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The re-coding of rural development rationality: tracing EU Governmentality and Europeanisation at the local level

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of EU rural development policies and imaginaries have entailed that rural areas in Europe and their residents have been assigned specific roles concerning local responsibility and identities when it comes to attaining positive territorial development. The paper approaches the rationality of rural development as community-led through a lens of Governmentality and Europeanisation to explore how the local alignment of actions and government rationalities are linked. The presented research outlines rural development discourse first in EU rural policy and then at the local level through an analysis of text data published by a local development association. The paper traces the linkage between the two institutional levels and establishes how the success of rural development is not only to constitute issues and themes in a particular form but also to have these embedded locally.

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Introduction

Rural development in Europe has moved from ‘top-down, exogenous models to wholly endogenous approaches and now increasingly locally-led approaches characterised by mixed endogenous-exogenous dynamics’ (Bosworth et al. 2016, 427; see also Bock 2016). Within these changing planning rationalities concerned with supporting rural regions, the role of residents and communities has changed accordingly from being positioned as relying on state action in the first model, then the ‘main responsible’ for success, to in the latest appearing as ‘just’ another actor in networks consisting of other groups like consultants, enterprises or public institutions. These developments can be placed within a wider discussion in planning studies to identify the appropriate scale for policy action and address socio-spatial issues through reconfiguration of decision-making arrangements (Servillo 2019, 1). Examples of these debates are the appearance of the ‘local level’ as a new scale for implementing state policy (Cf. Swyngedouw 2004) or the re-scaling of the state (Brenner 2004). These new developments are emblemized by new actors constellations, public-private partnerships and the promotion of ‘active

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citizenship politics and rationality' aiming to transfer responsibilities from the public sector to individuals and communities (Kumpulainen 2016, 58; see also Rose 2000).

An example of this is emblemized by the EU's LEADER programme, which emphasizes bottom-up development through community empowerment in 'local action groups' (Cf. e.g. Scott 2004; Lapping and Scott 2019). The policy discourse propagating this development method has increasingly been promoted since the 1990s (Scott 2004, 49) with endogenous, territorial and integrated local approaches institutionalized in the EU rural development policy (Scott, Gallent, and Gkartzios 2019b, 13). Participation of the local level actors is meant to foster community-based strategies (Lapping and Scott 2019, 35) and decisions made by actors familiar with local needs (Pollerman 2014). While these ideas have merits, especially when it comes to propagating local participation, the standardization of policies and programmes has also contributed to the imagination of a 'European Countryside' as a specific *discursive* space encompassing certain particular ways of approaching rural development (Woods 2013, 100).

Halfacree's (1993) highlights the importance of this kind of 'social representations' in defining rural areas, i.e. theorizing rural space as both a tangible space and a non-tangible space. This is especially evident in the process of creating an EU level policy for rural development as it entailed the 're-invention' of rural areas from a vague, national-specific term to a formalized representation (Pospěch 2014, 98; see also Gray 2000). Social representations like these functions as 'spatial imaginaries': common understandings that make possible common practices encompassing a widely shared sense of legitimacy (Jaffe 2012, 676). Furthermore they contain cultural and ideological models, specifying how things are going, how they should go (Suitner 2015, 15) and 'advocate what the future may look like, or what people should do to shape it' (Watkins 2015, 510). An example of this, is how earlier rural society existed within a space of agriculture, but with the shift in policy imaginaries, agriculture is now placed within rural space and society (Gray 2000, 42). Pospěch (2014, 97) proposes these social representations inherent in policy developments have 're-coded' rural areas and endowed them with new values and ideological functions. As both Jones (1995) and Pospěch (2014) write, 'social representations' defining rural areas are a mix of lay, academic and policy discourses, and the relationship between these is complex and interactive. Policy (developments) should not be understood as 'texts' travelling from those in power down to local levels unhindered, but as a complex process wherein values, rationalities and ideas are constructed as common sense, and which then acquire particular response locally (Singh, Thomas, and Harris 2013, 466). As these new imaginaries present European rural areas and their future developments in a new light, and as the actions implicit in these are to be taken locally, the anchoring of these discourses locally is crucial for policy success. As Richardson (2000, 55) points out, this brings forward the question of how (or if) policy discourses links spatial (planning) imaginaries and local spaces. This focus on discourses and social representation has been described as a 'cultural turn' in rural sociology (Cloke 1997). This has sparked many noteworthy studies linking rural planning with specific ideas about 'what is rural', for example by analysing national debates on rural policies (Cruickshank, Lysgård, and Magnussen 2009), how public media portray rural as dying out (Christmann 2016) or how rural areas marginalized and their inhabitants 'blamed' for the lack of action (see e.g. Eriksson 2010; Plüschke-Altolf 2017). Other studies show how official development strategies might

