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The emergence of new uses for rural spaces and interrelations of rural and urban labour markets

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38th Congress of the European Regional Science Association
28. August – 1. September 1998 in Vienna
"Europe quoniam vadit? – Regional question at the Turn of the Century"
Topic: E: Poverty, Labour Markets and Migrations

**The emergence of new uses for rural spaces and interrelations
of rural and urban labour markets**

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Abstract

The former rural-urban dichotomy has been rejected by recent analyses of economic performance of rural areas. Much of this new reading of spatial tendencies within the industrialised world has been influenced by the rising concern for rural areas and the search for comparative data and concepts at international level. The paper takes the concept elaborated by the OECD-Group of the Council on Rural Development as starting point which dismisses the notion that there are clear cut boundaries between such territorial concepts as urban and rural areas. By setting up a hierarchical territorial scheme it elucidates the interlinkages of "rural" and "urban" parts of the territory at local and regional levels.

It is shown that a differentiation into lagging and dynamic rural regions is needed to reflect the actual very diverse development of these parts of the territories. Due to rather low settlement mobility and as a consequence high commuting shares Austria provides an example where population and employment changes in rural areas are often different.

Taking account of the trends towards fundamental employment problems and social exclusion processes presents a prime requirement also for rural development policy. As rural areas would be conceived in the latest European discussion as territories offering highly demanded amenities rural development policies will have to harness these potentials. The role of a wide variety of actors and shifts in the demand structure for "rural products" represent core items in this process. Networking seems to become one of the central requirements for development replacing sectoral/single objective support schemes. It will be of crucial importance to find

ways to make use of the emerging new tasks of rural areas for the local/regional population so as to prevent larger groups of population from being excluded.

1. Introduction

With growing integration of the rural economies into the national and international economies concern for rural issues has risen. This development mainly occurred in the European and industrialised countries' debate in the 1980s, a time period when agricultural employment has fallen to such an extent that even in the most predominantly rural areas the share of agricultural workforce in the active population had, in general, decreased to less than 20 per cent.

The former concepts for rural areas had been strongly associated with the agricultural sector. At least since the mid-1980s a much broader attitude has been formulated in the upcoming debate on rural issues (Summers et al 1988). It has to be noticed that those concerns for (peripheral) rural areas found their way to policy formulation (CEC 1988) and coincided with the first reform of the EU-Regional Policy. The implementation of regional policy measures, tackling problems of rural areas, did not imply a common notion and definition of rural areas but rather a vague allusion to what different countries understood by this term. With the rising need for international comparison on the situation and development of rural areas also international organisations have turned their attention to this issue.

The term rural area is widely used as an expression for non-urban or peripheral regions without necessarily defining the concept or its spatial implications. Attempts to define the spatial category of rural areas are therefore bound to incite to discussions on the theoretical concept and to create methodological problems. Views on the issue and the selection of indicators to be dealt with vary according to stakeholders, social groups, personal attitudes and national contexts. A review of the definition of rural areas in OECD member countries has shown that different criteria and different thresholds are applied (OECD 1994a, p. 82-83).

The OECD Rural Development Programme, launched in 1991, tried from its very beginning to overcome those shortcomings of national definitions which tend to reflect national culture traits, institutional structures and specific socio-economic and administrative patterns. It

focused on an internationally agreed framework to discuss the concept of rurality in an internationally comparable context (OECD 1994a).

The hierarchical database, established by the OECD Rural Indicators Programme, made it possible to provide analyses of the economic performance of rural areas but also for all other parts of the territory of member countries and the interrelations between and within different territories and its urban and rural parts. Thus the former rural-urban dichotomy has been rejected by the recurrent debate on rural research and those territorially disaggregated analyses. There does not only seem no clear cut boundaries between such territorial concepts as urban and rural areas but also considerable acceptance conceiving rurality as a social and cultural construct (Lowe 1997, p. 1).

Taking account of the spread of new technologies, especially information and communication technologies and the effects of globalisation of key elements of economy and culture our former understanding of rather narrow forms of interactions have to be reconsidered. The role of a wide variety of actors and shifts in the demand structure for "rural products" represent core items in this process. Networking seems to become one of the central requirements for development replacing sectoral/single objective support schemes.

