

GRABSKI-KIERON, ULRIKE, KORDEL, STEFAN, KRAJEWSKI, CHRISTIAN, MOSE, INGO, STEINFÜHRER, ANNETT (eds) (2024): *Geographie ländlicher Räume*. Paderborn: Brill Schöningh. 464 Seiten, 36 Tabellen, 125 Abbildungen. ISBN 978-3-8252-6068-2. EUR 38,00.

In recent years, research on rural areas has gained remarkable momentum, particularly in the English-speaking world. Contemporary rural geography is characterised by theoretical diversity and a broad range of thematic specialisations. On the one hand, rurality is discussed in the context of socio-economic challenges such as creating equitable living conditions, political polarisation and spatially differentiated voting patterns. On the other hand, rural areas are increasingly being recognised as places of new opportunities and appeal. Experiences during the pandemic, changing housing preferences and rising rents and property prices in many cities have further fuelled debates about the potential of rural lifestyles and housing options.

Against this backdrop, the textbook *Geographien ländlicher Räume*, edited by a group of well-established experts in the field, appears to have been published just in time for the twentieth anniversary of the “Rural Areas” Working Group within the German Geographical Society (DGfG). Bringing together contributions from 35 authors, the volume covers a wide range of topics and provides a comprehensive overview of the current state of German-language geographical research on rural areas.

The title itself is programmatic. The plural form *Räume* signals a shift away from the monolithic conception of rural areas towards an emphasis on diversity and heterogeneity. The core message is that there is no single “rural space” that can clearly be distinguished from the urban, but rather a variety of rural spaces shaped by differing economic structures, social practices, and degrees of connectivity to urban centres. This conceptual framework is consistent throughout the work, shaping both the theoretical foundations and the empirical chapters of the book.

The textbook is divided into eight chapters. After a brief introduction, Chapter 2 explores theoretical and conceptual approaches to rural geography. Alongside a historical overview of the discipline’s development in German-speaking and international contexts, such as the United Kingdom, France and

Northern Europe, it presents four conceptualisations of rural spaces: functional analysis; the political-economic analysis of restructuring; the social construction of rurality; and practices of rurality. These theories are consistently illustrated in separate boxes, for example by examining the topic of single-family housing developments from various conceptual perspectives.

Chapter 3 focuses on spatial typologies as methodological tools for spatial structural analysis. It describes the typologies commonly used in Germany, such as the settlement structure district types of the BBSR and the two-dimensional Thünen typology, as well as the spatial typologies of the European Union according to Eurostat and ESPON. Comparing these typologies yields surprisingly different results, making it clear that differences within rural and urban areas are generally much greater than differences between these categories. Reflecting critically on the typologies and discussing their pitfalls makes this chapter a particularly valuable section.

The chapter on social spaces (Chapter 4) covers a broad spectrum, from village and small town dynamics to local public services, migration, everyday mobility and volunteer work. At around 100 pages, the chapter on the economy (Chapter 5) is the most extensive in the volume. It examines the transformation and diversification of rural economies and addresses agriculture, forestry, commerce and tourism, primarily from the perspective of economic geography. It also devotes separate subsections to contemporary topics such as digitalisation, the energy transition and cooperative forms of regional development. Chapter 6 focuses on geographical, landscape and environmental perspectives, addressing historical and current changes in land use, ecological impacts, and regulatory and protective instruments. Finally, Chapter 7 is devoted to the multi-level system of spatial planning and development policy, with particular attention to EU funding instruments. The book concludes with a relatively brief outlook (Chapter 8), which proposes the UN Sustainable Development Goals as a guiding framework for the future development of rural areas.

This volume’s impressive pedagogical quality is all the more notable given the large number of contributing authors. The texts are written in a consistent style, easy to read and full of information. Numerous illustrations, maps, tables, photographs and text boxes complement and expand upon the main text. Reflection questions and recommended readings at the end of each chapter encourage in-



dependent engagement with the material. A subject index containing over 300 entries enables readers to explore specific topics in more detail, even if they are not covered in a separate subsection. The book successfully dismantles the traditional urban–rural dichotomy — still a central theme in the discipline — particularly convincingly in Chapter 3.

Beyond this breadth and depth of scholarly engagement, a reviewer inevitably finds a few points that might have deserved more attention. To name two: Debates on degrowth, post-growth and the foundational economy present specific challenges, but also open up new development prospects for rural areas. The same applies to the so-called renaissance of cleavage theories, as the contrast between urban and rural areas is increasingly being used to interpret political and socio-spatial divisions. While both topics are referenced in several of the volume's contributions, given their current relevance, a more systematic and in-depth treatment would have been warranted.

Finally, it would have been desirable if the editors had explicitly stated which research gaps they have identified or what their priorities are for the further development of the subdiscipline. Taking a bolder stance on disciplinary policy would have been welcome here.

These reservations, however, do not diminish the work's value. Overall, *Geographien ländlicher Räume* is an exceptionally well-crafted, content-rich and clearly organised textbook that fills a genuine gap in the German-speaking scientific community. Students of geography and related disciplines will find it an excellent, broad-ranging introduction to the diversity of rural areas, while instructors and researchers will appreciate it as a reliable reference work with up-to-date bibliographic references and a thoughtful overview of the field. The volume will undoubtedly become the new standard work in German-language rural geography - and rightly so.

Author

Dr. Simon Dudek
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4898-4523>
simon.dudek@ku.de
KU Eichstätt-Ingolstadt
Ostenstraße 18
85072 Eichstätt
Germany