

# Ruralities and Regions in Transition

## Book of Abstracts

8-9 November 2023

Åkersberga, Sweden



Nordregio

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# Preface

## **Ruralities and Regions in Transition - A conference for Rural and Regional Researchers in Sweden**

The Division of Rural Development (SLU) and Nordregio gather scholars from all over the country to meet, share and discuss important issues related to rural and regional development in Sweden.

The conference is arranged as a part of SLU:s government assignment to strengthen and coordinate Swedish rural and regional research. The ambition is to provide a constructive arena of exchange for scholars to collegially rethink how Swedish ruralities and regions may engage towards economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development paths.

### **Partners:**

The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, SLU  
Nordregio

### **Funding:**

Funding is provided by the Swedish Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation.

### **Online engagement:**

Conference website: <https://www.slu.se/en/ew-calendar/2023/11/landsbygder-och-regioner-i-omstallning/>

Homepage: <https://www.slu.se/uppdraglandsbygd/>

X (previously Twitter): Uppdrag Landsbygd @SLU\_UppdragLand

Hashtag: #RuralResearch2023

# Conference Programme

## 8 November – Day 1

10.00	Registration – Coffee and sandwiches
11.00	Welcome! Conference opens
11.15	Plenary speaker – Seema Arora Jonsson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
12.00	Lunch
13.00	Parallel session 1
14.00	Break
14.15	Parallel session 2
15.15	Coffee break and check-in
16.00	Parallel session 3
17.00	Break
17.15	Plenary speaker – Lotta Braunerhielm, Karlstad University
19.15	Dinner

## 9 November - Day 2

07.00-09.00	Breakfast
09.00	Plenary speaker – Jenny Wik Karlsson, Sámiid Riikkasearvi
09.45	Coffee break
10.00	Parallel session 4
11.00	Break
11.15	Parallel session 5
12.30	Lunch
13.15	Plenary speaker - Åsa Knaggård, Lund University
14.00	Panel session and gazing forward
14.45	Concluding remarks
15.00	Thank you! Conference closes and coffee break

# Parallel Sessions

Theme 1: **Seeing rural space: territorial resilience and rural mobilization**

Theme 2: **Place-based development and rural livelihoods**

Theme 3: **The role of natural resources in rural transformation**

Theme 4: **Networks, skills and changing labour markets**

Theme 5: **Demographic Change and Migration**

Theme 6: **Sustainable planning for rural areas - Book launch**

Day 1						
	Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4	Theme 5	Theme 6
13.00			Folkets hus 3 Max. 28pers	Folkets hus 4 Max. 30pers	Folkets hus 2 Max. 30pers	
14.15	Folkets hus 1 Max. 28pers	Folkets hus 2 Max. 30pers	Folkets hus 3 Max. 28pers	Folkets hus 4 Max. 30pers		
16.00	Folkets hus 1 Max. 28pers	Folkets hus 2 Max. 30pers	Folkets hus 3 Max. 28pers		Folkets hus 4 Max. 30pers	
Day 2						
10.00	Folkets hus 1 Max. 28pers	Folkets hus 2 Max. 30pers	Folkets hus 3 Max. 28pers	Folkets hus 4 Max. 30pers		
11.15		Folkets hus 2 Max. 30pers		Folkets hus 4 Max. 30pers		Folkets hus 3 Max. 28pers



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# Table of Contents

<b>1. Seeing rural space: territorial resilience and rural mobilization</b> .....	19
1.1. Bim Kilje. A State of Crisis After Folkhemmet? Uncertain Times and Safe Communities in North Uppland .....	20
1.2 Sara Löwgren. Tracing the view of the Swedish countryside over 50 years. ....	21
1.3 Annie Roos, Shqipe Gashi Nulleshi, Anna Alexandersson & Helene Ahl. Visions for sustainable rural areas in Sweden – Does the entrepreneurs and the innovation support system see the same future?.....	22
1.4 Peter Hultgren & Martin Kvist. Learnings from a small pilot study on Local Narratives about resilience and integration in Segregated Local Communities. ....	23
1.5 Svante Karlsson. Ruling Spaces. On the asymmetrical spatial relations between urban forest owners and rural dwellers.....	24
1.6 Katarina Landström. What are Mining Conflicts Conflicts About? .....	25
1.7 Richard Ferguson & Johan Gaddefors. Populism and activism in rural entrepreneurship..	26
1.8 Leneisja Jungsberg & Elin Cedergren. Enhancing participation of least engaged groups in the just transition - Legitimacy and Territorial Perspectives in the Just Transition through Futures Literacy Labs.....	27
1.9 Nils Pettersson. Spatialities of sustainability transition governance – hybrid actor constellations and strategies in the wild berry industry .....	28
<b>2.2. Place-based development and rural livelihoods</b> .....	31
2.1 Désirée Nilsson. Sustainable transport in rural towns – Shifts of travel behaviour when opening railway stations.....	32
2.2 Margareta Westin, Charlotta Johansson & Glenn Berggård. Potential reductions in fossil fuel consumption for personal transportation in rural areas – the views of rural residents.....	33
2.3 Anna Sörensson, Anna-Maria Jansson, Charlotta Faith-Ell, Marta Lindvert & Maria Bogren. Success Factors to Consider for Rural Municipalities when Establishing Large Scale Industrial Parks. ....	34
2.4 Magdalena Sjöberg. How to plan and build a socially sustainable society - A case study of Grundsunda 2030.....	35
2.5 Paulina Rytönen, Margaretha Bohlin, Marcus Box, Lotten Hjelm, Tommy Larsson Segerlind & Håkan Tunón. Island Research in the Swedish Context – Opening up a new research area and mapping research gaps. ....	36
2.6 Malin Tillmar & Marina Jogmark. Interplay of Sectors in Rural Settings: Collaboration Dynamics, Challenges, and Boundary Spanners. ....	38
2.7 Natalia Mamonova, Eirik Magnus Fuglestad & Katrina Rønningen. Rural reawakening in Norway. ....	39
2.8 Qian Zhang & Natasha A. Webster. Rural digitalization 2.0: Digging into context, everyday life and rural digital geographies.....	40
2.9 Ildikó Asztalos Morell. Culturally adequate food for Sami elderly in the public kitchen in municipalities. ....	41



2.10 Johan Jansson. Online funeral homes - from local anchoring to spatial differentiation..	42
2.11 Cecilia Hammarlund & Martin Nordin. Saving countryside shops – does government support increase survival and economic performance of grocery stores in rural Sweden?	43
<b>3. The role of natural resources in rural transformation.</b>	<b>45</b>
3.1 Emil Planting Mollaoglu. Climate interventions and private interests: Windpower, forestry and reindeer herding in Härjedalen.	46
3.2 Elsa Reimerson & Malin Brännström. Challenges and opportunities for local natural resource management in Sápmi: Insights from the Rádestit project.	47
3.3 Kajsa Kuoljok. Reindeer husbandry - a part of the regional economy.	48
3.4 Maris Gillette & Viktor Vesterberg. Forgotten fish: Reterritorializing seafood for Swedish rural development.	49
3.5 Stefan Hellstrand & Svante Karlsson. Ecosystem services as a driver of a balanced development of urban and rural areas.	50
3.6 Jonathan Rahn. Participation, private ownership and the state.	51
3.7 Shaghayegh Shirkhani. How Participatory Digital Platforms address the context of Natural resource- based conflicts	52
3.8 Lowe Börjeson, Ida Säfström & Brian Kuns. Farm work and green transitions.	53
3.9 Katarina Eckerberg, Therese Bjärstig & Matilda Miljand. Steering 'green' innovation policy toward sustainability? Lessons from implementing EIP-AGRI in Sweden.	54
3.10 Freja Marie Hegelund. Rethinking lowland soils: Negotiations between farmers' freedom and state authority.	55
<b>4. Networks, skills and changing labour markets</b>	<b>57</b>
4.1 Jenny Friman & Jayne Glass. Exploring social learning networks for enhancing multi-use forestry and rural development in Sweden.	58
4.2 Lotta Svensson. Knowledge, competence and education – what do we need?	59
4.3 Johanna Lindberg, Mari Runardotter & Anna Ståhlbröst. Crafting Rural Futures: Information Systems Rooted in the Nordic Tradition.	60
4.4 Bengt Johannisson. Mobilizing the Regional Universities in the Making of a Resourceful Rural Sweden.	61
4.5 Monica Johansson, Dennis Beach, Per-Åke Rosvall, Maria Rönnlund & Elisabet Öhrn. Rekrytering och delaktighet i högre studier för unga från landsbygd	62
4.6 Anna-Maria Fjellman, Monica Johansson & Elisabet Öhrn. Opportunities in rural upper secondary education – variations in space and time.	63
4.7 Janna Lundberg, Anna-Maria Fjellman & Elin Ennerberg. The Natural Resource Use Programme and a resilient countryside.	64
4.8 Maria Rönnlund & Aina Tollefsen. Staying on in a Changing Local Labor Market – Young People's School-to-Work Transitions in Rural Northern Sweden. Sara Forsberg	65
4.9 Sara Forsberg & Maria Vallström. Youth in Rural Areas - Presentation of a Research Network	66

<b>5. Demographic Change and Migration</b>	<b>69</b>
5.1 Jan Amcoff. Presence of immigrants in rural areas.	70
5.2 Samaneh Khaef & Karen Haandrikman. The initial residential patterns of immigrants across the urban hierarchy in Sweden: The role of educational attainment.	71
5.3 Emma Sahlström. Migrant relations and rural environments: a neglected dimension in sustainable development.	72
5.4 Peter Gladoic Håkansson & Peter Karpestam. The Great Escape. Why women escape the rural, while men don't.	73
5.5 Nora Wahlström. Different ways of going "back-to-the-land" in Sweden today.	74
5.6 Jan Amcoff. Development of back to the land-migration in Sweden in the early 21st century.	75
<b>6. Sustainable planning for rural areas - Book launch</b>	<b>77</b>
6.1 Susanne Stenbacka & Brita Hermelin. Planning for the good life in rural areas – introduction to the book.	78
6.2 Patrik Cras, Marie Nordfelt, Pelle Åberg & Johan von Essen. Understanding practices of civil society through resource mobilization theory.	79
6.3 Brita Hermelin. Collaborative governance for local development – place-based initiative in a rural environment.	80
6.4 Susanne Stenbacka. International migration and local welfare	81
6.5 Susanna Heldt Cassel & Susanne Stenbacka. Socially sustainable housing in rural areas.	82

# **1. Seeing rural space: territorial resilience and rural mobilization**

## 1.1. A State of Crisis After Folkhemmet? Uncertain Times and Safe Communities in North Uppland

**Bim Kilje**

In Sweden, political and popular discourse claims the country's rural areas are subject to crises – service and infrastructure is diminishing and the sense of marginalisation and peripheralisation is growing. Simultaneously, media reports on large-scale crises including climate change, the war in Ukraine and rapidly rising costs of living. My research, in cultural anthropology, investigates how the very notion that we live in a time of crisis and risk affects people in rural areas.

