

Call for Papers “Innovative Approaches to Services of General Interest and their Long-Term Establishment in Rural Areas of Europe”

In many media accounts and policy documents, public and private services and infrastructures of general interest in rural areas in Europe are often presented as being deficient. In fact, significant restructuring processes have taken place in this context with regard to the availability, quality and accessibility of certain services and facilities, both for services of general interest provided by the state and, in particular, by the private sector (Neu 2009; Naumann/Reichert-Schick 2015; Clifton/Díaz-Fuentes/Fernandez-Gutiérrez 2016). Furthermore, the expectations and demands of citizens are not static (Farmer/Nimegeer/Farrington et al. 2012). However, the diverse political, economic and socio-demographic developments of recent decades in Europe have by no means led to a homogeneous trend of deterioration in services of general interest in all areas or in all sub-areas. For example, primary schools and small grocery shops have been closed in many places or their spatial accessibility has been restricted by being relocated (Gieling/Haartsen/Vermeij 2019). Yet, rural regions have also been able to take advantage of opportunities, to expand availability and quality in the areas of technical infrastructures and also to develop a broader range of new services in social and welfare matters, such as childcare or post-school education (Steinführer 2020). At the same time, the dichotomy of "dismantling versus expanding" falls short, as the structural framework and understanding of the state as well as the division of tasks between commercial, private and civic actors in the provision and maintenance of basic services and infrastructures of general interest have fundamentally changed in the course of privatisation, de- and re-regulation as well as financialisation (e.g. Kersten 2006; Enjolras 2009; EU-COM 2011). The state's degree of involvement is once more being discussed by many stakeholders, ranging from the necessary maintenance of public services on the one hand and on the other, its obligation to create adequate and up-to-date framework conditions for private sector and civil-society actors to operate – whether to substitute or supplement state services.

The recently adopted Territorial Agenda of the European Union clearly identifies an existing need for action by 2030: people and places are drifting apart in the wake of increasing imbalances and inequalities in the areas of "quality of life" and "services of general interest", among other things (EU-COM 2020). The COVID19 pandemic (Schorn/Franz/Gruber et al. 2021) has brought to light how different and how dependent on location the availability, accessibility, affordability, quality and diversity of services of general interest actually are. In the case of many European rural areas, the shrinking population and uncertain economic prospects continue to lead to significant challenges in maintaining adequate services of general interest (Fassmann/Rauhut/Da Costa et al. 2015; Clifton/Díaz-Fuentes/Fernandez-Gutiérrez 2016). The crucial importance of regional infrastructures for stronger territorial cohesion as a link between urban, suburban and rural areas in an international context has been highlighted, for example, by Addie/Glass/Nelles et al. (2019).

Solutions to these problems are being sought in all rural areas of Europe. Some countries, e.g. in Scandinavia, or Scotland have made a name for themselves as pioneers in new approaches to rural services of general interest (BMVBS 2013). Great opportunities are seen in digitalisation, but also in the active involvement of citizens. At the same time, the latter is not without controversy, as citizens do not want to and should not be expected to be guarantors for former public services (Salemink/Strijker/Bosworth 2017; Tönurist/ Surva 2017).

The testing of new approaches is a relevant field of action of European funding policies, in the context of which, for example, model projects are tested and pilot schemes launched. However, the usually great commitment during the funding phases often quickly expires on the difficult path towards establishing successful project approaches in the long term (cf. e.g. Shediac-Rizkallah/Bone 1998; Adelman/Taylor 2003; Scheirer 2005). Their long-term establishment is of uttermost importance and should benefit from the transferability of tested approaches from other countries.

The [InDaLE joint project](#) (2020–2022) explores innovative approaches to public services in three European countries (Austria, Sweden and Scotland) and examines their applicability and transferability to rural areas in Germany. In this context, this special issue intends to present the state of social and spatial science research on innovative approaches to services of general interest and their continuation in rural areas in Europe in empirical, methodological or conceptual-theoretical contributions.

