

The challenge of diversity through migration: rural communities as host for incoming refugees

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1. Introduction and Research Questions

Migration has severely changed the population structure and social fabric of many regions in Europe. Especially in recent years, many urban but also peripheral, rural regions in Europe experienced increasing population diversity due to the inflow of various groups of migrants, among them European free movers, labor migrants from third countries and refugees. Contrary to urban agglomerations, rural communities often have few experiences with diversity.

In Germany, the huge inflow of refugees since 2013 and their redistribution among federal states and counties confronted many rural municipalities with questions of integration and diversity for the first time. Dealing with those questions we can observe a new East-West divide, with the post-socialist part of Germany appearing as especially hostile, xenophobic and even dangerous for foreigners. A longitudinal study on the reception culture in Germany revealed that recently almost every second East German citizen believes that immigrants are not welcome in Germany, while in West Germany, this perception is found in one third of the population (Bertelsmann Foundation 2015: 16). As those differences were not found in earlier versions of the survey, it can be assumed that East and West Germany are developing in different directions concerning the willingness and ability to develop a welcoming reception environment for immigrants.

Differences regarding the openness towards immigrants can be found throughout Europe. The European Eurobarometer-survey shows differing perceptions concerning immigration in accordance to age and social status. Negative and hostile perceptions were especially frequent in older age groups and in those groups with low social status (European Commission 2015: 151ff). Thus, the socio-economic and age profile of regions may serve as part of an explanatory frame for the analysis of diverging reception cultures.

In Germany, regional differences are not only found in perceptions towards immigrants, but also in practices like for example criminal attacks against foreigners or refugee accommodations. Police statistics covering the year 2015 revealed a high number of criminal assaults against refugee accommodations in most East German Federal States. In Saxony, with a share of 5 % at the total population and accommodating 6 % of asylum seekers, there occurred more than one quarter of all incidents against refugee accommodations in 2015 (Tab. 1):

Tab. 1: Criminal attacks against refugee accommodations in Germany, 2015, by Federal state, and shares of attacks in comparison to population share

Federal State (E for Eastern Part, W for Western Part)	Attacks against group accommodations 2015	Share of attacks at all attacks 2015, in %	Number of asylum seekers allocated, 2015	Share of asylum seekers allocated 2015, in %	Number of total population 2014	Share of total population 2014, in %
Saxony (E)	74	26.5	27,180	6.1	4,055,274	5.0
North Rhine-Westphalia (W)	27	9.7	66,758	15.1	17,638,098	21.7
Baden-Württemberg (W)	22	7.9	57,578	13.0	10,716,644	13.2
Bavaria (W)	22	7.9	67,639	15.3	12,691,568	15.6
Mecklenburg-Vorpommern (E)	22	7.9	18,851	4.3	1,599,138	2.0
Berlin	21	7.5	33,281	7.5	3,469,849	4.3
Saxony-Anhalt (E)	18	6.4	16,410	3.7	2,235,548	2.8
Lower Saxony (W)	17	6.1	34,248	7.7	7,826,739	9.6
Brandenburg (E)	15	5.4	18,661	4.2	2,457,872	3.0
Hesse (W)	10	3.6	27,239	6.2	6,093,888	7.5
Thuringia (E)	10	3.6	13,455	3.0	2,156,759	2.7
Rhineland-Palatinate (W)	8	2.9	17,625	4.0	4,011,582	4.9
Schleswig-Holstein (W)	7	2.5	15,572	3.5	2,830,864	3.5
Bremen (W)	2	0.7	4,689	1.1	661,888	0.8
Saarland (W)	2	0.7	10,089	2.3	989,035	1.2
Hamburg (W)	2	0.7	12,437	2.8	1,762,791	2.2
TOTL	279	100	441,899	100	81,197,537	100

Source: Federal Police Agency, BAMF 2016, StBA 2015

Several factors are currently debated as an explanation for those obvious differences. First, there are considerable differences concerning experiences with heterogeneity, which is due to the different immigration history of the two German states. Also, the experience of

political, economic and social transformation in East Germany seems to play a role. Particularly for inhabitants of rural areas in East Germany, the transformation period was associated with various losses. Experiences of personal loss (such as the loss of employment and the social function or loss of social networks due to outmigration of family members) mingled with the experience of spatial stigmatization as “rural periphery”, which also included the dismantling of public infrastructure. In many cases those experiences of deprivation resulted in fundamental distrust of state actors and institutions.

