

How Do Single Mothers Evaluate and Cope with Living in Rural Peripheries? Insights into the Interplay of Social and Spatial Disadvantage*

Sylvia Keim-Klärner 

*Thünen Institute of Rural Studies
Braunschweig
Germany*

Josef Bernard 

*Department of Local and Regional Studies, Institute of Sociology
Czech Academy of Sciences
Prague
Czech Republic*

Anja Decker 

*Department of Local and Regional Studies, Institute of Sociology
Czech Academy of Sciences
Prague
Czech Republic*

ABSTRACT When social and spatial disadvantages meet, are they doubled? Empirical studies have convincingly demonstrated that disadvantages tend to accumulate. Our paper advances this scholarship by focusing on the under-researched issue of social positions, subjective perspectives, and agency among single mothers in rural peripheries characterized by weak labor markets and accessibility issues. Drawing from problem-centered interviews conducted in eastern Germany and Czechia, we investigate how single mothers perceive and evaluate the local and regional opportunities available to them. Additionally, we employ the concept of coping to analyze how they navigate spatial constraints. Our findings reveal that while our respondents encounter various spatial limitations and some feel ensnared in cycles of accumulating disadvantages, they often view these constraints as balanced or outweighed by the advantages of their living environment. Our in-depth analysis identifies room to maneuver in coping with spatial disadvantages and sheds light on the costs and risks associated with different coping strategies. In conclusion, we argue that incorporating a perspective on agency and subjectivity into research on inequalities allows for a nuanced understanding of the interrelation of social and spatial disadvantages.

Introduction

The combination of weak regional economies, low population densities, and population decline has given rise to a number of structural problems in rural areas. These issues have been discussed in regional and rural studies for quite some time, including through the framework of peripheralization processes (Copus 2001; Grabski-Kieron et al. 2016). Despite the considerable interest in living conditions in rural

* This paper is based on the research project ‘Social disadvantage in rural peripheries in Eastern Germany and Czechia,’ funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG; Project Number: 391073923) and the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR; Grant Number: GF23-42452L). We are grateful to the members of the research team (Susann Bischof, Hana Daňková, Andreas Klärner, Martin Šimon, Annett Steinführer, and Christoph van Dülmen) and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful feedback that has significantly improved the quality of this paper. Address correspondence to Sylvia Keim-Klärner, Thünen Institute of Rural Studies, Bundesallee 64, Braunschweig 38116, Germany. Email: sylvia.keim-klarner@thuenen.de

peripheries, research that has asked the residents of such regions how they experience, deal with, and evaluate regional opportunities and constraints is relatively rare (Steinführer et al. 2016). Case studies have shown that while people living in rural areas undergoing population decline and infrastructure cutbacks often report experiencing various difficulties and constraints in their everyday lives, they also seem to be quite content with their living environment (Shucksmith 1996; Steinführer and Küpper 2013). In this paper we use the empirical example of single mothers living in rural peripheries in Czechia and in eastern Germany to further investigate these findings.

Our interest in comparing Czechia and eastern Germany was sparked by their shared state socialist past and the subsequent transition to market economies after 1990. Despite the similarities that can be identified between the two countries, it is important to acknowledge that each country had distinct experiences and partially different trajectories. In both cases, political system changes and economic restructuring, including the privatization of farmland and industrial production, resulted in a significant decline in jobs. However, whereas job losses in Czechia were often compensated for by employment in other sectors, eastern Germany experienced high unemployment rates during the 1990s and early 2000s (Laschewski 2009; Šimon and Bernard 2016). In both cases the dissolution of agricultural cooperatives and state-owned enterprises, which previously provided essential services such as childcare, healthcare, and transportation, had a severe impact on the local infrastructure. In eastern Germany, a considerable decline in the availability of services was observed, whereas in Czechia, the decline was more moderate, and also in smaller municipalities a greater number of amenities were retained (Bernard, Joukl, and Vítková 2022; Steinführer 2020). Eastern Germany experienced a significant net out-migration to western Germany during the 1990s and 2000s, whereas in Czechia, migration was more balanced. Nonetheless, rural peripheries in both cases experienced net out-migration (Ouředníček, Klsák, and Špačková 2019; Ouředníček, Novák, and Šimon 2013; Wiest and Leibert 2013). Additionally, an increase in spatial polarization and the marginalization of specific rural regions has been observed in both countries. Furthermore, such marginalized areas in eastern Germany and Czechia exhibit a comparable “rural bundle” of disadvantageous characteristics, concerning, among others education, employment, and access to services (Bernard and Keim-Klärner 2023).

Social disadvantages in rural areas have been addressed in particular by research on rural othering (Milbourne 1997), rural gender inequality (Bock 2010), and rural poverty (Shucksmith 2012). With regard to the interrelation of social and spatial disadvantages, some of these studies have pointed out that the situations of socially disadvantaged groups in accessible and peripheral rural areas differ (Bock 2010). In a recent review paper on rural poverty research, Bernard et al. (2019) emphasized the need to focus on locally specific factors of rural disadvantage, especially to investigate poverty in spatially marginalized rural areas, and to pay attention to the socio-cultural aspects of rural disadvantage. This argument also relates to the broader debate on the importance of recognizing the diversity of rural areas in general (Marsden et al. 2012). Our study aims to respond to these calls to take seriously the heterogeneity present in rural areas and

among rural dwellers by exploring how social and spatial disadvantages intertwine in the everyday lives of single mothers living in particularly spatially disadvantaged rural areas. We draw from empirical data collected in four peripheralized rural regions in Czechia and Eastern Germany. Cross-country comparisons are notably scarce in Europe, particularly in Central Europe. From an epistemological standpoint, such comparisons offer a broader context for comprehending complex phenomena and facilitate the identification of common patterns. Therefore, they promise a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between social and spatial disadvantages. While it is evident that single mothers constitute a highly heterogeneous group with varying social positions, available material and social resources, internalized norms, and everyday arrangements, stigmatization poses a significant challenge (Yorks 2022), and they face a heightened risk of poverty (Struffolino and Bernardi 2017). Knowing more about how they can take advantage of their living environment and handle the disadvantages in contexts of rural peripheralization is thus an important field of inquiry (Veréb et al. 2024) that has been significantly underexplored.

A common approach for dealing with the interrelation of spatial and social disadvantages is to study how different forms of social and spatial disadvantages accumulate and strengthen each other, resulting in a double disadvantage, a reduction in opportunities, and in the reproduction of poverty in poor places (Bernard et al. 2016; Cotter 2002; Németh 2019). While acknowledging the value of such studies, we go beyond this approach by advocating a focus on agency and subjectivity that allows us to investigate how single mothers living in peripheralized rural areas with weak labor markets and serious accessibility issues discuss their everyday lives, evaluate the local living conditions, and react to them.

Subjectivity and agency play important roles in research on disadvantage accumulation over the life course (Schafer, Shippee, and Ferraro 2009), but they are also worthy of consideration in research on socio-spatial inequalities. Carving out the subjective dimension of disadvantage can improve our understanding of the effects of disadvantage on individuals' lives. If people see structural conditions as major problems, they might react to them differently than they would if they considered them to be minor issues. The emphasis on agency allows us to identify the strategies and resources people use to adapt to and overcome disadvantages. To examine the respondents' subjective perceptions of their living conditions and to identify realms of agency under conditions of vulnerability and disadvantage, we use the concept of coping. As well as enabling us to understand the broad range of responses the single mothers gave when asked what it means to live in a rural periphery, this approach allows us to detect the various (often hidden) costs associated with their everyday arrangements.

