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Snapshot: Expressions of Urban – Peri-Urban – Rural Relationships

Rural Barometer 2014: Urban-rural identity of Finns

Helsinki city-region, Finland

1. Brief Description

Finland is one of the most rural countries in Europe and according to the Rural Barometer (2014) Finns have quite positive views of the countryside. Most Finns attach to the countryside things like authenticity, freedom, openness and communality. The countryside is thus seen as a pleasant environment and, in a word, as a place for a good life. A fresh identity study of the Finnish Cultural Foundation and Think Tank e2 shows that the identities of Finns are also surprisingly similar irrespective of sex, age, the place of residence or political views, for example (Pitkänen & Westinen, 2018).

According to the Rural Barometer 2014, the number of Finns who identified as both rural and urban has grown. Four out of ten Finns have this dual identity and it is not directly related to the place of residence. There are also some “urban-like” residents who live in the countryside, and even more “rural-like” people living in the cities. Those who have dual identity are found both in cities and rural areas. Two out of ten respondents in the Barometer identified themselves as rural people and four out of ten as urban people. “Either/or” thinking is somewhat more common in rural areas than in town. In this respect, the countryside close to cities differs from other countryside, since only 42% of the respondents living there identified themselves as rural people.

2. Questions and/or Challenges

- > How to take urban-rural dual identity into account in planning?

Rural Barometers do not have direct connection to regional and urban planning since they are not a part of the statistical information provided by the formal planning system. However, the results at least partly challenge the prevailing planning paradigm, where cities and countryside are often handled separately.

“Interaction policy” addressing rural and urban issues simultaneously in Finland is weakly developed, even if it would be very desirable given the rurality of the country

and the scattered population structure (Saartenoja 2004). In decision-making and regional policy in Finland over the last few decades, strong emphasis has been placed on the development of central regions. This, however, seems to be somewhat contradictory with how the Finns identify themselves on the urban-rural axis.

> How to balance location of jobs and housing preferences?

The results of the Rural Barometer on the dual identity of Finns are related to the overall picture that has long been prevailed in Finnish regional development: jobs are more focused than housing. The regional and population structure of Finland is very sparse and the population has strongly concentrated during the last few decades to the centres, where most of the new enterprises and jobs are created. At the moment there are only five growing major city regions: Helsinki, Tampere, Turku, Oulu and Jyväskylä. Of them, only Oulu is located far from the “growth zone” of southern Finland (about 600 km). In the vision of the regional structure of Finland for the year 2050, however, the country will be polycentric and there will be opportunities to live also in the lower level centres and in the countryside (Uusiutumiskykyinen ja mahdollistava Suomi..., 2015).

People can influence their place of residence more than their place of work. Finnish urban-rural dual identity would require creating jobs in places other than in the central regions. If the work becomes more independent of the location and if there is a functioning infrastructure in the countryside, there are a lot of potential migrants to the rural areas of Finland. The well-being felt by them would be improved on the basis of the Barometer's answers.

3. Main Insights

3.1. Indications of the application of the new concept of 'New Localities'

The dual identity common among the Finns both in urban and rural areas clearly reinforces the idea of the New Localities concept that space is relative, not absolute. There are many people and families living in cities that have close links to the countryside, for example through summer cottages. Similarly, in rural areas, many identify themselves as urban. This scene actually challenges the entire rural-urban dichotomy.

An example of this set of attitudes can be found in a question of Rural Barometer 2014, which explored the desired future direction for the development of the community structure of Finland. The respondents were given two statements that asked their opinion on the restriction of construction in sparsely populated areas on the one hand and on the question of whether the growth of urbanization should be restricted in their neighboring (rural) areas on the other.

The majority of Finns (59%) objected to both measures. In addition, the survey showed that 88% of Finns supported people's right to live where they wanted. The same opinion in replies prevailed regardless of the respondent group and their political views. Of the respondent groups, among experts were the most who thought that there was some reason for limiting construction, but even among them, the supporters of the restriction were clearly a minority.

In the light of this Barometer, the explanation for opposing the restriction of construction, especially in rural areas, can be considered from two perspectives. First, people can experience that rural living increases their wellbeing. It may be due to space and peace, as well as a simpler way of life and the value of nature. These are meanings that GDP does not measure, but which are reflected in health and well-being. If people could choose, they would live more broadly and naturally. They do not see why, in a country like Finland where space is not a scarce resource, it should not be used.

Second, the majority of Finns do not share the view that a dense urban structure in cities would be more environmentally-friendly than the sparsely populated rural areas. According to the Barometer, 79% of Finns attach the environmentally friendly lifestyle to the countryside either quite a lot, much or very much. Only 24% of the respondents felt the same way about cities.

