

Revisiting Rural Development: How Can we Make Rural Regions Lucrative and Attractive In A Participatory Manner?

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Abstract¹

Rural development has undergone many changes in the past decades, both conceptually as well as practically. An historical bibliometric study of the past 70 years reveals various dramatic paradigm shifts, expressed through an initial key emphasis on agricultural production to flexible discourse touching upon a wide spectrum of inter-related issues, such as food, water and land tenure security, energy supply, village renewal, agro- and ecological tourism, and digital connections, amongst others. As a result of the shifts in conceptualisation, strategies for rural development have altered as well, from top-down agro-economic optimization strategies towards bottom-up and middle-out participatory strategies focusing on integrated socio-economic development, preserving and revitalizing spatial identity, and ensuring equal opportunities between urban and rural regions. This paper zooms in to the contemporary implementation challenges of rural development, specifically: how to make rural regions lucrative and attractive at the same time; and how to ensure that participatory approaches to do so work. Addressing these questions is based on practical experience in Bavaria, Germany, and on a content-centred review of rural development practices in sub-Saharan Africa. As lucrativeness and attractiveness may represent two different value systems; getting the better of the two words seems at first contradictory. However, there are a number of conditions under which they can simultaneously be achieved; nonetheless, it does not come by itself. It requires a lot of stimulation, activation and engagement of local leaders, citizens and local firms. A Mayor would for example play a crucial role in fostering inspiration and aspiration. Citizens should be engaged and feel proud of the uniqueness of their region and the related socio-spatial identity. Local firms should remain actively involved in pursuing quality products and services. Together these will ensure realization of hard and soft measures to support rural development.

1. Introduction

Land management and rural development are strongly interconnected (de Vries and Chigbu 2017). As rural areas have been traditionally strongly dominated by agricultural activities it is

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relevant to see how much rural land is actually available. Roughly we can estimate the total land on the planet based on basic geometrical equations. If we assume that the earth is a perfect sphere, the total surface area is: $4\pi r^2 = 11.57 \times (6371 \text{ km})^2 = 5.101 \times 10^8 \text{ km}^2$ (r = Radius of Earth; Radius is approximately 6371 km). However, since the earth's surface consist of 70.8% water and 29.2% land, the total water area equals $70.8\% \times 5.101 \times 10^8 \text{ km}^2 = 3.612 \times 10^8 \text{ km}^2$, whereas the total land area is $29.2\% \times 5.101 \times 10^8 \text{ km}^2 = 1.489 \times 10^8 \text{ km}^2$. Although only 4.7% of the earth's surface supports permanent crops, 13.3% is used as arable land (CIA-Factbook, On line). So, the total arable land is approximately $13.3\% \times 1.489 \times 10^8 \text{ km}^2 = 0.1980 \times 10^8 \text{ km}^2$. When we connect this to the total population, which can be estimated at 7.6×10^9 (May, 2018) = 7.6 Billion (a nice web feature is available at (<http://www.worldometers.info/world-population>) then the total arable land per person on the entire planet is $0.1980 \times 10^8 \text{ km}^2 / 7.6 \times 10^9$ (people) = 0.0026 km^2 , which corresponds to a square of 51x51 metres. Obviously we know that many people own much more than these square meters, so the simple conclusion is that arable land is unequally divided on this entire planet, including Africa.

One of the consequences is that rural areas are suffering population decreases and abandonment, whilst the poverty in rural areas is not clearly decreasing. Rural development as a panacea to reducing poverty is losing its essence and is at a declining rate (Ashley 2001). With the continent expected to be more urbanised than rural by 2030, country governments have demonstrated a silent disinterest in pursuing rural development strategies with as much zeal as they do urban areas. In fact, most African countries, except for Tanzania and South Africa, have no clearly defined rural development strategy. So, how can one put rural development on the radar of the politicians and investors again, and ensure that rural development is more than just agricultural production increase?

The research problem here is that, in the context of rural governance there are currently insufficient, monolithic and/or inappropriate tools to evaluate and to design rural development strategies which take into account both economic and socio-cultural aspects of rural development, i.e. a strategy beyond agriculture only. The research dilemma is therefore whether the combination of rural development and industrialization in rural regions would be a 'contradictio in terminis' (contradiction in terms) or a *condicio sine qua non* (hard requirement without which nothing else can happen)? In other words, can rural development

and industrialisation really go together, as industrialisation tends to make rural regions more urbanised and reduce the rural character of the region? The core research objective is therefore to evaluate how can one make rural regions lucrative and attractive in a participatory manner, and to which extent can industrialization support or hamper rural development? Addressing these questions requires both a view on what rural development is, or should be, and a view on whether industrialization can co-evolve with and affect rural development.

