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Social Economy: A Useful Approach to Tackle Peripheralization in Eastern Germany?

KORNELIA EHRlich and TOBIAS FEDERWISCH

Abstract

Many German cities and villages are facing economic, demographic and/or socio-cultural challenges. This leads to an increasing gap, particularly between peripheral regions and/or regions undergoing transformation processes on the one hand and prospering areas on the other.

Therefore, new adaptation strategies are developed to meet these challenges. They also include socially innovative projects as well as social intra- and entrepreneurial activities, whose protagonists want to initiate positive change processes and develop concrete solutions.

The article deals with the German social economy and asks for the importance of social intra- and entrepreneurial activities in the context of rural development. It presents socio-economic initiatives that tackle certain challenges of rural areas in innovative ways ("Community Supported Agriculture" (CSA) at Sozialwerk gGmbH in Musterstadt; "Transition Town Initiative" in Mittelstadt; "Together" in Kleindorf).¹ All empirical examples are located in the Federal State of Brandenburg, which has valuable experience with social innovations and socio-entrepreneurial initiatives.

Social Entrepreneurship; Social Intrapreneurship; rural development

Zusammenfassung

Soziale Ökonomie. Ein nützlicher Ansatz im Umgang mit der Peripherisierung in Ostdeutschland?

Viele deutsche Städte und Dörfer sind geprägt durch wirtschaftliche, demographische und/oder sozial-kulturelle Herausforderungen. Vor allem die peripher gelegenen und/oder von den anhaltenden Transformationsprozessen betroffenen Orte entfernen sich weiter von den Entwicklungen der prosperierenden Räume. Den genannten Herausforderungen wird immer häufiger mit neuen Anpassungsstrategien begegnet. Dabei lassen sich auch sozial innovative und sozialunternehmerische Aktivitäten im Sinne des Social Intra- und Entrepreneurship beobachten, deren Protagonisten konkrete Lösungen zur Bewältigung spezifischer Herausforderungen vor Ort entwickeln wollen.

Der Beitrag setzt sich mit der sozialen Ökonomie in Deutschland auseinander und fragt nach der Bedeutung von Social Intra- und Entrepreneurship für die ländliche Entwicklung. Es werden drei Initiativen vorgestellt, die in den Bereichen von Social Intrapreneurship („Solidarische Landwirtschaft“ (CSA) der Sozialwerk gGmbH in Musterstadt) sowie Social Entrepreneurship („Transition Town Initiative“ in Mittelstadt, „Together“ in Kleindorf)¹ angesiedelt sind. Alle Beispiele stammen aus Brandenburg, in dem seit langem wertvolle Erfahrungen mit sozialen Innovationen und Social Entrepreneurship gemacht werden.

Soziale Ökonomie; Social Entrepreneurship; Social Intrapreneurship; ländliche Entwicklung

¹ All names of locations, initiatives, protagonists, etc. have been changed by the authors.

Introduction

Since the beginning of the metropolitan and locational discourse in the 1990s, German cities and urban regions have increasingly attracted the attention of the expert community. Especially major cities and prosperous urban regions have been perceived as crucial players for Germany's performance and competitive ability. On the contrary, the structural, economic and demographic development in many villages and small towns has led to a rather problem-oriented view of rural regions. The focus of the debates is on the loss of meaning, function, power and image in the rural areas as well as the challenge of maintaining public services (cf. to KÜPPER et al. 2008; BUCHER a. FLÖTHMANN 2009; BBSR 2009, 2010; WILLISCH 2012; KÜPPER a. SCHEIBE 2015).

If we follow the arguments of critical observers, there is an increasing gap between the development of peripheral rural regions on the one hand and prosperous cities and urban areas on the other. In the scientific literature, this development has often been described as "polarization" and "peripheralization" (cf. KEIM 2006; BARLÖSIUS a. NEU 2007; BEETZ 2008; LANG 2013; LANG et al. 2015 for a discussion of "peripheralization"). In this context, we can observe a growing interest in compensating the effects of peripheralization with corporate means. Especially social economy seems to offer a starting point to initiate change processes in a challenging environment (cf. to JÄHNKE et al. 2011; JANSEN et al. 2013; CHRISTMANN 2011, 2014).

