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SELECTED ASPECTS OF THE LIFEWORLD OF YOUNG WOMEN ILLUSTRATED BY THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH-EASTERN STYRIA

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Abstract. The worldwide trend of migration from the peripheral rural areas (“rural exodus”) to the central areas of a region raises the question of how to deal with it in some regions of Austria. On the one hand, the loss of population always represents a loss of importance for a municipality, whereas on the other hand, a strong influx puts a strain on the central areas and the increased land consumption poses a challenge for the environment and spatial planners. Depending on the region, this can have various causes, whereby specific pull factors of the central areas as well as a set of push factors of the surroundings are relevant. Within the framework of a study lasting several years and using a mix of selected methods, an attempt was made to work out or characterize those aspects of the female rural lifeworld that represent the decisive factors for shaping the further life paths of women. In this context, the economic structure and organization proved to be particularly important factors for successful economic and land use development, sufficient natural resources, and environmental quality for housing and quality of life as well as a potential for a leisure economy, good accessibility, and infrastructure in terms of transport development and information and telecommunication technologies (distance to the higher-level economic centers is a significant obstacle to development). Finally, cultural values, social trends, and human capital with the existing gender-specific role patterns also play a certain role in the consideration of migration.

Keywords: spatial analysis; regional planning; cognitive mapping; GIS; population geography

1. Introduction

In most cases, the phenomenon of rural exodus in general, or rural exodus of young women in particular, can be simplified to the dualism between “city” and “countryside” or between urban (receiving) and rural (delivering) areas. A large number of publications on this topic indicate that the following characteristics are considered to be the formative elements of such regions, which are assessed as problem zones in the given context (representative for works with a similar focus see Weber & Fischer, 2014):

- an agricultural sector dominating the appearance or the landscape, which may be inactive in some places;
- a poorly diversified economy with an increasing number of chain shops dependent on urban regions;

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- a thin labor market with a strong downward trend in the number of people seeking training and entering the labor market, and low levels of training activity;
- a landscape-based tourism industry that is active in favorable areas;
- a below-average, increasingly centripetal provision of supply, education and technical infrastructure as well as a modal split that is strongly oriented toward motorized private transport; this phenomenon is further promoted by the greater decentralization of facilities for personal needs compared to the urban living environment and by the deficits of a less profitable local public transport infrastructure;
- an extensive land use with high degrees of freedom, or low, but spatially concentrated base area figures and with a high proportion of crops;
- a social structure with a large proportion of homogeneous groups and a negative demographic-gerontological development prognosis; as well as
- a residential function and building structure characterized by very low floor area figures and a large floor area per inhabitant.

Objectively or subjectively perceived deficits/maldevelopments in these areas have serious consequences in the fact that they increasingly worsen the regional situation. In this context, the situation of young and adolescent women, in particular, should be mentioned as an example: As a result of the regional labor market (ironically, again, as a result of the strong economic focus on the valorization of the landscape) and traditional gender role models, the women of the district can be seen as disadvantaged, with their demonstrably “higher” formal education likely to be more of a hindrance in terms of employment. Thus, in many personal mindsets, the consideration of moving out of the district becomes a seriously conceivable possibility. If one assumes that the women who leave are to a large extent the bearers of more modern images of life and thus, in a certain sense, the motors of social change, it is easy to understand that the region is losing this potential for development. This trend is reinforced by the fact that scenic attractions, culinary delights, price levels, etc. attract (mostly older) people to the region who are looking for and precisely appreciate these qualities, making a tendency toward a conservative mindset or (also social) “value preservation” at least more likely.

In quite a lot of previous studies, either only partial aspects of the characteristics described were examined, or the studies referred to differently structured spaces, or the attention was not directed at a gender-specific target group. The latter is particularly relevant because this population group seems to be especially affected for various reasons. Therefore, a major goal of this project was to study the problem from the perspective of the affected women. Special attention had to be paid to the delimitation of the target group. The apparently obvious term “working age women population” is not accurate because younger women (schoolgirls) were also taken into account in the study. On the other hand, the upper age limit of the target group was around 45, i.e., significantly below the end of working life. In the given context, the term young women refers to those female inhabitants of the region who are aware of the living environment deficits of the region and, in addition, have a realistic possibility to migrate with regard to their age.

2. Study area

The district of South-eastern Styria (Südoststeiermark [SO]) is located in the south-eastern corner of Austria on the border with Slovenia and consists of 26 municipalities, in which 85,991 inhabitants lived on an area of 1,009 km² (Statistik Austria, 2018). The district was formed in

2013 from the two former districts of Feldbach and Bad Radkersburg and has since been congruent with the development region Steirisches Vulkanland. The region has always been considered an out-migration region (Steirisches Vulkanland, 2014). As early as in 2018, the Styrian provincial statistics predicted a population decline of around 5% by 2030, with the productive age groups being particularly affected by the out-migration trend (Amt der Steiermärkischen Landesregierung, 2021). Within this group, young women should be mentioned first and foremost, as they are increasingly leaving the rural regions to settle in the cities because they cannot find adequate jobs locally (Franke & Schmid, 2013; Henkel, 2013; Seiser, 2009; Weber & Fischer, 2014; Zehetmair, 2013). In more than two-thirds of the municipalities in the district of SO, the decline of the number of women has been higher than that of men in the last seven years (Mitterer et al., 2016).

