Social Networks and Coping with Poverty in Rural Areas

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Abstract

This article draws attention to the spatial dimensions of poverty and the importance of social networks as coping resources for the rural poor. We analyse data from an explorative, mixed-methods study conducted in rural and urban areas in north-eastern Germany, and show that spatial contexts shape poor people's social networks. Our quantitative analyses indicate that compared to the urban networks, the rural networks in our sample are smaller, and include more family members and fewer supportive relationships. Our analysis of qualitative interviews with rural poor people yields a typology of strategies for coping with poverty. It also shows that while social networks represent important resources for coping with poverty in rural areas, the support capacities of these networks are weakened by structural changes, the selective out-migration of younger and better educated individuals, and by the ageing and shrinking of the population.

Introduction

It is generally assumed that poor people living in remote and economically deprived rural areas face different challenges in managing their daily lives and coping with their circumstances than poor people living in urban areas. Recent research from the United Kingdom and the United States on rural poverty and related topics, such as social exclusion in rural areas and rural disadvantage (Philip and Shucksmith 2003; Milbourne 2004; Milbourne and Doheny 2012; Madanipour et al. 2015; CRC 2006; Lichter and Schafft 2016), as well as recent regional case studies on rural poverty in Germany (Schäfers-Walkmann et al. 2009; Winkler 2010; Kreher 2012; Klärner et al., 2015, Knabe et al. 2018c), have shown that mobility constraints, the centralisation of services, and the lack of infrastructure in rural areas affect the poor people living there in specific ways. However, while these issues are important, we underestimate the complexity of rural poverty by focusing only on the economic and infrastructure deficits in rural areas.
Recent research on rural poverty has suggested that the social relationships of the rural poor influence their capacity to cope with their circumstances: ‘... the limited provision of public goods in rural areas requires poor households to place increased reliance on private or informal forms of provision in relation to housing and transport, which cuts against conventional societal discourses of public sector dependency amongst the poor’ (Milbourne, 2016, p. 454).

Their social relationships with individuals and groups in their communities, combined with their cultural contexts, also determine whether rural people who live below a statistically defined poverty line perceive themselves as poor (Vasilachis de Gialdino 2006). Some studies have suggested that social relationships can also induce exclusionary processes, like stigmatisation, cultural degradation, and shaming (Shubin 2010); while other studies have described rural poverty as a complex interaction of ‘social inclusions and exclusions’ (Milbourne and Doheny 2012) and compensatory effects of integration into rural communities (Milbourne and Webb 2017).

In our article, we want to look more closely at these relational aspects of poverty. We draw on theories and methods of sociological social network research (Barnett 2011; Scott and Carrington 2011) that enable us to analyse the structure of social relationships, and thus to gain a deeper understanding of their importance for the rural poor.

In our article, we want to address the following questions:

1. What role do social networks play in strategies for coping with rural poverty?
2. What network compositions and structures can we observe among the rural poor?
3. How does the rural context influence the social networks of poor people?
4. What social resources, such as support from family, friends, and institutions, are the rural poor able to mobilise through their social networks?

**The importance of social networks**

The sociological social network perspective looks at the structure of social relationships; i.e., the patterns of interactions between individuals and/or other actors (institutions, firms, states, etc.). Thus, it focuses on the role of social relationships, either as support networks or as factors that initiate social exclusion processes.

A basic assumption of sociological network research is that individuals do not act as isolated individuals, but are instead ‘embedded’ in a network of social relationships and interactions (Burt 1982; Granovetter 1985; Wellman and Berkowitz 1988). This network influences an individual’s potential courses of action through influence mechanisms, such as social pressure and learning (Bernardi and Klärner 2014); by providing access to resources, such as financial, instrumental, emotional, informational, and social support (McTavish 2011); and, more broadly, by enabling or restricting options for individual agency (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).
The structure of an individual’s social network depends on a range of factors. For example, people living in poverty are only able to embrace support from institutional actors if there are (public or private) welfare systems and institutional actors within reach; and they are only able to mobilise family support if there are family members in their network who have resources to spare. Thus, an individual’s options are affected by spatial structures, places, and contexts (Entwisle et al. 2007). In this research, a ‘focus’ (plural: ‘foci’) is defined as an ‘extra-network social structure that systematically produces patterns in a social network’ (Feld 1981, p. 1016). For poor people, nearby public meeting places can be foci that provide them with opportunities for social exchange. If people lack access to such meeting places, or have to drive an hour or more to reach one, they are clearly at a disadvantage. Foci can be part of local opportunity structures; i.e., of the regionally available economic, educational, medical, and cultural infrastructure and services (Tickamyer and Duncan 1990).

Rural poverty and social networks

While there is an ongoing debate about the similarities and the differences between rural and urban poverty (Bailey and Gannon 2018; see also: Commins 2004), there is general agreement that poverty in rural areas is intensified by mobility constraints. Having access to a car is especially important in these areas. For instance, young people may need to drive to get to work, while older people may need to drive to access medical services (Shucksmith and Philip 2000; Shucksmith 2004; Warburton et al. 2017; for Germany: Becker et al. 2006).

Research in Germany has shown that the costs of car maintenance, fuel, and repairs are burdensome for lower-income people (Land 2016). Moreover, research on single parents in rural areas in Germany has found that the loan of a car is an important form of social network support (Keim et al. 2014).

For the rural poor, coping with poverty is made more difficult by structural and administrative changes, such as the centralisation of services, cuts in infrastructure and public transport services, and reductions in local access to essential goods (Barlösius and Neu 2008; Leibert 2013). Research conducted in Germany has also shown that the rural poor can find it difficult to maintain their social networks because they lack access to public spaces (Klärner 2017).

The capacity of social networks to provide social support may be limited in structurally weak rural areas by the selective out-migration of younger and better educated people, leaving older and less educated people behind. In eastern Germany, there is also a gender-specific bias of out-migration, with more young women than young men leaving rural areas (Arbeiterwohlfahrt Mecklenburg-Vorpommern e.V. 2015; Siebert and Singelmann 2015). This selective out-migration has an impact on social relations. For example, when young people leave their home region, they are less able to support their ageing parents.

