

Socio-Economic Dynamics in Sparse Regional Structures

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*Socio-Economic Dynamics
in Sparse Regional Structures*

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Abstract: The aim of the thesis is to describe and analyse socio-economic changes in northern Sweden. Focus is on the period 1985-2000. Population development, restructuring of economic activities, political and cultural changes are related to a theoretical discussion on the transformation of sparsely populated areas as an outcome of multi-dimensional and inter-related processes. Besides an introductory and concluding section, the thesis contains four papers.

The first paper deals with forestry's changed role in the local economy of four municipalities located in the inland areas of upper Norrland. The changes within forestry have been driven by adaptation to global competition and rapid technical development. Even though timber production has increased in some of the municipalities, job losses have greatly reduced the importance of forestry in the local economies. Many employees have left forestry for work in other branches, unemployment or retirement. However, relatively few have moved from the area. A multiplier model was employed in order to analyse the impact on the local economy.

The second paper deals with population changes in the six northernmost counties. During the 1990s, most municipalities and rural areas in northern Sweden have experienced renewed depopulation. At the same time, some rural areas have shown significant population growth. Three types of rural areas with population growth have been identified. Firstly, there are rural areas within daily commuting distance from regional centres. Secondly, there is a group of rural areas, mainly a number of mountain villages close to the border with Norway, which has benefited from the tourist industry. Finally, there are a few rural areas characterised by attractive residential environments and leisure housing.

The third paper is based on a classification of 500 residential areas and villages in the county of Västerbotten into seven types of housing environments. In this way, the county is broken down into a mosaic of housing environments characterised by very different prerequisites for consumption and economic development. A complex and dispersed pattern of disadvantaged residential areas all over the county indicates the difficulty in treating counties and municipalities as homogeneous regions.

In the fourth paper, focus is on young peoples' attitudes towards staying in or moving to small communities within a local labour market region in northern Sweden. The study is based on telephone interviews with 400 young men and women in the Umeå region. Half the interviewees lived in the university city of Umeå while the others were residents in five rural municipalities surrounding Umeå. In general, the males and females aged 19-25 had a much more positive attitude towards living in rural communities than did those aged 15-18. Nevertheless, only half of the young people already living in the rural municipalities wanted to stay there. Among the young people living in the city, slightly less than 50% showed an interest in moving to the surrounding rural areas, mainly the countryside within commuting distance from the city. The connection between higher education and out-migration of young people from rural areas is also highlighted.

Keywords: Northern Sweden, Norrland, Sparsely populated areas, Countryside, Rural change, Regional development, Forestry, Population, Welfare

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Regional Structures***

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Preface

My first twenty years of life were spent in Vebomark, a village about 90 kilometres north of Umeå. Growing up in a village in northern Sweden has, naturally, influenced my views and values, but it has also given me a lot of time to reflect on the development of rural areas and northern Sweden in general. However, little did I expect that this in time would become the focus for my thesis.

There are, of course, many people whom I would like to thank for their contribution to this thesis. First of all, I want to thank my main supervisor Ulf Wiberg for always supporting me and commenting on an endless stream of preliminary versions of research reports, conference papers and thesis drafts. I am also very grateful for the encouragement and constructive comments that I have received from Urban Lindgren and Kerstin “Polly” Westin. I want to thank Bruno Jansson for animated discussions and help during the forestry project, Dieter Müller and Backa Fredrik Brandt for moral support and positive thinking, Einar Holm for introducing me to the world of “neural networks”, Ian Layton for improving my English in two of the articles, Lotta Brännlund and Margit Söderberg for helping me with various practical things and Erik Bäckström for all sorts of help with computer related issues. Other friends and colleagues at the department, both former and present workmates, should also be credited for inspiring me over the years as a PhD student.

During a substantial part of my time at Umeå University I had my daily workplace at CERUM (Centre for Regional Science). For this reason, I want to express my gratitude to everyone working at CERUM during the period 1995-2001, not least Lars Westin and Christer Degerman. Susanne Sjöberg and Peder Axensten helped me with the cover. I would also like to thank Erik Sondell for all the discussions over cups of coffee. These discussions have often taken us on a journey along winding gravel roads to small villages and secluded settlements such as Gorkuträsk, Korpnäset and Harrvik. In my opinion the world would be much more boring if such places did not exist. It is also worth mentioning that the thesis is part of the research program *Urban Design* coordinated by CERUM.

Over the years I have had the privilege to work with other people in various research projects. In addition to persons already mentioned I am grateful to Monica Johansson, Patrik Johansson, Hans Nilsagård, Anna Nordström, Lars Olof Persson, Linda Rislund and Erik Westholm. I also want to express my gratitude to Jan Amcoff, Department of Social and Economic Geography at Uppsala University, who came with valuable comments on a draft version of the thesis. Furthermore, I am grateful to the Gösta Skoglund International

Foundation for enabling me to present my research at several international conferences.

Finally, I want to give my deepest and warmest thanks to Camilla and my parents Sven-Erik and Viola. Without their support and love I would not have been able to write this thesis. You mean more to me than I will ever be able to explain! My brothers together with their families, my “parents-in-law” and, last but not least, my friends have in various ways contributed to my well-being. The parties, excursions and other social events have always put me in a good mood. I sincerely hope, though, that the completion of the thesis will give me a chance to compensate you all for the occasions I have neglected you!

Umeå and Vebomark in April 2002

Örjan Pettersson

Contents

Introduction	1
<i>From a land of the future to a distressed region</i>	1
<i>Aim and delimitations of the thesis</i>	3
Method and material	4
Rural restructuring - a theoretical framework	8
<i>The concept of rural</i>	8
<i>Northern Sweden as a sparsely populated region</i>	10
<i>Rural restructuring</i>	13
<i>The economic dimension</i>	16
<i>The socio-demographic dimension</i>	20
<i>The cultural dimension</i>	23
<i>The political dimension</i>	24
Paper summaries	27
I <i>Forestry restructuring in northern Sweden</i>	27
II <i>Contemporary population changes in north Swedish rural areas</i>	29
III <i>Microregional fragmentation in a Swedish county</i>	31
IV <i>Young Swedes' attitudes towards rural areas</i>	33
Discussion	35
<i>The restructuring of northern Sweden</i>	36
<i>Planning for socio-economic dynamics in sparse regional structures</i>	38
<i>A future for the north?</i>	39
References	41
Appendix – Map showing the municipalities of northern Sweden	47
Paper I – IV	

The attached papers

- I Pettersson, Ö., Lindgren, U. & Jansson, B. (2002): Forestry restructuring in northern Sweden. Submitted.
- II Pettersson, Ö. (2001): Contemporary population changes in north Swedish rural areas. Accepted for publication in *Fennia*.
- III Pettersson, Ö. (2001): Microregional fragmentation in a Swedish county. *Papers in Regional Science* 80 (4), 389-409.
- IV Pettersson, Ö. (2002): Young Swedes' attitudes towards rural areas. Submitted.

Introduction

From a land of the future to a distressed region

During the second half of the 19th century northern Sweden was considered to be a land of the future. The area was rich in natural resources to be harvested, further processed and exported (Sörlin 1988). Northern Sweden was seen in some respects as a new America that could help solve the problem of providing for an increasing population (Nilsson 2000a). Timber, ore and hydroelectric power would also lay the foundations for a rapid industrialisation, particularly along the coast but since raw materials were gathered from inland areas these parts of the region also experienced an upswing. The success of the sawmill industry made northern Sweden a major exporter as early as the 1880s and in per capita terms the area was Sweden's most export-oriented region. In time a manufacturing industry grew up around these activities (Nilsson 1979, Nilsson 1992).

This situation had already begun to change by the 1930s when the economic crisis led to a temporary reduction in demand for the region's products. The lack of a domestic market and the area's focus on exports suddenly became clear disadvantages. It was not until after World War II, however, that these problems attracted serious attention. Mechanisation within the primary industries (agriculture and forestry), coupled with rationalisations within the traditional base-industries, caused reductions in employment. An additional problem which attracted a great deal of attention, particularly in the media, was depopulation. Out-migration from the region had occurred for a considerable period of time but it was not until the birth rate failed to compensate for out-migration that the population began to decrease. During the 1960s and 1970s depopulation became an important "Norrland issue". The debate acquired new relevance during the 1990s when an increasing number of municipalities registered population decreases.

As early as the 1960s there came government initiatives to actively reverse these trends, firstly with the so called industrial location policy (lokaliseringspolitiken), and subsequently with a broader regional development policy (Nilsson 1992). Ever larger areas came, in time, to be included in the regional policy's support initiatives and nowadays the whole of northern Sweden (including the county of Dalarna) is part of the European Union's Structural Fund programme under either Objectives 1 or 2.

The northern areas of Sweden have also, during the 1990s, been affected by a number of events both within and outside the national borders. During the early 1990s Sweden went through a serious crisis characterised, amongst other things, by sinking industrial production and export, reduced GNP and

relatively high, at least for Swedish conditions, unemployment. This economic downturn was the most serious and persistent recession that Sweden has experienced since World War II. The crisis was a result of international recession coupled with internal problems. There was no upward turn in the economy before the mid-1990s (Jonung 1994).

Another important change in the late 1980s was the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. These events had major effects, not least for the countries of the Baltic region. Sweden's entry into the European Union 1994/1995 was a change of equivalent importance for the country as a whole. It will, however, be many years before we understand the long-term consequences of these two events. Even now though it is possible to anticipate changes in the EU in terms of an eastward expansion and closer internal co-operation between member states. An eastward expansion will most probably also entail changes in central EU decision making areas such as agriculture and regional development policies, both of great importance to northern Sweden. Sweden faces, furthermore, an important decision in terms of participation in the European Monetary Union.

Against this background it becomes important to attempt to interpret changes in northern Sweden at the end of the 20th century, and how various processes have acted with each other to create the present situation. It is hoped that such an approach could also lead to a deeper insight into those areas that concern the region's development in the beginning of the 21st century.

Northern Sweden is, however, far from a homogenous region. Coastal areas differ from inland areas, industrial towns differ from university and higher education centres, countryside areas near towns differ from markedly forested districts and peripheral mountain areas etc. etc. Within each of these categories there also exist significant differences. The development of northern Sweden is characterised by both general development patterns and more or less local changes and events. Even though large parts of northern Sweden have obvious economic problems there are also examples of a positive development. Throughout the region there are robust communities, both large and small, as well as expansive businesses. Even in areas with serious problems there is a willingness and desire to change and to contribute to a more favourable development. Despite the fact that numerous municipalities face out-migration and negative population trends, there are many individuals who choose to remain and also a degree of in-migration to such areas.

Aim and delimitations of the thesis

The purpose of the thesis is to describe and analyse socio-economic changes in northern Sweden. The choice of time period and geographic area studied varies to some extent between the different papers (see map in Figure 1). For the thesis as a whole, however, the focus is on changes in northern Sweden¹ during the period 1985-2000. The following questions are considered:

- How have the ongoing structural changes in the economy, especially the reduced importance of forestry in employment, affected the local economies of a number of sparsely populated municipalities? (Paper I)
- In what way can the demographic development of northern Sweden at the end of the 20th century be related to general urbanisation and counterurbanisation patterns? In which areas of northern Sweden has the population increased and in which has it decreased? What characterises the rural areas where the population has increased and how can the growth in these areas be explained? (Paper II)
- Are standards of living equal throughout the counties of northern Sweden or do they follow some kind of urban-rural continuum? Which different types of housing environment are represented in northern Sweden? (Paper III)
- Have post-materialistic values regarding, for example, work, leisure and social relations affected young peoples' attitudes toward living in rural areas? How do the youth of sparsely populated areas view the option of remaining in their home municipalities and what attitudes do city youth have toward the nearby countryside and towards nearby rural municipalities? (Paper IV)

The next chapter describes the data and methods used in the papers. Thereafter follows a discussion of the term rural and a concise area-description of northern Sweden. The greater part of the chapter, however, consists of a run-through of an overarching theoretical framework where northern Sweden's development is related to the term "rural restructuring". A subsequent chapter contains summaries of the papers' main results. A final, concluding, chapter discusses northern Sweden's development and future conditions.

