Connectivity of Rural Older People in a Changing Countryside

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Outline

• **Introduction:**
  – Demand side of connectivity: (older) people
  – Questions:
    • Are older people able to do what they want to do in remote rural places?
    • Are remote rural places demanding and/or supportive for older people?
    • Digital connectivity of rural older people?

1. **Rural change**: Changing villages and villagers
2. **Rural ageing**: lessons from (European) research programs about rural ageing

• **Conclusions**
Rurality is ‘nation specific’

- Usefulness of European projects
- Rurality in The Netherlands
  - Dutch villagers:
    - 5 million inhabitants of the Netherlands are living in villages
    - 1,9 million lives in remote, small villages
  - Positive about local quality of life
    - Good residential quality
    - Strong local commitment
    - Good access of service and employment centres
Rural Change

• **Transition from a productive to a consumptive order:**
  – Basis: changes of economic structure and transport technology
  – Changing ‘day path’ of villagers: regionalisation

• **The local perspective** (village and villagers):
  – Change often regarded as loss (of employment and services)
  – The residential function:
    • Became dominant at a local level
    • Change from where you were ‘born and grown up’ towards ‘a matter of choice’ within a regional housing market
  – Changing ‘life path’ of villagers.
Changing villages and villagers

- **Transition** from relatively *autonomous villages* towards more or less *residential villages* within a regional housing market

- **Changes in attachment to the village:**
  - *Functional:* Most villagers work, shop, and go out mainly outside their village
  - *Social:* More friends and acquaintances outside than within the village

- **Positive consequences:** number and quality of opportunities for participation in all kinds of activities has grown tremendously
Changing villages and villagers

1. Regionalisation is strongly dependent on high connectivity: *winners and losers*
2. Regionalisation means another frame of mind: *changing identity and attachment*
3. Policymakers are faced with *complex problems* because the path of rural change differs between places and people: difficult to do *social justice* and be *efficient*. 
Changing villages and villagers

1. Regionalisation is strongly dependent on high connectivity: **winners and losers**

- **Less mobile villagers** (older people aged 75 or older and villagers with limited resources): *tied to the village*: high functional attachment and fewer social contacts in the village and feel often less valued by fellow villagers

- ‘*Trapped in*’ the village
Changing villages and villagers

2. Regionalisation means another frame of mind: changing identity and attachment

- **Upscaling** of functional and social relations
- **Downscaling** of cultural and political relations
- Changing emotional attachment:
  - Traditional village bond
  - Local consciousness / village pride
- Changing Frames of reference
  - Frame of reference of the autonomous village
  - Frame of reference of the residential village
Changing villages and villagers

3. Policymakers are faced with complex problems because the path of rural change differs between places and people: difficult to do social justice and be efficient.

- Different and Changing **realities**: from an old diversity to a new diversity
- Different and Changing **frames of references**
- **Regional approach** with attention for individual justice is more efficient than a **local approach** with attention for territorial justice.
Changing movement patterns Dutch population 1985 - 2009

< 40 year

Source: Tordoir & Poorthuis, 2014

≥ 40 year

Source: Tordoir & Poorthuis, 2014

*Alleen relaties met meer dan 516 interacties weergegeven
Bewerking: Tordoir & Poorthuis
Rural Ageing
Lessons from European projects

• Older People in Europe’s Rural Areas (OPERA) 1989-1990
  – 6 countries (UK, NL, FRG, GDR, POL, HUN), 1824 older people, 65+
  – Patterns of integration and participation varies across countries
  – National differences: cultural context and civil society

• European Study Adult Wellbeing (ESAW) 2002-2003
  – 6 countries (NL, L, I, A, UK, S), 12478 older people, 50 – 90
  – Nation important for differences in life satisfaction
    • Nation even more important than age
  – National differences: age structure, economic situation and welfare system
  – Growing diversity of older people (in rural areas)
Age-related diversity

Growing old:
- Loss of health
- Loss of social roles
- Loss of social capital

Generation differences:
- Level of education
- Emancipation
- Use of technology
- Lifepath and Daypath
Diversity: succesfull and vulnerable older people

Successful older people
• ‘Elected’: able to choose a place consistent with wishes

Vulnerable older people
• ‘Excluded’: Had to take the village for granted, experiencing rejection and marginalisation

• Less mobile villagers are tied to their village (older people 75+, rural poor)
• 75+ is now underrepresented in small remote villages, but this pattern will change
Demanding and supportive local environments

Proportion older people with relatively low life satisfaction

- Village - less affluent
- Village - affluent
- Urban - less affluent
- Urban - affluent

Percentage

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40

Drenthe
N-Brabant
N-Holland
Many rural older people are non-users of ICT

**Proportion of non-users**

- **telephone**
- **e-mail, txt message, chat**
- **following people, posting information**
- **looking for information on internet**

**Analysis:** Lotte Vermeij, SCP, 2015
Conclusions

• Rurality and rural ageing are nation specific: Implications of changes in the national context for (rural) older people.

• We are on the eve of a new period of regionalisation: changing geography of EU countries and the position of rural places.

• Growing diversity of rural older people: a divide between older people with multiple disadvantages and older people able to choose a rural place with ‘person-environment fit’.

• Small remote, less affluent villages: demanding environments for vulnerable older people. Low expectations about the supportive character of these communities.

• Many rural older people are still non-users of ICT. No strong evidence that lack of adequate ICT infrastructure is related to low adoption of ICT-use.
Thank you for your attention

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