

“WHY THE RUHR VALLEY COULD BECOME THE NEW BERLIN”: HOW CHARISMATIC INSTAGRAM USERS IN PARTICIPATIVE GOVERNANCE CONTEXTS PLAYFULLY BRING FORTH A NEW REGIONAL IMAGINARY

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Drawing on ethnographic data collected from regional Instagram marketing in the Ruhr Valley, this article explores the social and symbolic dimensions of charisma as a resource of civil actors in postindustrial governance settings. It is argued that charismatic Instagram users not only utilize the past as a resource for figurative practices, but also transform it symbolically by mixing it with elements derived from the cultural meaning repertoire of Berlin as a role model for a creative city. Furthermore, results are presented on how Instagram users and public marketing actors engage in the socioeconomic transformation of the region: both groups pursue the goal of bringing forth a new economic imaginary for the region. While charismatic Instagram users aim at redefining the Ruhr Valley by playfully challenging and transforming its industrial structures, regional marketing mainly focuses on following a path set by Berlin, based on the shared characteristic of an industrial past in both areas.

Keywords: postindustrial region, charisma, economic imaginary, figuration, creative worker

THE SOCIOECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION OF THE RUHR VALLEY

The Ruhr Valley is a region undergoing postindustrial transformation, located in the German federal state of North-Rhine-Westphalia. Formerly, it was the leading center of the

coal and mining industry in Germany, until it fell into crisis in the late 1950s. Although economic programs beginning in the 1960s and 70s tried to address the upcoming difficulties, the region has not lost its industrial stamp and is still struggling with structural change. According to Inga Haese, who studied the role of charismatic actors in a city in Eastern Germany experiencing decline, we can conceive of the Ruhr Valley as a deindustrialized area, where “social, spatial and symbolic features of shrinkage, on the one hand, and economic crisis phenomena, on the other, are densified” (2017: 65, translated by the author) and new visions for its revival are needed (*ibid.*). In accordance with this observation, the knowledge and service sector has slowly begun to emerge as a new perspective in the past few decades. Being a key driver in urban and regional competition (Florida 2002), this change in the regional economy is further promoted and supported by regional development programs and political plans (BMR n.d.). Studies on this topic have, therefore, suggested viewing the establishment of a new economic vision of the Ruhr Valley as a contested field between regional historical culture in the mining industry and imaginations of a regional future in creative and cultural economies (Wietschorke 2010; Berking and Frank 2010). This article will take the next step by examining how this new vision of socioeconomic development is negotiated on an everyday cultural level by different regional actor groups and what role charismatic citizen actors play in this process.

Social media seems to be a highly fruitful research field for this undertaking, as studies on spatial representation and symbolic transformation via Instagram have shown (Oh 2021; Boy and Uitermark 2017). Among others, research has found that social media and especially Instagram is used by residents to rebrand cities or certain quarters (Ambord 2021; Hoogendoorn and Hammett 2021). My observations in the Ruhr Valley support these findings: local residents also make use of Instagram photography to present the Ruhr Valley as a livable region that has left heavy industry behind. The regional community of Instagram photographers I encountered in my field research between 2018 and 2020¹ developed some years ago, with the aim of establishing different Instagram activities to promote the Ruhr Valley. They meet regularly and organize talks or other joint events focusing on Instagram. They have account names which usually convey a regional reference and they emphasize their regional focus on their Instagram appearances by commenting and posting on regional themes and photo spots. At the same time, there is also considerable institutional and public effort in the field of regional marketing on Instagram, and their aim is to cooperate with influencers, often those with a limited number of followers (so-called micro-influencers) interested in regional topics. Some years ago, for example, such a micro-influencer (and one of my research participants) produced Instagram content for “ExtraSchicht”, a popular cultural event with more than 200,000 visitors that takes place annually at regional industrial heritage sites and is organized by the regional tourism marketing association (Ruhr Tourismus GmbH n.d.). Therefore, I also propose to consider regional Instagram photography as a field of governance in

¹ The ethnographic data and the findings presented in this article are based on my ongoing PhD project at the Department of Archaeology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Bonn.

which both public and citizen actors are involved in regional marketing. The aim of this paper is to shed light on how regional Instagram users become involved in this specific field of governance as charismatic actors from civil society in broader processes of the socioeconomic transformation of the Ruhr region.

