



CoP Public Infrastructure and Social Services

Example of Good Practice

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Multilocality – underlines use of regions as a starting point for regional planning and development

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1. Introduction

Urbanization, i.e. the increasing number of urban dwellers is a global trend. It is not often considered in public debate that cities could have seasonal or part-time populations. With multilocality, people moving and living temporarily in many places outside cities over the year, population statistics overestimate urban and underestimate rural populations. Multilocality has been internationally studied during the last few decades especially in the research fields of migration and mobility, living and leisure, developing countries, social sciences and family studies (Wood et al. 2015). At its simplest, multilocality means that people have more than one place of residence. However, multilocality may consist of e.g. traveling, using services, working, hobbies, experiences and living in different places. It is related to globalization, increased labor market flexibility, and the growth of household wealth and change in family structures. The phenomenon is accelerated by digitalization that enables time- and place-independent work.

Multilocality is a common phenomenon in Finland. For example, in a survey by the Finnish Innovation Fund, Sitra, in their Maamerkit programme in 2011, 38% of respondents regarded themselves as both urban and rural at the same time (Haukkala 2011). The rural areas of Finland are linked especially closely to multilocality through the rural identity, telework, summer cottages and the leisure activities which take place in the rural area.

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The major explanation for the importance of multilocality in Finland is the high number of summer cottages (more than 500 000) compared with the number of population (5.5 million). The number of summer residents has multiplied within a few decades (Adamiak et al. 2016) and it has been estimated that about 2.2 million Finns regularly spend their time in rural areas, in average 79 days annually (Mökkibarometri = Summer Cottage Barometer 2016). In the near future, multilocality is predicted to increase further. This is supported by studies in which it is predicted that living in well-equipped summer houses as well as multilocality of living and working in general will increase in the future (Heinonen & Ruotsalainen 2011; Rissanen et al. 2013; Lehtonen et al. 2019).

Multilocality is about grassroots interaction between rural and urban areas. In the context of public infrastructure and services it is important to notice that multi-local and seasonal population forms a large group of people, who also need services outside their official place of residence. It is also important to notice that multilocality is not a simple matter of rural-urban interaction, but a multiform phenomenon that integrates urban and rural residents into both directions. Some rural residents have second homes in the cities, some urban inhabitants may have apartments in other cities or abroad, etc. We concentrate here on the seasonal multilocality based on summer cottages since it is the most important form of multilocality in Finland, and in line of the focus of the ROBUST project.

Our future society cannot be based on the idea of people having a single workplace and place of residence. This should also be highlighted in the public debate when considering what kind of society and under what conditions we are building in policymaking.

2. Project Intention / Background information

Multilocality is different in urban and rural areas, as urban living is often linked to work, study, family reasons and relationships, but in rural areas the phenomenon focuses, in particular, on leisure and seasonal living. Multilocality should be recognized and the conditions for living should be developed at both ends - rural and urban. As already mentioned, it is estimated that 2,4 million Finns are seasonal residents. This population is made up of people who live part of the year outside their registered place of residence, in practice mostly in their summer cottages. The seasonal population has increased because both the number of summer cottages and the time spent there have increased in recent decades.

The importance of the seasonal population is different for the regions (figure 1). According to population statistics, for example, the county of South Savo (Lake Saimaa area) has approximately 145,000 inhabitants on the last day of December in official statistics, but the average number of inhabitants in July is 80,000 more. In addition, during midsummer, the population of South Savo is estimated to double. Problems of regional equality related to multilocality stem from the fact that in South Savo, for example, the cumulative use of 418,000 people during the year is beyond the reach of traditional statistics.

The South Savo case demonstrate the situation that the use of rural areas in Finland has not taken into account in the planning of the society.