Learning from good-practice examples between different European countries can – in line with our thesis – decisively promote the transfer and adaptation of innovative approaches. In this respect, there is a need for both research and action. While there are some reports of supposed or actual "good" or "best" practices (e.g. BMVBS 2013), there is little in-depth and critical research that scrutinises the factors that enable or hinder innovation and consolidation or reveals the benchmarks for assessing an infrastructure solution as "good" practice (e.g. Küpper/Tautz 2015; Schaeffer/Hämel/Ewers 2015). Thus, there is a **knowledge gap in research** regarding the exact consolidation and long-term establishment processes of such innovative projects, which would be of great importance, for example, for transferring knowledge across to comparable projects or the future design of funding programmes.

The successful transfer and consolidation of innovative approaches is determined by the decisive role played by hard and soft contextual factors in the countries under consideration. In addition to institutional framework conditions, the multi-level distribution of responsibility and the consequences of national financial and welfare policies, the development and establishment of new forms of governance are particularly relevant in the provision of services of general interest (Jann 2002; Jessop 2016). Finally, not only do the societal framework conditions play a decisive role, but also basic attitudes and beliefs of state, market and civil actors play a role. In this context, increasing importance is attributed to regional practices of coordination, negotiation and provision of services and infrastructures of general interest (March/Olsen 2006).

The aim of the proposed special issue is to present to the expert public **important core topics and findings of the InDaLE research project in the thematic range of services of general interest in rural areas** – these include long-term establishment, adaptation and transferability strategies, governance, examples of good practice in Germany and other European countries, findings from individual or various areas regarding services of general interest – as well as **to take up and debate the state of discussion from other European countries as it affects Germany**.

Possible contributions might address the following topics, among others:

- Successful or failed strategies for the long-term establishment of location-based or mobile infrastructures for demographically shrinking and ageing rural areas in Europe
- Comparative analyses of governance models of innovative approaches to services of general interest in different European countries and discussion of their advantages and disadvantages

- Presentation of innovative projects and approaches (including success and contingency factors) – Please note: a mere description of the project (fact sheet or similar) is insufficient. A presentation must include the embedding of the project or approach in a theoretical or conceptual framework, as well as in the international state of research.
- Findings from experimental initiatives in the context of specific funding programmes or pilot schemes.
- The importance of public services and infrastructures of general interest for the resilience of rural areas in the aftermath of the COVID19 pandemic (linked, for example, to the question of whether previous "good" practices can still be considered as such).
- Related concepts and developments influencing the provision and sustainability of services of general interest and infrastructures in European rural areas (e.g. migration, social entrepreneurship in rural areas, changes in the understanding of volunteering and cultures of involvement in society ...).
- Success factors in stabilisation processes of innovative projects and initiatives.
- Methods of transferability of "good" practices and mutual learning in different European countries.

Contributions can be written in German or English and submitted in the categories of "Article" and "Policy and practice perspective", as well as "Book review". Authors interested are requested to first submit a draft abstract of 150 to 250 words in order to ensure their contribution fits the theme of the special issue. All authors interested are requested to follow the journal's instructions for authors (<https://rur.oekom.de>; section "Submissions"). All manuscripts to be submitted will undergo the usual double-blind peer review process.

The timetable projected is as follows:

- Deadline for abstract submission: 30th April 2022.
- Authors receive feedback on their submitted abstracts: 10th June 2022.
- Deadline for submission of completed manuscripts: 30th September 2022.
- The initial online publication (online first) will take place approximately four weeks after the respective contribution has been accepted.
- The print publication of the special issue is scheduled for October 2023.

The Guest Editors will be happy to answer any questions regarding content: Prof Winrich Voß (voss@gih.uni-hannover.de), Annett Steinführer, PhD (annett.steinfuehrer@thuener.de) and Alistair Adam-Hernández, PhD (adam@arl-net.de).

For organisational questions, please contact the editor-in-chief Prof Andreas Klee (klee@arl-net.de).

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