¹ Northern Sweden is defined in this thesis as the six most northerly counties of Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Västernorrland, Jämtland, Gävleborg and Dalarna.

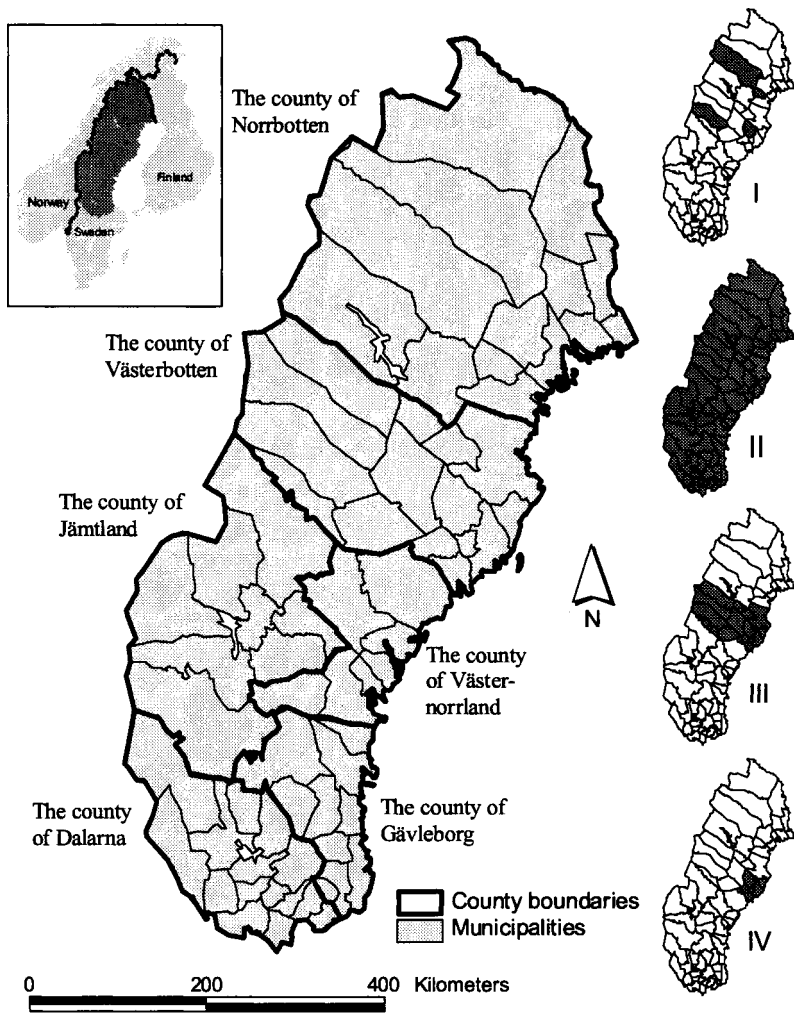


Figure 1: The geographic focus of the different papers.

Method and material

The papers are based on quantitative methodology and specially acquired data has been used in several of the studies on which the articles are based. Most of this data has been purchased from Statistics Sweden. The fourth paper, however, is based on a questionnaire study. This section gives a concise presentation of the methods and material used in the different studies. More detailed information is to be found in the respective papers.

The first paper – *Forestry restructuring in northern Sweden* – is based on case studies of the forestry industry's development in four municipalities during the period 1986-1995. The intention behind selection of the municipalities was that they should be reasonably representative for inland northern Sweden. The municipalities of Jokkmokk and Vilhelmina represented the mountain region whereas Vindeln and Älvsbyn represented inland areas relatively nearer the coast (see map in Figure 1).

The data was mainly acquired from a database of individual residents held at the Department of Social and Economic Geography, Umeå University. The database contains information on the entire population of Sweden over the period 1985-1995. A record containing every inhabitant of each studied municipality at any time between 1986-1995 was taken from this database. In this way the selection came to cover a total of 42 000 people. Information existed for each individual regarding: sex, age, education, income, occupation etc. The database also provided the possibility of following these individuals over the whole time period, an opportunity that was mainly used to gain an understanding of what had happened to those people who left the forestry industry during the period of study.

We also had at our disposal data concerning the development of forestry activity during the period 1986-1998. This information was provided by the National Board of Forestry and by the Regional Forestry Boards for the counties of Norrbotten and Västerbotten. In order to gain an understanding of the importance of forestry for other parts of the local economy in these municipalities we made use of a multiplier model. This model was used to assess the consequences of three scenarios: a) the cessation of forestry in the municipality; b) the level of activity continued to change according to present trends or; c) the level of activity increased by 20% to a maximum level considering the present growth of timber.

In two of the papers (II & III) I have used a new type of statistical information for geographical areas smaller than a municipality (so called microregions). These types of geographical subdivisions were utilised mainly for practical reasons, but also because most microregions have names identifiable to politicians and the public.² This type of data had previously seen little use in a research context. The projects that lay behind the articles were therefore to some extent pilot projects and a central point of departure for these studies was that data at municipality level concealed significant local variations. The data for these two articles was acquired from Statistics Sweden

² Other considered options were parish data or data on squares. The first option was not chosen due to the fact that several municipalities consisted of only one or two parishes, whereas with the squares there was a risk of loss of detail in the data material due to privacy restrictions upheld by Statistics Sweden regarding geographical units containing less than ten persons.

and was processed and analysed with the help of a geographical information system (GIS).

In the paper *Contemporary population changes in north Swedish rural areas* I have focused on demographic changes during the period 1985-1995 in 1300 electoral wards in the six northernmost counties. Besides data as to residents' age and sex there was also information concerning housing and family composition. With the assistance of GIS population density and distance to towns were calculated. This latter calculation was used, amongst other things, to analyse the relation between population change in rural areas and the distance to towns (such as the centre of the municipality). Two additional detailed studies were made covering the counties of Västerbotten and Dalarna.

The third paper – *Microregional fragmentation in a Swedish county* – uses somewhat similar data. The focus, however, lies solely on the county of Västerbotten and the intention has been to group residential areas and villages into categories with similar characteristics. Geographic subdividing was made using the municipalities' NYKO grouping (key code areas, nyckelkodsområden) in the three most heavily populated municipalities and SAMS (Small Area Market Statistics, generally the same as electoral wards) in the other municipalities. In the county of Västerbotten this meant approximately 500 microregions. NYKO were used because they were more detailed and so made possible the distinction of small areas within the towns.

Large quantities of information were associated with each of these microregions. Besides data as to residents' sex and age information was also obtained concerning income, level of education, employment status, housing and car ownership. The so called ill-health rate was used as an indicator of residents' health (a special analysis of variations in the ill-health rate in the county is presented in Pettersson 1999). The majority of the variables concerned the situation at the start of the 1990s, but data regarding employment and disposable income was acquired for the year 1985. A cluster-analysis was performed in order to group the microregions into categories. It was judged that seven clusters were sufficient to realise a good description of the county's different types of microregions.

The fourth and final paper – *Young Swedes' attitudes towards rural areas* – was based on telephone interviews with a total of 400 young people, aged between 15-25, in the Umeå region. The empirical data underlying the paper was derived from two case studies targeted at young people and women (30-50 years of age) residing in the Umeå region (see also Johansson & Pettersson 1998, Pettersson & Nordström 2000). Some of the questions in the two case studies were similar, which made comparisons between the populations

possible. The questionnaires contained both open and closed questions. However, in the paper only material regarding young people was presented. In the first questionnaire, directed towards people in the surrounding rural municipalities, the main idea was to illuminate the attitudes towards their own municipality. The point of departure for the analysis was whether the person wanted to or believed it was possible to stay. Other questions dealt with opinions as to the local availability of jobs, housing, services and recreational activities. There were also questions about mobility and social relations with local people. Another theme was the spirit of community and local engagement. The second questionnaire was targeted towards the same age groups, but this time to people residing in the city of Umeå. Since many inhabitants in Umeå have grown up somewhere else, it was believed necessary to ask questions regarding the interviewees' connection to Umeå. There were also questions as to the present place of living. The main focus in the questionnaire, however, was the interviewees' attitudes and actual relations to the surrounding rural areas, both the relatively nearby countryside and the more distant rural municipalities within the region. Did they visit these parts of the region and for what purposes? Were they interested in settling down there and how did they motivate their standpoint? Finally, in both questionnaires there were also a number of background questions.

The first case study was aimed at young people living in Umeå's surrounding municipalities, and during April and May 1998, 100 young men and 100 young women were interviewed. The interviews in the second case study were aimed at an equal number of young people living in central Umeå and were performed just over a year later. Selection of interview subjects was conducted from lists of the addresses of people of the relevant ages supplied by the municipalities. A random selection was made from these lists and the individuals located using telephone directories. Since not all young people could be found this way there was a certain degree of drop-off. A few individuals declined to participate or could not be reached at that time (due to trips abroad etc.). The young people interviewed in Umeå were on average slightly older than those in the surrounding municipalities, a fact that is mainly attributable to Umeå being a university city that has experienced a high level of in-migration of people in their early twenties while the surrounding municipalities have experienced a net out-migration within the same age group.

Rural restructuring - a theoretical framework

The concept of rural

Throughout history the meaning of the concept of rural has been discussed from a variety of angles and there is still divided views as to how the concept should be used.³ In certain contexts it has been claimed that it is extremely difficult or even pointless to attempt to find an all-inclusive definition (see, for example, Hoggart 1990, Halfacree 1993, Hoggart et al. 1995, Halfacree & Boyle 1998, Ilbery 1998, Amcoff 2000). In this section I present a concise overview of part of this discussion and then relate in more concrete terms this thesis' geographical delimitation to the term.

Halfacree (1993) mentions four main approaches to a definition of rural (see also Halfacree & Boyle 1998, Ilbery 1998). The first approach is primarily *descriptive* and involves identifying different characteristics and statistical measurements that can capture rurality. Another perspective is the *socio-cultural* which begins with the premise that low density of population (or other typical features) affects, in various ways, attitudes and actions. According to a third approach, *rural as locality*, the rural forms a particular type of society that differs from urban society. The fourth perspective, *rural as social representation*, is based on the notion that the rural is a social representation of space and the focus is therefore directed towards how the rural is understood and how the images of the rural are constructed by people. These mental images vary and while the countryside is in certain contexts regarded as genuine and peaceful the countryside can also be seen, by other people and in other contexts, as uneventful, tradition-bound or restricted. In this way, the focus of the thesis mainly coincides with Halfacree's descriptive approach to a definition of rural.

Another discussion concerns the question of whether the terms rural and urban should be seen as dichotomous, i.e. each other's opposites, or as a continuum where it can be difficult to draw a clear boundary between the two (see, for example, Champion & Watkins 1991). The latter view presents the possibility of finding "zones of transition" where urban and rural characteristics are mixed (compare with "urbanised rural areas" in Johannisson et al. 1989).⁴ In this approach there lies an inherent view that the countryside is successively "urbanised", for example by city dwellers moving to the countryside, by country dwellers increasingly commuting to workplaces in towns and by people living in the country adopting an urban lifestyle.

³ For a more in depth discussion see, for example, Amcoff (2000).

⁴ The urban-rural continuum may also imply a hierarchy with metropolitan areas and large cities at the top and successively smaller cities, towns and finally small settlements further down the hierarchy.

