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Life and Work in Rural Germany

Vonderach, G., 2012, *Arbeitsmarkt-Akteure im historischen Wandel. Beiträge zur Entwicklung der Arbeitsmarktforschung*, Aachen, Shaker Verlag.

Vonderach, G. (ed.) 2012, *Begegnung mit historischen Arbeitswelten. Ausgewählte ländliche Museen mit Schwerpunkten vergangener regionaler Wirtschaftsweisen*, Aachen, Shaker Verlag.

Vonderach, G. 2013, *Land-Leben. Beiträge zur Entwicklung ländlicher Lebenswelten*, Aachen, Shaker Verlag.

The three books discussed here are the subsequent volumes (sixth, seventh and eighth) of the *Buchreihe Land-Berichte* series¹ – a continuation of the *Land-Berichte* periodical².

¹ The *Buchreihe- Landberichte* series is one of the few sociological publishers on the European market which systematically presents important social processes taking place in rural areas. So far (other than the three reviewed in this volume) it has published the following books:

Vonderach G., 2005. *Museumsengagement auf dem|Lande. Eine empirische Studie zum ehrenamtlichen und privaten Engagement in ländlichen Museen*, Aachen, Shaker Verlag.

Vonderach G. (ed.), 2006. *Neue Erwerbsskombinationen auf dem Bauernhof*, Aachen, Shaker Verlag.

Vonderach G. (ed.) 2008. *Land-Pioniere. Kreativität und Engagement-Lebensbilder aus ländlichen Praxisfeldern*. Aachen, Shaker Verlag.

Vonderach G., 2009. *Erkundungen ländlicher Lebenswelten. Berichte über lebensweltnahe aus Forschungsvorhaben vier Jahrzehnten*. Aachen, Shaker Verlag.

Sterbling A., 2010. *Entwicklungsverläufe, Lebenswelten und Migrationsprozesse. Studien zu ländlichen Fragen Südosteuropas*. Aachen, Shaker Verlag.

The first, which most attention is devoted to is *Arbeitsmarkt-Akteure im historischen Wandel. Beiträge zur Entwicklung der Arbeitsmarktforschung*, a continuation of Gerd Vonderach's (editor of the entire series) interest in the rural labour market. In his earlier publications in this series he concentrated on rural entrepreneurship, understood not only as "traditional agriculture" but rather as new forms of farming involving modern, non-standard methods, e.g. in rehabilitation (*New forms of paid work in farming*, 2006). He also paid attention to the role of individuals, leaders, modern-day pioneers paving the way for the unconventional business of farmers, particularly from the so-called peripheral areas (*Rural pioneers, Creativity and Engagement – practical examples from rural life*, 2008). He refers to many of these issues in *Arbeitsmarkt-Akteure...* which consists of five chapters. The first two refer to early research on the rural labour market. They introduce the research pioneers – Ignaz Jastrow and the so-called classical studies on unemployment – Marientahl-Studie, as well as young unemployed people from the post-war generation. The next text in the third chapter is devoted to a more contemporary subject: new actors on the labour market after 1970 and the problem of self-employment. The fourth chapter presents subjective feelings, ways of coping with unemployment from the perspective of those affected by this problem. The author discusses questions connected with the long-term unemployment of young rural inhabitants and individual ways of coping with it as well as the problems of people returning to the labour market after rehabilitation. The last section includes a text about migration to work, the so-called *Pendler*, i.e. commuters.

Since the discussed texts were earlier published by the author, each is preceded by an introduction where the author informs the reader about their origin and place of former publication as well as complementing them with critical references to new publications and research on the given

A review of the last of these books appeared in *Eastern European Countryside* (2011/17), cf. Piszczek *Tradition and Modernity in South-Eastern Europe – the Balkan Countries' search for their own way of Social Development in a Modern, United Europe*, pp. 151–158.

² *Land-Berichte. Sozialwissenschaftliches Journal* is a German academic periodical, edited by a team including Gerd Vonderach (editor-in-chief), Karl Friedrich Bohler and Anton Sterbling, devoted primarily to the history and modernity of rural areas, not only in Germany. More detailed information about the periodical in *EEC 2007/13*, pp. 187–188.

subject. There are also references to the author's other texts on a similar topic.