The ethnographic study is located to North Uppland. With its long industrial history, the area relates to the current national debate on socio-political change in former company towns.

I am particularly interested in whether and how times of uncertainty can function as productive – although not always constructive – starting points for social change. This project examines what groupings, networks and social infrastructures arise in order to create a sense of belonging, safety and continuity in uncertain times.

## 1.2. Tracing the view of the Swedish countryside over 50 years

**Sara Löwgren**

When studying change in the Swedish countryside, researchers frequently refer to “the view of the countryside.” The view of the countryside entails depopulation, shrinkage, backwardness, and a lack of sustainability, along with some romanticization of a peasant past. But where does “the view of the countryside” come from? Do big political actors indeed see the countryside in the way that researchers seem to assume they do, and how has this view changed over time?

In the first chapter of my dissertation, I trace how the Swedish state has viewed the countryside by analyzing official government reports (Statens offentliga utredningar) from the 1970s until the present. Most of my findings serve to empirically support “the view of the countryside” and offer examples and some explanations to how the view of the countryside formed, especially in relation to the growth paradigm and large-scale economic and demographic changes.

I also find that in recent years, the imperative to tackle climate change has led to the emergence of competing views of the Swedish countryside. In my PhD research as well as in Swedish rural research more broadly, this work contributes an empirical foundation to know what we are talking about when we talk about the view of the Swedish countryside. This is important when studying rural change at the local level, as local rural actors must relate to, work with, and work around big political actors' view of the countryside while incorporating territorial perspectives.

### 1.3. Visions for sustainable rural areas in Sweden – Does the entrepreneurs and the innovation support system see the same future?

Annie Roos, Shqipe Gashi Nulleshi, Anna Alexandersson & Helene Ahl

#### Purpose

This paper contributes to entrepreneurship theory by studying entrepreneurs' and local innovation support system actors' visions on rural sustainability. We see that not only entrepreneurs, but also local innovation support system actors, shape the context and thus influences entrepreneurial processes and policymaking.

#### Approach

This study focuses on rural Southern Sweden, using qualitative narratives from entrepreneurs and local innovation support system actors. These narratives provide reflections and insights that inform their perceptions on addressing challenges of sustainability and innovations in rural contexts. By employing rural proofing to assess context, we identify various factors influencing the entrepreneurship process.

#### Findings

The preliminary findings suggests that entrepreneurs and local innovation support system actors envision different sustainable futures for rural areas in Sweden. Both rural entrepreneurs' perceptions and local innovation support system actors' perceptions have the same objective in relation to long-term sustainable rural enterprises such as ecologic farming versus short-term solutions. However, their perspectives on sustainability and innovative ways of doing entrepreneurship differ.

#### Originality

We are contributing to the growing interest in context, agency, and policy. The interviewed entrepreneurs and local innovation support system actors does not talk the same language when it comes to rural sustainability. This hampers efforts for a sustainable rural future. To foster innovation and sustainability in rural settings, we must systematically assess context and involve both entrepreneurs and local innovation support system actors.

**Keywords:** Rural entrepreneurship, policy, context, agency, regional development of sustainability transition politics, power and governance.

Annie Roos, Linnaeus University  
Shqipe Gashi Nulleshi, Linnaeus University  
Anna Alexandersson, Linnaeus University  
Helene Ahl, Jönköping University

### 1.4. Learnings from a small pilot study on Local Narratives about resilience and integration in Segregated Local Communities

Peter Hultgren & Martin Kvist

This text presents the results of a small pilot study conducted in two segregated rural communities where interview and survey data were collected on behalf of two ongoing citizen dialogues aimed at supporting integration efforts and local development plans.

In the citizen dialogues and in the preliminary results of the study, it is indicated, in line with several other studies, that the significance of place for young people's horizons of opportunities and transitions to adulthood is substantial. For instance, previous research provides essential insights into how young people's perceptions of whether to stay or leave their hometown, their choices in education and career, and their aspirations for adulthood are largely shaped by socio-economic factors, narratives, structural changes, and shifts in norms, and how these manifests within young people's local contexts.

The pilot study's data reveal socially polarized communities where "everyone knows everyone," a seeming paradox but one that clearly marks an assumed 'us vs them' mentality. A potential fault line that points to the need for more knowledge to enhance our understanding of how local narratives shape and impact young people's horizons in segregated rural communities.

Based on the lessons from our study and previous research, this text aims to develop theoretical and methodological foundations for further research on the formation of young people's horizons of opportunities in segregated rural communities

Peter Hultgren, Linnaeus University  
Martin Kvist, Linnaeus University

## 1.5. Ruling Spaces. On the asymmetrical spatial relations between urban forest owners and rural dwellers

**Svante Karlsson**

Over time, a spatial redistribution and concentration of ownership of forestry properties has taken place, while an increasing proportion of forest owners no longer live on their owned properties. At the same time, small properties have been created in rural areas through subdivision. The new properties are usually without access to land and forest. These properties can be for permanent or second homes.

Rights to the landscape's natural resources are, in addition to what is possible within the framework of the right of public access, strongly related to the ownership of agricultural and forest properties. Thus, there is a situation where urban residents hold the entry ticket to the scope for action in rural landscapes. Residents on the small properties with very limited rights are thus left behind and relegated to an asymmetrical dependence on land owners living in urban areas far away.

Compared to urban areas, rural areas are characterized by undeveloped democratic systems for influencing landscape use and development, probably in light of the assumption that the residents are also the owners of the landscape's resources, something they not necessarily are.

This study shows examples of contemporary property division and land consolidation in the Swedish countryside. Comparisons are made with the property structure that applied before extensive urbanization took place. A theoretical discussion is conducted on the importance of the contemporary ownership and property structure in rural areas. Finally, possible alternative developments are discussed and what is required for these to be realized.

## 1.6. What are Mining Conflicts Conflicts About?

**Katarina Landström**

In contemporary research, mining conflicts are grasped as the result of conflicting values between mining proponents and mining opponents. Previous research links opposition to mining with valuation of a clean environment, local culture and livelihoods.

Meanwhile, local support for mining is linked to a valuation of local economic and demographic growth. However, the notion of value employed in much research is insensitive to the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental values. This has left the values or ends of mining proponents, who see money and development as means to something else, unexplored. Although value is acknowledged as being central to mining conflicts, previous research on mining conflicts rarely unpacks the notion of value in detail.

By taking a more precisely defined notion of value as its starting point, this paper offers a deeper understanding of the hopes, dreams and expectations underlying the explicitly stated economic rationales advanced in support for a mine. Empirically, it adds to the literature on mining conflicts through an ethnographic account of support, rather than resistance, to local mining operations. Theoretically, it offers a starting point for rethinking mining conflicts, and other natural resource conflicts, not primarily as the product of actual, clashing values between different local groups, but as struggles over the very definition of value. In that struggle, the main line of conflict runs not between members of the local community, but between local communities and actors driven by profit maximization.

## 1.7. Populism and activism in rural entrepreneurship

Richard Ferguson & Johan Gaddefors

Melin, Gadefors & Ferguson (2022) discuss the duality of populism and activism in entrepreneurial development, where populist stories build on the stereotype of hero-entrepreneurs and local perceptions to support venture development; and activist stories challenge the status quo, introducing new meaning and change in social and environmental values. We aim in this paper to more deeply reflect on the role and balance of this duality in the specific context of rural entrepreneurship.

The duality of populism and activism builds on the recognition of the role of storytelling in the practice of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship is a change process enacted in social exchange, where stories are formed that can preserve, strengthen, and defend existing structure and meaning or reveal new paths, new relationships, and new meaning (Burnell, et al 2023; Steyaert 2004).

Research on rural entrepreneurship has noted the need for local embeddedness to access local resources (Gaddefors & Andersson 2018; Korsgaard, et al 2015, etc.) while at the same time the need to bridge to outside resources and new ideas (Müller & Korsgaard 2018). How do the stories that drive rural entrepreneurial change feed into (or grow out of?) these dissonant needs, and how can we coherently understand dual-tension of preserving existing local values and resources while pursuing re-valuation and change?

Richard Ferguson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences  
Johan Gaddefors, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

## 1.8. Enhancing participation of least engaged groups in the just transition - Legitimacy and Territorial Perspectives in the Just Transition through Futures Literacy Labs

Leneisja Jungsberg & Elin Cedergren

A just transition aligned with the EU principle on active subsidiarity requires meaningful citizen involvement and recognizing territorial specificities at local and regional scales - especially in the regions most affected by the sustainability transitions. Considering the least heard communities is a key challenge for policy-makers and practitioners as transitions are far reaching and nested across policy areas - territorial and social outcomes of policy decisions are hard to oversee. Creating legitimacy for the "justice" component of just transitions requires careful consideration of the design of policy implementation and dealing with local and citizen-engaged sustainability solutions. In this paper, we argue that using the Futures Literacy Lab (FLL) approach can enhance participation of citizens and ensure territorial perspectives are taken into account in just transition processes.

