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CENTRE-PERIPHERY RELATIONS IN GERMANY: HOW NORD
STREAM 2 LED TO THE STIGMATISATION OF MECKLENBURG-
VORPOMMERN

MA Thesis

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Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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Verena de Lange, 6 January 2023.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'V. de Lange', written in a cursive style.

Abstract

This research concerns itself with the stigmatisation process of the German *Bundesland* Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. It argues that the German behavioural norm guiding accepted foreign policy regarding Russia changed drastically after the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This change in behavioural norm led to the stigmatisation of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, which had, up until that point, a very pro-Russia attitude. The stigma which was subsequently attached to the state was that of a community of *Russlandversteher*. The analysis shows that this pro-Russia attitude can be attributed to the presence of Nord Stream 2 in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. The project came with investments and job security which the peripheral state needed, which led the political elites of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania to pursue a Russia-friendly foreign policy. This cumulated in the set-up by the state's prime-minister Manuela Schwesig of a Foundation which was meant to safeguard the construction of Nord Stream. 2 This choice led to a lot of criticism back in Spring 2022, when it turned out that Nord Stream AG had a lot more say in the Foundation than it was assumed, and this resulted in a lot of negative press attention for the state. This research analyses these news articles and shows that the media discourse is controlled by elites from the centre, who are responsible for stigmatising Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. The periphery, in turn, is not a powerless entity, but engages in stigma-management in the discourse. This results in counter-narratives and denial of the stigma. Ultimately, the stigmatisation and counter-stigmatisation can be seen as a discursive struggle surrounding an abrupt change in the behavioural norm. The stigmatisation of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania contributes to the further peripheralisation of the state.

Keywords: *stigmatisation, peripheralisation, centre-periphery relations, discourse analysis, Ostpolitik, Nord Stream 2, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania*

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List of Abbreviations

IR: International Relations

MV: *Mecklenburg-Vorpommern* (Eng: Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania)

ECLA: United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

FCEP: *Stiftung Klima- und Umweltschutz MV* (Eng: Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection MV)

Introduction

Nord Stream 2 has been a controversial project since its announcement. Throughout its construction, it faced multiple issues, ranging from threatened supply lines due to European sanctions after the Russian Federation annexed Crimea in 2014, to unilateral sanctions taken against the project by the United States which took a toll on cohesion within the European Union. Finally, a week after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Germany's *Bundespräsident* Olaf Scholz suspended German approval of the pipeline indefinitely (Lambert et al., 2022). Nord Stream 2 was the logical consequence of the success of Nord Stream 1. The pipeline would be able to transport more gas to the European mainland, something especially welcomed in Germany, which was in the process of closing its nuclear reactors. On the German side, the terminal would end in the *Bundesland* of Mecklenburg-Western-Pomerania (*German*: Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, henceforth: MV).

Many of the controversies surrounding Nord Stream 2 can be linked to Germany's so-called *Ostpolitik*. *Ostpolitik* translates to Eastern policy, but in recent practice mostly concerns Germany's Russia policy. For a long time Germany had a friendly attitude towards Russia. Even though the annexation of Crimea, the false-flag operation in the Donbass and the downing of flight MH17 cooled the relationship between the two countries, critics of the *Ostpolitik* claim that the energy interdependence between Moscow and Berlin had only grown. The main culprit of the close energy ties between the two states was considered to be Nord Stream (Tjon-A-Meeuw, 2022). German elites, ranging from the federal level to the state level,¹ have been quite involved with Nord Stream 2. It was championed by German chancellors and presidents alike, and in MV, the prime-ministers saw Nord Stream as a chance to secure investments for the state. Nord Stream 2 has become somewhat the symbol of Germany's, and certainly MV's, *Ostpolitik* these few recent years. The entanglement of political elites with Nord Stream 2 leads to the main focus of this thesis, which is the stigmatisation of MV as a pro-Russia state in the German news media.

I look at this stigmatisation by using a centre-periphery framework. Following this, MV is a periphery which generally experiences stigmatisation along that line. This means that the

¹ In this research, "state" always refers to the *Bundesland* or *Bundesland* level as its English translation. The country of Germany will not be referred to as state, only when the word federal is explicitly added.

negative stigmas surrounding the state usually focus on unemployment, rurality and population exodus. From February 2022, MV has been socially constructed in the discourse as a pro-Russia state. The stigma of its peripherality has contributed partially to this, and this new stigma in turn impacts its peripherality. I research this by conducting a discourse analysis of the German news media.

In general, elites in the centre are seen as responsible for imposing their decisions on the periphery (Kühn, Bernt and Colini, 2016; Herrschel, 2011; Lang, 2012; Friedmann, 1973). However, there is not enough research into the “power of resistance” peripheral elites have in democratic systems (Kühn, 2013, p. 376). This research shows that peripheral elites have the power to develop counter-narratives to stigmatisation. Stigmatisation is the process of how a place becomes associated with negative stereotypes, and how a community internalises these negative associations. Stigmatisation occurs in societal discourse, which mainly reflects opinions and values of the dominant group in that society, however the discourse is ultimately controlled by elites from the centre, who determine which normative line to follow in the discourse. The main argument here is that the behavioural norm vis-à-vis Russia in Germany changed abruptly after the war in Ukraine in February 2022. Before the war, Germany and Russia enjoyed a cordial relationship. After the war, any indication of pro-Russia or Russia friendly behaviour stood out, as this deviated so extremely from the new social norm which dictates that there should be no more friendly relations entertained with Russia. This research argues that MV is an internal periphery of Germany, which attempted a process of de-peripheralisation when it was presented with the opportunities provided by Nord Stream. This is based on the idea that places are not static, and those in the periphery have the agency to change their position by several means. In the case of MV, this means that Nord Stream 2 was highly supported by the political elites of the state – particularly the minister-president of MV, Manuela Schwesig. Given the importance of the project for MV’s economic prospects and prestige in the rest of Germany, the political elites of the state advocated for strong ties with Russia. After February 2022, this led to stigmatisation of MV in the German mainstream media as it being a pro-Russia state. This stigma affects MV’s chances of further investments for the state, and generally reflects badly upon its population. As a result, MV may peripheralise further, instead of de-peripheralise as was the initial intention of the political elites.

Thus, elite involvement in Nord Stream 2 led to the stigmatisation of MV. This brings us to the following research question this thesis attempts to answer: How does elite involvement in Nord Stream 2 contribute to the stigmatisation of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern?

The relevance of this research question can be explained in three ways. The war in Ukraine has had ripple effects throughout Europe, many of these effects are easily identifiable and receive attention in political research. The case of MV shows a local community impacted by the war in an unexpected way. Germany's *Ostpolitik* has received quite some attention, but the impact of Nord Stream 2 in the country's foreign policy is more documented in small reports than in scholarly research. MV provides a case study of a German state which pursued a pro-Russia policy which fit the national norm until February 2022. The international geopolitical environment thus has a very large impact on the development of the state, and thus the consequences of a sudden change in geopolitics impacted MV way more than other German states would have felt the changes. That is because MV's main foreign investments and subsequent de-peripheralisation process was so closely linked to its friendly Russia policy. Russia's influence in the state's politics is well-documented and was substantial before the war. Because of the war the social norm for acceptable relations with Russia changed abruptly within Europe, and so too in Germany. This means that MV's Nord Stream 2 policy of the last few years suddenly became morally indefensible, which left the state vulnerable for the stigma of being pro-Russia in general. After the war, the state had to deal with a new reality of accepted social behaviour and a significant loss of income and prestige. Stigmatisation is thus important to study in this case, as it is one of the processes which contribute to peripheralisation of the state. Stigmatisation can be seen as a social dimension of peripheralisation and influences the way the periphery is perceived by the centre. MV has already undergone a stigmatisation process in which it was discursively constructed as a periphery (think, for example, of references to its rurality), but this new process of stigmatisation constructs the community of MV as being *Russlandversteher* (Eng: Russia-understanders, the German way of referring to those with a pro-Russia attitude). This can be harmful for future investments in the state, and can lead to further peripheralisation. Lastly, peripherality is a concept which sometimes remains overlooked in the field of IR, but with this thesis I intend to show its conceptual relevance for the field, as it is versatile enough to be applied to different scales and communities.

This research looks into the stigmatisation and peripheralisation of MV by conducting a two-stage discourse analysis. The first stage focuses on how Nord Stream was discursively constructed to be a project which would help to de-peripheralise MV by its political elites. This part looks at speeches and press statements from the last two prime-ministers from MV and discusses ways in which they talk about MV's peripherality, and how Nord Stream can help combat this. The conclusion from this analysis is that Nord Stream was indeed intended to de-peripheralise the state of MV. The second stage of the discourse analysis uses news articles from German newspapers to discuss how MV got stigmatised to be a pro-Russia community. This research focuses on how the stigmatisation process took place around the struggle which ensued after the behavioural norm vis-à-vis Russia drastically changed in February 2022. MV gets stigmatised by the centre elites who judge the state through this new normative lens, and MV's elites and citizens apply stigma-management techniques such as counter-narratives or stigma denial to combat this stigma. The result of this analysis is that elites from the centre are responsible for the stigmatisation process of MV, but that they base this stigmatisation on behaviour and discursive practices of MV's elites and citizens, especially regarding the Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection MV set up by Manuela Schwesig. The periphery does not control the discourse, but does have some agency. This shows in their attempts to counter-stigmatise their state. This research shows that centre-periphery relations can be pervasive in discursive practices, even in rich democratic countries such as Germany. The case study also shows how Russia's external influence (its investments in the state of MV) can deepen internal cleavages in a Western country in a manner which has not been touched upon much before (as opposed to research on Russia's funding of the far-right in Europe).

The first chapter expands on research focusing on centre and peripheries. It provides an overview of some relevant literature on the topic. It focuses on how the research approach towards peripheries has changed throughout time, elaborates on the process of peripheralisation, and how peripheralisation leads to marginalisation and stigmatisation. The last section of the theoretical framework discusses how elites come into play in centre-periphery theories. The second chapter justifies the chosen case study of MV, discusses the data collection process and the method of data analysis. It also provides background to the chosen method of analysis: discourse analysis, which has been chosen to analyse the ways in which MV gets stigmatised in the German news media. The third chapter, which focuses on the empirical analysis, is divided in four sections. The first section is some short background information on MV as a periphery, and why Nord Stream would have helped combat this

peripheral status. The second part is the first stage of the discourse analysis of speeches made by the political elites in MV, and shows how they intended to use Nord Stream 2 as a way to combat peripherality in their state. Finally, the main section of the empirical analysis is the second stage of the discourse analysis of German news media and its stigmatisation of MV after the cancellation of Nord Stream 2. I argue that stigmatisation in the discourse gets perpetuated by the elites from the centre, but that MV has agency as a periphery and is able to use stigma-management techniques in the discourse. The fourth section discusses the results of the analysis and their implications before the conclusion summarizes the work done and recommends avenues for further research.

1. Centre-periphery theories, peripheralisation, stigmatisation and elites

This chapter is an analysis of the literature on the centre-periphery framework, and an overview of its relevant concepts. Because centre-periphery theories are not limited to International Relations (IR), it will include works by authors from a variety of academic disciplines. It mainly relies on articles and book chapters within social science. This part of the thesis consists of four sections. The first will introduce the concepts of centre and peripheries and discuss the mainstream theories that highlight the centre-periphery framework up until the 2000/2010s, at which point the literature took a turn away from the rigid structuralism which had driven research up until then. This leads us to the second section, which discusses peripheralisation as a process and elaborates on the four different approaches to peripheralisation: political, economic, social and communicative. The third part zooms in on the communicative approach to peripheralisation, and concerns itself with the concepts of marginalisation and stigmatisation, as described by authors who study discursive practices. The last part of this chapter is about peripheral elites, and relates back to the research problem.

1.1. Centres and peripheries

This section introduces the concepts of centre and periphery according to political, economic, and geographical theories. It discusses how, according to the viewpoint of many theorists, centres and peripheries are the logical consequence of post-Fordism, and how the concept of scale comes into play in centre-periphery thinking.

Centre and periphery are mutually constitutive concepts. A periphery cannot be defined without its relationship to the centre, and vice versa. As explained by Manfred Kühn and Matthias Bernt, it is impossible to find a singular definition of periphery or centre, because the research on it is fragmented across different academic disciplines. However, what scholars can agree on is that centres and peripheries are dialectic, and simultaneously each other's opposites (Kühn and Bernt, 2013, pp. 302-303). For a very long time, a periphery was defined as a space located on the edge of a geographic unit, such as the nation-state or a region. This has now become an outdated way of thinking about peripheries, as their spatiality now matters less than their subordinate status compared to centres (Anderson, 2000, p. 92). Centres are – unsurprisingly – located at the centre of the constructed units, such as the nation-state, and are

also the centre of political, economic and social power (Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013, pp. 9).

The subordination line of thinking ascends directly from one of the very first theories on centres and peripheries: dependency theory. This theory originated from the scholars that made up the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), such as Raul Prebisch, Aníbal Pinto and Theotonio dos Santos. The ideas suggested by this commission became known as dependency theory. The ECLA had an obvious focus on economic theory, but dependency theory also includes critique from a political and sociological viewpoint (Chirot and Hall, 1982). Dependency theory explains how growth in the peripheries of the world gets stagnated because of their unequal power position vis-à-vis the centre, which manifests itself in domestic politics; access to technology (including mass media); and factors of production (Prebisch, 1976). The dependence part refers to the fact that peripheries in this view are seen as resource peripheries, which are places which provide raw, material resources to the centre. These resource peripheries get exploited by the centre (Robertson Munro, 2019, pp. 3).

Unequal power relations being the foundation of dependency theory struck a chord with many theorists. Most notably, Immanuel Wallerstein was heavily influenced by the ideas of dependency theory when he developed his world systems analysis. World systems analysis is rooted in much of the same critical worldview as dependency theory. In his work, Wallerstein explores the existence of centre and periphery by referring to economic structures throughout world history. In contemporary times, we find ourselves in a capitalist world economy. Within the capitalist world economy, there are multiple structures and processes at work, but the division of labour is defined by the exploitative relationship between centre and periphery (Wallerstein, 2004, p. 58). This relationship is analysed economically: high-end production processes with high value are located in centre areas, whereas low-end production processes of lower value are located in peripheral areas (Wallerstein, 1996). For world systems analysts, peripheries are spaces which are exploited by the core, which uses cheap resources from the periphery in their high-end production processes in order to generate more profit (Harders, 2015, pp. 37; Wallerstein, 2014, p. 93). Dependency theory and world system analysis are the main centre-periphery frameworks which are used by scholars of International Relations (IR), because on a scalar level they can easily be applied to the world as a whole, and lend themselves for analysis focused on nation-states as units (Bonacker, 2018, p. 5). For this thesis, dependency

theory and world systems analysis are crucial because they were among the first to outline the uneven power dynamic that is present in a centre-periphery relationship. The idea of the periphery being the subordinate of the centre was developed and highlighted by these two theories. Furthermore, both of the theories pay due attention to the peripheral experience, something which is missing in the theories I discuss in the next paragraph. This focus on the periphery has made a reappearance in contemporary academia, and allows scholars to introduce the concept of stigmatisation. After all, the periphery being a stigmatised place comes forth from the unequal power relationship between the periphery and the centre.

Having discussed some global political economic theories, I now discuss more regional economic theories of centre and periphery. The two most notable ones are the polarization theory of Karl Gunnar Myrdal. The theories mentioned here define peripheries and centres from the vantage point of agglomeration, which is the clustering of economically valuable infrastructure, industry, research and innovation clusters, and living spaces for high-skilled labourers. For this research, the polarization theories can be used to illustrate the peripheral status of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The state does not have the same amount of agglomeration as centres within Germany have, especially when it comes to infrastructure. MV has some important industry clusters, including Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2, among which agglomeration has built.

Polarization theories have been discussed and advanced by many different scholars, but the main theories discussed here are developed by Myrdal. The starting point of polarization theories is that spatial unevenness leads to spatial polarization. Myrdal speaks of centripetal and centrifugal effects that occur when centres grow, and these effects determine the extent of spatial polarization. Centripetal effects are negative, and pull people away from peripheries. For example, the wage disparity between the city and the countryside leads to a rural exodus. Centrifugal effects are positive in nature, which is when a centre grows but peripheries remain unaffected, or become positively affected. An example would be the spread of technical knowledge from a centre to a periphery, which increases productivity in the periphery. Myrdal notes that centripetal effects are most likely to dominate in practice. (Collective authors, 2015, pp. 6-7).

Another important discipline that has a longstanding tradition of centre and periphery theories is social geography. Social geography focuses on a wide set of issues, but interestingly

also dedicates quite some scholarship to the matter of innovation. This is also touched upon in economic theories, but it is one of the main features of social geographic theory. of the research in this field focuses on the innovative power of centres, which peripheries are lacking. Innovation is defined as access to advanced technological manufacturing technologies, the number of start-ups in a region/country, educational centres and investment opportunities (Anderson, 2000, pp. 94). This is reminiscent of world systems analysis, and how the centre has high-end production processes with high value as opposed to the periphery. The discipline Social geography has pushed centre-periphery relations outside this structural viewpoint. As can be seen in more recent articles, innovation gets linked to positive representation of a place, and the original assumption that innovation sets the centre apart from the periphery has been disproven by periphery-focused research (See: Willett, 2020; Robertson Munro, 2019; Graffenberger and Vonnahme, 2019; Eder and Trippel, 2019). Just like agglomeration, innovation is one of the characteristics which partially determines MV's peripheral status. The state does have some science parks, start-ups and higher education facilities, but definitely not as much as centre states (such as Berlin, Baden-Württemberg or Bayern) have. The main technological manufacturing in MV is the maritime industry, which is not surprising since the state is one of the three German states with a coastline. Nord Stream required innovative and high-quality engineering in MV of its introduction, and reflected positively on the status of the industry in MV.

A common explanation for the rise of centres and peripheries comes from neo-Marxist scholars (outside of world system's analysis and dependency theorists), based on thoughts on uneven development. In this view, capitalism fixes spatial relations by clustering capital in one place and simply moving it away when that place does no longer serve its purposes, be it profit, cheap production costs or easy access to natural resources. The disregard capitalism has for spatial cohesion in a territory means that moving production areas to a periphery in order to boost that space often has the opposite effect (Harvey, 2001; Collective authors, 2015). The idea that the post-Fordist capitalist system idolised privatisation and deregulation connects to this. This phase of capitalism massively impacted global spatial patterns, as firms moved their locations to exploit the peripheral areas because of their lax labour- and environmental laws (Kühn and Bernt, 2013, p.178). Again, in these theories we see the echo of dependency theory: the periphery will always be exploited by the centre. Most of these main points from dependency theory, world systems analysis, economic geography and innovation-focused social geography still ring true in the work of theorists today, but the academic community has

expanded on these original theories, for instance with the introduction of peripheralisation or closer attention to peripherality within cities (Argent, 2013).

One of the first things that contemporary centre-periphery theories have progressed from is the focus on the nation-state. If the nation-state is still the subject of analysis, it is no longer understood as a static entity, but rather a historical place consisting of discourses and social practices which can be a useful approach, especially for post-colonial scholars (Moisio, 2019, pp. 8; Pocock and Jones, 2017, p. 105).

Within vast countries with large spatial unevenness it has become common to focus on the “North”, the “East” or the “South” (Smette Gulbrandsen, 2022; Henn and Schäfer, 2020; Sheludkov, Kamp and Müller, 2021; Albahari, 2008). Internal peripheries became a popular term to describe areas within countries which have a smaller or aging population, less public transport connections and fewer high-tech industries and levels of innovation (Kühn, 2015, pp. 372-373 and see: Mihály, 2022; Schmalz, Singe and Hasenohr, 2021; Šimon, 2017). An example would be the High North in Scandinavian countries. To complicate conceptual matters, inside these internal peripheries we can find centres as well. If we go with the example of the high north, a centre is Tromsø in Norway. Thus, these centres in peripheries are always cities, and are usually a place where industries are clustered (as suggested by the New Economic Geography and polarization theories). Generally, these internal centres have good transport connections to other centres within the country, and their population tends to grow instead of shrink (Smette Gulbrandsen, 2022; Trefzer et al., 2014; Henn and Schäfer, 2020). Just like we have seen with the nation-state, this means that the region is no longer seen as a static entity, it too is a socially constructed place and an area for competition discourses and processes (Paasi, 1996). Regional culture can differ from national culture, and regional and national discourses very often clash. Particularly in peripheries, where the interest of those residing in the place do not align with that of political decision-makers in the centre (Kühn, Bernt and Colini, 2016, pp. 4-15). In Germany, the geographical distance between centre and periphery is considerably less than in Norway or Russia. However, we can identify internal centres in Germany’s peripheries. For our case of MV it is the capital city, Lubmin, which continues to attract its inhabitants while other cities and villages keep losing them. The regional discourse in MV, particularly regional elite discourse, differed from the centre discourse on the topic of Nord Stream 2, which is what inspired this research. The continuation of the project was in the best interest of MV, as it would economically highly profitable. However, after

Russia's full-scale invasion, it was no longer the interest of elites in the centre (the federal government) to continue Nord Stream 2, and it is the discourses surrounding this conflict that this thesis analyses.