However, the group aged 65 and over will increase by 20–40% in SO according to the forecasts of the regional statistics of 2018 (Amt der Steiermärkischen Landesregierung, 2018). This demographic change in the district of SO is characteristic of many municipalities and regions in Austria and results not only from the pure exodus of young population groups, but also from a declining birth rate (Biwald, 2012). In many villages, there are four deaths for every single birth (Fleischhacker, 2018). These developments of the last decades decisively determine the prevailing regional processes and framework conditions of the living environment of the resident population in the municipalities. The consequences are structural economic weaknesses in combination with declining municipal tax revenues, which have a particularly negative impact in these municipalities, as the maintenance costs for infrastructure facilities remain constant. Consequently, the average costs and user fees for this provision tend to increase (fixed cost degression). In the long term, this cost remanence cannot be compensated for by financial equalization (Biwald, 2012). In addition, due to the close coupling of the tax revenue head ratio (a measure of the financial performance of a municipality) to the revenue shares of the municipality, multiple disadvantages occur in out-migration municipalities (some of which are very dependent on these revenues, as they have hardly any income from municipal or property tax). Thus, the more dependent municipalities are on fiscal equalization, the more vulnerable they are in times of crisis and/or structural changes, or the longer it takes them to recover (Gspurning & Macheiner, 2018).

A very cost-intensive part is the maintenance of educational institutions, which is particularly reflected in the low or declining number of pupils. In the school system, too, 95% of primary schools and 96% of compulsory schools are based on federal structures, which hit municipalities with small populations even harder. The effects of falling number of pupils are also increasingly leading to the closure of small schools in Styria (Pizzera et al., 2018). This circumstance also leads to the loss of important reference points in the communities, which has a lasting negative impact on community life and everyday life. However, in addition to the public accessibility of everyday infrastructure facilities, school and preschool facilities in the immediate vicinity play a key role for young families when deciding where to live (My Broker Immobilien GmbH, 2018), which reinforces the current developments in out-migration communities and hinders future positive developments. For the highly sprawled region in the south-easternmost part of Styria, therefore, a major challenge against the decades-long trend and forecasts—the out-migration of young population groups and the simultaneous ageing of the resident population—to create perspectives for future developments and to ensure the maintenance of basic services in the communities. In addition to the provision of goods and

services for daily needs, school and educational facilities, basic social and medical care, sports and recreational facilities, technical infrastructures, communication services, public administration, and security, as well as public transport structures are also counted as basic services (Weber, 2006). If workplaces, infrastructural facilities for the supply of daily needs, or educational institutions can only be reached by car, children, young people and older, non-mobile people in particular are dependent on carpooling or pick-up and drop-off services from family members or neighbors (Verkehrs Club Österreich [VCÖ], 2018). Women in rural regions play a central role in this, as they are mostly responsible for family, education, and upbringing, as well as for caring for the elderly, due to traditional values (Zehetmair, 2013). However, as in many other aspects, there is a strong disparity between urban and rural areas in the case of mobility. According to VCÖ, in 2018, people in rural areas in particular are affected by mobility poverty and thus often excluded from the participation in social life, as well as from the labor and education market, which can lead to a downward spiral for many families. In Austria, 44% of the lower income quartile do not have a car of their own to cover the rather short daily distances, even in peripheral regions. For young people, however, access to educational institutions and, by extension, access to the labor market (participation as well as accessibility of workplaces) is an essential prerequisite for longer-term local settlement (Weber, 2006). The studies have also shown that 55% of commutes to work are shorter than 10 kilometers. However, many commuter routes are tailored to a permanent availability of a car or public transport options of full-time employees. Thus, people who do not always have a car available, such as part-time workers or people with additional care responsibilities, are often restricted in their everyday mobility. In 2014, 49% of jobseekers and 44% of women in Lower Austria stated that they do not always have a car at their disposal. Essential parameters for mobility behavior in a region are above all the spatial and settlement structure, as well as the available transport infrastructure (VCÖ, 2015). In order to reach all the important points of interest by private or public transport, an appropriately developed transport network is required—especially for women who must bear the main burden of pick-up and delivery services. Thus, the terms “living environment” or lifeworld also include the existing transport structures in the region.

Based on the general presentation of the problem in the previous section, an attempt will now be made to characterize the study region in the context of the problem of “rural exodus” based on the current official statistics at the time of the study (January, 2021) and to classify it in comparison with the neighboring districts (Table 1). In addition, the selected parameters were to serve to either confirm the statements in the surveys or to question them as subjective opinions.

