1. Introduction

In most countries in North-Western Europe approximately one-fifth of the population lives in rural areas. In middle income countries such as Turkey this is about one-third (data 2018: Eurostat, 2020). Most of these people live in smaller or larger villages. Since World War II, the inhabitants of villages in the developed world have been confronted with changes in the wider society. These wider societal changes had direct consequences for their geographical mobility (Sheller and Urry, 2006), their way of life as reflected in day path and life path (Hagerstrand, 1970), the character of their local residential environment, and their perspectives on education, jobs and income, health and life expectancy, local quality of life and resilience. Post-war rural change in North-Western Europe is traditionally characterised as a transition from a productivist, mainly agricultural, order towards a post-productivist, consumptive order (Marsden, 1998; Cloke and Goodwin, 1992; Holmes, 2002; Wilson, 2001). As a consequence villages experienced a transition from being relatively autonomous and mainly agriculture-oriented settlements that function at the local level, towards more or less residential villages within housing markets and catchment areas that function at a regional level (Thissen and Loopmans, 2013; Goodwin-Hawkins, 2015).

The structural dimensions of rural change and their local features and effects have been widely documented in the literature over the past decades. However, the consequences of the transition towards a consumptive order are in our opinion mainly described for rural settlement systems (Parr and Denike, 1970; Cloke, 1979; Van Engelsdorp Gastelaars and Ostendorf 1986; Lamb, 1975) and rural life in general (Mak, 2000; Woods, 2005), but to a lesser extent for villages as a specific type of local environment. In the consumptive countryside, the modern village as a local context was generally considered to be less relevant for the welfare development and the well-being of the rural population now that rural life was increasingly organised in a regionalised world (Elias, 1974; Verrips, 1981; Cloke and Goodwin, 1992). Nonetheless, the speed and details of these developments vary considerably between rural regions, but also between villages in similar regions. Therefore, we consider it relevant to study particular transformations of and at the level of villages, and take their locally specific features into account.

In this special issue, hinting at Hagerstrands’ seminal paper ‘What about people in Regional Sciences’ (1970), we focus on the inhabitants of changing villages. This actor-oriented approach aims to highlight how different inhabitants perceive processes of change and how they deal with them in everyday life. As Michael Woods suggested “examining the performance of rurality enables the research to move away from thinking of the rural as a spatially fixed entity and focus on the way in which rurality (or particularly ways of being rural) is embedded in social practices” (2005, p. 302).

The papers that are included in this special issue ‘Changing villages: what about people?’ deal with the effects of societal transitions on village populations: their changing social structures, and the way they experience and perceive these transitions. The origin of our approach lies in the rural geography tradition of the Low Countries. In The Netherlands and Flanders, the Dutch speaking part of Belgium, the perspective of rural change and the experiences and perceptions of villagers have been a central focus of research for the last three decades (e.g. Haartsen et al., 2000; 2003; Meert, 2000; Rogge and Dessein, 2015). Both countries are affluent and highly urbanised, while distances are relatively short. Village populations in these countries are strongly integrated in the regional and national economy which is dominated by the tertiary and quaternary sector. The majority of villagers are part of a daily urban system by being functionally oriented towards nearby urban (ized) centres for employment and consumption. Nevertheless villagers in these countries generally consider their living environment as having a distinctive identity (Gieling et al., 2017; Haartsen et al., 2003) and are very aware and appreciative of living in a small-scale ‘community’ with a specific housing supply, situated within a ‘natural’ landscape (Steenbekkers and Vermeij, 2013). In this special issue, we analyse the confrontation of different experiences and perceptions of the changing village with the reality of social change. We explore how different social groups in rural villages construct their own image of the village, and analyse how the social reality of living in these post-productive residential villages affects community life and social networks. Finally, we
also address consequences of the different experiences and perceptions of the village in rural policies.

Whereas the origins of our analysis of the villager’s experiences and perceptions of rural change are rooted in the ongoing debates among Dutch and Flemish rural scholars (in interaction with a predominantly Anglo-American literature), this special issue aims to compare these localized experiences and reflections with experiences in other parts of the world. Such a ‘comparative ruralism’ approach (Philips and Smith, 2018) provides us with the opportunity to both provincialize and critically improve and elaborate our concepts and theories on changing villages. Although there are clear national specificities in terms of history, culture and lay-out of villages, with important consequences for rural studies and rural policies (Hoggart et al., 1995), such as sprawled urbanization of rural Flanders, and, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands (De Decker, 2011; Dehaene and Loopmans, 2003; Dehaene, 2015; El Makhloufi, 2013), there are also some fundamental similarities with the other cases, like the ongoing pressure of urbanisation, the transformation of rural economies, the increasing integration of rural and urban places, the influx of new groups of villagers and the ageing of rural populations (Shortall and Brown, 2019). This provides us with comparable as well as new challenging perspectives, and allows us to assess the transferability of our earlier insights and theories.

