration and management of a local swimming pool or library to the citizens themselves while only providing the regulatory framework. This goes in line with a 'cooperative state', a state that uses social and economic agencies to support public goals and socializes public tasks to be fulfilled in cooperation with these agencies (Küpper, 2011).

Privatization is also part of a cooperative state, relating to the economic agencies. This process is top-down as well and follows hierarchical structures. The state is giving over a task to the market. This makes sense when the state is aiming for more efficiency in the provision. This can be accomplished by competition in the sector; however it leaves other principles like social inclusion and countrywide cohesion aside. A currently highly debated process of privatization (though not only in the respect to rural regions) is the privatization of water supply.

The bottom-up relationship between civil society and state is **active citizenship**. The initiation for projects of this kind comes from the civil society and is triggered through concrete problems and struggles the citizens are facing in every-day life. The shift from a providing to a guaranteeing state opened up the possibilities of more engagement by the citizens. Not only being instructed by the state to take over tasks but also through the organizational space and infrastructure that is being generated by the guaranteeing state. The advantage of civil society actors is their less bound and more creative approach to problems. Furthermore they know best where to act and are more effective in reaching fellow citizens. The local civil society becomes more engaged as it realizes its own power and ability to achieve improvements in their live. Sometimes they rely on the financing and the framework provision of the state but mostly they take up initiative by themselves. 'The nonprofit sector can become a field of experimentation, an area for trying out new ideas that may not necessarily have to stand the test of either the market or the ballot box. It is here that subsidiarity and self-governance achieve a modern relevance, and it is here that independence becomes meaningful again' (Foundation & Smerdon, 2009).

Social entrepreneurship, the other bottom-up process in the triangle is steered by market mechanisms, while at the same time following social goals. They have the entrepreneurial style of action (Evers, 2005) and include the aims of civil society and market. Through the

general non-profit aspect they can be used in less profitable locations, creating positive social effects. The organization is based on mechanisms of the market. However the initiator often is part of the civil society. Social entrepreneurship is not only the market taking over tasks of the state but includes the efforts and the social capital of the civil society to do so in a proper way.

3.3. Strategies

There are four types of general policy strategies to deal with shrinkage. These are trivializing, countering, accepting and utilizing shrinkage (Haase, Hospers, Pekelsma, & Rink, 2012). In the context of this article they are helpful in offering a perspective on dealing with the provision of public services in shrinking areas. A prior condition for choosing the projects in this research is that their main method of dealing with shrinkage is accepting and/or utilizing shrinkage. Trivializing shrinkage is not relevant in this paper. Projects that are dealing with the problems arising through depopulation and demographic change cannot be following the policy strategy of trivializing shrinkage. Countering shrinkage on the other hand is a strategy used by many projects in Germany. Nevertheless the underlying growth paradigm can no longer be prevailing as the population in general is decreasing because of demographic change and because growth in one village causes decline in another. The competition of regions resulting thereof is not sustainable and does not contribute in tackling the roots of the problems (Haase et al., 2012) (Weber & Klingholz, 2009). In accepting and even utilizing shrinkage lies the chance of stabilizing the population size and improving the overall situation. In the case of public service provision this implies that it needs to be aimed at adapting the infrastructure and constructing new solutions. Hahne (2009) introduces seven options for adaptation: improving the accessibility and flexibility of infrastructure, reducing and/or combining it, offering temporary and/or mobile provision, or focusing on either decentralization or centralization.

Improving the accessibility focuses on the aim of providing public services in an appropriate proximity. This is especially important for immobile people, dependent on easy access to the provision of basic needs or on good mobility infrastructure. Examples for improving the accessibility are initiatives focusing on the provision of public transportation but also bringing village shops and other retail facilities back into the village (Hahne, 2009).

Flexibility of infrastructure refers back to innovative ideas in using and providing public services. This includes adapting offers of public services to the demand in the light of more depopulation but also to be able to provide them on lower costs and with more efficiency. To

some extent this includes the reduction of services but only so far as to be still able to provide them (Hahne, 2009). Existing examples are smaller busses in remote areas or busses on demand, only riding when they are called. To be able to establish flexible solutions an adaptation of laws and regulations might be necessary as well. For example to allow schools to combine classes.

As mentioned above **reducing** is an adaptation option as well. Realizing and accepting the lower demand and adapting the infrastructure accordingly can save a lot of money in the long run. However from a certain point onwards reducing the offerings even further might not be a viable possibility, when the demand becomes too low or it is in no way efficient any more. A way to still be able to provide a certain service then is to **combine** it with others, making the provision again more profitable. A nice example is a village shop, not only functioning as supermarkets but also offering post office services and maybe including an ATM. Here many services are combined to increase demand for and utilization of the village shop (Hahne, 2009).

Temporary provision means offering services for a certain time, making it cheaper to provide it and more efficient as everybody will use it in the given time. In regard to health care that could comprise local branches of medical practices, open for a few hours some days in the week. Also weekly markets are a solution falling under the temporary provision in regard to the retail infrastructure (Hahne, 2009).

Next to temporary also **mobile provision** is an option. Bakeries, any kind of groceries and local farms operate a bring service, drive through villages once a week or deliver on demand to reach their more immobile and dependent clients. Also in the category of social infrastructure, in regard to health care a mobile solution is of interest. In Germany the project of ‘nurse Agnes’ was launched, nurses that travel over the villages to look at patients to spare them the travelling while communicating with the doctors through new communication media (Hahne, 2009).

Decentralization is referring to a separation of before more centralized services. Using new technologies or following new organizational principles can help in making it more efficient to use local and decentralized infrastructure (Hahne, 2009). The bioenergy village Jühnde is using new technologies to become energy autarkic, making themselves independent from the public distribution grid, being self-responsible for the upholding and renewing of their network but also independent from the increases in prices on the energy market (Sywottek, 2007). In

the provision of administrative services local agencies integrated into existing infrastructure decrease the effort citizens have to undertake to use these services.