This paper will focus, on the one hand, on the differentiation into lagging and dynamic rural regions which is required to reflect the actual very diverse development in different regions. Moreover, the regional level can be split up into its rural and urban parts which allows a further dimension of territorial assessment, the intra-regional patterns of population, labour and capital flows. The Austrian case will provide an example where population and employment trends in rural areas are often different. This divergence is mainly due to low settlement mobility and spatially increasing labour market regions.

On the other hand, it will be revealed that rural areas are experiencing a revival of some of their central elements, i.e. rural amenities. In the latest discussion (OECD 1994b, OECD 1996b, OECD 1998) rural areas would be conceived of as territories offering highly demanded amenities and rural development policy's outstanding task to harness these potentials.

”In a globalising world (economy), uniqueness, specificity and distinctiveness are becoming important development assets. While many economic production functions and factors such as technology, information, finance and labour can either be quickly moved or found all around the globe, other development assets such as unique rural amenities, natural habitats, landscapes and local cultures are immobile and can only be experienced on the spot. Thus, in a globalising economy which speeds up factor mobility and international exchange of goods and services, these immobile factors begin to gain importance again, at least in relative terms” (OECD 1998, p. 104).

Together with the fundamental change of sectoral employment and types of employment this renewed valuation of rural amenity features stands for a complete new set of uses of resources in rural areas. Although with globalisation it is often alluded to the shrinking of space (e.g. Kirsch 1995), amenities with characteristics of scare and unique products turn to a significant development asset. There arises a need for deeper regional analyses covering the interconnectedness of the specific region and for case-by-case assessment of strengths and weaknesses.

In this process it will be of crucial importance to secure a wide participation of local actors not at least with the aim to forestall social exclusion processes. It is the challenge to make use of the emerging new tasks of rural areas for the local/regional population. Aiming at such an integrated development process calls for a renewed notion of rural areas and an approach focusing on cooperation among actors of different layers of society and at different levels of territories.

2. Interrelations of rural and urban territories

Very often discussion on rural problems centre on the nagging question: ”What is rural?” and lead to severe doubts on the usefulness of the concept of rurality (e.g. Pratt 1996). Taking the extreme position, Hoggart (1990) had suggested to ”abandon the category ‘rural’ as an analytical construct”. Such considerations, not to take territorial aspects as research base into account, incited to sharpen the debate on the focal group of ”rural research”. In addition, it

responded to the vagueness of any delineation of rural and implied to emphasise the growing interaction between rural and urban areas.

When starting its rural indicators project the OECD has embarked from the notion that international comparability can only be achieved by analysing the entire territory of member states. This would not just allow later on greater flexibility in the discussion on the definition of rural areas but also provide a standardised territorial framework for comparative analyses of the flows between different types of territories. Thus, the scheme distinguishes two hierarchical levels of geographic detail.

At the local community level it uses the basic administrative or statistical unit, in most cases the community, as the lowest geographical areas to be classified as “rural” or “urban”. The communities were split by the simple criterion of population density (threshold of 150 inhabitants per square kilometre) into rural and urban ones. At the second stage, as regions usually comprise rural as well as urban communities, the degree of rurality was ascribed by the share of people living in rural communities, thus distinguishing the following three types of regions:

- predominantly rural areas (PR)
(more than 50 % of the population lives in “rural” communities),
- significantly rural areas (SR)
(the share of the population in rural communities is 15 - 50 %) and
- predominantly urbanised areas (PU)
(less than 15 % of the population is in rural communities).

The framework has to allow for analysis of interrelationships between regions but also to enable differentiation between rural and urban communities within a region at a lower geographic level.

It is not the intention of this paper to cover the statistical results of that work. The basic elements which largely reflect the diversity of rural areas and an analysis of the territorial indicators of employment have been published up to now as first steps of the programme by

OECD (1994a, 1996a) and have been discussed by the author previously (e.g. Dax 1996, Dax 1997).

The territorial data are assembled in such a way that the rural and urban parts of one region, being classified as predominantly rural, significantly rural or predominantly urban, can be analysed separately. This underlines that regions do not show homogenous performance, but are rather composed by various spatial parts. These parts in their turn reveal considerable interaction to the other parts of their own region (intra-regional) as well as to other regions (inter-regional). Moreover, with globalisation more and more aspects of our economy and culture trespass this narrow spatial concept emphasising physical interaction in the geographical vicinity.