Table 1. Selected statistical parameters on the structure the districts

Feature	Styria	Südost- steiermark	Hartberg- Fürstenfeld	Weiz	Leibnitz
Men	615,572	41,854	44,951	45,125*	42,019
Women	630,823	42,276	45,655*	45,529	42,737
aged below 20	18.0%	18.1%	18.7%	19.8%*	18.6%
20–65 years old	61.5%	60.5%	60.7%	60.9%	62.3%*
aged 65 and over	20.5%	21.4%*	20.7%	19.3%	19.2%
Migration balance	5,022	1	107	252	695*
Proportion of foreigners	11.5%	5.6%	4.7%	6.0%	7.8%*

Table 1. Selected statistical parameters on the structure the districts (*Continued*)

Feature	Styria	Südost- steiermark	Hartberg- Fürstenfeld	Weiz	Leibnitz
Day care centers (DCC)	1,068	72	87*	72	82
Children in DCC	38,160	2,196	2,713	2,731*	2,463
Schools (2019)	884	70	84*	70	66
Pupils (2019)	150,213	12,209*	10,683	10,204	9,567
Unemployed (m)	19,109	1,131	1,188	803	1,277*
Unemployed (w)	14,929	766	1,059	562	1,128
Per-capita tax revenue (€)	1,514	1,161	1,264	1,362*	1,244
Arrivals	4,318,840	284,249	552,722*	153,035	256,730
Overnight stays	13,288,592	1,122,402	1,471,861*	412,915	566,169
Compulsory school	24.5%	30.7%*	27.0%	25.6%	28.2%
Apprenticeship	35.2%	38.5%	37.6%	39.7%	40.4%*
Vocational school	13.9%	15.0%	17.3%*	15.2%	13.6%
General secondary school	5.8%	3.2%	3.2%	3.5%	3.8%
Vocational secondary school	8.4%	6.5%	7.9%	8.4%*	7.0%
University-type degrees	1.8%	1.8%*	1.8%*	1.6%	1.6%
University degrees	10.4%	4.3%	5.2%	5.9%*	5.3%
Academic ratio (m)	14.7%	6.4%	7.5%	8.7%*	7.9%
Academic rate (w)	17.5%	9.5%	10.6%	11.4%*	10.0%
Activity rate (m)	80.7%	83.2%	83.3%	84.7%*	82.3%
Employment rate (w)	73.3%	74.9%	75.8%	76.6%*	74.5%
Unemployed (m)	280,787	19,461	20,908	21,326*	19,392
Self-employed (m)	44,283	3,626	3,959*	3,756	3,418
Absent (m)	1,364	111*	111	95	109
Unemployed (w)	242,866	16,301	17,557	17,906*	16,657
Self-employed (w)	31,186	2,803	3,149	3,175*	2,495
Absent (w)	11,511	816	921	999*	851
Commuting balance	-21,877	-10,153	-8,421	-6,225	-13,734*
Pensioners etc.	287,580	20,212	20,589*	18,708	17,998
Land price in €/m ²	53.0	25.1	25.4	39.4	49.6*

Note. Data in table are adopted from *Steirische Statistiken* [Styrian statistics; Unpublished raw data], by Amt der Steiermärkischen Landesregierung, 2021; District values marked by an asterisk indicate the respective maximum in the district comparison.

The comparison of the selected demographic and socioeconomic parameters in Table 1 documents the position of the target area in relation to the national average. It is striking that the situation, which can be substantiated by figures, is less dramatic in some areas than it is perceived by those affected. Furthermore, the difference between the study area and neighboring districts remains relatively small for most parameters. Only a few parameters (e.g., number of pupils, per-capita tax revenue, and commuter balance) show significant differences between the districts. Particularly noteworthy is the large discrepancy between the land price in the Styrian average compared to other districts, especially since the latter is perceived as very high by the district population.

3. Methodology

In principle, the approach to the problem followed a rather holistic concept with the aim of obtaining the broadest possible access to the subject matter. Building on the results of studies on similar issues already carried out elsewhere and by other bodies, own methodologically different studies were to be carried out to complement and consolidate the results available at that time. This consideration resulted in some important characteristics for the design and execution of the project.

3.1. Chronology and target groups

Due to adverse external circumstances (measures against COVID-19), it was only possible to implement the project in a way that was as coordinated as possible with similar studies because of possible synergy effects (which per se had an influence on the timing of the project itself). This created constraints in the sense of feedback mechanisms on the one hand, but on the other hand also opportunities for an ongoing adaptation of the content of one's own approach. In view of the research question, the original focus of interest was on an unspecified group of women as potential emigrants from the region. As the study continued, it became clear that this selection was too imprecise, so that it was successively expanded to include other groups; first, female young people from the region were surveyed online (FB1), followed by the survey of women who had recently emigrated from the region (FB2). In the next step, so-called focus groups (high-ranking representatives from politics, business, management, NGOs of the region) were included in a workshop (FGM). In order to circumvent the weakness of questionnaire campaigns (high non-response rate) and to obtain a sample from a group of people who might not participate in online surveys, an on-site survey of women was conducted by means of a structured interview (VOB). In addition, workshops (KUJ) were organized at selected schools in the district to help find out from which age girls and young women become aware of the problems of living in a disadvantaged environment in their district and if they may be already experiencing the problem of "rural exodus of women" in their area. Finally, it was to be checked to what extent the most recent socio-economic data of the official statistics of Styria could confirm the results obtained from the project (Landesentwicklung Steiermark, 2016). In this context, the selection of indicators was primarily guided by the main problem areas that emerged in the previous work packages.

