University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice

Faculty of Economics

Department of Regional Management

Master thesis

The Problem of Regional Identity in Vorpommern

A Case-Study on the Impact of a Regional Development
Project on Regional Identity

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České Budějovice, 31.08.2020

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH BOHEMIA IN ČESKÉ BUDĚJOVICE

Faculty of Economics

Academic year: 2019/2020

ASSIGNMENT OF DIPLOMA THESIS

(project, art work, art performance)

Name and surname: **Judith Marie ALMS**
Personal number: **E18644**
Study programme: **N6237 Regional and European Project Management**
Field of study:
Work topic: **The Problem of Regional Identity in Vorpommern**
Assigning department: **Department of Regional Management**

Theses guidelines

Objective:

identity

identity *

The aim of this study is to assess the influence of regional culture on regional development in Vopommern and the way how this culture is addressed in or influenced by regional development projects.

Methodological approach:

The empirical part will be based on qualitative approach. Data will be collected based on focus group and/or individual interviews concerning influence of the realized projects in a selected region.

Framework structure:

1. Introduction. Objectives.
2. Review of literature.
3. Methods.
4. Results, discussion.
5. Conclusion.
X. References
X. List of Annexes (if any)
X. Annexes

* *covered by supervisor*

M. Zajra

21. 2. 2020

Extent of work report: **50 – 60 pages**
Extent of graphics content: **as necessary**
Form processing of diploma thesis: **printed**
Language of elaboration: **English**

Recommended resources:

Anděl, J., Balej, M., Bobr, L. (2019). Landscape types and regional identity – by example of case study in Northwest Bohemia. AUC Geographica 54(1), 81-91.

Hawkes, J. (2001). The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability. Culture's essential role in public planning. Victoria: Cultural Development Network.

Hitchcock D. (1997). Transition to Sustainable Development: is it about planning?. Proceedings of the American Planning Association conference.

Weber, G. (2010). Der ländliche Raum – Mythen und Fakten. Landlicher Raum, 1-11.

Woods, M. (2011). Rural. London: Routledge.

Supervisors of diploma thesis: **doc. PhDr. Miloslav Lapka, CSc.**
Department of Regional Management

Date of assignment of diploma thesis: **January 30, 2020**
Submission deadline of diploma thesis: **August 15, 2020**

doc. Dr. Ing. Dagmar Škodová Parmová
Dean

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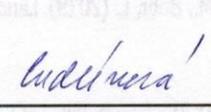
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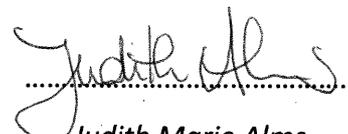
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Table of Content

Table of Figures

Introduction

As poorest region of Germany, Vorpommern (Western Pomerania) faces special challenges in regional development. This former area of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) is a rural periphery with regional specifics that shape the economically unattractive and remote area. In the thesis, the region is examined from a sociological perspective. The focus is laid on the regional identity of the historic region Vorpommern and especially the smaller region Peenetal/Loitz within it about which the case study is carried out. The research interest is to assess how its identity is considered in and shaped by the development project Zukunftsstadt (future town). The thesis begins with the theoretical background, defining the basic terms necessary in the research. Affiliated, theories of regional identity and regional consciousness are explored. The study is based on the theoretical outline of the Finnish geographer Anssi Paasi and his understanding of regional identity as identity of the region and regional consciousness. As first dimension of identity of the region, the scientific classification is examined in the following chapter when assessing the region Vorpommern in its historical, natural and economic features. Subsequently, in a minor theoretical analysis, the theory and the historic and current development are brought together in the chapter "The problem of regional identity in Vorpommern". With this first notion given, the case study of the development project in Peenetal/Loitz will be presented. A qualitative analysis of 15 interviews with stakeholders of the project and habitants of the region reveal the interrelations between the project and regional identity. The results demonstrate the way regional consciousness and the identity of the region influence all stages of the development project. At the same time, even in the still ongoing project influences of the project on the regional identity are already observable. Concerning regional consciousness, the data indicates that the project changes the regional mentality to be more open to innovation and change. The identity of the region was most shaped at the level of the image so far. Further impacts are to be evaluated when the project is finished. The current difficulties within the project Zukunftsstadt identified in the case study are linked to regional identity. This indicates the importance of the topic during the whole cycle of a project.

Theoretical Insights

Definition *Region*

A first important step in understanding regional identity lays in the distinction between *region* and *place*. For long, geographers took those two concepts as synonyms and didn't differentiate their notions. For Anssi Paasi instead, "a region is comprehended as a concrete dynamic manifestation of social (natural, cultural, economic, political etc.) processes that affect and are affected by changes in spatial structures over time." (Paasi, 1986, p. 110). As such, a region is part of the institutional sphere and cannot be experienced directly but is represented by symbolic means. Places on the other hand are connected to everyday life practices of individuals and their lifeworld. They present an individual category. As such, places can englobe entities of different sizes, even a national state can be a place, if it carries *everyday* symbolic meaning for its inhabitants. Thus, the distinction between region and place is not based on scale, but on their relation to the individual. A region has a collective character and legitimately represents institutional practices as well as the history of the region using symbols and control. A place is where an individual reproduces his material and intellectual existence by participating in social actions. It ceases to exist when one dies while a region is more permanent, as it represents a contingent historical process within the society, just as a place is a contingent historical process for one individual (Paasi, 1986).

This approach overcomes the notion of the region as a static and stable entity, as it is assumed by political entities like the OECD or the EU in order to create statistical entities under the national level. These NUTS-level (Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics) from the EU and similar TL (Territorial Level) of the OECD classify German regions at three levels. The first level are the federal states (NUTS 1, TL 2) which are administrational and socio-economic regions. In some states, next level (NUTS 2, NOG) regions are administrative districts, in some, they represent the whole state and in others they are a statistical level without the political body of a socio-economic region. These differences are due to the varied levels of population density among the territories. The term NOG in the OECD classification considers this by calling the level a Non-Official Grid (NOG). The NUTS 3/TL 3 correspond again to political administrative regions, as these are the counties. The shape of these policy regions needs to be stable to maintain the statistical value (OECD, 2020).

As this study is of sociological and qualitative nature, the first approach of Anssi Paasi is to be adopted and regions are to be perceived as spatial manifestations of social processes. As such, regions can emerge and disappear whenever the regional division of a society changes. Once established, regions are reproduced in individual and institutional practices, like other social systems.

The notion of *Heimat*

In the German language, the concept of *Heimat* is very important and often referred to in the context of regional identity by citizens and researchers. The literal translation into English as *homeland* does not fully comprehend the complexity of the concept, which has been analyzed in multiple papers by German social scientists. As this thesis will be focused on a German region, the concept of *Heimat* is essential for understanding the statements of local people and their relations to their region. Interviewers as well as interviewees are consciously or unconsciously relating to the concept when discussing regional identity.

Manfred Seifert describes the history of the term, starting with its first documented evidence in the 15th century in Middle High German. At the time, *heimout(e)* meant as much as *lying down* or *a place to settle.* Semantically incorporated in this term are already connotations of safety and calm. Until the second half of the 19th century, the term *Heimat* carried a concrete economic and legal meaning, as concepts like *Heimatrecht* and *Heimatbesitz,* respectively *home-law* and *home-property,* were linked to ownership of a house or farm (Seifert, 2016).

Since the beginning of modernity, the concept of *Heimat* became an answer to the ongoing industrialization process and increasing mobility, a notion which it continues to carry. Seifert states that "Heimat forms in this context the projection screen of the nostalgia created by the modern lifestyle. As such, it already confronts us at the turn of the 20th century as a concept of an emotionalized mindset with a retrospective stance. With this spiritual charge, Heimat became a highly idealistic project of identity assurance" (Seifert, 2016, p. 69).[1] Already since the middle of the 20th century *Heimat* started to refer to the regional level. The idealized *Heimat* region becomes an emotional value itself by creating images of harmony and

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[1] All translations by Judith Marie Alms.
Original quote: "Heimat bildet in diesem Kontext die Projektionsfläche der aus dem modernen Leben sich ergebenden Sehnsüchte. Solchermaßen tritt sie uns bereits an der Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert als ein Konzept emotionalisierter Geistigkeit in retrospektiver Haltung entgegen. Heimat wurde in dieser geistigen Aufladung zu einem in hohem Maße ideell formatierten Projekt der Identitätssicherung."

intimacy. As contrast of the industrial society with economic, politic and social tensions, the image of *Heimat* is one of intact harmony linked to ancient traditions (Seifert, 2016).

Some ethnic and nationalistic positions and programs shaped the term *Heimat* on a basis of exclusion of others. As such, National Socialism integrated the concept in its ideology and the term continues to carry these negative connotations. Thus, the essential ideal of an idyllic world with harmonic relations was turned into an ambiguous term (Seifert, 2016).

Weichhart, Weiske and Werlen describe the term *Heimat* as "a generally positive emotional tie to the region or territory where one grew up and which represents the center of the subjective living environment for a longer period" (Weichhart, Weiske, & Werlen, 2006, p. 23). This notion of relatedness is of increasing importance in our globalized world, where communication technology creates uniform global lifestyles and trends. The ongoing disembedding of individuals who feel lost in this global society reinforced the notions of regional consciousness and *Heimat* throughout the population (Weichhart, Weiske, & Werlen, 2006).

Identification and *Identity*

In order to understand the relation between the region and identity, the meaning of the latter needs to be equally clarified. Therefore, we will focus on the theory of the German psychologist Carl Friedrich Graumann who determines the *identity* by three aspects of *identification*.

The first meaning of identification he describes, is the *identification of* objects by the perceptive and recognizing subject. Thus, the given objects, which can also be people or places, are represented as a cognitive structure in the mind of the observer. Even abstract concepts, which have no equivalent in the world of objects, like *nation* or *home* can thus be learned and understood in their pluralistic meaning. Due to the repetitive exposure to these objects and concept during the process of our socialization, we acquire an understanding of the factual and social reality around us. This cognitive process of identification implies the recognition of the identity of the given object. By referring to an object or concept it is described by its position in the given frame of refence, its boundaries towards other objects and/or its properties. The ongoing communication and socialization processes within society

enable the individuals to acquire a common understanding of the objects and concepts and thereby facilitate further communication and socialization (Graumann, 1983).

Graumann's second form of identification is the passive form of *being identified as.* In this identification the person is the object which is being identified by others. As certain characteristics are attributed to her[2], we can speak of role expectations of the social environment towards the individual. This process claims that the given person possesses these characteristics, independently from the truth of such affirmations. As such, identification is always a social process. This leads us to the third dimension of identification: *identification with*. In this active identification process the individual created a relation between a certain object, group of people or concept and her personal identity and, thus, identifies with it or them (Graumann, 1983).

The personal identity is based on the distinction of the *Me* and *not-Me* and permanently tries to find answers to the question *Who am I?* The answer can change during the ongoing personal development of all of us. This development connects us to significant persons, places and concepts. The importance we give to them shapes our personal identity. Groups play a special role in this process, because the belonging to and identification with certain groups of people has an important impact on our identity. The identity of groups is very often linked to certain areas and this shared identity creates a sense of responsibility of the group towards its region. This connection can create a sense of belonging and loyalty towards the other inhabitants of the region (Weichhart, Weiske, & Werlen, 2006).

Definition *Regional Identity*

The next step is to bring the two theoretical concepts of *region* and *identity* together and thus determine the definition of regional identity used in this thesis.

Many disciplines already addressed the topic of regional identity, as for example sociology (Treinen, 1965), psychology (Graumann, 1983), ethnology (Greverus, 1979), regional planning (Winter & Church, 1984) and even medicine (Godkin, 2015). Each of these disciplines approaches the concept form a different perspective and with a distinct aim.

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[2] The generic feminine form is used in the whole thesis to facilitate reading. Nevertheless, both genders are meant equally.

Further, regional identity is a concept referred to by many different terms in Anglophone and Germanophone literature. While in English the terms *regional identity*, *place identity* or *place attachment* are current, German sociology provides terms like *symbolische Ortsbezogenheit* (*symbolic place relatedness*), while geographers prefer terms like *Regionalbewusstsein (regional consciousness)* or *raumbezogenen Identität* (*place related identity*). The meanings of these different terms are not always clearly distinguished from each other as especially the different disciplines often lack notion of the work of their fellow researchers (Weichhart, Weiske, & Werlen, 2006).

The Regional Identity Theory by Anssi Paasi

A key researcher in the domain of regional identity in Europe is undoubtably Anssi Paasi. The Finnish geographer developed an own theory on regional identity in which he combines geographic approaches with sociology and other sciences to an interdisciplinary perspective. He departs from the sociological point of view of Gidden's structuration theory which proclaims the social structure of society to be the medium and outcome of social action. As such, the social system is self-reproducing within the socialization process of its members. Giddens already develops a first notion of what he calls a *locale*, that refers to a space providing a setting for interaction. The *locale* can be assumed by any territorial unit, from a room to a supranational organization (Giddens, 1981). These ideas were adopted by time geographers who further assumed a place to be a process of social and cultural reproduction which constantly unites biographies with the transformation of the natural environment and time-space specific activities (Pred, 1984). In this social reproduction process, there are some individual actors, like politicians and journalists who play major roles for the establishment and maintenance of spatial entities. But in general, the influence of individuals is rather small, and the importance of their position surpasses the importance of the person holding it. Thus, the socialization and social reproduction are mainly carried out by institutions, formalized routinized actions of individuals which structure the society (Berger & Luckmann, 1976). These are the main theories and approaches on which Paasi's theory of regional identity is based (Paasi, 1986).

On the basis of the definition of regions as processes of society given above, Paasi then focuses on the process of institutionalization of regions, which he describes in four stages: 1) the formation of the territorial shape, 2) development of the symbolic shape, 3) development

of institutions and 4) establishment as part of the regional system and regional consciousness. The order in which these stages are achieved can vary. The territorial shape is assumed by the existence of boundaries. Some of those might be physical and linked to natural features of the landscape, like great mountains or rivers, though many boundaries are artificial and lacking any natural or cultural relation. Furthermore, the territorial shape of a region can also be vague. Boundaries often change during history and the *idea* of a region can differ from its current administrative shape. Concerning the second stage of emergence of a region, the region's name has to be mentioned as its most important symbol. The name connects the image of the region with the regional consciousness, the *identification of* the inhabitants and *with* the region (see Graumann above). The symbolic shape of a region is what distinguishes it from all others and carries with it the history and traditions of the society. The symbols express group solidarity and carry regional identity. Natural features of the territory and landscape can also gain a symbolic role. In the next stage, regional institutions develop. These institutions are crucial for the reproduction of regional consciousness. By carrying the regional symbols, they strengthen the identity of the region and a sense of togetherness among its inhabitants. Institutions exercise control and are thereby integrated in the socialization process. An institutionalized region becomes part of the communication processes, from interpersonal communication to mass media and schoolbooks. Another important aspect of the institutional establishment of the region is the emergence of organizations carrying the regional symbols. In gaining an administrative role in the spatial structure of the society, the region reaches the fourth stage of institutionalization. The region becomes part of the system of public administration practices. With this last accomplishment, the region gains an identity, an image with a material and mental basis (Paasi, 1986).

Identity of Regions and Regional Consciousness

Thus, the identity of the region cannot be reduced to the regional consciousness of its inhabitants; not only because the identity of the region is the very basis for the emergence of regional consciousness, but because the region is also characterized by its territorial, symbolic and institutional shape. Therefore, Paasi divides the regional identity into two important aspects: the identity of the region and the regional identity of the people living in and outside of it, what he calls regional consciousness.

