

# Contemporary population changes in north Swedish rural areas

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During the 1990s most municipalities and rural areas in northern Sweden have experienced renewed depopulation. At the same time, many regional centres (mainly university cities), but also some rural areas, have shown significant population growth. This article focuses on the latter rural areas and describes their geographical location and the socio-demographic characteristics of their populations. Three types of rural areas with population growth have been identified. Firstly, there are the rural areas within daily commuting distance from regional centres. Secondly, there is a group of rural areas that has benefited from the tourist industry. Most of these tourist resorts are mountain villages close to the border with Norway. Finally, there are also a few rural areas characterised by attractive residential environments and leisure housing.

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## Rural areas going against the stream of depopulation

In Sweden, the 20th century has implied a major shift in the population distribution, away from the rural areas to the urban areas. This urbanisation process has primarily taken place within the regions, i.e. from surrounding rural areas to nearby localities and cities, and to much less extent meant a redistribution of the population between different parts of the country (Andersson 1987; Borgegård et al. 1995). However, the patterns concerning population concentration and dispersion observed at different scales of spatial resolution have shifted several times since the beginning of the 19th century (Håkansson 2000). Although the main trend in Sweden has been towards population concentration and urbanisation, there have also been shorter periods characterised by dispersion and counterurbanisation, in Sweden especially manifested during the 'green wave' of the 1970s. Furthermore, while most rural areas have experienced population decline in recent years, there have nevertheless been rural areas with substantial in-migration and population growth. There are also examples of expanding rural areas in depopulating regions, and vice versa. However, such tendencies are difficult to trace

with statistical data for counties and municipalities. By using socio-demographic data with a higher degree of spatial resolution it is though possible to analyse changes within the municipalities.

The purpose of the article is to identify and describe the rural areas in northern Sweden that have experienced population growth during the past decades and also to emphasise some of the characteristics of these rural areas. The main focus is on the period after 1985, in particular the first half of the 1990s.

Earlier studies of population changes in Swedish rural areas have often dealt with the whole country or focused on rural areas within comparatively densely populated metropolitan regions. By contrast, northern Sweden exhibits substantial variation between on the one hand moderately large cities and densely populated rural areas mainly along the coast and on the other hand large tracts of extremely sparsely populated areas in the interior parts of the region. Even though the article primarily deals with the situation in northern Sweden the results should be of some relevance in other sparsely populated regions in the Nordic countries, especially regarding Finland with many similarities in settlement patterns and population trends (see for instance Tervamäki

1987; Vartiainen 1989a; Karjalainen 1989; Räisänen et al. 1996; Rusanen et al. 1997; Wi-berg 2000).

The tendencies towards a population turnaround, i.e. counterurbanisation, in many developed countries all around the world have generated an extensive literature. The counterurbanisation phenomenon has been studied and discussed in numerous publications. Berry (1976) was one of the pioneers. Other often cited contributions have been written by Fielding (1982), Cochrane and Vining (1988), Vartiainen (1989b), Geyer and Kontuly (1993) and Champion (1989, 1992, 1994). More recent publications include for instance Halfacree (1997), Champion (1998), Kontuly (1998), Lewis (1998), Dahms and McComb (1999), Ford (1999) and Stockdale et al. (2000). There have also been a number of contributions dealing with the situation in the Nordic countries, for instance Ahnström (1980, 1986), Court (1989), Hansen (1989), Vartiainen (1989a), Borgegård et al. (1993), Illeris (1994), Borgegård and Håkanson (1997), Amcoff (1997, 2000) and Westlund and Pichler (2000). In the article's first section focus is on Swedish literature relating to the phenomenon and various explanations to these tendencies. Main emphasis is on Swedish households' motives for moving to the countryside. In the next section there is a presentation of contemporary population changes in northern Sweden. Finally, we take a closer look on certain rural areas in the two counties of Dalarna and Västerbotten (see Fig. 1). The county of Dalarna was chosen since it contains some traditional rural municipalities with surprisingly high in-migration and relatively steady population growth since the 1970s. The choice of Västerbotten was due to the county's large internal differences in population density and development. Within the county there is also great variety in residential environments; from cities and villages in agricultural districts along the coast to scattered towns and settlements in forest dominated landscapes or even mountainous surroundings in the interior parts of the region.

### Counterurbanisation in Sweden

During the late 1980s in Sweden there were signs of a renewed interest in living in the countryside. Based on data from Statistics Sweden it is possible to conclude that the 1980s was the first decade in a very long time that had an absolute in-

crease in the numbers of inhabitants living in rural areas (Carlquist 1992). This trend shift led to speculations about the occurrence of a 'new green wave' similar to the 'green wave' of the 1970s and similar to the counterurbanisation trend observed in several other countries. It was in the metropolitan regions that these tendencies were most obvious, but there was also growth in rural population in some sparsely populated counties.

The last delimitation of urban and rural areas was performed in 1995 (Statistics Sweden 1997). In Sweden urban areas are defined as localities with at least 200 inhabitants. By definition all areas outside these localities are rural areas. Since 1990 these rural areas can be further subdivided statistically into rural agglomerations (with 50–199 inhabitants) and other rural areas (i.e. very sparsely populated areas and scattered settlements). The last delimitation of urban and rural areas seemed to indicate that there had been a return to rural depopulation for the period 1990–1995. This change, however, was mainly due to reclassification of rural areas into localities, thus in reality implying continued population growth in villages and small towns (Statistics Sweden 1997). Some researchers claim that there is a tendency towards polarisation with increasing population growth in the major cities and in rural areas, whereas small and medium-sized towns are growing at a slower rate or even losing inhabitants (Amcoff 2000; Westlund and Pichler 2000).