This article focuses on the potential of socio-economic initiatives for developing solutions for economic, demographic and/or socio-cultural challenges. It starts with a brief introduction into the German system of social economy and their significance for rural areas (chapter 2). Following this, it introduces three socio-economic initiatives from Brandenburg, which use social intrapreneurial ("Community Supported Agriculture" (CSA) at Sozialwerk gGmbH in Musterstadt) and social entrepreneurial ("Transition Town Initiative" in Mittelstadt, "Together" in

Kleindorf) approaches to solve certain economic, demographic and/or socio-cultural challenges (chapter 3). As a conclusion, we will discuss the effects of these three initiatives in the sense of new pathways of development (chapter 4).

The empirical material was collected in the form of guided interviews with experts in August 2013. The authors talked to representatives of Sozialwerk gGmbH in Musterstadt, the "Transition Town Initiative" in Mittelstadt and a community representative in Kleindorf. The fact that all socio-economic initiatives are located in the Federal State of Brandenburg is not a coincidence, because Brandenburg has a long tradition in promoting social innovations and socio-entrepreneurial initiatives (cf. TECHNOLOGIE-NETZWERK BERLIN 2011; KUNZ 2011).² Furthermore, the co-author, Tobias Federwisch, was directly involved in a project which supported socio-entrepreneurial initiatives in the rural areas of northern Brandenburg. The goal of the project was to recruit people from different population groups for social-innovative and socio-entrepreneurial activities and thus to contribute to improving their living environment. Potential changemakers were supported in developing ideas and concepts and financing, promoting and communicating their projects. A unique model of civic participation, which aimed at encouraging socio-entrepreneurial initiatives in the respective municipalities, complemented this.

Social economy and its potential to tackle peripheralization

Social economy is not a new phenomenon in Germany.³ Since the beginning of industrial modernity, a *classic social economy* has developed, which is characterised, for instance, by charitable organizations and cooperatives. Over the course of the 20th century, many integration enterprises and qualification companies appeared and contributed to the transformation to a post-industrial society (BIRKHÖLZER 2011; EHRlich a. LANG 2012, pp. 9-10). All of these organizations have in common that they often have urban origins and are financed by so-called "quasi-markets" (STIFTUNG MERCATOR 2012, p. 5), that is, the legally regulated markets for welfare-state service provision.

The institutions of the classic social economy have also been assuming important functions in rural areas for a long time, therefore institutions with religious (Caritas, Diakonie), humanitarian (Deutsches Rotes Kreuz, Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband) or political convictions (Arbeiterwohlfahrt) run kindergartens and hospitals, provide education and/or take care of seniors or people with special needs. Hence, the classic social economy ensures, on the one hand, the (social) public services for a continuously shrinking and ageing rural population,

³ Although the concept of social economy was used for the first time by the French economist Charles Dunoyer (WESTLUND 2003, p. 1192) in 1830, today's understanding of this term is not easy to grasp. Since there are different definitions and understandings due to national particularities of social welfare systems, neither the EU nor single (European) nation states have developed a coherent and internationally accepted definition so far. In the existing literature, different terms are being used for the concept of social economy – the third sector is perhaps the one that is best known. Other common terms are, for example, non-profit sector, not-for-profit sector, solidarity economy, alternative economy and third system (WESTLUND 2003, p. 1192). When speaking of social economy, the authors generally refer to the definition of WESTLUND, who perceives social economy as 'organised bodies which have primarily social purposes, are based on democratic values and are organisationally independent of the public sector' (WESTLUND 2003, p. 1194). This rather broad understanding can be specified a bit more when referring to DEFOURNY (2001). According to him, social economy includes any economic activities conducted by enterprises, primarily cooperatives, associations and mutual benefit societies that apply the following principles: a) they provide their service to their members or to the community without profit; b) they have introduced an autonomous management; c) they follow a democratic decision-making process; d) the primacy of people and work has priority over capital in the distribution of revenues.