This article addresses these questions by first of all revisiting the main objectives and practices of rural development. How has the discourse changed over time, and what sorts of objectives have created new opportunities or new bottlenecks. Secondly, the issue is addressed by evaluating changing practises of rural development in Bavaria, Germany. With a long tradition in rural development, it is relevant to investigate how goals, tools, narratives and methods have evolved in this context in order to contribute to rural development strategies in Africa. The structure of this article follows a similar sequence. The first section compares different definitions of rural development and aims to explain how and why these definitions have changed. The goal of this comparison is to better understand and position the current discourse and the current inattention for comprehensive rural development strategies in Africa. The subsequent section presents how theoretical and practical paradoxes have been dealt with in the Bavarian context. With these experiences one can derive under which conditions rural regions can enhance and/or regain their attractiveness and lucrativeness.

2. Revisiting rural development

Over the last decades, the concept of “rural development” has been widely discussed in academic literature. An extensive literature review done by TUM PhD student Ying Lu (currently still unpublished) looks at more than 5000 peer-reviewed articles since 1945, and found that the core topics of discussion has gradually changed. Rural development as a theme has become much more than agricultural production development and/or industrialisation only. It can encompass environmental management and creating green and sustainable landscapes, development of manufacturing and service sector economies, preservation of indigenous and/or cultural identities, amongst others.

The rural development literature quotes the following definitions of rural development often:

- “Rural Development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of a specific group of people – the rural poor” (World Bank 1975).
- Rural development “refers to a distinct approach to interventions by the state” (Harris and Gilbert 1982)
- “Rural development as a multi-level, multi-actor and multi-faceted process” (Van der Ploeg *et al.* 2000)
- Rural development can be seen as not an outside intervention, but the aspiration of local people living in rural areas for taking the challenge themselves and improving their life circumstances and their immediate environment (Nchuchuwe and Adejuwon 2012)

However, there is a growing realization that it would not be possible to generate a universally accepted definition of it. The concept of rural development has been evolving, reflecting both the dramatic transformation occurring in the rural economics, environment and societies and the shifting goals of different groups of actors. Moreover, one can observe differences of rural development conceptualisations when comparing literature about Africa compared to rural development articles about Europe or China. What is obvious, however, is that much of the literature does not address industrialisation as a key factor of rural development.

Related to the definitions is the problem of reconciling guidelines and associated indicators at different scales. For example, governments and practitioners are required to work with European and national guidelines simultaneously, such as the Cork.2.0 Declaration on Rural Development (European Commission 2016) at the European level or the ‘equivalent living conditions’ principles (‘gleichwertige Lebensbedingungen’) at the German level. The indicators of these guidelines may result in contradicting recommendations. Moreover, the required data for such indicators may draw on both objective and subjective measurements, and may draw on a combination of local data and regional data with various levels of accuracy. This makes formulating daily planning decisions complex, and as a result may provide a contested picture about the degree of attractiveness and lucrativeness.

An interesting example of redefining and re-conceptualising rural development is the Land Atlas, developed in Germany. The project Land Atlas (<https://www.landatlas.de>) combines a number of publicly available datasets (such as the ones published by the national planning and statistical agencies) with the aim to develop a more comprehensive and detailed overview of

developments in rural areas. One of the key achievements is the integrated indicator on 'rurality', comprising of 5 other integrated indicators: Built-up area density, Proportion of agricultural and forest land, Proportion of family houses, Regional population potential and Accessibility to major centres. The combination of all these indicators, which are all georeferenced or geotagged, leads to an online Land Atlas, comprising of multiple maps and associated data. Through the Land Atlas it is possible to research interactively possible spatial correlations or associations at the lowest administrative scale. This type of information may be highly useful for citizens who aim to fact-check regional development indicators (e.g. is our region really shrinking or are only certain Municipalities affected).