3.2. Mix of methods

Due to the "Vulkanland Investigation" (ISK), which was carried out almost simultaneously with a slightly different focus, there was a danger of "over-sampling" (also recognizable from the comments in the questionnaires), so that, if possible, further area-wide surveys were not carried out. Instead, in addition to various surveys (FB1, FB2, or FGM), interviews or discussions and other methods of information acquisition (World Café, cognitive mapping) were to be used, based on an extensive search of the relevant scientific literature. The data described below was acquired within the framework of these work packages.

The target group of the study ISK (external survey; September, 2019) was composed of five subgroups (female citizens over 16, mayors, local councilors, female farmers, female entrepreneurs) which were interviewed on selected topics in analog form or online. According

to the subgroups, the resulting data showed different results. The female citizens table ultimately comprised 98 relevant/usable variables and 1,530 cases, whereby—not least depending on the question type—a relatively large number of fields contained blank entries in some cases. This table had a total of 766 explicitly female cases (compared to 763 explicitly male cases), the remaining 741 persons could not or did not want to declare themselves in this question. For this reason, the evaluation concentrated only on the answers of the first group, especially in view of the overarching question. After restructuring, the female farmers table comprises 95 cases (i.e., explicitly “female” in the corresponding field) with 200 variables (195 of which are relevant), whereby, depending on the type of question, many fields alternately contained blank responses. For the female entrepreneurs, the same applies in principle, whereby this table contains 425 cases (of which 67 explicitly declared themselves as female, 191 as male, and the others decided not to provide their gender) with a total of 58 characteristics (of which 48 are relevant). What is striking about both questionnaires is the unexpectedly high non-response rate for certain questions.

The FB1-survey (own survey; April–June, 2019) focuses exclusively on women who currently live in SO and are between 15 and 64 years of working age. For this study an online questionnaire was chosen, where the basic structure of the questionnaire consisted of seven blocks intended to describe whole research topic (demographic information, responsibility for family members, reasons for moving away, gainful employment, questions about unpaid work, questions about education, desire to stay in the district SO). Out of a total of 54 questions, only nine questions are visible to all respondents, due to the inclusion of filter questions. A minimum number of 14 questions must be answered in any case. The data matrix consisted of 104 variables and 70 cases.

The target group of the investigation FB2 (own survey; February–June, 2020) were women who actually migrated from the district SO. As a method an online questionnaire was used again. The dataset resulting from this study consists of 87 cases, each with 54 responses to record the motives for emigration; for the purpose of comparability of the results with those from FB1, the questions were also largely oriented toward the focal points of FB1.

The FGM investigation (own survey; November 28–29, 2019) was aimed at female leaders of the Styrian Volcanic Land (managers, artists, etc.). The results of the moderated discussion were recorded and analysed by the moderators as were the course of the discussion, the intensity, personal interactions and the emotions expressed. At the beginning focus groups (21 women in total) were conducted. After a short presentation of the project by the project leader, each group was initially asked two standardized questions and each question has to be discussed by the group within 45 minutes. The procedure was the same for each group, the questions and introductions with identical wording. After the questions were asked, the interviewers did not interfere, but recorded every verbal utterance as well as all non-verbal reactions, attention, participation, and energy level of the group.

During the on-site survey (VOB; own survey; October, 2020) in a structured interview women were asked specific questions about the subject of the survey; in addition, cognitive maps were used to test the extent to which the subjects could provide correct information about the functional features of their district. The resulting data matrix shows 44 cases and 38 variables with questions on the following areas: housing, work, children, leisure, culture,

shopping, services, pharmacies, hospitals, doctors, family, public transport, and sports facilities. Special attention was paid to a close interaction of question and map. The locations used were selected car parks at shopping centers, car parks at department stores or supermarkets, if not otherwise possible in the inner-city area (a total of 12 locations, distributed as comprehensively as possible in SO). Basic principles and tools for cognitive mapping: colored printouts with reduced topographic content in A3 format (for referencing the results in GIS; Figure 1).