² According to the sociologist Wolfgang ZAPP (1989, p. 177), 'Social innovations are new ways to reach aims, particularly new forms of organisation, regulation, new lifestyles which change the direction of social change [...] [They] help to solve problems more appropriately than already known practices and which are worth being imitated and institutionalised.' From a geographical perspective, local and/or regional problems are often the decisive factor for the development of innovative ideas (CHRISTMANN 2011, pp. 204-205). Since rural areas face economic and social problems due to de-industrialization, depopulation and unemployment, some authors have discovered higher shares of social innovations in rural regions than in urban spaces (WILLIAMS 2007).

and, on the other hand, offers employment opportunities, which are extremely important in structurally and economically weak areas.

However, it is problematic that the financial aid for welfare service provision has stagnated (cf. KAUFMANN 1997; PILZ 2004), and therefore the institutions' scope of action as well their employment potential has become increasingly restricted. This fact has created large challenges for the classic social economy, particularly in rural areas, since the available financial, material and human resources can hardly balance the growing need in the area. Consequently, a downward spiral is often started, which is expressed by the reduction of goods or the acceleration of services. This affects not only the facilitating institutions, but also integration enterprises and social institutions.

The developments of the past years have also induced some organizations of the classic social economy to compensate for financial, material and personnel cuts in innovative ways. In some places, an already existing service spectrum is adapted to new needs and new business segments, and new target groups/clients and corresponding revenue and employment potential were identified and developed further. In the scientific literature, this practice has often been described as *intrapreneurship*, referring to the adaptability of existing organizations with the help of innovations (STIFTUNG MERCATOR 2012, p. 8; cf. MAIR a. MARTÍ 2006; SCHMITZ a. SCHEUERLE 2013). We can even observe a trend towards "social intrapreneurship" (SCHMITZ a. SCHEUERLE 2013), since, in the case of the classic social economy, not only "business-motivated efficiency considerations" (STIFTUNG MERCATOR 2012, p. 9; translated by the authors), but also the development of socially innovative concepts are being pursued.

Furthermore, the economic and demographic challenges as well as the poor image of rural areas are providing a change in the mindset of players across the classic social economy. They are increasingly interested in developing social innovations to compensate for the ongoing spatial,

economic and social displacement, growing resilience to other influences (such as supply gaps and the rising oil price) and improving the image of rural areas. These players include, on the one hand, *citizens' initiatives and non-governmental organizations*, which more and more perceive themselves as members of a socially innovative society. On the other hand, there is a growing number of *social entrepreneurs* who would like to meet the challenges in rural areas with decidedly corporate means (cf. JÄHNKE et al. 2011; JANSEN et al. 2013; CHRISTMANN 2011, 2014).

In short, the classic social economy develops social-innovative concepts in order to create potential revenues and employment. In addition, new socio-economic players develop socio-innovative concepts in order to address the population's needs with new products and services as well as to raise resilience to external influences. Altogether, they might compensate for at least some effects of peripheralization with corporate means. In the following sections, we will discuss the significance of social innovations and socio-economic activities for rural development by reflecting three examples from the areas of social intrapreneurship (CSA at Sozialwerk gGmbH in Musterstadt) and social entrepreneurship ("Transitions Town Initiative" in Mittelstadt and "Together" in Kleindorf).

Socio-economic responses to peripheralization in Brandenburg

The initiatives in Brandenburg's rural areas are well suited for examination if one would like to empirically understand the socio-economic reactions to the processes of peripheralization. This area is generally affected by structural economic weakness and demographic transformation, which have led to a continuous loss of significance, function, power and image as well as the removal of comprehensive public services. In addition to this, the area has been influenced by its relatively close proximity to the prosperous Berlin metropolitan area. In contrast to rural Brandenburg, the German capital has substantially gained significance and

influence with its concentration of decision, control, innovation, competition, gateway and image-related symbolic functions in recent years (cf. BLOTEVOGEL 2002, p. 346; BLOTEVOGEL a. DANIELZYK 2009).⁴

A first example of socio-economic reactions to the consequences of peripheralization is Sozialwerk gGmbH. The main task of this integration enterprise headquartered in Musterstadt is to ensure the social and occupational integration of people with psychological and mental impairments. Since Sozialwerk gGmbH has had to put up with various budget cuts in the past (compare with section 2), its business segments – in the sense of social intrapreneurship – were expanded by the model of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA). In doing so, Sozialwerk gGmbH did not only generate new sources of income in order to support their own organization, but also contributed to a bringing together people from urban and marginalized regions.