The renewed interest for living in the countryside during the 1980s has been explained in Sweden by changes related to economic development and various structural phenomena, for instance the incentive to move to the metropolitan regions diminish during recessions (Johansson and Persson 1991). Furthermore, the expansion of the public sector and various regional policy measures resulted in improved service accessibility and new job opportunities in sparsely populated regions (Borgegård et al. 1995). Other researchers maintain that the changes are due to a shift in the general sense of values and residential preferences (Eriksson 1989; Forsberg and Carlbrand 1993). In a post-industrial society it becomes more important with a pleasant housing environment than closeness to place of work (Bengtsson and Johansson 1992), whereas technological advances and commuting make a more dispersed settlement pattern possible (The Population 1991). Other aspects are that different generations have different

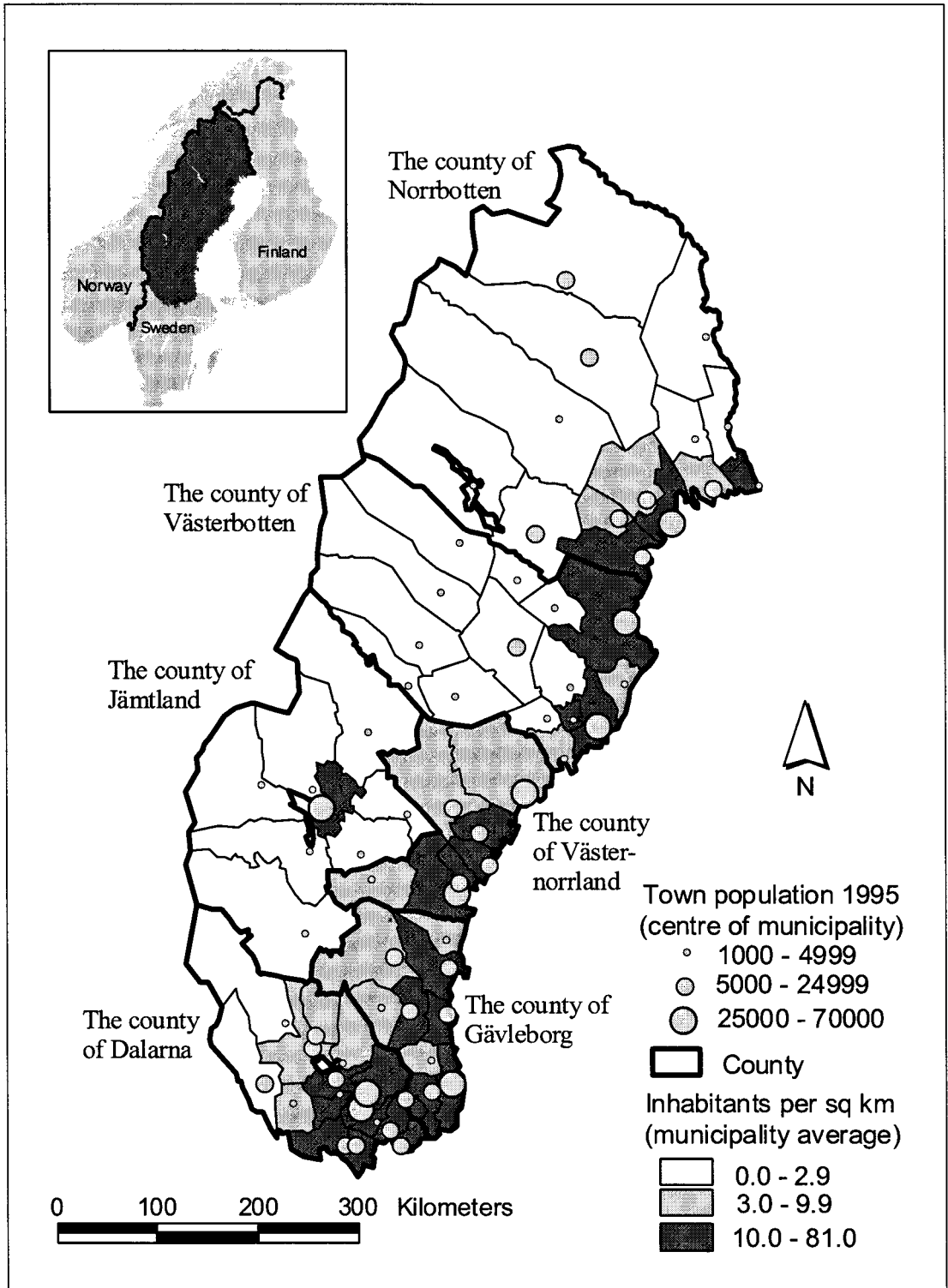


Fig. 1. Counties, municipalities and centres of municipalities in northern Sweden.

sets of values (Johansson and Persson 1991) and that certain age groups more often choose to live in the countryside (Amcoff 1997). The increase in the population living outside urban areas could largely be assigned to a process whereby leisure housing in metropolitan regions has been turned into permanent dwellings (Nyström 1989; Carlqvist 1992).

### **Swedish households' motives for moving to the countryside**

The tendencies towards an increased rural population during the 1980s also led to a number of studies of the motives of households for moving to the countryside (Borgegård et al. 1987; Nyström 1989; Ennefors 1991; Borgegård et al. 1993; Forsberg and Carlbrand 1993; Kåks and Westholm 1994; Amcoff 2000; Garvill et al. 2000; Stenbacka 2001). In this short overview a few of all the possible reasons are emphasised. In the studies many households gave priority to what could be called countryside features in their residential environment. Besides the actual house and the immediate surroundings, other environmental factors, such as access to nature and the open scenic landscape, are often mentioned as important. It is, though, often unclear what so-called environmental motives really are and how important such reasons are for in-migrants to rural areas. It has even been suggested by socio-biologists that the preferences for open landscapes are deeply rooted in our genes (for a discussion, see Amcoff 2000). Nonetheless, many households emphasise the improved possibilities to perform various outdoor activities and other hobbies, for instance hiking, hunting, gardening and doing handicraft. The move to the countryside could also be a part of a self-realisation or choice of life-style.