Some studies conducted in Germany have found that stigmatisation tends to occur in more closely knit social networks in rural areas, and that it is more shameful to be perceived as poor in rural than in urban areas (Hauss et al. 2006; Winkler 2010). However, while there is substantial evidence that poverty is associated with stigma...
and shame (Walker et al. 2013; Walker 2014), the findings of other studies from the UK do not support that claim (Bailey and Gannon 2018).

Research on the social networks of poor people has often focused on special subgroups, such as homeless women (Rowe and Wolch 1990), single parents (Lumino et al. 2017; Keim 2018), and ethnic minorities (McCabe et al. 2013). Other studies have looked more broadly at the networks of the long-term unemployed (e.g., Böhnke and Link 2017). The issue of the interplay between long-term unemployment – a term that is sometimes used interchangeably with poverty – and personal networks is most relevant for our focus on the general aspects of poverty. This research emphasises three main points (Sattler and Diewald 2010; Matthews and Besemer 2014, 2015):

1. Social networks are relevant for the emergence and the reproduction of joblessness (and poverty). Joblessness can result from network strains, such as the need to care for family members (Herden et al. 2015). Some strands of Anglo-American research, mainly in economics and the neo-liberal political discourse, have stressed that social networks may contain ‘negative social capital’ in the form of network partners who transmit norms that do not encourage employment. The empirical findings for this ‘moralising discourse’ are rather weak and disputed (Macdonald et al. 2014; Matthews and Besemer 2015);

2. Long-term unemployment can affect the structure of social networks and the network resources that can be mobilised (Cole 2008; Marquardsen 2012a; Jahoda et al. 2017). There is evidence that long-term unemployment and poverty lead to reduced social contact with former colleagues and friends, which can be only partially compensated for by strengthening and re-activating family ties (Diewald 2007; Böhnke and Link 2017; Jahoda et al. 2017). Research has shown that when people are unemployed for long periods, their social relations may become strained (Szydlik 2000; Marquardsen 2012b; Herden et al. 2015), and they may withdraw from their social network contacts out of fear of being able to keep up (Offer 2012), or out of shame (Boon and Farnsworth 2011). There is also evidence that the close ties of the long-term unemployed, such as their relationships with their immediate family members, can be overburdened by their need for support (Diewald 2007; Heflin et al. 2011).

3. Social networks can help people cope with the negative implications of poverty and long-term unemployment, such as stress, the lack of money, and the lack of daily structure. There is evidence that the amount of social support an individual receives from his or her social network ties diminishes with the duration of unemployment. But other studies have shown that some unemployed individuals find meaningful activities outside of employment that can foster social integration, such as civil engagement through voluntary associations or caring for others (Cole 2008; Marquardsen and Röbenack 2010; Herden et al. 2015).

There is also a (small) body of research on the impact of social relations on rural poverty. Economic approaches to examining this topic (e.g., Bebbington 1999; Narayan and Pritchett 1999; Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002; Serra and Poli 2015) have
drawn on the concept of social capital (Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000) and ‘focus on the ways in which social capital can enhance access to other actors governed by the logics of state, market and civil society, and thus affect livelihood sustainability and poverty’ (Bebbington 1999, p. 2035). However, while these approaches acknowledged that social relations influence how people cope with poverty in rural areas, they did not take into account the role of the rural (i.e., the spatial) context in the formation of social relationships and social capital. Moreover, as these studies focused on rural areas in developing regions, the extent to which these results can be applied to western industrialised countries is unclear.

How the spatial (and historical) context and the specific characteristics of rural areas influence the formation of social relationships and social networks is better addressed in ethnographic approaches. For example, Duncan (1996), in her studies of poverty in rural Texas, rural Mississippi, and Appalachia, showed that the structures of social relationships in these rural areas result from their specific historical and socio-economic contexts (e.g., whether a region had a history of slavery, sharecropping, migrant labour, reservations, patronage, etc.). She argued that these contexts either provide opportunities for upward mobility or perpetuate poverty, and observed that the poor can benefit in communities ‘where norms are more inclusive and participatory, social institutions can help those whose families fail them’ (Duncan (1996), p. 118).

Fitchen (1992) illustrated how having strong social relations could help people cope with homelessness in a rural area of upstate New York. She found that families and close friends were important sources of support for the homeless, but that in order to provide help, the relatives or friends had to have enough space to act as temporary hosts. Thus, homeless people who came from outside the area were often forced to live in inadequate or unsafe places, or to move frequently from one cheap residence to another. Fitchen also found that the homeless people in this area were receiving little institutional assistance.

Lindsay et al. (2005) analysed the strategies of job seekers in rural and suburban areas in Scotland. They emphasised the importance of network-based job search methods given the ‘small pools of opportunities’ (Lindsay et al. (2005), p. 53) and ‘weak public service infrastructures’ in these areas (Lindsay et al. (2005)). The respondents explained that informal allocation processes determine job search outcomes, and that this is ‘the way it has always been’ (Lindsay et al. (2005), p. 66). The authors noted, however, that the dominance of such processes can have negative effects on those who are not integrated into the local communities and the local information flow, like young and long-term unemployed people.

These results are partially contradictory. Moreover, several of these authors used the term ‘network’ metaphorically, without analysing the structure and the specific foci of the networks. To identify the specific network structures and mechanisms the individuals in our study sample use to cope with poverty, we collected and analysed data on their relationships and their coping strategies. This combined approach enabled us to describe the integrated actions of the respondents, and to reconstruct their dependence on foci and opportunity structures.
Study design and methods

We analyse data from a mixed-method study in north-eastern Germany (Klärner et al. 2015) that allow us to compare the specific situations of poor people in rural and in urban areas.