The paper is structured as follows. The following section presents a literature review on figures of brokerage and charisma in participatory governance and postindustrial contexts. This is followed by an outline of how new visions addressing the socioeconomic crisis are understood as imaginaries in the underlying theoretical framework (Cultural Political Economy) of my research. The methodology section explains my approach to field research, which combined principles of digital and physical on-site ethnography. The analysis section centers around a case study of a research participant and micro-influencer named Andreas and is divided into three parts that build on each other. The first part shows conflicting figuration processes in my field between civil society actors and public institutional marketing. The second part explores how these actor groups follow Berlin as a role model and connect it to the region's industrial past. The third part develops a broader perspective of the role of civil society actors in processes of postindustrial innovation, based on understanding figuration processes as a playful approach to bring forth new social arrangements. The conclusion summarizes the main arguments of the analysis and provides answers regarding the overarching question of the article.

FIGURES OF BROKERAGE AND CHARISMA

The involvement and participation of civil society actors, also visible in the field of regional Instagram marketing, is discussed as a technology of "governance-beyond-the-state" (Swyngedouw 2005; see also Barnett 2002 on this topic) in literature on the neoliberal shift to governance. The involvement of civic actors, especially in multilevel governance settings, was identified as an attempt to legitimize political plans, although it was found to fail concerning democratic representation (Heidbreder 2015). It was observed that bottom-up decision-making in such governance contexts remains an interpretative framework on a conceptual level which serves merely as a basis for ritual performances of "participation" (Müller et al. 2019).

A further key finding of research on participatory governance involving civil society is that brokerage is central (Mosse and Lewis 2006; Müller et al. 2020). Cultural brokers, or intermediaries, come into play as actors who manage transactions and negotiate between resources (Lindquist 2015). They can be considered translators (Clarke et al. 2015) but can also act more broadly as a mediating link between different nonoverlapping parties by representing collective interests (Lindquist 2015). Concerning the specific case of intermediaries in postindustrial settings, Justin O'Connor (2012) studied the coming into being of the new vision of cultural and creative industries as a perspective for postindustrial cities in the United Kingdom during the 1980s. He argued, that the

figure of the new cultural intermediary was a pivotal agent in this project of local transformation: Embodying the aesthetically reflexive self, able to work within the new “freelance professional” cultural industries, they were made possible by the post-industrial city and actively engaged in its transformation in their image. (ibid.: 6)

The charismatic figure is a specific figure of brokerage. Theories on charisma have mainly centered on the search for explanations for the establishment of sovereignty or leadership (Weber 1972; Bude 1989; see also Haese 2017: 32ff.). This stands in slight contrast to intermediaries and brokers, who were mainly thought of as translators and mediators between different parties, as mentioned previously. Nevertheless, both conceptualizations share the common idea of a social figure dealing with certain resources which others in a society do not have (yet), so they are considered powerful. This observation also gave rise to calls in urban research to further explore such powerful figures who foster processes of urban transformation and modernization (Barker et al. 2013; Ege 2020). Thomas Blom Hansen and Oskar Verkaaik (2009) already expanded the idea of charisma in their work more than a decade ago to the figure of “urban specialists” in cities of the global south as something

portable and shareable, as a quality that can be conferred upon objects both material and fantasmic – such as cities, crowds and physical sites. But we also want to retain charisma as a name for specific registers of conduct, in this case conduct by different “urban types”, i.e. people whose gift is to know the city and to act decisively, with style and without fear. These figures distribute certainty, they convince followers of their own special qualities and self-sufficiency and demonstrate new potential and possibility. (ibid.: 8)

Following their argument, charisma must be understood as something distributable between different actors with different qualities, as long as they are convincing in offering innovative and new perspectives.

Inga Haese also identified the offering of future perspectives to be the main feature of charismatic people. In her study, she followed the idea of a dependence between the success of charismatic people in mobilizing collectives and the qualities of the social situation in which they are embedded (Bude 1989: 412). According to Haese, charismatic actors have to embody future perspectives based on resources of the past to be able to mobilize communities in crisis in the best way possible (2017: 220). Although she has shown that civil society actors can become charismatic leaders in postindustrial communities, at the same time, her results regarding this group of actors were limited. She presented her findings condensed into two case studies: one centered around a charismatic entrepreneur who acted as the main investor in deindustrialized quarters, and the other presented as a portrayal of an entrepreneur who was engaged in labor protests (Haese 2017: 149 and Haese 2012: 81ff).

