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Shifting notions of the rural: Protests over traffic infrastructure and far-right normalization

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Abstract

Current far-right attitudes to the climate crisis are highly ambivalent, oscillating between the glorification of nature and ideological fragments of "fossil fascism". Invocations of "the rural" serve as semantic mediations, enabling populist radical right parties (PRRPs) to apply seemingly frictionless and multi-scalar narratives of far-right ecology to rural protests. Applying relational and scale-sensitive approaches can help to disentangle how far-right discursive and political effort ties into and transforms spatial imaginaries. This paper discusses the role of rurality for populist scalar re-articulations and the impact of the latter on local communities. Drawing on findings from a qualitative longitudinal study in small towns in Brandenburg, Germany, the paper shows how local PRRP chapters create a specific notion of 'rural rationality' that helps to normalize far-right politics and politicians at the local scale, contrasting a proclaimed albeit abstract cordon sanitaire.

Keywords: *Far Right, Normalization, Rural, Scale, Spatial Imaginaries, Protest*

1. Introduction

Following the rapid ascent of far-right parties and candidates in many democratic countries all over the world, we are now confronted with multiple established far-right ruling coalitions. Although their reach for power remains contested, as Bolsonaro and Trump's recent electoral defeats have shown, processes of mainstreaming far-right thought and the normalization of racist positions and personnel is evident (Mondon & Winter 2020). In many liberal democracies, and especially in Germany with its Nazi past, the political establishment is attempting to uphold a 'Cordon Sanitaire' where other parties rule out cooperation with populist radical right parties (PRRPs). In political

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day-to-day business and notably at subnational level, however, these agreements are in a state of gradual erosion (Heinze 2022a: 347; see also Nettelbladt 2022).

This creeping process might best be observed in *issues* that are ideologically less "suspicious" than migration, for example, when it comes to reaching out effectively to mainstream political audiences (Ross 2017: 3). Also, in a democratic system with a multi-level approach, the 'lowest' level, the local *scale*, provides a productive entry point to explore how far-right actors re-articulate their positions into ostensibly depoliticized local issues (Domann & Nuissl 2022a). Furthermore, specific *places* where this process might be most pressing are in sharp focus, given that the rural areas tend to show higher voter support for PRRPs and their political processes receive less attention in scientific and mainstream media discourse (Kasabov 2020). Hence, this paper concentrates on what appears to be ideologically unsuspicious far-right everyday politics at the municipal level in rural areas: I am particularly concerned with how local PRRP representatives mobilize notions of rurality in the context of disputes revolving around traffic infrastructure. The paper builds on a wide body of (geographical) research with reference to the 'demand side' of radical right populism (on societal context, see Mudde 2007: 229) and there is a lively discussion on how rurally embedded sentiments of anger, discontent and nostalgia affect far-right electoral success (Cramer 2016; Berlet & Sunshine 2019; Furlong 2019; Deppisch *et al.* 2021; Rickardsson 2021; Harteveld *et al.* 2022). In addition, the representation of 'the rural' as a ("parochial") far-right stronghold has been both assessed (Jarosz & Lawson 2002; Rodríguez-Pose 2018; Gkartzios *et al.* 2020; Kasabov 2020) and contested by a growing number of scholars (Halfacree 2018; Scoones *et al.* 2018; Woods 2018; Roman-Alcalá *et al.* 2021). Looking at the 'supply side' (institutional and ideological structure of PRRPs, see Mudde 2007: 256–276), some scholarly attention has been given to how PRRPs utilize notions of "rural populism" (de Lange & Rooduijn 2015; Nilsson & Lundgren 2015; Limeberry & Fox 2021; Pied 2021; Bori & Gonda 2022). Other scholars unpack the far right's strong ties to car-centrism and the petrol industry (Malm & Zetkin Collective 2021; Moore & Roberts 2022), and their specific forms of climate and environmental populism (Atkins & Menga 2022; Swyngedouw 2022). Very little research, however, has been carried out on how the far-right employs the discourse of 'rurality' at the local scale (for an exception, see Jadhav 2021).

Consequently, this paper wants to contribute to ongoing discussions in political and rural geography by disentangling the following urgent questions: How do municipal PRRP actors apply notions of rurality and how do they normalize far-right topics and representatives through this discourse?

Drawing on two case studies of conflicts centred on traffic infrastructure in Brandenburg, Germany, this contribution argues that populist invocations of the rural hint at a crucial semantic dodge, one that enables local far-right actors to address climate-related issues by re-framing them as specifically *rural* rather than politico-ecological concerns. They furthermore use embedded spatial imaginaries of "the rural" to create a "rural rationality", emphasizing the common sense of rural everyday life. This allows local PRRP chapters to use vertical anti-establishment rhetoric, while at the same time gradually integrating themselves into the municipal establishment.

In order to create a conceptual framework, I will develop a relational understanding of rurality in the context of the widely debated urban-rural divide of far-right electoral success (2.1) and theorize the AfD emphasis on the rural as a mediation of two competing far-right ideological fragments (2.2). Furthermore, the relevant literature on the normalization of PRRPs is reviewed (2.3) and a scalar-sensitive analytical framework

sketched out in order to disentangle the correspondent re-articulations of local far-right actors (2.4). Following an introduction to the case studies and the methods applied (3), I present the results of empirical fieldwork and discuss them in four steps. I describe the dominant spatial imaginaries of rurality (4.1) and analyse far-right "rural rationality" as a scale-mediating strategy (4.2). In a final step, the impact of the latter on the normalization of far-right topics (4.3) and representatives (4.4) will be discussed. The concluding remarks (5) are a summary of the findings and critically assess the limitations and future trajectories of research on rural far-right normalization.

2. Conceptual framework

To adequately evaluate the possible effects of local far-right evocations of rurality, the following paragraphs will provide a brief review of the literature associated with rurality, (local) normalization and scale in the context of PRRP research. Step by step, each section clarifies the conceptual approach to the two case studies.

2.1 Developing a relational understanding of uneven far-right electoral success

When the debate on the spatially uneven distribution of PRRP electoral success flared up, the level of academic discussions about "rurality" as a term and as a concept was either outpaced or neglected by popular discourse. The strongholds of the far right were depicted globally as traditionalist, parochial rural areas in stark contrast to cosmopolitan and progressive urban and metropolitan spaces (Roman-Alcalá *et al.* 2021). The importance of the rural areas for the electoral success of PRRPs has been widely discussed, and notably (if somewhat ironically) framed as the revenge of "places that don't matter" (Rodríguez-Pose 2018). In fact, there are solid indications for an electoral urban-rural divide, with a higher voting share for PRRPs on the rural side (Scala & Johnson 2017; Corradi 2021; Rickardsson 2021). That said, there is a consensus on the assessment of problematic aspects of mainstream and media discourses on PRRP success: "In a sense, rural and peripheral areas are being 'blamed' for the rise of nationalism" (Pugh & Dubois 2021: 270). This spatial narrative not only leads to externalizing the problem from the social milieus of most academics and media professionals, it also nurtures contempt towards peripheral and rural regions as a whole (Jarosz & Lawson 2002; Kasabov 2020). Furthermore, a dichotomic concept of urban centres and a rural periphery is used as a powerful discursive tool by right-wing autocrats themselves (Roman-Alcalá *et al.* 2021). The mobilizing power of anti-urban PRRP tropes also needs to be understood in relation to the dominant spatial representations of a political rift between these two realms.