In general, we can see that it has become commonplace for centre-periphery relationship scholars to acknowledge the many forms and scales the relationship can be perceived. Form-wise, centre-periphery can be observed from an economic angle, for example focusing on investment or currency regimes (Kolomov, 2019; Yu, 2015; Fritz, De Paula and Magalhães Prates, 2018), or it can provide a framework for critical security theorists (Cottrell Studemeyer, 2019; Bonacker, 2018), but it just as easily can serve as a lens to analyse national discourses (Pugh and Dubois, 2021; Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2013). This flexibility and option for reflexivity is nowhere as profound as when it comes to scale and the centre-periphery framework. Earlier centre-periphery theories, as noted, did not do much with the concept of scale. Despite political theories being more global in nature, and economic geography theories much more local, more recent theorists acknowledge that centres and peripheries exist on any possible scale imaginable. On the micro-level, it is possible to refer to a neighborhood in a city as a periphery (Wacquant, 1999). And from here it goes up to the regional (internal peripheries), the regional connecting multiple countries, and of course the global, in discussions of the Global South. Some criteria set for peripheries on a national scale would not translate well to criteria for a periphery on a global scale, e.g. population density being low in a rural area of Germany does not mean that it is also low in developing country Bangladesh (Kühn, 2015, p. 372).²

From the work of Loïc Wacquant, it is possible to see that researchers started to focus on the stigmatisation that people who lived their daily lives in urban peripheries, such as the Parisian *banlieus*, experienced. At the same time, the field of social geography discussed the social implications of the centre-periphery framework. One such discussions was about the notion of path-dependency, which was a *leitmotif* throughout centre-periphery theories. The path dependency in question refers to a self-fulfilling prophecy situation that many peripheries find themselves in: because of their peripheral status, there are less prospects for the working age population, who will continue to migrate to the centre (the centripetal effects from before).

² For more on scale in centre-periphery relationships, it is possible to look at most articles cited up until this point, in particular Kühn and Bernt, 2013; Collective authors, 2015; and Bonacker, 2018.

Because there is a population shrinkage, and less people available for work, new firms will not settle in the area, and yet even more people will commit to outbound migration from the periphery (Sheludkov, Kamp and Müller, 2021; Bonacker, 2018). Not all scholars disagree with the notion of path-dependency in peripheries. Joanie Willett considers it a vital way in which knowledge and meaning are built upon and communicated in peripheries (Willett, 2020, pp. 89-90). Using a positive spin on path-dependency, Argent's use of Innis' "staple trap" shows how path-dependency works in a periphery that is reliant upon a singular industry, and how all levels of government and community organization will bind together to preserve this industry, and develop a regional culture surrounding it (Argent, 2013, pp. 326-329). However, as Bonacker notes, the idea of a path-dependency promotes a zero-sum game. The more the periphery loses, the more the centre gains and vice versa (Bonacker, 2016, p. 6). The periphery becomes trapped in the endless circle of being on the losing side of a zero-sum game inside a path-dependency of outward migration, which robs it from its agency. As Kühn notes, and I shall get back to shortly, peripheries *do* have agency, and viewing them through a lens of path-dependency promotes a static view of the periphery and suggests they will remain peripheries forever (Kühn, 2015, p. 368).

Many scholars have also criticized the concepts of centre and periphery. As explained, the centre and periphery are mutually constitutive, but they also represent a dichotomy. By using centre-periphery based language, this dichotomy becomes more commonly accepted as representing a hierarchical link between two places. However, as is often the case with dichotomies, this way of viewing the world can lead to oversimplifications of a complicated social reality (Harders, 2015, pp. 42-42). Centre and periphery are often used in the media as well, they provide readers of all backgrounds with a visualization of two opposites: a modern city with a diverse and highly educated population, and a rural area with backwards political beliefs (Lang, 2015, p. 177; Lang, 2012, pp. 1747-1749). Usually periphery is used as a reductionist term, implying that if a place is a periphery it can never be viewed as anything else, as argued by Peter de Souza. The generalisability of the concept of periphery provides issues for the researcher (De Souza, 2018, pp. 12-15, 113-114, 130-131). As noted by Willett, periphery and centre are concepts that are associated with "othering" which the population of both sides are very aware of. They tend to associate certain values and attributions to the other, and take the opposite of these with them in their daily life (Willett, 2020, p. 88). So stigmatisation already starts when places are named, as the identification of a place as a periphery or a centre reduces it to stereotypes of academics and the general public alike

(Collective authors, 2015, p. 10). Stigmatisation, for this research, is one of the ways peripheries are produced and reproduced socially by the consistent use of repetitive negative stereotypes and images (Bürk, 2013, pp. 169-172).

What has been discussed up to here presents several issues which should be addressed, from the oversimplification of using dichotomous concepts to the inherent stigmatisation which comes with using the terms centre and periphery. For this research, the concepts of stigmatisation and marginalisation – especially in the media – derive a lot of value from the dichotomy. The negative association with peripheries is easy to make (particularly by those not located in the periphery). This negative association relies upon the oversimplification that the dichotomy of centre-periphery lens provides, and this is what my research concentrates on, meaning that it uses the dichotomy to identify moments of stigmatisation in the discourse on MV. Additionally, this research goes beyond the image of peripheries being dominated and exploited by centres and rely upon their agency, as is recommended by experts in periphery studies (Kühn, Bernt and Colini, 2016, p. 15). By seeing MV as an agent of its own discourse, as well as relying upon its agency in the political debate in Germany, it becomes possible to connect peripheralisation of MV to later instances of stigmatisation in the Nord Stream context. Peripheralisation is a process taking place in MV, partially because of budgeting decisions taken in the centre and partially because of choices made within the federate state. MV has agency in matters of Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2, which were projects which would benefit the state and combat its peripheral status. MV had the agency to change their policy on Nord Stream 2, but choose not to which opened them up for stigmatisation when the national policy on Russia changed.

Of course, this discourse does not remain contained within the borders of MV (Agnew, 1992). It is also present in the national news media that I analyse, after all, there are other people outside of MV which promote a pro Nord Stream policy, if not a pro-Russia policy. However, important national media discourse will more often than not reflect the views of the centre, rather than the periphery. Lastly, to shortly address the biggest problem in periphery research, which is the confusion surrounding terminology used to refer to centre and periphery (Pugh and Dubois, 2021, p. 269). In this research, the periphery refers to MV, which undergoes a process of peripheralisation. The centre are the states which used to make up West-Germany, as well as the federal German government in Berlin.

This section has summed up the premise of the structural centre-periphery theories which gained traction the last half of the twentieth century. It introduced ways in which centres and peripheries got defined which still are relevant in contemporary theory, and discussed current issues academics face in centre-periphery research. The next section elaborates on the process-based concept of peripheralisation.

1.2. Peripheralisation

This section introduces the concept of peripheralisation as conceptualized by Kühn, and discusses the four social processes that are included in this process. Two of those processes: the economic and the social have been elaborated on in the last section, the third one, the political will be expanded upon here. The next section describes the fourth process, which is the communicative process, and introduces the concept of stigmatisation.

It was William Logan who made the initial observation that there should be a difference between periphery and peripheralisation (Logan, 2001). This notion was further explored by Andrea Fischer-Tahir and Matthias Naumann. In their research, they noted the rise in inequality between cities and rural regions which could be observed all over Europe. They defined peripheries as the outcome of social processes, among them demographic, economic, political and discursive processes. Their focus on the multiple aspects that impact and shape peripheries beyond economic concerns. What is important to acknowledge, according to Fischer-Tahir and Naumann is that social injustice is the key in defining both peripheries and peripheralisation. The focus on social injustice comes from dependency theory and world systems analysis (including later work on these theories done by feminist scholars). There would be no inclusive theorization on centres and peripheries if it were not for the postcolonial and critical scholars of dependency theory and world systems analysis (Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, pp. 12-17). By focusing too much on quantitative factors, such as economic and demographic, it is hard to paint the full picture of injustice that peripheries experience. That is why this research includes as much critical perspectives as possible when analysing the discourse on Nord Stream.³

³ However, it should be acknowledged that MV is not a resource-periphery in a former colony, but rather a rural space in a highly developed country. Peripheralisation might explain why Nord Stream 2 is important to the state, but cannot be used as a way to defend the moral position of the pro-Russia discourse among its elites and citizens.

Kühn argues that peripheralisation is a concept to look at social processes with spatial implications. He identifies four of these processes: the economic, social, political and communicative. In his research, Kühn only describes the first three (Kühn, 2015, pp. 368-369). Throughout this chapter, I have discussed multiple theories of political economy, economic polarization and social inequality. Kühn's peripheralisation includes all of these approaches and highlights their important elements, broadening our understanding of peripheries. Lastly, his inclusion of the communicative approach introduces the concepts of marginalisation and stigmatisation, which provides the link between the theory on peripheries on my case study of MV.

Accordingly, peripheralisation (and its counterpart centralization) is a concept that combats the static notion of the periphery as a remote location, a vast distance away from the centre, located at the edge of regions, nations, or even the world. A periphery defined in this sense, will never be more than a periphery, as it is not that easy to change population density, let alone physical distance (Kühn, 2015, p. 368). Peripheralisation rather emphasizes the social process that the periphery undergoes with an relational approach. Manfred Kühn defines it as “the production of peripheries through social relations and their spatial implications” (ibid., p. 367). Here, the social relations in question may refer to economic, political, social and communicative processes (ibid., 2015, p. 368). This research uses Kühn's definition of peripheralisation, mainly because of the inclusion of the four processes. MV is an economic and social periphery, dealing with a political issue in the communicative space. In general, Kühn's concept of peripheralisation is relational, process-oriented, multidimensional, multi-scalar and temporal. This makes it a good concept to base this research on. Although MV can – and is – defined as a periphery within this research, peripheralisation provides us with knowledge of the background processes which have caused the state to become a periphery. It keeps the relational approach upon which centre-periphery frameworks rely, after all, dependency and exploitation cannot take place outside of a(n inequal) relational context. But, it also gives MV the agency which is needed to analyse the choices the state has made concerning Nord Stream. The defensiveness over the project by the regional elite and citizens in the national discourse also displays agency on MV's part. Furthermore, according to Meyer and Miggelbrink, it is important to not just reproduce hegemonic representations of certain places. That is why guiding research questions never be “why is *x place* a periphery” but should be rephrased as how did this image of *x place* as a periphery come to be. It is unavoidable that the wording in this research sometimes contributes to hegemonic ways of thinking, but because

it is for internal publication purposes only this should not be a problem. Nevertheless, the analysis tries to avoid any reproduction of hegemonic representations when describing peripheral elements that exist in MV.

The economic polarization theory of Myrdal is based on clusters of economic agglomeration. Centre regions have larger concentrations of firms, as well as more educational institutions and transportation hubs. Peripheries are basically all other places (Kühn, 2015, pp. 370). This approach has been criticized for the static implications it carries in changing times, and the generalization of peripheral areas, which can be also be hubs for innovation, as research has shown (Copus, 2001; Graffenberger and Vonnahme, 2019; Robertson Munro, 2019; Willett, 2020). Upon reflection, I would like to refer back to Anderson's argument of centre and periphery. He offers the view that the geographical spatial between centre and periphery divide creates an unequal access to power. Thus, agglomeration-based views cannot fully explain when peripheries turn into centres. Yet, the characteristics that have shaped the periphery, such as difficulty in accessing education or public transportation, have all contributed to the "otherness" of the periphery compared to the centre (Anderson, 2000, pp. 93-105). Thus, taking a wider scope and broadening peripheralisation beyond economic polarization, it becomes possible to account for the lifespan of centres and peripheries.

Social inequality is closely related to political power and socio-economic inequality, as it is closely intertwined with the concept of exclusion, as political sociologist Kreckel has shown. In his view, people in peripheries lack access to resources or goods which they need to take autonomous action. This can occur at any scale (Kreckel, 2004, p. 43). Related to the economic dimension, social inequality also can be indicated by poverty levels. Poverty is linked to de-industrialization, lower levels of education, a shrinking and/or an aging population, as well as high level of out-migration of younger, educated people. Here then, it is possible to tell why Kühn's concept of peripheralisation has become so prominent. Because of its inclusion of all the four processes, it is able to fill research gaps in one approach with another. Although this research's empirical part is mainly centred around discourse analysis, and thus the communicative dimension, the background information on MV provided in the third chapter relies upon the three other approaches to define its peripheral status.

The other side of the coin of exclusion is political in nature. This approach is mostly covered in the work of scholars studying European governance. An example of peripheries

being excluded on this scale are referred to as Euroregions. Tassilo Herrschel argues that they are excluded from networks of power, which directly impacts their place in European decision-making. In this view, exclusion from the decision-making process and lack of agenda-setting power are the determining qualities of peripherality. Herrschel acknowledges the existence of spatial peripheries, but argues that these overlap with his proposed network peripheries. Networks in this sense are European governing networks (Telle, 2017; Herrschel, 2011). It is less clear how this approach would transfer to different scales, particular to regional peripheries in Germany, as the three-tier governing system in the country means that governance is very accessible to civilians on all levels, from the national to the municipal (Kühn, Bernt and Colini, 2016, p. 6). Further critique comes from Kühn, who claims that this theory does not allow enough consideration for peripheral elites, and their possible access to networks of governance and their possession of agenda-setting power. Furthermore, as has been briefly touched upon before here, the claim that the periphery is politically powerless is an oversimplification, which further strengthens the dichotomous view of centres and peripheries. Arguing that the periphery is powerless, and the centre holds all the power over the periphery is reductionist of many states' governing systems and their multi-scalar inclusion of locality and regionality in their election. The argument may hold up for European governance and perhaps even on a global scale, but is unable to travel down on the scalar hierarchy to national, regional and local levels.

Elaborating on power and peripheries, Kühn, Bernt and Colini make the helpful distinction between power over and power to. Power over, according to them, is the approach that can be found in the claim that peripherality is as good as a synonym for powerlessness. Taken from the Urban Regime Theory headed by Clarence Stone, power over is another way to study how power gets exerted *over* a group of people. Power to is a more productive version of power which they observed in a community, as it provides agency to a marginalised group, and shows how they are capable to act upon their communal needs. Looking closer at this approach, there is a difference between power as an invisible structure orchestrating the lives of those in the periphery, or power as it is presented in narratives, discourses and norms (Kühn, Bernt and Colini, 2016, p. 3-5). In periphery research, power is often represented in its first form, as being an invisible force directing people's lives. Peripheralisation is the direct result of deliberate decisions made by elites in the centre, meant to keep the periphery powerless. The authors do not necessarily disagree with this notion, but declare that many studies of peripheries avoid the power debate altogether, as it is seen as an intimidating concept (*ibid.*, p. 2). By including the version of power as "power to", the view of the periphery being a powerless agent loses some

its credibility. They conclude by calling for more research into “power to”, specifically done with a focus on local political decisions, as the different scales of decision-making reveal the faces of “power over” and “power to” (ibid., pp. 13-15).

Kühn’s conceptualization of (de-)peripheralisation has also been used by other scholars (see Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2015; Kuhn, Bernt and Colini, 2016; Willett, 2020; Collective authors, 2015; Kuhn, 2015-II; Lang, 2015; Mihály, 2022; Bachmann-Vargas and Van Koppen, 2020). The main feature of the peripheralisation approach is that it brings back agency to peripheries by highlighting their capacity for change rather than viewing them as static entities, giving scholars the option to also study de-peripheralisation, or even centralization of (former) peripheries. It manages to explain moments in time where peripheries turned to centres, particularly after the fall of the Soviet-Union (Kühn and Bernt, 2013, p. 178). However, it is a careful balance between providing the periphery with agency, but also not overstating this agency and forgetting that the main characteristic of peripheries across all scales is their unequal status vis-à-vis the centre. To paraphrase Hörschelmann et al., peripheralisation allows researchers to see peripheries as subjects instead of objects (Hörschelmann et al., 2019, p. 780). The power that the centre holds over the periphery remains in place, but peripheries are able to respond to this and evolve. Some authors prefer to understand peripheralisation as Kühn intended, but develop the concept. For example, Erika Nagy et al. define peripheralisation as a process of the making of dependencies (Nagy et al, 2015, pp. 136-137). This relates more directly to dependency theory and world systems analysis than Kühn’s peripheralisation does, but by referring to matters of dependence, exploitation and power, Nagy et al.’s definition still fits by Kühn’s wider definition of “social relations”, which includes power under its political process.

One of the reasons why Kühn’s peripheralisation is used by so many other academics is because it lends itself for critical research, ranging from critical security theory to critical discourse analysis. For Pugh and Dubois, there are two types of centre-periphery theories: those based on economic agglomeration and those based on power asymmetries. They have different roots, but similar outcomes. Kühn’s peripheralisation manages to combine these two viewpoints. As Bonacker shows, peripheralisation is a concept that is easily reproduced across different academic disciplines, in his case in the field of critical international security. He conceptualizes peripheralisation not just as an abstract concept for scholars, but as a form of social reality. He applies it to a global scale, and manages to find colonial stereotypes in the

intersection between peripheralisation and stigmatisation (Bonacker, 2018, pp. 5-9). This is reflective of the discursive element that runs through peripheralisation. Part of peripheralisation, the process of a place becoming a periphery, is the repeated use of othering, orientalising and rural representations which get repeated in popular discourse (Eriksson, 2010). Peripheralisation then, as a concept, is in theoretical literature associated with two relational and processual concepts: marginalisation and exclusion. Both have roots mainly in the fields of sociology and social geography (Kühn, 2015, pp. 370-373).

This research avoids to paint the picture of MV as a powerless actor in Berlin's decision-making process by placing focus directly upon the political elites of MV. Peripheral elites in Germany, particularly in MV have access to the political agenda, especially when this agenda also serves the common interest of the country, as the public support for Nord Stream 2 before February 2022 has shown. However, when political interests changed after Russia's war in Ukraine, the priorities of MV were no longer synchronized with the national interest, and the elite's defensiveness over their decisions regarding Nord Stream 2, left MV open to stigmatisation from the German public.

1.3. Stigmatisation

Marginalisation and stigmatisation are closely related to what has been discussed so far on peripheries, as well as peripheralisation. Marginalisation fits more with the political and sociological theories introduced, whereas stigmatisation is intertwined with research on discourses, placing it on the communicative end of Kühn's four theoretical approach. Marginalisation and stigmatisation complete the picture of peripheralisation which has been painted so far, which needs all four approaches (economic, social, political and communicative) to make analytical sense.

Although there is a very clear overlap between marginalised communities and those living in peripheral places, according to Nagy et al. peripheralisation as a process creates a dependency of the periphery on the centre. Marginalisation refers to the deliberately created dependency of certain communities on social (and political and economic) mechanisms which function unequal for them (Arnold, 1995). In my opinion, the theoretical difference between the peripheralisation and marginalisation is needlessly overcomplicated. Therefore, I suggest the following solution: in this research, all peripheral places are subjected to a process of

marginalisation, however not each marginalised group has to be located in a periphery (e.g. not all African-Americans live in a periphery, but they are considered to be a marginalised group. All inhabitants of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern do live in a periphery and experience marginalisation because of this). Peripheries are places which are undergoing a process of peripheralisation, which is a place-based process of marginalisation. In this, I follow the line of Meyer and Miggelbrink, who argue that peripheralisation is a process of socio-spatial marginalisation, as well as Steinführer and Grossmann's declaration that local trajectories are capable of change despite marginalisation (Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2013, p. 218; Steinführer and Grossmann, 2021, p. 192).

Stigmatisation is one of the ways peripheries are produced and reproduced socially by the consistent use of repetitive negative stereotypes and images (Bürk, 2013, pp. 169-172). However, it can actually be defined broader as well. In this definition, stigmatisation is the application of stigmas to – in this case – peripheries, and the exclusion and discrimination of those who have been stigmatised (Bürk, Kühn and Sommer, 2012, p. 338). The process of stigmatisation comes forth from the concept stigma. In his theory, Ervin Goffman conceptualizes stigma as a socially negative reputation or attribute assigned to a group or an individual, which leads them to feeling stereotyped by society (Goffman, 1963, p. 164). Adrian Rogstad's definition of stigmatisation is closely linked to Bürk's concepts of stigma, however in his definition of stigmatisation he relies on Goffmann and Zarakol, and he includes that the process occurs when the stigmatised actor/community/country gets linked to a certain (negative) attribute because they deviated from accepted social norms. Seen from that viewpoint, the stigmatisation MV occurs because the behaviour of the state's actors did not align with the moral standards of the rest of Germany, particularly the centre. Stigmatisation is meant to correct this behaviour and bring the offender back to the accepted social norms (Goffmann, 1963, p. 164; Zarakol, 2014; Rogstad, 2022, pp. 4-7). In Germany, the social norm which ruled acceptable behaviour for conducting relations with Russia changed abruptly after Russia's war in Ukraine. Before that, Germany had always had a cordial, if not friendly, foreign policy. This could be seen the most in the German energy policy, as the German industry relies heavily on Russian gas resources. Germany's new foreign policy towards Russia is informed by a new moral and normative viewpoint, which is against friendly relations with Russia. MV's pro-Russia policy in the past, and some instances of pro-Russia behaviour, are now judged through this new norm. That is what initiated the stigmatisation process, which is a way in which the centre tries to bring MV to comply with the behavioural norm.