Through the case of Austria some of the aspects of basic indicators with regard to unfolding the strict urban-rural division will be presented here. Austria gives an example where the classification units, both at the local and the regional level, are rather small (Dax 1996, p. 9f.). This administrative situation arises from its location in mountain areas where cultural and socio-economic differences occur at a low territorial scale. The regional organisation constituted in this national context favours a perspective on smaller regions and with increasing interdependencies a risen awareness of inter-regional aspects.

The comparison of population and employment change (Table 1) reveals quite clearly that population tends to locate in more rurally structured regions, whereas employment concentrates, in particular, on the intermediate regions. In addition, this appears even more obvious when looking at the rural and urban parts of the different types of regions: Rural communities tend to have a significant role as settlement area and urban communities, i.e. the small and medium towns in the regions, show a marked positive employment change. This is a quite distinct case for the crucial role also of small and medium towns for their rural hinterland. Similar observations have been made in other OECD-countries (OECD 1996a) so that particular concern has been put on the functions of those urban parts for the development of the whole "rural" regions (e.g. OECD 1997, OECD-China workshop on small and medium-sized towns in non-metro regions in December 1997). In part, these tendencies have been addressed in the counter-urbanisation movement starting in the 1970s. Migration towards the centres has been replaced since then by net migration gains for the peri-urban and rural areas

(Deavers 1988, Saraceno 1994). For instance, from OECD analysis it can be seen that the rural areas in France, Italy, Spain and Belgium had a considerable positive migration balance in the 1980s, whereas the urbanised regions of these countries had clear migration losses.

The Austrian data (in Table 1) also suggests that it is, in particular, the increasing involvement of women in the labour market which had in those small towns a positive impact on employment. As the three different types of regions are established for international comparative analysis an in-depth investigation of the actual performance of regions gives a better picture of the broad variety of regions (Figure 1). All regions with an employment change better than the national average can thereby be subsumed as *dynamic*, all others as *lagging regions*. A breakdown of employment development for this two groups accentuate the divergence of regions of the same type and point again to the core role of towns within its region (Table 2). Of course, results from interaction between different regions (very often over growing distances) overlap the intra-regional aspects addressed here at the first sight.

Further data on the sectoral structure of employment allow to reject the assumption that structural patterns are the main reason for success or failure of regions (OECD 1996a, p. 56-59; Table 3). Moreover, the data on employment change for the previous period (1971-81) show that most regions would have been assigned to the same category, i.e. either dynamic or lagging regions in the previous decade. This suggests that factors for success of a region are very difficult to impact upon and seem to be inherent to the culture of local actors.

The statistical analysis presented so far can not give clues on the causes for rural economic dynamics. However, they allowed to reject the notion that "rural" always has to go with lagging economic development. Quite on the contrary, it is standard in the recent rural discussion to allude to the diversity of rural areas and its potential for successful economic strategies. A wide range of issues has to be analysed to provide an understanding of the specificity of working of labour markets in rural areas and its interrelations to other territories (Monk/Hodge 1995).

3. Developing new uses of rural areas

Having recalled the interconnectedness of rural issues with the economy and social development of other territories it appears appropriate to address the changes in rural areas in more detail. As with the notion of "rurality" in itself these have to be seen as result of a social construct where the dominant valuation patterns often are developed "at a distance" and originate from trends and influences in the wider social community. As mentioned before, the shift from an agricultural community to a diversified rural society is commonplace in most of industrialised countries and therefore fosters the search for diversification - in a broad meaning. Since some years the rural debate has focused on the basic fact that "rural areas offer a strikingly diverse combination of natural and man-made attributes. ... There is a growing demand for such amenities" and policies are looked for which focus "on harnessing the benefits stemming from these resources" (OECD 1996b, p. 3). Increasingly rural amenities are esteemed to play a decisive role in rural development. However, often their nature as public goods disfavours that market forces alone can ensure optimal provision or adequate reward for providing them to the public. On the contrary, the very nature of those goods calls for an appreciation of non-use, option and existence values and for maintenance of valuable assets for future generations (OECD 1998, p. 86). In many countries the assessment and "reconstruction" of rural amenities has become one of the central considerations in rural policies. A range of specific case studies in OECD countries like in Austria, Japan, France, Switzerland and Australia has concentrated on specific examples of rural amenities which are of national concern. Central among these are the role of different kinds of cultural landscapes, which have to be seen in conjunction with specific ways of land use and (traditional) forms of farm management (Austria-OECD 1998; Japan), their interrelation to environmental policies (France) and the potential use as tourist attractions (all three of them, including Switzerland) or the focus on the specific social processes in formulating forest policies with regard to amenities (Australia). This list might be continued by numerous additional examples revealing the prime concern of many countries for a revaluation of rural assets as a means for rural development.