So, what is to be found at the empirical core of this dominant narrative in the case of Germany, where the PRRP Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) celebrated a huge electoral ascent during the last decade?

Analyses of the latest electoral data "partially confirm the link between rurality and higher levels of support for the AfD" (Deppisch *et al.* 2021: 12). That said, the study cited did find a non-linear correlation indicating that although AfD support (particularly in eastern Germany) is higher in rural compared to non-rural areas, the AfD gains its

strongest support in *fairly* rural areas, not in *very* rural areas. This is only one of many geographic-electoral studies indicating that rurality does not per se sufficiently explain AfD success. Apart from the spatially uneven distribution of economic hardship, experiences of local marginalization (Harteveld *et al.* 2022) and peripheralization (Förtner *et al.* 2021) provide far more nuanced explanations for a geographic analysis that transcends the urban-rural dichotomy. These shared feelings of relative decline in one's own part of the country compared to other places (see de Dominicis *et al.* 2022) generate regionally rooted forms of resentment, a topic that has been discussed quite prominently (Cramer 2016; Gest 2016; Hochschild 2016). The debates clearly showed, however, that "studies of subnational variation in PRR support (or other electoral outcomes) need to theorize and model how different factors operate in different contexts, rather than adopt a 'one size fits all' approach." (Harteveld *et al.* 2022: 457).

This leads to the question of whether rurality as a conceptual term is of any significance when it comes to researching PRRPs in these areas. Some qualitative case studies assessing the role of rurality for (local) far-right politics point to a fruitful method of applying this dimension without losing complexity (Jadhav 2021; Pied 2021; Walter 2021). Chip Barlet and Spencer Sunshine (2019), for example, demonstrate how organized white supremacists exploit prejudice, rural imaginaries, discontent, and localism in their campaigns, which in turn shape local political consciousness. With this in mind, the approach in the current paper works towards a relational understanding of rurality that allows for recognition of "the diverse networks and flows that criss-cross rural and urban space and the hybrid forms that result as being part of the very constitution of both the rural and the urban" (Woods 2011: 43). It highlights the material and powerful cultural effects of 'the rural', simultaneously interrogating its discursive, historic and territorial construction, and ties in with the growing interest in Lefebvrian theories of the rural, framing it as a process of the social production of relational patterns of consumption and production, representations and lived everyday practices (Halfacree 2006; Halfacree 2007; Woods 2009; Lefebvre 2022). This thinking offers empirical access to 'scripts' (Woods 2011: 202) of the rural that produce and signify rural everyday life.

I address these scripts as spatial imaginaries of rurality and show how they constitute a political opportunity structure for PRRPs. Julie-Anne Boudreau notes that spatial imaginaries function not only as individual frameworks but as *collectively* shared beliefs that structure everyday life (Boudreau 2007: 2596). Spatial imaginaries, as Josh Watkins emphasizes, are carriers of the performative and forward-looking potential of places and communities: "They make arguments about characteristics of the past and present to advocate what the future (of certain spaces) may look like" (Watkins 2015: 510). It seems therefore that the specific aspects of rurality these spatial imaginaries entail are more important than whether the socio-economic or demographic characteristics of a place are classified as "rural". Chapter 4.1 and 4.3 shed light on how these conceptual ideas translate into empirical inquiry.

2.2 Placing the rural in far-right discourse: The AfD between Eco-populism and Fossil fascism

To understand the discursive and political strategies of AfD representatives at the local scale it is, first of all, crucial to recognize how they are entangled in wider partisan and non-partisan contexts. The party should be contextualized as an important parliamentary

project within the environment of a globally active far right (Mudde 2019), which has in recent years gone through several waves of radicalization (Arzheimer 2019). More precisely, the party can be understood as an exceptional PRRP. AfD's organization is more decentralized and its decision-making modes are more inclusive than is habitually associated with far-right parties – this stems from AfD's strategy to serve as a "movement-party" (Heinze & Weisskircher 2021). This section discusses the various connections between local partisan far-right politics and broader non-partisan and movement-oriented far-right narratives of rural nature, climate and ecology.

The AfD has no genuine roots in agrarian issues, since it was founded in 2013 initially as a rallying party of Eurosceptics. Yet, its later positions towards more anti-migrant, racist and climate change denialist sentiments collide with the active appropriation of rurality. This strategy has also been analysed recently for other populists in the Global North (Limeberry & Fox 2021). But, given the observation that the age of (policy-oriented) agrarian populism is over (Strijker *et al.* 2015: 32), it seems to be merely a symbolic tactic and less the inheritance of genuine agrarian populism as Margaret Canovan defines it (Canovan 1981). Conceptualizing the AfD as populist far right is a common definition stemming from the idea that populism is a "thin-centered ideology", in this case attached to the ideological elements of the radical right (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2018: 1669). Here, two competing ideological strands are conveyed by the concept of "the rural".

Firstly, far-right thought is fundamentally rooted in the fetishization of nature. The ecological ideology of the radical right has always claimed that the rules of nature apply in equal measure to social relations (Moore & Roberts 2022: 44). Mystifying the forces of nature and naturalness can, in times of ecological turmoil, serve as the essence of right-wing radicalism, as several key thinkers of the Frankfurt School argue (Wallmeyer 2021). 'Organic' and Darwinist theories of societal and state organization, "wherein each and every individual forms a cell in the state's body and conformity produces health in body as well as state" (Ross 2017: 26), provided the foundation for historic Nazism. As Bernhard Forchtner (2019: 300) demonstrates, current far-right movements in Germany also draw their imaginary of nature (as "not multicultural, but biodiverse") from a rich intellectual legacy of ethno-nationalist ideas. One of its latest manifestations is the consolidation of several *völkisch* settler projects in several rural parts of Germany, embodying the very idea of *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) and imagining future geographies of racially immunized socio-ecological configurations (Varco 2023). Balša Lubarda describes how far-right ecologism emerges as a key ideology for stabilizing and unifying the ruling coalition of the right in post-socialist European countries (Lubarda 2023).