As we face a growing demand for self-governance and participatory politics in post-Fordist societies, we have to focus more on the diversity of civil society drivers of transformations; this raises the question of the role that charismatic figures from civil society

play in participatory governance settings in postindustrial communities. Furthermore, it has not yet been fully explained how they translate new perspectives into processes of social innovation. Although Haese (2017: 65) has shown that deindustrialization settings are characterized by the symbolic and social dimension of shrinkage as much as by the spatial one, little work has been done to explain how charismatic actors from civil society meet these demands in their offering of future perspectives.

OVERCOMING CRISIS BY OFFERING PLAUSIBLE IMAGINARIES

Regional governance in the context of post-Fordism and after economic crises relies heavily on the establishment of new economic imaginaries (Jessop 2004; Sum 2013). In this article, future perspectives and innovative visions with a regional focus on the Ruhr Valley are, therefore, conceptualized as imaginaries. In the theoretical framework underlying Cultural Political Economy, Bob Jessop posited that imaginaries (economic, spatial or others) are formed in semiotic practices (though also shaped by material factors) and are the object of negotiations between different social formations (Jessop 2004: 162–163). He claimed that the success of imaginaries depends on whether social actors put their strategies, projects and concomitant narratives of innovation into practice in a plausible way (Jessop 2010: 347). In other words, he argued that a convincing new economic imaginary has to be rooted in the existing knowledge and imaginations of a region, but, at the same time, has to offer as many new perspectives and innovations as seem plausible (*ibid.*).

To address the lack of knowledge on how charismatic people create new perspectives in contemporary governance frameworks, this article brings together two theoretical perspectives: the acknowledgement of the role of charismatic civil society actors as resourceful and mobilizing figures in postindustrial communities, on the one hand, and the idea of skills that are needed to offer new regional imaginaries after crisis, on the other. Therefore, I want to sharpen the overarching question of the article on the involvement of regional Instagram users in socioeconomic transformation processes as follows: Which symbolic and social resources from the industrial past do charismatic civil society actors use to bring forth new regional imaginaries? Drawing on ethnographic data on Instagram photography in the Ruhr Valley, I will argue that they achieve this by performing as creative workers with reference to Berlin and, thereby, represent a future economic imaginary for the region which they symbolically root in its industrial past.

METHODOLOGY

My ethnographic research from 2018 to 2020 was based mainly on attendance and participant observation at regular network meetings of regional Instagram users and photowalks in the Ruhr Valley. To get in touch with people striving for regional representation in a

civil society context, I identified the most active Instagram photographers, who were, for example, responsible for organizing the meetups and photowalks. Later, I also extended my inquiry to cooperations between Instagram users and marketing associations.

I conducted 26 interviews, either semi-structured, walking or informal, accompanied by photo elicitations with Instagram users and marketing representatives in the region. The interview format depended on the participants' engagement with Instagram photography: whereas a walking interview with a micro-influencer engaged in representing regional tourist spots was fruitful to learn more about the meanings they attached to those sites, I preferred spontaneous talks with Instagram users I got to know on photowalks to keep an informal level resembling an everyday conversation.

I collected and archived Instagram images, comments, videos and stories produced by users I got to know during these events, in about 1000 screenshots. The combination of ethnographic research online and in physical co-presence allowed me 1) to get in touch with nonoverlapping groups of people beyond my own "bubble" on Instagram and 2) to continue observing relevant interactions even at times when I was not physically present in the field (Hine 2015: 25). To use Gabriele De Seta's words (2020), this approach provided the opportunity to put my *co-presence* with the research participants into the center of my field research, instead of being co-located only physically.

