

Maria Budnik (University of Applied Sciences Erfurt)
Katrin Grossmann (University of Applied Sciences Erfurt)

Emotional Geographies of Loss and Vulnerability: The Role of Emotions for the Transformation of Local Worlds

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Emotions and affects are key drivers of human behaviour, influencing the way we perceive, shape and claim spaces. Whether in urban centres or in peripheral regions, (collective) emotions such as anger, fear, hope or solidarity shape our interactions with places and people. In times of rapid change, the spaces we inhabit are increasingly shaped by vulnerability and loss. From the disappearance of community services to the personal grief tied to transformed landscapes, the interplay of emotional and spatial shifts raises urgent questions. How do we navigate altered spaces and how do these changes transform local worlds? How do loss and vulnerability influence conflict dynamics and politicize both urban and peripheralized societies?

Following Davidson et al. (2016), we are interested in the spatial, temporal and societal context within which loss and vulnerability take place. Like emotions and affects (Bondi 2005), they are also relational processes that we cannot understand isolated from space and time. We ground this session in the concepts of loss and vulnerability (Jakobi 2015, Elliot 2018), particularly as they emerge in processes of peripheralization (Kühn 2015). When local stores close, medical services become centralized in distant urban centers, and public transportation networks are dismantled, the emotional and practical fabric of communities is deeply affected. Such shifts not only reshape physical spaces but also engender feelings of abandonment, insecurity, and frustration among residents. Neckel (2020) argues that shame often arises when social norms are violated or self-esteem is threatened. These emotional conditions create fertile ground for right-wing actors, who exploit regional grievances by framing small, marginalized localities as victims of neglect by distant, out-of-touch governments. Their rhetoric often taps into these emotional geographies, amplifying narratives of resentment and resistance, see the debate on geographies of discontent (De Ruyter et al. 2021, Lenzi & Perucca (2021).

This session is dedicated to examining emotional geographies as a key to understanding loss and vulnerability in an increasingly polarized world. The aim is to shed light on the role of emotions for the shape of local worlds from an interdisciplinary perspective. What dynamics do emotions unfold through the erosion of natural environments, in conflicts over energy transition projects, in planning conflicts over climate change adaptation and new housing projects, in neighborhood conflicts over noise and dirt or in polarized local contexts? How are emotions used in the political instrumentalization of loss and vulnerability, and what possibilities do they offer for de-escalation and reconciliation? The session offers a forum for researchers who want to explore the emotional dimensions of loss, vulnerability and space and develop new perspectives on these interrelationships. We welcome submissions on the following topics:

- **Political instrumentalization of collective emotions:** How and why are collective emotions increasingly (and successfully) being used by right-wing actors to mobilize and politicize sections of the local population? What are ways of contestation? In which local contexts do actors succeed better or worse in connecting with collective loss and vulnerability? What role

do historically evolved histories of vulnerability in peripheralized regions play in political mobilization?

- **The role of memory in spaces marked by loss:** How do processes of peripheralization influence the ways memory is preserved or erased in spaces marked by loss? In what ways do neglected or marginalized areas become sites of contested memory? How does the loss of infrastructure or public spaces in peripheralized regions impact collective memory?
- **Vulnerability, loss and power dynamics in contested or neglected areas:** How do vulnerability and loss shape power dynamics in contested spaces, and who benefits or suffers most from these dynamics? In what ways do emotional histories of marginalization or abandonment influence struggles over space and resources? How do different actors mobilize narratives of vulnerability or resilience to assert power in neglected areas? What role does spatial neglect play in reproducing or challenging existing power hierarchies?

We are looking forward to your abstracts of up to 300 words until Friday, February 21, which you please send to both maria.budnik@fh-erfurt.de and katrin.grossmann@fh-erfurt.de. We will announce our decision by Friday, February 28.

Literature

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