

## 28 THE MIGRATION OF THE ELDERLY: A KEY TO DEVELOPMENT IN PERIPHERAL AREAS OF GERMANY AND IN THE MEDITERRANEAN?

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### INTRODUCTION

In Germany, rural peripheral areas, which were heavily affected by the socio-economic transformation after 1990, are often perceived as difficult and poorly manageable regional cases for redevelopment (Kapphan, 1996). In short, three different processes can be identified:

- The primary and secondary sector, together with their supply and demand chains, were subject to massive structural changes, most obviously visible in the disproportionately high unemployment rates in rural areas and the relatively high importance of the tertiary sector.
- As a result of the ongoing economic crisis in East Germany and the growing demand for labour from West Germany, selective flows of migration from the East to the West were induced.
- At the same time, the population in the peripheral rural areas is aging.

The results of these developments can be summarised as a relatively aged population, a numerical deficit of young women and disproportionately high frequency of low-qualified people (Weiss & Hilbig, 1998; Weiss, 2002; Marezke, 1998).

Similar processes can be identified in peripheral areas of the Mediterranean, with the additional and very important aspect of the seasonal migration of elderly people from Central and Northern Europe.

However, following the theory of counter-migration, it is possible to identify signs of migration flows into East Germany: Quite similar to urban areas (Beck, 2003), peripheral rural areas seem to attract migrants that do not correspond to the regional demographic structure. This counter-migration contributes to a further internal differentiation of rural areas but cannot soften the intra-German disparities. Such counter-migration flows can be identified in the rural areas of Brandenburg (outside Berlin) where, from 1991 to 1998, 10758 people over 50 years relocated from outside Brandenburg. The identification of these groups seems to fit into earlier discourses about the migration of elderly people in the United States, a field of research that has been covered since the mid-1980s in the US (Gober, 1985; Long & Hansen, 1979; Longino, 1994; Speare & Meyer, 1988).

A transfer of the recent debates on the role of the elderly in society (Kühnemund, 2001) and the importance of counter-migration as a conceptual framework from a geographer's point of view has led to the following questions:

- Which motives make elderly people move (from urban areas) into peripheral rural areas?
- Does the immigration of elderly people create any new perspectives for the development of rural areas?
- Can this migration flow be instrumentalised for revitalising activities on the local level?
- Do the existing planning instruments reflect the potential of the migrants, and which actions should be taken?

### **THE SPATIAL IMPACT OF THE IMMIGRATION OF THE ELDERLY**

From a theoretical point of view, the immigration of the elderly into peripheral areas can induce two processes with spatial implications:

First, immigration can, at least partially, compensate population losses. The demographic stability or the slowing of the regression can have at least three direct implications: (i) existing functional structures can be stabilised in their use and physiognomic existence (persistence); (ii) existing non-customer adopted services and infrastructure will be transformed or perish (regression); and (iii) new customer-orientated services and infrastructure will grow (expansion). Thus, persistence, regression and expansion might lead to a restructuring of functional structures: the degree in which these processes might materialise depends on the intensity of the immigration and the qualifications and needs of the immigrants. Demographically differentiated immigration tends to challenge the adaptivity of the existing planning instruments and act as catalyst for adaptations and development.