Many in-migrants to rural areas are so-called returnees who have kinship with local people or are in fact moving back to the homestead. High housing costs in newly built areas and city-regions could also be a driving force behind in-migration to rural areas. By purchasing a house outside urban areas households with low incomes can fulfil their wish for a house of their own. Families with children moving to rural areas often state that the countryside offers a more suitable environment for children to grow up in. New and improved communication technology and less rigid working conditions, for instance working from a distance and flexible working hours, make it pos-

sible for more workers to settle in rural areas. Some households mention that it is strategic to settle down in rural areas between two or more cities. In this way they have access to more than one local labour market within commuting distance. There is also a quite large group of households, mainly pensioners, who are not dependent on nearness to large labour markets. They are thus free from an important restriction concerning their choice of where to live.

The relative importance of different motives for moving to the countryside varies from study to study. This could partly be explained by the fact that many Swedish studies are based on interviews with a limited number of households. It is also likely that the in-migrants' motives, at least to some extent, vary between different types of rural area. The situation is further complicated by the fact that many households mention more than one reason. Nevertheless, several studies highlight the importance of environmental and social motives (such as housing, access to nature, family situation or nearness to friends and relatives) behind the move to the countryside. Based on the answers from nearly 500 in-migrants to the countryside all over Sweden, Garvill et al. (2000) conclude that 70 per cent of the respondents gave emphasis to environmental or social motives. In comparison, only 20 per cent mentioned work-related reasons such as education, unemployment and finding a new job.

### **Gentrification of the countryside and the rural idyll**

In recent years and especially in literature focusing on changes in the British countryside there has been a great deal of interest in the motives and socio-economic characteristics of the in-migrants to rural areas (see for instance Champion and Watkins 1991; Marsden et al. 1993; Murdoch and Marsden 1994; Clout 1996; Cloke et al. 1998; Fielding 1998). These studies show that a substantial part of the in-migrants belongs to a well-educated and relatively prosperous middle-class. Often they have settled in amenity-rich and picturesque villages and small towns. This gentrification process has also led to conversion of farm buildings and rural land into new uses, such as exclusive housing and golf courses. Closely linked with gentrification of the countryside is the concept of rural idyll whereby the countryside is perceived as quiet, calm, clean, safe and inhabited by all-

white nuclear families with traditional values. Little and Austin (1996) argues that the notion of rural idyll maintains traditional gender roles and emphasises women's roles as mothers. The rural idyll concept is also associated with neighbourliness and sense of community.

Based on case studies in the metropolitan region of Stockholm, Amcoff (2000) claims that gentrification of the countryside is a relatively marginal phenomenon in Sweden. Nevertheless, such tendencies are though likely to be observed in some rural areas, such as Österlen in southernmost Sweden (Hjort and Malmberg 1996).

## Population redistribution in northern Sweden

During the period between 1950 and 1974 several reforms were carried out in order to reduce the number of municipalities in Sweden from approximately 2,300 to fewer than 300. One of the main purposes was to construct municipalities with populations large enough to secure the provision of services, mainly in the public sector. Christaller's central-place theory (1966) provided the theoretical basis for a hierarchical central-place system. The centre of the municipality was supposed to provide local people with everyday services, while the major cities, the so-called regional centres, were supposed to provide high-level services to the inhabitants in larger regions. However, many genuine rural areas continued to lose inhabitants while the centres of the municipalities, primarily the major cities, experienced population growth. During the 1990s it was mainly municipalities in the metropolitan regions and regional centres, in particular university cities, that had substantial population growth, whereas many rural municipalities, industrial communities and small and medium-sized cities outside the metropolitan regions experienced decreases.

The study area, northern Sweden, is a very sparsely populated region (Fig. 1). The region extends from the Gulf of Bothnia to the mountainous border with Norway. In the north-eastern part, the region borders on Finland. In this article northern Sweden is defined as the six northernmost counties. The area consists of 69 municipalities covering approximately 270,000 square kilometres. Northern Sweden has 1.5 million inhabitants; thus the average density is 5.5 inhabitants per square kilometre. This means that only 16 per cent of the Swedish population live on two thirds of the total land area. The population is unequally distributed over the region, however, and most people are in fact concentrated in cities and the coastal areas. Within the interior parts of the region most inhabitants live in the river valleys and administrative centres at different levels. Many of the municipalities, especially those in the interior parts of the region, have had a negative population trend during the last decades.

Since 1970 more than every second municipality in northern Sweden have lost more than ten per cent of their population. At the same time, many of the major cities with nearby municipalities have experienced strong population growth. Table 1 shows that during the 1990s there were more municipalities with population losses and fewer with a growth rate above the national average. The maps in Figure 2 illustrate that population growth is increasingly concentrated to a few regional centres, mainly those with universities. This process has accelerated in recent years and, at least at the municipality level, it seems as if the 1990s has implied a shift back to strong urbanisation. According to Persson and Nygren (2001) this trend is likely to continue at least during the first decades of the 21st century.

## Contemporary changes in rural areas in northern Sweden

In Sweden, however, county and municipality

Table 1. Population changes by municipalities 1970–2000. Northern Sweden (Statistics Sweden 1995, 1996, 1997).

Number of municipalities with:	1970–1974	1975–1979	1980–1984	1985–1989	1990–1994	1995–2000
Population decrease	39	32	43	42	39	66
Increase less than country average	10	8	5	14	23	1
Increase more than country average	20	29	21	13	7	2