overlook local identities, thus causing clashes between local experiences and external perceptions of a place or region (Cf. e.g. Willett 2009; Lee et al. 2005). By studying the entanglement of policy and local discourses the paper aims to contribute to the literature on rural development in Europe by strengthening the understanding regarding if or how policy and local development discourses are linked.

As rural development policy has become a question of instigating local ‘self-help movements’, i.e. ‘changing things’ (e.g. rural decline) by ‘changing people’ (Cheshire 2006, 105). At both the EU and national levels rural development programmes have been initiated to ‘educate’ individuals and communities with the entrepreneurial qualities and spirit necessary for instigating ‘self-help’ activities (See e.g. Christmann 2014b; Cheshire 2006). One tool for achieving this is through encouraging local village associations that reframes local residents as members of active communities and as responsible for their own welfare (Kumpulainen 2017, 612). For this paper, the point of departure is this initiation of a new policy discourse, wherein rural development mainly builds on local-led community action. It is then asked whether this governmentality is embedded in local communities (here represented by a local development organization) through analysing the specific ways in which the local discourses constitute issues and themes in a particular form within the specific local level social collective. The paper hence aims to understand if and how rural development policy is ‘enacted’ locally, meaning how it is ‘interpreted and translated by diverse policy actors as they engage in making meaning of official texts for specific contexts and practices’ (Singh, Thomas, and Harris 2013, 466). The research questions driving this paper is the attempt to outline firstly, what encapsulates local rural development in the new policy discourse and rationality as it emerged around the 1990s on the EU level concerning what encapsulates ‘successful’ rural development, and secondly, to what extent can we assert any alignment of policy rationalities with local discourses.

This paper is structured as follows: The following section (part 2) situates the study within a conceptual framework by drawing on governmentality and Europeanisation approaches. The ‘methodology’ section in part 3 presents the case study, data and data analysis. Part 4 outlines the EU level policy development. Part 5 presents the analysis of local community publications wherein the policy discourse is shown to be embedded locally. Finally, the implications for rural development policy will be discussed, followed by concluding remarks.

Conceptual framework: governmentality and the Europeanisation of rural areas

The re-coding of rural development locally as criteria for successful policy

Both Cheshire (2006) and Kumpulainen (2016; 2017) propose the Foucauldian concept of ‘governmentality’ (Foucault 1991; see also Lemke 2001) to approach the link between policy rationality and local level processes of local residents becoming ‘actors’ in rural development. In these ‘practices of governing’, discourses (for example, related to how to behave, what to do, etc.) coordinates social behaviour (Angermuller 2018, 417) through providing specific subject positions (for example: ‘residents as responsible’) and systems of common meanings (for example reasons for rural decline), which together bring about social practices (Keller 2013). Research on developing new

successful rural development processes likewise links the identification of a need to change behaviour, perceptions or attitudes among local actors and the local acceptance of a new local discourses (i.e. ideas, narratives, imaginaries) (Christmann 2016, 265; Neumeier 2012, 57; Cf. also Neumeier 2017). The notion of governmentality highlights the aim of rural development *policy* as explicitly needing the development of a ‘new’ mentality or local discourse wherein new ideas and positive outlook can gain traction and instigate local residents to take up new actions (Christmann (2016)). As Servillo (2019), 5) outlines, community-led local development is thereby not just a ‘local project’ by the ‘community’, but a process that bind policy agenda, actors (public institutions, local communities, businesses etc.) and territories together into one development vision specifying what actions are needed.

‘Governmentality’ as link between state and local residents

A governmentality perspective means (re)focusing on the effects of practices of government at the ‘mundane, local level of everyday life’ (Cheshire 2006, 24) wherein specific technologies of governing (e.g. rural development programmes) link micro and local social practices in rural areas with the organization of state power (Cheshire 2006, 5ff). In short, the perspective of governmentality brings into focus the connection between state rationality, i.e. the underlying ideas regarding how the population should be governed and what role and responsibility the population should take upon themselves. This perspective is not limited to analysing state-activities but is instead interested in considering how non-state actors become closely involved in modern forms of rule. The emphasis on civil society actors in rural development has brought forward a new rationality of active citizenship politics, with the ‘objective to make individual citizens more responsible for their own welfare by reconstructing them as members of active communities’ (Kumpulainen 2016, 58) which encompasses the right kind of behaviour or attitude, e.g. active, responsible, entrepreneurial, etc.

