

Place, practice and the countryside Rural newcomers and the construction of "the rural society" in Sweden

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Introduction

During the 1990s, the debate concerning rural communities as sites for specific lifestyles² as well as a location or destination for certain groups of people (Boyle & Halfacree [eds] 1998, Cloke & Little [ed.] 1997, Cloke et al. 1995) was intensified and many villages and rural living milieus have been studied from different perspectives since then. While one point of view has been to stress the role of the middle class (Cloke & Thrift 1990, Cloke et al. 1995), another line of research has tried to identify subgroups (see for example Cloke & Little [ed.] 1997, Milbourne [ed.] 1997) which have moved into the countryside, and, furthermore, to explore if tensions between the groups or between different fractions of the groups could be found. While a good deal of work was devoted to try to determine which group of people that could be said to lead this migration wave, or the counterurbanisation movement, the debate showed that the people moving into the countryside do differ when it comes to age, occupations and reasons for moving. Cloke, for example, (1996) tried to capture the variety of marginalisation and problems in relation to different rural lifestyles but faced difficulties in presenting the results to the national authority who had commissioned the research.

The large number of articles published, for example in the *Journal of Rural Studies*, certainly shows that the phenomenon of counterurbanisation, which has been observed in several countries, has come about through different relations and influences and also manifests itself in different visible and invisible physical and social relations. British studies have contributed most to the different debates and they have also inspired studies in other countries, in some cases because similar phenomena were being observed, in some cases for opposite reasons.

A statistical study in Sweden, describing population changes in the Swedish countryside during the last few decades of the 20th century showed that counterurbanisation,

¹ Department of Social and Economic Geography, Uppsala University, Sweden. Conferência apresentada no 2º Congresso Internacional de Geografia Rural - *Ruralidades: teorias e vivências*, 23-24 de Janeiro de 2003, Faculdade de Letras, Porto

² (Dean et al. 1984, Forsberg & Carlbrand 1993, Cloke et al. 1995, Halliday & Coombes 1995, Walmsley et al. 1998 are only a sample from a large scale of research.)

understood as population growth in rural living milieus, could be observed from the 1970s until the 1990s. This growth was almost entirely due to in-migration of people from towns or cities (Amcoff 2000:chapter 3). Interestingly enough, when it comes to the composition of these migrants flows, the same study stated that the newcomers have a "working-class background", and should not be seen as the middle class searching for the rural idyll (Amcoff 2000, chapters 6-8). This finding has been confirmed through qualitative studies, and what is also important is that the main reasons behind moving to the countryside has to do with people's wish to participate in certain activities and to achieve certain values. Several Swedish studies have shown that important reasons for moving into the countryside are to live close to nature, and to find a sense of community, but also to get closer to a specific social environment where they could find relatives or friends (Borgegård 1993, Forsberg & Carlsbrand 1993, Kåks & Westholm 1994, Stenbacka 2001).

"The rural" as an arena for migration could be seen as three-dimensional, consisting of the rural in general, the specific area and the specific house. The locality (parish) to which someone moves might be important because it happens to be the place where he or she grew up, or where relatives live, or because it is attractive in terms of scenery and physical resources. Sometimes the house itself is the major attraction; it might be the opportunity to build the house of one's dreams, to take over the family farm, or to rebuild a second home into a place for permanent residence. What people intend to achieve through their choice of how and where to live thus can be accomplished through a particular destination, a specific house or a combination of the two.

Sometimes the interviewees express very pragmatic reasons for moving to the countryside; such as ownership of a second home, a piece of land offered by relatives or similar resources, but it is however of particular interest here to explore the reasons for moving in terms of values and in terms of societal changes. What households regard as characteristics of "a good life" is what encourages them to move to the countryside: values such as freedom, peace and quiet, independence and 'what is ours', and participation in the local community were found to be important in the study which provides the empirical data for this paper, mainly in the form of qualitative information (Stenbacka 2001).

In several cases the interviewed migrants had previous experience of countryside living. It is not the image of a "rural idyll" that has tempted them to move to the countryside, nor do they feel that they live in one, or even regard the concept as a realistic representation of the countryside. Rather, they are very conscious of both the advantages and problems of everyday rural life - they knew "what was in store for us".

So, it is time to move to the next section which will focus on "how", but with the context of "who" and "why" in our minds. How do the newcomers affect the different countrysides, how do they act, and how do they experience the actions of others?