As has already been mentioned, in the first, historical section, Vonderach recalls the so-called classics of research and classical studies on the problem of unemployment. He talks about Ignaz Jastrow, the creator of concepts such as "the labour market" ("the manpower market") and "accountability". He initiated the systematic collection and analysis of data concerning the labour market, which he first published in the "Soziale Praxis" periodical and subsequently in a periodical founded by him, "Der Arbeitsmarkt" (which he edited until 1903). The author presents a profile of Jastrow using biographical data. He underlines his role in designing studies about the labour market as well as pointing out his innovative role in creating employment policy. The period of Jastrow's academic work was connected with dynamic changes since – as Vonderach notices – the 19th century in Germany saw a significant rise in birth rate and in its second half a rapid development of industry as well as changes in the countryside. New, interesting phenomena emerged, such as the wandering from enterprise to enterprise in search of work, often as "poor wanderers" described by the special term "Umschau".

Apart from introducing the classic pioneer of market research, Vonderach also presents classic studies on these matters. This is the Marienthal-Studie research concerning unemployment (apart from a work which appeared in Great Britain at the same time, *The unemployed man*³) which continues to be widely quoted and concerns psycho-social issues connected with unemployment. The research which took place in the small village of Marientahl outside Vienna became an illustration of unemployment problems which grew after the First World War and during the great crisis, reaching its peak in 1933. It shows the extent to which quality data can contribute to official statistics. Researchers devoted much time to acquiring the trust of the village inhabitants and consequently collected unique information. A researcher quoted by the author notices that they began not so much with a fixed theory or method but with a list of open questions. From today's perspective we can say that that research reminds us of the approach of the so-called grounded

³ G. Vonderach, *Arbeitsmarkt-Akteure im historischen Wandel. Beiträge zur Entwicklung der Arbeitsmarktforschung*, p. 36. *The unemployed man. A social study*, London 1933.

theory in sociology, although the then researchers modestly described themselves as attempting to connect official statistics with materials giving the impression of a social report, i.e. using select data “in the spirit of the situation”⁴. It is worth mentioning an interesting detail in the age of data recorded on computers, pen drives etc. that the report materials from that research weighed 30 kg! Vonderach presents select conclusions, resulting from, e.g. one of the main observations about the inhabitants who were described as “a tired community” (*die müde Gemeinschaft*) or remarks by the inhabitants about their perception of time, colourfully backed up by quotations (being relative, e.g. passing differently for women and men, perceived differently before and during unemployment).

The next text refers to the now classic research on unemployment of the post-war generation of young Germans in West Germany, e.g. *Arbeitslosigkeit und Berufsnot der Jugend* (The unemployment and professional work of young people) which was conducted by Helmut Schelsky. When presenting these and other studies about the unemployment of young rural inhabitants and referring to the most important conclusions, Vonderach often underlines their shortcomings, resulting from the impossibility of comparing the results of such a variety of analyses with one another.

The subsequent part of the book is a selection of the author’s lectures presented somewhat earlier and referring to the situation on the job market after 1970. The author points to the absurdity connected with employment, where e.g. a nurse caring for a patient is described as “working” but when a patient is cared for by his/her family that is not considered as “work”. He draws attention to new forms of paid work connected with the changing job market, mentioning two groups, the so-called *ABMler* and *Umschüler*.

Discussing problems on the job market he also refers to two types of “workers”, the *halbe Aussteigern* and *neue Selbständige*. According to the author these types aroused numerous commentaries both among professionals and in the media. The *Halbe Aussteigern* are people who, for various reasons, work part-time. This may simply be a conscious choice for those wishing to have more free time or is sometimes a question of vital necessity. Such a form of employment is not only characteristic for young people but also for middle-aged women who neither accept full-time work

⁴ G. Vonderach, *Arbeitsmarkt-Akteure im historischen Wandel. Beiträge zur Entwicklung der Arbeitsmarktforschung*, p. 39.

nor full-time housework or men who feel comfortable not only identifying themselves with professional work and for whom material goals are not of primary importance. This is a miscellaneous group about whom the author writes: for some, such a way of earning money is a hedonistic lifestyle, for others a way of turning to less “traditional” professional roles and for yet others it is simply an interruption in normal full-time professional work whereas many may be classified into a category created by the author: the *neue Selbständige*⁵.