There seems, however, to be a certain degree of consensus that *rural areas* are characterised by sparse settlement patterns, low population densities, great distances to towns, sparse infrastructure networks and a comparatively limited range of services, plus that primary sector activities are of great importance for employment and for the appearance of the landscape (see, for instance, Champion & Watkins 1991, Ilbery 1998). The relative importance of these factors varies, however, between different countries. Several of the factors tend, furthermore, to change over time, generally towards becoming less and less typically rural. The importance of agriculture is reduced, for example, in many rural areas at the same time as the availability of urban labour markets and service functions is increased due to improved road networks. Low population density, though, is a common, and to some extent lasting, element of the majority of definitions of rural areas (see, for example, Hoggart et al. 1995). Despite this fact there are great variations between different countries when one tries to make use of this definition, in terms of population numbers and population densities.

In Sweden, as in many countries, there is often a lack of clear definitions for terms relating to rural areas.⁵ In Swedish, for example, there are two words that are frequently used synonymously; *landsbygd*, which can be translated as “countryside”, and *glesbygd*, which means “sparsely populated area”. The first term is seen as having a more positive ring to it than the latter. The term *landsbygd* is generally applied to areas where agriculture is a dominant landscape feature, whereas *glesbygd* is often used when referring to (the problems in) northern Sweden’s sparsely populated inland. At the same time the term is connected to a statistical definition where all areas outside urban areas with at least 200 inhabitants, and no more than 200 meters between houses, are classified as sparsely populated areas.⁶ This means that even fairly small localities with few town-like characteristics are classified as urban. The concept of “sparsely populated regions” is yet another term. Normally it is applied to counties with generally low population densities. A partially related term is *landsorten* meaning “the provinces” or “the country” which is mainly used of areas outside the larger cities (principally Stockholm).

The overall geographical focus of the thesis mainly corresponds with the perspective of northern Sweden as a sparsely populated region. In general, northern Sweden is characterised by a sparse settlement pattern with low population density and long distances between towns. The relative importance of primary industries and industries connected with further processing of natural resources is another common denominator for northern Sweden (see also the following chapter). Nevertheless, the low population density, the

⁵ See, for example, Glesbygdverket (2001) for a presentation of different definitions.

⁶ From an international perspective this is a low cut-off point. Several European countries have 2 000 as their criterion (The Population 1991).

peripheral situation in comparison to Europe's economic core areas and the tradition of dependency on primary industries is shared with many other rural areas all around Europe. Other common features with many European rural areas are the problems related to population development (depopulation, out-migration of young people and an ageing population), a relatively slow growth in many "new" and expanding sectors of the economy and a dependency on the public sector (for instance, transfers to households and local authorities, farming subsidies and regional policy measures).

As indicated earlier in the text, the geographical delimitation is of importance (see also Champion & Watkins 1991). In the thesis, I have mainly used three types of spatial division when referring to rural areas. Firstly, there are (*genuine*) *rural areas* or (*open*) *countryside* associated with small settlements (i.e. villages and scattered settlements). Secondly, there are *rural municipalities* or *sparsely populated municipalities* characterised by their small number of inhabitants in relation to the total land area. In Sweden, however, these municipalities usually embrace small towns with a few thousand inhabitants. In a similar way, it is possible to refer to the counties of northern Sweden as *rural regions* or *sparsely populated regions*. Although the average population density is relatively low, there may exist quite densely populated areas and large towns within these regions. In the international literature, however, the terms *rural area* and *countryside* are frequently used more or less interchangeably. For this reason, I have not made any clear distinction between these terms within the literature reviews.

Northern Sweden as a sparsely populated region

This thesis concentrates on changes in northern Sweden. There exists, however, no exact geographical delimitation of northern Sweden, nor of the more frequently used term *Norrland*. These notions are often used interchangeably but neither in the case of *Norrland* nor northern Sweden is the geographical area implied either clear or generally agreed upon (for a discussion see, for instance, Sörlin 1988). This is particularly true of the region's southern boundary. The term *Norrland* is nowadays often used only of the five most northerly counties (Gävleborg, Västernorrland, Jämtland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten) but there also exists a traditional definition of *Norrland* as everything north of the Dal river.

In this thesis I have chosen to define northern Sweden as the six most northerly counties, that is to say the five named above plus *Dalarna*. The changes in *Dalarna* county have much in common with the development in the five northernmost counties such as: sparse population patterns, an historical dependence on primary industries and industries connected with further processing of natural resources. These similarities are mirrored by the

fact that Dalarna is included in the group of regions generally termed the seven forest counties, which also includes Värmland. It is against this background that I have chosen to use the term “northern Sweden” to avoid confusion with the definition of Norrland as the five northernmost counties. This is, however, simply the delimitation applied to paper II (*Contemporary population changes in north Swedish rural areas*) and to the introductory and concluding sections of the thesis. The other papers are based on case studies in more narrowly defined geographical areas (see map in Figure 1).

Northern Sweden is characterised by a small population relative to its large area. The region has nearly 1.5 million inhabitants spread across 270 000 km², which comes to just over 5 residents per km². The population density is, in other words, very low and large areas are more or less uninhabited. Within this area, mainly in the coastal parts of the region, there are around twenty towns with populations in excess of 10 000. The largest is Umeå with approximately 70 000 inhabitants within the city. In addition there are a large number of smaller towns and localities. In the region’s inland areas the population is concentrated along river valleys and in the centres’ of the municipalities (see map in Figure 2). Only a small part of the population lives in truly sparsely populated areas. Distances between populated areas are generally great, especially in inland areas, and distances to large towns are often in excess of 100 km. Distances between towns in northern Sweden are generally greater than 50 km, which greatly limits commuting possibilities. There are, however, a few regions where two or more towns are situated relatively close together, for example, Luleå/Boden/Piteå/Älvsbyn in Norrbotten, Sundsvall/Härnösand in Västernorrland and Falun/Borlänge in Dalarna (Johansson 2002). Northern Sweden can, furthermore, be seen as a peripheral area, not least in relation to Stockholm and southern Sweden. Northern Sweden is to an even greater extent peripheral when related to Europe’s economic heartland (Minshull 1990).

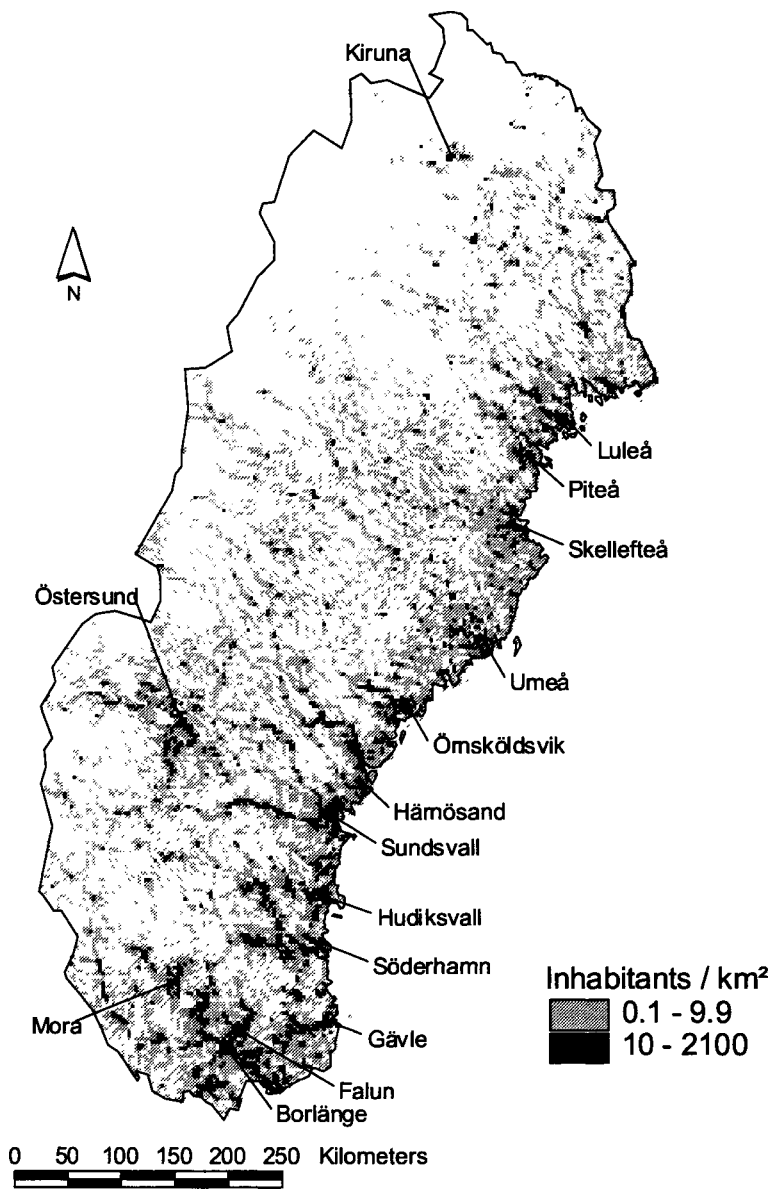


Figure 2: Number of inhabitants per km², 1995. Grid squares 3 km * 3 km.

The landscape of northern Sweden is dominated by forested areas while the amount of land used for cultivation and buildings of various kinds is very small.⁷ Compared to the rest of Sweden large areas of land in the north are considered as wasteland (Statistics Sweden 2002). The infrastructure network in the form of roads and railways is generally more sparse and of lower quality than that found in the south of Sweden. The most significant routes for transit of people and goods run along the coast and along a number of roads and railways linking coastal towns with inland towns and with Norway. A new railway line along the coast (The Bothnia Line) is currently planned that will run from Nyland (in the municipality of Kramfors, see map in Appendix) to Umeå and supplement the northern rail structure whilst supplying Umeå and more southerly towns with an express rail connection with the Stockholm region. Also running in a north-south direction is the E45 road that connects a large number of towns in the inland areas and mountain municipalities. Additionally there exist a relatively large number of airports in relation to the population.

The economic structure of northern Sweden generally follows the national division of the different economic branches. In 1999 the number of people employed within agriculture and forestry was 2.6%, which is slightly higher than the average for Sweden. The number employed within the extracting and manufacturing industries was just over 18%, while the remaining part was fairly evenly distributed between the private service and public sectors. In northern Sweden there are proportionately more people employed by the public sector, and fewer by the private service sector, than in southern Sweden.

Rural restructuring

One approach to analysing the development of rural areas is that which is generally termed “rural restructuring”. This approach, which had a great impact during the 1990s, can be seen as a theoretical framework for analysing development from a holistic perspective where a long series of inter-related processes have transformed rural areas (Marsden et al. 1990, Marsden et al. 1993, Ilbery 1998, Marsden 1998, Phillips 1998, Hoggart & Paniagua 2001a). The approach can also be seen as an attempt at analysing the development of rural areas in a wider context. This latter attempt is based on the insight that changes in rural areas are not only a result of local processes but increasingly stem from global processes. Exactly what is meant by rural restructuring is, however, somewhat vague and, for example, Hoggart & Paniagua (2001a,

⁷ Land use in northern Sweden is divided as follows: forested areas 51%, marshland and mountain 39%, lakes and streams 7%, cultivated land 2%, built up areas and infrastructure 1% (Statistics Sweden 2002). Figures are for 1995.

p.42) assert that the approach is certainly useful, but that it in many situations is used far too routinely and therefore risks becoming an empty concept:

For us, when seen as a shift in society from one condition to another, 'restructuring' should embody major qualitative, and not just quantitative, change in social structures and practices. Unless we want to trivialise the concept, its use should be restricted to transformations that are both inter-related and multi-dimensional in character; otherwise we have descriptors that are more than adequate, like industrialisation, local government reorganisation, electoral dealignment or growth in consumerism. To clarify, in our view restructuring is not a change in one 'sector' that has multiplier effects on other sectors. Restructuring involves fundamental readjustments in a variety of spheres of life, where processes of change are causally linked.

