



Rostocker Institut für Sozialforschung
und gesellschaftliche Praxis e.V.

Distrust as a regional barrier to civic participation

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Our Project...

- peripheral area, North-Eastern-Germany
- 3 municipalities, approx. 6,000 inhabitants
- professional inventory of existing and potential climate protection measures
- Implementation of a citizens' council
- funded by the federal ministry of economy



Gefördert durch:



aufgrund eines Beschlusses
des Deutschen Bundestages

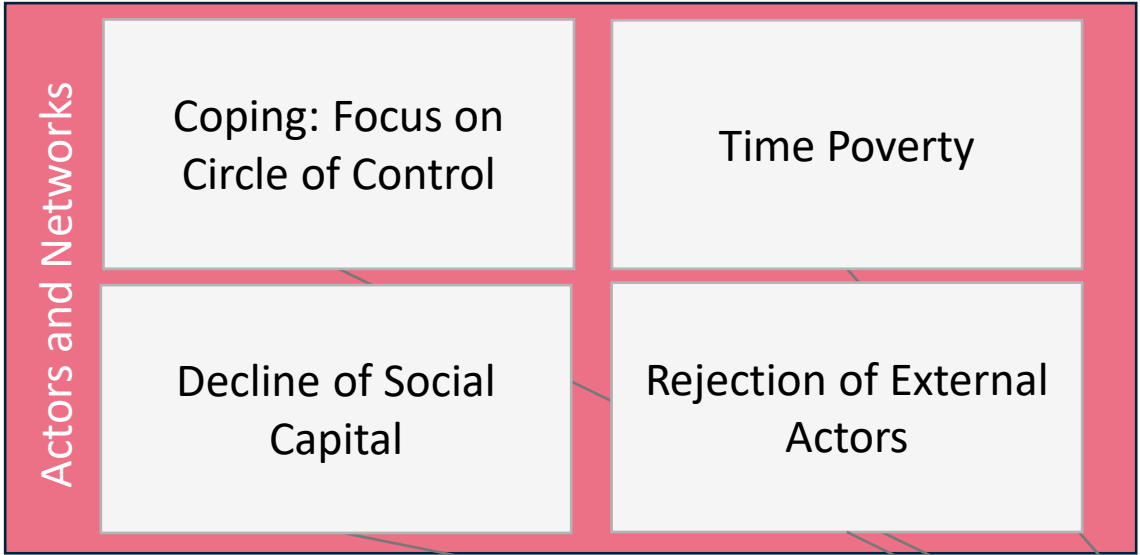
...and our problems

- low interest on the part of residents
- non-resilient gatekeeper networks
- lack of trust in us as researchers and implementers
- lack of belief that there is anything to decide on
 - unintended key-category: **distrust and ignorance**
 - Can we describe it as a *regional* category?
 - What are the factors that explain this category?

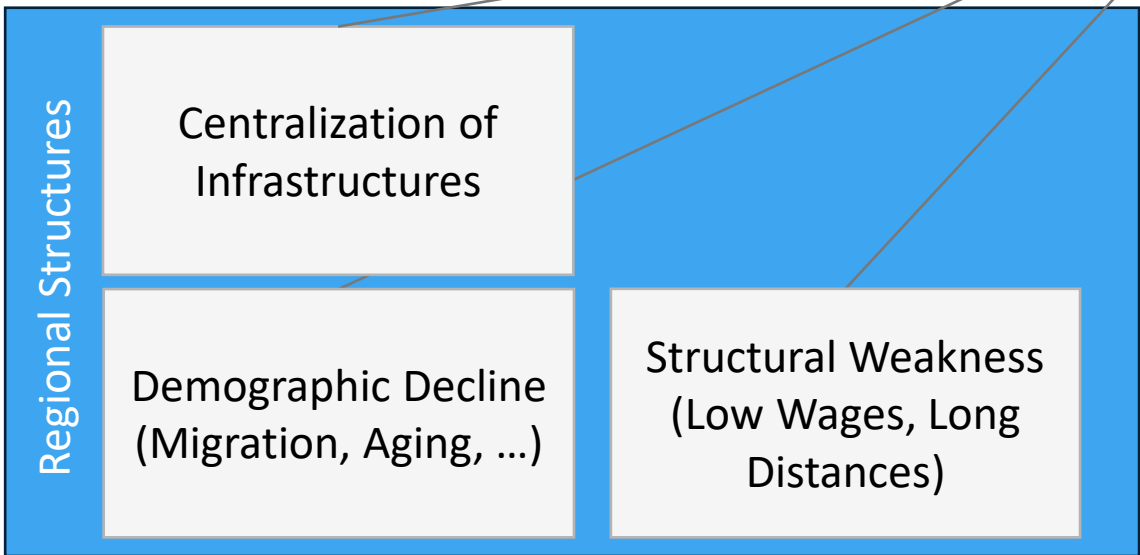
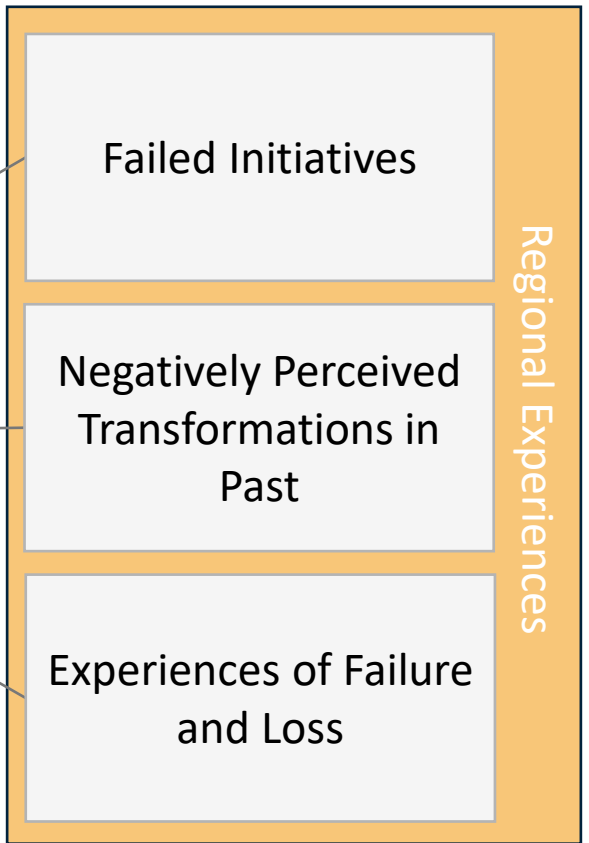


