Demographic Change: Translating Future Visions in Rural Development Projects in Germany

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Abstract

Rural regions are problematized as effected by challenges caused by the demographic change in rural development policies, such as the European Union's LEADER program. Residents are called upon as bearers of hope and future shapers who are to be activated to participate in development projects. This paper addresses which role representations of demographic change—understood as policy-induced future objects—have in the activation of residents as future shapers. The analysis is based on qualitative interviews and participant observations collected in three years of ethnographic field research in two LEADER regions in Germany. Building on the Anthropology of Policy, I adopt Michel Callon's concept of translation and argue that visions of the future and actor attributions of policies are displaced in everyday negotiations of residents.

Keywords: Future; demographic change; rural regions; policy; translation

Introduction

> I live in the countryside and experience that it is becoming increasingly difficult: The village butcher has closed down because he can no longer keep up with the dumping prices in the discount stores or cannot find a successor, or both; the bank has closed down; or the way to the next family doctor becomes increasingly far because there are not enough younger doctors who want to settle in the rural areas. [...] But I also experience something else, namely, that community spirit and civic engagement are playing an increasingly important role and upheavals are also understood and used as opportunities. I have experienced representatives from politics, administration, business, science, and associations [...]. People who make a difference on the ground: Mayors, business developers, youth workers – in short, the movers and shakers in rural development. (Klöckner 2020, author's translation)

This excerpt from a speech by the German Federal Minister of Agriculture at the opening of the nationwide "Future Forum Rural Development," represents typical rhetoric about rural areas. It describes challenges facing rural regions, such as declining infrastructures or population. As a solution, the minister highlights the (mostly voluntary) engagement of so-called "movers and shakers" or "active people" who keep rural regions alive or fill them with life.

This rhetoric that rural regions are addressed as problematic regions affected by future challenges such as demographic change is also prevalent in policy documents on the development of rural regions—such as the European Union (EU) LEADER[1] program. The latter is part of the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and explicitly addresses local actors. The *community-led local development approach*, which is the characteristic of the LEADER program, enables local actors to organize themselves in public-private partnerships—so-called *local action groups*—to work out a regional development strategy from the *bottom-up* with citizen participation, and design and implement project ideas (European Structural and Investment Funds 2014). The LEADER program, thus, attests to the regions and their inhabitants a unique, locally specific repertoire of economic, social, cultural, and ecological—so-called *endogenous*—resources that have to be activated for the future development of rural regions (Ray 2000). Residents of rural areas are called upon as important actors in rural development and to initiate LEADER projects (Müller, Sutter & Wohlgemuth 2019, 2020; Cheshire & Higgins 2007, 4; Woods 2011, 143; Ray 2000).

Contrary to the widespread stereotype of a rural idyll anchored in traditions and the past (Ward & Ray 2004, 4), residents are even called upon "to play an active role in shaping their own future" (European Commission 2006, 5), as the LEADER regulation of the European Commission makes clear. This transfer of responsibility—away from state institutions to communities of local actors, often based on voluntary work— makes the LEADER program an example of the new rural paradigm (Høst 2016; OECD 2006; (Kumpulainen & Soini 2019), with its characteristic forms of *governance-beyond-the-state* (Swyngedouw 2005) or *governing through communities* (Rose 1996). In their study on the effects of community development activities on rural places in Finland, Kumpulainen and Soini (2019, 306) attest rural communities even the characteristic of becoming political instruments in rural development.

I discuss in this paper how, in the context of the LEADER program, residents of rural regions are made into these politically intended shapers of the future. The quotation at the beginning of this paper shows that references to demographic change play an essential role in this context. Based on ethnographic material collected during three years of field research in two LEADER regions in Germany within the project "Participatory Development of Rural Regions," funded by the German Research Foundation[2], I ask how do local actors in LEADER projects use projective representations of demographic change to motivate future-oriented practices in rural regions? What visions of the future do these prognoses give rise to, and how do residents position themselves in relation to them?

The present paper is structured as follows: To provide some background information, I will first roll out my methodological approach and present the concrete LEADER project—the "helping network" [pseudonym]—that builds the ethnographic basis for this paper. I illustrate then the thematic topic of the future from a theoretical perspective based on approaches of the *Anthropology of the Future*. Subsequently, against the background of the *Anthropology of Policy*, I elaborate on adaptations of Michel Callon's four moments of translation (1986) in order to show in the following analytical parts that the future visions generated in the LEADER project—with their associated

goals and actor attributions—are displaced in everyday negotiation. To this end, I will first analyze the project's goals and visions of the future as an outline of the *problematization*. Second, I analyze the *interessement* by arguing that the material representations of demographic change function as future objects (Esguerra 2019) that *enroll* the residents as future shapers. Thirdly, I show how the project initiators adopt the topos of "active age" to transform members of the LEADER project into bearers of hope for *mobilizing* new members and to thus realize the future visions. In a fourth step, I focus on the *controversy* between the future visions of the members and the visions of the future conjured up by the future object of demographic change. The paper ends with an outlook on how the visions of the future and role attributions of residents in rural regions can be ethnographically explored in rural development programs.[3]

Methodological Approach and the LEADER Project

This paper is based on a case study about future practices aiming at counteracting the effects of demographic change in the context of the LEADER program. The case study is part of the research project above "Participatory Development of Rural Regions," funded by the German Research Foundation. The overall theoretical framework of the research project is built on the *Anthropology of Policy* (Shore & Wright 2011; Adam & Vonderau 2014), which stresses the dynamics of policies in the process of their translation and implementation into different contexts on various scales. Respectively, the research project employs the concept of *multi-sited ethnography* (Marcus 1995) supplemented by a *studying through* procedure (Wright & Reinhold 2011) that avoids a linear top-down presumption of policy implementation (Lathrop et al. 2005; Müller, Sutter & Wohlgemuth 2019, 2020). According to Susan Wright and Sue Reinhold, 'studying through' follows a discussion or a conflict as it ranges back and forth and back again between protagonists, and up and down and up again between a range of local and national sites" (Wright & Reinhold 2011, 101). This procedure helps to analyze especially "how the meaning [sic!] of keywords are contested and change" (ibid.).

This paper strives to investigate how the meaning of future visions is contested on the different governance levels of a LEADER project. Accordingly, the analysis is based on insights of my ethnographic fieldwork where I followed the EU regional development program LEADER on all its levels of governance—from activities at the European level to training of regional managers at the federal level and program design in state ministries to the implementation of the LEADER program by regional actors from the economic, administrative, and social sectors as well as by village residents.

For this paper, I focus on the local level—i.e., implementation level of the LEADER project "helping network" [pseudonym].[4] Its main aim is to build a platform for intergenerational self-help as they state on the website of the LEADER region. The idea is that people in the region help each other with everyday tasks that cannot be taken over by professional care facilities or other (e.g., manual) services. Such tasks include, for example, changing light bulbs, taking down and hanging curtains, mowing the lawn, or playing games together. The LEADER project was initiated voluntarily in

2014 by the heads of a regional cooperative bank and a care facility in a five-member "competence team," consisting of local politicians, a bookkeeper, and a network coordinator, and started in 2017. The initial phase of the project was still based on the help of seniors, but now it includes all age cohorts, so that, for example, "hired grandma" services or babysitting are also offered.