"The rural" as a site for action

The first aim of this paper is to analyse the everyday practices of the rural newcomers. The second aim is to explore how the newcomers' preconceptions of what the rural living environment should be able to offer them is connected to their everyday practices in four rural communities in Sweden.

A theoretical point of departure is that society can be studied by focusing on people's actions and that places are shaped by people's intentions concerning their daily life, the physical characteristics of the area, and the social relations within the area as well as with other places.

First, I will discuss the theoretical base for studying "society and action", and how it might be applied in a study of rural society. This is followed by a description of the method used in the case study (which has been reported at greater length in Stenbacka 2001). From these basic elements the discussion continues with a presentation of the empirical results from a study of rural newcomers and their views on rural living, in comparison to their former living environment which could be characterized as "urban"³. This is discussed firstly in terms of three types of practices and secondly in terms of how these practices will affect society. In a final section I will discuss the way in which the intentions behind rural living and people's actual practices merge and form a somewhat paradoxical lifestyle.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

A useful definition of the concept 'practice' has been proposed by Åquist (1995); in her words practise is "the concrete reality of the everyday-life in which we live and act, the experiences we make and the way in which we relate ourselves to the world". I would add that 'practice' can be seen as the sum of the actions of individuals, aggregated to the level of a society.

Werlen's model on "society, action and space" (1993, p. 183) includes three life spheres - the physical, the subjective, and the social world - and (following Max Weber) he identifies three categories of actions:

- Social actions - social meaning is expressed through actions, which are always related to other people and presuppose communication; in this study such actions have to do with social relations in the local community.
- Actions related to artefacts - a home, for example, is an artifact, which has social meaning as something that is indispensable for everyday life and also because it represents a way of life or symbolizes continuity in life.
- Actions related to the physical world - which is given meaning through peoples' subjective experiences; in this study this type of action is represented by actions related to nature in its socio-cultural context.

According to Max Weber "social actions" should be studied by sociologists and the two following topics could be left to "other social sciences". Werlen, however, argues that geographers should deal with all three since "immobile material artifacts represent the most important elements in which social world meanings are persistently expressed in patterns of spatial arrangements". One of the most important determinants of regional differences are different social systems which in turn are an outcome of the spatial arrangement of immobile artifacts (Werlen 1993:184f).

Within this theoretical framework an attempt has been made in this study to view everyday practices not only as "action in time" but also as "action in context" (see Halfacree & Boyle 1993 and 1998 for a deeper discussion on "the biographical approach" and migration studies). The most important elements of this context are:

- the values and intentions of people with respect to housing, such as the aspiration to live a less stressful and healthier life, to have a meaningful social life or to establish "a private territory";

³ The characteristics of urban and rural lifestyles, and the question of to what extent the lifestyles in rural areas are "urban" will not be discussed here. Here the point is simply that the people who were interviewed have left one kind of living environment for another. And for these people the categories "urban" and "rural" are relevant.

- potential migrants' access to material and immaterial resources, such as a second home or a building site, experience of living in both urban and rural areas, and previous social contacts, e.g. with relatives;
- factors which determine the time for moving, and the precise destination, such as changes in family situation, specific leisure interests, previous contacts with a certain area and so forth;
- type of housing milieu at alternative destinations with respect to such things as types of houses, density of settlement, whether it is permanent or recreational residential area, and so forth.

Methodology

The empirical information on which this article draws was collected in an interview study⁴ during the years 1996-1998. In four parishes in the Mälaren region in central Sweden, 29 persons in 18 households were interviewed. The format was in-depth interviews with open questions or themes that were discussed at length. The method, its implications and reflections, is discussed in Stenbacka (2001).

My study took place in a part of Sweden which includes the capital of Stockholm and several other relatively large cities, such as Uppsala, Västerås and Eskilstuna. But this is not a solely "urban" area since the region as a whole, "the Mälaren region", also contains vast forest areas and a sparsely populated archipelago. The Swedish National Rural Development Agency categorizes the area as "tätortsnära landsbygd", i.e. "rural areas within a 5-45 minute drive to densely populated areas". Densely populated areas, in contrast, have more than 3 000 inhabitants and less than a five minute drive to a local population center (Swedish National Rural Development Agency 2000). Two of the areas studied are situated between 10 and 25 kilometers from the larger cities of Västerås and Uppsala, and these used to be, and still are, areas important in terms of agriculture. In the last few decades, have however been witnessed an in-migration of people who commute to other jobs in the cities and other urban places. In *Tortuna* close to Västerås we can find some big farms as well as single-family housing, but also an area with small houses and terraced houses for rent. In *Rasbokil* the housing stock has developed in a remarkable way in the 1990s with the addition of a considerable number of new houses.