In rural development, this means that policy goals are achieved ‘by convincing rural people of the worth of government policy but, rather, of ‘developing (govern)mentalties’ in rural dwellers that lead them to embrace the political objectives of late capitalist societies as their own’ (Martin 1997 as cited in Cheshire 2006, 61, emphasis in original). Thereby essential criteria for success is that residents in rural areas transform themselves from being solely ‘passive tax-paying citizens’ to active ‘entrepreneurial actors’ who take responsibility for the local area and its development (e.g. in the sense of starting up local initiatives). As Kumpulainen outlines it: ‘rationality means ways of reasoning that define the norms and objectives for rural community development; in other words, what a good village is and how communities should develop themselves’ (2016, 58).

The ‘Europeanisation’ of rural areas

With the promotion of a common European approach to rural development being a prioritized aspect of the EU, one aspect of the implementation of LEADER (and other programmes) is how EU’ropean norms contribute to restructuring the way public policy action takes place in the member states (Woods 2013, 100). This process of policy alignment has been termed ‘Europeanisation’, referring to the reorientation or

reshaping of national politics and governance to align with EU policy discourses (Bache et al. 2011, 5; See also Marshall 2005; Hamedinger and Wolffhardt 2010). In this multi-level and multi-actor arrangement, the effectiveness and success of spatial planning policy become dependent on both the consensus about objectives and principles as well as the compatibility of strategic choices and the specific spatial context in question (Luukkonen 2011, 253). Within current rural development schemes, the impetus given for local communities to engage actively is primarily by making project funding available. As Kumpulainen writes:

Since most of the funding of the local village development projects comes from the European Union's LEADER programme, it means that the projects have to be in accordance with the rural policy objectives. Development work in rural communities is [thus] never purely self-motivated or arising only from local needs, but it is controlled by the prevailing rationalities, norms and objectives of the rural policy (2017, 616).

Ray (1997) already noticed this process when studying the implementation of LEADER in the region of Western Isles, Skye and Lochalsh (Scotland, UK). It here not only provided a catalyst to initiate the founding of a local development association but also 'influenced the nature of the initiatives: the definition of their boundaries, types of organization and styles of projects.' (Ray 1997, 358). Gray (2000) uses the term 'new local policy space' to describe this development of territorial identity interlinked with policy. While these at first might be initiated for funding eligibility, the local community might end up constructing meaningful places imbued with a distinctive local cultural identity (Gray 2000, 47). It is thus clear that current rural development entails local processes of Europeanisation that works 'implicitly as a discursive process [and] which affects the practices of regional and local development' (Luukkonen 2011, 254).

Research design

To illustrate this empirically, the paper draws on data from the European research project RurAction, which investigated socially innovative initiatives in rural regions. Specifically, it builds on research of spatial transformation processes by way of discourse analysis (see Christmann 2014a) in a local development association in the Austrian region of Mühlviertel. Here a distinctly coherent local discourse was encountered while conducting field visits and interviews (Conducted in the Autumn of 2018). While the research did not explicitly focus on the role of Europeanisation initially, it became apparent that how rural development was framed locally indicated a rationality close to the principles of European policy. For example, how instead of 'silo thinking' (i.e. only thinking development separately within specific sectors) the local communities chose to pursue a new path of 'regional cooperation' and 'holistic, networked and sustainable regional development' (Almpost 04: 2004). The association consists of 10 municipalities which collaborate as a Local action group to implement LEADER. From being an area in decline in the 1990s, a reoccurring storyline was how a local feeling of resignation and negative development was 'turned around' due to a growing local initiative and responsibility among the residents. This hypothesis was strengthened through interviews that highlighted the LEADER programmes crucial role in initiating the local action group in 1993 (similarly to the study by Ray 1997).