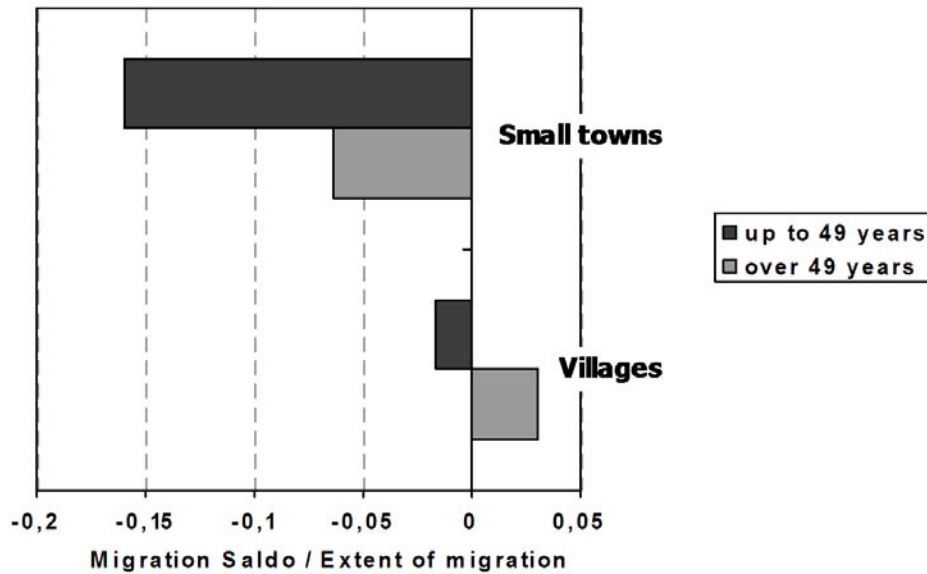
Second, elderly immigrants can act as innovators in rural areas, especially if their discontent with their existing living environment, their demand for environmental quality and their economic power can be instrumentalised and implemented in rural development policies. Potential areas for these innovative impulses can be the traditional social communication and interactive patterns that could be transformed or modified by urban activity. Furthermore, changes in the demand for services and infrastructure can occur (Kühnemund, 2001). In this context, it is worthwhile to consider the changing perception of rural areas following the current debate about post-productivist rural landscapes. Immigrants from urban areas might perceive rural areas not predominantly as spaces of agricultural production but as spaces of high environmental quality (Ilbery & Bowler, 1998: 75).

The following section brings about the results of a small-scale research project that was promoted by the Common Regional Planning Authority of Berlin-Brandenburg. During

the research, in the summer of 2002, 534 people were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire.

### MIGRATION INTO RURAL AREAS

The analysis of migration in the villages and small cities of the Land Brandenburg, exemplified in the case of the Prignitz-Region, reveals the regional diversity of demographic change induced by migration: small cities are losing population in the age up to and over 49 years, while villages lose in the segment up to 49 years and gain in the segment over 49 years. This increase is exclusively created by immigration (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1:** Effectiveness of migration into small towns and villages in Brandenburg, 1991-1999 (source: Statistical Data of Land Brandenburg, 1991-1999)

Looking at the geographical perspectives of migration (Fig. 2), the dominant role of Berlin as source of immigration (44% of all immigrants) becomes obvious. As regards the target areas, the regions Oberhavel, Prignitz and Dahme-Spree could attract most immigrants. A differentiation of the immigrants by age shows significant spatial variations: the so-called “younger elderly” (up to 65 years old) prefer Oberhavel, Prignitz, Märkisch-Oderland and Ostprignitz-Ruppin, while the “older elderly” tend to move to Oberspreewald-Lausitz und Oder-Spree. Emigrants from Berlin tend to settle in the surrounding areas, while immigrants preferred the Prignitz and Spree-Neiße areas from West Germany. A possible explanation for this migration pattern could be the relative small distance to the West (in the case of Prignitz, which is only 35 min. away from Hamburg), or the availability of jobs for Western experts in the area of Cottbus, which is dominated by lignite mining and chemical industries that were restructured by West German companies.