FLL methodology enables stakeholders and policy-makers to collaboratively to explore and challenge their assumptions about the future, opening up new possibilities for action. The approach can help to address power imbalances and give voice to the least heard communities in just transition processes.

The DUST project showcases research from Norrbotten, which is currently benefiting from the EU Just Transition funding. Its objective is to highlight the potential of FLL in bolstering stakeholder engagement and legitimacy within just transition policies, all the while incorporating territorial perspectives.

Leneisja Jungsberg, Nordregio  
Elin Cedergren, Nordregio

## 1.9. Spatialities of sustainability transition governance – hybrid actor constellations and strategies in the wild berry industry

Nils Pettersson

Sustainability transitions are inherently political processes imbued with power and contain a wide range of actors with different views on change and how it should be achieved. In order to understand sustainability transitions, we need to understand the underlying power dynamics, goals/visions and the actors behind them.

This entails a deeper exploration of dominant visions, how directions for sustainability transitions are articulated and the role different actors play in performing them. In addition, there is a need to challenge current theorizations of sustainability transitions with a more in-depth knowledge and reasoning stemming from human geography and relevant spatial theories. Doing so means analyzing the negotiation of political space and the spatial dimensions of power and agency in sustainability transitions.

This paper explores the political and organizational dimensions of sustainability transitions through the case of the wild berry industry in Northern Sweden. It is an industry heavily characterized by exploitation and precarious working conditions, but in which several firms, policy and research institutes recently have taken initiatives that might transform the industry into a more sustainable condition.

Drawing on in-depth interviews, document analysis and spatial concepts from economic and political geography, as for example scales, networks, proximity and reach, the paper zoom in on how these actors purposefully engage with others, their interactions, relationships and the creation of, as well as work within, actor coalitions. In this way, the paper illustrates how an understanding of the spatial shapes of actor relationships, interactions and strategies may contribute to a broader understanding of sustainability transition politics, power and governance.

## **2. Place-based development and rural livelihoods**



## 2.1. Sustainable transport in rural towns – Shifts of travel behaviour when opening railway stations

Désirée Nilsson

Transport has a central role in the everyday activities of people. Public transport is sometime referred to as the backbone of land use planning. In rural settings this is more apparent since smaller towns and villages depend on the network infrastructure and connectivity between towns.

The purpose of this article is to analyse changes in travel behaviour in rural towns when introducing a new public transport mode, railway. The empirical setting is Sweden and the north-eastern parts of the county Scania. It also stretches into the border county of Kronoberg. This part of the region has been characterised by declining incomes and populations. The investment in ten new railway stations, that opened in 2013, was seen as a measure to integrate the area with the economically stronger south-western parts of the county. It was also an ambition to make it by using more sustainable transports in an area that is very much dependent on car use.

Attitudes and changes in travel behaviour have been analysed by using data from three surveys, spread over nine years.

Results shows little change in actual travel behaviour even if attitudes towards the new transport mode are positive. The analysis looks closer into opportunities for changes as well as remaining obstacles.

Désirée Nilsson, Malmö University

## 2.2. Potenteial reductions in fossil fuel consumption for persoanl transportation in rural areas – the views of rural residents

Margareta Westin, Charlotta Johansson & Glenn Berggård

Today, fossil-fuel cars are the dominant means of achieving essential accessibility for rural residents. Rural environments are challenging with long distances, poor accessability to services and limited public transport. This study aims to find alternatives to fossil fuel car usage, which is vital in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It also looks at how secure and sustainable transport can be made available for those dependent on fossil fuel transport today.

This study is based on rural residents' perspective over time, as well as what solutions and strategies they believe might be possible, and what is required for these. Six settlements were studied in Västerbotten and Norrbotten. Residents were invited to participate in focus groups to discuss reduced use of fossil fuels, as well as what problems, solutions and strategies they see. Västerbotten and Norrbotten are Sweden's most sparsely populated regions.

In the future it is important to address how different solutions can work together and complement each other or not. Some dimensions are switching to electricity, reducing travel, closer services, multipurpose travel, car and ride-sharing, and social and technological change.

Maria Westin, Luleå University of Technology  
Charlotta Johansson, Luleå University of Technology  
Glenn Berggård, Luleå University of Technology

## 2.3. Success Factors to Consider for Rural Municipalities when Establishing Large Scale Industrial Parks

**Anna Sörensson, Anna-Maria Jansson, Charlotta Faith-Ell, Marta Lindvert & Maria Bogren**

Large scale industry parks are important contributions to regional development, especially in rural regions. New technical solutions that can drive a green transition, and help build a sustainable future, require the establishment of new industry parks. These can, for example, be related to sustainable energy solutions and battery production. Currently, there is a strong trend where industry parks based on such sectors are under establishment in the Nordic countries. Although this development is beneficial for the local communities in many ways, there may also be challenges. Highly qualified staff is needed, leading to an inflow of employees, often from abroad. Land, water, and other natural resources may be scarce, and a new industry park may require new roads, airports, or train lines. These are some areas that may be challenging for the local municipality to handle.

The purpose of this study was to investigate which factors should be considered in the event of a larger industrial park is established, from the perspective of a sparsely populated municipality. Hence, we ask What factors play a role in creating a successful industrial park, when foreign labor is to work on site?

A qualitative research approach was used. Five geographical areas with established industry parks were identified, all located in Europe. The purpose was to learn from these five areas, both as best practices and to identify conflicts or mistakes to avoid for future establishments. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with municipal officials and representatives of the private or private/public owned large-scale industries. Seven factors were identified as particularly important to consider during the establishment process; Communication, Culture and language, Competence supply, School/Preschool, Leisure activities, Mobility/Infrastructure, Land and Place branding. Practical implications from this study can be used by municipalities or regions, when designing and establishing new industrial parks.

**Keywords:** industrial park, sustainable development, sparsely populated area, rural, regional development, municipality

**Anna Sörensson, Mid Sweden University**  
**Anna-Maria Jansson, Mid Sweden University**  
**Charlotta Faith-Ell, Mid Sweden University**  
**Marta Lindvert, Mid Sweden University**  
**Maria Bogren, Mid Sweden University**

## 2.4. How to plan and build a socially sustainable society - A case study of Grundsunda 2030

**Magdalena Sjöberg**

Urban planning of the rural place Grundsunda 2030 (Municipality of Örnsköldsvik), is connected to the green transition in Northern Sweden. Grundsunda 2030 is unique since they not only work from all three perspectives within Agenda 2030, but also consider social sustainability as a necessity to achieve economic and ecological sustainability. Also unique that civic society are included as an equal stakeholder, together with the municipality and private sector. The project is in a startup phase and in need of a plan for how to do a sustainable urban planning of Grundsunda?

**Aim:** Through the method program theory and collaboration with the three stakeholders, this pilot study aims to produce a model for urban planning of how to build a socially sustainable society. Here following factors will be clarified: Who will do What, When and How will urban planning activities be implemented and Why? What desirable Results are each urban planning activities supposed to lead to, and for Which social group(s)?

**Methods:** Through Program theory the researchers will map up a model for how the urban planning of a socially sustainable Grundsunda 2030 is supposed to be realized? Who will do What of the three stakeholders and When. How are each urban planning activity (e.g place attractiveness and competence supply) related to each other and together lead to desirable results, through a so called causality chain? Through this the pilot study will produce a model of how to plan and build a sustainable society in a rural place such as Grundsunda

**Magdalena Sjöberg, Umeå University**

## 2.5. Island Research in the Swedish Context – Opening up a new research area and mapping research gaps

**Paulina Rytkönen, Margaretha Bohlin, Marcus Box, Lotten Hjelm,  
Tommy Larsson Segerlind & Håkan Tunón**

Island studies was consolidated as an interdisciplinary research field with internal scientific development during almost 20 years (Baldacchino, 2006; Stratford, 2015). The emergence of island studies was motivated by arguments that islands are territories that need to be studied "on their own terms" (ISISA, <https://www.isisa.org/>). In a Swedish context the academic field of Island studies is currently in an initial emerging phase (Ronström, 2013; 2021; Rytkönen et al., 2019), which has been commented as an irony (Baldacchino, 2013) since Sweden has the most islands in the world, with some 250 000 islands. From a European perspective, over time the societal contribution of island research has grown, for example by contributing to the articulation of island policies in the EU (Armstrong et al., 2012). The EU recognises islands as territories with "certain geographical specificities". Islands are therefore the subject of specific development policies (EU Article 174 and 349; Haase & Maier, 2021). The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (Article 121) states that an island is a naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water and that sustains human habitation or economic life of its own. The UN's definition of islands can be perceived as ambiguous, however the EU has several and even more problematic definitions, especially for countries with small inhabited islands that are being parts of bigger administrative units and the lack of wider autonomy that island states and sub-national island jurisdictions enjoy (Armstrong, et al., 2012).

A decade ago, the EU's Economic and Social Committee issued an own-initiative opinion on "The islands' special problems" (2012). They stated that islands have common and permanent characteristics that clearly distinguish them from regions on the mainland. They emphasize that the EU's definition of islands is "inappropriate", especially due to the EU's expansion of member states with different types of island regions. At the same time, they request efforts on the part of the EU to adopt an adequate strategy based on the specific needs of the islands.

Local development on islands is challenged by insularity and remoteness – two characteristics that can contribute to creating a cultural, social, political and economic distance between island communities and mainland society (Hall, 2012; Ronström, 2021). Island studies often also raise the paradox of islands being simultaneously vulnerable and resilient (Starc & Stubbs, 2014).

In spite of the challenges that follow for those who choose to live on an island, islands are also "territories of hope" (ISISA, <https://www.isisa.org/>). Within the European context, islands are seen as potential laboratories for promoting sustainability, for testing and developing smart digitized solutions, and renewable energy solutions. At the same time, islands are expected to offer sustainable recreation opportunities and contribute to livelihoods and food sovereignty strategies, for example by developing sustainable management of marine resources (Buffetaut, et al., 2010; EU, 2023).