Data collection and analysis

The empirical data used to analyse local processes of Europeanisation is the community magazine or 'newsletter' *Almpost*. It is published 2–4 times annually by the local development association with the local community as the target audience. The local development association at the centre of this research forms the link between the policy level discourse and the local community and thereby functions as a 'local-level policy actor', which, according to Singha, Thomasa and Harris, can be investigated to 'illuminate the process of policy interpretation and translation in processes of policy enactment' as they 'mediate the processes of policy enactment, by explicating and elaborating the condensed code of official policy texts' (2013, 468). The analysis covers the at the time of research complete publication period of the magazine, i.e. the period 2003–2019 (N=56). From the full sample of articles (N=200), the focus was primarily on the editorials written by the chairman of the association. The data is in German originally, with all quotations translated. The findings were cross-checked with secondary sources, including strategic documents, press articles, together with interview transcriptions and field notes that had been carried out in the broader research project. While, as noted, interviews as well as field visits were carried out in the initial stages of the research, the analysis presented builds mainly on text data, this due to two reasons: Firstly, it was decided to use data which covered a longer time span, and thus ensured an analysis that could take account for any (possible) changes in the discourse over time. Secondly, the research interest was not the position of individual actors (which could be analysed from e.g. interviews), but data which could showcase the 'legitimate' or 'public' discourse at the local level. Furthermore, as intra-community communication (see Christmann 2016) and 'media' (see Borén and Schmitt 2021) has been shown to play a central part in learning processes and place-based development the texts chosen serve as an appropriate data corpus to grasp common understandings and local identities.

The analytical approach builds on the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse, which is especially concerned with how discourses constitutes themes in a particular form of interpretation and offers normative orientations for action (Keller 2013). The aim of the analysis was to identify 'interpretive schemes' or 'model practices' which act as guidelines for how the local residents and community should behave as actors in rural development. For the data analysis, the texts from the community magazine were imported into MAXQDA software and analysed using the procedures of qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2014), in which recurring categories and themes were identified and coded. Through this process, topical clusters appeared, for example, statements about the role of government programmes (such as LEADER), self-description of the community and rural regions (e.g. related to responsibility), or the development of the region (e.g. how it used to be, current developments, priorities for action, etc.).

The text analysis of the community magazine is held up against a meta-analysis of academic literature, which outlines the policy development (or at least the contemporary zeitgeist) as it appeared on the EU level around the 1990s. This is, for example, exemplified in the European Commission communication *The future of rural society* (EC 1988), the *European Conference on Rural Development in Cork* (IR), 1996, and the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (EC 1999). This period saw the beginning of a series of changes taking place wherein regional and local governments had to 'adapt

their behaviour and to change their relationship with other levels of government, vertically and horizontally' (Goldsmith 1993, 683) and is therefore deemed an appropriate point of departure for the analysis. While some studies on the development of new practices make distinctions between innovations as only 'rhetorically' embedded or their manifestation as actions (Cf. Hutter et al. 2018; Noack and Federwisch 2019), within the limitations of this paper, it has been chosen to focus on the discourse as it appears as 'rhetoric' rather than attempt to include any 'in practice' implications.

The re-coding of rural development within European policy

The following part outlines the changes in the EU rural policy rationality. The focus is especially on the changing imaginaries or representations of rural areas along with the new role of rural residents and communities in reaching policy goals. Through these policy developments, rural development has developed into a mixture of informal activism and formalized local planning processes propagated by a combination of EU and State sponsored programmes and projects (Gallent and Gkartzios 2019) with active residents playing an increasing role in maintaining vital services (Bock 2019, 130). The guiding principles (e.g. as institutionalized in LEADER) are supposed to put emphasis on community-based strategies through the participation of local-level actors. A strength of this approach is that the decisions should be made by actors who are familiar with local needs (Pollerman 2014). The policies thereby present a territorial approach through the use of endogenous resources (Cañete, Navarro, and Cejudo 2018, 2). It is structured around five nodes wherein the *discursive* construction of rural areas saw major changes in the development of a new EU policy rationality: 1) The change from agriculture towards heterogeneity and diversification of activities, 2) the promotion of holistic and sustainable development, 3) the local communities as responsible for rural development, and 4) rural areas and their development as 'networked' between different actors, and lastly 5) the interlinkage of urban and rural areas.

Diversification of activities

The publication by the European Commission *The Future of Rural Society* (EC 1988) presents rural areas as incorporating a heterogeneity of activities and spaces, such as small industry, leisure activities, and environmental preservation (Gray 2000, 43). These developments are in the document established as founded on an endogenous approach to rural development, which combines EU funding with local resources and local agents (Gray 2000, 44). With this, the role of the agricultural sector as emblematic for rural areas was marginalized, and the former strategy of encouraging rural development through supporting agriculture was replaced with an approach providing financial assistance also for infrastructural, educational, social and economic development to create a heterogeneity of activities and spaces in rural areas (Gray 2000, 44).