Centralization as opposition to decentralization is promoting the transfer of infrastructure to central places, acting upon the underflow of utilization. It promotes the efficiency, increases the number of products or offers and enhances competition (Maretzke & Bau, 2009). This as strategy on its own can be problematic in the light of immobile people and a bad transportation infrastructure as it simultaneously decreases the density of infrastructure offers. Combined with other strategies like mobile or temporary provision and improvement to public transportation, centralization however can help in answering to arising challenges. For example, if more villages close to each other cannot afford the operation of a village school anymore they should collaborate and support one school in a central village while at the same time investing in good public transportation or new ideas like car sharing systems.

When developing solutions to guarantee provision of public services it is important to pay attention to sustainability, thinking out of the box and across the range of categories. To stabilize the population development enhancing the attractiveness of the region and increasing the quality of life is important (Maretzke & Bau, 2009). In applying an innovative solution the interest for the region might be increased and tourists as well as potential imitators are drawn to the region. The identification of people with their region and seeing it as innovative and modern enhances their interest in staying and contributing to the region. However intact and sustainable solutions always have to be aware of and use regional peculiarities and characteristics, making the adaption of local and specialized strategies necessary (Maretzke & Bau, 2009).

4. Methodology

The research is qualitative research using secondary data for the analysis. The projects represent ‘good-practices’ chosen by the researcher in a way that they resemble a variety in actors, strategies, categories of public service provision and regions in Germany. A project can be termed to be a ‘good-practice’ if it is effectively challenging the problem it addresses. In this case it means the project succeeds in securing the provision of public services in appropriate distances and for reasonable prices. It presents an innovative solution and considers sustainable aspects if applicable. Good-practices are furthermore projects whose

concept and organization can be applied to other regions as well, without compromising local necessities and leaving space for adaptation.

The analysis of good-practices in the field of public service provision is well suited for answering the research question because it adds to the comprehension of how similar projects can be organized and how the provision of public services can be secured in rural and depopulated regions.

The project of the bioenergy village Jühnde was chosen for its success in becoming energy-autarkic and the type of organization chosen. The project was recognized by Lower Saxony as very useful and is being imitated by other villages in the region. The same stands for the DORV-initiative, the possibility to replicate it and accommodate it to the local needs makes it interesting for other villages. JugendMobil is a project included under the framework 'Modellvorhaben Daseinsvorsorge 2030'. Here projects with good approaches of dealing with public service provision are included (Beauftragter, 2011). CAP-markets of the franchise system exist all over Germany and were included here because of their special approach in combining provision of retail infrastructure and work opportunities for disabled people (Lippmann, 2012). The projects nurse AGnES are already established in various federal states and show an interesting approach in dealing with health care (IFCM, 2008). The bar 'Kumm' rin – die Hofschänke' and the socioeconomic center Eldingen were chosen on basis of the competition 'Gemeinsam stark sein' (enlg.: Being strong together) where they won first and third place (Deutsche Vernetzungstelle Ländliche Räume dvs, 2012a). The project descriptions are based on the official project websites (if available), the LEADER+ database and national programs and competition results projects participated in.

5. The projects

In the following part the chosen projects will be presented. They are arranged according to the type of infrastructure they address. In order to clarify why there exists the necessity of innovative projects for the provision of the different types of public services, a short description of the situation of the infrastructure and general approaches of solutions will be depicted. Even though the projects are separated according to infrastructure type, most of them apply an integrative approach, relating to more than one of the categories. They were included under the category they address primarily.

Map 3: Overview of projects (source: Author)



5.1. Technical infrastructure

Technical infrastructure comprises networks of water, electricity and gas as well as the road system and public transportation. Like mentioned before, in regions faced by depopulation these networks often suffer from underflow of utilization (Kocks & Gatzweiler, 2005). One solution in regard to electricity is the aim of energy autarky for small units like villages or municipalities. The strategy of decentralization is the framework in this approach. A good practice in this field is the bioenergy village Jühnde that aims for energy autarky with its own biogas installation (LEADER, 2007). The second sector included in technical infrastructure is public transportation. The decreasing offers of public transportation especially feature

problems for the more immobile population, the young and the elderly. Furthermore it is an important aspect in the overall consideration of public service provision. Choosing either the centralization or decentralization strategy for projects tackling problems in other categories of public services is connected to the general mobility of the citizens. Centralization is only a viable option in connection with a good transport and road system. To address the sparsely supplied public transportation in depopulated rural regions several flexible and innovative ideas can be adopted. The strategy of flexibility is the most appropriate in this public service. Citizen busses, collective call taxis, call busses and the combination of services with public transportation are all flexible ways of making citizens mobile also in the countryside (Bertocchi, 2009). The good-practice of JugendMobil will be introduced below (Beauftragter, 2011).

5.1.1. Bioenergy village of Jühnde

General Information

Project	Bioenergy village
Location	Jühnde in Lower Saxony
Population size	1072
Area in km ²	24,49
Population density: people per km ²	43,77 (Germany: 231)
Start of project	2004
Type of public service	Technical infrastructure
Actor	Civil society
Strategy	Decentralization

The village Jühnde is going a special way when it comes to their energy supply. Instead of relying on energy from outside, they built their own energy network. Special hereby is the type of energy and the way in which they built up the organization. The



1 Bioenergy village Jühnde. Executive board and directorate of biogas installation (FNR/Jan Zappner)

self-produced energy is from renewable sources, biogas gained with biomass in a biogas plant, then transformed into heat and electricity in a block heating station. To guarantee the supply in winter an additional woodchip heat plant was installed (Fangmeier, n.d.). The installations supply the village with heat since 2005, and so far 140 households, 70% of Jühnde are part of the network (LEADER, 2007). The users and operators are organized in form of a cooperative, the 'Bioenergiedorf Jühnde eG'. This will help to be able to eventually become energy-autarkic. Furthermore it gives the whole village a stake in the project. The cooperative holds 195 members at the moment (Fangmeier, n.d.). Citizens of the village pay for being a member of the cooperative, to become consumers and the municipality and the church are members as well. As are all farmers in Jühnde which have the special role in the project as suppliers of most of the biomass (Fangmeier, n.d.). The biogas plant uses around 17.000 tons of biomass per year. The farmers therefore grow corn, whole crop silage and sunflowers and provide manure. The residue remaining can then be used again by the farmers on the field as organic fertilizer (LEADER, 2007). This even provides a partial solution regarding odor and drinking water problems (LEADER, 2007). The wood for the woodchip heat plant comes from the forest land around the village.