This paper takes off from those principal considerations in order to explore the perceptions and practices of refugee reception in a post-socialist rural part of Germany. It aims to show that the recent refugee allocation is not only perceived as an external shock, but also as a form of betrayal of the local population, which partly still suffers from devaluation due to the political and economic transformation since 1990. The paper will search for explanations concerning the development of xenophobia and will analyze how notions of xenophobia transfers into practice of both residents and public authorities. In the outlook, the paper generalizes its findings and unfolds the interfaces between immigration, integration, social resistance and social innovation in a regionalized perspective. The paper draws on statistical material and case studies which the author carried out in the Federal State of Saxony in the course of the year 2015.

2. Integration, Social Acceptance and Xenophobia - Explanatory Approaches

Dealing with the question of preparedness of local communities for the reception of international migrants, we have to consider that the integration of migrants is a two-sided process, affecting migrants as well as members of the host society. Historical key approaches from integration research like for example the race-relations-cycle focus on the role of newcomers and the steps they have to take in order to become a full member of the host society (Park/Burgess 1921, Taft 1957). Integration is seen as a multi-step process, which provides for a gradual approach to different segments of the host society until full assimilation. At the same time a gradual alienation from the society of origin occurs. More recent approaches suggest the alternative of simultaneous integration in societies of origin and arrival and the development of transnational identities (Pries 1997, Welsch 1999). In addition, the integration of migrants into the host society is no longer equated to assimilation, but it is rather conceptualized as equal participation, while the migrants’

different characteristics and cultures are accepted by the host society. But even those approaches lack the perspective on the host society's characteristics and the designation of factors that enable, promote or hinder the integration of foreigners.

The requirements of intercultural understanding are addressed in approaches from cross-cultural psychology. In Redfield et al.'s acculturation approach, acculturation is described as a bundle of phenomena "which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield et al. 1936: 149). Thus, basic elements of the acculturation process are contact (continuous and first-hand), reciprocal influence and change. Berry (2006) furthermore stresses the contextual configurations of acculturation, considering the diversity of the reception society and its acculturation strategies as well as the voluntariness of migration. Reflecting those approaches, we can hypothesize that the host society's constitution in terms of socio-economic situation, demographic development and migration history will influence integration and acculturation processes. In addition to the experience of heterogeneity, the socio-economic situation of the specific locality must be considered in order to describe differences in the ability to integrate.

For a better understanding of the dynamics and quality of inter-group-relations, approaches from social psychology are helpful which focus on social group identity. Following Tajfel and Turner (1986), social identity is the „part of an individual's self-conception derived from the perceived membership in a relevant social group“. Social identity theory predicts intergroup behavior on the basis of the perceived group status differences, the perceived legitimacy and stability of those differences and the perceived ability to move from one group to another group.

The development of negative dynamics in inter-group-relations is correlated with the endangerment of status devaluation, for example in the context of social or economic transformation processes. In those situations, social groups may react with active degradation of groups which are perceived to rank lower, or because of a perceived competition in the context of social benefit allocation. This mechanism is also referred to as relative deprivation (Pettigrew 2001). This approach appears to be especially suitable for the analysis of inter-group-relations in transformation situations. Several empirical studies show

correlations between relative deprivation and the development of right wing attitudes in various European countries (Heitmeyer 2010; Küpper/Zick 2010).

Regarding the general openness towards foreigners, the form of nationhood seems to play a crucial role. Especially the “ethnic” (Hjerm 1998) type of national feeling was found to correlate with features of xenophobia, while the “civic” type produced a greater openness towards heterogeneous societies and furthermore correlated with a higher level of institutional legitimacy (Billiet et al. 2003; Ceobanu/Escandell 2008). Several authors discuss the prevalence of the “ethnic” type of national belonging in post-socialist societies due to specific historical paths into nationhood, which might be object to challenge and change during the European integration process (Hjerm 2003; Smith 1991; White 2000).

3. The Federal State of Saxony as Source and Destination of Migration

In the following section the paper will briefly describe the demographic development of the case study region since 1989/90 in order to empirically frame the analysis of reception and integration practices and the social conflicts arising from the arrival of asylum seekers.