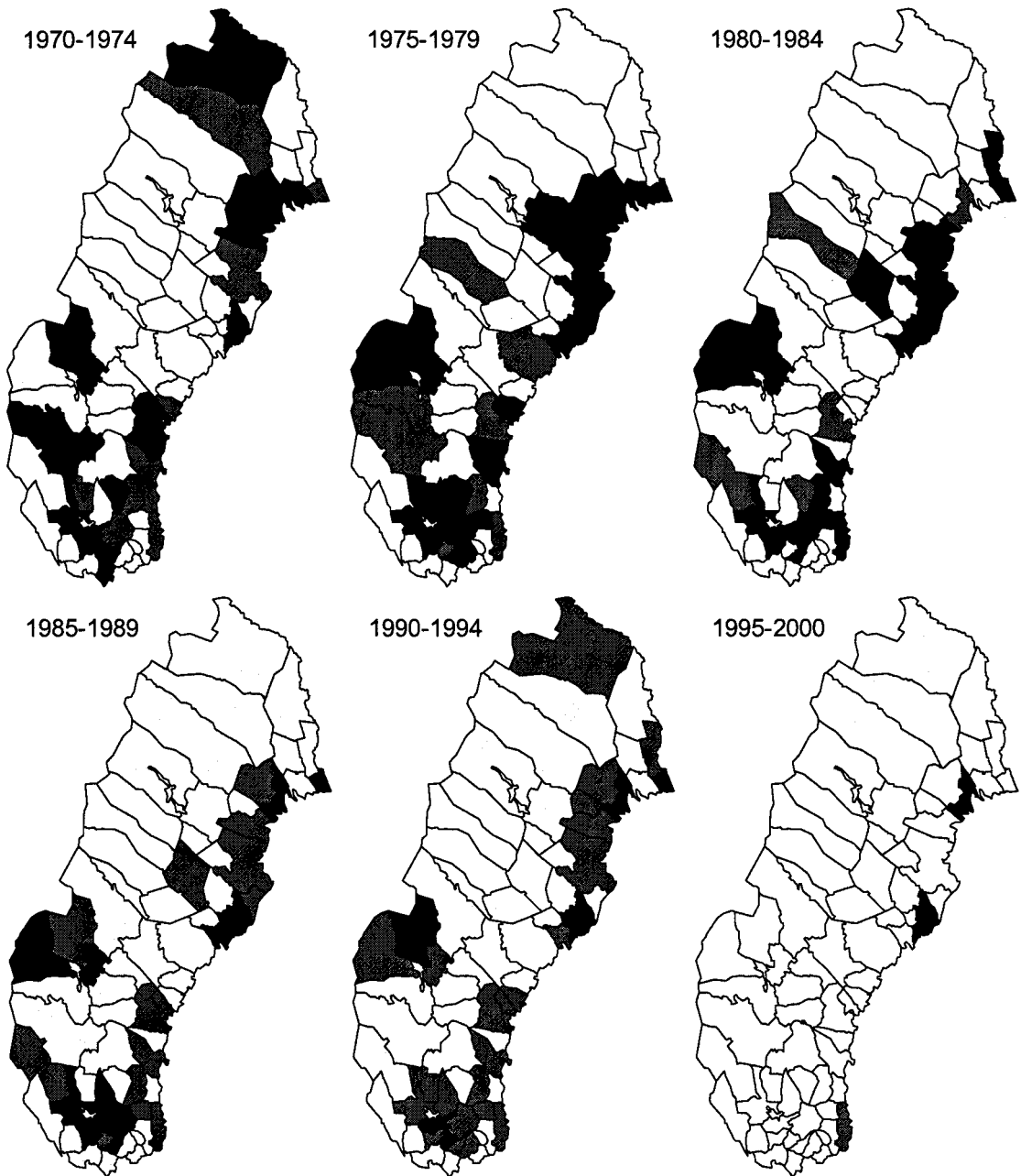


Fig. 2. Population changes by municipalities 1970–2000. Northern Sweden (Statistics Sweden 1995, 1996, 1997).

Note: Municipalities with population growth above the country average during the period are shaded with black. The municipalities with population increase below the average are shaded with grey, while those exhibiting population decrease are white.

averages often conceal a great deal of the geographical variations in population change and socio-economic development within the regions. For this reason, we have in several research

projects employed data with a higher degree of spatial resolution than municipalities, mostly electoral wards or even smaller geographical entities. These geographical subdivisions are by Statistics

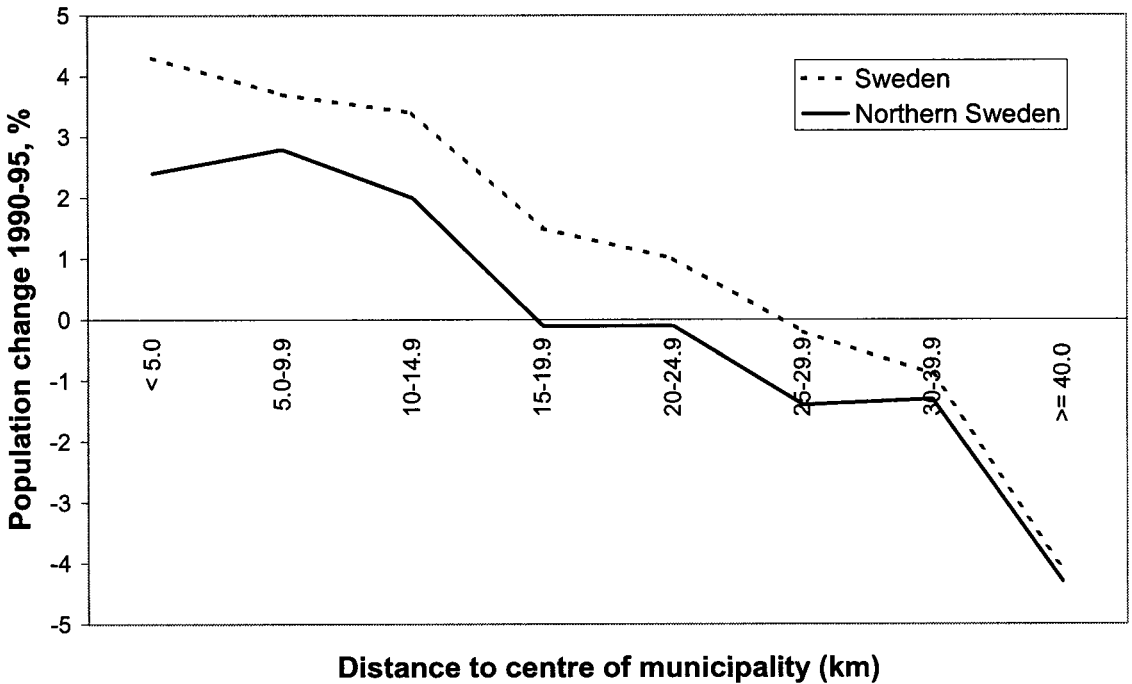


Fig. 3. Average population change in wards grouped into distance zones from their local municipality centres 1990–1995 (Statistics Sweden 1995, 1996, 1997).