2. From autonomous villages towards residential villages

The consequences of the transition from a productivist order towards a consumptive order for the meaning of the village as a local context can be described as a transition from relatively autonomous villages towards villages with primarily a residential function. Changes in the wider society with respect to the dominant economic sector and changes in the mode of transport changed the scale of the productive and consumptive order and the ranges of economic, social, and recreational activities (Fig. 1) (Van Engelsdorp Gastelaars and Ostendorf, 1986; Thissen, 1995). After World War II, commuting distances increased for many villagers accessing jobs in nearby urban centres. Moreover, the new affluence acquired in the sixties, which was originally spent within the village, was increasingly spent in nearby urban settlements. This transition has made many villagers more dependent upon nearby centres for employment and services, but also more mobile. Some villagers regarded this transition as a loss, although most villagers took advantage of a more differentiated regional labour market and the variety and quality of services offered within their wider region (Cabus and Vanhaverbeke, 2003; Hazans, 2004; Jacobs-Crisioni and Koomen, 2017; Gieling et al., 2017; Christiaanse and Haartsen 2017).

Notwithstanding the general expansion of the daily activity spaces of rural residents, the residential village remains important as a specific type of local context for their inhabitants. The assumption that where one lives affects a person’s social and economic opportunities over the life course is still an important starting point for rural geographers (Brown, 2019). The village is the place where the majority of rural residents start and finish the day. It is the place where a growing number of inhabitants once decided to live because they could afford a proper dwelling in a residential domain they consider appropriate. For another group of people it is the place where the housing distribution system allocated them and for a declining number of people it is the place where fate located them because they were born there or simply because they stayed (Stockdale and Haartsen, 2018). But for all of them the village is the place where they make a home, where they are ‘homing’ (Sheller and Urry, 2006), where they develop different forms of attachment (Gieling et al., 2017), new forms of involvement (Vermeij and Mollenhorst, 2008; Vermeij and Steenbakkers, 2015; De Haan et al., 2018; Ubels et al., 2019), and draw at least part of their identity from (Jones, 1999; Lewicka, 2005, 2011). Consequently, they generally also want to have a say in policy affairs at the local level (Cooke, 1989; Van Engelsdorp Gastelaars, 2001).

Although residential villages stay, in comparison with urban neighbourhoods, relatively mixed with respect to economic status and age of their residents, also residential villages are developing social profiles that are related to their residential function within their regional housing market or wider urban fields of metropolitan areas, even outside the commuter zone (Friedmann, 1978; Lamb, 1975). Also small villages or neighbourhoods in villages tend, within a society with growing diversity, to develop a certain level of homogeneity, called ‘social homophily’ (Musterd et al., 2016b; Van Gent et al., 2019) because of a growing preference to live close to other people who are like themselves. Retirement migration and counterurbanisation (Cloke, 1985) contributed most to the development of local social profiles related to residential quality, but also selective migration within rural housing markets resulted in a differentiation between affluent and dynamic villages and poor, stagnating villages related to the residential quality (Thissen, 1995; Thissen et al., 2001, 2005; Bijker et al., 2013; Elshof et al., 2017).

