



Ways Across the Country Democracy in Transforming Landscapes

Research question and methods

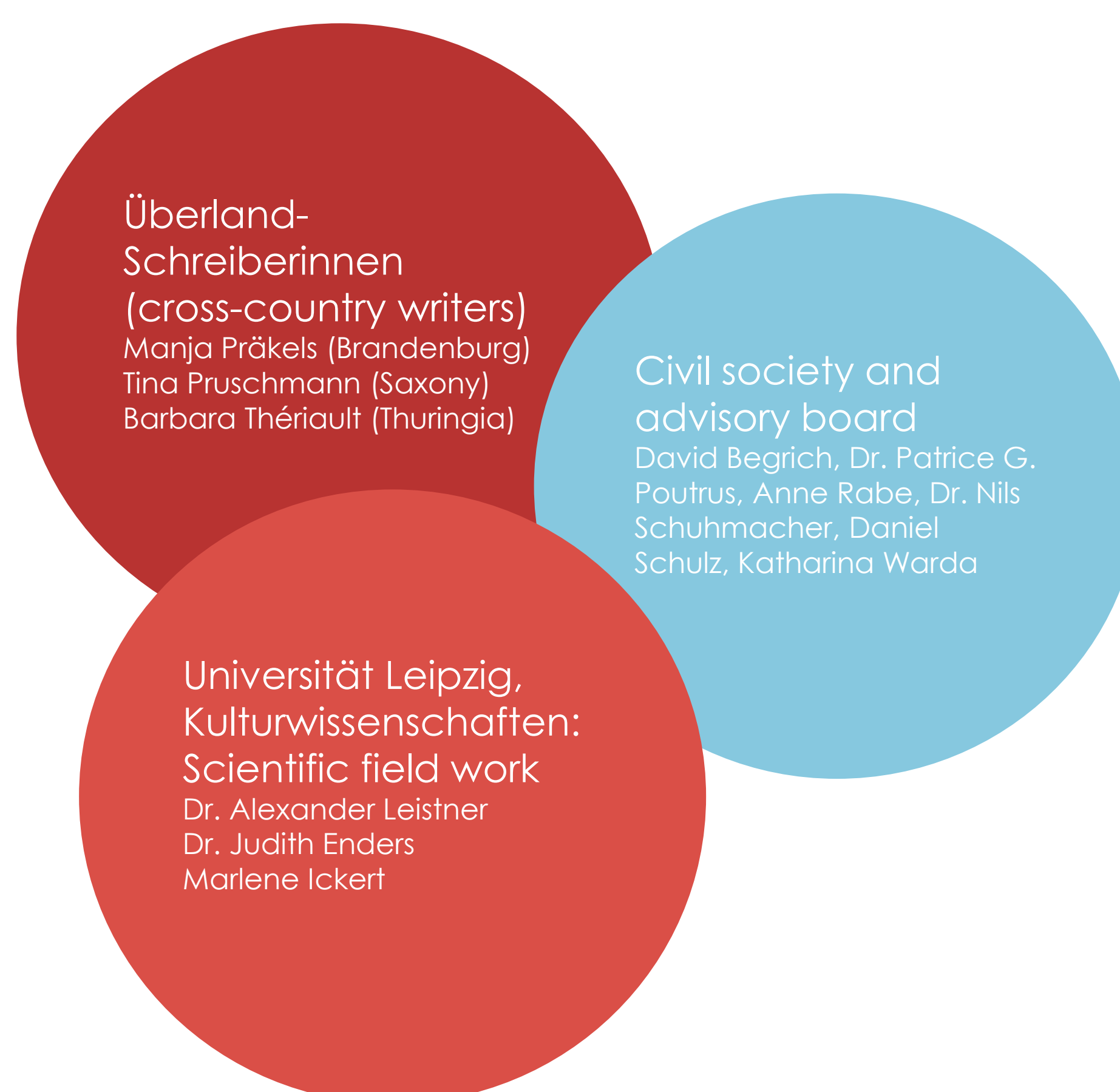
The project examines the influence of right-wing parties and movements on local democracy in small-town and rural regions of eastern Germany. It asks how the state elections of 2024 in Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia and the election success of the Alternative for Germany party (AfD), which is monitored by the domestic intelligence services as a right-wing extremist (Thuringia) or suspected right-wing extremist (Brandenburg, Saxony) party, are experienced by citizens and civil society activists. We suspect the strength of the political upheaval in the local pre-political resonance spaces of extreme right-wing takes root in 1) a local everyday hegemony of extreme right-wing positions, which is reinforced by 2) their normalization and depoliticization in everyday life, from which results 3) a weakening and retreat of civil society.