While authorities see islands as a vehicle to promote the "EU Green Deal" and to promote the UN Sustainable Development Goals, all political aspirations of policies depend on islands being inhabited. The latter depends on the possibility for island populations to have reasonable living conditions, being able to create livelihoods through employment, or self-employment and enjoying a reasonable level of societal services (e.g. schools, health care, elderly care, etc.) (Merouani et al., 2023).

In a Swedish context, there are about 400 inhabited islands without a permanent land connection (Källgård, 2022). Unlike Sweden, however, Finland has had a coherent island and archipelago policy ever since 1949. Experiences from Finland and Croatia, indicate that locally led activities and the participation of the islanders are important when developing islands (Jord- och skogsbruksministeriet, 2019; Starc & Stubbs, 2014). In Sweden, authorities recognize the challenges of designing policies to support sustainable development on islands. A key reason behind mentioned challenge is a gap of knowledge about the type of context and places

that islands represent. Mentioned knowledge gap also concerns research. In addition, while "island studies" as a research area shares concepts and characteristics, research, concepts and island reality are conditioned by institutional, spatial, and cultural context (Stratford, et al., 2011).

The purpose of this paper is to problematize "island studies" in the Swedish context, and also present the results of an inventory of topics, concerns and challenges related to islands, islanders and archipelagos in which research is needed. Data was gathered through participatory workshops during 2022. More than 100 islanders, experts and scholars participated and contributed in the research process.

**Paulina Rytkönen, Södertörn University  
Margaretha Bohlin, Södertörn University  
Marcus Box, Södertörn University  
Lotten Hjelm, The Swedish Archipelago Confederation  
Tommy Larsson Segerlind, Södertörn University  
Håkan Tunón, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences**

## 2.6. Interplay of Sectors in Rural Settings: Collaboration Dynamics, Challenges, and Boundary Spanners

**Malin Tillmar & Marina Jogmark**

There is an increasing consensus that the complex challenges of our time, including the fulfillment of Agenda 2030, require not only the mobilization of rural communities but also cross-sector collaboration (Oskam et al., 2021, Al-Tabbaa et al., 2022). Lately, research into cross-sector collaboration has identified both obstacles and enablers on various level but little is known on specific rural conditions (Miller et al., 2017). We report from ethnographically oriented longitudinal studies of Cross-Sector Collaborations (CSC) in two contrasting rural communities in southeastern Sweden, one marked by growth, the other by decline.

The explorative studies cover topics such as the inherent tensions in CSC, governance mechanisms (DiVito et al., 2021) to overcome these, risks of mission drift (Kwong et al., 2017) and the role of boundary spanners (Ryan and O'Malley, 2016). The empirical material is analyzed using the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013). In contrasting the studies, we highlight the role of conditions in the rural communities, the organization/governance of the CSC and the impact of that in the short and medium term. The paper concludes with suggested avenues for further research into rural CSCs, where the role of boundary spanners in tandem with collective entrepreneurship is at center stage.

Malin Tillmar, Linnaeus University  
Marina Jogmark, Linnaeus University

## 2.7. Rural reawakening in Norway

**Natalia Mamonova, Eirik Magnus Fuglestad & Katrina Rønningen**

The purpose of this study is to analyze rural discontent in Norway as part of a global "rural reawakening" in response to neoliberal changes in the countryside. Based on primary qualitative data collected during fieldwork in southern Norway (summer 2023), we investigate whether rural discontent in Norway bears some resemblance to right-wing (authoritarian) rhetoric and politics in other rural areas of the Global North. This study answers the question: Does Norwegian rural discontent correspond to rural populist sentiments and politics in other Western democracies, and if so, why does Norwegian rural discontent not have right-wing features?

Natalia Mamonova, RURALIS the Institute for Rural and Regional Research  
Eirik Magnus Fuglestad RURALIS the Institute for Rural and Regional Research  
Katrina Rønningen RURALIS the Institute for Rural and Regional Research

## 2.8. Rural digitalization 2.0: Digging into context, everyday life and rural digital geographies

Qian Zhang & Natasha A. Webster

Digitalization is increasingly a central feature in rural development strategies worldwide. In Sweden, opportunities of digitalization for tackling economic, social and demographic challenges in rural and sparsely populated areas are often highlighted, sometimes in combination with innovation and sustainability ideas. Emerging critical studies draw attention to the challenges and complexities of how digital tools, infrastructures and practices entangle to transform rural social and economic life, but it is still unclear to what extent and how rural spaces as distinctive and diverse spaces are theorized in digital changes.

Based on a two-stage/scale computational literature review of rural-digital relations, combining 1) topic modelling from a Global Dataset (459 article abstracts) with 2) qualitative content analysis from a sub-dataset focusing on the Nordic region (Nordic Sub-Dataset, 17 full articles), we argue that, stemming from ten identified thematic clusters of global rural-digital studies, the contextualization of rural is

generally thin, positioning the rural as a backdrop, an incidental empirical site or a spatial container. In the Nordic region, digital in rural contexts are primarily positioned outwardly as social/regional development and business/economy, and less situated inwardly through individual experience and community building. Thus, we propose in future digital studies to embrace the heterogeneity and complexity of rural context, focusing on rural lives and everyday life and centering rural context both empirically and theoretically. Only in these ways, it is possible to uphold the importance of rural spaces and places through, by and with digital geography.

**Keywords:** rural-digital relations, rural digital geography, context, computational literature review, global, Nordic

Qian Zhang, Stockholm University  
Natasha A. Webster, Örebro University

## 2.9. Culturally adequate food for Sami elderly in the public kitchen in municipalities with the administrative duty to care for minorities

Ildikó Asztalos Morell

According to epidemiological studies, the older Sami people get, the smaller proportion of their diet consists of reindeer meat, something that is a marker of Sami eating habits. Reindeer is a climate-adapted animal species with high nutritional value. With the transition to market-driven industrial slaughter and processing, a substantial part of the reindeer's bodies are no longer used as food. Municipalities with responsibility for Sami minority must contribute to the survival of Sami culture, including food culture. The public kitchen is a major player in food consumption. The project Healthy aging in indigenous communities, which is based on participatory methods to facilitate administrative municipalities' introduction of Sami food in care for the elderly in the Vindelälven Biosphere Reserve. Older Sámi living in Umeå municipality have their roots in various Sámi villages within the surrounding Sámi villages. The work with minority rights in Umeå has so far not touched food. The focus in elderly care is on establishing a Sami department within special housing.

Through the introduction of a new policy, Umeå municipality's home service will no longer contribute food boxes for the elderly, with the exception of those with special dietary needs. The elderly must be helped to order food at the open market.

The project follows how the change affects food security for the elderly more generally and opportunities to gain access to culturally appropriate food for elderly members of minority groups. The change is motivated by freedom of choice for the elderly. At the same time, costs are expected to increase, it is also unclear how smaller players can compete with established large-scale suppliers. With the change, the public kitchen's opportunities to shape the food chain disappear in favor of smaller local producers who want to invest in increased processing of, for example, reindeer products, which in turn could increase the sustainability of food production.

Ildikó Asztalos Morell, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

## 2.10. Online funeral homes - from local anchoring to spatial differentiation

Johan Jansson

In an increasingly diverse society, it is no longer obvious who to turn to when planning a funeral for a deceased relative. The roles previously held mainly by the local vicar and community are now separated into a number of professional specialists in their field. In contrast to a spatially fixed point for consultation, these roles are now spatially separated and located in different places, sometimes completely unrelated to the place where the deceased either lived or wants to be buried. The landscape that the next of kin encounters is thus changing and consists of a new functional and spatial division of funeral services. In order to understand the emerging functional and spatial division, this presentation takes its starting point in the concepts of differentiation and professionalization.

Empirically, this presentation highlights online funeral homes; this is a form of funeral home that recently have been established and becoming an integral part of the Swedish market for funeral services. This presentation aims to understand how funerals that previously often had a clear local anchoring, both in 'the church in the middle of the village' and the 'local' funeral director are today to a greater extent handled by spatially separated professional service providers with rather weak local anchoring. The presentation also raises questions about what role this development could potentially have for funeral homes located in peripheral contexts and rural communities.

Johan Jansson, Uppsala university

## 2.11. Saving countryside shops – does government support increase survival and economic performance of grocery stores in rural Sweden?

Cecilia Hammarlund & Martin Nordin

We evaluate a place-based policy aimed at commercial service providers in Sweden. In 2016, the Swedish government introduced a special operating support for grocery stores in remote rural areas with the intention to slow down the process of grocery store closures. We investigate the effects of the support in a Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) framework by using a distance criterion that determined if stores qualified for the support. Stores located at least 15 kilometres away from another store could apply for the support whereas stores located closer to each other could not. Thus, the local causal effect of receiving the support can be estimated.

The results indicate a 15-20 percent increase in store survival rates due to the support. For surviving stores, the effects on employment are negative, possibly due to labour being replaced by capital investments. Such labour substitution appears to be more pronounced for smaller stores.

Cecilia Hammarlund, Lund University  
Martin Nordin, Lund University

### **3. The role of natural resources in rural transformation**

## 3.1. Climate interventions and private interests: Windpower, forestry and reindeer herding in Härjedalen

**Emil Planting Mollaoglu**

The role of Swedish forests in relation to the climate transition is widely debated in media, in politics and among academics. The demands on Swedish forests for a variety of purposes (such as bioenergy, timber and raw material, reindeer herding, carbon storage, biodiversity and conservation, tourism and recreation) are also projected to increase. This calls for exploring new forms of governance and collaboration, new ways of approaching conflicts of interest and goals, and for investigating how synergies can be amplified. In a case study of Glötesvålen in Härjedalen municipality, I will study forest use by different actors. Conflicts between reindeer herders and forest owners have been ongoing for decades in this area. In a notable court case in 2004, the rights of five Sami villages to use private forest land for reindeer herding was restricted, and in recent years, a wind farm has complicated the situation further.

