

Rural gentrification as a migration process: Evidence from Sweden

Susanne Hjort*

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate rural gentrification as a migration process in parts of the sparsely populated countryside. The aim is sought through an analysis of the socio-economic and demographic composition of migration patterns using register data and employing different methods including logistic regression analysis. The particular time set of the analyses from the late 1980s until the early 1990s has been utilized as a way to understand the changing migration pattern of a changing economy; from boom to bust. The results show that rural gentrification is of marginal importance in the sparsely populated countryside of Sweden.

Keywords: rural gentrification; migration; Sweden

Introduction

In studies of migration, the focus has traditionally been on out-migration from the countryside and problems associated with loss of population. However, there are several studies focusing on in-migration to the countryside (Amcoff, 2000; Boyle and Halfacree, 1998; Halliday and Coombes, 1995; Hjort and Malmberg, 2006). In view of declining rural populations and in particular the out-migration of young people from rural areas it becomes increasingly important to understand who the rural in-migrant is and how this may affect areas of destination; in-migrants with high incomes could contribute to the municipal tax base or older migrants add to the ageing process.

In the international literature, predominantly British, rural in-migration by the middle class has been a major issue of concern (Cloke, et al., 1991; Cloke, et al., 1995; Hoggart, 1997; Phillips, 1993, 1998a, 1998b). One aspect of middle class in-migration is rural gentrification which has been most frequent in British and to a lesser extent in North American studies (Cloke, et al., 1998; Darling, 2005; Halseth, 1993, 2004; Little, 1987; Phillips M, 1993, 2002, 2004; Smith and Phillips D A, 2001). The concept of gentrification has a firm basis in urban geography but has received much less attention in rural geography, though the term is often used casually to describe a certain aspect of middle-class migration to rural areas. There are a number of ways of defining gentrification, and different ap-

* PhD student in the Department of Social and Economic Geography, Umeå University, Sweden. Email: Susanne.Hjort@geography.umu.se.

proaches have been discussed thoroughly; perhaps most notable is the discussion of rural gentrification by M Phillips (Phillips, 1993, 2002, 2004, 2005). Usually gentrification is defined as a change in the social composition of an area (mainly in cities), whereby the middle class replace the working class (Cloke, et al., 1995). In M Phillips' article from 1993, a gentrifier was defined as someone who moves into a rural area and alters existing property or builds new property, giving housing an important part to play in gentrification. In this light, the connection between gentrifiers and class (based on employment position) was tested and most of the gentrifiers were middle class. In Smith and D A Phillips' study (2001) rural gentrification is defined as a process of consumption, not only of housing but the consumption of green environment in order to consolidate the migrants' middle class position and consequently exclude other groups of people from these areas. In addition, Smith and D A Phillips argue that the distinctive place matters to how the process of gentrification evolve. Darling (2005), investigating rural gentrification in the USA argues for a rent gap approach to rural gentrification whereby gentrification is caused by the undervaluation of property in particularly attractive areas in the vicinity of national parks.

In Smith's article from (2002) he argues that gentrification research would benefit from a closer connection with population research and in particular in relation to migration processes. The present study does take a starting point in the migration patterns and flows of people and tries to find a process of rural gentrification in the sparsely populated areas of Sweden. The focus lies at the changing socio-economic composition of the population in rural areas in order to investigate to what extent such a process could be important to particular countryside in current processes of change affecting the countryside.

Given the international literature where rural gentrification is a prominent feature of rural life we could expect to find rural gentrification in Sweden as well, and the Swedish countryside is often portrayed as if it is being gentrified in mass media coverage, particularly in life style magazines. However, there have been few studies on the subject to date and those studies have been focused on particular areas rather than the entire country (for example, Amcoff 2000, Clark et al 2007, Kåks & Westholm, 1994) giving slight indication as to the significance of the process.

In a previous article (Hjort and Malmberg, 2006), we found that in-migrants to the countryside, and in particular to the more sparsely populated countryside were less likely to be university educated or have high incomes than migrants to urban areas. These

results awoke curiosity about whether this pattern was true for all countryside or if there could be areas of the sparsely populated countryside that were experiencing rural gentrification. Following this, the aim of this study is to investigate rural gentrification as a migration process in parts of the sparsely populated countryside. The main questions to be answered are: Are there indications of rural gentrification occurring in parts of the countryside? How are migration flows and composition in relation to gentrification affected by the economic ups and downs of the late 1980s and early 1990s? The time set of the present study is of particular interest. In the early 1990s Sweden experienced a depression almost as severe as that of the 1920s. The boom was at its peak in 1990, when there was a dramatic bust in the economy. The financial crises became very deep and prolonged and had effects on all parts of society including the labour market (Hagberg and Jonung, 2005).