The LEADER project "helping network" is listed as a "lighthouse project" in the regional development strategy, which is considered a guideline for implementing the LEADER program. Therein, the helping network is part of the field of action "Living space for young and old" whose overriding goal is the "activation of social capital and healthy village structures" (Regional Development Strategy 2015, 52). As for the policy logic, the LEADER project "helping network" represents a measure to counteract the prognosticated effects of demographic change in the present. This is why I chose this LEADER project for ethnographic inquiry about future practices in the context of LEADER. Furthermore, since the funding period of the LEADER project and the fieldwork period both started in 2017, I had the chance to accompany the project from its beginnings of kick-off events, mobilization actions up to the "daily routine" of project implementations.

LEADER funding has been used to create staff positions to coordinate the development of the helping network and act as intermediaries between those seeking help and those giving it. The unique feature of the helping network is that the members are insured during their missions and that they are paid an expense allowance for the voluntary work. In simplified terms, those seeking help pay nine euros for one hour, and the helpers receive six euros (but they can also donate these to the network); three euros remain with the network. By this, no dependence should develop, and people receiving help should also get the possibility of giving something back without providing intangible help on their own like the initiators described their intentions in the interviews.

In total, I ethnographically accompanied the LEADER project "helping network" for almost two years, from spring 2017 until winter 2018. I gained first access to the research field via the regional managers of the LEADER region by explaining my research interest. They brought me in contact with the project initiators whom I introduced myself first via email. I was then invited to join the official kick-off event where I met the two project initiators, the project coordinator, and further employees of the LEADER project as well as inhabitants interested in joining the network for the first time in person. Based on these first contacts and using the multi-sited approach, I followed the LEADER project to various events. I conducted participatory observations at information events in community centers, at consulting meetings in the project's public office, at project presentations at LAG meetings in town halls, and finally became a member of the helping network myself. As a member, I helped elderly people change light bulbs or cooked meals for (permanently) disabled people, and I also received help from other members who gave me rides in remote areas. Next to those ambulant observations (Welz 1998), I also lived for six weeks in the region to get acquainted with the daily routines and challenges in the rural area such as public transport and general public services.

Furthermore, for the LEADER project "helping network," I conducted 18 qualitative interviews with the head of the LAG, the regional managers, the project initiators, and the coordinator, with village representatives and inhabitants who helped and got help via the network. The project coordinator facilitated the interviews with the network members, others were based on previous personal contacts (snowball effect). For this paper, next to media analysis of radio and TV reports, I used ethnographic material collected during five participant observations and seven qualitative guideline-based and narrative interviews.

Even though I mostly met the actors selectively for specific events, I was in continuous contact with the initiators and coordinators whom I met again and again and with whom I spoke on various occasions. Also, with two members I was in constant contact since we met regularly for workshops, helping missions, and information events. Mainly thanks to the interviews with an intense biographical and narrative part next to its guideline-based structure, which implies mutual trust and interpersonal connection (Schmidt-Lauber 2007), the ethnographic work was guided by personal relations on different levels. According to anthropologist Sandra Wallman, the research interest in the future "leads us [...] to try to interpret the way we and others picture the future, and then to understand the effects of our (or their) picturing it as we/they do" (Wallman 1992, 2). Consequently, the ethnography on the topic of the future is itself already to be understood as future practice. The anthropological understanding of the future, and my praxeological understanding, in particular, is the focus of the next part.

Future — A Theoretical Perspective

> One thing is certain: If people have no confidence in the future viability of a region, those who are able to do so will move to the conurbations, where care, education, training and work are guaranteed close to home. We are determined to do everything we can together to ensure that those who want can continue to live in our villages to a high standard of quality – the elderly and the old as well as young families with children. (Regional Development Strategy 2015, author's translation)

This quote from a development strategy of one of the LEADER regions studied clarifies that it is a crucial horizon of action within the LEADER program to imagine and create the future. In the following, I will focus on the term *future* from a theoretical perspective, referring to various interdependent dimensions, such as cultural-anthropological orientations to future, praxeological approaches to future practices, concepts of the future as an open space of possibility, and the concept of agency.

The study of the future in the history of the discipline goes back, as Silvy Chakkalakal (2018, 4) points out, to the early cultural anthropology of the 1910s and 1920s around Franz Boas (1887–1948), Ruth Benedict (1887–1948) and Margaret Mead (1904–1975). At those times, anthropologists were mainly involved in generating knowledge about the future in commissioned research for the US government. After a long pause, the future as a field of research (again) played a role in anthropology, especially in the 2000s, as Rebecca Bryant and David Knight note when the "war on terror" and the

global financial crisis and its aftershocks "left many people around the world unable to anticipate the following day" (Bryant & Knight 2019, 9). Now, during a global COVID-19 pandemic[5] and a climate crisis ahead, ethnographic research dealing with the future is more current than ever before in the field of cultural anthropology (Hänel et al. 2021; Sutter et al. 2021; Flor 2020).[6]

Forms of prognostic, creative, and solution-oriented thinking and practices that are negotiated in traditional fields, such as democratization, technological development, migration and mobility, the future of work, sustainability, and the environment, or—as I focus on here—demographic development, are referred to as futurology.[7] What those anthropological approaches to the future have in common is that they think about the future as a means to understand the present rather than starting from the future (Bryant & Knight 2019, 3–12). Bryant and Knight define the characteristics of an *anthropology of the future* which "appears to entail a reorientation of the discipline from being to becoming, from structure to agency, and from social institutions to the hope, planning, practices, and action that project those into the yet-to-come" (ibid., 193). They demand a repositioning of teleology to the center stage of anthropological analysis "to make further sense of the role of the future in orienting quotidian action [...] to disentangle the everyday" (ibid., 201).

The anthropological perspective on the future is, thus, characterized by a praxeological *presentist approach* (Ringel 2018). This approach describes the assumption that actors create the future in the present through concrete practices. Barbara Adam and Chris Groves state that: "A true future orientation [...] is only possible when the future is no longer pre-given as future present but arises from actions in the present" (Adam & Groves 2007, 53). I also refer to these practices as *future practices* regarding Andreas Reckwitz (2016). Jochen Koch and others define future practices as "those forms and patterns with the help of which social actors imagine their future and process ideas about the future in their daily actions" (Koch et al. 2016, 163–164). Such future practices include representational practices—for example, materially generated visions of the future, as seen in urban planning, and nonrepresentational expressions of the future in the present, such as the expression of hopes, expectations, or fears (Ringel 2018, 177–179; Anderson 2010, 783). The future, thus, offers an analytical approach to understanding current negotiation processes from a praxeological perspective.

Since the future nowadays appears as an empty open projection surface that offers orientation, makes planning possible, organizes expectations, gives hope or generates depression and resignation (Bühler & Willer 2016, 9), the future has moved from the domain of fate to a "realm of action potential" (Adam 2010, 365). That is what I am interested in in this paper: how do the actors define their agency, how do they relate to the future that is anticipated by representations of the demographic change, and what actions do they take in regard to the future. The agency of institutions and actors has a unique role to play in this concept of the future (Kleist & Jansen 2016, 381). According to Simone Abram and Gisa Weszkalnys, shaping the future is always an articulation of agency, political interests, and questions of who governs and who is legitimized to do what (Abram & Weszkalnys 2011, 3–4).