Holistic, sustainable development

With the shift in policy discourse away from the earlier sectorial framework towards the integration of different sectoral dimensions, a parallel shift took place towards 'a holistic

approach' of balancing the economic, social and environmental concerns (Scott 2008, 9). Scott (2008) highlights an emphasis on the importance of territorial identity for local governance and rural communities. This broadening of policy aims simultaneously entails the expansion of policy targets, i.e. the inclusion of larger parts of the rural population, which, albeit connected to the agriculture sector, also resides in rural areas.

Local community responsibility

Emblematic for *The Future of Rural Society* publication is the emphasis on endogenous rural development and rural communities as 'self-supporting' (Gray 2000, 44). According to Gray (2000), the LEADER initiative was based on the image of rurality presented in *The Future of Rural Society*, wherein 'each rural locality has particular development problems specific to their activities and available endogenous resources - natural and cultural' (Gray 2000, 46). The LEADER principles emphasize an area-based approach of looking 'for the most effective use of local resources and assets in order to enhance the regional identity of the rural residents' (Dax and Oedl-Wieser 2016, 31) and to develop and to use the capacities of local residents and groups within their communities.

Internal and external partnerships

The new policy discourse emphasized the role of partnerships in rural development. In the European Conference on Rural Development (Which took place in Cork 1996), this it was linked to ideals of community participation and 'bottom-up' development (Edwards et al. 2001, 294). This new vision for rural development was presented to be implemented through 'partnership and cooperation between all levels concerned (local, regional, national and European).' (EU Commission 1996 as quoted in Ray 2000, 164). It reinforced the role of partnerships and linked it as a policy approach to rural development, which became constituted as a 'multi-level and multi-scalar activity concerned with institutional integration' (Scott 2008, 9).

Urban-rural integration

The partnership narrative was furthermore extended to the development of a 'new urban-rural relationship' (Scott 2008, 9). Richardson (2000) points to how the *European Spatial Development Perspective* (introduced in 1994 and formally adopted in 1999) further delinked rural areas and agriculture. This document called for an end of the dualism between city and countryside, and instead to strengthen the partnership and connections between urban and rural areas and thereby provide 'integrated approaches' to regional problems (Scott 2006, 814). Rural development here became defined by rural areas being located within a balanced and 'polycentric city system', with the city and countryside seen as one functional spatial entity defined by interdependencies (Richardson 2000, 62).

Local discourses of rural development

There is a saying: It is not how the wind blows, but how we set the sails that counts.

(Almpost 02: 2003)

The policy development on the European level introduced a new form of rural imaginary connected less with agriculture and production but instead expanded the imaginary of rural territories as a diverse space, both when it comes to economic, geographical and to social issues. As outlined by Hadjimichalis, the shift in imagination, had ‘political, economic and social significance as the assumptions, pre-images and stereotypes on which it is based predetermine decisions and strategies’ (2003, 104). The following part presents the analysis of the local discourse as it appears in the community publications. As the above quote hints at, the overall structure of the local discourse is largely positive. While threats or challenges are outlined (e.g. outmigration, lack of economic power, etc.), the discourse is defined by a positive outlook, at least when it comes to the possibility for the local community to take action.

Heterogeneity and diversification of activities

Agriculture + trade + commerce + local supply + crafts + tourism = strong regional economy.
A networked regional economy brings added value, new businesses, enterprises and thus quality of life.

(Almpost 20: 2008)

As the above quote expresses, locally, the economic development rationality pivots around diversification and towards networks, added value, and ‘quality of life’. While it is clear that agriculture, and especially the farmers, locally play a central part in the geography and as a actor-group, the promotion of diversification of economic activities is continuously present in the local discourse. With the aim to ‘strengthen the local supply and to secure and create jobs’ (Almpost 10: 2005), fields of activities are presented pluralistically; e.g. the need for ‘product and service innovations in the areas of construction/living, health, tourism, culture, wood and handicraft’, as well as regional offers of education and qualification. This proposal for diversification can be seen to be stemming both from the self-described inefficiency of the local geography (e.g. soil quality and hilly landscape), which makes large scale industrial farming difficult, but also from the general changes which the agricultural and forestry sectors experienced around the turn of the last millennia. This entails locally that both farmers have seen themselves changing profession, and that young people look for different fields of work, leading to many residents commuting to the provincial capital Linz (Almpost 02: 2003).