Setting: The federal state of Mecklenburg-West Pomerania in north-eastern Germany

Drawing on data from an explorative case study, we look at individuals living in Mecklenburg-West Pomerania (MWP), a federal state in the north-east of Germany that is sparsely populated and has large rural areas. In the 1990s, MWP was hit hard by an economic crisis that resulted from the political, social, and economic transitions the region underwent following German reunification. MWP has also experienced enormous demographic changes over the last 30 years. In 1990, MWP had a relatively young and growing population. These trends have since been reversed. Currently, MWP’s population is shrinking and ageing rapidly. Fertility rates in MWP have been declining since 1990, and in rural areas in particular there has been a selective out-migration of younger and better educated people, particularly women. Most of these people have moved to Rostock, the biggest city in the state, or to other regions in Germany (Siebert and Singelmann 2015).

MWP is also among the German states with the highest poverty rates: in 2015, when the last interviews were conducted, 21.7 per cent of the total population of MWP had less than 60 per cent of the median income of the respective comparison group. In Bavaria, another state with a large rural population, the corresponding rate was only 11.6 per cent. If we look more closely at the regional level in MWP, we can see that the poverty rate is 19.4 per cent in the city of Rostock and the surrounding region, but is, for example, 24.4 per cent in the peripheral rural region of West Pomerania located close to the Polish border.

Mixed-methods study design: Qualitative interviews and social network analysis

To examine the logic of actions of individuals and the ways in which socio-spatial contexts influence people’s agency and coping strategies, we have integrated qualitative and quantitative research methods. This mixed-methods approach is particularly well-suited for analysing structures and the meaning of social relationships and contexts (Domínguez and Hollstein 2014; Crossley et al. 2015).

We draw on 49 ‘problem-centred interviews’ (Witzel and Reiter 2012) conducted in 2014/15 with people living below the poverty line in rural and urban areas of MWP. We recruited participants in community centres, public welfare institutions, clubs, associations, state welfare centres, labour market reintegration programmes, and special stores for welfare recipients. We also used newspaper advertisements to search for respondents.

Each of the interviews lasted between 60 and 240 minutes, and followed a guideline in which we asked the respondents about their biographies; their daily
challenges and coping strategies; and their experiences with issues such as unemploy-
ment, illness, addiction, family-related problems, violence, social exclusion, and
discrimination.

The respondents were also asked to describe the social relationships that are re-
levant in their daily lives, and that provide them with social support. We systematically
collected data on the personal networks of our respondents (ego) using the software
Vennmaker (Gamper et al. 2012).

Respondents were asked to name individuals (alters) and institutions with whom
they (1) share their personal thoughts and feelings, (2) spend their leisure time, and
(3) exchange social support; as well as (4) individuals who would lend them money or
(5) to whom they would lend money, (6) and any individuals ‘with whom they recently
had quarrels or conflicts’. Each question appeared separately on the input screen,
and the names and institutions mentioned by the interviewee were entered by the
interviewer. The same alters could be named multiple times in response to different
questions. This process enabled us to capture multiplex relationships with alters.

The name-generator questions asked the respondents to simply list all of the peo-
ples and institutions that came to mind, because we did not want to limit the ties to
a given kind of relationship. To analyse the meanings of different kinds of relation-
ships, we used the respondents’ narratives about the ties in their networks, and how
they are interrelated. We observed, for example, that the attribution of different kinds
of social support to different kinds of social relations (formal/informal) was not as
clear as it initially seemed: i.e., we found that emotional and financial support was
provided not only by spouses and close friends, but by institutional advisors (like a
training programme teacher).

Furthermore, we collected information about whether the alters knew each other
(alter-alter ties). We also collected data about the ego’s and the alters’ basic socio-de-
mographic characteristics, and about the characteristics of the ego/alter relationships
(e.g., type and duration of the relationship, spatial distance, frequency of contact).

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in German. All
quotes used in the paper were translated by the authors into English and checked
by a bi-lingual, native English speaker. All names and some details were changed to
protect the respondents’ anonymity.

Data analysis

We analysed our data in two steps. First, we conducted a structural analysis of the 49
ego-centred networks in our sample to determine how the network structures of the
respondents differed depending on whether they were living in an urban or a rural
area. Second, we performed a qualitative analysis of a subsample of the 16 rural resi-
dents to gain more detailed insights into how social relationships help rural people
cope with poverty.

Drawing on quantitative methods of social network analysis (see, e.g., Scott and
Carrington 2011; Borgatti et al. 2013; Scott 2017), we calculated a set of measures for
use in a descriptive analysis of the structure and composition of the networks.
Network size is the sum of alters in an ego’s network. In most cases, these alters were single individuals; but in a few cases in which the respondent was not willing or able to name individuals, these alters were institutional actors, such as the Job Centre or a club. A smaller network size can indicate that a respondent had less potential support. Density is a measure of how many of the possible relationships between alters in the network were realised. A value of one means that all of the alters in the network know each other; while a value of zero means that no alter knows any other alter in the network. A higher density suggests that a respondent has a closed network into which new ideas and information (e.g., information about jobs) are seldom introduced (Granovetter 1973; Rogers 2003). Social pressure to conform with group norms (e.g., norms that discourage moving away from the rural area) is also higher in denser networks (Burt 1982). Modularity describes the extent to which networks can be divided into different subgroups (e.g., family, colleagues, or a circle of friends), ranging from having a high degree of internal density to having few or no bridging relationships (Newman 2006). A higher modularity value suggests that the respondent has more bridging social capital (Brooks et al. 2014); whereas a lower value indicates that the respondent’s network has different components, meaning ‘that the alters are from similar social circles and as such ego may not have much access to alternative viewpoints or information’ (Crossley et al. 2015, p. 83). The share of family divides the number of the ego’s kin within the network by all network members. A network with a higher share of family members may be assumed to provide ‘more emotional and material support’, but also ‘less companionship than do other networks’ (Wellman and Gulia 1999, p. 107).

The share of supportive relationships divides the number of all network members by the network members the ego listed in response to the name-generator question: ‘Do you get any kind of support from people, social groups, or institutions of any kind?’. The sum of institutions reflects the average number of institutional actors in the network, such as the Job Centre and social helpers. A higher average number of institutional helpers in the network suggests that the respondents have access to multiple sources of support, which could have a positive impact on their quality of life (Cagney et al. 2013).