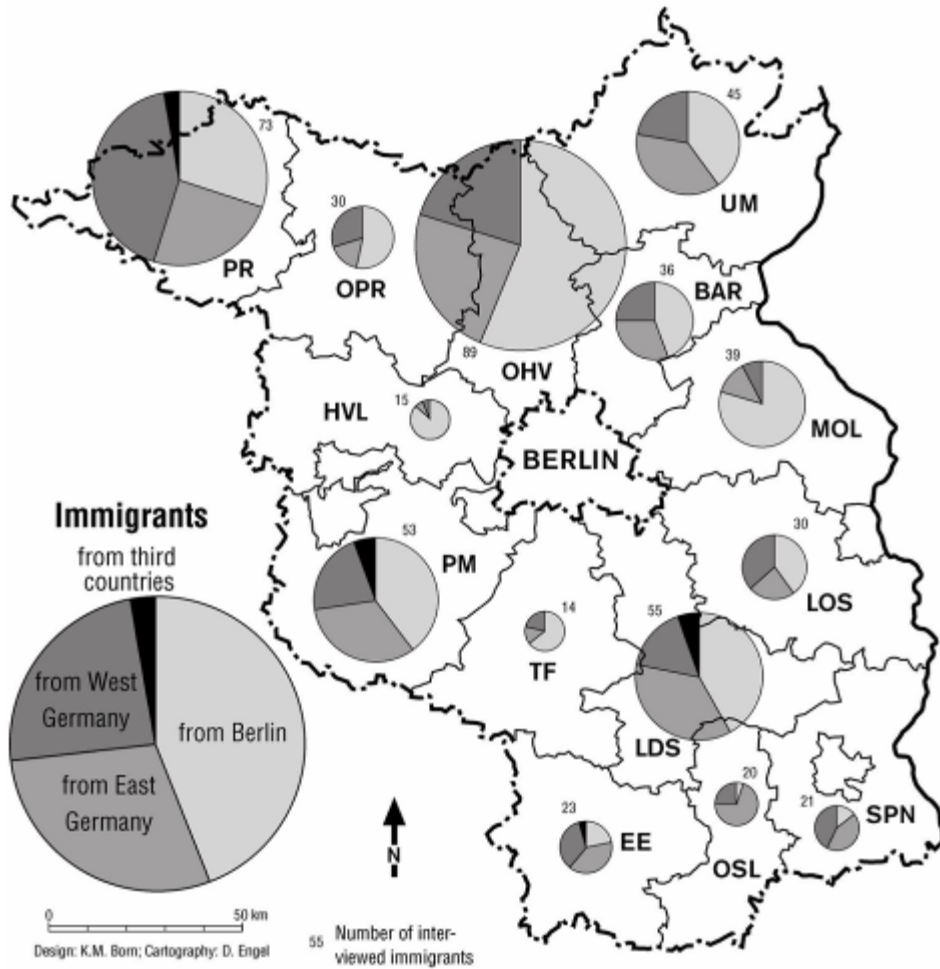


Figure 2: Structure of the interviewed immigrants in peripheral areas in Brandenburg (source: KMB).

### Motives of the immigrants

Our analysis of the migration motives started out by investigating the common parameter of personal links with the area or a possible affinity to rural areas. The research design followed an interaction model that interlinks quality of living, personal resources and use of space, and recognises integration, mobility and identity as the main elements of interaction of elderly people with their environment (Friedrich, 1995: 210-213).

Quite contrary to our expectations, derived from historically forced emigrations, and actual restitution or reprivatisation policies (Born, 2004), there was no sign of correlation between personal links or affinities and migrations: over 70% of those interviewed had not lived in the village before, or had no familiar links to the area.

Similarly, there was no biographically induced affinity of the interviewed to rural areas as they used to live longer in cities than in villages.

Building upon the results from the interviews, two main types of immigration motives could be identified:

- 228 of the 543 interviewed, mostly elderly, referred to family motives for their migrations;
- 315 of the 543 interviewed, mostly younger, referred to area-related motives: property, quiet, rural environment, nature, low living costs.

As shown in Fig. 3 that illustrates the regional diversity in the migration motives, the areas of Prignitz, Ostprignitz-Ruppin, Ueckermark und Märkisch-Oderland seem to be the most attractive ones because of their cultural and natural environment.