3.1 Internal migration and demographic decline

The federal state of Saxony already experienced population losses prior to the transformation period, but since the political revolution of 1989, the outflow increased tremendously. Between 1990 and 1993, more than 400,000 people left the federal state of Saxony, which makes 8.5 % of its 4.7 million inhabitants. Between 1990 and 2013, the population number decreased by 15 % (4.7 million to 4.0 million) (StBA 2014). Emigration was highly segregated by age, education and gender, leading to an extended peripheralisation process of geographically remote and rural regions. While mostly younger and better educated people (among them a high proportion of women) left, the remaining population represented growing proportions of elderly, unemployed and less educated people, who faced an ongoing downsizing process of public infrastructure and a stagnation of economic development (Glorius 2015: 26). Those processes proceeded with high regional variation. Especially remote areas or de-industrializing regions experienced a population loss of up to one quarter of their population. Generally, internal migration was heading from small municipalities to the largest agglomerations of the Federal State or to other parts of Germany. While 1990 almost one third (32.1 %) of the Saxonian population lived in

municipalities with less than 5,000 inhabitants, their share decreased to 17.1 % by 2013 (StLA 2015).

3.2 International Migrants in Saxony

The former German Democratic Republic (GDR) had a low level of internationalization. The immigration regime mainly allowed temporary labor migration without possibilities to stay for good; also students and scientists from other socialist countries lived in the GDR, as well as small numbers of political refugees and migrants who arrived due to marriage with a GDR citizen. In 1989 a total of 190,400 foreigners (1 % of the total population) lived in the GDR, of which 93,568 were contract workers (Bade/Oltmer 2004: 95). For comparison, the share of foreign population in the former Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) was 8 % in the end of the 1980s.

In the beginning of the 1990s the immigration dynamics to Germany changed drastically and thus also touched the new federal states which were reunited with the western part at October 3rd 1990. There was a huge inflow of asylum seekers (rd. 1 million from 1991-93) – especially refugees from the Balkan wars (rd. 290,000 from 1991-93) –, a huge wave of resettlement migration of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe (rd. 850,000 from 1990-92, and around 2 million from 1990-99) as well as Jewish quota refugees from the former Soviet Union (28,462 in 1991/92) (Haug/Schimany 2005, BAMF 2014). All those groups had in common that they could not settle at free choice, but they were distributed under the paradigm of burden sharing among and within the German Federal States. This is also the case regarding newly arriving asylum seekers, of which the Federal State of Saxony – according to the national distribution key “Königsteiner Schlüssel” – has to accommodate 5.1 % of all asylum seekers arriving in Germany (BAMF 2016: 13).

A further group of international migrants residing in Saxony are European free movers. Their numbers increased significantly since the new EU member states gained full freedom of residence. Due to Saxony's location bordering Poland and the Czech Republic, there are significant immigration numbers from those two countries. But also the number of migrants from Southern European EU-member states has increased since those countries are facing financial and economic crises. Lastly, there is a considerable number of international students residing in Saxony on a temporary basis. Summing up those groups, the Federal

State of Saxony hosted rounded 124,000 foreigners in the end of 2014, which represented 3 % of its total population (Tab. 2).

Tab. 2: Main groups of foreigners in Saxony, 2013, 2014

	2013	2014
Total population	4,046,385	4,049,504
Foreign population, of which	106,663	123,648
Asylum seekers	5,663	11,163
Persons under subsidiary protection	3,058	3,841
EU-free movers	37,147	43,561
International students	13,610	15,472