"Before the political change, this was a large farm which supplied the psychiatric hospital in Musterstadt. Sozialwerk gGmbH came into being after the political change. Two supporting associations founded this company in order to give psychologically handicapped people living and occupational possibilities. [...] Two and a half years ago we thought that we needed new commercial channels and marketing, therefore our focus shifted a little: away from the care of our clients and towards economic, cost-covering

⁴ Hans-Heinrich BLOTEVOGEL (2007) differentiates four metropolitan functions: the „decisive and control function“ refers to the fact that metropolitan regions can be understood as political and economic power centres. Therefore, strategic decisions are being made by the 'Global Players' in the central administration as well as the (inter)national ministries, whose effects can be felt far beyond the regional borders. The „innovation and competitive function“ refers to the fact that metropolitan regions also represent innovation centres in which a high concentration of research and development institutes, universities, knowledge-intensive service providers, cultural facilities and 'places of social communication' are made possible, among them the emergence of creative settings. BLOTEVOGEL addresses the access to people, knowledge and markets by using the „gateway function“, which is expressed by infrastructural aspects such as long-distance traffic hubs, libraries, trade fairs or exhibitions. The „symbol function“ refers to the availability of cultural institutions (theatres, museums) and illustrates the value of the urban design (aesthetics) for metropolitan regions.

Socio-entrepreneurial reactions to peripheralization			
	CSA at Sozialwerk gGmbH Musterstadt	Transition Town Initiative Mittelstadt	“Together” Kleindorf
Problem	Budget cuts and the threat of losing jobs	Vulnerability due to external influences (financial and oil crises)	Removal of social public services and poor image
Solution approach	Development of a new business segment for solidarity through community supported agriculture	Increase in resiliency due to re-localization of the economy	Development of community gardens, village café, workshop etc.
Socio-economic approach	Social intrapreneurship by expansion of the business segment	Social entrepreneurship by testing business ideas	Social entrepreneurship by combining different activities

Source: Author's own figure

Fig.: Socio-economic reactions to peripheralization

work” (interview partner from Sozialwerk gGmbH in Musterstadt).

The second example, the “Transition Town Initiative”, also fits into the picture of the socio-economic reaction to the process of peripheralization. The “Transition Town Initiative” was founded in 2006 by Rob HOPKINS (2008, 2014) and has since then spurred numerous people around the world into economic, ecological and socially sustainable action. This also happened in the small town Mittelstadt, which is about 50 kilometres northeast of Berlin and which has lost its former position in the metal industry as well as approximately a quarter of its population over the past 25 years (cf. AMT FÜR STATISTIK BERLIN-BRANDENBURG 2016). Consequently, the “Transition Town Initiative” in Mittelstadt sees its task in developing local answers to socio-economic challenges, testing new forms of social and corporate participation and advancing the eventual re-localization of the economy.⁵

“Transition Town itself is a concept that was developed by a permaculture activist, Rob Hopkins. The main idea is to find local strategies for topics such as climate change and resource shortages together with the local population. That’s the basic idea, and it includes many partial aspects such as local economic management and regional self-sufficiency. There is also another level on which we ask how we can strengthen the solidarity between people

at a time when more and more people are feeling economic pressure and the existing concepts as such no longer work. [...] There is a network across Germany as well as exchanges with England, and there are also some people who have travelled to England in order to visit transition initiatives” (Mittelstadt Transition Town interview partner).

This approach is also being applied in the small village of Kleindorf, situated in the Uckermark region. Kleindorf has long since lost its former significance as a large sheep farming location as well as a large part of its population. Due to the economic and demographic decline, the opportunities for social public services and the image of a once prosperous industrial village have worsened. The inhabitants of Kleindorf are exploring new ways by combining a community garden, a village café and a village workshop into their socio-entrepreneurial concept of the “Together” project. The project involves public and private players (administrative office, community, a wind turbine operator) and was awarded a prize by a well-known German foundation.

