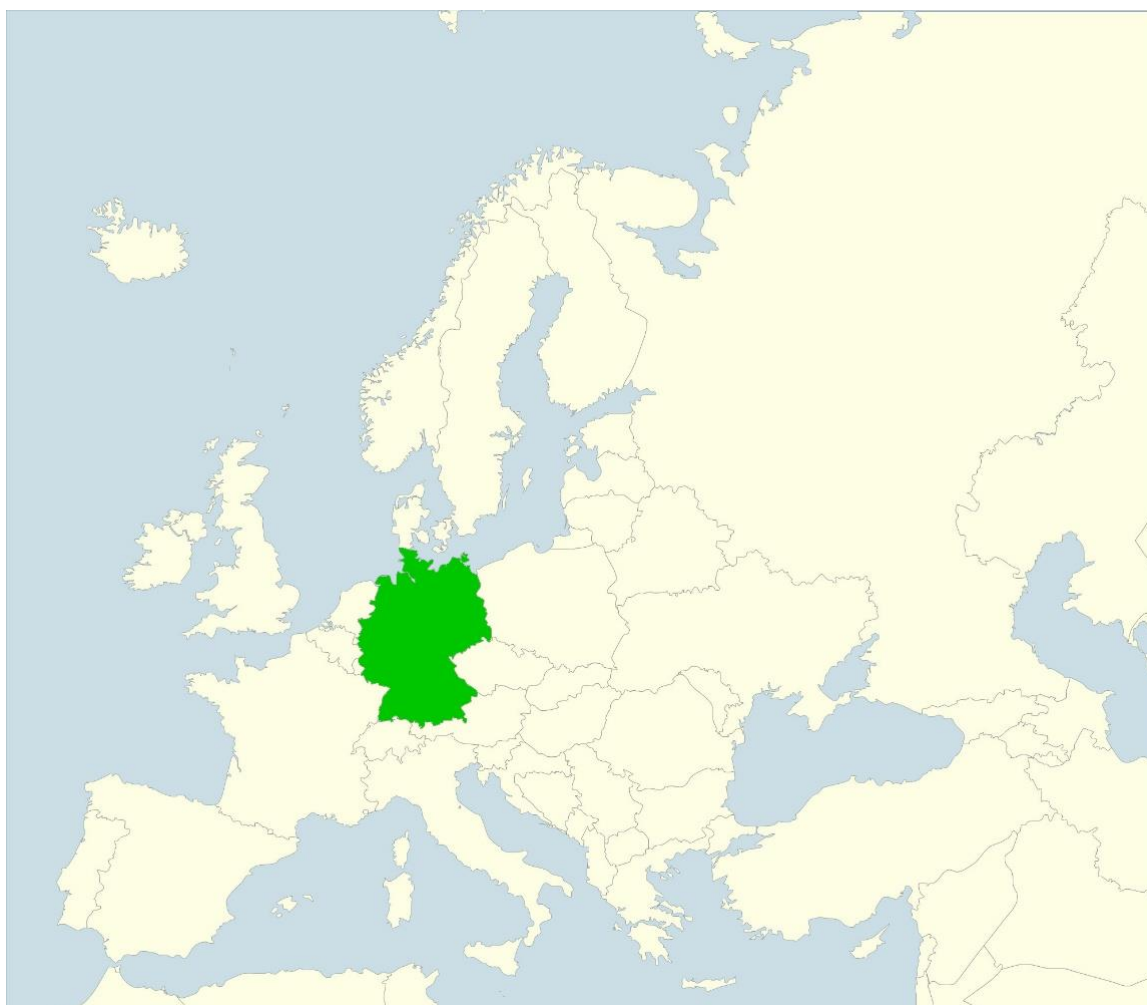


SHAPING PEOPLE AND PLACES: INSIGHTS INTO THE STRUCTURES AND EFFECTS OF VOLUNTARY CULTURAL WORK IN THE OLDENBURGER MÜNSTERLAND

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Abstract: In the context of cultural offerings, rural areas are frequently perceived as lacking in resources and opportunities. However, the rural Oldenburger Münsterland region, comprising the districts of Cloppenburg and Vechta in the northwest of Lower Saxony, Germany, is characterised by a vibrant cultural sector. The region is home to a plethora of singing, music, theatre and dance groups that organise frequent performances and festivals, thereby fostering a sense of community cohesion. The engaged individuals play a pivotal role in shaping the region's cultural environment. This paper employs ethnographic methods to address questions regarding the available cultural offerings and their impact on individuals and communities in the Oldenburger Münsterland region. The findings offer insight into how voluntary cultural work affects and shapes individuals and places in rural areas.

Keywords: volunteering, rural regions, resilience, place attachment, cultural sector, Lower Saxony

Zusammenfassung: In Bezug auf das kulturelle Angebot wird ländlichen Räumen häufig ein Defizit attestiert. Das ländliche Oldenburger Münsterland, das die Landkreise Cloppenburg und Vechta im Nordwesten Niedersachsens umfasst, zeichnet sich jedoch durch einen lebendigen Kultursektor aus. In der Region gibt es eine Vielzahl von Gesangs-, Musik-, Theater- und Tanzgruppen, die regelmäßig Aufführungen und Feste veranstalten und so den Zusammenhalt der Gemeinschaft fördern. Die engagierten Menschen gestalten das kulturelle Umfeld der Region maßgeblich mit. In diesem Beitrag wird mit ethnographischen Methoden der Frage nachgegangen, welche kulturellen Angebote es im Oldenburger Münsterland gibt und welche Auswirkungen sie auf den Einzelnen und die Gemeinschaft haben. Die Ergebnisse geben Aufschluss darüber, wie ehrenamtliche Kulturarbeit Individuen und Orte im ländlichen Raum beeinflusst und prägt.

Stichworte: Freiwilligenarbeit, ländliche Räume, Resilienz, Ortsbindung, Kultursektor, Niedersachsen

Highlights

- Voluntary cultural work promotes personal development and participation.
 - It organises meeting places and creates community in rural areas.
 - It reproduces and preserves the local cultural heritage.
 - It enables socially significant roles for volunteers.
 - Voluntary cultural work contributes to the formation of social capital, resilience, and place attachment.
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1. Introduction

Rural areas and rurality are terms that have been experiencing a boom in media, political and scientific discourses in recent years (Flor/Graf 2020, pp. 226–228). The pair of terms has ambivalent connotations. On the one hand, 'new rurality' (Hahne 2011, pp. 12–18) brings with it a positive image, which is expressed in the popularity of lifestyles perceived as rural as well as the "Revitalisation of 'folk culture' apostrophised phenomena in fashion, music, regional development and event culture" (Decker/Trummer 2020, p. 11, translated from German by the author). Since the early 1990s, a paradigm shift has also taken place at the European political level, in the course of which the heterogeneity of rural areas is taken seriously and bottom-up projects in regional development are increasingly promoted (Pollermann et al. 2020, p. 157). On the other hand, negative perceptions of rural areas still prevail. Narratives of dying regions and deficiency paint a picture of despair. Despite the new awareness of rurality and rural areas, the peripheries are considered problematic areas (Decker/Trummer 2020, p. 11). While rural living cannot

be distilled into these aspects, they reflect the challenges of global transformation in the European countryside. Major social issues are influencing rural areas, including climate change, globalisation, declining birth rates, immigration and emigration, and the transformation of lifestyles (BMEL 2014, p. 12).

In spite of (or perhaps because of) the inadequate infrastructure and the gradual disappearance of the traditional village centres, a considerable number of people are involved in their village communities and associations in a variety of ways for the common good of all, regardless of whether they are newcomers or long-established residents.² In particular, cultural activities contribute to the shaping of rural life through their orientation towards participation (Kegler 2019, p. 15). In the Oldenburger Münsterland, an agricultural region in north-west Germany comprising the districts of Cloppenburg and Vechta, a vibrant cultural life can be observed, organised voluntarily. The numerous singing, music, theatre and dance groups regularly organise performances, dance evenings and other festivals that bring the local population together. Their weekly rehearsal meetings provide an opportunity for individuals with an interest in music or art to meet and interact, thereby strengthening three core aspects of social cohesion: a sense of belonging, social relations, and an orientation towards the common good (Moustakas 2023, p. 1029; Chan et al. 2006, p. 289).