2 The bioenergy village Jühnde (FNR/Jan Zappner)

Actors

The main actor in this project is the civil society of Jühnde. With their engagement and their disposition to apply innovative ideas they made it possible that the project was established and could be conducted. The organizational form of a cooperative made it possible to include market mechanisms. As running expenses are covered with the finances of the cooperative,

resulting from membership contributions and the profit earned with selling the energy (LEADER, 2007). However on their own they would not have been able to initiate the project. The ‘Interdisziplinäre Zentrum für Nachhaltige Entwicklung’ (interdisciplinary center for sustainable development) from the University in Göttingen initiated the project and accompanied it the whole time (Fangmeier, n.d.). Also the project was heavily funded through state finances. Without the funding it would not have been possible to conduct the project. The ‘Fachagentur für nachwachsende Rohstoffe’ (agency of renewable resources), which derives its capital from the federal republic, as well as the federal state Niedersachsen and the municipality Göttingen invested in the project. Furthermore it received funds from the LEADER+ program (LEADER, 2007). Hence cooperation between civil society and state is observable. In the triangle it can be classified as active citizenship. The cooperation is mainly initiated from the bottom, the citizens are organizing themselves to take up the provision of this service and only receive the funding from public sources.

Strategies

In order to guarantee the future provision of affordable energy the citizens of Jühnde followed the strategy of decentralization. Instead of being dependent on the public network and the external supply of energy they built their own network and took over the responsibility themselves through their cooperative. Additionally through the sustainability aspect of the project the villagers of Jühnde add to field comprehensive solutions. The participation of all villagers in the project strengthens the community feeling and increases the stake of citizens in the project, resulting in the active engagement of all.

5.1.2. Jugend Mobil



3 Kleeblattregion (<http://www.kleeblattregion.de/>)

General information

Location	Kleeblattregion, Kyritz, Brandenburg
Population size	10.190
Area in km ²	168
Population density: people per km ²	61 (Germany: 231)
Start of project	October 2010
Type of public service	technical infrastructure
Main actor	State
Strategy	municipality cooperation, participation

JugendMobil is a
already enforced
regions in
project was



project now
in three central
Brandenburg. The
developed in the
model project

framework of the 4 The project JugendMobil (© www.jugend-mobil.net)
'Daseinsvorsorge 2030 – Innovativ und modern – eine Antwort auf den demografischen Wandel' (Public service provision 2030 – innovative and modern – an answer for the demographic change) (Beauftragter, 2011). The project is aiming for the integration of the youth in their region and in solving the problems they are facing. Like mentioned above mobility is a pressing issue for the youth in peripheral regions. Insufficient public transport and the far distances to be covered make it difficult for teenagers to follow their hobbies and engage in the offers for them that are mostly provided in central areas. JugendMobil is tackling this problem not solely by introducing ways of better mobility for the youth but rather by promoting the participation of the youth in solving their problems and introducing the framework to establish this practice on a long-term basis (Beauftragter, 2011). The official aims mentioned are 'improving the mobility situation of adolescents in rural regions', 'develop the structure for a permanent participation in decision-making processes concerning

adolescents' and 'develop a format for the project that is conferrable to other regions' (ContextPlan, 2011). The project is aiming at teenagers between 12 and 18 years. Together with experts and pedagogues different approaches to better mobility were discussed and best-practices were found and introduced. Comparisons and discussions on different rideshare systems by the teenagers lead to the introduction of the system 'flinc' in the region. It is a system enabling everyone to spontaneously look for a ride, be mobile directly from home and providing security through the closed group design and included control mechanisms.

Actors

The project was introduced in the framework of the aforementioned model project, which is an initiative by the government to promote and support useful projects challenging the demographic change (Beauftragter, 2011). The Deutsche Kinder- und Jugendstiftung gGmbH (German: gemeinnützige GmbH) was the responsible agency during the trial phase. It is a civil society actor included in a more organized structure. Now the responsibility was passed on to a governmental actor, the ministry of infrastructure and agriculture of the land Brandenburg. The adolescents as main actors are part of the civil society, working together with and in the network of local and regional actors (Beauftragter, 2011). There is cooperation between state and civil society, a mixture of the two shifts socialization and active citizenship. The state provides the framework for the youth to participate and solve their own problems; however they still rely on the cooperation of state actors. The solutions they find are only possible to conduct if the citizens are willing and able to get involved.

Strategy

The Kleeblattregion is composed of four municipalities that were already following the approach of cooperation between municipalities before the JugendMobil project. But their cooperation is of importance in this project as well. The inclusion of four municipalities and the joint reflection on problems and solutions makes it a lot easier to approach the projects sustainable and without creating problems for other municipalities. The problem of competition between the municipalities in the region is prevented by acting together. In general the project is of course following the approach of improving the accessibility and doing so by better mobility and transportation possibilities. The attractiveness of the region is enhanced for adolescents through the opportunities of participation and the better mobility.