This study sets out to answer the following research questions in order to shed light on the interplay of social and spatial disadvantages: (1) How do single mothers living in peripheralized rural areas with weak labor markets and serious accessibility issues evaluate the local living conditions and perceive spatial constraints? (2) Which strategies do single mothers employ to cope with spatial constraints, what are the costs of these strategies, and which resources do they rely on?

The paper is structured as follows: In the next section, we shortly outline some key aspects of the complexity of (rural) single motherhood and the respective

debates enfolded in social sciences. In the following section, we discuss the concepts relevant to analyses of both the living conditions in rural peripheries and the modes of dealing with the challenges associated with such spatial contexts: that is, regional opportunity structures and individual coping strategies. In the sample and methods section, we present the data, methods of data collection and analysis, and regional contexts of our qualitative study. In the following two results sections, we display single mothers' perceptions and evaluations of the spatial constraints they experience in their everyday lives and the coping strategies they have developed to meet these challenges. Finally, we discuss the results and present our conclusions.

Single Mothers: A Common Family Form, a Socially Disadvantaged Group and Diverse Lived Experiences

The one-parent family has become a common family form in recent decades. Both Czechia and eastern Germany saw an increase in single parenthood from the late 1960s on, with a sharp rise after the collapse of the state socialist system (Dudová 2009; Krüger and Micus 1999). In Germany, there are currently 1.6 million single parents, that is, mothers or fathers who share a household with their underage children but who do not live with a partner. About one in five families with children under age 18 is a single-parent family. Single parents are mostly women; in Germany, only around 12% of single parents are men (Statistisches Bundesamt 2018). Similar, albeit slightly lower numbers apply for Czechia, with currently around one in seven families with children being a single-parent family. Also, in Czechia these families are mainly headed by women, who account for more than 80% of the single-parent families (Palonciová et al. 2019).

A legacy of the socialist past in both societies is a high female employment rate and a predominant dual-earner family model. However, the majority of the responsibility for household and childcare tasks remains with women (Hašková, Maříková, and Uhde 2009; Kreyenfeld 2006). Nevertheless, even during the socialist era, there were notable differences in family policies and social norms between eastern Germany and Czechia. In eastern Germany a continuous dual-earner model emerged, with women returning to work early after childbirth, supported by public childcare institutions for children below three years of age. In contrast, an interrupted dual-earner model emerged in Czechia, based on generous parental leave regulations and limited public childcare options for children under the age of three. Both countries also diverged in their common beliefs and public discourses regarding the impact of women's employment and public childcare on young children. Following the collapse of the socialist regime, eastern Germany maintained high rates of public childcare provision and social norms that were supportive of working mothers with younger children. However, given the limited employment opportunities and high unemployment rates, part-time work and parental leave increased. In Czechia, policies promoting parental leave were further extended, and subsidies to childcare facilities for children under age three were strongly reduced. This contributed to the prevalence of the interrupted dual-earner model (Haskova and Klenner 2010; Kalíšková and Münich 2023; Mätzke 2019; Trappe, Pollmann-Schult, and Schmitt 2015).

Building on statistical data comparing the group of single-parent families to two-parent families can provide evidence of single parents' vulnerability to social disadvantage (Struffolino and Bernardi 2017) based on indicators such as household income (Neuberger, Schutter, and Preisner 2019) and deprivation in multiple spheres of life, including poorer health (Chiu et al. 2017). An analysis conducted across 45 OECD countries showed that single parents have higher poverty rates than coupled parents, and that the differences in the poverty rates of these groups are greatest in the US but are also relatively large in Germany and Czechia (Maldonado 2017). Yet, while the vulnerabilities related to single parenthood are well documented, for the perspective we take in this paper, it is important to emphasize that single parents form a heterogeneous group with a broad range of living and employment arrangements over time (Zagel 2014).

Perceptions of single motherhood and single-parent families are ambivalent in both countries. It is associated with both poverty and social disadvantage, as well as with female empowerment and resilience (Nestmann and Stiehler 1998; Schutter 2015). During the state socialist era, single-parent families benefited from policies that supported women's employment. However, also negative images of single-parent families persisted, depicting them as "broken," incomplete, or deficient (Drauschke 2002; Dudová 2009). In recent decades single-parent families have become a more common family form, accompanied by a rise in societal acceptance of single motherhood. Concurrently, single mothers encounter discrimination in the competitive labor market. In both countries traditional family discourses have re-emerged, including a critique of divorce and single motherhood. Scholars have contested that mothers, and particularly single mothers, have no 'lobby' and rarely articulate their interests and needs (Chromková Manea and Rabušic 2019; Dudová 2009; Krüger and Micus 1999; Wieland 2012).

Studies on the experiences of (single) motherhood in rural areas are surprisingly rare, and those that exist have tended to focus on single issues, such as mental illness and health (Hine, Maybery, and Goodyear 2018), family norms (Nelson 2006), or economic vulnerability (Porterfield 2001). Other studies have examined the broader category of non-metropolitan single mothers but have not focused explicitly on single motherhood in rural contexts (Brown and Lichter 2004). At the same time, we know from research on rural gender inequalities that women face particularly high risks of exclusion and precarity (Bock, Kovacs, and Shucksmith 2015). Among the factors that have been cited as contributing to this rural gender gap are the greater share of care work done by women, the gendered structure of rural labor markets, and the fact that women in rural areas face greater mobility disadvantages than men (Decker 2019a; Schumacher and Kunz 2016). There is also evidence that while gender relations in rural spaces are changing, these communities remain male dominated (Donkersloot 2012).

Thus, our focus on the subjective perceptions and the coping strategies of single mothers in rural peripheries not only adds to the broad body of research on single parenting by providing a particular spatial perspective, it also complements existing studies on both rural gender inequalities and rural social disadvantages in a broader sense by focusing on a social group whose experiences are under-researched.

Living in a Rural Periphery: Regional Opportunity Structures, Agency, and Individual Coping Strategies

Peripheral rural areas are characterized by the absence of large urban centers; weak economic conditions, poor access to services, and detrimental demographic changes, such as the out-migration of younger and skilled people, population decline, and population aging. They are distant from the centers of economic, political, and symbolic power spatially, psychologically, and in terms of their influence (Steinführer et al. 2016). The effects of the structural features of a place or region on the lives of the inhabitants can be described using the concept of opportunity structures. This term refers to 'the panoply of markets, institutions, and systems that act on and convert personal attributes into outputs affecting social advancement' (Galster and Killen 1995:9). There is a growing body of research on the consequences for residents of living in a rural periphery with restricted opportunity structures. As well as experiencing economic disadvantages in the form of, for example, lower wages (Bernard and Safr 2019) and a tension between attachment to a place and the inability to find an appropriate job (Paulgaard 2012), researchers have also pointed out that rural residents suffer from 'opportunity deprivation' in terms of access to services of general interest (Bernard 2018).