Source: Der Sächsische Ausländerbeauftragte 2015: 130

4. Refugee reception and the challenge of diversity in rural regions of Saxony

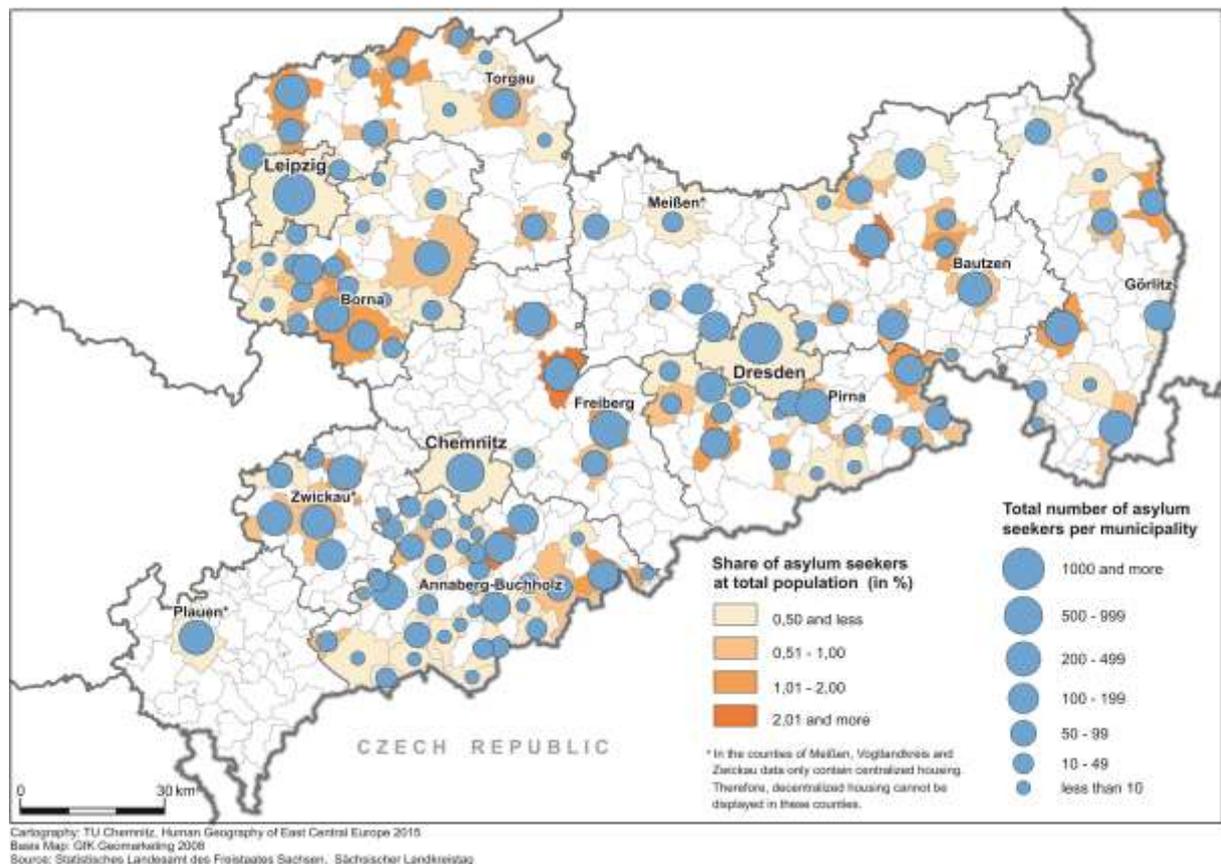
Since the changes of the Federal Law of Asylum in 1993, the number of incoming asylum seekers and asylum applications were steadily decreasing and reached levels of rd. 20,000 in the beginning of the 2000s. Due to increasing conflicts in the Near East and the constant inflow of refugees over the Mediterranean in the 2000s, countries of arrival like Italy were facing severe reception and accommodation problems and refugees started to move onwards, for example to Germany. Since 2014, refugees from the West Balkans and those travelling over the Balkan route led to quickly increasing arrival numbers of asylum seekers in Germany. While in 2014, there were rounded 174,000 first time asylum applications in Germany, this number increased to rounded 442,000 in 2015, but the arrival numbers prior to registration and asylum application are estimated around one million for the same year (BAMF 2016: 7).

4.1 Refugee distribution and housing

After crossing the German border, asylum seekers are registered by the Federal police and then distributed over the Federal States according to their shares of total population and economic situation, calculated by the gross domestic products (BAMF 2016: 13). The Federal State of Saxony has to accommodate 5,1 % of all newly arriving asylum seekers, which made 6,030 persons in 2014 and 27,180 in 2015. Among the Federal States, refugees are again

