

Ingo Mose

Rural areas



CC license: CC-BY-SA 4.0 International

URN: 0156-559912345

This is a translation of the following entry:

Mose, Ingo (2018): Ländliche Räume. In: ARL – Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung (Hrsg.): Handwörterbuch der Stadt- und Raumentwicklung. Hannover, 1323-1334.

The original version can be accessed here:

urn:nbn:de:0156-55991234

Typesetting and layout: ProLinguo GmbH
Translation and proofreading: ProLinguo GmbH

Recommended citation:

Mose, Ingo (2018): Rural areas.

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0156-559912345>.

Rural areas

Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Structural change in rural areas
- 3 Definition and typology of rural areas
- 4 Development of rural areas as a challenge for spatial planning and regional policy
- 5 Outlook

References

Additional literature

Rural areas in Germany are starkly differentiated according to their different functions and polarised between economically prospering and structurally weak areas. This results in divergent requirements for the strategies and instruments of spatial planning and regional policy. The central objectives are the equivalence of living conditions, sustainable development and the engagement of the various stakeholders against the backdrop of European integration.

1 Introduction

Rural areas in Germany – as in Europe – were and still are subject to a process of profound change. In the 1960s, the term *rural area* still referred to a fairly homogeneous spatial type characterised above all by ▷ *Agriculture*, a low population density and by the prevalence of certain rural lifestyles. However, this perception no longer holds true. In fact, a clear heterogeneity of rural areas must be presumed. A characteristic feature here is the continuing convergence of the living conditions in the city (▷ *City, town*) and the countryside, which makes it increasingly difficult to distinguish between urban and rural populations. At the same time, the various functions assumed by rural areas nowadays have become more diverse and differentiated; this phenomenon is appropriately termed ‘multifunctionality’. Conspicuous disparities between economically prosperous rural areas on the one hand and structurally weak rural areas on the other hand (▷ *Disparities, spatial*) are another characteristic feature; these disparities mainly result from regional competition at the European level as well as from the ongoing processes of ▷ *Globalisation*. Accordingly, rural areas can now only be sensibly perceived as a plurality (Schmied 2005).

The implications of the growing heterogeneity of rural areas for ▷ *Spatial planning (Raumordnung)* and regional policy (▷ *Regional economic policy*) in the early 21st century are considerable. They equally affect the need for a stronger differentiation of specific regional programmes, strategies and instruments, the inclusion of different stakeholders who play a role in rural development and are involved in the processes of ▷ *Spatial development* through various forms of ▷ *Governance*, the increasingly imperative alignment with the objectives of ▷ *Sustainability* and, last but not least, the increasing Europeanisation of regional policy on the basis of advanced EU integration (OECD 2007; ▷ *European Union*).

2 Structural change in rural areas

This heterogeneity of rural areas is expressed in particular in the emergence of significant spatio-structural disparities. While the ongoing structural change in many regions has brought about access to improved development opportunities and helped them to overcome previous weaknesses, this has led elsewhere to an intensification of existing problems or the emergence of new ones. This development pattern has led to disparities at two levels: large-scale disparities (predominantly in the form of an East-West but in part also a North-South divide) and intra-regional disparities at an extremely small-scale level.

Various factors are decisive for structural change and determine the resulting development patterns of rural areas:

a) *Industrialisation of agriculture*

The industrialisation of agriculture is of key significance for the ongoing processes of change. It is mostly driven by agrotechnological progress and (European) ▷ *Agricultural policy*. Continuing operational concentration (‘grow or give way’) and spatial specialisation have given rise to a marked divergence of operational structures (size, ratio of full-time employment to part-time work) as well as a spatial polarisation of agriculture. The emergence of intensively used agrarian areas (e.g. Oldenburger Münsterland, Börde landscapes, Allgäu) is associated

with growing prosperity in these areas, but also with an accumulation of ecological problems, while conversely, agriculture is increasingly economically marginalised in many low-intensity agrarian areas (especially in low mountain regions).