Reindeer herders are increasingly suffering from the accumulative effects of the claims on forest lands. At the same time, the demand for wind power to replace fossil fuels is clear. What is less apparent is how to address conflicting interests that arise when wind farms are planned or established. In my thesis, the issue of diverging rights to forest land in the era of climate change will be problematized, based on environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development.

Emil Planting Mollaoglu, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

## 3.2. Challenges and opportunities for local natural resource management in Sápmi: Insights from the Rádestit project

**Elsa Reimerson & Malin Brännström**

Issues concerning the governance, management, and use of natural resources are fundamental to rural communities – and often central to conflicts both on the local level and between the local and regional, national, or international levels. In Sápmi on the Swedish side, the matter of small-game hunting and fishing rights is an ongoing point of contention. Following the 2020 Supreme Court verdict recognizing Girjas Reindeer Herding Community's exclusive right to small-game hunting and fishing in their traditional areas, several processes relating to these issues are currently in progress. From the top-down, a government-commissioned inquiry is working to clarify the legal situation concerning rights to lands and natural resources in Sápmi. From the bottom-up, a local project in Arjeplog – Rádestit – is now finalizing over two years of deliberations on alternatives for local management of small-game hunting and fishing.

The Rádestit project was initiated by five Sámi reindeer herding communities and implemented in collaboration with organized hunters and fishers, tourism entrepreneurs, and representatives of other local interests. Coming to a close in December 2023, the project is preparing to present a local management model that hopes to meet the rights, needs, and interests identified by participating actors.

In this paper, we will present this innovative attempt to find alternatives for local natural resource management, offer preliminary analyses from the research project that has followed it from the start, and reflect on the collaboration between practitioners and researcher in the process.

Elsa Reimerson, Umeå University  
Malin Brännström, Silvermuseet/INSARC



### 3.3. Reindeer husbandry - a part of the regional economy

**Kajsa Kuoljok**

For the Sáme, an Arctic indigenous people, the relationship to the land is a question of existence as the Sáme culture grows from the land. An important part of the Sáme culture is reindeer husbandry which is a livelihood with many roles, it can be seen as an important steward of the Sáme's right to land and resources and food production. Reindeer husbandry is a natural part of the ecosystem in forests and mountains and a prerequisite for preserving the area's character of grazed landscape. Reindeer husbandry is also an important part of the regional economy.

How well is reindeer husbandry as a livelihood doing today? The starting point for reindeer husbandry is reindeer owners and reindeer husbandry companies. How these actors succeed in their livelihood, how they see the future, and which opportunities and threats are identified are the basis for the future of reindeer husbandry. Reindeer are dependent on extensive land areas and the extraction of natural resources, including large-scale commercial forestry, makes everyday life difficult for the reindeer husbandry.

Husbandry is supported by *árbbediehto*, the traditional Sáme knowledge. Some factors that have been pointed out as important for developing and strengthening reindeer husbandry are increased Sáme self-determination over Sáme land use and that Sáme traditional knowledge is respected and used to an increased extent as a basis for political and administrative decisions. However, the importance of Sáme traditional knowledge in management of land today are overlooked and excluded from decision-making concerning the reindeer herding area.

### 3.4. Forgotten fish: Reterritorializing seafood for Swedish rural development

**Maris Gillette & Viktor Vesterberg**

Mounting evidence demonstrates that the global system through which much of our food is produced, processed, distributed, and consumed degrades the environment, homogenizes foodways, disenfranchises small-scale producers, and contributes to rural depopulation and decline. More than 50% of seafood worldwide enters international trade, which means that efforts to transform food provisioning to enhance sustainability and facilitate rural development must attend to fish as well as agricultural products. In this article we investigate a citizen- and professional initiative designed to reimagine and reterritorialize Swedish seafood provisioning.

Designed and implemented by the civil society organization Rutabaga Academy, Forgotten fish: Heritage for the Future of Sustainable Fish Consumption assembled in four rural communities groups of small-scale fishers, chefs, and local civil servants, inviting them to "joyfully explore" the gastronomic potential of abundant, locally-available seafood. Points of departure for the initiative were the homogeneity of fish in large-scale consumption circuits, fragile and threatened marine ecosystems and fish populations in Swedish waters, and the negative social and economic effects of the existing food system on local communities. Participants tasted historically-important fish species that were no longer part of culinary culture, and began imagining the seafood provisioning system they wanted, rather than the one that existed.

In this paper we explore alternative foodways that participants imagined, identifying the tensions that characterised this effort to reterritorialize seafood production and consumption. Participants shared a sense of discontentment with the existing seafood provisioning system, a conviction that change was needed, and a belief that celebrity chefs could catalyse this change. Depending on their position in the food system, the values that they thought were most important for transforming seafood provisioning varied, with different consequences for reterritorializing seafood. Actors' positions also affected their ability to create change. Fishers, rather than chefs, were the key actors for re-territorializing fish in rural food systems, while chefs, through their focus on commensality and embodied experience, contributed to building new communities of concern around forgotten fish.

## 3.5. Ecosystem services as a driver of a balanced development of urban and rural areas

Stefan Hellstrand & Svante Karlsson

Localisation and land use theories during the past 200 years have motivated the rational localisation of economic activities focusing the production factors labour and capital. The theories have explained the success of urban areas and that the rural areas have fallen behind. Earlier, that was a reasonable simplification. Now, the size of the economy threatens vital carrying capacity limits from low to high system level. In this paper ecological-economic relationships are quantified by an integration of human geography and systems ecology.

The advantages of urban areas are well known. We broaden this understanding from a spatial ecological-economic perspective, analysing what will happen of the production factor land, i.e., the ecological dimension of the economy, is included.

We show the outcomes for all municipalities and regions in Sweden, as well as on the national scale. We cover the ecosystem services forest biomass production, transformation of dilute solar energy to concentrated chemical energy, release of oxygen for humans and other animals to breathe, and the removal of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, decreasing the risk of climate change.

We estimate the impacts on GDP, jobs, inhabitants, and incomes to local and regional authorities supporting "healthcare, schools and care of children and elderly people". We do that, assuming that the market mechanism is adopted to consider ecological sustainability.

We quantify the mutual dependencies between urban and rural areas, where the results support policies that favours a general sustainable development, and by the way closes the perceived gap between rural and urban areas.

## 3.6. Participation, private ownership and the state

Jonathan Rahn

The guarantees given in Western democracies, and Sweden in particular, for private ownership pose democratic challenges when it comes to governing land use. Academic discourses in development studies about participatory forest management in a Global South context come down to relationships between the state and its citizen and, importantly, to micropolitics in the communities themselves. In a Swedish context, this framework does not apply cleanly, as most of Swedish forests are owned by private people and corporations, not the state. Therefore, a reciprocal relationship of two participants is replaced with a triangle-shape, where communities have some potential sway on the state, the state can regulate companies and other owners, and companies then make decisions on forest management.

In my project's case in Tiveden, a single company, Sveaskog, owns most of the forest surrounding a national park. According to residents of the villages around the park, its clear-cut forestry practices are impeding tourism, and thus local livelihoods. In a unique cooperation, a village association, the local municipality and Sveaskog started a dialogue and Sveaskog agreed to adapting their forestry practices to the needs voiced by these local stakeholders. I pose the question what this constellation means for democracy: Even though on the surface successful, the underlying power dynamics between Sveaskog vis à vis Tiveden residents have not changed. How can we then ensure equitable governance of land, if the people affected do not have a legally mandated or democratically anchored say in these matters?

## 3.7. How Participatory Digital Platforms address the context of Natural resource- based conflicts

Shaghayegh Shirkhani

The world is experiencing unprecedented uncertainty, mainly derived by climate change and excessive consumption behaviour. Over half of the ecological services on which civilization depends have been damaged, and natural resources have become increasingly limited. Therefore, managing the usage and distribution of natural resources among diverse competing actors with different interests in society demands crucial joint endeavors, which necessitates equitable and inclusive dialogue and participation of all groups of actors more than before. This coincides with the pervasiveness of information and communication technologies, which allows leveraging the digital spaces for dialogue and collaborations among stakeholders beyond time and space.

There is a growing body of knowledge and study on "online deliberation" and "digital democracy," which is rooted in Hebermasian theories of deliberative democracy. Online deliberation denotes a particular kind of engagement determined by enlightened conversations among individuals on mutual concerns, facilitated by digital tools mostly known as participatory digital platforms. These participatory platforms are primarily designed to facilitate discussions or involvement of participants in different sorts of topics of interest in general. Most of these digital platforms can be seen as toolboxes that provide similar features for general communication. But in this paper, we would argue that there is a need for a design that serves the context when it comes to topics that meet higher degrees of complexity.

So, by proposing a model, we address "how participatory digital platforms can be adaptive to the context of natural resource-based conflicts." For this purpose, bridging the gap between deliberative democracy, natural resource management, and Information and communication technology, the qualities that need to be seen in designing a participatory digital platform that is meant to be used in the context of natural resource-based conflicts are determined and suggested.

Furthermore, this proposed model gives insight to initiators interested in running participatory digital platforms to comprehend the mechanisms of effect better through which these initiatives would provide purposeful impacts from a more comprehensive perspective. They will realize through which themes they need to walk through and under which circumstances the possible outcomes could be expected. They get insight into how these collective initiatives can lead to more desirable directions to make the communities well-prepared to deal with future uncertainties concerning the effects of climate change and green transition, in line with sustainable development goals. In the next step, the possible use of features and functionalities of digital platforms will be studied to support the design and development of our proposed model.

