3rd edition of

Ruralities and Regions in Transition

Book of Abstracts

11–12 November 2026
Örebro, Sweden

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Preface: *Renewing thinking and action for new times*

Rural areas across the globe have become sites of ‘sustainable’ development. Through climate interventions such as wind power, climate smart forestry and agriculture and mining, rural areas are taken for granted by politicians and companies alike as the basis for sustainable futures. In parallel, a sense of crisis is an underlying current in rural areas. Depopulation, conflicts over land as well as increasing xenophobic rhetoric are setting the boundaries for what actually is sustainable development in rural and regional politics. Policy measures that strive for sustainable business practices and citizens can have contradictory outcomes for everyday rural lives and the rural economy. But stories of rural and regional development are not only of struggles over resources, colonial domination and exclusions but also about local mobilisation, innovation and collective action aimed at strengthening communities and meeting the everyday needs of the people who live in and care for rural environments. All this and more demand close examination and reflection on the rural. We need new ways to think and act in times of transition. Old concepts and theories need revisiting and rethought for our new times.

The conference Ruralities and Regions in Transition is arranged biannually and is held in different locations in Sweden. This year, 2026, the conference is held in Örebro 11-12 November. The purpose of the conference is to create space for researchers and actors involved in rural development to meet and discuss, with the hope of nurturing new collaborations and ideas on how to tackle these complex questions. The overarching theme of this years conference, is *Renewing thinking and action for new times.*

Conference program

Wednesday 11th November

09:30-10:30 Registration and fika

10:30-11:00 Welcome address

11:00-12:00 Keynote speaker Ruth McAreavey, Discussant Klas Fritzon

12:00-13:00 Lunch

13:00-14:30 Parallel sessions

14:30-15:30 Keynote speaker Jan Dobbernack, Discussant Seema Arora-Jonsson

15:30-16:00 Break

16:00-17:30 Parallel sessions

19:00-21:30 Conference Dinner

Thursday 12th November

09:00-10:30 Parallel sessions

10:30-11:00 Break

11:00-12:00 Keynote speaker Jennifer Gabrys, Discussant Johann Lindberg

12:00-13:00 Lunch

13:00-14:30 Parallel sessions

14:30-15:00 Break

15:00-16:30 Parallel sessions

16:30-17:00 Closing of conference

Program for parallel sessions

SESSIONS WEDNESDAY 11TH OF NOVEMBER

	Rural Housing and Living environments	Rural Transitions	Work, entrepreneurship and value chains	Renewing thinking and action for new times
Session 1 Kl. 13:00	**Bryggaren** WG 12:1 Age-Optimized Living Environments. Chairs: Petter Ahlström & Ann Svensson **1. Svensson et al.** *Designing Health-Promoting Senior Housing: Exploring How Built Environments Enable Social Participation and Wellbeing.* **2. Egea-Hernández et al**. *Women´s volunteering associations for active ageing in rural areas of southern Spain.* **3. Ahlström et al.** *A gap in planning? The relationship between spatial planning and individuals' perceptions of senior housing.* **4. Bjelke et al.** *Optimized Aging in Sustainable Human–Environment Systems; Older Adults in Need of Care.*	**Mältaren** WG 8 Transition by Design, Care by Default: North-South Dialogues on Rural Green Transitions. Chairs: Kavya Michael & Kennedy Mbeva **1.Mbeve.** *Who shapes the just transition? Examining intellectual hegemony in climate research.* **2. Andersson.** *From Self-Sufficient Urban Households to Caring Interdependence: Reimagining Individualised Crisis Preparedness as Collective Resilience.* **3. Michael et al.** *Caught between pressures and measures: the entanglements, tensions and alignments between climate adaptation and mitigation.* **4. Arora-Jonsson.** *Everyday Justice in Disassembled States: Forest Contestations in Times of Climate Transition.*	**Skomakaren** WG 1:1 Rural Work Futures: Flexibility, Equality and Skills Provision. Chairs: Lena Grip, Ulrika Jansson & Maria Bogren **1.Eng et al.** *Balancing Flexibility and Skills Provision in SMEs: Opportunities and Challenges for Rural Work Futures.* **2. Bogren et al.** *Beyond Flexibility: The Role of Leadership, Trust, and Autonomy in Work–Life Balance.* **3. Talleraas.** *Rigid Thoughts – Flexible Actions. Do mental barriers constitute an unconscious bias in recruitment processes?* **4. Jansson & Grip.** *Problematic Proximity: Gender, Recruitment, and Skills Provision in a Rural Labour Market.*	**Näbben** WG 14:2 Open session: Mobilities, emerging rural communities and community action. Chair: Arvid Stiernström **1. Lindberg.** *From Mobile Libraries to Facilitative Platforms: The Role of Bookmobiles in Rural Digital Service Ecosystems* **2. Brunet Johansson.** *Facilitating Local Actors and Local Action (LALA) for community sustainability: insights from a rural municipality in northern Sweden* **3. Cras.** *Conceptualizing engagement in local civil society – crisis and transformations.*

SESSIONS WEDNESDAY 11TH OF NOVEMBER

	Rural Housing and Living environments	Rural Transitions	Work, entrepreneurship and value chains	Renewing thinking and action for new times
Session 2 Kl. 16:00	**Bryggaren** WG 12:2 Age-Optimized Living Environments. Chairs: Petter Ahlström & Ann Svensson **1. Hellman.** *Translating Age-Optimized Living Environments: An Actor-Network Theory Perspective.* **2. Clase.** *Age-Optimised Housing in Rural Areas: A Case Study from Sweden* **3. Bomble.** *From NIMBY versus YIMBY to place-attachments and place logics: Understanding residents' views of place-making in South Africa and Sweden.* **4. Asztalos Morell.** *Promoting culturally adequate food for in the public kitchen and the indigenous Eight season wheel: The case of food provision for elderly Sami.*	**Mältaren** WG 3. Rural Landscapes in Transition: Digital Technologies, Land Use and Local Knowledge. Chairs: Kajsa Kuoljok & Malte Rödl. **1.Prado Córdova et al.** *Finding epistemic avenues for justice within the conservation-related datascape at the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala.* **2.Rohlin & Arora-Jonsson.** *Digitalisation in Swedish Forestry: From Policy Visions to Forest Owners' Practices.* **3.Kuoljok.** *Translating Árbediehtu into RenGIS++: Cumulative Effects and Digital Land-Use Planning.* **4. Rahn.** *Disappearing in the crowd: The challenge of collective accountability in devolved forest governance.* **5. Sobiech.** *Automated transport solutions to improve accessibility – experiences from a living lab in northern Sweden.*	**Skomakaren** Workshop: Engaging in policy as rural or regional scholars Charis: Patrik Cras & Arvid Stiernström Starting in 2019, the Swedish university of agricultural science have been tasked to coordinate rural and regional research in Sweden and to supply the ministry of infrastructure and rural affairs with policy relevant knowledge. In this panel discussion and workshop, we will explore policy development at the intersection of academia and government in the context of rural and regional studies. We will discuss both the joint knowledge and policy production process and critically examine the opportunities and limitations of the government-academia interface.	**Näbben** WG 14:3 Open session: Agrarian transitions. Chair: Arvid Stiernström. **1. Ramsay.** *Searching for (a)ffective policy: An emotion discourse analysis of the Farm to Fork Strategy.* **2. Barabair.** *Contested Ground: Green Transition, Agrarian Discontent and the Politics of Territorialisation in Sweden, Poland and the EU.* *3.* ***Fuglestad.*** *Metabolic rift and Mute compulsion: an approach to advancing sustainable agriculture.*

SESSIONS WEDNESDAY 12TH OF NOVEMBER

	Rural Housing and Living environments	Rural Transitions	Work, entrepreneurship and value chains	Renewing thinking and action for new times
Session 3 Kl. 9.00	**Bryggaren** WG 12:3 Age-Optimized Living Environments. Chairs: Petter Ahlström & Ann Svensson. **1.Herrmansson et al.** *Designing Inclusive Digital Care Environments: Integrating Older Adults' Perspectives in the Development of Home-Based Health Technologies.* **2. Bjelke & Ahlström.** *Optimized Aging in Sustainable Human–Environment Systems; Healthy Older Adults.* **3. Olsson-Tall et al.** *Living in a bridgeless island community: environmental, social and infrastructural conditions for age-optimized living in remote regions.* **4. Sjöström.** *From planned space to lived place: Exploring health-promoting senior housing in rural Sweden.*	**Mältaren** WG 14:1 Open session: Policies and actions for sustainable rural landscapes. Chair: Arvid Stiernstrom **1. Sörensson.** *Ecological Collateral: Forest Ownership as Organizational Slack in Rural Entrepreneurship* ***2.*** **Hermansson.** *Environmental politics and political polarization – Exploring rural perspectives in Sweden* **3. Isaksen.** *Visualising Value - Using film to map Restoration Futures with forest owners*	**Skomakaren** WG 1:2 Rural Work Futures: Flexibility, Equality and Skills Provision. Chair: Lena Grip, Ulrika Jansson & Maria Bogren **1.Widerstedt & Hovdan.** *Beyond "Women Move and Men Stay": Migration, Education and Family Formation Among Young Adults in a Nordic Peripheral Region.* **2. Axelsson.** *Rooted in care: alternative wild food economies and the remaking of work in the north Swedish inland.* **3. Mozetič.** *Remote Work, Rural Refuge: Spatial Dimensions of Settlement Among Refugee Remote Workers in Rural Sweden.* **4. Zackrisson.** *The picture of entrepreneurship among young men and women in rural and urban settings.*	**Näbben** WG 14:4 Open session: Politics and actions of everyday rural sustainability. Chair: Patrik Cras **1. Guaglione.** *Sustainability in a Changing Place: Everyday Practices and Tensions in a Rural Border Neigbourhood.* **2. Kilje. "***Social dumpning"and neighbour-to-neighbour advocacy in a Swedish mill town.*

SESSIONS WEDNESDAY 12TH OF NOVEMBER

	Rural Housing and Living environments	Rural Transitions	Work, entrepreneurship and value chains	Renewing thinking and action for new times
Session 4 Kl. 13:00	**Bryggaren** WG 2:1 Rural Housing: Market, Mobilities and the Politics of Rural Dwelling. Charis: Andreas Back & Josefna Syssner. **1. Löwgren.** *"Anyone can afford to live here" – an ethnographic exploration of the politics of cheap, vacant housing in rural southern Sweden.* **2. Persson.** *Urban expectations, rural realities? Exploring notions of homeownership and alternative market practices in rural Sweden.* **3. Runga & Stamsø.** *Innovation in Rural Housing Markets Under Structural Constraints: Agency, Governance and Rural Transformation in Norway.*	**Mältaren** WG 10:1 Perspectives on Justice, Inclusion, and Legitimacy in the Local Climate and Energy Transformation. Chair: Daniel Lindvall. **1. Planting Mollaoglu**. *Governance Through Private Ownership: Wind Power, Land and the Climate Transition in Rural Sweden.* **2. Callerstig**. *Gender, justice and inclusion in the energy transition: Exploring social dimensions of rural prosumership in Sweden* **3. Meurling.** *Renewable energy for resilient and sustainable food production*	**Skomakaren** WG 6:1 Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Value Chains in Transition. Chair: Henrik Dellestrand. **1. Jaller, Sörensson & Kask.** *Against the Grain: Dependency Reduction and Resilience in Rural Entrepreneurship.* **2.Tillmar & Roos.** *Cross-sector entrepreneuring in times of transformation: Sustaining rural libraries through ecosystem collaboration***.**	**Näbben** *Panel discussion:* Challenges, Potentials and the Future of Rural and Regional Research. Panel discussion organized in cooperation with Formas. Moderator: Katarina Eckerberg, UmU Panel discussion with: • Seema Arora-Jonsson, SLU • Katarina Giritli-Nygren, MIUN • Åsa Isacsson, UU • Alex Dubois, Formas • Emma Stockvall Carlsson, Formas • Josefin Wangel, Formas

SESSIONS WEDNESDAY 12TH OF NOVEMBER

	Rural Housing and Living environments	Rural Transitions	Work, entrepreneurship and value chains	Renewing thinking and action for new times
Session 5 Kl. 15:00	**Bryggaren** WG 2:2 Rural Housing: Market, Mobilities and the Politics of Rural Dwelling. Chairs: Andreas Back & Josefina Syssner. **1.Back.** *Zombies of the Rural Housing Market: A Scoping Review of Housing Abandonment.* **2. Meriläinen et al.** *The Rural Blind Spot: Reframing the Housing Crisis in Left-Behind Nordic Regions.* **3. Syssner.** *Trygghet i glesbygdens bostadsområden.*	**Mältaren** WG 10:2 Perspectives on Justice, Inclusion, and Legitimacy in the Local Climate and Energy Transformation. Chair: Daniel Lindvall. **1. Lindahl.** *Navigating Dilemmas and Trade-offs in Natural Resource Governance: Ensuring Just and Legitimate Decision-Making.* **2. Gonda & Bori.** *Energy Transitions after Illiberalism: Infrastructures of Democratic Repair.* **3. Lindvall.** *Is Wind Power Acceptance a Matter of Justice? Evidence from Residents Living Near Wind Turbines in Sweden***.**	**Skomakaren**	**Näbben**

Program for PhD student sessions

During the conference, we arrange two special PhD talks outside the regular conference program. These will be opportunities to discuss your own work in relation to the field of rural research, together with other PhD students and the conference keynote speaker Ruth McAvery, senior lecturer in Political Sociology Jan Dobbernack and professor of Rural development in the global north Seema-Arora Jonsson.

You register for these talks by sending an e-mail to patrik.cras@slu.se. All registered participants will receive three research articles on the theme of the future or rural research to read before the PhD sessions at the conference.

Wednesday 11th November

9.00 – 10.00	PhD talk: What is rural research? Round table discussions with Ruth McAvery, Jan Dobbernack and Patrik Cras. Location: Room "Näbben" at the conference venue.
17.45 – 18.45	PhD talk: The future of rural research? Round table discussions with Ruth McAvery, Jan Dobbernack and Seema Arora-Jonsson. Location: Scandic Grand Örebro, look for the meeting room market "SLU PhD talks"

Keynote Lectures



The Rural Reframed: Knowledge, Practice, and the Politics of Development

Keynote speaker: Ruth McAreavey

Ruth McAreavey focuses on migration, governance and ethics. She is interested in the inequalities that migrants face in the labour market and in other areas of everyday life. She has published extensively on rural governance and regeneration, international migration, and research ethics and methods.

The Rural Reframed: Knowledge, Practice, and the Politics of Development challenges comfortable assumptions about what "the rural" is and who gets to define it. It interrogates the or invisible, and how development agendas reshape rural realities. Bringing theory into conversation with lived experience, I will argue that reframing the rural is not a theoretical process, but a political act that determines whose futures are made possible—and whose are excluded.

In conversation with Klas Fritzon

Klas Fritzon works at Hela Sverige ska leva, a Swedish umbrella organisation for local development groups and civil society organisations. He served as an expert in the government's SVESAM inquiry into rural and regional development policy, having previously worked on similar issues at the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. His work brings together rural research, political debate and people's everyday experiences. He explores the gap between the widely shared ambition that all parts of Sweden should thrive and the decisions that shape people's opportunities to live and work there. At the conference, Klas will respond to Ruth McAveary's keynote, drawing on insights and questions from the Swedish rural policy context.



Left Behind People, Left Behind Places and the New Politics of Resilience

Keynote speaker: Jan Dobbernack

Jan Dobbernack is a political sociologist at Newcastle University. His research examines how social and political problems are framed in public debate and policy, with particular interests in migration, belonging and inequality. His recent work explores narratives of spatial disadvantage and the "left behind", examining how marginalized populations are represented in contemporary projects of cohesion, development and resilience.