Agriculture does play a pivotal part in one of the flagship projects of the region, the Mühlviertel Bioregion (<https://www.bioregion-muehlviertel.at/>) where the association is also participating. However, the Bioregion is not only seen as an agriculture-focused project but rather incorporates other sectors, for example, ‘nature-oriented tourism’ (Almpost 47: 2016). A similar approach is inherent in the project ‘Eco-Economic Region Mühlviertler Alm’, which aims to link ‘economy, agriculture, trade, industry and consumers, cultural and social initiatives in partnership’ (Almpost 10: 2005). Furthermore, the rationality of economic diversification is presented explicitly in one editorial, where the manager of the local development office gives examples of key projects in the local development. Mentioned here are e.g. a tourist trail riding project, a textile workshop and a fairytale park - as well as cooperative projects in the agricultural sector (Almpost 09: 2005).

Holistic and sustainable development as territorial identity

My personal conviction is that a rural region like the Mühlviertler Alm can only survive by consistently focusing on holistic, networked and sustainable development.

(Almpost 04: 2004)

With agriculture losing its symbolic and economic high status, the diversification of activities is furthermore mirrored by a diversification of the fields of actions. From purely economic goals, rural development becomes encompassed within a frame of social development (e.g. networks, social relationships, community focus, local well-being, etc.). As also seen in the previous part, the quote above similarly highlights the integration of different topics into rural development, which becomes to include a multitude of 'labels' or 'values' more focused on the development of a specific local 'culture of rural development' (as opposed to specific aims like economic or population growth). An example of this coalescence of development, rather than sectorial deviations, can be seen in the theme of 'tourism', which in the local discourse becomes a 'community concern'. As a result of this, a prerequisite for development becomes the involvement of different stakeholders (i.e. public actors, community, civil society, businesses, etc.). For example, when laying out why the trail riding project has been successful, the answer is put down to a process where 'Sustainable partnerships with the communities, farmers, forest owners, hunters and all those involved have grown' (Almpost 14: 2006). Tourism is thus presented as something that 'serves the entire region and increases the atmosphere and value of our Mühlviertler Alm' (Almpost 52: 2017).

The local construction of territorial identity is centred around narratives on 'togetherness'. While ascriptions to the residents (E.g. diligence, craftsmanship, innovative, friendly) and area (E.g. scenic beauty, special soul, economically weak, peripheral) are present, the local identity is primarily constructed around a community which work together for a better future for the region. The issue of partnership-focused and networked rural development is locally embedded within a narrative frame of 'holistic, sustainable development', as, e.g. seen in the quotes beginning this part. Labelled locally as the 'living region' of Mühlviertler Alm, this approach encompasses 'the connection and interaction of tourism, trade, agriculture, social affairs and the basic need for quality of life' (Almpost 09: 2005) and aims to strengthen 'the social fabric, agriculture, tourism, education, culture, energy supply and an economy that offers people local jobs.' (Almpost 43: 2014). The diversification of economic development here becomes embedded within a discourse of holistic development.

Local community responsibility

Our regional future lies only in joint efforts. I must say again and again that we need a 'self-responsibility movement' of all the inhabitants of the region [...]

(Almpost 40: 2014)

How 'self-help' discourses appear embedded locally in rural communities are prominent in the data, as emblemized in the above quote. As mentioned earlier, this 'movement' had its beginning in the 1990s. In the data, the relocation of responsibility from the state to local communities is explicitly outlined. For example, in the earliest copy of the publication in 2003, the initiation of the local development association is described as follows:

We must not wait and hope that someone else will do the work for us. [...] Only when we can't go any further on our own [will we] demand support from the regional authorities.
(Almpost 01: 2003)

While the responsibility of the regional authorities becomes apparent in case of lacking local capacities, this statement outlines how the local rationality is constructed with entrepreneurial actions and 'self-responsibility' at the fore. Furthermore, while 'traditional' policy work implies the formulation of local issues seen from the government, as inherent in the policy discourse, in the local discourse, the community also becomes integrated into the work of 'problem definition'.