The finding that a cumulative causation of disadvantage results in the mutual reinforcement of spatial and social disadvantages is in line with the observation by Tickamyer and Duncan (1990) that the uneven distribution of opportunities in space drives inequality production and reproduction. It also resonates with Bourdieu's argument that 'site effects' reproduce social inequality (Bourdieu 2010). However, as we noted in the introduction, claims that the effects of living in a rural periphery are mainly negative remain contested. Theoretical reflections on the interrelation of structure and agency provide arguments against the assumption that there is a simple accumulation of disadvantages on the individual level. The concept of agency stresses that although individuals act within their given spatial and social structures, their actions are not fully determined by these structures (Rapport and Overing 2000). It highlights the capacity of individuals to act and to make choices within societal structures, to actively deal with restrictions and constraints, and to (re)shape these structures (Mische 2011). In other words, people's agency provides them with room to maneuver in striving to achieve their goals (Ejrnaes, Larsen, and Müller 2020). Thus, individuals' practices can produce, form, or rearrange social space(s), which can, in turn, reduce, compensate for, or increase their spatial disadvantages. The concept of agency has faced criticism for overemphasizing individual responsibility and neglecting structural constraints, power dynamics, social norms, and interpersonal relations that influence agency. This critique is encapsulated in the idea of bounded agency, which views agency as a socially situated process (Evans 2002; Shanahan and Hood 2000). Our work averts an overly optimistic take on agency by explicitly incorporating into our analysis the question of the hidden costs and dependence on unequally distributed resources that accompany the everyday enactment of agency.

To examine more closely how (notions of) agency influence the approaches the respondents use to deal with their spatial constraints, and thus to better understand

their subjective perceptions and evaluations, we apply the socio-psychological concept of coping. This concept was developed to study ‘the cognitive and behavioral efforts made to master, tolerate, or reduce’ stressful experiences (Folkman and Lazarus 1980:223) and has been applied to various aspects of life (e.g., most prominently to health, but also to coping with poverty). We apply this concept to the experience of living in a rural periphery. Notably, the process of coping is related to behaviors as well as to cognitions, and it involves developing strategies for modifying situations, such as changing the causes of stress (problem-focused coping); strategies for regulating emotions, such as getting involved in distracting activities; and strategies for managing the meaning of a situation, such as drawing on values and beliefs (cognitive coping) (Folkman and Moskowitz 2004).

Previous research on the effectiveness and consequences of employing different coping strategies has provided mixed results and suggests that coping strategies can only be evaluated in specific contexts and in relation to specific aims (Folkman and Moskowitz 2004). Research on poverty has shown that there is considerable room to maneuver in applying different coping strategies that help to compensate for or reduce the detrimental effects of living in poverty (Ejrnaes, Larsen, and Müller 2020). Research on rural areas has provided insights into the variety of strategies people use to actively deal with the limited availability and accessibility of jobs and services (Bernard et al. 2016); and the agency of women who combine wage and child care work (Decker 2019a). There is some evidence that people with lower socio-economic status are not only more likely to experience stressful events, they also have fewer coping resources and use less effective coping strategies (Eckenrode 1991; Lee, Park, and Kwon 2021). It also been argued that certain cognitive coping strategies play a role in the reproduction of poverty. For example, disadvantaged people may adapt their needs and preferences to their limited resources by claiming that they are getting along well because they do not need much anyway (Klärner and Knabe 2019). While such forms of adaptation are said to bear the risk of hindering people from addressing problems and from achieving upward social mobility (Sieber 2018), they can also provide life satisfaction, for example, when social security recipients consider material wealth to be less important than health or happiness and praise their own frugality or self-restraint (Hirsland 2016).

Sample and Methods

This paper is an outcome of a larger qualitative research project that has focused on the everyday experiences and agency of three social groups (single parents, individuals experiencing labor market disadvantages, and elderly people living alone) residing in four rural peripheralized regions in Czechia and eastern Germany (Bor and West-Jeseniky in Czechia; Mansfelder Land and Vorpommern in eastern Germany). These regions are characterized by a number of similar challenges. They have low population densities and, within each country, rank low in terms of economic performance, income levels, employment opportunities, and access to public and private services.

The focus of this paper is solely on single mothers. Although we recruited respondents based on an inclusive notion of single parenthood, searching for persons

sharing a household with at least one dependent child under age 18 but not with a partner, almost all respondents we were able to interview were single mothers; two respondents were single fathers, and two single grandmothers with custody of their grandchildren.

In the framework of our qualitative research, we conducted personal problem-centered interviews (Witzel and Reiter 2012) through which we gained rich accounts of the residents' daily lives, mobility, social relations and interactions, perceptions of the availability and accessibility of opportunity structures, and practices of accessing opportunities. For this paper, we consider all interviewed single mothers, who form a sample of 30 interviews. All respondents were recruited based on theoretical and snowball sampling aiming at heterogeneity in age, number and age of children, education, employment situation, and their place of living. We recruited accordingly in both villages and small cities, in kindergartens and social service institutions, via direct contact in the streets, ads and flyers, and via the internet. We did not place any restrictions on the form of custody the participants have. However, in many cases, the father was not regularly involved in childcare. In other cases, the parents had specific arrangements, such as arrangements in which the children are living with their father every second week or weekend. While the interviewed single mothers are a rather heterogeneous group in terms of their age and qualifications, most of them reported holding low-paid or unstable jobs, and many are trained or work in female-dominated professions such as education, care, or cleaning. Some selected sample characteristics are presented in the [supporting information](#).

Our analyses are based on thematic coding of the interview transcripts (Flick 2009) and the preparation of individual portraits for each case (Rodríguez-Dorans and Jacobs 2020). In particular, we focus on narrations on local and regional opportunities and constraints and on spatio-temporal practices for managing everyday life. To analyze in depth what living in a rural periphery means to the single mothers in our sample, we proceeded in two steps: (1) we explored the respondents' accounts of their daily arrangements and practices and analyzed how they perceive and evaluate their spatial context and spatial constraints in terms of the availability and accessibility of local and regional opportunities; and (2) we formed categories of their practices in dealing with their local and regional contexts and assessed the costs they involve, being sensitive as to how their agency and ability to cope are shaped by structural constraints, societal norms, power relations, and social networks. These practices could be easily grouped within the coping framework by Folkman and colleagues, which therefore guides our presentation.

This approach enables us to draw a complex picture of how opportunities are perceived, evaluated, used, shaped, and created and allows us to investigate the ambiguity in how people who face social and spatial disadvantages perceive their living situations and social positions.

Single Mothers' Perceptions and Evaluations of the Local and Regional Environment

When talking about their spatial environment and the role of spatial structures in their everyday life, all of the single mothers we interviewed in all four regions indicated

that they are aware of spatial constraints and cited various problems they encounter in their everyday life—regardless of their financial situation, their care arrangement, or if they are living in a village or a small city.

The spatial constraint highlighted most often is limited job opportunities. For example, the interviewees reported that there are few locally available jobs or that the jobs that are available are seasonal, precarious, and not well-paid. Their care duties make it difficult for them to commute to more distant job opportunities. In localities with industrial production sites, the respondents problematized the obstacles posed by the prevailing shift work systems:

A lot of [employment] here in the area is with shift work. (...) So it's very difficult to find family-friendly jobs here, to find someone who says, 'Okay, we'll make sure you are able to manage with your kids' or something. So, you're either there or you're not. (1_DE, 2 children, aged 6 and 7, lower secondary education, unemployed)

With a few exceptions, our interviewees reported facing repeated periods of unemployment or working in jobs below their qualification levels. As well as noting that the local work environment ignores the needs of caregivers, some of the women reported that (potential) employers did not employ them after learning that they are single mothers.