5.2. Retail infrastructure

Another vital problem arising in depopulated, rural areas is the closure of supermarkets, small shops, banks, post offices and similar infrastructure. These are mostly the last parts of village services that close down, but if they do not exist anymore, generally no active village life is observable. Long ways to the next supermarket and the need to go by car or bus (if available) to grocery shopping are reasons for people to move away. Hence a feasible solution of how retail infrastructure can be secured is necessary to stop the trend of rural depopulation. Here the concept of local village shops emerged. They are more than just normal supermarkets and comprise many services in one location and under one operator. According to Wolfgang Gröll, the most important aspect for the success of a village shop is the acceptance and the participation by the citizens (Rath, 2012). To secure their engagement in the shop and their identification with it and the village presentations to awaken their interest and motivation, and discussions with the villagers about their daily needs and wishes for the village shop should be conducted. Another characteristic of village shops is the provision of regional products. A village shop convinces through originality and its own personality fit to the village and its villagers. There is a variety of possible initiators, organization forms and agencies involved. Furthermore they provide several opportunities to the inhabitants for civic engagement. The focus does not solely lie on the provision of groceries but on something more than food, depending on local necessities (Rath, 2012). That is also why the transferability of concepts is controversial. However there exist models that while giving an overall framework allow for local adaptation. Several of these village shops can be found in Germany and the good practices of CAP-market and DORV will be described below.

5.2.1. DORV-Initiative Barmen



5 Header of the DORV project (www.dorv.de)

General information

Where	Barmen in Düren, Nordrhein-Westfalen
Population size	1319
Area in km ²	5,38
Population density: people per km ²	no data found
Start of project	2004
Type of public service	retail infrastructure
Main actor	civil society
Strategy	improving accessibility, decentralization

DORV sounds like the German word ‘Dorf’ meaning village and is short for ‘Dienstleistung und Ortsnahe RundumVorsorge’ (Provision of local, basic services) (Engelhart, n.d.). The center is based on five columns, related to the provision of basic local services, columns that enable citizens of a village to live a good and uncomplicated life regarding the provision of public services. These are the provision of groceries and convenience goods, all kinds of services, public, half-public as well as private, medical and social services, possibility of communication and a village culture that arises (Frey & Spelthann, 2009). Furthermore to



6 The DORV center in Barmen (www.dorv.de)

be able to provide all these services in an appropriate manner five principles are followed. The first principle is bundling, providing more services combined in one location (Lippmann, 2012). Second is concentration, meaning the concentration on the more important infrastructure and services for the particular village. These have to be worked out with the whole village community.

Thirdly regionalism indicates that mostly regional products shall be supplied. This serves the purpose to support regional businesses and strengthen the regional identity. The principle of quality is important as a competitive strategy in comparison to bigger suppliers. It encompasses freshness, proximity, the personal contact and flexibility in goods. The last one is using the new media, for example providing possible services online (Engelhart, n.d.).

Actors

The idea of the DORV-center comes from one of the citizens of Barmen. It was initiated as a response to the arising problems in the village as the last ATM closed down and no infrastructure was left (Sywottek, 2007). It is a prominent example for civic engagement, citizens tackling their own problems with own initiatives. In order to establish the center the DORV association was founded and used to organize the civil society and to make participation of everybody possible. Furthermore two enterprises were brought to life, the DORV-Zentrum GmbH (german: Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung) and the DORV-Partner GbR (german: 'Gesellschaft bürgerlichen Rechts') (Frey & Spelthann, 2009). The DORV-Zentrum GmbH is the framework for commercial aspects, the actor getting in contact with suppliers, and composing the legal framework for the supermarket. The DORV-Partner GbR attends to the finances and administrates the capital of the citizens. This is necessary as the citizens are active shareholders of the businesses and by investing in it enabled the establishment of the DORV-center (Frey & Spelthann, 2009). However it is based on a non-profit principle for the shareholders, any profit of the business is reinvested. As service in return citizens have shopping facilities close by and do not need to travel far for many more services (Sywottek, 2007).

Strategy

The strategies used by the DORV project are focusing on the improvement of accessibility. The whole aim of the village shop is to provide goods and services to be reached by foot for villagers. This accessibility however can only be reached through the combination of services, providing everyday goods together with services, makes it more interesting for potential consumers to use the offers. The possibility to attend to several needs at once is a real gain for users. It is not profitable for a market if people only go there if they forgot something in the city. They need to use it as main shopping source. Paired with the social aspect and through the participation of the whole village this can be achieved. This social aspect is also given in

the provision of a third place, a place of communication and where villagers meet. The whole shopping experience is made more sociable and hence more enjoyable.

5.2.2. CAP-market



7 Logo of the CAP-markets (KVJS, 2011)

General information

Location	Ötlingen, Kirchheim unter Teck, Baden-Württemberg
Population size	6354
Area in km ²	no data found
Population density: people per km ²	no data found
Start of project	2009
Type of public service	retail infrastructure
Main actor	Civil society
Strategy	combining infrastructure, decentralization

The CAP-market is another form of retail infrastructure suitable to secure the local supply with daily goods. Under the categorization of the ‘Bundesministerium für Verkehr, Bau und Stadtentwicklung’ (BMVBS) the CAP market belongs to the category of integration markets (Schüring, Küpper, Eberhardt, & Tautz). This is due to its special approach. For one they are concerned with providing everyone a good shopping experience, wide aisles and low shelves make it easier for elderly people and people in a wheelchair to reach the products. Their motto is ‘Grocery shopping without handicap – also for people with handicap’ (Lippmann, 2012). Even more special however is the integration of handicapped people as employees in CAP markets. CAP markets provide work opportunities for disabled people, integrating them in the work market as well as in a normal life. The main aims of CAP-markets are offering employment options for disabled persons, enhancing the exchange and integration of disabled and non-disabled people and contributing to the building of a community in city districts and in villages (KVJS, 2011). An important partner is Edeka, a German supermarket chain, who provides all CAP-markets with their goods. All over Germany 90 CAP-markets are operating currently, with 1.200 employees (KVJS, 2011). About half of them have a disability. All

CAP-markets are organized over a social franchising system, the operators often being not-for profit companies (Lippmann, 2012). This is also part of the ideology of the markets, not aiming for profit but operating with the social goal in mind. The concept of CAP-markets is used in Germany since 1999, in Ötlingen the market opened in 2009 (Lütz-Holoch, 2012). Additional offers that are developed in the framework of the CAP-markets are CAP compact, intended for small villages and aiming even more at the securing of the retail infrastructure, CAP mobile, a bring service and CAPpuccino, integrating a social meeting point in the concept (KVJS, 2011).