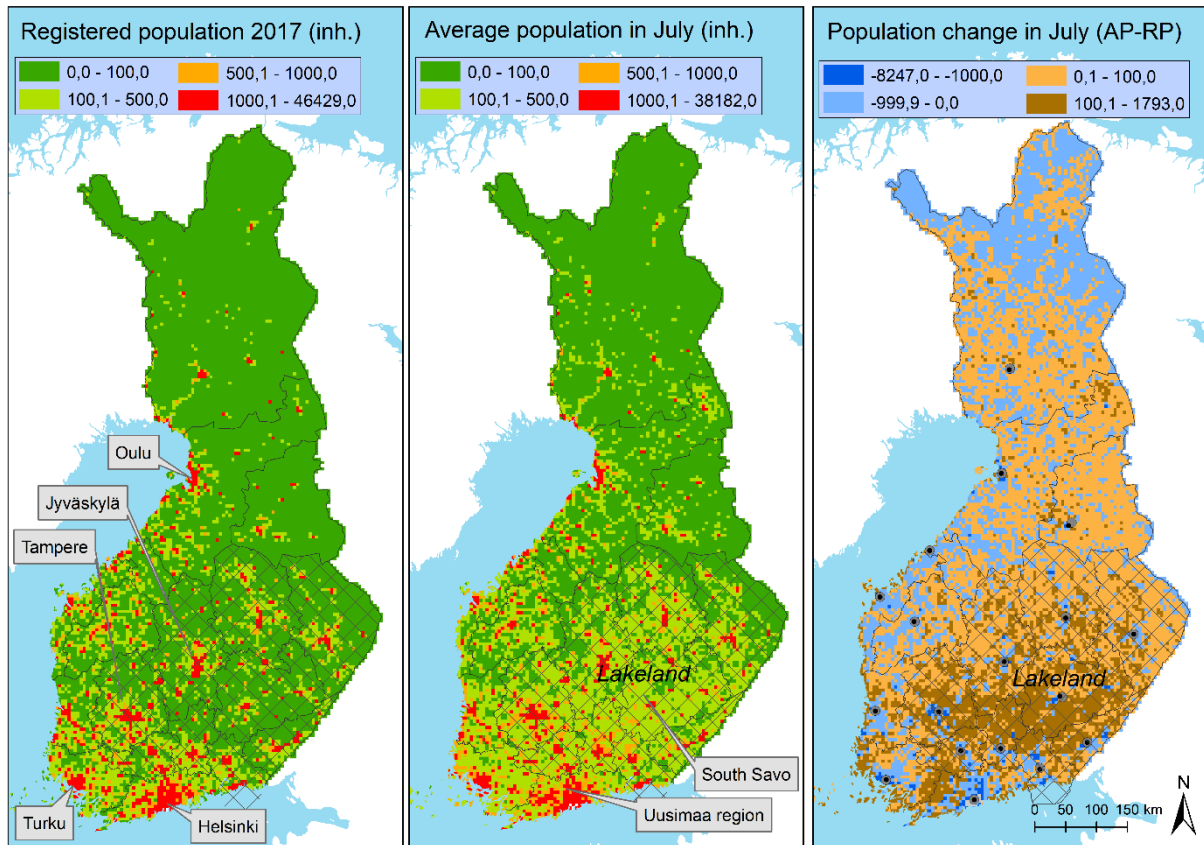


Figure 1. Registered population, estimated average population and their change in July 2017.

The government supports commuting, second homes (for work), home offices etc. with tax deductions. The municipal taxation system in Finland is based on a single and permanent place of domicile: all the municipal taxes are paid there and they are used for financing the public services for the local people, like health and social services. Multilocal people and families may spend even several months annually in the municipality they have their summer cottage, but they do not pay taxes there and so take not part to financing the public services. This is a problem connected with the use of official statistics based on only one place of residence for people as a base of social and regional planning and resource allocation. These statistics do not recognize seasonal populations. Therefore, these people are neglected in the area when planning infrastructure, public services or distributing, for example, rural development money. Current regional policy and planning favor urban areas as it ignores seasonal mobility.

3. Main Description

Multilocality offers an alternative perspective to the current debate on urbanization and population concentration. It means that the use of (rural) areas has changed its nature over time. Consequently, the relationship between seasonal use and statistical use of areas in society and its development has become relevant. The issue will be even more prominent in the future if multi-local living and time- and place-independent work become more common.

If the aim is to increase regional equitability in the planning of society, recognizing multilocality and seasonal / part-time use of the areas as an important aspect in the rural-urban integration gives one opportunity to advance this aim. This requires better understanding how areas are used at different times of the year. Therefore, consideration should be given to the need for (regional) policies that take into account the fact, that multi-local people also live and work outside urban areas for a long period of time, even though formally their place of residence is in the cities. The possibility of teleworking contributes to social, economic and ecological sustainability as it enables the revitalization of rural areas and reduces the number of cars travelling to city offices. On the other hand, the employer can save in office costs.

A challenge is that developments in official statistics and related practices do not follow the changes in regional behavior and mobility very slowly, if at all. Official statistics should increase the recognition of multilocality as part of regional development, and thus integrate it more closely into society. However, regardless of slow progress in the statistics, there are some practical societal and work-related examples of actions supporting multilocality. For instance, at the moment time- and place-independent teleworking is based on an agreement between employers and employees (including state/government as an employer). Moreover, the government supports commuting, second homes (for work), home offices etc. with tax deductions. Otherwise multilocality is still neglected but should be better taken into account in regional development and service planning. To conclude, as yet multilocality is not recognized in statistics that form the basis for planning. Sustainable multilocality requires, for example, services or infrastructure with scalable solutions and systems that adapt more dynamically to changing demand over time (e.g. social and health services, energy production, food, waste, transport).

4. References

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