In conversation with Seema Arora-Johnsson

Seema Arora-Johnsson is a Professor of Rural Development and Chair for the subject, Rural Development in the Global North, at SLU in Uppsala. Among other things, she works with sustainability and justice in environmental governance, climate transitions and rural development across the global North and South.



Planetary Praxis for Environmental Justice

Keynote speaker: Jennifer Gabrys

Jennifer Gabrys focuses on the relationship between environment, technology and society, with a particular interest in how digital technologies, sensors and citizen science shape environmental knowledge, governance and societal transformations. She leads the Planetary Praxis research group and is the principal investigator of the ERC-funded project Smart Forests: Transforming Environments into Social-Political Technologies. She also leads the ERC-funded projects Citizen Sense and AirKit.

The Planetary Praxis research group launched in September 2020 to undertake practice-based investigations focused on social, digital, and environmental justice. This talk offers an overview of the group's projects, with an emphasis on Smart Forests, a current initiative exploring the increasing digitalisation of forest environments worldwide. How do digital technologies organise the problem of environmental change, and what types of action do they facilitate? How can attention to social equity rework conventional approaches to digital technologies? This talk considers the potential of community-led practices to transform engagements with technologies and environments.

In conversation with Johanna Lindberg

Johanna Lindberg work with Environ Living Lab (ELL), a newly initiated effort to develop Living Labs as an approach for bringing together local and experience-based knowledge, research, environmental monitoring, and digital technologies. The work builds on a participatory and needs-driven approach, where people living and working in a place are not only seen as recipients of knowledge, but as active participants in identifying needs, producing knowledge, and adapting solutions. At the moment her work focuses particularly on water environments and on how Living Labs can support long-term collaboration between local communities, researchers, public-sector actors, and other relevant stakeholders. Johanna will reflect on Jennifer Gabrys' keynote with insights from researching the intersection of digital and environmental issues in local communities in Sweden.

Working groups

We started off with 14 different subthemes for the working groups at the conference. Some of them have been cancelled but to avoid misunderstandings we have keep their original numbers.

The subthemes for the conference are:

1. Rural Work Futures: Flexibility, Equality and Skills Provision
2. Rural Housing: Market, Mobilities and the Politics of Rural Dwelling
3. Rural Landscapes in Transition: Digital Technologies, Land Use and Local Knowledge
6. Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Value Chains in Transition
7. Cancelled
8. Transition by Design, Care by Default: North-South Dialogues on Rural Green Transitions
9. Cancelled
10. Perspectives on Justice, Inclusion, and Legitimacy in the Local Climate and Energy Transformation
11. Cancelled
12. Age-Optimized Living Environments
13. Cancelled
14. Open track with the following subthemes:
    14:1 Policies and actions for sustainable rural development
    14:2 Mobilities, emerging rural communities and community action
    14:3 Agrarian Transitions
    14:4 Politics and actions of everyday rural sustainability

Panel discussions and workshops

There will also be a panel discussion and a workshop during the parallel sessions.

Panel discussion: Challenges, Potentials and the Future of Rural and Regional Research

There will be a panel discussion organized in cooperation with Formas. The aim of the session is to provide food for thought for future research priorities, including knowledge gaps, knowledge production modes, and dissemination and implementation needs. The session seeks to achieve this through bringing together a panel or researchers and research funders and inviting them to a joint discussion of future research needs in the field(s) of ruralities and regions in transition.

Moderator: Katarina Eckerberg, UmU

Panel:

- Seema Arora-Jonsson, SLU
- Katarina Giritli-Nygren, MIUN
- Åsa Isacsson, UU
- Alex Dubois, Formas
- Emma Stockvall Carlsson, Formas
- Josefin Wangel, Formas

Workshop: Engaging in policy as rural or regional scholars

Rural and regional policy stands out in the Swedish political landscape in that it is designed to have a territorial scope, focusing on geography, in contrast to sector-specific policy. In practice this means the policy production process covers many different political topics, ranging from migration to spatial planning to healthcare and natural resource extraction. Starting in 2019, the Swedish university of agricultural science have been tasked to coordinate rural and regional research in Sweden and to supply the ministry of infrastructure and rural affairs with policy relevant knowledge.

In this workshop, we will explore policy development at the intersection of academia and government in the context of rural and regional studies. We will discuss both the joint knowledge and policy production process and critically examine the opportunities and limitations of the government-academia interface.

Workshop organizers: Patrik Cras and Arvid Stiernström, SLU.

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WG 1. Rural Work Futures: Flexibility, Equality and Skills Provision

Working group chairs:
Lena Grip, Ulrika Jansson & Maria Bogren

About the working group

Skills provision has increasingly been framed as a decisive and necessary condition for sustainable regional development and for maintaining competitiveness across both the private and public sectors. This challenge is particularly pronounced in peripheral and sparsely populated regions, where demographic shifts, out-migration, and structural labour-market changes intersect with the escalating demand for labour associated with the "green transition". Northern Sweden, alongside other rural areas across the Nordic region, is currently experiencing substantial pressures regarding labour shortages. New jobs, new competencies, and strategies for broader recruitment make skills provision a central issue in both private and public sectors. Remote work and other flexible work arrangements have been promoted as possible means to address these challenges by expanding recruitment pools and counteracting geographic constraints. At the same time, the location where work is performed can influence how the work and the worker are perceived and valued. Flexible forms of work also introduce organisational challenges, including weakened knowledge transfer, reduced opportunities for informal collaboration, diminished creativity, and the risk of exacerbating gendered and other structural inequalities within organisations.

This working group invites contributions that critically engage with issues of work, recruitment, and workforce retention in rural contexts. If flexible work arrangements are to function as sustainable components of long-term skills provision, a nuanced understanding of both their potentials and their limitations is essential. This includes the development of strategies and methodologies that promote socially sustainable and gender-equal organisational environments.

We therefore welcome papers that offer renewed conceptual, methodological, or empirical perspectives on work, skills provision, and flexible work arrangements in rural areas. Contributions that engage explicitly with gender equality, social justice, or intersectional dimensions of labour and regional development are particularly encouraged.

We invite submissions from scholars at all career stages and across disciplinary boundaries. Both theoretical and empirical contributions are welcome, intending to collectively deepen and advance discussions on the theme of this working group.

Balancing Flexibility and Skills Provision in SMEs: Opportunities and Challenges for Rural Work Futures

Ingela Eng, Emmanuel Aboagye, Eva Bergsten & Annika Strömberg, Gävle University, Sweden

Abstract text

The ability to attract and retain skilled employees has become a critical challenge for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), particularly in rural and sparsely populated regions facing labour shortages and demographic change. Flexible work arrangements (FWAs), including remote and hybrid work, are frequently presented as a potential solution by expanding recruitment pools beyond local labour markets. However, less is known about how such arrangements influence organizational functioning and long-term competitiveness in SMEs.

This study explores how SME managers perceive the consequences of FWAs for organizational attractiveness, productivity, and innovation. A qualitative design was employed, based on semi-structured interviews with 17 managers from small and medium-sized enterprises located in central Sweden. The sample included organizations from manufacturing, finance, consulting, telecommunications, and related sectors.

The findings indicate that FWAs create both opportunities and challenges for skills provision in SMEs. Managers described flexibility as an increasingly important factor for attracting and retaining employees, particularly by enabling recruitment from a wider geographical area and increasing access to specialised competencies that would otherwise be difficult to secure. At the same time, participants expressed concerns regarding weaker organizational attachment and reduced employee loyalty when remote work becomes extensive. Managers also highlighted challenges related to coordination, knowledge sharing, and the development of innovation, emphasizing that flexibility requires active management and structured work processes to maintain organizational effectiveness. While FWAs may enhance individual productivity and autonomy, they can also reduce opportunities for spontaneous interaction and collaboration that are important for collective learning and innovation.

The study contributes to discussions on rural work futures by demonstrating that flexible work arrangements can support skills provision and organizational attractiveness in SMEs, but that their long-term sustainability depends on how organizations balance flexibility with collaboration, knowledge exchange, and organizational cohesion.

Beyond Flexibility: The Role of Leadership, Trust, and Autonomy in Work–Life Balance

Maria Bogren, Tonje Christensen & Gro Talleraas, Nord University, Norway

Abstract text

In contemporary working life, characterized by increasing flexibility in when and where work is performed, new challenges and opportunities arise in achieving work–life balance (WLB). Although WLB and leadership have been widely studied, the relationship between them remains insufficiently explored. This study examines how employees in a Norwegian financial services company experience flexible work arrangements, and how managerial facilitation influences their WLB.

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was applied, based on nine informants (five women, four men) aged 34–66, with 5–37 years of organizational tenure. All participants had experience with remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted in February–March 2025 and analyzed using thematic coding.

Findings indicate that flexible working hours and flexible work location are perceived as the most important forms of flexibility for achieving WLB. However, flexibility alone is insufficient. Rather, WLB is enhanced through a combination of flexibility, autonomy, clearly communicated expectations, and managerial support and trust. Trust between employee and manager emerges as a central theme; when expectations regarding task completion are explicitly communicated and consistently reinforced in practice, employees report improved WLB.

The study also identifies unintended consequences of flexible work arrangements. Many participants report feelings of guilt when working from home, often resulting in shortened lunch breaks. Combining remote work with caregiving responsibilities—such as caring for sick children—can create unsustainable situations and result in dual feelings of inadequacy both as employees and caregivers. Some participants emphasized the need for separation rituals, such as maintaining a dedicated home office. Notably, male participants also reported being allowed to work from their workplace offices during the COVID-19 period.

Overall, the study highlights the critical role of leadership in translating flexibility into sustainable work–life balance.

Rigid Thoughts – Flexible Actions. Do mental barriers constitute an unconscious bias in recruitment processes?

Gro Talleraas, Nord University, Norway

Abstract text

How SMEs deal with labour shortages, how they think about and practise flexibility and what consequences this has for the company is an under-researched area. This study contributes to filling this gap by exploring flexibility practices in SMEs in Trøndelag and Jämtland.
Using a qualitative approach with interviews and participant observation in local businesses, specifically in the Steinkjer area and Strömsund, this study examines how different forms of flexibility play out in local SMEs, focusing on whether flexible arrangements are deliberately incorporated into the company's strategy and structure or whether they are more random products of specific negotiations between employer and employee.

Interviews and observations were conducted in different industries in Steinkjer and Strömsund, all of which had growth potential and a need for more labour. They pointed to different reasons for not being able to get hold of people, but what they had in common was that they had clear ideas about who they wanted to employ and how the work should be organized and performed. This represents a predictive approach to recruitment where the business has defined the who, what and how in advance. In practice, however, they hired people who didn't match this picture and a great deal of flexibility was exercised in several areas. Recruitment processes were predominantly informal and random and were handled as social negotiation and adaptation processes. This points to more private, flexible solutions, partly in relation to, and partly across, the frameworks set by the organizations as collective actors. This shows that there is a gap between how they think about recruitment and what they do in practice - and a gap between how they reflect and talk about flexibility opportunities in the job and what they actually facilitate individually. These gaps point to room for maneuver where there is untapped potential.

Problematic Proximity: Gender, Recruitment, and Skills Provision in a Rural Labour Market.

Ulrika Jansson, University of Gothenburg & **Lena Grip,** Karlstad University

Abstract text

This paper examines how gendered norms shape skills provision and recruitment to leadership positions in a rural regional context. Responding to ongoing debates on labour shortages, regional development, and the future of work in sparsely populated areas, the study contributes an empirically grounded, gender-sensitive analysis of recruitment practices and their implications for sustainable skills provision.

Drawing on qualitative interviews with recruiters, HR professionals, and hiring managers, the study conceptualises recruitment through different forms of proximity: geographical, professional, emotional, and network-based. The findings show that recruitment processes are strongly embedded in informal networks and local knowledge, which can facilitate trust and retention but also reproduce excluding practices. Homosocial dynamics and gendered assumptions about leadership lead to the continued privileging of male candidates, while women and newcomers are more likely to be scrutinised or overlooked.

The paper further demonstrates how proximity operates as both a resource and a constraint in rural labour markets. While local embeddedness and strong ties support organisational stability, they may also limit access to new competencies and hinder broader, more inclusive recruitment strategies—an increasingly critical issue given demographic change and growing labour demands linked to regional transformation.

Beyond “Women Move and Men Stay”: Migration, Education and Family Formation Among Young Adults in a Nordic Peripheral Region.

Barbo Widerstedt, Mittuniversitetet, Sweden **& Birgitte Hovdan,** Nord University, Norway

Abstract text

The observation that “women move and men stay” has become a recurring theme in research on rural demographic change. Persistent gender imbalances may have long-term consequences for population renewal and economic development in peripheral regions. While this pattern has been documented across a variety of national and regional contexts, less is known about how migration decisions unfold during the transition to adulthood and how they relate to education, labour market participation, and family formation.

This presentation examines migration trajectories among a cohort of Swedish and Norwegian young adults born in 1991–1992 between the ages of 20 and 30. The study focuses young adults who grow up in *Nordens gröna bälte*, a cross-border region spanning parts of Sweden and Norway and characterized by long distances, sparse population, and common labour market challenges. The cross-border regional context highlights opportunities for future comparative research on how national institutions shape migration, education, and family formation decisions among young adults.

Using longitudinal register data, we analyse transitions between different geographical areas and activity states, including higher education, employment, and family formation, and particularly gender differences in migration behaviour. We also compare movers and stayers with respect to family background, educational achievement, and upper-secondary school pathways.

By linking migration decisions to key life-course transitions, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the demographic and socioeconomic processes shaping regional development in peripheral areas with challenging demographic trends and thin labour markets.

Rooted in care: alternative wild food economies and the remaking of work in the north Swedish inland.

Linn Axelsson, Stockholm University

Abstract text

The urgent need to transform contemporary food systems has become increasingly clear as industrialised modes of production continue to exacerbate ecological and social crises. Such transformation cannot be achieved through technical fixes alone but must involve deeper economic reorientation. Drawing on J-K Gibson-Graham and colleagues, the paper centres care and affect as constitutive elements of alternative economic lives, understanding rural, peripheral economies as "spaces of hope" and "creative possibility" through which dominant industrial food logics become open for questioning and reimagining. Empirically, the paper builds on long-term engagement with wild food producers in the north Swedish inland. This is a landscape under multiple pressures, including depopulation and resource extraction, and it is within and against these conditions that these producers' choices about how to work, what work is for, and what it means to sustain a livelihood in a peripheral region take on their particular character. The paper explores a diverse range of care-centred economic practices characterised by a reparative stance: an openness to affect, a willingness to experiment with alternative forms of economic organisation, an ethical commitment to enoughness in resource use, and a deliberate refusal to scale up production. These practices prioritise values other than profit, including multispecies relations, a life close to nature, and a commitment to remaining in, and contributing to, peripheral communities. In doing so, these producers enact a vision of working life and food system transformation grounded in place-based ethical relations; one that is inseparable from the rural spaces in which it is rooted.

Remote Work, Rural Refuge: Spatial Dimensions of Settlement Among Refugee Remote Workers in Rural Sweden.

Katarina Mozetič, Malmö University

Abstract text

Swedish rural areas are facing shrinking communities, economies and services. As the country embraces in-migration and remote work as possible remedies for these pressing issues, it is crucial to understand the role these transnational processes play in designing socially sustainable rural areas.

To do so, the paper examines how refugee remote workers settle in rural Sweden. Specifically, it asks how the spatial dimensions of the local context – like presence of coworking spaces, digital and transport infrastructure, and proximity to public institutions and services – affect their settlement in rural Sweden. To do so, I draw on semi-structured interviews conducted with individuals who have fled Ukraine after the 2022 full-scale invasion. The study participants encompass individuals who have, since coming to Sweden, worked remotely for an employer/customer(s) abroad, and now reside in rural areas.