In this study rural gentrification is viewed as a migration process of social change where the middle class is replacing the working class and class is operationalized using indicators of class; income and university education.

Data and methods

To be able to investigate rural gentrification, a method of identifying areas with an exceptionally high in-migration of middle-class people as compared to residents had to be worked out. First, the same classification of the territory as in the previous study was used. The classification was based on the assumption that it is possible to analyse the rural by looking at population density and it was made by dividing the Swedish territory into four categories: cities (44% of population), periurban countryside (17% of population), small towns (12% of population) and remote countryside (27% of population).¹ For this particular study, I have chosen the most sparsely populated category, the remote countryside (fewer than 80,000 inhabitants within a 25-kilometre radius and fewer than 3,000 within a 1-kilometre radius).²

¹ The analysis is based on a database which links information from various official statistical records and censuses provided by *Statistics Sweden* (SCB). This database covers anonymous individual records of all residents in Sweden with an annual update for the period 1985-1995, and it also contains information about place of residence accurate to within a 100-metre square.

² 25 kilometres refer to a reasonable daily reach and 1 kilometre to the immediate surrounding of each 100-metre square. 3000 people were chosen as the lower population limit since it corresponds to the limits for urban places used by The Swedish National Agency for Rural Development, Glesbygdsverket (2006) *Sveriges gles- och landsbygder 2006*, Östersund. The highest population interval was set to correspond

RURAL GENTRIFICATION AS A MIGRATION PROCESS

Second, an analysis of the occurrence of middle class people in the remote countryside at a low geographical level using GIS methods was conducted in order to identify areas having a large proportion of middle class residents and in-migrants. However, no conclusive results were found, no areas in particular were visible. This led on to a third step where a boundary was used, in this case, municipalities and in particular the remote parts of the municipalities. The number of in-migrants in each of the municipalities with a certain middle-class feature, such as high income or high education was compared to the number of residents with the same feature using quotas concerning both general in-migration and remote rural in-migration as compared to residents during a nine year period (1986-1994)³. The idea was that areas with a large difference between in-migrants and residents may be in a process of change whereby the areas are becoming gentrified. Fourth, thirteen remote rural areas were selected for further analysis from the lists of municipalities displaying the largest⁴ differences between in-migrants and residents concerning middle class indicators. The selected areas have been grouped into two categories: close to a city (three largest cities) and close to a mid-size town (regional centres). This was done because the three largest cities in Sweden (Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö) are unique and markedly different from other cities in Sweden. They share features not present in other urban areas and there is a strong possibility that these rural areas may be affected by some kind of ex-urbanization process related to their closeness to these metropolitan centres. Particularly during a period of drastic economic change, the closeness or remoteness to large cities may be important. Many of the areas in the mid-size town group are areas that are associated with tourism, for example Åre (skiing) and Simrishamn (summer, sea and artists).

The analyses were conducted using logistic regression models in order to assess the partial impact of the characteristics of in-migrants as compared to residents and out-migrants while at the same time being able to control for factors that are known to affect migration, such as age, family, gender and employment. All analyses were

to the average size of the middle sized towns of Sweden. For more details see; Hjort and Malmberg 2006.

³ The idea of including general in-migration to the municipality is that if many in-migrants to a municipality are middle class, this will have an effect on the rural areas as well, particularly in the long-run.

⁴ Most areas show small differences between in-migrants and residents. The mean values lies around 3-5% gain of middle class in-migrants as compared to residents over the nine year period. The areas selected here gain around 5-10% middle class in-migrants.

made at the individual level. The analyses were constructed from the assumption that rural gentrification contributes to a change in the social composition of an area which can be measured as a difference between in-migrants and residents and in-migrants and out-migrants. There are two types of analyses (in-migrants vs. residents and in-migrants vs. out-migrants) conducted for two sets of areas (areas close to a city and areas close to a mid-size town) and at three different points in time (1987, 1990 and 1994). The variables used in the models are listed below (Table 1).