We examine this iterative process as a series of democratic tipping points and dynamics and analyze its movement from three interrelated perspectives: first, the long-term observations of three Überlandschreiberinnen (cross-country writers) assigned to the three federal states; second, a scientific fieldwork conducted in the regions (qualitative interviews, participant observation); and third, the experiential perspective of organized and non-organized civil society actors.

Thus, with the help of ethnographic-literary explorations, scientific analyses, and close exchanges with civil society members, the project explores the following questions:

- What are democratic tipping points from the perspective of academia and civil society?
- What everyday life experiences do the electoral promises resonate with?
- Is there any unfinished business the electoral promises try to take on?
- What are the hopes, fears and expectations associated with the act of voting?
- How do those who live in the communities, but are not allowed to vote (newcomers without a primary residence, young people, refugees), look at the election?
- What are the forces fighting for a democratic, friendly coexistence? What are their means, experiences and strategies?

Type of collaboration



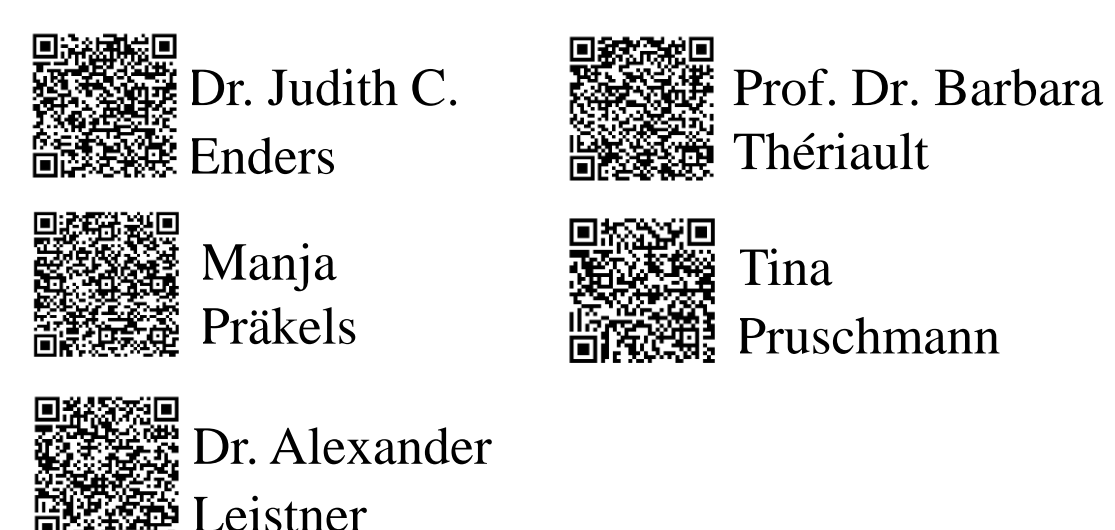
The taskforce explores rural regions in three East German federal states (Saxony, Brandenburg and Thuringia) at the intersection of sociology and literature and in cooperation with civil society. As members of the taskforce, we are supported by a project advisory board. This board includes representatives from science, literature and experts from civil society.

Working mode: The cross-country writers, the researchers from Universität Leipzig and the advisory board meet at regular intervals. At the meetings, the observations and texts are analyzed and discussed as well as theory and methods (e.g. lyrical sociology according to Siegfried Kracauer).

Book: The texts of the cross-country writers will be brought together in a book, framed by a scientific approach and further reflections on the dynamics of transformation in rural areas of Saxony, Thuringia and Brandenburg.

Media cooperations and response: If you scan the QR Codes beside the graphic, you can read the articles, that have been published in the taz newspaper. In addition to this, the project cooperates with 'Soziopolis' scientific platform and local newspapers. Furthermore, the project members are present in podcasts and radio features in Deutschlandfunk and MDR.

Listen to radio features with:



Our recommendations for action

1. establish sensitivity to tipping points and dynamics, observation of constellation of destabilization, do not just zoom in on individual cases
2. questioning so called neutrality (for example in local journalism and civil society), publicly discuss false claims to neutrality
3. center-periphery-conflicts, consider especially the dimension of the small medium-sized towns as politically vulnerable spaces for populism
4. making civil society visible and self-confident
5. establish and tell other narratives far from the identitarian and victim discourse
6. culture of memory as an indicator of change in political discourse

