Rural youth, nature orientation and strategies of sustainability

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Representations: periphery as problem

- Resten av Sverige:
  - https://www.svtplay.se/klipp/10449283/resten-av-sverige

- How can people live, work and what they think about themselves?

- No hope: absence of opportunities

- Remaining local has become synonymous with precarity and social exclusion (Farrugia 2005; Shucksmith 2004.)

- ”In public discourse, men living in the rural North are often represented as marginalised losers.” (Stenbacka 2011; Aure & Munkeford 2015)

- “The North represents the natural past, a kind of primordial reference of a people struggling with nature” (Eder 2006, 265; Nyseth & Granás 2007, 10.)
Most rural communities in the Nordic Arctic share their fate with Europe’s Northern periphery in that demographic development is characterized by a population decline that has been going on for decades.

It is often difficult to get skilled young people that have moved away and obtained an education to come back to help create growth and optimism.

(Nordregio policy brief 2015:4)
Forgotten minority? Young people in remote villages and municipal welfare services- research project (1.9.2015-31.8.2016) Mikkeli University of Applied Sciences and University of Eastern Finland. Funding: KAKS and MAMK Research group: Päivi Armila, Ville Pöysä (UEF) and Jussi Ronkainen, Sari Tuuv-Hongisto (MAMK)

The project explores rural young people’s lives that are shaped by sparse opportunities: their experiences living in a remote village, their education possibilities, experiences of welfare services, social relations, leisure opportunities and future dreams.

"The frontier of sustainability transitions: Cultural adaptations of sustainability policies in European peripheral regions."

Subproject: Success stories of sustainability in peripheral regions - concentrates of the green growth promises at the northern peripheries
Living in remote villages-interviews

- Methodology: multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995) – ethnographic thematic interviews in remote villages in eastern Finland
- 28 interviews, young people aged 14-17
- Research sites in eastern Finland, sparsely populated rural and remote areas, long distances to centers (20-50 kilometres to schools, commercial and municipal services)
What peripheries?

- Geographical distance: 20-50 kilometres to the nearest “centers” were the services and schools situated.

- Cultural distance: Peripheries, margins, frontiers, edges, hinterlands, outbacks: negative cultural, social and historical stigma.

- Images of backwards outbacks, double-peripheries with multiple and manyfold problems and remote villages at the edges of cities.

- Spatial dimension: at side, at edges, at marginal.

- In relation to the centre, not essentially marginal, relational marginality.

- Young people at the centre?
"I have many times thought, that is good to live here at the periphery"

– girl 17 years
"I like the place were I live, I can be free there, and I can think what I want. I have always been quite strong persona, and then, well, I can be there in the nature like I want to be, and I think it is like, it’s free and releasing, to live in a place where is no others, and on the other hand I have not used to live in place where is also others."

– girl15years
"Well I have always thought that when I have lived my youth in quiet place, so then I will move to Lapland or stay here (at Kainuu). But I will not, I do not want to live in city or in the south. I have noticed in the trips for example in the summer to Helsinki, and then when I came back I had to go the forest for couple of days, to the wilderness cabin and wander at the forests, and I needed to relax and calm down."

– boy 16years
"Y: Yes, this is very important, good and special place for me.

I: What makes this as good place?

Y: Well, here is so much space, for example for walks, and here is still so much forests, and we have a lake near by, and this is just so good place to live in.

– boy, 14 years.
Home at the margins

- Home, family, everyday life, own life’s centre where present all the important things

- Space and nature as opportunity and for meaningful activity: walking, climbing, fishing, playing, hobbying, or just being

- Nature, peace and quiet, space -> closeness to the nature, images of purity, security, and freedom -> ideal and perfect place to grow up

- Rural idyll, nostalgic and prevailing nature discourse: rural places as reserves of traditions, continuity and history away from the pressures of modern world

- Familiarity and safety

- Home: rural youth spend lot of time at home by themselves or with family
I: Do you like this village, Koivula?

Y: Yes, I do.

I: Does it feel like home?

Y: Yes.

I: What then, when you finish your high school, what happens then in the relation to Koivula?

Y: Then I have to leave, probably

— girl 17 years
Mobility imperative for rural youth (Farrugia 2015)

- The structural: education and work opportunities are concentrated in urban centres -> structural inequality

- The symbolic: city is the place where modern life happens: rural places are associated with nature, urban with culture

- The non-representational: embodied attachments to place within rural body-space assemblages: feelings of comfort and belonging to landscape

David Farrugia: The mobility imperative for rural youth: the structural, symbolic and non-representational dimensions rural youth mobilities. –Journal of Youth Studies. 2015
Mobility imperative

- Non-representational, affective dimensions
- Refer to embodied and affective entanglements between young people and the spaces and places which contribute to the formation of their subjectivities (Thrift 2008)
- Place attachments are established through practices, or concrete, socially situated activities which produce an affective, co-constitutive relationship between place and body
- Place attachment within rural body-space assemblage
- Embodied feelings of comfort and belonging to landscape as central dimensions of their relationship to their communities and local places
- Emerged form practices which young people established an affective relationship to place, including farm work or leisure activities -> bodily hexis
- Unfamiliar space of the city: uncomfortable, feeling that something is out of place: themselves
Close to the nature – the nature relation of rural youth?

Nature and environment as free and uncontrolled space: self made hobbies and activities
Leisure activities at forests and nature
Physical activities, doing things at nature
Growing to the nature: fathers and masculinity
Difficult to think living without nature
Nature relation?

- Trational nature relation: farmers and their land (maahenki), agribusiness, nature as resource, active making and doing, source of livelihood, living environment, background for hobbies and activities, rural relation

- Green relation to nature: environmental, green discourse, protection of nature, nature-hobby, outdoor living, urban relation,

- -> affective relation to nature?
NSPA: Strong, Specific and Promising

“The regions of northern Finland, Norway and Sweden have many common circumstances such as sparse population, harsh climate and long distances. This part of Europe is also specifically affected by globalisation, energy-supply, climate change and demographic change. The region has a population density of only 4.9 inhabitants per km², something that cannot be found in any other part of the European Union.”
The northern sparsely populated areas (NSPA) of Finland, Norway and Sweden are becoming increasingly important to the geopolitical and economic interests of these countries and the European Union (EU). The NSPA regions are located on the periphery of Europe and are part of Europe’s gateway to the Arctic and eastern Russia. A changing climate, access to hydrocarbon and mineral resources, and shifts in relations with Russia are changing the political and economic landscape. The sustainable development of these regions is crucial to managing such strategic risks and opportunities.

The challenges in the northern regions are not of a pure temporary nature, but are more or less permanent. The main problem in the least populated regions is often a lack of profitable projects. In addition, without a sufficient population level, the area would not be able to provide, or attract, a work force able to handle the challenges ahead. Maintaining a skilled work force is essential to be able to exploit the natural resources like forestry, petroleum and minerals, which is needed for the future growth of Europe.
Success stories of sustainability in peripheral regions

- Sustainability, green growth and bioeconomy are recent years buzzwords. There are high expectations towards bioeconomy and the advance of green growth appears to be the promise of the future. The expectations and promises focusses especially to the north, peripheral and resource-rich regions.

- The subproject concentrates on the green growth promises at the northern peripheries.
Nature orientation- Promissory construct?

- how nature-orientation is now used as *promissory construct*?
- Bare life – immersive experiences – produced enhanced nature (Thrift 2007)
- Governing narratives
- Cultural scripts