Furthermore, Hoggart & Paniagua claim that few studies can live up to the high level of ambition that the concept implies. According to them, the empirical support for rural restructuring is also vague, and they refer to a large number of studies that indicate that even from a British perspective the tendencies are exaggerated and frequently contradictory. They are even more critical in their article about the development of Spain's rural regions (Hoggart & Paniagua 2001b).

The rural restructuring perspective has its roots in the restructuring debate that occurred as a result of the economic downturn in many traditional industrial regions during the 1970s. The term restructuring is to a large extent associated with the theoretical perspective that is generally referred to as Marxist political economy (Newby 1986, Lovering 1989, Phillips 1998). It is still clear that many rural restructuring studies take as their point of departure production relationships and the functioning of the capitalist system. Many rural restructuring studies deals with the transformation of agriculture since World War II, especially its greatly reduced economic importance for the countryside at the end of the 20th century (see, for instance, Marsden et al. 1990).

The temporal perspective varies, however, between different studies. At times a relatively long temporal perspective is applied where the emphasis is on development during the entire post-war period. In other investigations it is assumed that the economic crisis throughout large parts of the western world during the 1970s initiated the transformation, while in yet others the focus is entirely on changes during the 1980s and 1990s. In any event, it is reasonable to assume that both slow and rapid processes are involved in the development of rural areas. It is worth noting that many processes are comparatively slow and have been effective for many decades, for example the depopulation of Norrland's inland areas. The restructuring of the region's trade and industry is

another example of a reasonably slow change. Such a development can, however, have dramatic local consequences, such as when a company becomes bankrupt or when the management decide to close a production facility. There also exist examples of very large-scale changes that have occurred comparatively quickly (and surprisingly), for example the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

The concept of rural restructuring also emphasises the multi-dimensionality of rural change. Exactly which dimensions are given the greatest weight has varied somewhat between different studies, but the choice has frequently been made to illuminate certain aspects more thoroughly and other dimensions more superficially (Hoggart & Paniagua 2001a). The choice of dimensions, and to a certain degree also the choice of theories and concepts, is connected, quite reasonably, with the study's direction or with those factors adjudged particularly central to a certain area's development.

Finally, it is possible to conclude that there are differing views concerning the concept of rural restructuring and that Hoggart & Paniagua (2001a) represents a rather "orthodox" point of view regarding the meaning and implications of the concept. At the same time, the critical content of their article is worth considering and they do indeed call attention to several weak points in earlier research within the field (see also Hoggart & Paniagua 2001b). However, if their guidelines were to be followed too strictly and if we were only to regard dramatic and fundamental changes within the society as restructuring, there is an obvious risk that only major transitions such as those that have taken place in certain areas in Eastern Europe could be labelled rural restructuring. In my opinion the most important contribution of the rural restructuring approach is the application of a broad perspective to changes in rural areas and it is from this point of departure that I want to analyse northern Sweden's development during the late 20th century. This also implies that my purpose is not to prove that rural restructuring has taken place within the region, but rather to assess the region's development from a rural restructuring perspective.

In the following sections I have chosen to present some of the changes that have either been highlighted in the international literature in the area of rural restructuring or that have, in some other way, been seen as important for analysing changes in northern Sweden. I have chosen to examine changes in four main dimensions; socio-demographic, economic, political and cultural. It is worth noting that each of these dimensions contains in turn a long series of theories and concepts, plus that the same theory or concept may have connections to several dimensions. It is important to be aware of this since this fact can also be said to be a basic idea behind the approach. Grouping into the four dimensions can therefore be seen primarily as making things easier for the reader. I have chosen to consider the demographic and social

changes together since they tend to overlap with each other in the literature. This approach also seems natural against the background of many social changes in northern Sweden being related to, for example, age-related migration and an ageing population. Cultural changes, on the other hand, have generally played a rather subdued role in the books and articles that have discussed the subject of rural restructuring. I have instead decided to give particular attention to this dimension and have therefore taken up some examples of such processes of change under a separate heading.

Like so many other studies this thesis has, as its point of departure, economic development. Subsequently the other dimensions: socio-demographic, cultural and political will be examined in that order. The choice is subjective and restricted to a few dimensions and aspects of rural restructuring and should not be seen as an attempt to conduct an all-embracing survey of the processes that have transformed northern Sweden at the end of the 20th century. These dimensions and aspects are also the theoretical framework that forms the basis of the summary of the papers and the concluding discussion.

The economic dimension

Globalisation is itself a multi-dimensional development that embraces a long series of changes. The change which is most often implied by the term is, however, a globalisation of the economy featuring, amongst other things, increased international trade in raw materials and also, increasingly, in further processed products. This also implies that industrial production is spread out amongst more countries and that manufacture often takes the form of global production chains where raw materials and components are brought together as finished products that are then distributed to a global market. Other classic indicators of globalisation include the growth and increased importance of transnational companies, an internationalisation of finance, faster and cheaper transportation, increased use of new communication technologies and a standardisation of international consumer markets (see, for example, Knox & Marston 2001). According to Dicken (1998) globalisation does *not* mean that geographical distance has completely lost its importance. Neither has the relevance of location been eliminated; production and consumption are still to a great extent localised to certain places and parts of the world. Development towards a global economy has been going on for a long time and gained momentum after World War II.

Lundmark & Malmberg (1988) state that from the end of the 1960s to the mid-1980s Swedish industry had a tendency to relocate from heavily urbanised areas and traditional industrial municipalities to more peripheral areas. Reduced industrial employment in the cities was balanced by an expansion of

the service sector. At the periphery, however, the job losses in agriculture and forestry were greater than the increases in industrial employment, while expansion of the service sector was relatively limited.

Northern Sweden's economy has for a long time been dominated by industries based on the natural resources of farming land, forest, ore and hydroelectric power, i.e. industries that have been heavily rationalised during the latter part of the 20th century. The public sector has instead become an important employer (NUTEK, 1994). During the 1990s, however, the public sector has shrunk while the private service sector has grown in importance. Examples of the latter development include the growth of call-centres and car testing activities in many areas of northern Sweden, and also the research facilities that have been established in connection with universities and higher-education centres. In some areas new job opportunities have been created in tourism, for example in Sälen and Jukkasjärvi. Growth within the private service sector has been greatest, however, in cities, particularly Stockholm, and in a number of expansive university cities (NUTEK 1994). According to Eliasson et al. (1999) the northern Swedish economy is characterised by relatively numerous job opportunities in primary industries, labour intensive industry and capital intensive industry (the latter mainly along the coast). Competition has generally increased, not least from low cost operations in eastern and central Europe. At the same time more and more workplaces are externally controlled by large national or multinational companies (see, for instance, Axelsson et al. 1994).

One example of this development from northern Sweden is how the forestry company *Svenska Cellulosa Aktiebolaget* (SCA) changed from having been a clearly north Swedish company during the 1960s, with practically all production in northern Sweden, into a transnational forestry company with production in many countries throughout the world. At the same time the company has been divided into several divisions some of which have their headquarters in other countries (Lindgren & Layton 1994).

Parallel with this development, many researchers have highlighted a transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist system of production. Fordism is associated with, amongst other things, the exploitation of scale economies within the framework of large, vertically integrated companies mass-producing standardised goods for mass-consumption, plus that the government took a general responsibility for ensuring that citizens were well educated, in good health and able to consume that which was produced. Post-Fordism, on the other hand, is generally associated with a growth in the role of specialised companies connected to each other through various forms of network, plus attempts to create flexibility of organisation and production (see, for example, Dicken & Lloyd 1990, Holly 1996). This last may be achieved by, for example,

a company choosing to externalise parts of its operation to other companies, such as subcontractors and entrepreneurs. A background factor to this desire for increased flexibility is that companies wish to restore the profit levels that were reduced substantially during the 1970s (Dicken & Lloyd 1990). A post-Fordist society is further characterised by a change in the government's role, from a welfare state based on Keynesian ideas to inflation control, deregulation of the labour market and growing divisions of wealth in society (Peck 2001).

Similar ideas, but based on a longer historical perspective, are presented by Andersson & Strömquist (1988) who suggest that the developed world has gone through a series of logistic revolutions and that Sweden is currently undergoing a transition from an industrial society, where local natural resources and geographical proximity to markets were central competitive advantages, to a post-industrial "knowledge society" where local and regional growth is based on knowledge, creativity, communications and culture.

This structural transformation has been dramatically expressed in areas with a very narrow industrial base (i.e. one company towns). Rationalisations and closures of individual production facilities have in these towns and villages had considerable consequences for residents and the local economy. In common with many other countries, northern Sweden has areas where mining has been of very great importance (see, for instance, Neil et al. 1992, Neil & Tykkyläinen 1998).⁸ Closures have occurred at, amongst other places, Stekenjokk in Västerbotten county, Grängesberg in Dalarna county (both at the end of the 1980s) and Laisvall in Norrbotten county (in 2001). Less dramatic but still significant reductions in personnel have occurred at the mines in Kiruna and Malmberget (also in Norrbotten county), but also in other branches such as the forest based industry and other manufacturing industries. Such events have occurred in a great number of smaller and larger communities throughout the region. During 2001, for instance, a number of electronics companies have closed down or moved significant areas of production to low-wage countries.

Within research into rural restructuring a great deal of interest has, for natural reasons, been focused on the development within agriculture and the importance for the transformation of the countryside (see, for example, Marsden et al. 1990, Hoggart et al. 1995, Ilbery 1998). Trends in agriculture have generally been in the direction of increased mechanisation and other ways of increasing effectiveness. This has had the effect of dramatically reducing the importance

⁸ It should be pointed out that people in mining towns are generally aware of the mine's estimated lifetime and that closures are thus normally not a surprise. On the other hand it has, naturally, happened that mines have been closed before the ore was exhausted, for example, because falling prices on the world market have made mining unprofitable.

of agriculture for employment and for the local economy in many rural areas at the end of the 20th century. Instead, the manufacturing and service industries have increased in relative importance even in rural areas. In general this has meant that rural areas has been brought closer to the national average (i.e. has become more like the rest of the economy). In recent years the increased importance of the service industry to rural areas has been brought to notice and it is often within tourism and other private services that new job opportunities have been created (see, for example, Champion & Watkins 1991, Townsend 1997). On the other hand the range of local services aimed at residents in rural areas has often been reduced with the results that jobs have disappeared and that availability of goods and services has worsened, above all for households without access to a car (Furuseth 1998). Parallel with this development, many rural areas have been incorporated into urban labour markets and today large sections of the rural population commute to workplaces in towns (Clout 1996).

Another, and in many ways related, perspective offers the concept of post-productive countryside (see, for instance, Murdoch & Marsden 1994, Halfacree 1997, Halfacree & Boyle 1998, Marsden 1998, Ilbery & Bowler 1998, Mather 1998). As the economic importance of the primary industries has declined the interest in alternative and/or complementary uses for the countryside has increased. In many circumstances it is claimed, for example, that the countryside is undergoing a transformation from having been a landscape dominated by agricultural production for sale and further processing to becoming a landscape for consumption where functions such as housing, recreation and tourism are stressed. This means, at the same time, that the rural environment itself is changed into a saleable commodity and that production and consumption often occur at one and the same location. Examples could include cultivated land converted into golf courses, converted barns used as bed and breakfasts or houses in the countryside becoming exclusive homes for affluent city dwellers. Alternatively it can also mean that large areas are set aside to protect specific habitats or species. Tourism and recreation in particular are industries that have set their stamp on many rural areas and contributed to restructuring (Butler 1998, Jenkins et al. 1998). Recreation and tourism are often seen as important industries for the future and are almost always part of local and regional development strategies for rural areas.

As far as Sweden is concerned it is interesting to note that certain areas of the countryside are particularly attractive for leisure housing but also that numbers of second homes are converted into permanent housing (see, for example, Nyström 1989, Müller 1999). Even certain natural resources are redefined in time, for example, fish stocks that previously were almost exclusively exploited as food are becoming an important resource for

recreation and tourism in northern Sweden (Alatalo 2001, Appelblad 2001). Similarly the Swedish Sami population has chosen to complement reindeer herding with Sami tourism (Müller & Pettersson 2001).