The former points to those features of nature, culture and people that are used in the discourses and classifications of science, politics, cultural activism, regional marketing, governance and political or religious regionalization to distinguish one region from others. These classifications are always acts of power performed in order to delimit, name and symbolize space and groups of people. Regional consciousness points to the multiscalar identification of people with those institutional practices, discourses and symbolisms that are expressive of the 'structures of expectations' that become institutionalized as parts of the process that we call a 'region'. (Paasi, 2003, p. 478)

The two dimensions of regional identity are closely linked, as for the regional consciousness to emerge as a sense of togetherness, there has to be a perceived, distinctive cultural-historically or political-economically region. In order for people to identify themselves, there has to be a relevant experience in social and cultural discourse and action. There are also actors and opinion leader who actively shape public communication and thereby also shape the regional consciousness (Paasi, 1995).
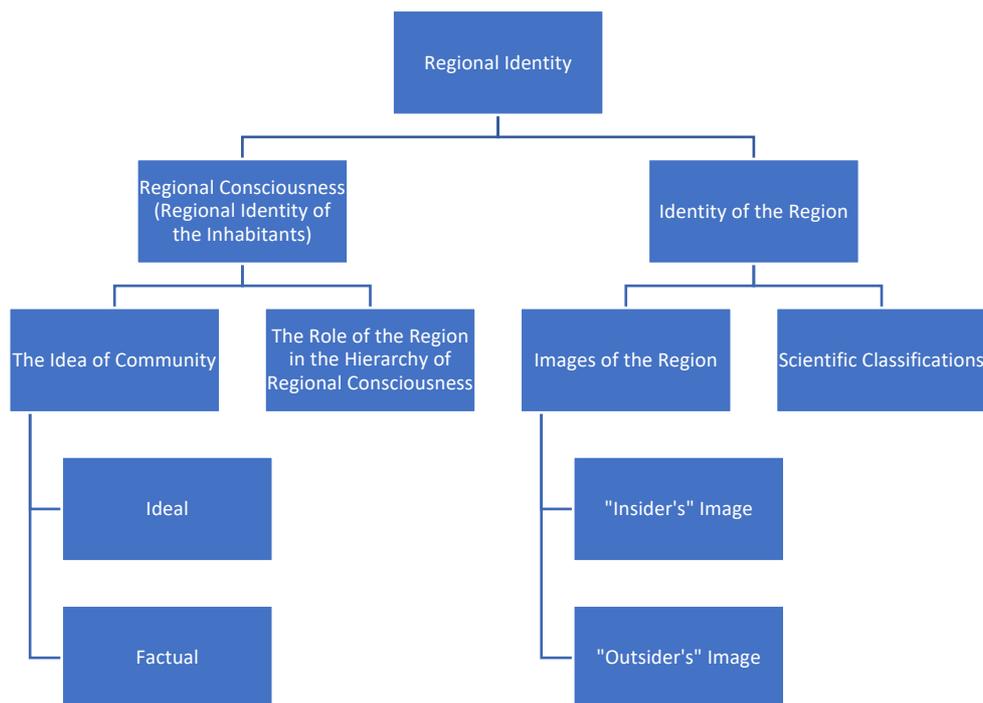
Figure 1: Some dimensions of regional identity. (Paasi, 1986)

Within the sphere of regional consciousness, there is on the one hand the identification with the regional community. This refers to a sense of togetherness within a regional group based on common structures of expectations. It can be moderated by personal face-to-face interaction in smaller regions (factual communities) or a symbolic we-feeling in larger scale regions transmitted by institutions like mass media (ideal communities). The latter expresses

an idea of regional solidarity by creating common social values and, to an extent, social reality of shared experiences. Thereby a "we" and "they" differentiation is made possible. On the other hand, Paasi makes clear, that people identify simultaneously with numerous territorial units of different size having variable meaning for them (Paasi, 1986).

In an ideal community, it is not necessary for a group to really exist in order to establish a sense of group membership. American scientists like H. J. Gans (1979) describe this phenomenon as symbolic ethnicity and A. D. Hunter (1974) as symbolic community. It occurs when people act as if there was a certain social group, even though in reality there is no such link of communication and social action as to form a real group in the sociological sense as described by H. Treinen (1965). Such a symbolic group can be activated and become a real group shaped by social interaction. But even if it is not, there are typical symbols in the latent communication processes which characterize the ideal community, as the name of the region, landscapes or landmarks, drink or food, regional historical happenings or myths, certain behaviors or traits of the habitants, language, clothing or regional festivities among others (Weichhart, Weiske, & Werlen, 2006).

Regional consciousness is present on different levels of territorial identification. Small regions compete with other level of identification, like the national one. As such, strong regional consciousness within its sub-regions is often seen as a threat by national states aiming at inner hegemony. Regional consciousness can, thus, be actively used by the habitants to encourage local action or create an identity of resistance against nationalization and globalization tendencies (Paasi, 2003).

Concerning the identity of a region, Paasi distinguished the subjective and objective perspective. The former refers to the images held by in- and outsiders while the latter points to classifications from different scientific disciplines. For the image of a region, the landscape is often important, as well as the history. These images can be influenced by the institutions through regional marketing but nevertheless carry a rather stable character. The image creates a relation between the people and the region. As such, "regional identity is understood [...] as a social construct that is produced and reproduced in discourse. The discourses of regional identity are plural and contextual. They are generated through social practices and power relations both within regions and through the relationships between regions and the wider constituencies of which they are part." (Paasi, 2013, p. 1208).

Utility of place-related identity

In order to understand the role of regional identity in the socialization process, we take a step back and consider the utility these feature of identity port for individuals and groups. Weichhart, Weiske and Werlen are German researchers who do not differentiate between the individual place and the institutional region as Paasi does. Instead they use the notion of place-related identity. Nevertheless, the functions of place related identity they describe are fruitful for this analysis.

The three researchers consider the stabilizing of systems as core function of place-related identity. Taking a closer look at the different benefits of this core function, they point out five different aspects. The first is safety. By reducing the complexity of social relations, a *Heimat* provides us with a place of belonging and safety. Furthermore, regional identity provides us with stimulation and thus encourages action. In a local or regional territory which is considered home, an individual has the highest chances to be able to control and influence the environment. The smaller the unit, the easier it is for the individual to shape its environment, the best example being the own home. Another function is identity formation and individualization. Places help people by providing an anchor for the formation of their personal identity and, thereby, create a tie of belonging between the individual and the place. The next two functions are on an interpersonal level, the first one being social interaction and social symbolism. Physical objects are often charged with symbolic meaning and values. Thus, landscapes and landmarks can relate to shared emotions and create a sense of belonging. This is where the second social function sets in, the social cohesion and creation of community. There are multiple studies proving that neighborhoods are interpreted by their inhabitants as social structures. Especially in parts of town which have a specific appearance or history the sense of community is stronger. Also, local and regional dialects can be used as an underlying expression of group membership (Weichhart, Weiske, & Werlen, 2006).

When referring to the overall function of stabilizing systems, we are placing our viewpoint in the system theory. This originally natural scientific theory was adopted to social science by the sociologist Niklas Luhmann in Germanophone sociology. In his theory of autopoietic system, these systems are believed to be self-maintaining and self-producing. The underlying principle of self-reference requires the system to be certain of the difference between the *self* and the *other*. Luhmann perceives this differentiation as the very basis of all identity.

Place related identity is, in this sense, one mean to differentiate the personal or social system from its environment and thus enable the reproduction of the system. "The individual can describe herself as Bavarian and know that thereby she excludes herself from being Prussian."[3] (Luhmamm, 1985, p. 360).

Border studies

It is constitutional for every region to possess a territorial shape and therefore be framed by borders in order to be distinguishable from other territorial entities. As Nicklas Luhmann noted for all social systems, Paasi illustrates the importance of a border for the identity of a territorial entity. Like the regions themselves, their borders bear a socio-spacial character and can combine natural, historical, cultural, political as well as economic traits. Often wrongly perceived as such, borders are not constant but rather part of a continuous territorial transformation process. In literature, border areas are often described in a negative light from a perspective of conflict and periphery but Anssi Paasi points out the potential of border areas to develop into vital contact zones which benefit from tight local and regional ties across the border (Paasi, 1995).

With the example of the border-town Värtsilä, which was divided between Finland and Russia with the end of WW II, Anssi Paasi stresses the role of memory and heritage for a community. Whereas older Finish people still see the ancient Värtsilä on the over side of the border as their imaginary home, the younger generations have never known another border than the existing one. Even though the perception changed with the shift of generations, Paasi stresses, that "Personal histories always include elements of the history of a 'larger self' – family, neighbourhood, locality, nationality – which unites individuals as a part of the histories of these entities." (Paasi, 1995, p. 55) As such, especially communities which have lost their homeland tend to foster nostalgic feelings of an idealized and sacred lost world. These memories and imaginations often play a role in border conflicts. They can pass the generations through spatial socialization. This process describes the socialization of an actor as a member of a territorially bound spatial entity. The actor learns the narratives of traditions and spatial images and thereby acquires the collective territorial identity, which she also reproduces herself (Paasi, 2009).

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[3] Original quote: "Das Individuum kann sich als Bayer beschreiben und wissen, dass es damit ausschließt, Preuße zu sein"

Assessment of the Region Vorpommern

The first aspect of the identity of the region Vorpommern (Western Pomerania), that will be analyzed in this thesis is the scientific classification. Therefore, the region will be portraited from the viewpoint of different sciences. This approach will further provide us with a deeper understanding of the socio-historic particularities of the region. As the spatial socialization illustrates that the identification of a society with its region is often linked to heritage, we start with the history, to continue with the present situation of Vorpommern. The aim is to gain an impression on what it means to "be in Vorpommern" and "be a Vorpommer".

History of Pomerania

In this thesis, the history of the whole region Pomerania will be described, as it is considered an important feature of Vorpommern (Western Pomerania) to have been part of this historic region. We will see that the region Pomerania was often divided and disputed about, but nevertheless formed a certain regional identity over time, which stays present until today in the sense of a regional history culture as described by Kotte 2013.

From the Beginning until the End of the Pomeranian Dukes in the 18th Century

The name Pomerania is of Slavic origin and means "at the sea". Thus, Pomerania is the land at the seaside and the relation to the Baltic sea is its most important characteristic. In the very beginning, there were Germanic tribes in the area. Later, West-Slavic tribes arrived and over time, three centers were formed: Stettin, Schlawe and Danzig[4]. Already in this period, a characteristic of Pomerania shows: even though there have been some local centers during history, there was never any central place in Pomerania, as there was for the German, Polish or Danish Empire. The thus given vacuum of power invited the neighbors to frequently invade the territory (Arnold, 1988).

In the 12th century, the Polish had conquered most of the territory eastern the river Oder and the Saxons invaded the western part. In 1122, the Polish conquered Stettin and Duke Watisław I. had to submit and convert to Christianity. He was the first documented ancestor of the house of the later called *Griffins* who reigned Pomerania until the Thirty Year's War. In 1181, Duke Bogisław of Pomerania subdued to the German Emperor and Pomerania became

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[4] German town names are used. Polish names: Szczecin, Sławno and Gdańsk

an independent Slavic duchy attached to the German Empire. This was no act of sympathy with the Germans, but rather due to the growing menace of the Danish and the need for a protector. In 1231, Pomerania became officially a fiefdom of the German Empire. During the 13th century, many German settlers immigrated to Pomerania and new towns where founded. The new opponent of the Pomeranians where the important *Brandenburgs* who reigned southern the Pomeranian border (Arnold, 1988).

In the 14th and 15th century, the Pomeranians grew stronger and were able to annex the biggest part of the ancient Pomeranian territory. Duke Bogisław X., who ruled from 1474 until 1523, united the duchy and reformed the legislation. He paved the way for the creation of an Early Modern territorial state which was especially important, as the maritime trade association *Hanse* which dominated the welfare of the region for the last two centuries started to decline and early capitalistic tradesmen emerged. Politically, author Udo Arnold attests the Dukes of Pomerania a certain passiveness. In spite of being considered the Golden Age of Pomerania, the stability under Duke Bogisław X. was not used to establish a law of inseparability and the duchy was later divided again (Arnold, 1988).

The sons of Bogisław X. still reigned together, achieved independence from Brandenburg and made the Griffins the direct lords over the fiefdom Pomerania until the dying out of the ducal family. The unity of the duchy ended in 1532 when the dukes divided the land in two parts. They changed the church constitution and adopted Protestantism. After a transition period, the reformed Pomeranian church reappeared in stabile unity in the whole of Pomerania. This religious tradition is preserved in Vorpommern until today (Wächter, 2014).

In 1572, an economic crisis weakened the duchy. To regain financial stability, the noble families increased the use of the already ongoing practice of *Bauernlegen*, the expropriation of peasant holdings. Thereby, farms of peasants were destroyed in order to unite bigger agricultural production areas held by the nobles. Most of the farmers became serfs, some fled, and others became vagabonds while the power of the nobility increased, and ever bigger open fields were created (Wächter, 2014).

The Swedish-Prussian Era (1648-1815)

With the turn of the century, the Griffin family started to die out. Bogislaw XIV. was the last Pomeranian duke. The status as unarmed neutral territory did not save Pomerania from

getting involved in the Thirty Year's War. When the troops of Wallenstein[5] conquered Mecklenburg, they turned to the yet undamaged neighboring Pomerania for lodging. Duke Bogislaw capitulated to the invasion in 1627. Pomerania was freed by the Swedish, but after they defeated the Bohemian commander, Pomerania became subordinate of Sweden and had to pay it taxes. In addition to this economic burden, the battlefields between the Swedish and the German troops destroyed huge parts of the duchy (Wächter, 2014).

During this time, in 1637, Bogislaw XIV. the last Duke of Pomerania died childless. The Brandenburgs reclaimed Pomerania as their territory, but at the same time, the Swedish claimed Pomerania by martial law. With the Peace Treaty of Osnabrück 1648, the Thirty Year's War ended. The Swedish kept *Vorpommern* (Western Pomerania) and Stettin, and the Brandenburgs gained *Hinterpommern*, Farther Pomerania, in the East. As Swedish law was only adopted in the territory when accepted by the territorial parliament, Vorpommern became a relatively independent and German-speaking German fiefdom owned by the Swedish crown (Wächter, 2014).
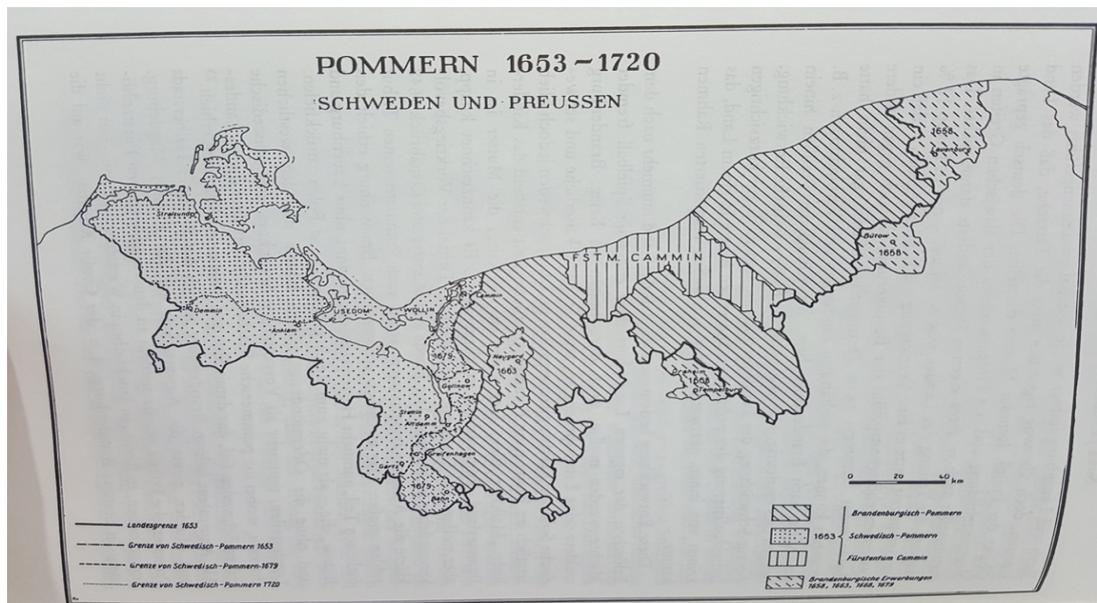
Figure 2: Pomerania 1653-1720. The Swedish and Brandenburgian provinces. (Arnold, 1988)
Swedish areas are dotted, and Brandenburgian/Prussian areas lined

The following decades did not leave time to recover from the war. "As part of the Swedish Baltic Empire, Pomerania became the hotspot of Swedish superpower politics. Here, the interests of expansionist Baltic politics […] collated with interventionist continental politics,

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[5] Full name Albrecht Wenzel Eusebius von Waldstein (CZ: Albrecht Václav Eusebius z Valdštejna) one of the most famous politicians and commanders of the Thirty Year's War

addressed against Brandenburg and temporarily also against Habsburg."[6] (Olesen, 2013, pp. 133-134) The next war followed from 1655 until 1660 between Sweden and Poland and from 1674 until 1679 against Brandenburg. Both parts of Pomerania took severe damage and afterwards, the Swedish and the Brandenburgs imposed new taxes to pay for war expenditures (Wächter, 2014).

The taxation of Vorpommern increased when Sweden started fighting in 1700 in the Great Northern War against Russia, Prussia[7], Saxony/Poland and Denmark. In the beginning, the battle did not reach Pomerania, but the fiefdom was drained by taxes, a bad harvest in 1708 and a plague epidemy from 1709 to 1711. With the defeat of the Swedish in 1709 in Ukraine, the opponent powers invaded Swedish-Pomerania. For vengeance of a Swedish act of war in a Danish province, the Russian Tsar ordered to burn down the towns of Gartz, Wolgast and Anklam. The latter could be preserved, while the other two were turned into ashes. In Wolgast, also the historically important castle of Pomeranian dukes was burned down. In 1715, the Swedish King fled and capitulated and the Swedish momentarily lost their power in the region (Wächter, 2014).

With the end of the Great Northern War, Vorpommern was divided between the winning powers of Denmark and Prussia. Therefore, a new border was established. The river Peene served as North-South border between the Danish areas in the North and the Prussian territory in the South of Vorpommern. The Danish part of Vorpommern was about half of the former Swedish territory. They could not withstand the Swedish for long and lost their part of Vorpommern to them in 1720 (Krüger, 2014).