The volunteers shape their cultural environment and rural life in a self-determined manner. Their efforts play a crucial role in the cultural offerings available to the community. The present paper therefore seeks to address the following questions: What cultural offerings are available and how does voluntary cultural work shape the people and places in the rural communities of the Oldenburger Münsterland? The subject of this study is voluntary cultural work in the performing arts, which encompasses voluntarily organised hobbies and other activities in the cultural sector that are geared towards performances in front of an audience. With a view to assessing the importance of cultural volunteer work in rural areas, the empirical material enabled me to identify four key aspects of voluntary cultural work in the research region: Individual development and participation, design of meeting places and establishment of community, (re-)production of local cultural heritage, and assumption of a meaningful role in society.

The microcosm of voluntary cultural work in the Oldenburger Münsterland reveals concrete structural problems of rural areas in a condensed form. The objective of this paper is to make a qualitative, empirically sound and actor-centred contribution from a region that has been relatively under-researched to the interdisciplinary and international debates on rural living spaces and their (self-determined) design. Following a critical literature review of the theoretical framework and an explanation of the methodology, I proceeded to introduce the area of study and the forms of engagement that are taking place. Subsequently, I elucidated pertinent elements from the empirical material and analysed their effects. Finally, I discussed these effects with regard to the theoretical framework and their significance for the Oldenburger Münsterland.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Volunteering in rural areas

Volunteering³ is a broad field that has been extensively researched, yet remains challenging to define. In the social sciences, volunteering is regarded as “a social phenomenon that involves patterns of social relationships and interactions among individuals, groups, and associations/organisations” (Hustinx et al. 2010, p. 417). The characteristics of voluntariness, gratuitousness and collectivity mean that social networks in the context of voluntary engagement, represent a unique kind of social bond. As such, volunteering can be considered a “fundamental expression of community belonging and group identity”,

² Volunteering in Germany is quantified and analysed by the Volunteer Survey, which is published every four years. In 2019, around 28.8 million people aged 14 and over volunteered, which is 39.7 per cent of the total German population (Simonson et al. 2019, p. 276).

³ The diversity of volunteering, in terms of both the individuals involved and the activities undertaken, has resulted in the emergence of numerous terms with nuances in their meanings across a range of languages. In the German language, a distinction is made between the terms ‘Ehrenamt’ (English: honorary office) and ‘Freiwilligenarbeit’ (English: volunteer work). While both terms can be used to describe volunteering, they each carry their own unique connotations.

which contributes to the social integration of the individual (Hustinx et al. 2010, pp. 417). As a social construct with different definitions and manifestations, the respective understanding of which depends on public perception, the theoretical version of volunteer work is challenging to define (Hustinx et al. 2010, pp. 410). Comprehensive content analyses of over 200 definitions of volunteerism (Cnaan/Amroffell 1994; Cnaan et al. 1996) concluded that all definitions concern the provision of time, work and knowledge, and are centred on four axes: free will, availability and nature of remuneration, proximity to the beneficiaries, and a formal agency (Hustinx et al. 2010, pp. 414).

Within the context of the present research, this ambiguity gives rise to diverse self-conceptions and interpretations among the volunteers. Furthermore, performing cultural work primarily comprises activities that are regarded as hobbies or creative leisure pursuits. This renders participation low-threshold, with motivations frequently centred on the pursuit of enjoyment and the exchange of ideas with like-minded individuals. The membership of the majority of individuals is passive in nature, involving minimal commitment and no financial obligation beyond the annual membership fee. The viability of such a passive membership model hinges on the active involvement of other members within the association. In the extant literature, 'active membership' is understood to be somewhat synonymous with volunteering, focusing on the assumption of internal functions within the association or regular participation in work assignments (Beher et al. 2002, pp. 104–105). According to this understanding, taking on an office is not a prerequisite for being considered a volunteer, but it is sufficient to regularly contribute personal resources at one's own discretion. This aligns closely with the prevailing self-image of my interlocutors.

In the context of European politics, the role of volunteering in the development of rural areas has been a topic of considerable debate for several years.⁴ The focus of scientific enquiry aligns with the political issues, concentrating on systemically and infrastructurally pertinent areas that cannot be fulfilled by paid employees and must therefore be assumed by volunteers.⁵ Volunteering in the cultural sector has been the subject of relatively little research (Beher et al. 2002, p. 45). This is noteworthy in view of the fact that the number of people involved in music and culture in Germany more than doubled between 1999 and 2019 (see Figure 1; Simonson et al. 2019, p. 93).

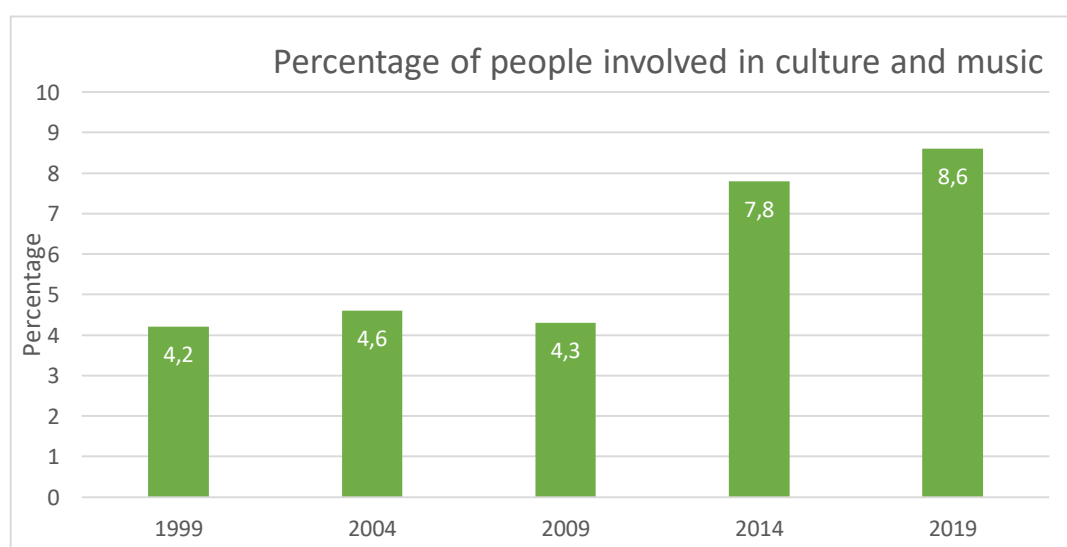


Fig 1. Percentage of people involved in culture and music. Source: Simonson et al. 2019, p. 105

⁴ The particular circumstances surrounding volunteering in this context were the focus of a public expert discussion held in July 2023 by the Subcommittee on Civic Engagement of the Committee on Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth of the German Bundestag. A brief account can be accessed via the following link: <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2023/kw27-pa-engagement-laendlicher-raum-953248>

⁵ See for example Kleiner/Burkhardt 2021, Mettenberger/Küpper 2019, van der Star/Hochstenbach 2022, Alonso/Nyanjom 2016, Davies et al. 2018 and 2021, Nilsson 2021, and Lundgren/Nilsson 2023. An overview of current research projects within the framework of a research funding programme of the BMEL on voluntary work in rural areas can be found here: <https://www.bmel.de/DE/themen/laendliche-regionen/ehrenamt/forschung-ehrenamt.html>

As shown by Kleiner and Kühn (2023, pp. 11–13) in their analysis of the data provided by the German Volunteer Survey and the Socio-Economic Panel (SOEP), volunteering in the cultural sector has traditionally played and continues to play an important role in rural areas (see Figure 2).

