

PERIPHERIES PLAYGROUNDS OF SOCIETY

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PLAYGROUNDS

PERIPHERIES

UCKERMARK

AIGUES-MORTES

MICRONATIONS

Peripheries are playgrounds of society because they offer an opportunity for self-realization while designing and exploring something new. Thus, peripheries become places of social innovation, especially for people who are willing to take risks and try some-

thing new, even if they are ridiculed for it at first. They may assign less value to getting recognized by the social mainstream. Peripheries therefore offer niches to try out other ways of life and go off the beaten path, particularly when there is a need for real change.

INTRODUCTION: PERIPHERAL REGIONS AS PLAYGROUNDS

Peripheries are not marginal by nature. Society considers them as the opposite, or the other; they function as the counterpart to the center. Peripheries are connoted with shrinkage, disconnection, weakness, and emptiness on the one hand, and are romanticized on the other. The interaction of both sides of the coin offers opportunities for certain social groups who aim to create a difference.

This paper argues that peripheries can be seen as playgrounds of society. Especially due to the characteristics attributed to peripheries, such as emptiness, social and/or topographical seclusion and insularity, neglect, non-attention or even ignorance of the center, people can find the freedom and opportunity for self-expression, self-realization, and self-efficacy by creating something new and different.

Based on qualitative research, this paper tackles two ways of using this concept of playgrounds.

The first case study focuses on a micronation called Principality of Aigues-Mortes, where the heads of state use the playground in an area designated as periphery in Southern France to create an alternative citizenship by trying to make a difference to the existing social, cultural, and economic situation.

The second case study explains how urban in-migrants find a new and good life and private happiness in the German Uckermark, a region in Eastern Germany which is labeled as peripheral. They decided to live in this less populated area precisely because it is the antagonist of their previous life in German cities. By taking two peripheries as playgrounds into consideration, we will analyze how their qualities are used for play. Play can theoretically be understood as a starting point for social dynamics on four levels; from imitation and deconstruction to critical engagement and experimental experiences, and as a way to create an imaginative, better world.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The theoretical perspectives are based on theories of periphery and peripheralization as well as theories of play.

Peripheries and Peripherization

When tackling the theoretical perspective of periphery, it is necessary to focus on both the center and periphery, which are inextricably linked.

In the traditional literature on peripheries two characteristics of peripheral places are particularly relevant: accessibility and concentration (Beetz, 2008, p. 565). First, peripheries are characterized by poor accessibility. Schürmann and Talaat (2000, p. 6) called this a key criterion of positional peripheral-ity because peripheries are remote in relation to the center and because of the lack of public transportation. Living in peripheral locations makes it more challenging to get to the center and peripheries are less frequently visited. This problem leads to the second aspect, concentration. Services such as education, medical care, or cultural offerings are concentrated in the center. Therefore, positional periphery extends into the realm of the social. Important social functions are assigned to the center, and economic and political decisions are made there. Likewise, the population is concentrated in the center. Both aspects can only be understood in relation to a center; consequently, the attribution peripheral only exists in contrast to central.

Keim's (2006) reflections on peripherization go beyond these somewhat static approaches. Peripheries are created through the interaction of institutions and social actors (Keim, 2006, p. 4). While the notion of periphery is still based on a positional and/or social situation, peripherization also considers functional, economic, and cultural dimensions. Peripherization describes the interaction of population decline, due to ageing and out-migration, with "a lack of integration in globalization of markets, cultures, and values" (Wirth et al., 2016, p. 63). Wirth et al. (2016, p. 63) also states that "peripherization is generally