While the fieldwork is ongoing, the preliminary findings indicate that remote work operates for most interviewees as a transitional livelihood strategy until local employment that is commensurate to one's qualifications is found. While the interviewees living in (the vicinity of) urban, especially bigger municipalities see the prospect of local employment as realistic, those residing in rural – and, especially, remote – municipalities are less optimistic. Yet, relocation does not appear to be the most obvious option for many. Participants describe other emerging attachments to rural places that motivate longer-term settlement, often related to children's schooling and social embeddedness. The subsistence of these is, however, strongly dependent on the existence of, for instance, good schools, public transportation, co-working spaces and NGOs.

Together, the material indicates that remote work functions as a spatial buffer. It allows participants to remain in rural municipalities despite weaker local job prospects, yet the durability of this settlement depends on support structures that convert provisional presence into place-based attachment.

The picture of entrepreneurship among young men and women in rural and urban settings

Ingrid Zakrisson, Mid University, Sweden **& Maria Bogren,** Nord University, Norway

Abstract text

Running an enterprise is one way of maintaining a livelihood. But this opportunity does not seem to be gender equal. The proportion of enterprises run by women is approximately 30% in Sweden. One reason is that most businesses are found within domains dominated by men, such as construction, technical services, engineering, etc., and that entrepreneurship most often is connected to abilities stereotypically associated with men, such as agency, competitiveness and leadership. Still, when it comes to young entrepreneurship (Ungt Företagande) the gender differences are much smaller, and even non-existent.

When researching entrepreneurial intent, the focus is often on entrepreneurial goals and abilities, implicitly assuming that the same kind of qualifications are necessary regardless of the type of businesses people want to run. Is it perhaps so that men and women are interested in different kind of businesses, and that different kind if businesses require different qualifications? In a joint Swedish Norwegian project, we address these questions through a questionnaire among around 1600 young people (16 to 18 years old) in the regions of Jämtland-Härjedalen, Västernorrland, and Trøndelag. All three regions are characterized by geographically large rural areas, and few larger cities. In this study we ask the participants: To which extent are they interested in running a business and in which branch? How do they perceive various types of businesses? These questions are analyzed in relation to their career goals and their view of their own abilities, as well as to gender and geographical (rural/urban) background. The main results reveal that the entrepreneurial intent does not differ between boys and girls, and that different types of businesses are associated with different abilities and goals.

The results are discussed from the perspectives of career and gender models such as Social Cognitive Career Theory, Social Role Model, and Role Congruity Models.

WG 2.Rural Housing: Market, Mobilities and the Politics of Rural Dwelling

Working group chairs:
Andreas Back & Josefina Syssner

About the working group

Housing is a key factor for the transformation of rural areas. Across many rural regions, housing systems are shaped by overlapping and often contradictory processes: depopulation and ageing populations, second-home development, new forms of multilocal living and distance work, rising housing costs in attractive landscapes, and the persistence of vacant or abandoned dwellings in others. At the same time, housing policies, societal discourse, and planning frameworks often remain urban-focused.

This working group invites contributions that place housing at the centre of debates on rural and regional development. Rather than treating housing as a secondary outcome of economic change, the group approaches rural housing and housing markets as systems that actively shape who can live in rural areas, under what conditions, and with what consequences for local communities.

We welcome theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions addressing themes such as:

- rural housing markets and real estate issues,
- planning and governance of rural housing,
- abandoned and vacant dwellings,
- second homes and multilocal living,
- sustainable housing solutions and adaptation,
- housing inequalities.

The aim of the working group is twofold. First, it seeks to bring together researchers working on rural housing across disciplinary boundaries, for example, architecture, economics, engineering, ethnology, geography, heritage studies, and sociology. Second, it aims to advance conceptual discussions about how housing can be better integrated into broader understandings of rural transformation and sustainable regional development.

By foregrounding housing as a central component of rural futures, the working group hopes to contribute to new ways of understanding and acting upon the challenges and opportunities facing rural areas today.

“Anyone can afford to live here” – an ethnographic exploration of the politics of cheap, vacant housing in rural southern Sweden.

Sara Löwgren, Linköping University, Sweden

Abstract text

What does it mean for a village to have some of southern Sweden’s cheapest housing? In this paper, an empirical chapter of my dissertation, I explore this question based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in two villages in southern Sweden. The two villages, each with a population of roughly 1500 people, share long-term population decline and abundant vacant housing, but differ in terms their geographic, economic, historical, and social conditions, allowing for a nuanced relational analysis. Drawing on field observations and in-depth interviews with 40 residents as well as civil servants, I analyze the role of cheap and vacant housing in the two villages in two ways: first, focusing on lived realities in the villages, I discuss how housing questions play into residents’ decisions to move there. Second, turning the gaze towards discursive dimensions, I study how narratives about the cheap and vacant housing in the villages shape the stories about these places. Analyzing these results in relation to wider power-laden questions of identity, belonging, and community building, I thus aim to make an empirical contribution to our understanding of the role of cheap and vacant housing in the politics and development of shrinking villages in a rapidly changing and uncertain world.

Urban expectations, rural realities? Exploring notions of homeownership and alternative market practices in rural Sweden.

Hannah Persson, Malmö University, Sweden

Abstract text

A majority of Swedish households live in ownership housing – a tenure form that has a strong, historical connection to rural areas, and that currently remains most prominent beyond the metropolitan areas. Yet, previous research suggests that our understanding of modern, financialised homeownership in Sweden is characterised by a predominantly urban discourse, where traits of urbanity – such as speed, mobility, stress, and competitiveness – have become synonymous with the buying process itself, at the risk of obscuring other experiences of homeownership across various geographies. Through a case study of a small municipality in Dalarna, Sweden, this paper thus sets out to explore homeownership practices at the intersection of urban expectations and rural realities. Drawing on a qualitative thematic analysis of interviews with local residents (N=13), the study identifies a simultaneous reproduction of, and friction with, (urban) financial market logics. Notably, the study points to informal and relational practices around housing acquisition, where houses are exchanged through personal networks and rarely reach the open market; practices that seem to emerge as a reaction to a perceived pressure on the local housing market, and an influx of buyers with 'outside', urban capital. Here, local place attachment and heritage seem to play a larger role in the local market, challenging and renegotiating purely financialised reasonings. Yet, the study also indicates that these practices might simultaneously reinforce other forms of housing exclusion, favouring those already tied into local networks, while some dwellings appear to remain vacant or off market despite a local housing shortage. Thus, by centring lived experiences beyond the urban, this paper contributes with a new, critical perspective on how historical, social, and geographical contexts shape homeownership practices in ways often overlooked.

Keywords: rural housing markets, financialization, place attachment, urban-rural relations

Innovation in Rural Housing Markets Under Structural Constraints: Agency, Governance and Rural Transformation in Norway.

Abel Runga & Mary Ann Stamsø, University of Inland, Norway

Abstract text

Rural housing markets in peripheral regions face persistent structural constraints, thin demand, and high construction costs relative to values. Specifically, challenges include demographic decline, urbanization, vacant housing, fragmented institutional responsibilities, and labor market constraints. These constraints deter conventional mechanisms in the quest to provide housing that meets local needs. Against this backdrop, this paper seeks to examine how innovation emerges in response to structural constraints in rural housing markets and how actors mobilize agency and governance arrangements to develop new approaches to housing provision.
The paper will draw upon perspectives on peripheral development and change agency, particularly the relationship between structural conditions and strategic agency in processes of regional transformation, such as the concept of the trinity of change agency by Grillitsch and Sorauta: innovative, institutional, and place-based leadership, to examine how actors initiate, coordinate, negotiate, and advance new approaches to rural housing provision under structural constraints. Selected rural housing initiatives in Norway include the Bygdevekstavtaler initiative in Innlandet Kommune, involving the four municipalities Engerdal, Trysil, Våler, and Åmot, as well as other emerging place-based housing initiatives in municipalities such as Heim, Åseral, Hemsedal, Hamarøy, etc. A qualitative comparative case-study approach will combine semi-structured interviews with relevant actors and project documents. The analysis will examine how housing problems are identified, how actors mobilize resources and networks, how institutional constraints are negotiated, and how new approaches to housing provision are developed and implemented.

The paper seeks to contribute to rural housing and regional development research by positioning housing as an active component of rural transformation. It further seeks to demonstrate how innovation, agency, and governance can shape rural housing responses under conditions where conventional market mechanisms are constrained.

Zombies of the Rural Housing Market: A Scoping Review of Housing Abandonment.

Andreas Back, Umeå University, Sweden

Abstract text

Abandoned, vacant and underused dwellings are increasingly recognised as important features of rural housing markets, yet the research literature on this phenomenon remains fragmented across different concepts, geographical contexts and disciplinary traditions. This article presents a scoping review of English-language research on abandoned housing in rural areas, including vacant dwellings, empty homes and abandoned residential properties. The review aims to identify key themes in the literature, with particular attention to how existing studies explain the causes and drivers of rural housing abandonment. Rather than treating abandonment as a self-evident outcome of rural decline, the article examines how it is linked to wider demographic, economic, institutional and property-market processes, including depopulation, ageing, inheritance, absentee ownership, housing-market restructuring and planning conditions. By mapping the conceptual and empirical terrain of the field, the review highlights how rural housing abandonment has been studied, what explanatory frameworks have been mobilised, and where the literature remains uneven or underdeveloped. In doing so, the article identifies gaps in current knowledge and outlines directions for further research on the relationship between housing abandonment, rural transformation and spatial planning.

The Rural Blind Spot: Reframing the Housing Crisis in Left-Behind Nordic Regions.

Eija Meriläinen, Susanna Heldt Cassel & Susanne Stenbacka, Örebro University, Sweden

Abstract text

Rural areas in the Nordic countries are increasingly seeing a rise in spatial as well as socio-economic inequalities in housing. Conditions that affect access to housing are fluctuations of rural labor markets related to booming/busting industries and changing mobility patterns. The housing crisis discourse draws attention to how affordability, availability, stability and quality of housing are declining, or have declined over the past decades through rising costs, uneven and sometimes restricted access to social rental housing and a financial housing systems that favour private sector landlords whose practices have become increasingly extractive.

We argue that the housing crisis discourse currently has a strong metropolitan bias which makes invisible the decline in housing conditions and accessibility in rural regions. For instance, in what could be called 'left-behind' places households struggle with declining housing prices and unsellable homes at the same time as the costs of rental housing are increasing and there is a lack of available housing of appropriate standards meeting the needs of vulnerable groups. However, in some places empty flats challenge the economy of municipal housing and lead to fear of social dumping. The housing crisis debate thus largely overlooks deteriorating housing conditions in regions where the population is declining and industries are divesting from and which are often far from centres of national and transnational power.

This paper explores the housing crisis in left behind places with examples from Swedish and Finnish rural regions. Specifically, this paper asks: How have rental housing conditions developed in left-behind places, how do local actors perceive and act on these challenges. What are the consequences for different tenant groups? The paper proposes an expanded discussion on the housing crisis in left-behind Nordic places in the context of socially sustainable rural housing.

Trygghet i glesbygdens bostadsområden.

Susanne Wallman Lundåsen, Susanne Stenbacka & Josefina Syssner, Linköping University, Sweden

Abstract text

Befolkningsminskning bidrar till att den byggda miljön förfaller på många krympande platser och kan bli symboler för att samhället överges. Synliga markörer kan påverka invånarnas trygghet, tillit och vilja att bo kvar. Kommunala bostadsbolag förvaltar ofta 20–30 procent av bostadsbeståndet i mindre kommuner och fattar avgörande beslut om renovering, rivning, vakanser och gemensamma utrymmen. Dock saknas kunskap om hur dessa beslut påverkar vardaglig trygghet i krympande, socioekonomiskt utsatta bostadsområden. Befintliga verktyg fokuserar på urban brottsprevention och lämnar landsbygdskommuner utan anpassad vägledning. I vårt projekt undersöker vi hur kommunala bostadsbolag arbetar med byggda miljöer för att främja trygghet på krympande platser. Teoretiskt utvecklas begreppet "institutionell närvaro genom den byggda miljön". Resultaten sprids via kollegialt lärande, vetenskapliga artiklar, en praktisk handbok samt en nationell konferens om platsanpassad vägledning för trygga samhällen vid befolkningsminskning.

WG 3. Rural Landscapes in Transition: Digital Technologies, Land Use and Local Knowledge

Working group chairs:
Kajsa Kuoljok & Malte Rödl

About the working group

Significant transformations are taking place in rural regions across Sweden. Climate policy, green industrialisation, energy expansion and new conservation initiatives are changing patterns of land use and putting pressure on landscapes and natural resources. These changes are particularly visible in northern regions but affect rural areas across the country, where various interests such as agriculture, forestry, energy production, tourism, conservation and Indigenous land use intersect with national and global sustainability agendas.

At the same time, digital technologies are playing an increasingly important role in how landscapes are monitored, understood and governed. Satellite data, sensors, machine learning, digital mapping tools and data platforms are becoming integral to environmental monitoring, land use planning and regional development. While these technologies offer the promise of improved knowledge and more efficient decision-making, they also raise important questions about participation, access to data, and the sources of knowledge that inform environmental governance.

Digital technologies influence how landscapes and its inhabitants of all species are seen, represented, and understood and consequently how land use decisions are made. As technological systems become increasingly embedded in land-use planning and environmental management, questions arise regarding the recognition, negotiation, and integration of different knowledge systems — scientific, local, and Indigenous.

This session explores the interaction between the digitalisation of landscapes and ongoing rural and regional transformations, including but not limited to the role of local knowledge, community perspectives and Indigenous land use in digitally mediated forms of governance. We invite contributions examining the role of digital technologies in shaping rural landscapes, land use governance and regional development processes. Relevant topics may include:

- Digital tools and data infrastructures in rural landscapes
- Digital land-use governance and competing interests in rural regions
- Indigenous land use and knowledge in the digitisation of environmental management
- Community participation and local perspectives in digital environmental initiatives
- Rural knowledge practices involving machine learning and other AI applications
- Power relations, data ownership and governance in rural digitalisation
- Multispecies relationships in light of datafication
- Rural innovation and regional development in the context of environmental transitions

By bringing together empirical research and critical perspectives, the session will contribute to discussions on the intersection of technological change and social, cultural and institutional dynamics in rural regions undergoing profound transformation.

Finding epistemic avenues for justice within the conservation-related datascape at the Maya Biosphere Reserve in Guatemala.

José Pablo Prado Córdova, Laura Aileen Sauls & Gabriela Mariana Fenner Sánchez,
Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Guatemala

Abstract text

Earth observation —EO— is increasingly being used for conservation purposes across the globe thus shaping an evolving datascape for nature reserves. This paper addresses the first stage of a larger research project whose main purpose is to critically assess the contemporary datascape for the Maya Biosphere Reserve —MBR— in Guatemala. Our methods combine walking workshops, participant observation, and discourse analysis to identify relevant actors and explore the geodata value chain with the explicit intent of spelling out ongoing epistemic injustices with respect to how geodata is produced, accessed, used, and distributed for nature conservation purposes. We hypothesized that marginal groups such as local communities and on-the-ground forest users occupy a subaltern position whose world views are for the most part neglected for the making and interpretation of EO-derived planning products such as aerial photographs and satellite imagery. Our preliminary results suggest that the most prominent central nodes in the institutional network associated with geodata handling are heavily influenced by an international conservation agenda indirectly perpetuating a fortress conservation rationale and an automatization of decision-making thus jeopardizing the inclusion of local and indigenous voices. Furthermore, we have come across a collectively shared ethos stressing the need to somehow reconcile nature-conservation targets with rural wellbeing by using EO technologies to improve income-generating activities such as sustainable cattle rearing in the vicinity of the MBR —thus reducing encroaching upon conserved lands— and community forestry within it. We nuance our findings by providing a dialogue between data justice for conservation and the ways in which EO could also be used for emancipatory purposes at the local level. We also provide some lessons learned framed within a convivial conservation approach and single out the role of local organisations in strengthening community-based governance mechanisms to counterbalance what seems to be an instrumental-to-capital-accumulation trend towards “smart” conservation practices.