One area, *Gräsö*, is an island with ferry connections, about 90 kilometers from Uppsala. The island is rather big and many of the inhabitants live several kilometers from the ferry station. Here we can find many summer houses, some older farms but also a housing area with flats and terraced houses built in the 1990s. The last area investigated, *Karbenning*, is an area with an old housing stock, some summerhouses and a more peripheral location. None of the areas could be characterized as a tourist area, although Gräsö is a kind of holiday island with plenty of second homes.

In-depth interviews were conducted by myself. The interviews were transcribed by myself and an assistant and the texts were analyzed and synthesized in Nud*ist, a computer program for text analysis. With the help of Nud*ist data could be categorized and synthesized as themes concerning the incomers' background, their decision to move and their experience of the everyday practices of themselves and others in the rural society.

⁴ The starting-point of the study were two broader questions concerning, firstly, the reasons behind counterurbanisation from the view of the newcomers, and, secondly, how the newcomers act in their new living environment. In this paper the first question has been tuned down and the focus is on the second question. The project is reported on in a PhD dissertation (Stenbacka 2001).

Three practices oriented towards the local community, nature and the home

Newcomer profiles

I have chosen a few of the people I interviewed and used their statements and their life stories to construct profiles which represent some of the essential characteristics of the newcomers in the Swedish countryside. These profiles, hopefully, will be a useful base for a discussion of the everyday practices.

Anette is 30 years old, she grew up in the city but spent childhood summers at her grandparents' place in the countryside. She got into drug problems but she got pregnant and decided to change her lifestyle and move out into the countryside. After a short time she and the father of the child separated, but Anette still lives in the same neighbourhood, in a flat which she rents. Here she "feels at home". She has met a man from the area and she enjoys to stay at his farm and to become involved in another way of life, and to learn from his old relatives about how to handle practical chores and reproductive work.

John and Vendela have three children and they have nurtured the dream of the "green lifestyle" for many years. Much of the money they earn they spend on the house, which they have designed themselves. It is environmentally "sound" and suits their allergic son well. John was active in the green wave movement in the 1970s and both he and Vendela are interested in alternative energy systems and in self sufficiency. They work long hours, he as a surgeon and she as a teacher, but they are also keen gardeners and even keep hens. They sometimes take part in various activities that their children engage in.

Elisabet and Lars lived in the city centre but wanted a bigger house. What they really wanted was a farm so that they could raise horses, but their economy did not allow that at the time. Elisabet is studying and Lars has had different jobs. They are not very much involved in community life but meet a lot of friends from the city at home. They are keen on renovating the old house – to them it is important to keep the old style while modernising the building – and they like to have the garden full of friends.

Erik has moved out into his summer house close to the sea. He is tele-commuting but also travels a lot in his work. His wife still lives in the city since she has a less flexible job but she comes out on weekends. During the winter they spend more time in the apartment in town. Lars used to spend his summers in the area where they live now and he feels that he can get a lot of help from his childhood friends. He has a dog, and walks in the woods are very important to him. He wants to build a guesthouse so that they would be able to invite the children and their families to come and stay.

These biographical sketches, albeit very brief, illustrate how the biographical context, the motifs for rural living, as well as the place these people have chosen are interconnected and together contribute to the material as well as the immaterial make-up of rural society today. It is an illustration of how social relations shape places.

Different people – but with common values

One result from the interview study was that the rural milieu in a way could be seen as "a place for people with common values". They experience a sense of community which is built upon their common preferences for the rural and "the repudiation" of the urban, at least as a living environment. These values are articulated also in forms of collective action - such as keeping watch over each other's houses, accepting a collective responsibility for the children, or just keeping tabs on the neighbours: "... I can't see any light through the window, is he ill or is he not at home... I had better check..." or "...someone is phoning and asking if it is OK that my son is there, in their street. They know my number by heart. This would never happen in the city."