Regarding understanding agency, this paper follows the cultural-sociological approach of Mustafa Emirbayer and Ann Mische (1998). Based on the theory of practice of Pierre Bourdieu (1972, 1989), Emirbayer and Mische understand agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, i.e., as "informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment)" (Emirbayer & Mische 1998, 963).

Arjun Appadurai's concept of the *capacity to aspire* (2013a, 2013b) can be seen, according to Chakkalakal (2018, 24), as a research attitude to strive for something that is not yet there and to, thus, also combine a formative claim. Appadurai understands the *capacity to aspire* as a culturally shaped ability to express future visions or aspirations. These visions of the future are part of larger ideas that originate from higher cultural norms and are, therefore, not shaped individually but in social interaction (Appadurai 2013a, 187ff.). The *capacity to aspire* is also described as a "navigation capacity." By that, Appadurai refers to the social positioning and associated set of capital that determine how actors will approach the future (ibid., 188). However, he also emphasizes that less privileged actors can actively change the spaces of possibility that prevent them from expressing their own opinions and asserting them in public space (Appadurai 2013b, 289; Borghi 2018, 904; Wohlgemuth 2020).

In order to analyze how, in the context of the LEADER program, inhabitants of rural regions are made into just such future shapers, I apply the theoretical perspective on the future presented here in conjunction with the analytical adaptation of the concept of translation, which I show in the following.

Shaping the Future—A Translation Process

"[P]olicy is a narrative in a continual process of translation and contestation [...]" (Shore and Wright 2011, 14). There is a consensus in the *Anthropology of Policy* that policies in their moments of translation are reinterpreted in a way that may go beyond and deviate from their original political intentions and goals (Clarke et al., 2015; Shore 2010; Müller, Sutter, and Wohlgemuth 2019). I apply Michel Callon's concept of translation (1986) to show in the following parts of the analysis how the visions of the future generated in the LEADER project "helping network," with their goals and role attributions, are displaced in everyday negotiations. Even though Callon developed the concept in the context of actor-network theory using examples from science and technology studies, his reflections on the moments of translation are also fruitful for analyzing the negotiation of policies.

"The notion of translation emphasizes," according to Callon, "the continuity of the displacements and transformations which occur in this story: displacements of goals and interests, and also, displacements of devices, human beings, larvae and inscriptions" (ibid., 18). He distinguishes four translation moments in his sociology of translation: *Problematization*, *interessement*, *enrolment*, and *mobilization*. In those four moments, different actors negotiate knowledge and form new socialities. The pivotal

point of the translation process is the *problematization* around which a new network of relations unfolds. *Problematization* describes, according to Callon, "a system of alliances, or associations, between entities, thereby defining the identity and what they 'want'" (ibid., 8).

In the empirical examples of this paper, the problematization is that the initiators of the LEADER project assume that residents are future shapers by participating in the LEADER project. *Interessement* is what Callon calls the actions with which actors impose and stabilize these identities. "To interest other actors is to build devices which can be placed between them and all other entities who want to define their identities otherwise" (ibid.). One such device is the use of representations of demographic change that motivate specific groups of actors—the "active elderly"—to take action. Connected to this is the question of how these roles are defined and attributed—Callon calls this third moment of translation *enrolment:* "Enrolment does not imply, nor does it exclude, pre-established roles. It designates the device by which a set of inter-related roles is defined and attributed to actors who accept them" (ibid., 10). This leads to the fourth moment of translation: The *mobilization of allies*, the definition, and negotiation of representative spokespersons.[8] In *mobilization*, Callon describes processes to ensure that the supposed spokespersons for various relevant collectivities could properly represent those. In this paper, I portray residents who speak on behalf of the LEADER project and contribute to implementing the future vision.

However, these four moments of translation, the consensus, and the alliances it implies are not uncontested. Here again the *Anthropology of Policy* comes into play, assuming that policies are not simply adapted to local contexts but rather reformulated and, thus, brought into being in the moment of implementation (Clarke et al. 2015; McCann & Ward 2012; Shore & Wright 2011). Callon describes this as *controversy*, which refers primarily to "all the manifestations by which the representativity of the spokesman is questioned, discussed, negotiated, rejected, etc." (Callon 1986, 15). This connects to the future concept of an open space of possibility mentioned above, which assumes that actors can influence the future due to their respective agencies. The pivotal point of the translation, the future vision that residents shape the future in the LEADER project, can, thus, be reinterpreted at any time by rejecting the role attributions. What this translation process looks like is the subject of the following analyses.

Problematization—The Future Vision of the LEADER Project

As indicated in the introduction, the LEADER program aims to make the rural region "future-proof" by developing and implementing projects. I understand the concept of LEADER projects as *problematization* which builds the subject of the translation process (Callon 1986). In this section, I will present the LEADER project "helping network," its actors, and intentions to elaborate the vision of the future, the translation of which will be analyzed in the following sections.

One of the project initiators, a member of the board of a regional cooperative bank, a committed man in his 50s, presents the necessity of the LEADER project for the future viability of the region as follows:

> [We live] in a region that is now demographically, yes, has to deal with some demographic issues and especially with the aging of the region and that young people are moving away. And you also need concepts and ideas here on how to ensure that the region remains worth living in. And that is actually one of the ulterior motives of the [helping network], that we try to give old people the opportunity with this project [...] to grow old within their own four walls. (Interview, project initiator I, November 9, 2017,[9] author's translation)

The project initiator in this interview places the LEADER project in direct connection with the demographic change and positions himself with this statement as an idea giver who aligns his acting with the change of life circumstances in the future. This future corresponds to a vision, which is influenced by demographic prognoses.

The interviews call upon the demographic change as further challenges to which the LEADER project reacts. Eventually, the second project initiator, a director of a regional care facility, a man in his 50s, addresses in the interview the narrative of the loss of the infrastructure due to the demographic change:

> It is already so that the children often move away first and also say: "Well, I also want to see something else first apart from this beautiful [region] and want to get out." And this is the generation that has been brought up in this way: "Learn something and do something and go out into the world and create something." And the old people just stay behind. And remain often back within the village area, in contrast to the city, in large houses with still large properties, which was good in earlier years, but now also become somewhat of a burden. We experience that. We have facilities with assisted living here and people from the neighboring villages move there and say: "I will go to the place where there is at least a baker and a butcher or something and I can take care of myself." [...] Well, it's already like that, there are [...] of course there are still good structures, but we have to start now to maintain them. (Interview, project initiator II, August 17, 2017)

Therefore, the LEADER project "helping network" contributes to work against this loss of infrastructure and supply and makes it possible for residents to remain as "independent" as possible at the place where they live. The third project initiator of the network, a local social democrat politician and a senior physician in his early 60s, calls for the villages to be made attractive for all generations as a solution:

> There will be a lot of houses on the market soon and then young people must want to move there. And the old people must be able to stay there until the end. That is what I understand by a living village. So, not just seeking young people. Yes, they belong there, but old people also belong in a good village. And the old people who then say, for example, in the network: "Yes, I can do something, too. Because I can pick up your child from kindergarten. You don't get home until half past five, but I go there every day at four and pick him up and then he can have dinner at my place." That's my idea of it. (Interview, project initiator III, August 7, 2017)

In this interview, the project initiator expresses the vision of the future that within the LEADER project, older residents in the village can remain living there, and the village is to be made so attractive that younger people want to move there. The LEADER project thus creates certain location advantages.