Bürk, Kühn and Sommer assume that the behaviour of actors is impacted by the process of stigmatisation. For actors in the periphery, negative associations with the place they live in might lead to population changes, with an exodus of a young and educated population. For actors located in the centre, negative associations with the periphery might lead to deliberate exclusion of peripheries in social spaces, including political debate or economic deliberations (Bürk, Kühn and Sommer, 2012, pp. 340-346). Stigmatisation is thus harmful for peripheries, as their collective identity is continuously attacked because stigmatisation informs social practises upon which actors make decisions (Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2015, p. 63).

The process of stigmatisation has two groups of actors: a stigmatising and stigmatised. Earlier on, we have seen them being referred to as actors in the periphery and actors in the centre, respectively. They are in a coalition, meaning that they both contribute to the stigmatisation of the periphery. For the stigmatised group, this refers to them being subjected to “peripheralisation in the mind” which can have consequences for the behaviour of actors. Meyer and Miggelbrink argue that it is too deterministic to state that individual actions and decisions are indeed influenced by the negative stereotypes, however, they also state that stigmatisation influences social practises, which we can also see in the empirical evidence on the city level. Although stigmatisation does not directly impacts decisions, it indirectly contributes to ideas and identities which inform decisions. Bernt and Kühn see that repetitive stigmatisation leads to a negative feedback loop, which makes the local population of peripheral areas more and more vulnerable over time. They even argue that stigmatisation can be used a way to shift blame for the structural underdevelopment of a place to its inhabitants, instead of the elites in charge of development policies. In their view, stigmatisation affects the thoughts, and consequently, the behaviour of the stigmatised (Kühn and Bernt, 2013, pp. 168-171). The academic community is divided on whether or not stigmatisation directly influences actors’ behaviour, and it is a difficult topic to investigate without reinforcing negative stereotypes of a place (Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2015, p. 74). For this research, I view stigmatisation as a harmful process for peripheries which might have unintended and indirect consequences on the behaviour of actors in peripheral places, and direct negative consequences on the collective identity of the stigmatised community.

There are multiple strategies that the stigmatised develop in order to cope with the attack to their identity. The first one is the denial of the stigma, this also includes the making of

excuses and the denial of local responsibilities. The second one is the development of a counter-narrative, which actively tries to combat the stigma and sometimes includes the involvement of local politicians (Bürk, Kühn and Sommer, 2012, p. 340; Bürk, 2013, p. 182). Rogstad theorises stigma management beyond these two strategies by combining stigma contestation as defined by several scholars to come up with four coping mechanisms that the stigmatised group can use. If the stigmatised group accepts the stigma, both for themselves and the way the public will perceive them this is stigma acceptance. If the stigmatised group accepts the public stigma, but not to themselves, there is stigma rejection or avoidance. If the stigmatised do not accept the public stigma, but accept it for themselves there is stigma evasion. Lastly, and most importantly for this research. If the stigmatised group challenges the public stigma, also to themselves finally we can observe counter-stigmatisation (Rogstad, 2022, pp. 4-5). This is what happened in MV, the counter-stigmatisation was mainly pushed by the political elites of the state, as the discourse analysis shows. This counter-stigmatisation however, just means that the stigma is being challenged, but not that the stigma no longer influences the citizens of MV.

One of the most pervasive and easiest identifiable perpetrator of the stigmatisation of peripheral areas is the news media (Kühn and Bernt, 2013, p. 171). This brings us back to the fourth peripheralisation process: the communicative. This approach remains underdeveloped in Kühn's article, most likely because the other three approaches have roots within historic approaches, such as world systems analysis or social marginality research. The communicative process of peripheralisation consist of discourses. The idea that peripheries are discursively constructed has been around for quite some time, Myrdal already expanded on the economic centre-peripheral way of thinking by wanting to move beyond economic theory, which in his view takes away from social reality (ibid, pp. 209-210). Meyer and Miggelbrink go so far as referring to forms of communication being the mediating role in reducing the dualist centre-periphery perspective that prioritizes space. In their view, people really are at the foreground, whereas in other theoretical approaches their actions, thoughts and rationalities do not play a role at all. They claim that the communicative dimension is of the utmost importance when one wants to understand the process of peripheralisation (Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2012, pp. 211-212). This notion is repeated by Bianka Plüschke-Altöf, who provides elaboration on the communicative approach of Kühn's framework. In her work, she tries to understand how peripheries became discursively known as rural areas, which she calls a discursive node. Here, she repeats ideas from Bourdieu and Foucault among others: the powerful more opportunities to make their opinion heard, and marginalised groups are generally excluded from societal

discourses (Plüschke-Altöf, 2016, pp. 13-14). She argues that the discourse is dominated by a stigmatising elite. This elite (mainly) consists of journalists, politicians and academics (Plüschke-Altöf, 2016, pp. 22). It is not surprising then, that the discourse which affects the stigmatisation of peripheries can be found in news media (see: Plüschke-Altöf, 2016, pp. 17 and 24; Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013, p. 17. Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2013, pp. 215-218; Kühn and Bernt, 2013, pp. 171-172).

Research shows that former East German federal states have had to deal with stigmatisation following policy decisions taken by the centre (see: Bürk, Kühn and Sommer, 2012; Kühn and Bernt, 2013; Kühn, 2015-II; Kühn, Bernt and Colini, 2016; Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2013). My case study focuses on the former East German state of MV, and the Russia policy of the state government, which was driven by a desire for a de-peripheralisation process which Nord Stream 2 would initiate, as I show in the analysis of speeches from political elites from the states. The second analysis focuses on the process of stigmatisation in the news media from the centre. I show how negative sentiments and stereotypes are present in several news articles, and analyse how they contribute to the stigmatisation of MV as a state.

1.4. Elites and the periphery

Up until now this research has looked at centre-periphery theory across academic disciplines and throughout the years, and now it is time to provide the definitions for centre and periphery which I will maintain throughout this paper. For this, it is important to first establish the scale my research will focus on. The main periphery mentioned in this research is an internal periphery of Germany: the state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. MV has no noticeable resources that the centre in Germany would exploit, so we can rule out that it has a status as a resource periphery for Germany. This absence of natural resources does not mean that this periphery does not get exploited in other ways, since the building of the Nord Stream terminals has a significant damaging effect on the environment (Lott, 2011). After all, peripheries are always in some way exploited by the centre, as this is one of the main arguments in the theories discussed so far. Without resources, MV plays host to what Copus refers to as “the third groups of peripheral elements” (Copus, 2001, p. 540). These are high unemployment numbers, lower income levels, low population density, bad access to public transportation, and an aging and shrinking population.

Using the national scale, many authors have identified the entirety of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) as a place subjected to the process of peripheralisation (Mihály, 2022, pp. 2-3; Kühn and Bernt, 2013, p. 175; Lang, 2012, p. 1748; Schmalz, Singe and Hasenohr, 2021, p. 2-9; Heinrichs, 2010, p. 89-93). Despite the fall of the Berlin Wall being over thirty years ago, in academia, politics and media, large areas of the country - including MV - are still referred to as East Germany. Its logical opposite then would be West Germany, which experiences the opposite process of peripheralisation: centralization.

Qualifying all of East Germany as a periphery is too simplistic and deterministic for my research, as there are also places within Western Germany which fall under peripheralisation processes, like the Ruhr area. Moreover, there are quite some areas within Eastern Germany which are centres within peripheries, such as Dresden and Berlin, or even Lubmin in MV. Within Germany then, I define a periphery as a place with a shrinking/aging population and low socio-economic prospects, which gets stigmatised in the news media. As stated, this definition is not confined to the borders of the former GDR, but can be applied throughout the country. However, I am mindful that in practice, the former East German states are more stigmatised as peripheries by the German news media than peripheral places in former West German states.

The definition of periphery for this case study includes the three processes outlined by Kühn, apart from the (bureaucratic) political dimension. The reason for the exclusion of the political dimension is that there exists no empirical evidence that MV has systematically been denied access to political power. Because of Germany's tiered-governance structure, as well as the high position that political elites from the state have in the government, it is not possible to infer that it somehow has a disadvantaged position when trying to access political agenda-setting. A problem that MV as a periphery does face, however, is a lack of agenda-setting power in the national news media because of its marginalised position, but it does have internal news coverage in newsletters specifically made for circulation within the state. A centre as defined in this research is located at the other end of the dichotomy. I define it as a place with a growing population, high socio-economic prospects with little stigmatisation in the media. Many factors which have been mentioned in this literature review, such as lack or abundance of public transportation; innovation; highly educated population and high internet speed, as well as high or low wages; unemployment and birth rate all fall under socio-economic prospects in this instance. This will be elaborated upon in chapter three.

Because the subject of elite involvement ties together this chapter of the thesis with the empirical analysis, I have saved it for last. Elite involvement in peripheralisation is an under-researched phenomenon, although it does get mentioned by some scholars. Kühn provided the angle for this research when he wondered what power peripheral elites have in democratic systems to resist the centre. He assumed that in democratic systems such as Germany, elites (particularly elected political representatives) would have a say in political discussions, and have an opportunity to de-peripheralise their constitutive places (Kühn, 2015, p. 376).

This mirrors the question posed by Friedmann in the 1970s: who are the actors responsible for peripheralisation? Since many aspects of peripheralisation are reflective of - and can be combatted with - social policies, it seems like a conscious choice from elites in the centre in order to create an “organized dependency” of the periphery upon the centre (Friedmann, 1973, p. 48; Kühn and Bernt, 2013, p. 306). Friedmann argues that those in power have the autonomy on decision-making, and marginalised communities (also those in peripheries) receive limited opportunities in this processes (Mihály, 2022, p. 5). However, I believe that this is not the case in Germany, where the democratic systems means that also marginalised communities (as long as they are institutionalised, which those in peripheral, former GDR states are) have a voice in policy matters. Friedmann’s thoughts also echo in the idea of network exclusion by Herrschel, as well as the work by Lang (Herrschel, 2011, p. 86; Lang, 2015, pp. 178-181). Here then, it becomes clear to see how closely related the matter of elites and peripheralisation is to questions of power and peripheralisation. This is not that surprising, considering elites in the context of this research are the representatives of political power in a geographical area. Kühn, Bernt and Colini also touch upon questions which have been discussed in the part of this literature review which focused on power. These authors wonder if Friedmann is correct and peripheralisation is the result of conscious decisions made by elites in the centre (or maybe even all elites, also those in the periphery), or if it is a structural problem which takes place in an “invisible” manner, unnoticed by power elites until too late? (Kühn, Bernt and Colini, 2016, p. 2).

The matter of elite involvement in peripheralisation processes has been analysed by Bürk, Kühn and Sommer. In a comparative case study of two Eastern German cities and their responses to stigmatisation in the (inter)national media, the authors showed that local elites carried large responsibility in the making of a counter-narratives, and other forms of stigma-

management. On a city-level, local elites are actively involved in countering the stigmatisation of their cities, whether this is done by confirming the stigmatisation, proving the opposite, rejection of the norm, or reacting defensively (Bürk, Kühn and Sommer, 2012, pp. 340-346). As the discourse analysis shows, the political elites of MV have also provided counter-narratives to the stigmatisation in the discourse, and have also denied the stigma multiple times.

One way MV's elites are involved in the stigmatisation of their state is that most stigmatisation happens because of their choices regarding Nord Stream 2. They are not doing the stigmatising themselves, however, their past actions are judged by the current normative standard, and defensiveness over their former policy opens the state up for criticism from the centre elites, and this criticism in turn can be stigmatising. As research by other authors shows, peripheral places in former East-Germany are regularly stigmatised by the national news media (Bürk, Kühn and Sommer, 2012; Kühn, Bernt and Colini 2016). The discourse surrounding the struggle around the new norm regarding relationships with Russia in Germany, means that MV has been dealing with another type of stigmatisation. This new stigmatisation occurs when MV is described negatively when it comes to its relationship with Russia. It is important to note that close ties to Russia is not a unique quality of MV. Bjorn Gens has described how Germany's business elites have discursively been pushing a closer cooperation with Russia for years after 2014, and it was of one of the key themes in the German national election of 2019 (Gens, 2019). As Gens shows, Nord Stream 1 and 2 have been championed by German elites, political and economic alike, for a long time. The behavioural norm in conducting relations with Russia has changed very abruptly and was very different than the accepted norm before. Thus, the stigmatisation that MV has undergone since cannot be accounted for by just their past pro-Russia policy, as other East German states, as well as the German federal government had the same policies. This means that the stigmatisation can at least partially be explained by the recent revelations of the entanglement between the state government and Nord Stream by means of the Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection MV, as chapter 3 shows.

In conclusion, this chapter has been a brief overview of theories and thoughts on centre-periphery dynamics, starting with dependency theory in the 1950s, and ending with a focus on stigmatisation in current times. It has touched upon economic, political, social and communicative aspects of centre-periphery relations. It has shown how there remains an unequal relationship between the centre and the periphery across scales, although the periphery should be seen as an entity with agency for changing its own course in history, whether that is

by providing counter-narratives to stigmatisation or by strikes and protests. This research builds upon research of stigmatisation of the periphery, by showing how MV became stigmatised due to its involvement with Nord Stream 2, which was intended to de-peripheralise the state. Germany's national norm on conduction relations with Russia changed from friendly relations to relations between discouraged. This impacted the way in which MV was discussed in the German news media and lead to stigmatisation of the state, because of its past pro-Russia policy due to Nord Stream 2. This new type of stigmatisation is part of a peripheralisation process which will impact the state in the future.

2. Research design and method

The last chapter has outlined existing scholarly debates and literature on centres, peripheries and stigmatisation. The chapter started with theories concerned with peripheries on the world-stage and moved to smaller notion of peripheries within Germany. Despite the extensiveness of research done on centres and peripheries, there has been a clear divide between the scale peripheries are discussed. Either they are impacted by domestic processes or international processes. Even though globalization has impacted this way of thinking by showing how international trade processes have impacted internal peripheries of countries (this is mostly shown by research done by social geographers and their notion of innovation), there are other international processes that can impact peripheries and their domestic status, as this research intends to point out. By focusing on the way Nord Stream has changed the discourse surrounding MV domestically in Germany, I also touch upon the Russian policy by the German federal government and MV's state policy. This foreign policy has only very recently changed course for the worse, before the Ukraine war the Russia-policy of Germany was very positively interpreted by the general public. The stigmatisation and peripheralisation of MV is mainly a process which occurs domestically in Germany, but it is inherently connected to the international dimension because these processes occur because of MV's pro-Russia sentiments that their positive notion of Nord Stream warranted. As the stigmatisation process occurred after MV broke the new social norm which was no longer pro-Russia, the international dimension to the process cannot be ignored. This is also how this research gains its relevance, since there is not much research which focuses on the intersection between changed norms due to international factors and peripheralisation and stigmatisation. By looking at the discourses of stigmatisation and counter-stigmatisation of MV in German news media, I can explain why Nord Stream is so important for MV and identify the discursive consequences of their entanglement. The influence of elites on peripheralisation and stigmatisation of places is under-researched. Because the full-scale invasion of Ukraine is quite recent, discourse surrounding the war and involvement of German elite by extent of Nord Stream has also not been discussed yet.

This main theme of this paper is the stigmatisation of peripheries, and the way political elites contribute to this process. This is researched by means of a discourse analysis of German media. In this chapter, I outline the methodological choices that build my research, and shape

the empirical analysis. This is done in five sections. The part outlines discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis in particular, which is the chosen method of data analysis for this thesis. The second shows how I plan to analyse the collected data. The third section discusses the case study of MV, and Germany in general. The fourth explains how I gather data from German news media. Lastly, the fifth section consists of reflection and reevaluation of the methodological choices made in this research, and difficulties I expect to find along the way.

Research on peripheries has moved away from structural approaches, and prefers to focus now on social processes. Simultaneously, academics studying peripheries have taken on a more activist role, which was visible in the call for more research focus on peripheries instead of centres, as well as more recent objections against the stigmatising language used by scholars when describing peripheries. Most notably, social geographers also study peripheries with the specific goal of improving conditions in these areas by critically analysing government policies (Collective Authors, 2015, p. 10; Kühn and Bernt, 2013, p. 177; Cottrell Studemeyer, 2019, pp. 806-807). With all this being kept in mind, this research joins in taking a more critical approach to structural ontology.

2.1. Discourse analysis

With the implication of structural socio-economic places being the outcome of material decisions (as economic approaches have argued), came the realization that they are also discursively constructed (Plüschke-Altöf, 2016, pp.13-14). As discussed by Lang, peripheralisation is intrinsically linked to ideas about discourses, because peripheralisation as a process indicates polarization (again, this can be economic, political or social in nature) between the centre and the periphery. Polarization is accompanied by value-statements, and othering. It reveals an hierarchy, in which certain places are valued above others (Lang, 2015, p. 175; Willett, 2020, p. 88). In the way Lang interprets the work of other scholars, power formations are what constructs perceptions that people have about a place, and which are attached to this place. These perceptions are consistently being repeated in the discourse, and this in turn affects how a place is perceived by others (Lang, 2015, p. 177).

This hierarchy becomes apparent when looking at discourse. Discourse as a concept presumes that everything in social life (our decisions, our relations, our space, our upbringing etc.) is significant. Very often, we can analyse significance by turning to discourse (Meyer and

Miggelbrink, 2013, p. 212; Laclau, 1983, p. 90). Discourses do not live in our imaginations, but shape social reality to a point where it is constitutive of it (Gulbrandsen, 2022, p. 7). To think of space, centres and peripheries might have existed before we gave a word to it or before academics started to analyse these spaces. A good example of this can be found in Bianka Plüschke-Altöf's research. She shows how the rural became equated in discourse with our concept of periphery. Interestingly, she also takes Laclau's notion of empty signifier and argues that periphery functions as such. Because it can absorb any number of meanings, it can be used in political contexts to bend meaning (Plüschke-Altöf, 2016, p. 18). By focusing solely on the stigmatisation of MV, the research avoids problems with the analysis of empty signifiers, as well as simply repeating the work of other scholars. The centre-periphery framework which underlies the research provides a way to look into power relations reflected in the discourse.

Most research done of peripherality and discourse has been informed by types of Foucauldian discourse analyses (Meyer and Miggelbrink, 2013, p. 216; Willett, 2020, pp. 87-90). Foucauldian discourse analysis is built on ideas about power relations, which are prominent in peripheralisation processes. Peripheralising discourses, or stigmatisation, originate in centres, and are a product of the unequal discursive power the centre possesses vis-à-vis the periphery (Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013, p. 8; Hörschelmann, Cottrell Studemeyer, Hopkins and Benwell, 2019, p. 780). Stigmatisation in this sense is a peripheralising process, which is the discursive use of negative emotions, stereotypes and other repeated utterances of negative value about a peripheral place. For this analysis, this means that stigmatisation of MV is when the discourse surrounding Nord Stream and Schwesig uses these negative emotions, stereotypes and negative value utterances to make claims about MV. Simultaneously, in the discourse we can also see the emergence of counter-stigmatisation, which are narratives which oppose the stigma persistent in the discourse. As discussed, when people from peripheries partake in the peripheralisation discourse, they could use their marginalised position by favouring interaction over exclusion (Hörschelmann, Cottrell Studemeyer, Hopkins and Benwell, 2019, p. 780). This is especially visible in the counter-discourses, which have been touched upon in the literature review. They are most often championed by political elites, and provide opposition to the peripheralisation discourse perpetuated by the centre. They are meant to negate the stigmatisation in the peripheralisation discourse (Bürk, Kühn and Sommer, 2012, pp. 340-431 and 346). In the discourse analysis in chapter 3, I identify the counter-stigmatisation narrative laid out by MV's political elites, and show how this influences the stigmatising discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a branch of discourse analysis. One of the proponents of CDA is Norman Fairclough, who developed three dimensions of analysis, which paid special attention to grammar and other linguistic aspects of the discourse. This focus on linguistics is what set CDA apart from discourse analysis in the Foucauldian way, as argued by Fairclough (Blommaert and Bulcaen, 2000, pp. 448-455). Fairclough's analysis of discourse as social practise, is what truly has made CDA a common practise of discourse analysts, as it lend itself to critical scholars, and came just in time for the paradigm shift to less structuralist approaches in the 60s and 70s (ibid.; Van Dijk, 2015, pp. 466-469). Since CDA is not a singular method of conducting discourse analysis, the approach lends itself to a variety of methodologies and ways of doing research. CDA is a popular approach across different fields in social sciences, from media studies to IR. That is because inherently, CDA is a critical (and some might even say activist) way of doing research. CDA focuses on social issues and political problems, and it has been very successful in uncovering unequal power relations pertaining class, gender, race etc. in political speech, media and literary works (ibid.; ibid.). According to Fairclough, CDA is a way to contribute to critical social analysis, which aims to both explain social reality, but also to provide a normative dimension. That is helpful for approaches used by feminist and post-colonialist scholars (Fairclough, 2013, pp. 9-10). When discussing social reality, it becomes apparent that inequality can be detected in different discourses, as discourses reflect the patterns of social life. CDA tries to untangle historical path dependencies. The aim of CDA is to change social reality for the better, this can only be done if one includes an exploratory dimension to their research (ibid., p. 10).

