

To Which Extent Is Vitality of Rural Regions a Geospatial Variable?

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SUMMARY

In the context of studying and detecting variations in vitality, vulnerability and versatility in rural regions, a dilemma exists with regard to the geospatial nature of the concept ,vitality'. Development studies usually characterize vitality by a number of statistical and descriptive indicators, which are on the one hand connected to either individuals or groups of individuals, and on the other hand to features of objects or clusters of such features and objects. Whilst such indicators tend to rely on regular government repositories and on proxies generated from open geospatial resources, it is not meaningful to associate one pixel, point or polygon with a given value to represent vitality, because there is a strong dynamic and discretionary human and social component, which is not necessarily fixed to one location. Based on both socio-economic and geospatial data collection followed by a conceptual reflection in case studies in Germany, Spain, Poland and Japan, we reach the conclusion that vitality can best be approached as a quasi-geospatial variable. This means that one can indeed distinct degrees of vitality based on geospatial differences, but one cannot derive a particular value of vitality for one specific location. The implication of this notion is that a map showing grades and quantitative values of vitality is not necessary significant for spatial planning. Instead, one still needs to understand the non-spatial degree and variability of vitality in its spatial context to generate feasible spatial development plans. In simple terms, an empty school building is not an indicator of negative vitality because of its location and spatial features, but because of its lack of social activity needed to generate a vital socio-spatial environment.

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