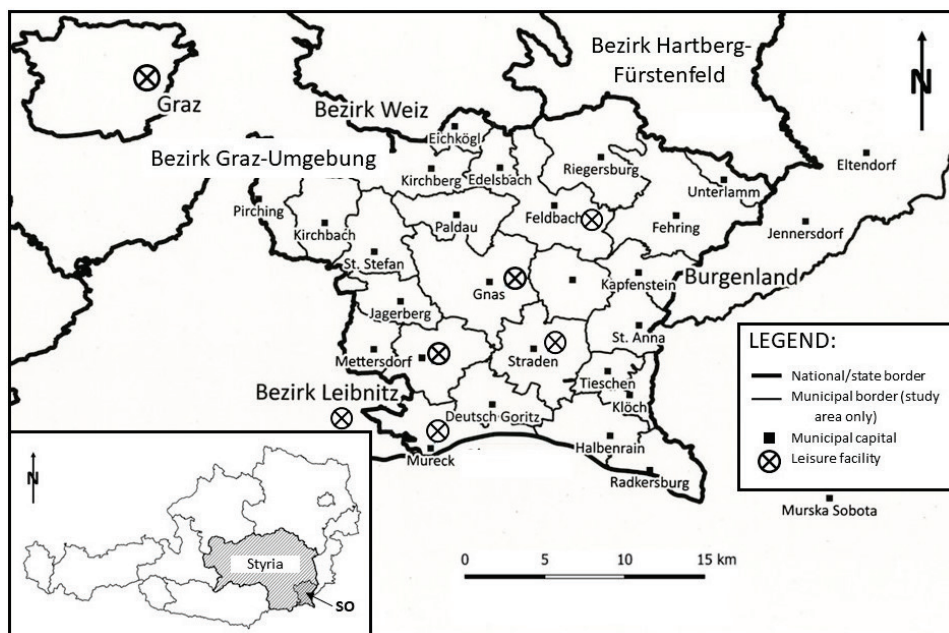


Figure 1. Basic map of SO and the adjacent areas as used for cognitive mapping of leisure facilities used by the respondents.

Finally, it was the intention of the project presented here to allow female persons of school age to have their say for the first time. Therefore in the study KUJ (own survey; October, 2020) school classes of all school levels from the study area were nominated. As in the VOB study, structured interviews and cognitive mapping were used as methods; due to the lower age of some groups of pupils, the World Café method was also utilized. The result was a data matrix with 38 variables and 34 cases (not including pupils on primary school level). In the first part of the unit in a World Café different aspects of the topic were raised by the pupils (in some cases, through a thought-provoking process in which the students' responses were collected and summarized after a brief discussion); in the second lesson, the resulting topics were exemplarily discussed with the pupils more deeply (e.g., which professions they could imagine their female classmates having and which problems and needs the female classmates see in their district). The male pupils were also specifically included and asked for answers in order to check how far the male and female way of recognizing topic-related parameters coincide at this age.

4. Results and discussion

The review of the available data has shown that, regardless of the method used, a kind of “common sense” exists on many issues. Most of the time, there is basic agreement on the issue itself, coupled with minor differences in emphasis, e.g., there is broad agreement on the poor coverage of public transport, but (slightly) different opinions on the importance of the issue. Each problem area is first described in general terms based on the available survey results; if there are also divergent, in some cases even contradictory opinions, these are discussed separately and marked with the corresponding source abbreviation in square brackets (e.g., VOB for on-site survey).

4.1. *Mobility and commuting*

These are actually at least two topics that in both cases are without exception identified as deficits of the region. In most cases, two subgroups—public transport and private motorized transport—can be distinguished regarding to mobility.

Public transport: both qualitatively (desolate, too small buses [KUJ]) and quantitatively (frequency, interval density outside peak hours, few lines, high prices, insufficiently varied offer in shopping centers and in the direction of the higher-level centers, also applies to ÖBB (the Austrian Railway Company) in the direction of Slovenia [ISK]).

Motorized individual transport: Aware of the importance of a car, the lack of a motorway connection (to Graz) or a sufficiently dense road network is predominantly complained about. The general condition of the roads (road surface, lighting, etc.) is criticized less frequently. Other shortcomings (although comparatively rare) in this context are noise pollution and traffic jams.

Commuting as such should be considered separately, especially since the mobility deficits of the region can be seen in a causal connection with it, but the problem as such has much more serious effects on the satisfaction with the world of work and, connected with this, also with the decision to move. In view of the general traffic situation in SO, owning one's own car is considered indispensable (although the aspect of company shuttles, car-sharing, or car-pooling was never actually addressed in any of the results). If one considers the length of the commute route, which appears to be acceptable, or the intervals (ISK), the loss of time and thus quality of life as well can be easily understood.

4.2. *Career opportunities*

In accordance with its outstanding importance for individuals and the area as a whole, the working world of SO proves to be a multi-layered problem area, both in terms of the number and the quality of jobs available and in terms of the wage level offered; professional opportunities suffer from the reduced mix of sectors (e.g., few/no offers for academics or those in IT and other hi-tech fields). Overall, a mismatch between the existing training quality and job supply/demand is also identified. Sectors that are less in demand (low wage level, unattractive working hours) often cover their labor needs through agencies or from abroad (which in some cases is reflected in fear of strangers or even xenophobia [ISK]). The prevailing corporate structure and the basic orientation toward tourism prove to be aggravating in the workplace context.