considered a form of uneven spatial development, leading to fewer opportunities for people who live in peripheralized areas.” This relates to Komlosy (2006), who discusses the extent to which peripheries can be seen as colonies of the center. As Barlösius (2004, p. 86) notes: “The center determines the struggle for distribution and legitimacy.” Peripherization is controlled by social decision-making, definition, aspiration, and evaluation standards, which are developed in the centers and exist only in functions to the centers (Heintel, 1998). Subsequently, it should be clear that people in peripheralized areas do not have enough power to represent and enforce their interests against those of the center. On the side of the peripheralized areas, however, a negative self-image also contributes to the process of peripherization. At this point at the latest, it becomes clear that peripheralization must be understood as production of space, which takes place on the material level, the production of knowledge and meaning. This production process determines the relationship between periphery and center depending on the dominant mode of production, nowadays capitalism (Lefebvre, 1991). In this understanding the relationship between center and periphery can be changed (Wirth et al., 2016, p. 63) and is subject to social negotiation. As Fischer-Tahir and Naumann (2013, p.18) explain, “peripheralization refers to a spatially organized inequality of power relations and access to material and symbolic goods that constructs and perpetuates the precedence of the centres over areas that are marginalized”. They further argue that “the label ‘peripheral’ is predominantly attached to the rural areas and small and medium-sized towns or to space within large urban agglomerations that are marginalized in terms of income opportunities, housing, traffic structures, and access to educational, medical or other infrastructural facilities” (Fischer-Tahir & Naumann 2013, p. 19). These are exactly the characteristics that were explained at the beginning of this section as typical of peripheral locations.

Regions that are labeled as peripheral suggest on the other hand less regulation by the center and, therefore, more

freedom. In part, this situation creates a kind of pioneering atmosphere: “The players range from international energy corporations, investment funds for wind turbines and biogas plants, new forest owners, agribusinesses, gigantic livestock facilities, and genetic engineering test fields to Demeter farmers, conservationists, and castle-owning avant-gardists” (Beetz, 2008, p. 572). Peripherization can also produce freedom for individual developments, offering opportunities for experimentation and new ways of life, away from the dominant norms (Keim, 2006, p. 6). This could also be understood as a socially produced meaning of ‘peripheral regions’ – a space of play.

Play (ground)

The second theoretical perspective we will focus on is play. While much has been written about play in cultural history, sociology, and education for decades (Huizinga, 1966; Caillois, 1961; Sutton-Smith, 1978), little attention has been given to the term in the field of geography (notable exceptions are the works of Boos, 2016 and Woodyer, 2012). By focusing on play, we neither follow the utilitarian perspective that sees play as children’s work (Cross, 1997) necessary for their social, emotional, and cultural development, nor the non-instrumental perspective that regards play mainly as a waste of time (Caillois, 1961) and an opposite to work and seriousness (Woodyer, 2012). Instead, we understand play as a lifelong practice that is performed by people of all ages and fulfills certain societal and individual functions. The following characteristics of play are considered central to our analysis.

First, play is a mirror and refraction of society. It is an expression of the societal order (e.g., power, economic factors, aggression) and its disorder, of insecurity and a desire for change (Sutton-Smith, 1978, p. 85). In play, boundaries shift; existing rules and roles are imitated, adapted, or neglected. Consequently, play helps people become aware of social practices and relationships. When we play, our world becomes more comprehensible (Woodyer, 2012).

Secondly, play may be seen as a form of criticism, resistance, and subversion. Play offers a critical perspective by questioning existing boundaries, rules, and roles. “What human rigidity proposes as law, settled opinion, and fixed tradition, play undermines, transforms, and re-creates. Play is a manifold and subversive set of strategies, including trickery, parody, satire, and irony” (Schechner, 1992, p. 279). Another important aspect is that play is the antithesis of our world’s rational logic and thus a form of resistance (Aitken, 2001).

Thirdly, play can test and spark cultural change and social transformation. By questioning the practices and settings of social dis/order, thereby creating and moving new meanings, play is “a field of experimentation” (Adamowsky, 2000, p. 26) that makes social transformation possible. “It is an area ripe for rupture, sparks of insight and moments of invention, which present us with ways to be ‘different’. In Benjamin’s terms, it is through playing that a revolutionary consciousness and possibilities for more deliberate social transformation may emerge” (Woodyer, 2012, p. 322). Consequently, play is a phenomenon “whose manners and forms are essential impulses of culture. Play is not only a cultural mirror of its time but also an opportunity. Not only do we imitate, we model” (Adamowsky, 2000, p. 242).