**Keywords:** Participatory digital platforms, Online deliberation, Natural resource-based conflicts, Adaptive collaborative governance

Shaghayegh (Shay) Shirkhani, Lulea University of Technology

## 3.8. Farm work and green transitions

Lowe Börjesson, Ida Säfström & Brian Kuns

Questions about labor is central for how we imagine and work towards sustainability transitions: how are work processes changing, and who does what work, with what machines, under what social conditions, and with what consequences for sustainability? Our ongoing research project on "Farm work: a survey of work processes, segmentation patterns and sustainability visions in Swedish farm-based Production" aims to fill a gap in research on farm labor in Sweden in general, but specifically we address questions about the ways organization of farm labor, with its relations to different technologies, shapes (and are shaped by) visions for sustainability, or "green transitions".

A key focus is how production and employment goals are balanced with goals for decent and inclusive work opportunities and with goals for environmental sustainability and climate change mitigation and adaptation. In short,

we are interested in learning about how farm workers, including young and newly educated workers, relate to, engage with and experience their work with respect to these goals.

Methodologically, the project is based on in-depth qualitative interviews, farm visits and participatory observation, focusing on how farm work (for a diversity of production contexts) is experienced by workers and farmers. An overarching aim is also to better understand processes and patterns of labor segmentation in contemporary Swedish farming. While we have some preliminary results to share, we will in this presentation present the project and what we are currently working on and still planning to do.

Lowe Börjesson, Stockholm University  
Ida Säfström, Stockholm University  
Brian Kuns, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

### 3.9. Steering 'green' innovation policy toward sustainability? Lessons from implementing EIP-AGRI in Sweden

Katarina Eckerberg, Therese Bjärstig & Matilda Miljand

This presentation will be based on results from our recently published article in *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions* (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2023.100732>) which I believe is relevant to the audience of Landsbygder och regioner i förändring. We critically examine the state's steering capacity of 'green innovation' programs using Sweden's implementation of the agricultural European Innovation Partnership (EIP-AGRI) as a case representing part of the EU's Green Deal. The innovations should promote the competitiveness of rural areas and contribute to national environmental protection and climate goals. Our main research questions concern how 'green innovation' is operationalised in practice, and what can be learned from the administrative process where prioritisations of what projects to fund are made.

We found that despite expectations, implementation of EIP-AGRI rests on compartmentalized networking within the agricultural sector, prioritizing increased 'competitiveness' before 'green' development, and interpreting 'innovation' mainly in the technical sense.

The results indicate that the state's steering capacity of 'green innovation' programs meets several obstacles: the overall goals from the top tend to be both too many and too vague, leaving it to the administration to interpret what kinds of features should be prioritized from below. The state's steering in the case of EIP-AGRI relies mostly on internal agricultural expertise contrary to previous research that suggests a recent 'decompartmentalisation' of European agricultural policymaking. Also, monitoring of EIP-AGRI is geared towards budgetary reporting rather than measuring effects and outcomes, which makes it difficult to feed back to society what is achieved.

### 3.10. Rethinking lowland soils: Negotiations between farmers' freedom and state authority

Freja Marie Hegelund

Low-lying carbon rich soils have become central in the green transition of the agricultural sector due to the estimated greenhouse gas reduction that comes from rewetting and redesignating the soils for nature purposes. In 2021 the Danish Parliament agreed to aim for taking 100.000 hectares of low-lying farmland out of production before 2030. However, the possible climate effects are contested among different stakeholders who have different interests in the soils.

Acknowledging that past and present imaginaries and practices as well as visions of possible and hoped-for futures are indeed also part of the establishment of geographical landscapes and soils, this presentation will focus on negotiations of knowledge in the process of identifying and classifying lowland soils in the act of recuperation with a particular focus on notions of farmers' freedom and autonomy among local farmers as well as state regulation of the agricultural sector.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork among farmers and public authorities in Northern Denmark this presentation shows how farmers negotiate and place themselves in relation to new regulations and demands within the green transition of the agricultural sector in Denmark. I conclude that a strive towards autonomy as well as mistrust against state-authorities among farmers need to be addressed in order to create new sustainable cooperations and conversations between Danish farmers and public authorities in the process of rethinking lowland soils and renaturing the Danish landscapes.

**Keywords:** Farmers, agriculture, soil, Denmark, local knowledge, trust, mistrust, autonomy, farmers' freedom

Katarina Eckerberg, Umeå University  
Therese Bjärstig, Umeå University  
Matilda Miljand, Stockholm University

Freja Marie Hegelund, Lund University

## **4. Networks, skills and changing labour markets**

## 4.1. Exploring social learning networks for enhancing multi-use forestry and rural development in Sweden

Jenny Friman & Jayne Glass

Alternative forest stewardship methods have the potential to diversify primary production and provide a wider variety of income opportunities in rural regions while also improving a range of environmental services. In this study, we focus on Swedish family forest owners and their social learning networks as representing a potential fulcrum on which the adoption of multi-use and alternative forest management practices may hinge. The aim of the study is to investigate how networks and processes of small-scale change in forest practices can facilitate social learning for forest owners.

More precisely the study pays attention to how social learning can be leveraged to accelerate the adoption of alternative forest management methods and multi-use forestry and how policy interventions can build from these insights to improve rural livelihoods and biodiversity outcomes. The study has mapped research on multi-use and alternative management practices in Sweden and completed a literature review of how social learning networks support a transition to more sustainable forestry practices. The study

## 4.2. Labour market opportunities for skilled long-term migrants in rural Sweden

Ulf Hansson & Zuzana Macuchova

Rural parts in Sweden have in the last three decades gone through outmigration and population decline. In this context, international migration has been perceived as a part of the solution of how to reverse population decline and economic sustainability (Hedberg and Haandrikman 2014). Research carried out that looks specifically at the situation for migrants' employment in Sweden has highlighted issues such as the underutilization of skills, language barriers and entrance thresholds (see for example Andersson et al. 2014), Bevelander, 2011). The role of international migrants in rural labour markets is an emerging research area, although Benerdal (2021) and Vogiazides and Mondani (2020) has looked at factors that might facilitate access to employment such as proximity to networks enabling employment.

It is however felt that it is vital to have a better understanding of the work conditions for migrants and factors that support their upward mobility, promote their well-being and feelings of belonging.

This paper therefore proposes further research to highlight the experience of particularly long-term migrants in rural areas in Sweden by answering the following questions:

What are the labour market opportunities for skilled long-term migrants in rural area?

What are the gendered differences in migrants' experiences of labour market opportunities in these rural communities?

Are there specific challenges and enablers in rural areas concerning upwards mobility of immigrants?

While the focus of the paper/abstract has a certain national focus, the lion's share of the work focuses on the region of Dalarna in the north-east of Sweden

## 4.3. Knowledge, competence and education – what do we need?

**Lotta Svensson**

One of the major challenges in Sweden, and to a large extent in the smaller municipalities, is the current and future supply of competence. Gävleborg, and other similar regions, are facing a changing demographic structure with an increasingly high proportion of elderly people, a low level of education, high unemployment, high levels of ill-health and economic exclusion, a gender-segregated labor market, a business community in need of adjustment and a relatively low degree of innovation.

The low level of education that characterizes Gävleborg County is reflected at all levels within the school system: the percentage of those eligible for upper secondary school is lower than in the country, a lower percentage chooses university-preparatory upper secondary school programs, a lower percentage continues to study at university after finishing upper secondary school, and the region has problems retaining its young academics in the county. Learning centers in Gävleborg, which are responsible for adult education (apart from university), believe that it is not the supply of education positions that are the biggest problem - but the difficulty of getting enough applicants for the positions that are offered. In an interview survey, I spoke with the target group that everyone hopes will want to train/develop their competence - adults without higher education.

In 40 interviews with people between the ages of 22-52 in Gävleborg county, the conversations revolved around the relationship to school and education, family background and support, possible reasons for dropping out of upper secondary school, reasons for starting education or not, knowledge of learning centers/adult education and education systems - and living in smaller municipalities and study as an adult - with opportunities and difficulties. The analysis discusses what obstacles and opportunities they experience in relation to education and how learning centers/adult education and society's education system can be developed to meet the needs that exist and to remove the obstacles that people experience.

**Lotta Svensson, FoU Hälsingland**

## 4.4. Crafting Rural Futures: Information Systems Rooted in the Nordic Tradition

**Johanna Lindberg, Mari Runardotter & Anna Ståhlbröst**

The field of Information Systems (IS) in Nordic countries is renowned for its emphasis on user-centric perspectives and a critical appraisal of technology's societal implications. As digital transformation sweeps across both urban and rural landscapes, understanding the dynamics of such a transition becomes pivotal. This is especially true given the Nordic tradition's focus on human involvement and co-creation.

Digitalisation's societal impact is paramount, as it can either connect or divide communities, depending on the nuances of its implementation. Despite the broad reach of digital transformation, a noticeable disparity exists not only between urban and rural areas, but also between the urban and rural view of rural areas. Rural settings, such as Norrbotten, have witnessed rapid technological integration in sectors like natural resource extraction but lag behind in community development to improve residents' quality of life.

This study aims to explore this inconsistency by introducing the sociological theory of Social Acceleration, as conceptualized by Rosa, to the IS domain. Employing a critical perspective rooted in the Nordic tradition, we utilize the Digiby project in rural Norrbotten as a case study. Furthermore, we illustrate that the Information Systems (IS) field holds significant potential for examining rural development. Here, we adapt and test existing technologies and services to discern their potential in elevating living conditions. While technological advancements offer the promise of societal growth, understanding and addressing the differential pace of its integration, especially between urban and rural view of rural regions, is essential.

Our study underscores the need for synchronizing technological advances with community-centric needs to ensure an inclusive digital transformation, thereby bridging the digital divide.

**Johanna Lindberg, Luleå University of Technology  
Mari Runardotter, Luleå University of Technology  
Anna Ståhlbröst, Luleå University of Technology**



## 4.5. Mobilizing the Regional Universities in the Making of a Resourceful Rural Sweden

**Bengt Johannisson**

The general digitalization of the world, enforced by the pandemic trauma and recently also the AI challenge, has caused a breach between the academic and local/regional communities. This has had three effects: (1) the regional universities are detached from their spatial context; (2) the cosmopolitan universities' argument that only they are potent enough to carry out qualified research is enforced and (3) the concern for the two further tasks of all state universities in Sweden – education and dialogue with the community – is considered as a disadvantage.