The LEADER project is coordinated by a project coordinator who is in her late 30s. She studied social pedagogy and worked for the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs before moving to the rural region with her young family and building a local voluntary network. She talks in the interview about the practices she used to establish the network and attract new members:

> Well, at the moment, it's all about, yes, it was primarily about creating an image first. That was the first step. And then it was about going public, thinking about where we can reach people. We are still at that point. We also realize that the ways we try out don't work and many others have worked and are continuing to work. [...] But what is very important to me as a next step […] is to bring people into the foreground, to tell stories that are happening now. But also personal skills, like now someone who says: "I have a barrel organ" or "I have expert knowledge about herbs" or "I would like to go on an excursion, I used to run a forwarding agency, I like to drive." So, to get ahead and make very concrete offers in this network. And to see the General Assembly also as a kind of summer party. So, not just this sober construct but to bring more life into it, so that we can exchange ideas, so that we can meet each other. Simply to do something for the community building. (Interview, project coordinator, May 3, 2018)

What is clear from all the interview excerpts is that the project initiators—all of them are leading personalities with long professional experience and a robust social network in the region, including the project coordinator with her experience in networking people – have the necessary *capacity to aspire* (Appadurai 2013a) with their capital set to visualize a possible future and show the necessary courses of action. Similar to the policy rhetoric presented in the introduction, the initiators take up aspects of demographic change, such as the threatened or already perceived loss of local infrastructure, to present a goal or a context to which the efforts of the LEADER project are directed.

To sum up, the project initiators and the coordinator construct a *problematization* (Callon 1986), according to which potential members and their actions in the LEADER project are attributed an agency with which they should shape the future. In concrete terms, the *problematization* is that rural regions are affected by various aspects of demographic change, which local actors can counter with the help of LEADER projects. This creates relationships between global social challenges observed and experienced locally and local actors, who are shaping the future. In order to realize these intentions, a functioning LEADER project requires the membership of other people. How the project initiators gain new members is explained in the following.

Interessement and *Enrolment*—How Statistics on Demographic Change Enroll Future Shapers

The following aims to show the functions of demographic change in the LEADER project. I focus specifically on the project initiators' use of material representations and narratives of demographic change, which I refer to as future objects permeated by policy logic (Esguerra 2019). I show how the initiators of the LEADER project "helping network" use these future objects as a device of *interessement* to win residents to participate in the LEADER project and, eventually, enroll them as future shapers.

Therefore, I use an ethnographic example of a situation in which demographic change was explicitly addressed. This is an ethnographic observation from the kick-off event of the LEADER project "helping network." The kick-off event formed the first physical contact between the project initiators and the residents. It, thus, represents a "moment of friction" (Tsing 2005), in which the policy—in this case, in the form of the LEADER project presented by the project initiators—meets the living environment of the residents and triggers effects (Adam & Vonderau 2014, 19–22). After three years of planning, the implementation of the project began with this kick-off event. The declared aim of the event was to make the inhabitants of the region aware of the project and motivate them to become members of the network.

The kick-off event took place on a summer's day in 2017 in a small town's *Kurhaus* (assembly rooms). The project initiators promoted the invitation to the event in local newspapers. When I arrived, the hall was already well filled. About 160 people, as was later announced in a press release, most of them over 65 years old, sat at long rows of tables. The latter was facing a screen onto which a PowerPoint presentation was projected. Roll-up banners marked the room—they showed a warmly laughing man with a white beard behind him, dynamic-looking senior women of the same age. The five-member competence team described above had gathered in front of the screen. After the first round of introductions, the local politician took the floor as project initiator. With shining eyes, expressively gesticulating, the wiry man in his early 60s in a short-sleeved checkered shirt took the stage.

"Demography: What is that?"—"A description of how a population is composed," he answered his rhetorical question. "And that has changed – and that is why we need this [the helping network]. It all goes back 50 years ago that something in the population composition changed," he said, showing a slide with a population statistic, which was a graph of the age structure of the population in Germany. "That's when the contraceptive pill was developed," he said, pointing to a bend in the statistical curve for today's 55-year-olds. "The big bulge before that was the baby boomers born after the war. But even HERE the pill arrived"; the audience in the hall laughed. Then he showed statistics again. "In the past, it looked like a pyramid (many young people, few old people)," he explained, "Today it is a mushroom." That would mean that in 2030 we would have many more 70-year-olds. "But that is no reason to panic. Because the 70-year-olds in 2030 will be much healthier and more active – and that is what we hope for. Many people say: 'Oh, it's not so bad here. I don't want to scare you either. A proverb says: "It comes how it comes" [he speaks in local dialect].' But this attitude

is not good!" he proclaims. "The population is decreasing, especially in the southern districts," he continues. In the local community, there would even be a population decline of 20 percent. For all communities, he said, there will be more older people over 65. "This is no reason to panic," he repeated, "because these are people who help each other. And they have to! – So, I think you all now have to sign a contribution form!" With these words, he walked off the stage, the audience in the hall clapped. The lecture had the character of a TED talk—and it did not fail to achieve the desired effect because more questionnaires were indeed asked for afterward, as I experienced standing at the table with the forms (author's observation protocol, May 29, 2017).

This situation is an excellent example of how LEADER enrolls and calls upon residents to participate in projects as future shapers. The project initiator creates a vision that there will be more older people in 2030 and that the accustomed social composition will change, which the present audience has to manage. As this situation shows, the *enrolment* works first via community-building mechanisms. In this example, the project initiator refers to an imagined community by using local proverbs in dialect, making self-ironic jokes about a "backwoods" mentality, and naming concrete village names where the audience lives, – an approach that is well known from nation-building processes (Anderson 1983). This is typical for the new rural paradigm of self-responsible citizens empowered by a constructed sense of community to feel responsible for shaping their future (Husu & Kumpulainen 2019; Markantoni et al. 2018; Paula 2019).

Second, the residents are enrolled as future shapers with the help of representations of statistical data on the demographic change, materialized in the form of the statistical graph, projected onto the screen as a PowerPoint presentation. I understand the graph on demographic change as a *future object*. Alejandro Esguerra defines future objects as "an array of socio-material entities that underpin future practices" (Esguerra 2019, 964). As "socio-material entities of anticipation," they emphasize, according to Esguerra, what could become a problem. They form the infrastructures with which people imagine the future.

Esguerra highlights further that future objects are not neutral but rather perform political work since they co-construct the future (ibid.). He assigns knowledge-generated objects, such as surveys, databases, or statistics, to the future object type one. Their function is to generate a vision of the future as something that can be determined and known and promote corresponding practices, such as decision-making, in the present. For the future objects to have an effect, knowledge must be made evident—arenas for this purpose are, for example, conferences, events, or press reports (ibid., 964–966). Practices such as performing, calculating, and imagining give, according to Ben Anderson, content to specific futures. "It is through these acts that futures are made present in affects, epistemic objects and materialities," he continues (Anderson 2010, 778–779).

The project initiator uses the references to demographic change to present the future as a threat in this empirical example, the handling of which requires action in the present. In concrete terms, the image emerges that existing and familiar social relations, such as neighborhood help or family support, will no longer exist as usual

in the future due to the declining population. With the help of the graphic, the project initiator, thus, creates an urgency to act now in the present. The future is transported into the present. In this process, the statistics represent a future that can be planned and anticipated, where the exact content is not relevant.