The ideal type of *neue Selbständige* is someone who discovers an interesting occupation for him/herself, combining professional and daily life. This is a way of life and such activity partly exists within the informal market (the grey zone). The economic aspects of such an undertaking are important but even more so their social and cultural aspect. Of course the best scenario would be if dreams, ideas and interests were to fit in with professional activity and provide sufficient income. Vonderach notices that people undertaking such work do not feel too comfortable within the formal restraints of principles, rules and demands of the labour market and in his opinion it is worth helping such entrepreneurs (hence an appeal to politicians and reformers).

The next section is about individual strategies of coping with the difficult moments in professional life. The author refers to quality research as a type of answer to the surplus of rigid statistics and the overlooking of rural areas in analyses of unemployment and the labour market.

As Vonderach notices, the mid-eighties in Germany saw an above-average rise in unemployment both in the industrial sector and in rural areas. These processes proved so interesting to researchers that they gave rise to the creation of quality studies on the long-term unemployment of young people in three rural areas. A similar project was undertaken 10 years later. Quality research (interviews) provides access to new, fascinating facts which elude standard quantity research. While discussing such studies he indicates their shortcomings, e.g. the very low number of interviewed people (in the Alheit/Glass project) or the concentrated attention on the young inhabitants of large towns while ignoring rural areas.

The following text in this chapter is devoted to professional rehabilitation, understood as every possible means of help in getting and

⁵ Ibid., pp. 66–72.

maintaining training and employment⁶. The problem is described with reference to research carried out in 1994/95 in the Niedersachsen region (biographical interviews with over 30 men and women from a protected work establishment). The author presents and discusses types created due to the goals which were expected to be achieved through rehabilitation. He also draws attention to the fact that from the point of view of carrying out the research and from that of those interviewed, it is far more difficult to grasp and analyse the professional rehabilitation of the mentally handicapped or psychosomatically ill than the physically handicapped.

The final text is about those travelling to work. Vonderach notices that the very phenomenon of such commuting backwards and forwards is absolutely natural for the majority of inhabitants of German and European villages in general. This is not only a question of travelling between the home and the work place but also where family and friends live, the location of educational institutions and services (shops, doctors' surgeries etc.) – the so-called *Quasi-Pendel*⁷. People described as *Pendler* are frequently the subject of research connected with the job market. The author presents this phenomenon from the historical point of view (the rapid development of industry, the extension of the railways). In the kingdom of Wittenberg where the first statistical data come from, between 1900 and 1939 the percentage of commuters rose from 6.6% to 13.8%⁸. Vonderach also discusses the problem from the perspective of the post-war job market. He refers to the Darmstadt-Studien research (Grüneisen 1952, Kötter 1952 and Teiwes 1952), whose analyses indicated the connections between town (industry) and country, to some extent created by rural dwellers commuting to work in towns. While discussing current aspects of commuting to work he emphasises that it no longer has much in common with what it was like in the past. The very fact of simply owning a car and the large number of high quality roads greatly improve the possibility of covering distances in daily commuting. By naming one of the chapter sections "From commuting to work to commuting to services" (*Vom Arbeiterpendler zum Dienstleistungspendler*) the author gave a very apt description of the direction of those changes.

⁶ Ibid., p. 98.

⁷ Ibid., p. 118.

⁸ Ibid., p. 122.

The second book (*Begegnung mit historischen Arbeitswelten. Ausgewählte ländliche Museen mit Schwerpunkten vergangener regionaler Wirtschaftsweisen* – Meetings with former realms of work. Examples of select rural museums from the perspective of former, regional farming methods) deals with a somewhat different subject. A rather small collection of texts edited by Vonderach was devoted to the policy of creating and managing rural museums as well as their role in preserving the memory about the culture of the former countryside as well as the influence on the current functioning of communities now living there. The examples concern museums in Germany (*Das Museumsdorf Hösseringen, Das Emsland Moormuseum, Industrie Museum Lohne, Das Binnenschiffahrtsmuseum Oderberg*) and Austria (museums in *Montafon*). The book opens with an introduction by the editor. The museums, a detailed description of which can be found in the publication present the daily life of rural communities once living in the particular areas. Archaeological findings, old documents and memoirs were used during the creation of the museums. They are beautifully located in old architectural edifices, themselves “exhibits” (the publication contains photographs of the buildings, their interiors and some exhibits). The founders of these museums and their supporters, often amateurs, devoting their free time have tremendous enthusiasm and passion to successfully run such professional endeavours. In fact, this not only serves to preserve the memory about the past but also supports the current functioning of local communities, activating them as far as tourism is concerned⁹.