But there are also plenty of examples of people acting to fulfill "private ambitions" and of wanting to be on their own. This could manifest itself in terms of self-sufficiency or some sort of spatial integrity. It is important to be able to do what you like in the garden without having neighbours watch you, and there is also a feeling of safety in knowing that there is fish in the sea and vegetables in the garden. With such individual ambitions also goes a respect for other people's wish for privacy. Erik is talking about boating and spending the weekend by the sea. There, he says, "... if a boat is moored to an island you do not go ashore. You find another island."

Elisabet and Lars chose their house because they knew that the area around it is protected because it is agricultural land containing archaeological remains, and they knew that they would not get any neighbours close by.

The paradox here is that distance from the city, but also distance from the neighbours, are creating relations and a perceived closeness that is important for the so called sense of community. The rural, however, is a specific place – and forms a specific context – for people's actions. The actions can help to reproduce the milieu that was desired in terms of the values discussed above but can also change that environment because people act in another way due to circumstances which have to do with work and social networks.

Practice and the local community

It was the general opinion among the interviewed households that the social geography of the local community in the countryside - the localism of places - allows for greater social closeness than can be found in the city, despite lower population density and longer distances. In rural areas people meet in a limited number of often small and easy-to-take-in public places, where the behavior of new in-migrants can be observed and commented upon by other residents. How people act is more important than their background or appearance; it is appreciated if the migrant is as keen on boating as the local "old guard", and if the immigrant with a different ethnic background participates in the Christmas fair and joins the local historical society. Behaviour that deviates too much from the norm is regarded as problematic because "people will talk", and the result is non-acceptance.

If in-migrants have relatives in the area this will often mean that practices become more "private" or family-oriented, whereas otherwise social relations are often established through participation in the activities of clubs and societies. A third pattern is that a household primarily maintains contacts with friends in the town from which they moved and that the new home then becomes important as a focus for activities in already existing social networks.

Intentions behind the choice of housing situation obviously have an impact upon rural practices; a focus upon the children might lead to active participation in child-care matters and club activities, while a focus upon "peace and quiet" might mean an emphasis upon outdoor recreation and work on and around the house.

Quite often people commented upon the question of social control. On the positive side were reflections about the fact that people pay attention to what their neighbours do, but on the other hand people sometimes felt that this kind of attention circumscribed their freedom of action.

As mentioned above, involvement in local community life often takes the form of participation in the activities of clubs, societies and the like. Such involvement varies over the life cycle. Households with children, as well as retired people, tend to be more

involved in such activities than middle-age households for which work and contacts with relatives play a greater role. Clearly the distribution of households over different life cycle phases will have an impact upon the dynamics of local community life. Engagement in social organizations might be an indication of a willingness to participate in collective actions which aim to influence local development. Goals like "independence" and "having one's own territory", however, need not necessarily be incompatible with a willingness to take part in local community development.

The nature as "pantry", scene and essence

Practice oriented towards nature takes three forms. Firstly, it refers to the use of what nature provides - berries, mushrooms, fish, and also garden products - in everyday reproductive activities. Secondly, nature is seen as a desirable and appreciated backdrop to one's own living environment, even though one might not spend that much time in the great outdoors; rather it was a question of coffee and barbecuing in the garden and the occasional walk in the woods. Thirdly, in some interviews people expressed feelings of gratitude for just being able to "become one with nature", to have the opportunity to observe and reflect upon plant and animal life, weather, seasonal changes and so forth: "... you kind of gain new strength when you are out in the nature. And during the summer we are out of doors all the time. We live out of doors. The first thing in the morning... breakfast or coffee in the garden and we have built a porch where we can sit all night." Anette wants to spend time with "the old folks" and learn from them and this is closely connected with a desire to make use of natural resources – to pick and dry hips or smoke fish: "... they do everything by themselves, that's how I want it to be."

The house as an outlet for creativity and as something to care for and hold in trust

The house is important to some people as a place where one can be creative and busy oneself with various things. The house and the lot offer the secluded and private space that many seek. The home is also a symbolic investment, primarily for one's own household, for something that it has in common, rather than an investment intended to show "who one is" to others. For many households the home is a shared and important family project and for others it seems to be the man's life project, while the woman in the household has other interests: "...that's one reason for living here, so that Thomas would be able to build and repair" Myself, I spend most of my time with the horse."

The interviews show that what is appreciated with the rural milieu is on the one hand what the rural "is" and on the other hand what it is not – or what is referred to as urban. Interesting enough, the households had one thing in common – they talked about moving into the countryside, not about leaving the city. This is understandable because people had connections with the place where they moved – relatives, a cottage or summer vacations – and because many of them still visit the city several days a week, commuting to work or studies.