The generalizing use of statistics on demographic change for political purposes can be also described as 'demographization' (German "*Demographisierung*"). According to Stephan Beetz, the term goes beyond the use of entrenched stereotypes to mean that social, economic, and cultural factors are subsumed under demographic statements or suppressed by them (Beetz 2007, 238). Social, cultural, and economic changes are blurred under the term demographic change; they are "demographized" (ibid., 221). Eva Barlösius points out that statistics and discourses on demographic change constitute representations that are oriented towards a normative conception of population development. The statistical representations show that a stable population structure favors a stable society (Barlösius 2007, 19–20). Demographization offers patterns of order that, according to Beetz (2007, 242), in recourse to Beck, are intended to provide security for political action. Barlösius (2007, 20) points out, however, that this suggested security hinders the view of options for shaping the future and the openness to the future.

The empirical example shows the effectiveness of the LEADER policy with its future objects on the imagination, action, and design options of local actors. With knowledge about demographic change, the policy and, thus, state knowledge becomes present in the field. Cris Shore and Susan Wright define policies as instruments with which actors (e.g., governments, companies, NGOs)

> "classify and regulate the spaces and subjects they seek to govern. Policy is a fundamental 'organising principle' of society which, like 'family', 'nation', 'class' or 'citizenship', provides a way of conceptualising and symbolising social relations, and around which people live their lives and structure their realities." (Shore & Wright 2011, 2)

Since policies organize people's thinking and actions, they are powerful vehicles for social change (ibid., 3) and, eventually, also function as future objects. According to Vonderau and Adam, policies have the characteristics of supporting specific modes of action and preventing others (such as assistance in addition to neighborhood and family support), establishing new institutional structures (such as the helping network), generating public discourse, and establishing their key concepts (such as demographic change or bottom-up citizen participation). Furthermore, they privilege particular visions of the future or visions of the 'good life' (Adam & Vonderau 2014, 19). In this example, the project initiator uses his agency, i.e., his ability to speak and be well networked in the region, to use statistics as future objects with the help of which residents are activated. The project initiator understands the membership in the network thereby as a means to work against the prognosticated future.

This part has shown a "moment of friction" in which local actors have applied action-motivating future objects, permeated by policy logics, such as the use of statistics on demographic change in their contact with residents. Visions of the future of

new social helping structures were created with the help of the future object. Through this practice of using the future object, an *enrolment*, according to Callon, becomes apparent. In this case, the project initiators take on the role of brokers (Müller, Sutter & Wohlgemuth 2020), who mediate between the policy logic and the everyday life of the people. They act as visionaries of the future, which, according to Callon's understanding of *interessement*, use specific future objects to privilege a vision of the future within the framework of which residents are intended to take action. At the kick-off event, the project initiators address the audience as potential members and, thus, enroll them as future shapers.

Mobilization—The "Active Old People" as Bearers of Hope

By using the future object of statistics, the project initiators use the future practice of stirring hope as an alternative response to the threats posed by demographic change. In doing so, they mobilize members to take on the role of representatives or spokespersons in the further course of the project. In the example above, the project initiator addresses the target group of older people as bearers of hope for shaping the future by saying: "But that is no reason to panic. Because the 70-year-olds in 2030 will be much healthier and more active—and that is what we hope for" (author's observation protocol, May 29, 2017). The hope in this LEADER project lies in older people's health condition and their engagement to participate in the LEADER project.

One of the functions of the future practice of stirring hope is to motivate people to act, as Bryant and Knight say: "Hope [...] is a form of futural momentum, a way of passing into the future that attempts to pull certain potentialities into actuality" (Bryant & Knight 2019, 134). The presence of the not yet realized potential, i.e., a supposedly dark present, becomes a resource for hope (ibid., 136). As Berlant's concept of "cruel optimism" (Berlant 2011) also suggests, hope makes the present more bearable and helps to get over crises. Bryant and Knight state: "[I]n a Time of Crisis, hope stabilizes and familiarizes the present, but it does this through collective mobilization, a momentum that focuses on specific targets, from which generalized hopefulness springs" (Bryant & Knight 2019, 153). In this phase of the LEADER project, these targets, on which hopes are pinned, are the fit and active older people who are to become members of the "helping network."

These "wishful images" (ibid., 135) are created and conveyed in narratives or media-effective representations of the LEADER project—materialized in roll-up banners or other print media. In an interview, the project coordinator explains the role of conveying experiences and stories to create a community:

> So you have to be in the public eye permanently to get it into people's heads again and again. You actually have to be present everywhere in all places. [...] And, at the same time, it is my heart's desire to get this community going, as a community. And that's where I now try to bring stories to the fore every time we get into the press (laughs). (Interview, project coordinator, May 3, 2018, author's translation)

Therefore, the project coordinators entered into media partnerships for which they asked members to talk about their helping missions in radio, or television reports, newspaper articles or social media. In order to acquire new members, for example, a story from the network was broadcasted weekly on the radio at specific intervals over one month.

The following radio report is from a series in which ten such contributions were broadcasted. They are all between three and a half and four and a half minutes long and follow the same pattern: Firstly, a moderator introduces the network, then it follows a description of a helping person and a person helped and, finally, the report explains how the listeners can become members. The following is an excerpt of a radio report that exemplifies well the members' narratives, which helps to understand their role in the LEADER project better:

> Moderator: "So, there are services provided for which there is often no market in the countryside. Everyday things that used to be the responsibility of the family community, which is no longer the case everywhere. A good thing for [Harald Schulz][10]. And that's why he does everything he can to ensure that [the helping network] continues to grow quickly."
>
> Helper [Schulz]: "It is important for me that as many as possible get in touch with us in the sparsely populated [region], because the neighborliness among people is good, but more and more, I see this in our village, we have 54 houses, […], and so you notice that the young people are moving away, the old people stay behind or have to go to old people's homes, because they can no longer manage the domestic environment in the same way."
>
> Moderator: "[Marie-Luise Kramer] has also received everyday help from [the helping network]: She is particularly pleased about the interpersonal and practical aspects that are part of the [helping network]."
>
> Person helped [Kramer]: "That was, for example, repairing a raised bed, and what I like about it: If I am interested in how it is done, with what it is done, then I get the corresponding information from the person. And that's what also interests me. Or working with fretsaws; I once called on somebody's help to show it to me. And then I was shown it by a nice young man.
>
> (Radio report, July 17, 2018)

The medial mediation helps create the image of the fit and active older people who are presented as future shapers at the kick-off event. With their engagement, they embody the wishful thinking of older people as to what they should be like in the future through the network. The personalized stories of the members function thereby as a means to let the visions of the future, intended by the LEADER project, become real in the present. The members portrayed, thus, stand as representatives and spokespersons (Callon 1986) of the future narrative.

These representations of the members—as involved older people onto whom hopes are projected, who are committed to the future, and who help each other in everyday life—are part of the topos of *active old age*. According to Matthias Ruoss, this image of *active old age* is commonly understood as a call for productive occupation, for

greater participation in social life, and for an independent way of living, which is why it is particularly prevalent in the context of demographic change (Ruoss 2015, 160). The topos of *active old age* is to be located not only in the context of the cuts in the aid systems of the welfare state and the increasing underfunding of public administration and infrastructure but also in the (re)discovery of civil society. The latter is characterized by a partial transition from state provision to self-care and from public to private responsibility for help for those who need it (van Dyk et al. 2016, 38).