CONFLICTING IDEAS OF THE REGIONAL INFLUENCER

The regional association of the Ruhr Valley was founded in 1920 as an association of several neighboring municipalities operating in the coal mining industry. Since then, it has become one of the few umbrella institutions of regional development, facing a fragmented field of city administrations and business development actors. In 2019, the association organized a training event as part of the regional business marketing campaign. Regional Instagram users were invited to the event called "Influencer Academy" to learn how to post images about the so-called "City of Cities" (based on a marketing campaign named *Stadt der Städte* in German) and how to spread "stories of the Ruhr Valley to the outside world".² Each city of the Ruhr Valley was asked to send two interested people to the event. It was intended to provide a fast-track introduction to the basics of working with Instagram and to train future "ambassadors of the Ruhr Valley". This included, among other things, the description of desirable topics that the regional marketing association considered important in the publication of images about the region, such as the representation of the Ruhr Valley as a "region where you can work and live well". The participants were not selected in advance based on their prior knowledge in the field of regional marketing or of Instagram. They were trained by "social media experts" and "professional influencers"

² The above information, as well as the event information I mention in the rest of this paragraph, can be found in the unpublished event brochure of the "Influencer Academy".

who had been invited from outside the Ruhr region, from Düsseldorf. This training event was a situation in which different actor groups of this governance field were involved: on the one hand, public actors of regional marketing and, on the other, regional micro-influencers and ordinary Instagram users. In the following sections, I will examine the conflicts which emerged between these actor groups and revolved around the figure of regional influencers.

The regional marketing association's goal was to attract more people to represent and promote a positive image of the Ruhr Valley on Instagram. The representative of the regional association's business campaign I interviewed afterwards affirmed that the goal of their collaboration with Instagram photographers was to address the existing clichés of everyday life in the Ruhr Valley, which is still affected by heavy industry. As the representative stated, "the influencers and ambassadors are supposed to prove the opposite, and report on their everyday life here in the Ruhr region to the outside world" (Interview July 2019). According to the regional marketing association, anybody can be a regional influencer and ambassador, after being trained by experts from outside the region.



Fig. 1: Screenshot of a photograph of the Zollverein colliery, posted on Instagram by a research partner in 2018. Source: Photo elicitation with a research participant.

In my research, I often encountered such statements on the relevance of Instagram photography as evidence for the region's socioeconomic transformation. But the different meanings people attach to the industrial past and the representations of the ongoing transformation often collide or have to be negotiated, even when people talk about the Ruhr Valley on an everyday basis. This is demonstrated by two comments I observed under an image of a heritage site in Essen, the Zollverein colliery (see Fig. 1), posted on Instagram in 2018 by one of my research partners named Andreas to which he responded:

Unknown Instagram user: "The Ruhr! 🍷❤️"

Andreas: "Haha, yes, exactly! THE symbol of our region. I am curious to know what it will be after digitization. 😊"

Andreas is a good example of residents in the Ruhr Valley who are concerned with these questions on regional representation on Instagram. He is a communication consultant, 38 years old, who was working as a freelancer when I met him initially at an Instagram meetup in Essen in 2018. He not only regularly organized such meetups in the Ruhr Valley together with other regional Instagram users, but was also active in various start-up networks and cooperations focusing on Instagram activities in the region. Before our first interview, he humorously (and also somewhat proudly) introduced himself as the "minister of foreign affairs of the Ruhr Valley" (Interview March 2018). This was no mere phrase; he was indeed very committed to representing the region to the outside world in the best possible way, even without a designated political role as "regional ambassador" or any position in regional marketing. Among other things, for example, he visited other regional marketing associations in Germany to learn from them and build up a network for possible further cooperation. He spent a huge amount of his spare time on trying to improve the image of the Ruhr Valley and its marketing without receiving any funding or remuneration.

He contacted me in 2019 to inform me about the "Influencer Academy" mentioned previously, which he had also attended as a participant. I noticed that he was very interested in sharing his experiences in detail, so I decided to interview him once more. In the second interview, Andreas told me that he was initially quite disappointed with this event because, in his opinion, it appeared like a seemingly random group of participants who were trained as "ambassadors of the Ruhr Valley". Due to the amount of experience and knowledge Andreas considers necessary to be a regional ambassador, he found it surprising to see that Instagram was thought of as a simple communication tool that everyone can handle as an expert. In principle, he emphasized, he found the efforts of a stronger official presentation of the region on Instagram very welcome. But because he himself already put a lot of time and a lot of knowledge into his way of presenting the region on Instagram, he felt it was quite a waste of time, as the event could not offer him any new or useful knowledge. Instead, as an expert, he could have supplemented the content of the training, he reported. Finally, he had difficulties particularly with the fact that he, as an expert, attended the event and participated in the campaign free of charge. He also wondered why the event speakers were not regionally based, although the Ruhr Valley actually had experts in this field.