The socio-demographic dimension

A significant proportion of research into the development of the countryside has focused on demographic changes of different kinds. In general terms industrialisation meant an urbanisation process where a large part of the population was redistributed from rural areas to urban areas (Andersson 1987). Many rural areas in the developed world are still characterised by depopulation, but towards the end of the 20th century in-migration and population growth have also been observed in rural areas (Berry 1976, Fielding 1982, Champion 1989, Kontuly 1998). This phenomenon is termed counterurbanisation (or rural population turnaround). Exactly what this term is used to mean varies greatly between different studies but in general terms counterurbanisation implies some form of redistribution of people from towns and densely populated regions to the countryside and sparsely populated regions (for a discussion see, for instance, Vartiainen 1989, Geyer & Kontuly 1993, Champion 1998). In certain cases even an urbanisation on the decrease or a weak but positive population development in rural areas has been interpreted as a break in the trend. Comparisons between countries show, however, that population trends have shifted over time and that periods of counterurbanisation have often been followed by renewed urbanisation (Kontuly 1998).

Explanations for the counterurbanisation phenomenon have been sought in theories about everything from changes in structural conditions (economic development, regional policy etc.) to changes in housing preferences (for an overview see, for example, Champion 1989, Borgegård et al. 1995, Lewis 1998, Kontuly 1998). In-migration and population growth have often occurred in areas close to towns or within the metropolitan regions, leading to the question as to whether or not counterurbanisation is really a type of suburbanisation driven by improved commuting possibilities. There are, however, examples of long distance migration and population growth in peripheral rural areas that cannot be explained in terms of suburbanisation.

In the case of Sweden it can be stated that there existed counterurbanisation tendencies during the 1970s and probably during parts of the 1980s (Borgegård et al. 1995). The first period came to be known as the “green wave” (gröna vågen) and had, amongst other things, the result that net out-migration changed direction. Suddenly it was the metropolitan regions that were losing residents due to net out-migration (The Population 1991). This development

was already in reverse by the early 1980s. Despite this it could be shown that the number of residents in rural areas (i.e. sparsely populated areas as defined by Statistics Sweden) did in fact increase during the 1980s (Carlquist 1992), leading to speculation regarding a “new green wave” (Borgegård et al. 1993). A significant part of the growth, however, had occurred in metropolitan regions or other areas close to cities (Carlquist 1992). Instead the 1990s have come to be characterised by a relatively strong tendency towards urbanisation, but despite this many rural areas have experienced population growth even outside the metropolitan regions (Westlund & Pichler 2000, Glesbygdsverket 2001). The picture is thus a complex one with variations over time and space. Furthermore it seems that the choice of indicators and degree of spatial resolution have an effect on the possibilities for demonstrating counter-urbanisation tendencies in Sweden for the period after 1970 (for a discussion see, for example, Amcoff 2000, Håkansson 2000). On the other hand it is obvious that, above all in rural areas within metropolitan regions and near larger towns, there has been a more or less continuous population growth at the end of the 20th century. It is also worth noting that the same rural area can experience both extensive out-migration (normally of young people) *and* in-migration, for example of families with children or people close to retirement age.

The 1990s population reductions in northern Sweden’s inland areas depend, however to a great extent on demographic skewness resulting from earlier out-migration, for example the mass out-migrations of the 1950s and 1960s (Håkansson 2000). The depopulation was then added to by continued out-migration of young people. Borgegård et al. (1998) have analysed the role of foreign immigration policy in population redistribution in Sweden during the late 20th century. Between 1984-1994 the “Whole of Sweden Strategy” was applied, under which refugees (mainly from Iran, Iraq and Ethiopia) were spread out over the whole country. Not least for municipalities in inland northern Sweden, this additional population went some way towards balancing the trend of population reduction. When this strategy was abandoned in the mid-1990s these immigrant groups increasingly moved to larger towns and metropolitan regions.

Several British studies have described how the new inhabitants have affected the rural areas that they have moved to. One aspect that has received attention is the fact that those moving to the countryside tend to be more highly educated and have higher incomes than the resident population (Cloke & Thrift 1990, Phillips 1993, Murdoch & Marsden 1994, Murdoch 1995, Cloke et al. 1998, Fielding 1998). Certain studies talk of a middle class colonisation of the countryside, usually defined as a service class of professional and managerial workers, who, with their values and economic and political resources, reshape the countryside (often in a post-productive direction).

Often these in-migrant groups' actions are in conflict with the established residents (for example farmers and other land owners or groups with modest economic resources) and their wishes. The status of certain areas has risen due to the in-migration of relatively affluent and influential groups (i.e. gentrification). The phenomenon is also connected to the concept of the "rural idyll" which represents an idealised image of the countryside as a stable, secure and healthy living environment characterised by good relations with neighbours and community (see, for instance, Little & Austin 1996).

In Sweden there exist both those who view counterurbanisation as a middle class phenomenon (Westlund & Pichler 2000) and those who argue that it is a relatively marginal occurrence, mainly affecting only certain areas (Forsberg 1998, Amcoff 2000). It is likely that some of those who move to the countryside can be classified as middle class, but affluent middle class households cannot be said to be over-represented compared to other groups. On the other hand it cannot be ruled out that some rural areas have undergone a process of gentrification, for example Österlen in southernmost Sweden and certain archipelago areas (Hjort & Malmberg 1996, Forsberg 1998).

Several studies have pointed to the heterogeneity of rural areas and that such areas are a long way from being as homogenous as was often thought (Pacione 1995, Axelsson 1996, Blunden et al. 1998, Forsberg 1998, Pettersson & Westholm 1998). Gade (1991) suggests that there are deviations, with relatively prosperous areas within the mixed and rural regions as well as "pockets of poverty" within the core regions, and that the largest variations in general living conditions are to be expected at both ends of the urban-rural continuum. Some claim that the differences tend to increase and have already resulted in a fragmentary mosaic of different types of countryside (Marsden et al. 1993, Persson & Westholm 1994, Persson & Wiberg 1995, Clout 1996). This development is often placed in connection with the restructuring of the primary industries (primarily the transformation of agriculture), post-Fordism and the tendencies towards a post-productive countryside (Halfacree & Boyle 1998, Marsden 1998). The social composition of the rural areas cannot be said to be homogenous either, and a number of studies during the 1990s have focused on previously neglected groups in the countryside such as low income households, the handicapped, homosexuals, the elderly, children and young people (see, for example, Cloke & Little 1997, Matthews et al. 2000).

The differences between various types of countryside are often related to distance from towns, where areas near towns are commonly characterised by a more dynamic and positive development compared to peripheral rural areas which has often stagnated or developed negatively in terms of number of inhabitants, age distribution and labour market. In Sweden, for example, the

term “urbanised rural area” has been introduced to describe those areas that lie within commuting distance from towns (Johannisson et al. 1989).

The cultural dimension

In some contexts it is claimed that attitudes amongst today’s young people differ from those of previous generations. Andersson et al. (1997), for instance, claim that young people are increasingly characterised by post-materialistic values and aim to live a mobile life in which social relations, internationalism, education and work are of great importance. Ziehe (1991) argue for a “cultural release” and that today’s young people can no longer take their parents as role models for their own lives. This change, he claims, has contributed to increased freedom of choice but also to increased ambivalence (see also Fornäs & Bolin 1995). In other contexts it is asserted that young people seek to escape from small towns and villages, which are seen as “boring” and are instead drawn to the “neon lights” of the cities. Trondman (2000), for instance, argues that young teenagers in small communities are especially critical of their local community.

Another important change is the increase of educational demands (see, for instance, Furlong & Cartmel 1997, Kugelberg 2000, Miles 2000). Many young people therefore see higher education as a necessity in order to compete for attractive jobs. For young people from rural areas, however, the choice of higher education generally means moving to a larger town (Wiborg 2001). Several studies stress the lack of so called “quality jobs” in rural areas or the fact that the local economy in rural areas does not provide for highly educated people (see, for example, Wiberg 1995a, Ericsson & Sjölander 2000, Jentsch & Shucksmith 2001, McGrath 2001).

Fielding (1992) has introduced the term “escalator regions” to describe regions that attract young people by providing the opportunity to progress faster in a career than is possible in other areas. Forsberg (1997) states that Swedish university regions are typical examples of such escalator regions. The fact that metropolitan regions and university cities have gained while sparsely populated areas and industrial communities (even quite large towns) have lost inhabitants suggests that many young people have chosen to move in order to acquire a higher education. Statistical data also shows that young people tend to stay in the regions where they acquired their university education or move to metropolitan regions (Nilsson 2000b).

Many rural areas have a skewed demographic profile with comparatively few young women. It has frequently been argued that rural areas are characterised by distinct gender roles and a society dominated by men, and that this is an

important factor in explaining why young women leave rural areas more often than young men (see, for instance, Gunnarsson 1994, Dahlström 1996, Waara 1996, Wiborg 2001).

Putnam (1993) has stressed the importance of social networks for social involvement and economic development. The social capital to be found in, for example, non-profit organisations forms the basis for relations built on trust and co-operation, which in turn contribute to economic growth. In Sweden there exists a long tradition of organised social activity and, especially in rural areas, many people are actively involved with non-profit organisations of various kinds. An important change towards the end of the 20th century has been that the number of local development groups has dramatically increased. Some of these have sprung from older organisations but completely new groups have also been created whose purpose is to contribute to local development. Such attempts could include trying to influence politicians, communally owning and running the local shop or arranging cultural events. Frequently these organisations have appeared because residents have felt their communities to be under threat. One interpretation is that people are attempting to fill the vacuum public bodies and private companies have left behind when they have made reductions in service accessibility or closed some facility (Westerdahl & Westlund 1997). This development took off during the mid-1980s when many local development groups were founded. At the end of the decade there were around 900 such groups in Sweden, but within another ten years the number was close to 4 000. The so called “countryside movement” is therefore generally considered a new popular movement (Berglund 1998, Herlitz 2000).

During the second half of the 1990s local development groups in certain parts of Sweden have been able to obtain financial support for their activities through the EU’s LEADER-programme for countryside development (see also the later section on entry into the EU and changes in regional development policy). By forming so called Local Action Groups even small and economically weak local development groups have been able to conduct EU-projects (Westholm et al. 1999, Larsson 2000). Between 1996-1999 there were six LEADER-areas in northern Sweden (including Dalarna).

The political dimension

Within the framework of rural restructuring there has also been an interest shown in the ways in which political decisions and the exercise of public authority have affected the development of rural areas. A general trend in many western countries at the end of the 20th century has been towards deregulation (see, for instance, Marsden 1998). Within the public sector in

Sweden there have been important changes during the 1980s and 1990s (SOU 1997:13). During the 1970s public sector employment increased substantially, to be subsequently reduced during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Analyses indicate that small communities and sparsely populated areas have, to a great extent, been negatively affected by these changes during the 1990s. At the same time as there has been a decentralisation of certain state activities, many functions have been concentrated in larger towns and regional centres as a result of reorganisations and cutbacks. Similarly the expansion within the higher education and cultural sectors has primarily been of advantage to regional centres throughout the country. Deregulation has had a significant effect within infrastructure and communications. Generally speaking, these deregulatory measures have negatively affected smaller communities where lack of competition has led to worsened service and/or higher prices. Similar conclusions have been drawn by Hallin et al. (1999) and Johansson et al. (2000).

Persson & Wiberg (1995) claim that Sweden has, during the latter part of the 20th century, undergone a series of changes. In general terms political decisions have been more market orientated. Another significant change has been that the central government has decentralised a number of functions to the municipalities. At the same time as the municipalities have received increased responsibility for their residents' welfare and their own development, many municipalities have ended up in economic difficulties. The authors claim that these two changes will most probably lead to increased differences between different municipalities. Despite the fact that a significant amount of tax revenue is redistributed between rich and poor municipalities there is a clear risk that certain municipalities' economies are drained of resources.