The quantitative social network analysis was performed with the statistical software R (McFarland et al. 2010) using the packages ‘network’ (Butts 2015), ‘sna’ (Butts 2010) and ‘igraph’ (Csárdi and Nepusz 2006). We calculated the network measures for each of our 49 ego-centred networks, describing the structure and the composition of the networks. We then compared the mean values of each measure in the urban and the rural subsample (see Section ‘Results: Structure and meaning of social networks in rural and urban contexts’).

In many cases, the structural network measures were not independent of each other (Borgatti et al. 2013, p. 151). Therefore, we calculated the correlations between each of our measures. We found higher correlations (p-values > 0.3) between size and modularity (0.39), density and modularity (-0.47), and density and share of family (0.37). This means that modularisations increased with the size of the network. These results correspond with those of other studies on personal networks (Cattell 2001; Stead et al. 2001; Keim 2011; Herz 2014): namely, that family-centred networks tend to have higher density, and that large networks tend to have higher modularity.
and lower density. Surprisingly, we did not find a strong correlation between size and density.

The aim of our qualitative approach was to identify different perceptions of and strategies for coping with poverty in rural areas. To do so, we followed the concept of theoretical sampling taken from the grounded-theory approach (Corbin and Strauss 2008). This involved choosing contrasting cases in order to capture a wide range of coping behaviours. The 16 rural residents in our sample were living in various social and institutional contexts and were at different life course stages. Thus, we were able to capture a wide range of coping strategy types with a relatively small number of cases. Additional analysis showed that adding more rural cases or non-rural residents to our sample did not lead to more types of coping strategies. This means that the criteria of theoretical saturation (Corbin and Strauss 2008) were met, and that our typology captures the most relevant coping strategy types. However, we are not able to quantify how frequently the types we identified occur in the rural population.

The qualitative interviews were analysed using the coding procedures of the grounded-theory approach (Corbin and Strauss 2008), and following instructions for team-based qualitative research (Guest and MacQueen 2008). The coding and the categorising were performed jointly by the first and the second author, who met regularly to discuss the categorisation of open codes and the procedures for selective and axial coding.

We used the categories to identify the coping strategies that were reported most frequently in our sample. Based on the case memos, we analysed which of the coping strategies were used by which of the individuals in our sample. Finally, we obtained four distinct groups of respondents (see Section ‘A typology of strategies for coping with poverty in rural areas’).

**Sample**

Our sample consists of 49 individuals – 33 urban and 16 rural residents – who mentioned a total of 466 alters on the standardised network questionnaire. The 27 women and 22 men in the sample were between the ages of 18 and 67. Six of the urban residents were migrants, while the others were native Germans. Seven of the participants had a high school diploma (Abitur or Fachhochschulreife); 20 left school after the 10th grade with a secondary school certificate (Realschule); and 22 left school after the eighth or ninth grade with a secondary school certificate (Hauptschule), or with no certificate.

**Results: Structure and meaning of social networks in rural areas**

**Comparative analysis of respondents’ social networks in rural and urban contexts**

We divided our sample of 49 ego-centred networks into two subgroups consisting of respondents living in a rural area of the administrative district Mecklenburgische Seenplatte (n = 16); and respondents living in the urban area of Rostock (n = 33). While some of the respondents in the rural subsample were living in medium-sized towns,
the applied typology of rural and non-rural areas of Küpper (2016) indicate that these towns are located in very rural areas with weak socio-economic characteristics.

Table 1 gives an overview of the network measures within our two subsamples. On average, there are 7.63 alters in the rural respondents’ networks and 10.91 alters in the urban respondents’ networks. The rural networks are also denser: the average density is 0.46 in the rural networks and 0.38 in the urban networks. The average modularity is 0.19 in the urban networks and 0.06 in the rural networks, which means that the urban networks are more likely to become decomposed into different subgroups.

The value for ‘share of family’ is 0.42 in the rural and 0.31 in the urban networks; the ‘share of supportive relations’ is 0.28 in the rural and 0.39 in the urban networks; and the average ‘sum of institutional alters’ is 1.5 in the rural and 2.58 in the urban networks. Thus, we can see that the rural networks contain larger shares of family members but smaller shares of supportive relations, and that the rural respondents have fewer institutional contacts than the urban respondents.

This explorative quantitative structural analysis of the rural and urban networks shows a number of differences between the rural and the urban networks in our sample. On average, the rural networks are smaller, more closely connected, and less likely to be divided into subgroups than the urban networks. Moreover, the shares of family members are larger and the shares of supportive relations are smaller in the rural than in the urban networks.

But why do network structures differ between urban and rural residents, and what do these differences mean for the strategies rural residents use to cope with poverty?

Table 1: Structural measures of rural and urban respondents’ networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rural respondents’ networks (n = 16)</th>
<th>Urban respondents’ networks (n = 33)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>7.63</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Density</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modularity</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of family</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of supportive relations</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sum of institutions</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We calculated correlations but decided not to add information on statistical significance in Table 1 and Table 2. Calculating p-values or estimating confidence intervals would be misleading, because the sample size of our exploratory study is too small. The histograms (not displayed in this article) of the values for the whole sample of 49 networks nearly have a normal distribution. But – based on 16 and 33 observations – we do not really know how our values are distributed within the two subgroups. What the table shows is that our explorative data gives reason to think about different network structures and compositions in urban and rural contexts. Our aim is not to prove this observation by quantitative analysis but to illuminate the spatial contexts of network formation from a subjective perspective.
Table 2: Typology and characteristics of egos and their networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data on egos</th>
<th>Network measures</th>
<th>Share of supportive relations</th>
<th>Sum of institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex Age Family status</td>
<td>Residents</td>
<td>Size</td>
<td>Density</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 1: ‘Disappointment and resignation’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 51 married, 1 child</td>
<td>5250</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 52 single, no children</td>
<td>10750</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 54 married, 1 child</td>
<td>10750</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 64 married, 2 children</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 63 divorced, 6 children</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2: ‘Adaptation and maintenance’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 54 Single</td>
<td>1050</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 55 divorced, 1 child</td>
<td>3900</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3: ‘Dependent but hopeful’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 34 divorced lone mother, 3 children</td>
<td>21200</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 38 single mother, 2 children</td>
<td>1100</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 64 divorced, no children</td>
<td>7500</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 18 Single</td>
<td>10500</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 19 Single</td>
<td>65000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 23 Single</td>
<td>10500</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4: ‘Precarious but resilient’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 26 partnership, no children</td>
<td>5250</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female 58 married, 2 children</td>
<td>65000</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male 53 divorced, in partnership, 3 children</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same reasons for not displaying p-values and confidence intervals in Table 1 apply here. See Table 1.
A typology of strategies for coping with poverty in rural areas