With all these new assets mentioned it is not their existence which is really new, quite on the opposite they often *start* from long-lasting features of the natural and man-made environment. What is really new, is that much of the demand on those valuable assets has arisen from outside the region and thus valuation is dependent on interaction between different spaces. In some countries and for some economic fields the valuation of rural amenities is so important

and wide-spread that the on-going discussion is just a revival of the discourse and a broadening of economic activities already relevant since long time. For instance, tourism in Austria is concentrated with about 90% in the mountain areas which reflects the interest in these specific cultural landscapes. As one of the major economic sectors tourism (together with tourist-related services) accounts for 15% of GDP in Austria (OECD 1998, p. 10).

Much of these processes have been preceded by the rise of pluriactivity of farm households which in the beginning reflected the agricultural viewpoint of diversification towards other activities. However, much of that analysis (Arkleton Trust 1992, Dax et al 1995) addressed the combination of sustainable farm management and diversification of on-farm activities and off-farm activities. In particular, it lead to a search for new activities farmers participate in, including converting and developing land, buildings and farming machinery and services.

With the Rural Development Programmes for Objective 5b-areas the strategy for diversification of farmers received a considerable impetus in many rural areas of the European Union. However, the approach and primary objectives of those programmes differ widely between nations. Besides agricultural diversification they deal with activities like tourism, SME-support, crafts development, the establishment of technical aid resources and the factors to enable business creation in rural areas.

Yet, as most of the supporting analyses still cling to physical distance and centre-periphery type classifications of rural areas they don't achieve a marked step towards capturing the rural amenities as core values for their concepts. As "rural development is increasingly reliant upon demand conditions created outside its geographical boundaries" (Marsden 1998, p. 115) concepts incorporating new visions on the use of the specificity of the rural regions are requested.

The broadening awareness and conviction of the need to harness those "new" rural potential is acknowledged in the numerous examples provided by a host of rural development initiatives. Besides the settlement function, the use for recreational purposes and a prudent management of spatial and environmental resources (ÖROK 1996), the utilisation of the rural amenities incorporates activities as the revival of the physical and human cultural heritage (Leader magazine 1998). Moreover, it is alluded as an element to foster business development in those

areas. The latter includes the use of new information technologies, an issue which reveals best that the supply and demand of rural products and services has to be thought of increasingly as interrelated to economic patterns transgressing the physical boundaries of regions and the notion of physical interrelation (Bryden and Sproull 1997).

The on-going discussion on the changes in rural areas reflects the profound uncertainty on the future of industrial society, though economic growth has still remained the rule and prime objective in economies of industrialised countries. In this context rural areas seem more adapted to the required modes of flexibility and new assets for development are perceived. This leads Westholm (1997, p. 4) to ask: "Are rural areas more receptive to novelty?" He continues his argument: "Much of what is new stands in contrast to features which have been important in industrial society, such as knowledge-monopoly, waged labour, systems of rules, mass production, and exploitation of natural resources. A process of massive readjustment is under way. Perhaps, therefore, it may be natural to seek the requisite innovation and openness in environments which have never been wholly dominated by industrial modes of thought. Can the rural areas better than the urban meet the newly-emergent demands and profit from them?".

This revaluation of rural amenities bears the danger of lapsing into the trap of rural fetishism. In order to prevent this, a new reading of spatial development has to be promoted. This shall allow to cope with the number of problems rural areas are facing and which increasingly show similarities to those of other (urban) areas (Cloke 1997).

4. Conclusions: Participation and networking

As has been argued so far, the globalisation process has its very effect on the local/regional level. With tendencies of global standardisation of cultural paradigms (Lash/Urry 1998) the specificity of regional features does not lose its attractiveness. On the contrary, amenities characterised by scarcity and uniqueness gain increased interest (OECD 1994, p. 72). The bulk of rural amenities is mostly appreciated by people living outside these areas, and what gains importance for its provision, by local people as well.