Both parts of Pomerania were characterized by an extreme form of manorial economy and the practice of *Bauernlegen* continued to force many farmers into serfdom. New agricultural land was made accessible in the delta of the river Oder and a high number of colonists from the Netherlands, Mecklenburg, Palatinate, Württemberg and Poland where recruited. The development in the two parts of Pomerania differed now, as the Prussians focused on immigration and the exploitation of marshlands while the economic difficulties reinforced the

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[6] Original quote: "Als Teil des schwedischen Ostseeimperiums geriet Pommern mehrmals in den Brennpunkt schwedischer Großmachtpolitik. Hier bündelten sich Interessen einer expansionistischen Ostseepolitik […] sowie einer interventionistischen Kontinentalpolitik, deren Zielrichtung im Reich vorwiegend gegen Brandenburg, zeitweilig auch gegen Habsburg gerichtet war."
[7] The Elector of Brandenburg carried the title of "King in Prussia" since 1701

expropriation of farmers in the Swedish part, where property farms where almost completely replaced by landlords with big estates. The industrialization began and manufactures were founded to treat commodities within the province. The troublesome war against Napoleon resulted in the handover of Swedish-Pomerania to Prussia. With the Congress of Vienna, the Swedish influence in Pomerania came to an end in 1815 (Krüger, 2014).

The 187 years of Swedish reign over Vorpommern were perceived as rather positive time. Especially in times of GDR and the reunification of Germany, the local people liked to remember the peaceful decades of Swedish reign over the territory. Still, it should not be forgotten, that "whenever Sweden entered militarily into action at the continent, the province suffered; be it as a gathering point for troops, permanent accommodation for campaign armies, supply base for other battlegrounds or, in the worst case, as a battleground itself"[8] (Olesen, 2013, p. 135). But there were also extend periods of peace under the Swedish reign during the 18th century and the economy developed. In the cultural and educational sphere, there were exchanges between Sweden and its province too. Thus, between 1740 and 1770, 560 of 1.513 students at the university of Greifswald came from Sweden and some professors of the university lectured Swedish law. An important personality was the Stralsund-born Professor Dähnert (1719-1785) who is described by Olesen as representing a typical identity of the time: fist Pomeranian, then Swede and then German. Other important figures of the time were the romantic painter Caspar David Friedrich, born 1771 in Greifswald, and the historian Ernst-Moritz Arndt, born 1769 in Groß Schoritz (Olesen, 2013).

Pomerania during the Prussian Era (1815-1945) and after

The historian Ludwig Biewer states, that when talking about Pomerania today, people generally refer to the territory of the Prussian province (Biewer, 2014, p. 111). From 1815 until 1945, Pomerania was part of the large Prussian unitary state and was reigned by an enlightened absolutism which did not allow much liberality and democracy. The population was almost entirely German, only 1,5% of the inhabitants of Hinterpommern stated to have Polish or another language as mother tongue. Almost all Pomeranians were evangelic and population density was low. The Prussian Province was administered in Stettin and divided in

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[8] Original quote: "Sobald Schweden auf dem Kontinent militärisch in Aktion trat, wurde die Provinz in Mitleidenschaft gezogen, sei es als Sammelstelle für Truppen, Standquartier für Feldarmeen, Versorgungsbasis für andere Kriegsschauplätze oder schlimmstenfalls aus Kriegsschauplatz selbst."

three districts. The former Swedish province kept most of its legislation and its political and administrative body and the integration into Prussia proceeded gradually (Biewer, 2014).
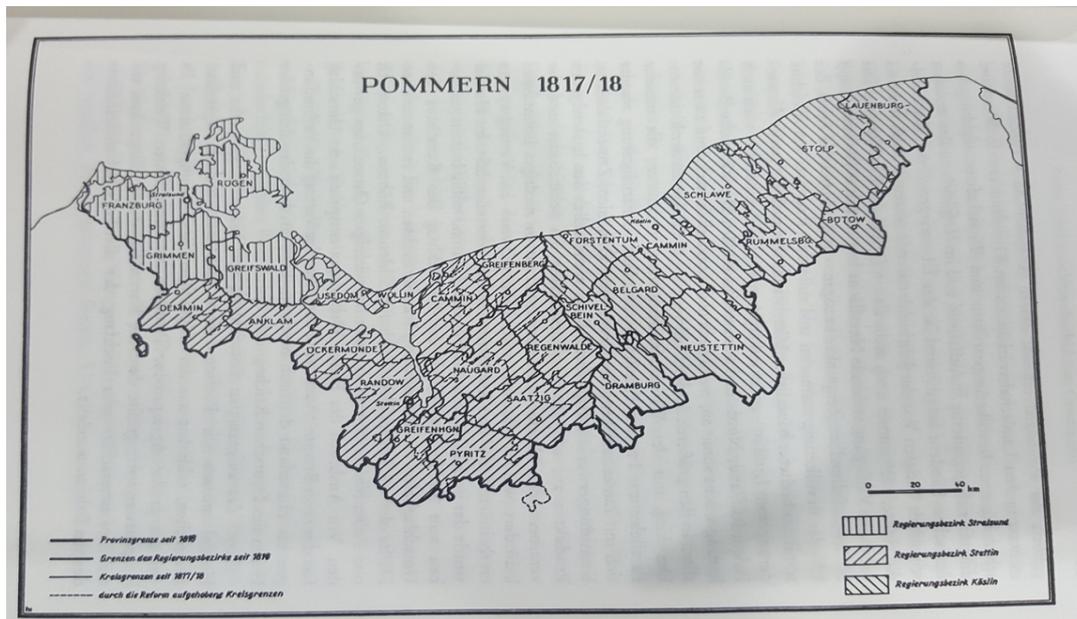
Figure 3: The Prussian Province of Pomerania 1817/18: Division in 3 districts. (Arnold, 1988)

Pomerania was a province of large estates. In Neuvorpommern[9] 70% of the usable agricultural and forestland was kept by the nobles who constituted but 1% of the population. Despite the ongoing industrialization and urbanization, Pomerania continued to be the most important agrarian province of Prussia. The introduction of machines improved planting and breeding, as well as fishery. In 1843, a railway connected Stettin and Berlin and 20 years later, Stralsund and Berlin. Stettin profited from the industry in Silesia and became the third most important German harbor. A touristic sector developed in the coastal areas in the early 19th century. The Pomeranian coast became the most popular German tourist area (Biewer, 2014).

The revolutionary movement in all over Europe never really reached Pomerania. The historian Franz Mehring titles Pomerania as the "politically most backward province" which was illustrated by conservative elections until 1933 (Arnold, 1988). World War I affected the Pomeranian economy severely. With the resignation of the German Emperor and King of Prussia in 1918, Pomerania was governed by democratic principles, as part of the German republic. The National Socialists became most important power in the Pomeranian provincial parliament in 1933 and the province enrolled in the war. The counterattacks of World War II

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[9] The former Swedish Province, which comprehended the part of Vorpommern northern the river Peene, was called Neuvorpommern, New Western Pomerania, to be distinguished from Altvorpommern, Old Western Pomerania, the region South of the river Peene, already held by the Prussians before.

reached it late, but severely when important towns where bombed. Starting in January 1945, the Red Army invaded the province. After the war, Prussia ceased to exist and Hinterpommern including the capital Stettin became part of Poland and the German population had to flee (Biewer, 2014).

After the Second World War, Vorpommern was merged with Mecklenburg to form one federal state of the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The name Vorpommern was excluded and the state was called Mecklenburg. Even though it did not have a political body anymore, Vorpommern stayed an administrative region for the post, the railways and the church. Many heritage sites were neglected or destroyed during the GDR era. With the unification of Germany, the name Vorpommern and its blue-white flag with the griffin were reintroduced in the state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (MV) (Oberdörfer, 2002).

Regarding the role of Pomerania in general, the historian Udo Arnold states: "Since the beginning, Pomerania was […] an object of politics. It acquired the role of a subject only to a very humble extend"[10] (Arnold, 1988, p. 7). As most prominent characteristics of the region he names foreign control over the territory as a first and the fact of being divided as a second. During the 9 centuries of its existence, Pomerania was not unified but for 2 centuries: first as independent ducal fiefdom and later as Prussian province. These weaknesses prevented Pomerania from ever becoming an important maritime power and its history is one of a playball between other superpowers in a strategically significant location (Arnold, 1988).

Present Vorpommern Region

The presentation of the present Vorpommern region is rendered difficult by its lack of institutional shape. There is no administrative entity covering all of Vorpommern. In the current structure, there are two counties which carry the name Vorpommern and are fully located in the historic region, Vorpommern-Rügen and Vorpommern-Greifswald. They cover most of the area of Vorpommern, but not all; the rest being part of the county Mecklenburgische Seenplatte. All data available is either concerning the whole state MV or the counties. The lack of an institutional body renders the region Vorpommern almost invisible for research.

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[10] Original quote: "Pommern war von Anfang an […] Objekt der Politik und vermochte nur in ganz bescheidenem Rahmen, die Subjektrolle zu erlangen."
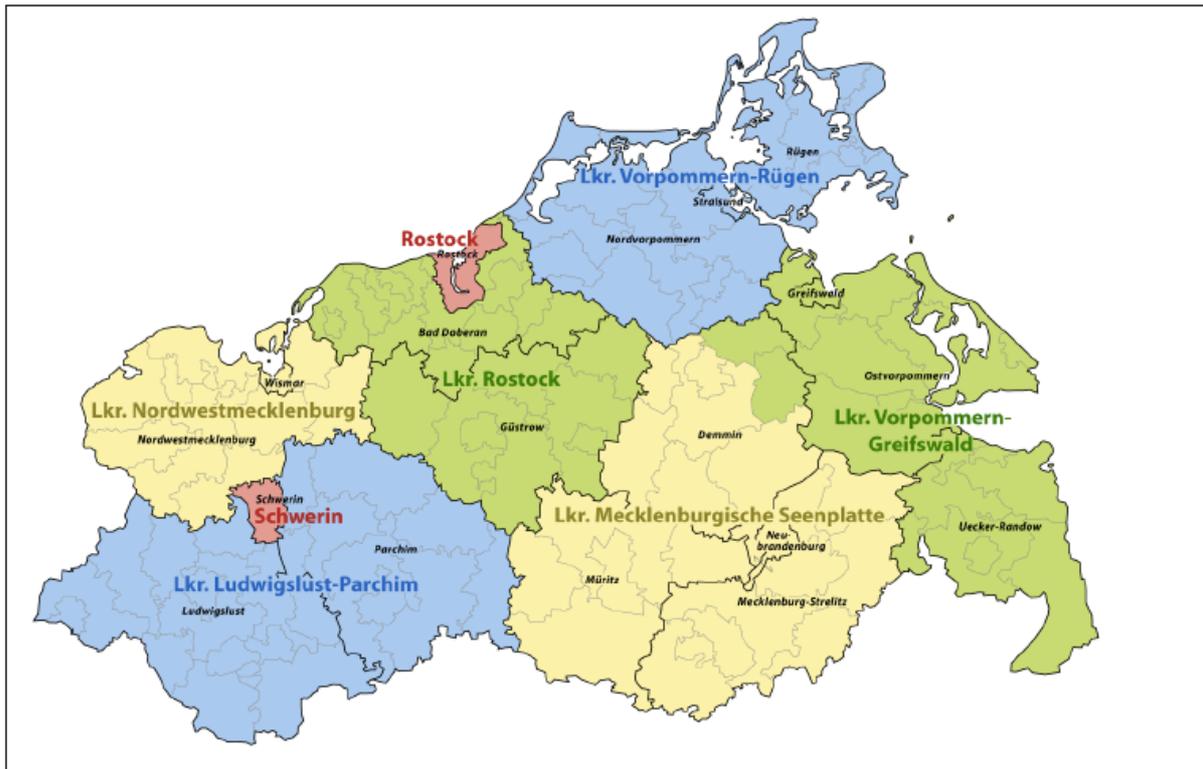
Figure 4: New and old counties in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern after the reform in 2011. (Stuhr, 2019)

Cultural landscape of Vorpommern

There is a lot of touristic literature concerning the region Vorpommern, as tourisms is the most important sector in the coastal areas. Some travel guides try to convince the reader to step away from the typical tourist attractions of the region, mainly the beaches, the islands and the typical hanseatic coastal towns of Greifswald and Stralsund (Bergmann, 2002). As the Duke's residence of Wolgast was burned down in 1713 in the Great Nordic War, there are no important historic sites of Pomeranian history left today in Vorpommern. In two elaborate volumes, the author Eckhard Oberdörfer presents a rich overview of landmarks in the hinterlands of North and East Vorpommern. In detail, he lays out the history of the manors and churches which can be found in each village (Oberdörfer, 2006) & (Oberdörfer, 2002).

On the islands, especially the seaside health resorts are attractive for tourists for over 200 years now. The natural tourism around the bays, deltas and rivers is still less developed, but presents a growing sector. In comparison, the cultural landscape is economically much less important. Even collections of cultural sites in the hinterlands like Oberdörfer's cannot deceive from the fact that there are few attractions on the countryside as most of the manors are either privately own, neglected or both and there are few possibilities for tourism in the villages which are mainly composed of private houses.

Natural landscape in Vorpommern

The natural landscape is another feature of the identity of a region. The landscape of Vorpommern was most shaped by the last ice age when the land was flattened by the ice. Most of the area is very wet and marshlands dominate the landscape (Oberdörfer, 2002).
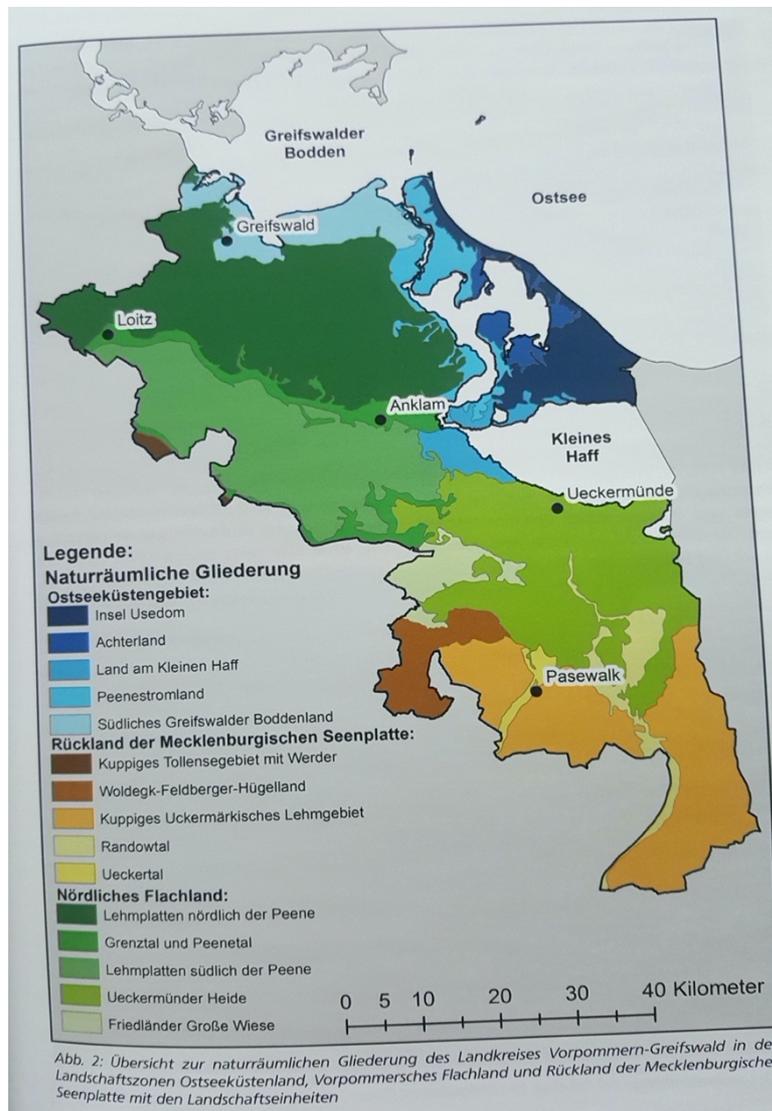
Figure 5: Structure of the Natural Environment in Vorpommern-Greifswald. (Landkreis Vorpommern-Greifswald, 2013)

Figure 5 shows the distribution of natural environment types in the county of Vorpommern-Greifswald, which represents about half of the Vorpommern region. The island of Usedom and the coastal areas are marked in blue. They are is dominated by sand beaches and dunes, but also by marchlands and swamps. The brown and orange areas represent the backcountry of the Mecklenburgian lake area, which is hillier than the other areas. Nevertheless, the highest elevation in the county is 133 m MSL. On the hills are mainly forests while the valleys are occupied by swamps or lakes. In green, the northern lowlands are intensively used for agricultural purposes due to their rich soils. They are very plane. Typical for the landscape are the frequent small, but very deep kettle lakes. The ample agricultural areas are important for migratory and water birds. Also, forestry can be found in this landscape, especially in the Ückermünde heath, light green in the card. (Landkreis Vorpommern-Greifswald, 2013).

