

The Opportunities of Emptiness

Julia Rössel

Department of Geography
Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz
Johann-Joachim-Becher-Weg 21
D-55099 Mainz
j.roessel@geo.uni-mainz.de
<http://www.geo.uni-mainz.de/roessel/>

The Uckermark in north eastern Germany is one of the regions with the lowest population density in Germany. It is a peripheral region which was part of the German Democratic Republic and was mainly characterized by agriculture use. Since the Fall of the Wall in 1990 the Uckermark is strongly affected by a population decline with the well-known vicious circle of ageing of the population, unemployment, vacancy and so forth. These negative aspects are recently part of public discussions, however this paper attempts to change the point of view in order to focus on the opportunities that rise out of the emptiness.

Based on qualitative interviews and the village Wallmow as an example this paper deals with the moving in of new inhabitants into the village, which was strongly affected by population decline. The new inhabitants understand emptiness as an opportunity that offers the possibility to produce spaces of good life which are inherently based on the freedom they get from the emptiness to develop their own wishes and pursue their goals. Following LEFEBVRE I would like to describe the production of space of these new inhabitants in terms of the three dimensions of material production, production of knowledge and production of meanings. This theoretical approach allows for integrating the upgrade of buildings, the development of new projects like schools or cultural events as well as individual wishes, goals, values and meanings. The production of positive meanings is an important aspect to change the negative image of empty regions.