He and other Instagram photographers I encountered in my research repeatedly came up with their interpretation of why the recognition of influencers' expertise in the Ruhr Valley might be failing: forms of mental and knowledge work have no tradition in the Ruhr region.

Overall, two ideas of regional influencers and the goals they should pursue collide in the empirical case of Andreas and the "Influencer Academy". On the one hand, the regional marketing association's interest in influencers is a typical participatory governance approach to make use of the capacities of "ordinary people" (Clarke 2013) who communicate certain ideas, such as a green and livable Ruhr region, in their spare time, while, on the other hand, concepts of the "regional influencer" evolving in civil society, such as Andreas' statements have shown, require a certain expertise and specific professional biographies. In the Ruhr region, however, it is precisely this kind of labor that is not particularly well recognized and established because it runs counter to the regionally rooted professional biographies of the industrial era.

Considering the theories on charisma and other figures of brokerage, we can explain the conflict between the different parties as divergent figuration processes. While the regional marketing association considers influencers to be voluntary intermediaries, "simply" ambassadors from civil society dealing with symbolic resources to present the Ruhr Valley to somewhere *outside* the region, Andreas' idea of an influencer is the personification of social and economic innovation *in* the region, the coming-to-life of a charismatic figure. A regional influencer in Andreas' sense, therefore, is a charismatic person who strives for the establishment of new employment possibilities and professional biographies in the region and embodies new resources (like social media expertise) in person in order to provide future perspectives for the regional community. In the sense of Blom Hansen and Verkaaik, regional influencers are charismatic figures who "distribute certainty, they convince followers of their own special qualities and self-sufficiency and demonstrate new potential and possibility" (2009: 8).

ROOTING THE BERLIN MODEL IN THE REGIONAL PAST

For Andreas and other regional influencers, performing as a charismatic figure not only means "living" their work life as freelancers and being role models for others in a region where self-employment is unusual. The creative worker as a new social figure in the region also has to come to life in their everyday practices. Therefore, as I will illustrate in this section, he and other Instagram users make use of different historically developed figurative styles based on the Ruhr Valley and Berlin.

In Andreas' case, such figuration practices were observable not only in his way of talking but also in his comments and self-staging on Instagram. He told me, for example, how he had selected his profile name:

Then I changed my name, thought about what I could do to fit in with the region and quickly came across ranks in mining. And I decided to choose a name that corresponded to the post I had done as a board officer at that time, only in mining. He used to be responsible for the general manager of a mine. So I wasn't the pit foreman or the head foreman who goes into the adit, but I did the administrative, outside. (Interview March 2019)

Andreas matched his professional position with the corresponding historical equivalent in the region's past in the mining industry. I see this matching practice as an orientation towards social figures which Moritz Ege defines as self-typing or self-figuration (Ege 2013: 63). In this process, the actor positions him-/herself, thereby creating distance or proximity to figures or groups labelled with these figures. Similarly, Andreas expresses the proximity to the former industrial Ruhr region by choosing a historical reference to the time in which the industrial worker played a central role in the regional economy. At the same time, he expresses distance to the industrial worker figure by clarifying that he did "the administrative, outside" (of the pit). Hence, he positions himself as part of a professional group who, as knowledge workers, generally represent a counterpart to those who work physically.³

This act of figuration is reinforced by the linguistic appropriation of the Ruhr dialect on the Instagram account he runs together with a team of other Instagram photographers. For instance, they generally thank people for positively commented images with the phrase *Hömma vielen lieben Dank!*, using an unambiguous wording at the beginning of the phrase with reference to the regional dialect. Furthermore, they always greet other Instagram users in the comments with *Glück auf!*, a typical miners' greeting formula. Such situational switching between languages or dialects is defined as code-switching in sociolinguistics (Bußmann 1990). What is significant here is that Andreas and his fellow Instagram photographers reflect this code-switching and use it as a stylistic element in their self-staging. All of my interview partners vehemently denied that *Glück auf!* is still a contemporary greeting in the Ruhr region, thus this is a conscious practice of switching to an expression that refers to the region's mining history.

With such symbolic-discursive references to the figure of the industrial worker, on the one hand, and to the knowledge worker, on the other, my research partners revealed their competence to stylize and deal with figures "in a reflexive-performative way" (Ege and Wietschorke 2014: 34). They switch between different registers of figures by making use of their specific attributes and distinguishing themselves from others, as the interview excerpt with Andreas on the choice of his account name has shown.