Differences in local residential environments in rural areas will always be nationally and regionally specific because, more than in urban areas, they are based on local amenities (Lamb, 1975) and a reinterpretation of the existing diversity, inherited from the past. The old diversity in rural areas was based on the provision of services for an often dispersed agricultural population (Christaller, 1933), on local products and local craftsmanship and patterns of nodality and mobility (Predd, 1977) and on local culture (Keur and Keur, 1955). This resulted in a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of development</th>
<th>Agricultural society</th>
<th>Industrial society</th>
<th>Post-industrial society</th>
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<td>Wider society</td>
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<td>Main economic sector</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
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<td>Most important sector for local development</td>
<td>Services</td>
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<td>Housing</td>
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<td>Scale of productive order</td>
<td>Family farm</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
<td>Region</td>
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<td>Scale of consumptive order</td>
<td>Separate rooms / separate buildings</td>
<td>Neighbourhood</td>
<td>Settlement</td>
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<td>Separation between production / consumption</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Between neighbourhoods</td>
<td>Between settlements</td>
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<td>Mode of transport</td>
<td>On foot / by horse car</td>
<td>(Motorised) bicycle, tramway</td>
<td>Car, train</td>
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<tr>
<td>Type of village</td>
<td>Autonomous village</td>
<td>Residential village</td>
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Fig. 1. The transition from the autonomous village towards the residential village, the related changes in the wider society and transport technology and the changing scales of production and consumption (based on Thissen (1995, p. 120), Van Engelsdorp Gastelaars and Ostendorf (1986, p. 236)).
multidimensional, complicated and regional specific rural diversity.

Although the autonomous village, the traditional closed rural community or Gemeinschaft (Tönnies, 1963), with residents rooted there for generations (Keur and Keur, 1955) no longer exists, most rural regions still comprise of some villages with relatively many residents born and raised locally with a strong local attachment or general village bond (Gieling et al., 2017). These villages, which maintain a certain level of closedness (Vermeij and Mollenhorst, 2008), are still referred to as communities because they are seen as discrete geographical entities characterised by high-quality social interaction between inhabitants, strong social networks and a shared sense of identity (Woods, 2005). However, just like ‘rurality’, ‘community’ is elusive and not restricted to a certain type of settlement. The majority of villages is first of all relevant for their inhabitants as a local residential environment that matches with their preferences and that develops according to their social profile.

3. The autonomous versus the residential village

3.1. Representations of changes in villages

Although autonomous villages have largely disappeared in Northwestern Europe they are still present in the representations and discourses of rural and urban people. A part of the villagers, but also some professionals and politicians, as well as the media (see also the role of cultural imaginations of the rural in film, television and literature (Duggan and Peeren, 2020)), continue to portray rurality and rural affairs from the perspective of the autonomous village. The autonomous village, although a vanishing reality, remains a powerful frame of reference (Amcoff et al., 2011; De Vries et al., 2016; Christiaanse and Haartsen, 2017; Gieling et al., 2019a). An important aspect of this frame of reference is the set of presupposed causal relationships at the local level (Fig. 2) which relates the development of the number of inhabitants to the development of the number of locally available facilities and considers this indispensable for the development of the local quality of life or liveability and will, finally, be decisive for the (population) development, the viability and progress of the village.

However, the relations presupposed in this frame of reference are losing validity (Borchert and De Kruyf, 1991; Van Dam, 1995). Although an obvious static relation between the number of inhabitants and the number of local facilities of settlements in a region does exist at one moment in time, a dynamic relation between the development of inhabitants and the development of local facilities at settlement level is more complicated (Parr and Denike, 1970). While even villages with an increasing population are confronted with a decrease in the number of local facilities, the reflex of local authorities that are confronted with a loss of local facilities is still often directed to new housing construction as a policy goal (Provincie Zeeland, 2009). The development of the number of inhabitants and the development of the number of local facilities of villages are nowadays strongly connected to general demographic developments, such as the declining number of people per household, and the general upscaling of the service sector. Simultaneously, the local availability of (basic) services has long been considered important for the local quality of life because of mobility reasons. However, as Moseley already emphasized in 1979, it remains necessary to counter, context to popular and policy discourse, that because of the increased mobility of the rural population, the focus shifted towards the accessibility of rural service centres and the access of facilities and services for less mobile villagers (Moseley, 1979). At the same time other village characteristics, became more important in how villagers evaluate the quality of the residential environment and the local quality of life (Ostendorf and Thissen, 2001).

The persistence of the autonomous village frame, including the circular character of the presupposed relations (Fig. 2), contributed in many villages to a perspective of decline. In this frame of reference, the experience of loss (of facilities and/or inhabitants) emphasizes that the village lacks the necessary conditions for a contemporary way of life (Cook et al., 2007; Christiaanse and Haartsen, 2017). This contributed to the ‘territorial stigmatisation’ (Wacquant, 2007; Mak, 2000) of especially peripheral - small villages.