4.3. *Educational opportunities*

In view of the figures published in the official statistics, the issue highlighted with relative frequency, at least as far as schools in the narrower sense are concerned, is probably less a quantitative problem than a structural one (e.g., discontinuous school careers etc.). It cannot be predicted with sufficient certainty whether or how a consolidation of the school offer will help the region. In some cases, the problems of socially weak (marginal) groups also continue in the school sector (KUJ).

Active promotion of women takes place only to a modest extent, where there is some concession on the part of employers, primarily in the field of work organization; on the other hand, however, it must be noted that there are only limited possibilities for entrepreneurs in the struggle for qualified employees due to the modest repertoire of possibilities used, mostly without any real chance (ISK). Also, in the already tense apprenticeship issue, mainly caused by the company structure and by more temporary workers than apprentices (ISK), a disadvantage of female applicants can be seen at least subliminally. On the one hand, it is through the lower willingness to hire female apprentices, and on the other hand through the extremely narrow range of apprenticeship positions (KUJ).

4.4. *Childcare*

The extent to which this problem, being a major one by itself, can be solved by increasing the number of childcare facilities cannot be conclusively deduced from the statistics, as the picture is essentially the same as the overall situation in Styria and any distributional imbalances and associated accessibility disadvantages are difficult to prove. However, it is clear from the survey results that there are deficits induced by other problem areas, such as the connection between the world of work and childcare. This manifests itself, for example, in structural weaknesses (inadequate daily opening hours, no care at weekends/holidays, etc.) or in the provision of alternatives (childminders, etc. [FGM]), which is sometimes perceived as suboptimal. Irrespective of this, however, it is quite clear that all the resulting expenses and disadvantages are almost exclusively at the expense of the childcare provider, in most cases women. Another aspect of care that is often mentioned in other contexts is the factor of “unpaid work”, which in many ways at least influences the lives of women, and in more extreme cases even prevents the person concerned from leaving the district.

4.5. *Care for the elderly*

A small shortcoming of the present study is that the important topic of care for the elderly (Kühnemund & Kümpers, 2019) was not given as much attention in the interviews (or could not be given due to the framework conditions). Unlike the schoolgirls, this population group, which has become increasingly strong in recent years (frequently mentioned aspects: immigration of the elderly, danger of ageing of SO, [ISK]) was not included directly (i.e., as senior citizens) in the surveys. Therefore, the statements made here are mainly the result of the interactions with other (questioned) subject areas. Here, of course, the area of transport (individual transport and increasingly public transport) should be mentioned in the first place. Another focus is on medical care, too few and difficult to reach specialists, fears about the continued existence of hospitals. In this context, reference should also be made to the

xenophobia already discussed above: Despite the obviously tense situation in the care sector, voices can be found that vehemently reject the employment of “foreign” care personnel.

4.6. Participation in networks and associations

In the surveys, this topic area proved to be rather less important overall, whereby a certain ambivalence in the assessments was recognizable. In a positive sense, associations and (informal) networks are valued as opportunities for exchanging information, as a social bracket or integration platform, and also as preservers of customs, and they are also evaluated accordingly (e.g., being a member of the board as a reason to refrain from leaving [KUJ]). On the other hand, more and more people are rejecting this kind of networking as “club bureaucracy” and/or perceive the cultivation of customs in the broader sense of the word as an outdated tradition. The situation becomes particularly problematic when, as mentioned in some cases, communication through other channels (e.g., the municipalities) does not work or works poorly. Especially people who not from the region easily feel isolated and “disconnected” from the local social association. In order to optimize the existing repertoire, an expansion of the rather traditional, narrow spectrum (football, tennis, fire brigade, music), e.g., in the direction of culture, should be considered, especially since this aspect is seen as an area of deficiency by a not inconsiderable number of respondents. Only sparse survey results are available on this—in the corporate sector explicitly 67 out of 425 respondents; mayor and municipal council survey was conducted without separation of the genders. However, it can generally be stated that, although women are increasingly successful in committees, too few female representatives are still active in this area. The main reasons cited were a lack of self-confidence, overload, conservative role models, and the opposition of the existing insider relationships (or male competitors; FGM).

4.7. Housing

The housing sector is also a frequently mentioned problem area, whereby several aspects must be separated from each other: apparently rigid building regulations, which are often perceived as harassment and are also held responsible for the lack of building sites or a lack of suitable premises for the economy. On the other hand, there is both the recognition of architectural blunders and the danger of urban sprawl, land consumption, and sealing. The prices that are considered too high cannot be confirmed by a look at the relevant statistics in comparison with other districts in the state. The accusation of too high rents cannot be assessed with sufficient certainty due to the lack of data, but it could possibly be a more local problem as a result of the generally lower wage level in the region.