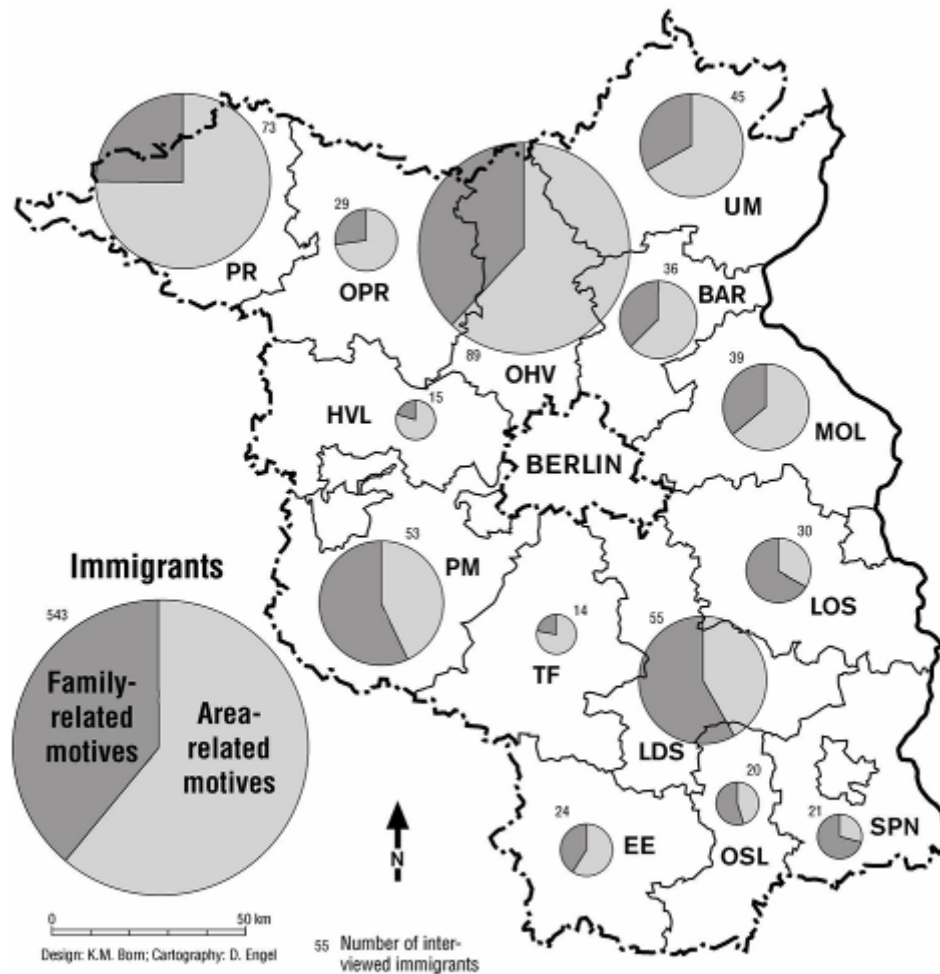
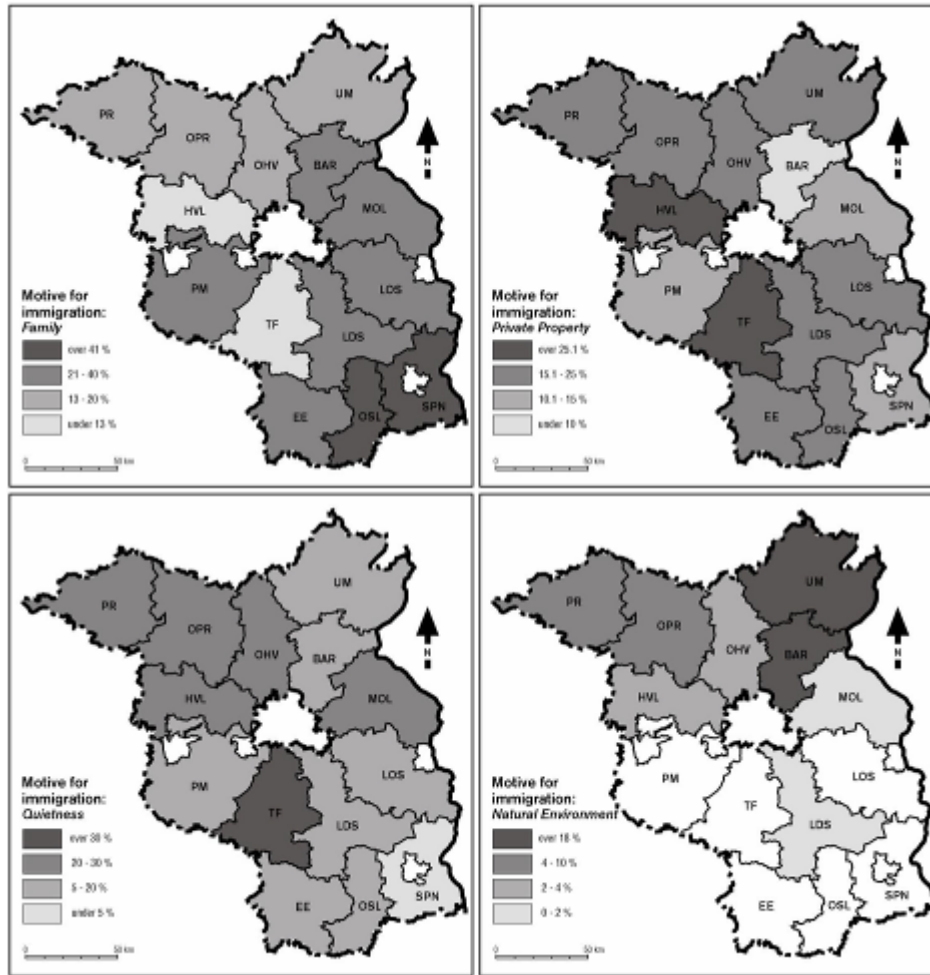