However, because of the transition towards residential villages, a growing number of villagers construct a different frame of reference with respect to local causal relationships (Fig. 3). This specifically applies for those villagers with a wider daily activity space, like young villagers, newcomers or retirement (return) migrants. In their frame of reference, the development of the local quality of life is primarily based on the development of the residential function of the village as a specific type of residential environment within a wider regional setting which matches their preferences and needs. The quality of their dwelling and the physical and social characteristics of the local residential environment compared with other places in the same housing market area contribute to their person-environment fit (Iwarsson, 2005) and are important factors for their evaluation of the liveability of the village (Thissen and Van Engelsdorp Gastelaars, 2000).

The local causal relationships belonging to this frame of reference can be interpreted as useful hypotheses for rural research and as a more realistic and more positive perspective of villages in comparison with the perspective of the autonomous village. The residential village frame of reference contributes to a more positive judgment about the quality of life of villages, irrespective of the development of the number of inhabitants and the local service level. Housing construction combined

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**Fig. 2.** Presupposed local causal relations belonging to the frame of reference of the autonomous village.

**Fig. 3.** Presupposed local causal relations belonging to the frame of reference of the residential village.
with village renewal, like the demolition of low quality housing, can contribute to a higher local quality of life when it contributes to the improvement of the residential function of the village (Verwest, 2011).

The emergence of the frame of reference of the residential village among villagers stimulated other forms of local attachment like local consciousness (Groot, 1989), village pride (Mak, 2000), and specific patterns of local attachment (Gieling et al., 2017). A positive valuation of the local quality of life in terms of an appropriate residential quality can motivate villagers to contribute to the social vitality of the village (Vermeij and Steenbekkers 2015, De Haan, 2019; and in this Special Issue: Gieling et al., 2019b), for instance through citizens’ initiatives that strengthen the residential function of the village (Fig. 3). Depending on their connectivity, available social capital and local amenities, residential villages with successful citizens’ initiatives will develop their own social profile and related identity. Some are more oriented to the natural environment, others on recreation or cultural heritage (Thissen and Loopmans, 2013).

3.2. Territorial justice in villages

The local effects of changes in the wider society have had diverse effects on different categories of villagers. Not all villagers experience a perfect person-environment fit in their village. Conflicts can arise between groups of villagers with different ideas about the identity of the village, like villagers who still see the village as an autonomous village, and those who perceive the village primarily as a residential environment (Cloke et al., 1997; Gustafson, 2013; Gieling et al., 2017). Besides the ‘privileged’ villagers who are able to choose residential locations and activities consistent with their biographies and life histories, a part of the villagers belong to the ‘excluded’, those who are tied to a village instead of attached (Vermeij and Steenbekkers, 2015) and who experience rejection or marginalisation from their place of residence (Phillipson, 2007; Woods, 2005).

Patterns of territorial injustice have always been connected with local power relations (Shucksmith, 2012) and originally with certain local economic activities, like the exploitation of natural resources (for instance peat: Rijnks and Strijker, 2013, mining: Argent, 2017). Rural poverty and social exclusion could in former times be related to a scarcity of local resources and were often inherited through generations (Meij et al., 2020). Patterns of injustice are nowadays often more individualised and connected to social positions and patterns of exclusion in the wider society. Yet still, the local environment will reflect and strengthen patterns of social inequality. Residential villages that offer a lot of amenities attract higher income groups. This rural gentrification puts pressure on the local housing market, inflates prices and standards in local shops and facilities, often aggravating pre-existing local patterns of social exclusion and polarization (Dirksmeier, 2008; Solana-Solana, 2010; Guimond and Simard, 2010; Phillips et al., 2020). Other newcomers in villages, like ethnic minorities or international migrants might experience great challenges themselves (Schuermans and De Maeschalck, 2010; De Lima, 2012). Facing discrimination in wider labour markets, they sometimes move into the countryside to occupy low-paid and insecure job niches in agriculture or construction that increasingly fail to attract native residents or high income newcomers (Rogaly, 2009). They struggle to access rural housing markets (De Lima and Wright, 2009; Verstraete and Moris, 2019) as well as local social capital (Vergunst, 2009; Gil-Lacruz et al., 2013), as exemplified in the case study of Moris (this special issue).