Fourthly, play acts as an escape and bulwark of life where a more exciting world can be created. Play “is primarily a fortification against the disabilities of life. It transcends life’s distresses and boredoms and generally allows the individual or the group to substitute their own fun-filled theatrics for other representations of reality in a tacit attempt to feel that life is worth living” (Sutton-Smith, 2008, p. 116). Thus, play serves two purposes: leaving the difficulties of everyday life behind and shaping the world in such a way that it corresponds to one’s own desires (Adamowsky, 2000).

Following this understanding of play, this article considers playgrounds as places where societal questions are critically discussed and societal tensions can be released (Powell, 2009, p. 118 with reference to Huizinga, 1966).

Through the intensity of play and its ability to criticize, individuals may experience the “micro-power or ‘vitality’” (Malbon, 1999, p. 148) at playgrounds that leads to self-affirmation and self-validation (Woodyer, 2012).

EMPIRICAL EXAMPLES

Using the case studies of Aigues-Mortes in southern France and the Uckermark in eastern Germany, we will analyze two variants in which peripheralized regions are used as playground. It is important to emphasize in this context that this analysis aims to illustrate and explain different playgrounds in regions which are attributed as periphery; the presentation of the case studies does not intend to be a systematic comparison. For that reason we have chosen two very different case studies.

Principality of Aigues-Mortes: a playground for micronationalists

Micronations, also named Cryptarchies (Fuligni, 1997, p. 13) or Micropatrias (Moreau, 2014), are land-based or fictional self-declared nations proclaimed by individuals or groups, although they have very little chance of being recognized as independent by established macro-nations (MacKinnon, 2014, p. 105). Their number is difficult to estimate, but figures between 400 and 600 are usually quoted for the late 2000s (Fumey, 2002; Abbal, 2016; Lasserre, 2012). Micronations are mainly found in the countries of the Global North, most notably—but by no means exclusively—in North America, Australia, and Western Europe (Lasserre, 2012; Petermann, 2019). Within Western Europe, micronations surrounded by France have a special and active position: not only are numerous micronations located here, but the MicroFrancophonie, an organization that wants to federate French-speaking and Francophile micronations, was also founded in France.

To be able to grasp the general phenomenon of micronations scientifically, a total of around 130 interviews from

City	Inhabitants of Aigues-Mortes (2018) ¹	Distance in km to Paris by car (rounded) ²	Train hours to/from Paris (rounded) ³	Distance in km to Marseille (rounded) ²
Aigues-Mortes	8535	750	to: 5-6h from: 4-5h	140

Tab. 1
Selected characteristics
of Aigues-Mortes.

54 micronations around the world were conducted. For the analysis of the case study of the Principality of Aigues-Mortes (PAM) 14 interviews with 12 individuals are included, four women and eight men. The interviews were conducted mainly in 2020 and 2021 with the head of state and citizens of the Principality as well as shop owners of Aigues-Mortes. The interview length varied between 25 minutes (shop owners) and 3.5 hours. In addition, many conversations were held during participatory observation at micronational conferences and cultural events in Aigues-Mortes.

The PAM is located in the “typical provincial city” (PAM 1) of Aigues-Mortes (Table 1) in the so-called Petite Camargue, near the Camargue National Nature Reserve in the Grande Camargue.

The Grande Camargue has a population density of only 10 inhabitants/km²; the Communauté de Communes Terre de Camargue with its capital of Aigues-Mortes a density of about 100 inhabitants/km² (Insee, 2021a). Aigues-Mortes is characterized by a decline in younger population groups, while an increase in people aged 60 and older offsets that decline (Insee, 2021a). As already explained above, the label peripheral often is attached to such regions.

