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Session:

Civic engagement and socio-structural changes in rural areas. Current developments.

*3rd Rural Geographies Conference
in Groningen, The Netherlands, 26-29 June 2023*

Rurality is anything but a clear and consistent concept. It appears to be quite the opposite: a vast and colourful continuum of differently structured social spaces with specific characteristics and histories. Rural areas itself have always been very heterogeneous and embedded in social, cultural, economic and regional contexts. These contexts create and form regional constellations, which are in turn differently capable to react to socio-structural changes. Until recently, the capacity of rural areas for dealing with these changes had rather negative connotations in Germany. This perspective is changing though. Especially the constitution of civic engagement as one of the most important elements within these constellations seems to be a central aspect of their resilience or vulnerability towards these processes. Engagement significantly influences the competence of rural areas to react to these changes. But how do certain rural areas encounter processes of transformation such as shrinkage, overaging and de-industrialization and what role do civic engagement and social innovation play in this context?

The panel will focus on the role of civic engagement in rural areas that are facing large-scale socio-structural shifts and will try to discuss the following questions: Which elements influence the capability of rural areas to react towards socio-structural changes and how is this connected with civic-engagement? Why does “shrinkage” in some areas appears to be a healthy and innovative process, while in others it means loss and decline? Are rural areas more or less creative in dealing with the effects of socio-structural changes than urban regions? Which forms of civic engagement emerge in rural areas in this context? Which ones of them appear to be “novel” (such as refugee initiatives or solidarity-based housing projects and farms) forms of engagement and how do “established” (such as clubs, volunteer fire departments or local politics) forms react to social change? Do novel and established forms of social engagement coexist independently of or do they influence each other?

We are specifically looking for contributions that distinguish different kinds of civic engagement in rural areas and their interplay with socio-structural conditions and changes.

*To submit an abstract, we ask for a brief description of the theme and content you would like to present on (max 250 words). The abstract should also include a (working) title, up to 5 keywords, your name and your co-authors if applicable. The deadline is **31 January 2023**. We appreciate a maximum of two abstract submissions per person. Please use the conference tool to upload your proposal: <https://www.ruralgeo2023.nl/abstracts>*