Note: All distances are calculated as the crow flies (between the geographical centroid of the electoral ward and the centroid of the centre of the municipality). In this way, the distance measure is only a rough approximation of the actual road distance.

Sweden considered to represent homogeneous housing environments. This has also made it possible to group the wards according to various features, for instance by distance to localities of different sizes.

The empirical data utilised in this article is mainly derived from three research projects (Pettersson et al. 1996; Johansson and Pettersson 1997; Pettersson and Westholm 1998). The data has been analysed in a rather straightforward way. Firstly, we identified the rural areas with population growth. Secondly, by combining statistical analyses with visual interpretations of the geographical patterns we were able to generalise the rural areas with population growth into three broad categories. These are presented in the final section of the article. It should though be mentioned that we have only had access to data concerning the number of inhabitants in the wards (together with some demographic and socio-economic characteristics) at different times. For this reason we are not able to analyse whether a population increase is due to natural increase or net in-migration. However, most rural areas have a

long history of net out-migration of young people and therefore nowadays exhibit skewed demographic profiles with many elderly. Subsequently these rural areas are usually characterised by natural decrease and therefore necessitate net in-migration in order to avoid further population losses.

Figure 3 shows that the population growth rate decreases with distance from the centres of the municipalities. Nevertheless, rural areas can have substantial growth, both in Sweden as a whole and in northern Sweden. In northern Sweden, however, the growth zones do not extend as far out into the periphery as in other parts of Sweden. A comparison between the six counties in northern Sweden also shows that there are obvious variations within the region.

During the period 1990–1995 relatively many municipalities in northern Sweden have had population growth in rural areas near towns and cities (i.e. within a distance of 5–15 kilometres from the centre of their own municipality). On the other hand, few rural areas farther away from the centres show an increased population. Not only do rural areas at different distances show differ-

Table 2. Population statistics for rural areas in northern Sweden (Statistics Sweden 1995, 1996, 1997).

Population change 1990-95	Rural areas by population change 1990-95						Rural areas in Northern Sweden	Northern Sweden
	Decrease			Increase				
	<-5.0%	-5.0% - -1.9%	-2.0% - -0.1%	0.0% - 1.9%	2.0% - 4.9%	>=5.0%		
Average population change 1990-95, %	-8.7	-3.5	-0.9	0.9	3.5	15.2	0.6	1.4
Number of electoral wards	207	158	102	115	104	130	819	1262
Number of inhabitants 1995, thousand	151	155	103	126	117	157	808	1483
Share of total number of inhabitants 1995, %	19	19	13	16	14	19	100	100
Share of dwellings in small houses 1990, %	71	78	77	77	78	76	76	56
<b>Share of inhabitants 1995, %:</b>								
0-19 years of age	24	26	26	27	27	29	26	24
20-44 years of age	28	29	29	30	31	34	30	32
45-64 years of age	26	26	25	26	25	23	25	25
65-74 years of age	12	10	10	9	9	8	10	10
75 years of age and older	10	10	9	8	8	6	9	9
Women	48.7	49.0	49.0	49.0	48.8	49.1	48.9	50.1
<b>Average age of population:</b>								
1985	40.5	39.8	39.5	39.0	39.2	37.3	39.3	39.3
1990	40.5	39.8	39.4	38.7	38.9	37.0	39.1	39.4
1995	41.9	40.6	40.0	39.2	39.2	36.6	39.6	39.8
<b>Share of families 1994, %:</b>								
Single men	33	32	32	32	31	31	32	32
Single women	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	33
Married/Co-assessed, both econ. active	19	21	21	22	22	25	22	19
Married/Co-assessed, one econ. active	8	8	8	8	8	7	8	7
Married/Co-assessed, no one econ. active	11	10	10	9	9	8	10	9
Families with children	20	22	23	24	24	27	23	21

Note: Only areas with more than five kilometres to the centre of their own municipality are included in the table.

ing population trends but their populations also differ in various aspects. The rural areas within the 15-kilometre zone of the centre of the municipality are characterised by relatively many families with children and households where both partners work outside the home. It is mainly in the peripheries of the municipalities that it is possible to trace obvious signs of a far-reaching depopulation and a high proportion of elderly people.

In general, the rural areas with a rapid population increase have relatively many young inhabitants, families with children and households where both partners work outside the home (Table 2). Contrary to the depopulating rural areas with an ageing population, the average age is decreasing and the high proportion of inhabitants below 45 years of age indicates that these areas are attractive for families with children.

### The county of Västerbotten – growing villages in the expanding Umeå-region

The county of Västerbotten is characterised by large internal differences. In particular, the contrast between the expanding city of Umeå and the extremely sparsely populated interior parts of the county is manifested. The municipality of Umeå has experienced dramatic population growth during the last decades. In 1950 Umeå had 46,000 inhabitants and in 2000 the total number of inhabitants had risen to almost 105,000 (i.e. an average annual growth rate of almost 1.7 per cent). One important explanation to this development is the founding of Umeå University in the 1960s. At the same time other municipalities in the county have had a stagnating population or a decrease in the number of inhabitants. Within the county