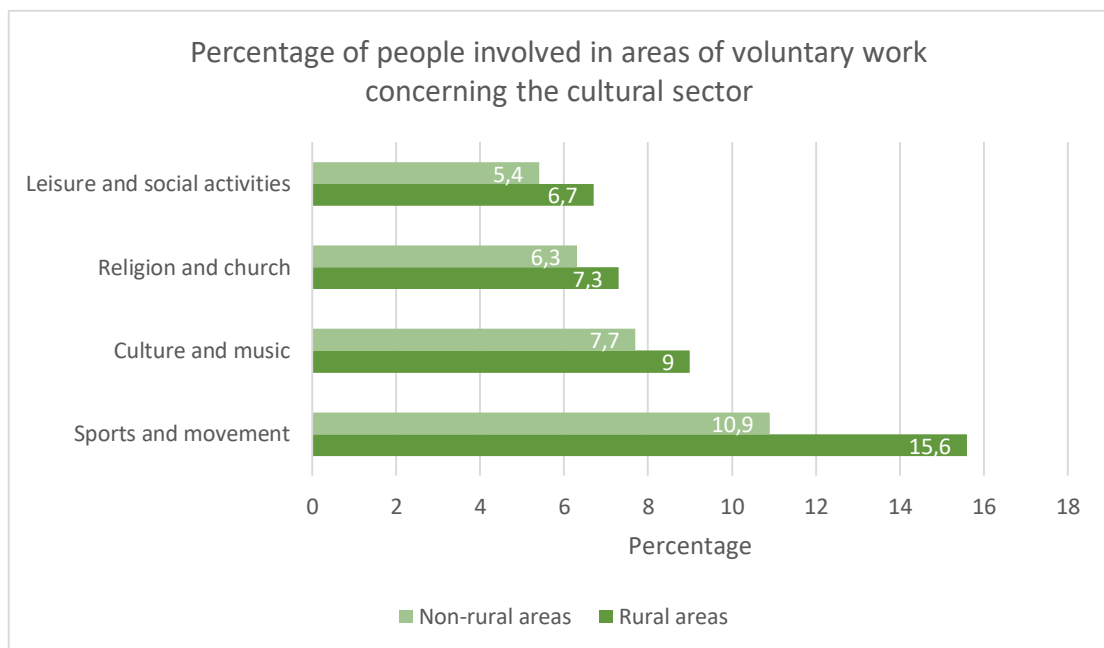


Fig 2. Percentage of people involved in areas of voluntary work concerning the cultural sector. Source: Kleiner/Kühn 2023, p. 12

The proposition that voluntary cultural activities have the potential to enhance the appeal of rural areas, stimulate economic growth and reinforce the sense of community is a hypothesis that is garnering interest at both national and international levels. Research conducted in rural Australia suggests that the arts are a vehicle for building resilience in rural communities (Anwar McHenry 2011), and explores how musical performance and expression foster alternative spaces for creativity (Gibson/Gordon 2018). Santos Silva et al. (2018) explored the challenges and opportunities for applying culture as an instrument of rural sustainability by examining a long-term artistic and cultural intervention project in Northern Portugal. Drawing upon a comprehensive set of 15 case studies conducted in Denmark, Frølund and Johansen (2023) delved into the pivotal role of cultural life in driving the economic and social vitality of peripheral regions. In Germany, academic work from the disciplines of cultural policy studies (Zimmermann/Geißler 2022) and regional development (Rammelmeier 2023) addresses the subject of voluntary cultural work in rural areas. An interdisciplinary contribution is that of Schneider et al. (2019), who analysed the effects of provincial theatre on cultural participation and artistic diversity in rural Germany. Cultural anthropological studies that bring together rural areas, volunteering and cultural work from an actor-centred perspective cover, for example, volunteer work with regard to intangible cultural heritage during the Covid-19 pandemic (Leineweber 2024), volunteer-run local museums (Krämer 2021) and regional amateur theatre (Rieken 2023).

2.2 Forming social capital, resilience and attachment

The framework conditions and structures of voluntary work have been dealt with in detail, especially in political science. A notable illustration of this academic work is evident in Putnam's (2000) extensive exploration of the notion of social capital. Putnam defines social capital as comprising social trust, generalized reciprocity, and community-oriented values at the individual level on the one hand, and formal and informal social networks on the other. In his conceptualisation, the accumulation of social capital is contingent upon social interaction; it is not an attribute of individuals, but rather a resource

available to society at large (Oberle 2016, pp. 397–398).⁶ In practice, the formation of social capital can be observed in voluntary social networks, that, as mentioned above, represent a unique kind of social bond. Based on the positive experiences gained from this, there is a tendency for social trust, the reciprocity norm and community-oriented values to be transferred to society as a whole (Putnam 2000, pp. 134, 411).

In the context of rural areas, the notion of social capital, as proposed by Putnam, finds congruence with certain aspects of the concept of resilience. In the field of cultural and social sciences, resilience signifies the ability to maintain one's identity in the face of change (Brown 2016, p. 2). Brown (2016, p. 2) develops the understanding of resilience further, proposing that it encompasses two additional dimensions: the capacity to adapt to variability and uncertainty, and the potential for positive transformation through structural change. In their 2017 publication, geographers Beel et al. critiqued the predominant focus of resilience theory on the immediate coping mechanisms of external shocks by communities and the assumption of a return to a "pre-disturbance state" (Beel et al. 2017, p. 461). Although Beel et al. (2017, p. 461) do not explicitly cite Brown's comprehensive definition of resilience, their argument aligns with it, emphasising the need to conceptualise rural communities as dynamic entities, endowed with agency, and underscoring the pivotal role of human agency in resilience. Brown's (2016, pp. 185–187) view is that effective resilience-building processes are typified by three key characteristics. Firstly, there is the interweaving of individuals with their physical and social environments (rootedness). Secondly, there is social creativity and the ability to form networks (resourcefulness). Thirdly, there is the capacity to not only withstand external pressures but also the possibility of initiating change (resistance). In this regard, the links to social capital as defined by Putnam (2000) become evident. However, resilience does not negate existing power relations; rather, it is situated within the "micro-politics of place and the macro influences of the current political economy" (Beel et al. 2017, p. 461).

It can be hypothesised that the formation of social capital and resilience occurs in specific locations of various scales in rural areas, including clubhouses, churches and community centres, as well as more abstract places, such as villages, districts and regions. A more thorough examination of the interconnectedness of people and places as well as the micro-politics of place can be enabled by the notion of place attachment.⁷ This concept is derived from the field of environmental psychology and signifies the emotional connection that forms between individuals and their significant physical surroundings (Scannell/Gifford 2010, p. 1, as cited in Birnbaum et al. 2021, p. 189). The development of these bonds, which evolve over time from the behavioural, affective, and cognitive ties between individuals and/or groups and their socio-physical environment, provides a framework for both individual and communal aspects of identity, exhibiting stabilising and dynamic features (Brown/Perkins 1992, p. 284, as cited in Thomas 2009, pp. 41–42). In the present paper, the sociocultural processes of place attachment are of particular interest, as they can be defined as "systems of social reproduction and social norms that constrain as well as locate human relations" (Low/Altman 1992, p. 9). In essence, place attachment can therefore be considered a process of symbolisation, whereby the experience of a given space is transformed into a "culturally meaningful and shared symbol, that is, place" (Low 1992, p. 166). The underlying understanding of place acknowledges the interconnection of quotidian realms within distinct geographical locales. However, it also emphasises the dynamic and processual nature of these spaces, which are shaped by symbolic-material social practices and intricately woven into relational networks of social interactions (Müller 2020, pp. 47–48). It is therefore evident that places serve as contexts within which interpersonal, community and cultural relationships are established. It is these social relationships, rather than the physical characteristics of a place, to which individuals develop a sense of attachment (Low/Altman 1992, pp. 6–7). This can, in turn, give rise to an intrinsic commitment

⁶ In this way, Putnam's conception of social capital differs significantly from the category of analysis of the same name developed by French sociologist Bourdieu (1983, pp. 190–192). In contrast to Bourdieu's power-critical perspective, Putnam adopts an integrative social view and conceives of social capital as a unifying force within society.

⁷ A plethora of terminological nuances, which bear similar meanings, underscore the significance of this concept. Nelson et al. (2020) compared a few of these terms. A comprehensive overview of the many operationalisations can be found in Giuliani (2003). Hidalgo and Hernández (2001) and Giuliani and Feldman (1993) adopt a critical perspective on the diversity of terminology and conceptualisations.

to the community (Thomas 2009, p. 42). Rural spaces are distinguished by their distinct central functions, demographic trends, economic dynamics and remoteness, thus offering unique foundations for processes of place attachment (Birnbaum et al. 2021, p. 191).

The comprehension of rural regions as heterogeneous spaces, whose analysis facilitates the investigation of socio-cultural transformation processes, establishes the basis for reflective and differentiated research in the area under investigation. The divergent perceptions of volunteering in the field necessitated the creation of a working definition that would be applicable to the majority of cases derived from the empirical material. When considered together, the concepts of social capital and resilience can be used to argue that voluntary cultural work is a foundation of sustainable rural communities. The social networks that are established through volunteering can be regarded as a manifestation of social capital. Concurrently, the collaborative, innovative, and problem-solving endeavours undertaken in the course of voluntary cultural work, which is designed to benefit the specific village community, can be interpreted as evidence of the formation of resilience. It is evident that these processes are characterised by a distinct connection to the places of voluntary commitment, which can be further explored through the lens of place attachment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design and methodological approach

The ethnographic research approach employs a combination of interviews and participatory observations, with the objective of gaining a comprehensive understanding of volunteer cultural work as a practice (Kaschuba 1999, pp. 196–213). A total of 25 interviews were conducted between February 2022 and October 2024 with individuals actively engaged in cultural and performing arts activities within the districts of Cloppenburg and Vechta. The guideline-based in-person interviews had a duration of between 45 and 90 minutes. The main aspects of the guideline concerned the respondents’ comprehension and perception of their involvement, their motivations, their personal involvement history, and the impact of their involvement on their daily lives. Additionally, respondents were queried about the structure of the respective association or group, its history, and personal and institutional networks (Helfferich 2022, pp. 881–885). Figure 3 illustrates the participants’ affiliations within the domain of performing cultural work.