Going beyond the sphere of employment, the interviewees also discussed the spatial constraints they face in accessing the services in their area that are important for managing both their everyday needs and their family activities—for example, childcare facilities, shops, leisure time activities, and healthcare facilities. In the interviews, the women frequently described such services as insufficient or of poor quality, how they need to renounce some of them, or how the need to travel complicates their family activities:

There's nothing here at all. We have to go terribly far to see a doctor. There's no culture or anything like that. When I really want to go to the cinema with the kids, I have to go to [a regional town] and figure out if I can catch the last train and get home. (1_CZ, 2 children, aged 10 and 13, no car available)

Overall, when speaking about the challenges of being a single mother in a rural periphery, most of the women focused on practical issues associated with managing everyday life and rarely talked about experiences of discrimination or stigmatization. When disclosing that neighbors or other community members asked tendentious questions or made negative comments about their single motherhood, most ascribed such incidents to the individuals involved being older or having outdated gender norms. Only one Czech respondent reports that her single parenthood makes her the target of gossip in her village but also states that the many supportive local contacts she is engaged with allow her to ignore this. The interviewed women did not see negative attitudes and stigmatizing behaviors towards single mothers as general features of rural life. In a similar vein, they perceived discrimination in the labor market as ubiquitous and not a rural-specific.

Although reports of experiencing spatial constraints are present in all of the accounts of the interviewed women, and although many describe their lives at

times as stressful or boring, the respondents differ strongly in their perceptions of how severe and burdensome these constraints are. What is more, they also usually did not present themselves as being in general discontented with living in their place of residence. Notably, they often highlighted the spatial advantages of their place of residency, such as having opportunities to relax (nature, calmness, own garden); ample space (no neighbors close by, no complaints about being too noisy); opportunities to engage in low-cost leisure activities (hiking, cycling, playing in the garden); access to forests and a garden that allow for self-provisioning (collecting mushrooms, cutting wood, raising chickens); and a safe environment to let their children play or go out and meet friends without adult supervision at an early age, which reduces childcare demands. From this perspective, living in a rural periphery offers the single mothers in our sample many opportunities they consider beneficial:

When my young son wants to go out, I'll say, 'Yeah, go.' I say, 'Just tell me what parts of the village you are you going to be in.' Because it is quite stretched, isn't it? I say, 'Which places do you think you're going to be so that I can find you in case I want something?' In town, I can't imagine letting that kid out. (2_CZ, 1 child, aged 8, no car available)

The accounts highlight many qualities of rural life that have been extensively discussed in the literature on the rural idyll and its formative effects (Shucksmith 2018; Valentine 1997). We will return to the importance of the perceived beneficial aspects of rural life in the following section, in which we examine the arrangements the respondents reported making to deal with their spatial context. We apply the concept of coping strategies to help explain why the respondents' accounts of facing spatial constraints do not lead them to feel more discontented with living in a rural periphery. Thus, this concept allows us to identify a broader and more complex set of factors that includes but goes beyond the regulative power of the rural idyll.

Coping with Living in a Rural Periphery: How Single Mothers Deal with Spatial Constraints

In the following, we present the five major coping strategies for dealing with limited job opportunities and access to services we identified in the empirical material. Applying the categorization of Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) presented above to the data, the first three strategies can be considered problem-focused strategies, while the last two can be seen as cognitive strategies. It is important to note that applying coping strategies can be more or less demanding, and at the end, the strategies can solve a problem or fail. Therefore, we will go beyond merely describing strategies and instead also look at their outcomes, the resources the strategies depend on, and the costs they produce, with a special focus on the respondents' financial resources and childcare arrangements. This allows us to avoid simply assuming that the respondents' abilities to employ certain coping strategies necessarily mitigate their hardships or disadvantages. Finally, we are aware of the limitations of exploring socially stigmatized or disapproved coping strategies—such as

regulating emotions via violence, alcohol, or drug use—using interviews, which are not explicitly designed for this aim. Therefore, such strategies were not part of this investigation.

Enlarging Activity Spaces Via Mobility

Being mobile and traveling to more distant places is an important strategy for overcoming spatial constraints and enlarging activity spaces. The interviewees indicated that mobility enables them to reach more distant job opportunities and services and helps them in managing their family life. Most respondents have a car, and many explain that they could not manage their everyday life without a car:

If you look at me now, I actually need a car; I'm hooked on it. If my car breaks down, I have a serious problem. (2_DE, 3 children, aged 8 to 17, full-time employed)

Some women revealed how they were able to improve their social position by enlarging their activity spaces via mobility and accessing (better paid) job opportunities by traveling farther away. Yet, enlarging activity spaces via car mobility comes with costs and requires resources. Respondents with limited financial means talked about the economic challenges associated with car mobility, such as securing enough money for gas or repairs, and their strategies of being mobile despite restricted financial resources, that is, using the car only when it is absolutely necessary, making sure to always keep enough fuel for important trips, or relying on friends' support in repairing the car. Yet, car mobility offers, despite its costs, also access to services that help save money, such as food banks or discounters.

Having enough money to own, maintain, and regularly use a car does not per se guarantee to mitigating spatial disadvantage to a subjectively satisfying degree. To our respondents, extensive mobility to access jobs or services has its limits in the constrained time resources that come along with their care responsibilities. Consequently, women with both greater and fewer financial resources face similar limitations in the time resources they can activate for mobility. Many women therefore report finding traveling time-consuming and stressful and apply strategies to reduce the need to travel, such as taking turns with other parents in driving their children to activities.

Among the respondents that do not have a car available, some lead a rather local life. While especially those living in small towns state that they have what they need available locally, others feel trapped in a negative circle: in their locality they cannot earn enough money to buy a car, while without a car, they are not able to find a better-paid job. Yet, some single mothers in our sample are extensively mobile without having a car—by getting lifts or by using public transport. Lifts are often received on a daily basis or multiple times a week, for example, lifts by workmates to travel to work. Relying on other people to provide lifts, however, requires adapting to the lift-giver's time schedule and rewarding the lift-giver, producing, therefore, considerable, yet negotiable costs that might not necessarily require monetary payment. Using public transport, in contrast, is perceived as expensive and contingent on the local transport systems' quality and compatibility with

one's own travel needs. Many respondents talked about high travel costs and time intensive trips, when a short visit to a doctor can easily fill half a day, and the stress they experience when traveling with small children. To deal with these demands, some women use strategies such as planning their trips strategically and organizing complex trip chains of appointments, shopping, and leisure activities. In sum, enlarging activity spaces by being mobile can be a very successful coping strategy, while especially for those respondents with limited financial resources and limited childcare or mobility support, this strategy not only solves problems but creates new challenges based on the costs it entails.

Activating Social Support

The relevance of social support for coping with spatial constraints has already been highlighted in the previous section; however, such support goes far beyond help in being mobile. The respondents reported many incidents when family, friends, and acquaintances had assisted them in securing employment or had provided childcare support, thereby enabling them to combine care and income-related work despite the necessity of long travel times. Experiences of being resented for being a single mother and the resulting denial of support were not reported. In particular, local ties were perceived as helpful, as local individuals were able to provide information on local employment opportunities as well as flexible childcare support. Local associations facilitate access to leisure activities and provide locations and opportunities to get to know people and to socialize, which are crucial for activating social support. A few respondents engaged in voluntary work or local clubs, contributing to the expansion of local offerings and services and to their own local integration:

I then got involved in church and did a lot with the children. So, Easter or Thanksgiving, we still do that here in the village. And gradually, through my voluntary work and, yes, by being active in the village, I was able to integrate myself here. (...) I've actually managed to make a lot of things happen in the village, and yes, that's benefiting me now as well. (3_DE, 1 child, aged 8, full-time employed, car available)

Activating social support was a strategy used by respondents irrespective of their financial resources, yet for those with limited finances, activating support was an important strategy to step out of negative circles emerging from a small budget and spatial constraints.