Over time, this distinct division of responsibility has been challenged. Locally two streams are identifiable: Firstly, we can find explicitly mentioned a call for a more comprehensive policy strategy for regional and state action, based on 'sustainability, social justice and the common good.' (Almpost 28: 2010). Secondly, although not overly present in the data collection, there are apparent issues regarding the capacity of the community to take on local development alone. Locally, there is a continuous request for further *financial* support, for example, for projects like supporting start-ups, development processes, economic impulses or education schemes: '*For such an overall regional development we need corresponding additional financial resources.*' (Almpost 20: 2008).

Internal and external partnerships

Here in the Mühlviertler Alm it is and should be different - we do not build fences and walls, but bridges and relationships!

(Almpost 30: 2011)

With partnerships being an integrated part of policy discourses, it follows that this rationality is also locally present. As seen in the above quotes, a central part of the local discourse is the continuous reiteration of partnerships as an integrated rationality. Locally, partnerships are related to either internal or external collaboration.

Internal partnerships are formulated as purely 'local', meaning the close internal cooperation of communities within the association, local business or civil society actors, and specific social groups (e.g. 'young people' or farmers). The partnership approach is also linked to singular persons or communities lacking the capacity (e.g. financial) to act alone in the region's development. Therefore, only synergies and cooperations are presented as the solution for rural development. While the local discourse appears as embracing this rationality, it is also outlined as a view shared with actors at the provincial state level. One specific groups mentioned are the 'landowners'. They are recurrently highlighted as a group 'required' to be flexible to make local development possible. For example, while voluntarism is a foundation for local development, this does not only entail volunteering time but, in this case, also private land. As explicit in the following quote, 'responsibility' for local development entails that this group become 'partners' in the project: 'Crucial for successful tourism in the region is the understanding and willingness of landowners to allow the use of trails' (Almpost 56: 2019). While this paper does not per se want to instigate any discussion on the 'fairness' of the imposition of partnerships, it is instead the point that specific development imaginaries can propagate various implicit charges on different groups.

The second type of partnership is ‘external cooperation’, without which the local development is presented as impossible. Examples given are supportive politicians and functionaries in the provincial government (E.g. chambers of commerce, agriculture and forest management department), the regional development office in Mühlviertel, and consultants supporting the local communities. The ‘media’ is also thanked, because they report about the local work ‘in a positive and objective way.’ (Almpost 01: 2003). While giving thanks publicly to partners is not a surprising feature, it is included as it provides an overview of the actors constituting the local development framework. While there can be no doubt that the internal partnerships remain the central focus, the process of local development appears as a networked scheme, deeply intertwined with regional actors.

Urban-rural integration: the country and city alliance

We need each other, and it is obvious that we should get to know each other better and cooperate with each other.

(Almpost 03: 2003)

The rationality of urban-rural integration, and more specifically, an expiration of separate paths for development, appears locally, for example in the ‘central area campaign’, which was incorporated in the local Leader strategy for the period 2000–2006. While this project focused mainly on developing attention in the provincial capital of Linz to generate tourism, the idea of an ‘alliance’ between countryside and city also includes a clear narrative of territorial integration. While policy discourses position rural areas as secondary to (or relying on) urban areas, as seen in the above quote, the relationship is locally presented as ‘equal’. For example, the question of integrated regional development is discussed more nuanced in the local discourse; where rural areas are not only promoted for landscape quality, tourism and leisure activities, but also for economic development opportunities:

By bringing urban and rural areas closer together, completely new and promising developments for the future are emerging. [...] We should succeed in winning over companies from the greater Linz area to examine and implement company participations based in the Mühlviertler Alm.

(Almpost 03: 2003)

This in mind, the urban-rural connection and the possibilities for development also present themselves as a threat to rural areas. This is, for example, expressed as ‘The economically vibrant and financially strong central area exerts a powerful pull effect on our region.’ (Almpost 20: 2008) due to new shopping facilities in Linz and its outskirts. Likewise, job opportunities, educational institutions, better access to medical facilities are featured in the local discourse as threats. The urban-rural relation thus appear ‘Janus-faced’, i.e. it does not only align with the positive development proposals in European policy discourses but also includes urban-rural competition.