We seek to answer these questions by providing a more detailed analysis of the 16 qualitative interviews conducted in rural areas. This aim of this analysis is to construct a typology of strategies for coping with poverty in rural areas. In a first step, we developed the typology independently from the network dataset; and in a second step, we analysed the relations between coping strategies and the structure and composition of our respondents’ networks.

Two dimensions for building the typology of strategies for coping with poverty emerged in our analysis: the respondent’s future prospects and his or her perceptions of self-efficacy. These dimensions can be used to build a two-dimensional grid with four fields representing different coping strategy types (see Figure 1).

The first dimension, future prospects, emerged from our analysis of respondents’ narrations on their expectations for their private, familial, and occupational biographies; and of their general statements about the future. The answers are classified as anticipating stagnation or change. Stagnation means that the respondents do not expect significant changes in their levels of material wellbeing (improvement in income) or social integration (finding a job or another meaningful activity). Change means that the participants believe their situation could improve.

The second dimension, self-efficacy, emerged from our analysis of respondents’ narrations about how they manage their daily schedules and perform routine tasks like grocery shopping; and how they manage the tasks and activities they perform
irregularly, such as negotiating with institutions or celebrating holidays or birthdays. Self-efficacy in this sense means that the respondents have the subjective perception that they have the capacity to influence the situation themselves. An individual can, for example, have a strong belief in her self-efficacy and perceive herself as self-determined, or she can have a weak belief in her self-efficacy, and believe that everything that happens in life is influenced by other people or by circumstances beyond her control. Change and stagnation can therefore be interpreted as self-determined or other-directed along the second dimension of self-efficacy.

In the next sections, we introduce and describe the four types of strategies for coping with poverty and relate them to their spatial and network contexts (see Table 2).

**Type 1: Disappointment and resignation.** The first type of strategy for coping with poverty is to retreat from an environment that is perceived as being harsh and as lacking in adequate infrastructure. The respondents who were using this strategy indicated that they do not expect to see any improvement in their circumstances, which they interpret as being negative (resignation) for external reasons, like a lack of support (disappointment). For example, a male respondent (aged 60+) commented: ‘Here, there’s really nothing’.

These respondents talked extensively about their negative experiences in the job market (exploitation, fraud, uncertainty) and in dealing with governmental institutions (undue pressure, failure to provide appropriate support or to recognise previous achievements). All of these respondents had serious setbacks in their biographies (job loss, divorce, deprivation, mental illness). They characterised institutional support as meaningless and degrading, and indicated that they feel betrayed by the political and societal establishment. One male respondent (aged mid-fifties) talked about participating in a Job Centre qualification programme on how to save money:

As if we were daft. That’s how we’re labelled. And all these institutions [such as the qualification programme], in the end, they make money with the unemployed!

These respondents interpret their circumstances as negative, and doubt that any improvement is possible in the place where they currently live, or anywhere else. They believe that public institutions have betrayed them, leaving them to face their daily challenges alone. The respondent above, for example, said he suspects that the function of Job Centre training is not to support the unemployed, but to employ the trainers:

I want to work; I want to get away from the Job Centre. I want to get away. But you don’t find anything here. [...] You want to do something [...] but you don’t get away from the institutions. [...] So I said to the boss of the training programme: ‘Young woman, if we weren’t here, you’d be unemployed’.

The networks of the respondents in this group are small (between five and eight alters), closely connected, and family-centred (18 of the 31 alters are kin, seven are institutions). These respondents indicated that they do not take part in clubs or associations in their small towns and villages, and they do not participate in other social activities outside of their homes. The low social integration levels observed among
these respondents are likely attributable to the interaction between the lack of social and cultural opportunity structures and institutional support in their rural communities, and the tendency to retreat from social relationships.

There are three main reasons why the relationships in these networks deteriorated over time. First, these respondents are disappointed and mistrustful (‘The others wanted to take advantage of me’). Second, poverty and a lack of opportunities to do something of value makes it difficult for them to maintain relationships (‘After awhile you don’t know what to say to each other anymore’). Third, they are spatially isolated (‘My husband had a lot of friends, too. But this ended because of the long distance’). These respondents therefore tend to avoid intensive social interactions, and to prefer noncommittal interactions (‘In our garden, a neighbour comes by from time to time, or you go by to talk’) or engagement with family members. Most of these respondents rely heavily on their children or their partner. In several cases, the respondent’s whole life is centred around his or her partner: ‘Thank God, we still have the two of us’ (all of the quotes above are from a male respondent, mid-sixties).

The tendencies towards social isolation and retreat associated with this ‘disappointment and resignation’ coping strategy were attributed by the interviewees to the disadvantages of living in their rural region (spatial isolation, economic disadvantages, lack of institutional support). According to the respondents, their rural area is neglected and falling behind. For example, one male respondent reported that medical services are deteriorating in his community:

We had everything. Surgeons, we had dermatologists […]. Now we just have a dentist and my family doctor. Four doctors will retire now at the end of this year

But leaving is not seen as an option. Another male respondent (aged mid-sixties) commented:

Anywhere else it would be like here
Interviewer: How is it, here?
Well, you don’t know anybody, you don’t see anybody. Here, I still have my children. If I moved to another place, I wouldn’t have anybody

Type 2: Adaptation and maintenance. Two of the respondents use the Type 2 strategy for coping with their circumstances: i.e., they accept their life as it is without complaining too much about the hardships and situations they are unable to change. They are not happy about their financial or employment situations, but they try to make the best of it (adaptation). This means that they do not pursue goals they perceive as being unrealistic, such as getting a well-paid and open-ended employment contract.