Digitalisation in Swedish Forestry: From Policy Visions to Forest Owners' Practices.

Linnéa Rohlin & Seema Arora-Jonsson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

Abstract text

Using scientific tools and technologies, forestry has long reordered spaces and landscapes for production. Products and people have been moved around for global markets. Science and technology have been used to make this more efficient. Scientific tools for mapping and categorizing have abstracted lived forest spaces into numbers and maps to be used for production and steered from a distance. Recent research emphasizes that digital tools amplify this 'singularization' of forests. Ever more granular data on trees or carbon further cuts off the forests from the context focussing on one thing at a time with which the forest gets defined. Yet, digital tools may help identify and further dialogue on incommensurable ways of knowing the forests in relation to care for forest organisms and relations. In this paper, we examine this dilemma in relation to digitalisation in Swedish forestry. We examine an overarching Swedish policy document and how private forest owners engage with new prescribed digital forest management plans, GIS-based platforms, and satellite and laser scanning data.

We found that forest policy promotes digitalisation as a solution to a lack of knowledge and inefficiency in forest management as well as forest growth. However, forest owners emphasize the imperative of combining digital information with local knowledge, experiences, place-based practices and social relations. By providing new ways of visualising, sharing and coordinating information about forests, the tools are beginning to shape how forest owners coordinate land use, access knowledge and negotiate forest values within rural forest space. While many valued the digital tools, uneven access to data between forest owners, forestry companies, contractors, forest managers and public authorities determined how systems are designed and used. These findings challenge the policy assumption that increased data availability automatically benefits all actors, showing that digitalisation may reinforce existing power imbalances within the forest sector.

Translating Árbediehtu into RenGIS++: Cumulative Effects and Digital Land-Use Planning.

Kajsa Kuoljok, Swedish University och Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

Abstract text

Significant transformations linked to climate change, industrialisation, forestry and mineral extraction are reshaping landscapes across northern Sweden. These overlapping processes place increasing pressure on reindeer husbandry and Sámi cultural land use. Forestry, mining, infrastructure development and climate-related environmental changes alter grazing conditions, migration routes and ecological relationships central to reindeer husbandry. Yet cumulative effects across landscapes and over time remain difficult to visualise and communicate through GIS-based planning. At the same time, digital technologies and GIS-based planning tools increasingly shape how landscapes, land use and environmental impacts are rendered visible and made legible in governance processes. This study examines the tensions that emerge when árbediehtu (traditional knowledge) and reindeer husbandry practices are translated into GIS-based planning systems characterised by cumulative environmental change.

Previous experiences illustrate how digital spatial data has become increasingly necessary for making reindeer husbandry legible within consultations concerning land-use changes. Mapping technologies have enabled reindeer herders to visualise grazing areas, migration routes and overlapping land-use pressures within planning and consultation processes. At the same time, translating reindeer husbandry practices into mapped categories risks simplifying relational and adaptive forms of árbediehtu into fixed and extractable spatial data. This becomes particularly challenging in relation to cumulative effects, which emerge gradually across time and space through changing snow conditions, altered animal behaviour, fragmented grazing landscapes and reduced flexibility in seasonal land-use practices. This study analyses how digital mapping systems privilege certain forms of spatial knowledge while making relational, temporal and experience-based dimensions of árbediehtu difficult to communicate in planning processes. The analysis draws on interviews, participatory workshops and roundtable discussions with four reindeer herding communities and other stakeholders. The study contributes to discussions on árbediehtu, digital governance and cumulative land-use planning in landscapes undergoing rapid environmental and industrial change.

Disappearing in the crowd: The challenge of collective accountability in devolved forest governance.

Jonathan Rahn, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

Abstract text

Swedish forestry is governed by "freedom with responsibility": owners decide how to manage their forest, and the law only requires that harvested stands be replanted. The premise, that private property can resolve commons dilemmas, works well for timber, which has steadily grown in volume over the last decades. It does not, however, work for biodiversity, recreation, or cultural values, produced across a fragmented ownership landscape at a scale neither the state nor the community can readily assess. The owner responsibility that should condition the freedom is consistently under-emphasized. I argue an under-explored problem here is landscape legibility. In Tiveden, where the state-owned company Sveaskog holds a majority of forest land, I combine interviews with residents, forest owners, and company employees with a machine-learning classifier of clear-cut events. Residents are sensitive to changes in the landscape and believe they know who is responsible for them. But this attribution is lopsided: clearings and other bad outcomes are attributed to Sveaskog, which has to weather the community frustration, while small owners doing similar 'disappear' in the crowd. The ML analysis confirms that Sveaskog responds to state directives and reveals that a 2016 buNer-zone agreement reshaped its practices even beyond the zone's boundaries. It also uncovers a pattern no informant describes: in aggregate, private owners increased harvesting intensity after 2016 and surpassed Sveaskog by 2020. Fragmented, partly absentee private ownership has no formal accountability structure and informal substitutes, such as peer scrutiny or neighbourhood reputation, have no bearing because the pattern produced by individual decisions cannot be reduced to any one decision. While individuals usually can justify their own decisions with specific circumstances, issues that materialize in aggregate have no one that is responsible. Instead, blame falls on the visible actor, and no one answers for the landscape everyone else produces.

Automated transport solutions to improve accessibility – experiences from a living lab in northern Sweden.

Cilli Sobiech, Swedish National Road and Transport Research Institute, Sweden

Abstract text

With a particular focus on automated and demand-responsive public transport, a living lab project examines how local knowledge can support the planning and implementation of new transport solutions in rural areas. The living lab area is located in northern Sweden, in Tavelsjö–Rödåbygden and it highlights rural mobility challenges that differ significantly from those in urban environments. Mobility challenges are closely rooted in local conditions, experiences, and everyday travel practices of different user groups. By involving residents, local associations, municipalities, and regional transport actors in co-creation processes, the living lab approach provides insights into mobility needs that conventional transport planning often overlooks. The findings show that local knowledge is essential for identifying travel patterns, transport gaps, and social groups at risk of transport poverty, especially older adults, young people, and residents without access to private cars. Through workshops, questionnaires, on-demand tests and analyses of previous pilot projects, the living lab identifies a need for more flexible local transport that complement existing public transport networks, particularly connections to main bus routes and short-distance travel within rural communities.

Rural transport innovation depends not only on technological development but also on integrating local experiences and community priorities into planning and governance. By combining technical innovation with participatory approaches, automated and on-demand mobility services can be adapted to the realities of sparsely populated areas. Such mobility services are a novelty in Sweden and still come with challenges. While these services are mainly discussed in urban mobility contexts, we argue that they also need to be considered in rural areas to strengthen long-term regional development goals by reducing car dependency and improving accessibility.

WG 6. Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Value Chains in Transition

Working group chair:
Henrik Dellestrand

About the working group

Rural areas are deeply entangled with wider local, regional, national, and global processes, rather than being isolated pockets of social and economic life. Building on this, the “Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Value Chains in Transition” working group invites contributions that place firm actors at the forefront while situating them in a broader context of places, policies, and power relations. We are especially interested in how rural entrepreneurial ecosystems intersect with value chains in times of climate, demographic, and economic transitions, and how these intersections shape tensions between growth and sustainability.

We understand rural entrepreneurial ecosystems as configurations of interconnected actors – firms, individuals, community organizations, intermediaries, and policymakers – located in specific places yet linked across space and place. These ecosystems support and constrain value creation, innovation, organizational change, and sustainable business practices, but are also exposed to shifting regulations, markets, and narratives about sustainable development. At the same time, rural firms are embedded in value chains that span multiple regions and countries, where decisions by upstream or downstream actors may redistribute risks, responsibilities, and opportunities, thereby directly influencing the evolution and dynamics of rural areas.

By bringing together ecosystem and value chain perspectives, this working group seeks to capture complex, multi-level, and contested relationships in which rural firms are simultaneously dependent, creative, and vulnerable. We welcome theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions that, for example, trace long-term embedded relations within and between firms, examine how new forms of organizing or collaboration emerge, or explore how collective action, local mobilization, and experimentation rework existing value chains. Such work can advance critical understandings of rural development and inform policies and practices that support transformative and sustainable outcomes in ruralities and regions in transition.

Against the Grain: Dependency Reduction and Resilience in Rural Entrepreneurship

Martin Jaller, Torsta Landsbygdsutveckling, Sweden, **Anna Sörensson,** Mid Sweden University, Sweden & University of Inland Norway, & **Johan Kask,** University of Inland Norway.

Abstract text

This study develops an account of entrepreneurial resilience as dependency reduction in rural entrepreneurship. Based on qualitative interviews with rural entrepreneurs in agriculture, food production, and forestry-related businesses in Jämtland county, Sweden, the paper shows how they sustain firm viability in thin regional systems where processing, distribution, labor access, and finance rest on a narrow set of actors and infrastructures. The analysis shows how rural entrepreneurs reduce their firms' exposure to vulnerable regional links by spreading work, income, and market access over several partly connected activities. Such pluriactive arrangements connect farming with small-scale processing, tourism, social entrepreneurship, direct sales, and forest-related work, reducing dependence on a single buyer, season, channel, or support structure. Firms also adjust their value chain positions when external processors, buyers, or distributors become unreliable, through local sourcing, direct customer relations, own processing, and vertical integration. Informal collaboration and reciprocal exchange extend this resilience beyond the firm by providing repair capacity, transport solutions, knowledge, labor support, and practical problem-solving outside formal support systems. Forest ownership adds a financial layer to this logic. As ecological collateral, it can be borrowed against, sold when needed, used to buffer investments, or used to secure loans that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. Selective limits to expansion protect flexibility and reduce debt-related exposure. The paper contributes to the entrepreneurship resilience literature by shifting attention from recovery, persistence, and individual coping to the organizational arrangements through which small firms reduce dependence before disruption becomes acute. It also contributes to rural entrepreneurship research by specifying how pluriactivity, informal exchange, small-scale processing, ecological collateral, and constrained growth form a coherent resilience logic in thin regional systems. Limited growth, in this account, signals active management of exposure, flexibility, and long-term viability, with entrepreneurial ambition expressed through control over dependence instead of scale.

Keywords: Rural entrepreneurship; entrepreneurial resilience; dependency reduction; pluriactivity; informal networks; ecological collateral

WG 6. Rural Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Value Chains in Transition.

Cross-sector entrepreneuring in times of transformation: Sustaining rural libraries through ecosystem collaboration

Malin Tillmar & Annie Roos, Linnaeus University, Sweden

Abstract text

As welfare states withdraw from rural areas, community actors mobilise to address local development needs, ranging from basic services to cultural and social activities. This paper examines rural libraries as a telling case, vital to sustaining democracy and positioned at the intersection of welfare provision, cultural infrastructure, and local development. In Sweden, access to libraries is a legal right, yet many rural municipalities struggle to sustain library services, prompting new cross-sectoral forms of organizing in which entrepreneurs and civil society are central. Building on perspectives of rural entrepreneurial ecosystems and entrepreneurship-as-practice, we explore how cross-sector entrepreneuring emerges and unfolds in rural contexts shaped by institutional change, resource constraints, and competing understandings of value creation.

Drawing on a comparative qualitative study of two rural libraries , we analyse how local entrepreneurs mobilise resources, negotiate responsibilities, and collaborate across sectoral borders to sustain libraries. One case is organised as a voluntary–public partnership, while the other concerns a public library branch embedded in a community-owned business. Actors from across the ecosystem have been interviewed, including entrepreneurs, civil society actors, civil servants, politicians, funders, and local stakeholders. This enables analysis beyond a grass-roots perspective and illuminates multi-level dependencies within the ecosystem. Theoretically, we adopt a practice perspective, focusing on how bundles of practices and material arrangements interact with institutional logics to shape cross-sector entrepreneuring.

The findings show that while entrepreneurial practices challenge dominant narratives of rural decline and demonstrate the creative capacities of rural communities, sustained collaboration with municipal, regional, and state actors remains crucial. At the same time, differing institutional and professional logics—such as contrasting views on libraries, librarians, and involuntary entrepreneurs—generate tensions. The paper contributes to research on rural entrepreneurial ecosystems by unpacking the practices by which cross-sector entrepreneuring rework value creation in rural areas in transition.

WG 8. Transition by Design, Care by Default: North-South Dialogues on Rural Green Transitions

Working group chairs:
Kavya Michael & Kennedy Mbeva

About the working group

Rural communities are expected to deliver green transitions they did not design — through their land, their labour, and their local knowledge — while bearing costs that governance frameworks were not built to see. This working group examines why, tracing three interconnected problems across rural contexts in both the Global South and Global North.

The first is a problem of authority. National and EU climate ambitions set the terms — what gets built, where, and how fast — but rural communities absorb the consequences: landscapes transformed by extraction and green-transition infrastructure. In Swedish rural governance, responsibility for transition implementation is routinely devolved to local actors without corresponding authority, while commitments to inclusion thin out as they travel down governance levels. This is not a coordination failure. It is a structural feature of how transitions are designed.

The second is a problem of visibility. The daily work of managing energy, food, and water — performed across households and communities — is carried out disproportionately by women and marginalised groups and goes unrecognised in the transition governance frameworks. In the Swedish context, just transition visions remain rooted in male-dominated, technology-focused sectors, while care work is treated as support for industrial mobility rather than a core transition component.

The third is a problem of learning. Communities in the Global South have been resisting these patterns for decades, building grassroots governance innovations at the intersection of livelihood insecurity, gender injustice and climate impact. Yet good practice from the Global South is rarely studied as a learning resource for the Global North. This working group sets out to address that gap.

Sweden’s green transition offers a sharp lens on dynamics that are global: governance structures that sideline rural communities, care work that goes uncounted. We invite abstracts from researchers working at the intersection of gender, care, and rural green transitions to jointly interrogate these blind spots. We ask: How do gender and care reshape our understanding of rural green transitions? And what can reciprocal North–South dialogue reveal that neither region’s scholarship can produce alone? We welcome contributions that diagnose how these problems operate, or document how communities have responded — building alternative governance arrangements, making care labour visible, or crossing the Global South–Global North knowledge divide on their own terms. We also welcome contributions grounded in Global North contexts that draw on insights across the North–South knowledge divide.

Who shapes the just transition? Examining intellectual hegemony in climate research

Kennedy Mbeva, University of Cambridge, United Kingdom

Abstract text

Analysing a dataset of 5432 journal articles (1986–2023) using bibliometric techniques, we investigate the conceptual framing, thematic evolution and publication trends of just transition—a concept seeking to reconcile climate action with social and economic justice but the scope and application of which fuel intense debate between the Global South and North. Our findings reveal that a small cadre of scholars and core journals exert disproportionate influence, steering the discourse towards technological fixes at the expense of structural political change, societal transformation, inclusive sustainable development, and addressing global inequality. This intellectual hegemony underscores age-long significant challenges around the politics and ethics of knowledge production in the discourse of global sustainability, not least the grave risk of marginalising the experiences and perspectives of the most vulnerable, who remain under-represented in both scholarship and policy-making. We conclude by calling for the integration of diverse viewpoints to ensure just transition strategies are both effective and equitable across varied global contexts—an imperative made all the more urgent by the resurgence of fractured climate politics and weakened global solidarity.