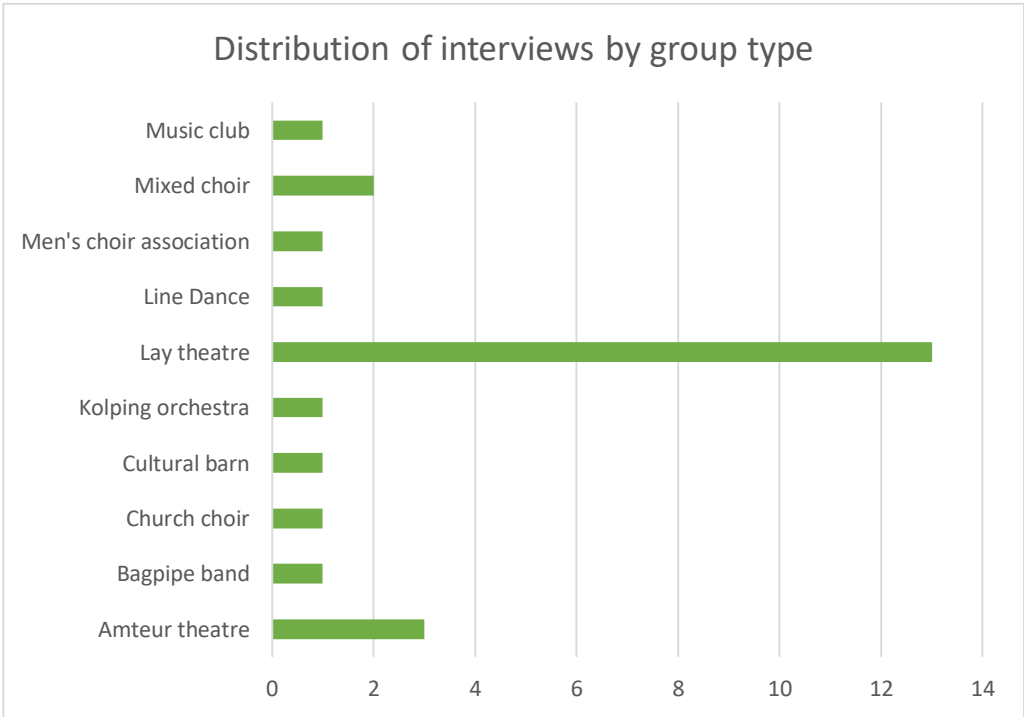


Fig 3. Distribution of interviews by group type (n=25). Source: own research

The participatory observations were conducted in the same time frame as the interviews, primarily at theatre rehearsals and performances, a singers' ball, a coffee afternoon, and choir rehearsals. This approach entails the direct involvement of the researcher in the day-to-day social activities of the research area and is characterised by a combination of empathetic and analytical understanding (Schmidt-Lauber 2007, p. 220). Participatory observation is a dialogue-based method in which the researcher's experiences in the field are fundamental to the acquisition of knowledge (Schmidt-Lauber 2007, p. 230). The field impressions were documented in observation protocols and field notes, thus enabling their contextualisation and interpretation.

Furthermore, in order to facilitate exchange with the actors and to bring together individuals with different commitment backgrounds, storytelling cafés were held under changing thematic focuses. Through collective reflection, participants can identify commonalities and divergences, facilitating a more profound comprehension, categorisation and re-evaluation of personal experiences (Kohn/Caduff 2010, p. 193). The events were thematically focused on self-perceptions and interpretations of one's own commitment, motivations, factors that favour and hinder volunteering, as well as identity and volunteering, target groups and member recruitment. Participants were prompted to reflect on their attitudes and values through the utilisation of specific questions, leading to novel interpretations and perspectives (Kohn/Caduff 2010, pp. 197–198).

The evaluation of the collected data is conducted by the principles of grounded theory. In accordance with the grounded theory method originally proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1996), the collected data is subjected to coding and categorisation in three coding stages. Firstly, open coding involves the segmentation of the collected data into codes, followed by the establishment of relationships between these codes and their subsequent categorisation. Secondly, empirical relationships between the categories are established through the utilisation of axial coding. This coding step translates into a sampling strategy that aims to uncover as many differences in the material as possible. Thirdly, as the contrasting of the cases progresses, the evaluation advances to the subsequent step of selective coding. According to Strauss and Corbin (1996, p. 158), this stage involves the elaboration of a core category and thus the development of the subject-related theory. At this stage, the sampling serves to substantiate this core category and, to a large extent, verify the summarisations (Truschkat et al. 2011, pp. 367–369). The overarching objective of this research design is to develop a comprehensive, empirically-grounded theory through iterative data collection and evaluation (Mey/Mruck 2011; Götzö 2014).

It should be noted that this is an ongoing research project; the ethnographic element and the evaluation remain unfinished. The results presented in this article are preliminary findings based on the evaluation of a selection of the interviews conducted, as well as the participatory observations. All quotes from the empirical material have been translated into English by the author.

3.2 The Oldenburger Münsterland as a research region

The region of Oldenburger Münsterland derives its name from the cities of Oldenburg and Münster, which are situated outside the boundaries of the region (see Figure 4). This can be traced back to a change in the political administration of the area that is now comprised of the districts of Cloppenburg and Vechta. In 1803, the political landscape fell under the authority of the Duchy of Oldenburg as a result of the dissolution of the Diocese of Münster as a state lordship. Despite the new Protestant rule, the region remained ecclesiastically under the diocese of Münster, which led to the development of a Catholic milieu that continues to exert a significant influence on the region's self-perception and perception by others. Following the Second World War, the state of Oldenburg was incorporated into the state of Lower Saxony. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of the population continues to maintain a strong attachment to Oldenburg (Schürmann 2021, p. 9). As a result of missionary activities, the region has been in contact with a multitude of locations across the globe for over a century (Aka 2024). In addition, Catholicism exerts an influence on the political attitudes of the population: elections tend to be characterised by a conservative voting pattern (Jakob 2022).

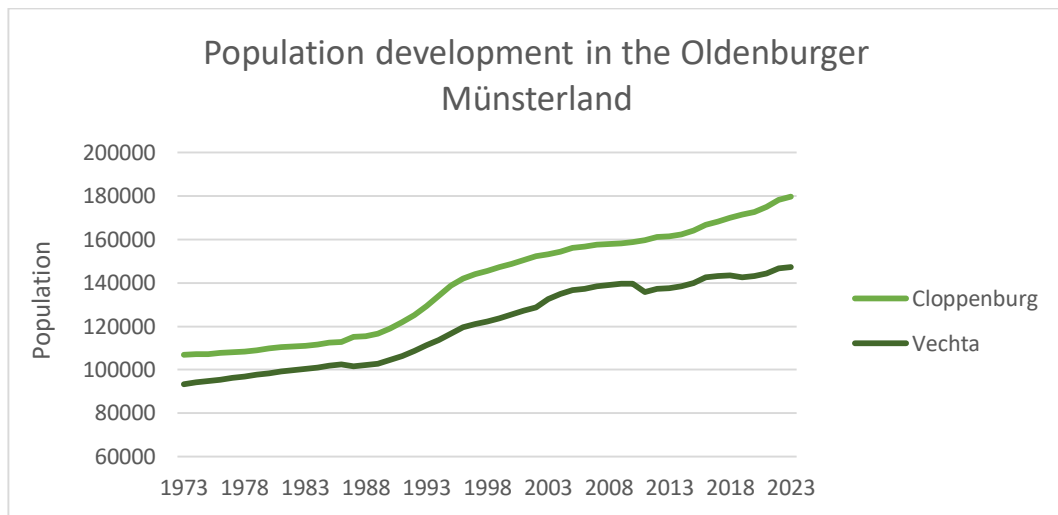


Fig 6. Population development of the districts of Cloppenburg and Vechta from 1973 to 2023. Source: Landesamt für Statistik Niedersachsen