Regarding the implementation and the role of government in making rural regions more attractive and lucrative it is perhaps relevant to make the distinction between the responsibility to detect and the responsibility to affect, hence the difference between governance detectors and effectors. Detectors, in relation to governance and development as defined by de Vries (2018) are all the instruments government uses for taking in information from the outside world. Effective rural development strategies should be premised on evidenced-based detectors, as such the use of detectors for planning and implementing rural development projects is essential for every country. Effectors of rural development on the other hand are all the tools a government can use to try to make an impact on rural areas within its jurisdiction (ibid). It can thus, be argued that effective 'detectors' leads to effective 'effectors'. This direct correlation can define the success of or otherwise of rural development projects. Examples of effectors in relation to rural development include Agribusiness and rural industrialisation, rural electrification, community empowerment, local led economic development, farm input subsidies and rural industrial knowledge transfer.

3. Experience from Bavaria, Germany

The question of whether rural regions can develop with or without industrialization, and in which shape and form these could develop was one of the key issues during the 2017 version of the so-called München days for sustainable land management. In 2017, the 19th MünchenerTage, the core theme was indeed how to make rural regions more lucrative and attractive (de Vries 2017). Both the documented and undocumented results act as empirical data for this article. Each year the Chair of Land Management of the Technical University of Munich together with the Hanns Seidel Stiftungorganise a workshop with central and local

government officials, practitioners and academics in the fields of land management, land development and rural development. These workshops usually have a central topic which is introduced by both scientific and professional / practical perspectives and which is discussed through interactive workshops. Both the presentations and interactions are synthesized in consecutive documents. Besides the compilation of impressions and presentations the workshops derive a wealth of data based on personal insights and highly interactive discussions.

Problems experienced by practitioners and decision makers in the Bavarian rural regions, or by professionals working with/in the Bavarian rural regions included that an average decrease in rural population took place, resulting in a higher percentage of older people as compared to younger people in rural regions. As a result, increasing inter-generational gaps emerge as a larger number of older people live together with a smaller number of younger people. This in turn leads to a lack of regional identity and regional connectedness, because younger people move out of rural regions, which causes a decrease of investment of time and resources to contribute to the development of the region. Therefore, they might feel less connected to the region, resulting in a loss of identity. A more distinct problem related to the information management expressed by practitioners and investors is that they have to deal with competing interests and contrasting data on a daily basis. This causes a lack of investment value in the regions.

In addition to the practical problems, there also exist various paradoxes for policy makers which blur the direction of where rural development should lead to. These paradoxes point to contrasting directions for concrete action. They are both rooted in theory and in practical experience. The first of such paradoxes concerns the paradox of polyrationality. Polyrationality reflects how different kinds of values, rationalities and logics compete in the determination of the use of land and of buildings (Davy 2015). The values are at the root of comparing attributes of land and property and provide a basis to make decisions by relying on the highest possible value, or the optimal value. A choice for regions to be lucrative and/or attractive therefore relies on each of the associated values systems. These are however different, contradictory or even conflicting. For example when optimizing land use using either economic or aesthetic rationalities, it may lead to different outcomes and decisions. Spatial development choices tend to relate to either maximisation of economic gains, on

maximisation of equality in opportunities, or on morality of what is right and what is wrong. As a consequence, fostering a national policy, such as reducing spatial disparities, may rely on different values systems and logics that need to be reconciled. All of these factors make a single, uniform, perspective impossible, and make balancing the priorities of rationalities complex. Essentially optimizing values is therefore a paradox in itself, because the optimisation of one value system is usually at the expenses of another value system.

There exist more of such paradoxes when determining the ‘attractiveness’ or ‘lucrative’ of regions. Issues such as ‘the use of spatial justice’ (‘Gerechtigkeit’) and ‘quality of living’ are important for the question to which degree rural regions are attractive or lucrative. Whilst both issues are highly anchored in German legislation and planning practices, the terms themselves lead to contradictory explanations and developments, expressed by un-satisfaction dilemma (‘Unzufriedenheitsdilemma’) and the satisfaction paradox (‘Zufriedenheitsparadox’) (Zapf 1984). These express an apparent inconsistent correlation between the degree of happiness and the degree of development of the social-physical environment. In simple terms, social groups in very bad living conditions may still be very happy, whereas social groups in a very fortunate or attractive environment may still be very unhappy. Apparently, the degree to which people perceive spatial justice and quality of living is highly subjective and changeable. In other words, economic value and spatial inequity does not equate social or individual quality of living, or social value (Mayring 1999; Noll 2000). In other words, the fundamental indicators guiding a land use planning process may lead to unintended effects. Attractiveness and being lucrative may thus be concepts which either are leading to the wrong assessments of current situations, or causing unintended effects when used as design criteria for planning and development.