Conclusion: The paradoxes of rural living

Many of the people I interviewed spoke of the paradoxes of rural living, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously. They had (together in the household) chosen a living milieu that on the one hand they hoped would offer close-knit social relations, freedom to move around in the nature, for contemplation or various activities in the woods, on lakes or sea, or in the garden, but on the other hand also encompasses a sometimes

Place, practice and the countryside
Rural newcomers and the construction
of "the rural society" in Sweden

strict social environment that sets limits for what is acceptable, as well as daily routines which do not always allow people to engage in all those social relations which were one of the attractions of rural life in the first place.

I have discussed here some of the results from an interview study in a part of Sweden that is experiencing counterurbanisation. Starting from the two broader questions concerning the decision to move to the countryside and how life in the new living milieu forms out, the study provides empirical information about how a rural society is perceived and constructed – through the eyes of the newcomers.

The diversity of experiences concerning rural areas or "a rural place" is an effect both of the place itself, its characteristics, opportunities and restrictions, the intentions of the people moving there and the background (relations and material resources) of the newcomers. The act of moving and the act of "living" thus must be seen as practice in a social and physical context, as well as a biographical one.

The motifs for moving to the countryside and some of the practices which were documented in this study suggest that "counterurbanisation" - migration to the countryside – primarily has to do with the specific interests of individuals and households, and less with a desire to further broader societal goals. Respondents often talked about their feelings about nature, but few about nature in terms of environmental problems, and only in one household was the option of living in an environmentally more responsible way mentioned. The reasons for moving to the countryside primarily seem to reflect "private ambitions", a feature also discussed by Berlan-Darque and Collomb (1991).

The fact that the households in this study were well aware of the problems associated with living in the countryside - a lack of services and much travelling - sometimes has the effect that they show little interest in attempts to save what services there are. In younger and middle-age households people often work or study in nearby urban places and patronize shops and other service establishments there, and their attitude sometimes is that "we moved to the countryside for other reasons, certainly not for its supply of services". A few older respondents were more likely to look ahead, worry about not being so mobile in later years, and therefore keen to use what services there are in the hope that this will help maintain mail delivery, the local general store, and so forth.

There were more discussions during the interviews about preserving and protecting than about changing elements in the physical as well as the social milieu - to stop plans for a gravel pit, repair a community centre building, build an open-air dance floor, lobby to maintain the bus service, limit expansion of second home settlement, and discourage in-migration of "problem households". Respondents illustrated their awareness of conflicts between private and collective interests - they put a high value on having one's own private territory, but were against heavy exploitation of the archipelago for second homes because it would destroy natural assets and limit public access to recreational areas.

The rural idyll reproduced in a new context

In some cases change was welcomed - a new terrace house project in one parish was regarded as a good thing (even though some people would never contemplate living there themselves), and several respondents said that they would welcome in-migrants of non-Swedish background because this would better reflect the national demographic profile. There are signs that the new countryside residents, in their "production of rural space" want to preserve and reproduce some of the past - sometimes associated with the rural idyll - but realize that this must be done in a new context.

It is sometimes tempting, perhaps, to look upon households in the countryside as small islands, where people have found the peace and independence they have sought, and from where only sporadic contacts are taken with local clubs, nearby relatives, or the work-place and social networks in the nearest town or city. Such a picture can be interpreted in different ways in the context of rural planning. The countryside can be viewed as areas characterized by order (cf. Halfacree 1997:83) and dominant localized relations and practices, or as areas which are "relational" in a broader sense, with people linked to many other places (place polygamy according to Beck, 1997) in many different contexts - but perhaps with the houses and small villages still as "islands of order".

I have tried to reach beyond questions concerning migration and frequently cited reasons for countryside living - to try to find out how the countryside is constituted through people's actions and the newcomer's perceptions of other people's actions. I have also tried to use an "action approach" which focuses on people's actions and the directions and contexts of their actions, rather than upon categorizing the newcomers themselves.

This study thus supplements a well-established rural geography literature which shows that places are constituted by a mix of social relations and physical environments which together form the geographical area in focus. The identity of such a place can be something that many of the people inhabiting and visiting have in common but there are also most definitely characteristics which people do not agree about. Tortuna, one of the parishes that was visited in the study, was characterized by the people I interviewed both as a close-knit community where you always can get help and enjoy rich social relations, and as a place where you are not accepted until you belong to the fourth generation and where "there is no sense of community at all".