In all three examples, social processes of change are to be initiated and/or concrete challenges to be solved in a socio-economic manner (see Figure 1). Among them, there are a) the compensation of budget cuts with the help of a socio-innovative business segment expansion, b) the increase in resilience to external influences in an atmosphere of

entrepreneurial experimentation, as well as c) the improvement of social public services by community action. The people and the community are acting in a challenging environment, which is characterised by a multidimensional decline in the shadow of the dominant city of Berlin. In the following chapter, we will discuss the effects which this socio-economic involvement has in the sense of new pathways of development.

Effects of socio-economic activities of the empirical examples

Referring to the three cases mentioned above, the question whether these cases are successful when it comes to reactions to peripheralization remains open. In other words, have problem-solving effects in the sense of new pathways of development emerged from the socio-economic players’ point of view?

Example Case 1 (Solidarity through CSA and Sozialwerk gGmbH): Sozialwerk gGmbH was founded in the 1990s as a classic social enterprise for the occupational integration of psychologically and mentally ill people. The company receives state subsidies for this work. Due to rising cost pressure and various budget cuts, it was forced to find new ways of ensuring employment and support and therefore generate new income possibilities. During their search, the employees came across the model of solidarity through CSA, which had until then been rarely

5 <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/blogs/rob-hopkins> (Access: 31 January 2014).

used in Germany, and which promised noteworthy employment and income potential thanks to the marketing of regional products.⁶

“The social enterprise received many subsidies in the 1990s, and the focus really used to be on the support of the people. The more people you had, the more subsidies you received. However, these subsidies decreased in the 2000s, but we did not pay attention to be more efficient in due time. [...] When three farms in the Uckermark region started with solidarity through CSA, we said, [roughly translated] OK, we’ll try it because we need new marketing for the garden centres [employment opportunities for Sozialwerk gGmbH’s clients], otherwise we won’t be able to sustain them. We used to market the products directly from the farm or at the marketplace, but that was no longer profitable. Then this idea of CSA came up, and we simply started with it” (Sozialwerk gGmbH Musterstadt interview partner).

From our interview partner’s point of view, two years after solidarity through CSA had been implemented into the business strategy of Sozialwerk gGmbH, the effects were predominantly positive. The gardening had been professionalized and the social and occupational integration of the clients as well as two jobs (including contributions to the social security scheme) had been secured at Sozialwerk gGmbH.⁷ Additionally, contractual relationships with consumers of the regional, seasonal and organic produce had been entered into and solidarity communities with multiple urban groups in Berlin and

two other towns had been created.⁸ Thirdly, both the producers and the consumers benefited from a permanent exchange of knowledge: the urban groups learned a lot about the background and practices of an integration enterprise, gardening and healthy and regional produce. Sozialwerk gGmbH, on the other hand, benefited from involving the urban groups on specific participation days, which created a better image of each other and minimized mutual reservations.

However, although the experience of Sozialwerk gGmbH with the concept of CSA had been mostly positive, the company decided to stop the project at the end of 2014. The main reason is connected to a problem classic socio-economic players face when it comes to the development of own income sources, which become necessary because of public cost cuts: most of these organizations receive subsidies and/or belong to the non-profit sector. Hence, it is not possible for them to finance public funded activities with own generated income. In order to prevent legal conflicts, Sozialwerk gGmbH decided to stop the project.

In addition, the plan to integrate the clients of Sozialwerk gGmbH (people with psychological and mental impairments) into CSA proved not as easy and realistic as expected. The main problem was that the clients did not have the capabilities which are required to efficiently run a garden. On the contrary: They needed intensive supervision by the regularly employed gardeners, which consumed a lot of their time. This in turn had a negative impact on the quality of the produce which was occasionally criticised by the urban groups.

Example case II (Transition Town Initiative in Mittelstadt): In contrast to Sozialwerk gGmbH in Musterstadt, the members of

the “Transition Town Initiative” in Mittelstadt, comprising various initiatives, organizations and citizens, and whose structure is less formal, are not facing economic or social pressure. The members, some of whom only recently moved to the area, are usually motivated by their idealistic attitude which focuses on the creation of an ecologically sustainable, socially fair and locally-oriented community. These goals are to be achieved by using a comparatively playful approach to urgent local challenges such as vacant flats, unemployment or lack of prospects. The members are driven by the need to achieve the re-localization of the local economy, to develop sustainable consumption patterns and to use the inactive skills and talents of the local population.