Figure 3: Main types of motives for the migration of the elderly into peripheral areas of Brandenburg (source: KMB).

The spatial discrepancy between family- and area-related motives is also clearly recognisable when looking at the individual motives: property, nature and quiet were most often invoked by immigrants to the northern parts of Brandenburg (Fig. 4).



Design: K.M. Born; Cartography: G. Engel

**Figure 4:** Share of the motives “Family”, “Private Property”, “Quiet” and “Natural Environment” in all motives (source: KMB).

A comparison between the motives of elderly migrants into Brandenburg with those having migrated to the Mediterranean reveals striking similarities (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Most important reasons for moving to the Mediterranean (sources: Born/Goltz/Saupe, 2004; King/Warnes/Williams, 1998).

	BRANDENBURG	TUSCANY	MALTA	COSTA DEL SOL	ALGARVE
Cost of living	5.29	2.9	8.6	6.2	6.9
Climate and environment	23.79	15.4	37.5	48.1	44.2
Health	6.28	10.6	14.6	18.4	15.2

Antipathy to former home	12.78	14.4	3.0	6.8	11.1
Admiration of country	n/a	11.5	7.9	5.0	3.7
Work/Business	6.28	18.3	6.0	2.7	8.8
Family	25.0	19.2	15.0	8.9	8.8
Other	20.58	7.7	7.5	3.9	1.4
N. ° of respondents	534	104	267	337	217

Pull factors, such as “cost of living” and “climate and environment”, were mentioned in all five areas, whereas “antipathy to former home” seems to be the main push factor. The most important difference between the five studies refers to the role of family as an attracting factor: it is obviously lower for the national migration within Germany than in the cases of international migrations to the Mediterranean. Health as a reason for migration also differs between the case studies. In fact, it is not clear whether health as a motivation to migrate can be reduced to the quest for warmer winters, or to the need for care.

This differentiation by immigrant groups and regions can be taken into account in the formulation of policies for the stabilisation of rural areas, as the demand for property can stabilise the property market or at least save some of the derelict houses. Furthermore, the demand for high environmental quality can be used in support of environmentally friendly, sustainable policies of landscape preservation and conservation.

### **Potential effects of the immigration of the elderly for rural development**

Besides the already mentioned effects of immigration on the demographic development and the housing stock in rural areas, our findings allow more conclusions regarding potential direct and indirect effects of immigration.

Most of the interviewed immigrants evaluated their integration in the local community as good and mentioned contacts with their neighbours and the membership in local clubs. But it is precisely this participation in the local community which stresses the differences, as well as the spatial impact, between “older elderly”, who support more traditional clubs and organisations, and the “young elderly”, who committed themselves to local initiatives, protest movements or support groups. This commitment underlines the general willingness to become involved as stakeholders in their new environment (N.B.: Most of those interviewed did not consider any future change of residence besides the final one, *i.e.* to the cemetery). But this commitment can also be seen as an important impulse for development, as the immigrants could use their experience from other areas in a constructive, innovative way.