Rural development will have to build on the integration of different sectoral policies and, in particular, on integration of the local population in the development process. This approach has become a recurrent statement in recent work on rural issues (like the need for a sustainable development). The driving forces underlying the differentiation of rural spaces are far from being harmonious and it seems doubtful if the repeatedly evoked aim of integration can be achieved. The different spatial development is strongly influenced by contesting regulatory systems in the regions but also increasingly by powers and authorities from outside. The debate on social exclusion extends to the rural scenery and addresses the significance and distinctiveness of rural problems (Shucksmith 1997). If development processes should lead to empowerment and inclusion a more imaginative regional development work and use of rural resources is required. Broadening participation in this process is a long-term issue and needs a secured understanding and democratic pattern. Such "a system of democratic experimentalism" is called upon, for instance, in the OECD-evaluation of local partnerships in Ireland (OECD 1996c) and suggests on-going activities "towards a new form of social inclusion".

The processes to be set off by such local activities have the task not to limit their approach to a restricted geographical rural area but to "maximise the synergies (for instance production-consumption linkages, value streams) between urban and rural places within a regional context, and be more realistic about the degree to which rural areas can capture economic and social value from rural products, services and resource use" (Marsden 1998, p. 116). "We need to give more attention to the combination of local *and* non-local processes which impact *together* upon rural areas" (Marsden 1998, p. 109), and to assess the emergence of new uses in rural space. As these reflect in many cases to a high degree demand from outside the rural areas the building of networks is one of the main prerequisites to prepare to those influences. Addressing innovation within this spatial setting is dependent on the endogenous assessment of strengths and weaknesses and self-evaluation of regulatory systems. The regional identification of its specificity and an imaginative handling of their rural amenity supply will be required to increase the positive examples of "dynamic" rural areas. As many regions "have suffered so long from deprivation of their own autonomous capacities for action" (Storper 1995, p. 215) it is not sufficient to transfer regional development concepts and programmes from one region to another. Viable regional development initiatives would have to explore new pathways for regions which aim at building action capacities. This complex

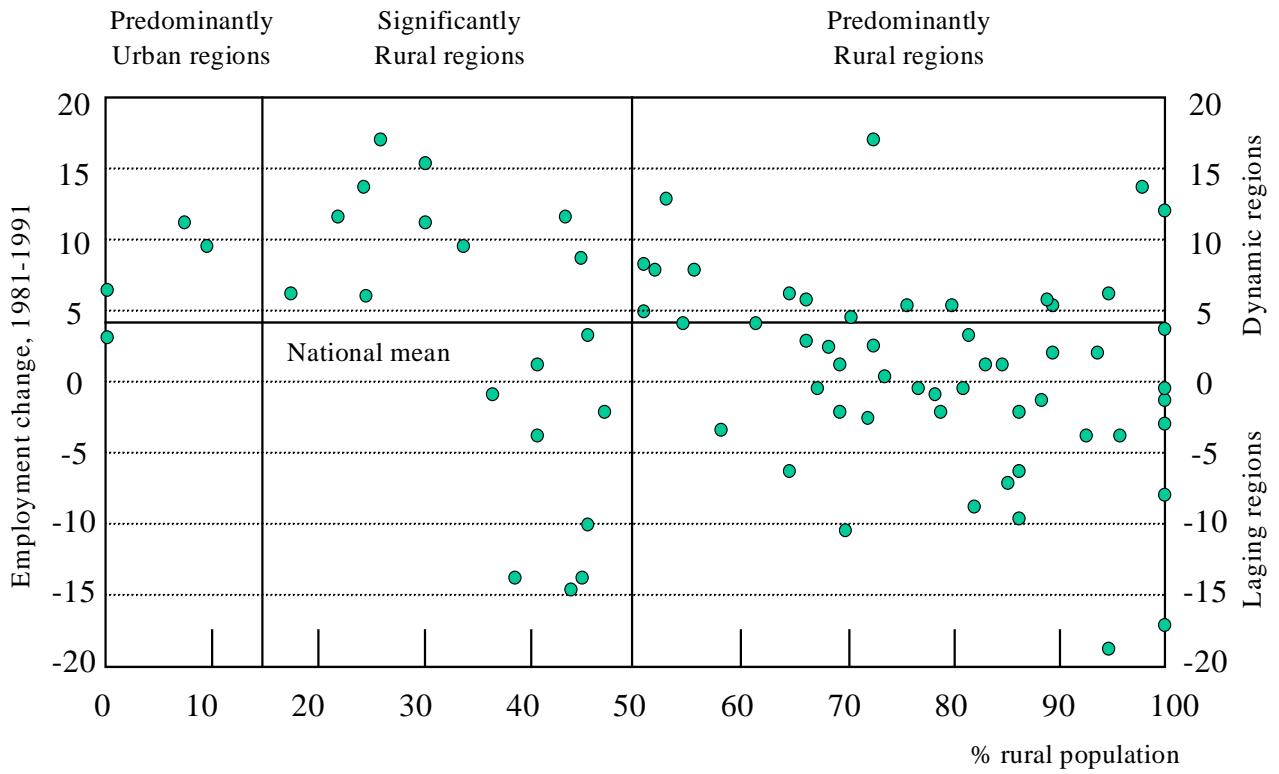
task can not be simply achieved by reiterating the magic formula of "integrated development" but by starting to address the whole scale of interrelations and to work in this dynamic process.