“Here in Mittelstadt, there are thousands of unemployed metal workers, and so much knowledge is lying idle. The unemployed certainly have skills, and we want to put them into the position of using this knowledge again, for example, with the construction of cargo bikes or a mobile fruit press. It’s therefore about creating added value, but possibly not in a classic way like when founding a new company or something like that. Of course, with a fruit press you could also build up a company, but we’re currently in a kind of preliminary stage in which we’re focussing on making such ideas better known” (Mittelstadt “Transition Town Initiative” interview partner).

Since the foundation of the Mittelstadt “Transition Town Initiative” in 2011, multiple civil society activities have been conducted and business ideas tested. Among the civil society activities, there were, for example, the establishment of a community garden in one of the town’s districts and the development of a swap and exchange forum for sharing everyday items. In addition to this, the participative event “Green Bus Station” takes place at regular intervals. Within this event, potted plants of many citizens are arranged into a garden oasis in front of the main station by garden and landscape architects from Mittelstadt for a certain time. Finally, the cultural centre “Probierraum”

⁶ Community Supported Agriculture consists of a community of individuals who ensure support to a farm as subscribers. Typically, they guarantee to cover the anticipated costs of the farm operation and farmers’ salary in advance. In return, they receive their share of the harvest during the growing season. Members also share the risks of farming, including poor harvests due to unfavourable weather conditions or pests. By directly selling to community members farmers receive a better price for their crops and gain some financial security. www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/pubs/csa/csa.shtml (Access: 18 September 2013).

⁷ “The purpose of this company is to offer clients an employment area in which they can develop, where they can give things a try, where they can learn things. That is still the purpose and we shouldn’t forget that.” // “Thanks to CSA, two jobs have been secured at our company” (Sozialwerk gGmbH interview partner).

⁸ Nevertheless, the anticipated consumer numbers had not been achieved by the end of 2013: “We calculated with 75 consumers, and we haven’t quite achieved that. At the moment, we have about 57. It’s stagnated a bit this year. We feel that there was more dynamics in it last year. It’s probably due to the fact that there is an increasing number of farms in the region which are also doing community supported agriculture, and therefore the competition for consumers, especially from Berlin, is getting stronger” (Sozialwerk gGmbH Musterstadt interview partner).

offers a location for meetings and events to socially active and culturally interested people.

In comparison to this, the production of cargo bikes as well as their use for the transport of goods within Mittelstadt and for the marketing of regional products has already been commercially developed. This also applies to the production and seasonal operation of a fruit press, with the help of which more than 10,000 litres of juice were produced from regional apples and sold at the farmers' market. The latest project plan of the Mittelstadt "Transition Town Initiative" was to establish a laboratory. The feature of this laboratory is an open workshop for the processing of wood, metal, textiles or ceramics, an open technology laboratory for creative work on new products and a co-working space for the networking of entrepreneurs, self-employed people and small businesses.

"Now, our strategy is to make smaller, more alternative things ourselves with the help of this laboratory. At the beginning, we will finance it ourselves and we will try not to work with the authorities, because that's all too complicated. They don't understand it all. We are just going to get started ourselves" (Mittelstadt "Transition Town Initiative" interview partner).

From the perspective of this interview partner, many civil society and commercial activities of the "Transition Town Initiative" in Mittelstadt have raised awareness for sustainably economic local living among the citizens. They have therefore contributed to a positive change of how the people of Mittelstadt perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others as a location for innovative ideas and concepts:

"We have a vacuum situation in Mittelstadt: the town was an industrial town which commercially fell apart after the political change, therefore many people have left Mittelstadt. Since then we have had a lot of vacant flats. At the same time, there is the need to develop new ideas and go new ways. I'm from Hamburg, where it doesn't feel like that because it's a finished city which also functions economically. There, it's difficult to gain a foothold

with new ideas and different ways of doing things, because the established structures seem to function smoothly. In Mittelstadt, there are already many players who are exploring new alternatives and doing new things, and that's terrific because you don't start from zero. There's simply an extreme amount of potential here" (Mittelstadt "Transition Town Initiative" interview partner).