Already in the younger stone age the humans impacted the shape of the landscape. With the establishment of German settles of the 13th and 14th century, many forests were cleared, and villages created. The foundation of the present cultural landscape of the region was set. The first half of the 18th century was marked by a new wave of immigration and population growth. The economic activities required much wood and the beginning shortages of forests gave rise of a systematic forest management. At the same time, many lakes and marshlands were drained by the settlers to create more agricultural land. For centuries, the farms of peasants were united by noble landowners to huge estates to increase the agricultural productivity. During industrialization fertilizers and machines were introduced. The next step was taken after World War II by the agricultural production cooperatives of GDR. They further intensified agriculture by removing hedges and smaller water bodies. Natural habitats for a plurality of animals and plants were destroyed. Even the marshlands were intensively used, as dikes and ditches transformed them into productive green lands where foreign types of grass with high earning rates were planted. The long-term use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides seriously damaged the ecosystem, the quality of the soils and the water balance. After 1990, some natural environment could be preserved, and some wetland meadows and marshlands could be reestablished. Nevertheless, extend open fields with intensive agriculture continue to be the most important landscape feature of the region (Landkreis Vorpommern-Greifswald, 2013).
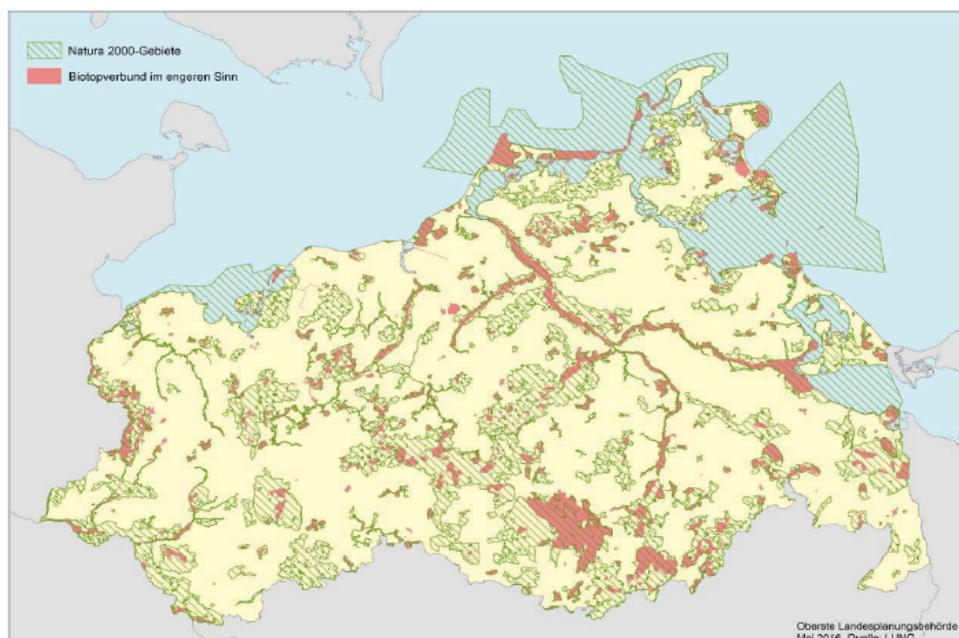
Figure 6: Natura 2000 areas and stricter biotope networks. (MEIL-MV, 2016)

For the protection of nature, there are different protection areas installed. Present in Vorpommern are flora-fauna-habitats, bird protection areas, nature protection areas, landscape protection areas and biotopes. Some of them are merged in natural parks. According to the county authorities, the plurality of landscapes and biodiversity are to be protected but can also be used economically by sustainable tourism (Landkreis Vorpommern-Greifswald, 2013). In the Peenetal, the valley of the river Peene, there are 350 rare animal and 170 plant species. Among them are mammals like otters and beavers which had been extinct in the region and could be resettled in 1975/76 (Oberdörfer, 2006).

Even though, this description refers to the county of Vorpommern Greifswald, it is a valid description of the most important landscape features of the whole of Vorpommern. The regional land use pattern is highly influenced by the heritage of the socialist agricultural practices. The absence of mountains and hills in Vorpommern allowed the creation of huge coherent open fields which dominate the landscape nowadays (Herrmann, 2006).

Symbols of Vorpommern

Vorpommern is a historical region, with no remaining institutional body. Still the regional consciousness persists through the symbolic shape. The symbols and the name of the region are frequently used and referred to. Even the distinction between Vorpommern and Mecklenburg continues to be part of the othering: a regional consciousness is created by differentiating from the people of Mecklenburg.
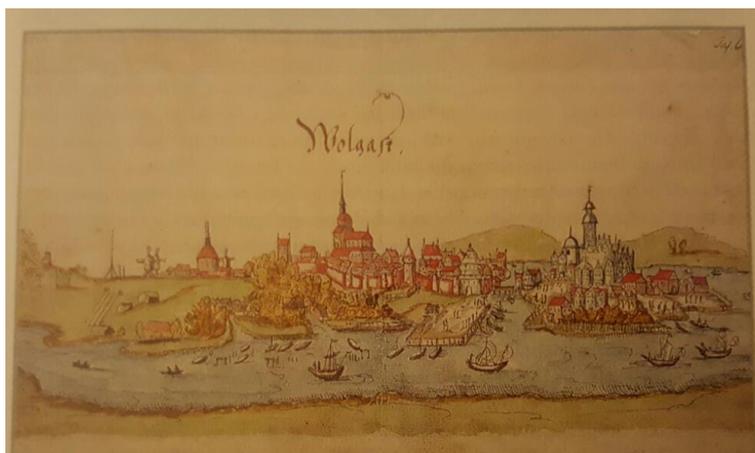
Figure 7: Wolgast about 1615. (Ewe, 1998)

Unfortunately, the course of history destroyed many of the important Pomeranian monuments. In Vorpommern, especially the destruction of the town of Wolgast by the Russian at the end of the Great Northern War was a big loss, as an important part of Pomeranian history was burnt with the residence of the Pomeranian dukes. The castle was never rebuilt.

What persisted until today is the symbol of the griffin. Not only place names like *Greifswald*, "forest of the griffin", reminds of it. It is also still the official heraldic animal of Vorpommern and appears in the joined emblem of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as well as on its flag. The image of the griffin also appears in the emblems of many towns in Vorpommern. Its name and image, as well as the names Vorpommern and Pommern (Pomerania) are also much used in marketing of regional companies and associations. The regional flag can nowadays occasionally be seen in gardening plots.
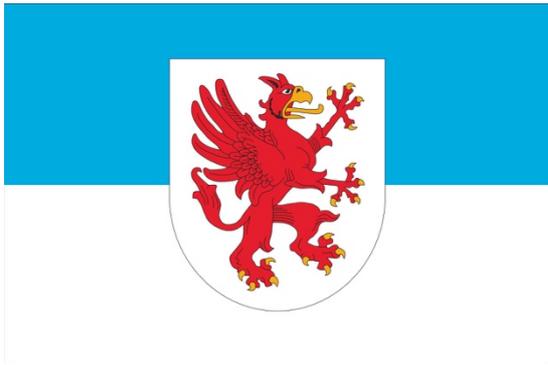
Figure 8: Flag of Vorpommern. (flaggenmeer.de)

Figure 9: Flag of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. (wikimedia commons)

In the current legislation period which started in 2016, Vorpommern is put forward on the political agenda of the state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. With the creation of the position of the Parliamentary State Secretary for Vorpommern at the state's parliament, for the first time since the unification of the two regions after the end of World War II an institutional position for the whole region Vorpommern was established. Furthermore, a council of Vorpommern and a fonds were established to decrease the economic deficits of the region. The fonds provides EUR 3 Mio. each year for small projects in the region Vorpommern and the website (vorpommern-fonds.de) uses the emblem of the griffin for every supported project.

Political situation of Vorpommern

As in many East-German rural areas, there is a huge influence of far-right parties to be noted in Vorpommern. The National-democratic Party of Germany (NPD) was an important force: at the state election of 2011, the party gained up to 33% in rural election districts in Vorpommern. At state level, the party gained 6% of the votes and therefore was represented in the state parliament. In the last years, the NPD lost much of their influence to the new far-right German party Alternative for Germany (AfD). In the last elections, the elections for the European Parliament in 2019, the AfD was second strongest party, after the ruling Christ-

democrats (CDU). The drift towards the far-right parties is explained by Ines Geipel in her partially autobiographic work with the experience of political impotence of the citizens in the autocratic regime in GDR and an ongoing disenchantment with politics (Geipel, 2019). In line with this assumption is the comparatively low share of people voting at all in the Eastern states of Germany. At the last state election, the participation rate was at 61,9% in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. At the elections for the European Parliament in 2019, 58,4% of the population in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern voted, the lowest rates being in the three counties which are part of Vorpommern.

Demographic situation of Vorpommern

The demographic development is extensively discussed in Germany. In 2006 Michael John already stated that this discussion was to be held much earlier. As the German population is decreasing, questions about how to maintain the social security system raise. The ageing population and increasing number of single households also change existing patterns of settlement. Rural areas far from economic centers are especially hard hit by these tendencies. As young people leave these regions for a lack of employment possibilities, there are fewer families founded in the areas and the demographic downturn increases. The decreasing number of pupils leads to a decreasing offer of educational services. Also, other infrastructure is economized in regions with decreasing population, which impacts the standard of living (John, 2006).

The outmigration for the north-eastern rural areas already started during GDR and since the end of socialism it is unique in its intensity and impact (Herrmann, 2006). It took one decade after reunification for discussions on domestic migration to gain political concern in Germany. Especially the negative synergies between outmigration and family founding elsewhere were not sufficiently studied for long (Dienel, 2005). Monika Putzing point out a gender effect within this tendency, because especially young women tend to leave, which creates a surplus of men in the East-German rural areas. The decreasing number of families negatively impacts the age structure of the regions. The author further emphasizes the qualitative aspects of the outmigration, as highly educated and socially active citizens have a higher tendency to leave structural weak regions (Putzing, 2006).

Youth is very important for the development of rural areas. Even though most young people would prefer to stay in their home region, the lack of offers of apprenticeships, studies and

other economic constraints often force them to go to towns and cities after they finished high school. The possibility of entrepreneurship presents an alternative, but surveys show that especially children of parents who have an own company tend to become self-employed themselves. This example function of the previous generation is lacking in the former GDR where an employee mentality prevails (Busch, 2006).

These studies of the 2000s are characterized by the fear caused by rapidly decreasing population numbers in all Eastern German states after reunification. It took until 2011 for the population numbers of the states to stabilize again. Since then, the total number of habitants in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is decreasing much slower at a level of 1,6 Mio. Compared to its populational peak in 1985 the state lost almost 400.000 inhabitants. The latest population prediction foresees a continuous negative development for the state: The German federal statistical office prognoses a population decrease to a total of 1,2 Mio habitants in 2060 at a moderate fertility and life expectancy increase and a low migration rate. A reason for this is, that the birth rate will continue to be much lower than the mortality rate. The shrinking tendency affects over-proportionally the potentially economically active people aged between 20 and 66. Their number in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern will likely shrink by a third to 636.000 people in 2060. In this scenario, Mecklenburg Vorpommern will be the state with the second largest share of seniors, the first one being its southern neighbor Brandenburg. While in 2019 the median ages were of 56 to 59, the most common age of a person in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern in 2060 is predicted to be 72 (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2019).

Figure 10: Population development of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 2010 to 2030 per county. (MEIL-MV 2016)

Figure 10 originates from a dataset of the state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and illustrates the decrease of population from 2010 to 2030 at county-level. Accordingly, the hardest-hit county will be Mecklenburgische Seenplatte, which englobes territories of Mecklenburg and Vorpommern. The other two counties of Vorpommern are foreseen to develop less drastically. But it must be considered, that especially the islands and coastal areas are very attractive and therefore, the development might vary largely between the coasts and hinterlands of the counties. The scenario analysis show that the concerns of the researchers at the beginning of the century are still valid. The federal statistical office foresees a continuously declining and ageing population which weighs on the social systems.

Economic situation of Vorpommern

Not many companies in Vorpommern survived the change from socialism to capitalism at the reunification of Germany. The already no highly industrialized region was therefore almost completely deindustrialized in the 1990s. The most important sectors nowadays are tourism and agriculture, as population density is low (Oberdörfer, 2006).

The statistics of Eurostat illustrate the difficult situation of the state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. In a comparison of GDP/capita at purchase power, the state continues to hold the last place among the German states. In an international comparison, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern is at the same level as the Czech NUTS-II region Jihovýchod and Estonia (Eurostat, 2020).

Figure 11 and 12 are a main outcome of an analysis by the Institute of the German Economy on income poverty among German regions carried out in 2017. They compared regions in Germany by their percentage of people considered poor. The 130 regions of the study are a statistical unit of one or several counties, which in general englobe a population of about 500.000 habitants. Figure 11 shows income poverty. The card reveals the lowest percentages of income poverty in the south of Germany and a persisting difference between the east and west. Of all eastern German regions, only the one englobing Berlin exhibits less than 15% of the population who have to live with less than 60% of the national median income. In the last-placed regions, among which there are all the counties of Vorpommern, there are 23%-33%. There is even a visible distinction between the two parts of the state Mecklenburg and Vorpommern with Mecklenburg being less affected by poverty (Röhl & Schröder, 2017).
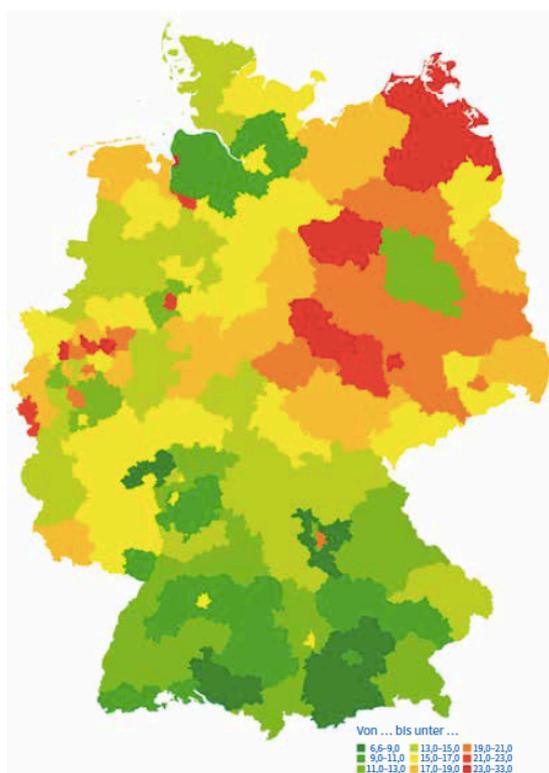
Figure 11: Percentage of Habitants with an Income of less than 60% of the Federal Median Income. (Röhl/Schröder, 2017)
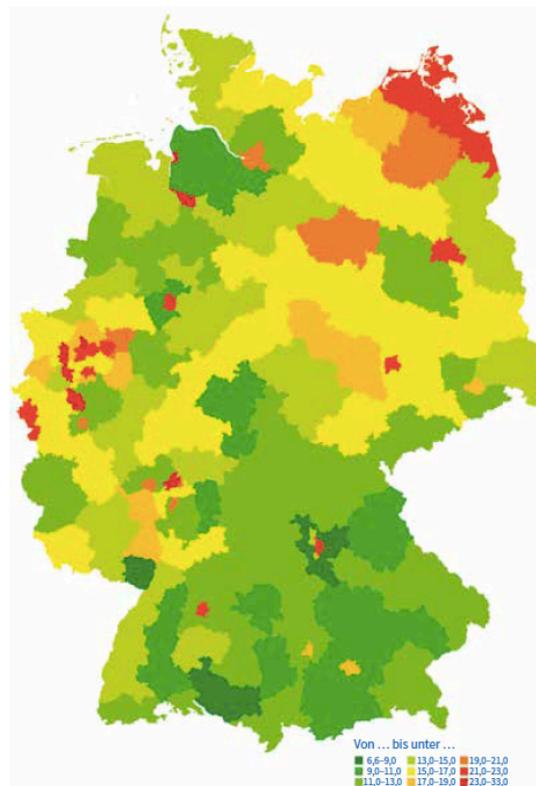
Figure 12: Poverty at Purchase Power among German Regions: Percentage of Habitants with an Income of less than 60% of the Federal Median Income adopted to the Respective Regional Price Level. (Röhl & Schröder, 2017)

The outstanding situation of Vorpommern is revealed in figure 12. In this card, the income level is adjusted by integrating the regional price level. The resulting poverty at purchase power shows the percentage of people who are poor considering the prices they pay in their region. As in poorer regions, especially rents but also the prices of good are generally lower, people are often able to maintain an adequate living standard with a lower income than people in richer regions. The card illustrates that poverty at purchase power is in general an urban phenomenon, as especially urban centers show a high percentage of this kind of poverty due to large income disparities and high prices in metropoles. The counties of Vorpommern are the only rural counties of Germany with a percentage of over 23% of the population affected by poverty at purchase power. The authors explain this by the relatively high prices in the touristic areas at the coast which are in no relation to the low level of income of the residential population. These extreme values for both kinds of poverty in Vorpommern illustrate the economically particularly weak situation of the region (Röhl & Schröder, 2017).