3.2. Insights related to the broad area of 'Smart Development'

In Finland, strategies for Smart Specialization have been prepared in all provinces. Also the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region has a strategy “Älykäs erikoistuminen Uudellamaalla – Aluekehityksen tutkimus- ja innovaatiostrategia 2014–2020” (Research and Innovation Strategy based on Smart Specialization - RIS3; Helsinki Smart Region ...). It is closely linked to the Europe 2020 strategy and the policy and financial instruments supporting it. The content of the RIS3 strategy and its future focus on the implementation of most the important measures is the responsibility of the Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council.

The regional Smart Specialization strategies are a relatively new tool for regional governance in Finland. Their effect on regional development, especially in the areas outside the central regions, cannot yet be evaluated. However, smart development must nowadays be taken into account in the project applications on regional development, like the ERDF project focusing on living, traffic, land use and climate policy, for example.

Residents and third sector actors have been somewhat involved in the preparatory workshops of the strategy, but smart growth is mainly associated with companies and public actors. The dual identity of the Finns described above does not seem to be related to smart growth based regional and urban planning.

3.3. Other insights that could be relevant for further work

None at the moment we could think of.

4. Data Sources and Indicators

Table 1 Data / Indicators for Example 1

Data / Indicator	Source
Name of data source / indicator	Citation, website link, organization
Maaseutubarometri 2014 (Rural Barometer 2014, in Finnish only)	https://mmm.fi/documents/1410837/1516647/Maaseutubarometri+2014_LOPPURAPORTTI.pdf/3d544033-79ea-453d-9406-4ba37ffdf4aa/Maaseutubarometri+2014_LOPPURAPORTTI.pdf.pdf
Maaseutuindikaattorit (Rural Indicators), pay database, where Luke has license	Statistics Finland
Maaseutukatsaus 2017 (Rural Survey 2017, English abstract)	http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/80600/MMM_7_2017_low.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

5. Critical Appraisal of Data Use

Luke has access to both the Rural Barometer material and the Rural Indicators database, but access rights cannot be granted to other ROBUST partners. This is also limited by the fact that most of the material is only available in Finnish. It is a positive thing to say that the Rural Barometer is supposed to be re-designed in 2019. Luke team members will probably be involved in the development of this new barometer, and so its results will be available for the project.

6. References

European Commission (2010) Europe 2020: A Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

Helsinki Smart Region promotes smart activities.

https://www.uudenmaanliitto.fi/en/development_and_planning/regional_programming/smart_specialisation_in_helsinki-uusimaa_region

Maaseutubarometri 2014 (Rural Barometer 2014, in Finnish only).

https://mmm.fi/documents/1410837/1516647/Maaseutubarometri+2014_LOPPURAPORTTI.pdf/3d544033-79ea-453d-9406-4ba37ffdf4aa/Maaseutubarometri+2014_LOPPURAPORTTI.pdf

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Pitkänen, V. & Westinen, J. (2018). Identiteettejä kahdella kielellä – tutkimus ruotsin- ja suomenkielisistä (Identities on two languages – study on Swedish and Finnish in Finland, in Finnish only). Finnish Cultural Foundation and Think Tank e2, Raportti 3.

<file:///C:/Users/ppo64/Downloads/identiteetteja.pdf>

Saartenoja, A. (2004). Kaupungin ja maaseudun vuorovaikutus alueellisessa kehittämisselityksessä (English abstract: Urban – Rural Interaction in the Regional Development Policy). Turun yliopiston julkaisuja C OSA – TOM. 214. Turku 217 s.

<https://www.utupub.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/5996/C214.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

Uusiutumiskykyinen ja mahdollistava Suomi. Aluerakenteen ja liikenteen kehityskuva 2050 (2015) (Regenerative and competitive Finland. Development picture of regional structure and traffic in 2050, in Finnish only). Ministry of Transport and Communications.

http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10138/155054/ALLI_Uusiutumiskykyinen%20ja%20mahdollistava%20Suomi_Aluerakenteen%20ja%20liikennej%C3%A4riestelm%C3%A4n%20kehityskuva%202050.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Vesala, K. M. & Vihinen, H. & Rantamäki-Lahtinen, L. (2012). Maaseudun merkitykset ja identiteetti (Meanings and identity of rural areas, in Finnish only).

<https://www.sitra.fi/artikkelit/maaseudun-merkitykset-ja-identiteetti/>

Älykäs erikoistuminen Uudellamaalla – Aluekehityksen tutkimus- ja innovaatiostrategia 2014–2020. (Research and Innovation Strategy based on Smart Specialisation - RIS3, in Finnish only).

https://www.uudenmaanliitto.fi/files/15320/Alykas_erikoistuminen_Uudellamaalla_Aluekehityksen_tutkimus-ja_innovaatiostrategia_2014-2020_B_50_-_2015.pdf

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