From Self-Sufficient Urban Households to Caring Interdependence: Reimagining Individualised Crisis Preparedness as Collective Resilience

Camilla Andersson, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

Abstract text

Swedish crisis preparedness is increasingly framed as an individual responsibility. The 2024 national preparedness brochure *In Case of Crisis or War* asks households to manage independently for at least one week, reinforcing a reactive and individualised model in which citizens are expected to prepare for disruptions rather than transform the conditions that make everyday life vulnerable. We argue that this model reproduces a long-established invisibilisation of the material resource flows, social relations and wider territories that sustain urban life, representing a missed opportunity: preparedness could instead become a transition towards long-term resilience based on care for the material flows and social relations that sustain everyday life—water, food, heat, waste and energy—as central infrastructures of resilience and climate action. Such a shift requires making visible the interdependencies that sustain everyday life across households, communities and territories.We develop this argument through the three interconnected dimensions suggested for the session: **authority, visibility and learning.**

Authority. Contemporary preparedness is largely organised through a top-down logic in which responsibility is transferred to individual households without transforming the infrastructures and systems on which they depend. We ask what preparedness might look like if authority were complemented by local capacities to care for and manage resource flows through low-tech, open and circular infrastructures. Moving from reactive, individualised crisis preparedness towards proactive, collective resilience means not simply preparing households to withstand the failure of existing systems, but transforming the material and social relations on which resilience depends.

Visibility. Today's sharp separation between urban and rural areas, together with established divisions between the Global North and Global South, is reinforced by infrastructures that render resource flows increasingly invisible. This obscures the wider territories and caring practices on which urban life depends. Making resource flows visible—from water and food to heat, waste and energy—also reveals the social relations, labour and care required to sustain them. This challenges the imaginary of the self-sufficient urban household and opens up a more situated understanding of resilience as the capacity to maintain, circulate and care for the resources on which communities depend.

Learning. Making these interdependencies visible also opens questions of whose knowledge counts in shaping resilient futures. We ask what can be learned from situated practices of collective resource management and grassroots resilience in the Global South, where communities have long negotiated livelihood insecurity, environmental change and uneven

access to infrastructure. Bringing such knowledge into dialogue with Swedish preparedness challenges established imaginaries of centres and peripheries and opens possibilities for reciprocal learning across the Global North–South divide.

We argue that recognising **interdependence and care as central principles within contemporary preparedness discourse** holds the potential to reconfigure power relations across urban–rural and Global North–South relations, challenging established hierarchies between centres and peripheries. Such a shift positions preparedness not as a temporary response to crisis, but as a pathway towards more sustainable, caring and climate-resilient societies.

Caught between pressures and measures: the entanglements, tensions and alignments between climate adaptation and mitigation

Kristina Sehlin MacNeil, Umeå University, **Åsa Össbo**, Umeå University, **Kavya Michael**, University of Gothenburg, **Martin Hultman,** University of Gothenburg, & **Camilla Andersson**, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden

Abstract text

While climate adaptation is commonly understood as an adjustment in natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climate related changes which reduces harm or promotes more positive effects, climate mitigation is understood as a human driven intervention to prevent or reduce green house gas emissions causing climate change. These concepts are frequently treated as separate pillars of climate action but in reality, they collide. Mitigation measures often create new adaptation burdens, especially for communities already living on the frontline of climatic and socio-economic change.

For example mining critical minerals in Swedish Sápmi, Indigenous Sámi land, has been deamed a crucial strategy for climate mitigation by the European Union as well as the Swedish government. Wind power is another climate mitigation measure used in Swedish Sápmi. Both have considerable negative effects for Sámi reindeer herding communities that have already been forced to adapt to a changing climate and are now facing further necessary adaptations due to consequences of climate mitigation activities. A comparable pattern is visible in India's energy and land-use transitions. For example, the Pavagada Solar Park in Karnataka, one of Asia's largest utility-scale solar projects, is heralded as a flagship mitigation effort. However, it has transformed fertile agricultural land into industrial energy zones, depriving smallholder and lower caste farmers, especially women, of livelihoods and water access. These communities, already adapting to erratic rainfall and rising heat, must now adapt again to the socio-ecological consequences of mitigation.

Through document studies, including previous research, media articles and grey literature, this article examines the entanglements, tensions and alignments between climate adaptation and mitigation. Using a transdisciplinary lens we explore consequences for local and Indigenous communities in Sweden and India, focusing on how climate mitigation measures can amplify pressures leading to forced adaptation for certain communities.

Everyday Justice in Disassembled States: Forest Contestations in Times of Climate Transition

Seema Arora-Jonsson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

Abstract text

A just climate transition has become a common refrain, but what justice means in relation to climate related interventions in forest landscapes is far less clear. This paper studies everyday justice in contestations over land in three Swedish forest spaces undergoing interventions – mining, wind power and forest governance–ordinarily dealt with in separate literatures and in relation to different groups. Bringing them into a single analysis shows that not only is everyday justice plural, but that in practice it falls to a 'disassembled' state to uphold. The hallmarks of the 'disassembled' state are not merely a disaggregated state apparatus but that its responsibility and power are diffuse and difficult to pin down. We draw on feminist and critical theories on justice, assemblages and the state to conceptualize people's lived experiences of injustice. Using these as our analytical entry point, we trace how the 'state' re-assembles itself when needed, how dimensions of geographic, recognitional, infrastructural, and scalar injustice cut across different assemblages and what makes them possible: governance through proxy, asymmetric procedural rights, and a capacity to assert hierarchy based on ownership, growth, and science. We reflect on how the disassembled state is not incidental to the injustices that follow. It is structurally implicated in their production. But the disassembly also holds within itself possibilities for openings that can make justice possible.

WG 10. Perspectives on Justice, Inclusion, and Legitimacy in the Local Climate and Energy Transformation

Working group chair:
Daniel Lindvall

About the working group

To achieve national and global climate targets and phase out fossil fuels, a rapid expansion of renewable energy is needed. However, clean energy technologies, such as solar, wind, and batteries, rely both on land and minerals and in these dimensions, the transition can have profound impacts on local environments and communities. These developments raise important justice dilemmas, including the distribution of externalities and benefits, as well as procedural justice concerns related to the inclusiveness and transparency of planning and decision-making processes.

Energy investments and mineral extraction can also intrude on landscapes, affecting the lifestyles, identities, and cultural values of local populations, including indigenous peoples and rural communities, highlighting issues of recognitional justice. The use of local environments may generate conflicts between local and national interests, across different stakeholders and communities, and among social, economic, and environmental priorities. Renewable infrastructure development and mineral extraction may also pose challenges to biodiversity and local ecosystems if undertaken without careful environmental consideration. Tensions can arise across multi-level governance, involving local, national, and EU-level decision-making.

At the same time, the climate and energy transition presents opportunities for local development, prosperity, and empowerment, including ways to address energy poverty and social exclusion through approaches such as energy communities, revenue sharing, local ownership models, or broader energy democracy and transition frameworks. Many climate and energy solutions offer multiple co-benefits, including economic, social, and health improvements. Identifying strategies, policies and governance models that ensure justice, legitimacy, and democratic inclusion is therefore critical, not only for achieving climate and energy targets, but also for advancing broader societal development.

This workshop invites researchers to explore perspectives on justice, inclusion, and legitimacy in local climate and energy transformations. We welcome contributions from all social research disciplines, using various methodologies, including qualitative, quantitative, and participatory approaches.

Governance Through Private Ownership: Wind Power, Land and the Climate Transition in Rural Sweden

Emil Planting Mollaoglu, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

Abstract text

As climate change accelerates, with devastating consequences for communities, environments and economies, transitioning to low-carbon societies is vital. One of the pillars of current climate governance is the expansion of renewable energy. While generating low levels of greenhouse gas emissions compared to fossil fuels, land-based large-scale renewables require access to extensive areas of land. This paper addresses the relation between wind power and land, especially in indigenous and rural areas, by focusing on the implications of turning wind into a commercial resource. Through ethnographic fieldwork in Härjedalen municipality in mid-western Sweden, we study how the rollout of wind power is contingent on access to privately owned land and how that might affect the possibility for justice in the climate transition: in relation to recognition of different groups of people, procedurally in how people are involved in the process and in terms of who gets what, i.e. distribution of burdens and benefits. The data consists of interviews with individuals and organisations involved in- or affected by wind farms, observations and interactions with people in their everyday lives, complemented with a desk study of court- and policy documents. The paper adds to ongoing discussions about the land-wind nexus, rights and justice in the climate transition, arguing for the need to centre the question of property rights in the climate transition, an often taken for granted aspect of transition work.

Gender, justice and inclusion in the energy transition: Exploring social dimensions of rural prosumership in Sweden

Anne-Charlott Callerstig, Örebro University, Sweden

Abstract text

The transition towards fossil-free energy systems increasingly relies on decentralized renewable energy production and storage. In Sweden, rural landowners are expected to play an important role in this transition by acting as energy prosumers, i.e. by producing, storing and consuming renewable energy while contributing flexibility and resilience to future energy systems. While previous research has primarily focused on technological and economic aspects, less attention has been paid to the social conditions shaping participation in energy transitions. This study examines how gender and intersecting dimensions of social differentiation, including age, education, access to resources and rural contexts, shape opportunities and willingness to engage in energy transitions. The analysis draws on theories of energy justice and gendered sustainability transitions. The empirical material consists of 15 semi-structured interviews with rural landowners and key stakeholders through an ongoing study within the ”PLA: Producera, Lagra, Använd” project funded by the Swedish Energy Agency, that investigates how renewable energy production, battery storage and electrification can contribute to future energy systems in rural areas.

Preliminary findings indicate that participation in energy transitions is shaped not only by economic and technical considerations but also by gendered norms and power relations. Traditional gender patterns continue to influence ownership, investment decisions and access to knowledge. Technology, including energy technologies, are often associated with masculinity, while communication and support structures may unintentionally exclude certain groups. At the same time, energy transitions may create opportunities to challenge existing inequalities and foster more inclusive participation. Motivations extend beyond economic incentives and include resilience, rural development, animal and environmental protection and responsibility for future generations. By examining rural prosumership, the study advances understanding of energy transitions and provides recommendations for fostering more inclusive and socially sustainable transitions.

Renewable energy for resilient and sustainable food production

Gunilla Meurling, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

Abstract text

To achieve a resilient and sustainable food production in Sweden moving away from fossil energy is pivotal. In the agri-food sector farmers do have the potential to be more self-sufficient on energy inputs as they have resources and skills to manage many renewable energy sources, such as wind, solar and bioenergy. In Sweden, farmers-initiated collaborations are already taking the lead on the energy transition in agriculture. A doubling of biogas production is expected in Sweden largely thanks to farm-led biogas plants with manure as the basic substrate, and an initially farm collaboration around fossil free drop-in fuels are today Sweden's largest producer and distributor of RME (biodiesel of rapeseed oil), just to name a few examples.

To scale up this transition pathway and reach 100 % fossil free agri-food systems there are more investments to be done and resources to be harvested for energy purposes. As many scholars are reporting the energy transition is creating tensions around social justice. However, when the renewable energy projects are initiated by farmers – rural agents with local interests – it provides a different context for studying energy justice. These are not energy projects initiated by external agents with obvious conflicts to many local interests. Thus, this paper will study the justice considerations around farm-driven energy projects. Are there certain types of conflicts of interest around farm-driven energy projects? How do these conflicts of interest differ from energy projects initiated by external actors? How can procedural justice be achieved in a farm-driven local energy transition?

This paper is part of my doctoral studies, where I will use qualitative methods to study farmers attitudes, needs and preferences in the transition to fossil free agri-food systems in two Swedish regions, Östergötland and Västergötland. The paper will present the results from a desktop study on energy justice and propose a theoretical framework for studying energy justice in farm-driven energy transition projects.

Navigating Dilemmas and Trade-offs in Natural Resource Governance: Ensuring Just and Legitimate Decision-Making

Karin Beland Lindahl, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden

Abstract text

The governance of natural resources is inherently shaped by dynamic trade-offs between conflicting interests and goals. Such dilemmas pervade political decision-making and public policy, but climate-driven transformations and the rising demand for critical minerals and energy are presenting policymakers with unprecedentedly large-scale and complex trade-offs. However, despite their importance, the concept of trade-offs remains conceptually underdeveloped and empirically under-researched.

This paper focuses on dilemmas and trade-offs central to the climate-driven industrial transition. It starts by distinguishing between dilemmas and trade-offs and then categorises the types of dilemmas and trade-offs that arise, as well as the conditions under which they can be managed without eroding justice and democratic legitimacy. We present a three-step analytical framework. First, we conceptualise and categorise the anticipated dilemmas according to type. Secondly, we examine the conditions under which different types of trade-offs can be effectively addressed, focusing on their negotiability and the compatibility of possible responses, or solutions. Thirdly, we assess how such dilemmas and trade-offs align with existing governance mechanisms. Finally, we demonstrate the empirical applicability of our framework by conducting a comparative analysis of two land-use dilemmas involving mining and wind-power developments on traditional Indigenous land in northern Sweden.

In doing so, this paper provides a structured account of just and legitimate trade-offs in natural resource governance and offers novel insights into how societies can navigate sustainability transitions without undermining justice and legitimacy - the foundations of the democratic social contract. The study empirically shows that Swedish land use conflicts involving Indigenous reindeer-herding communities remain intractable due to weak trade-off mechanisms, uneven negotiation power and incompatible solutions. This leads to what we refer to as “rotten outcomes” or “uneasy compromises”.

Energy Transitions after Illiberalism: Infrastructures of Democratic Repair

Noémi Gonda, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden & **Péter József Bori,** Central European University, Austria.

Abstract text

Energy transitions can shape possibilities for democratic reform in contexts marked by the legacies of illiberal governance. Indeed, energy infrastructures are not politically neutral systems of decarbonisation, but enduring material and institutional arrangements that can stabilise authoritarian power long after political regimes change. Across many contemporary illiberal contexts, including Hungary under Viktor Orbán, energy transition projects such as solar parks, battery plants, and nuclear expansion have been mobilised to consolidate political authority, strengthen oligarchic networks, and secure geopolitical alliances while simultaneously legitimising regimes through the language of green transition and energy security. These projects often persist beyond electoral change due to the lock-in effects of infrastructures, long-term contracts, regulatory frameworks, and investment regimes. As a result, democratic reform efforts must operate within inherited systems that both constrain and enable political transformation. Focusing on Hungary after the end of Orbán's sixteen-year rule in 2026, this paper conceptualises energy systems as post-illiberal infrastructures whose institutional, material, and ideological legacies shape the possibilities for democratic repair. Drawing on political ecology, socio-technical transitions theory, and research on democratic backsliding, it develops a threefold analytical framework centred on institutional inheritance, democratic re-embedding, and ideational persistence. The analysis explores how attempts to restore rule of law, accountability, and European Union alignment are negotiated through infrastructures embedded in previous regimes of power.

Empirically, this qualitative study investigates key energy transition projects inherited from the Orbán rule in Hungary, including the Russian-financed Paks nuclear expansion, Chinese-backed battery production facilities, and large-scale solar developments connected to politically affiliated ownership structures. The paper contributes to debates on justice and democracy in relation to energy transitions as arenas where democratic continuity and rupture are contested.