Actors

Like mentioned before, the operator of CAP-markets are mostly non-profit organizations. It is the cooperation between civil society and the market. Even though the principles of the market are used and they have to be operated economically, the markets are not meant to bring high profits for any stakeholders. In the case of Ötlingen the Filderwerkstatt is the operator, supported by the 'Reha Verein für soziale Psychatrie' from the district Esslingen (Lütz-Holoch, 2012). The Filderwerkstatt is aiming at the integration of disabled people. The provision of retail infrastructure in less or not at all profitable locations can be secured because the special approach and the integration aspect enable the application for funds and the support of governmental financing. Though not aiming at dividend payouts to any stakeholders CAP-markets still have to earn enough to write black figures. Through the franchise system they get help by the company that distributes the franchise rights, the 'Genossenschaft der Werkstätten für behinderte Menschen Süd' in planning, analysis and marketing of the market (Lippmann, 2012). The main actor hence is the market but in close cooperation with the civil society. Edeka as a big company is involved and also the participation of the citizens is necessary, they need to be willing to support the market by going there for their grocery shopping. The state's function is participation in the financing of the markets.



8 The retail association of Baden-Württemberg awards the CAP-market in Ötlingen a quality mark for generation friendly grocery shopping (Lütz-Holoch, 2012)

Strategy

The CAP-markets are following the strategy of decentralization and a combination of different offers. The franchise system is enabling the decentralization by concentrating many of the organizational aspects and providing support to all branches. The approach of social entrepreneurship is of great importance, operating economically but following a social purpose helps in offering the market in unprofitable locations. Through the integration approach the acceptance in the society is generally higher and the citizens are often very willing to support the market. But not only because of the employment of disabled people, do citizens go for their grocery shopping to these markets. The service in the markets for everybody is of high quality, the market in Ötlingen was awarded with a quality mark by the 'Einzelhandelsverband Baden-Württemberg' (Retail association of Baden Württemberg) (Lütz-Holoch, 2012). The good service and high quality makes it easy for elderly people, families with children and disabled people to make their purchases at the CAP-market.

5.3. Social infrastructure

Under social infrastructure the main topics included are education, health care and care for the elderly. In depopulated, rural regions schools have to close, doctors cannot find successors for their offices and the infrastructure is not adapted to the increasing number of elderly people. A variety of approaches to finding solutions are already discussed in the literature. In the field of education besides finding creative ways to keep schools running they also comprise innovative ways of offering teenagers possibilities of further education, work training and extra-curricular learning. Through the changing structure of society the exchange between the

generations is decreasing, they seem further apart than in earlier times. Projects such as generation houses or generation parks are aiming at improving the exchange between old and young, providing new infrastructure for both population sectors. The socioeconomic center Eldingen is one project providing infrastructure to increase this exchange (Deutsche Vernetzungstelle Ländliche Räume dvs, 2012a). The worsened health care situation in the villages calls for innovative projects as well. Mobile health offices as well as the temporary provision are often approaches to spare old, immobile people a long travel to doctors' offices. The project nurse AGnES is addressing this issue (IFCM, 2008).

5.3.1. Socioeconomic center Eldingen

General information

Location	Eldingen, Lower Saxony
Population size	2.200
Area in km ²	56,71
Population density: people per km ²	37,7
Start of project	28 th April, 2012
Type of public service	social infrastructure
Main actor	Civil society
Strategy	combining infrastructure



9 Socioeconomic center Eldingen opening (Hildebrandt, 2013)

The socioeconomic center in Eldingen is a project initiated by the municipality of Eldingen. Originally the only goal was to provide a youth center to make the village Eldingen more attractive for families and provide the youth with new opportunities (Hildebrandt, 2013). Out of this idea a holistic approach to address more problems of the village than just the youth's need for a place to meet. The center is multifunctional, additionally to the youth center a doctor's office, a common meeting room for the youth, a hair dresser, a bistro and a bank are integrated ("Ein neues Zentrum belebt das Dorfleben," 2013). The rooms are provided for free to the associations of the village while private operators like hair dresser, doctor and bistro owner are paying lease to the municipality who is the proprietary (Deutsche Vernetzungstelle Ländliche Räume dvs, 2012a). With the center the attractiveness of the village is highly upgraded and it induces a pull-effect for other service providers. In the example of the socioeconomic center that way already a dentist was attracted to the village (Hildebrandt, 2013).

Actors

The initiator of the project was the municipality – a state actor. In a certain way they are a very important actor as without the state there would neither have been the initiation nor enough money for the financing. The project was financed by LEADER, by another fund called 'Dorferneuerung' by the German government and funds from the rural district and the federal state (Deutsche Vernetzungstelle Ländliche Räume dvs, 2012a). All levels of government were included, generally following the subsidiarity principle. But also the civil society was an important actor. Only because of the societal life, the existing infrastructure of associations and the willingness of all citizens to participate made the project so successful. Even though public service provision was less and less guaranteed, regarding retail, social and cultural infrastructure, the associations were a stable factor in the community life (Deutsche Vernetzungstelle Ländliche Räume dvs, 2012a). Like the name socioeconomic center already suggests not only the social aspect is a part of the concept. Market mechanisms are included through the leasing to private operators, what constitutes also the second half of the financing of the project. The project is a good example for an integration of all three actors, state, market and civil society, whereby state and civil society have a more prominent role. The project aims at generating a sense of community in the village where everybody participates and is asked to contribute.