Conclusion: implications for rural development policy

The focus of this paper was twofold: Firstly, to outline the connection between the recorded EU policy, governmentality, Europeanisation and community-led local

development. Secondly, to explore this empirically through holding a local discourse up against the rationality inherent in European policies as they appeared from the beginning of the 1990s. Within the limitations of this paper, the spread of EU policy rationality to the local level appears clear, indicating that local processes of Europeanisation take place. Furthermore, the embrace of the policy discourse at the local community level should, first of all, signify a success for EU policymaking as a tool for fostering development in rural areas. With this is meant that linkages can successfully be established between EU institutions and the local communities. If the policy rationality of overcoming 'local decline' aims to instigate change in local imaginaries towards specific actions needed for a positive future development for rural areas, this can be affirmed. Although contestations also occur, the alignment of discourses furthermore verifies local acceptance of the policy solutions offered. The following part will attempt to discuss what implications thereby arise when considering rural development policy and design.

While the anchoring of EU policy discourse locally should be seen as a success, it does raise the question of local agency in defining problems. If the transfer of responsibility from the state to individuals and communities does not per se entail any freer choice regarding how to organize local development, but rather that 'subjects adopt the rationality of governing as their own 'project' – as norms, values and truths in relation to which they conduct their lives' (Kumpulainen 2017, 615), we must also be cautious regarding providing adequate room for manoeuvre for local communities towards steering local action. For example, between more traditional agriculture centred imaginaries and multi-functionalists and recreational interests (Pospěch 2014, 98). Similarly, as Noack and Federwisch (2019) present in their study on the transfer of ideas from urban to rural areas, these processes might entail conflicts between actors groups with different cultural backgrounds. Thus, although the capacity to 'adopt' or align itself to extra-local discourse among rural communities is a worthwhile aptitude to possess (e.g. for acquiring funding), this must encourage reflections on the implications for policies engaged with promoting rural development through local-led approaches.

Recent research on achieving successful neo-endogenous development stresses the extensive participation of the local population and respect for the values these express as 'Identifying one's own development objectives is closely linked to the way of representing one's own territory and to the internal and external elements that are identified as resources and opportunities' (De Rubertis 2020: ix; see also Esparcia and Abbasi 2020). Some commentators have, however, criticized rural development policies and more specifically LEADER for being 'a change more of style than of substance' (Navarro, Woods, and Cejudo 2016, 16), and point to how influential local actors with high social capital benefit the most from neo-endogenous approaches, while those areas without these are challenged with obtaining funds (Cañete, Navarro, and Cejudo 2018, 4). If the creation of 'new policy spaces' implies the construction of 'meaningful' places locally, issues such a 'local responsibility' might be imprinted as 'moral responsibility' and framed within unquestioned narratives constructed by influential actors (rather than the community) and interlinked with belonging to the community (Kumpulainen 2017, 617). In this line of thought, the 'fairness' of the imposition of policy imaginaries on local residents can be discussed. To give an example, while voluntarism often

stands as the foundation for much local development, this does not only revolve around volunteering time but, in some cases, also private space. For example, as shown in the presented case, landowners can be asked to provide access to their private land for hiking trails.

Furthermore, if a key part of contemporary governance systems is the development of locally designed strategies that must satisfy a number of European and national criteria, it raises the question if the agenda is set locally or imposed top-down. In the case study, it was clear that while ‘idea generation’ can be embraced as a community responsibility, the financial capacity and support to implement these projects were portrayed as lacking. While the call for further resources is not uncommon anywhere where there is a reliance on external support, if policies strive to instigate local development as locally-led, it must be reviewed if there is an inadequate fit between ‘local ideas’ and ‘project possibilities’. Some studies point to the design of locally designed strategies entailing a degree of ‘game-playing’ among local actors to cover both the application for funds and suggested strategic delivery (Bosworth et al. 2020, 28) or ‘lip service’ to strategic planning requirements (Dąbrowski 2012, 738). Local development strategies might thus become more akin to ‘wish lists’ than any development of visions for local development.

While local-led development schemes are designed around a rationality of defining and solving local needs locally, there is a need for policy actors at various levels to contemplate the implications of rural development policy imaginaries. Firstly, it should be considered if particular groups become marginalized or, through policy implementation, will have to bear burdens unfairly or unquestioned. Secondly, it should be reevaluated if policies push rural communities too firmly in a specific direction when instigating local development ideas and practices by leaving too little space for local agenda-setting. Finally, although the scope of this paper did not make it possible to ‘test’ to what extent the relationship between top-down spatial imaginaries and local discourses has consequences for the community *actions* (e.g. project design and development), this question should be pursued in future studies.

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Appendix

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