b) *Development of non-agricultural employment*

The dynamics of the secondary and tertiary sectors continue to play a major factor. In both sectors, the specific location qualities of rural areas (availability of land, land prices, the attractiveness of the landscape, etc.) play an important role. The focused ‘re-industrialisation’ of numerous rural areas during the 1960s and 1970s, which was generally advanced through intensive state aid, frequently had only a limited impact. However, there are also a number of rural regions that traditionally show a very strong incidence of industrialisation and have developed very successfully (e.g. Sauerland, Württemberg). This can primarily be attributed to the adaptability of medium-sized enterprises, some of which are even global players. Nowadays, the advancing tertiarisation (including ▷ *Tourism* but also ▷ *Information and communication technologies*) increasingly offers new development opportunities. This applies similarly in recent years to the expansion of renewable energy (▷ *Renewable energies*), mainly wind power and biomass, which has triggered enormous development dynamics; at the same time, this expansion has also given rise to concerns, i.e. about the ‘cornification’ of the ▷ *Landscape*. Small and medium-sized enterprises in particular have helped many rural areas to benefit from economic development (e.g. Oldenburger Münsterland, Bodensee-Oberschwaben). On the other hand, many rural areas of Eastern Germany (Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Brandenburg in particular) lack any alternative means of generating income outside of agriculture, a phenomenon which has led to disproportionately high unemployment rates.

c) *Demographic change*

The attractiveness of the landscape in rural areas compared to the metropolises (‘living in a green idyll’), enhanced by lower property prices and good transport infrastructure, predominantly for cars (▷ *Motorised individual transport*), has led since the 1980s to a significant deconcentration of the population (counter-urbanisation) with a strong movement away from metropolitan areas towards more distant, rural areas with tolerable commuting distances. This trend has given rise to persistent growth in many rural municipalities and regions, which is associated with a clear shift in the previously predominantly agrarian population. At the same time, ▷ *Demographic change* continues to lead elsewhere to a rural exodus and a disproportionate ageing of the population. These phenomena are particularly evident in various Eastern German regions (e.g. in Western Pomerania), but also affect regions in Western Germany (e.g. the Harz region, Wesermarsch).

d) *Infrastructure facilities*

Since the 1960s, the ▷ *Infrastructure* has continuously been expanded in many rural areas; this is particularly true for the peripheral municipalities of large cities (▷ *Suburbanisation*) as well as for central places of areas that are at some distance from the metropolitan areas. The quality of the available public and private infrastructure is often very high in those areas - often even comparable to those of metropolitan areas. Other, especially peripheral areas saw a considerable dismantling of infrastructure: in many places public transport (▷ *Public transport*), for example, and in particular access to the railway network, is no longer available,

Rural areas

or only to a limited extent. The same is true for education, social and health services and for the ▷ *Retail trade*. Thus, ensuring the ▷ *Provision of public services* is becoming a key challenge for the future for these areas.