Strategy

The strategy primarily used in the project is combining many aspects of social infrastructure into one: providing them under one framework reducing the effort and the expenses of the provision. Examining the doctor's office also the temporary provision of services and decentralization can be observed as the doctor is only present three times a week and the office constitutes a district office of another office in a bigger town. Also providing the facilities to open a little business is a good way in enabling villagers to open their own business and become self-employed, contributing to the life in the community and at the same time being supported by it.

5.3.2. Nurse AGnES

General information

Location	Erzgebirgsregion, Saxony
Population size	363.741 (2011)
Area in km ²	1.828,35 km ²
Population density: people per km ²	199 (Germany: 231)
Start of project	2007
Type of public service	social infrastructure
Main actor	state
Strategy	mobile provision



10 The nurse Agnes from the German television show (MDR, 2012)

around for home visits of patients in the villages. This does not only alleviate doctors with the overload of patients during the consultation hours but also supports immobile or less mobile people in the villages. The project is already applied in four federal states of Germany, one of them Saxony. Saxony is suffering from an extreme shortage of doctors' offices (Hummel-Gaatz, 2012). The nurses working for the projects are employees in an already established

The project of nurse AGnES was developed by the University of Greifswald in order to tackle the problems of decreasing medical provision in peripheral regions (IFCM, 2008). It is named after a movie from the 70ies where the main character is the nurse Agnes, travelling over the villages with medical consultation and consolation. The approach of the nurse AGnES project is to delegate some tasks of doctors to nurses that travel

doctors' office. They have to follow special qualification on top of their primary qualification in a medical or care employment. Their tasks comprise medical performances, controlling medication, taking blood samples, tending to wounds, observing symptoms of illnesses and managing the contact to the doctor (Van den Berg et al., 2009). For the communication with the doctor they use new communication technologies, the internet and additionally make use of telemedicine practices. It is not the aim to replace doctors but to guarantee sufficient and qualitatively high provision of medical services. Apart from the medical services the nurses also fulfill a social role, the elderly, immobile people that are mostly the target group are often lonely, taking the nurse's visit as an opportunity for social contact (IFCM, 2008).



11 One of the nurses from the project: Nurse AGnES (www.aertzeblatt.de)

Actors

The actor involved in this project is especially the state. The University of Greifswald is one of them, responsible for initiation and supervision of the project, additionally to state actors on different levels, responsible for the financing. The doctors' offices and the patients need to be involved and integrated in the project to guarantee the acceptance and to ensure the best inset of the nurses. Another main actor are of course the nurses themselves, they are the ones enabling the contact between immobile patients in the villages and the doctors in the city. The state itself takes up the task to find new solutions to the problems. There is no shift of responsibilities to other actors observable. This is partly due to the nature of health care provision and the higher rigidity of certain standards in the provision.

Strategies

The nurse AGnES project is using the strategy of mobile provision and using it in the field of medical services. There are not many projects in the medical areas that use a mobile approach. However it is useful in alleviating the doctors and simplifying the access for the elderly and more immobile part of the population. Additionally to the mobile provision of medical services also the need of social contact by the patients is satisfied better as the nurses bring more time and approach the patients in a personal manner in contrast to overfilled waiting rooms in the offices.

5.4. Cultural infrastructure

In cultural infrastructure the concept of Oldenburg's (1999) 'third place' comes into focus. It is the category addressing the absence of third places most. Places like a bar, a restaurant but also a library can enhance the quality of a village immense. A village however where people have no place to meet is a 'dead' village. The social capital and the experiences that are created in the exchange between villagers are what make a village truly enjoyable and sustainable under the light of rural depopulation. The first example given in the next section is showing how these kind of places can be generated even in small villages, like Ostwig. The other example illustrates that even very specific offers can create a considerable additional value to the village, like a theater in the stables.

5.4.1. Kumm rin – taproom



12 Voluntary barmen of the taproom Kumm' rin (Schmücker, n.d.)

General information

Where	Ostwig, Bestwig, North Rhine-Westfalia
Population size	Ostwig: 1040 (2012) Bestwig: 11.285
Area in km²	Bestwig: 69,36 km ²
Population density: people per km²	176,8 (Germany: 231)
Start of project	December 2011
Type of public service	cultural infrastructure
Main actor	Civil society
Strategy	accessibility, decentralization, attractiveness

Ostwig is a little village in the municipality of Bestwig. Ostwig itself does not struggle excessively with the impact of depopulation and demographic change. Nevertheless the villagers were missing a location where to meet in the evenings, a place where young and old could come



13 Teenagers in the Taproom in Ostwig (Schmücker, n.d.)

together, to talk, relax and benefit from the generation exchange – they were missing a bar (Deutsche Vernetzungstelle Ländliche Räume dvs, 2012a). The way the problem is addressed in Ostwig is with exemplary activism of the civil society. The initiation came from a long-time resident of the village who renovated old stables to resemble a taproom which he conferred to the home association of Ostwig ('Heimat und Förderverein Ostwig e.V.') for a small monthly payment (Deutsche Vernetzungstelle Ländliche Räume dvs, 2012a). The association established the 'Kumm rin – Hofschänke' in the taproom and manages its operation (Deutsche Vernetzungsstelle Ländliche Räume dvs, 2012b). The barmen are volunteers from Ostwig and the neighbor villages. For everybody participating in the project profit is not the end aim, their motivation is to give something to the village and do something good for the villagers. The bar contributes to an active communal life. It provides space for the youth to play and hang out together while adhering to the law for the protection of the youth. Especially for the young generation the principle of no compulsory consumption was introduced, considering their limited means and to make sure that social get-togethers do not come with a price for them. Through the appeal the bar has for all generations the contact between the younger and older generations is rendered possible, the solidarity between them is strengthened through the exchange. The profit that is generated by the bar is granted to the associations of the village (Deutsche Vernetzungstelle Ländliche Räume dvs, 2012a).