Secondly, several voices share the analysis that in the current era of climate change mitigation, crisis coalitions between far-right parties and the dominant classes – fearing loss of their accumulated wealth – are forged(Malm & Zetkin Collective 2021; Cox & Skidmore-Hess 2022; Moore & Roberts 2022). Ranging from "petro populism" (Tornel 2020) to "fossil fascism" (Malm & Zetkin Collective 2021), these politics can take on a wide variety of forms. Andreas Malm and the Zetkin Collective have developed an understanding of this emerging force that goes beyond mere opportunistic partnerships. Drawing on the work of Roger Griffin, they define "fossil fascism" as a set of ultranationalist ideas connecting "fossil fuels to palingenetic or palindefensive purposes" (Malm & Zetkin Collective 2021: 274). In this sense, an ideological core can be identified, one that worships the organic national community and places fossil industries at the centre of its creation and its wealth, which in turn must be protected

in order to defend the community. Despite some weaknesses in the analytical use of the term fossil fascism, which will be addressed later, it helps to identify a core element of the "thin-centered ideology" of PRRPs and explain its recent appeal to several classes, but also the need to harmonize it with other ideological elements.

This emerging strategic and ideological partnership should come as no surprise to observers, since Erik Swyngedouw (2007, 2010, 2018, 2019, 2022) has argued in several instances that populist climate change denialism should be understood in terms of its complex relations to mainstream climate politics. The core of his argument lies in the unveiling of liberal climate measures as populist "ecologies of fear", naturalizing post-politics and marginalizing alternative imaginations of the given socio-ecological order (Swyngedouw 2010: 217). Within this regime, the master discourse itself becomes populist, so that the anti-climate politics of PRRPs should not be seen as opposition to the regime but as a *perversion* of its core narratives (Swyngedouw 2022: 915).

Both the 'ecofascist' and the 'fossil fascist' far-right positions exhibit the inherently contradictory ideological foundation of PRRPs. As shown, for example, in case studies of (right-wing) "populist ecologies" in Hungary (Bori & Gonda 2022), Italy and Brazil (Atkins & Menga 2022), these contradictions are re-articulated and exploited by the far right in a somewhat contingent but always opportunistic way. Environmental and climate vocabulary can serve "as a container for [the far-right's] wider social, political, or economic demands" (Atkins & Menga 2022: 224). I argue that the AfD has found a means of communicating and combining its nature-glorifying and "fossil-fascist" ideological elements through excessive emphasis on *the rural* and provide empirical evidence for this in Chapter 4.2.

2.3 Normalization of radical right populism

Apart from this ideological context, studies on populist *tactics* help to explain the normalization of AfD politics. Populism worships and idealizes the people and populists claim to be the only genuine and resolute representation of its will (Ionescu & Gellner 1969). As Rogers Brubaker adds, their discourses should be understood in relation "to a *two-dimensional vision* of social space, defined by the *intersection* of vertical and horizontal oppositions" (Brubaker 2017: 362, emph. in orig.). With the term vertical opposition, Brubaker addresses the populist strategy of defining an established elite that is imagined as suppressing and exploiting 'the people' or acting on behalf of foreign interests. This vertical dimension of the enemy also operates "downwards" and mobilizes bigoted attitudes towards marginalized and (sub-)proletarian groups within a stratified society. When it comes to clarifying horizontal opposition, radical-right ideologies fuel thin-centred populism in order to define boundaries of belonging (to 'the people') through racial, cultural and nationalist categories. Here it can mobilize attitudes deeply engrained in capitalist nation states. Cas Mudde (2007: 297) therefore suggests understanding the "populist radical right essentially as a 'pathological normalcy', i.e., a radicalized version of mainstream ideas, and not as a 'normal pathology', unconnected to the mainstream".

Against this background, normalization of the far right must be understood as a non-exceptional process in which already embedded forces become dominant (Mondon & Winter 2020). Empirically, this can be clearly observed in two dimensions. Ruth Wodak argues for tracing how specific ideological fragments of PRRPs over time and through semiotic shifts become normalized and part of the mainstream (Wodak 2019). Another,

albeit more obvious aspect of the (local) normalization of radical right populism is the tendency to de-demonize far-right representatives, despite (on higher levels) the cordon sanitaire in place to exclude them (Heinze 2022b). This short definition of normalization as a) the mainstreaming of far-right ideological fragments and b) the acceptance of its partisan representatives within the parliamentarian establishment is applied here to the case studies under review and gives structure to the results (4.3 and 4.4) (for a more extensive conceptual discussion of local far-right normalization, see Domann [forthcoming]).

Insightful studies in the context of this latter aspect show how PRRP actors exploit local governance arenas such as municipal councils, townhall meetings, participation, and participatory planning processes, all of which have been studied most prominently for the rise of the Tea Party movement (Westermeyer 2019; Ehrhardt 2020). For the German case, this aspect has been discussed as key to understanding AfD processes of normalization (Nettelbladt 2021; Domann & Nuissl 2022b). In this context, it is vital to note the well-described trend of institutional polarization in local politics between small (mostly rural) and large (mostly urban) communities. While urban politics tends towards an increasingly contentious mode of decision-making, whereby majority ratios in local councils are definitive and parties that dominate national politics are powerful, the situation in small communities is reversed. Numerous structural constraints that foster consociational political arrangements in small municipalities have been identified, such as the interdependencies of local politicians due to family ties or social density, and growing competition with other localities or historic-materialist path dependencies (Jeggle & Ilien 1978; Sonnenmoser & Wuketich 2017). Here, consensus, deliberation, compromise, and concentration of power in the mayor's office tend to become ever more important (Bogumil & Holtkamp 2016). These local politics share many aspects of what Jacques Rancière describes as "archipolitics", understanding the political as a social space that is homogenously structured and leaves no room for dissent: "The good city is one in which the order of the cosmos, the geometric order that rules the movement of the divine stars, manifests itself as the temperament of a social body" (Rancière 1999: 68).

Although the cited terms are broader concepts, derived mainly from national and international party politics, this paper argues that they can also be applied with caution to untangle "opportunity structures" (see Koopmans 1999) for and different processes of far-right mobilization at local level. To this end, the following chapter discusses the scalar dimension of local PRRP chapters and suggests that their discursive efforts be interpreted as scale framing.

2.4 Far-right scale framing and municipal politics

In political and electoral geography, the relevance of scalar dimensions for the success of parties and narratives has been a topic of discussion for decades. In his analysis of the spatial dimensions of Italian party politics, John Agnew claims that "political parties cannot be adequately understood without attending to the ways in which considerations of geographical scale are intertwined with their ideologies and organizational activities." (Agnew 1997: 99–100). Acknowledging the fundamental critique of using *scale* as an analytical dimension (e.g., Marston *et al.* 2005) and the widely disputed scale debates of the discipline (see Jones III 2017), recent analyses of far-right politics continue to highlight the value of examining the phenomenon from a scalar perspective

(Graddy-Lovelace 2019; Casaglia *et al.* 2020; Kalb 2020; Lamour 2020; Förtner *et al.* 2021; Roman-Alcalá *et al.* 2021).