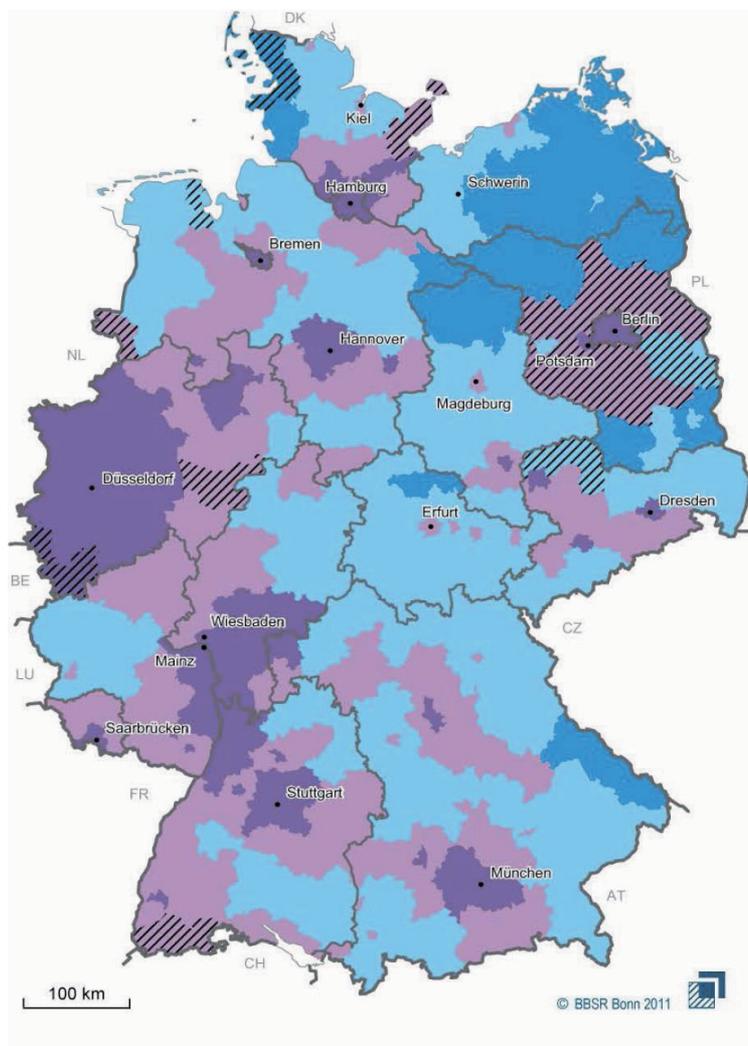
e) *Leisure and recreational functions*

The use of rural areas for free time and recreational pursuits is evident. Many places and regions have turned into centres for local recreation and tourism, with this frequently being the only economic alternative to agricultural use. However, not all rural areas are equipped with the necessary conditions to develop tourism. Areas with an attractive landscape have an advantage (e.g. the coast of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, the Alpine region) and in particular nature reserves (▷ *Conservation areas under nature conservation law*; e.g. national parks), which are among the most sought-after tourist destinations. At the same time, there are obvious risks to being economically dependent purely on tourism (e.g. seasonal employment, lack of alternative employment opportunities) as well as the associated adverse social (e.g. dominance of low-income jobs, commercialisation of culture) and ecological impacts (e.g. pollution of soil, water and air), in particular in the strongholds of mass tourism.

3 Definition and typology of rural areas

Notwithstanding the ongoing structural changes, many definitions of rural areas do not adequately reflect them. Rural areas are still described in parts of the literature as areas with predominantly village-like or small town-like settlement structures (▷ *Settlement/settlement structure*), a comparatively low population density and a working population mostly employed in the agricultural sector. In addition, rural areas are often generally characterised as requiring subsidies and structurally weak or backwards. Such characterisations, which are usually based on generalising descriptions of such areas, follow numerous stereotypes and clichés, but also idealistic perceptions of rural areas or rurality. In the light of the inadequacy of such dubious definitions, some authors even object on principle to the use of the term 'rural' (Helbrecht 2014: 175).

Figure 1: Spatial types in 2010 – by location



Types of location according to accessible daytime population



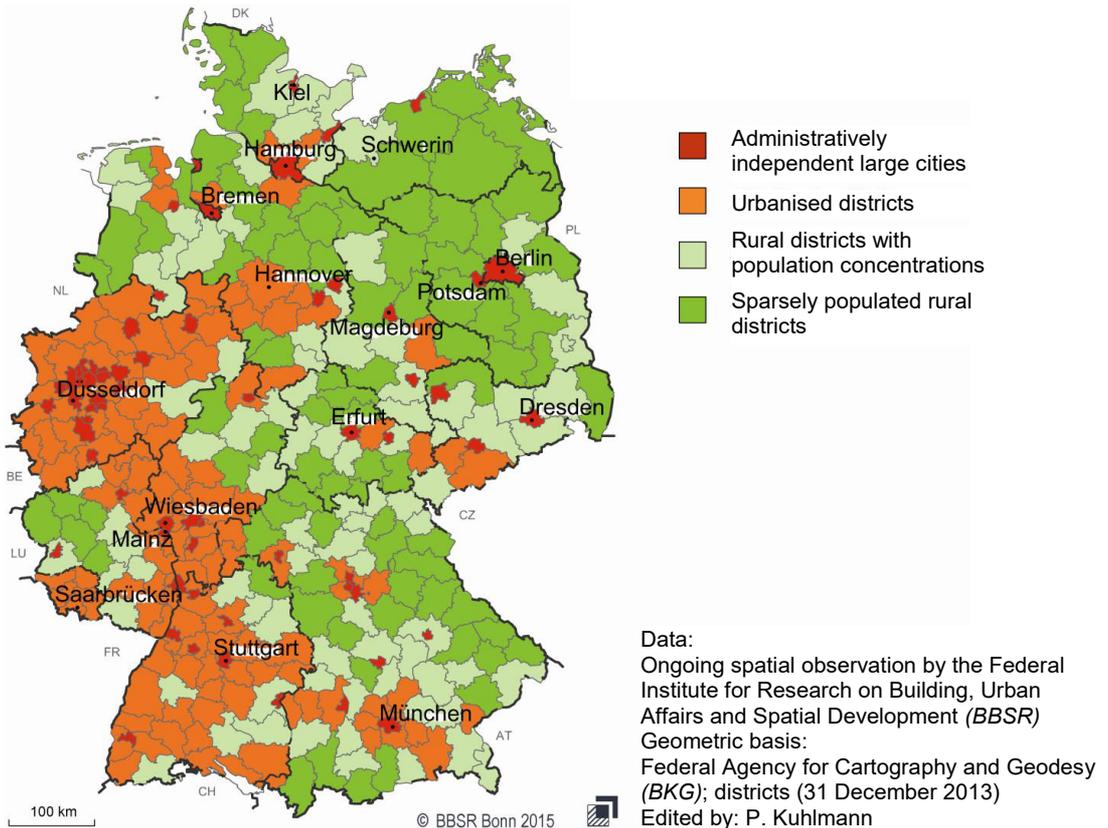
Source: BBSR (Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development) 2011