Is Wind Power Acceptance a Matter of Justice? Exploring Attitudes Toward Wind Power Among Nearby Residents in Sweden

Daniel Lindvall, Uppsala University, Sweden, & **Jens Ewald**, Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden

Abstract text

Drawing on survey data recruited through a geospatial sampling method, we investigate attitudes toward wind power among individuals residing within five kilometers of wind turbines in Sweden. We specifically examine how experiences of the planning process and financial benefits influence local and national wind power acceptance, and self-reported changes in attitudes over time, and whether these relationships can be explained by justice perceptions. The results demonstrate that meaningful opportunities to influence decision-making is an important facilitator of acceptance, besides economic personal and collective compensation. Although justice perceptions emerge as a key mechanism underlying acceptance, we find little evidence of a consistent causal pathway linking procedural and distributional experience to justice beliefs and acceptance. Personal compensation constitutes an exception, enhancing the effect of distributional justice perceptions on wind power acceptance. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that direct experience of the planning process and economic benefits are the primary drivers of local acceptance.

WG 12. Age-Optimized Living Environments

Working group chairs:
Petter Ahlström & Ann Svensson

About the working group

Society is undergoing significant demographic changes as the proportion of older adults increases, creating growing demands for senior housing, health care, and social services in both rural and urban regions. In many areas, there is already a shortage of suitable and age-adapted housing, while planning processes, resources, and cross-sector coordination remain limited.

At the same time, perspectives on ageing are shifting from a focus on illness to promoting healthy, active, and independent living. The concept of "age optimization" highlights how living environments, social interaction, and welfare technologies can support health, quality of life, and participation in later life.

This working group "Age-Optimized Living Environments" invites contributions that explore how senior housing and living environments can be designed, organized, and developed to support healthy and active ageing in both rural and urban regions. The working group will focus on how senior housing environments can be designed and organized to support independence, well-being, and social participation among older adults in rural regions. Ultimately, the initiative seeks to support both individual well-being and broader social and economic sustainability for ageing in rural and urban regions.

We welcome interdisciplinary perspectives and encourage contributions from academia, as well as from practitioners in municipalities, industry, and civil society.

We particularly invite papers that address:

- innovative models of senior housing and age-adapted environments
- the role of welfare technologies in supporting independent living
- social design and opportunities for participation in later life
- organizational, management and business models in senior housing
- collaboration between sectors in rural contexts
- entrepreneurial models of building, financing and managing senior housing

Both empirical and conceptual papers are welcome, including work-in-progress and case-based studies. Contributions may focus on research findings, practical implementations, or methodological approaches related to ageing and living environments.

The working group aims to foster dialogue and knowledge exchange across disciplines and sectors. By bringing together diverse perspectives, the session seeks to contribute to the development of sustainable and transferable approaches to senior housing and ageing in rural and urban regions.

Designing Health-Promoting Senior Housing: Exploring How Built Environments Enable Social Participation and Wellbeing

Petter Ahlström, Ann Svensson, Thomas Sjöström, University West, Sweden

Abstract text

The development of health-promoting senior housing has received increasing attention as societies face demographic ageing and growing demands for sustainable solutions in housing, health, and care. Such environments are designed not only to provide accessibility and safety, but also to support autonomy, social participation, wellbeing, and active ageing. However, knowledge remains limited regarding how these ambitions are translated into everyday living and experienced by residents.

This study explores how a newly developed health-promoting senior housing environment in Sweden is designed, experienced, and enacted in everyday life. The aim is to analyse how the built environment creates opportunities for, and potentially constrain, health, independence, and social participation among older adults. The study examines the relationship between design intentions and residents' lived experiences of their housing environment.

The study adopts a relational perspective on place, where housing environments are understood as continuously produced through interactions between material structures, social practices, and everyday activities (Lefebvre, 1991). Drawing on Gibson's (1979) concept of affordances, the analysis focuses on the possibilities for action that emerge through the relationship between individuals and their surroundings. The focus is therefore not only on what has been built, but on what opportunities for interaction, mobility, independence, and belonging become meaningful and accessible in residents' everyday lives.

By examining the interplay between architectural intentions and lived experiences, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how health-promoting senior housing can support ageing well in practice. The findings aim to provide knowledge for municipalities, housing developers, architects, and policymakers involved in future planning of senior living environments. More broadly, the study contributes to research on how built environments shape social connectedness, autonomy, and wellbeing in later life.

Keywords: senior housing; healthy ageing; built environment; social participation; affordances.

Women's Volunteering Associations for Active Ageing in Rural Areas of Southern Spain

Maria Egea-Hernández, Juan Carlos Maroto-Martos & Aida Pinos-Navarrte, University of Granada, Spain

Abstract text

This study examines how women-led volunteer organizations contribute to the creation of supportive environments for the active ageing of rural women in Andalusia, Spain. Despite being the second largest and most populated region in the country, extensive inland and mountainous areas are experiencing significant demographic transformations associated with depopulation, population ageing and the progressive decline of public services and social infrastructure. In this context, community-based initiatives are becoming increasingly important in sustaining wellbeing, social participation and quality of life among elderly people. Regarding the methodological process, an analysis of volunteer organizations operating in different rural municipalities was conducted, with particular attention to those most affected by demographic decline. Subsequently, an online focus group was carried out with eight women involved in volunteer activities. The remote format of the session responded to the geographical dispersion of the participants. The objectives were twofold: first, to foster synergies among associations; and second, to identify the actions they undertake in support of women within the village. The discourse analysis demonstrates how, through cultural and sports activities, emotional support, volunteering, intergenerational interaction, and digital inclusion, among other initiatives, these organisations play an essential role in reducing loneliness and social isolation among older women. They also mediate the relationship between local administrations, Rural Development Groups (RDGs), digital centres and the older population, facilitating access to resources, well-being programmes and social support in contexts where institutional services are often limited. In conclusion, it is worth highlighting the importance of informal community networks for the social sustainability of an increasingly ageing rural Europe.

A gap in planning? The relationship between spatial planning and individuals' perceptions of senior housing

Petter Ahlström, Isabell Brodin, Emma Jacobsson, Ann Svensson & Börje Bjelke
University West, Sweden

Abstract text

Sweden’s ageing population places new demands on housing provision and spatial planning. Senior housing, self-chosen, self-financed, age-limited (typically 55+) accessible dwellings within the ordinary housing stock, is one response, distinct from needs-assessed care housing. Yet it remains unclear how well planning practice corresponds to older individuals' own perceptions and preferences. Prior research has largely treated the planning perspective and the individual perspective separately, leaving the relationship between them underexplored.
This study identifies and analyses differences between how senior housing is planned and how individuals perceive it, and considers how these differences can be understood within spatial planning. A qualitative, exploratory design combined semi-structured interviews with eight planning actors and twelve members of the public with a document analysis of municipal comprehensive plans and housing-supply programmes from five municipalities. The material was examined through thematic analysis and interpreted using Forester's (1999) theory of deliberative planning.
The findings reveal a clear gap. Planning actors describe senior housing as important, yet its development remains limited in practice and low in priority. Individuals show limited knowledge of the housing form, often conflating it with care housing, and low willingness to relocate, preferring to remain in familiar homes and neighbourhoods until declining health or loneliness makes moving necessary. Planning is shown to rest largely on assumptions about demand rather than on residents’ actual preferences.
Read through a deliberative lens, the gap reflects a lack of inclusive, dialogue-based processes in which citizens' experiences are meaningfully integrated. The study underscores the importance of communication, knowledge and dialogue in spatial planning, and argues for planning with older adults rather than merely for them.

Optimized Aging in Sustainable Human–Environment Systems; Healthy Older Adults

Börje Bjelke & Petter Ahlström, University West, Sweden

Abstract text

Definition: Optimized Aging is a life-course and systems-oriented framework for understanding and enabling individual capacities and biological, social, built and natural environments can interact over time to achieve the best attainable trajectory of functional ability, autonomy, participation, resilience and quality of life.

Background: Overseeing a memory clinic, the possibility of improving quality of life, intellectual and physical ability in patients with neurodegenerative diseases throughout their remaining lifespan became obvious. If it is possible in diseased patients, it would be even more powerful in healthy and young people.

Thus, Optimized Aging, relates to the individual's holistic situation during the aging process and can always be optimized in relation to medical aspects, lifestyle, physical/housing environment, social interaction societal infrastructure. Applying Optimized Aging in Sustainable Human–Environment Systems it becomes an interventional tool in creating healthy older adults and thereby reducing health care costs.

Results: We have documented base line data from a conceptual senior housing, Bovieran, where social interaction, emotional and physical security as well as satisfaction are factors highly derived from environmental aspects.

Discussion: Several concepts on aging and health do exist i.e. EU's Healthy Aging, centenarian lifestyles, aging optimization and several other but should not be misunderstood as Optimized Aging which focus on the individuals present situation involving a transdisciplinary umbrella of expertise in medicine, economy, law, architecture, survey and SLU provides a unique setting for developing Optimized Aging beyond the traditional health-care perspective by integrating food systems, nature, animals, landscapes, rural and urban environments, sustainability and human functional capacity across the life course.

Optimized Aging can further be developed into a more explicitly optimization-oriented and life-course-based framework by examining how different resources and environments can actively be combined, balanced, and modified over time in order to create the best possible individual aging trajectory.

Translating Age-Optimized Living Environments: An Actor-Network Theory Perspective

Stefan Hellman, University West, Sweden

Age-optimized living environments have become an important research and societal concern, as ageing populations place new demands on housing, care, mobility, technology and social participation. Such environments are not created by any single actor, but depend on the capacity of multiple actors—including municipalities, housing companies, healthcare and social care organizations, civil society, technology providers and older adults themselves—to act in relation to one another. The starting point for this planned study is therefore that age optimization should be understood not only as physical design or service provision, but as a question of how relationships between heterogeneous actors are formed, negotiated and governed over time. The purpose of the study is to contribute to research on age-optimized living environments by exploring how relations between different actors may enable, constrain or transform the conditions for ageing well. Collaboration across organizational and professional boundaries is necessary, but challenging. Actors may share an ambition to improve living environments for older adults, while being guided by different interests, responsibilities, resources, time horizons and institutional logics. These differences may create tensions concerning what should be optimized, for whom, by whom and through what forms of coordination.

To understand these dynamics, the study will use Actor-Network Theory and translation theory as its theoretical lens. It is designed as a qualitative case study of an emerging age-optimized living environment initiative, drawing on interviews, document analysis and observations of collaborative arenas. The analysis will trace processes of problematization, interessement, enrolment and mobilization to examine how human and non-human actors—including organizations, professionals, technologies, policies, buildings, routines and funding models—are connected, negotiated and potentially stabilized in networks. The study thereby seeks to identify which relations are important for age optimization, where collaboration becomes fragile, and how challenges emerge when actors attempt to align divergent interests.

The expected contribution is, first, that the study will develop a conceptual understanding of ageoptimized living environments as relational and sociomaterial achievements rather than predefined solutions. Second, it will show how Actor-Network Theory and translation theory can reveal possibilities and challenges involved in governing long-term, robust and adaptive networks for age optimization. By focusing on relations, translations and network formation, the study aims to support more integrated and sustainable approaches to ageing well.

Keywords: age-optimized living environments; Actor-Network Theory; translation theory; interorganizational collaboration; sociomaterial relations; ageing well.

Age-Optimised Housing in Rural Areas: A Case Study from Sweden

Susanne Clase, Seniorvärlden Ideell Förening / White Arkitekter/Abako Arkitektkontor, Sweden

Abstract text

Demographic change presents a major societal challenge, particularly in rural municipalities where many elderly live in detached houses that do not meet current accessibility standards. Long distances to services and social activities increase the risk of isolation, while home care providers face growing challenges in delivering efficient services across sparsely populated areas.

Creating sustainable, attractive, and health-promoting housing environments can support healthy ageing and encourage seniors to relocate from inaccessible dwellings. Such environments require design solutions that address the needs of ageing populations at multiple scales, from urban planning and architecture to interior design and welfare technology. By promoting autonomy, social interaction, and physical activity, these environments contribute to what may be described as *age optimisation*.

In 2022, the municipal housing company Torsås Bostads AB conducted community dialogues to explore housing preferences among older residents in the rural municipality of Torsås, Sweden. The consultations revealed a strong demand for centrally located extra care housing. The result was *Snödroppen*, a new development completed in 2025 with 21 apartments, 90% of which were leased before occupancy. Designed by White Arkitekter, the building is constructed entirely from timber and has a climate footprint of 290 kg CO_2e/m^2. Apartment layouts were carefully designed to support independence, while shared indoor and outdoor spaces encourage social interaction, community participation, and physical activity.

This paper presents the project and discusses the role of age-friendly housing in promoting health and sustainability in rural communities. A post-occupancy evaluation will be conducted in autumn 2026 using surveys and interviews with residents and home care staff. The study will examine motivations for relocation, experiences of the living environment, perceived impacts on health and independence, and the functioning of the housing environment as a workplace. Future research will explore broader societal benefits, including housing chain effects, health outcomes, and home care service costs.

From NIMBY versus YIMBY to place-attachments and place logics: Understanding residents' views of place-making in South Africa and Sweden

Lisa Bomble, University west, Sweden

Abstract text

In a recent publication (Bomble et al 2026) we introduce the concept of place logic and explain how that works in very diverse communities and can potentially be used to understand the politics of place-making at the community-level anywhere. The article compares reflections on two cases that explore the role of residents and their leaders in various place-making projects from Sweden and South Africa. From the article's abstract:

> *"The article shows that residents' attitudes towards place-making are more varied and complex than portrayed in the NIMBY-YIMBY dichotomy, and that local leaders play an important role in representing residents on place-making projects. The attitudes and actions of residents, represented by their leaders, can vary dramatically down time, falling into four broad categories of "allies", "opponents", "entrepreneurs" and "guerillas." However, the self-understanding of leaders as acting in the interests of their place is consistent across these multiple engagements, and there is an enduring and specific vision for development that informs the views and actions of leaders in both cases. We suggest that local resident motivations can be strong due to place-attachment and that reasoning is guided by local logics."*

Understanding this local logic is the difference between planning *for* and planning *with* a local community. Our presentation will show the cases from the article as well as exemplify how new housing projects mentioned in the track adhere to local logic in different ways. We hope for a discussion whether local logic and the roles of local leaders discussed in the article may help explain how and why a project is received and implemented in different communities. Thus, the language around place logic could help facilitate collaboration between sectors in rural contexts.

Ref:

Bomble, L., Piper, L., & Saldert, H. (forthcoming). 'From NIMBY versus YIMBY to place-attachments and place logics: Understanding residents' views of place-making in South Africa and Sweden', Journal of Place Management and Development.

Promoting culturally adequate food for in the public kitchen and the indigenous Eight season wheel: The case of food provision for elderly Sami.

Ildikó Asztalos Morell, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

Abstract text

This paper explores the potentials of introducing local community based indigenous food into the state elderly care provision in Sweden while unpacks ways how this can contribute to a transition towards a more sustainable food system through participatory action research. The public kitchen is supplied adhering to EU harmonized public procurement rules. This places large-scale suppliers in favourable position leveraging food from "anywhere", marginalising local small scale producers. Sami enjoy national minority rights, which can be applied to Sami elderly's demand for culturally adequate food. Facilitating their demand strengthens the position of traditional Sami food providers throughout the value chain.

The method was developed by indigenous public kitchen expert, Ann Sparrock combining talks with municipal politicians and managers at the top level with mobilising elderly Sami, who agreed upon eight meals to be served by the municipality during a year along the eight season wheel representing the seasonality of traditional food. Case studies were based on facilitation talks, interviews, workshops and surveys exploring the internal and external mechanisms through which municipal public kitchen organises its provision of food.

Suppliers of traditional food experience diverse difficulties: public procurement assumes competitors with substantial economic and logistic resources; prioritising one large supplier; producers fear penalties if not being able to deliver. Meanwhile, good examples, such as small specialised calls, collaboration on logistics can enhance the opportunities for local producers. This in turn can offer opportunity for a more holistic use of the reindeer in accordance to traditions.