Elsewhere (Domann & Nuissl 2022a), we have suggested applying the concept of scale framing to the disentangling of far-right multi-scalar discourses, drawing on the understanding of Helga Kurtz, who comprehends scale frames as

> *"discursive practices that construct meaningful (and actionable) linkages between the scale at which a social problem is experienced and the scale(s) at which it could be politically addressed or resolved." (Kurtz 2003: 894).*

Using this concept, three modes of scalar re-articulations of local PRRP chapters have been identified: localizing, de-localizing and scalar-mediating scale frames (Domann & Nuissl 2022a), the last of which seems to resonate most with locally embedded narratives. And for the case studies in this paper, it has been shown that local AfD representatives specifically problematize wind turbines in rural and diesel ban zones in urban areas in this scalar-mediating manner.

Connecting these findings to research on current AfD framing strategies in relation to climate and ecological crises, it can be expected that the politics of its local chapters will not embrace climate change denialism outright but instead focus on the costs and burdens to local 'people'. This hypothesis is supported by Anne Küppers, who analysed the AfD member magazine and concluded that "energy transition scepticism" seems to be the most dominant frame here. Without falling into profane denialism (which resonates in its radical form with approx. five per cent of the German population), energy transition scepticism allows for "the question of 'who pays?' for climate change mitigation (the AfD's answer being 'the core people')" (Küppers 2022: 16).

As will be shown later, it is of some importance to understand the discursive work of local PRRP chapters as scale framing when it comes to normalizing far-right topics (4.3). But first, the next chapter introduces the case studies under review and the methods applied.

3. Doing longitudinal geography: Case studies, methods and interpretation

In order to examine the role of rurality for far-right scalar re-articulations and their normalizing effects, this paper discusses results from two case studies on conflicts revolving around traffic infrastructure in Brandenburg, Germany.

The first conflict ("B158") stems from the planned construction of a ring road to bypass a suburban municipality close to Berlin (Ahrensfelde) with 14 000 inhabitants (see Figure 1). As the recent spatial development of the Berlin metropolitan region has undergone dramatic changes in the wake of reunification, resulting in rapid and ongoing residential suburbanization dynamics (Hierse *et al.* 2017), the tangential road cutting through the suburb is now a major bottleneck for commuters and suffers regularly from heavy traffic. The road is part of the federal highway B158 and the section is called Dorfstraße (village road). The starting point for the conflict dates back to a time before German reunification when initial steps were taken for the planning of a ring road to relieve the village core of through traffic. In 1991, the municipality applied for the execution of similar plans. The higher-level state and federal administrations

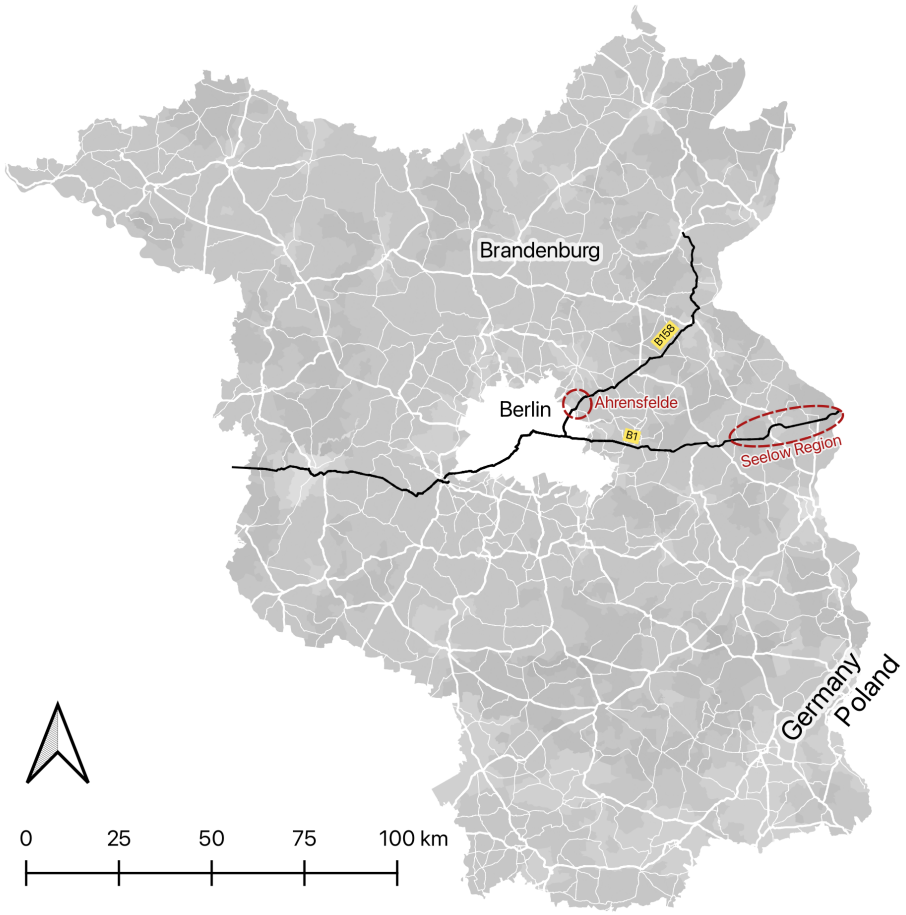

Figure 1. Study area in eastern Brandenburg; sections in focus of local protest groups highlighted in red (source: own illustration based on OpenStreetMap data; map projection: ETRS89).

responsible, however, were immersed in financial debates, since both Berlin and the neighbouring state of Brandenburg would be obliged to contribute to the construction. It took twenty years for the two states to come to an arrangement and initiate the road scheme evaluation that led to the preferred choice of a partially covered multi-lane road parallel to the current tangent. In 2015, the planning process ground to a halt once again due to financial constraints. After three decades of turbulent debate, the fear of substantial noise emissions and the potentially negative impact on the townscape has sparked protest in recent years, with campaigns, demonstrations, gatherings, and public letters calling on those responsible to reconsider their plan and once and for all seek a solution to the issue of 24 000 cars passing through the town on a daily basis (see Figure 2). The preferred solution of a local citizens' initiative and all of the local council members is to construct the entire ring road below the surface until it leaves the developed area of the suburb.