Actors

The actors involved in the project are foremost actors of the civil society; Carl-Ferdinand Lüninck who provided the facilities, the association of the village taking over the

management and all the voluntary barmen. The barmen also have an influence on the type of evening, providing an appeal for everybody, a youth disco the one night and German hit songs the other. This integrative approach makes everybody participate in the project and brings the whole community together. The civil society has taken over the role of the market in providing a bar using volunteers and changing the conventional aim of monetary profit into one of added value to the village. The cooperation of active citizenship and social entrepreneurship enables the villagers to profit from the establishment of the bar twice – a location where they can enjoy each other's company and have a source of income for their associations.

Strategy

The strategies followed in this project are improved accessibility and decentralization. The central position of the bar makes it easy for everyone to reach it. Even elderly people and the youth, people without a car and dependent on public transportation, can arrive easily. The decentralization makes the usage of public transportation unnecessary, at least for the villagers of Ostwig. The neighbor villages are more dependent on public transportation but through smaller distances between the villages themselves than to the next bigger town also the bicycle and going by foot become viable options. The project aims at integrating the whole village population, giving them a place to meet and exchange stories and experiences. Especially the exchange between the generations is focused upon. This contributes to the attractiveness of the village, long-term residents as well as newcomers are integrated easily and the engagement in village affairs increases. This and the space for teenagers to spend their time might convince families to stay in a village, stabilizing the population size

5.4.2. Theaters in the stables

General information

Location	Maßbach, Bad Kissingen, Bavaria
Population size	109.434
Area in km²	1.137 km ²
Population density: people per km²	96 (Germany 231)
Start of project	October, 2005
Type of public service	Cultural infrastructure
Main actor	State
Strategy	accessibility, attractiveness

The theater in castle Maßbach belongs already since 1961 to the community life (Fränkisches-Theater, n.d.). The theatrical venues however are less interesting for the children and teenagers in the region. To improve the cultural offerings also for the younger generations the theater in cooperation with the municipalities Bad Kissingen and Rhön-Grabfeld initiated the project of a youth theater (LEADER, 2007). The theater is located in the stables of castle Maßbach, right next to the traditional theater. The location enables it to use the infrastructure and staff of the already established theater, making the management easier and decreasing the expenditure. The theater wants to provide plays appropriate and interesting for the youth, possibility for discussion afterwards as well as an environment to experience and learn about the theater world. In the project internships in the theater are offered, on technical and cultural aspects of theater, information events and theater days are arranged and a cooperation with the schools of the regions established. It is not only a theater but a place for the young people to learn, be educated and get interested in theater and other cultural aspects (LEADER, 2007).



14 Logo of
Theater in the
stables(Fränkis
ches-Theater,
n.d.)

Actors

The actors involved in this project are mainly the state, the municipalities of Bad Kissingen and Rhön-Grabfeld and the market, represented by the theater, the business Fränkisches Theater Schloss Maßbach GmbH (Fränkisches-Theater, n.d.). Together they initiated the project. It was financed to a large part by LEADER+ and funds by different state levels; the rest came from own resources (LEADER, 2007). Including it into an already existing infrastructure saved a lot of money. Further operating costs will be settled through ticket sales, ensuring the sustainability and the independent operation in the future. Market and state are sharing the responsibility to take over cultural education in the region. Market-mechanisms like the selling of the tickets are used to ensure the operation while the production of profit is not the primary goal. Rather the education and interest of the children and teenagers lies in the focus. This can be secured through the cooperation of state and market.

Strategy

The improvement of accessibility as well as the general increase in the attractiveness of the village plays a role in the project. A certain plus point is the provision of the youth theater in

combination with already existing infrastructure. This makes theater visits of whole families possible, where kids and parents can both have entertainment suitable for them. The additional offers for children contribute to the attractiveness of the region for families that value the cultural education of their children highly. They are not only informed about the work of a theater but can participate directly through the internships and workshops. Furthermore the cooperation with other regions shall be strengthened. Hereby a mobile provision of the cultural offers is possible as the youth plays can and shall be performed on other stages as well. The project uses infrastructure that exists already for another purpose than originally planned. The stables of the castle after reconstruction are fit to hold the youth theater.

Table 1: Summary of project characteristics

Project	category	actors	relationship	strategy	location
Bioenergy village Jühnde	technical	civil society market	active citizenship	decentralization	Niedersachsen
JugendMobil	technical	state	socialization	improving accessibility, flexibility	Brandenburg
CAP market	retail	market civil society	social entrepreneurship	improving accessibility, flexibility, concentration	Baden-Württemberg
DORV	retail	civil society market	social entrepreneurship	accessibility, concentration decentralization	Nordrhein-Westfalen
Socioeconomic Center Eldingen	social	state civil society	active citizenship	flexibility	Sachsen-Anhalt
Nurse Agnes Kumm' rin	social	state	no shift	mobile provision	Saxony
	cultural	civil society	active citizenship	improving accessibility	Nordrhein-Westfalen
Theater in the stables	cultural	state market	privatization	improving accessibility, attractiveness	Bavaria

6. Conclusion

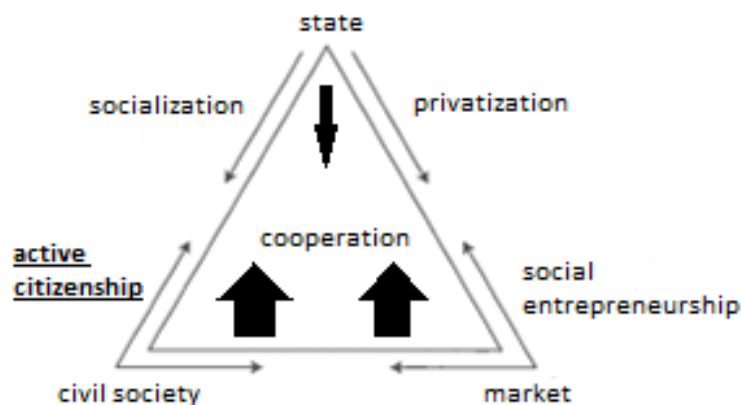
The effects of rural depopulation and demographic change on rural regions in Germany are of considerable degree, increasing in severity with the ongoing process and demand fast and effective action. In the field of public service provision many innovative and creative approaches are already applied and some of the good-practices were introduced in this paper. The main research question of the paper is: ‘How is the provision of public services in depopulated, rural regions in Germany organized and what can be learned from ‘good practices’ in this field?’. The conclusion will summarize the findings and relate to the transferability of the projects.