The third book, *Land-Leben. Beiträge zur Entwicklung ländlicher Lebenswelten* (Life in the countryside. A contribution to the development of living in a rural environment) is a volume in which the author presents the condition of rural sociology as a science and its potential. Vonderach again refers to themes discussed in the earlier publications of the *Buchreihe Land-Berichte* series, e.g. the origin and functioning of rural museums, problems connected with peripherisation, regional development in

⁹ The reader interested in the functioning of rural museums is encouraged to read another publication in the *Buchreihe Land-Berichte* series by Vonderach (2005): *Museumsengagement auf dem Lande. Eine empirische Studie zum ehrenamtlichen und privaten Engagement in ländlichen Museen*. It shows even more distinctly the role of local leaders, volunteers in creating museum activity in rural areas and the positive effects of such enterprises.

Germany. Vonderach also shows the new role of actors – farmers becoming guardians of nature. There is a Polish accent here – the study of the case of Edmund Jereczak, a doctor from Poland who, after studying medicine in Gdansk (where he met his wife who came from Eastern Prussia) and having experienced “Polish socialism” escaped to Germany in 1958.

The author introduces Herbert Kötter, a representative of rural sociology. As Vonderach presented a profile of this outstanding German rural sociologist in *Eastern European Countryside*¹⁰, we shall omit an analysis of that part of the book which concentrates on questions raised by Gerd Vonderach, referring to where rural sociology is heading. He stresses that despite the numerous changes acting in a unifying manner on both town and country, the decline of rural sociology as a subject taught in agricultural studies in Germany there continues to be a need for analysis in the field of rural sociology in particular. It should involve current questions concerning food quality, the ethical aspects of animal husbandry, the rapport between man and animal, the ecology of farms – or, more generally, the issue of nature conservation from the agricultural point of view, landscape conservation, the feminisation of farming, farmers’ education, multi-professionalism and diversification of incomes among the rural population, etc. Only a few of the problems which rural sociology could and should in the author’s opinion deal with, have been mentioned. It would be difficult to give a negative answer to the author’s question, being the title of one of the chapter sections, about whether there are still interesting research topics for rural sociologists (*Gibt es für Landsoziologen keine interessanten Themen mehr?*)

The analysed books, particularly *Arbeitsmarkt...* are yet further proof that some current highly popular theories and research methods (I refer specifically to grounded theory) derive from those applied much earlier, but under different names. Vonderach seems to apply a specific role to typologies which are very useful to put in order quality material acting as a counterbalance and complement to rigid quantity data.

It also seems that Vonderach is relatively critical as regards statistical data in general, preferring the so-called soft style of sociology in the description of the discussed phenomena. That does not mean that he is

¹⁰ G. Vonderach, Herbert Kötter – an outstanding German rural and agricultural sociologist [in] *Eastern European Countryside* 2010, no. 16, pp. 231–238.

uncritical towards qualitative methods. In the texts he underlines not so much their flaws, but rather their not quite correct application (which is how the important comparability of results suffers).

He also shows the importance of remembering the pioneers, both those who practically transformed the countryside as well as those who analysed it academically, to whom we owe so much, and about whom we don't always remember, or simply know nothing about. This is a unique incentive to take a look at bookshelves in libraries (or museums) in the search for original, old publications (as well as their new editions), which have not run out of date. And this is proof of the exceptional power of thorough empirical research, which does not have to be, as those who criticise rural sociology often imply, a reason for its decline (the surplus of empiricism, without reliable comparable analyses as a form of substitute for the shortcomings in theory). After reading these three books, it is hard to remain convinced that rural sociology will run out of interesting research topics. The unification of town and country in the "western world" has not diminished the research field of this sub-discipline of sociology – on the contrary, it has broadened considerably. At local, national and world level these problems exist and await exploration.

