

International migration and sustaining resilience in rural areas

Susanne Stenbacka, Department of Social and Economic Geography, Uppsala University, Sweden

3rd Nordic Conference for Rural Research 8-10 September 2014, Trondheim, Norway





UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET



County	Inhabitants	Received 2013	Inhabitants/received
Stockholm	2159252	5174	417
Skåne (Malmö)	1272434	3192	399
Västra Götaland (Göteborg)	1613342	6180	261
Dalarna	277118	1398	198
Jämtland	126322	807	157

Source: Swedish Board of Migration 2014-05-05

Active rural municipalities

“I went to one of those IMER conferences some years ago. And I couldn’t resist – I had to stand up and ask ‘Where are all the sparsely populated areas in all this?’ /.../ and someone on the panel started to talk about a suburb of Stockholm, and that was their example of a rural area.” (public official, woman)

Responses to change: Active municipalities seeing refugee migration as a resource

“there are 268 municipalities, or something like that, signing contracts with the migration board; we have to be active and fill our quota”

“...one of many in-migration strategies is receiving refugees. I have a job that involves the strategy of getting refugees to come to this municipality and stay here. It is a part of a long-term population strategy.”

(refugee coordinator, man)

“we should economise by speeding up”

(refugee coordinator, man)



Resilience

‘the capacity of ecosystems, individuals, organisations or materials to cope with disruption and stress and retain or subsequently regain functional capacity and form’ (Hudson 2010: 12).

‘A “desirable” state of socio-economic systems is usually highly subjective, politically contested, and may vary over time’ (Yamamoto 2011: 729).



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

“the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, including opportunities to experience feelings of well-being, and a condition of the individual’s family, community and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways..” (Ungar, 2008)

Resource thinking

“Most of the money is staying in the municipality. They rent flats, they buy food and most of them have no cars for travelling so they stay, and spend their money here.” (politician, man)

“We know that it is the foreign-born who will work at the homes for elderly in the future, we know that. Luckily enough, we have people who want to take care of our elderly.” (politician, man)



Resource thinking

“This is the world in miniature. This is Sweden in miniature. It is easier to get a grip on things in a smaller municipality /.../ to understand how different things are linked, and to understand different authorities and institutions. You can have direct contact, not only on the phone. You also receive first-hand information and do not have to rely on rumours and on other people telling you. /.../ you get a little map that you can superimpose on the bigger picture as well.” (public official, woman)



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Refugee migration may enhance resilience in rural communities. Can rural communities enhance individual resilience?

Physical environment – nature

We fish every day, we go out at around six and come home at around one or two o'clock. Around twenty fresh fishes! In high season we carry three or four bags! /.../ You will not find us at home in the summer! We are always out barbecuing and fishing. We are always outdoors.

(migrant woman, 13, Iraq)





”It is really funny. Not complicated. We do it in summer, we barbeque or go swimming. We are waiting for good weather and if it does not happen we swim in the cold water! And we prepare food, meat or fish. /.../ The children enjoy when we cook outside.”

“And we arrange a one week summer camp for the children, they stay over the day, and they have lunch by the lake. The children can swim if it is sunny and play, and they enjoy it. Families are also coming from the south of Sweden, to let their children join. They want their children to meet children with the same language and culture.”

(migrant woman, Uzbekistan)



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

When we were in Moscow, there were so many parks. We could bring the children and they could play, and it was a bit different. Here we have nowhere to go. We do not know what to do with the children when we are at home. We have no particular place to go...

(migrant woman, Afghanistan)

The Rural as an Intervening subject in the Lives of Internal and International Migrants”

There exists a “common language” for expressing the content of life in a rural setting.

Rural areas may satisfy the wants and needs among households with different backgrounds but with similar expectations and goals.

Communication is crucial and encourages merging of places and place experiences. (Stenbacka 2012)

Community resilience

Organisational resilience: consider existing cooperation and the advantages of re-organisation. Involves communication and learning.

Social resilience: about possibilities to engage and choose membership in the community. Also about resistance to racism.

Individual resilience

A collective identity may be based on sharing interest and affinity in relation to place. The time aspect often referred to when discussing attachment should be downplayed.

Nature, as a setting and actor, may be the glue that is active in the formation of social relations and in collective and individual processes of identity building in certain places.

The right to the countryside

...real Nazis have also settled here. One of them, is in Stockholm being prosecuted for the riots. He lives down in /.../ and has some friends who also lives there... (politician, man)

When the National Migration Board had an information meeting for the villagers, they [the Nazis] took over the meeting. /.../ They are scary, they photograph people who oppose them and it is very unpleasant. After that, the villagers distanced themselves from them. (politician, man)

Resilience involves strategies of resistance. [adaptation is not enough]

Building resilience – some key factors

- Social inclusion; welfare (structure), networks and participation is a basis.
- Well-being is not only about health. The positive relationship environment –health should not subjugate the involving of the social aspects of nature
- Communicative processes are crucial and need to include critical approaches; meaning and identity is constituted from positive as well as negative input.
- Building resilience involves responsibilities on several spatial levels
- The "physical rural" is an active context and is part of individual as well as community resilience processes.

Conclusion

- Rural development and rural sustainability needs to be understood as processes involving local as well as non-local resources and interactions.
- Recasting the understanding of resources involves paying attention to institutional and physical environments, and account them as actors in processes of building resilience.
- While migration streams are increasing rather than decreasing, learning from localities with globalisation-migration-experiences are important.

Theory, policy, reality

External factors coming from higher levels of scale are often seen as a threat or causing the shock, but in some cases, they can also be a chance to renew and transform regional economies.

(Hassink 2010: 54)

Resilience and its related concepts can be seen as analytical categories that may usefully help us (re)direct our attention towards overlooked aspects of regional development beyond growth and competitiveness.

(Yamamoto 2011:731)



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Stenbacka, Susanne. 2012. "The rural" intervening in the lives of Internal and International Migrants: Migrants, Biographies and Translocal Practices. In: Hedberg, Charlotta and do Carmo Renato Miguel: Translocal Ruralism. The Geoforum Library, Springer. 55-72.

Stenbacka, Susanne. 2013. International Migration and Resilience: Rural Introductory Spaces and Refugee Immigration as a resource. In: Tamásy, Christine and Revilla Diez, Javier: Regional Resilience, Economy and Society. Globalising Rural Places. Ashgate. 75-93.



UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Thank you...