Additionally, in a network of residential villages, social differentiation is less based on where you live, and more on the kind of transport, and hence facilities you can access (Gray, 2004; Kamruzzaman and Hine, 2012; Morris et al., 2020). Notwithstanding great differences between nations and regions in the provision, frequency and accessibility of (public) transport facilities, studies generally show how low income groups, women, younger people and older people suffer additional disadvantage from a lack of access to transportation (e.g. Plazinić and Jović, 2014; Gasparović, 2016; Hagan, 2019). It limits their access to facilities, but also significantly reduces their activity space and social capital (Hagan, 2019). These insights should lead policy makers to move away from ‘modernist’ spatial policies which aimed at providing universal access to facilities across all settlements, towards a heightened attention for individual or group based barriers to mobility.

4. Changing villages in the 21st century

Urbanisation, the transformation of national economies and an expanding personal mobility changed the meaning of villages for their inhabitants in the last century. Villages developed towards (diverse types of) residential environments within a regionalised world. Nonetheless, the mighty trope of the traditional, relatively autonomous village still persists in the imagination of most villagers. The 21st century presents new challenges to villagers, deepening the tension between imagination and reality. A new wave of urbanisation, related to the development of ‘knowledge based’ economies, and increasing and diversifying forms of mobility and communication are fundamentally changing the geographies of nations (Tordoir et al., 2015). This new wave of urbanisation on a global scale, welcomed by policymakers as a sign of modernisation and development, causes rapid and radical local changes in the world’s countryside (Koolhaas, 2017). Although processes of regional restructuring and local differentiation continue, the context will strongly differ from that of the changing villages in the last century (Woods, 2007; McCarthy, 2008). It can now be stated that the urban will be defining the rural, and that the faith of rural areas will increasingly depend upon the urban needs they can serve (Bock, 2018).

An important result of the new wave of urbanisation is a growing territorial inequality between central and peripheral regions within nations, between affluent and rich villages and between affluent and poor people within villages with different levels of mobility. The resulting increase in “interdependence and interpenetration of space” (Brown and Shucksmith, 2017; as cited by Bock, 2018) makes the distinction between rural and urban less dependent of geographical characteristics and makes the content of rural concepts, like the village, even more the result of socio-cultural construction, based on experiences and perceptions of urbanised people.

Even more than today, villages will be distinguished based on perceived distances to urban centres of activity or relative positions in settlement networks and on the perceptions of local qualities; qualities measured against urban life styles, and reflecting national social divisions and urban power (Bock, 2018). Villages that are seen as ‘peripheral’ and ‘unattractive’ risk to lose out in the globalizing competition for wealthy and healthy residents able to ‘fend for themselves’. Villages are now integrated in trans-local relational networks (Hedberg and Do Carmo, 2012) where connectivity counts as much as proximity in everyday life. Resulting in growing differences in access and needs, today’s processes of change have diversified and hybridized (Camarero and Oliva, 2016) local experiences of rurality and quality of life (Woods, 2007). Ageing and population decline (Haartsen and Verhorst, 2010), (international) migration, brain drain and gain (Thissen et al., 2010; Kooiman et al., 2018) and social and technological changes in the rural economy (e.g. rural gentrification, availability of high speed internet, amenity migration and tourism developments) will create new social divides and alter older ones (see e.g. Roberts et al., 2017 and Cowie et al., 2020 on the rural digital divide). We need to understand the problems villagers face in changing villages in the 21st century within the context of an urbanised world with dynamic relations between urban and rural areas (Bock, 2016, 2018).

A growing polarization at a regional and local level is reported in European countries (Hochstenbach and Musterd, 2017; Musterd et al., 2016a; Woods, 2011), stimulating diverging perceptions of local and regional change, as well as various forms of discontent, distrust and political unrest, especially in rural regions and villages (De Voogd, 2014; Strijker et al., 2015; Mamonova and Franquesa, 2019).
5. Contributions to the special issue

This special issue ‘Changing villages; what about people?’ focuses on the interrelations between Diversity, Perspectives and Agency in changing villages.

Firstly, the papers highlight the new diversity amongst rural village populations. This new diversity of rural dwellers is based on regional, national and global developments and reflects both general social divides and local dynamics. Yet they stimulated a reinterpretation of the existing, engrained socio-spatial structures in rural areas. Many of our papers look beyond classic socio-economic or ethno-cultural distinctions to differentiate the experiences of village dwellers. Some papers zoom in on particular groups that have recently become more prominent in rural areas (e.g. Thissen and Droogleever Fortuijn; and Volckaert et al. on older people; Moris on refugees); others construct their own analytical subdivisions based on the practices, rhythms and experiences of people in the village (Martens et al.; Christensen and Jones; Kocabiyik and Loopmans).