The respondents' childcare arrangements were characterized by varying degrees of the father's involvement, from no contact to regular childcare arrangements. Viewed together, the narrations highlight that fathers' involvement in caregiving is neither considered self-evident nor sufficient, posing challenges in motivating and organizing it. At the same time, traditional gender roles that assign the main share of care work to mothers limit women's agency in activating fathers' support in care. If fathers paid financial support, this made a significant difference to many families, and those receiving alimonies were financially better off. In contrast to the role of the fathers, some respondents emphasized that they were enabled to work because they could

rely on their mothers and mothers-in-law to provide childcare support. Yet, this form of support was not available for all respondents due to distance, limited time, health issues, or conflictual relationships.

Activating and using social support to cope with spatial constraints is not without associated costs. These encompass the time and effort invested in the formation, maintenance, and nurturing of social relationships. However, the demanding schedules of some mothers do not permit the requisite time. Furthermore, the obligations inherent in the norms of reciprocity, which demand that those who receive support provide support in return, give rise to additional costs. When expectations are not met or support is not repaid, relationships involving reciprocal exchanges can give rise to conflicts. Rather than providing support and relief, they can instead result in additional constraints and increased feelings of stress. Thus, activating social support was not a strategy used by all of the women who were interviewed. Some presented themselves as ‘lone fighters’ who do not want to rely on anybody, do not want to get involved in community life, and do not ask for support. The individual agency to activate support is also constrained by the resources available in the social networks, particularly those provided by the family of origin. While some families can offer significant material support, such as lending money or providing housing, this is unattainable for others.

Seizing and Creating Opportunities

Another strategy for dealing with spatial constraints applied by the respondents was a certain readiness to seize opportunities whenever they turned up, or to create new opportunities. One respondent had applied for a local job, arguing that it made combining family and full-time employment easier, although it did not align with her initial career plans. Regarding access to services, a mother of four has her children enrolled in the local karate class, adding that taking each child to an extra activity further away is logistically impossible for her. The ability to identify and seize opportunities helps lower expenses and deal with limited financial means. In particular, when reflecting on their food provisioning strategies, our interviewees displayed a rather strong notion of agency, stating, for example, that they are able to save money through self-provisioning and combining commuting to work with shopping in larger discount supermarkets. Some respondents reported creating opportunities; by arranging with the kindergarten teacher to bring their children to class earlier in order to get to work on time, or by engaging in local sports or cultural clubs and organizing courses and activities, which not only expands the activities available to their own children but creates opportunities for other families as well.

Coping by seizing and creating opportunities also requires resources and comes with costs, that is, having the capacity to adapt to new situations, make compromises, or rework initial plans; forging local ties to learn about and access opportunities; and having the time, energy, and social skills needed to negotiate with people and convince them to provide support or to join in organizing activities. Thus, this strategy was not used by all respondents—especially less or not at all by those who report to be (currently) in a particularly demanding life situation, for

example, involving their own or their children's ill health or disabilities. However, it was used by the interviewed women regardless of their financial situation and their childcare arrangement.

Framing Constraints as Acceptable Trade-Offs

As we outlined above, many respondents talked in a differentiated way about local and regional opportunities, identifying the advantages of their locality for some life contexts (e.g., housing, free time activities, or supportive contacts), while stressing a lack of opportunities in their community for other contexts. Accordingly, the respondents' evaluations of their spatial constraints and spatial advantages display an awareness of the plurality of spheres of life that make up their everyday experiences. In our material, we found various examples in which the respondents' reports of negative aspects were narratively balanced with references to positive aspects of life in the locality—and vice versa.

The wages [are] still lower (...) It would be nice if there were a bit more cultural things here (...) but, I think, at the end of the day, everything is actually good here in the area, isn't it? I mean, I can still send my children to the lake in the dark without having to worry. (2_DE, 3 children aged 8 to 17, full-time employed, car available)

Many respondents framed their constraints as acceptable trade-offs by placing them in 'dialogue' with the benefits of their place of residence. When assessing the quality and the challenges of managing life in their locality, the interviewed women indicated that they consider not just their own needs, interests, and preferences but also those of their children. Balancing the different needs of household members requires them to make compromises. The single mothers often stressed that they do their best to provide for their children's needs and are therefore prepared to renounce their own interests and aspirations, at least temporarily. For example, one woman said she wants her children to engage in leisure time activities outside of their place of residence and thus accepts the additional personal stress associated with needing to pick them up. In contrast, only one single mother stated openly that living in a rural area (with teenage children) is mainly good for her and justified this stance with the argument that her children will do well only if she is doing well herself. Such an explicit expression of the notion of self-care was rare in the accounts, as most respondents stressed that they focus on the welfare of their children and consider the corresponding strains and costs an unavoidable component of good mothering.

Commitment to Modesty and Frugality

Some respondents commented that while the opportunities available in their region may seem insufficient to some people, they fully meet their own needs. They described themselves as undemanding individuals who value what is available, get along well with little, and are able to adapt. For example, one woman who described the lack of choice of consumer goods and of quality services in her community said that she has no time for other things anyway, as she finds childcare very demanding. However, she also stressed

that she does not plan to move elsewhere because she does not lack anything really important. She explained her attitude as follows:

If I were any kind of ambitious, if I wanted something out of the kids, something more, yeah, it would bother me here, yeah. But me, I grew up here in this, too, so I guess everybody finds what they want to do, yeah. (3_CZ, 3 children under age 10, higher secondary education, part-time employed)

In addition, in some narrations an ideal of not having or not expressing excessive demands came up. For example, a factory worker described herself as a person who tends to be satisfied with a low salary as long as she enjoys her job, while another respondent stated that if she experienced a loss of income, she could easily adapt her standard of living by moving to a smaller apartment. Other women explained that they have been used to a modest and frugal way of life because they have grown up in a village. From the perspective of coping theories, this stated correspondence of opportunities and personal needs can be interpreted as an outcome of an effective cognitive coping process: that is, negative emotions are regulated by accepting the inevitable and by managing the meaning of a situation by, for example, drawing on values such as modesty and frugality when having to deal with limited resources. Nevertheless, this strategy was not only used by respondents with restricted financial means. Some respondents related frugality explicitly to rural life, considering frugality as a common and accepted strategy in their region. Moreover, the women in our study who expressed a commitment to modesty and frugality at the same time also reported employing problem-focused strategies for overcoming spatial constraints.

When Social and Spatial Disadvantages Meet in the Everyday Lives of Single Mothers: Discussion

The challenges faced by many single mothers in our study have been described in previous studies as limited financial and time resources and difficulties in combining family management, care work, and income production (Alsarve 2017; Nieuwenhuis and Maldonado 2017). From a purely structural perspective, one could assume that such challenges are intensified by living in a rural periphery with a weak labor market and services and facilities that are insufficient and/or difficult to access, leading to an accumulation of social and spatial disadvantages. We did indeed find indications for vicious circles, for example, when a weak local labor market, gendered job choices, and opportunities impede finding a well-paid job close by, while limited financial resources and caring responsibilities make it difficult to travel to more distant job opportunities. The women we interviewed used and depended on a wide range of services, institutions, and facilities in their daily lives, and many found it difficult to access them for time and financial reasons. Thus, living in a rural periphery challenged their social participation.