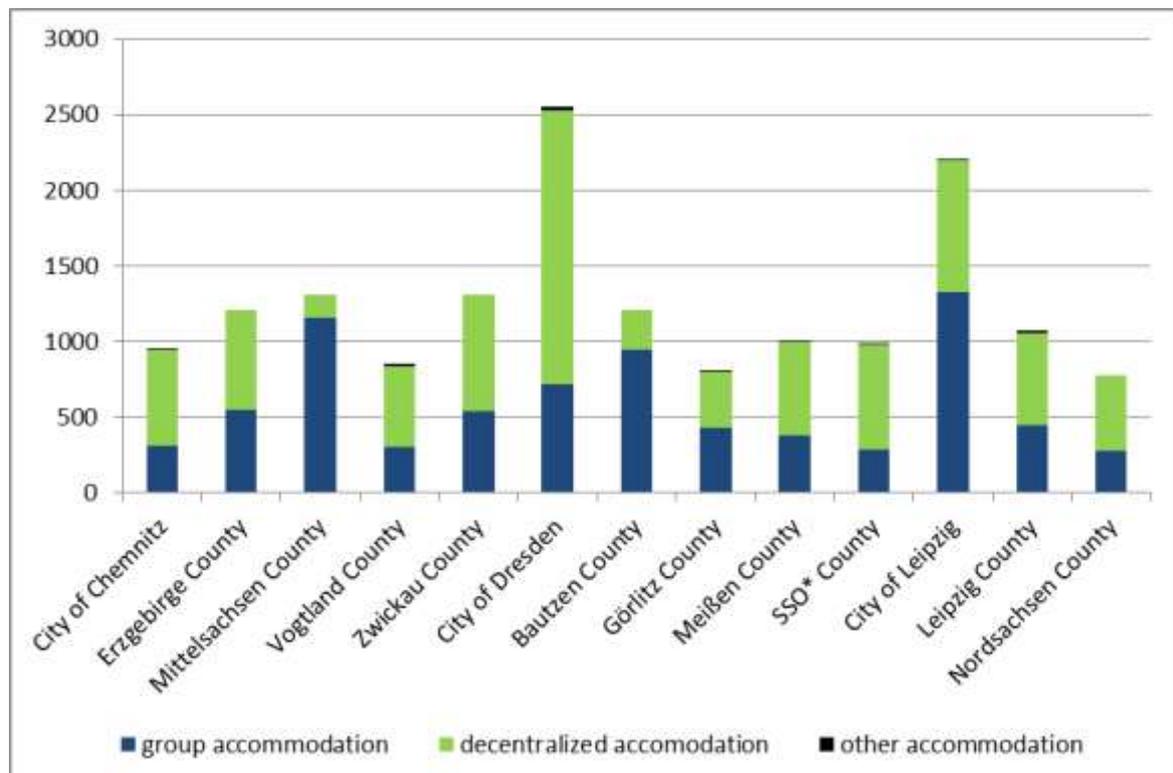
distributed over the counties according to population distribution and economic situation. Figure 1 displays the distribution of asylum seekers in counties and cities of the Federal State of Saxony and shows that practically every region of the State is touched. However, the proportion of asylum seekers towards the total population still is quite moderate, mostly varying between one and two percent (fig. 1).

Figure 1: Distribution of asylum seekers in counties and towns of Saxony, February 2015



Since 2013, counties and towns in Saxony agreed on a desegregation strategy, aiming to provide individual accommodations for about 50 % of all asylum seekers. After arriving from the federal first reception facility, asylum seekers usually spend a couple of weeks in a group facility of the county or town. Then they are allocated to individual apartments, which are preferably offered to families with children, but also to groups of individuals. However, the implementation of this strategy varies considerably between counties and towns, which is (among other reasons) due to the differing availability of adequate housing facilities (fig. 2).

Figure 2: Asylum seekers in Saxony per type of accommodation, February 2015



*Sächsische Schweiz – Osterzgebirge; Source: County data, own compilation

Since the year 2015, the author is carrying out fieldwork in rural municipalities in Saxony in order to explore commonalities and differences in the reception situation. The research design consists of a mixed methods approach, containing focused interviews with politicians, administration professionals and social workers in the municipalities, as well as the analysis of administrative bulletins, newspaper articles and social media blogs. In a later stage, participant observation and narrative interviews with refugees will complete the research design. The following elaborations display results from the first series of expert interviews, concentrating on the management of reception and accommodation procedures and underlying problems. Among those problems, the question how to prepare a population that is lacking diversity experiences and partly displays signs of relative deprivation proved to be a major issue for all my respondents. In my analysis, I will contextualize my findings on the basis of Redfield et al.'s (1936) acculturation theory, combined with social identity theory (Tajfel/Turner 1986) and relative deprivation theory (Pettigrew 2001).