Due to the Mediterranean climate in southern France, its proximity to the sea, the fascinating natural landscape of the Rhône delta, and the pleasing character of the old town and its ramparts, Aigues-Mortes attracts tourists as well as second homeowners. In the Communauté de Communes Terre de Camargue, about 67% of properties are owned by second homeowners in 2018 (Insee, 2021a). The city can be divided into the tiny old town intra muros with a lot of restaurants and small shops, and the districts extra muros that “fall into the stereotype of the French suburban vil-

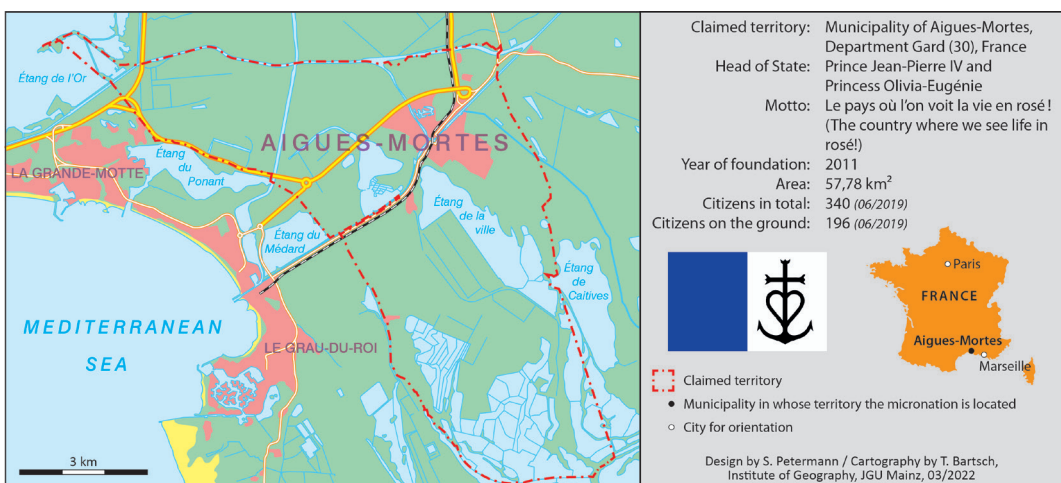
lage” (PAM 5). Inhabitants distinguish themselves between the “real Aigues-Mortais” (Ventres Bleus), whose families have lived in the city for generations (PAM 8), and the immigrants, who came to Aigues-Mortes for either work or retirement. While the Ventres Bleus are often described as narrow-minded and focused on the “tradition bouvine” (consisting of feasts, bulls, and horses) (PAM 1-4; 6-11), the newcomers are characterized as curious, open, creative, and full of drive (PAM 2, 9, 10). What they both have in common, however, is their love of Aigues-Mortes: “It is the most beautiful city in France. [...] In fact, it’s a city with a village soul” (PAM 11).

The PAM (figure 1) is based on human rights values like gender and race equality (PAM 2) and was founded by two second homeowners as a parody of the Principality of Monaco (PAM 1, 2, 3, 5, 9). Like almost all micronations, it possesses the classic political symbols of a nation, such as identity cards, coat of arms, flag, anthem, and maintains diplomatic relations with other micronations around the globe.

Legally run as an association, the principality opposes the lack of involvement of the population in the development and enlivenment of their city:

Because in Aigues-Mortes they tell you ‘I don’t want to take care of something that would interest the common

Fig. 1 Principality of Aigues-Mortes.



good. Because that's the job of the town hall or because I don't like the mayor or because whatever I do, France has 60 million people, whatever I do will never be noticed. (PAM1)

At the same time, many inhabitants complain that what happens in their life is the fault of the president or the mayor of the city that never do enough (PAM 1). Against this background, the concept of the micronation is to create an alternative citizenship that federates, values, and encourages the people of Aigues-Mortes through solidarity, friendship, and kindness "to pass on messages that are important, to do social acts" (PAM 2). Because even if it is a village, people are not federated [...], there's no interactivity between people. [...] The idea was to create value by working together [...]. We wanted to convey an idea, a value, that we are also actors of our destiny. (PAM3)

The founders see their micronation as a "laboratory" (PAM 3), a "social experiment" (PAM 1).