4.8. Infrastructure

The undoubtedly existing infrastructural problems of the district SO are very difficult to characterize in the given brevity, especially because “infrastructure” is a rather generalizing term and therefore also covers topics such as traffic/public transport, i.e., topics that were observed separately in this study. Furthermore, the term is also used in this way in the answers of the interviewees, so that it comes to a generalization of the conveyed contents, so to speak. In general, “infrastructure” was therefore understood in this study as everything

that could not be explicitly assigned to specific problem areas or was not assigned by the respondents. However, this approach has the effect that the term was used as a collective term for everything that was not specifically asked about and that could somehow be described as infrastructure. Regardless of this problem, the high number of mentions shows that infrastructural deficits (outside of the specified areas) are indeed seen. The sheer variety of answers alone hardly allows for a “handy” specification of the problems mentioned (Figure 2).

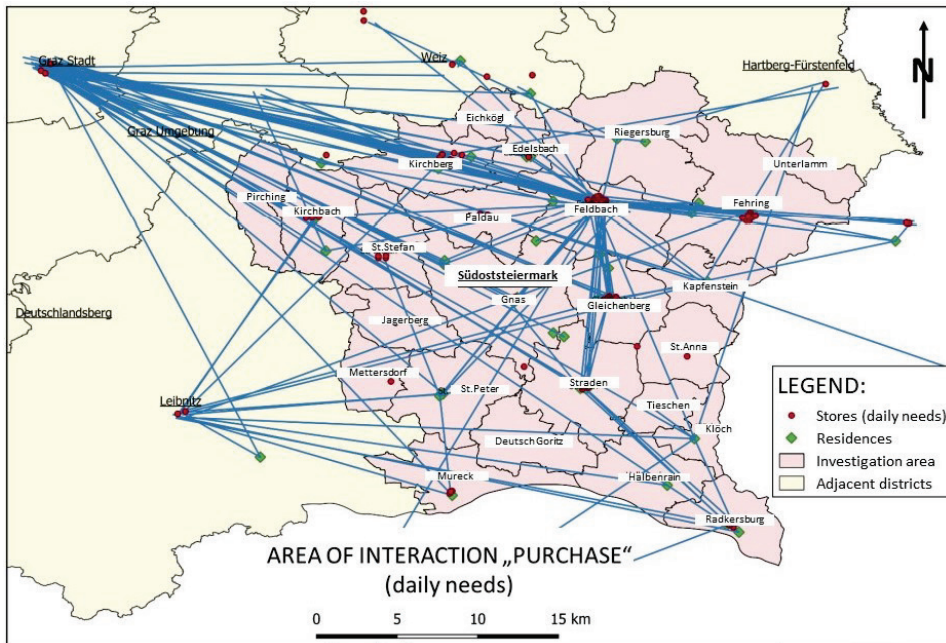


Figure 2. Area of interaction “Purchase” (daily needs).

Note. This illustration of the distances travelled for daily needs shows that a large amount of these goods is acquired outside the hometown and thus underlines the high dependence of the population on the transport infrastructure.

4.9. Leisure

With regard to the area of leisure time activities, apart from the problems already discussed, reference was made primarily to the small number of different possibilities (which are also perceived as being influenced by the traditional attitude of those responsible or by tourism); subliminally, the picture drawn of the existing possibilities consists of walking, hiking, visiting thermal baths, soccer, or tennis and, with some exceptions, cycling. At times one gets the impression that “Vulkanland” (this is the name under which the region is marketed) is in danger of becoming a victim of its own advertising strategy when, for example, visits to wine taverns are stylized as a highlight of local leisure activities. In most cases, special interests have to be satisfied outside the district (Figure 3); some of the interviewees identify deficits in cultural offerings in a subordinate position.

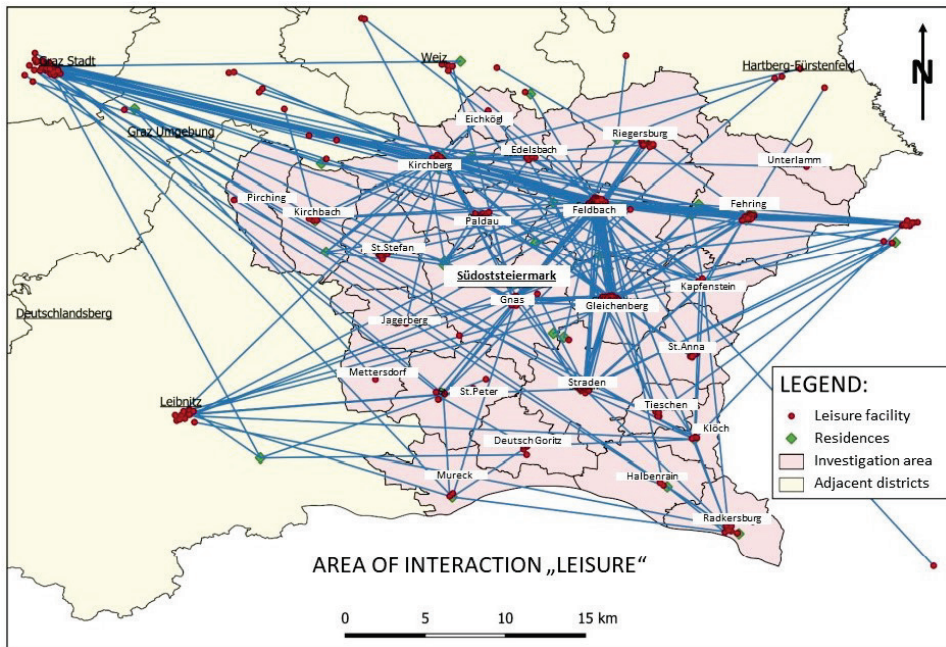


Figure 3. Area of interaction "leisure".