4.2 Acculturation as double-sided process and the contextualization of racism

Following Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936) and Berry (2006) the acculturation process in the context of newly arriving foreigners has to be perceived as a double-sided process, based on continuous first-hand contact between residents and newcomers, which over time may lead to subsequent changes of cultural patterns of both groups. Both Redfield et al. and Berry stress the contextuality of such processes, taking into account the diversity of the reception society, the acculturation strategies of both newcomers and residents as well as the voluntariness of migration.

Rural populations such as in my case study regions in rural Saxony appear to have little expertise with diversity. Migration experiences mainly consist of the huge internal outflow, which – due to its selectivity – left behind local populations with high levels of ageing, unemployment and other social problems (Cudny 2012; Dornbusch/Wolf 1994; Glorius 2010). In those local populations, outdated patterns of thought and behavior from socialist times persisted to a large extent, such as the contradictory behavior towards international migrants: During socialist times, the presence of labor migrants was put as sign of international socialist solidarity with countries such as Poland, Vietnam and Cuba, while in everyday-life migrants from those countries were living segregated and under strict control of security police. Contacts between locals and foreigners were rare and not supported by the state, who suspected that migrants from more liberal socialist states such as Poland might bring counter-revolutionary ideas into the country. This brought forward manifold stereotypes and accusations, which were reflected by the daily press and thus legitimated xenophobic and racist stereotypes of the resident population. In relative absence of foreigners, racist stereotypes were never reflected and thus remain stable even in higher strata of today's East German society (Münch 2013). This argumentation can be found in the expert interviews, as in the following quote from an interview with the mayor of a county town, who is explaining (and excusing) the negative reactions of some locals against refugees: „They rarely have experiences with foreigners. On holidays, yes, then I go to the bazaar, there is bustle, it's loud, there are exotic smells, but I definitely don't want to have this at home in front of my doorstep” (interview mayor E2, translated from German by the author). Needless to say, that these attitudes prepare the ground for harsh xenophobic and

anti-islamic reactions like it is displayed in the weekly “PEGIDA”-demonstrations¹ in Dresden and motivates racist assaults. And in fact, the number of criminal attacks against refugee accommodations in Saxony is significantly higher than its share at the total of allocated asylum seekers (tab. 1).

4.3 The importance of first hand contact

In the absence of foreigners, racist stereotypes are produced and reproduced on the basis of rumors spreading through printed and social media. This becomes evident in the following quote reflecting a town meeting prior to the allocation of asylum seekers and the attitudes that were displayed by the local population during the public conversation: “Sometimes I find it very difficult to understand where those fears come from, it's actually the fear of the unknown. Because if you get to ask more deeply, there has never been any contact with refugees. It is a fear of something which is completely unknown. For me, personally, this is always difficult to understand” (interview social worker E4, translated from German by the author).

Following Berry's (2006) argumentation, continuous first-hand contact is crucial for the acculturation process. Refugees who are located in large compounds have difficulties to achieve first hand contacts with locals, apart from contact with integration professionals or NGO's. Analyzing the institutional strategies for the accommodation of refugees in rural municipalities, the strategy of decentralized refugee housing is framed in a twofold way: Whereas on the one hand, the argumentation follows Berry and stresses the greater ease to get into daily contact and thus create a higher level of acceptance – and of mutual support – decentralization is also pursued to prevent the stigmatization of neighborhoods or draw the attention of right wing radicals.

4.4 The effects of relative deprivation

The correlation between deprivation and extreme right-wing attitude has been repeatedly described and confirmed in empirical studies. The increase of extreme right-wing attitudes is contextualised with a perceived or actually experienced social decline – not only in post-socialist Germany, but also in neighboring European countries (Heitmeyer 2010; Küpper/Zick

¹ PEGIDA stands for „Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes“ /“Patriotic Europeans against the islamisation of the western world“.

2010). The perception of relative deprivation is found to result in a destructive attitude against democratic principles and institutions and leads to the rejection of social groups that are perceived as being different. Social groups suffering from relative deprivation frequently feel attracted by authoritarian, chauvinist or right-wing extremist ideas (Heitmeyer 1994; Endrikat et al. 2002; Schmidt/Maes/Gollwitzer 2003). Indeed empirical studies find differences between East and West Germans, with the East Germans more strongly tending towards chauvinist, racist and social-darwinist attitudes and propagating authoritarian regimes (Tab. 3) (Decker/Kiess/Brähler 2014: 35).