Table 1: List of variables and comments

Variables ⁵	Comments
University education	If the individual's highest level of education is university education
Disposable income	The disposable income of the individual in 100 SEK
Unemployed	If the individual has received unemployment benefits during the year
Single	If the individual is not married
Children	If the individual has children
Woman	If the individual is a woman
Age 19-25	If individual is between the ages of 19 and 25
Age 26-40	If individual is between the ages of 26 and 40
Age 61 and older	If individual is 61 years and older

Results

The main focus of this analysis is on comparisons between in-migrants and residents, but also between in-migrants and out-migrants. There is an underlying assumption that a large difference between in-migrants and residents indicate that there is gentrification process occurring. Apart from university education for areas close to a city all variables were significant for all years and the results were similar for both types of areas (Table 2).

Table 2: Estimation results from models, in-migrants vs. residents

Models:	In-migrants vs. residents in areas close to a city			In-migrants vs. residents in areas close to a mid-size town		
	1987 1a			1987 2a		
Variables	B	Sig.	Exp(B) *	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
University educ.	0.1653	0.015	1,3598	0.4321	0.000	3,7241
Disposable income	0.0010	0.000	0,0077	0.0009	0.000	0,0065
Unemployed	0.9062	0.000	10,0799	0.5724	0.000	5,2321
Single	0.5812	0.000	5,6775	0.7995	0.000	8,0264
Children	-0.2893	0.000	-1,9706	-0.3879	0.000	-2,3673

⁵ All variables refer to year after migration, migration being measured as change of residence from the year before, for ex. in-migrants 1987 lived somewhere else in 1986 and variables refer to 1987 (year of investigation).

RURAL GENTRIFICATION AS A MIGRATION PROCESS

Woman	0.1527	0.001	1,2496	0.2881	0.000	2,3366
Age 19-25	1.1791	0.000	14,5445	1.3932	0.000	17,5921
Age 26-40	0.7227	0.000	7,4756	0.7953	0.000	7,9705
Age 61 +	-0.8999	0.000	-4,7952	-0.9712	0.000	-4,6881
Constant	-3.7007	0.000		-3.9085	0.000	
-2 log likelihood	13581.603			11816.627		
N	26546			25249		
Models:	1990 1b			1990 2b		
Variables	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
University educ.	0.0998	0.084	1,0240	0.3411	0.000	3,2338
Disposable income	0.0005	0.000	0,0049	0.0006	0.000	0,0050
Unemployed	0.6672	0.000	8,4724	0.8230	0.000	9,4316
Single	0.4946	0.000	5,8967	0.5748	0.000	5,9856
Children	-0.1979	0.001	-1,8083	-0.4016	0.000	-2,8127
Woman	0.2051	0.000	2,1916	0.2696	0.000	2,4828
Age 19-25	1.4363	0.000	23,3327	1.5245	0.000	22,3514
Age 26-40	0.8749	0.000	11,9496	0.8458	0.000	9,7886
Age 61+	-0.7072	0.000	-5,3027	-0.7337	0.000	-4,5005
Constant	-3.4411	0.000		-3.7456	0.000	
-2 log likelihood	16244.345			12179.851		
N	26082			23149		
Models:	1994 1c			1994 2c		
Variables	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
University educ.	0.0072	0.905	0,0592	0.6482	0.000	6,3216
Disposable income	0.0000	0.000	0,0008	0.0001	0.000	0,0007
Unemployed	-1.4209	0.000	-6,6735	0.6058	0.000	5,8062
Single	0.8084	0.000	9,1716	0.8458	0.000	8,9354
Children	-0.4242	0.000	-2,9249	-0.5708	0.000	-3,3552
Woman	0.1892	0.000	1,6758	0.2545	0.000	2,1076
Age 19-25	1.3523	0.000	18,6754	1.5129	0.000	20,4763
Age 26-40	0.8778	0.000	10,2268	0.8054	0.000	8,3720
Age 61+	-0.9015	0.000	-5,1447	-0.8432	0.000	-4,4450
Constant	-2.9138	0.000		-3.5191	0.000	
-2 log likelihood	14598.256			10644.066		
N	27041			22337		

* *Exp(B)* as percentage change in probabilities.