Taking minority rights into practice can strengthen indigenous producers and consumers throughout the value chain of the public kitchen. However, it requires systematic engagement with municipal suppliers of care (top down) as well as right holders (elderly care recipients). Implementation assumes change in municipal practices of procurement.

Designing Inclusive Digital Care Environments: Integrating Older Adults' Perspectives in the Development of Home-Based Health Technologies

Jonas Hermansson, Louise Danielsson, Henry Ascher & Ann Svensson, University West, Sweden

Abstract text

Digitalisation is transforming healthcare and creating new opportunities for older adults to maintain independence and manage their health at home. However, digital health systems are often developed and procured based on assumptions about users' language skills, digital literacy, health knowledge, and willingness to share personal health data. For older adults with migrant backgrounds, these conditions may not always be fulfilled, potentially resulting in reduced access to digital healthcare services, increased dependence on relatives, and unequal opportunities for independent living.

This study explores how inclusive perspectives can be integrated into the procurement and development of digital health technologies supporting ageing in place. It focuses on a central but often overlooked stage of digital transformation: the procurement process, where requirements regarding accessibility, language support, usability, and user involvement are defined. Although healthcare organisations increasingly aim to provide equitable digital services, procurement processes are often designed from an organisational perspective rather than from the lived experiences and needs of diverse user groups.

The study investigates how older adults' experiences and needs can be incorporated earlier in the development process, moving from reactive adaptation in healthcare encounters towards proactive design of inclusive digital environments. This will be conducted by interviews and thematic analysis. The study aims to develop a transferable framework for integrating diverse older adults' perspectives into the procurement of home-based medical information systems.

By highlighting the relationship between digital infrastructure, living environments, and social inclusion, the study contributes to discussions on age-optimized living environments. The findings provide insights for municipalities, healthcare organisations, technology providers, and policymakers seeking sustainable solutions that support autonomy, participation, and wellbeing among older adults in rural and urban contexts.

Keywords: ageing in place; digital health; welfare technology; inclusive design; procurement; social participation.

Optimized Aging in Sustainable Human–Environment Systems; Older Adults in Need of Care

Sandra Pennbrant, Anette Ekström-Bergström & Börje Bjelke, University West, Sweden

Abstract text

Background: Optimized Aging is a life-course and systems-oriented framework describing how individual capacities interact with biological, social, built, and natural environments to support functional ability, autonomy, participation, resilience, and quality of life throughout later life. The last two to three years of life are the most resource-intensive from a healthcare perspective, with the final six months accounting for particularly high healthcare utilization and costs. Opportunities for healthy and independent aging are shaped by environmental and social conditions. In this study, the environment is represented by the Bovieran housing concept, an age-friendly residential model that combines accessible housing, year-round access to nature through enclosed gardens, animals and opportunities for social interaction. While nature exposure and garden environments have been associated with positive health outcomes, limited knowledge exists regarding how long-term exposure to nature-integrated living environments such as Bovieran influences functional aging, independence, and quality of life among older adults.
The aim: is therefore to explore how living in a Bovieran environment contributes to Optimized Aging, functional ability, and independent living among older adults, and to identify the social, physical, and environmental resources that support these outcomes.
Method: A convergent mixed-methods design will be used. The study was conducted in selected Bovieran communities in Sweden. Residents aged 65 years and older were invited to complete a survey assessing health, functional ability, quality of life, social participation, loneliness, and perceived environmental support. In addition, a purposive sample of residents participated in semi-structured interviews exploring experiences of aging, independence, social connectedness, and the role of nature in everyday life. Quantitative and qualitative data will be analysed separately and integrated through triangulation, in the collected data.
Expected outcomes: The study is expected to generate new knowledge about how nature-integrated housing environments support healthy and independent aging and to identify key social, environmental, and organizational factors that promote quality of life, functional ability, and potentially reduce healthcare needs among older adults.

Living in a bridgeless island community: environmental, social and infrastructural conditions for age-optimized living in remote regions

Maivor Olsson-Tall, M., Adolfsson, S., Tengdahl, N., & Svensson, A, University West, Sweden

Abstract text

Rural and remote regions face particular challenges in supporting healthy, active and independent ageing, where suitable living environments, social participation and access to care must all be sustained across distance. Island communities without a bridge connection offer an instructive case, because the conditions that shape everyday life and health become unusually visible there.

This paper draws on a qualitative interview study of twelve permanent residents of a Swedish island community without a bridge connection, exploring their experiences of living conditions and the organization of health care from a health-promotion perspective. Semi-structured interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis.

Three themes emerged. The natural environment supported recovery, physical activity and well-being. A small, closely tied community created belonging, safety and mutual support, though at the cost of privacy and social visibility. Infrastructure, above all transport dependency and the way care is organized, shaped daily planning, the practical reach of health services, and the possibility of living on equitable terms. A recurring finding was that care which formally exists is not always practically accessible, because its organization does not fully reflect the geographic and everyday conditions of island life.

For the working group, the study offers a rural, place-based perspective on what makes a living environment support independence, well-being and participation as people age in place. It points to the interplay of natural setting, social cohesion and infrastructure, and to the gap between available and usable services, as central questions for age-optimized living environments, and to the need for cross-sector coordination between health care, municipalities and local actors in remote regions.

From planned space to lived place: Exploring health-promoting senior housing in rural Sweden

Thomas Sjöström Campus Västervik, Västervik Municipality, Sweden

Abstract text

Rural municipalities face a dual demographic challenge. The proportion of older residents grows while there is a limited supply of housing that supports independent and active ageing. Increased attention has been given to senior housing in which the built environment is explicitly designed to promote health and social participation. However, these ambitions are often based on assumptions about how architectural and social features will be used. Less is known about how these environments are experienced and given meaning once residents move in (so-called post-occupancy evaluations, or POEs).

This paper presents the design of a case study of a newly established senior housing facility comprising 21 apartments in a rural municipality in Sweden.

The study examines how intentions to create a health-promoting rural living environment are translated into residents' everyday practices and experiences. Its overarching question is: How is a health-promoting senior housing environment created, used and given meaning through the interaction between the built environment and the people who live there?

The study combines interviews with architects, commissioners and other actors involved in the planning process with interviews, observations and a survey involving residents, relatives and staff. The analysis draws on Lefebvre's relational understanding of space and the concept of affordances. These perspectives make it possible to examine both how the housing environment was conceived and further, which opportunities for social interaction, activity, independence and well-being emerge – or fail to emerge – in everyday life.

By comparing planned intentions with lived experiences, the study seeks to contribute with knowledge about how age-optimized living environments can be designed and developed in rural contexts. It also illustrates the value of post-occupancy approaches for evaluating whether innovative senior housing achieves its intended purposes.

WG 14. Open sessions

Working group chairs:
Arvid Stiernström & Patrik Cras

About the working group

This panel is for contributions that resonates with the main theme of the conference but does not fit into the other working group topics.

We welcome proposals in all stages of development that focuses on renewing thought in rural and/or regional development. Accepted submissions will be formed into sessions by the conference organizers based thematic connections between the submissions.

The abstracts submitted for this working group topic formed the following themes:

14:1 Policies and actions for sustainable rural landscapes.

14:2 Mobilities, emerging rural communities and community action.

14:3 Agrarian transitions

14:4 Politics and actions of everyday rural sustainability.

14:1 Open session: Policies and actions for sustainable rural landscapes

Working group chair:
Arvid Stiernström

Environmental politics and political polarization – Exploring rural perspectives in Sweden

Karoline Hermansson, Uppsala University, Sweden

Abstract text

Territorial inequalities and the discontent associated with them are increasingly recognised as factors shaping political shifts in Western democracies, not least the rise of populist parties. Simultaneously, environmental policies are increasingly acknowledged to have territorially differentiated consequences, with rural areas experiencing and perceiving their material and cultural impacts differently. Further, a nascent literature positions environmentalism as an independent dimension of political preferences in Europe. Combined, this raises the possibility that environmental politics may become connected to political conflicts beyond the environmental domain, such as spurring anti-establishment sentiments. Whereas the correlations between rurality, right-wing populism and criticism of environmental policies are well-established quantitatively, the mechanisms through which these connect remain to be further elucidated.

This paper takes as its theoretical starting point that environmental policies may deepen pre-existing rural discontent not only due to material factors, but through how material factors coincide with and enhance cultural factors, here looked at through the concepts of place-based identities and experiences of lack of political recognition. Bringing these material and cultural dimensions together provides a novel approach for studying how rural discontent with environmental policy is understood, going beyond purely distributive or identity-based accounts. As such, this paper explores how citizens perceive the territorial and social consequences of environmental policies, and whether and how these perceptions connect environmental politics to broader political identities and policy preferences. The research focuses on Sweden, where environmental protection has historically been characterised by broad political consensus, but recent political developments have involved growing political polarization around both environmental policy and territorial inequalities. The analysis draws on preliminary findings from semi-structured interviews in three rural settings across Sweden, to illuminate *how, and under what conditions, environmental politics becomes entangled with broader political conflicts among rural citizens in Sweden.*

Visualising Value - Using film to map Restoration Futures with forest owners

Emelie Victoria Isaksen, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Abstract text

This presentation proposes forms of visual ethnographic methodologies for researching human-environment relationships amidst both fast changing policy landscapes and ecological conditions. Focusing on values held in forested landscapes primarily in rural areas, it looks at how legislation like the EU Nature Restoration Law are lived, interpreted, contested, and reworked in everyday rural practice. Taking off in previous work, it develops an argument for testing collaborative lo-fi photographic methodologies as a means of studying that negotiation and the potential for 'restauration futures'.

I foreground one of the methods at the centre of my upcoming PhD: low-resolution film practiced collaboratively with Swedish small-scale forest owners. These methods deliberately slow down and open up the research process. Grain and imperfect unstabilised movement become ways of distributing authorship beyond the researcher and makes space for participants to co-create images rather than be 'captured' or 'documented' by them, as well as acknowledging more-than-human actors as actors impacting the representation. The resulting works function as basis for creating counter-maps where the material can be validated with participants; alternative, situated visions of what forests are and whom they are for, challenging the aerial, and often extractive view that dominates forest policy and that misses interpersonal and spatial relations.

In the presentation, I will show an extract from the film *Letters to a Forest* (2024), a collective poetic essay-film based on ethnographic fieldwork I conducted in diverse forests in central and northern Sweden in the summer of 2024. In the film, we get to hear from forest owners, biologists, migrant workers, foresters, activists, and avid foragers, and the film demonstrates how lo-fi aesthetics surface subjectivity, correspondence between actors, and ambivalence - treating rurality as a site of both tension, resistance, and potentiality.

Ecological Collateral: Forest Ownership as Organizational Slack in Rural Entrepreneurship

Martin Jaller, Torsta Landsbygdsutveckling, Sweden**, Johan Kask,** University of Inland Norway**, & Anna Sörensson,** Mid Sweden University and University of Inland Norway.

Abstract text

This paper develops the concept of ecological collateral by exploring how forest ownership functions as a strategic organizational resource in rural entrepreneurship. Qualitative interviews were conducted with entrepreneurs in agriculture, food production, and forestry-related industries in northern Sweden to examine how forests create resilience and strategic flexibility in rural areas. The findings shows that forests play a significantly broader role than conventional resource-based understandings of natural capital. Rather than functioning solely as productive assets, forests operate as ecological collateral: a place-embedded resource that enables firms to secure loans, finance investments, absorb market shocks, maintain liquidity, and reduce dependence on external financing structures. Forest ownership thereby creates organizational slack and strategic autonomy in contexts where traditional financial systems often fail to support small-scale rural firms. Several firms explain how forest assets enabled the construction of slaughterhouses, investments in machinery and energy systems, or provided economic buffers during periods of rising fuel costs, unstable supply chains, and market uncertainty. In this sense, forest ownership becomes directly connected to entrepreneurial decision-making and adaptive capacity. The analysis further shows that ecological collateral supports a particular organizational rationality in which firms prioritize resilience over rapid expansion. Rather than optimizing for scale and maximum efficiency, firms deliberately maintain diversified income streams, operational redundancy, low indebtedness, and flexible business structures. The study argues that this resilience-oriented logic differs substantially from dominant urban and growth-oriented assumptions within entrepreneurship and business model research. Existing theories frequently conceptualize resources as drivers of competitive advantage, innovation, and growth. In contrast, this study demonstrates how natural capital can instead function as a stabilizing mechanism that preserves autonomy, reduces vulnerability, and enables long-term adaptability under conditions of structural uncertainty. The paper contributes theoretically by introducing ecological collateral as a conceptual bridge between natural capital, entrepreneurial resilience, and organizational adaptability in peripheral economies.

14:2 Open session: Mobilities, Emerging Rural Communities and Community Action

Working group chair:
Arvid Stiernström

Facilitating Local Actors and Local Action (LALA) for community sustainability: insights from a rural municipality in northern Sweden

Albert Brunet Johansson, Umeå University, Sweden

Abstract text

Rural settings in Sweden are undergoing long-term structural changes that reshape the conditions for community sustainability – meaning the ability of rural communities to provide opportunity for good lives, including access to meaningful activities, inclusive governance, and a sense of belonging. These shifts require actors in communities to adapt to new social, demographic and economic realities. Against this backdrop, there is growing interest in how local actors and local action (LALA) can contribute to community sustainability. Local actors, like village associations, form the backbone of community life in rural Sweden and possess contextual knowledge that helps them judge the cultural appropriateness and long-term viability of initiatives.

Our previous research found that rural municipalities in northern Sweden were increasingly positioning themselves as facilitators of LALA, especially in areas with limited municipal presence. Considering this, we investigated how a rural municipality in inland northern Sweden understood and facilitated LALA to support community sustainability. We achieved this through semi-structured interviews with municipal actors focusing on their interpretations of LALA, and the strategies they employed to enable it.

Findings indicated that the municipality understood local associations to play a vital role in community sustainability by fostering socially and recreationally active lifestyles, strengthening social connections, and supporting conditions linked to health and wellbeing in ways the municipality was unable to – particularly in very remote settings. The municipality facilitated these activities in several ways, including administrative support systems, supporting social infrastructure, and working to reframe community-municipality relationships.

This study contributes to a conceptual understanding of facilitation as a relational and infrastructural practice and highlights the importance of civil society associations, social infrastructure and shared ownership in sustaining community life under conditions of demographic and resource constraints. As rural municipalities continue to navigate structural change, facilitative approaches to governance may offer a pathway to sustaining resilient rural communities.

Conceptualizing engagement in local civil society – crisis and transformations.

Patrik Cras & Seema Arora-Jonsson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

Abstract text

In this paper we turn to a pressing development in civil society work that needs more theorizing. How do new generations find their place in local civil society?

Local civil society associations work in various ways with the aim of making it possible to live and work in rural areas also in the future. The role of civil society to mediate structural transformations in sparsely populated areas is recognized in EU policy as well as in the Swedish national political debate. Policy interventions related to rural matters often rely on mechanisms of interactive governance, where government programs support local civil society groups such as village associations to find local solutions when their community faces diverse structural challenges. However, there is a widespread concern that the foundations for civil society to have this function fade away. Many people give testimony that there is a crisis of volunteer engagement. Many witness that it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit people for board positions and in other ways get people involved in local community organizations. Not getting an influx of new people has crucial consequences. As one informant puts it:

> [What is] special about community life, [is that] it is based on voluntary commitment. […] That is how we keep things running. Because if we didn't do this on a voluntary basis, it would never be financially viable; there is simply no way.

At the same time as the experiences of a crisis of civil society engagement is easy to find we can also find a parallel trend that might be more hidden from view, an important transformation of the everyday work of civil society. Increasingly groups are organizing ephemerally for shorter periods and exist as latent networks that come together to work on particular issues. Many and especially the younger generation can organize around issues, especially through digital platforms. Taking some examples from our ethnographic work in Sweden, we scrutinize if the civil society might in fact be in the midst of a transformation. What would be needed to understand this transformation? How do we need to widen conventional theorizations on the civil society?