However, the conclusion that spatial constraints uniformly lead to subjective perceptions of (multiple) disadvantages proved to be too simple. Two counterarguments dispute the validity of this assumption and call for a more nuanced explanation. (1) most respondents indicated that they see their living environment as having both spatial

advantages and spatial disadvantages and that they are generally content with living in what they consider to be a good environment for raising children. Milbourne (2014) made a similar observation in a study of poor people living in the British countryside. The interviews showed that material and sociocultural aspects are often disconnected, as the respondents placed more importance on community belonging and place attachment than on material hardship. In a study of rural motherhood under conditions of precarity, Decker (2019a) found that the perception that the well-being of children is better supported by growing up in a rural than an urban environment provides rural mothers with a sense of agency. (2) Our respondents reported employing various coping strategies that enabled them to create room to maneuver and to compensate for the perceived shortcomings of the regional infrastructure. They displayed notions of agency emerging from the local and regional spatial features, and many reported being satisfied with their overall life situation. The strategies the respondents employed were as varied as the resources they used, and they found manifold ways to buffer, compensate, or overcome restrictions in dealing with spatial disadvantages. At the same time, we also found that available resources were sometimes considered to be of little use (e.g., financial resources did not help for dealing with time squeeze) or even burdensome in the coping process, when, for example, supportive ties were perceived as conflictual. Yet, social support contributed to successfully applying problem-focused coping strategies, which echoes the relevance of social support for single mothers found in previous studies (Keim 2018). Furthermore, participation in local clubs in accordance with the social capital perspective put forth by Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (2000) provided a foundation for the activation of social support, facilitated coping with spatial limitations, and expanded local service offerings. In sum, our findings support the argument that the relationships between spatial and social structures are complex, and to better understand the social consequences of peripheralization processes, we need to closely investigate the whole range of creative approaches individuals use in dealing with their social situations.

Although a comparison between rural and urban coping strategies is beyond the scope of this paper, the coping strategies reported here have certain features specific to rural contexts. In particular, mobility is central to the first coping strategy presented. Additionally, studies of rural community life have emphasized the importance of reciprocal strategies based on intergenerational and kin-related solidarity (Meert 2000) and contacts with neighbors (Sherman 2009), which can facilitate the activation of social support. Moreover, the respondents described certain activities considered frugal, such as household food production or the reuse of materials, as common features of village life. Such activities may be easier to adopt and to sustain in rural areas, as they require access to land or storage space (Decker 2019b; Jehlička et al. 2021).

Notably, the experiences of our respondents and their coping strategies are not fundamentally different depending on whether they are living in the studied Czech or eastern German regions. Despite somewhat different trajectories after the collapse of the state socialist regime, despite country differences in income levels and social security systems, differences in family policies, and partially also in work-care arrangements, the respondents' experiences and challenges when residing in rural peripheries are strikingly similar. The interviewed women also deploy similar ways to cope with spatial constraints. These findings indicate the importance of including a

sub-national perspective on issues of social disadvantages while paying attention to locally specific factors and the residents' agency.

Conclusion

Addressing the under-researched issue of the social situations of single mothers in rural peripheries not only added to our understanding of the challenges many members of this heterogeneous social group face; it also provided more general findings on the interplay of social and spatial disadvantages. Our analyses showed that spatial constraints could indeed lead to experiences of severe deprivation for people who already face the risk of multiple social disadvantages due to their gender, parenthood, partnership status, care responsibilities, and financial means. We therefore advocate taking spatial contexts seriously in researching social disadvantage. While our results do not refute the claim that social and spatial disadvantages accumulate, they go beyond it. Our findings support the argument that integrating a perspective on agency and subjectivity into research on disadvantage allows for a more differentiated understanding of the interrelation of social and spatial disadvantages. By focusing on how the single mothers in our study perceive their residential environment, what types of spatial opportunities and barriers have become salient in their lives, and how they deal with constraints in their everyday lives, we showed that they are generally satisfied with their place of residence, and many of them perceive having room to maneuver in dealing with spatial constraints.

The wide range of coping strategies the rural single mothers in our sample apply (and often combine) to compensate for what they lack has ambiguous effects. We showed that it is crucial to understand these strategies not just as convenient ways to adapt to local conditions and to overcome potential disadvantages. The interviews also indicated that these strategies may not always have the desired effects, as they might provide notions of agency without reducing the level of precarity and structural disadvantage, and as they are often associated with significant costs and potential risks. These costs are not just financial, as there are also social, physical, and psychological costs associated. The concept of coping helped to spell out in detail the costs, resources, and ambivalences involved. Learning more about individual perceptions and room to maneuver can provide grounds for more fine-grained political initiatives supporting socially disadvantaged persons living in peripheralized rural areas together with more general policies against poverty, spatial disadvantages, and the discrimination of women and persons providing (sole) care to their children.

Conflict of Interest Statement. No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data Availability Statement. The data used in this paper is qualitative interview data (transcripts of audio files) and is not publicly available due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

References

- Alsarve, Jenny. 2017. "Working It Out: Strategies to Reconcile Work and Family among Swedish Lone Mothers." *Families, Relationships and Societies* 6(3):325–40.

