

Transforming Civil Society Engagement into Democratic Action:

Political Socialization Dynamics of Rural Youths in Germany

Marion Näser-Lather | Philipp Langer | Philip Jammermann
Alina Brehm | Christopher Steffen | Claudius Wagemann

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Starting Points

Our key assumptions:

- declining voter turnout and rising populism,
- institutional distrust and growing polarization,
- social media 'echo chambers' .

Previous research:

- focused on urban areas and already politicized groups (Lijphart 1999; Michelsen/Walter 2013),
- Overlooks or stereotypes rural youth as apolitically nostalgic or ideologically extreme

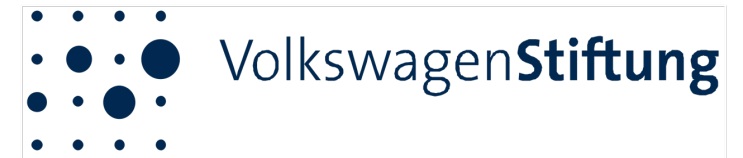
Our perspective emphasizes:

- rural youth as active community members and potential political game changers,
- 'democracy as a social way of life and everyday practice (Adam/Vonderau 2014; Rolshoven 2018)
- the 'political' as a sphere located between people (Arendt 2010)



Research questions:

1. How do young people in remote areas perceive, interpret and react to social and political issues?
2. Why and how do they develop and maintain a meaningful social commitment?
3. How can their civil society engagement translate into political engagement that is responsive to perceived social transformation dynamics and the various crises of democracy?



Young People in Remote Regions
Prospects for Strengthening Democratic Attitudes and Participation



Prof. Marion Näser-Lather
Cultural Anthropology



Steffen Richter
Sport Youth Saxony



Prof. Phil C. Langer
Social Psychology



Theresa Schmidt
German Rural Youth Association

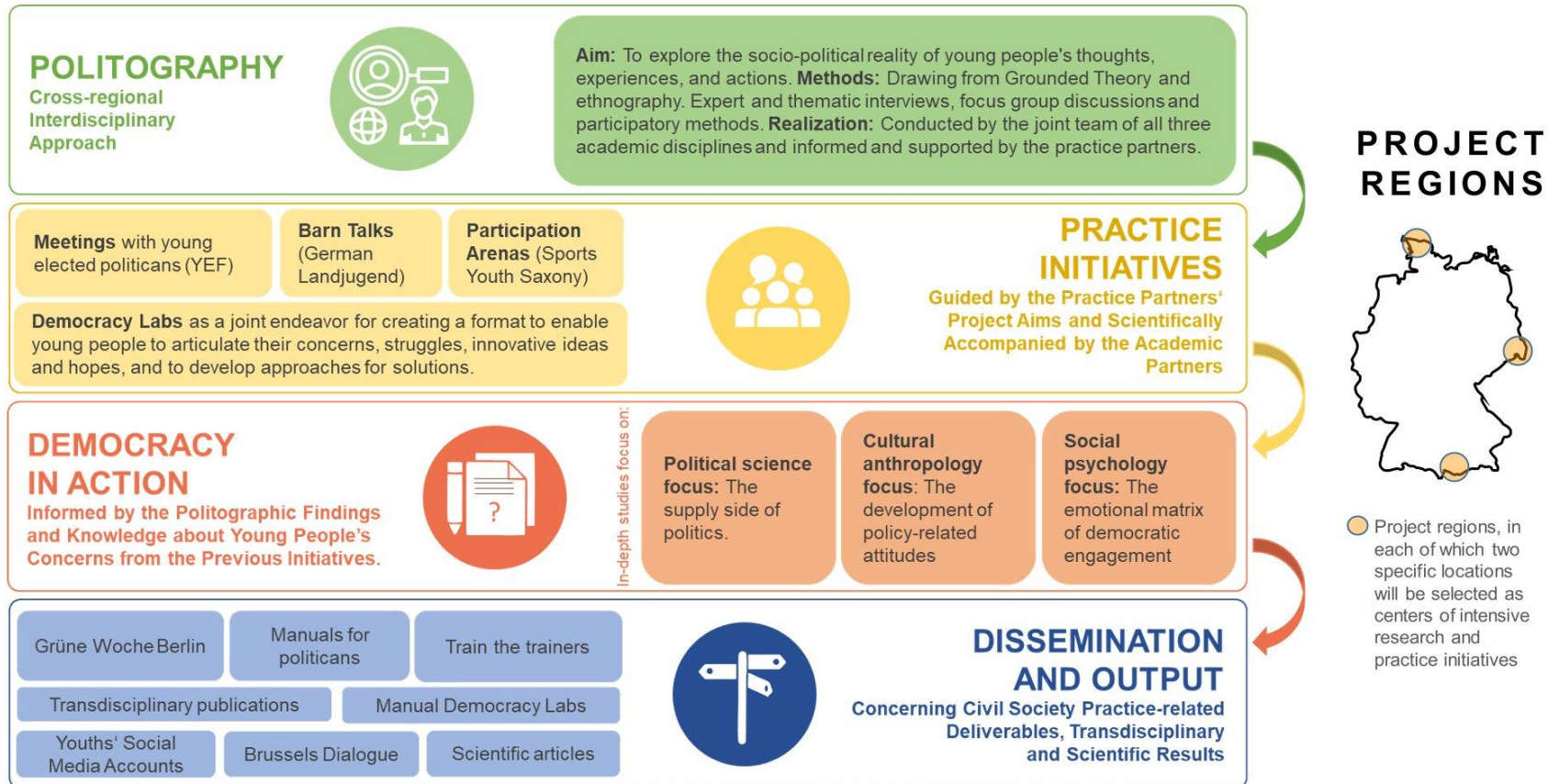


Prof. Claudius Wagemann
Political Sciences



Alex Weber-Hermann
Young Europea Federalists

PROJECT PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES



Preliminary study: left-wing politics in Tyrol and Saxony

Research questions:

- How are rural young people imagined and addressed by left-wing actors?
- How do these constructions of «the people» materialize in the political narratives and offerings directed at them?
- What kind of political environment do these young people encounter?

Key Themes:

- Resignation vs. Hope: political stagnation & silent dissent
- pronounced distinction between rural and urban life-worlds:
“It started as early as kindergarten. My mother was often not invited, and this carried over to the children. You always knew who belonged and who didn’t.”



Preliminary study: left-wing politics in Tyrol and Saxony



Punk festival, Deutzen, Saxony, 2022

- “The political is private”: Leftist views stigmatized and tolerated only in private:
 - “In my circle of friends, everyone I knew thought differently, but as long as I didn’t speak out, it was fine.”
 - “After we organized the punk festival, no one greeted us in the village store anymore.”
 - resistance and a transformative potential
 - “The few times we organized a punk festival, we realized how much potential there actually is. It brought so many people together.”
 - “You feel like a guest in your own home.”
 - “I’m so angry about the inequality here, and it pushed me to do something. I couldn’t stay silent anymore.”
- ➔ political socialization as affective, sensory, embodied, situated, and highly ambivalent

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YouReACT Contacts:

Marion Näser-Lather: marion.naeser-lather@uibk.ac.at

Philipp Langer: phil.langer@ipu-berlin.de

Philip Jammermann: philip.jammermann@ipu-berlin.de