The biographies of the respondents who use Type 1 and Type 2 coping strategies are similar, but their interpretations of their positions and their social opportunities differ. The 55-year-old man in this group reported that he had established and managed an agricultural enterprise in Denmark that later crashed because the owner of the farm refused to follow his suggestions for modernising the business. At around age 50 he had to move back to his rural home region in Germany. Now he lives in
his parents’ house and helps them with their daily tasks and house maintenance. He does not expect to find a job, but he takes what he can get. For example, he participated in a work creation programme he was assigned to by the Job Centre.

The other person in this group is a 54-year-old childless and single woman who is functionally illiterate and partially blind. Before German reunification she worked as an unskilled labourer in agriculture. Now she has been unemployed for decades, except for taking part in a few qualification and re-integration programmes. With the help of social relations in her network, she has adapted herself to a life of poverty characterised by material scarcity and long-term unemployment.

Having opportunities to do important work and to receive social recognition have enabled these respondents to adapt to their situations. The male respondent voluntarily extended his participation in the work creation programme not because of the financial incentives (he earns a very small sum of €1.50 per hour in addition to his unemployment benefits), but because of the social recognition it provides him:

I have been in this programme for one and a half years now. Usually it’s just half a year, but I extended, extended, extended. Because – I do not want to praise myself to the skies – but A., who works there as the foreman, says: ‘You’re good with wood, so come on over’.

He is also involved in the local riding club, where he plays an important role because of his ability to handle horses (before moving to Denmark he owned an equestrian farm, which also failed).

The female respondent’s coping strategy is also centred around opportunities to engage in meaningful activities in her network. She cares for several graves of deceased relatives, a task that provides structure to her day as well as some additional income. Asked to describe what she does during the day, she replied:

I get up in the morning, have breakfast and if it’s not that hot outside, I have several graves on the cemetery to clean up. I tend them, I take care of them. The people come and plant, but I have to keep them orderly, you know? Interviewer: Local people?
No, the people live further away [...] and some in the village who can’t do it anymore
Interviewer: Do you get some money for it?
I am not allowed to take money because of the Job Centre, but I get groceries, that helps
Interviewer: And how often do you go?
When it’s warm like these days, I go every second day

Receiving groceries for doing work in the graveyard also helps the respondent remain in contact with other people. When the interviewer asked whether anybody was coming to visit her, and she replied: ‘Well, I have the graves, the woman from A. [town in the near of her village], she visits me regularly and she brings me something. You know, I can’t do it for free’.

Through her grave-tending obligations, she is needed by and in contact with others from whom she receives support with tasks such as filling out disability pension applications.

These respondents have a small number of reliable social relationships with family members and close friends, as well as social relationships in contexts in which they are able to play an important role, such as the neighbourhood, a circle of friends,
or institutions like sport clubs or work creation programmes. Their networks are not much bigger than those of the Type 1 respondents (each has eight alters), but they are more diverse (family and institutions + friends and neighbours + clubs), and therefore provide a greater scope for action.

Asked whether she wants to leave her village and move to a larger nearby town, the female respondent said:

No, I will stay here [...] Because I’m used to it and I don’t want to be inside [like in an apartment in the town]. In the yard I feel good, in the yard I can work. And as long as I can do this, this will be my graveyard and I will carry on.

The two cases in the Type 2 group show that living in an economically and structurally weak rural area does not have to lead to social exclusion provided there are formal or informal opportunity structures that enable residents to get involved in social circles.

**Type 3: Dependent but hopeful.** Respondents who use the Type 3 coping strategy believe that their situation could improve (they are hopeful), but they are unable to set the objectives themselves or to craft a strategy for achieving these objectives without external – usually institutional – support (dependent). They describe their impoverished circumstances as common in their social environment, and do not draw inspiration from positive examples of network members who have been successful.

There are two single mothers in this group. Both reported that they are engaged in an ongoing struggle to reconcile their precarious living conditions with their aspirations to be a good mother, and are actively looking for a job that can accommodate their parenting responsibilities. But at the time of the interview, neither had found such a job. This challenge was described as especially daunting by one of these lone mothers, as she has two children, including one with Down’s syndrome who needs special attention:

The worst for me is that I have no chance of getting out of this situation on my own. Doesn’t matter what I do, the only way to be free would be to put my sick child into a special-care home. But that’s [...] not even a theoretical alternative. But otherwise I have no chance of getting out of this trap – independently.

Another respondent in this Type 3 group is a 64-year-old woman who rents part of what had been her family home, which she had to sell after her mother died. She reported that she struggles to find employment primarily out of a desire to be seen as a qualified and respectable person who is needed by others: ‘*The problem is really not to be needed*.’ She noted that she takes every opportunity to work, even when the job is low-paid and below her qualifications: ‘*The problem is not that I have no money, but that I have nothing to do*’. She added that she will not stop looking for work when she reaches retirement age, because her pension will neither improve her material situation nor give her the social recognition she wants. It thus appears that this respondent is trying to move forward while having no detailed plans for her future. Like the other two women, she feels alone in her struggles, lacking the social support and opportunity structures she would need to become successful. Finally, there are three
young men in this group (aged 18, 19, and 23) who left school early in life, and who are the sons of parents who are long-term unemployed or precariously employed. One of them completed his secondary school certificate in a programme mediated by the Job Centre, while the other two broke off their efforts to earn a certificate after the second try. The two men without certificates said they participate willingly in job creation measures, and rely on their supervisors for career advice: ‘Miss D. said she would look for my skills, so we found a skill in laying bricks. So I will just start to become a bricklayer’ (single male, aged 18).