- Bernard, Josef. 2018. "Rural Quality of Life. Poverty, Satisfaction and Opportunity Deprivation in Different Types of Rural Territories." *European Countryside* 10(2):191–209.
- Bernard, Josef, Sandra Contzen, Anja Decker, and Mark Shucksmith. 2019. "Poverty and Social Exclusion in Diversified Rural Contexts." *Sociologia Ruralis* 59(3):353–68.
- Bernard, Josef, Anja Decker, Renata Mikešová, and Kateřina Vojtíšková. 2016. "Living and Dealing with Limited Opportunities: Social Disadvantage and Coping Strategies in Rural Peripheries." *Sociální Studia/Social Studies* 13(2):29–53.
- Bernard, Josef, Miroslav Joukl, and Lucie Vítková. 2022. *Vybavenost venkovských obcí: vývoj, význam, využití*. Praha: Sociologický ústav Akademie věd ČR.
- Bernard, Josef and Sylvia Keim-Klärner. 2023. "Disadvantaged and Disadvantaging Regions: Opportunity Structures and Social Disadvantage in Rural Peripheries." *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 114(5):463–78.
- Bernard, Josef and Jiří Šafr. 2019. "The Other Disadvantaged Neighbourhood: Income Related Effects of Living in Rural Peripheries." *Housing Studies* 34(6):946–73.
- Bock, Bettina. 2010. *Personal and Social Development of Women in Rural Areas of Europe*. Brussels: European Parliament.
- Bock, Bettina, Katalin Kovacs, and Mark Shucksmith. 2015. "Changing Social Characteristics, Patterns of Inequality and Exclusion." Pp. 193–211 in *Territorial Cohesion in Rural Europe: The Relational Turn in Rural Development*, edited by A. K. Copus and P. De Lima. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1986. "The Forms of Capital." Pp. 241–58 in *The Handbook of Theory: Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by J. G. Richardson. New York: Greenwood Press.
- . 2010. "Ortseffekte." Pp. 117–23 in *Das Elend der Welt*, edited by P. Bourdieu. Konstanz: UVK.
- Brown, J. Brian and Daniel T. Lichter. 2004. "Poverty, Welfare, and the Livelihood Strategies of Nonmetropolitan Single Mothers." *Rural Sociology* 69(2):282–301.
- Chiu, Maria, Farah Rahman, Paul Kurdyak, John Cairney, Nathaniel Jember, and Simone Vigod. 2017. "Self-Rated Health and Mental Health of Lone Fathers Compared with Lone Mothers and Partnered Fathers: A Population-Based Cross-Sectional Study." *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 71(5):417–23.
- Chromková Manea, Beatrice-Elena and Ladislav Rabušic. 2019. "Marriage, Childbearing and Single Motherhood: Trends in Attitudes and Behaviour in Czechia and Slovakia from 1991 to 2017." *Sociální Studia/Social Studies* 16(2):25–50.
- Copus, Andrew K. 2001. "From Core-Periphery to Polycentric Development: Concepts of Spatial and Aspatial Peripherality." *European Planning Studies* 9(4):539–52.
- Cotter, David A. 2002. "Poor People in Poor Places: Local Opportunity Structures and Household Poverty." *Rural Sociology* 67(4):534–55.
- Decker, Anja. 2019a. "The Ambiguous Experience of Motherhood in the Western Bohemian Countryside: Exploring Rural Gender Inequalities through the Framework of Precarity." *Sociologia Ruralis* 59(3):517–39.
- . 2019b. "A Freezer Full of Meat. Subsistence Farming in the Context of Social Inequality." *Journal for European Ethnology and Cultural Analysis* 3(2):169–92.
- Donkersloot, Rachel. 2012. "Gendered and Generational Experiences of Place and Power in the Rural Irish Landscape." *Gender, Place and Culture* 19(5):578–99.
- Drauschke, Petra. 2002. "Allein erziehende Frauen in Ostdeutschland." Pp. 123–49 in *Weibliche Lebenslagen und soziale Benachteiligung. Theoretische Ansätze und empirische Beispiele*, edited by V. Hammer and R. Lutz. Frankfurt/Main: Campus.
- Dudová, Radka. 2009. "The Rise of Lone-Parent Families—Challenging the Norm." Pp. 135–70 in *Women and Social Citizenship in Czech Society. Continuity and Change*, edited by H. Hašková and Z. Uhde. Praha: Institute of Sociology.
- Eckenrode, John. 1991. *The Social Context of Coping*. Boston, MA: Springer US.
- Ejmaes, Morten, Jörgen Elm Larsen, and Maja Müller. 2020. "Parents on Low Benefits. Coping with Poverty." *Journal of Poverty* 24(7):610–26.
- Evans, Karen. 2002. "Taking Control of their Lives? Agency in Young Adult Transitions in England and the New Germany." *Journal of Youth Studies* 5(3):245–69.
- Flick, Uwe. 2009. *Qualitative Sozialforschung: Eine Einführung*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Folkman, Susan and Richard S. Lazarus. 1980. "An Analysis of Coping in a Middle-Aged Community Sample." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 21(3):219–39.
- Folkman, Susan and Judith Tedlie Moskowitz. 2004. "Coping: Pitfalls and Promise." *Annual Review of Psychology* 55(1):745–74.
- Galster, George C. and Sean P. Killen. 1995. "The Geography of Metropolitan Opportunity: A Reconnaissance and Conceptual Framework." *Housing Policy Debate* 6(1):7–43.

- Grabski-Kieron, U., I. Mose, A. Reichert-Schick, and A. Steinführer, eds. 2016. *European Rural Peripheries Revalued: Governance, Actors, Impacts*. Berlin, Münster: Lit.
- Haskova, Hana and Christina Klenner. 2010. "Why Did Distinct Types of Dual-Earner Models in Czech, Slovak and East German Societies Develop and Persist?" *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung* 22(3):266–88.
- Hašková, Hana, Hana Maříková, and Zuzana Uhde. 2009. "Leaves, Allowances, and Facilities: Childcare Past and Present." Pp. 77–134 in *Women and Social Citizenship in Czech Society. Continuity and Change*, edited by H. Hašková and Z. Uhde. Praha: Institute of Sociology.
- Hine, Rochelle Helena, Darryl Maybery, and Melinda Jane Goodyear. 2018. "Challenges of Connectedness in Personal Recovery for Rural Mothers with Mental Illness." *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing* 27(2):672–82.
- Hirsland, Andreas. 2016. "Gefühlte Mitte—prekäre soziale Selbstverortung von Grundsicherungsbeziehenden." *WSI-Mitteilungen* 69(5):365–72.
- Jehlička, Petr, Branko Ančić, Petr Daněk, and Mladen Domazet. 2021. "Beyond Hardship and Joy: Framing Home Gardening on Insights from the European Semi-Periphery." *Geoforum* 126:150–8.
- Kališková, Klára and Daniel Münich. 2023. "The Impact of Childcare Availability on Maternal Employment: Evidence from Czech Municipalities." *PLoS ONE* 18(7):e0288987.
- Keim, Sylvia. 2018. "Are Lone Mothers Also Lonely Mothers? Social Networks of Unemployed Lone Mothers in Eastern Germany." Pp. 111–40 in *Lone Parenthood in the Life Course*, edited by L. Bernardi and D. Mortelmans. Cham: Springer Open.
- Klärner, Andreas and André Knabe. 2019. "Social Networks and Coping with Poverty in Rural Areas." *Sociologia Ruralis* 59(3):447–73.
- Kreyenfeld, Michaela. 2006. "Family Formation in East and West Germany Before and After Unification." Pp. 225–36 in *Education and Postponement of Maternity. Economic Analyses for Industrialized Countries*, edited by S. Gustafsson and A. Kalwij. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Krüger, Dorothea and Christiane Micus. 1999. *Diskriminiert? Privilegiert? Die heterogene Lebenssituation Alleinerziehender im Spiegel neuer Forschungsergebnisse und aktueller Daten*. Bamberg: Staatsinstitut für Familienforschung an der Universität Bamberg, ifb-Materialien, 1.
- Laschewski, Lutz. 2009. "Der Umbau der ländlichen Gesellschaft in den Neuen Bundesländern." *Landberichte. Sozialwissenschaftliches Journal* 12(3):73–94.
- Lee, Hyunjoo, Sojung Park, and Eunsun Kwon. 2021. "Life Course Pathway to Later-Year Depressive Symptoms: Multiple Mediation of Socio-Economic Status and Coping Resources by Gender." *Research on Aging* 43(5–6):237–49.
- Maldonado, Laurie Chisholm. 2017. *Doing Better for Single-Parent Families: Poverty and Policy across 45 Countries*. Dissertation, Los Angeles: University of California.
- Marsden, Terry Keith, Jonathan Murdoch, Philip Lowe, and Neil Ward. 2012. *The Differentiated Countryside*. London: Routledge.
- Mätzke, Margitta. 2019. "Comparative Perspectives on Childcare Expansion in Germany: Explaining the Persistent East–West Divide." *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice* 21(1):47–64.
- Meert, Henk. 2000. "Rural Community Life and the Importance of Reciprocal Survival Strategies." *Sociologia Ruralis* 40(3):319–38.
- Milbourne, P., ed. 1997. *Revealing Rural "Others": Representation, Power, and Identity in the British Countryside*. London: Pinter.
- Milbourne, Paul. 2014. "Poverty, Place, and Rurality: Material and Sociocultural Disconnections." *Environment and Planning A* 46(3):566–80.
- Mische, Ann. 2011. "Relational Sociology, Culture, and Agency." Pp. 80–97 in *The SAGE Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, edited by J. Scott and P. J. Carrington. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nelson, Margaret K. 2006. "Single Mothers "Do" Family." *Family Relations* 68(4):781–95.
- Németh, Krisztina. 2019. "Trapped in the Past? The Reproduction of Poverty and Marginality in a Hungarian Manorial Village." *Sociologia Ruralis* 59(3):419–46.
- Nestmann, Frank and Sabine Stiehler. 1998. *Wie allein sind Alleinerziehende? Soziale Beziehungen alleinerziehender Frauen und Männer in Ost und West*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Neuberger, Franz, Sabina Schutter, and Klaus Preisner. 2019. "Einkommensunterschiede zwischen alleinerziehenden und verheirateten Müttern 1997–2015. Eine detaillierte Effekt-Dekomposition." *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 48(1):42–69.
- Nieuwenhuis, Rense and Laurie C. Maldonado. 2017. *Single-Parent Families and in-Work Poverty*. Luxembourg: LIS Working Paper Series, 687.
- Oufedníček, Martin, Adam Klsák, and Petra Špačková. 2019. "In Between City and Village: The Development of Spatial Patterns of Czech Suburbanisation 1997–2016." *Demografie* 61(4):299–308.