However, our interview partner also mentioned difficulties in implementing ideas and concepts of post-growth and local/regional economy which comply with the municipal policies in Mittelstadt. In his opinion, this has to do with a necessary fundamental mentality and structural change, which has not yet been successfully implemented:

"We presented the concept to the Economic Development Office and tried to explain that new ideas are being created from which new businesses can emerge. They simply didn't understand the concept. They said that there are businesses, which are coming. They receive the subsidies to build a new supermarket and that is economic development. You could also say that Mittelstadt is a beautiful place and people move here, buy a house and renovate it themselves; they are also investors. But no, it is the classic investors who are looked for – people who come from somewhere, build something and never ask whether we actually need it. It's about who brings the money. There are also many people from Mittelstadt who have fantastic new ideas but can't implement them. There's an architect who can build houses of straw bales, a landscape architect who has totally new plans for the city which would fit in wonderfully, but somehow they never really get off the ground. On a certain level, there is a lack in awareness that things can and should somehow be done differently" (Mittelstadt "Transition Town Initiative" interview partner).

Example case III ("Together" in Kleindorf): In Kleindorf in the Uckermark region, former employees of sheep farming adopted social responsibility at an early stage in

order to maintain the supply of social public services within an atmosphere of catastrophic economic decline. Therefore, the clubs which were founded exactly for this purpose were, for example, able to transform an empty school building into a community centre – including a medical care station, an internet café, a village library, a sports and fitness room and numerous other facilities with the help of state subsidies.

"That was the great time when a lot of money went into the East. We were able to employ the citizens with taxpayers' money and ABM measures (a job-creation scheme) [...] That was actually a really nice pioneering time, but it definitely wasn't an entrepreneurial approach, because the "Auffanggesellschaft" (rescue company) was financed by the Treuhand (privatisation agency)" (Kleindorf interview partner).

However, government grants were massively cut around the 2000s, and despite the involvement of citizens and clubs, neither the (further) economic decline nor the departure of hundreds of citizens could be prevented. Therefore, it was clear that the provision of social public services (swimming pool, child and senior care facilities, library etc.) would either have to be discontinued or placed on a more sustainable basis. In view of this, the idea of the "Together" project emerged in 2012, which included the management of community gardens, the revival of a village kitchen, the construction of a village workshop for the production and maintenance of appliances, the development of a village café and a community organized village shop.⁹ Up to now, the focus has strongly remained on activities on a voluntary basis, though it is becoming clearer to those involved that, in order to implement the project, a more socio-entrepreneurial approach is necessary.

"Up to now, entrepreneurial thinking and action haven't played a role in the

⁹ In the „Together“ project, the citizens of Kleindorf were supported by various consulting organizations. Due to its complexity, the development of a community-organized village shop was not included into the „Together“ project, but also supported by various consulting organizations at the same time. Therefore, both projects were seen as strongly interrelated.

‘Together’ project; I haven’t had the confidence yet to do that myself. It’s also a question of mentality. For example, if I started to run the Konsum (supermarket), I would be afraid that the citizens would say, ‘We’re not going to shop there. They must not get rich.’ But we are considering how to finance and organise the project together, perhaps as a cooperative. We now have the dream of founding a GmbH & Co.KG [...] We have to get everyone on our side, and the citizens have to participate – if not with money, then with voluntary activities” (Kleindorf interview partner).

During the project duration, the inhabitants really pulled together and, at least from the perspective of the Kleindorf interview partner, the mentality of the people changed because of the “Together” project. Whereas Kleindorf had been perceived by both the inhabitants and others as a “no-go area” (Kleindorf interview partner), it was then confidently called a “must-go area” (Kleindorf interview partner). Unfortunately, the positive dynamics experienced a setback when the development of the community-organized village shop failed in 2015. When the village kitchen also stopped its service at the end of 2016, the citizens of Kleindorf experienced another painful setback in the community-driven development of their socio-entrepreneurial approach.