CDA is also very often used for media analysis, which is one of the main discursive settings in which societal problems can be uncovered (Van Dijk, 2015, pp. 471-474 and 477; Blommaert and Bulcaen, p. 451). Because this research concerns itself with the uncovering of unequal power relations between the centre and periphery in Germany by focusing on stigmatisation, and much research on peripheralisation is meant to both critique the power of the centre, as well as empower the periphery, CDA is a well-fitted approach to social reality. For this research, I will follow CDA as outlined by Van Dijk, whose approach to analysis is outlined below.

2.2. Data analysis

Power in the discourse, as argued by Van Dijk, lies with those who hold the control over the construction of the public discourse. Usually, this is done by elites or other people with authority. In the case of this research, the discourse is controlled by the media elites behind German newspapers, from owners to editors to other people who have a voice in shaping the media discourse. Because news is a resource for people in their day-to-day lives, the headlines of newspapers guide them to understand which topics are important.⁴ In his argument, Van Dijk separates media discourse and political discourse. The power of control in media discourse lies with editors and journalists, and the power of control in political discourse is exerted by politicians (Van Dijk, 2015, pp. 354-357). This research looks at media discourse, however, I do believe there is a large amount of entanglement between political discourse and media discourse. After all, the political debate initiated by political elites also informs the media discourse. Moreover, politicians use media discourses to justify their opinions, and journalists use political discourse to further their own interests. Therefore, the power of control over the media discourse is, in my opinion, lies with elites in general, and there is no need to differentiate between political elites and media elites. However, in the case study of MV, we are dealing with peripheral elites who push a counter-stigmatisation narrative going against the accepted norm. This means that the MV elites as studied in the analysis probably do not have the same level of control over the media discourse, which is why they can be portrayed in a stigmatising light. As Van Dijk also states, is that the elites who control the discourse have the power of language on their side. Using metaphors, negative statements and stereotypes, they manage to influence the general public (Van Dijk, 2015, pp. 357-358). In other words, they do hold the power over language choices in the media discourse. If the news source is considered reliable, then recipients will accept the beliefs, opinions and values it conveys.

There is not a singular best way to conduct a discourse analysis, but because this is a CDA I focus in the first place on the meaning behind language. This means that I read the media articles multiple times. I look at the word choices which indicate negative feelings, stereotypes or other forms of stigmatisation. This can be directly noticeable, or be more discreet such as the choice of active or passive sentence structuring (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 359). The CDA looks

⁴ Admittedly, there is a growing number of people who disregard common sources, and their public discourse gets formed by “alternative” news. This research does not include the latter, and only focuses on mainstream news sources.

for meaning conveyed by language choices and is conducted by multiple critical readings of the same texts and placing them in the context of centre-periphery relations with MV as a periphery. According to Schaffner, it is possible to approach texts either from a micro or macro perspective. The micro perspective focuses on how linguistic structures fulfill certain functions, whereas the macro-level works from the function of the text, e.g. what message is it trying to convey, and analyses how the linguistics serve this purpose (Schaffner, 1996, pp. 202-203). My CDA is mostly done on a macro level, and the function of the text is being interpreted through the lens of stigmatisation. This means that even if the original purpose of the text was not to stigmatise, I analyse how it stigmatises MV.

2.3. Research design and case study

The analysis of the next chapter is structured in four parts. First, I provide a historical overview of MV's peripheral status. It outlines how MV became a periphery after the reunification, and how this has led to the need of investments in the state. Then, I show how Nord Stream was seen as one of these investments by the state's politicians. This is done by the first stage of the discourse analysis, focusing on official speeches and press statements made by Erwin Sellering and Manuela Schwesig, who were prime-ministers of MV during the announcement and construction of Nord Stream 1 and 2. This part of the discourse analysis shows that Nord Stream was intended as to de-peripheralise the state. This is followed by a second and larger stage of the discourse analysis, focusing on German news media, in which I show how the discourse surrounding the changed norm regarding supporting Russia and Nord Stream has developed, and how MV has tried to initiate counter-stigmatisation discourses. Then, all of this is analysed in a discussion of the results.

This research is a case study of the German state of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The case is chosen because of the negative news coverage of the state since February 2022. This negativity leads to the stigmatisation of MV. In the first chapter, the case has been outlined in light of the concept of peripheralisation and introduced how stigmatisation is one of the social processes that encompass peripheralisation. This research is foremost case study of stigmatisation of a periphery. There has been research on this phenomenon (particularly in Germany), but not in the context Nord Stream. I argue that this is because Nord Stream 2 led to the stigmatisation of MV because it was discursively constructed by MV's political elite as a means to de-peripheralise by bringing investments and jobs to the state. That brings us to the

significance of my case selection. It is situated within research on Germany's foreign policy, particularly its close energy ties with Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Nord Stream 2 has been controversial among Germany's allies (notably the US), and has also led to divisions within the country. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Germany's foreign policy changed abruptly to a rejection of its energy dependency upon Russia, and the closure of Nord Stream 2. Before the decision to stop the launch, Nord Stream 2 was very popular among Germans and also in the *Bundestag*: more than 70% of Germans supported the project (Hoell, 2021). As the third chapter shows, many Germans still are in favour. This makes MV's elites discourse not just one voice of dissonance, but connects it to broader support among the German population. It also is closely related to voices among Germany's extreme right and left, and other pro-Russia camps (Wood, 2020). My analysis intends to show that MV as a state has been stigmatised for being pro-Russia, by its elites, its citizens and the centre alike. This stigma reflects negatively on the state, and might cause them to peripheralise further. Further information on MV and its peripheral status is detailed in section 3.1, which includes a short historic overview of its peripherality and details the state links to Nord Stream.

This means that it is a specific research which is not easily replicable in other instances, as many of the circumstances described in this research are unique to the case. However, case study research is still relevant even though drawing broader conclusions from them is difficult (Flyvbjerg, 2011, pp. 301-303; Thomas, 2011, p. 511). Case studies are used to explore subject areas, to illustrate points made in the research, they are compared against each other or used to explain research phenomena and much more. This case study is an explanatory case study, and focuses on the discursive struggle around the changed behavioural norm vis-à-vis Russia which has become accepted by most German actors, and which MV can be criticised for. What is important to note is that in looking at the discourse, I am looking at it through the prism of national (federal media), and not media which is based in the periphery. This means that this media outlet already has a bias regarding the periphery (MV) which is hard to ignore. The discourse is constructed by journalists, who will have picked the quotes and interviewees to build a certain narrative which they intended to promote. This is not an issue in itself, as this is a part of the stigmatisation process, but is something that should be kept in mind when looking at the discourse.

This whole thesis is a case study of the stigmatisation of a place within Germany. Nord Stream is only discussed within a German societal setting, but the cause of the controversy

around the project lies with larger geopolitical implications. Apart from the general geopolitical repercussions that Nord Stream 2 brings to the European continent, in Germany there are political domestic consequences of the project, which this thesis focuses on. The empirical part consists of three parts, the discourse analysis is by far the largest and most important empirical section. However, I start by providing a brief background description of MV and Nord Stream. This information is necessary to bridge the gap between the theory as discussed in the literature review, and the analysis provided in the empirical section.

2.4. Data collection

I have collected my data by looking at the most-read German printed news media. These are the news media with the largest circulations, which are *Die Zeit* and *Der Spiegel* (published weekly). The newspaper which has the highest circulation is *Bild*, which is a daily published newspaper, whose online version gets updated every minute. However, it became apparent to me that there is too much information available in *Bild* to read in the scope provided for me in this research, next to that, it is nearly impossible to use the search function on their website, and I do not have access to their print version. *Die Zeit* and *Der Spiegel* are read less than *Bild*, but do still have a large reader base. The reason why I choose weekly distributed newspapers is because they are more likely to have in-depth articles on Nord Stream, and less short, factual articles which are not very useful. By leaving out *Bild* I admit that I do not have a full understanding of the German news media discourse, however, that would always have been the case, because the media landscape of Germany is too diverse, and also includes for a large part online discourse as well. Nevertheless, I consider my sample to be representative of the general discourse because the discourse deals with a normative change in attitude towards Russia, which is widely accepted among Germans and Europeans as widespread support for Ukraine has shown, with outliers among the far-right and far-left (and, as the second discourse analysis shows, some citizens of MV). This means that the discourse surrounding this normative change and the subsequent stigmatisation of those who do not conform to this norm change should be broadly the same in all standard German media outlets. Another way in which my data collection represents the societal discourse well is the variety of articles I have selected, among the articles there are interviews, in-depth reports, field reports and opinion pieces. Within these different type of articles, the stigmatisation element in the discourse, as well as the counter-narrative to the stigma becomes clear through cross-referencing the texts. This means that it becomes possible to see the accepted behavioural norm repeated throughout

different types of media discourse, and shows that the editorial line follows this norm (Hansen, 2006, pp. 76-78).

A way in which I can easily scan through several months' worth of news, is by using the keywords "Schwesig" and "Mecklenburg-Vorpommern" when I search for the articles, but have only selected articles which were about Nord Stream 2. A preliminary search has shown that the keyword "Nord Stream" yields too many results which are unusable for the research question at hand. Most news articles which discuss Schwesig include mentions of Nord Stream, and almost all include MV (if only as a way to identify her as prime-minister of the state). Articles which do not mention either were left out of the collection process.

Because doing a discourse analysis allows me a certain level of reflexiveness, I have gathered data until I felt like I had an adequate grip on the discourse presented in the news media. I have set a timeframe for articles I analyse: from the beginning of 2022 to September 26, 2022, when the news about Nord Stream became dominated by the explosions. The explosions were an act of sabotage (believed to be done by Russia) which damaged both of the Nord Stream pipelines. This is the ending point for my data gathering, since this indicated a turn in a discourse. Even if the people of MV wished the pipeline to be opened, this now had become factually impossible. The discussion surrounding Nord Stream had been in the news before the war, but the war indicated a change in public opinion and policy concerning Nord Stream, it can be seen as a starting point for the stigmatisation of MV in that regard. In total, I have collected 35 news articles (of which 17 are directly quoted in the discourse analysis) out of ca. 100 articles which the search yielded. These 35 show clear signs of stigmatisation. In this main analysis, 17 of these articles are used for direct quotes which are analysed. The sentiments of all quotes, if not the direct wording, are consistently repeated in articles which are not quoted but are a part of my collected materials.

For my first discourse analysis, I rely upon official statements related to Nord Stream made by the former and current prime-ministers of MV. This led to a relatively small sample size of 6 sources, since Nord Stream was not discussed as a separate issue that often by the government officials. The timeframe for these articles is larger than for my second and larger discourse analysis, as it includes statements made by SELLERING since the announcement of Nord Stream 1 in 2011. I have gathered two press releases from the state government of MV done by Erwin SELLERING, prime-minister at that time and one speech of him in the state parliament. I have also

collected two speeches in the local parliament by Manuela Schwesig, and one speech of her in the national parliament. These have been chosen because they are the most notable occasions of Nord Stream 2 being discussed in state politics.

2.5. Limitations

One issue this research faces is that in the articles, it sometimes is difficult to assess whether the writer is attributing certain negative emotions to Schwesig as a person, or to MV. It is therefore paramount that I always apply the centre-periphery informed critical lens to the analysis. This is made easier by the extensive literature, which has showed nodal points in the discourse which indicate a centre-periphery dimension. Because I analyse articles about a female leader, negative emotions coming through in the data can also come from a patriarchal bias, rather than being a reflection of the stigmatisation by the elites in the centre. However, with the guidance of the theoretical framework, and the reflexivity that CDA allows I feel like multiple readings are enough to discern the intentions of the authors. Next to this, there are still general criticism of CDA and discourse analysis in general, such as its overfocus on language (the introduction of multimodal discourse analyses should disprove this), and its limited theory-building power that hinders the bringing of social change (Henderson, 2005, p. 4).

Additionally, I should address the fact that I am not a native German speaker. However, I have learnt the language from a very young age and my native language is closer to German than English is, which allows me to easily understand literary and grammatical context. For the reading of texts, I am bound to the socio-cultural context of my own culture, and the same goes for my interpretations and translations (Alghamdi, 2014, pp. 120-122). Discourse analysts often struggle with this issue, balancing between being too distant or too involved in a cultural discourse. CDA, however, does not require for the analyst to be impartial to issues, as its goal is to actively promote social change. Therefore, and because my understanding of the German language and culture is quite extensive, I have been able to conduct the analysis without any major risk of misinterpretation.

3. Elites, Nord Stream and the German news media

Having established the methodological background for this thesis, it is now time to turn our attention towards the case study. This empirical part of the paper is divided into four sections. The first section provides some background information on MV and its peripheral status. It lists several aspects of peripherality from social and economic processes. Before turning towards the communicative process and stigmatisation, the second section is a short discourse analysis of speeches given by MV's current and last prime ministers, relating to Nord Stream and its impact on MV. The speeches are analysed from the centre-perspective, and this research shows that Nord Stream 1 and 2 were attempts to de-peripheralise MV. The idea that the Nord Stream projects were meant to contribute to a de-peripheralisation attempt for MV connects the theoretical concepts laid out in the first chapter and the main analysis of this chapter. If the goal of the elites in MV was to de-peripheralise their state, and Nord Stream is a way to achieve this, then this explains the vehement defensiveness of the project, and the subsequent stigmatisation which MV. The third section of this chapter is dedicated to the main analysis of German news articles mentioning Schwesig and Nord Stream 2, and focuses how her involvement with Nord Stream 2 lead to the stigmatisation of MV. The fourth section is a discussion of the results following the analysis.

3.1. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern as a periphery

MV is one of the 16 *Bundesländer* in Germany, it is located in the northeast of the country, next to the Polish border at the coast of the Baltic sea. As mentioned, MV is one of the five federal states which used to be under Soviet occupation when they were a part of East Germany. From these 5, MV has the lowest population density, making it the state with the lowest population density in all of Germany with only 69 inhabitants per square kilometer (Kulke, 2020, p. 177). This is one of the most easily identified indicators of the peripheral status of the state, but not the only one. Population statistics, after all, tell us little about socioeconomic circumstances in the state, nor is it an adequate reflection of its spatial status. MV is located north of Brandenburg, which is adjacent to Berlin, on its southern border, and is also quite close to the federal city of Hamburg to its East. Therefore, it does not occupy an isolated position in German topography. Geographically then, apart from its history of being located in East Germany, MV cannot be considered to be defined as a spatial periphery. Despite having the highest amount of hectares of agricultural land per company and large areas of MV being dedicated to farming projects, the agricultural sector does not provide much employment for

the people of MV, because of technological innovation in farming equipment at the end of the last century (ibid., p. 166; Tamásy and Klein, 2020, pp. 362-368).

After the reunification of Germany, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern has slowly become more and more peripheral. It used to be the federal state with the youngest average population, but since 1990 it has become one of the states with the oldest average population. Next to this, the population has shrunk considerably, with one out of five inhabitants dying or passing away in the time between 1990 and 2013. The population shrinkage is made worse by high numbers of outmigration of young and educated people. The shrinkage expected to only increase in the future, as more and more young people leave the state in order to pursue higher education or find jobs. The life expectancy in the state is also lower than most other states in East Germany and all states in West Germany (Corthier, 2020, pp. 391-393). One of the results of the shrinking population is the growing lack of social services. Because of the population shrinkage in – mostly rural – areas, it becomes no longer possible to offer certain services. One of the first services which disappears is that of primary education for children. This in turn leads to young families leaving to live in places closer to educational centres (Heinrichs, 2010, pp. 89-92; Corthier, 2020, p. 398). Another pressing issue that stems from population decline in MV is the lack of public transport options. Outside from the capital Schwerin, which is the only settlement in MV with large growth potential, the situation is dire (Henn and Schäfer, 2020, p. 91). Studies show that 25 to 30% of cities and villages in MV are no longer connected to any form of public transportation (Steinführer, 2020, p. 382). Deteriorating access to public facilities, among them schooling and public transportation, is seen by many scholars as part of the peripheralisation process, as it impacts people's social lives as well as the cultural, medical and educational sector (Binder and Antje Matern, 2020, p. 1049; Heinrichs, 2010, p. 90; Nagy et al., p. 144; Fischer-Tahir and Naumann, 2013, p. 17; Mihály, 2020, p. 2-3; Naumann and Reichert-Schick, 2013, p. 148; Burdack, Nadler and Woods, 2015, p. 335).

Lack of social services and the shrinking population are not the only indications of the peripheral status of MV, there are also quite some economic factors of concern in the state. The first is the high level of unemployment. Unemployment generally is high in the East German states, but it is highest in MV. Unemployment has steadily increased in most places outside of Schwerin (Richter and Schiller, 2020, p. 126). Furthermore, the high unemployment rate is indivisible from a lack of jobs for highly qualified individuals. This in turn, means that the wages in MV are lower than in other parts of Germany (Niebuhr, 2007, pp. 2-4). The average

household income in MV is the second lowest of all German states, just above Brandenburg (Statista, 2020). MV is also tied with Saxony-Anhalt as the worst federal state when it comes to debt from private persons (Scheuplein, 2020, p. 116). Lastly, MV is also one of the federate states who have been hit hardest by the sanctions applied to Russia since 2014. Its largest industries, the maritime and the agricultural industry relied heavily on trade with Russia (Jung, 2022, pp. 280-281). In general, the former East German states have been hit harder by the sanctions (Schwandt, 2018). Overall, from the information above, we can conclude that MV is a periphery within Germany, in the geo-economic and social sense. Now, I discuss how Nord Stream impacted MV, and what its inhabitants think of Nord Stream 2 and the federal government's decision to freeze the usage of the terminal.

In MV, particularly in the city of Lubmin where the terminals end, annual profit of Nord Stream 2 in taxes alone would have been over 2 million euros (which would have surpassed the taxes paid on Nord Stream 1). Furthermore, the town benefited from cultural and educational exchanges with Russia, even going as far as having a yearly "Russia Day" which celebrated the longstanding historic and cultural ties the state shared with Russia. Employment under Nord Stream 2 was very limited, but the financial benefits were undeniable (Solomon, 2022). Nord Stream 2 also attracted at least 80 million in investments for the construction of the terminal via the so-called *Stiftung Klima- und Umweltschutz MV* "Foundation for Climate and Environmental Protection MV" (Henceforth: the FCEP) (NDR, 2021).

Surveys indicate that 40% of inhabitants in MV regrets the failure of Nord Stream 2. Against that 42% of those asked support the federal government's decision to halt the inauguration of the pipeline. The other 18% is undecided (Zeit Online, 29 April 2022). According to a Germany-wide survey, support for the government's policy to not use Nord Stream 2 is around 53%, with 39% stating that they would prefer if it opened because of the gas shortage. This smaller group which support Nord Stream 2 is consists of about 60% East Germans, and 56% West Germans (NTV, 2022).⁵ While the closure of Nord Stream 2 did secure the approval of the general public, we can see that those in favour of the project continuing are still quite high, especially in MV.

⁵ Important to note is that all these survey result are from before the explosions in late September 2022, i.e. the surveyed assumed the use of Nord Stream 2 at full capacity.

3.2. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Nord Stream

This section consists of two parts and is a short discourse analysis of speeches and press statements given by MV's last two prime ministers: Erwin Sellering, who was prime-minister at the time of the announcement of Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2, and Manuela Schwesig, who is the current prime-minister of MV and was there throughout the political debates following the project, starting with the sanctions applied by the United States of America and accumulating in the cancellation of the project and the corruption scandal of the FCEP sponsored by Nord Stream AG.

In 2009, the state government of MV announced the build of a large gas infrastructure project which would secure German energy supplies for a long time to come. The pipeline Nord Stream 1 would be built along the coastal line of MV and go on land there in the port of Stralsund, before it would transition into a land-based pipeline in the town of Greifswald. After the plans got approved, Sellering said the following:

Q1: *"This is useful to us in MV, because it ensures and gives us labour opportunities in our region."* (State Government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2009).