The micronation projects are mainly social, cultural, and economic. The Bal du Godet d'Or is inspired by the Rose Ball of Monaco. "There is a real frenzy for this ball because people want to live an evening with a beautiful dress, well made up, elegance. During this evening, everyone is dressed as if they were at court" (PAM 2).

During the presence of an international audience at the ball, the Prix de Constance is awarded to people who had made a significant contribution to the quality of life or the reputation of the city (PAM 2). In addition, the Festival International de Musique Classique d'Aigues-Mortes (FIMCAM) is held every year, as well as the Eurovision contest of small countries and in 2016 the Summit of the MicroFrancophonie. All these projects are "ludic events that are well rooted in the territory" (PAM5). The PAM has also developed projects to strengthen the local economy.

These include a fashion show with collections from stores in the city, the support of local shops and products, and above all, the implementation of a local currency (Le Flamant) as an officially recognized method

of payment in Aigues-Mortes. In general, humor is very important for the micronation as one can see in its official motto “The country where we see life in rosé!” and in the omnipresent slogan “It is necessary to do things seriously without taking oneself seriously.”

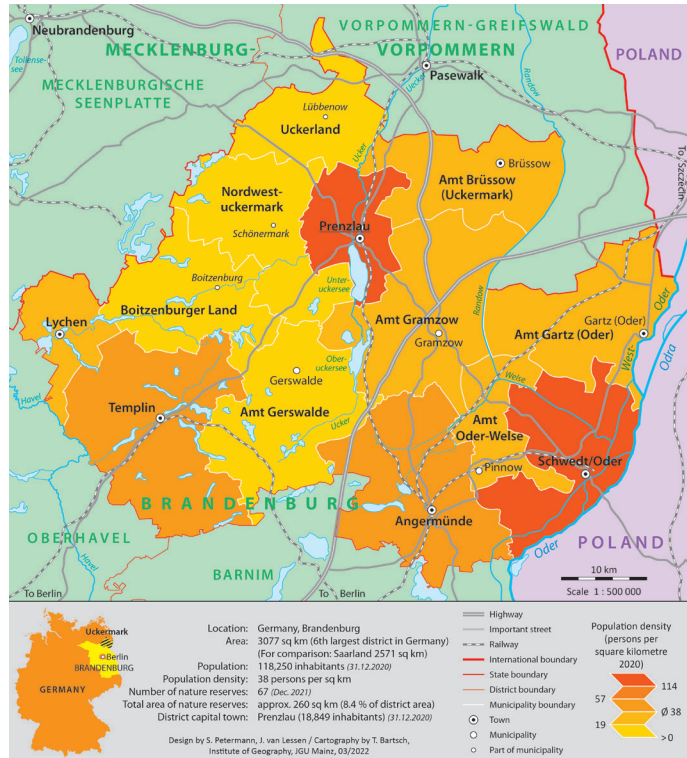
As a result, the projects and events primarily helped promote the city of Aigues-Mortes and increase the quality of life of its inhabitants. Secondly, they demonstrated to the citizens of the Principality the ability to do things that they had not previously thought they could do (PAM 3), leaving residents with a feeling of satisfaction and self-efficacy. The PAM became a source of pride, at least for their founders and citizens (PAM 1).

The German Uckermark – Playground for city weary people

In terms of area, the Uckermark is one of the largest counties in Germany, spanning 3050 km². At the same time, it is one of the most sparsely populated counties, in some areas less than 20 inhabitants/ km². The location at the northeastern edge of Germany (figure 2) and the lack of infrastructure in terms of public transportation and services like education and medical or social care make the Uckermark appear as a periphery. The significantly declining population of the district since the fall of the Berlin Wall is also an aspect of the process of peripheralization. The population of the Uckermark has been steadily declining since 1990. The negative natural population development accounts for about one third of the loss whereas out-migration covers about two thirds. Uckermark lost almost 50,000 inhabitants between 1990 and 2020 (Destatis, 2021). Buzzwords such as shrinkage, migration, aging, population decline, vacancy, and unemployment are frequently mentioned in the media. Inhabitants and outsiders alike use the term ‘outlying region’, thusly devaluing the region.