Note. This illustration of leisure-based activities, derived from the cognitive maps, clearly shows the intensive interconnectedness with the neighboring districts and the willingness to accept greater distances for this purpose.

4.10. Additional aspects

As already described, the methods of Cognitive Mapping and World Café were used for data acquisition in the present project. The former represented an attempt to bring the test persons' spatial image of their environment (the district SO) into congruence with the real world and was intended to compensate for a shortcoming of the otherwise usual data collection, the almost complete abandonment of the spatial reference and the information that can be derived from it (where is something located? or how do I get there?). In this way, especially those topics were detected that turned out to be significant in the course of the surveys. The following topics appear to be significant themes in the study: housing, work, children, leisure, culture, shopping, services, pharmacies, hospitals, doctors, family, public transport, and sports facilities. Without going into too much detail, it can be summarized at this point that the respondents almost without exception had a very precise "inner map" of their home district. There were hardly any serious deviations from reality, both in terms of location and the number of objects (KUJ, VOB).

The involvement of the pupils in the study quickly made it clear that a more age-appropriate type of stimulation was to be used for the topic. The well-tried World Café method was chosen, which allows a playful introduction to the subject matter and a relatively informal collection of information. The main aim was to find out whether and to what extent the pupils are aware of the problems in their district (Figure 4).

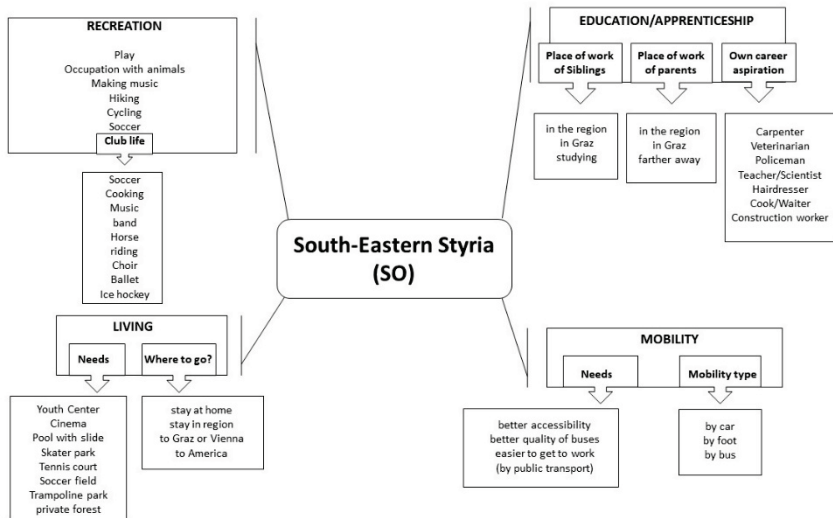


Figure 4. Summarized results of the World Café method as a blackboard picture (Age group: 15/16 years).
 Note. To improve readability and understanding the text has been transcribed and translated by the author.

Subsuming these findings, it can be stated that the juvenile test persons were definitely aware of the problems of their home (especially concerning the world of work and public transport). Apart from that, youth care and leisure activities were also perceived as deficit areas. It was somewhat surprising and therefore particularly pleasing that in this age group the particular problems of the female classmates (e.g., in the field of jobs) were also perceived (KUJ). Thus, it can be concluded that despite the different methods used, the results from the other studies were confirmed. This age group is already sensitized to the problem of migration, even though its members are at best indirectly affected by it.

5. Conclusion

With reference to the general conditions and objectives of the study outlined at the beginning, it must first be noted that the large number of entities involved and the resulting data were only partially conducive to the quality of the results. In particular, it became apparent that it was not always possible to homogenize and merge the data material, so that redundancies and data garbage had to be identified. Nevertheless, certain similarities with the results of similar studies from other regions could be demonstrated. In addition, it has been shown that within the study region there is a kind of “common sense” regarding the disadvantages and deficits of the region, which is partly based on verifiable facts, but partly also on prejudices or misconceptions (see land prices). The perceived disadvantages are differentiated according to gender because rural social rules have a great impact on the way women in particular act in this field of tension. Finally, the inclusion of adolescent women in the study yielded two main results: on the one hand, in this age group there is already a perception of the living environment that largely coincides with the assessment of adult women; in contrast to the adult world in which the genders partly see each other as competitors, the perceptions of adolescents with regard to the problems of the region are increasingly converging.

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