Thus, outwardly, the project is not only advertised for its usefulness for the German gas supply, but it is specifically mentioned how the project will bring jobs to the region. This is repeated by Sellering's ministry for economy, Jürgen Seidel, who states that it is:

Q2: *"An important signal for the economy."* (ibid.)

Seidel was also sure to mention that there would be over 4 billion euros of investments connected to the construction in MV alone.

In 2010, the federal policy of the *Energiewende* was announced. A large majority of the German public and its politicians wished to get rid of their nuclear energy, and - in time – coal-based energy. The result was a policy that favors renewable sources of energy, and other resources which would be less environmentally taxing than coal, such as gas. Sellering spoke out in a debate in the *Landtag* (parliament) of MV, on the opportunities the *Energiewende* could offer the state.

Q3: *It's all about bringing capital to MV. We have to build up our state as an electricity exporter and the creation of value in our state.* (Sellering in the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2011).

As becomes clear in the discourse, Nord Stream is intended as a “between” energy solution in the *Energiewende*, while Germany builds up its technical expertise of renewable energy, and turns away from the coal-based energy supply. In 2011, when SELLERING speaks, MV’s reputation as an energy supplier started with Nord Stream 1. While Nord Stream is not mentioned directly in this speech by SELLERING, it is underlying his points. Without the initial success of Nord Stream, the energy turn in MV would have been more of an abstract concept. By the time of SELLERING’s speech, parliamentarians already had seen some of the results of the investments Nord Stream generated, and MV already was known for its energy supply.

In a press statement after the location of the build for Nord Stream 2 became known in 2016, SELLERING reacted positively:

Q4: *Around 150 jobs are to be created in the concrete coating plant for the duration of the project. Mukran will once again become an important logistics centre for the construction of the pipeline through the Baltic Sea.* (State Government of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2016).

Again, we see how he emphasises the local jobs the projects will bring. He also touches upon the pride of a harbor town becoming a logistic centre again, indicating that it was once before and has since fallen out of grace. In order to make it more clear, he repeats how local companies will contribute to the construction:

Q5: *“As a result, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern will also benefit directly from the construction of the second Baltic Sea pipeline.”* (ibid.)

In the first chapter, we related loss of labor spaces to a socio-economic process of peripheralisation. In this chapter we have seen that MV has high unemployment rates and not as much job opportunities as other states. By highlighting that jobs will be created by the project, as well as mentioning investments that benefit the local economy, it is clear that Nord Stream 1 and 2 were at least partially projects that intended to contribute to a de-peripheralisation process in MV.

Manuela Schwesig was appointed new prime-minister of MV after SELLERING had to quit due to a serious illness in 2017. In her inaugural speech in the state’s parliament, she mentions several economic and social conditions she wishes to improve with her policies in the coming years. Most of these conditions are the result of peripheralisation. Her main goal is developing

the economy of MV with the creation of new jobs and higher wages, and more opportunities so people no longer have to move to West Germany.

Q6: What definitely needs to improve in our country are wages. MV will only be able to compete with other regions in the long run if we have attractive wages. (Schwesig in the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2017).

Q7: Because despite all the progress made in the economy and on the labor market, our country is still lagging behind. Economic power and incomes are lower, unemployment and the risk of poverty are higher than elsewhere, and we have to work on that. (ibid.)

From the statement that MV is lagging behind other states economically, we can infer that it is seen a periphery. In her first quote, she mentions the necessity of competing with other states, which in the context of the whole speech relates more to a competition with West German states which can offer better and more opportunities for young and skilled people.

In the rest of her speech, she also mentions the importance of digitalization and internet access throughout the territory, and attracting high-educated labor force is also one of her priorities by developing industries and economic sectors that are not tourism, but rather high-tech. In this speech, Schwesig does not mention Nord Stream. However, we can see that many aspects of peripherality are touched upon, from poverty to unemployment to a lack of high-skilled laborers. She also mentions the lack of childcare facilities in rural areas, vocational opportunities for young people, bad access to healthcare despite the aging population, bad pensions and problems with internet access throughout the territory. These are all aspects of peripheralisation as discussed in chapter one, and also in this chapter. This speech shows that politicians acknowledge the issues MV as a periphery is facing, and make it their priority to combat them (ibid).

When it comes to Nord Stream 2, there are two speeches that are of importance here. The first is Schwesig's speech at the *Bundestag* (German national parliament) after the US threatened with sanctions if Germany continued with Nord Stream 2. Most of her speech highlights how important Nord Stream 2 is for the Energiewende as a transition technology, and how the project contributes to energy security for Germany and Europe. However, she also briefly touches upon the project's importance for MV. She discusses her visit to the harbor town of Mukran in MV, where construction for the project was being based from. When she talks about her visit to the town, she says:

Q8: *I don't know when you, as members of parliament, were on site at the Mukran port and spoke to the employees.* (Schwesig in the German Federal Parliament, 2020).

Although not outright accusing the parliamentarians of never visiting (in which she would use “if” not “when”), it is clear that there is an underlying accusation to the statement. It touches upon the disconnect between the centre (in the parliament in Schwesig) and the reality on the ground for those in the periphery (the harbor town threatened by US’s sanctions). The accusation is being strengthened by how she ends the paragraph:

Q9: *“And I would expect you to support the citizens of our state.”* (ibid).

In this sentence, she brings the general tone of the speech back to an “us-versus-them” mentality, especially considering her strong condemnation of the US’s sanctions plans and the innocence of Mukran in the whole. It paints MV as a small periphery standing up against a great power, and a centre on the world stage.

The last speech for this analysis was given by Schwesig in state parliament of MV and is her plea to the *Landtag* to approve of her proposed FCEP. This is one of the debates which directly mentions Nord Stream 2 in the regional parliament before February 2022 and Schwesig’s speech mentions on several occasions the importance the pipeline has for the state.

Q10: *The Baltic Sea pipeline is of course an important economic factor for the country.* (Schwesig in the Parliament of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, 2021).

Q11: *And that's why I want to say that it is an important factor for the port of Mukran, which has also been strengthened in the long term as a location for offshore projects... The Lubmin site also benefits from the construction of the pipeline with the two landing stations. Companies that equip special ships are based in MV.* (ibid.)

It is clear from her wording that MV benefits from Nord Stream using the port of Mukran as an example. Schwesig illustrates how Mukran now is a homebase for a specialized industry. She also talks about how the project creates jobs, particularly jobs with high wages.

Furthermore, there are several outlooks which come back in her counter-stigmatisation attempts from section 3.3.2.:

Q12: *And I have to say that I find it remarkable that people are now being criticized for standing up for the economy in their country.* (ibid.)

Q13: *And we all know that this project is controversial and ideologically contested. And that's why, if we go down this path, we have to be aware that we will also have to endure headwinds.* (ibid.)

Just like her other speech, her rhetoric usage here points to an “us-versus-them” effect. The message is clear: the periphery of MV is just doing their best to improve their economy, and now they are being criticized for it by the centre in Berlin. This project is clearly very beneficial for the MV economy, and the periphery should be allowed – and be prepared to – defend it against those who do not see that, or who do not care.

The main funding for the FCEP would be provided by Nord Stream AG, the interstate company in charge of Nord Stream 1 and 2. The main goal of the FCEP is to help complete the build of the pipeline (as admitted by Schwesig in the speech), however, in her speech she mostly frames it as a that would implement a lot of good projects in MV. This means again that in her words – directly and indirectly – Nord Stream as a project brings good things to MV, investments, employments with high wages and prestige for the towns involved. For the FCEP she says:

Q14: *I'm sure that the foundation will give us the opportunity to implement many, many good projects in our country in the years to come. This is what our state needs.* (ibid.)

In other words, Nord Stream can be seen as a project which de-peripheralises areas and towns in MV, and contributes to the de-peripheralisation of MV overall by contributing to the local economy.

From a centre-periphery perspective, the discourse by the highest of the political elites in MV in recent years has been enlightening. First, MV is framed clearly as a periphery. Of course, as politicians representing the state neither Sselling nor Schwesig is outright negative about MV, but they do talk about the high unemployment rate in the state, the low wages and the population exodus. Furthermore, especially Schwesig builds a discourse around MV versus the centre, whether this is West Germany or the US. MV in her discourse is always in need of defense and clearly on the opposite side of the centre, constructing it to be a periphery. This discourse is later used by her in her counter-narratives. Nord Stream, by Schwesig and Sselling, is being framed as a project that brings opportunities to MV. There are several indicators of peripheralisation that Nord Stream actively combats, such as unemployment, low wages and low-skill industries. Overall then, there is a compelling argument for Nord Stream

1 and 2 being classified as de-peripheralisation projects championed by MV's elites. What is harder to pick up on in the discourse, is that the FCEP and overall any dealings between Nord Stream and the government of MV is a part of foreign policy, and particularly Germany's Russia policy. Although the federal German government made the decisions on Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2, MV had its own foreign policy course as well. This aligned with the policy of the German government, which, in its *Ostpolitik* was friendly towards Russia. Partially this can be explained by shared cultural ties and general attitude of the German government, but also because Germany was (and to an extent, is) very dependent on gas and oil imports from Russia. Nord Stream 1 and 2 are the outcome of this dependency. Because Germany did not diversify its gas supply, it was a big change in policy when Nord Stream 2 was cancelled. Not only was it a policy change, it also come with a normative change in behaviour. The *Ostpolitik* pursued the last few years by the German government and MV's government alike was no longer morally justifiable, and became subject to heavy scrutiny. Nowhere was this scrutiny more felt than in MV, which experienced stigmatisation as a result, as the next section expands on. Therefore, despite MV being a case study of a region in Germany, the overall research is based on international relations between Germany and Russia.

3.3. Nord Stream 2 and the stigmatisation of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern

In section 1.3, I discuss the processes of stigmatisation, which is a way in which a periphery is produced and reproduced discursively by the consistent use of repetitive stereotypes and images (Bürk, 2013, pp. 169-172). I laid out how the process of stigmatisation is done by a stigmatising group of actors. In the case of this research the stigmatising elites are those involved in the constructing of the news articles on MV and Nord Stream 2 from a centre-perspective. My discourse analysis thus focuses on how the discourse by the stigmatising actors contributes to the stigmatisation of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The full process of stigmatisation includes the stigma set out by the stigmatising group as the first step, and secondly the internalization of the stigma by the stigmatised group. This research concerns itself with the first part of the process, as it is not possible to tell yet what the effects of the stigmatisation language are on the inhabitants of MV in the long run. It is, however, possible to recognize forms of stigmatisation language in recent news articles in the German press, and analyse the effect they might have on the stigmatised group. The main thing to note here is that stigmatisation of MV in the media is not new, the community has longer been stigmatised on account of its peripheral status, as both chapter 1 and the first part of this chapter have shown.

However, the stigmatisation discussed in these following sections is caused by the change in the behavioural norm vis-à-vis Russia, made by Germany (and many other countries) after Russia's war in Ukraine in February 2022. Following the norm change, the accepted behaviour went from maintaining a friendly dialogue with Russia to behaving in a way that no longer can be interpreted as being pro-Russia. This analysis highlights the discursive struggle which ensued around this norm, from stigmatisation from the centre's part in order to enforce the norm, to counter-narratives and denial of the stigma coming from the periphery.

The analysis does touches briefly upon how the stigmatised deal with the stigmas they are confronted with, which can result in the denial of the stigma or the development of a counter-narrative. We see this especially coming back in direct quotes from elites in MV. The analysis on the stigmatisation of MV is structured along three forms of stigmatisation which became clear on my initial read-throughs of the data. They are: centre-stigmatisation, top-down self-stigmatisation (elite-stigmatisation) and bottom-up self-stigmatisation. Self-stigmatisation in this context does not mean that the actors stigmatise themselves to themselves (thus, internalize the stigma), but rather that they exhibit behaviour or contribute to the discourse in a way which can be interpreted negatively by the centre, as this shows a deviation from the generally accepted norm to not behave in a way which can be seen as a friendly or forgiving attitude towards Russia. The analysis of both forms of self-stigmatisation include the analysis of counter-narratives that elites and citizens of MV try to develop in order to combat the stigma of them being pro-Russia. Centre-stigmatisation is solely an analysis of stigmatising language used by elites.

The data is split according to which type of stigmatisation takes place in the article in question, and discussed in light of the research question: how does peripheral-elite involvement in Nord Stream 2 lead to the stigmatisation of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern? The analysis also includes references to MV's peripheral status, and how the stigmatisation relates to this. The three forms of stigmatisation are closely related to each other, and there might be significant overlap between the three. The difference between them is based on *who* is doing the stigmatisation (MV's elites, MV's citizens, or actors from the centre), but in the end all these forms of stigmatisation are being engaged with by the stigmatised actors. In the data set of 35 articles, there is not an even division of stigmatisation. Most stigmatisation is done by the centre (in 15 articles), followed by elites from MV (15 articles). Bottom-up self-stigmatisation is the

rarest form of stigmatisation and occurs only in 5 articles. Because the data is gathered with the keyword Manuela Schwesig, many articles focus on critiquing political elites in MV.

3.3.1. Centre-stigmatisation

Centre-stigmatisation is the main type of stigmatisation which was introduced in section 1.3 of this research. This is because media discourse is mainly controlled by an group of stigmatising elites of journalists, columnists and editors from the centre. This analysis is about on the centre's perpetuation of the stigmatisation image of MV as a pro-Russia peripheral place. Stigmatisation is one of the ways in which a periphery gets constructed by the centre (the communicative process), and focuses on the discursive construction of the periphery (Kühn, 2015). Generally, news media are important discursive actors (Naumann and Reichert-Schick, 2013, p. 145; Schmalz, Singe and Hasenohr, 2021, p. 6). Media coming from the periphery is less likely to stigmatise the periphery, because of their smaller readership. National newspapers reach more people, which means that the stigmatizing discourse spreads further and faster and they capture the full extent of the societal discourse better.

Stigmatising elites have the upper hand in the construction of the discourse. Journalists and editors get to decide on the “agenda-setting” in the discourse. Generally, they tend to follow the political agenda, e.g. when the report revealed that the FCEP was controversial, there was a lot of media coverage on the topic. They also get to decide the tone of their articles, and influence the political agenda in turn. This is because the media acts as an intermediary between politicians and the citizens (Fawzi, 2017, pp. 1-6). It is impossible to fulfil this bridging function without bringing biases, prejudices and stigmas to the articles, which is how stigmatisation takes place (Hess, Tandoc Jr. and Westlund, 2022). They are the main responsible actor for the stigmatising sentiments circling the societal discourse, since they are the gatekeepers to the discourse (Chen et al., 2022, p. 24).

Q15: In the summer of 2016, the SPD incumbent at the time, Erwin Sellering, did pretty badly in the polls. Then he repeatedly emphasized an issue: the Russia sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 must be dismantled! Sellering won convincingly. Many citizens also supported him because of his clearly pro-Russian stance. Schwesig, on the other hand, was elected last fall with a sensational 39.6 percent of the votes – just months after pushing

ahead with the construction of the pipeline. (Hähnig and Nejezchleba, 20 April 2022; for similar sentiments in the discourse, see also Schuler and Steffen, 2022).

Q16: *It all begins well before her term of office: the pipeline from Russia is to land in a small Baltic Sea resort called Lubmin, in an underdeveloped area. When Schwesig became Prime Minister in 2017, she campaigned for the pipeline that had been planned for years. Because for MV, gas is a bridge technology to the energy transition. And because she sees close ties to Russia as an opportunity: for stability in Europe, for prosperity in MV. Incidentally, many of the voters like Russia and, accordingly, pro-Russian politicians.* (Nejezchleba, 27 May 2022; for similar, see also Bangel, 2022).

These two quotes show the context in which the stigmatisation of MV by the centre takes place: namely, critique of Manuela Schwesig, the SPD and Erwin Sellering. Almost all articles from my dataset have a main focus of critiquing Schwesig's policies, or the general pro-Russia attitude of Germany's political elite – particularly the CDU and the SPD, but on the extreme ends of the political spectrum also *Die Linke* and the *Alternative für Deutschland* (Wood, 2020). One might expect that the stigmatisation by the centre may thus only affect the aforementioned elites. However, this section shows that that is rarely the case. By critiquing Schwesig or Sellering very often the negative sentiments carry over to MV as a whole.

Quote number 15 shows how this works. It comes from an article which details how Manuela Schwesig rose to power within her state, and argues this can be factored to her consistent pro-Russian policies. In the quote, it is described how her predecessor, Erwin Sellering, managed to hold onto his position as prime-minister by repeatedly stating that the sanctions against Russia must be taken down. The article goes on to say how Schwesig followed this line of thinking, and this resonated with her voters. This idea is repeated in quote 16: “*many of the voters like Russia*”. However, in Schwesig's election campaign back in 2021, the short party program from the SPD mentions Russia only once, in saying that MV values its relationship with states on the Baltic Sea (SPD MV Kurzprogramm, 2021). The larger party program mentions Russia 5 times, including criticisms of its human rights record (Regierungsprogramm 2021-2016). Furthermore, neither programme mentions Nord Stream 2 or a preference for a discontinuation of the sanction regime (Shagina and Westphal, 2021, pp. 4). The importance of Russia for the voters of MV is exaggerated in this article, and contributes to the stigmatisation notion of MV being a state full of *Russlandversteher*. Lastly, note the use

of “underdeveloped” for describing the area around Lubmin. Quote 35 and 36 divulge more on this peripheral form of stigmatisation.

Q17: But what is driving the SPD government in MV to get so vehemently committed to the pipeline? What will Nord Stream 2 bring to the state? The overall economic benefits should be manageable. In fact, only three percent of all exports from MV go to Russia. “The Russian love of many governments in East Germany cannot be explained with economic data alone,” says Joachim Ragnitz, an economist at the Ifo Institute in Dresden. (Dausend et al. 2022).

Q18: And yet: MV’s strange love affair with Moscow is difficult to explain with economic arguments or concerns about jobs. In 2021, Russia was far behind, in 10th place in the state’s foreign trade balance. (Gathmann et al., 2022; for similar, see also Der Spiegel, 20 May 2022).

These quotes are part of a larger set of articles which discuss the economic benefits MV got out of the deal with Nord Stream and the FCEP. The discourse here moves vehemently in the direction Schwesig tried to stir it away from with the introduction of her counter-narrative that MV needed the money: namely that MV did not profit that much at all. The main arguments here is that exports to Russia from MV are very low, and that Nord Stream did not provide many direct jobs for MV’s citizens. However, we have seen before that this notion is very limited. It has been proven that at least the town of Lubmin was set to receive tax payments from Nord Stream 2, that quite some local companies were involved in the construction of Nord Stream 2 and that the culture, education and sports sector in MV greatly benefited from grants and sponsorships coming directly from the FCEP (See: Klimkeit and Steffen, 2022; Gathmann et al., 2022). Therefore, Schwesig’s counter-narrative which we can see in the next section is a more accurate portrayal of Nord Stream’s importance for MV.

Downplaying the economic importance of Nord Stream 2 for MV can be seen as contributing to stigmatisation. Not only because it disrupts the counter-stigmatisation attempt by Schwesig, but also because it makes it seem like MV’s citizens desire for the opening of the pipeline is useless, since they would have gained next to nothing anyway. Furthermore, in recent years trade with Russia has indeed been not that important for MV’s economy, but that is because their export sector has been hit hardest by the sanction regime implemented since 2014 (Schwandt, 2018; Meister, 2019). While the push for the pipeline from MV’s local politicians and citizens may not be morally justifiable, downplaying the economic significance

of Nord Stream 2 for the state contributes to the centre's ignorance of the periphery's economic needs (Förtner, Belina, Naumann, 2020, p. 6).

Q19: For the past several years, Russian money has played a decisive role in the north-eastern state. Whenever the notoriously cash-strapped shipyards in MV were in crisis, Moscow was an obvious place to look for millions in bailout money, sometimes the only option. (Gathmann et al., 2022 for similar, see also Der Spiegel, 17 May 2022).

Q20: The receiving station for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is in the Baltic Sea resort of Lubmin. With the end of the project, the hopes of many people here have also been dashed. The transfer station is still in operation and will also be needed in the future. (Latsch, 2022; for similar, see also Schuler and Steffen, 2022).

Lubmin being defined as an underdeveloped area in quote 31 set the tone for the type of stigmatisation discussed in section 1.3, which contributes to peripheralisation. This means that the discourse moves in a direction which attaches peripheral qualities to a place. The usage of the word underdeveloped is a clear example of this. In the two text samples above, this peripheralising discourse and the subsequent peripheralisation also comes through. The first quote directly relates to what this research so far has set out to do: link MV's peripheral status to its stigmatisation. The stigmatising moment here lies with the choice of wording. "Cash-stripped shipyards" invokes a strong image of poverty. The idea that the hopes of the local population has been crushed by the cancellation of Nord Stream 2 also plays into the mechanism of dependency of MV on Russia. This rhetoric contributes to the stigma of Germany's peripheral areas having no opportunities for those who live there, and feeds into the narrative of MV being reliant upon Russia.