The possible main actors of projects are state, market and civil society. In the projects the roles they can resume are manifold, as initiators, as financers, as implementers or operators. The first observation made was that the actor coming into focus most by taking over new roles and being successful in increasing innovation in the project is *civil society*. Citizens are personally involved and experience the problems first hand, they see their own and neighbors’ needs and therefore have a personal interest in solving problems they are facing, they are good initiators. The projects DORV and Kumm’ rin are good examples of civil society as initiator. The approaches of these two projects and the bioenergy village Jühnde are also interesting in those cases where the state and market are not willing or able to finance public service provision infrastructure because they show how civil society is functioning as a source of finance as well. Civil society actors are less constraint, they are neither aiming solely for the highest profit nor are they dependent on the vote of constituents. This enables them to think the most creative and apply innovative solutions in the provision of public services while not losing sight of the social aspect of the service provision.

The second finding regards the *cooperation of actors*. In many projects the state is taking over the role of funding or at least provides start-up financing. The higher acceptance of projects by civil society and the relief of the state in public service provision make the financing deal a win-win situation. Furthermore the cooperation leads to more sustainable structures. For example it is beneficial for the state to increase the stake of civil society actors in the provision of public services through their direct participation. This happened in the project of JugendMobil. But participation not only increases the interest and stake in the projects, it also enables to find the most suitable and required solutions. The market’s role is often rather the delivery of principles like efficiency and taking care of affordability of projects. The market

structures provide a tool for good provision when used by civil society actors. This is for example apparent in the projects of the retail infrastructure, the DORV-center and the CAP-markets where market elements are an important aspect of organization while the focus lies on social goals. In the CAP-markets the role of the state as financer appears again. A vivid cooperation and interaction of the actors is always more useful than one actor dealing on its own. These two aspects, the importance of the civil society but also of cooperation were incorporated in the figure of Steen et al. (2013).

Figure 2: Changing relationship between state, market and civil society – the importance in public service provision (Steen et al, 2013 - modified by researcher)



A third observation regards the type of actor and their relationship used most in the different types of infrastructure. In *technical infrastructure* state involvement is still necessary. Road networks, water and waste management are difficult to transfer to other actors because certain minimum standards have to be met. The approach of the bioenergy village Jühnde is one showing that electricity provision can be taken over by civil society. Furthermore innovative solutions provided by the civil society are especially prominent in the public transportation sector, approaches like citizen busses, multi-busses and similar ones. In both cases however the state plays a role as new structures, especially in public transportation, need to be legally integrated into German law.

In the *retail infrastructure* the state never was involved much. There are approaches by the state aimed at securing shops, post offices, banks etc. in rural regions. Projects initiated by civil society and characterized by participation and involvement of all villagers however are generally more sustainable and effective in their approach. The main approach is social entrepreneurship, civil society or market not aiming at profit but at securing retail infrastructure provision.

Apart from the health sector *social infrastructure* is subject of many initiatives of active citizenship. The socioeconomic center in Eldingen is not the only project aiming in the direction of provision of social infrastructure. Active citizenship seems the most appropriate form in addressing shortages in this field; the citizens know what is missing and what fits in their village. In the case of health care provision however the state is still the responsible actor. In the project nurse AGnES also the state is the main actor, a provision in this field by the civil society or the market would be difficult to realize due to safety and health standards. In the *cultural infrastructure* civil society plays again the most important role. The state and the market are included through cooperation but a provision without participation of the citizens is not advisable.

Transferring good practices to other problem regions or villages helps in addressing the rural depopulation and the demographic change in all rural regions in Germany. To answer the question how rural regions can deal with their special problems resulting from depopulation, it is useful to take a close look on what the different projects described in this paper have in common.

First of all, the projects are all developed from the *particular local situation*, referring to the complaints of the people living there or finding an answer to a problem of the local community. Second, the *civil society* plays a role in the projects. The local people know best what is needed, whether in respect to technical infrastructure or for example healthcare, what is desirable like the cultural projects or what they do not want to lose or want to reestablish like shops, bars etc. The aim of the project must be clearly defined and supported by the locals, relating back to *active citizenship*. Third, all projects have a head and motor. Personal interests and intrinsic motivation seem to be a good indicator for the success of the projects. If the need for action and the interest in action is high, the motivation of the citizens to act is high as well. Their willingness to engage themselves and participate in projects is needed for successful projects. Furthermore organizational knowledge is needed. This head and motor does not necessarily have to come from the locals alone. Here *cooperation* with the market or the state may ensure the success of the projects. They are the ones providing knowledge, networks and finances in many cases. This leads to the fourth point, the conditions for success. To establish a project like the described ones, not only good ideas and motivation are needed but also financial and personal resources and infrastructural conditions. When these conditions meet the possibilities of the particular local situation or even use the problematic

situation, projects are highly probable to work. *Utilization* of the particular local situation can be found in all projects. The projects were created very close to the citizens and the further development was in cooperation with target groups. The conditions relate and influence each other and forming a cycle, hence being all connected, they are the basis for successful projects. In the projects different strategies were found and described. Reflecting back it can be seen that it is not so much the question of which strategy works best but if the implemented strategies follow the above described conditions to result in a good-practice.

Figure 3: Cycle for good-practices (source: author)



Active citizens, their willingness to engage in projects, take over tasks from the state and be creative with the provision of public services are what can make the difference between the survival and the fading away of a village. It is exactly that what keeps the life in Haidenkofen, the little village in the middle of Bavaria, going and the people interested in staying.

7. References

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