The presentation at the conference will present ongoing work on this theme building on: 1.) ethnographic research carried out 2020– 2024, 2.) quantitative data on civil society participation collected by other researchers, and 3.) observations of how the situation for rural civil society is understood and discussed in a thematic network on rural civil society set up by the Swedish Rural Network in cooperation with the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Development.

From Mobile Libraries to Facilitative Platforms: The Role of Bookmobiles in Rural Digital Service Ecosystems

Johanna Lindberg, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden & **Jonna Steinrud**, Digidel, Sweden.

Abstract text

Across Europe, rural areas face challenges related to depopulation, service centralisation, and ongoing processes of digital transformation. These developments are reshaping how public and private services are organised and delivered, raising questions about access and participation in sparsely populated regions. In northern Sweden, municipal bookmobiles have traditionally provided access to books and library services in remote villages. In recent years, bookmobiles have expanded their activities to include digital connectivity, access to e-services, and digital support. This development raises questions about the role of bookmobiles in supporting rural service provision under conditions of digital transformation.

Despite growing research on rural digitalisation and service innovation, little attention has been paid to how existing public institutions support coordination and resource exchange across actors involved in rural service provision. Drawing on the concept of Rural Regional Digital Service Ecosystems (RRDSEs), this paper examines how bookmobiles function as facilitative platforms that support coordination among residents, municipalities, libraries, civil agencies, and other service providers.

The paper draws on participatory action research conducted within the DigiBy and SMALL projects in Norrbotten, Sweden. The findings show how the transformation of the bookmobile can be understood through the integration of physical space, digital resources, and staff competence. Together, these elements support access to digital services and facilitate interaction between residents and service providers. As a facilitative platform embedded within a Rural Regional Digital Service Ecosystem, the bookmobile contributes to coordination, resource exchange, and service provision across organisational and geographical boundaries.

The paper contributes to research on rural digitalisation by conceptualising the bookmobile as a facilitative platform within a Rural Regional Digital Service Ecosystem. The study demonstrates how an existing public institution can function as a facilitative platform that supports coordination, resource exchange, and service provision under conditions of sparsity.

14:3 Open session: Agrarian transitions

Working group chair:
Arvid Stiernström

Contested Ground: Green Transition, Agrarian Discontent and the Politics of Territorialisation in Sweden, Poland and the EU.

Matilda Baraibar Norberg, Södertörn University, Sweden

Abstract text

The European Green Deal has intensified pressure on agriculture across the Baltic Sea region to reduce emissions, curb nutrient leakage, and halt biodiversity loss. While these environmental imperatives are framed as necessary for sustainable rural futures, they have simultaneously triggered discontent and resistance among farmers, manifesting in road blockades, tractor demonstrations, and intensified lobbying across several European countries. This paper examines how such moments of friction between environmental policy and agricultural livelihoods constitute *open moments* – junctures where established structures of rural governance are exposed, contested, and reconfigured through political mobilisation.

Drawing on an ongoing comparative research project on the political economy of agriculture and the organising of farmers' movements in Sweden and Poland, this paper explores how EU green policy becomes a site of territorialisation, claimed and contested by a multiplicity of actors – farmers' organisations, political parties, authorities, and transnational bodies such as Copa Cogeca. While Polish farmers have mobilised extensively and visibly against the Green Deal, Swedish farmers, represented primarily by LRF, have thus far avoided street protest in favour of institutional channels, though signs of growing frustration and scepticism toward environmental regulation are emerging.

The paper asks: which actors emerge as agents of change in these open moments, and which are marginalised? How do political parties position themselves in relation to pre-existing agrarian discontent – as instigators or as followers? And how do differing agricultural traditions and political structures in Sweden and Poland shape divergent trajectories of mobilisation in response to a shared supranational policy pressure?

By tracing how discontent is organised and connected across local, national, and EU scales, the paper contributes to understanding how rural space is politically reterritorialised in times of green transition, and what this means for the future of agricultural and environmental governance in the Baltic Sea region.

This paper would be part of the joint research project “Seeds of Dissent: the political economy of Farmers' Resistance in the Baltic Region. The cases of Poland and Sweden”, together with Gonzalo Pozo Martin. Financiers: The Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies (25-PR2-0036). Ethical approval: Etikprövningsmyndigheten (Dnr 2026-05104-01)

Metabolic rift and Mute compulsion: an approach to advancing sustainable agriculture.

Eirik Fuglestad, Ruralis, Norway

Abstract text

Agriculture faces grand sustainability challenges that are both ecological, economic and social. This talk takes as its starting point the social metabolism between humans and nature (Marx, 2021) and suggests that such an approach to the sustainability challenges facing agriculture and rural ares can provide a holistic and integrated analysis that can help solve these problems. Such an analysis makes clear that the sustainability challenges originate in the social relations and practices in the agricultural social metabolism with nature. The talk also applies Hartmut Rosas theory of social acceleration to underpin its analytical points. The talk is primarily a problem description, but it does also briefly discuss Eric Olin Wrights ideas about social change to point to some possible leverage points to change agricultures metabolism in sustainable direction. The talk is based on the authors own experiences and his own reflections as a future farmer and as a current sociologist, and the method is thus partly autobiographical (Ellis et al, 2011). One of the key insights that the talk promotes is that the social processes of accumulation of capital through commodities and the generation of surplus value are particularly important in understanding the sustainability challenges in Norwegian agriculture.

Searching for (a)ffective policy: An emotion discourse analysis of the Farm to Fork Strategy

Sarah Ramsay, Södertörn University, Sweden

Abstract text

Governing institutions such as the European Commission are introducing a growing number of agri-environmental policy mechanisms meant to drive forward ecological transitions in agriculture. Many farmers across Europe, however, are responding with frustration, anger, and resistance. Meanwhile, policymaking continues to operate under the emotion-logic dichotomy, where logic is conceptualized and treated as a process devoid of emotion and affective reasoning. This paper challenges this conventional dualism and advocates for an integrated approach to governance that embraces affective reasoning as legitimate and necessary. In so doing, I argue that we can re-imagine an agricultural regime which is emotionally self-aware and thus has the capacity to represent farmers' interests and sow a reciprocal relationship with farming communities. The emotion-logic of both those in policy development and governance, and those on the receiving end of these strategies is crucial to understanding motivations, hopes, expectations, responses, and reactions that occur at the interplay of political mechanisms and societal actors. Digging into the emotion/reason continuum is necessary to get to the root of, for instance, why farmers protest or otherwise resist green transition initiatives (Matejak & Mahmutovic 2025). It is likewise important for understanding, for instance, why green transition policy is often described as detached from the real world or ineffective. (European Court of Auditors 2017; Fiala et al. 2024). By conducting an emotion discourse analysis on the development, implementation and receival on the European Green Deal's Farm to Fork strategy, this article investigates the role of affect and emotion in shaping the agri-environmental political field. More specifically, this study addresses the question of how and to what extent emotions and affective reasoning are framed and expressed in the European Commission's *Farm to Fork Strategy*.

14:4 Politics and actions for everyday rural sustainability

Working group chair:
Patrik Cras

Sustainability in a Changing Place: Everyday Practices and Tensions in a Rural Border Neighbourhood

Maddalena Guaglione & Jolanta Drzewiecka, University Università della Svizzera Italiana, Switzerland

Abstract text

This project seeks to understand how the social, ecological and economic dimensions of sustainability are interrelated in practices and interpretations of residents of a neighbourhood in a small town situated in a marginal border rural region. Studies on sustainable practices typically focus on cultural norms and values (Ni et al., 2025; MacGregor et al., 2019; Head et al., 2021), embodied habits and religious norms (Agusalim et al., 2024; Ives et al., 2024) of marked social groups. We combine the mundane everyday practices approach (Rau, 2018; Dal Gobbo, 2022), a relational ecological framework (Loftus, 2019) and the interrelated sustainability dimensions perspective (Arora-Johnson & McAreavey, 2023) to examine the social, environmental and economic sustainability practices in a diverse neighborhood shaped by different forms of mobility and continuous development. Rather than focusing specific groups abstracted from their everyday life contexts, we examine sustainability as a dimension of emplaced, diverse social relations to reveal the dynamics of (im)balanced power relations within economic, social, and political forces converging in places (Massey, 2005; Loftus, 2017) that legitimate some practices while marginalizing others in the context of ongoing urban development. Our preliminary findings show that the participants' varied and culturally shaped notions of what practices are sustainable is based in a sense of personal responsibility aligned with dominant discourses. They define green spaces as places for social interaction that need to be well maintained and where one needs to behave well by not littering. These definitions reveal a tension between social and ecological sustainability as well as a tension between their embrace of 'progress' and a simultaneous critique of 'cementification' due to the continuous development. We analyze how social sustainability is shaped by tension between longterm residents closing themselves off in a 'shrinking village,' forms of interactional segregation, and a local grassroots inclusion project aimed at migrant residents.

“Social dumpning” and neighbour-to-neighbour advocacy in a Swedish mill town

Bim Kilje, Uppsala University, Sweden

Abstract text

Social dumpning is a term that has risen in popularity in Swedish media debate over the last few years. It entails that municipalities, by encouragement or various forms of economic incentives, impel residents to move to another municipality. The affected residents tend to be those who receive income support at the municipal level and today, refugee migrants constitute the most part of its subjects. Oftentimes, it is urban municipalities with a lack of affordable housing that transfer people to rural municipalities, where job opportunities may be scarce. This paper is based on interviews and participant observation with the people involved in a particular case of *social dumpning*. About ten families subject to transferral have found themselves living in material and social poverty, in a set of dilapidated and health-hazardous rental apartments in a Swedish mill town. However, neighbours have mobilised and are working with these tenants to attempt and improve their situation. This paper presents a sub-topic of my dissertation in Cultural Anthropology on what interpersonal belong can mean in times of alleged individualisation. How is belonging and equitable inclusion crafted in these initiatives – and what are the boundaries of what can be achieved? What can we learn about rural mobilisation by looking at how highly informal acts of resistance by private persons have developed into impactful local networks? The research is based on empirical material from one year of ethnographic fieldwork in a rural and post-industrial municipality in demographical mid-Sweden.

Panel discussion. Ruralities and Regions in Transition: Challenges, Potentials and Future Research.

Organized together with Formas.

From Saving Rural Areas to Rural Areas Saving the Future? Rethinking Ruralities in Times of Transition

Katarina Giritli Nygren, Mid Sweden University

Abstract text

Rural areas have long been approached through the language of development, as places facing demographic decline, economic restructuring and uneven access to services, and hence as places in need of intervention. Yet contemporary transformations increasingly produce a different dynamic. Rural regions are simultaneously imagined as key sites for solving wider societal crises: providing land and resources for the green transition, enabling new forms of self-sufficiency and sustainable living, and contributing to resilience, preparedness and alternative futures. Drawing on the project How and by Whom Should the Countryside Be Saved? Aesthetics and Identity Formation in Contemporary Rural Conflicts, I want to raise questions about how rural and regional research might critically engage with the growing expectations placed on rural areas in times of transition. Across studies of green investments and local resistance, rural youth cultures, everyday infrastructures, Indigenous perspectives, and digital narratives of off-grid and back-to-the-land lifestyles, the project demonstrates that rural futures are constituted through competing visions of development, sustainability and belonging. Rather than obstacles to transition, the conflicts surrounding these visions reveal fundamental questions about whose futures are being pursued, whose values and forms of work become recognised, and how the responsibilities and costs of transition are distributed. Our project, I believe, suggests that future research should move beyond asking how rural areas can successfully adapt to transition and examine the politics of transition itself. What happens when rural places become responsible for solving crises produced at other scales? Which futures become imaginable and investable, and which are displaced or rendered invisible? Approaching ruralities as sites where societal futures are actively negotiated opens up a research agenda centred on conflict, power and alternative futures, and on the capacity of rural and regional research not only to facilitate transitions, but also to critically examine what transitions are for, for whom, and on whose terms.

Counterculture Operating Systems: Identifying Underlying Dynamics and Infrastructures Scaffolding Small-Scale Rural Groups Transitioning Beyond Growth

Åsa Isacsson and Marco Adelfio, Chalmers University of Technology

Abstract text

Transitioning to a sustainable mode of life requires not only radically different everyday practices, but radically different infrastructures to support such practices.

This project explores three interconnected aspects of this challenge: (a) post-growth as an emerging paradigm for situating the issue in context and for moving from symptomatic treatments toward systemic transformation; (b) technological infrastructure underpinning which systems become embedded in daily life; and (c) countercultures as radical laboratories that co-create, self-organize, and enact alternative visions of life beyond growth in practice.

Drawing on three case studies, this paper analyses technological infrastructures used by small-scale groups organizing around alternative visions of society. The analysis identifies crucial dynamics that shape whether such groups succeed in enacting their ideas or instead tire, fragment, or revert to conventional patterns. From this, we derive two contributions: a hierarchy of needs outlining the infrastructural preconditions that scaffold these groups' work, and an ontology characterizing the nature and dynamics of the socio-technical organism that infrastructure sustains.

The findings suggest that awareness of how group dynamics interrelate with technological infrastructure is essential on two fronts. For countercultural groups themselves, such awareness supports self-understanding that enables more balanced and resilient internal self-organization. For external actors sympathetic to these initiatives - municipalities, institutions, and other potential allies - it offers a framework for understanding where and how support can be meaningfully directed without undermining the autonomy these groups depend on.

This paper contributes to WG3 by positioning technological infrastructure as a double edged sword that requires careful consideration of the context it is being used to support - drawing on concepts such as the technological fix, convivial technologies and methodological luddism. It asks not only what infrastructural support looks like in practice for small-scale rural groups working towards transition, but also points toward a wider umbrella under which such efforts can be understood as connected.

Migrant relations and Rural Environments: a neglected dimension in sustainable development

Seema Arora-Jonsson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Abstract text

Rural areas in Sweden are undergoing shifts in population with far-reaching impacts. International migration and intra EU mobility to rural areas have increased in past decades while the number of locally born residents has consistently decreased. Yet questions of sustainability, that is, how environments, the economy and social lives are woven together, rarely address migration, both in policy and most academic literature.

In this talk I draw on work within the project (ethnographic research, quantitative analysis of demographic changes and integration policymaking and project analysis) in relation to rural Sweden to discuss the implications of migration for rural sustainability. We studied migrant presence in three important areas that characterize the question of sustainability in rural Sweden – in relation to climate interventions such as wind power, to forests as crucial to rural sustainability and lastly the maintenance and care of rural communities as indispensable for sustainable rural societies. We studied the role of three migrant groups often largely disregarded in rural policymaking – 1) European 'lifestyle' migrants who have set up farms and nature-based activities, 2) asylum seekers from Africa and the Middle East, the latter whom authorities have tried to involve in green industries or integrate through nature based programs and 3) seasonal workers and forest labor in particular.

Our findings suggest that sustainability in rural areas cannot be conceptualized without addressing migration – regardless of whether it has positive or negative connotations. Resource rich migrants are questioning climate interventions, migrants form the backbone of forest production and migrants especially from the global South are indispensable to the social reproduction of rural communities. As one migrant we interviewed, put it, migrants are 'Shaking up the Sleeping Viking.' We show what this shaking up means for rural Sweden and how these heterogeneous groups together contribute to the changing demography and social (and environmental) relations in rural areas and with what implications for sustainability and social justice.

Organizers

The conference is organized by *Uppdrag landsbygd*. Uppdrag Landsbygd is a government mission with the aim of strengthening rural and regional research in Sweden. The work is carried out by the Division of Rural Development at the Department of Urban and Rural Development at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

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