In a departure from the earlier literature, the 2011 Federal Spatial Report (*Bundesraumordnungsbericht*) largely refrained from using the term *rural*. Instead, the report relied on the elaboration of distance-based categories, by which very peripheral, peripheral, central and very central spatial types can be differentiated (BBSR 2012, cf. Fig. 1). This serves to

Rural areas

take into account both the interaction of each spatial type with the centres and the particularities of the transitional areas between urban and rural areas. Nevertheless, traditional typologies, such as classifying district types according to their settlement structure and thereby distinguishing them as administratively independent cities, urbanised districts, rural districts with population concentrations and sparsely populated rural districts, are still in use as well (cf. Fig. 2).

Figure 2: District types according to settlement structure in 2013



Source: BBSR 2015

At the level of the federal states, however, the situation is different. At this level, rural areas as a defined spatial category often still play a significantly more important role, and the term is often still used, e.g. in various Federal State Development Plans or Federal State Spatial Planning Programmes (such as Baden-Württemberg, Lower Saxony, Schleswig-Holstein). This reflects the strong dominance of rural structures overall and the continued political significance of these areas.

From a practical viewpoint in particular, it makes sense to attempt a characterisation of rural areas, which adequately takes into account both the demand for an accurate description of the regional differences in structures and processes, as well as the necessary development and implementation of suitable strategies and instruments for rural development. The 1995 Framework for Action in Spatial Planning Policy of the Conference of Ministers for Spatial Planning formed the basis for distinguishing five types of rural areas, which still today offer a fairly appropriate framework for orientation to distinguish different spatial structures, processes and development dynamics.

a) *Rural areas in proximity to agglomeration spaces and large-scale transport axes*

These areas play a role particularly as residential locations ('living in a green idyll') and are defined by a comparatively high level of population density. At the same time, they have a sound economic basis, which is mainly rooted in the dynamics of the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises. Due to their close interaction (based on transport infrastructure) with the neighbouring metropolitan areas, these areas are consistently deemed to hold positive development opportunities.

b) *Attractive rural areas for tourism*

These are areas with a particularly attractive and diverse landscape, where tourism offers many people employment and income opportunities at least on a seasonal basis. These areas are, however, frequently exclusively dependent on tourism; hence their development opportunities are not deemed to be unreservedly positive. The coastal regions of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, the Alpine region and various lake districts may serve as examples.

c) *Rural areas with advantageous conditions for agriculture*

Due to their good natural preconditions for agriculture, the high level of agrotechnological development, the competitiveness of agricultural holdings and their proximity to sales markets, these rural areas generally show a positive development. Typical examples are the *Börden* (fertile lowland plains) and wine-growing regions.

d) *Less densified rural areas with an economic development dynamic*

These areas are defined by their greater distance to the metropolitan areas and a clearly lower population density. At the same time, their development primarily relies on the growth of employment in industry, the trades and in the service sector (▷ *Services*), for which these areas are well suited. Examples of such areas are the southern part of Lower Saxony or the middle regions of Bavaria.

e) *Structurally weak, peripheral rural areas*

The situation of this spatial type is defined by its distance from the centres, with which the peripheral areas are generally inadequately connected (▷ *Peripheries/peripheralisation*). The insufficient infrastructure, weak economic structure and population decline characterise these rural areas as problem areas with frequently unfavourable development prospects. Examples are parts of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania as well as Northern Hesse.