What I have argued is that such different standpoints are an effect both of the place itself, the intentions of the people moving there and the background (relations and material resources) of the newcomers. The act of moving and the act of "living" must be seen as action in a social and physical - and a biographical - context.

I have also argued that the image that the newcomers have of the village or area they are moving into can be fulfilled perhaps only in some respects. What also can happen is that the village does seem to live up to the expectations that the newcomers had, but that does not guarantee that the newcomers - or other people - will continue to reproduce all the elements of the milieu that originally attracted them to it.

The intentions with the new life play a crucial role here. Was the idea to live an outward-directed life and to become involved in the community through the pursuit of leisure activities, and contacts with relatives or new friends? Or was the primary reason to shape the perfect home for the family, one's own household? The latter will mean that actions are inwardly directed, the home and house are in focus, and as long as the adults of the households are working (probably in a town nearby, but commuting) there will not be much time for community life. One of the main reasons given by the newcomers of today for moving to the countryside, to become a part of a close-knit society - which to some extent might still be a reality, may not be so much of a reality in the future.

The study also illustrates how the everyday practices of households are contributing to the local place in terms of actions directed towards three different arenas: the community, nature and the house or home. The newcomer's actions can be understood through these three arenas and it is the degree to which the actions are outwardly or inwardly directed that affects the society and how it will change. Arenas for social relations and community activities are just as important as the intentions and experiences of the household.

Countryside living and individualization

Finally, I would like to refer to the concept of individualization, as it has been developed by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002). A fruitful approach when studying society and its actors is to pay attention to the shift from an industrial society with relatively static social categories to a society characterized by the increasing fragility of such categories as "class and social status, gender roles, familj, neighbourhood et cetera" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002:2). At the end of the 20th century, people are no longer tied to the lifeforms of the industrial society, just as they, at the beginning of the industrial epoch, were liberated from the corporative and feudal forms of society and ways of life. The more stable forms of socialisation that characterised industrial modernity are dissolving and we are instead facing a much more pronounced individualization (Beck 1995:133).

Beck means, however, that individualization is a concept that does not imply atomization, isolation, increasing alienation and lack of all meaningful social relations. Rather, the concept has another meaning – it has as its cornerstones the *dissolving* of the lifeforms of the industrial society and their *replacement* by other lifeforms (Beck 1995:134). "The decisive feature of these modern regulations or guidelines is that, far more than earlier, individuals must, in part, supply them for themselves, import them into their biographies through their own actions" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002:2). In other words, it is up to every individual to shape his or her own future, to consider the opportunities and to make an active effort. This does not mean that everything is happening by choice, rather it is happening due to a combination of the framework of the industrial welfare state and the individual's own actions (Beck 1995:134f).

When, in such a scenario, the individual assumes an important role as an actor, constructor, juggler and stage-setter, the rural could be regarded as a suitable context for the creation of a biography since it could represent "freedom" and "the creation of 'what is ours'". The countryside could also be seen as the arena that still contains some of the relatively well-defined roles in society, or at least clearly expected actions (see also Halfacree 1997). But what will be obvious is that the newcomers are changing "the rural" themselves, just by joining it with their own experiences and expectations and by "stirring" the pot while constructing their own biographies. And this should not be seen either as a disadvantage or an advantage for the rural areas which are experiencing counterurbanisation, but rather as an important aspect of the shaping of biographies and of the shaping of society.

In the future it will be interesting to see whether the old image or representation of the rural will survive. Even though the practices of people change, the representations could remain. Alternatively, the preferences of people will be different in the future and such values as independence, freedom and "peace and quiet" might be even more important than participation. Or we may see other values emerging as essential in people's lives.

A question that should be explored in the future is to what extent the valued and experienced countryside in terms of a sense of community and close-knit society will exist if the practices of the newcomers to a large extent are inwardly directed and mostly concentrated on the family and activities connected with the well-being of the family. The increase in single-person households will make this less likely but, on the other hand, these households are relatively rare in the countryside. We will probably be able to observe the differentiation of the rural, of its different countrysides, also in aspects concerning the rural as a private territory or as an arena for collective action and "border-crossing" activities – all important for shaping "the sense of community" and "the construction of the rural society".

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