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Figure 1: Rurality and employment change in Austria, 1981 - 1991
Regions by share of rural population and employment change



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Table 1: Population and employment change in Austria, 1981 - 1991

	PR			SR			PU			S		
	rural	urban	total	rural	urban	total	rural ¹⁾	urban	total	rural	urban	total
<i>population</i> (Ö = 100)	31	9	40	12	27	39	0	21	21	42	58	100
population change 81-91 (in ‰ p.a.)	2,5	0,4	2,8	6,5	3,7	4,5	11,4	1,2	1,2	3,6	2,8	3,1
<i>Employment:</i> participation rates ²⁾			69			70			75			71
employment change 81-91 (in ‰ p.a.)	-1,8	7,9	1,7	4,0	7,8	7,2	-4,1	3,6	3,6	-0,4	6,2	4,4
employment change - male	-2,3	5,1	0,4	4,1	6,2	5,9	5,9	2,7	2,7	-0,8	4,8	3,3
- female	-1,1	12,2	3,4	3,8	10,3	9,1	-17,8	4,8	4,7	+0,0	8,4	6,0

1) due to small regions only a negligible part of urbanised regions is "rural" and data is of very restricted relevance.

2) participation rate: labour force as percent of population aged 15-64

Source: OECD Rural Indicators, own calculations

Table 2: *Employment change 1981-91 in dynamic and lagging regions (in per thousand p.a.)*

dynamic regions									
	male			female			total		
	rural	urban		rural	urban		rural	urban	
PR	6,0	9,1	7,3	5,7	11,5	8,0	5,9	10,0	7,6
SR	7,9	9,3	9,1	6,7	11,8	11,1	7,4	10,3	9,9
PU	5,9	5,8	5,8	-17,8	13,4	12,8	-4,1	8,9	8,7
<i>total dynamic regions</i>	<i>6,8</i>	<i>9,1</i>	<i>8,6</i>	<i>6,1</i>	<i>11,9</i>	<i>10,5</i>	<i>6,5</i>	<i>10,2</i>	<i>9,3</i>
lagging regions									
PR	-5,8	2,7	-2,9	-3,8	12,6	1,4	-4,9	6,6	-1,1
SR	-5,3	-10,2	-8,9	-3,5	0,7	-0,6	-4,6	-6,3	-5,8
PU	-	2,4	2,4	-	4,2	4,2	-	3,2	3,2
<i>total lagging regions</i>	<i>-5,7</i>	<i>0,6</i>	<i>-1,4</i>	<i>-3,8</i>	<i>5,3</i>	<i>2,5</i>	<i>-4,9</i>	<i>2,5</i>	<i>0,2</i>
Austria	-0,8	4,8	3,3	0,0	8,4	6,0	-0,4	6,2	4,4

Source: OECD Rural Indicators, own calculations

Table 3: Sectoral structure in dynamic and lagging regions, predominantly rural (PR) areas of Austria (1991)

	male			female			total		
dynamic regions	primary	secondary	tertiary	primary	secondary	tertiary	primary	secondary	tertiary
rural part	13,1	47,5	39,4	12,7	21,1	66,2	12,9	36,8	50,3
urban part	2,4	52,9	47,7	2,5	24,7	72,8	2,4	42,1	55,4
lagging regions									
rural part	20,5	44,8	35,0	25,2	21,2	53,6	22,5	34,6	42,9
urban part	2,5	50,2	47,3	2,8	25,6	71,6	2,6	40,2	57,2

Source: OECD Rural Indicators, own calculations