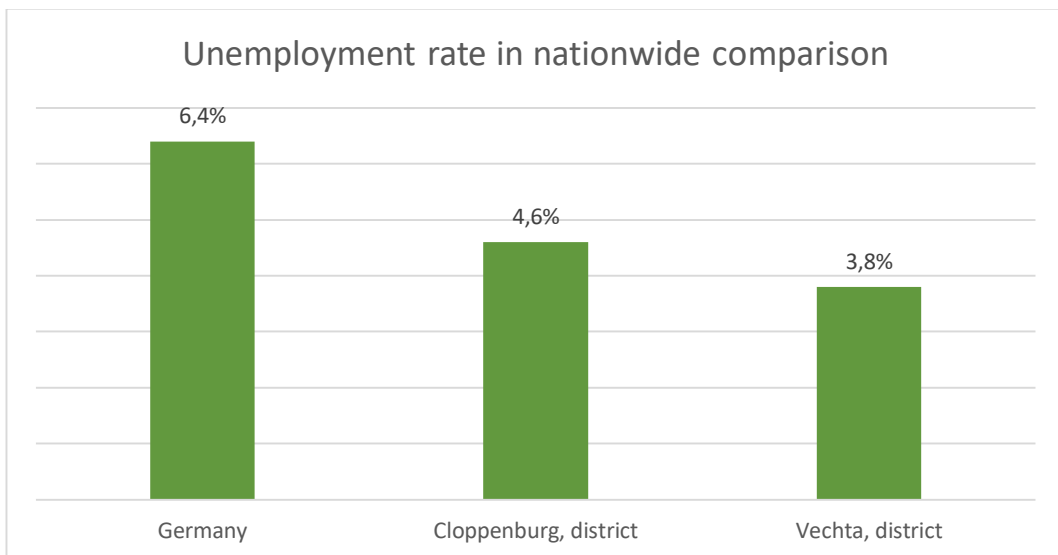


Fig 7. Unemployment rate in a nationwide comparison, March 2025. Source: Bundesagentur für Arbeit

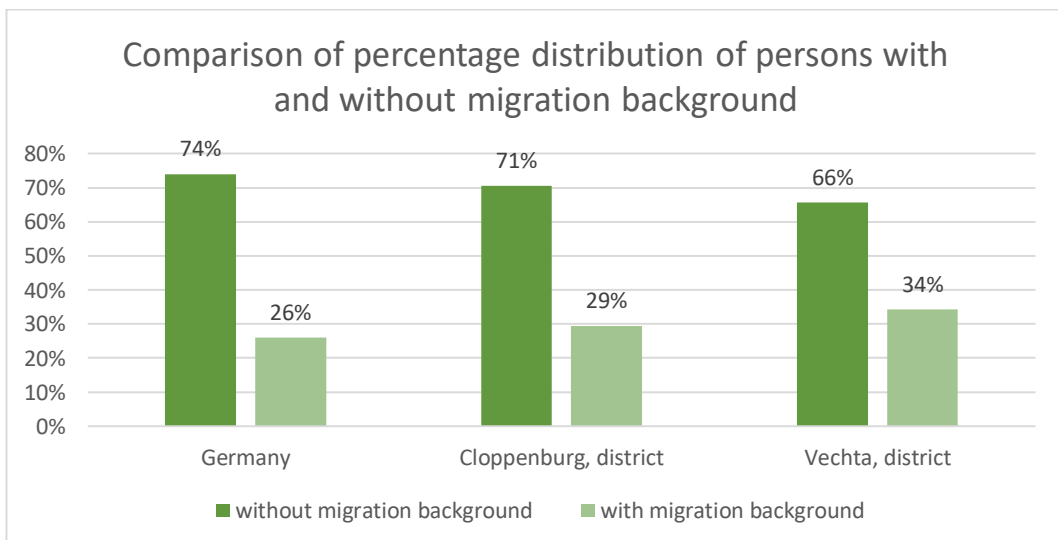


Fig 8. Percentage distribution of persons with and without migration background in Germany and Oldenburger Münsterland districts, 2019. Source: Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder, Deutschland

The Oldenburger Münsterland is currently one of the most intensive agricultural regions in Europe. However, the foundation of economic success is gradually reaching its limits, as intensive agriculture is increasingly being criticised by the public for its practices, some of which are harmful to the environment. This impacts the region's image⁸ and is associated with the proliferation of stereotypes and negative headlines (Schürmann 2021, p. 12–14). Concurrently, however, the (agricultural) economic challenges present opportunities for change and innovation (Fend 2024). The influence of the globalised agricultural industry is evident in its impact on the region's social structure, which is reflected in the slightly higher proportion of individuals with a migration background compared to the German average (see Figure 8). In the district of Cloppenburg, for instance, the combination of a low unemployment rate and a high birth rate can be attributed to the Russian-German community, which began to settle in the region in the 1980s and 1990s. The majority of jobs in meat processing plants are occupied by this demographic, who, in part, adhere to a religious group that espouses a traditional family concept (Willenbring 2009). The northeast of the district of Vechta offers favourable soil conditions for fruit and vegetable cultivation, with the harvest being carried out by Eastern European seasonal workers (Jakob 2022). This distinctive demographic composition is reflected in the region's everyday culture, yet there is no evidence of widespread inclusion. Instead, exclusive communities have emerged, which are reinforced by employers, religious communities and local politics through the establishment of demarcated settlements and mass accommodation (Willenbring 2009; Jakob 2022).

4. Voluntary cultural work in the Oldenburger Münsterland

In the ensuing chapters, an exposition of the empirical findings is provided. Prior to the presentation of four key aspects of the effects of voluntary cultural work in chapter five, a concise inventory and overview of the challenges faced by my interlocutors facilitates a more profound comprehension of the cultural landscape in which the study is set.

4.1 Inventory

An inventory of the forms of voluntary performing cultural work on the basis of the association directories of the 23 cities and municipalities of the Oldenburger Münsterland reveals that the most significant areas in terms of numbers are singing (42%), music (32%), amateur and lay theatre (17%) and dance (9%). The individual categories, especially singing and music, are characterised by significant heterogeneity and can be differentiated into distinct sub-areas (see Figure 9).

The distinction between amateur theatre groups and lay theatre groups is made with regard to their respective self-image: while the former perform literary and artistic plays, the latter focus on social interaction and perform comedic plays in Low German. In the majority of cases, the establishment of amateur theatre groups in the Oldenburger Münsterland was initiated by teachers from various secondary schools in the region. The establishment of lay theatre groups is characterised by a diversity of founding narratives. Some have emancipated themselves from shooting clubs or Kolping Families⁹ over the years, while others have founded themselves as associations or continue to be affiliated with a larger club (Rieken 2023, p. 9). The music groups in the region exhibit a diverse array of forms. In this context, Kolping Families emerge as a prominent organisational framework. However, the majority of music societies function as independent entities, yet frequently collaborate with regional music schools to facilitate the musical education of their members. The diversity of vocal groups is equally pronounced. In many cases, the church provides the necessary infrastructure, which is unsurprising given that singing constitutes an integral part of Christian masses, and the Catholic church year comprises a variety of occasions for which singing is required.

⁸ Since the broadcast of the documentary film "Und ewig stinken die Felder" (Kleinschmidt/Eimler 1984), the two districts have been nationally known as 'Lower Saxony's pig belt' (Brandau 2022).

⁹ Kolping Families are sub-groups of the Kolping Society, which is an international Catholic social organisation. They began as Catholic journeymen's associations, which campaigned for the interests of journeymen, and were significantly influenced by their namesake Adolph Kolping (Nunes Matias 2002, p. 40).

Category	Group type	Number
Singing		167
	Mixed choir	55
	Church choir	40
	Men's choir	27
	Youth choir	18
	Women's choir	16
	Gospel choir	6
	Shanty choir	5
Music		128
	Music association	39
	Hunting horn	20
	Orchestra	15
	Band (different genres)	11
	Brass orchestra	10
	Marching band	10
	Trombone choir	6
	Shooting band	6
	Music school	5
	Harmonica and accordion	4
	Bagpipe	2
Theatre		67
	Lay theatre	52
	Amateur theatre	15
Dance		34
	Dance (in general, no differentiation possible)	24
	Folk dance	9
	Line Dance	1

Fig 9. Inventory of group types by category. Source: own research

The diversity of voluntary cultural activities is evident from this overview, which demonstrates that such activities are organised in a variety of ways. The majority of groups engaged in the pursuit of artistic endeavours, encompassing theatre, music, singing and dance, adopt a club-like organisational structure to facilitate the management of their time-consuming activities. Some of the older clubs, especially singing and music clubs, can trace their history back to the mid-nineteenth century, when the social restructuring that accompanied industrialisation created the environment for the organisation of leisure activities (Bohn 1984, p. 36). In the Oldenburger Münsterland, this development is exemplified by the emergence of choral societies, which were established with the objective of fostering conviviality and cohesion within local communities (Rieken 2023, p. 16).