Conclusion

Many regions in Germany are characterised by economic, demographic and/or socio-cultural challenges. The gap, particularly between the regions located in the peripheries and/or affected by transformation processes and the more prosperous areas, has been increasing. (Inter-) national incentive programmes aim at minimizing the effects of peripheralization. Although the subsidies policy has contributed to the reduction of certain deficits, many challenges have remained.

Therefore, there is an increasing need for new adaptation strategies. This article focussed on socio-innovative projects and social intra- and entrepreneurial activities, which seem to offer a starting point

for initiating change processes in a challenging environment. It introduced three examples from two medium-sized towns (Musterstadt and Mittelstadt) and a village (Kleindorf) in the north of Brandenburg. The socio-economic activities have been developed from a kind of pressure situation (the examples of Sozialwerk gGmbH in Musterstadt and the “Together” project in Kleindorf) and a more playful manner of dealing with alternative ways of social participation (the example of the “Transition Town Initiative” in Mittelstadt).

What all of these socio-economic initiatives have in common is that they have introduced new possible pathways for their own organization and/or local communities. It can even be argued that the CSA approach of Sozialwerk gGmbH in Musterstadt, the “Transition Town Initiative” in Mittelstadt and the “Together” project in Kleindorf contributed to a renaissance of the community as an alternative to radicalised capitalism. However, socio-economic approaches seem to be challenging – in conceptual and legal aspects (i.e. CSA approach of Sozialwerk gGmbH in Musterstadt), in terms of convincing public authorities and possible sceptics (i.e. Transition Town Initiative in Mittelstadt), but also with regard to their economic and financial sustainability (i.e. “Together” in Kleindorf). For this reason, socio-economic initiatives can be seen as promising approaches, but not as the silver bullet in local and regional development.

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Резюме

КОРНЕЛИЯ ЭРЛИХ, ТОБИАС ФЕДЕРВИШ

Социальная экономика. Эффективный подход к проблеме периферизации в Восточной Германии?

Многие сельские районы характеризуются взаимным усилением структурных, экономических и демографических проблем. В этом случае периферийно расположенные и/или затронутые трансформационными процессами территории ещё более отстают в своём дальнейшем развитии от передовых регионов.

С этими проблемами всё чаще сталкиваются и новые стратегии адаптации. При этом можно наблюдать примеры социально-предпринимательской деятельности, когда основные акторы стремятся разрабатывать конкретные меры для преодоления негативных демографических изменений.

В связи с этим в статье рассматривается новейшее развитие социально-предпринимательской деятельности в Германии и ставится вопрос о значении социального интрапренёрства и предпринимательства для развития сельских районов. Представлены три инициативы/организации из Бранденбурга, в области социального интрапренёрства («Солидарное сельское хозяйство» среды обитания в Мустерштадте) и социального предпринимательства („*Transition Town Initiative*“ в Миттельштадте, „Вместе“ в Клейндорфе).¹

Социальное предпринимательство; социальное интрапренёрство; развитие сельских территорий

Résumé

KORNELIA EHRLICH et TOBIAS FEDERWISCH

Économie sociale et solidaire: une approche utile face à la périphérisation en Allemagne de l'Est?

De nombreuses régions rurales sont caractérisées par un renforcement mutuel des défis structurels, économiques et démographiques. Ainsi, ce sont principalement les régions périphériques et/ou concernées par les processus de transformation qui s'éloignent encore des avancées en cours dans les zones prospères.

Afin de faire face à ces défis, de nouvelles stratégies d'adaptation sont de plus en plus souvent développées. On observe également des activités socio-entrepreneuriales dont les acteurs souhaitent mettre en œuvre des solutions concrètes de gestion du changement démographique.

Pour cette raison, le présent article aborde les avancées socio-entrepreneuriales les plus récentes en Allemagne et interroge la signification de l'intraprenariat et l'entrepreneuriat sociaux pour le développement rural. Il présente trois initiatives/organisations du Brandebourg ancrées dans le domaine de l'intraprenariat social («Agriculture solidaire» de Sozialwerk gGmbH à Musterstadt) et de l'entrepreneuriat social («Transition Town Initiative» à Mittelstadt, «Together» à Kleindorf).¹

Entrepreneuriat; Entrepreneuriat social; intrapreneuriat social; développement rural