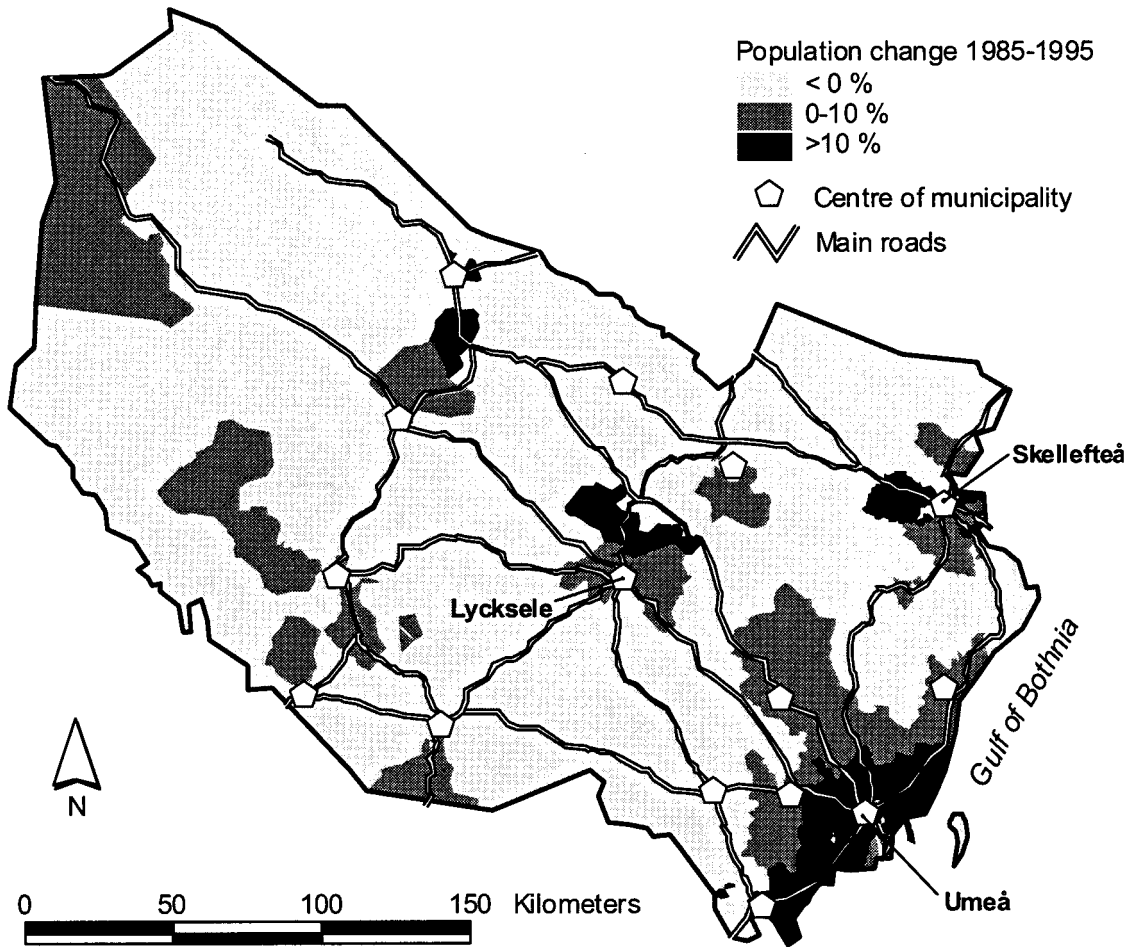


Fig. 4. Population changes in electoral wards 1985–1995. The county of Västerbotten (Statistics Sweden 1995, 1996, 1997).

there has been a concentration of people to the large localities, most of all to the centres of the municipalities and especially to Umeå, Skellefteå and Lycksele. However, Figure 4 shows that many rural areas close to the major localities also have had population growth during the period 1985–1995.

During the first half of the 1990s most of the centres of the municipalities in the interior parts of the county had decreasing populations (Fig. 5). At the same time most localities in the coastal region showed population growth. Within commuting distance from the cities we also find many rural agglomerations with growth. The spatial pattern indicates the importance of the major roads, thus demonstrating a kind of extended suburbanisation. However, there are some rural areas and

villages with population growth lying outside the commuter zones of the major localities. Some of these are characterised by strong entrepreneurial traditions or expansive firms. Unexpectedly, relatively many rural agglomerations close to the border with Norway have maintained or even increased their number of inhabitants. Often these are villages benefiting from an expanding tourist industry. In particular, the Hemavan area show increased population figures (see also Wiberg 2000).

A research project concerning the geographical distribution of welfare in the county of Västerbotten showed that there are substantial differences in living conditions between various parts of the county (Pettersson et al. 1996; Pettersson 2001). Usually, the expanding rural areas sur-