In a second conflict in the rural area around the town of Seelow, a section of another federal highway ("B1") linking the adjacent Polish border to the Netherlands for a length of 778 kilometres is at the centre of the local dispute. The current conflict was prompted by Polish government plans to replace the old road bridge over the River Oder

near Kostrzyn with a new one, which would then be available to heavy cargo transport on its way to Berlin. In response, the "citizens' initiative B1" was formed in 2013 and began to rally against the dreaded increase of cross-border transit traffic, associating it with noise and environmental pollution. The initiative has already abandoned its more radical demands – opposition to any kind of cross-border heavy cargo transportation – and is now rallying to have the road adapted to the expected traffic, e.g., with ring roads for the affected villages and a broadening of certain road sections to facilitate safer overtake manoeuvres. Ten years into the campaign, the conflict remains unsolved and since no mitigation measures have been implemented, tension is rising (see Figure 3).

Both cases can be understood as suitable observation subjects for the normalization of local AfD chapters. This is exemplified by the party's gains in each local council election after its founding in 2013. In the Ahrensfelde local elections, its share of the vote jumped from zero per cent in 2014 to fourteen per cent in 2019. For the same period, it rose from zero to twenty per cent in the Seelow local council election. In the Brandenburg state elections in late 2019, the AfD won the direct and the majority vote in both constituencies, ranging from 24 to 27 per cent. Since these results are only slightly above the state average, the municipalities should not be considered strongholds of this PRRP. They do, however, help to understand the daily workings of far-right politics and its gradual normalization.

The two case studies were not chosen for this aspect alone but also as a high-contrast sample of structural rurality (the Seelow region is classified as very rural, Ahrensfelde as suburban with a rural past), subjective rurality (surprisingly more pronounced in Ahrensfelde than in the Seelow region), and a low-contrast sample in terms of the conflict (strong citizens' initiatives at odds with the federal highway plan to mitigate the impact of traffic and preserve road functionality).

A prospective longitudinal study was carried out in Ahrensfelde and the Seelow region between spring 2019 and early 2023. The deliberate design of temporality in qualitative longitudinal research (QLR) allows data to be analysed diachronically to identify changes (Holland 2011) – in this case the impact of the AfD having been elected to the municipal councils in May 2019 and the attendant processes of normalization. Following Norbert Elias (1997), this allows for understanding society as a figuration under constant processual change; his ontology of "sociogenesis" thus provides a fruitful concept for QLR (Stanley 2015: 254) and spatial research (Knoblauch & Löw 2017).

At the heart of this study are the findings from longitudinal qualitative interviews with several citizens. The temporal dimension of longitudinal interviews makes it possible to understand "the meaning of temporal change to people, while also exploring how people interpret and respond to such change" (Hermanowicz 2013: 194). The interviewees were chosen for their (mostly voluntary) involvement in the local community and their claim to have a (fairly) good knowledge of the issues that currently give cause for community concern. It was important for this study, nonetheless, that none of them is either serving or running for office on a council or in parliament. The sample consists of a variety of informants ranging from local parish priests to volunteer coaches in local sports clubs. It represents a significant segment of small community milieus. Due to the sampling criteria, however, the interviewees (compared to the local population) are older than average (many are already retired) and white, whereas in terms of gender the sample is balanced. The objective was to talk to the interviewees twice, once prior to local elections (n[t1]=39) and a second time one year after the elections, by which time the AfD would gain a significant share of the seats on each of the local councils. The

Figure 2. Protest Banner in Ahrensfelde (B158): "We don't want a multi-lane highway [cutting] through our village!!!"

Figure 3. Protest Banner in the Seelow region (B1): "No 40-ton trucks in transit through our villages".

Covid 19 pandemic led to the postponement of a second interview phase several times, which had an adverse effect on the trust-building process between the interviewees and the interviewer that is considered an integral part of successful QLR (Miller 2015). The result was a considerably high panel attrition of fifty per cent (n[t2]=19).

With regard to the scope and complexity of longitudinal research, Jane Lewis (2007: 551f) suggests adopting a very clear method of analysing the data. Of the seven methods she identifies, this paper makes use of a) cross-sectional analysis (interpreting the interview data for the first period of inquiry), b) repeat cross-sectional analysis (tracing changes between the two periods of inquiry on an individual level) and c) a thematic analysis (changes over time relevant to the key issue across cases) (see Table 1). Coding and diachronic comparison of the interview transcripts help to identify sequences that describe aspects of the past, present and future of the places in the

exact same words and those where slight or massive shifts in meaning over time are observable. Here, the challenge is to identify the minute distinctions in how change or stability is represented. This calls for fine-grained analysis that equates the researcher's work with that of a "word cruncher" (Saldaña 2003: 46).

As suggested by the methodological reflections on qualitative longitudinal research, the interview data is triangulated with other, notably ethnographic data collections (Neale 2017: 6). The main additional resources presented in this paper are document analysis of files, minutes and records of local councils and administrations, and of the political manifestos of all locally represented parties and independent lists, participant observation at field-configuring events (such as protests, demonstrations or town fairs), and non-participant observation of online spaces relevant to the issue (Facebook pages and Instagram accounts of local protest groups, AfD chapters and the local newspaper). In order to reconstruct far-right rural rationalities, AfD material was analysed in a scale-sensitive approach to evaluate where the problem, cause and suggested solution were located. The data was coded in a content analytical approach and where possible ascribed with the associated scalar references (Kurtz 2003; Domann & Nuissl 2022a). Table 1 shows how the different data corpuses and analytical steps form the argument of this paper.

Table 1. Empirical sources and analytical steps used to disentangle the role of rurality for normalization of far-right local politics and politicians.

Aspect of observation	Data and analysis	Period of inquiry	Presented in chapter
Spatial imaginaries of the rural	Cross-sectional analysis of interviews from the first period of inquiry	Spring 2019	4.1
Far-right creation of rural rationalities	Scale-Frame Analysis of observations and documents	03/2019-08/2021	4.2
Normalization of far-right topics	Repeat cross-sectional analysis of interviews, comparison of both periods of inquiry	Spring 2019 vs. late summer 2021	4.3
Normalization of far-right personnel	Thematic analysis of observations and documents	03/2019-02/2023	4.2

4. Results

In order to show how local AfD chapters appropriate notions of the rural and to assess the effects, the following sections will 1) present embedded imaginaries of rurality, particularly in the context of car-dependency in the places under review, 2) show how local AfD chapters use aspects of rurality in their discursive work to create smooth rural rationalities not only for their traffic policies but also for climate and environmental issues in general, 3) provide evidence of how these discourses influence local imaginaries, and 4) provide insights into normalization processes in the sphere of mainstream politics and the administration.