Following Ege's thoughts on figuration processes in Berlin (2013), I argue that there is a repertoire of locally attached meanings and figurative styles that my research partners draw on in these figuration practices: the industrial worker from the Ruhr Valley, which they

³ Pierre Bourdieu already described this juxtaposition as a basic and recurring pattern of socio-spatial positioning and claimed that there are manifold other pairs of opposites (e.g., below vs. above, vulgar vs. distinguished) that follow this pattern (1982: 281).

symbolically reimagine using elements of the creative worker from the German capital. With a similar idea of resources depending on the specific conditions a city has to offer in transformation processes, Heinz Bude, as early as in 2001, predicted the rise of Berlin's creative scene to embody a new modernity, due to the capital's dominant employment structure of individual entrepreneurship. But it was not only the "hard" facts of employment infrastructures that shaped Berlin's path of economic transformation. As Moritz Ege's examinations of the "Proll" figure (somewhat resembling the "chav" in the United Kingdom) in Berlin have shown, its industrial history and the accompanying "non-bourgeois" and proletarian style still shape Berlin's character (ibid.: 133). This proletarian "stamp" has consolidated itself as an urban disposition and still provides actors with a "fund of signs, motifs and themes" (ibid.: 145) in figuration processes. Similarly, we can conceive of the Ruhr Valley as a fund of industrial meaning repertoires, whereas Instagram users in my research field referred to Berlin as a role model in how to perform as creative workers; they used historically developed meaning repertoires that are tied back to local socioeconomic developments.

Consequently, Instagram users expressed an ongoing orientation towards Berlin's creative scene by comparing⁴ the economic situation in the Ruhr region with the German capital:

There are 5.5 million inhabitants, but the, let's call it the "creative scene", or something like that, is relatively small. If you look for something like [my Instagram account], which would be quite small in Berlin or something, it's already in the top 2 or so here. (Interview February 2020)

The "creative scene" mentioned is attributed to the German capital's dominant way of life since the 2000s and thought of as an artistic-creative lifestyle (McRobbie 2016). This creative lifestyle encounters unique challenges in the Ruhr region, which Andreas and other research partners related to the industrial past of the region and compared with a more creative atmosphere in Berlin:

Based on what I have seen in other metropolitan areas, I feel that this whole thing of implementing creativity into the Ruhr region lacks a bit of looseness. Skepticism is much higher than in other regions. People think: "They want to do something with Instagram [...]" [dismissive]. But I think it has a lot to do with mentality. Berlin has always been kind of hip; people in Berlin have been able to prepare themselves for years for the fact that something like this exists, and now it is the start-up metropolis, and young, hip and creative people are active there. In the Ruhr area, people just weren't creative. (Interview March 2019)

It can be noted that regional industrial history not only provides symbolic meaning repertoires and figurative styles that are necessary to link new forms of creative labor to the region, but it is also seen as a rigid structure that challenges the charismatic influencers' goal of establishing new forms of labor in the region.

⁴ On a regional comparison as a linguistic practice observed in regional Instagram photography, also see Huszka 2021.

As the example of the “Influencer Academy” has already shown, public marketing actors are also working on bringing forth a new economic imaginary of a leading creative and knowledge sector to the Ruhr Valley. Therefore, the perspective provided by the regional marketing association in their economic campaign was also based on a reference to Berlin as a role model for economic development. Among other things, they promoted this idea on their website with the phrase “Why the Ruhr Valley could become the new Berlin” (RVR 2020, see Fig. 2).