4.2 Challenges: adaptation to structural change

Despite the vitality of volunteer work in the Oldenburger Münsterland, many of the groups and associations are facing a range of challenges associated with structural change in rural areas. The decline of traditional meeting places such as inns, dining halls and pubs can be attributed to a shift in society as a whole, characterised by an increase in work and obligations in both professional and private life. As a consequence of the reduction in the number of customers, restaurants with halls are no longer able to generate sufficient revenue to remain profitable (Interview no. 23). This is particularly relevant in the context of groups and associations engaged in performing arts, given the necessity to have access to permanent premises for storage and adequate space for their numerous members. Some municipalities have sought to address this issue by establishing cultural barns or village community centres, which are specifically designed to serve as gathering places for the local population and are available to local associations for rehearsals and events (Interview no. 19).

The issue of room availability is inextricably linked to the constraints imposed by inflationary pressures on financial resources. Consequently, significant annual regional gatherings, such as choir and musicians' festivals or district theatre evenings can only be held by the associations that have access to appropriate premises (Interview no. 23). As a result, the visibility of the clubs and groups active in the region is constrained to those who possess the requisite resources to organise the major events. Furthermore, elevated prices affect the response to events and the willingness to donate in the village community. In the economically robust region, numerous local enterprises provide financial support to cultural initiatives through advertising and sponsorship. Nevertheless, this practice perpetuates a concentration of resources among towns and villages that are already financially well-positioned (Interview no. 24).

The advent of the Covid-19 pandemic signified a substantial disruption to prevailing patterns of social interaction, accelerating the symptoms of structural change. The regularity of the weekly rehearsal meetings and the structuring of the year through the cultural events were central aspects of social life. Due to the protective measures that were put in place to combat the spread of the virus, these aspects were eliminated. Consequently, the sense of obligation towards weekly commitments has diminished, and it is now more straightforward for members to cancel than it was prior to the pandemic (Interview no. 23). The festivals and celebrations that once attracted a considerable number of participants have either not yet recovered their former size or have completely disappeared, as the chairman of a mixed choir recounts:

"Covid has ruined a lot of things. To be honest, we couldn't organise a singers' ball anymore and after two or three years, who would tackle it again? That was the problem. [...] And that's why this event has now been cancelled. Will it be revived again? I don't think so" (Interview no. 24).

An additional challenge is that of individual time management. The nature of professions and leisure activities in rural areas has undergone a significant transformation over recent decades. The traditionally high number of farmers has decreased, while the number of employees and shift workers has increased. According to the chairman of a men's choral association, such individuals typically work longer hours, which leaves them with less time for leisure activities:

"Today, people are involved in their work, they have their tasks. In the past, there were a lot of farmers, a lot of self-employed people, who could stay in late at night. They didn't go home at a quarter past ten, they would still practise the so-called post-singing. They also had a schnapps and a beer. And you just have to recognise that and we have to find other ways of doing it" (Interview no. 17).

In the majority of families, the traditional role of the housewife has been superseded with both parents engaged in paid employment. In contrast to the situation where one individual has the requisite time to pursue leisure activities, the reality is that two people have no time at all (Interview no. 24). As a result of the diversification of leisure activities, the performing hobbies are also facing increased competition, necessitating a stronger assertion of their own identity and appeal (Interview no. 23).

The decline in the influence of religion is a pivotal factor, as numerous performing activities are linked to denominational umbrella organisations. Despite the robust Catholic tradition in the Oldenburger

Münsterland, the Church is witnessing a decline in popularity in certain areas, which is also impacting the associated organisational structures (Interview no. 23). Religious and denominational affiliations have become highly differentiated in recent decades and are steadily losing importance. As a result, exclusion mechanisms based on them are no longer effective in clubs today, particularly given that few cultural associations can afford to categorically exclude so many potential members (Interview no. 17).

One of the most significant factors influencing the long-term sustainability of voluntary cultural activities is the limited appeal of traditional content to prospective younger demographics. The lack of responsiveness to the preferences of young people contribute to the decline of many associations and groups due to ageing members. In order to avoid this fate, efforts are being made to gradually modify the content to align with contemporary preferences while avoiding overwhelming the older members (Interviews no. 23, 24). The experience of the interviewees indicates that young people who have left their hometown to pursue training or studies continue to participate in rehearsals and performances, contingent on the distance and the feasibility of arranging transportation (Interview no. 16).

The success of the adaptation to structural change ultimately depends on the efforts of the leading staff, specifically the choir directors, conductors, directors, and course instructors in terms of content, and the board members in terms of organisation. In order to guarantee the continued viability, they must demonstrate adaptability and flexibility. It is also crucial that they foster a sense of optimism among their more passive members, who must embrace transformation (Interviews no. 18, 24).

5. Effects of performing voluntary cultural work

5.1 Individual development and participation

The various associations and groups contribute to the entertainment of the population and promote artistic exchange and creative development in the region. Rehearsals and performances also raise awareness of aesthetic experiences and cultural identity. Volunteering provides an opportunity for individuals to contribute their own ideas to the development of their local communities, thereby influencing the shape of their surroundings in a way that aligns with their personal interests and aspirations. The chairman of a mixed choir, for example, states that he has had little time in recent years and is now beginning to settle into the community as a newcomer with the help of voluntary work (Interview no. 23).

In the case of performing hobbies, the way to the hobby is often characterised by family closeness, personal preferences, interests and passions (Interview no. 18). The focus is usually on the joy and fun of the hobby, as well as the distraction from work and family life: "Singing always makes you happy. It's a way of concentrating on the task at hand, of being able to switch off, and I think it also releases happy hormones" (Interview no. 18). Such a hobby can be understood as self-care and is often taken up in young years or when family and professional life allow more time (Interview no. 18). The performing hobbies are not as strongly linked to physical fitness as sports activities, so the groups and clubs are age-inclusive (Interview no. 17). Performing in front of an audience is seen as a highlight that motivates: "Somehow you have such a feeling of elation when you're there, when you release adrenaline. And afterwards there's an after-show party and it's always a really nice evening" (Interview no. 18). At the same time, the many appearances and commitments may prove overwhelming for some individuals. In order for the performing hobbies to be fun, it is essential that the individual engaging in the activity identifies with the activity itself and is motivated to invest a significant degree of commitment to it (Interview no. 17). However, the cultural hobbies are very low-threshold, because they are a team effort, as the chairman of a men's choral association makes clear: "It is important that in each voice, there are some who sing really well and the others are carried along. A choir singer doesn't have to be a solo singer" (Interview no. 17). This shows the accessibility, social trust and community aspect of 'singing together', which supports Putnam's (2000, p. 411) argument that social capital is formed in clubs like this.

In this context, personality development also includes the experience of competition and ambition, which the creative leaders have to channel into good performances (Interview no. 17). In comparison with other groups, the clubs differentiate themselves from one another in terms of their goals and motivations and

use these to define their group identity, which in turn is reflected in personal self-image (Interviews no. 17, 18). This becomes particularly clear in a longer interview passage in which the chairwoman of a mixed church choir talks about the difficulties in recruiting men and explains this circumstance with the competition of the men's choral society in the village and a general tendency of men towards more social formats:

"It can be tough for men, and it's also a big competition that we have such a large men's choir. So that the men then say, 'I'd rather go to the men's choir because there's more of a social atmosphere.' We also have a good community, but a different one, somehow. So, perhaps the celebration is even more in the foreground. For us, it's also celebrating, but it's a different kind of party. It's not that we don't like to drink, but I think it's different in the men's choir and maybe our standards of singing are a little higher" (Interview no. 18).

The chairwoman makes a clear statement regarding traditional gender roles that have persisted to the present day and are apparently reflected in the various singing groups. A clear demarcation takes place here, which helps to address the desired target group in the public perception.

The numerous groups and associations in the Oldenburger Münsterland region facilitate cultural participation in a variety of ways. While the primary objective of theatre and music groups is to provide entertainment, choral societies and choirs frequently assist in the organisation of certain church services, in addition to their secular performances (Interviews no. 18, 23). To address the evolving social context, novel formats such as project choirs are being explored as potential avenues for enhancing the appeal and flexibility of performing hobbies (Interview no. 23). This phenomenon coincides with a structural change in voluntary commitment observed throughout Europe (Ehrhardt 2011, pp. 24–25; Meijs/Hendriks 2022, p. VII).