4.1 Threatened rurality and involuntary car-centrism as opportunity structures

The index on rurality calculated by the Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries merely defines the spatial setting of the B1 conflict in the Seelow region as rural (Thünen-Institut 2023). Yet, following the relevant debates on relational rurality (see 2.1) it seems more pertinent to concentrate on the specific representations, practices and perceptions of the current state of these places in an urban-rural continuum. Ahrensfelde, the spatial setting of the B158 conflict, is framed by most of the local interviewees as a "village" that happens to border Berlin. As a result, it faces rapid growth, is witnessing a steady influx of young families, and struggling to cover the demand for building plots and the infrastructure for childcare and education. In contrast, the imaginary of Seelow, with only a third of the population of Ahrensfelde, is that of a regionally important centre with some urban attributes and infrastructure amidst a sparsely populated environment.

In both cases, these changes are perceived as challenging the rural imaginaries of these places. In Ahrensfelde, in particular, newcomers, who are mostly used to an urban lifestyle, are seen as a major threat to the customary way of life. Here, it is feared that the influx from urban areas will put an end to certain time-honoured local qualities such as *"the communal, the peacefulness…"* (Int_B158_7_t1).

This imaginary of accustomed rural livelihoods under threat goes hand in hand with an ambivalent car-centrism. After decades of neoliberal transportation planning, privately owned vehicles have evolved as the sole means of mobility for most interviewees. A different kind of future seems beyond their imagination. Which is why the two roads, B1 and B158, are considered vital lifelines for both communities and individuals; their deterioration is therefore experienced as an existential threat: "In the holidays [when no school buses are running], if you are an old person without a car, you're lost." (Interview _B1_10_t1). This imaginary not only holds true for individual mobility but also for the road-based distribution of economic and consumer goods in the study areas, paralleled by the realization, notably for the B1 case, that people on the road are competing with each other for a rare space: "They say we have no choice. [...] So if this new bridge doesn't come and trucks are not operating, then we'll be *even more* isolated. So, it definitely has to happen, this traffic through here [but then] I don't want to drive along this road anymore." (Int_B1_11_t1). In this perceived ambiguity, the car-dependency of the interviewees becomes even more drastic. The content of almost all the stories

they shared about their daily lives – seeing a doctor, visiting relatives, buying groceries – begins with turning the key in the ignition. This explains why discussions about the two roads are so heated, "because here of course in terms of transport you spend half the day getting to work or getting home from work" (Int_B158_4_t1). Hence cars are simultaneously perceived as, on the one hand, the key to social participation and, on the other, as tin traps that 'wasted' countless hours of their lives. So, when it comes to the B1 and B158, what we see for both case studies in terms of traffic is the frustration and car-centrism of the residents, who are equivocally *for* their own motorized traffic and *against* that of others. The above-mentioned idea of an emerging fossil fascism allows us to understand such everyday practices of de-solidarization as opportunity structures for far-right projects. And perhaps an empirical focus on concrete characteristics of the everyday, here for example forms of detachment from the space of others through automobility, can be a way to flesh out the often abstract concept of (fossil) fascism (Henderson 2006; Malm & Zetkin Collective 2021: 371).

One major difference between the two cases is the identification of the traffic cause and the attendant sense of (de-)centrality, an aspect that creates slightly different opportunity structures for far-right mobilization. In terms of the B158 conflict in Ahrensfelde, many interviewees were of the opinion that their proximity to Berlin, the economic centre of the region, was the main cause of traffic and its impact. They also saw Berlin responsible for blocking a solution due to its hesitancy to use financial resources for the good of a small suburb on its margins. Many generalize this observation into a broader feeling of being constantly disdained: "You should know, of course, and the street illustrates this, that Berliners don't give a shit about Brandenburgers." (Int_A10_t1).

Yet, the causes of the B1 conflict are narrated quite differently. The decision to re-build the old bridge so that the road can take heavy-duty traffic is ascribed solely to "the Polish". Thus, the problem is narrated as one of foreign or international politics, leaving no room for local council influence. The new cross-border bridge has meanwhile morphed to a project nicknamed "Pole Bridge" [Polenbrücke] (Int_B1_18_t1). This narration seems to resonate widely and is supported by an alliance of the citizens' initiative and local administrations. The citizens' initiative was allowed to publish statements at periodic intervals for the official council magazine and diffuse interpretations such as the following: "Almost every weekend in the region, masses of Polish commuters (a total of approx. three million are said to be working in Western Europe) pass through the region in old polluting German cars, heading for home and leaving only their exhaust fumes behind." (Baier 2019: 14).

Villages affected by this international traffic are still imagined as located "in the middle of nowhere", but ultimately closer to the gravitational centre of international commodity flows (Berlin) than to neighbouring Poland. This comparison suggests that despite numerous similarities the different conflict settings provide different opportunity structures for far-right populist agitation of vertical and particularly horizontal scapegoating.

4.2 Far-right creation of rural rationality

The prevailing discontent associated with the road construction plans for the B1 and B158 were taken up by the sizeable new local AfD chapters. In 2019, they even rose to an election campaign issue in the Seelow region, when the district chapter called for ring roads alongside the B1, claiming that the anticipated heavy-duty "border traffic" would pose an "unbearable burden on the residents concerned" (Doc_AfD-WP_MOL 2019: 5). During the research period, however, the party did not engage with this topic in any significant way on the local councils, merely backing the citizens' initiative on social media and portraying their dispute as vertical anti-establishment politics (Onl_AfD-FB_MOL 2020: 04.02.). With reference to the B158 conflict, the local chapter has not been conspicuously vocal about this road issue in their election campaign, most likely because other local parties and independent lists have addressed the topic prominently. That said, as soon as they were elected to the local councils, the AfD took advantage of their unique position in the multi-level political system, while other local party associations had to deal with their fellow party members at higher levels, some of whom were involved in the planning process. Local independent lists have no counterpart at higher levels. The AfD, in this case, was the only representative in a position to carry the issue all the way to the federal parliament (Bundestag). In a parliamentary inquiry, they emphasized the urgency of a local ring road and cast themselves as the voice of the local people by reporting "numerous discussions with the population living in the area" on this topic (Doc_AfD-BT 2019).

Local AfD chapters play out yet another advantage over local lists and local chapters of the parties in government at national level. They offer a coherent narrative of their pro-car policies. In contrast, chapters of national parties must consider their party's more general positions on the climate crisis, while local lists frequently lack an ideological superstructure. Only local AfD chapters offer a non-contradictory *and* ideologically underpinned approach. Here, a specific conception of rurality takes centre stage.

As argued in Chapter 2.2, local AfD chapters make use of a certain image of rurality not simply to mediate the party's nature-glorifying and fossil-fascist ideological elements but to actually make them applicable to concrete local settings. On the one hand, local AfD chapters portray nature (culturally transformed over generations) as a link between the rural people and their identity rather than as naturalness. In other words, a lived "widespread loss of identity" is exploited as an argument against renewable energy projects and their industrializing impact on the landscape (Steinkraus 2019). AfD posters with the words "Stop environmental destruction!" against a background image of energy turbines in a rural landscape are gaining ideological weight (Onl_AfD-A_Insta 30.03.2019).