4 Development of rural areas as a challenge for spatial planning and regional policy

Current discussions in spatial planning and regional policy focus on problems associated with the structural change in rural areas. It should be noted, however, that the problems in rural areas are not new and have led to a long tradition of supportive policies, which are based in particular on the mandate to maintain equivalent living conditions (▷ *Equivalence of living conditions*). Since the 1990s, valuable experience has been gained in planning and implementing innovative strategies in the course of various action programmes and competitions (including ‘*Regionen aktiv*’ [‘Active Regions’] and *Modellvorhaben der Raumordnung, MORO* [Model Project for Spatial Planning]) as part of rural spatial development. Beyond the national level, the EU structural funds are of key importance for regional policymaking (▷ *European regional policy*); they are not only important sources of funding but also instruments for innovation. In addition to the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (since 1975), the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) (since 2004) now plays a similarly important role. It reflects in particular the EU’s visions for multifunctional rural development (European Commission 2004).

There is a broad consensus that certain rural areas need particular attention, as their problems are expected to become more acute in future. The main focus in this regard has been and will remain on two spatial types:

a) *Structurally weak, peripheral rural areas*

These areas are defined by a rural exodus and disproportionate ageing of the population, the continuing decline of agricultural holdings, a manufacturing industry in the late stage of the industry and product life cycle, a shortage of services for the business community in particular and a lack of investment.

Accordingly, the key regional policies in these areas focus on the shaping of multifunctional development prospects for regions and municipalities. This comprises to an equal extent the diversification of agriculture (production of regional products, eco-friendly agriculture, conservation of the cultural landscape, farm holidays, etc.), the expansion of environmentally-friendly free time pursuits and recreation in nature (‘soft tourism’), the production of renewable energy (in particular wind power, biomass, solar energy), the further development of the residential function (barrier-free housing, holiday homes, etc.), the preservation and conservation of historical cultural landscapes (forms of land use, architectural monuments; ▷ *Cultural landscape*) as well as ▷ *Nature conservation* (expansion of large conservation areas within the biotope network; ▷ *Biotope*). The commercial sector encompasses the trades and small enterprises, rather than large-scale industries, as the major employers; support for existing businesses and advisory services for start-ups are needed. Professional ▷ *Regional management* in particular is considered an important prerequisite for defining and developing regional and local qualities and the related development potentials, and thus to enhance the identification of the populace with the area in which they live. While regional management is now considered part of the mainstream funding instruments, it frequently lacks the necessary resources and an adequate temporal perspective; ensuring these is a special challenge for regional policy in the face of the increasing financial constraints of public budgets.

Many such funding measures are based on an integrated development strategy that aims to overcome the traditional limits of sectoral policies and focuses on the elaboration of holistic solutions subject to the ▷ *Participation* of important stakeholders and the populace concerned (Mose 2011) (▷ *Integrated rural development*). This approach is reflected in the more recent programmatic focus of the funding programmes and instruments at the national level (e.g. regional development strategies) and the European level (e.g. LEADER programme). Increasingly, the major conservation areas are also considered to play a driving role in ▷ *Regional development*. This applies primarily to biosphere reserves (e.g. Rhön, Schaalsee, Schwäbische Alb), which take on a model function (in terms of the UNESCO definition) for sustainable development (Hammer 2007); these expectations have now also been transferred to other types of conservation areas, e.g. nature parks, which thus fulfil an important innovation function for regional development in rural areas (Hammer/Mose/Siegrist et al. 2016).

b) *Rural areas in proximity to agglomeration spaces and large-scale transport axes*

These areas are defined in particular by the development dynamics of the centres, and they benefit in many different ways from the spillover effects of those centres. At the same time, this is associated with risks that may jeopardise their qualities as residential and economic locations. The key problem of these areas is unquestionably the increasingly conflict-prone clash of competing land-use demands resulting from the continuing pressure exerted by settlement, residential, commercial and transport development trends. This is increasingly exacerbated by the competition between core cities and the peripheral municipalities and between the peripheral municipalities as such.