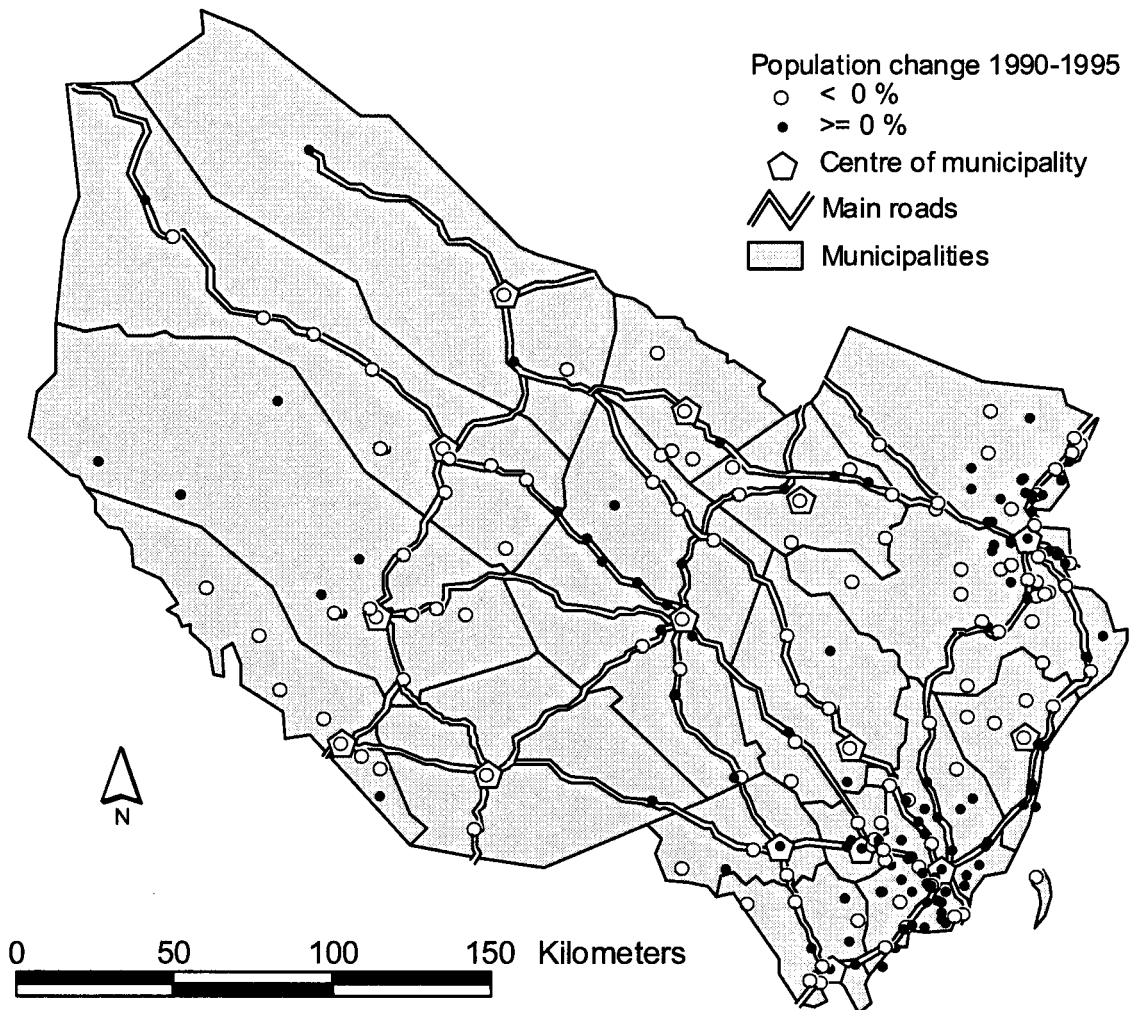


Fig. 5. Population changes in rural agglomerations and localities 1990-1995. The county of Västerbotten. Agglomerations with at least 50 inhabitants (Statistics Sweden 1995, 1996, 1997).

rounding the cities have populations characterised by general well-being in terms of employment, educational level and incomes. Another common feature is the high proportion of families with children. Some of these rural areas have benefited from scenic surroundings and are located in traditional agriculture landscapes, in river valleys, close to lakes or by the sea.

#### The county of Dalarna – picturesque villages around Lake Siljan and ski resorts in Sälen

Like Västerbotten, the county of Dalarna is a region with large internal differences. For instance,

there is a sharp contrast between the municipalities in the south-eastern part of the region and the municipalities around Lake Siljan (Fig. 6). The first mentioned region is part of Bergslagen, a large region extending over many counties united by the history of their mining industry. The Siljan region is characterised by a scenic landscape and old traditions.

The area around Lake Siljan is often regarded as a national symbol of the old rural Sweden as it was during the 19th century. In a historical perspective, however, it is a little ironic that the rural areas around Lake Siljan were considered as backward and underdeveloped during the indus-

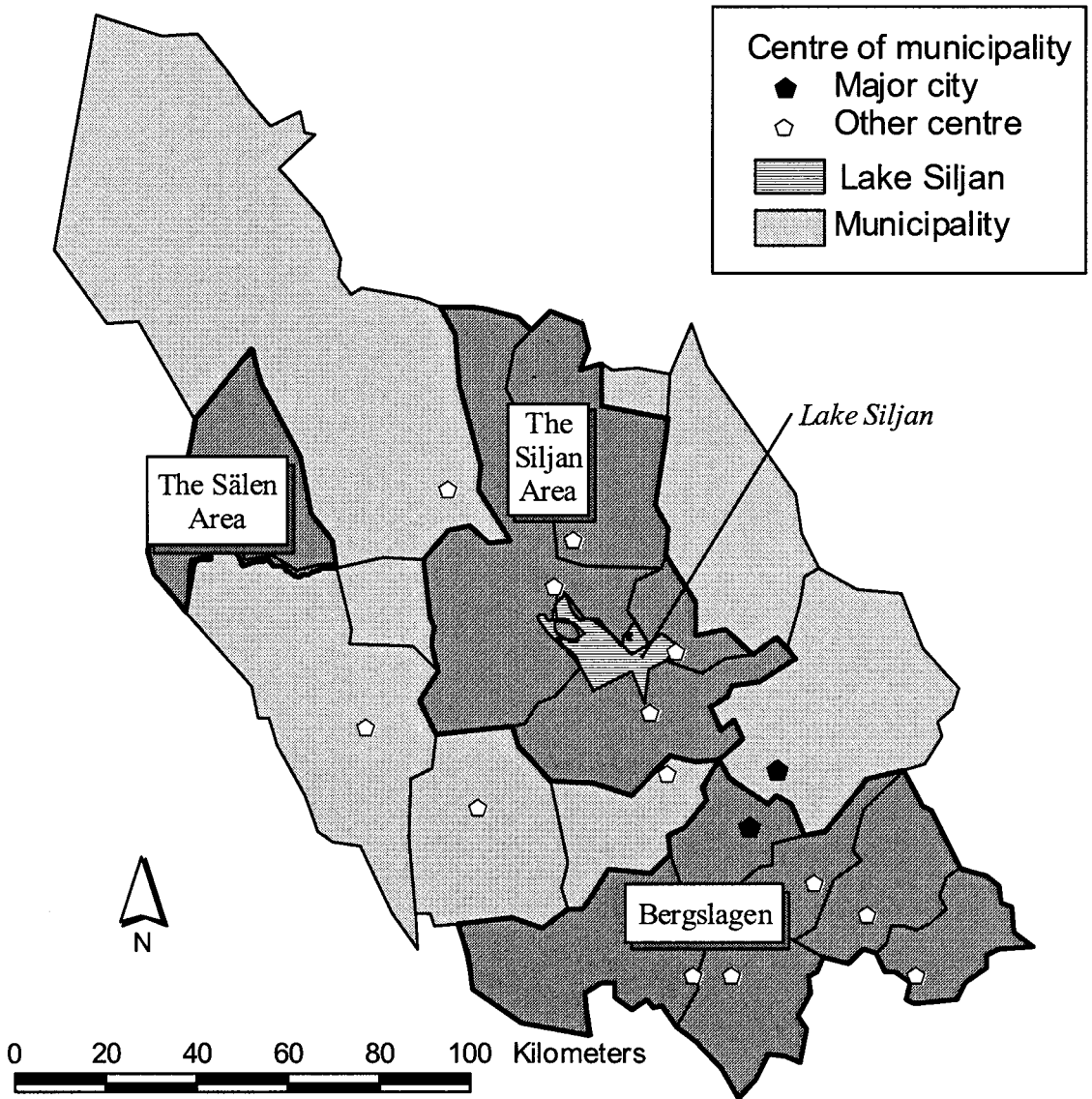


Fig. 6. Case-study areas in the county of Dalarna.