On the other hand, shifting the focus from the climate ecological crisis to the protection of "rurality" also enables local AfD chapters to transfer to the local scale what is described in Chapter 2.2 as a perversion of the dominant discourse on climate mitigation. One AfD district chapter uses rurality to disavow rather than directly deny the local effects of the climate change. This facilitates their complete omission of the causal relations to climate change in their electoral programme section on the danger of flooding along the river Oder:

> *"A region where we are proud of keeping our communities as places worth living in, where the villages are cherished and the community is intact. […] That is home to us. We have to defend it! An important concern is the protection of our cultural landscape along the Oder. Beavers and*

muskrats are undermining and destabilizing the Oder dams on a broad front [...], which is why we demand more restrictive beaver management." (Doc_AfD-WP_MOL 2019: 2).[1]

During the period under review, numerous discursive links to rurality generated by local AfD chapters were found in various policy areas. In its generalizing and fetishizing aspects, the image of 'the rural' hardens into a specific logic – a *rural rationality* applicable to a wide range of topics: passing through the study area in the late summer of 2021 – at the height of the general election campaigns – one particular AfD slogan dominated the roadside and made this tangible: "Berlin macht mehr Mist als unser Vieh!" (Berlin produces more crap/nonsense than our cattle). The slogan exhibits two major spatial tropes. Firstly, the reference to "Berlin" functions as a metonym for the federal government, which is located in the German capital, and indicates a super-diverse metropolis, heavily shaped by international migration, atypical lifestyles and left-leaning subcultures. Secondly, "our cattle" conveys the party's sense of belonging to the hard-working lifestyle of the rural population. The rural rationality expressed here functions as the somewhat bendable legitimization for the local far right to resist "ideological" or "irrational" decisions from the top.

This rationality becomes a powerful tool in far-right scale-mediating framing strategies (see Domann & Nuissl 2022a), as indicated in a Facebook post by a local AfD chapter referring to the discussed ban on combustion engine cars in nearby Berlin: the locally perceived problem (residents would not be allowed to drive to the neighbouring capital) with a cause located at a higher level ("insane" green ideology "far from *reality*") can only be remedied if the representatives of the rural areas act locally and rationally (Onl_AfD-Mü_FB 29.01.2020).

In the context of the road disputes, their rural rationality allows local AfD representatives and their car-centric policies a) to appear pro-ruralist and not as climate-change deniers, b) to charge their position on small-scale politics with an anti-establishment gesture and c) to present themselves as the authentic local voice of rural residents.

4.3 Normalizing far-right Issues: Shifting rural imaginaries

The previous chapter has shown that local AfD chapters emphasize rural rationality in order to translate their ambiguous positions on climate and ecology into what appears on the surface to be a frictionless and scalar-mediating narrative. And this framing strategy seems to blend well into the observed narratives of the current traffic infrastructure conflict, which is dominated by the perceived threat of vanishing rurality and feelings of (authoritarian) nostalgia for a village-like past (4.1). This section sheds light on how these rural imaginaries shifted as the road-centred conflicts and associated far-right discursive efforts unfolded. It presents findings from the follow-up interviews conducted approximately twenty-eight months after the first round of interviews.

On a more general level, it can be observed that in both cases, particularly among the older generation, the (expected) increase in traffic is condensed to a perception of their community as losing its rural character completely: "I have lived next to the village road [B158] for almost seventy years. As children, we used to play in the street and say: 'oh wow, a car's coming'. Today you have to watch out constantly that you don't get run over." (Int_B158_21_t2).

In assessing the current situation, where strong support for the local protest has failed to achieve even the smallest goals, the interviewees mostly agreed with the scalar trope that targeted the supra-scalar "political" centres of decision-making, one that fueled vertical resentment towards "the elites". In the face of this powerful opposition, they saw little chance of success for local protests: "Whether I organize a citizens' initiative or not, it's a losing battle." (Int_B1_10_t2).

With the portrayal of "politics" as ideologically driven and caught up in complicated regulations, some local narratives on the road construction plans gradually converged with the far-right scale frames observed over the study period. Hence the far-right party was able to connect its affirmation of the rural to a specific rural rationality directed against the ideologically driven policies of higher levels.

This growing discontent with the controversy surrounding the roads, where apparently "nothing is moving forward", can be described as a general trend in the follow-up interviews. It was observed in several interviews that AfD scale frames of rural rationality were integrated into local imaginaries. In the Ahrensfelde case, these narratives merge with fears of a development project that will see the first new multi-storey apartment building – in the opinion of some interviewees, another concrete threat to the village atmosphere. They describe the local AfD chapter as the only political force to contest these plans and evidence how a far-right rural rationality manages to combine different areas of political discontent:

> *"Meanwhile, I feel that if we get another construction area in front of us and I don't know how many thousand people move in, because there will also be rental apartments [...]. I can see myself in a traffic jam right at my front door waiting to even get onto the [B]158 in the morning. Honestly, it's getting more and more like a ghetto. […] I like living in the village, and we've got to the point where my husband and I are really looking to move further out to still have that genuine village feeling. [...] I'm a bit worried because [...] if I think of all my neighbours moving out and all the Turks and Iranians moving in, I might feel a bit odd and say: "Okay, me too. I'm out of here." (laughs)" (Int_B158_5_t2).*

This sequence shows how productively the discursive coupling of car-centric arguments and anti-immigrant racism can be deployed (see Malm & Zetkin Collective 2021: 41).

Having rendered visible the shifts in rural imaginaries that led to the partial normalization of far-right tropes, the following section will discuss the question of how this rural rationality also helps to de-demonize far-right personnel at the local level.

4.4 Normalizing far-right representatives: Creating horizontal alliances

Rural rationality as a far-right scale-mediating framing strategy (see 4.2) declares the local scale to be the *locus operandi* and identifies the enemy of the local population at higher scales. In this sense, it creates an anti-establishment narrative that defines a clear vertical opposition but is open for horizontal alliances. In both case studies, this ties in with a strong spatial imaginary of *internal harmony*, which in turn tunes into the dominant mode of how the communities deal with diverging interests in everyday matters of the "rural". Since most residents of the two places plan their own and their children's future on their property, which is bound to the land and, thus, to the community, good neighbour relations are considered of the utmost importance. Consequently, should

disagreements arise, the residents and councillors are expected to discuss and solve them in a polite and objective manner or leave it to authorities such as the mayor to decide on the outcome. Since reunification, local councils have developed a decision-making mode that builds on consensus rather than conflict. Council members, mayors and the local administration are expected to cooperate in a task-oriented way in the best collective interest of the community (Domann & Nuissl 2022b).