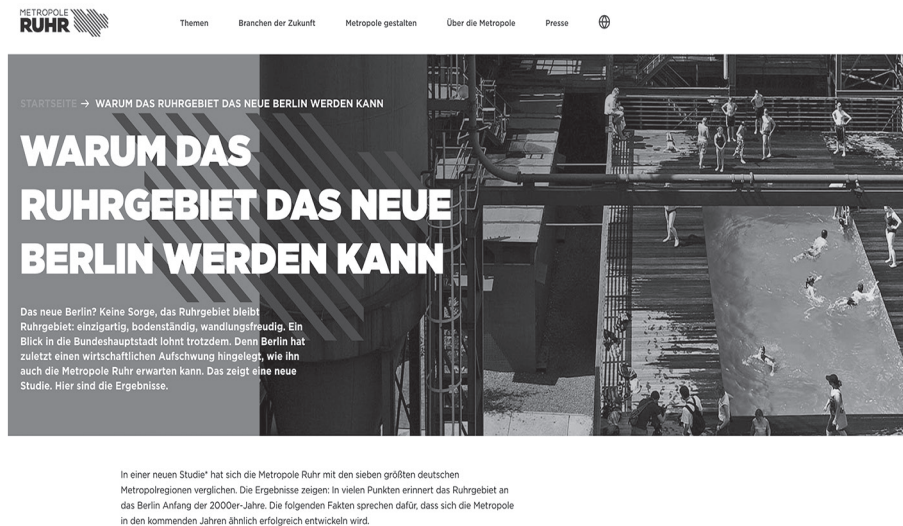


Fig. 2: Website: Location marketing campaign of the RVR “Metropole Ruhr.” Source: Screenshot of the website (RVR 2020), taken on 27 September 2022.

Based on a study comparing different metropolitan areas, the regional marketing association claimed on its campaign website the likelihood of an economic upswing following the example of the German capital. Stating that “in many ways, the Ruhr area is reminiscent of Berlin in the early 2000s” (ibid.), the marketing association argued that both areas have a similar historical disposition that could lead to the consolidation of the creative sector in the Ruhr Valley and an accompanying economic revival. While Instagram users were also oriented towards Berlin’s creative scene, they problematized the structural reminiscences of the industrial past. As their interview statements have shown, they see industrial structures as an obstacle in the development toward a creative region.

CHARISMATIC CREATIVES AND REGIONAL MARKETING: SAME GOAL, DIFFERENT APPROACHES?

Economic imaginaries offered by both parties are based on following the Berlin model and using the industrial past as a resource: either symbolically, in figurative style repertoires, or structurally, in the region's industrial economy.

These observations allow me to draw further conclusions on the role of charismatic actors from civil society in transformative processes of postindustrialization. Inspired by critical urban geographer Matthew Thompson's examinations of social innovation in Liverpool as a postindustrial city (2019), one could say that, although both parties pursue the same goal, they adopt different approaches to reach it.

To explain this, I would like to trace Thompson's argumentation more closely. He based his argumentation on a literature review of urban transformation, ultimately borrowing from David Graeber's thoughts on social innovation and its transformative potential within the context of bureaucracy and rules in society (2015). Graeber defined social innovation as something rooted in spontaneous play and experimentation, where people find themselves in a situation of setting and creating their own rules (ibid.: 191–193), which stands in opposition to the rigidity of institutional sovereignty and rules that are "anything but playful" (ibid.: 190). Therefore, Thompson was concerned with the question regarding postindustrial transformations of "how we might start playing another policy game altogether, one which draws on the creative capacities of resident social innovators" (Thompson 2019: 1171). Following Graeber's claim that play has to be in tension with the rules of a certain (policy) game to be transformative, Thompson formulated the need for "playing-around with" (ibid.: 1176) them.

Similarly, in the case of the Ruhr Valley, one can observe two different approaches and sets of capacities of striving for transformation: on the one hand, the participatory governance approach which aims at using residential, "ordinary" people's capacities to symbolically represent a new regional imaginary on Instagram, but basically playing by the rules of the regional association based on the past industrial economy; and, on the other hand, Andreas and other influencers performing as charismatic creatives, thus bringing new social figures to life with new professional biographies and forming new social arrangements. By so doing, the latter group challenges the current rules which they found to still be based on industrial structures. For example, they consider these structures to be reflected in the regional marketing's view of the Ruhr Valley as a region characterized by Fordist labor where creative workers seem to be absent, as the invitation of marketing experts to the "Influencer Academy" from Düsseldorf made clear (instead of inviting Andreas, for example). In this "game", my research partners attach special importance to performing as charismatic creatives and offering social and economic innovation in the form of new professional biographies as freelancers as well as employment prospects in the creative and start-up economy. In contrast, institutional actors rely on "ordinary"

people's brokerage and the structural resemblance to the German capital's postindustrialization. This observation exceeds Thompson's findings regarding the role of social innovators, which he did not include in his thoughts on social innovation. It can be said that regional Instagram influencers performing as charismatic actors "play around" with the rules by mixing industrial-historical and new symbolic and social elements.