In this context, in-migration to this region initially appears to be a contradiction. To investigate the phenomenon of moving to a peripheralized region such as the Uckermark, 26 in-depth interviews varying in length between 30 minutes

Fig. 2 District Uckermark.



and 2 hours were conducted with newcomers in 13 different villages in the Uckermark. Qualitative data was collected during 5 field visits that took place from 2010 to 2012 in different seasons. In addition, observations made during field studies are included in this analysis. The age of the interviewees, 17 women and 9 men, ranged from early 30s to late 60s. All interviewees had previously lived in large German cities and spent most of their lives there. They did not decide to move to the Uckermark for professional reasons but to focus on other values in their lives. All in-migrants see the Uckermark as a space of opportunities (Rössel, 2014).

As explained in the theoretical consideration, regions which are labeled as peripheral can also be produced as a space of play. A middle-aged interviewee who moved to the Uckermark from a large German city explains that he considered emptiness something he could fill (IP 12). A young

family man, who also had previously lived only in large German cities, echoes that sentiment. He sees the Uckermark as an extreme out-migration area which everyone who has common sense leaves as quickly as possible, creating a vacuum that wants to be filled with something new (IP 2). The Uckermark is described by an in-migrant as a white spot, i.e., a functionless void (IP 8) in which he sees a good opportunity to produce his own free spaces (IP 8). Thus, the area offers possibilities for personal growth whereas there is relatively little room for self-fulfillment in the centers (IP 5).

Let's return here to the assumption that play is a way to engage with the logistics of society in a critical way. In the Uckermark, there are niches to escape a capitalist system, as one interviewee explains. Her previous life in big cities was all about commerce, but the Uckermark is more of a DIY community (IP 1). It is precisely the spatial remoteness that also allows in-migrants to connect to other aspects of life. "What mattered to me was togetherness, frugality, and a life of spiritual abundance, which is why I am grateful for this region, which has been spared from industry or highway networks," an interviewee explains (IP 23/2). Just like a play allows its players to experiment, moving into a peripheralized region offers the possibility of trying out other ways of life. For example, people who have moved in have been able to set up their own businesses with relatively modest financial means. Even if the sales market in the Uckermark is not as high due to low purchasing power, there are still suitable framework conditions, e.g., through favorable rent prices and the large amount of space available, making the decision to try something out easier (IP 12). As another interviewee stated, "It is a good idea to look for the activity that makes you feel really good and you can take the time to find this gift and thereby achieve satisfaction and experience a certain self-efficacy" (IP 22). The newcomers have initiated various projects. They revived extinct traditions in villages like the Schifferfest in Annenwalde (IP 8) and created new cultural events, such as the open studio day of the artist group umKunst (P 16), a singing circle, and a reading

circle. For their children, they founded a free school that offers an alternative educational concept (Zuckermark e. V.).

It is difficult to find employment in the Uckermark, so many venture into self-employment: “You only have a chance here if you have the guts or take the initiative to be self-employed” (IP 5). In addition to studios and workshops run by artists (IP 8, 15) and craftsmen (IP 1, 2, 24, 25, 16, 18, 13, 14), old handicraft techniques such as clay plaster are practiced again. Ecological building materials are also distributed because the newcomers are heavily engaged in the sustainable renovation of their homes. Due to the high vacancy rate in the region, it is also possible to buy a house with relatively little capital. The house can be designed according to your own ideas and values. Most home or business owners do the remodeling and renovation work themselves. Some newcomers are committed to using the regional currency Uckertaler, a barter system of time as currency, and thus distances itself from the monetary system. One interviewee explains that it is something like a business game for all the newcomers. They bring in their ideals and talents, but there are still far too few offers and far too few people to make the dream of meeting everyone’s needs a reality (IP 23/2). Self-efficacy, including food, is one of the main concerns of many new citizens (IP 6, 16, 1, 13, 20, 21). They find being self-sufficient an incredibly good feeling. People don’t have much money, but they have a forest and a garden. Thus, they see a completely different connection to life (IP 6).