Q21: From their retrospective self-awareness, many East Germans believed they understood Russia and Putin better than the West, because they learned Russian, vacationed in Sochi and knew Russian songs. They were a bit ahead of the West Germans there, a head start in terms of competence. (Rennefanz, 2022).

This quote is part of a column goes further than just targeting MV, instead all of the former East-German federate states receive the stigma of *Russlandversther*. Most articles which follow this line of stigmatisation are limited to criticism of East-German politicians, such as Schwesig or Merkel, however there are some articles - such as the one this quote is from -

which extend this critique to the East-German people. The column's main intention is to critique East German politicians who suddenly show solidarity with Ukraine, while they have ignored Russia's aggressive behaviour for years. However, in order to set the tone for this, the column starts with describing East Germany's feeling of superiority regarding understanding Russia better than the West, which this quote shows. This is part of a wider societal discourse which divides Germany along its former borders. Whether it is East-German towns (Lang, 2012; Bürk, 2013), East-German culture (Miethe, 2019), or East-German politicians (Nejezchleba, 18 March 2022), the idea that there is a difference between them and the West is perpetuated in the discourse. By the centre, which this example shows, but also by East-Germans themselves, as the section on self-stigmatisation lays out. The stigma that East Germans are able to understand Putin and Russia better than West Germans, perpetuated by the centre and East Germans alike, casts former East German states again in a negative light of being *Russlandversteher*s.

Q22: Mecklenburg-Gazprommern (Feldenkirchen, 2022, for similar sentiments in the discourse, see also Der Spiegel, 19 April 2022; Thuman, 2022; Der Spiegel 18 May 2022).

Q23: In fact, nowhere is the fight for Nord Stream 2 as hard as in MV. Nowhere are the lines between the SPD and Russia as short as in the north-east. MV, Russia's deputy trade minister once said during an appearance in Rostock, is "an outpost in Europe" for Moscow. (Dausend et al., 2022; for, see also Bangel, 2022; Thuman, 2022).

Q24: Elsewhere, however, the halt to the pipeline approval process is causing concern. The main loser would be MV, which is linked to the pipeline like no other federal state. (Klimkeit and Steffen, 2022; for similar, see also Kollenbroich, Latsch and Ziegler, 2022; Ziegler, 2022).

The last stigma which is very much pushed forward by the centre, and is noticeably absent in the other types of stigmatisation, is the notion that MV is intrinsically linked together with Nord Stream 2. So far, we have established that the tax income and the grants by Nord Stream AG have been highly beneficial to the state, and that losing this source of income was a tough pill to swallow for politicians and citizens alike. We have also seen that the political elites of MV have had close ties to Nord Stream AG, and by extension Russia, as the FCEP has highlighted. However, as quotes 19 and 20 showed, the importance of Nord Stream 2 for MV can also be overestimated in the discourse, which increase the stigma of MV's dependency upon Russia. Underestimation of the meaning of Nord Stream for the state, on the other hand, as described under quotes 17 and 18, can lead to the neglect of MV's peripheral status and

difference in economic needs from the centre. This shows that getting the balance right can be quite tricky. In quote 22 to 24 this is once again demonstrated.

The effect of the wording in these quotes is that the policy enacted by the state government of MV gets equalized with the entire state, not just the government. Mecklenburg-Gazprommern is a title of a column that criticizes the state government and Schwesig in particular, however the effect of the wording is that the whole state of MV is implied to be in league with Gazprom. The repetition of a Russian official – not the most reliable source of objectivity – of MV being an “outpost of Moscow” is stigmatizing, as it adds to fuel to the discourse of MV being completely being under the influence of Russia. Whereas the opposition in MV has a longstanding record of opposing Nord Stream, so not even the entire political elite can be counted as being pro-Putin (NDR, 9 June 2022). The use of hyperboles and generalization in these examples, as well as in most other articles that have been collected, thus contributes to the stigma of the state of MV being completely pro-Russia.

3.3.2. Top-down self-stigmatisation and counter-stigmatisation

In the current case, top-down self-stigmatisation (referred to as elite-stigmatisation, as it is done by the elites of MV) is stigmatising language coming from the political elites of MV. This occurs when they refer to MV in a way that can be interpreted as negative. This type of stigmatisation is thus a consequence of either direct language choices of these elites. The quotes in this section come from news articles. The main stigmatisation which is discussed in this section comes from the elites of MV themselves, so the quotes here are directly made by them. This section focuses on how these quotes can lead to the stigmatisation of MV. The second discourse that is identified in this section is that of counter-stigmatisation (or, the development of counter-narratives) by the elites of MV. It is also possible to see this line of counter-stigmatisation in the bottom-up form of self-stigmatisation coming from the citizens of MV. Before February 2022, the government of MV was pursuing a pro-Russia policy, not in the least because of Nord Stream 2, but also because generally East German states have more Russia-friendly foreign policies in lieu of their shared past. After February 2022, the government of MV changed course together with the German federal government, and was much more critical and disapproving of Russia. However, as the quotes in this section indicate, MV’s political elites continued to defend their prior positions and tried to justify it.

Simultaneously, as section 3.3.3. shows, MV became stigmatised in the media discourse as a pro-Russia community. In this section we can see the development of a counter-narrative which is pushed by MV's elites, which is often accompanied by their justifications for their past pro-Russia policy. Most of the direct quotes discussed in this section come from Schwesig in her capacity as prime-minister of MV. To a lesser extent, there are also quotes featured from Christian Pegel, the interior minister of MV. Other officials – apart from Sellering – are not quoted as much.

The very first quotes discussed here are made by Schwesig and refer to MV's ongoing partnership with the Leningrad region, which was halted after February 2022. This partnership was criticized by journalists and the political opposition alike after Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine. To the critique, Schwesig defended her position on the partnership these last years.

Q25: As a state, we have always supported this criticism. Nevertheless, Germany has never completely broken the bridges to Russia for decades. We in MV have also kept up dialogue and cooperation, especially with our Russian partner region, the Leningrad region, because we and I thought that dialogue could change things for the better. (Schwesig quoted in Zeit Online, 30 March 2022; for similar, see also Mestermann, 2022).

Q26: I stand by the fact that we had a dialogue with the Leningrad region. It was about cooperation in business, science and culture. In principle, it is always good to be in dialogue, even with difficult partners. (Schwesig quoted in Lebert and Machowecz, 2022).

Q27: In recent years, the state has focused on dialogue and exchange with Russia in business, science, culture and between young people from both countries, Schwesig continued. "The current development is all the more painful for us." (Zeit Online, 28 January 2022).

The first thing to notice from these quotes is Schwesig's usage of "we" and "us" when discussing the former Russia policy of the state. Her wording implies that the whole state of MV, and all its 1.6 million inhabitants were somehow involved in a dialogue with Russia. According to Titus Ensink, the use of the plural form indicates that she is not just speaking as prime-minister on behalf of the state government, but that she is speaking from the perspective of the state of MV. The wording she uses implies she is acting as the representative of her citizens culture and belief systems. She holds opinions that do not fit the new behavioural norm, and with this counter-narrative she is trying to appeal to the wider audience (Ensink, 1996).

Still, the main responsible actor for the dialogue with the Leningrad region was the government, not the citizens of MV, making her wording seem like she is shifting responsibility.

The second thing to notice is that there is no clear indication of regret in her words, she even reiterates the importance of dialogue, even with “difficult partners”. Difficult is a euphemism when describing Russia, its annexation of Crimea, the poisoning of Navalny and the Skripal affair. She defends the past dialogue with Russia in her quotes, but this can still lead to stigmatisation as it will be interpreted through the current normative lens, and the past behaviour clearly deviates from the changed norm. These quotes do not only reflect badly on Schwesig, but also on the whole of MV because of her consistent use of “us” and “we”, whereas it is unclear whether her constituents share her sentiments. As Fairclough notes, the use of rhetoric can “misrepresent as well as represent realities” (Fairclough, 2006). Schwesig’s rhetoric here represents a reality in which the whole of MV stood behind her policy of dialogue in the first place, and in the second place is grappling with the painful end to the partnership of Russia. The reality however, is more unclear and nuanced than this, and the main responsibility for failed policy should lie with the government, not the citizens of MV.

In fact, Schwesig uses rhetoric to represent a certain reality which fits her belief-system more often. This is most visible when she is directly quoted on the subject of her election, which took place in the autumn of 2021.

Q28: *"Six months ago there was a state election in MV. And the citizens confirmed me in my office with a large majority, with a strong vote by the citizens," said Schwesig at a meeting with her northern German counterparts in Kiel. "That's why the people in MV can also rely on me continuing to live up to this expectation and trust of the citizens." (Zeit Online, 21 April 2022; for similar, see also Der Spiegel, 20 August 2022).*

This quote comes after several calls for her to step down from office after the reveal that her proposed FCEP was used to fund Nord Stream 2. The implication of this in the discourse was that Nord Stream AG had a considerable hold over the state government because of the FCEP. Her intention with her wording is to deflect from calls for her removal, and reiterate that she has the support of the public. Nevertheless, her political position during in the spring of 2022 was very different than in the autumn of 2021. Recent surveys showed that only 31% of respondents in East Germany still support Schwesig, against 46% who reject her (Der Spiegel,

20 May 2022). She still represents them as their elected official, but the polls show the people do not deem her as reliable as she says she is.

The counter-narrative pushed forward by MV's political elite is most prevalent in the discourse when Nord Stream and the FCEP get discussed, as the following quotes and the subsequent analysis show.

Q29: *"Always in the interest of the state of MV." It was about economic power, jobs in the country, the interests of the ports and the energy supply of the future. "But also about environmental protection and protecting local companies from sanctions," said Schwesig, referring to the controversial climate protection foundation. (Zeit Online, 20 April 2022; for similar, see also Der Spiegel, 22 April 2022).*

Q30: *Employees of our port on Rügen were written to by senators from America and threatened with sanctions. Other companies were invited by the US government to a kind of tribunal via video conference. Not all of these companies are internationally active. But they noticed that suddenly their banks, their insurance companies, were starting to ask questions. (Pegel quoted in Hähnig and Nejezchleba, 2022; for similar, see also Großbongardt et al., 2022).*

Q31: *"I was convinced that it was right to continue supporting the construction of the pipeline. For three reasons...third point was that companies from MV are involved in the construction. For example our state-owned port of Mukran... The pipeline was important for all of Germany.... Companies from our state were also involved in its construction. We didn't make this decision for Putin, but for our state." (Schwesig quoted in Lebert and Machowecz, 2022; for similar, see also Kollenbroich, Latsch and Ziegler, 2022).*

Q32: *"But I now see many citizens saying: "From our point of view, it was the right thing to do back then, today we look at it differently. Please stand firm.""* (Schwesig quoted in Lebert and Machowecz, 2022).

Q33: *"Do you understand that many citizens are upset by this half-hearted processing?" Pegel: "I hear very different opinions from the citizens. And I believe that most of them had similar hopes for cooperation between the EU and Russia as we do, namely to live together peacefully and to work together economically." (Pegel quoted in Hähnig and Nejezchleba, 2022).*

These five quotes come from interviews from *Die Zeit* with Manuela Schwesig and Christian Pegel, her interior minister. They are not just unitary occurrences in the discourse. To the contrary, they actually get repeated either word for word or paraphrased in various other articles by *Der Spiegel* and *Die Zeit*. The repetition of these sentiments by the newspapers contributes to the overall negative view of MV in the discourse, and increases the stigmatizing effects of these words (Hase, 2021, pp. 692-694; Bürk, 2013, pp. 169-172). It is possible to pick up on a specific discursive point in quotes 29 to 32, in which Pegel and Schwesig focus on the importance Nord Stream 2 had for MV. Their answers are given to questions about why the FCEP was set up, and what the use of it was. In the first place, the argument now goes, it was there to help MV's companies to avoid sanctions, and only in the second place was it meant to contribute to environmental protection of the state. Here then, we can see the clear development of a counter-narrative in their attempts to justify Nord Stream 2. In the counter-narrative, both Pegel and Schwesig closely link Nord Stream 2 to MV's prosperity and economic future, indicating that their choices were for the benefit of their state.

Schwesig and Pegel try to justify the FCEP's existence by framing the circumstances of its establishment as a "David vs. Goliath" matter. This is clearest in Q30, in which Pegel describes how employees and small businesses from MV were being "bullied" by the US to the extent they needed protection from the state government. In calling not all businesses "internationally active" Pegel attempts to construct a narrative around two points. Firstly, the US threatening MV's businesses is being framed as unacceptable. The reader is presented with an image of a small, local company run by only German-speakers who are suddenly taken to court by the US for something out of their control. Pegel's wording discursively constructs the businesses of MV as small, local actors in need of protection, rather than the specialised engineering companies they are. The second intention behind his wording is to exemplify that these businesses were not involved in some scheme with Russia. After all, they are not internationally active, they were just minding their own business in their own harbour. By making it seem like the protection of local businesses in MV was the initial goal of the state government when suggesting the FCEP, there is an attempt made to garner sympathy from an audience. However, the true goal of the state government and Nord Stream AG was to have enough money in a place to fund the rest of the build of Nord Stream 2 without having to worry about sanctions.

Furthermore, in the discourse there are repeated intentions of the state government trying to shift responsibility for their policy choices to the citizens of MV, which negatively frames

the whole state. Instead of referring to decisions made by “us” as we saw in the first two quotes, both Schwesig and Pegel say that they have heard from citizens how much their policy has been appreciated. It is not specified how many citizens have expressed their support for this policy, or whether or not these appreciative sentiments come from citizens who directly benefited from the policy (e.g. business owners who got to expand to the Leningrad area). Pegel also contributes to the stigmatisation his own constituency of MV, when asked if he understands why citizens are upsets.. In his answer, Pegel says he hears differently from citizens. In other words, according to him, the citizens of MV, feel differently than the rest of Germany. His implication that MV’s citizens shared the state government’s initiative for peaceful cooperation shows the periphery of MV as acting upon their agency and making their own choices. Schwesig’s quote about citizens of MV who “look at things differently today” adds to this implication that MV’s citizens feel different than the rest of Germany, and pursue their own interests. Here, we can also see a denial of the stigma, as her words indicate that the citizens of MV now feel differently about Russia, and therefore can no longer be labelled a pro-Russia community. Important to note is that her quote does not indicate any regret from the citizens’ (or the government) over their support for the pro-Russia policy.

The next two quotes are also are two attempts made by Schwesig to create a counter-narrative to the stigma of MV’s government being controlled by Russia.

Q34: *I don't think it's right that the finger is pointed at our federal state just because the pipeline lands here - while everyone else continues to be supplied with Russian gas every day, every hour.* (Schwesig quoted in Lebert and Machowecz, 2022; for similar, see also Der Spiegel, 27 April 2022).

Q35: *When I'm out and about in the state, I notice how upset people are. You're not asking me questions about the foundation, but about what we're doing to prevent the war from escalating and bring down energy prices. In the national average, we have the lowest incomes and the smallest pensions... In MV, we are at the forefront when it comes to renewables, we produce more than we need ourselves - but we have the most expensive electricity prices, which doesn't seem fair to me.* (Schwesig quoted in Lebert and Machowecz, 2022; for similar, see also Jacobsen, 2022).

In quote 34, it is possible to see the denial of the stigma, which can also be counted as a way of stigma management as seen in chapter 1 (Bürk, Kühn and Sommer, 2012, p. 340; Kühn and Bernt, 2013, p. 182). Schwesig points out that the amount of critique MV gets as a state is

unjustified since all other states benefited as well from Russian gas. She thus tries to draw attention away from the criticism of MV by implying that all of Germany was guilty of profiting of Russian gas, not just MV. Quote number 35 exemplifies the other counter-narrative, besides deflection, that Schwesig is trying to build. This narrative was also briefly visible in quotes 19-23. Her counter-argument to the criticism of MV's pro-Russia policy is that MV needed Nord Stream 2 to build up its economy. It has been unfairly treated by the rest of Germany, and relied on the investments of the pipeline project. We see that this narrative gets continued by the centre in section 3.3.1., in which it is used in a peripheralising way.

Schwesig and Pegel's rhetoric is meant to make the state government's actions justifiable (Mazlum and Afshin, 2016, pp. 167-168; Schaffner, 1996). When discussing stigmatisation, we established that usually there is a reaction to the application of the stigma by the stigmatised group, particularly leaders of that group. In this case, the stigmatised community is MV, and their leaders are the political elites. In her counter-narrative, Schwesig denies the stigma of her government being influenced by Russia, and does not show regret over the past pro-Russia policies of the state, rather we see her usage of "us" and "we" in an attempt to shift responsibility away from her government. We have also seen her trying to provide a counter-narrative to the stigma, in which she invokes the injustice that MV experience because of its peripheral status, and its subsequent necessity of Nord Stream 2 and the FCEP. This counter-narrative relies upon a denial of the stigma, as well as an explanation for the past pro-Russia behaviour from MV's elites and citizens. However, it does not manage to explain the current pro-Russia behaviour, such as the demonstrations discussed in section 3.3.3.

In the initial stigmatising discourse by the centre, MV's government was discursively to be under Russian influence. Schwesig's counter-narrative of stigma denial and explanation of the past policies tries to combat this stigma. However, her lack of regret in the light of criticism, which is a large part of her building a counter-narrative, does not manage to negate the stigma of MV being a pro-Russia state in the eyes of the centre, as it just attracts more criticism. In conclusion, MV's elites contributed to stigmatisation of the state by the centre, even if they did not intend to.

3.3.3. Bottom-up self-stigmatisation and counter-stigmatisation

The last type stigmatisation which is notable in the discourse is bottom-up self-stigmatisation. This is not the same as the peripheralised internalizing the stigma, which is the second part of the stigmatisation process. For this research, it means that behaviour of actors in the periphery garners negative attention from the centre, and opens the periphery up for stigmatisation in the discourse constructed by that centre. I have chosen to make it a separate category from elite-stigmatisation, because in general political elites have a lot more opportunity to get featured in media outlets, and thus also have more opportunity to make stigmatising statements. This explains why this section will have less quotes than the former and upcoming section. The result of bottom-up self-stigmatisation and counter-narrative building is the same as that of elite-stigmatisation, but is less frequently recorded. As the analysis shows, self-stigmatisation is harmful, because it can confirm prejudices and stigmas that the centre pushes in the discourse. What should not be overlooked is that self-stigmatisation in the context of this research only takes place when citizens are being given a platform by the centre (in this case: the journalists from *Der Spiegel* and *Die Zeit*), therefore, to an extent it is entangled with centre-stigmatisation. That is because societal discourse generally excludes marginalised actors, which would be most people living in the periphery apart from the political elites. Hence, the discourse is controlled by actors from the centre (Plüschke-Altöf, 2016, pp. 13-14). Nonetheless, this research operates from the assumption that a periphery has agency, because it is not a static entity like it was in portrayed in theories from the second half of the 20th century (Kühn, 2015, p. 368). Therefore, marginalised and peripheral actors may not have control over the societal discourse they are participating in, but they do control their actions which can contribute to their own stigmatisation.

Q36: *When you ring the manager's doorbell, you first hear that he doesn't want to talk. And then a conversation begins, initially about Putin's war. He should be condemned, says the man. But have you really tried everything to resolve the conflict diplomatically? To accommodate Russia?* (Nejezchleba, 18 March 2022).

Q37: *The foundation is a sponsor for the women's volleyball club SSC Schwerin. One does not want to say goodbye to it completely for the time being. The contractual relationship is suspended, but it has not yet been terminated.* (Nejezchleba, 18 March 2022; for similar, see also *Der Spiegel*, 13 May 2022).

Q38: *In hardly any other region in Germany is the lack of understanding about the energy crisis as great as here. Businessmen and mayors are clamoring for an end to sanctions on Russia, and the number of protesters is rising every week. According to the police, more than 10,500 people took to the streets in the state on Monday, more than anywhere else.* (Nejezchleba, 21 September 2022).

These quotes are not only direct citations, such as those used in the former sections. They are a combination of direct quotes, indirect quotes and descriptions of self-stigmatizing behaviour. In section 3.3.1., we saw that in many of the descriptions made by the centre use stigmatising language. That is also the case here, but the difference is that the stigmatizing part is just a factual description of the actual behaviour of the peripheral actors. That is different in the first section, where the behaviour of the peripheral elites is not just described, but also morally reflected upon. The recurring form of stigmatisation here is pretty clear: MV is discursively being portrayed as a state full of *Russlandversteher*. The above quotes show that this does not only apply to the state elites from the SPD and the CDU, but also follows the generalising line that Schwesig and Pegel had set out in their discourse: that the citizens of MV supported the state government in their pro-Russia policy.

