

Rural Populism: New Emerging Political Geographies of the Rural

Convenors: Matthias Naumann (University of Klagenfurt, Austria) and Michael Woods (Aberystwyth University, UK)

Populism has become a major topic in academic and public debates. While the election of Donald Trump, the vote for Brexit or the electoral success of numerous far-right parties around the world are seen as populist challenges for democracies (Müller 2016), some authors like Christophe Guilluy (2019) link current movements of authoritarian populism with issues of rural decline. “Landscapes of Hate” (Medina et al. 2018) are often associated with remote regions. Media reports draw a sharp dichotomy between open-minded and progressive cities on the one hand and xenophobic and reactionary villages on the other. While these simplifications are not able to account for the success of far-right populism, the question how the various transformations of rural regions, changing imaginations of rurality and the increasingly hybrid character of rural space is affecting (and is effected by) populist movements poses an important challenge for rural as well as political geography. Is there a certain form of “rural populism”, what are “rural” dimensions of populist movements and what roles does the “rural” play in the ideology of the far right?

This session seeks to explore issues of populism in rural contexts and on different political fields. We therefore invite contributions that make explicit links between rural change and populist movements. Contributions may focus on, but are not limited to the following issues such as:

- Examples of urban-rural divides in current political geographies, such as election results or mobilizations of social movements and the challenges they pose.
- Settlement strategies of the far-right, using rural locations as a home base for their activities.
- Different forms and fields of populism in rural spaces, such as agricultural, infrastructural or regionalist populism.
- Geographical representations of the rural used by populist movements, such as imaginations of a culturally homogenous rural “idyll”.
- Movements for a “left populism” in rural spaces.
- Experiences of populism and its affects by diverse rural populations, including immigrants and other minority groups.
- Initiatives to counter populism and political polarization in rural communities and to articulate alternative political visions for the countryside.

Please send abstracts of no more than 250 words to Matthias Naumann (matthias.naumann@aau.at) and Michael Woods (m.woods@aber.ac.uk) by Friday 19th February 2021. We aim to turn this session into a special journal issue on rural populism.

References:

Guilluy, C. (2019): *Twilight of the Elites. Prosperity, the Periphery and the Future of France*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.

Medina, R. et al. (2018): Geographies of Organized Hate in America: A Regional Analysis. *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 108(4), 1006-1021.

Müller, J.-W. (2016): *What is Populism?* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.