Method and Data

- 23 qualitative Interviews + quantitative Survey (N=92)
- group discussions with stakeholders
- participant observations (nosing around, local council meetings, public events)
- door-to-door conversations
- open, axial and selective coding according to Grounded Theory approach
- descriptive analysis of the quantitative Data
+ qualitative coding of free-text-responses



DISTRUST and IGNORANCE



Regional Structures

Centralization of Infrastructures

“There used to be loads of pubs. Our city was a lovely little town with loads of great, charming little boutiques where you could buy things. When you think about it and walk through the streets now, well, there’s no bakery left, and there’s no local butcher either. [...] It’s a shame.” I016

Demographic Decline
(Migration, Aging, ...)

“I’d say this region was pretty much bled dry after reunification, you know. I mean, families here were torn apart. The older generation stayed here [...] whilst the young people really had no choice but to leave [...]” I007

Structural Weakness
(Low Wages, Long Distances)

“There are a few people who have a lot of money, [...] perhaps farmers in the area, but [the most] people have less money or just an average amount [...]. I mean, here is not really a large migrant population or anything like that. It’s very German, very German definitely, so very, how do you say, White.” I022

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Regional Experiences

Failed Initiatives

“People have been demonstrating and have also written to the local authorities, but it was simply brushed aside. [...] So it feels as though the decision had already been made beforehand, but they [...] pretend [...] that they’re still listening to what’s being said [...] but it feels as though it had all been decided behind closed doors beforehand.” I003

Negatively Perceived Transformations in Past

“With the reunification, a lot has also fallen apart. In a way, lots of people used to work in agriculture. There was much more going on in the villages and so, and that was definitely always a topic for the older generation. [Our region] wasn’t really seen as a positive place with lots of opportunities, unlike the way younger people or someone like me might look at it. But rather that you get the feeling, the good old days, [...] those years are unfortunately over and now it’s rather empty and so on. I think that’s quite an issue for a lot of the older people there. I mean, for a lot of them, their children have moved away, and yes, moved to the West to, to work [...].” I022

Experiences of Failure and Loss

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Experiences of Failure and Loss

Actors and Networks

Coping: Focus on Circle of Control

“On the one hand, I'm phlegmatic; on the other, I lack assertiveness. And rather than wearing myself out in the discussions I focus on my own personal energy.” (standardized survey)

Time Poverty

main reason for non-engagement in the stadardized survey

Decline of Social Capital

“The same people are always involved in all of these projects, who go there, who do something. And the vast majority of the population just say, ‘Oh, what’s this again?’, and yes, they’re simply sceptical.” I010

“If you ask people now, the answer is probably - why should we get involved when it’s all a waste of time anyway? With what kind of project or opportunity for participation [...] they can really make a differenceThat really does affect your motivation. [...]” I008

Rejection of External Actors

“A citizen participation initiated by *someone [from the outside]* is likely to be viewed with criticism. We’ll notice that [...]. The initiatives where nobody feels they’re being steered or guided go much more smoothly.” I009

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Conclusion and Discussion

Can we describe **distrust and ignorance** as a *regional* category?

- regional experiences and structures shape regional attitudes

What are the factors that explain it?

- attitudes and beliefs rooted in: *biography, experienced transformations, proven coping strategies, networks, shared experiences, ...*

We can describe an influence of spatial factors on trust. But how big is it really?

We do not have a contrasting case-study to answer this question. **But maybe you...?**



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Thank you very much for your attention!

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