The conflict sparked by the failure to implement the ring road/tunnel plans for the B158 should be understood in this context. In 2022, all local council party factions signed a public letter on the matter addressed to the federal ministry for transport (Doc_B158_GV 16.03.2022). This allowed the local AfD chapter to join the ranks of the legitimate voices of the elected and at the same time to indulge in antagonistic scalar criticism. In doing so, they are pursuing the tactic employed by highly successful European PRRPs in consociational settings of "keeping one foot in and one foot out of government" (Albertazzi 2008: 110). The party representatives on the local council use a similar tactic to force the administrative head of the district to accommodate what they frame as the "will of the local people" as vocalized by the AfD (Doc_B158_KT 21.09.2022). The preliminary climax was a demonstration with approximately 200 participants in February 2023 against the current road construction plans. Almost all local council party groups held short speeches, including the AfD group chairman, who made no reference to his political affiliation. All of the speeches at the rally fed into the same narrative: the village has been neglected in policies "from on high". They expressed pride in the fact that all locally represented forces voiced a strong consensual statement against the road construction plans. The subsequent protest march, which brought traffic on the road to a halt, was headed by the AfD chairman (Figure 4). His wife, likewise an AfD member of the local council, acted as a steward. No confrontation was observed between the AfD and other protesters for the entire duration of the protest (Obs_B158 25.02.2023).

The protest group campaigning for ring roads along the B1 in the Seelow region appears to have no reservations about local AfD personnel either. When the group blocked the road with a demonstration, four local AfD members openly supported it and later posted the fact on social media (Onl_AfD-MÜ_FB 11.09.2021). Nonetheless, after years of unsuccessful campaigning, protesters here seem reluctant to trust politicians of any orientation. This has led to a certain anti-representational spirit in the car-centred protest group, making it very difficult for the local AfD chapter to profit from the infrastructure issue. The citizens' initiative accepts them as public speakers only when it comes to demands that are not supported by their more established allies. This tentative "instrumentalization of the instrumentalizers" has also been observed for other local protest groups and their relations with AfD representatives (Bescherer & Feustel 2020: 195).

Although protest groups and local politicians in the Seelow region continue to distance themselves from the PRRP when no political advantage is to be gained, the AfD is in a position to strengthen horizontal ties and settle into the local political elite. This holds true for both places under review, since the spatial imaginary of a harmonious community translates into certain dispositives for local politics that are best summarized as the ideals of (horizontal) "archipolitics". Against the background of these consociational arrangements and once elected to the local councils, the PRRP can take advantage of the normative imaginary of harmonious cooperation in rural places without much dispute.

Figure 4. A local AfD politician (front row, right) leads the protest march along with other council members.

5. Conclusion

This contribution has shown that "unsuspicious" political issues at local level in rural areas serve as sites of creeping far-right normalization. Applying a relational approach helps to conceptualize rurality as socially produced, contested and in flux (see Woods 2011). As such, local conflicts focusing on traffic infrastructure in rural contexts are at the heart of the far-right populist agenda for several reasons. As "modules of ideology" (Malm & Zetkin Collective 2021: 364), cars are associated with several imaginaries highly compatible with far-right ideology. Experienced car dependency can thus be used to mobilize feelings of spatial discontent among those who imagine themselves living in "places that don't matter" (Rodríguez-Pose 2018), and to deny the protection of privilege that lies at the heart of some car-centric protests. Revanchist, self-serving, competitive, and secessionist values are manifested in spatial car use strategies and shape the everyday consciousness of those dependent on cars (see Henderson 2006). Hence car-centred protest provides fertile opportunity structures for local agitation by PRRPs but demands discursive effort and scalar mediation.

To achieve such mediation, PRRPs employ *rural rationalities*, claiming a genuine understanding of the "core people" and their car dependency. They offer car-centric solutions, and at the same time oppose the "distant politics" of the (urban) decision-making centres, which are in turn framed as eco-ideologically driven. These rural rationalities can create powerful scale-mediating frames that help local AfD actors charge their position on small-scale politics with a pro-car, pro-rural and anti-establishment gesture, portraying their representatives as the resolute voice of the rural people.

Invocating 'the rural' in this context has the potential to resolve a twofold dilemma typically faced by PRRPs. Firstly, imagining the community as one of vanishing rurality mitigates the frustrated car-centrism of the local population, which is simultaneously *for* (their own) and *against* (other) motorized traffic, as it entitles the former and delegitimizes

the latter. Secondly, the emphasis on rural dimensions serves as a semantic mediation for the profound ambivalence of PRRP positions on broader ecological issues, since their ideology draws on the glorification of nature *and* the fetishization of fossil fascism.

Observing processes of normalization over time has the potential to trace small shifts in spatial imaginaries – and thus to assess the local mainstreaming of far-right topics. Returning at regular intervals, conducting repeat interviews and observing on- and offline spaces over time unveils these gradual processes but also shows several limitations. When applying a study design open to the complexity of social realities, even the most discerning, 'word-crunching' methods of interpretation will be unable to check reliably for unexpected variables; shifts in locally embedded notions of rurality or in attitudes to far-right politics or politicians cannot simply be reduced to one single impact factor. The subsequent triangulation of several empirical longitudinal approaches helps to approximate probabilities, on the one hand, but at the same time calls for considerable effort and the readiness of researchers to expose themselves for years to these sometimes quite depressing processes.

Looking forward, QLR in the context of rural far-right normalization could turn this 'inconvenience' into a resource and investigate ways of doing Anti-fascist Geographies (Ince 2019). Constant involvement in settings such as car-centric protest groups, which might irritate critical geographers at first glance, could also be used to identify and actively support elements in the rural protest groups resistant to far-right agitation. "Envisioning Alternatives" (Ince 2019: 6) in times of current uneven geographies that give rise to highly car-dependent peripheries all over the world could be a challenging task. Thinking rurality relationally is a crucial step not only towards envisioning different futures. Essentializing rurality only helps to create (palin)defensive spatial imaginaries, securing the given uneven social and racial order in the face of the climatic-ecological catastrophe on the horizon. It nevertheless remains vital to disentangling the current materially lived, perceived and represented notions of marginalization and peripheralization if their re-articulation as far-right rural rationalities is to be prevented.

Endnotes

1. Marking the rodent from the border river as a threat is another integral part of climate populism transferred to the local: "the imaginary coherence of the people as ONE is predicated upon staging a supernumerary outsider, who is foregrounded as an existential threat that invades the fundamentally healthy body-politic of the People and is constituted as the object-cause of all manner of problems, potentially leading to a catastrophic disintegration of the Body of the People" (Swyngedouw 2022: 908).

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