Secondly, there is a wide range of perspectives on (what changes in) villages. Reflecting their diverse social positions and identities, villagers express very different perceptions of what constitutes their village and how they relate to changes in their village. Confrontations of the old, local autonomous village trope with the newer perspective of the regional residential village (Volckaert et al.) intersect with varying images of stability, progress and decay to situate change (Nørgaard and Thuesen, Martens et al.; Christensen and Jones, 2020; Tuitjer and Steinführ, 2021; Gieling et al., 2019b), and experiences of otherness and belonging to make sense of diverse fellow villagers (Moris, Kocabiyik and Loopmans, Christensen and Jones, 2020).

Thirdly, many papers illustrate how villagers cannot be seen as passive recipients of changes in their environment, but negotiate these as active agents. Individual villagers and outsiders drive change and stimulate diversity in everyday life in villages (e.g. Kocabiyik and Loopmans; Moris), but also collective agency is crucial in the mediation of global change (Nørgaard and Thuesen, Martens et al.). Agency is unequally distributed over villages and within villages, and the increasing importance of citizens’ initiatives tends to create new social and technological divisions. Some of the papers (Martens et al., Volckaert et al., Nørgaard and Thuesen; Christensen and Jones, 2020) explicitly address the role of local and supra-local policy makers in tapping into and mediating such local agency. They reveal how often, policy makers not only overestimate local agency, but also underestimate or ignore the divisions and differences in local populations. Martens et al. in particular present ways in which (some of) these local differences can be overcome in order to enhance the collective agency in villages.

The nine papers highlight these interrelated topics in different national contexts. They also illustrate the need for theoretical and methodological innovation to grasp the challenges and opportunities faced in changing villages today (see also Heley and Jones, 2012; Shucksmith, 2018) and represent a wide diversity of possible approaches, from quantitative surveys to biographic ethnographies, from an individual-izing comparative case study to change-oriented action research and from historical archival work to contemporary policy analysis. For this reason, each article also pays attention to carefully explain its methodological approach.

(Tuitjer and Steinführ, 2021) present the central theme ‘changing village’ by a reconstructive analysis of German village research in a trend study on ten and after the German unification 14 villages in four waves from the 1950s to the 2010s. They reflect on the framing of villages and villagers and the role of researchers in this rural research project for a period of more than half a century with profound economic, social and demographic changes in the wider society and changing perspectives that science and policymaking hold on rurality, village life and rural development. In the 1950s food shortage and worries about the future of agriculture made agriculture a top priority of the German state, which resulted in a study focussed on the situation of family farmers. In the 2010s the implications of population decline, ageing and the loss of services were central topics of investigation. The ‘residentialisation’ and the concomitant focus on housing and quality of life in villages and a psychological detachment of agriculture from village life influenced the way ‘the village’ was conceptualised in the consecutive research projects. Starting with the assumption of the village as a local economy based on agriculture and with number of inhabitants as reliable indicator of the village’s prospects, the village was increasingly seen as a form of residential scheme in a social and physical sense with a population homogeneous along socio-economic patterns.

Thissen and Droogleever Fortuijn critically examine the concept of ‘age-friendly’ communities in a rural context. They use the concept of the residential village by an analysis of changes in ‘person-environment fit’ of the older inhabitants in types of villages in a relatively peripheral rural region in The Netherlands. Changes in the social profiles of types of villages and changes in the diversity of the older rural population are related to changing patterns of person-environment fit for rural older people by a comparison between two moments in time (1995 and 2009). In both years a low person-environment fit is reported for specific groups of older people in certain types of villages. In 1995 older women and in 2009 older people with a low household income showed a lower person-environment fit irrespective of their place of residence. This illustrates the relevance of the village as a local context and shows at the same time that person-environment fit is first of all dependent on the social position of villagers.

Volckaert, Schillebeeckx and De Decker critically reflect on policies in Flanders with respect to ‘ageing in place’, hereby assigning a leading role to informal caregivers. By a qualitative study in two rural regions that vary in terms of morphology and degree of urbanisation these policy proposals are qualified as unrealistic and based on invalid and nostalgic ideas about a Gemeinschaftliche local society. Their analysis is focused on the perceptions on and experiences of older people with informal care delivered by their adult children and neighbours. The availability of informal care by adult children varies with the level of urbanisation. In peripheral rural regions many children left the region for study and work opportunities. Neighbours meet the condition of proximity by definition, but even if they would have time and opportunity, they cannot be automatically viewed as reliable caregivers, because they keep a certain psychological distance and are less likely to provide intensive care. And although most respondents perceive their village as a close-knit community, certain groups are excluded from the community as ‘outsiders’ because of life style differences and migration history and may thus not receive neighbourhood support.