However, some of those who have moved there wonder what life in the Uckermark will be like in old age, and whether they will then still be able to cope with the difficulties of the region, such as poor public transportation. Many are confident that innovative solutions can be found for this, too, such as multigenerational houses (IP 15), but some wonder if they will return to the centers when they need assistance in their old age (IP 3).

Those who have moved in also take a critical view of the functionalization of the periphery by the agricultural and

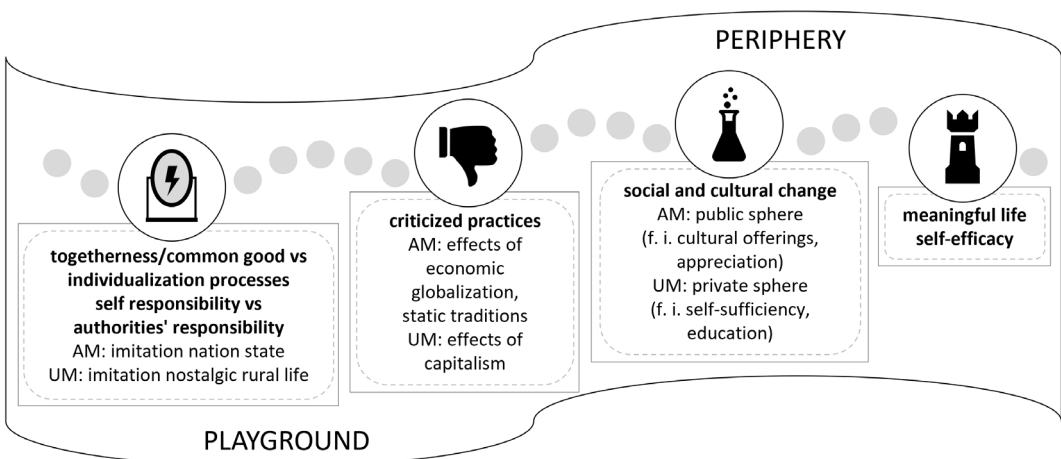
energy industries. The landscape is being changed by wind farms, biogas plants, and large fattening facilities. This use of the Uckermark by large corporations is difficult to reconcile with the values and ideas of those who have moved there. The world of large corporations and financial profit was, after all, precisely what many newcomers wanted to leave behind (IP 14).

DISCUSSION

In the context of social peripherization, regions and their populations are produced as spaces which are negatively affected by a lower quality of life and fewer decision-making options. At the same time, they are considered free and less regulated. It is precisely this meaning of free space and emptiness that can be used creatively (for the interconnection of peripherality and creativity see f. i. Grabher, 2018). It is the origin of the idea that play in areas labeled as peripheral makes it possible to take new paths in society and to initiate and shape development processes.

As the case studies of the Uckermark and Aigues-Mortes show, these regions are affected by peripheralization processes, albeit with different focal points and effects.

Fig. 3 Aigues-Mortes and Uckermark as playgrounds.



Both the Uckermark and the Grande Camargue have very low population density. While the Uckermark has been continuously hampered by emigration and population decline, a large difference between summer and winter months is particularly noticeable in the Grande and Petite Camargue. The summer months are characterized by high numbers of tourists and numerous cultural events, while in the winter, the tourist infrastructure is scaled back, many second homes remain empty, and cultural life slows down.

When analyzing the case studies based on the four categories of play mentioned earlier, the following stands out (Figure 3).

In both Aigues-Mortes and the Uckermark, play is a mirror and refraction of society and expresses a desire for change. The respective stakeholders want to transform the individualization processes that exist in society and develop a togetherness based on the common good. This transformation also means not leaving it up to higher authorities to make political decisions but rather assuming one's own responsibility for shaping development processes and thus using the free spaces created by peripherization in a system-critical manner. Imitation and adaptation of existing structures and practices play a key role here. In the context of PAM, it is a matter of imitating the structures and practices of nation states and monarchies, which are humorously questioned and used in a modified way in the form of a parody. The newcomers to the Uckermark, on the other hand, refer to nostalgic-romanticized images of rural life by carrying out practices associated with it and reviving traditions that had been forgotten: old handicraft techniques are re-learned and used, and old, seasonal village festivals are celebrated.