In areas close to a city, having higher incomes increased the probability of being an in-migrant as compared to a resident and as compared to an out-migrant all years (Table 2 & 3). However, there was a diminishing difference over the years between in-migrants and residents in areas close to a city regarding education. The areas started out with a positive correlation between university education and being an in-migrant as compared to a resident but in 1994 there was no significant difference between the two groups, which might indicate that a change in the population composition had taken place during the study period whereby in-migration had increased the level of education among residents, or possibly that in-migrants in 1994 were more like the residents regarding level of education (the share of university educated residents had increased since 1990 while the share of university educated in-migrants had

remained at the same level). In-migrants as compared to out-migrants in 1990 were negatively correlated to being university educated, which underscores the weak results regarding gentrification.

There was some support of there being a gentrification process occurring in areas close to a mid-size town as higher incomes and university education were positively correlated to being an in-migrant (Table 2). The effect of university education on the probability of being an in-migrant as compared to a resident in areas close to a mid-size town increased in 1994 as did the probability of being an in-migrant as compared to an out-migrant, which lends support to the conclusion that rural gentrification was occurring in areas close to a mid-size town. However, concerning income the difference became smaller in 1994 as compared to the previous years, which might be related to the economic crises of the early 1990s.

These results mirror general migration patterns where migrants are younger, more highly educated, more often single and have lower incomes than residents (Hjort and Malmberg 2006). However, in this study incomes were positively correlated both with in-migrants as compared to residents and as compared to out-migrants. This means that in-migrants to these particular areas are different from what is generally known about migrants and migrants to rural areas.

Concluding remarks

There is no conclusive evidence of rural gentrification understood as a migration process, affecting rural areas in Sweden. The reasons for this conclusion are that even though remote rural areas in all municipalities in Sweden initially were investigated regarding differences between in-migrants and residents concerning middle class features only a handful of areas showed such differences. Looking more closely at these areas did not result in any more conclusive results but rather, what was found was a striking similarity with previous studies of rural in-migration and a strong resemblance between in-migrants and out-migrants indicating an exchange of people with similar characteristics rather than an effect on the social composition of residents. However, there is some support for a gentrification process affecting areas close to a mid-size town.

This is not to say that rural gentrification can be ruled out in Sweden as a non-existent process but rather that the process of gentrification may only be found in a specific rural setting or perhaps, segment of the housing market (c f. Amcoff, 2000; Smith and Phil-

lips D A, 2001). Also, it is quite possible that rural gentrification may be a process of a more periurban character, since the present study only is concerned with the more sparsely populated parts of the countryside. However, Amcoff's (2000) study does not lend support to such a notion; neither does Stenbacka (2001). Both of their studies were conducted within the Stockholm region of influence. Also the fact that the migration flows of this study looks very much like a previous study (Hjort and Malmberg, 2006) of general flows of migration, where the most mobile are younger and university educated as compared to non-migrants; indicate that in general, rural gentrification may be a marginal phenomenon. The only difference found is that related to income, which might partly be explained with the fact that this study is concerned with disposable income and not income from employment, although employment is controlled for. It is also notable that the most distinct variable, university education is not significant in the analysis comparing in-migrants to residents in areas close to a city (apart from 1987), which might be interpreted as underscoring the conclusion that there is no gentrification process occurring in areas close to a city.

The second question was related to the specific time of investigation. First, two years of economic prosperity and then one year set at a time of economic depression. As previously argued, times of economic prosperity might lead to more migration due to an increased willingness on the parts of individuals to take risks. 1990 was a year with high rates of migration and the real estate market was at its peak. A booming real estate market usually means high prices, easy credits and strong demand. This might lead to a displacement effect where house prices in urban centres have increased so much that people with less monetary resources might have to move further out into the countryside to be able to afford housing. Coupled with this is the demand for single family dwellings, the dominating housing segment in Swedish rural areas which might lead to an increased demand at a time of a heated housing market, a demand that might reach even remote rural areas.

These are obviously complex relationships and they need more scrutiny. However, what has been shown in this study is that economic cycles have effects on migration flows and composition. Secondly; rural gentrification as a process of migration affecting remote rural areas of Sweden seems to be a marginal phenomenon but there are indications of areas close to mid-size towns being subject to the process. Although, the issue of rural gentrification has to be addressed further in order to conclusively dismiss it as insignifi-

cant or attribute it important in the reshaping of rural areas that is currently taking place in Sweden.