The above-average income of the immigrants can have its impact on the use of infrastructures in central towns. The relatively high purchasing power creates not only stabilising effects for the existing infrastructure but it can initiate new or diversify

existing structures. An indicator for this assumption is the criticism by the interviewed of the lack of age-specific offers in sports, culture and leisure.

Although the immigration of elderly people into peripheral areas might create a positive push in the restructuring of these areas, it should not be forgotten that it can also create problems and tensions within the rural society. Firstly, the purchase and use of houses by immigrants reduces the options for potential local buyers, *i.e.* those who live in the area or those who might return to their hometown after having worked in the West. Secondly, the concept of a regional development stimulated by immigrants needs to take into account that conflicts might arise between those who actively migrated into peripheral areas, which they perceived as an ideal living environment, and those who feel captive of their environment and tend to flee from it.

It must be born in mind that the immigration of the elderly into rural areas does intensify the demographic over-aging process, and that the above mentioned positive effects might be assessed as rudimental or marginal. But even such an evaluation does not prevent the necessity to reassess the so-called “third life phase” in which consumption prevails and could be benefited from.

### **Qualities of an “ideal” immigration area for the elderly**

The interviews with elderly immigrants into rural Brandenburg pointed to the qualities of those areas. Since the motives of those who migrated to their families cannot be linked with area-related qualities, the following remarks apply only to the other group of migrants.

In general, the level of satisfaction amongst the elderly in rural peripheral areas seems to be remarkably high: in a survey of 271 elderly in the urban area of Berlin and the peripheral Prignitz area, the elderly in the peripheral area show higher rates of contentedness [8.24 compared to 7.78, on a scale of 1 (“low”) to 10 (“high”)] (Born and Goltz, 2006). However, these results cannot lead to the conclusion that political activities for the elderly should address rural areas only marginally, because the high level of satisfaction must be seen in the context of a long habitation in poorly equipped areas.

The qualities of an “ideal” immigration area for the elderly were found by using a simplified push-pull model (Lee, 1966) and by recognising those characteristic landscape qualities which were both mentioned as reasons for the relocation and as elements for the present high evaluation of living quality in the area. Thus there is no need to crosscheck the subjective results from the interviews with the objectively measurable landscape or living quality.

The following explanations of the qualities of an “ideal” immigration area will later be used as basis for the discussion of those challenges that the immigration of the elderly put upon the regional and local actors. Although the order of the qualities is derived from the frequency of references, it must be mentioned that their spatial implications can only be recognised in their combination and balance.



“Ideal” areas of immigration in peripheral areas should comprise the following qualities:

- high landscape quality: positive aesthetical and ecological values in the local and personal living environment (low emissions, high ecological diversity), traditional historical landscapes with diversified land use patterns and landscape elements, and small to medium scale farming;
- attractive housing (negatively proportional to former housing) and low living costs;
- network of towns with attractive and customer (age) oriented supply of goods and services;
- public transport to towns and villages; continuity in the use of medical and cultural amenities;
- population willing to integrate the immigrants with a low level of discontent, rejection or distrust;
- absence of large-scale projects with potential conflicts with the desired environmental qualities (e.g., military training grounds, wind turbines, airports); and
- mobile supply system: potential use as “safe-guard” in a long term perspective of increasing immobility.

## **PERSPECTIVES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL AREAS**

The results of our investigation, although done on a small-scale level, can be used as basis for the development of regional and local strategies and activity plans. However, it is necessary to stress that they are only focused on a particular area and a particular group within rural society. Therefore, the following ideas and recommendations can only serve as particular solutions for one of the many issues in rural peripheral areas.

First, the immigration of the elderly shows some positive and negative effects on regional development, such as:

- stabilisation of the population number and a flattening of the regression curve,
- persistence of the functional and structural built environment;
- intensification of over-aging;
- positive development of income and education;
- polarisation of the population into the original inhabitants and immigrants with different socio-economic backgrounds; and
- polarisation of the population into “the captured and marginalized in rural areas” and “the volunteer immigrants” with potential conflicts among them.

For the Mediterranean, additional negative effects might result from the pressure on the housing market, and the polarisation of the inhabitants due to cultural and socio-economic differences.