Accordingly, the resulting challenges are primarily of a regulatory and planning nature, and less related to development policies. The spatial planning tasks include in particular small-scale functional and land allocations for ▷ *Housing*, commerce, etc. with special consideration of environmental quality and of maintaining, safeguarding and developing open spaces (▷ *Open space*) in the sense of designating priority and reserve areas (▷ *Priority area, reserve area and suitable area for development*), e.g. green belts (▷ *Green belt*) or nature and landscape conservation areas, and of preserving and protecting areas with important natural spatial resources, such as groundwater conservation areas (▷ *Groundwater*) (Schekahn/Grundler 2004). For the solution of conflict-prone, competing demands for the use of land, inter-municipal approaches to action that rely on the cooperation of the parties involved are needed (Beier/Matern 2007). Numerous examples illustrate the varying scope, institutional embedding and usefulness of such approaches (e.g. the Hanover Region, the planning association for the Frankfurt/Rhein-Main metropolitan area, the municipal association of Lower Saxony – Bremen).

The general objective must be to stabilise these rural areas and to allow for an orderly development of the settlement and economic structure, which predominantly addresses ecological concerns that have grown over time and thus helps to permanently secure the specific attractiveness of these areas.

5 Outlook

The development of rural areas remains one of the particular responsibilities of spatial planning and regional policy. The perception of rural areas as disposable spaces for the urban centres or as the ‘leftovers’ of spatial planning, which still prevailed as late as the 1970s, have since given way to strategies and instruments based on differentiated analyses and assessments of the relevant structures and processes and which focus on the independent development of rural areas that takes account of the specific problems of each and which is sustainable. The objectives of sustainable development often require challenging adaptations that may call established forms and styles of policymaking into question (Mölders/Burandt/Szumelda 2010).

Special challenges also arise for many rural areas through the progressing Europeanisation of policies that focus on those areas and through the globalisation of the economy, which entails an intensification of the competition between regions. The integration of eastern European countries in the EU, which is still ongoing, has reinforced this development in recent decades (Grabski-Kieron/Krajewski 2007). Against this backdrop, spatial planning and regional policy bear the important responsibility of helping rural areas to successfully stand their ground in this competitive environment.

The focus is on integrated rural development, which strives to address the rural areas in their entirety as spaces for residential, economic, leisure and compensation purposes. This relies on addressing the various stakeholders in rural areas to involve them in shaping development processes through new forms of rural governance (Mose/Jacuniak-Suda/Fiedler 2014). LEADER and other funding programmes illustrate the challenges and problems as much as the opportunities of such bottom-up approaches of a participatory nature. However, civic engagement, entrepreneurial initiatives and the successful cooperation of stakeholders cannot simply be presumed (Born 2011: 7). Cooperative processes will only succeed if they take place in an environment where regional contexts are not merely a conceptual approach but also a basis for decision-making and action. The institutionalisation of new forms of the regional level (▷ *Region*) offers opportunities for rural areas in relation to coordinated action, whether in the planning of an industrial and commercial area, in regional marketing or in the management of conservation areas. To strengthen rural areas in an enlarged Europe, an approach on a regional scale is in any event indispensable.

References

- BBSR – Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (Ed.) (2011): Raumtypen 2010 – Bezug Lage. https://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/forschung/raumbeobachtung/Raumabgrenzungen/deutschland/kreise/Raumtypen2010_krs/Download_KarteLageKrs.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1 (06 January 2021).
- BBSR – Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (Ed.) (2012): Raumordnungsbericht 2011. Bonn.
- BBSR – Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development (Ed.) (2015): http://www.bbsr.bund.de/BBSR/DE/Raumbeobachtung/Raumabgrenzungen/Kreistypen4/Download_Karte_PDF.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=7 (14 May 2016).