In the Land Area Development Program of 2016 of the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the low income-level is described as a result of the economic structure of the state. Its basis are the sectors of agriculture and tourism, which both provided mainly low incomes. Every third employee in the state is directly or indirectly depending on tourism. For example, 15,3% of sales in the retail sector are generated by tourism. There is very little industry in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, as only 35 of 1.000 employees work in industry (MEIL-MV, 2016).

In February 2020, the level of unemployment in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern was at 7,6%. On county-level, the highest unemployment rate was to be found in Vorpommern-Rügen with 9,8%, followed by Vorpommern-Greifswald and Mecklenburgische Seenplatte, which both reached a level over 9%. Hence, the counties of Vorpommern are the ones with the highest rate in the state. To compare, the unemployment rate of Germany as a whole was at 5,3% in the same month. The high unemployment in Vorpommern is partly seasonal, because of the dependence on the tourism sector. In August 2019, the level of all three regions dropped under the level of the state's capital Schwerin which held 8,7%. Vorpommern-Rügen reached an unemployment rate of 6,9% in this month. This illustrates the importance of seasonal work in the county. The number of tourists who visited Vorpommern-Rügen in 2019 is by far the largest among the counties with almost 2,5 Mio visits. The second place holds Vorpommern-Greifswald with 1,5 Mio visits. These high numbers are due to the importance of the two islands Rügen and Usedom. The data further reveals that these two counties are also the ones with the smallest number of companies and employees in producing industry. In January 2020, in the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern 1.146 new business were founded while 1.208 shut down. The number of closures surpassed the openings. The situation in the two main counties of Vorpommern is worse, as in Vorpommern-Rügen and -Greifswald in total 368 businesses closed while only 281 opened (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2020). This data demonstrates the already devastating economic state of Vorpommern which displays an ongoing economic decline.

Land Area Development Program

Many of the problems pointed out in the previous chapters were also identified by local and regional politicians. The Ministry for Energy, Infrastructure and Land Development designed a Land Area Development Program for the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (MEIL-MV, 2016) in which regional development and land use are addressed. In the situation analysis,

the program stresses the challenges posed by the decreasing and ageing population and points out development potentials in national and international cooperation as well as new perspectives in the sector of renewable energies. These new opportunities impose new concurrences in land use, where the protection of nature and the importance of natural landscapes for tourism must be addressed as well as the favorable conditions for the construction of wind parks and the plantation of food and energy crops. Cross-border cooperation and strengthening of the metropolitan area of Stettin is addressed as well as the connection to the Oresund-Region across the Baltic sea. An emphasis is put on the potential of creating more and better employment possibilities by bringing science and companies closer together. With the two universities of Rostock and Greifswald, three universities of applied science and 15 research centers, the domain of research plays a major role in the state (MEIL-MV, 2016).

The Land Area Development Program identifies regional, medium and basis centers. In Vorpommern, there is only one regional center which comprises the two close towns Stralsund and Greifswald. The direct surrounding area of this center is closely connected to it and is marked in gray in the card below as a "urban surrounding area". There are seven medium centers in Vorpommern and several basic centers, as the town Loitz, who provide basic services, like health care, schools, supermarkets, pharmacies and banks. The basic centers are seen as crucial anchor places for the surrounding rural area. This differentiation based on the theory of central places was already established in the previous development program. The new strategy of 2016 builds upon it by introducing the category of *rural transformation areas*[11]. These refer to the structural weakest regions which therefore carry a lot of development potential. They are marked in orange in the map below. These regions were identified in a rating of all districts by seven socio-economic indicators as the 25% weakest districts of the state. The district Peenetal/Loitz is one of these regions. Furthermore, it can be perceived, that these areas are mainly in the hinterlands and a significant part of these areas is located in Vorpommern (MEIL-MV, 2016).

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[11] The German name *Ländliche GestaltungsRäume* is a creative word creation which is difficult to translate as *Gestaltung* carries multiple connotations of transformation, creation, design and craft with a powerful role of the actor. It refers to the potential of the areas and open possibilities for commited people.
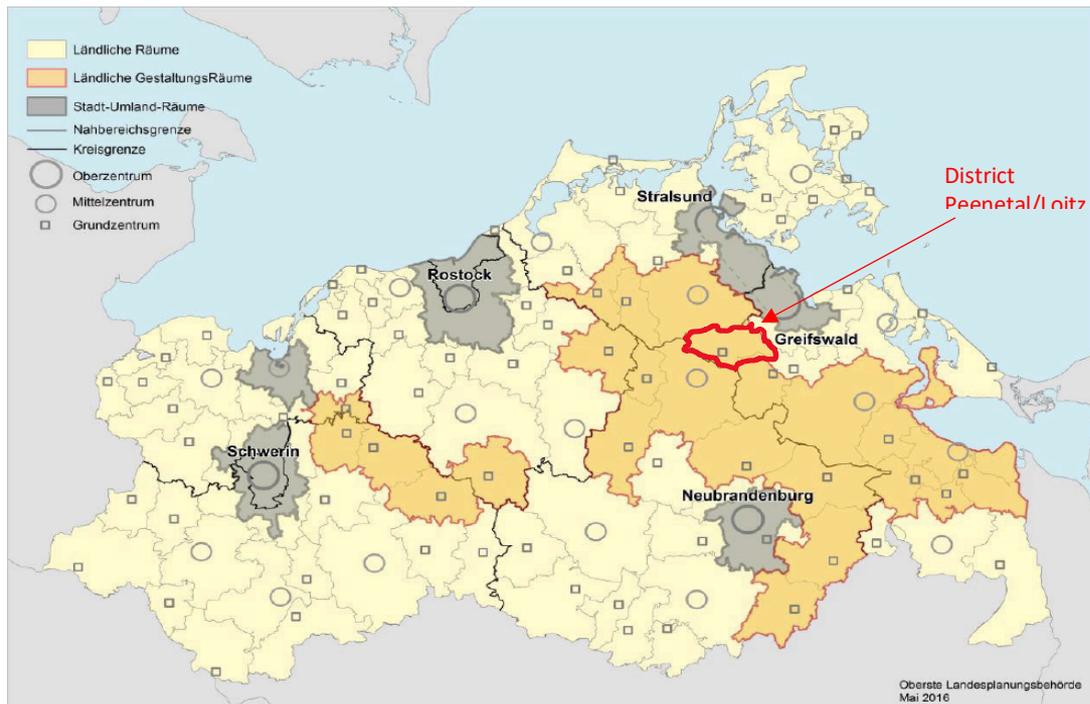
Figure 13: Rural Creation Areas and Central Places in the Land Area Development Plan. (MEIL-MV, 2016)

The overall aim of the Land Area Development Program is to provide equal living condition in all regions of the state Mecklenburg-Vorpommern respecting local specifics. The goal is not to create uniformity, but to provide equal opportunities for all citizens. Therefore, actors at all levels are encouraged to take stabilization and securing measures concerning the rural transformation areas. Core elements of these measures are information, innovation and cooperation and crucial actors are the municipalities and counties of rural transformation areas. Thereby, the natural and cultural landscape is to be preserved. The development program even refers to regional identity: "Significant cultural landscapes are to be preserved and developed as areas of regional identity and expression of cultural and social plurality"[12] (MEIL-MV, 2016, p. 63).

The Problem of Regional Identity in Vorpommern

The history of Vorpommern is characterized by foreign control and numerous disruption which illustrate the discontinuity. It is shaped by dramatic events which were imposed on the region and its inhabitants instead of being actively shaped by those. In the first paragraph of this short summary of Pomeranian history, the author Udo Arnold cites the Pomeranian-born

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[12] Original quote: „Bedeutsame Kulturlandschaften sollen als Räume regionaler Identität und Ausdruck kultureller und gesellschaftlicher Vielfalt erhalten und weiterentwickelt werden."

Oskar Eggert, who summarized: "[…] who was lord of sea, generally also ruled in Pomerania. This did not let any great specific trait appear during history. Peaceful work, deeply religious tranquility and tough power of obstinacy might have been the strongest characteristics of the Pomeranian" [13] (Arnold, 1988, p. 1).

As historic continuity is an important feature for the formation of regional identity and regional consciousness, especially the times under strict regimes can be interpreted as breaks. Interaction and communication are necessary for regional identity as well as the creation of memory culture and history culture (Assmann & Assmann, 1994). The discontinuities, even in recent history, prevented Vorpommern from establishing such cultures. With the end of the second world war, the former ideological belief system in Vorpommern was abruptly replaced by the Soviet socialist ideology. Historic revision was mostly suppressed and clouded by ideology. There was no open discussion about the National Socialist past and nether of the violence during the invasion of the Red Army. The German reunification had a similar effect on people's identities. Again, they were judged for the system which was imposed on them and the recent past of their life experience was judged as inferior. Again, no real revision of the past decades took place.

As the citation of Arnold above illustrates, this is not a new development, but the suppression of the region can be found during almost all of its history. This could be the reason for Vorpommern to present no local or regional traditions or cultural festivities as can be found in other German regions. The symbolic dimension of the regional identity is rather weak, as there are mainly two symbols which are preserved: the name of the region and its heraldic animal, the griffin. Almost all landmarks of the region where destroyed over time. In terms of symbolic shape, the region now almost completely merged with Mecklenburg to a common state. There is no administrative body of Vorpommern.

At the political level, there has been closer attention to Vorpommern as a region lately. With the introduction of the Parliamentary State Secretary for Vorpommern in 2016, a political position was created explicitly for the region. The high rates of far-right votes caught the attention of media at the federal level and the relation of the region to far-right ideology is a

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[13] Original quote: "[…] wer Herr des Meeres war, gebot gewöhnlich auch über Pommern. Dies hat in seiner Geschichte keinen großen, eigenen Zug aufkommen lassen. Friedliche Arbeit, tiefreligiöse Beschaulichkeit und zähe Kraft des Beharrens waren wohl die stärksten Eigenschaften des Pommern."

wide-spread stigmatization. The success of far-right political parties and low participation rates in election can be related to the disillusioning economic situation. The region is in almost all terms of economy and infrastructure far below the German average.

"Territorial identities emerge from tradition and collective memory that always have a link with the community" (Paasi, 1995, p. 43). Parting form this statement of Paasi, we can state, that the region Vorpommern certainly carries a regional identity. Even though the historic region has lost its institutional shape, it carries collective memory and preserved its unique natural landscape. The identity of the region by scientific classifications is rather negative, as the region Vorpommern is often associated with unemployment, far-right parties and general structural weakness. The representation of these features by federal media might also have an important impact on the image of the region by outsiders. At the same time, the region is known for its beaches as holidays destination. How insiders perceive the region and the community will be examined in the following chapters with the example of a development project at the small town Loitz in Vorpommern.

Case Study: Zukunftsstadt Loitz

History of the town Loitz

To gain an impression of the historic development of the town Loitz, an overview based on different publications of the town's chronicler Henning Rischer will be presented shortly. In an interview, he states that Loitz is a very typical example of a town in the region where "all bigger tendencies from the Middle Ages up to the present day" can be made out (Interview 4, p.8). Annex 5 further provides a timetable of important historical events.

The first mentioning of the name of the town has been documented in 1232 as "Losice", a settlement of West-Slavic tribes. In 1236, the Mecklenburgian knight Detlev von Gadebusch gained it as fiefdom and bestowed it of town ordinances. Loitz developed into a regional trade and service center and was able to build a castle and fortification. In the 14th and 15th century the town developed economically well, even though its development was already restrained by the bigger neighbors like Demmin and Anklam. In 1592, the widow of Duke Ernst Ludwig of Pomerania, Hedwig Sophie, move to the castle of Loitz as her widow domicile, which had a positive impact on the town's development (Rischer, 2008).

In the whirl of the Thirty Years' War, Loitz was occupied and sacked numerous times. The town and the castle took severe damage. In 1701, a huge fire destroyed a significant part of the town and the castle. The castle has never been reconstructed. With the end of the Nordic War, Loitz became a border and customs station between Prussia and first Denmark and then Sweden. The economy developed, the population grew richer and the financial situation of the town improved. A new town hall, the present one, could be construction with own resources (Rischer, 1992).

Since 1815 under Prussian control, Loitz developed an industrial sector with the installation of a glass factory in 1833, mill construction in 1848, a stark factory in 1888 and a dowel factory in 1924. Thus, the focus of the economic activities moved from the manufacturing sector to industry (Rischer, 2008).

In 1906 the town was finally connected to the railway system and the living standard increased due to stable gas and water provision. The town grew, but the development was impeded by the outbreak of World War I. After the war, the population was in misery and mass-unemployment created a fertile ground for the National-Socialist Party whose popularity increased erratically after 1930. During World War II, the dowel factory turned to war production and a small airplane plant was erected on its grounds. The 30th April 1945, the Red Army conquered Loitz without resistance. Several hundred refugees from the Eastern provinces came to Loitz in search for shelter (Rischer, 1992).

After a short time of political trouble, public life in Loitz got restructured in line with the ideology of socialism. The stark and dowel factories became publicly owned companies and production cooperatives were introduced. In agriculture, changes already started in 1945 with the land reform which assigned settlement sites at the ground of former nobility. In 1960, four agricultural production cooperatives were established (Rischer, 2017).

The 25th of October 1989 marked the political change in Loitz. In a prayer for peace at the church almost 1.000 people expressed their resentment with the regime. A Committee of citizens developed and the 6th May 1990 the first free council elections since 1933 took place. With the assistance of the West-German partner town Hiddenhausen, a new democratic administration was established and a modern central canalization system could be implemented. All big companies of the town suffered under the collapse of the GDR and

attempts to establish new industrial sites failed. The tradespeople had to face the challenges of the market economy in record time and most of them surrendered (Rischer, 2008).

Since 1991, the town is part of a support program of town renovation which is the main force of changes in the visual appearance of Loitz. A first focus was set on basic technical infrastructure like the central canalization system and the renovation of streets and squares. The appearance of Loitz improved a little, as the town hall and the market place were renovated and became one of the town's urban landmarks. Still, the financial situation of the town did and does not allow huge investments. The town renovation agency points out in the recapitulation of the first 10 years of the program, that the intensive traffic passing through the town center is a major problem for its development, as it renders the buildings unattractive for investment (Boie & Hausdörfer, 2001). This situation did not change before 2010 when a bypass road for transit traffic was constructed.

The towns territory grew by incorporating several small rural municipalities of surrounding villages. In 1998, the district Peenetal and the town Loitz united into the joint district Peenetal/Loitz which incorporates the town Loitz with its villages and the two rural municipalities of Sassen-Trantow and Görmin (Rischer, 2017).An ongoing problem is the decline of population. Even with the incorporation of the small municipalities, the population of Loitz decreased from 4.900 in 1991 to 4.700 in 2004. Especially the outmigration of young people is seen as a major problem. So, in 2006 the town had to follow the state's requirements and close the local high school due to the low number of pupils. The chronicler ends his overview over the town's history stating that "Loitz' future will largely depend on the questions whether the attractiveness of the town for its inhabitants can successfully be increased and, especially, whether employment possibilities for the population can be assured and created" [14] (Rischer, 2008, p. 22).

Current situation of the district Peental/Loitz

To illustrate the current situation of the district, the last extensive publication of the town's affaires in the course of the 775 years anniversary of Loitz was consulted. It presents a complete list of the 81 companies of Loitz at the time, including all self-employed people,

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[14] Original quote: "Die Zukunft für Loitz wird weitgehend davon abhängen, inwieweit es gelingt, die Attraktivität der Stadt für ihre Bewohner zu erhöhen und vor allem für diese Erwerbsmöglichkeiten zu sichern und neu zu schaffen."

doctors, small shops and restaurants. Furthermore 13 associations and citizen-initiatives are presented in the book of the anniversary. Among them are the very successful handball club, the football club of Görmin, and several new initiatives. One of them is the *Peenewinzer "Sophie Hedwig" e.V.* an association of wine enthusiasts which was founded in 2014. The first vineyard of the district was laid out in Loitz/Rustow with 1.200 vines and the first harvest in 2016 was a huge success. The 40 associates also contribute to the cultural life of the town and implemented an annual wine-queen ball at Ballhaus Tucholski. Furthermore, the association *KLANGFEST e.V.*, founded in 2016, organizes popular music events in Peenetal/Loitz and the art association *Künstler Gut Loitz,* founded in 2013, charges itself with the management of festivals, events, projects and exhibitions in the sphere of visual art. Another recent initiative was the creation of the peat museum connected to the establishment of a new company, the *Hafendestillerie* (harbor distillery) in 2012. The manufactory produces beer, whiskey and honey, all linked to the locally important historic commodity peat. The museum illustrates the importance of this resource in the history of the town and environs and the impact of the peat extraction on the landscape (Höll, 2017).