5.2 Design of meeting places and establishment of community

The performing hobbies facilitate cultural participation, particularly through the establishment of meeting points and communities. The weekly practice sessions serve as a forum for social interaction (Interview no. 17). However, it is essential to strike a balance between the pursuit of enjoyment and the fostering of conviviality on the one hand, and the commitment to rehearsals and professionalism on the other (Interview no. 18). In choirs and choral societies, the seating arrangement is determined by the affiliation to one vocal range, which precludes the possibility of contact with people in the other vocal registers during practice (Interview no. 17). Afterwards, members socialise, especially older members, given that they often have less involvement in social networks due to their status as retirees (Interview no. 23).

The chairman of a men's choral association states that rehearsal evenings provide a positive emotional experience. Like Putnam (2000, p. 411), he observes that the act of singing together serves to foster a sense of connection and community (Interview no. 17). This is essential in order to ensure the continued viability of the club community: "If it weren't for the social aspect, we wouldn't have the people in the choral society. If it were just the singing and nothing else, then it's game over" (Interview no. 17). This quote serves to illustrate the fundamental importance of sociability and a sense of community in the formation and maintenance of group identity. The undertaking of joint social activities throughout the year serves to consolidate the bond between the members and the association (Interviews no. 17, 18, 23, 24). The shared experiences facilitate the formation of an 'emotive connection' among the group members, which gives rise to a strong 'sense of togetherness' (Bausinger 1971, pp. 52–54). The bond of membership within the group is expressed through rituals and persists beyond the individual's lifetime. This is evidenced by the example of a men's choral association, which presents the club flag at the funeral of a member and performs the requiem. However, the bond is also subject to strict regulations, as those who had departed from the association for a period exceeding five years prior to their demise would be excluded from this gesture of farewell (Interview no. 17).

The associations and groups unite the entire municipality through the organisation of performances. The objective of these events is to raise awareness of the groups among the local population, thereby increasing their visibility and replenishing their financial resources (Interviews no. 17, 18, 23, 24).

Notwithstanding the perception of integration into the broader municipality, the local identity of the villages remains a salient feature. One chairwoman states that the volunteers view their commitment to their own village as a matter of course. Her fellow board member adds: "People help and support each other as a community. That's great added value for the whole town" (Interview no. 23). The various hobby forms often cooperate with each other at their events: the theatre association performs a sketch at the singers' ball, the big band entertains the theatre audience during intermissions and the music association accompanies the church choir at a performance (Interviews no. 14, 17, 18, 24). The sense of community in the village is manifested through the participation in and attendance of various events held within the local area (Interview no. 23). Musical and theatrical performances elicit a diverse range of emotions, which are collectively experienced by the audience and performers. Thereby, the cultural events and activities facilitate the process of communitisation (Bareither 2019, pp. 42–45).

At the regional level, choral societies and choirs, music associations and theatre groups are each organised in umbrella organisations. The corresponding affiliations are based on the district borders of Cloppenburg and Vechta, as well as on perceived affiliations to surrounding regions and districts. Consequently, the often-postulated networking between the two districts does not apply in this context (Interview no. 23). Annually, a major festival is held at the regional level by each umbrella organisation. The organisation of these festivals is the responsibility of a single association. Such festivals serve as regional meeting points for participants of the respective categories of performing hobbies, facilitating the exchange and comparison of experiences while also providing an opportunity for celebration (Interviews no. 17, 18, 23). However, it is becoming increasingly challenging for smaller clubs to host these festivals, which in turn is reducing their visibility within the region. This has an impact on cultural heritage, as the regular events are traditions that are no longer feasible to hold (Interview no. 23).

5.3 (Re-)production of local cultural heritage

In addition to the regular festivals and performances, the local cultural heritage of the region also encompasses the clubs themselves. The volunteers maintain the traditional organisational structures that were established in the nineteenth century around the performing arts, and adhere to the founding objective of that era, which was to safeguard and advance the local cultural heritage (Interview no. 17). In comprehensive chronicles, the club's history, traditions, rituals, and personnel changes are meticulously documented for future reference (Interview no. 18). The younger clubs and groups also adhere to this practice, thereby inscribing themselves in the cultural memory of their respective villages and the wider region. This is achieved through the constant reproduction of social club life, events and performances (Assmann 1988, p. 9). Over time, certain dates and traditions have become established. A significant proportion of the associations' traditions are associated with church festivals and rituals, including the musical accompaniment of church services on occasions of high religious significance, the celebration of the name day or the observance of Lent as a theatre-free period (Interviews no. 5, 17, 18). The traditions serve to unite the village and the wider community, as the chairman of a Kolping orchestra illustrates with reference to the Corpus Christi procession:

"It's also a tradition for some people and they find it has a recognisable value. There is a funeral march, with the singing and the musical accompaniment, [...] so something would be missing at that moment. On certain days, like Remembrance Day or Christmas in church, when everyone is really emotional, you also offer that. In any case, I think offering something like this is good for the cultural heritage of a community" (Interview no. 25).

The association's identity is significantly shaped by the specific traditions, which have been attested to as continuous since the founding period. In this context, the chronicles serve as a manual for the implementation of traditions, while old photographs help to reconstruct the traditional performance attire. To provide an example, in a men's choir that was established in 1894, the group includes three individuals who serve as flag bearers, whose role is exclusively representative, and who wear distinctive headgear (Interview no. 17). The hats and the club flag require restoration every few years, which is an expensive process. However, this is a necessary expense to ensure the continuity of the tradition

(Interview no. 17). The flag bearers serve to exemplify the association's identity, and in conjunction with the flag, they represent continuity and tradition, as well as community.

At the same time, the preservation of intangible cultural heritage gives rise to tensions, whereby those with agency determine what is significant and should be sustained (Beel et al. 2017, p. 461). In this way, the distribution of social power is embedded in cultural engagement. At the municipal level, the groups formed around the performing hobbies and cultural activities can be considered micropolitical entities. These entities may have an exclusionary effect, for example, by enforcing class differences or reproducing traditional gender roles (Ehrhardt 2011, p. 61).

In the event that established traditions are no longer popular, the clubs endeavour to implement novel traditions (Interview no. 23). An illustrative example of the alteration of rituals and traditions in order to align them with the evolving social context can be observed in the case of a men's choral association. On the evening preceding the general assembly on 8 December, a customary procession was held until approximately 35 years ago. This procession commenced at the restaurant where the meeting had been held the previous year and where rehearsals had been conducted since that time, and proceeded to the new host location. In order to achieve this, all cabinets and a large lyre had to be transported by the singers, which is said to have been a challenging undertaking. Since then, most restaurants and pubs have closed, thus rendering a procession no longer feasible. Instead, on the eve of the general meeting, the association's board provides sausages and an informal get-together, replacing the old tradition and forming a new one (Interview no. 17). The choral association's annual procession served as a defining ritual, reinforcing the group's collective identity. The strong local connection also shaped the emotional affiliation of the association members to the village, which represents a process of symbolisation that facilitates place attachment (Thomas 2009, pp. 40–41; Low 1992, pp. 166–167). The act of sharing a meal and recounting tales before the general assembly has become a novel ritual, serving to reinforce the sense of cohesion within the group. This illustrates how the association responds to evolving circumstances while striving to perpetuate traditions in a transformed form.

5.4 Assumption of a meaningful role in society

From an actor-centred perspective, volunteering can be seen as a form of public action in which actors leave the protective private sphere and expose themselves publicly to a certain extent (Ehrhardt 2011, p. 105), which, in this study, is potentiated by their public performances as lay actors, dancers, singers and musicians. Individuals who undertake these roles are required to dedicate a significant amount of time and possess a well-developed social network, which is often exclusive to those who are economically privileged (Ehrhardt 2011, pp. 58–65, 222–228). The opportunity to volunteer allows individuals to assume one or more roles within society, thereby integrating themselves into the social structure of the village community in a meaningful way.