Thus, the task of a development policy for rural areas should comprise the stabilisation and strengthening of the positive effects, as well as the mitigation of the negative effects. The implementation levels for this policy should include the formal process of spatial planning through the (re)definition of central places, or the planning of infrastructures and the informal processes of regional management (Fürst, 2001; Schäffer, 2004). If regional management is understood as the integration and coordination of the activities of public and private stakeholders, its role cannot be limited to immigration-supporting actions but must also include the integration of the new stakeholders. In this context, a set of policy recommendations are outlined hereunder:

- Activities of regional management should not only concentrate on the acquisition of enterprises but should also include the fixation of immigrants. One possible policy should be to focus on the accentuation of the positive aspects of the area, such as provision of housing, subsidies for the (re-)creation of housing, environmental quality, low living costs, social integration;
- Active preservation and development of the positive qualities of the area: restoration of the housing stock; formulation of guidelines for a comprehensive master plan in villages; investment into the public open spaces in villages; activation and mobilization of the village population through clubs and initiatives; planning-based on development of the cultural and natural environment (regional planning, land consolidation, nature conservation, agricultural planning etc.);
- Development and support of infrastructure focused on the demands of the elderly: development and support of sustainable and diversified health supply and care systems; offer of client-orientated activities in public associations, clubs etc.; support of the organisation of neighbourhood-orientated coordination activities; use of smart and innovative ways of public transport in sparsely populated areas; adjustment of public transport to the needs of the immigrants; securing public transport to the agglomeration centres;
- Strengthening of the role of medium-sized central towns: safeguarding and protection of the existing infrastructures; extension and diversification of the existing infrastructures according to the changing clientele, *i.e.*, adaptation to urban-influenced consumer needs;
- Integration and activation of the immigrants: securing the participation of elderly people in decision-making processes; integration of the elderly as innovators and carriers of development initiatives; interpretation of the immigration of the elderly as a chance for development with positive fiscal and employment effects; sustainable stabilisation and development of infrastructures

and services provided for the elderly; preventing the peripheral rural areas from becoming “transitional” for the elderly; moderation of conflicts between the native population and the immigrants;

- Intensified public participation of the elderly in planning and decision making;
- Diversified regional development through the identification of areas with regressive or stable character.

Although these recommendations seem to over-accentuate the impulses provoked by immigrants, it should be stressed that many of these arguments may create significant improvements for all elderly people in peripheral rural areas, regardless of whether they are immigrants or native residents.

Finally, it has to be mentioned that an important part of immigration-oriented activities has to include raising the awareness of the local policy- and decision-makers who tend to neglect the potential benefits that elderly immigrants can bring into rural areas, rather than just add to the fatalistically perceived rural decline. This process of raising awareness seems to be a prime field for the implementation of informal planning tools in the sense of impulse-generating by planning authorities at the local and regional levels.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA**

The results of our research on the migration of elderly people into rural areas provide some ideas about the motives and effects of the migration, but they are far from being complete or comprehensive. Nevertheless, they call for future research activities.

Firstly, different motives for the migration need to be analysed in greater depth: the rather rough differentiation into family- and space-related motives neglects many subtypes of migration motives which can be linked to individual characteristics like income, last occupation, educational level, etc.

Secondly, the important question of the effects of the immigration upon the local economy, infrastructures, village life and activities needs to be studied. In this context the research has to focus on regional economy issues, development trends and sociological analyses.

Further research should also reconsider the geographical dimension of migration: the regionally diversified attractiveness of areas needs to be investigated using migration data and information about the quality of regions. Furthermore, areas with permanent or seasonal migration should be identified.

There is also need to carry out policy analyses in the affected areas with a focus on the clientele, *i.e.*, to design development policies addressing the elderly. For instance, it would be worthwhile to study how policy- and decision-makers assess the over-ageing process and which interventions are considered to be effective.

Last, but not least, the European perspective needs to be studied: most Central and West European countries share the same demographical problems in their rural areas and,

thus, there is all reason to claim that the immigration of the elderly might play a similar role in these areas. On the pan-European level, permanent and seasonal migration into the Mediterranean countries has been well-known and documented, but the impact those immigrants might have on the regional economic and social fabric deserves greater attention among geographers and other researchers.

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