The direction of the Swedish regional development policy has varied somewhat during the second half of the 20th century (see, for example, Hallin & Lindström 1998).⁹ The industrial location policy of the 1960s was intended to encourage companies to choose locations outside major urban centres and thus contribute to a positive development in other parts of the country. During the 1970s the focus was partly moved towards a restructuring of certain branches (principally the steel, shipbuilding and textile industries) and particularly hard hit industrial areas received much attention. In time the goals of the regional policy were widened, from having almost exclusively been concerned with re-localisation of industrial activity to levelling out differences in living standards between different parts of the country. The expansion of

⁹ This section deals primarily with the so called "minor regional policy" which governed directed initiatives to stimulate development in certain geographic areas. The "major regional policy", on the other hand, governed the total resource redistribution between regions via the national budget (SOU 1997:13).

the public sector during the 1970s and 1980s also contributed to this process. During the 1980s a number of infrastructure investments were made, motivated by regional developmental considerations. Furthermore a series of regional higher education facilities were founded.

A great change came, however, with Sweden's entry into the EU in 1995 and access to financial resources in the shape of the EU's structural funds. This meant a substantial increase in the economic resources available for regional policies. A basic idea that has had a great impact is that of partnership between different levels (regional, national and EU) and between different groups (for instance authorities, municipalities, organisations and companies). Whereas regional policy had previously been largely controlled "top-down" by the government, the regional and local influence now increased significantly (see, for example, Hallin & Lindström 1998). Large areas of northern Sweden have been the objects of different Objectives and Community Initiatives since 1995.

The partnership idea also formed the basis for the "regional growth agreements" that were postulated at the end of the 1990s and came into effect in the year 2000. These agreements are intended to co-ordinate the regional policy with other areas of politics, such as labour market, economic development, transportation and education. The hope is that the regional growth agreements will more effectively accommodate the regions' different bases for growth. The regional growth agreements are also to be co-ordinated with the EU's structural programmes (Ds 2001:15).

The break up of the Soviet Union around 1990 came to be of great importance not just for those countries directly affected, but also for global economics and politics. The Baltic region and northern Sweden have been more affected than most by this development. The former Eastern bloc countries (including the Baltic States) liberated themselves and the iron curtain between East and West was torn down. The end of the Cold War also brought about a significant disarmament in the region. In northern Sweden this meant that a number of regiments were disbanded. This development has hit some towns particularly hard, for example Sollefteå and Kiruna.

The great differences in wage levels between east and west means that some labour intensive production can be expected to be moved from Sweden to Eastern European countries. In a similar way the future expansion of the EU can be expected to have consequences for companies' competitiveness, not least in northern Sweden (Eliasson et al. 1999). In northern Sweden we have already seen examples of how electronics manufacturing has been moved from the interior to the Baltic States and Russia. At the same time Sweden have certain comparative advantages within more advanced goods and service

production and in this instance proximity to eastern countries could prove to be a competitive advantage in a global market. This development has also created new possibilities for interaction between East and West, such as: trade, tourism, migration and student exchange.

A reasonably likely scenario is that trade between northern Sweden and northern parts of Russia will increase dramatically over the coming decades. There still exist, however, certain barriers to such a development. Firstly, the economic development within Russia is still weak and the transport infrastructure between countries in the region is underdeveloped. Secondly, there exist a long series of institutional and cultural barriers. Differences in language, legal systems etc. still significantly hinder exchange between Sweden and Russia. Since the mid-1990s there have, however, been attempts to create more contacts between northernmost Sweden (Norrbotten and Västerbotten) and north west Russia within the framework of the Barents co-operation (which also includes northern Finland and Norway) (see, for example, Wiberg 1993, Wiberg 1995b, Svensson 1997, Muilu 2001).

Paper summaries

I Forestry restructuring in northern Sweden

Forestry has traditionally been of great importance for employment in northern Sweden. The structural transformation of the industry gained momentum in connection with forestry mechanisation during the 1950s and 1960s, and since then the importance of the industry for employment has diminished rapidly. The first paper illuminates the changed role of forestry in the local economies of four typical forest municipalities in upper Norrland's inland (see map in Figure 1). The article's analysis principally covers the period 1986-1995.

We state in the paper that the importance of forestry to the local economy has decreased significantly during the period of study. Despite increased logging, employment within forestry has more than halved during the ten-year period, and wage earnings and tax revenues from forestry have reduced to almost the same extent. Multiplier model calculations indicate, furthermore, that local services are negatively affected by this development within forestry. Changes within forestry are simultaneously part of a more sweeping transformation of the economy of northern Sweden. There has been a change from a local economy based on the primary industries (agriculture and forestry) and industrial processing of local raw materials to an economic structure where public and private service industries dominate.

There were, however, differences between the four municipalities, the relatively peripheral mountain municipalities have, for example, been more severely affected by changes within forestry. In these municipalities there now exists a less intensive forestry and large areas have been closed to forestry for environmental or economic reasons. Nearer the coast the development has been towards a more intensive forestry and during the mid-1990s logging increased greatly. This development can also be linked to the ongoing discussion over a growing post-productive countryside. The fact that ever larger areas are protected from traditional forestry, and forestry companies' efforts to conduct a more environmentally friendly forestry, indicates that the image of the forest resource is changing. It is also possible that in time the forest resource will be used, to a greater extent than currently, for more than timber production, for example for recreation and tourism. There are also signs that the role of forest areas as residential environments, primarily within commuting distance of larger towns, will increase in importance. However, the changes in a post-productive direction seem more subtle than those described in the British literature and this difference could perhaps be explained by less competition from alternative land uses in the sparsely populated northern Sweden.

Analyses of the effects of restructuring on individuals indicate a complex situation. A large number of those people who left the forestry sector during the period 1986-1995 began working in other branches (41%). There was also a large number who became long-term unemployed (17%) or who in some other way left the labour market (35%). On the other hand there were relatively few who moved from the municipalities concerned (6%). This latter indicates that the causal link between employment reductions within forestry and out-migration has been weakened compared with the situation during the 1950s and 1960s. It also indicates that sparsely populated municipalities have become successively less vulnerable to further rationalisations within forestry.

The actions of the forestry companies are of great importance to changes within forestry. At the same time as the industry is subjected to increased competition, the Swedish forestry companies have developed into multi-national companies with production in several countries. Imports of roundwood have furthermore increased, mainly from the Baltic States and Russia. The rapid technical development in the field has also brought increased productivity. Some of the changes within forestry can be related to an increasingly post-Fordist production system, for example the forestry companies have externalised parts of their production chains. Nowadays almost all logging is done by private entrepreneurs. At the same time there is a development towards forestry work increasingly being performed by men aged between 25-50 with specialist forestry training.

In conclusion we can state that the restructuring of forestry in northern Sweden has been pushed forward as an adaptation to increased global competition within the industry coupled with a rapid technical development. We can also see clear signs of the growth of a post-Fordist production system within forestry and slight tendencies towards post-productive use of the forest resource.

II Contemporary population changes in north Swedish rural areas

Another aspect of northern Swedish development that has received much attention is demographic change in the region, especially population reductions in the region's inland areas. Depopulation is generally seen both as an indicator of problems in the area and as a circumstance that leads to difficulties in recruiting workers and worsens the basis for local services. In paper II the population changes in the six northernmost counties of Sweden were studied. The paper focuses on development in areas outside larger towns and on the period 1985-1995.

Since the 1990s large areas of northern Sweden have once again begun to lose residents at a rapid pace. The depopulation tendencies in the region's inland areas have increased at the same time as several densely populated coastal municipalities and industrial towns have started to lose residents. During the latter half of the 1990s only a handful of municipalities registered population increases, primarily a number of university and higher education towns. Despite the fact that large parts of northern Sweden experienced a negative population trend there were still rural areas whose populations increased during the period 1985-1995. At the same time it should be noted that many rural areas in northern Sweden have a skewed age distribution with many elderly and that a net in-migration is generally required to avoid depopulation. Northern Sweden thus has both large, sparsely populated areas with reduced populations and rural areas characterised by counterurbanisation tendencies. Later studies, amongst others by Glesbygdsverket (2001), indicate that this development has continued in approximately the same direction after 1995.

The late 1990s population growth in rural areas has primarily been observed close to larger towns. During the period of study, growth generally declined with increasing distance from the centre of the municipality. In northern Sweden the growth zones stretched less far from towns than in the rest of the country. A substantial proportion of the rural areas in northern Sweden that have experienced population growth during the studied period can, in most cases, be grouped into three types according to their relative location and characteristics:

- a) *Rural areas close to cities*: Here we often find a combination of low housing costs (at least in comparison with housing costs in residential districts within the cities) and possibilities for daily commuting to workplaces in the cities. Thus the population growth in these rural areas can be regarded as (extended) suburbanisation. These areas characterised by a relatively high proportion of families with children and, in general, high standards of living.
- b) *Tourist resorts*: In northern Sweden these rural areas are mostly ski-resorts found in the mountainous areas close to the border with Norway. Obviously, tourism and recreation have generated job opportunities in truly peripheral areas. The effects, however, seem to be concentrated in relatively small geographical areas such as single villages or certain mountain valleys. In a sense they can be seen as “urban satellites” attracting visitors and sometimes even young in-migrants from cities and metropolitan regions. This means that some of the most peripheral rural areas have managed better than more common types of rural areas in the interior of northern Sweden.
- c) *Other attractive rural areas*: In this group we often find rural areas with a distinctive historical and cultural heritage combined with an attractive scenic landscape, but also areas with a large proportion of leisure housing (especially along the coast). In these rural areas one can expect a high proportion of households that are not dependent on proximity to large labour markets, for instance, pensioners, distance workers, some self-employed persons and the like.

Of course, there are rural areas where two or more of the above features are combined and that to some extent fit into the above descriptions of all three types. There are, however, some rural areas with population growth that cannot easily be placed in of the above-mentioned categories. In some cases we find individual, successful firms, often small-scale manufacturers, or a history of entrepreneurial traditions in these rural areas.

In conclusion it can be stated that large parts of northern Sweden, at the end of the 20th century, were characterised by noticeable population reductions, but that there were also rural areas where the population increased during the period 1985-1995. There was, however, no general counterurbanisation in northern Sweden, but rather that the population growth in the countryside was mainly concentrated in areas near larger towns and in a number of other, smaller areas. It should also be noted that depopulation tendencies increased during the 1990s and that the increases in certain rural areas in no way balanced the reductions in other parts of northern Sweden. Another phenomenon that the paper brings to attention is that many municipality centres in sparsely populated municipalities, but even reasonably large industrial towns, lost residents rapidly during the 1990s.

III *Microregional fragmentation in a Swedish county*

Sparsely populated regions are often considered to be homogenous but during the 1990s this image has been adjusted by a number of researchers who have called attention to the need for consideration of local differences. Not least the capacities of different environments to attract individuals and companies have been stressed. The third paper is mainly built upon the classification of Västerbotten's around 500 residential areas and villages (microregions) into seven types of housing environment. The article is based on similar data to the preceding paper, but instead of focusing on demographic changes in northern Sweden's rural areas I have, in this article, chosen to present a more detailed picture of intra-regional differences in living conditions both in the countryside and in the towns of a single county.