The behaviour of MV's inhabitants can be seen as contributing to this negative stigma. The refusal of the volleyball club to completely cut ties with the FCEP, despite their entanglement with Nord Stream AG and the Russian government shows a clear deviation from the publicly accepted norm, which is to no longer conduct any relations with Russia. Popular opinion in Germany is generally pro-Ukraine, a survey indicates that around 70% of German supports the measures their country has taken to help Ukraine (Murray, 15 May 2022). Quote 38 is from an article covering political protests that took place in MV at the beginning of autumn 2022. The article describes how the aim of the protests is to lift the sanctions on Russia, and normalize relationship despite the war in Ukraine. The attendees of the protests are also in higher numbers than in most places in Germany. MV actors here open themselves up for judgement, by promoting opinions that can be perceived negatively by actors in the centre because they deviate so drastically from the accepted behavioural norm, and play into the existing discourse of all East Germans being *Russlandversteher*. The actual stigmatisation is still done by the centre elites who controls the discourse, but the peripheral actors give them here examples of behaviour which is not normative right in the eyes of the German public (Roctus, 2022).

Q39: *He understands that Nord Stream 2 had to be stopped for now. But does one want to lose the billion-dollar investment forever? Vogt doesn't want to believe that. He says: "I'm assuming that we'll be talking about solutions again soon."* (Nejezchleba, 18 March 2022).

Q40: *Vogt says he therefore also understands the 1,800 demonstrators who showed up in his coastal town at the beginning of September with Russian flags and who made the somewhat empty threat that they would turn on the Nord Stream 2 gas tap themselves if necessary at the next demo.* (Nejezchleba, 21 September 2022).

The discourse perpetuated by MV's citizens reflects their behaviour discussed in the news articles. The two quotes above come from Lubmin's mayor, Alexander Vogt. Lubmin as a city had most to gain from Nord Stream 2 in tax revenue, so it is not that surprising that the mayor of the town would advocate for the pipeline to be opened. His first quote reiterates the counter-narrative against the stigma, by highlighting the economic benefit of Nord Stream 2. He understands that the project had to be stopped in March 2022, barely a month after Russia's full-scale invasion, and only days before the Bucha massacre would become world news. In the same breath, however, he notes that soon "we" will be discussing solutions. His usage of soon indicates the lack of understanding of the moral necessity for the sanctions against Russia, which also could be picked up on in the behaviour of the volleyball club. His understanding for the pro-Russia demonstrations in September expressed in quote 29 might also contribute to the stigmatisation of MV, as it shows that even the local politicians in the state are following a Russia-friendly way of behaviour.

Q41: *The man says: "You finally said what everyone is thinking. About the long. The minister is silent. The man keeps talking. The Greens, first shut down the nuclear power plants, now kill Nord Stream 2. They should just open Nord Stream 2." Backhaus looks down at his toes. Then he says: "That's a journalist, by the way." "Ah, from Berlin?" Scrutinizing look. Yes. The man explains: "The war is bad, but we have a different cultural connection to Putin here. You in the West mourn the Queen, but we understand Putin better."* (Raether, 2022; for similar, see also Berner, Kroll and Modersohn, 2022).

Lastly, another example of self-stigmatising behaviour of peripheral actors is captured in the above text. The article this quote was featured in was a reportage on the minister for agriculture in MV. The minister meets this man at a farmer's convention. The man immediately fits into a stigmatising category: that of a rural farmer and thus a peripheral actor. He is

described as being suspicious upon hearing the reporter comes from Berlin (the centre), and talks about “you in the West” and “us.” His “us” is not followed by “in the East” but it is certainly meant to be there. In his wording, it is possible to see the division between the West and East, which “understands Putin better”. It becomes possible to categorize the discourse by this man as an example of MV deviating from the recently changed norm of not conducting friendly relationships with Russia. His understanding of Putin, which can be explained – but not excused by – his peripheral status is behaviour clearly not fitting the newly changed norm accepted by most German actors, and which is followed by elites in the centre.

The division between East and West indicated by this man also gets followed a lot in centre-stigmatisation. In the centre-stigmatising discourse it is described how East-Germans are happy to identify themselves as East Germans, but do not follow the anti-Russia political line that other “Eastern” identifying actors generally take (Knight, 2022; Pesthy, Mader and Schoen, 2020; Rennefanz, 2022). Instead, they are more understanding of Putin. This can lead the existence of negative stereotypes of East Germans in the discourse and stigmatisation of MV by the centre.

3.4. Discussion

The last few sections section has provided an analysis of German news coverage surrounding Nord Stream 2 and MV. I have identified three types of stigmatisation which could be discerned in the discourse. The first type of stigmatisation, centre-stigmatisation, is the most prevalent stigmatisation, as the discourse is controlled by elites from the centre, who initiate most stigmatisation processes. Centre-stigmatisation has been featured in quite some research discussed in the first chapter, by authors such as Kühn, Naumann, Sommers, Plüschke-Altöf and Lang. The second type of stigmatisation, top-down self-stigmatisation is most obviously connected to the research question “*how does peripheral elite involvement with Nord Stream 2 lead to the stigmatisation of MV?*” as it focuses on how elites from MV contributed to the negative perception of the state, which leads to stigmatisation by the centre. The last form of stigmatisation which could be found in the data is bottom-up self-stigmatisation, this shows that stigmas can originate from behaviour which goes against the accepted behavioural norm. This framework of three different types of stigmatisation was useful for analysing data, and keeping this research consistent. However, no matter the initiator, the outcome and workings of the process of stigmatisation is always the same. This discussion takes the results the discourse analysis from last section has yielded, relates them back to the theoretical concepts

and ideas from chapter 1, and makes an attempt at answering the research question. The first part discusses how the stigmatisation of MV leads to peripheralisation. The second part shows how elite involvement contributed to this, and reflects upon the truthfulness behind stigmas.

According to Kühn, peripheralisation is a process which occurs because of four separate processes. One of these separate processes is a communicative process, which we have identified as being the discursive construction of the periphery. This takes place because peripheralisation as a social process is built on polarization between two places, the centre and the periphery. In our case, MV – and sometimes the other former East German states – experience being othered in the media discourse. Othering is essential to polarisation between the centre and the periphery, and the applications of stigmas to a periphery. Another thing which plays a big role in polarisation is the issuing of value-statements. These reveal that one place is being placed above another in a hierarchy, which is how centres and peripheries are being discursively constructed (Lang, 2015, pp. 175-178; Willett, 2020, p. 88). In the analysis, it was possible to see multiple occasions of othering, for example when East Germans were described as feeling superior to the West in their understanding of Russia by both the media as well as in self-stigmatisation. Another moment of othering in the discourse was when MV's citizens were being described as receptive to the pro-Russia policy of their state government. This set them apart from other places in Germany, who adhere to a different behavioural norm. In chapter 1, the “staples theory” from Inness was briefly mentioned. This theory predicted that places dependent upon a singular industry will try to preserve this industry, and come together over it (Argent, 2013, pp. 326-329). We can see this is true to an extent for Nord Stream 2 in MV and the consistent support it received from the community and political elites. Especially in the counter-narratives, the importance of Nord Stream 2 and its resonance within the community of MV really came through.

Value statements then, can be found in peripheral descriptions of MV such as “underdeveloped” and “cash-strapped” which clearly put MV in a peripheral place in the centre-periphery hierarchy. Also the criticism of Nord Stream by the centre is full of value-laden criticism. Similarly, the demonstrations in MV and the support for the abolishing of the sanctions regime also indicate a value statement from the attendees and supporters against the West. These moments of value-statements being added to the discursive debate, othering taking places and negative stereotypes being repeated throughout the discourse show a considerable amount of insight in the power relations between the periphery and the centre.

According to Kühn, Bernt and Colini, the centre has a certain amount of power over the periphery by their control of the discourse. However, because the periphery has agency as well, it becomes possible to see it from the “power-to” approach. To a certain extent, the periphery manages to contribute to the discourse, particularly the peripheral elites with their counter-narratives to the stigma. This is a productive way of looking at power, we can see that the pro-Russia demonstrations in MV were a productive way of exerting power for a group which felt unheard, since they were able to mobilize. However, in the discourse there is a clear amount of power over, which means that the stigmatising group sets the tone for the discourse (Kühn, Bernt and Colini, 2016, pp. 3-5; Van Dijk, 2015, pp. 357-358). From here, we can conclude that MV as a periphery is hierarchically the subordinate of the centre, as is the main view point from centre-periphery theories.

The way peripheralisation takes place is the repetition of the negative sentiments caused by these instances of othering and value-statements, which ultimately will affect how a place is perceived. This in turn might impact people in the periphery, who might internalize these perceptions by others and face difficulties because of that (Lang, 2015, p. 177; Hase, 2021, pp. 692-694, Bürk, 2013, pp. 169-172). Indeed, we can see that the stigmatisation of MV in the media has led to a renewed peripheralisation process for the state. *Der Spiegel* already predicted that there would be the risk that MV’s reputation would be damaged and investors would avoid the state, and big companies are preferring to move their business elsewhere (Kollenbroich, Latsch and Ziegler, 2022; NDR, 26 April 2022). The stigmatisation of MV has thus initiated a renewed peripheralisation process, all the while Nord Stream 2 was meant to improve the peripheral status of the state.

What should be addressed is the elite involvement in the stigmatisation process. The most clear example of this is top-down self stigmatisation. The analysis has shown that the elites’ choice of words often had a stigmatising effect, in the way they described decisions taken by the state government as being taken by the whole state. Furthermore, they often spoke about their citizens supporting the government and their policies, even while there are surveys indicating citizen support for Schwesig has decreased tremendously. Next to this, foreign policy hardly played a role MV’s state elections, according to voter polls. It mattered so little to voters that it was hardly on the political agenda of the parties, despite the media’s insistence that MV chose Sattering because of his pro-Russian attitude (Franzmann, Giebler and Poguntke, 2020, p. 634). Therefore, the centre is responsible for a stigmatising discourse with

their instance that the pro-Russia attitude was widespread among citizens of MV. This is likely to be an exaggeration and a misrepresentation of citizen's actual normative attitude. The elites of MV attempt to provide a counter-narrative to this stigma, and at times also reject the stigma. The counter-narrative intends to show that the past behaviour of MV is hold to the current norm of minimising relations with Russia, and does not line up because the behavioural norm used to be different and encouraged a friendly relationship with Russia. It also highlights the unequal economic status MV has vis-à-vis other German states, which justifies the need for Russian investments. Thus, the stigmatisation process is caused by centre media discourse, and in times is confirmed by actions from MV's elites (in the past) and its citizens (in the present). Nevertheless, the presence of counter-narratives against the stigma shows that MV also has the agency to fight the stigma attached to them, especially via peripheral elite-involvement in the discourse.

In chapter 1, the question arose whether or not peripheralisation is a result of conscious choices by elites, or if it is an invisible process based on structural issues which go over elites' heads (Kühn, Bernt and Colini, 2016, p. 2). This research did not attempt to answer this question, but might shed some light on the matter. Generally it is the job of – at least the regional - political elites to combat structural policy issues, and MV's peripherality is the choice of deliberately developed policy and choices by political elites, it would be on oversight to ignore the MV's elites' influence on the peripheralisation process. Even if Schwesig's words did not directly stigmatise MV, and her Nord Stream 2 policy did not intend to peripheralise MV, she was an active contributor to these processes. The majority of the discourse that stigmatises MV focuses on the link between Schwesig and Nord Stream 2. This link is not just discursively constructed, but predates the social discourse on Germany's pro-Russian politicians by quite some time. Still, the majority of the stigmatisation in the discourse only started after February 2022. Stigmatisation is based on the repetition of negative stereotypes and associations of a certain place. This repetition could only take place because of the political reality which Schwesig created for herself and her state. Therefore, the political elites can be seen as partially responsible for the stigmatisation of MV, because when the behavioural norm changed in February 2022, past actions by the elites were scrutinised in the discourse through the lens of the new norm. However, the main responsible group for the stigmatisation is the centre elites who control the discourse.

Before the norm change, the involvement of MV's elites and the FCEP was criticized, but certainly not to the extent that it was during Spring 2022. We can see that the elites try to oppose this stigmatisation, which results from the new norm, by pointing out that the past behaviour they exhibited was in line with the norm at the time. This narrative was present in their counter-narratives. Nevertheless, other former East German states receive a lot less media attention for their pro-Russia attitude, because they did not have the scandals surrounding the FCEP and thus there was less opportunity for the media to initiate the discourse.

There is one more point to touch upon in this discussion. I have concluded that MV has suffered from being stigmatised in the German news media because of their state elite's involvement with Nord Stream 2, particularly regarding the Schwesig's push for FCEP. Because they are a periphery within Germany, and this new stigmatisation of MV being a pro-Russia state might contribute to the further peripheralisation of the state, instead of the de-peripheralisation process which was intended to happen with their embrace of Nord Stream, we touch upon a moral dimension. After all, throughout the centre-periphery theories discussed in the first chapter it became clear that there is an element of inequality embedded in the relationship between the centre and the periphery, with the periphery being lower in the hierarchy. This might lead to the conclusion that MV has been treated unfairly by the German news media, and certainly to a certain extent this is true. A stigma is a negative association connected to a community. However, just because the stigma is negative does not mean it is detached from reality and unfairly implied. As seen in the analysis, a significant amount of stigmatisation occurred because of behaviour from MV's citizens, such as their pro-Russia demonstrations. Because the prevailing understanding of stigma is negative, one tends to forget that a stigma gets applied to actors – or communities – which are seen as deviant of social norms. It is a way of regulating these norms and to try and get the offending party back in check (Goffmann, 1963, p. 164; Zarakol, 2014; Rogstad, 2022, pp. 4-5). In the case of MV, their pro-Russia policy was judged in the hindsight of the war as it deviated from the new social norms. Stigmatisation can seem unfair, especially if the stigmatised community is already lower in the hierarchy than the stigmatisers, which is the case for MV. However, to an extent the stigma is just a reflection of reality, and the behaviour of actors in the periphery and the counter-narratives by the political elites of MV do nothing to discredit the stigma they receive. Therefore, it might be an overgeneralization to discursively construct the whole state of MV to be pro-Russia, which the discourse might push for. Nevertheless, the stigma is partially rooted in the behaviour and discourse of peripheral actors.

Conclusion

This research set out to establish how peripheral elite involvement in Nord Stream 2 led to the stigmatisation of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. It has done so by adhering to a centre-periphery framework. The first chapter elaborated on the main arguments of centre-periphery theories. From these theories, I elaborated on political economic theories such as world systems analysis and dependency theory, economic theory from Myrdal, and theories from sociology. From these, it became possible to infer that there is an unequal power balance between the centre and the periphery, whether this is in the economic, social or political sense. In the second section of the chapter, the concept of peripheralisation was introduced. This is the process of a place becoming a periphery, which typically has several aspects. First, there is the economic process of peripheralisation, which is determined, for example, by investments, the amount of start-ups and high-tech production centres. Then there is the social process of peripheralisation, which concerns socioeconomic conditions, such as educational levels and lack of functional infrastructure. The political process of peripheralisation outlines how peripheries do not have the same agenda-setting powers as the centre. This political process of peripheralisation is the only one which is not applicable to MV, as Germany is a democratic country with a multi-tier government, meaning that also on a local level there is an opportunity for democratic engagement. The very last process that constitutes peripheralisation is the communicative process, this shows how a periphery is discursively constructed.

The communicative process is based on two major concepts, which are marginalisation and stigmatisation. The latter is the main concept for the research question and played a large role in the discourse analysis of chapter three. Stigmatisation here was defined as the “the process in which peripheries are produced and reproduced discursively by the consistent use of repetitive negative stereotypes and images” (Bürk, 2013, pp. 169-172). This research defined a stigma as a negative label associated with a community. The stigma which should come through in the stigmatisation process of MV in German news media is the idea that the state is pro-Russia. This stigmatisation got worse after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and the subsequent scrutiny for MV’s past pro-Russia policy. The main reason for this pro-Russia policy was the investments that Nord Stream 1 did - and Nord Stream 2 would - bring the state. The pipeline construction involved local companies, and was safeguarded from sanctions by the constitution of the FCEP, championed by MV’s prime-minister Manuela Schwesig. It was largely funded with Russian money, which opened the state up for corruption allegations.

The third chapter focused more on the relationship between Nord Stream 2, MV and stigmatisation. First, it provided background information for the case of MV and laid out all the ways in which it would be considered a periphery within Germany, such as high unemployment levels, a lack of infrastructure and an exodus of young and educated people. The first main argument this chapter made was that Nord Stream 2 was intended to de-peripheralise the state, as indicated by the first stage of the critical discourse analysis, of the speeches made by MV's political elites. The second argument addressed in the discussion was that instead of de-peripheralisation, the stigmatisation of MV caused by its relationship to Nord Stream 2, actually lead to further peripheralisation of the state. To research this, the second part of the critical discourse analysis focused on the ways in which MV was stigmatised in the German news media. Here, I found out that MV's stigmatisation came from the centre, whose elites were in control of the discourse. The elites and citizens of the state also participated in self-stigmatisation behaviour at times, which were words or behaviour deviating from the accepted social norm of no longer behaving in a Russia-friendly manner. This norm-deviaton provided the centre then with opportunities for stigmatisation of MV. In the discourse, however, there were also quite some examples of counter-stigmatisation by the political elites and the citizens of MV in which they showed that their actions were being judged by the current accepted norm, instead of the past one. This counter-narrative also outlined the need MV had for the investments, and the unequal economic position the state has compared to other German states. There was also the denial of the stigma. The notion of agency was very visible in these actions of counter-stigmatisation, as it this research assumed the periphery is able to influence its own fate.

However, as was concluded later on in the discussion, the centre elites were the main stigmatising actors, because of their control over the content of the media and social discourse. Another conclusion was that the data collection and discourse analysis indicated that the stigmatisation largely took place in discourse surrounding Schwesig and Selloering's decisions regarding the FCEP. The main reason for the stigmatisation was when the accepted behavioural norm in relations with Russia suddenly changed from friendly relations to no relation at all, and the FCEP could be interpreted as deviating from this norm. The controversies surrounding Nord Stream 2 provided the centre with enough material to build the discourse in a way which stigmatised MV as being filled with *Russlandversteher*. As noted, this exposes the unequal position MV as a periphery occupies vis-à-vis the centre. On the other hand, however, the

stigma of MV being pro-Russia is rooted in reality, and supported by the behaviour and discourse from the peripheral actors. The issue with the stigmatisation here lays with its generalisability, and the fact that the blame of the stigmatisation lies with the stigmatised, even when they have unequal access to the discourse. The responsibility for the stigmatisation is in the first place with how the stigma gets constructed. Certain actions (especially from MV's elites) can lead to stigmatisation, but the process is mostly initiated by the centre. MV not only was portrayed as a state which pursued a pro-Russia policy, neither are their citizens the only ones indicating pro-Russia behaviour. Additionally, its peripherality serves as an explanation for the past policies executed by MV's elites, in order to de-peripheralise the state, they needed investments and employment opportunities. Both Nord Streams provided them with this option. Even so, although the political elites of MV set out to frame Nord Stream 2 as an opportunity for the de-peripheralisation of their state, eventually it ended up contributing to the peripheralisation process. The past pro-Russia policy of MV deviated from the current accepted behavioural norm, which led to stigmatisation of the state by the centre elites.

This research intended to show how elite involvement in Nord Stream 2 led to the stigmatisation of MV. Next to that, it also touched upon how the behaviour of MV's citizens could contribute to their stigmatisation, and that ultimately the centre elites are the actors who were in charge of the stigmatisation. It thus contributed to centre-periphery research. Stigmatisation is not an well-researched phenomenon within the peripheralisation research, certainly not on the level of a federal state. This research also expanded on the link between elites and stigmatisation, and showed how elites from the periphery can contribute to the peripheralisation process of the place they represent. Elites from the centre, on the other hand, are the main responsible actors in the stigmatisation process of MV. There are also issues this research has not managed to touch upon, such as how the discourse on Nord Stream 2 is a more widespread than traditional news media and much of it can be found online. It also did not manage to shed more light on the involvement of radical left and right wing parties with Russia, and their presence in MV.

Therefore, further research has the opportunity to delve further in the role of Nord Stream 2 in the pro-Russia discourse within Germany, and perhaps even Europe. This research also opens doors for further ideas on radical opinions of the periphery fueled by far-right politicians, and the connection between former East German states and Russia. From this vantage point it also becomes possible to also look into Germany's pro-Russia attitude amongst elites and how

this influenced Germany's response to the Ukraine war. Lastly, peripheries are not limited to European countries, and centre-periphery frameworks can still provide IR scholars with fascinating cases and opportunities for research.