In the process, boundaries, rules, and roles are also questioned, criticized, supplemented, or rethought during the play. In AM, for example, the Bouvine tradition is deliberately extended to include other festivities and cultural events. The heads of state in PAM want to supplement traditional practices in the conservative Camargue, and to question entrenched

thought structures and the festivities themselves through humorous forms of production, such as the staging of the prince and princess. In the Uckermark, on the other hand, criticism of the capitalist economic system is very prominent. The newcomers strive to see the role of money as less dominant and thus to escape the existing social system of rules and norms to some extent, for example when some inhabitants use a barter system of time as currency. Aigues-Mortes has also introduced its own currency system, which, however, remains rooted in capitalist thinking and in lieu of an alternative to money introduces a regional currency that is designed to oppose the effects of a globalized system of money and goods.

In addition to the already mentioned economic projects, the open spaces also offer an experimental field or laboratory for social and cultural change. In Aigues-Mortes, for example, large balls and concerts are organized during tourism's off-season. Those events expand the previously existing cultural offerings, have gained an excellent reputation, and attract international audiences. Of great importance is the appreciation of the people who are dedicated to Aigues-Mortes. They either receive awards in front of a large audience or are honored on an interpersonal level. In the Uckermark, on the other hand, experimentation takes place in the private sphere. Community, self-sufficiency, professional independence, and alternative educational opportunities are tried out and new artistic paths are taken.

The awareness of being able to change something and shape things is common to both case studies, allowing the protagonists in each case to perceive their own lives as meaningful and to develop self-efficacy. The free space in peripheralized places allows the protagonists to shape a world that is better for them, according to their own needs and desires. Thus, at least the main players in *Aigues-Mortes* and the *Uckermark* can either meaningfully supplement their previous everyday lives through their play, or they can even leave them behind entirely. Their play gives them meaning and confirmation and consolidates their lives.

CONCLUSION

We consider both places labeled as peripheries creating free space for play. In Aigues-Mortes and in the Uckermark region, play is a mirror of society that expresses the desire for change. However, the players imitate and adapt existing systems on different levels. While in Aigues-Mortes, a monarchy is depicted in the play, which humorously refers to the level of the nation state, the Uckermark adopts a nostalgic image of rural life, which in many respects is a romanticized idea of peasant life. Both case studies emphasize the critical level of play, which is used to rethink social processes and to think differently. In the Uckermark, the critical view refers to a large extent to the capitalist economic system, which the in-migrants want to escape to a certain degree. The PAM, on the other hand, tackles both the economic effects of globalization and conservative, entrenched thought structures, and does so in a very humorous way. The PAM experiments with classic elements of monarchies, such as balls and tributes, which they use to promote Aigues-Mortes and create cultural offerings even in the less touristy winter season. In the Uckermark, experimentation takes place more on the private level. The main reason is to close a gap in the educational and cultural offerings available to them in the peripherization process. In both AM and UM, play creates the awareness of being able to change and shape something, allowing players to pursue a deeper meaning of their own lives and to develop self-efficacy. In both cases, in-migrants are key figures in such development processes. They are willing to take a risk, invest money, and accept inconveniences. To fill their lives with meaning, they are prepared to accept difficulties and uncertainties and to give up what is familiar and secure. In this sense, we understand the Uckermark and Aigues-Mortes as a playground especially for in-migrants, where social issues can be critically discussed, social tensions can be resolved, and micro-power or 'vitality' can be experienced in the form of self-efficacy and sense-making. Furthermore, the presented playgrounds in areas labeled as periphery –that could be

also named “creative outposts” according to Brouder (2012)—produce interesting and relevant approaches to social change, which are now repeatedly picked up by the media (Baudet, 2021; Jouhar, 2018; Pohlers, 2018) and which in turn influence the production of space.

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