Tab. 3: Right wing and extremist attitudes in East and West Germany 2014 (in %)

	Total	East (N = 503)	West (N = 1.929)
Advocacy of dictatorships**	3.6	5.6	3.1
Chauvinism**	13.6	15.8	13.0
Xenophobia**	18.1	22.4	17.0
Antisemitism	5.1	4.5	5.2
Social darwinism*	2.9	4.6	2.5
Derogation of national socialism	2.2	1.2	2.5

Source: Decker/Kiess/Brähler 2014; statistical significance after Pearson: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

A survey on the participants of the xenophobic PEGIDA movement found even higher right wing extremist, chauvinist and xenophobic attitudes than in the total of the East German population (Daphi et al. 2015: 29). The study also found very high levels of distrust against all sorts of public institutions of political actors. The respondents were found to be outstandingly sceptical against all established societal or political actors (ibd.: 27).

During the expert interviews, political and administrative actors expressed their awareness of the fact that public distrust can threaten their own legitimacy as public representatives. Consequently, they developed a strategy to cope with public distrust and tried to create as much transparency as possible prior to the refugee assignment. As the distribution of refugees affects different levels of governance and as the registration and application procedure dropped behind the inflow of refugees during the year 2015, the municipalities – as the last link in the administrative chain – are frequently left mal-informed on details of those refugees that are allocated to their municipality. Neither are they informed about exact numbers, nor about special needs or about cultural, ethnic or religious characteristics. As the people in charge know how important transparency is for a trustful relationship

between local populations and legislation, they organize information meetings prior to the arrival of refugees. However, this is not effective if they have no details to tell, as this mayor explains: “I have no problem to step in front of the masses and tell them ‘that’s how it is, that’s we have to go through’, but when I am asked: ‘Who is actually coming?’, and I say ‘I don’t know!’ – you can say that once, but at the second or third occasion, you lose your credibility” (interview mayor E1, translated from German by the author).

A further aspect covered by relative deprivation theory is the fact that the newly arriving refugees enlarge the population entitled for social benefits. This results in distribution conflicts of social goods of limited availability, like social housing, and thus scales up social envy. The interviewees in the present case study contextualize this fact with the general social problematics in their districts, which resulted from economic transformation and public cutbacks. The new conflict on social benefits for refugees is just one more example of social deprivation in the eyes of those social groups who perceive themselves as losers of the transformation. “That’s why I say, we don’t have problems because of the asylum seekers, but because of the general social problematics.” (interview county deputy E3, translated from German by the author).

5. Conclusion

Summing up, this paper aims to answer the question of preparedness for the challenges of heterogeneity in regions and populations formerly untouched by foreigners. It deals with the case of refugee accommodation in the Federal State of Saxony, which is largely characterized by remote regions that underwent a peripheralisation process during the last decades due to population losses. In a naïve sense, those regions have plenty of space for newly arriving migrants. But are they ready to respond to the challenge of diversity? The paper drew on theories from social psychology to explain intergroup behavior, like acculturation theory, social identity theory and relative deprivation approach. Relative deprivation theory helped to understand the development of right wing extremist attitudes, combined with a decreasing legitimacy of public institutions. Social groups fighting against deprivation were confirmed in their distrust and their “othering” by the experience of mal-information on arriving refugees and by perceiving refugees as social group inferior to them, albeit competing for social support. Low intercultural competence and xenophobic reactions could be explained with the historical context of a homogeneous society where heterogeneity was

officially denied. Also missing first hand contact serves strongly as explanation for existing fears and xenophobic reactions, and the historical context of nation building and national belonging might reinforce the notion of ethnic heterogeneity and thus oppose the settlement of strangers.

In generalized terms, those findings may be relevant also for other parts of post-socialist Europe, which are simultaneously struggling to cope with the effects of economic transformation and with the adaptation towards a more civic nationhood model in the context of EU integration and societal modernization. In this context, the recent arrival of asylum seekers appear to take a catalyst role, by highlighting existing societal conflicts that so far were not openly addressed. By this, the integration of refugees could bring forward necessary debates about social cohesion and might furthermore fuel processes of institutional adaptation and social innovation .

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