A so called cluster analysis was conducted to create groups of microregions with similar properties. The variables would reflect microregional living conditions with reference to education, income and employment levels together with health levels and service availability. The data used referred primarily to the first half of the 1990s. The cluster analysis resulted in seven groups that are here presented briefly in descending order of general living conditions (see also map in Figure 3):

- a) *Attractive suburban areas* (15% of the county's population): The cluster consists of residential areas in towns and the population is characterised by consistently high living standards.
- b) *Attractive urban cores* (14%): This type of area is situated in town centres and is inhabited by many elderly and single households.
- c) *Smaller service centres* (27%): This cluster is characterised by mixed housing and the population's living standard is near the county average. The areas are situated either in towns or are medium-sized localities throughout the county.
- d) *Exurban areas* (16%): The cluster mainly consists of countryside within commuting distance of towns. Here there are relatively many families with children. The area type is that which best fits the description "urbanised rural areas" (Johannisson et al. 1989).
- e) *Newly-built urban areas* (10%): The cluster is characterised by apartment-living on the outskirts of larger towns. Compared with other town clusters the average living standard is low. Here there are many young people at the start of their housing careers (mainly students), single parents with children, immigrants and other "marginal groups".

- f) *Deprived rural areas* (14%): These markedly sparsely populated areas are characterised by an ageing population (as a result of long-term out-migration of younger people). The living standard is, generally speaking, low.
- g) *Pronounced wilderness* (3%): These areas lie a long way from larger towns and are extremely sparsely populated. The area type is characterised by the lowest level of living standard. Within the cluster there are two types of area, firstly *ski resorts* with a relatively young population and secondly *truly marginal areas* that are reminiscent of an extreme variant of “deprived rural areas”.

The clusters’ geographical distribution throughout the county indicates both a centre-periphery pattern and a more complex, mosaic like pattern of housing environments. Four of the seven clusters can be said to be urban in character, while three area types can be described as rural. In two of the clusters the average living conditions differ clearly from those of geographically close clusters, and in this way they become deviations in the centre-periphery pattern. The cluster “smaller service centres” consists largely of small towns within the county’s sparsely populated municipalities and forms “islands of welfare”. Nevertheless, these microregions contain a substantial part of the population in the county’s inland areas. The area type “newly-built urban areas” is instead a variant of “pockets of poverty” in the larger towns. The article thus shows that housing segregation is not purely a metropolitan phenomenon but also exists in large towns in northern Sweden. A similar investigation was conducted for the county of Dalarna (Pettersson & Westholm 1998) and since the cluster analysis produced a similar pattern there is good reason to believe that these types of housing environment are also reasonably representative of other counties in northern Sweden (see also Axelsson 1996).

For the variables of disposable income and employment there existed data from 1985 for comparison. Analyses show that the recession that began around 1990 affected employment levels negatively, but that consequences were similar throughout the clusters. The period 1985-1992, however, brought reduced differences in purchasing power between different clusters, that indicates that the transfer systems equalising effects also reduced gaps between different housing environments. This would speak against the hypothesis of increasing microregional differences (Persson & Wiberg 1995), but it is doubtful that one could, from a single variable over so short a time period, draw any certain conclusions as to increased or reduced differences in the county of Västerbotten. The large intra-regional variations between different types of housing environments reinforce, however, the image of rural areas as heterogeneous and the view that there exist great differences in attractiveness and growth potential between different parts of the same county.

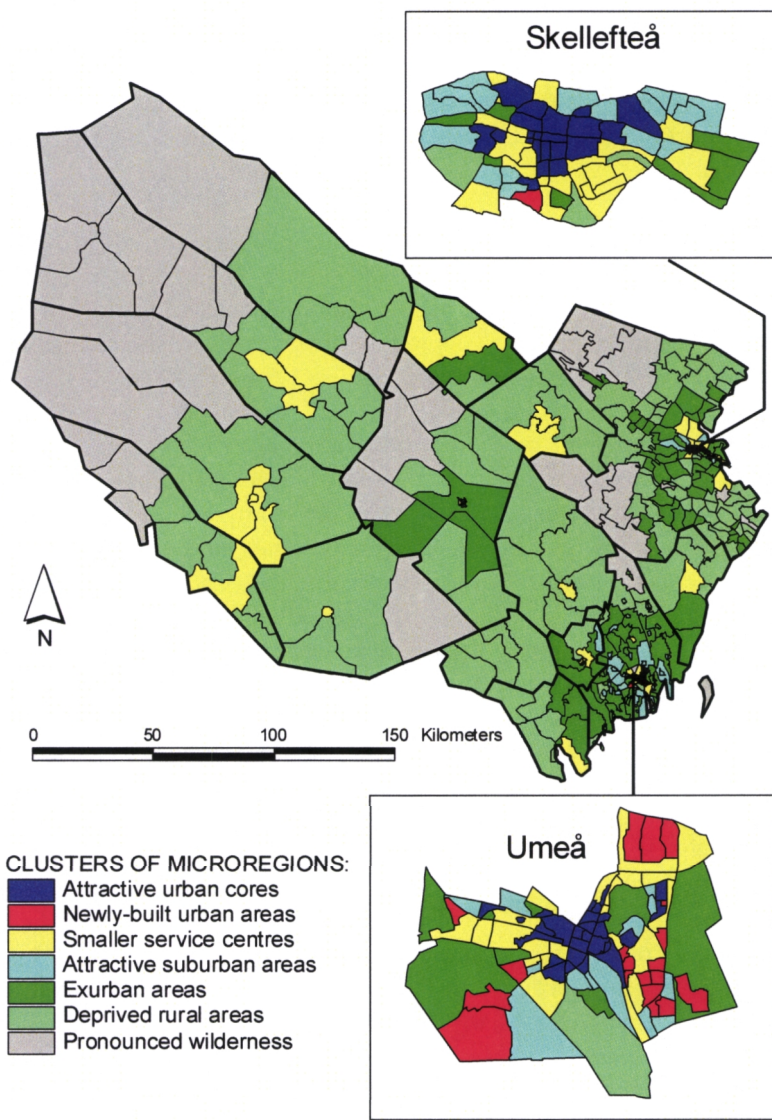


Figure 3: Clusters of microregions in the county of Västerbotten.

IV Young Swedes' attitudes towards rural areas

The ongoing demographic change in northern Sweden can, to a great extent, be connected to the migration of young people. Young people leave sparsely populated areas and move to higher education centres, cities or other countries. According to Persson & Nygren (2001) this development could, in time, threaten the availability of labour in some sparsely populated areas.

Those young people who choose to stay will be needed, declare the authors, to secure public services in the form of schools, healthcare etc. At the same time it can be stated that young people, especially the highly educated, are a mobile key group whose migration patterns are probably affected both by career opportunities and more general values and housing preferences (cf. Garvill et al. 2000).

The fourth and final paper deals with young people's attitudes towards living in rural communities. The study is based on standardised interviews with 400 young people aged 15-25. Half of the respondents lived in the university city of Umeå while the others were residents of five rural municipalities surrounding Umeå. The interviews were conducted in 1998 and 1999.

It is a well-known fact that young people migrate from rural areas to towns and from peripheral and sparsely populated regions to metropolitan regions. In recent years, however, the out-migration from rural areas in Sweden has increased substantially, whereas university cities and metropolitan regions have experienced increased in-migration. In the same way, Umeå has benefited from the university and has experienced substantial net in-migration of young people, though during the last few years out-migration of young people has increased. A substantial proportion of these people have moved to the metropolitan regions of southern Sweden in order to finish their educations elsewhere or to find initial employment.

The paper shows that slightly more than half of the young people living in the rural municipalities wish to stay there. Their motives are mainly the nature, social relations, that they like the atmosphere and feel at home. One third intend to move, emphasising that there is too little to do during their leisure time, that they prefer to live in a city or that they want a shorter distance to services and recreational activities.¹⁰ Among the young people in the university city of Umeå, slightly less than 50% show an interest in moving to the surrounding rural areas. Important motives are the possibility of living close to nature and that they have friends who already live there. Areas close to the city are, however, perceived as much more attractive than the rural municipalities.

¹⁰ By following the same cohort over a time period it is possible to get an idea about the number of people that choose to stay. An analysis of different age groups at different times reveals that almost one-third of the total number of young people in the surrounding municipalities have been lost during a 15-year period. In 1985 there were 415 persons aged 15, whereas in 1999 the number of people aged 29 was 293 (i.e. a reduction by 29 per cent). It is reasonable, however, to argue that a number of young people have returned to these municipalities during the period and that there has also been some in-migration of young people who have not lived in the area earlier. The total amount of young people who have left the surrounding municipalities for at least a short period is thus higher than 29 per cent. In comparison, the number of young people in Umeå increased by 40 per cent (1116 persons aged 15 in 1985 and 1570 aged 29 in 1999). *Source:* Statistics Sweden (2002).

In general, young adults aged 19-25 are much more positive towards living in rural communities than teenagers aged 15-18. Teenagers are usually more negative towards their present place of residence. Instead, they are attracted to large cities and foreign countries. A common opinion is that the rural municipalities offer too little in terms of education, job opportunities and recreational activities. In spite of this, some of them are willing to return when they have completed their education and are establishing a family. It is also noteworthy that the interest in living in rural areas seems to increase when young people look to their own futures. The paper also stresses the importance of social relations. Friends and relatives already living in rural areas are frequently mentioned as reasons as to why specific places are considered attractive. In many cases, "roots" are important, both for those who want to stay and for those who consider returning.

The findings give some support to theories claiming that young people aim at a mobile life where formal education, social relations and internationalism are of substantial importance. Quite a number of adolescents declare that they wish to travel, experience other parts of the world and get to know other cultures. It is also apparent that many young people of today choose to acquire a university degree and experience of living outside the places where they grew up. These decisions are often based on an opinion that the place where they grew up is too small and thereby limits their own development and chances of a richer life. This implies that young people are characterised by both post-materialistic and materialistic values (cf. Andersson et al. 1997, Kugelberg 2000). Clearly, the concept of "escalator regions" is useful. In this way, Umeå provides an opportunity to obtain a university degree, whereas the possibilities of finding initial employment are often better in the metropolitan regions. In fact, when young people in Umeå look at their own futures an absolute majority intend to move, for example, to another medium-sized city in Sweden, the metropolitan regions or another country. Only 16% state that they wish to stay in Umeå. This indicates that even the fastest expanding city in northern Sweden could be facing future difficulties in maintaining population growth.

Discussion

The image of northern Sweden as a land of the future has successively altered and the dominant impression nowadays is that of a region with depopulation problems and support dependence. A more detailed description of northern Sweden's development shows, however, that the picture is a complex one with great variation within the area. It is therefore reasonable to point out in this concluding discussion both positive and negative elements in the region's transformation. There is also much that indicates the value of analysing the

development of northern Sweden from the perspective of rural restructuring. One of the advantages of this approach is the attempt to relate changes in rural areas to national and global processes, instead of focussing purely on the local and regional aspect. At the same time it should be remembered that places and regions are characterised by more or less unique combinations of features and that the local and regional consequences of national and global changes can therefore differ markedly. Several of the processes that have contributed to changes are, however, relatively slow which gives reason to question the presence of dramatic shifts in development (cf. Hoggart & Paniagua 2001a). At the same time there is a risk that one underestimates the importance of slow changes. From the perspective of a generation ago it is clear that northern Sweden has undergone significant changes within society, although these changes are not as dramatic and wide-ranging as those that have occurred in Eastern Europe at the close of the 20th century.

The restructuring of northern Sweden

During the final decades of the 20th century northern Sweden has undergone a long series of changes. Not least the globalisation of the economy and tendencies towards reduced political control from the national level have affected this development. Many of the changes can also be related to Sweden's transformation from an industrial to a post-industrial society. The restructuring of the economy has brought considerable job losses within industries based on local natural resources. Furthermore, during the 1990s there have been significant cuts made within the public sector. While there have been increases in employment opportunities in other industries, primarily the private service sector, this expansion has mainly occurred in metropolitan regions.