Silke van Dyk also summarizes this development of the topos of *active old age* under the activity thesis. She assumes that older people—apart from (minor) health restrictions—have the same psychological and social needs as in middle age (van Dyk 2007, 97). The theme of the activity approach is, therefore, the coping with everyday problems caused by a perceived lack of social function (ibid.). The re-regulation of old age is, thus, associated with the neoliberal restructuring of society. However, according to van Dyk, this does not occur as a top-down process of engaging older people but rather a shift of regulation into the subjects themselves, through self-accentuation, and guidance for self-management (van Dyk 2007, 106).

When subjecting the radio reports to quick content analysis, it becomes clear that the members take up narratives of the demographic change—such as the omission of family structures or youth migration—and formulate them as their own desires (i.e., helper Kramer). Both members also adopt the role attribution as future shapers or bearers of hope by ending their comments with positive outlooks—the helper presents the network as an option to replace neighborly help, and those helped emphasize the gain of new knowledge. The rhetorical image is similar to what the project initiators want to convey; however, their speaker's positions as inhabitants or peers fulfill another function in the radio report. Eventually, the future affected by demographic change appears to the listeners as something jointly experienced in the present, which can be mastered by the membership together. A community of future-oriented actors develops among the residents.

I, therefore, understand the radio reports as means of *mobilization* described by Callon (1986). The members portrayed in these radio reports act as representatives and, literally, as spokespersons for the network to spread their visions of the future and, thus, mobilize other residents to become members. The subject of the next section is how the members negotiate this role in everyday life and what effects this has on future orientations in everyday life.

Controversy—Future vs. Present and the Effects on Everyday Life
The project initiators set their sights on the kick-off event on the future in the year 2030—a time horizon that, in some cases, lies further into the future than the expected lifespan of the audience. What relevance does this future have in the present for the target group of the lecture—older people aged 60 to 90 years? The question of this section is how the members position themselves and their agency in relation to the visions of the future conjured up by the future object of demographic change. I argue that this reveals a *controversy* (Callon 1986) in which members reject their assigned role or negotiate it differently than intended in the *problematization*.

Felix Ringel and Roxana Moroşanu established the term *time-tricking* to point out the agency of actors in shaping the future: "Time-tricking refers to the many different ways in which people individually and collectively attempt to modify, manage, bend, distort, speed up, slow down or structure the times they are living in" (Moroşanu & Ringel 2016, 17). Statistics and their underlying vision of the future, for example, would also help to realign individual life courses accordingly (Ringel 2018, 25). Once again, I will focus on the members who spoke in the radio report to better understand the residents' agency.

The helper portrayed is about 70 years old, a trained carpenter who later worked in public service. He has lived with his family in the same village all his life. I first met the helper in the network's office when we both signed our membership cards. In the following three months, I saw him again on each of my field research missions to the network: At an information event in a village pub, where he, as an already active member, had been there "out of curiosity" (author's observation protocol, July 17, 2017), at a training course for helpers and as my first helper when I requested help myself through the network. All in all, I perceived him as a "man of the first hour," concerned with the development of the network.

In an interview that I later conducted with him, he justified his commitment with the words: "We have to get the car running," which is why he also participates in the media reports, among other things. As he says in the following interview excerpt, his motivation to get involved with the network comes from a "sense of honor" that he feels on a human level towards the network:

> But as I have already said, the [project coordinator] is a passionate supporter [...], because she has a certain sense of honor. And she wants to get the thing through and that's why the basic idea [of the helping network], as I just said, is a laudable one, a good one, with a corresponding background, which will be needed more in the future than it is now. […]. Or I would commit myself even more, because, as I just said and formulated, the basic idea is good and when a person, as she does, goes through with it, it is like founding a company. […]. In a company, she would be the boss, she coordinates, she needs her supporters. It needs, as they say here in [the network], its caretakers. And the more positive things come along, the easier it is for her and the easier it is for her to pursue the matter. If there are a lot of people who help her and continue to do so, I think that in ten years' time, the matter will be more important than it is today. (Interview, helper, July 18, 2018, author's translation)

The helper describes himself as a "caretaker" and places his actions in the context of entrepreneurial action (Bröckling 2016; Husu & Kumpulainen 2019). The primary motivation for his commitment comes from interpersonal relationships and a habitually based sense of duty.

The second member portrayed in the radio report is a woman in her early 60s. She lives alone in a house with a large garden and sheep, which she bought ten years ago with her husband, who has since passed away. Before that, they lived 40 km away. She has no family in the region. In the interview, she talks about an arranged television shoot, where she was filmed in her garden during a helping mission.

> So I thought: "Gee, that [the fence repair] would be something for the TV show." Then we can at least show what we can do, what we do, in a practical way. [...] The editor did it very humorously. It was really great, wonderful. You could also show what the network is doing. That was the point of the thing, that they concreted the supports for the fence with quick cement. I could have done it myself, but ok, we just took it for the report. It was also quite good, was nice. (Interview, person helped, November 14, 2018, author's translation)

The person helped positions herself both in the interview and the radio report as "active" who has something to present and convey. She enriches her own life through the network by learning new skills and meeting other people, as she emphasized elsewhere in the interview when she reported on a mission in her garden:

> And then he [the helper] came. He brought another neighbor with him and said, "I have to see what to do here first. I have to bring the tools and stuff like that." "Yes, gladly." Drank coffee, told, showed. And then we built the raised bed together. I mean, he built it and I was the sidekick, so to speak. And that I also enjoyed. And then I went to him with a piece of wood because he said: "I don't have the drills with me now. Why don't you just come over." And then he showed me his workshop. Oh, that made me jealous. He has things, tools, wonderful, really great. [...]. And then he showed me how to drill the log. [...]. I admired that and so on, I am such a hidden craftsman. And ... yes, then we had a cup of coffee afterwards – his wife came downstairs and introduced herself. And that was a good wavelength with the wife, also with the garden and greenhouse and, oh, such a direct exchange. "If you get that from me, I'll get that from you," like that. Great. And that was also when they were shooting here, she came with him. (ibid.)

This interview excerpt clarifies what the implementation of the LEADER project is about. It is about accomplishing daily aid, the enrichment of everyday life and community. This is also made clear by the following excerpt with an over 90-year-old woman who received help via the network:

> I wanted to have someone to play games with me. That way you get more entertainment. And then I had help in the garden. And if something gets broken, for example, hanging a light bulb. They offer all that. [...] Now I have the Bible TV; I can't get it on the TV alone now, so I get help again. (Interview, person helped II, October 13, 2018, author's translation)

These notions of new forms of social interaction that the members highlight in the interview reveal different temporal horizons and logics on the different levels of the LEADER project. To illustrate that, there are, on the one hand, the members who highlight first and foremost the benefits of the LEADER project for their own lives in the present. On the other hand, the project initiators, who follow more the policy logic, envision what the LEADER project could achieve in the future. I understand this dissidence regarding the mediated visions of the future as the *controversy* in the trans-

lation process. Callon describes the controversy as "all the manifestations by which the representativity of the spokesman is questioned, discussed, negotiated, rejected, etc." (Callon 1986, 15). He asks what happens if the actors do not fulfill their expected roles and act in a very different or opposite way (ibid., 16). I do not want to say that the members actively reject their roles, nor could (and would) I detect any dissidence towards the project. On the contrary, I could see goodwill towards the engagement of the project initiators and the idea. However, I would like to point out a *controversy* between the intended future orientations on the LEADER project level and the individual future orientations in everyday life.