REGIONAL TRANSFORMATION ON A SYMBOLIC AND SOCIAL LEVEL

The goal of this article was twofold: (1) it addressed the need to clarify the existing findings as to which symbolic and social resources from the past are used by charismatic civil society actors to bring forth new imaginaries; (2) furthermore, it aimed at giving answers to the question of how regional Instagram users become involved as charismatic actors from civil society in broader processes of socioeconomic transformation.

(1) By conceptualizing the debates on regional influencers at the "Influencer Academy" as divergent figuration processes in the first part of the analysis, it was found that civil society actors in this field claim innovation in the region, performing as creative workers with new professional biographies and expertise. In the second section of the analysis, I argued that in order to perform as charismatic creatives, my research partners draw on a repertoire of locally attached meanings and figurative styles: the industrial worker from the Ruhr Valley (as Andreas' thoughts on choosing his profile name demonstrated), which they mix with symbolic-discursive elements of the creative worker from Berlin (as their orientation towards Berlin's creative scene has shown).

Therefore, my first conclusion is that in order to introduce the knowledge and creative sector as an economic innovation in the Ruhr Valley, charismatic Instagram users not only use the past as a resource, but they also *transform* it by mixing symbolic and discursive elements derived from the meaning repertoire of the regional industrial past with new, plausible features, referring to Berlin's resembling post-proletarian character. In other words, it can be said that these meaning repertoires serve them to figuratively reshape regional labor and establish the imaginary of a new, postindustrial Ruhr Valley following the Berlin model.

(2) The results presented here show how civil society actors become involved as charismatic figures in socioeconomic processes of transformation. Civil society actors engaged in regional marketing on Instagram are confronted with structural challenges characterizing a postindustrial region. They have to deal with, for example, a regional marketing association that seems to overlook their capacities, as the conflict between Andreas and the "Influencer Academy" illustrated, and as the lack of flexibility towards creative workers has exemplified. Nevertheless, despite these conflicts between civil society and public institutional representatives, they are both in pursuit of the same goal of offering a new economic imaginary; but there are two distinct logics of addressing structural change

underlying their respective actions, a fact that Matthew Thompson also encountered in his research on local forces with the aim of overcoming socioeconomic decline in Liverpool: they play the “game” of regional transformation differently. Therefore, a second conclusion can be drawn: Charismatic civil society actors have to be considered the actual transformative force that is able to deal with symbolic and social resources similarly: playfully engaging in new social experiments and challenging old rules at the same time. Whether or not their way of transforming the region will be successful has yet to be determined.

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"ZAŠTO BI DOLINA RIJEKE RUHR MOGLA POSTATI NOVI BERLIN": KAKO KARIZMATIČNI KORISNICI INSTAGRAMA U KONTEKSTU PARTICIPATIVNOG UPRAVLJANJA KROZ IGRU STVARAJU NOVI REGIONALNI IMAGINARIJ

U ovom se radu, na temelju etnografskih podataka prikupljenih na regionalnim Instagram profilima koji promoviraju dolinu rijeke Ruhr, istražuju društveno-simboličke značajke karizme kao resursa kojim civilni akteri raspolažu u kontekstu upravljanja u postindustrijskom okruženju. Karizmatični korisnici Instagrama ne koriste prošlost samo kao resurs za figurativne prakse nego je i simbolički mijenjaju, kombinirajući je s elementima proizašlim iz kulturnog repertoara Berlina kao modela kreativnog grada. U socioekonomskoj preobrazbi doline rijeke Ruhr sudjeluju korisnici Instagrama kao i regionalni akteri u javnom marketingu, a objema je skupinama cilj stvoriti novi ekonomski imaginarij regije. Ipak, karizmatični korisnici Instagrama nova značenja žele generirati razigranim propitkivanjem i transformacijom industrijskih objekata u regiji, dok se akteri u javnom marketingu prvenstveno bave time kako potaknuti kulturni razvoj regije po uzoru na Berlin, budući da Berlin i dolinu rijeke Ruhr povezuje slična industrijska prošlost.

Ključne riječi: postindustrijska regija, karizma, ekonomski imaginarij, figuracija, kreativni radnik