- Ouředníček, Martin, Jakub Novák, and Martin Šimon. 2013. "Současné změny migrační bilance nejmenších českých obcí." Pp. 246–55 in *Nové výzvy pro geografii. Výroční konference České geografické společnosti 3.-7. září 2012*, edited by H. Svobodová. Brno: Masarykova univerzita.
- Palonciová, Jana, Jana Barvíková, Sylva Höhne, and Věra Kuchařová. 2019. *Neúplné rodiny [Incomplete Families]*. Praha: VUPS, v.v.i.
- Paulgaard, Gry. 2012. "Geography of Opportunity: Approaching Adulthood at the Margins of the Northern European Periphery." Pp. 189–215 in *Rural Futures? Finding One's Place Within Changing Labour Markets*, edited by U.-D. K. Bæck and G. Paulgaard. Stamsund: Orkana Akademisk.
- Porterfield, Shirley L. 2001. "Economic Vulnerability among Rural Single-Mother Families." *American Journal of Agricultural Economics* 83(5):1302–11.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone. The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Rapport, Nigel and Joanna Overing. 2000. *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts*. London: Routledge.
- Rodríguez-Dorans, Edgar and Paula Jacobs. 2020. "Making Narrative Portraits: A Methodological Approach to Analysing Qualitative Data." *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 23(6):611–23.
- Schafer, Markus H., Tetyana Pylypiv Shippee, and Kenneth F. Ferraro. 2009. "When Does Disadvantage Not Accumulate? Toward a Sociological Conceptualization of Resilience." *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie/Revue Suisse de Sociologie* 35(2):231–51.
- Schumacher, Kim Philip and Alexander Kunz. 2016. "Gendered Rural Labour Markets and Intent to Migrate: A Case Study in Northwestern Germany." Pp. 109–30 in *Women and Migration in Rural Europe: New Geographies of Europe*, edited by K. Wiest. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Schutter, Sabina. 2015. "Risikofaktor Alleinerziehend? Einelfamilien zwischen Stigmatisierung und Bewunderung." Pp. 335–60 in *Kindgerecht—Verändertes Aufwachsen in einer modernen Gesellschaft*, edited by J. Hofmeister. Köln: Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft der Kinderschutz-Zentren.
- Shanahan, Michael J. and Kathryn E. Hood. 2000. "Adolescents in Changing Social Structures: Bounded Agency in Life Course Perspective." Pp. 123–34 in *Negotiating Adolescence in Times of Social Change*, edited by L. J. Crockett and R. K. Silbereisen. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sherman, Jennifer. 2009. *Those Who Work, Those Who Don't. Poverty, Morality, and Family in Rural America*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Shucksmith, Mark. 1996. *Rural Scotland Today: The Best of Both Worlds?* Aldershot: Avebury.
- . 2012. "Class, Power and Inequality in Rural Areas: Beyond Social Exclusion?" *Sociologia Ruralis* 52(4):377–97.
- . 2018. "Re-Imagining the Rural: From Rural Idyll to Good Countryside." *Journal of Rural Studies* 59:163–72.
- Sieber, Rebekka. 2018. "Adaptation to Precarious Prosperity: Is it Resignation?" *Swiss Journal of Sociology* 44(3):423–42.
- Šimon, Martin and Josef Bernard. 2016. "Rural Idyll Without Rural Sociology? Changing Features, Functions and Research of the Czech Countryside." *Eastern European Countryside* 22(1):53–68.
- Statistisches Bundesamt, ed. 2018. *Datenreport 2018: Ein Sozialbericht für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, ed.
- Steinführer, Annett. 2020. "Daseinsvorsorge in ländlichen Räumen. Zwischen Abbau, Umbau und Ausbau." Pp. 375–87 in *Regionaleentwicklung in Ostdeutschland. Dynamiken, Perspektiven und der Beitrag der Humangeographie*, edited by S. Becker and M. Naumann. Berlin: Springer Spektrum.
- Steinführer, Annett and Patrick Küpper. 2013. "Lokale Lebensqualität: Definitionen und Gestaltungsoptionen unter Alterungs- und Schrumpfbedingungen." Pp. 16–28 in *Der Demografische Wandel. Eine Gefahr für die Sicherung gleichwertiger Lebensbedingungen?* edited by S. Maretzke. Bonn: BBSR-Online-Publikation 2.
- Steinführer, Annett, Anja Reichert-Schick, Ingo Mose, and Ulrike Grabski-Kieron. 2016. "European Rural Peripheries Revalued? Introduction to this Volume." Pp. 2–27 in *European Rural Peripheries Revalued. Governance, Actors, Impacts*, edited by U. Grabski-Kieron, I. Mose, A. Reichert-Schick, and A. Steinführer. Berlin, Münster: Lit.
- Struffolino, Emanuela and Laura Bernardi. 2017. *Vulnerability of Lone Mothers Over the Life Course in Switzerland*. Lausanne: Lives Working Paper, 60.
- Tickamyer, Ann R. and Cynthia M. Duncan. 1990. "Poverty and Opportunity Structure in Rural America." *Annual Review of Sociology* 16(1):67–86.
- Trappe, Heike, Matthias Pollmann-Schult, and Christian Schmitt. 2015. "The Rise and Decline of the Male Breadwinner Model: Institutional Underpinnings and Future Expectations." *European Sociological Review* 31(2):230–42.

- Valentine, Gill. 1997. "A Safe Place to Grow Up? Parenting, Perceptions of Children's Safety and the Rural Idyll." *Journal of Rural Studies* 13(2):137–48.
- Veréb, Vanda, Carla Marques, Livia Madureira, Carlos Marques, Tigran Keryan, and Rui Silva. 2024. "What Is Rural Well-Being and How Is it Measured? An Attempt to Order Chaos." *Rural Sociology* 2:239–80. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12536>
- Wieland, Sigune. 2012. *Der (Mehr-)Wert der Zwei-Elternteil-Familie. Ein figurationssoziologischer Vergleich von Zwei-Elternteil-Familien und Alleinerziehenden*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag.
- Wiest, Karin and Tim Leibert. 2013. "Wanderungsmuster junger Frauen im ländlichen Sachsen-Anhalt—Implikationen für zielgruppenorientierte Regionalentwicklungsstrategien." *Raumforschung und Raumordnung* 71(6):455–69.
- Witzel, Andreas and Herwig Reiter. 2012. *The Problem-Centred Interview: Principles and Practice*. London: Sage.
- Yorks, Jessica. 2022. "Singled Out No Longer: The Changing Narratives and Types of Single-Parent Families." *Sociology Compass* 16(2):e12951.
- Zagel, Hannah. 2014. "Are All Single Mothers the Same? Evidence from British and West German Women's Employment Trajectories." *European Sociological Review* 30(1):46–9.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site.