During the 19th MünchnerTage we learned that both shared values, regional identity and pride and self-consciousness during a planning and development process are important in making regions lucrative and attractive. Shared values highly relate to shared ‘perceptions’. ‘Perception’ is a complicated issue in both theory and practice. In land management related literature one often sees the term ‘perception’ as a way to either express a public sentiment towards government officials, government structures or government decisions (Lisec et al. 2014), or as an individual sentiment or justification for individual actions (Celio et al. 2014). The 19th MünchnerTage has however brought forward additional perspectives on

‘perceptions’. Individual perceptions are highly influenced by someone’s posture and demeanour towards others, while collective perceptions tend to relate to the persuasiveness of images and symbols. The perceptions about rural regions are highly dependent on these two perspectives. Individual images are sometimes negative due to the lack of connectedness to the region, lack of collective identity and a lack of pride. These occur in the context of demographic changes, an increase of the ratio old/young people and the daily confrontation with images of empty land or empty buildings. The public image of rural regions is strongly determined by a persuasive discourse among institutional investors that one cannot generate any money in these areas. Instead, the main investments occur in highly urbanised regions.

The second concern for making rural regions attractive and lucrative is the actual activity, which involves activation and mobilization of people to generate attractiveness and lucrateness. It is at the root of making any change. This does not go by force. One has to realise that formal ‘power’, derived from a specific function or status does not equate to ‘influence’ to change or alter a rural region. Instead, one requires enthusiastic people, charisma and trustworthiness on the one hand, and a firm belief and self-consciousness in enhancing quality of living conditions based on shared identities in order to mobilise people and /or activities into a certain direction. Influence in this way is a crucial instrument for the transformation of ideas into practical actions. Attractiveness and lucrateness in rural regions constitute therefore principles in their own right, determined and shared by a local social context.

A third issue that of identity. Where the discourse of practitioners evolves around the necessity for regional branding as way towards both attractiveness and lucrateness, the theoretical approaches tend to use equivalent living conditions and quality of life as key concepts. The concept of regional branding is fundamentally based on the notion of uniqueness, whereas the concepts of equivalency and hierarchical monitoring using identical indicators can be associated uniformity. These key values are contradictory.

Rural regions require a particular kind of leadership and particular styles of frontrunners. The success in leadership is not only associated to how effective a person can foster economic profits, but it also relates to how supportable a person can address socio-cultural concerns and appeal to local identities. In addition, leadership at local political level is embedded in both the political reality of stakeholder interests at the community level, personal affinity with the

local region and a sense of historical familiarity with local traditions, local families and histories. Both the elected Mayor and the availability and willingness of citizens who contribute with activities on a voluntary basis play an important role in in these local socio-political dynamics. Starting points to improve practices are listed in Table 1, which distinguishes between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ measures. Hard measures are concrete activities, whilst soft measures are the generic aims underlying the hard measures.

Table 1: Improvements in practical measures

| ‘Soft’ Measures | ‘Hard’ Measures |
|---|---|
| 1 Stimulate a positive self-image | Local/regional branding/profiling/ marketing |
| 2 Engage and activate village community | Citizens execute (part of) the implementation of concrete improvements. Actively engage people by positive and optimistic communication and sharing of aspirations. |
| 3 Restoration and redevelopment (active & passive) | Reconstruction and/or restoration of empty buildings. |
| 4 Improve regional mobility | Car, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements and/or construction. |
| 5 Decrease energy dependency | Utilize possibilities of local (bio)energy better. |
| 6 Improve and support entrepreneurship | Make private investments possible through loans and investment funds organised by local community banks. Provide subsidies for the production and marketing of local products. Organize local events which could attract people from outside. |
| 7 Start inter-generational activities and constructions | Utilize and/or set-up club and association structures. Develop playgrounds and sport/ leisure facilities. |

4. Implications for African Choices in Rural Development

Now how are these experiences from Bavaria relevant for African countries? First of all, one has to observe that Bavaria faces similar problems in rural regions as any other country. It is indeed not so that extreme poverty or a high degree of joblessness exists, but the degree of workers in the agricultural sector has gradually decreased. Hence, there has been a gradual

increasing need to diversify economic opportunities. This does not come overnight, and any new economic products or services should also be of relevant quality. The same would apply for African industrialisation of rural regions. This applies for both the agricultural sector as well as for new economic opportunities in rural regions. For the agricultural sector it is therefore pertinent to start increasing the number of high quality products and higher efficiency production schemes. For the production schemes one can think of increasing all activities in the production and in the value chain. So, not just producing raw products, but also producing aggregated and enhanced products. The latter can provide new kinds of industrial and manufacturing services and will require new type of building and human resources. In other words, it can provide alternative job opportunities. Regarding the alternative economic opportunities one can think of a combination of rural and urban products and services. Higher quality products would in addition improve the regional capabilities and the regional branding and with these factors one can also enhance the self-image of rural regions.