If the project initiators portray the residents as bearers of hope and future shapers, a look at the residents shows that they act as spokespersons due to their agency. However, their motivation to participate, is individual and follows their own goals. Therefore, the shaping of the future plays more of a role on the level of the brokers and/or those who create and implement the LEADER project. Participation in the LEADER project for the current members, however, fulfills above all the purpose of mastering everyday life in the here and now and improving the life situation for the individual. The future plays a role only on the level of the policy and its materializations, such as the future objects and their medial mediation.

Conclusion

This paper shows that policy-induced visions of the future and role attributions are displaced and renegotiated in the process of their translation. The adaptation of Michel Callon's four moments of translation for the analysis of the negotiation process served to focus on the agency of local actors in shaping the future.

With their social and cultural capital, project coordinators act as brokers at the interface between LEADER experts and residents. They have the capacity to aspire to use policy-induced future objects, such as representations of demographic change, to convey a vision of the future and enroll residents as future shapers. Representations of demographic change serve the project initiators as future objects to anticipate their vision of the future in the present and, thus, create urgency among residents to act in the present. As this paper has shown, one future practice effected by that is the practice of mobilizing new members for the LEADER project by addressing the topos of "active old age." To this end, members act as spokespersons who, by telling personal stories from the network, embody the intended future vision of the "active age."

Therefore, the analysis showed that the future—in this case, related to the handling of the demographic change—plays a role primarily in the context of the LEADER policy as a strategic means to motivate residents to act. However, these policy-induced future practices have no significant influence on the everyday life of residents. It is more a matter of coping with the here-and-now challenges. In the LEADER project, residents are, thus, representatives of activated bodies intended to symbolize the future in an ideal way. Regarding the controversy about the policy-induced vision of the future, their agency comes into play when shaping a future characterized by a reinterpretation of the visions of the future conveyed and filled with individual life.

As Chakkalakal notes, making and knowing the future always has a political dimension of belonging and participation. The future is linked to power and inequality relations, making a perspective on *race*, *ethnicity*, *class*, *age*, *dis/ability*, etc., indispensable (Chakkalakal 2018, 9). My fieldwork that was focused mainly on official events, where the LEADER policy was visible, gave insights into who can formulate and assert a particular future vision. Further ethnographic research focusing more on the informal parts of LEADER projects, for example, strictly on the implementation phase when no "official" LEADER experts are present, could follow up on the inequality relations that exist when dealing with the future. That way, it could be determined even more who the declared "future shapers" are and how they position themselves to global social transformations such as the demographic change.

Notes

1. LEADER is the abbreviation for the French name *Liaison entre actions de développement de l'économie rurale* (Link between actions for the development of the rural economy) (see https://www.netzwerk-laendlicher-raum.de/regionen/leader/. Accessed November 20, 2020.

2. The DFG funded research project "Participatory Development of Rural Regions. Everyday Cultural Negotiations of the EU LEADER Program" of the Department of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Bonn is investigating the questions 1) of how inhabitants of rural regions participate in the local implementation of politico-economic development measures, 2) how they translate the measures into their everyday life, and 3) what effects these translations have on perceptions and interpretations, as well as on cultural objectification. (https://www.kulturanthropologie.uni-bonn.de/en/dep/en/research/projects/ dfg-projekt-partizipative-entwicklung-laendlicher-regionen-participative-development-of-rural-regions?set_language=en).

3. I thank the two anonymous reviewers for their careful reading of my manuscript and the insightful comments and suggestions.

4. In general, for my case study about future practices, I accompanied two LEADER projects in two neighboring LEADER regions in Germany in depths and three other projects occasionally in three LEADER regions. For this paper, I focus on just one LEADER project, even though my analysis is influenced by my insights on the other projects as well.

5. In regard to current anthropological studies about the coronavirus pandemic, the research project "Bonndemic. Urban cultures during and after the Pandemic" investigates based on participant observation, qualitative interviews, and online ethnographies at the example of the German city Bonn, how urban spaces of a neighborhood, nightlife, and protest are transformed in the wake of the pandemic and which practices become part of everyday urban culture after the crisis (see https://www.kulturanthropologie.uni-bonn.de/bonndemic/about).

6. That dealing with the future becomes more and more relevant for the study of everyday life is also shown in the increasing number of research projects and conferences on the topic of the future, such as the DFG funded project "Living or Surviving the Future? Future Laboratories as Spaces of Possibility for a Good Life Beyond Contemporary Society" of the department of cultural anthropology at University of Freiburg or the university conference of the German Folklore Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde) "Planning. Hop-

ing. Fearing. On the Presence of the Future in Everyday Life" of the department of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Bonn in 2018.

7   The future, for example, became a topic in the field of anthropological research of macroeconomics and finance (Guyer 2007), in processes of modernity and globalization (Appadurai 2013), in urban and state planning (Abram 2014, 2017), or in theories of temporal succession and duration (Moroşanu & Ringel 2016; Nielsen 2011)—to name just a few.

8   Callon uses the term "spokesman/spokesmen"—for gender neutrality, I use the term "spokesperson."

9   Due to the anonymization in the project, the author does not provide the names of the interviewees and the places where the interviews took place. Instead, only their functions in the LEADER project are named.

10 The following names in square brackets are pseudonyms.

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Responses

Grounding Future Visions: A Response to Wohlgemuth

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Sina Wohlgemuth details a useful methodological tool kit for ethnographic study, at a regional scale, of State-sponsored efforts to ameliorate rural demographic crises. Such crises are trending globally. Since the advent of industrial capitalism, rural areas have struggled to hold onto their young, and in recent decades, declining national birth rates have supercharged demographic strains on rural communities. These trends, which are both macrostructural and international, are ripe for interdisciplinary scholarly research that integrates critical cultural analysis.

What are the implications for aging rural communities facing declining government capacity and growing care needs? Jumping into the breach, the European Union's LEADER program models the provision of care for the old and young by integrating government services with family and neighborly caregivers. Focusing on the roll out of this effort in two regions of Germany, Sina Wohlgemuth has assembled data through interviews and participant observations of cross-sectoral[1]

public forums (and their accompanying documents) for stakeholders from local communities.

We find Wohlgemuth's careful attention to the emergent, fragile spaces where translational moments incubate networked matrices for collaborative governance especially compelling. These matrices, structured as communicative events, generate the new identities and temporalities needed for envisioning alternative futures. Wohlgemuth's methods are particularly effective in creating: a) an actor-centered view of bureaucracies; b) a linear, action-centered view of bureaucratic processes from top-down governmental vision to the uptake (or rejection or reconfiguration) of those processes by local actors; and c) a view of public deliberation and culture as a series of discrete social dramas, framed as events that produce definable discursive "objects."

At the points where the stalactites of government meet the stalagmites of bottom-up regionalization, we encounter contestation, struggle, and visions of contending futures. In 2019 our organization, the Livelihoods Knowledge Exchange Network (LiKEN), undertook a collaborative research project with a regional arts organization, Mid-Atlantic Arts (Hufford and Taylor 2020a, 2020b). With funding from a private foundation, LiKEN coordinated a field team to assess the need for folk and traditional arts programs in the region and identify resources and venues. Focusing on aesthetic practices that express and renew a sense of collective being helped structure our listening across 112 counties in Appalachia—a region comprising fertile territory for LEADER-like work. A focus on the arts allowed us to engage in appreciative inquiry into community assets and visions for alterna-

tive futures in a region coming to terms with post-industrial economics following well over a century of industrially driven, mono-economic forms of development.