All of the six respondents in this group said they hope their situation will improve, but that they are dependent on gatekeepers and opportunities to realise such changes. The networks of these individuals are close and economically homogeneous. Thus, these respondents lack bridging relationships into social circles that might offer inspiration and better opportunities.

Moreover, these respondents are restricted in their network activities by their responsibilities (children) and characteristics (old age, low educational level). They want to take advantage of social relationships, but they lack access to relationships that would meet their needs.

These respondents frequently mentioned the structural weaknesses of their rural region, noting that jobs and better educated people have been leaving the region since the beginning 1990s, and that there are few opportunities for those who remain. As a 19-year-old man said with despair: ‘Have you looked around here in F.? There are quite a lot of people doing nothing’. A 64-year-old woman explained: ‘I want to get up in the morning, dress up and go somewhere to do something. But this is really difficult here’.

Type 4: Precarious but resilient. The Type 4 group includes respondents who are able to set objectives for themselves and to describe their plans for pursuing these goals independently, or with social support (e.g., applying for further education or a job creation programme). In contrast to their Type 2 counterparts, the respondents in this group are still trying to improve their circumstances using self-directed strategies.

The individuals in this group have serious life crises in their biographies that changed their professional and private prospects. But in contrast to the Type 1 and 2 respondents, the Type 4 respondents are trying to build on their earlier successes instead of giving up. The three respondents in this group are two women aged 26 and 58 and a man aged 53. The younger woman’s employment biography was interrupted by two health shocks that forced her to abandon her plans to pursue vocational training in a large city about 200 km away. She reported that she is currently looking for opportunities in her home region that would allow her to remain close to her parents and her partner, but that she has so far found only temporary or insecure jobs, or has received offers from the Job Centre for jobs that are below her professional qualification level. She observed: ‘My experience is that, if somebody retires, the position will not be filled again or it will be changed into part-time work. So you do not have the chance to apply for this job or to get in’.

The 58-year-old woman reported that she has held literally dozens of different jobs since she lost her job following German reunification. She emphasised that she performed well in the positions she held, and that she has applied for jobs repeatedly: ‘Every job, I found myself. I’ve never got a job through the Job Centre – since 1990’.

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The 53-year-old man indicated that he is getting back on his feet again after experiencing a series of crises: job loss, divorce, the loss of his home, indebtedness, alcohol abuse, the loss of his driver’s license, and the loss of contact with two of his three children. He reported that with institutional support, he was able to stop drinking and to declare bankruptcy, adding, ‘I want to start again, now’. Noting that he has to work ‘at least 10 more years’ to earn an adequate pension, he said he plans to get his driver’s license back and to get a job.

The three respondents indicated that they find support and meaningful activities within their networks. Their networks are heterogeneous and relatively large (11, 10, and eight ties), and include family members, friends, and contacts at clubs and supportive institutions. However, their efforts to integrate socially have yet to succeed fully because they have been unable to find a secure job.

The older woman displayed self-efficacy by staying strong despite repeated setbacks. She said that as well as looking for employment, she remains active by going to the local cinema, the cultural club, the fitness centre, and volleyball team meetings. The following comment illustrates how receiving social recognition from other people boosts her self-esteem:

   have a bigger circle of friends, who say: ‘Tell us what’s happening (culturally), call us, we will join you’, and they call me: ‘Culture Birgit’

The younger woman indicated that she is active in the fire brigade, and has earned a licence to teach swimming to children that she has been unable to use because the swimming pool in her small town closed.

The 53-year-old man emphasised that having a job plays an important role in his recovery from alcoholism, and described his gratitude that a job creation programme he was participating in allowed to take a break and return after his alcohol rehabilitation: ‘Afterwards they took me again, because they said, if he sits at home now, he could relapse’.

While all of the respondents in this group acknowledged the disadvantages of living in a structurally weak rural region, they explained that they have not left because they have beneficial relationships with and obligations to people living there. The 58-year-old woman said she lives in a small town that she does not want to leave because her second husband has a good job and she feels comfortable there. The male respondent said he has a long-distance relationship with a partner who is living about 400 km away in a large city. He added that while he has thought about moving to this city to be with her and to improve his job opportunities, doing so would mean giving up being close to his daughter, who lives in the village with his ex-wife. The younger woman said she moved back to her rural home region because she needs social support from her parents and her partner to cope with the consequences of her accident. Thus, while the rural networks of these respondents represent important sources of social support; these relationships may reduce their chances of overcoming their impoverished circumstances by binding them to a structural weak region. The three respondents in this type have in common that they are able to name goals they want to reach and have an idea about what is necessary to be successful. All of them have already reached something in their lives and have the self-confidence to
be able to improve their situation. While they continue to pursue their goals, the success of their efforts will depend on the available job opportunities.

Table 3 sums up our qualitative results for each of the four types based on the six main categories of our analysis: the interviewees' perceptions of their situations, their biographies, their coping strategies, their future prospects, their levels of integration into social network structures, and their rural context.

Discussion and conclusion: Social networks and coping with poverty in rural areas

Our quantitative comparison of the networks of 49 individuals showed that network structures differ in urban and rural contexts. In line with the findings of Beggs et al. (1996), we found that rural networks are smaller and more closely connected than urban networks. Moreover, like previous studies (Fischer 1982; Hofferth and Iceland 1998), we found that rural networks have higher shares of family members than urban networks. Additionally, and in contrast to the results of a pioneering study by Petermann (2002) on urban and rural social networks in Germany, we observed that rural networks have smaller shares of supportive relations than urban networks. These conflicting findings may be attributable to the socio-structural weaknesses of the rural region we investigated, which include high levels of out-migration and a lack of public (social) services.

Our research confirmed our assumption that the social networks of the rural poor help them cope, but are also sources of stress (Marquardsen 2012a). The respondents who are integrated into various social circles beyond their family and closest friends have extended their scopes of action to adapt themselves to their constrained material circumstances (Type 2), or even to overcome poverty (Type 4). Participating in activities in more institutionalised social contexts like clubs, workplaces, or neighbourhood organisations increases the respondents’ feelings of self-efficacy and access to social support. The biographic analysis showed that when people perceive that they have few opportunities, their capacity to cope with their circumstances (engagement, self-esteem) and their motivation to extend the scope of their network are reduced.