The growing post-industrial society places high demands on its residents' educational levels. During the 1990s the tendency has been for more young people to go on to higher education, which, at the same time, is an important explanation as to why an increasing number of young people have moved from sparsely populated municipalities and industrial towns to university and higher education centres. This trend does not apply simply to northern Sweden but is seen in large parts of the country. The phenomenon can be related to theories regarding so called escalator regions (Fielding 1992, Forsberg 1997). The escalator theory also explains why many young people have subsequently moved on to cities where the opportunities to obtain employment and make a career have generally been better. It should at the same time be stressed that migration now seems to occur on a more voluntary basis than during previous decades, when the availability of employment had a more

direct effect on migration patterns. During the 1990s people moved primarily in order to change environment or to educate themselves (Garvill et al. 2000). Many of Sweden's municipalities outside of university and metropolitan areas are still characterised by a low level of education despite the appearance of a number of regional higher education facilities during the last two decades of the 20th century. The insufficient supply of highly educated workers is often considered a hindrance to these municipalities taking the next step into the knowledge-society. The low level of education has, however, several causes. One important factor is that there is only a limited demand for highly educated workers from the private sector (cf. Ericsson & Sjölander 2000). Furthermore, there often exists an imbalance, seen in the need to recruit personnel for certain positions at the same time as individuals with another form of higher education have difficulty finding employment. This type of imbalance occurs in many parts of Sweden but tends to be particularly problematic in smaller places where there, in most cases, only exist a few positions within each occupational group. In this way the possibilities for highly educated individuals to move to small municipalities are also rather limited. In order to address some of these problems decentralised higher education and distance courses have been made available in some areas, but it is too early to assess the effects of such efforts (cf. Asplund 2000, Asplund 2001). Another possible aspect is that many young people do not want the jobs that are on offer in smaller places. The positions that are available within the primary industries and the public sector do not seem to attract young people to any great extent (see, for example, Ek 2001). Attitude studies and choice of education suggest rather that today's young people wish to work within branches which primarily exist in larger towns.

Against this background it is not surprising that many sparsely populated municipalities and industrial towns around Sweden have experienced population reductions while metropolitan regions and university cities have grown. The out-migration of young people has, furthermore, reinforced the natural population decreases caused by the out-migration of previous decades. At the same time one should keep in mind that the population of Sweden has been relatively constant in recent years. Few children are born and without immigration the population would decline. The weak national population growth means that municipalities and regions must, to a greater and greater extent, compete for the relatively limited number of people who are prepared to move, and that far from all municipalities and regions can be winners in such competition. It should also be pointed out that there exists a conflict of interests between, on the one hand, the ambitions of sparsely populated municipalities to maintain population levels by reducing out-migration of young people and, on the other hand, young people's ambitions to improve their own situation and career opportunities.

The renewed depopulation tendencies during the late 20th century have put stress on the municipal structure in northern Sweden. There are signs which indicate that population levels in the smallest municipalities are passing a lower limit for a minimum size while still offering residents an acceptable service standard, at least in relation to the obligations that municipalities have today. The reduced population basis has meant that the amalgamation of municipalities is once again being discussed, but great distances and local resistance limit the prospects of such solutions. Furthermore, the principal towns of many sparsely populated municipalities have lost inhabitants during the 1990s. These towns have, for decades, been the municipalities' key areas for the provision of services and employment opportunities. When these towns are pulled into the negative population trend there is an obvious risk that the entire municipality is affected, i.e. the surrounding sparsely populated areas also. In Finland, for example, the political decision has been made to invest in a number of regional centres as one aspect in the creation of a more robust structure to meet new conditions of competition affecting both companies and households (Knudsen 2001).

This thesis shows that despite the generally negative population development in northern Sweden there are towns and rural areas which are developing in a positive direction. Besides university cities and higher education centres certain rural areas have experienced population growth and this is primarily a phenomenon affecting countryside at a comfortable commuting distance from larger towns. In such places it is possible to combine country living with the town's range of services and job opportunities. Additionally there is a number of attractive rural areas beyond commuting distance from larger towns, particularly along the coast and in mountainous areas. These latter have taken advantage of activities connected in one way or another with tourism and recreation, but it seems that most of this effect is geographically concentrated to a few villages and mountain valleys. Here the depopulation has been turned into population growth and rejuvenation. The success of these areas can also be interpreted as the investments made in the tourism industry having had, at least in some areas, the desired result.

One conclusion in the thesis is that municipalities and towns offer a wide range of different housing environments. Even within towns it is possible to find several types of residential areas each with its own appeal to different population groups. Two of the articles have shown that the use of micro-regional data and GIS can be useful in these situations. At the same time a more varied picture of local living conditions can be obtained than the relatively uninformative patterns produced by municipal or county statistics. Together with the surrounding countryside, towns can offer residents and

potential in-migrants a wide range of housing environments, from dense urban areas to picturesque villages and scenic countryside areas. It would therefore be of interest to attempt to identify such areas, and also to find out more about what it is that makes these housing environments attractive to different groups. From a planning perspective it ought to be of particular interest to be able to map certain key groups' housing preferences, for example young, highly educated and creative people, families with children and affluent retired people. Such knowledge could then be used to reinforce and create attractive housing environments.

In a more overarching development strategy for northern Sweden it could be meaningful to discuss so called development corridors. The ideas are put forward within the work for a spatial planning in the European Union (European Commission 1999, Wiberg 2002). For centuries the majority of the population of northern Sweden have lived along the coast. The colonisation of inland upper Norrland took place initially from coastal areas up along river valleys (Bylund 1956).¹¹ A large proportion of the inland population is still concentrated to the river valleys. There exist in this way "natural" corridors which, in modern times, have been strengthened with, amongst other things, roads and railways (see also the map in Figure 2). These corridors thus bind together a great number of small and large places into everyday arenas for commuting, service journeys and social contacts. The planned Bothnia Line can be seen as an attempt to, by means of a railway near the coast for high-speed passenger transport, reinforce the corridor along the Norrland coast. With the growing demands for mobility and accessibility, strategic investments in particularly important corridors can possibly stimulate growth and lay the foundation for a more robust structure in northern Sweden.

A future for the north?

In "The Land of the Future" prosperity was to be based on local natural resources but today we see that the primary industries have been heavily rationalised and only contribute to a lesser extent towards employment and welfare in northern Sweden. Instead the development has been towards a knowledge society where education, creativity and communications are important ingredients of success. In northern Sweden the development strategies at the end of the 20th century have often been about copying external solutions or taking over activities that have been moved out of the metropolitan regions. The disadvantage of such strategies is that the area always risks lagging behind in development. Against this background there can

¹¹ It should, however, be pointed out that prior to colonisation there existed a Sami population in the area, and also that a significant proportion of the in-migration was from areas that are today in Finland (Bylund 1956).

be reasons for considering alternative or complementary development strategies. One such strategy would be to attempt to make use of more permanent regional and local qualities. The future may lie in a creative use of northern Sweden's comparative advantages in terms of, for example, sparse population and climate together with a relatively clean and unexploited environment. Car testing facilities in several areas in inland upper Norrland, the Ice Hotel in Jukkasjärvi and a number of space related activities in Kiruna are just a few examples of areas where existing local conditions have been used in new and creative ways.

There is also reason to avoid overemphasising the negative tendencies. Despite dramatic job losses within the primary industries there are few signs that these industries will completely cease to exist in northern Sweden. On the contrary more timber is felled than previously and new mines are opened at about the same rate as old ones are closed. Forestry still generates revenue for forest owners who, in many cases, are individuals who live on or close to the property. Forestry is also of importance to the national economy and the export of forestry products gives considerable net income in terms of the balance of trade. Forestry, furthermore, has shown itself to have great endurance and over the centuries the main areas of application have changed from charcoal and tar to sawn goods and paper (Layton 1981).

Finally, it can be claimed that even if population reductions in inland northern Sweden continue at the same rate as during the 1990s the area will continue to be populated for the foreseeable future. Phrases along the lines of "will the last person to leave please turn off the lights" are still a long way from being a reality in the majority of places in northern Sweden. The general trend also points towards an increasing importance of residential preferences in determining where people settle, while classic migration factors such as, for example, the availability of job opportunities seem to decline in importance. It is, however, too early to predict the long-term consequences this development may have for northern Sweden. On the other hand it is clear that there exists in many areas a desire for, and a local commitment to contribute to, an improved development. Possibly this desire and commitment can be interpreted as the belief in northern Sweden as a land of the future never really having disappeared.

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Appendix – Map showing the municipalities of northern Sweden

Municipalities ordered by county.

Dalarna

- 1 Avesta
- 2 Borlänge
- 3 Falun
- 4 Gagnef
- 5 Hedemora
- 6 Leksand
- 7 Ludvika
- 8 Malung
- 9 Mora
- 10 Orsa
- 11 Rättvik
- 12 Smedjebacken
- 13 Säter
- 14 Vansbro
- 15 Älvdalen

Gävleborg

- 16 Bollnäs
- 17 Gävle
- 18 Hofors
- 19 Hudiksvall
- 20 Ljusdal
- 21 Nordanstig
- 22 Ockelbo
- 23 Ovanåker
- 24 Sandviken
- 25 Söderhamn

Västernorrland

- 26 Härnösand
- 27 Kramfors
- 28 Sollefteå
- 29 Sundsvall
- 30 Timrå
- 31 Ånge
- 32 Örnsköldsvik

Jämtland

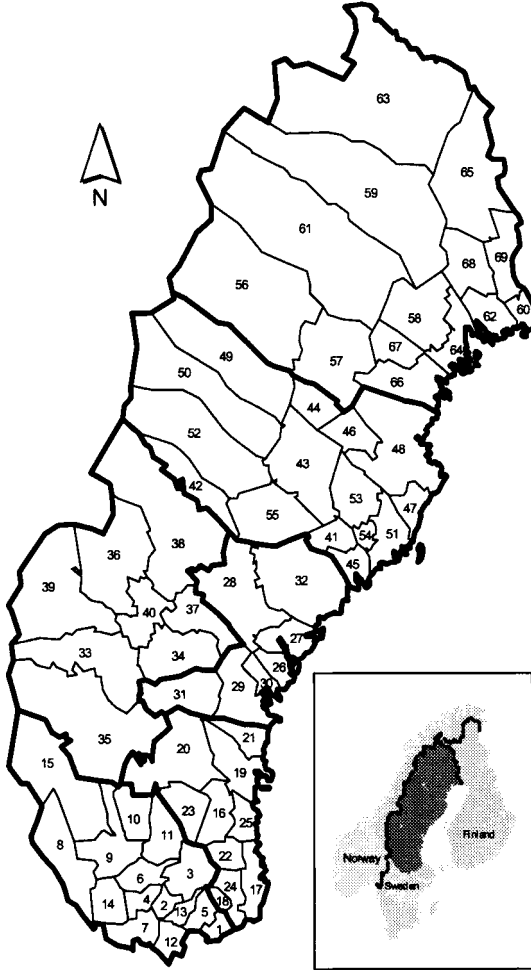
- 33 Berg
- 34 Bräcke
- 35 Härjedalen
- 36 Krokom
- 37 Ragunda
- 38 Strömsund
- 39 Åre
- 40 Östersund

Västerbotten

- 41 Bjurholm
- 42 Dorotea
- 43 Lycksele
- 44 Malå
- 45 Nordmaling
- 46 Norsjö
- 47 Robertsfors
- 48 Skellefteå
- 49 Sorsele
- 50 Storuman
- 51 Umeå
- 52 Vilhelmina
- 53 Vindeln
- 54 Vännäs
- 55 Åsele

Norrbottn

- 56 Arjeplog
- 57 Arvidsjaur
- 58 Boden
- 59 Gällivare
- 60 Haparanda
- 61 Jokkmokk
- 62 Kalix
- 63 Kiruna
- 64 Luleå
- 65 Pajala
- 66 Piteå
- 67 Älvsbyn
- 68 Övertalix
- 69 Övertorneå



County boundaries
 Municipalities

0 100 200 300 Kilometers