This regional survey identified emergent spaces and networks where local energies could be matched with the regional distribution of resources through a program such as LEADER. We found that these networked spaces are unevenly, but quite organically, emerging through locally-driven efforts to access and weave together many kinds of resources toward creating alternative futures. We feel a vital role for ethnographic research into how such efforts are incubating networked governance. We wonder how this terrain in the U.S. compares with that in Germany and how the research subtending the LEADER program was designed to discover and engage existing efforts to reflect on and reshape models for the future.

Like the rural parts of Germany described in Wohlgemuth's essay, rural parts of the Appalachian region face youth attrition and an aging population. Yet we found, in every county, community-based efforts to stem the tide of outmigration through economic development that integrated artistic and ecological assets. The leadership was often affiliated with regionally networked auspices such as Convention and Visitors Bureaus and local seats of governance, and regionalizing from below through meso-level alliances, cooperatives, and markets which were also connected through what we have come to call ecologies of care. Listening to this leadership formed the basis for our report and recommendations.

Having spent three decades in the Appalachian region of the U.S. following interactions among government agencies,

cultural /societal /economic macrostructures, and bottom-up collective (and individual) subjectivities and processes (from organized social /political movements to community life to national cultural meta-narratives), we are struck by the multi-dimensional interactions of forces. We recognize that cultural analysis is fundamental to an often-contentious process before policymaking and implementation. Because our work focuses on identifying policy needs at the grassroots in a region with a historically distinctive relationship to the State, we find ourselves wishing for more context that would situate the LEADER program in the play of local, regional, and national history and politics. Such a context could illuminate: 1) what is distinctive about national and regional political cultures and 2) a dynamic view of the State itself as a site of contestation.

1) Contextualizing within regional and national political cultures: We find that Government programs are never simply top-down but arise from distinctive kinds of historical relationships between the State and other sectors (e.g., organized civil society, corporate power, experts, media, etc.) (Rothschild and Stephenson 2009). A program like LEADER might play out differently in countries with relatively high levels of trust in government (like Germany) from countries where "bottom-up" civic voluntarism is traditionally trusted more than governmental action (like the U.S.) (OECD 2022). Unique political-cultural terrains are laid down by national and regional histories and contestations that provide the background of possibilities within which government policies operate across regional civic ecologies (Taylor 2009). The LEAD-

ER program is a many-layered design, with EU inspiration and origins, but national and subnational implementation. It is traversing heterogenous political terrains with diverse cultural narratives to frame how civil society, customary communities, and the State should inter-digitate. The LEADER model sounds curiously "American" with its valorization of voluntaristic and household-based care. However, it is being implemented in German regions with a long tradition of public care systems based in a strong social democratic State. Attention to background political cultures could encourage comparative studies of diverse national and regional contexts that would increase the depth and accuracy of cultural analysis.

2) The need for a dynamic understanding of the State: The content of the policy and the structures of agencies and programs arise in a messy back-and-forth, dialogue, and contestation among communities, civil society, government (at diverse and often antagonistic scales), and other players (Stivers 2009). How might the moments of contention to which Wohlgemuth alludes exemplify such a dynamism? Wohlgemuth alludes to the possibility that a program like LEADER could fit a neoliberal pattern of valorizing voluntary care work while decreasing government services and public revenues. How do participants within the communities recognize and address that possibility? We know these patterns from our work in a part of the U.S. that is a 'sacrifice zone' for extractive industries (Reid & Taylor 2010). For over a century, the coal and timber of Central Appalachia produced vast wealth for absentee corporate owners while locking local communities into a path of development on the peripheries of the world system, with severely under-funded government services and little room for maneuver (in a Gramscian sense).

Boom and bust, extractive economies generate deep local inequalities and a 'local State' dominated by local elites tied to extraction (Billings & Blee 2000). This is a kind of corporate State power structure in which, paradoxically, anti-government narratives can thrive. This kind of anti-government rhetoric has been key to the neoliberal dismantling of government services and agencies in recent years. Examining these cultural and political formations, "in the round," from multiple perspectives is essential. In the Appalachian context, the very dysfunctions of government in this "sacrifice zone" have also opened up alternative, civic spaces for social movements for a "just transition" from extractive industry—enabled by the distinctive, regional history of bottom-up justice movements (Tarus et al. 2017; Taylor et al. 2017)

"Edgework": 'research objects' that are 'boundary objects': To achieve the above goals, we think the primary need is to find methods that allow one to focus on objects of cross-sectoral care and stewardship that can become 'boundary objects' for collaborative research (see, for example, Bendix et al., 2017). We call this a form of "edgework" that brings multiple perspectives into dialogue to situate the object of research and action at a public nexus of interdisciplinary and multisectoral perspectives to break down silos between spheres, sectors, and scales (Hufford & Taylor, 2013). The key to this is understanding public life as arising from particular historical and cultural contexts

and paths of development. We need to contextualize them in the political terrain within which they must operate—defined as the background conditions of the political arena in which civil society navigates and "the prevailing atmosphere [that] determines boundaries and a language of possibility" (Perusek 2006, 86). This specificity matters, because cultural analysis of community rhetorics that mobilize collective hope are important to understanding the building of public trust and participation. Folklore's historical association with top-down regionalizing projects of the State has been reflexively redeployed in recent decades in the work of bottom-up regionalization (Taylor, 2001). Public folklore can play a vital role in fostering shared inquiry around named cultural expressions of collective being (festivals, foodways, land practices, musical and oral traditions, etc). Moreover, these forms of cultural production can form a productive boundary object for multisectoral (and cross-disciplinary) knowledge sharing—around which everyone assembles as subjects. Out of the shared inquiry into the boundary object comes the raw material (recordings, transcriptions) on which to reflect together in the process of collaborative modeling.

Wohlgemuth's essay foregrounds both the kinds of discursive boundary objects we have in mind and their functions. How might local discursive objects be at risk of cannibalization by the State's discursive objects? Attention to the interactions of official and vernacular forms of knowledge exchange engages vernacular epistemologies. Generating forms of time that depend on demographic stability, vernacular epistemologies could be more central to the process but would require ethnographic attention throughout the design and implementation of programs such as LEADER. In the case at hand, the most prominent objects are those originating with the State, termed "future objects." Like Dickens' ghost of Christmas future, graphic models of projected demographics offer scenarios around which alternative futures and alternative future shapers materialize. The essay mentions, almost in passing, the kinds of boundary objects to which public folklore might be most keenly attentive: proverbs, stories, herbal knowledge, gardens. As collective structures that secrete vernacular temporalities, bundling together past, present, and future, and as material practices that actively shape the future out of the present, this kind of knowledge could be used not only to model potential consequences of demographic change but to audit equity in planning and evaluation. Here, we believe that ethnographically grounded public folklore can play an essential role in the unfolding processes of knowledge exchange vital to the success of programs like LEADER.

Notes

1   We use "cross-sectoral" to refer to work and communication between the sectors of government, civil society, experts, and other key types of players relevant in particular settings (such as corporations, philanthropy, etc.)

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