However, in order to be able to contribute to the economic and social development of their local/regional context the regional universities have to engage beyond the integrating of their three fundamental tasks. They also have to adopt a moral compass, a responsibility to keep their settings innovative and sustainable.

This can only be accomplished if (a) university teachers and researchers recognize themselves as learning subjects, (b) attention is paid to not only a cognitive discourse but also to hands-on practices and (c) interactive and embodied methodologies are recognized as much needed roads to further insight. The author qualifies this argumentation by reporting his own life-long association with a regional university as an attempt to enact what he addresses as 'academic entrepreneuring.

## 4.6. Rekrytering och delaktighet i högre studier för unga från landsbygd

**Monica Johansson, Dennis Beach, Per-Åke Rosvall, Maria Rönnlund & Elisabet Öhrn**

Vid forskning om unga människors liv och utbildning finns en inbyggd bias som innebär att kunskapen om specifika behov och problem utanför städerna döljs. Detta påverkar landsbygdens utveckling men också rekrytering och delaktighet till/i högre studier (se till exempel Öhrn et al., 2019). I det föreslagna konferensbidraget vill vi därför rikta blicken mot svensk landsbygd och ge röst åt elever och personal från dessa delar av landet.

Utgångspunkten är två forskningsprojekt finansierade av det svenska Vetenskapsrådet om ungdomar och utbildning i mindre landsbygdskommuner där tillgången till både gymnasial utbildning och högre utbildning är (geografiskt) begränsad. Analyserna bygger på etnografiska data från sex kommuner och högstadieskolor i projekt 1 och ett stort antal intervjuer med personal från skolor och kommunal ledningsnivå i 21 kommuner i projekt 2.

Villkor och utmaningar när det gäller vidare studier för landsbygdens unga kommer att beskrivas och analyseras i relation till plats, som förstås i spänningsfältet mellan rurala och urbana områden. Betydelsen av familjers olika situationer, som till exempel materiella villkor, släkt och nätverk, och vikten av kommunikationer mellan hem och studieorten ges särskild uppmärksamhet.

Referenser: Öhrn, E & Beach, D. (2019). (Eds). *Young people's life and schooling in rural areas*. London: the Tufnell Press



## 4.7. Opportunities in rural upper secondary education – variations in space and time

**Anna-Maria Fjellman, Monica Johansson & Elisabet Öhrn**

Access to high-quality schools is central to the longevity of rural communities but there are few longitudinal studies on rural schools in the Nordic countries. Globally, educational marketization is transforming educational opportunities in school systems, with specific consequences for rural education. In Sweden, the geographical availability of upper secondary education has declined in rural and sparsely populated municipalities since the 1990s. The establishment of private schools in rural places are also low compared to urban municipalities and often rural upper secondary schools have fewer study programmes.

The starting point guiding the analysis is Massey's (1993) theory on sociospatial history and development. An emerging rural regional school market, in the middle of Sweden, has been selected. The study utilizes a mixed method

approach with ethnographic and statistical data, allowing a complementary exploration of both the structural challenges of upper secondary education in a rural region and lived experiences of the students residing there. The statistical data is register data that originates from the Gothenburg Longitudinal database (GOLD). The character of the data enables a longitudinal analysis of all students attending upper secondary education in the rural school market between 1998 and 2018 (N=213 736). The ethnographic data consist of a three-week participant observation in a school in one of the municipalities within the school market together with interviews with students and staff.

The aim is to examine the variability in private/ public schools and programme supply with students' choices and experiences and how these change and relate to each other.

**Anna-Maria Fjellman, University of Gothenburg**  
**Monica Johansson, University of Gothenburg**  
**Elisabet Öhrn, University of Gothenburg**

## 4.8. The Natural Resource Use Programme and a resilient countryside

**Janna Lundberg, Anna-Maria Fjellman & Elin Ennerberg**

We will present our project in an early stage of the research process. Our project investigates how the Natural Resource Use Programme in upper secondary school contributes to a resilient countryside. Recent societal challenges have shown that Swedish society is vulnerable in areas such as domestic food production.

Our project will study how social and economic sustainability are managed in relation to the natural resource use programme. Our study addresses individual as well as structural levels; students' own perceptions; school curricula and education linked to these concepts; and register data of students' participation in work and further studies. The project will use mixed methods (policy analysis, ethnography and quantitative analysis) to answer these research questions:

How is the Natural Resource Use Programme constituted as socially important for skills maintenance and development in rural Sweden? How do students in the Natural Resource Use Programme consider their education, future careers, and working lives in the countryside? What educational pathways, income opportunities and career trajectories have been developed by students after attending the Natural Resource Use Programme and how have these changed over time for different ruralities?

The purpose of the project is to investigate the educational programme's function in relation to skills maintenance and development, and to develop an understanding for the programme's importance in relation to local rural environments as well as the everyday lives of individual students.

**Janna Lundberg, Malmö University**  
**Anna-Maria Fjellman, University of Gothenburg**  
**Elin Ennerberg, Malmö University**

## 4.9. Staying on in a Changing Local Labor Market – Young People’s School-to-Work Transitions in Rural Northern Sweden

**Maria Rönnlund & Aina Tollefsen**

This paper addresses young people’s school-to-work transitions in the inland region of Norrland. After decades of industrial decline the labor market in Norrland is going through a process of rapid reindustrialization. Industrial mega investments are taking place in the coastal areas, but with spill-over effects also in the Inland regions. In parallel with the industrial upswing in the coastal areas, the Inland regions struggle with social reproduction. The crisis manifests itself in e.g. closures of educational and health care institutions and in decreasing range of transport services.

The aim of the study is to explore young ‘stayers’ transitions in a region characterized by economic growth, yet with large challenges in terms of providing e.g. education, local transports, health care and services.

We draw on data from an ongoing qualitative longitudinal project on youth transitions in three rural regions in Norrland. The sample for this paper is 8 youth who grew up in “Inland Town” – a small rural town located at large distance from any city and with shrinking population. They were interviewed for the first time 2015 (15 yrs old) and at the time for the latest interviews (2023) they had graduated from upper secondary, many had moved away from their parents but they had not left their home town (as many of their friends).

RQs: I) What characterizes their transitions from school to work? II) How can their transitions be understood in relation to the ongoing reindustrialization process in Norrland? III) What implications do their transitions have in relation to the wider social reproduction in the region?

## **5. Demographic change and migration**

## 5.1. Presence of immigrants in rural areas

Jan Amcoff

Patterns of immigration have changed in Sweden since the first more voluminous (labour-) immigrants arrived to work in manufacturing during the post-war decades. The extent of the phenomenon has multiplied, new types of migrants have appeared, and there have also been several initiatives to geographically spread out immigrants (e.g. Hela Sverige strategin in the 1980s, the kommunanvisningsförfarande legislated after 2015, local campaigns). Scholars have also suggested Immigration to contain a potential depopulation turnaround for rural areas. Studies of immigrants in rural areas have often been either case-studies, studies focusing on very large geographical entities with great internal variations, or on de-attributed geographical units such as km-squares. Further, the residents tend to be seen as one-dimensional (Swedish or immigrants).

The aim of this register-based study is to explore the presence, and in- as well as out-moves of immigrants in/to/from various types of rural environments whereas other individual attributes known to affect these statuses (such as sex, age, family-type, income, education) are controlled for. Deviations from general patterns may be used to generate new ideas about logics of importance for the matters studied.

The geography analyzed set out from the subdivision of Sweden into parishes which in turn are separated into four types of environments (sparse countryside, second-home areas, other gatherings of buildings and – used only as reference – urban localities). The parishes are also merged to larger functional units based on their most common location of work places to which their inhabitants commute.

## 5.2. The initial residential patterns of immigrants across the urban hierarchy in Sweden: The role of educational attainment

Samaneh Khaef & Karen Haandrikman

This study employs the aspirations-capabilities framework to explore the intricate interplay between choices and constraints shaping migrants' settlement patterns, with a particular emphasis on the often-overlooked aspect of educational attainment. Using Swedish register data containing information about migrants' educational level, this paper examines and typifies the initial residential sorting patterns of migrants arriving in Sweden in the period 2000-2014. Employing multinomial logistic regression to understand how migrant sorting takes place, the results show a clear distinction in settlement patterns, with higher educated migrants being more likely to settle in metropolitan areas,

and lower educated migrants ending up in rural areas, even when controlling for region of origin and purpose of migration. Nordic and African migrants, resettled refugees, older migrants, and migrant families with younger children are most likely to live in sparsely populated areas. The paper concludes that these trends exacerbate existing patterns of spatial polarization.

**Keywords:** initial settlement patterns; residential sorting; migrant educational attainment; Sweden; register data; logistic regression

## 5.3. Migrant relations and rural environments: a neglected dimension in sustainable development

Emma Sahlström

If we are to engage with sustainable development democratically, we need to consider how people and environments are being governed in times of changing social compositions. International migration is an important contributor to such change in Sweden and has been framed as solution to population decline and demographic rejuvenation in rural areas both by scholars and public discourse. Environments and their engagements, including agriculture, natural resource management and nature tourism, are central to rural areas, yet research tends focus on the socioeconomic dimensions of migration. Centering environmental relations is important not least in a political climate where migrants, especially from outside the EU, are framed as lacking the 'belonging' necessary to partake in sustainable environmental management. As scholars have pointed out, the voices of migrants and ethnic minorities are often missing in the discourse and practice of sustainable development.

I will be presenting my PhD project, which engages different forms of migrant-environment relations. These include initiatives by public authorities and civil societies to integrate primarily refugees and asylum seekers through employment schemes in agriculture and forestry as well as through recreational activities in nature. They also include seasonal work taking place in farms and forests across the country, as well as nature-based endeavors initiated by so-called lifestyle migrants. Using a 'whole community approach', I aim to investigate environmental implications of international migration to Sweden, asking how this might contribute to sustainable rural development.