Secondly, if there is a clear spatial decision to maintain the rural villages, it would be important to make use of quality improvements, i.e. restoration of buildings with good materials and aesthetic value. Quality in types of constructions and types of materials and visual aspects of the new designs (of buildings, parks, roads, playground, etc.) can enhance the social sustainability, and may lead to decisions of local people to remain in the area given the increase in quality of living. Connected to this aspect is also the need to sustain the social connections between generations. Where many rural regions have seen a gradual decline of younger generations, which tend to move to more urbanized areas, new job opportunities (including even those in e-Business and other ‘urban’ services) and any rise of the quality of the built environment may at least increase the chances that younger people find it interesting to remain in rural regions. This requires however major investments in internet access, something which Bavaria has heavily invested in. In African regions this should also be organised to provide this opportunity.

Another element is the possibility for individual citizens to invest privately in their local environment. As long as quality of the built-up area is enhanced and with an improvement in internet accessibility, the chances of obtaining credit for any business in rural regions will increase. Currently most banks and investor companies are still highly hesitant to invest in

rural regions as long as the overall context is not improving. Therefore these high quality investments in infrastructure and built-up areas are crucial for any rural region to survive.

So, more villages specifically, one can say the rural regions can improve in:

- Creating or improving self-consciousness.
- Creating or improving the feeling of pride in the village.
- Providing a more positive image of citizens in (small) villages.
- Creating some form of recognizable regional identity.
- Fostering engagement in local activities.
- Stimulate and activate people in villages.

5. Conclusions

The core question for this article was: Can regional rural areas be attractive and lucrative, and are industrialization objectives in line with rural development objectives?

Overall, the answer is yes, but the positive relation between industrialization and rural development is not evident and attractiveness or lucrativeness does not come by itself. It requires both a detecting and effecting capability within the rural regions itself. Detecting certain changes and being aware and sufficiently informed how and where economic and social contexts and opportunities change and how these changes affect local citizens. It also requires an effecting capability, i.e. the ability to create and foster change and mobilise others to go along with the changes.

Both detecting and effecting needs however first of all a deep interest in all people living and working in the rural areas. Experiences in Bavaria have shown that this interest is required for any local governors and Mayors in order to be inspired to develop new ideas, but it is also necessary to inspire and mobilise others. So, this deep interest is necessary for both government and citizens. Local leaders and local Mayors play a crucial role in taking up this role of inspiration and aspiration. Working in and working with rural regions requires the ability and art of responsible and effective communication by the responsible persons.

Secondly, getting people interested in taking up new roles and jobs in addition to or replacing agriculture, takes up a lot of stimulation, activation and engagement. This is not an obvious

job, and requires not only motivated individuals, but also a high ability to compromise. Not all ideas may be easily accepted, and promoting change and diversification may be met with suspicion and mistrust. One should however never be discouraged from setbacks, and always remain open for new challenges and have a personal vision. At the same time, development is a two-way street. It should not only be an issue of government or of local leaders. Local citizens should also become more engaged and feel more proud of their local region and own identity. This is necessary to make the rural regions more attractive and lucrative.

Last but not least, rural development has to come with possibilities of local investments and interconnected economies. This requires rural regions to increase the diversification of economies and connect existing economies to the larger value chains. Spatial injustices come especially from unequal access to economic and social opportunities and the lack in connectedness. Making rural regions more unique and increasing regional brands may create a competitive advantage and/or a specific regional economic niche, which will also be of interest for traders and investors operating in urban regions.

Research does not stop here. Further knowledge is required in which manners one can best mobilise people and increase participation and local engagement. Though local leaders in Bavaria expressed case by case how they organised this, they also expressed that many of the success depends on local contexts and on individual ability to engage with others. How to learn from this and make this practical knowledge available for future local leaders is however a crucial research task. Another research challenge remains getting the right information on local situations. Structuring information flows and making information available to the right people at the right time remains problematic. Detecting, in other words, for the sake of predicting and simulating where lucrativeness or attractiveness may be affecting is still an issue which should be further explored.

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