References

- Amcoff, J., 2000, *Samtida bosättning på svensk landsbygd*. PhD thesis, Uppsala University: Uppsala.
- Boyle, P. and K. Halfacree (1998) *Migration into Rural Areas: Theories and issues*. Wiley. Chichester.
- Clark, E., K. Jonsson, E. Lundholm and G. Malmberg, 2007, "Island gentrification and space wars" In *A World of Islands*, Baldacchino, G. Island Studies. Charlottetown.
- Cloke, P., M. Phillips and D. Rankin (1991) Middle class housing choice: channels of entry into Gower South Wales. In *People in the Countryside: Studies of Social Change in Rural Britain*, Champion, T. and C. Watkins. Paul Chapman. London.
- Cloke, P., M. Phillips and N. Thrift (1995) The new middle classes and the social constructs of rural living. In *Social Change and the Middle Classes*, Butler, T. and M. Savage. UCL Press. London.
- Cloke, P., M. Phillips and N. Thrift (1998) Class, colonisation and lifestyle strategies in Gower. In *Migration into rural areas*, Boyle, P. and K. Halfacree. Wiley & sons. Chichester.
- Darling, E., 2005, "The city in the country: wilderness gentrification and the rent gap" *Environment and Planning A* 37, 1015-1032.
- Glesbygdsverket, 2006, *Sveriges gles- och landsbygder 2006*. Östersund.
- Hagberg, T. and L. Jonung, 2005, "1990-talskrisen - hur svår var den?" *Ekonomisk Debatt* 33, 8. 30-45.
- Halliday, J. and M. Coombes (1995) In search of counterurbanisation: the evidence from Devon on the relationship between patterns of migration and motivation. *Journal of Rural Studies* 11, 4. 433-446.
- Halseth, G. (1993) Communities within communities: changing 'residential' areas at Cultus Lake, British Columbia. *Journal of Rural Studies* 9, 2. 175-187.
- Halseth, G. (2004) The 'cottage' privilege: Increasingly elite landscapes of second homes in Canada. In *Tourism, mobility and second homes: between elite landscape and common ground*, Hall, M.C. and D.K. Müller. Channel View Publications. Clevedon.
- Hjort, S. and Malmberg, G. (2006) The attraction of the rural: Characteristics of rural migrants in Sweden. *Scottish Geographical Journal* V122 (1), 55-75.
- Hoggart, K. (1997) The middle classes in rural England 1971-1991. *Journal of Rural Studies* 13, 3. 253-73.
- Kåks, H. and E. Westholm (1994) *En plats i tillvaron - Studier av flyttning till landsbygden*. Dalarnas forskningsråd, 1994:8, Falun.
- Little, J. (1987) Rural gentrification and the influence of local-level planning. In *Rural planning: policy into action*, Cloke, P. Harper & Row publ. London.
- Phillips, M., 1993, "Rural gentrification and the process of class colonisation" *Journal of Rural Studies* 9, 2. 123-140.
- Phillips, M. (1998a) Investigations of the British rural middle classes - Part 1: From legislation to interpretation. *Journal of Rural Studies* 14, 4. 411-425.
- Phillips, M. (1998b) Investigations of the British rural middle classes - Part 2: Fragmentation, identity, morality and contestation. *Journal of Rural Studies* 14, 4. 427-443.
- Phillips, M., 2002, "The production, symbolization and socialization of gentrification: impressions from two Berkshire villages" *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 27, 282-308.

RURAL GENTRIFICATION AS A MIGRATION PROCESS

- Phillips, M., 2004, "Other geographies of gentrification" *Progress in Human Geography* 28, 1. 5-30.
- Phillips, M., 2005, "People in the centre? The Contested Geographies of 'Gentrification'" In *Contested worlds: an introduction to human geography*, Phillips, M. Ashgate. Aldershot.
- Smith, D.P., 2002, "Extending the temporal and spatial limits of gentrification: A research agenda for population geographers" *International Journal of Population Geography* 8, 385-394.
- Smith, D.P. and D.A. Phillips, 2001, "Socio-cultural representations of greentrified Pennine rurality" *Journal of Rural Studies* 17, 457-469.
- Stenbacka, S., 2001, *Landsbygdsboende i inflyttarnas perspektiv: Intention och handling i lokalsamhället*. PhD thesis, Uppsala University: Uppsala.