Emma Sahlström, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

## 5.4. The Great Escape. Why women escape the rural, while men don't

Peter Gladoic Håkansson & Peter Karpestam

The fact that women are leaving the countryside has been acknowledged in several studies. However, the reasons why women to a greater extent than men leave rural regions has only partly been explained. We investigate whether motives to move between municipalities in Sweden differ between women and men. We use individual data from the longitudinal database LISA from Statistics Sweden and municipal level data from Swedish Municipalities and Regions (SKR). We estimate binary choice models and model individual migration between Swedish municipalities in 2020 for women and men separately.

First, we model the decision to stay or move in the current municipality as a function of individual characteristics (e.g., age, education, employment status) and characteristics of the current residential municipality i.e., push factors.

Second, we model the destination choice for those who moved as a function of characteristics of the potential destination municipalities i.e., pull factors. We include municipal level variables like population size, labor market conditions, geographical location, economic structure, access to university. We will focus specifically on the impact of factors with rural/urban dimensions. For example, are women more likely to leave municipalities with low population density than men? Are women more likely than men to leave municipalities which are categorized as rural and with relatively large primary sectors? Are women more likely to arrive in metropolitan municipalities than men? To our knowledge, there are no previous studies that has investigated differences in migration motives between women and men in Sweden using a two-step binary choice approach like ours.

Peter Gladoic Håkansson, Malmö University  
Peter Karpestam, Malmö University

## 5.5. Different ways of going "back-to-the-land" in Sweden today

Nora Wahlström

Back-to-the-land is a well-established concept and phenomenon in the Global North and recent literature suggests a resurgence of back-to-the-land migration during the past two decades. Existing literature on back-to-the-land phenomena consists mainly of case-studies and quantitative studies are few, presumably because of the difficulty in identifying this particular category of urban to rural migration in statistics. Characterizing back-to-the-land is also somewhat challenging, since the group comprises a rather broad array of people, motives and practices. While the subject of Swedish urban families leaving for the rural to live a more sustainable and food self-sufficient life is a topic for many newspaper stories, research on this phenomenon in contemporary Sweden is lacking.

Drawing on a survey distributed to 6000 diverse back-to-the-land households in Sweden, this article -in order to better comprehend the diversity of the contemporary back-to-the-land migration - presents a typology of different kinds of back-to-the-landers in Sweden based on their ways of making a living. The article also broadly presents some characteristics of back-to-the-landers which in some aspects confirm ideas about this group presented in Swedish media, while questioning others.

Nora Wahlström, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

## 5.6. Development of back to the land-migration in Sweden in the early 21st century

Jan Amcoff

The urbanization peaked in Sweden (and many similar countries) during the post-war decades. However, already in the 19th century, Ravenstein presented countertendencies to any migration movement as a 'scientific law'. In this light, gröna vågen, counter-urbanization or rural renaissance should be expected. Besides the difficulties to operationalize (perhaps even define) urban and rural, and the general imprecision of these concepts, a move may occur under different circumstances.

The focus of this project is the back-to-the-land variant of rural-oriented migration, i.e. those who move out into the countryside to engage in food production/agriculture in one way or another (but not in those who move there to create spaces for some other kind of hobby, or just for residential purposes).

This study aims to estimate the scope and persistence of this phenomenon and how its volume has developed over time and space in Sweden. Thus, we need to identify the b-t-t-ls in register data. The results from a survey to b-t-t-ls carried out in cooperation with the magazine "Åter" will supply some hints (e.g. the typical size of the real property units used, income structure, etc). These indications will be used to identify possible back-to-the-landers in register data, and to follow their presence. However, although we may be able to identify characteristics of b-t-t-ls everyone displaying these characteristics will not necessarily belong to the group. Thus, by necessity we will end up with a study of potential b-t-t-ls

Jan Amcoff, Uppsala University

## **6. Sustainable planning for rural areas - Book launch**

## 6.1. Planning for the good life in rural areas

Susanne Stenbacka & Brita Hermelin

The presentations in this session will introduce a recently published book on rural planning: "Hållbar samhällsplanering för landsbygden - Service, infrastruktur och välfärd för goda livsvillkor"

<https://www.gleerups.se/universitet-och-hogskola/samhallsvetenskap/hallbar-samhallsplanering-for-landsbygden-p51109534>

The work with planning and community development increasingly requires perspectives that integrate social, ecological and economic sustainability. Such a starting point leads to many questions related to energy, infrastructure for transport and communication, as well as how we should organize housing, care and social care. This integrated perspective on sustainable development forms the framework for this book.

The book presents studies of planning for good living conditions in rural areas, with a particular focus on service and infrastructure development. Rural areas and cities are linked in networks of places and dependencies, and good living conditions in rural areas contribute to sustainable development for the whole society.

The editors of the book Susanne Stenbacka and Brita Hermelin will briefly introduce the book before four of the chapters are presented more in detail by the authors.

Susanne Stenbacka, Dalarna University  
Brita Hermelin, Linköping University

## 6.2. Understanding practices of civil society through resource mobilization theory

Patrik Cras, Marie Nordfelt, Pelle Åberg & Johan von Essen

The trend has long been that the networks of place-based services in Sweden's rural areas are becoming thinner and thinner, i.e. many rural communities and smaller towns are losing the basic local commercial and public services they once had. In the chapter "Can civil society solve rural service challenges?", part of the newly published anthology on sustainable planning for rural areas, we discuss the interconnected contemporary issue of local civil societies increasing contribution to the maintenance and development of rural services.

In our analysis, we use theories of resource mobilization to highlight how processes of mobilization for local services are both similar and different in different rural communities where such mobilization takes place. In this presentation, we focus on how a resource mobilization perspective contributes to an understanding of how

organization processes are context-dependent and how organizations interact with other actors and institutions in their environment to acquire and generate necessary resources.

We find similar patterns in many studied local projects. These types of civil society activities often require a very extensive effort of volunteer work in the process of establishing the service. However, the activities that remain up and running over time are mainly activities where the amount of volunteer involvement needed decreases over time. If new modes of service delivery by civil society becomes stable, civil society reverts to more of a standby mode, waiting for the next local problem to arise; rural civil society can be said to be "on call" for new problems and possibilities to emerge.

Patrik Cras, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences  
Marie Nordfelt, Karlstad University  
Pelle Åberg, Marie Cederschiöld University  
Johan von Essen, Marie Cederschiöld University



## 6.3. Collaborative governance for local development – place-based initiative in a rural environment

**Brita Hermelin**

The ideal for local development to be initiated locally and place-based has strong impact on present-time models for strategic planning. This involves arguing that interventions need to be adapted for local contexts regarding site-specific needs, challenges and resources and it means that expectations on the local political bodies, i.e. the municipalities, to be proactive has increased. Furthermore, there is a strong belief that collaboration across organizations and social sectors is an effective strategy for achieving goals for local development initiatives. This has motivated proliferation of scholarly work on the management of place-based development initiatives through collaboration.

Through this paper, we investigate a local development initiative through a defined model for collaborative governance (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). His empirical case concerns the development of a service node offering combination of services (including grocery store, postage and communication services), located in a small settlement in a sparsely populated region in north Sweden. The analysis of this initiative identifies how the cycles of collaborative governance – relating to engagement, motivation and capacity – are intertwined for the different steps through which the development the service node is put through. The results of the empirical study also point at the impact of agency of individuals as well as the importance of local networks, trust and social capital.

## 6.4. International migration and local welfare

**Susanne Stenbacka**

This presentation deals with refugee migration to the Swedish countryside, and departs from a discussion of the organizational interaction between local, regional and national levels. The study intersects localization of welfare with refugee migration in municipalities facing challenges related to service provision and demography. The basis for the analysis is a study of international migration, social and economic sustainability in Sweden. Local perspectives contribute with knowledge of how global processes force municipal preparedness, but also make visible strategic thinking where international migration can play a significant role for municipalities' future opportunities.

Refugee migration entails both costs and income for the municipalities. The time perspective is important for the view on economic impact; as entailing a risk of negative development if the establishment phase becomes longer than expected – or as a positive injection, decisive for municipalities with an otherwise declining and aging population. The effects of international

migration are discussed in relation to basic societal structures; the network of fundamental services on which all people depend, regardless of socio-economic and geographical background. The foundational economy concept is used in order to provide a framework emphasizing the structures that all individuals need for their survival and for their well-being. The concept also encourages paying attention to individuals' varying roles, functions and needs within these structures.

The study is part of the project/book "Hållbar samhällsplanering för landsbygden - Service, infrastruktur och välfärd för goda livsvillkor" (Sustainable planning for rural areas - Service, infrastructure and welfare for good living conditions)

## 6.5. Socially sustainable housing in rural areas

**Susanna Heldt Cassel & Susanne Stenbacka**

To plan for services, housing and infrastructure in places that can be said to have a peripheral position in society is challenging and places high demands on several actors, both public, private and non-profit. When socially vulnerable households are displaced and directed to move to small towns without sufficient infrastructure, service, or resources, but with available housing, there are consequences for the entire local community. The problem has its roots partly in the operation of the housing market and within overall municipal principles to deal with homelessness, but also partly in shortcomings regarding service and infrastructure in many small towns and villages in the countryside.

In this chapter we examine the housing situation and efforts of local development in a particular village in Bergslagen, Sweden, to shed light on complexities and problems regarding socially sustainable rural housing provision. We aim at initiating a discussion about the importance of municipal planning for housing provision and how to advance knowledge in this field. What is a socially sustainable housing provision in rural areas and what are the key obstacles for achieving it?

This chapter is included in the published volume (Sv.) "Hållbar samhällsplanering för landsbygden" edited by Hermelin and Stenbacka, 2023.

Susanne Stenbacka, Uppsala University  
Susanna Heldt Cassel, Dalarna University



Nordregio