Gieling, Haartsen, Vermeij and Strijker (2019b) take a quantitative approach to understand (selective) attachment to villages. From a large dataset from the Netherlands they selected 4757 individuals, living in villages with less than 3000 inhabitants. They analyse how different forms of attachment predict the level of volunteering activities. They distinguish four forms of attachment: general, social, cultural and environmental attachment. They find that general attachment has a lower correlation with being a volunteer in the village than expected. They conclude that also residents who lived all their live in the village do not automatically have negative consequences for village communities. However, the research contains also some warnings. Selective attachment relies on selective forms of volunteering, and that could lead to less, or even conflictual contacts between different groups. Selective volunteering includes the option to abandon volunteering tasks, which makes village activities more vulnerable. In the end selectivity could put pressure on the traditional reciprocal solidarity in local communities, as not all forms of volunteering are equally valued.

Martens, Van Damme and Devisch illustrate the transition from a relatively autonomous Flemish village based on local agriculture towards a village with primarily a residential function. They present an
analysis of the process of reinterpretation of (changing) public spaces, landscapes and functions of the village of Hoepertingen by different groups of residents and local actors, using the methods of participatory design and action research. Change and reinterpretation are presented as a process in which inhabitants debate changes, their reflections and their own contribution to change and reinterpretation. This results in a more nuanced image of the village. Although not all groups of villagers are reached directly, the findings support the idea of different views on the ‘changing village’ and the diversity of privately, collectively or publicly owned places in and adjacent to the village.

Nørgaard and Thuesen also touch upon volunteering and development of the local community, but from a quite different perspective. They focus on competitions between, and prizes for villages and communities in Denmark, which are judged as outstanding in a certain way. They find that the criteria in these competitions resemble the existing literature on rural community development, by emphasizing cooperation, voluntarism and aspects of endogenous development. On top of that, cooperation between the public, private and volunteer sector is welcomed. From the interviews it became clear that villagers think winning prizes and rewards is really important, and is an impetus for villagers. The authors conclude that this kind of competitions is at odds with the traditional Nordic egalitarian welfare ideals, and shows the influence of a neoliberal perspective. The authors also conclude that the increasing emphasis on bottom-up processes has less to do with a desire for more democratic forms of community development or with efficiency, but more with the inability of local and regional governments to come up with successful strategies.

Moris evokes the perspective of international migrants in rural areas. Based on a single individual life-trajectory, she explores the contradictory processes of exclusion and attachment that determine feelings of belonging for villagers situated in the village margins. Taking a biogeographic life-course approach, Moris reveals how place attachment can change over time, depending on the challenges and opportunities individuals are met with. She explains how poor migrants negotiate rural belonging with dependency on urban facilities, shaping their lives as translocal engagements in a wider network of places across space and time. Simultaneously, however, a local support network serves to emotionally and materially tie one to a particular rural place over longer periods.

Kocabıyık and Loopmans equally address the issue of temporality and belonging, but from a different angle. Deploying an individualizing comparative case study on rural gentrification in Southwest Turkey, they reveal how perceptions and experiences of rural gentrification are shaped by its temporal, as much as by its spatial and social effects. The confrontation of the autonomous village frame of reference (still alive amongst some groups of native residents) with the emergence of different groups of new villagers operating at a wider regional and even national and international scale, is mediated by the various rhythms, sequences, periodicities and impermanence of their presence and activities in the village, and expectations about what a village is supposed to offer to its residents.

Christensen and Jones (2020) present a characteristic Australian case study of the rural town of Denham in the Shark Bay Region. The designation of Shark Bay as World Heritage Area (WHA) in 1991 is examined as a tipping point within the broader context of Denham’s transformation through the overlapping and interrelated processes of declining primary industries, improving transport networks, the growth of tourism and the expansion of nature conservation, and demographic developments. The shift of the original negative perceptions towards the WHA listing as an unwanted impost upon livelihoods and lifestyle from the ‘outside world’ to more positive attitudes can be related to demographic change and local leadership, manifestations of Denham’s socio-economic transition from a predominantly productivist to a post-productivist economic and demographic base.

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