- Beier, M.; Matern, A. (2007): Stadt-Umland-Prozesse und interkommunale Zusammenarbeit: Stand und Perspektiven der Forschung. Hanover. = Arbeitsmaterial der ARL 332.
- Born, K. M. (2011): Ländliche Räume in Deutschland: Differenzierungen, Entwicklungspfade und -brüche. In: Geographische Rundschau 59 (2), 4-10.
- European Commission (Ed.) (2004): New perspectives for EU rural development. Luxembourg. = Fact Sheet.
- Grabski-Kieron, U.; Krajewski, C. (2007): Ländliche Raumentwicklung in der erweiterten EU. Chancen und Probleme. In: Geographische Rundschau 59 (3), 12-20.
- Hammer, T. (2007): Protected areas and regional development: Conflicts and opportunities. In: Mose, I. (Ed.): Protected areas and regional development in Europe: Towards a new paradigm for the 21st century? Aldershot, 21-36.
- Hammer, T.; Mose, I.; Siegrist, D.; Weixlbaumer, N. (2016): Parks of the future – Which future for parks in Europe? In: Hammer, T.; Mose, I.; Siegrist, D.; Weixlbaumer, N. (Eds): Parks of the future. Protected areas in Europe challenging regional and global change. Munich, 13-22.
- Helbrecht, I. (2014): Urbanität und Ruralität. In: Lossau, J.; Freytag, T.; Lippuner, R. (Eds): Schlüsselbegriffe der Kultur- und Sozialgeographie. Stuttgart, 167-181.
- Mölders, T.; Burandt, A.; Szumelda, A. (2010): Herausforderung Nachhaltigkeit: Sozial-ökologische Orientierungen für die Entwicklung ländlicher Räume. In: Europa regional 18 (2-3), 95-106.
- Mose, I. (2011): Integrierte ländliche Entwicklung – Vergleichende Analyse unterschiedlicher konzeptioneller Ansätze der Entwicklung ländlicher Peripherien in Europa. In: Belina, B.; Miggelbrink, J. (Eds): Hier so, dort anders. Raumbezogene Vergleiche in der Wissenschaft und anderswo. Münster, 153-171.
- Mose, I.; Jacuniak-Suda, M.; Fiedler, G. (2014): Regional Governance-Stile in Europa. Eine vergleichende Analyse von Steuerungsstilen ausgewählter LEADER-Netzwerke in Extremadura (Spanien), Warminsko-Mazurskie (Polen) und Western Isles (Schottland). In: Raumforschung und Raumordnung 72 (1), 3-20.
- OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (Ed.) (2007): OECD Rural Policy Reviews: Germany. Paris.
- Schekahn, A.; Grundler, H. (2004): Nachhaltige Freiraumsicherung und -entwicklung in Verdichtungsräumen. Bonn. = Naturschutz und Biologische Vielfalt 5.
- Schmied, D. (2005): Winning and losing in Europe's rural areas. In: Schmied, D. (Ed.): Winning and losing: The changing geography of Europe's rural areas. Aldershot, 1-18.

Additional literature

- Bröckling, F.; Grabski-Kieron, U.; Krajewski, C. (Eds) (2004): Stand und Perspektiven der deutschsprachigen Geographie des ländlichen Raumes. Presentations and Results of a Workshop on 27 and 28 May in Münster. Münster. = Arbeitsberichte der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Angewandte Geographie Münster 35.
- Cloke, P.; Marsden, T.; Mooney, P. H. (Eds) (2006): Handbook of rural studies. London.
- Glander, M. L.; Hoßmann, I. (2009): Land mit Aussicht: Was sich von dem wirtschaftlichen und demografischen Erfolg des Oldenburger Münsterlands lernen lässt. Berlin.
- Hahne, U. (2013): Herausforderungen des demographischen Wandels für Angebote der Daseinsvorsorge. In: BLE – Federal Office for Agriculture and Food (Ed.): Daseinsvorsorge in ländlichen Räumen unter Druck: Wie reagieren wir auf den demographischen Wandel? Bonn, 9-12.
- Henkel, G. (2004): Der Ländliche Raum: Gegenwart und Wandlungsprozesse seit dem 19. Jahrhundert in Deutschland. 4th enlarged and revised Edition. Stuttgart.
- Hoppe, T. (2010): Der ländliche Raum im 21. Jahrhundert – Neubewertung einer unterschätzten Raumkategorie. Norderstedt.
- Klohn, W.; Voth, A. (2009): Die Landwirtschaft in Deutschland. Vechta. = Vechtaer Materialien zum Geographieunterricht 3.
- Köhler, S. (Ed.) (2007): Wachstumsregionen fernab der Metropolen: Chancen, Potenziale und Strategien. Hanover. = Arbeitsmaterial der ARL 334.
- Mose, I.; Schaal, P. (2012): Probleme der Intensivtierhaltung im Oldenburger Münsterland. Lösungsstrategien im Widerstreit konkurrierender Interessen. In: Neues Archiv für Niedersachsen, Issue 2, 50-69.

Last update of the references: January 2021