Recent analyses of our dataset that looked at how the respondents cope with poverty and stigmatisation also found that more diverse, heterogeneous and structurally complex networks can provide people with social recognition, because such networks allow them to play different roles in various social contexts (Knabe et al. 2018b). For example, a person can demonstrate that she is a caring mother, a good friend or a volunteer in community services (Keim 2016; Klärner 2016, 2017; Klärner and Knabe 2016). Diverse networks open scopes for alternative actions and resorts that help avoiding stigmatisation (Knabe et al. 2018a). Feeling that they are important to others can help people to cope with the experience of poverty, as giving care, services or advice to others can make it easier for them to accept social support in return (Knabe 2016).

The biographic narratives of our interviewees suggest that social networks are weakened by structural changes in rural areas. Living in a structurally weakened rural region reduces a person’s chances of building and sustaining supportive relationships. Demographic processes like selective out-migration and the ageing and
Table 3: Summary of the qualitative analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of the situation</th>
<th>Coping strategy</th>
<th>Future prospects</th>
<th>Social networks</th>
<th>Rurality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1: Disappointment and resignation</td>
<td>situation seen as negative (resignation) due to external actors (disappointment)</td>
<td>accept life as it is without complaining too much about hardships and circumstances they are not able to change</td>
<td>biographic declines, negative experiences in the job market</td>
<td>institutional support experienced as meaningless and degrading, no participation in clubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2: Adaptation and maintenance</td>
<td>adaptation - trying to make the best of the situation</td>
<td>maintenance – holding their current level and trying to avoid further declines</td>
<td>heterogeneous, functionally differentiated networks</td>
<td>lack of opportunity structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3: Dependent but hopeful</td>
<td>precarious poverty is seen as common, willingness to change but lacking ideas for how to do so</td>
<td>indecisive – hoping for positive developments</td>
<td>close and economically homogeneous networks</td>
<td>own problems interpreted as attributable to living in a rural area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 4: Precarious but resilient</td>
<td>challenging but manageable</td>
<td>overcoming poverty using self-directed strategies</td>
<td>heterogeneous and relatively large networks</td>
<td>strategy depends on a minimum of formal and informal opportunities in the rural environment for getting involved in social circles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perception of the situation:
- Type 1: Disappointment and resignation
  - situation seen as negative (resignation) due to external actors (disappointment)
- Type 2: Adaptation and maintenance
  - accept life as it is without complaining too much about hardships and circumstances they are not able to change
- Type 3: Dependent but hopeful
  - precarious poverty is seen as common, willingness to change but lacking ideas for how to do so
- Type 4: Precarious but resilient
  - challenging but manageable

Coping strategy:
- retreat from a hostile environment
- adaptation - trying to make the best of the situation
- maintenance – holding their current level and trying to avoid further declines

Future prospects:
- not expecting any improvement in their situation
- indecisive – hoping for positive developments
- maintaining self-determination - staying strong and continuing to try

Social networks:
- small, dense, and family-centred networks
- heterogeneous, functionally differentiated networks
- close and economically homogeneous networks
- looking actively for supportive relationships and making use of them

Rurality:
- lack of opportunity structures
- institutional support experienced as meaningless and degrading, no participation in clubs
- own problems interpreted as attributable to living in a rural area
- lacking opportunity structures tied to the region by social obligations and embeddedness
shrinking of the population, together with administrative and economic shifts like business closures, the centralisation of public services, and the consolidation of administrative districts (Kreisgebietsreform), can lead to quantitative and qualitative declines in social networks. Network ties disappear when alters move away.

Our respondents have encountered serious difficulties in improving or even maintaining their living standards, not just because of poverty, but because of spatial marginalisation. Opportunity structures that would allow them to maintain and expand their relationships are lost when doctors, shops, restaurants, clubs, and public services move further away, as these were once places (or foci) where they could meet other people in the village. In particular, if highly qualified people with good ideas and prospects leave the region because they see better (job) opportunities elsewhere, they are no longer able to serve as bridging ties and providers of opportunities in the networks of those who remain behind. Marginalisation becomes more acute when there is a lack of bridging social capital (Putnam 2000), because social relationships and social institutions (Duncan 1996) enable people to cope with and look beyond the constraints of their rural environment.

We also found that social networks link the rural residents to their region. The respondents cited their network as an important reason why they had not left the rural area. For example, the Type 1 respondents reported receiving support from or being responsible for family members, while the Type 2 and 4 respondents indicated that they are socially integrated into the local context.

One limitation of our study is the small sample size. As our results are not representative, we cannot make any claims about how frequently the coping strategy types we have identified are used by the broader rural poor population. Nevertheless, we are confident that our typology is valid and represents typical constellations, and that it therefore highlights important aspects of the relationships between social networks, strategies for coping with poverty, and the specific characteristics of rural areas. Our typology has some similarities with the pioneering typology of poor people developed by Jahoda et al. (2017), which indicates that we have reached theoretical saturation. They also found that poor people tend to respond to their circumstances in different ways, including with resignation and despair, efforts to adapt, and disorientated apathy. Adding new cases to the sample would not have led to changes in the typology.

We have not analysed systematically gender differences in coping strategies and social networks but the cases of lone mothers in Type 3 support claims of the existing literature. This research finds that networks of mothers (e.g., Domínguez and Watkins 2003, Song 2012) and lone mothers in poverty (Niepel 1994; Albeck and Kaydar 2002; Keim 2018) have higher demands for support but lower capacities to develop networks. In a next step it would be interesting to analyse whether there are systematic gender differences in social networks and coping strategies.

Thus, we believe that our explorative study demonstrates that research on poverty in rural areas could benefit from taking into account the theoretical and methodological perspectives of sociological social network research. While our findings suggest that spatial opportunity structures or foci are important for the formation of supportive social networks, we do not yet know enough about the interplay of spatial infrastructures, personal predispositions, and the dynamics of social networks.
Note

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Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare.

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