trial era of Bergslagen. Today, Bergslagen is one of the Swedish problem regions due to restructuring difficulties and depopulation. The Siljan region, on the other hand, has had an increasing population since the 1970s. Nevertheless, not only different parts of Dalarna but also various rural areas in the region have shown quite different population trends. In this section we shall take a closer look on two examples of rural areas in the county of Dalarna, namely the countryside around Lake Siljan and the Sälen

area, both with stable or increasing populations in recent years.

During the last decades the countryside around Lake Siljan has had an inflow of migrants and a steady population growth. The number of inhabitants in the area has increased by five per cent during the period 1985–1995 and nowadays more than 25,000 people live in the rural parts of the region. The in-migrants have moved in mainly from other municipalities in Dalarna and the Stockholm region. Some of these in-mi-

grants have resided in the genuine countryside while others have settled down in large villages and small towns. The in-migration cannot be explained by such factors as expansion in a certain industry, a single company investment or a university establishment. Due to the long distances to major cities in Dalarna, such as Falun and Borlänge, it is unlikely that the possibility for commuting is the sole cause of the population growth (see also Kåks and Westholm 1994). During the period 1985–1995 the growth rate in the rural areas around Lake Siljan has been above the county average. The area is characterised by a relatively low proportion of families with children and instead the proportion of elderly people is higher. As shown before, this is unusual for those rural areas in northern Sweden that are distinguished by substantial population growth. In recent years, several municipalities in the Siljan area have started losing inhabitants, although at a slower rate than most rural municipalities in northern Sweden.

Earlier studies have shown that, in particular, the people living in the municipality of Leksand generally have a high and evenly distributed living standard (Pettersson and Westholm 1998). Perhaps it is a combination of general well-being, the image of being the original Sweden, the scenic landscape, tourism, small-scale businesses and self-employment that has generated both a renewal and in-migration to traditional rural areas where one would rather have expected depopulation.

The second rural area of interest in Dalarna is the Sälen area. The Sälen area is situated in the mountainous region close to the border with Norway. There are only 2,000 people living in these ski resorts. Due to the in-migration of young people the area has experienced a ten per cent population increase during the period 1985–1995. The ski tourism has led to a development that differs in many ways from other peripheral rural areas in northern Sweden. The large tourist establishments provide job opportunities in a region where there are few alternatives and the employment rate is, in fact, seven percentage units higher than the county average. One third of the labour force works in the private service sector. In the Sälen area we find many young people and single persons, mostly single men. In comparison with the county average and most rural areas in northern Sweden, the Sälen area has very few families with children.

## Concluding remarks

In recent years most municipalities and rural areas in northern Sweden have experienced renewed depopulation. Nevertheless, some rural areas have shown significant population growth, at least during the first half of the 1990s. This population growth in rural areas in northern Sweden is concentrated to the commuter belts surrounding the major cities, while more peripheral rural areas generally exhibit population decrease. Access to large labour markets and access to services are still factors that make the countryside close to cities attractive. This rather suggests suburbanisation around major cities than a general and widespread counterurbanisation of the countryside in northern Sweden. However, the rural areas with growth that do not fit the description of being within the commuter belts of cities are often areas that have benefited from the tourist industry. This means that some of the most peripheral rural areas in northern Sweden have often managed better than more common types of rural areas.

The redistribution of the population in northern Sweden since the 1970s together with the fact that many rural municipalities have experienced a renewed strong depopulation during the 1990s puts further pressure on the rural municipalities' economic situation and possibilities for maintaining an acceptable standard of service provision for their inhabitants. Moreover, many municipality centres in northern Sweden have started to lose inhabitants in recent years. Westlund and Pichler (2000) maintain that it is the small and medium-sized towns outside metropolitan regions that presently are facing the most severe difficulties in attracting in-migrants and maintaining their populations. Forthcoming delimitations of urban and rural areas will reveal if this tendency has become even stronger in the late 1990s.

However, different rural areas have dissimilar preconditions, for instance in terms of job opportunities, service accessibility, quality of infrastructure, distance to major cities, housing supply, landscape features, recreational possibilities, social networks, image and status. Due to that different rural areas are likely to attract a wide range of combinations of in-migrants, for instance regarding age, family situation, stage in the life-cycle, purchasing power and choice of life-style. Altogether this generates a rather complex geographical pattern of rural areas with more or less unique characteristics and preconditions for fu-



ture development. Nevertheless, 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:

- i) *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. Furthermore, these areas are characterised by a relatively high proportion of families with children and, in general, high standards of living. In some cases these rural areas are strategic locations between two or more cities.
- ii) *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, seems to be concentrated to relatively small geographical areas such as single villages or specific 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.
- iii) *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. Here we often find 'lifestyle' arguments among the in-migrants (Kåks and Westholm 1994). Perhaps it is even possible to identify gentrification tendencies in this type of rural areas.

Of course, there are rural areas where two or more of the above features are combined, for instance in Leksand in the area around Lake Siljan, and that to some extent fit into the above description of all three types of rural areas. However, there are also some rural areas with population growth that cannot easily be placed in one of the categories mentioned before. In some cases we find single successful firms, often small-scale

manufacturers, or a history of entrepreneurial traditions in these rural areas.

Finally, it would be interesting to take a closer look at the rural areas that have had a relatively strong development despite being located outside the commuter belts of the major cities. How and why are these areas managing this well? Are there successful local firms or industries, entrepreneurs, tourist businesses, local action groups or development projects that might have contributed? Or are there other explanations? And what about people's preferences of where to live? Which groups of people are attracted to different types of rural areas and why? These questions require further research.

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