Prior to the process linked to the competition Zukunftsstadt, the engagement for the future of Loitz started in 2012 within the project *MORO - Modellregion Raumordnung* (Model Region of Land Use Planning). With its strategy for regional public services, the district Amt Peenetal/Loitz was chosen as a model region by the Federal Ministry for Traffic, Construction and City Development (BMVBS). Thematic priorities in Loitz were labeled as *naturnah leben, naturnah lernen, naturnah arbeiten* and *naturnah erholen* which means to live, learn, work and rest close to nature. Major outcomes of the project were the creation of visions and ideas for the development of the district and the renovation of the old tradesman's yard in Peenestraße 8, Loitz. With the financial support of the project and other funds, the town council started to renovation of the object in 2008. The building complex was erected after the great fire of 1701 and represents the most important building complex of townspeople preserved in Loitz. The Loitzer Heimatverein (homeland association Loitz) was entrusted with the creation of a public place in the building. To fulfill this duty, the association restructured in 2014 and labeled its new site *KulturKonsum*[15] where, ever since, many events and meetings

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[15] Literal translation: Culture Cooperative Store. The word *Konsum* relates to the widespread small cooperative shops in GDR and thereby create a link to this episode of history and the East-German identity.

took place. There are exhibitions, presentations, barbecues, films and readings, but also weekly meetings of the *Loitzer Wull Wiewer*[16] and activities like a cycle trip and a free computer course for seniors could be carried out. Furthermore, the place is used for marriages. The association, the district, the town, some companies and many inhabitants joined forces to reconstruct the whole complex including the yard, the garden and two historic ice cellars (Höll, 2017).

The closeness to nature declared in the vision of the project MORO is linked to the natural environment, mainly the valley of the river Peene and also the smaller valley of the river Schwinge around Loitz, which are declared as Natura 2000 areas. To gain an impression of the natural and human made landscape of the district annex 6 provides a book of photos.

Description of the Project-Area

Figure 14: Location of the District Peenetal/Loitz in the County Vorpommern-Greifswald. (Wikipedia 2020)

The project Zukunftsstadt is carried out by the district Peenetal/Loitz which is formed by the three municipalities of Loitz, Sassen-Trantow and Görmin. The only town in the district is the town Loitz. The two other municipalities are completely rural and offer very few basic services like a kindergarten and a small shop to their habitants. Görmin also provides a small primary school. For secondary school, all students go to Loitz. Also, further services, like general doctors, pharmacies, supermarkets, and small shops and services are centered in Loitz as basic central place. For further assistance, facilities or activities, the habitants go to the medium centers Demmin or Grimmen, or the regional center Greifswald.

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[16] Literal translation: Wool women of Loitz. The name of this group of people meeting weekly for doing wool craft is in Low German, the regional vernacular language.

Description of the Project

The project Zukunftsstadt could be realized in the frame of a nation-wide competition of three phases. In the beginning, 160 municipalities applied. Of those, 51 were chosen for a first phase in which they developed Visions for 2030+. 19 selected municipalities got the chance to develop concrete plans for projects in the second phase of the competition. The last phase started in 2019 when 8 of those municipalities were chosen and gained funds for the implementation of their idea. The district Peenetal/Loitz is by far the smallest participant, who entered this last stage. The others are all bigger urban centers: Bocholt, Dresden, Friedrichstadt, Gelsenkirchen, Lüneburg, Norderstedt and Ulm. Project partners are the district Peenetal/Loitz and the University of Applied Science of Neubrandenburg (Dehne, Müller, & Heymann, 2019).

In the first Phase in 2015/2016 a participatory process started in which many of the habitants participated and discussed their ideas for the future of their hometown and home-villages. The creative process was enriched by presentations of scientists, the development of future-boxes for children, a future-tree and a future-fairytale. As outcomes, they identified the closeness to Greifswald as important advantage. The largest problem in the district was identified as the attractiveness of the town Loitz. The town is still able to maintain basic services, but is unattractive as place for living and work, due to the decay of an important part of the building stock. The development into a livable town for everyone, especially young families, was to be carried out hand in hand with the citizens. In the planning phase, engaged citizens formed 6 task forces on different topics, to draft concrete plans. A feasibility study and a global communication strategy were carried out. The result are three flagship projects and the participatory laboratory, which accompanies them with smaller projects and events. The vision is to create an "urban small-town and livable villages. Good live, work and resting in the Peenetal." The three aims are to (1) enable good living conditions for all, (2) create attractive conditions and incentives for an influx of population and (3) to provide free space for experiments, ideas and creativity (Dehne, Müller, & Heymann, 2019).

The projects which are to be implemented in phase three that started in 2019 are called "real-labs"[17]. There are the real-lab GenerationenQuartier and the PartizipationsLabor which are rather directed to the people who are already living in Loitz, as well as the real-lab

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[17] Original: Reallabore; real laboratories

BauDeinHaus and KreativStärke which are meant to create external attention. The PartizipationsLabor is giving the citizens space to carry on their engagement and realize small projects and ideas together. For example, this year, they are organizing a potato festival in autumn and are building a mobile sauna on a hay carrier among other creative projects. The GenerationenQuartier is meant to be a living, meeting and service center in the heart of the town Loitz. By renovating and reshaping a quarter of the town center, the appearance of Loitz is meant to be improved and barrier-free flats for young and old habitants are to be created. The quarter should further provide a center of medical care with two young doctors and other spaces of public interest. The financing of this real-lab could already be established and the construction is meant to start in 2020. The next real-lab is BauDeinHaus ("BuildYourHouse") in which two houses are to be reestablished by tandems of a local and a person willing to move to Loitz. Together each tandem develops a concept of utilization for a house with a component of public interest, like a shop or café. They gain a basic income for 18 months in which they renovate the building and are accompanied by local support and media. These two actions are meant to be examples to inspire others to establish themselves in a similar way in Loitz. The last of the real-labs, KreativStärke[18], concentrates on the re-usage of the old stark factory. The big ground of the factory is in a central location in town and currently considered as "dirty spot" by the populations, as the ruin reminds the end of the industrial sector of the town after reunification and many people lost their jobs there. In a design competition around the two commodities stark and wood, which were important in the history of Loitz, artists, product developers and craftspeople are invited to develop new products at the grounds of the former stark factory. As Art in Residence, they are accommodated in Loitz during the competition. The results will be presented in a design festival in town. After this, the factory grounds are to be used regularly for an annual summer campus at which people are invited to get engaged in arts and crafts. The aim is to promulgate Loitz as a place of innovation and product development and develop the ground of the stark factory step by step into a creative space of working and living. All these real labs are to be implemented during five years from 2019 until 2023 (Dehne, Müller, & Heymann, 2019).

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[18] Translation: CreativeStark or CreativeStrength. The German word "Stärke" can signify both: the commodity stark and strength/power.

The overall communication strategy has three goals: (1) Long-term the aim is to inspire people to move to Loitz and help shape the town by filling empty houses with life. (2) The mid-term aim is to bring people temporarily to Loitz for them to establish an emotional link to the town. (3) Short-term, attention to an interest in Loitz is to be raised among people who never heard of Loitz so far. There are four target groups addressed in the communication strategy: university graduates, artists and creative actors, young families and employees. All of them have in common, that they are interested in craft works and look for new ways of living actively in a community far form big cities (Dehne, Müller, & Heymann, 2019).

The project was granted a total budget of EUR 617.000 by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. It includes labor cost and costs for activities and studies, but actual construction cannot be financed with the project funds due to the ministerial orientation. Therefore, real labs with construction components, like the GenerationenQuartier, required extra funds by other entities and the municipality. Furthermore, an investor will take on the construction of this building complex.

Study Approach and Layout

In order to do justice to the complexity of the concept of regional identity, a qualitative approach to the topic was adopted. The case study carried out in this paper is of exploring nature and does not intend to provide any representative quantitative insights. Rather, the particularity of the focused region and the individual perceptions of the interviewed persons are at the focus of the study.

The aim of this thesis is to determine the mutual influences between regional identity and a regional development project. The assessment of Vorpommern examined the first dimension of regional identity by Paasi, the scientific description. In order to gain insights in the regional consciousness and the images of the region, 15 semi-structured qualitative interviews were carried out. Interviewees were stakeholders of the project Zukunftsstadt and habitants of the district Peenetal/Loitz which were purposefully chosen to present a wide range of socio-economic characteristics and different degrees of involvement in the project as well as different relations to the region and town. All citizens were invited to participate and many engaged in the project at least for a certain time. There is no clear line between the stakeholders and citizens due to the participatory approach. Therefore, only interviewees, who are professionally concerned with the project will be considered as stakeholders. These

are: The Parliamentary State Secretary for Vorpommern, the former Mayor of Loitz and now County Commissioner of Vorpommern-Greifswald, the current Mayoress of Loitz, the project coordinator and the two academic assistants from the University of Applied Science of Neubrandenburg. The citizens chosen for the interviews are self-employed shop-owners, elderly people, a student and people who moved to the district in the last years. Summaries of the interviews can be found annex.

For the analysis of these interviews, methods of the grounded theory methodology were used because the aim is to develop a theory of regional identity in a regional development project. It is important to notice, that not the whole grounded theory methodology was applied, as it was not possible to conduct proper theoretical sampling as implied by grounded theory. Instead of choosing the next interviewee based on the analysis of the previous interview, the interviews were all conducted before the analysis. Of course, the participants were nevertheless sampled theoretically in order to gain the most divers perspectives on the topic. Despite this shortcoming, the grounded theory methodology was used in the analysis of the data. Adopting the approach of Corbin and Strauss developed in 1990, the analysis was carried out with the most possible openness of the researcher towards the data. In a first step of open coding, the data was first described and paraphrased. The following axial coding revealed relations between the different codes and categories which could be refined in the selective coding of more of the material. As such, a total of 1.200 codes was created which could be categorized according to the research interest. For the analysis, the software MaxQDA was used.

In order to assess the mutual influence between regional identity and the development project in Loitz, the analysis was carried out in three steps: firstly, the inductive categories were derived from the material. They are presented in the following chapter. Secondly, the core categories concerning regional identity were aligned with the dimensions of regional identity by Anssi Paasi, in order to thirdly address the research interest directly using the inductive material and the theory and terminology of Anssi Paasi.

Especially concerning the inductive categories, it is to be stressed once again that the research carried out is of qualitative nature and no generalizable assertions can be drawn from it. Even views which were commonly stated by all interviewees do not necessarily represent the opinion of the majority of the habitants of the town or region. The aim of the inductive

categories is rather to assess which are the different aspects that play a role in regional identity and regional development. Hence, an aspect mentioned by only one interviewee can be just as valuable as a shared opinion. In order to evaluate the quantitative importance of each aspect, subsequent quantitative research is required. The categories were derived from the codes and their relations can be consulted in the mind maps in annex 4. These maps are one interim step in the analytical process and were refined later.

Results

A) Inductive Categories

A typical Loitzer

In a first key question, the interviewees were asked how they would describe a typical habitant of Loitz. A few interviewees stated that they could not describe such a person, as everyone is different, but many answered without hesitation. The main narrative was described by the habitants and stakeholders very similarly. The most important feature of the typical Loitzer lies therefore in her relation to others, to new persons and new things. When such a new person arrives, the typical Loitzer is at first reserved and skeptical. It needs a bit of time to convince her, but once she opens up, she is very friendly and helpful. "A bit of a hard nut with a soft core" (Interview 11, p.41). This specific trait was prominently described by most of the interviewees and stated with an air of common knowledge. It was even mentioned that this trait also shapes the view on the project Zukunftsstadt. For most of the interviewees, the description of the typical Loitzer ended at that point. Some enriched their description of the typical Loitzer with more characteristics which fit the general narrative. At this point, there are first small differences between the stakeholders and habitants. The typical Loitzer is from the stakeholder's perspective traditional, down-to-earth and only slowly adopting to change. She is torn between pride of her Heimat and anger about the decay in town. The habitants also mentioned this pride but pointed out that it is also used to differentiate oneself form the habitants of other close towns: "As such, a Loitzer is not a Demminer, for example" (Interview 1, p.1). They described a Loitzer as authentic and convivial. Loitzer appreciate festivities and having people around. They are well known for very nice town festivals, on the other hand, they are also "often the first ones at the buffet" (Interview 1, p.1) which indicates a certain egoism. Many interviewees stated that a typical Loitzer is just like a Vorpommer and part of being Loitzer means being Vorpommer too.

A typical Vorpommer

The main characteristics described of a typical Loitzer and Vorpommer did not differ much. As such, the Vorpommer is also cautious when it comes to new people and ideas. The stakeholders describe her too as rooted and related to her Heimat. One habitant described the consequences of this authenticity as creating a certain profundity in the personal relations which creates reliability and connects the people among each other. Even though, she mentioned that this is an old and wrong image, one interviewee drew an image of an old man sitting on a bench and talking low German as being the typical Vorpommer.

Importance of Low German

The regional vernacular was mentioned by several interviewees and the opinions about it differed a lot. While some saw the maintenance of the language as important for the identity of Vorpommern, others did not give it that much importance. As the language is mostly spoken by the people who are over 80 years old and already most 60-year-olds have some trouble in speaking it coherently, it is most endangered to die out soon. Challenge for the maintenance are the many local dialect and the absence of a regulated grammar, therefore, "If we hear sometimes the radio emission in Low German on Sunday mornings, there are many terms which are not in my vocabulary" (Interview 7, p.23). There are some efforts made to maintain the language at different levels. Locally in Loitz, there are some Low German events in the KulturKonsum and the WullWiever-group where the participants speak Low German amongst themselves. The schools and kindergartens make some efforts to bring the children in contact with the vernacular through poems and small workshops, but they do not learn it in depth. The retired teacher sees no reason for maintaining it as "the young people should better learn English or French" (Interview 7, p.23). But nevertheless, he perceives the vernacular as "part of our rural culture" (Interview 7, p.23) and referred to an incidence when speaking the vernacular was an advantage for him: By talking to the fishermen in Low German, one could get some specialties, that were not officially sold. "Then you were one of them" (Interview 7, p.23). So we note, that Low German still plays a role for the identity of Vorpommern and it connects the habitants among each other, but the vernacular is currently in process of becoming rather part of the heritage that an existing cultural trait.

Observation: People who moved to the region and dialects

One of the persons who moved to the region explains that he sees no typical trait of the Loitzer. He explicitly mentions that there is no local dialect, as can be found in other German regions. Interestingly, the person who moved to the region from another coastal area in the West of Germany, and therefore speaks a very similar dialect, was the only one who came to the region and felt completely accepted by the local population, even though he moved there latest. The two other interviewees who moved to the region mentioned, that they themselves feel completely at home there, "but maybe the locals see that differently" (Interview 4, p.8). The interviewer noticed that the ones who were not sure if they are completely accepted by the local population, even though they lived there for 15 and 40 years respectively, spoke a perceivable dialect. There is no doubt that the local population understood them perfectly, but intonation, rhythm and some specific words made it clear that they were not raised in Vorpommern. This finding might be coincidence, and the topic cannot be addressed here properly, but in another research project it might be interesting to study the role of language differences as an influence on integration and trust building in a domestic context.

Perception of people who moved to the region

The perception of the typical Loitzer and Vorpommer differed for the people who are not originally from Vorpommern. They had much less to say to that topic and it seems that in general, these smaller regional categorizations were less important for them. They used much more often broader categorizations, like "the people here" and referred to the East or the North, depending on where they came from originally. One stated: "For me personally, nothing depends on that, whether I am in Vorpommern or Mecklenburg. One can't tell that to the people though" (Interview 4, p.8). That shows that he notices the importance of these regional categorizations for the locals, even though, they play no role for him personally.

Another interviewee who moved to the region focused a lot on the regional level of East-Germany when describing the local mentality. He described that he had some difficulties in the beginning, because he perceived the people as very rude and with a certain underlying aggression in their behavior among each other. This was very different from his home region, where politeness is an important value. He described the mentality of his new home region as egoistic, "if you want something, you take it" (Interview 8, p.28), generally unfriendly and even racist sometimes. He had the prejudice of the people in GDR being all friends, but

learned in his time in Vorpommern, that this was probably not so, "Or something broke at the time of reunification, I can't judge that" (Interview 8, p.28). His perception is much more critical than the self-image of the locals even though, he also emphasizes that there are some friendly and helpful people too.

Reasons for coming to Peenetal/Loitz

The people who moved to the region had different reasons. One moved there still in GDR for work. He came because he did not know the North of the country and wanted to explore the unknown. He liked the region and the people and stayed for the rest of his life. He explicitly mentioned the pure air which he appreciates, and which was missing in his Saxon hometown at that time. The two interviewees who moved to the region more recently had similar motives: both wanted to purchase property at the countryside which was much more expensive in their home regions and therefore they moved to the North-East where property prices are low. For the IT-specialist from Schleswig-Holstein it was important to stay close to the coast, like in his former home. He was looking for a peaceful lonely place as counterbalance for his demanding work. The lawyer from Bavaria had the aim to acquire a big estate where she had much space to work, live and spend her free time in one place. Both found in Peenetal/Loitz what they were looking for: "this is my balance, my haven of peace where I am on my own" (Interview 8, p.27).