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Appendix 1: German-English translations section 3.2

English (as in the text)	Original German
This is useful to us in MV, because it ensures and gives us labour opportunities in our region.	Es nutzt uns in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, weil es Arbeitsplätze in der Region schafft und sichert.
An important signal for the economy.	Das ist auch ein wichtiges Signal für die Wirtschaft.
It's all about bringing capital to MV. We have to build up our state as an electricity exporter and the creation of value in our state.	Es geht natürlich auch darum, dass Kapital nach Mecklenburg-Vorpommern kommt. Es geht um den Ausbau unseres Landes als Stromexporteur und damit um Wertschöpfung im Land
Around 150 jobs are to be created in the concrete coating plant for the duration of the project. Mukran will once again become an important logistics centre for the construction of the pipeline through the Baltic Sea.	Für die Dauer des Projekts sollen etwa 150 Arbeitsplätze im Betonummantelungswerk geschaffen werden. Mukran wird erneut ein wichtiges Logistikzentrum für den Bau der Pipeline durch die Ostsee.
As a result, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern will also benefit directly from the construction of the second Baltic Sea pipeline.	Damit wird Mecklenburg-Vorpommern auch vom Bau der zweiten Ostseepipeline direkt profitieren.
What definitely needs to improve in our country are wages. Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania will only be able to compete with other regions in the long run if we have attractive wages.	Was auf jeden Fall in unserem Land besser werden muss, sind die Löhne. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern wird auf Dauer nur konkurrenzfähig mit anderen Regionen sein, wenn wir bei den Löhnen attraktiv sind.
Because despite all the progress made in the economy and on the labor market, our country is still lagging behind. Economic power and incomes are lower, unemployment and the risk of poverty are higher than elsewhere, and we have to work on that.	Denn trotz aller Fortschritte in der Wirtschaft und auf dem Arbeitsmarkt ist unser Land immer noch im Rückstand. Die Wirtschaftskraft und die Einkommen sind niedriger, die Arbeitslosigkeit und das Armutsrisiko höher als anderswo, und daran müssen wir arbeiten.
I myself have experienced in the last four years that it is important to raise the voice for our country... As prime-minister, I will represent the interests of the people of MV, regardless of who is in the Chancellery.	Ich selber habe in den letzten vier Jahren erlebt, dass es wichtig ist, die Stimme für unser Land zu erheben... Ich werde als Ministerpräsidentin die Interessen der Menschen von Mecklenburg-Vorpommern vertreten, übrigens egal, wer im Kanzleramt sitzt.
I don't know when you, as members of parliament, were on site at the Mukran port and spoke to the employees.	Ich weiß nicht, wann Sie als Abgeordnete im Hafen Mukran vor Ort waren und mal mit den Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern gesprochen haben.
And I would expect you to support the citizens of our state.	Und da würde ich von Ihnen Unterstützung für die Bürgerinnen und Bürger in unserem Bundesland erwarten.

<p>The Baltic Sea pipeline is of course an important economic factor for the country.</p>	<p>Die Ostseepipeline ist natürlich ein wichtiger Wirtschaftsfaktor für das Land.</p>
<p>And that's why I want to say that it is an important factor for the port of Mukran, which has also been strengthened in the long term as a location for offshore projects... The Lubmin site also benefits from the construction of the pipeline with the two landing stations. Companies that equip special ships are based in MV.</p>	<p>Und deshalb will ich sagen, für den Hafen Mukran, der dadurch auch langfristig als Standort für Offshoreprojekte gestärkt worden ist, ist es ein wichtiger Faktor. Auch der Standort Lubmin profitiert vom Bau der Pipeline mit den beiden Anlandestationen. Firmen, die Spezialschiffe ausrüsten, haben in Vorpommern ihren Sitz.</p>
<p>And I have to say that I find it remarkable that people are now being criticized for standing up for the economy in their country.</p>	<p>Und ich muss mal sagen, dass ich es abenteuerlich finde, dass man mittlerweile dafür kritisiert wird, dass man sich für die Wirtschaft in seinem Land starkmacht.</p>
<p>And we all know that this project is controversial and ideologically contested. And that's why, if we go down this path, we have to be aware that we will also have to endure headwinds.</p>	<p>Und wir alle wissen, dass dieses Projekt umstritten ist, ideologisch umkämpft. Und deswegen, wenn wir uns auf diesen Weg begeben, müssen wir uns klar sein, werden wir auch Gegenwind aushalten müssen.</p>
<p>I'm sure that the foundation will give us the opportunity to implement many, many good projects in our country in the years to come. This is what our state needs.</p>	<p>Ich bin sicher, dass wir mit der Stiftung die Möglichkeit haben, in den nächsten Jahren viele, viele gute Projekte in unserem Land umzusetzen. Das ist das, was unser Land braucht.</p>

Appendix 2: German-English translations section 3.3.1.

English	German
<p>In fact, nowhere is the fight for Nord Stream 2 as hard as in MV. Nowhere are the lines between the SPD and Russia as short as in the north-east. MV, Russia's deputy trade minister once said during an appearance in Rostock, is "an outpost in Europe" for Moscow.</p>	<p>Tatsächlich wird wohl nirgendwo so hart für Nord Stream 2 gekämpft wie in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Nirgendwo sind auch die Drähte zwischen SPD und Russland so kurz wie im Nordosten. Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, sagte Russlands Vize-Handelsminister einmal bei einem Auftritt in Rostock, sei für Moskau "ein Vorposten in Europa."</p>
<p>But what is driving the SPD government in MV to get so vehemently committed to the pipeline? What will Nord Stream 2 bring to the state? The overall economic benefits should be manageable. In fact, only three percent of all exports from MV go to Russia. "The Russian love of many governments in East Germany cannot be explained with economic data alone," says Joachim Ragnitz, an economist at the Ifo Institute in Dresden.</p>	<p>Was aber treibt die SPD-Regierung in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern dazu, sich derart vehement für die Pipeline zu engagieren? Was bringt Nord Stream 2 dem Land? Die allgemeinen wirtschaftlichen Vorteile dürften überschaubar sein. Tatsächlich gehen nur drei Prozent aller Exporte aus Mecklenburg-Vorpommern nach Russland. "Die Russlandverliebtheit vieler Regierungen in Ostdeutschland ist mit Wirtschaftsdaten allein nicht zu erklären", sagt Joachim Ragnitz, Ökonom am Ifo-Institut in Dresden.</p>
<p>Elsewhere, however, the halt to the pipeline approval process is causing concern. The main loser would be MV, which is linked to the pipeline like no other federal state.</p>	<p>Anderswo löst der Stopp des Pipelinezulassungsverfahrens indes Sorgen aus. Hauptverlierer wäre Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, das wie kein anderes Bundesland mit der Pipeline verbandelt ist.</p>
<p>In the summer of 2016, the SPD incumbent at the time, Erwin Sellering, did pretty badly in the polls. Then he repeatedly emphasized an issue: the Russia sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 must be dismantled! Sellering won convincingly. Many citizens also supported him because of his clearly pro-Russian stance. Schwesig, on the other hand, was elected last fall with a sensational 39.6 percent of the votes – just months after pushing ahead with the construction of the pipeline.</p>	<p>Im Sommer 2016 stand der damalige SPD-Amtsinhaber Erwin Sellering in den Umfragen ziemlich schlecht da. Dann betonte er immer wieder ein Thema: Die Russland-Sanktionen, verhängt nach der Annexion der Krim 2014, müssten abgebaut werden! Sellering gewann überzeugend. Viele Bürger unterstützten ihn auch wegen seiner klar prorussischen Haltung. Schwesig wiederum wurde im vorigen Herbst mit sensationellen 39,6 Prozent der Stimmen gewählt – nur Monate nachdem sie den Bau der Pipeline vorangetrieben hatte.</p>
<p>It all begins well before her term of office: the pipeline from Russia is to land in a small Baltic Sea resort called Lubmin, in an underdeveloped area. When Schwesig became Prime Minister in 2017, she campaigned for the pipeline that had been planned for years. Because for MV, gas is a</p>	<p>Alles beginnt weit vor ihrer Amtszeit: In einem kleinen Ostseebad namens Lubmin, in einer strukturschwachen Gegend, soll die besagte Pipeline aus Russland anlanden. Als Schwesig 2017 Ministerpräsidentin wird, setzt sie sich für die seit Jahren geplante Röhre ein. Weil Gas für sie</p>

bridge technology to the energy transition. And because she sees close ties to Russia as an opportunity: for stability in Europe, for prosperity in MV. Incidentally, many of the voters like Russia and, accordingly, pro-Russian politicians.	Brückentechnologie zur Energiewende ist. Und weil sie enge Verbindungen nach Russland als Chance sieht: für Stabilität in Europa, für Prosperität in MV. Nebenbei mögen viele ihrer Wähler Russland und dementsprechend auch russlandfreundliche Politiker.
For the past several years, Russian money has played a decisive role in the north-eastern state. Whenever the notoriously cash-strapped shipyards in MV were in crisis, Moscow was an obvious place to look for millions in bailout money, sometimes the only option.	The original language of the article is English.
And yet: MV's strange love affair with Moscow is difficult to explain with economic arguments or concerns about jobs. In 2021, Russia was far behind, in 10th place in the state's foreign trade balance.	The original language of the article is English.
Mecklenburg-Gazprommern	No translation
From their retrospective self-awareness, many East Germans believed they understood Russia and Putin better than the West, because they learned Russian, vacationed in Sochi and knew Russian songs. They were a bit ahead of the West Germans there, a head start in terms of competence.	Viele Ostdeutsche glaubten aus ihrer retrospektiven Selbsterfahrung Russland und Putin besser zu verstehen als der Westen, weil sie Russisch gelernt haben, Urlaub in Sotschi machten und russische Lieder kannten. Da hatten sie den Westdeutschen etwas voraus, einen Kompetenzvorsprung.
The receiving station for the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is in the Baltic Sea resort of Lubmin. With the end of the project, the hopes of many people here have also been dashed. The transfer station is still in operation and will also be needed in the future.	Im Ostseebad Lubmin liegt die Empfangsstation der Pipeline Nord Stream 2. Mit dem Ende des Projekts scheitern auch die Hoffnungen vieler Menschen hier. Die Übernahmestation ist dennoch in Betrieb und wird auch in Zukunft gebraucht.

Appendix 3: German-English translations section 3.3.2.

English	German
<p>As a state, we have always supported this criticism. Nevertheless, Germany has never completely broken the bridges to Russia for decades. We in MV have also kept up dialogue and cooperation, especially with our Russian partner region, the Leningrad region, because we and I thought that dialogue could change things for the better.</p>	<p>Diese Kritik haben wir als Land immer unterstützt. Dennoch hat Deutschland über Jahrzehnte die Brücken nach Russland nie ganz abgebrochen. Auch wir in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern haben an Dialog und Zusammenarbeit vor allem mit unserer russischen Partnerregion, dem Leningrader Gebiet, festgehalten, weil wir und ich dachten, ein Dialog kann Dinge zum Guten verändern.</p>
<p>"I stand by the fact that we had a dialogue with the Leningrad region." It was about cooperation in business, science and culture. In principle, it is always good to be in dialogue, even with difficult partners."</p>	<p>"Ich stehe dazu, dass wir einen Dialog mit dem Leningrader Gebiet geführt haben." Es sei um Zusammenarbeit in Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Kultur gegangen. Es sei grundsätzlich immer gut, im Dialog zu sein, auch mit schwierigen Partnern.</p>
<p>In recent years, the state has focused on dialogue and exchange with Russia in business, science, culture and between young people from both countries, Schwesig continued. "The current development is all the more painful for us."</p>	<p>Das Land habe in den vergangenen Jahren auf Dialog und auf den Austausch mit Russland in Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft, Kultur und zwischen jungen Menschen aus beiden Ländern gesetzt, schrieb Schwesig weiter. "Umso schmerzhafter ist für uns die aktuelle Entwicklung."</p>
<p>"Six months ago there was a state election in MV. And the citizens confirmed me in my office with a large majority, with a strong vote by the citizens," said Schwesig at a meeting with her northern German counterparts in Kiel. "That's why the people in MV can also rely on me continuing to live up to this expectation and trust of the citizens."</p>	<p>"Vor einem halben Jahr gab es eine Landtagswahl in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. Und die Bürgerinnen und Bürger haben mich mit großer Mehrheit in meinem Amt bestätigt, mit einem starken Bürgervotum", sagte Schwesig am Rande eines Treffens mit ihren norddeutschen Amtskollegen in Kiel. "Deshalb können sich die Menschen in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern auch darauf verlassen, dass ich weiter dieser Erwartung und diesem Vertrauen der Bürgerinnen und Bürger gerecht werde."</p>
<p>"Always in the interest of the state of MV." It was about economic power, jobs in the country, the interests of the ports and the energy supply of the future. "But also about environmental protection and protecting local companies from sanctions," said Schwesig, referring to the controversial climate protection foundation.</p>	<p>"Immer im Interesse des Landes Mecklenburg-Vorpommern." Es sei um Wirtschaftskraft gegangen, um Arbeitsplätze im Land, um die Interessen der Häfen und die Energieversorgung der Zukunft. "Aber auch um Umweltschutz und den Schutz heimischer Unternehmen vor Sanktionen", sagte Schwesig weiter unter</p>

	Bezugnahme auf die umstrittene Klimaschutz-Stiftung.
Employees of our port on Rügen were written to by senators from America and threatened with sanctions. Other companies were invited by the US government to a kind of tribunal via video conference. Not all of these companies are internationally active. But they noticed that suddenly their banks, their insurance companies, were starting to ask questions.	Mitarbeiter unseres Hafens auf Rügen wurden von Senatoren aus Amerika angeschrieben und mit Sanktionsdrohungen überzogen. Andere Unternehmen wurden von der US-Regierung zu einer Art Tribunal per Videokonferenz eingeladen. Nicht alle diese Firmen sind international aktiv. Aber sie merkten, dass auf einmal ihre Banken, ihre Versicherungen anfangen, Fragen zu stellen.
I was convinced that it was right to continue supporting the construction of the pipeline. For three reasons...third point was that companies from MV are involved in the construction. For example our state-owned port of Mukran. The pipeline was important for all of Germany.... Companies from our state were also involved in its construction. We didn't make this decision for Putin, but for our state.	Ich war überzeugt, dass es richtig ist, den Pipelinebau weiter zu unterstützen. Aus drei Gründen... Der dritte Punkt war, dass Unternehmen aus Mecklenburg-Vorpommern an dem Bau beteiligt sind. Etwa unser landeseigener Hafen Mukran. Die Pipeline hatte Bedeutung für ganz Deutschland....An ihrem Bau waren auch Firmen aus unserem Bundesland beteiligt. Wir haben diese Entscheidung nicht für Putin getroffen, sondern für unser Land.
But I now see many citizens saying: "From our point of view, it was the right thing to do back then, today we look at it differently. Please stand firm."	Aber ich erlebe jetzt viele Bürger, die sagen: "Es war damals aus unserer Sicht richtig, heute schauen wir anders drauf. Bitte bleiben Sie standhaft."
Do you understand that many citizens are upset by this half-hearted processing? Pegel: I hear very different opinions from the citizens. And I believe that most of them had similar hopes for cooperation between the EU and Russia as we do, namely to live together peacefully and to work together economically.	Verstehen Sie, dass viele Bürger diese halbherzige Aufarbeitung aufregt? Pegel: Ich höre ganz unterschiedliche Meinungen von den Bürgerinnen und Bürgern. Und ich glaube, dass die meisten von ihnen ähnliche Hoffnungen in eine Zusammenarbeit der EU mit Russland hatten wie wir auch, nämlich friedlich zusammenzuleben und wirtschaftlich zusammenzuarbeiten.
I don't think it's right that the finger is pointed at our federal state just because the pipeline lands here - while everyone else continues to be supplied with Russian gas every day, every hour.	Ich finde es nicht richtig, dass mit dem Finger auf unser Bundesland gezeigt wird, nur weil hier die Pipeline anlandet – während sich alle anderen täglich, stündlich weiterhin vom russischen Gas versorgen lassen.
When I'm out and about in the state, I notice how upset people are. You're not asking me questions about the foundation, but about what we're doing to prevent the war from escalating and bring down energy prices. In the national average, we have the lowest incomes and the smallest pensions. In MV,	Wenn ich im Land unterwegs bin, merke ich, wie aufgewühlt die Menschen sind. Sie stellen mir keine Fragen zur Stiftung, sondern danach, was wir tun, um eine Eskalation des Krieges zu verhindern und die Energiepreise zu senken. Wir haben

we are at the forefront when it comes to renewables, we produce more than we need ourselves - but we have the most expensive electricity prices, which doesn't seem fair to me.

im Bundesschnitt die geringsten Einkommen und die kleinsten Renten. Wir liegen in MV bei den Erneuerbaren vorne, produzieren mehr, als wir selbst benötigen – haben aber die teuersten Strompreise, das kommt mir nicht gerecht vor.

Appendix 4: German-English translations section 3.3.3.

English	German
<p>When you ring the manager's doorbell, you first hear that he doesn't want to talk. And then a conversation begins, initially about Putin's war. He should be condemned, says the man. But have you really tried everything to resolve the conflict diplomatically? To accommodate Russia?</p>	<p>Klingelt man beim Geschäftsführer, hört man von dem zunächst, er wolle nicht reden. Und beginnt dann doch ein Gespräch, zunächst über Putins Krieg. Der sei zu verurteilen, sagt der Mann. Aber habe man wirklich alles versucht, um den Konflikt diplomatisch zu lösen? Um Russland entgegenzukommen?</p>
<p>The foundation is a sponsor for the women's volleyball club SSC Schwerin. One does not want to say goodbye to it completely for the time being. The contractual relationship is suspended, but it has not yet been terminated.</p>	<p>Beim Frauen-Volleyballverein SSC Schwerin ist sie Sponsor. Ganz verabschieden will man sich davon vorerst nicht. Das Vertragsverhältnis ruht zwar, gekündigt ist es noch nicht.</p>
<p>In hardly any other region in Germany is the lack of understanding about the energy crisis as great as here. Businessmen and mayors are clamoring for an end to sanctions on Russia, and the number of protesters is rising every week. According to the police, more than 10,500 people took to the streets in the state on Monday, more than anywhere else.</p>	<p>In kaum einer Region in Deutschland ist das Unverständnis über die Energiekrise so groß wie hier. Unternehmer und Bürgermeister fordern lautstark das Ende der Russlandsanktionen, und die Zahl der Demonstranten steigt wöchentlich. Am Montag gingen im Bundesland laut Polizei zusammengerechnet mehr als 10.500 Menschen auf die Straße, so viele wie nirgendwo sonst.</p>
<p>He understands that Nord Stream 2 had to be stopped for now. But does one want to lose the billion-dollar investment forever? Vogt doesn't want to believe that. He says: "I'm assuming that we'll be talking about solutions again soon."</p>	<p>Dass man Nord Stream 2 jetzt stoppen musste, das versteht er. Aber wolle man das milliardenschwere Investment für immer verloren geben? Vogt will das nicht glauben. Er sagt: "Ich gehe davon aus, dass wir sicher bald wieder über Lösungen sprechen."</p>
<p>Vogt says he therefore also understands the 1,800 demonstrators who showed up in his coastal town at the beginning of September with Russian flags and who made the somewhat empty threat that they would turn on the Nord Stream 2 gas tap themselves if necessary at the next demo.</p>	<p>Vogt sagt, er verstehe daher auch die 1800 Demonstranten, die in seinem Küstenörtchen Anfang September mit Russlandfahnen aufliefen und die etwas drollige Drohung aussprachen, sie würden den Gashahn von Nord Stream 2 bei der nächsten Demo notfalls selbst aufdrehen.</p>
<p>The man says: You finally said what everyone is thinking. About the long. The minister is silent. The man keeps talking. The Greens, first shut down the nuclear power plants, now kill Nord Stream 2. They should just open Nord Stream 2. Backhaus looks down at his toes. Then he says: That's a journalist, by the way. Ah, from Berlin? Scrutinizing look. Yes. The</p>	<p>Der Mann sagt: Endlich haben Sie gesagt, was alle denken. Über die Lang. Der Minister schweigt. Der Mann redet weiter. Die Grünen, erst die Atomkraftwerke abschalten, jetzt Nord Stream 2 killen. Die sollen einfach Nord Stream 2 aufmachen. Backhaus guckt auf seine Fußspitzen. Dann sagt er: Das ist übrigens eine Journalistin. Ah, aus Berlin? Prüfender Blick. Ja. Der</p>

man explains: The war is bad, but we have a different cultural connection to Putin here. You in the West mourn the Queen, but we understand Putin better.

Mann erklärt: Der Krieg ist schlimm, aber wir haben hier eine andere kulturelle Verbindung zu Putin. Ihr im Westen trauert um die Queen, dafür verstehen wir Putin besser.

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