One particular role is that of the individual assuming responsibility, a role which the chairmen and chairwomen of the associations perceive themselves to occupy (Interview no. 18). They relish the opportunity to assume responsibility, frequently do so in a professional capacity and consider themselves to be reliable and well-organised. The self-image of being a person who is willing to assume significant responsibilities is reflected in the voluntary commitment. In the context of hobby-based clubs, individuals who identify with a sense of duty and responsibility are able to engage in these activities and receive the appropriate level of recognition and appreciation. In this capacity, they demonstrate particular organisational skills and a high level of responsibility towards their fellow human beings, as well as a range of knowledge and skills, and social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1983, pp. 185–192). They display high levels of self-confidence and a clear affinity for the role of leader (Interview no. 17). As such, they distinguish themselves from passive members and assume a dedicated role within the village community (Interview no. 24).

Another role that can be identified in the interviews is that of entertainer and cultural custodian. Ultimately, those involved in this role assume a position of responsibility, albeit one that is not directed towards the association and its members. Instead, the responsibility is towards the village community,

which must be entertained, and the local cultural heritage, which must be preserved. In this dual capacity, the individual is regarded as a creative force, capable of both making and organising (Interview no. 17). The success of the group is primarily attributed to the response of the village community: “We may not play every note correctly, but that people say: ‘Wow, these are people who are committed, they are doing something and bring a certain joy’”, as the chairman of a Kolping orchestra explains about their main objective (Interview no. 25). As a result of their regular performances, the volunteers have become well known in the village and enjoy a certain status (Interviews no. 17, 23, 24). As organisers of cultural life, the personalities and biographies of these individuals are closely interwoven with the village itself (Interview no. 18).

The titles and offices within the clubs are not only indicative of status and prestige; they also entail obligations to the club members and the village community. For instance, members are expected to represent their respective groups at events hosted by other clubs (Interviews no. 17, 24). The considerable time commitment and extensive range of responsibilities associated with these roles make it challenging to identify individuals willing and able to assume these positions (Interview no. 23). It should be noted that volunteer work is not limited to activities undertaken within a single association or group. Those who wish to be involved will often engage in a number of activities, particularly given that hobby-based activities are frequently not considered to be volunteer work at all (Interviews no. 18, 24). The social roles that can be taken on through volunteering give those involved the feeling of being needed and contributing to the community, fulfilling them with a sense of purpose (Interview no. 24).

6. Conclusion: the role of voluntary cultural work in everyday rural life

As demonstrated above, the four effects of voluntary cultural work illustrate that cultural volunteering is a central phenomenon of everyday rural life. Firstly, the volunteer-organised cultural landscape provides a variety of opportunities for participation and contribution to the community. Participation in the cultural sector exerts a considerable influence on the personality of those involved, as well as linking them to their social and physical environment. Secondly, the design of meeting places is an effective method of fostering community. The establishment of hobby-based groups encourages the development of a network that extends across the entire region. This facilitates the aggregation of both engaged individuals and the population of the region, thereby forming social capital and resourcefulness. Thirdly, the continual (re-)production of cultural meeting places and events serves to inscribe the performing hobbies into the local cultural heritage. The preservation and creation of rituals and traditions by participating groups results in the production of symbols that exert a significant influence on the region’s everyday culture. Finally, the capacity to assume a meaningful role within society in a low-threshold manner ultimately fosters a sense of purpose and produces responsible citizens who engage in democratic processes within their associations, and shape their environment in a self-determined way.

The aforementioned aspects are reflected in the concepts of social capital and resilience. The advancement of social trust, the intrinsic nature of mutual support, and a sense of community exemplify the fundamental tenets of social capital in Putnam’s (2000) understanding. The facilitation of access to cultural forms of expression as well as the creation of meaning, identity and community connects voluntary cultural work to the concept of resilience (Brown 2016; Beel et al. 2017). The empirical findings show that engaged individuals are *rooted* in their place of residence, are *resourceful* in forming community-wide networks, and are *resistant* in dealing with challenges with the help of their resources. Consequently, it can be argued that these individuals contribute to the resilient development of their respective communities. The present paper thus lends support to the argument proposed by Beel et al. (2017) that the activities undertaken as part of voluntary cultural work represent a form of agency.

The findings of this study demonstrate that the engaged individuals, by shaping the cultural landscape of the region, inscribe themselves into their social and physical environment. The various forms of rehearsals and performances serve as catalysts for the convergence of diverse individuals, thereby creating “salient community and culturally relevant symbols and experiences” (Low/Altman 1992, p. 7). This symbolisation process fosters a profound sense of connection between individuals and their spheres of activity, thereby solidifying the bond between them and their social and physical environment. This is further reinforced

by the embedding of these groups within their respective localities, their active involvement in festivals and celebratory events, and the intricate interweaving of local history with that of their association, including the adoption of distinctive logos and coats of arms. The argument can thus be made that social capital and resilience materialise in these meaningful communities and places, and, concurrently, constitute place attachment. Accordingly, the voluntary cultural work undertaken in the Oldenburger Münsterland region is indicative of the region's quality of life, actively challenging existing stereotypes of 'lacking' rural areas in general and the region's reductive image as 'pig belt' specifically (Brandau 2022). Consequently, voluntary cultural work and the participating subjects influence not only their immediate social and physical environment, but also the public's perception of it.

The vibrant cultural landscape is an integral component of the everyday culture of the Oldenburger Münsterland, constituting a distinctive regional characteristic that renders the engaged locations appealing. The results of this paper address arguments posited in the discourse between cultural studies, regional development and local politics. This renders the present contribution a plea for actor-centred, qualitative perspectives on the two very heterogeneous research fields of rural areas and volunteering. It is argued that such scientific approaches are important in interdisciplinary research fields, as they enable a detailed examination of the realities of people's lives. Further research at the nexus of rural areas, volunteering and cultural activities could build upon existing findings by employing a mixed-methods approach to examine regional migration processes and the underlying factors that shape them. In particular, the Oldenburger Münsterland presents a case study in which questions of inclusion and integration of migrant groups in performing arts clubs are particularly pertinent. Furthermore, qualitative research on the organisational structures of cultural life in migrant communities is required. The mechanisms of exclusion that go beyond ethnicity also pose interesting questions for research. These include the perpetuation of conventional gender roles, which has not been adequately addressed in this paper. A longer-term study on voluntary cultural work could also serve to further observe the aforementioned structural change and analyse its effects on rural life. In the light of the foregoing, a study on the connections between the attractiveness of rural regions and the organisational structures of the respective cultural landscape would be a worthwhile undertaking.

In conclusion, this paper offers significant insights into the structures, logics, and effects of voluntary cultural work in the Oldenburger Münsterland. By combining empirical findings with the concepts of social capital, resilience and place attachment, the transformative potential of cultural activities such as singing, dancing, music, and theatre becomes evident. These activities not only enrich individual lives and shape them in a self-determined manner, but also foster community cohesion and shape public perceptions of the rural region. Ultimately, this study highlights the importance of grassroots cultural initiatives in enhancing community engagement and fostering a sense of belonging within rural settings.

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List of interviews

No.	Interviewee(s)	Date
1	Former chairman of lay theatre group, 1 person	February 7, 2022
2	Director and author of amateur theatre group, 1 person	February 7, 2022
3	Member of amateur theatre group, 1 person	February 9, 2022
4	Former chairman of lay theatre group, 1 person	February 16, 2022
5	Chairman and deputy of lay theatre group, 2 persons	February 17, 2022
6	Chairman and treasurer of lay theatre group, 2 persons	February 18, 2022
7	Chairman and press officer of lay theatre group, 2 persons	February 21, 2022
8	Former member and founding member of lay theatre group, 2 persons	February 22, 2022
9	Board member and director of lay theatre group, 2 persons	February 24, 2022
10	Director of amateur theatre group, 1 person	February 28, 2022
11	Chairman of lay theatre group, 1 person	March 4, 2022
12	Board member and regular member of lay theatre group, 2 persons	March 7, 2022
13	Board member of lay theatre group, 1 person	March 8, 2022
14	Chairman and member of lay theatre group, 2 persons	March 10, 2022
15	Chairman and treasurer of lay theatre group, 2 persons	March 17, 2022
16	Chairwoman and member of lay theatre group, 2 persons	June 23, 2022
17	Chairman and deputy of men's choral association, 2 persons	November 6, 2023
18	Chairwoman of mixed church choir, 1 person	January 30, 2024
19	Employee of cultural barn and artist, 1 person	January 31, 2024
20	Chairwoman of music association, 1 person	February 6, 2024
21	Chairman and founder of bagpipe club, 1 person	April 24, 2024
22	Leader of folklore and line dance groups, 1 person	May 14, 2024
23	Chairman and deputy of mixed choir, 2 persons	May 22, 2024
24	Chairman of mixed choir, 1 person	May 22, 2024
25	Chairman of Kolping orchestra, 1 person	June 4, 2024