Image of Peental/Loitz

The habitants associate their home district a lot with the natural environment and the country life. They enjoy that Loitz itself is rather a village than a town and appreciate some of the nice places in town. Loitz is central in the district and the immediate region, as it provides basic services as supermarkets, doctors and a school. One interviewee stated: "What I associate with it is life itself. Nothing special" (Interview 2 p.3). That points out, the essential role, the town plays in her life, and at the same time shows, that there are no important landmarks or any specific traits of the town. Historically the town is a good example for the region and the old town is still shaped in the design of a typical town of the middle ages. For some it is perceived as a dead town, as there are few small shops and especially on Sundays the streets are empty. While some stated, that especially as teenager there was not much to do in the town, others perceive it as a rather active town with many associations that is known for good festivities and solidarity. The habitants often reflected how others might perceive their town.

It was stated that the East is in general often seen as gray and dreary and they assume, that people passing by the town might not like it much. They were surprised when they heard of some tourists who liked the old town core after getting to know it in a guided tour.

The stakeholders perceive Loitz much more as an active town. While they also note, that Loitz is a small town as many others and without functions outside the immediate surrounding, they note, that due to the projects Loitz is now well known and it has a kind of pioneer status and serves as role model for other towns and regions. The stakeholders too associate Loitz with country-life and the natural environment. They see the town as a place of many possibilities: there is still a kind of vacuum of culture and development, natural and historic potential and the people open for taking on the challenges. They perceive the people of Loitz, maybe due to the project, as a little more open-minded than other people of the region.

Heimat

When asked about their Heimat, the interviewees answers can be grouped in 3 categories: for some the notion of Heimat was time-bound, for others place-bound and for other not place-bound and rather linked to feelings. Most of the interviewees mixed theses different notions in their answers, as they are not exclusive. The category time-bound means that Heimat is linked to the past, in general, the childhood and the places connected to that period. The not place-bout attributes are the emotional notions of Heimat, like feeling save, at home, and appreciated without a need to prove oneself. It was also mentioned to be needed and of value for their social environment as an aspect of Heimat. This notion is linked to family and interestingly also to silence, which might be a regional trait. It was also mentioned that one can have more than one place that is Heimat for you. The category of place-bound was the most often occurring. It was also linked to emotions as a place where one can always come back to. Some interviewees also mentioned nature in general and specific the free and open landscape of the region. They connected Heimat in a place-time relation to their origin, which for many is in Loitz. All of the people who grew up there feel like they are Loitzer and are at least a little proud to say so. As mentioned above, the people who moved to the region also feel at home there, even if it is not their original Heimat and they are unsure whether the others also feel like they belong there. When asked to imagine a picture of Heimat, many describes Loitz: the buildings, the church, the school, the river and the bridge. They also though of their homes and social life: their families and associations. They also mentioned

activities that were important for them in the past and are connected to the region, like swimming, boating and fishing. "And the tower of the church. That has to be in viewing distance to be Heimat" (Interview 5, p.16).

Strength and Opportunities

Habitants and stakeholders alike mentioned many positive aspects of the region Peenetal/Loitz. Here, they will be presented as internal strengths and external opportunities in the sense of a SWOT-analysis. As strengths were mentioned: the engaged municipality and the engaged citizens, the activities organized in town and some new facilities that were created lately. The relationship between the municipality and the associations was mentioned as very good. The citizens are encouraged by their municipality to get involved. In the projects MORO and Zukunftsstadt, administration and citizens work hand in hand. The cooperation among citizens was also mentioned often and solidarity a recurrent term. The people also appreciate the social environment of a small town or village, where everyone knows everyone and like the people around them. It was also mentioned, that even though the society is rather conservative in general, they can be surprisingly open sometimes. People were in general positive about all the activities and events that take place in the region. They like it when "something is happening". Specifically mentioned very the festivals in the villages and town, where all people come together, the offers of the sport-associations, especially the very successful handball association. Further, the wine-association is well known, and the annual wine-flower ball is always sold out. The Blues and Jazz night that is organized by the association Klangfest takes place in the village Düvier. This music event takes place three times a year and the people learned to appreciate it a lot and also that it is place in a village and not in town. "So the people also get to know Düvier. […] In general, they are all supportive and many people accept it after a while. First, the people are rather skeptical of course" (Interview 3, p.6). The new facilities that shape the region and town lately can also be presented as strength, as they are the outcome of the engaged citizens and municipality. In terms of infrastructure, the bypass road was mentioned, that keeps the traffic out of the old town of Loitz, and the construction of new cycling paths. Also, the Ilse-Bus, an on-demand small bus, that provides mobility for the villages around Loitz, was mentioned as strength. This offer was developed during the process of the project Zukunftsstadt and realized with the local service providers. Most often mentioned was the KulturKonsum, the main

realization of the last project MORO. This culture center is well appreciated by all and a sense of pride about this achievement was notable. The new harbor distillery was also mentioned, as aside its production of local brand beer and whiskey, they also provide a ballroom for events where people like to go. In general, people like all events and activities that are taking place and in the demand is often bigger than the offer.

SWOT-analysis of Peenetal/Loitz	Internal	External
Positive	**Strengths** - Engaged municipalities - Engaged citizens - Social life - Activities - New facilities	**Opportunities** - Beautiful landscape - Free creative space - Touristic potential - Low prices for real estate - Location (coast and Greifswald)

Negative	**Weaknesses**
	- Economic downturn
	   o Low wages
	   o Collapsed retail
	   o Few jobs
	- Outmigration
	- Demographic decline
	- Bad appearance of the town Loitz
	- Nostalgia and backwardness
		Threats
		- Distance to metropolitan areas
		- Bad infrastructure
		- Visual and acoustical disturbance by wind turbines

Figure 15: SWOT-analysis of Peenetal/Loitz.

The opportunities of the region are the landscape, the free space, touristic potential, prices for real estate and the location. The touristic potential is mainly linked to the river and landscape, but also the harbor area, where the campsite and train-station-restaurant are located. Main activities for tourists are linked to the river, like paddling and fishing but the touristic potential of the historic old town was also mentioned as well as the church and the historically important church library installed by duchess Hedwig Sophie in the beginning of the 17th century. Still, there is not much tourism and the region can attract tourists who look for silence and loneliness. These features of the region also provide an opportunity for artistic and creative people, as the free open space gives room for creative concentration without the distractions of crowded, tight metropoles. Of course, the beautiful landscape is not only attractive for tourists, but also an asset for the local population, most of which identify a lot

with the natural environment, its openness, calmness and pure air. The people who move to the region mentioned the low prices real estate as a main reason, which is an opportunity for attracting new habitants. The location can be perceived as an opportunity for all, as the coastal areas are not far away for recreational daytrips and the town Greifswald is close enough that Loitz can still be assumed as part of its commuter area.

Threats and Weaknesses

Very present among the external threats mentioned by the interviewees was the distance of the town from mayor towns which could provide more work opportunities. This distance goes along with bad infrastructure of all kinds. Roads are bad, the highway far and public transport was described as very bad. There is no railway in Loitz and even the train station of Greifswald provides few fast connections. The next airport in Rostock provides only very few and expensive connections. Also, the digital infrastructure is lacking, as there is still no glass fiber connection. All these are threats because the district, the municipalities and their inhabitants have no influence on the development of these factors. The last-mentioned threats are the wind turbines and the planned construction of many more of those. The wind turbines are widely visible in the open landscape and disturb the habitants of the villages acoustically. As the silence, openness of the landscape and natural environment were mentioned as main opportunities for immigration and tourism, these potentials are threatened by an excessive construction of wind turbines in this area designated as eligible wind energy area.

Concerning the weaknesses, the main challenge is the downward helix of economic decline and outmigration. Habitants and stakeholder alike are well aware of this development. There are only few job opportunities in the region and wages are much lower than in other German regions. Therefore, especially young people tend to leave the region. The population decreases and the average age increases. The buying power is very low and also the tax income of the municipalities decreases whenever companies close. The industrial sector and the retail had been very important but collapsed almost completely since reunification. The industry was not competitive in a market economy disappeared rather soon, while many small shops could not compete with the supermarkets, neighboring towns and online shopping, and closed one after another in the last decades. This development impacts the income opportunities of the local population which worked but also shapes the appearance of the town: there are almost no shops anymore in the former shopping street. "[T]he old-

town lost its classical function as a place of work, at the ground floor, and place of living, at the first floor of the buildings. Many of the houses are vacant, partly because of unclear ownership, but also because they are not usable anymore in their original form." (Interview 15, p.57) These vacancies shape the image of the town and the habitants are well aware of this. They think that others perceive their town as ugly with the many houses that are in a state of decay. "A typical Loitzer is a bit torn between being proud of his region and the people there and anger about the growing number of houses that are empty and fall apart." (Interview 12, p.44) The economic downturn also has political consequences which can be perceived as weaknesses. The most prominent is a nostalgia about the good old days during GDR, especially among the older population which might impact the innovative force in town and the acceptance of new ideas.

Political consequences

Some of the habitants are well aware of the political consequences of that economic downturn and outmigration, even though many interviewees did not mention that topic. By one, the region was even described as a political disaster. The people are left behind in a process of change since reunification. The habitants perceived no political will to change that situation in the last decades, as so small measures were taken. They feel betrayed and paced out and that gave ground for far-right parties which gain many votes in the region. But on the other hand, it was also described that the fact of being left behind actually opened the possibility for a tolerant society, that is not as ideologically bound as in other places and that the association with far-right parties is actually an external attribution reinforced by the national media that does not account for all of the habitants. The fact of being paced out also led to a nostalgia of the times of GDR, when there was more economic activity in town. Locally, the reunification brought an economic downturn that triggered already existing tendencies, like the disappearance of the retail sector, and this is still felt by the older inhabitants. One person who moved to the region from Western Germany described his observation on the way people talk about GDR and how "they lost parts of their identity with the change. Their country simply disappeared even though they were still standing on it with their feet. That was a very fast process and it didn't take along all the people. We feel the consequences of this until today." (Interview 8, p.29)

10 years perspective of the region

Within a period of 10 years, habitants and stakeholders alike wished for many changes, but also the maintenance of certain aspects in Loitz. They expressed their hopes and fears for the future. The fears mainly concern the continuation of the tendencies mentioned in the weaknesses above: the economic downturn and outmigration. They fear, the town might die out and with it the engagement of the municipality and the citizens might come to an end. But there were many more and more concrete hopes for the future expressed which are very align with the vision of the project Zukunftsstadt. They wished for the houses of the old town core to be saved from decay and for the town to get more attractive. They also wished for more vivacity in town by the reopening of some shops, a pub and attractive public space, so that a small-town life gets possible again. They wished for immigration of young families and active people who are willing to engage too. And of course, supporting this development, they hope to increase the attractiveness of the town for businesses. More economic activity could be developed in the area of agriculture or tourism. They hope for opportunities for people to gain attractive wages and grow independent of the support of the state. A new chance is the possibility of remote work. As many professions nowadays are operating digitally, they can be executed from any place with an appropriate internet connection and therefore, they offer much potential for remote areas with an attractive natural and social environment. At the moment, the people of Loitz still hope to get connected to broadband internet soon. Another measures they hope for concerning infrastructure is to solve the still existing problems concerning the ownership of some buildings in town so they can be saved from decay. Also, the terrain of the stark factory should be used in some way and there is more construction ground needed, especially when one aims to attract young families. For the social infrastructure, they hope to maintain and expand the local school. The hope for tourism is to increase the number of visitors, but without becoming too touristy. As the asset of the region is its peace and calm, this should not be disturbed by mass tourism. Still, there are more capacities, especially in the harbor area, where the big store building could be renovated and used. People also hope for the project to be finished and have positively impacted the town, so the life quality increased. Therefore, the engagement of all actors should be maintained, as well as the rich historic heritage of the town and the achievements of the last project and the beginning of the current one, mainly the KulturKonsum and the

Ilse-bus. The level of mobility provided now should not decrease. The parliamentary state secretary expressed very similar hopes for the whole Vorpommern region: improvement of the infrastructure, economic success, immigration and satisfaction of the citizens.

Habitants perception of the project

The interviewees had very different levels of knowledge of and involvement in the project. While some participated in the whole process, most only participated ones or never and get mainly informed by the local newspaper. Some also stated that they would have liked to get involved, but they had not enough time for private and professional reasons or because they were already engaged in other contexts. The habitant's general opinion on the project is that it is a good idea and they appreciate the efforts, some even showed pride to have won this federal competition, but they are not satisfied with the current state of implementation. They are most critical, that the process runs for so many years already, but there is no visible output. "[T]his is all still up in the air" (Interview 7, p.26). They also noted that the project has a huge budget and it has to be well evaluated how the money is spent. The project is at a decisive moment now, where it is missing its intention and possibilities, but can still be saved with open communication. The project showed many weaknesses, most of which were not caused by the project team. A first major problem is the long process of the federal competition which could not be accelerated locally. Another important factor are the many staff changes that happened recently. The former major of Loitz who was also head of the district was very involved in the last project and played a key role in the beginning of the project Zukunftsstadt. With the beginning of 2019, he became county commissioner and the new mayoress and the new head of district had to take over the project. The project coordinator had to take sick leave and the position was tendered anew. The current substitute project coordinator was contracted last summer for a duration of one year. The responsible employees at the scientific project partner also changed. So, all the positions involved in the rollout of the project were appointed anew in the last year. The citizens are rather skeptic towards the new project team and unsatisfied because this caused delays in implementation. The personal relation between the people and the responsible employees seems very important and was cut due to the staff changes. Another problem is the allocation of funds. The expectations were very high, that now as the implementation phase finally started, there would be funding for everything needed to implement the ideas. Unfortunately, as the project

is uniquely funded by the federal ministry of education and research, no costs for building material are eligible and the town needs to acquire new financial means for construction. This was a huge disappointment for citizens and stakeholders alike. "They only finance words" (Interview 12, p.48). The only problem mentioned by the citizens that can be influenced by the stakeholders is the communication of these troubles. There was much dissatisfaction about the communication to the people in town: many are uninformed and need to be taken along in the process. They wish for more transparency as currently the project distanced itself from the people.

Stakeholders perception of the project

The stakeholders are aware of the problems mentioned by the citizens. They know that the citizens are currently skeptic and disappointed and they also mentioned a lack of communication, delay and staff changes as problems. As new staff, it took them some time to understand the local situation, get to know the actors and establish trust. They state that they are on a good way of building the needed relation to the people. They also change the internal organizational structure of the project and try actively to reintegrate the people who have been previously engaged. As in the end of the planning phase there were some misunderstanding and the new project team took over at the beginning of the implementation phase, there is currently a lack of participation of the citizens. Furthermore, the stakeholders identified a problem of expectations. Internal and external expectations are very high. "But this creates certain expectations and a pressure we feel. Now it has to work" (Interview 11, p.43). The external expectations are mainly linked to the very good external communication. This created a very positive image of the district and the project as flagship project and role model to which it has to live up now. The perceived internal image among the people of Loitz is rather bad, mainly due to the lack of visible outputs. The stakeholders hope, that once, there are changes visible, the participation of the citizens will be reestablished. They perceive many chances the project provides for the district by breaking the vicious circle of economic downturn and outmigration, by increasing livelihoods and by implementing the spirit of cooperation and participation which is the basis of the project as an ongoing long-term process of citizen involvement. The risks they pointed out lie in the current distance between the project and the citizens, the creative means which are not

always understood by the population and the risk of failure and giving in what might shatter the citizen involvement not only for the current project but in a long-term perspective.

B) Application of the theory of Anssi Paasi

In the next step, the inductive categories will be put into a relation to the dimensions of regional identity by Anssi Paasi. The description of the region illustrated the dimension of scientific description from the points of view of multiple sciences. The interviews now provide insights in the internal and external image of the region and the regional consciousness. Some of the most essential points have been aggregated in figure 16.
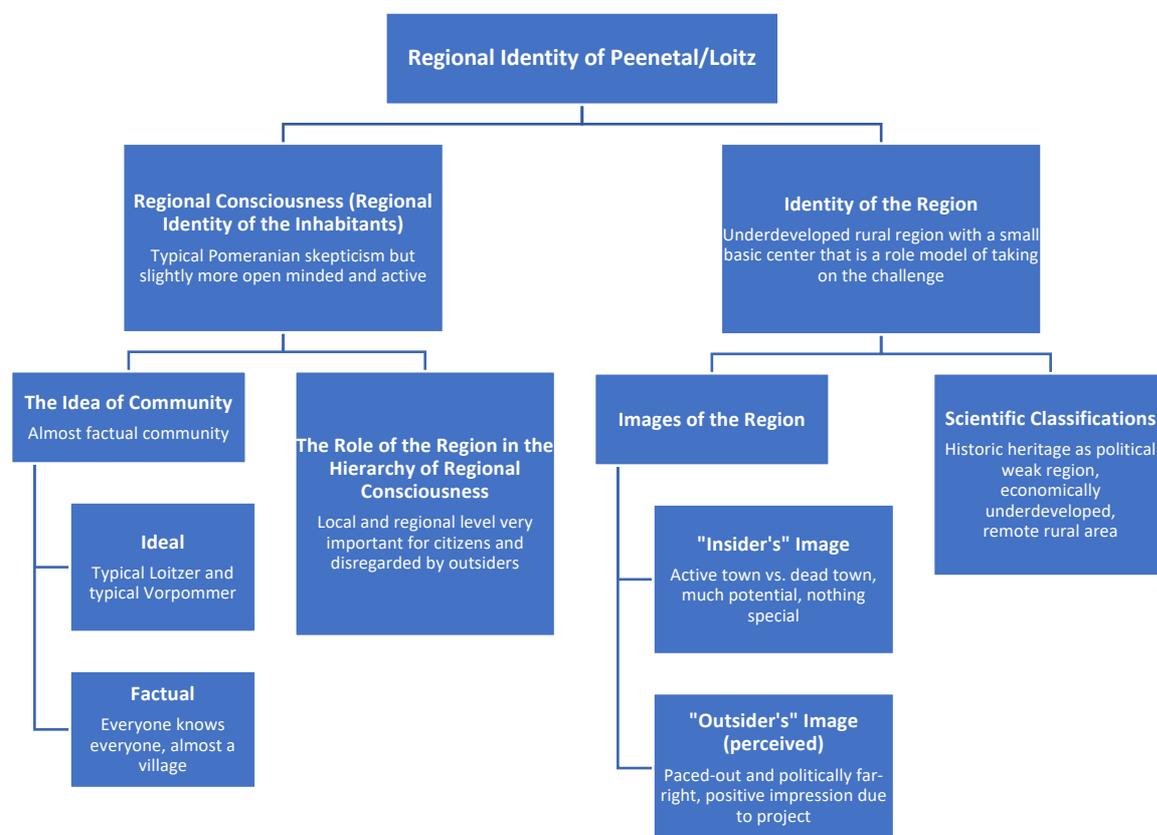

Figure 16: Application of the model of regional identity by Anssi Paasi on Peenetal/Loitz.

Identity of the region

The insider's image in the sense of Paasi is mainly linked to the image of Peenetal/Loitz of the habitants and to a certain degree extending to the stakeholders, as these are also not strangers to the region and most of them can rather be considered as insiders than outsiders. As such, the insider's image of the town is on the one hand one of a dead town, where almost all shops are closed and on the other hand one of an active town whose citizens are engaged in associations. There is still much potential for further development and the habitants and

stakeholders have the same awareness of current difficulties and share a common vision for the region. At the same time, the district is perceived as nothing special and it carries few characteristic traits that distinguish it from its surroundings.

An outsider's image cannot be provided extensively by this case study, as the only interviewee who could be considered an outsider is the parliamentary state secretary. All others live in the region or are much enrolled there. Therefore, I want to shortly illustrate at this point the perceived outsider's image, which presented itself as important category in the inductive data. Mainly shaped by the sociologist Nicklas Luhmann, the concept of "expectations of expectations" (*Erwartungserwartungen*) might be interesting to add to Paasi's dimensions of image. This concept does in our context not refer to the true image outsiders have of the region, but the image the insiders assume the outsiders to have. Even though, these assumptions need not to be true, they can impact the insider's self-image and their behavior. The image, the interviewees assumed others to have, is on the one hand related to the scientific description and media image in which the region is presented unattractively as paced out, underdeveloped and politically far-right. The notion of gray and dreary East-Germany fits in here. Even though these associations account for bigger regions, than the district Peenetal/Loitz, they effect the district because it is itself not well known by outsiders and judged by its location and context. At district-level the perceived outsider's image is rather positive, as with the two projects that took place, the district obtained a pioneer status in participatory town development and is seen as a role model for other towns tackling the same difficulties.

To sum it up, the identity of the district Peenetal/Loitz can be described as an underdeveloped rural area in a beautiful open landscape that has a small basic center that grew lately to become a role model for addressing the ongoing problems with participatory concepts.

Regional consciousness

Considering the role of the region in the hierarchy of regional consciousness, it was notable, that the district is only an administrative unit and the people do not identify with it. The regional level used for identification by the locals were mostly the municipality and the historic region Vorpommern. Often, they did not differentiate sharply between these levels. The notion, that Loitz is a very common example of a town in Vorpommern might add to these overlapping attributions. All the interviewees who do not originate from the region care much

less about the local and regional specifics and focus much more on bigger regional constructs as "the East" or "the North". Even the town chronicler, who move to the town over 40 years ago, stated: "For me personally, nothing depends on that, whether I am in Vorpommern or Mecklenburg. One can't tell that to the people though" (Interview 4, p.8).

The community in Peenetal/Loitz can almost be perceived as factual community, as many interviewees mentioned, that "everyone knows everyone" (Interview 5, p.13) and "what I like about Loitz, is that it isn't really a town, but a village" (Interview 8, p.28). Many people know each other, and the personal relations play a huge role. Nevertheless, as many interviewees could describe a typical Loitzer and a typical Vorpommer, there has to be an ideal community to a certain degree. The specific trait of these characters is their first skepticism against new people and innovations. The regional consciousness can therefore be described as a very typical Vorpommern-kind of skeptic personality, who is nevertheless very active and becoming slightly more open-minded lately.

C) Interrelations between regional identity and the project Zukunftsstadt

Focusing on regional identity

The previous analytical steps already indicated at various occasions the way the regional identity impacts the project Zukunftsstadt and vice versa. Therefore, first the regional identity is divided in the two aspects *identity of the region* and *regional consciousness* as defined by Anssi Paasi in order to determine, which facets of regional identity influence the project and which facets are influenced by the project.

The identity of the region provides the framework for any regional development project, as it presents the current state and image of the region. In the case of Peenetal/Loitz, the project


Current image, history, heritage and landscape

Identity of the region

Regional development project

Insider's and outsider's image, shape
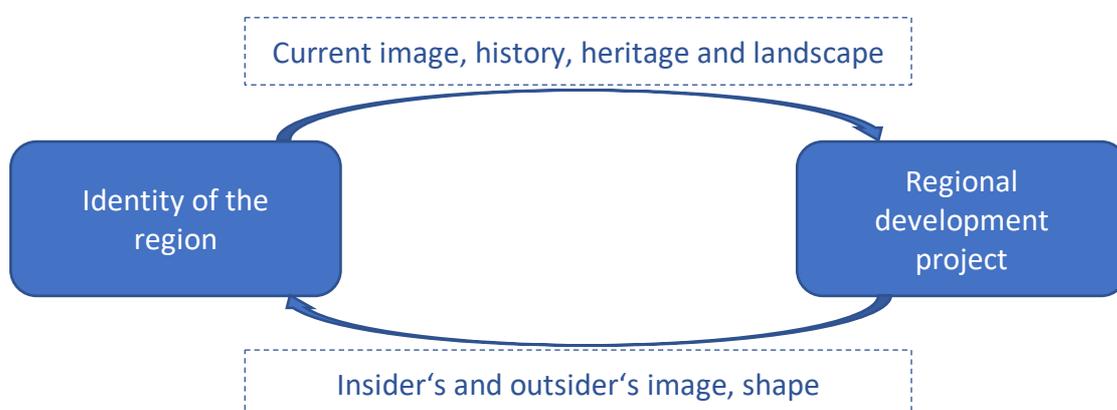
Figure 17: Interrelation between the identity of the region and a regional development project.

Zukunftsstadt was most shaped by the image as dead town and remote area where "there is nothing going on here" (Interview 4, p.11) but also "history is always present" (Interview 12, p.46). Even the long-passed history has a huge impact on the current shape of the region and continues to stay present in form of heritage site. In Peenetal/Loitz this is most centered in the medieval old town of Loitz. Recent history is closer linked to regional consciousness, as it influences the people, their values and attitudes. The historic and current land use pattern also impact the landscape of the region. Especially the river Peene is an important feature of the identity of the region and in perceived in the project as an asset for touristic development and livelihood for the habitants.

The participatory approach of the project Zukunftsstadt did already influence the insider's and outsider's image of the town. Concerning the internal image there is still more potential. It was mentioned by one interviewee, that there is a certain sense of pride to have won the federal competition with the project, but this aspect was not emphasized or brought up by any other interviewee. The self-image as active town was mentioned to be reinforced by the project, but the main change by now was in the perceived outsider's image. The project created an external attention and awareness. "Loitz is a name now." (Interview 11, p.42) The whole image of being a positive example, a role-model and pioneer was created in the project and its predecessor project. When the implementation will be finished, the project will most likely also have a major impact on the shape of the town Loitz.
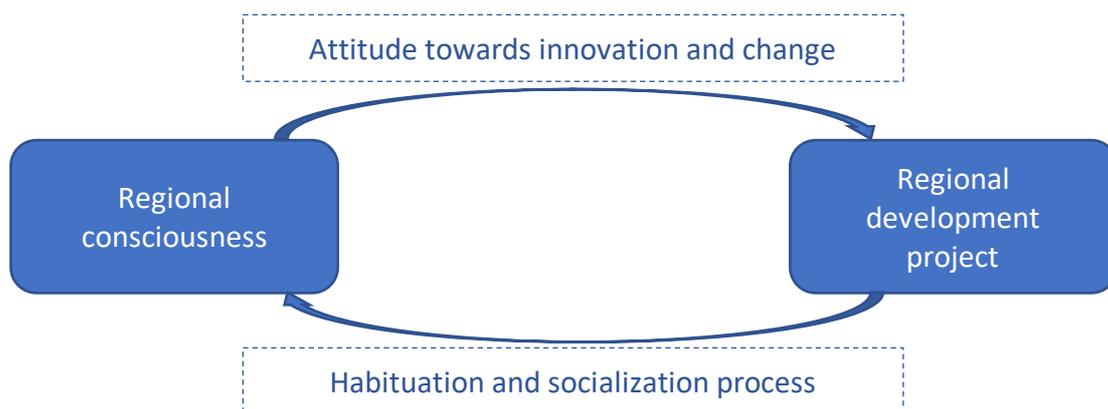

Figure 18: Interrelations between regional consciousness and a regional development project.

The regional consciousness influenced the project as well. Especially the typical skepticism has huge influence on the rollout and acceptance of the project. The people need to be convinced first for them to engage. This is a major problem for the project Zukunftsstadt

because it took so many years from kickoff up to the implementation. On the other hand, it was mentioned, that the people of Peenetal/Loitz are already a little more openminded towards innovative ideas than others. This could be an influence of the project and its predecessor. Since over eight years there are creative participatory projects taking place in the district. Through a process of habituation and socialization as described by Berger and Luckmann 1976, this ongoing exposure to innovation and encouragement to actively participate in the shaping of one's region has influenced the regional consciousness.

## Focussing on the development project

After analyzing which aspects of regional identity are impacting the project and being impacted by the project, the next step is to equally observe which specific steps of the project are most influenced by the regional identity and which are most influential. Therefore, the analysis will be orientated along the project cycle. The project cycle was slightly adapted to best represent the process of a participatory project, in which the identification of problems and the development of a vision play a larger role, as they need to be developed together and negotiated to establish a common understanding.

Figure 19: Project cycle of a participatory development project.

In the first step, the identification of problems, regional identity plays an important role. Especially the identity of the region is crucial in this analysis, but regional consciousness might also have an impact. In the project Zukunftsstadt, the problems have been identified as a threefold process: economic decline, outmigration and decay. They can all be attributed to the identity of the region. The notion of these problems was shared by all interviewees. The

development of the vision is more influenced by regional consciousness, as the way how people imagine their future and their ideals are part of who they are. The idea is to renovate buildings in a very public and active process that might call the attention of people, who will choose to move to the region and reinforce the local economy with their buying power and activity. The vision is influenced by the present and past of the region. Within the next step, the development of concrete measures, the first mismatches between the project design and the interests of the people of Peenetal/Loitz become perceptible. This estrangement increases with the next steps of planning and was identified as a major problem at the beginning of the implementation phase, when this study was carried out. The people of Loitz do not perceive the project Zukunftsstadt as their project anymore and therefore, the skepticism against something strange as significant trait of regional consciousness appears. The change of all the staff enrolled in the project is certainly a major reason for this. It indicates the importance of personal relations at a local level and in small regions that can be considered factual communities. The interviews indicate that further origins of this current negative image of the project in town might be in the planning phase, were the measures of the project were developed and chosen. Not all ideas could be implemented and financed and some of the chosen activities were very abstract. "The project wants to achieve this with the very creative means, which might not always be understood" (Interview 13, p.51). This could be another key reason for the current problems within the project Zukunftsstadt: the citizens and their regional consciousness were integrated in the first phase of the process, the "What?" but not until the final stage of the second phase, the "How?". Essential during the whole process of a participatory project is continuous communication. The lack of communication was repeatedly mentioned as problem and it might have caused the current lack of participation the stakeholders noticed.

Regional identity was found to be of importance at all stages of the project cycle. Its essentiality during the first two stages should not let it be forgotten in the following stages. Especially in regions with a regional consciousness that is rather reluctant to innovation, it is essential for the success of a development project to promote a high level of participation and ownership of the local population. Therefore, the measures need to be planned and implemented respecting the regional identity.

Discussion

The results indicate that in general the project Zukunftsstadt has a positive impact on the regional identity and vice versa even though in the current state this achievement is at risk. The commonly developed vision is accepted by the population and many actors took a joined action in the frame of the project Zukunftsstadt. In their comparative analysis of regional development projects in different European regions, Semian and Chromý 2014 point out:

> "Regional identity can make positive contributions to regional development in areas in which individual actors in development share common interests and visions. These visions are not only focused on dealing with existing problems, but are also formulations of long-term development strategies [...]. They also attempt to overcome or weaken the traditional basis of identity founded on the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them'. Such visions thus primarily connect regional consciousness and the identity of a region to sustainable socio-economic development. The resulting consensus on the direction of regional development is thus conceived as a 'joint action' involving various actors in various roles and at various scale levels." (Semian & Chromý, 2014, p. 268)

According to this assessment, the results of the present study show the very positive impact of the participatory approach of the project for the identification of problems and the development of a shared vision. Currently, the project is at risk of losing this closeness to the citizens who increasingly perceive the project as external and imposed on them rather than their own project. This sense of ownership can be considered as vital for the long-term success of the development project.

The results need nevertheless to be interpreted carefully, as the qualitative approach, mentioned in the chapter "Study approach and layout" is not able to represent a representative description of the habitants and stakeholders. The study presents the multitude of perspectives and opinions and makes no claim as to their respective quantitative importance. This assessment is not exclusive, and the choice of interview partners has potentially a major influence on the results.

Furthermore, due to the diversity of regional development projects, their different aims and approaches, generalizations based on this particular case study have to be carried out very carefully. The participatory approach in an almost factual community creates a very particular setting that cannot be adopted easily in bigger regional entities or urban settings.

A major weakness of this study is the incoherency of the regional level addressed. The data shows that for the habitants, the local level of the municipality and the regional level of the historic region Vorpommern are both more important than the level of the district Peenetal/Loitz. When referring to their Heimat, all levels intercepted, and it became clear that the interviewees do not differentiate sharply between the different levels. Therefore, the study included the extensive analysis of the historic region Vorpommern, as the region impacted not only the smaller territorial entities in their own development and history, but it was found to still play an important role in the regional consciousness of its habitants.

Conclusion

The theoretical assessment of the region Vorpommern and the analysis of 15 interviews with habitants and stakeholders of the project Zukunftsstadt indicate the existence of an interrelation between regional identity and a regional development project. The regional consciousness as well as the identity of the region influence all stages of the project cycle. They are especially crucial in the beginning when the problems are identified and a vision is developed, but the case study shows that the regional identity must continuously be considered during the whole process.

It can be recommended, that especially in a participatory regional development project, at every stage of the project, regional identity should not only be considered in the question "What to do?" but as well in "How to do it?". In all steps and especially in the ongoing communication, the regional identity should be considered when the adequacy of means is evaluated in order to integrate the citizens in the process. This can be most easily done, when the team working on the project disposes of members who are part of the regional community and well connected. The project Zukunftsstadt is currently at a challenging stage because the new project team does not dispose of such a person. The skeptic trait of the regional consciousness amplifies the distance between the people and the project, and it lacks acceptance. This is my assessment of the current state of the project form the perspective of regional identity. The interviews revealed, that the stakeholders are well aware of the challenges of the current situation and have already taken measures to adopt to these challenges.

The study provides ample possibilities for further research. It has to be emphasized, that the present study was not able to address the full impact of the project on the regional identity, because the project was not yet finished and especially potential impacts on the identity of the region and its shape are not assessable before the implementation of the project is completed. The present study chose this moment within the implementation phase in order to be able to examine more closely the indirect and unintentional effects on regional identity and the influence of this identity on the execution of the project. An analysis of the mutual influence between the regional identity and the project in the course of an ex-post evaluation would enrich the assertions of the present study. The setting of the project in an almost factual community within a historic region might have influenced the results. Therefore, similar research on different projects might provide further insights. The comprehensive analysis of the historic region which represents the context for the project is seen as one of the strong points of the present study and fellow researchers are encouraged to evaluate the value of this approach for their own research projects.

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List of Annexes