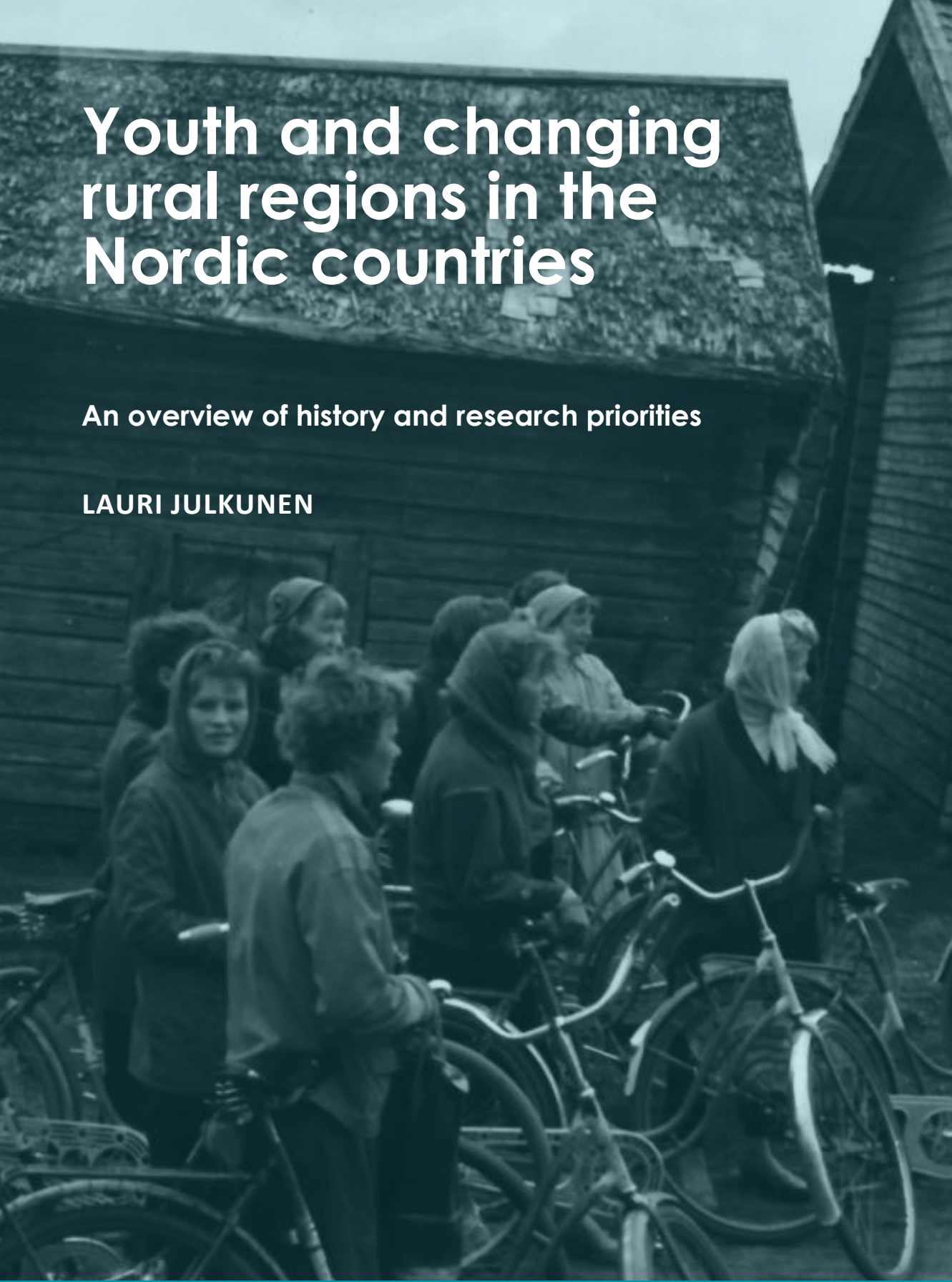
Youth and changing rural regions in the Nordic countries

An overview of history and research priorities

LAURI JULKUNEN



FINNISH YOUTH RESEARCH NETWORK

Youth and changing rural regions in the Nordic countries

AN OVERVIEW OF HISTORY AND RESEARCH PRIORITIES

Lauri Julkunen

Finnish Youth Research Network /
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Abstract

This review summarises previous research and historical knowledge on rural youth in four Nordic countries: Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. The temporal span of the review extends from the early 20th century to the 2020s. During this period, rural areas in all examined countries have undergone significant transformations: the decline in the importance of primary production has led to various challenges such as depopulation and the scarcity of services. This review explores how the transformation of rural areas has affected the lives of young people and examines the perspectives and themes through which the youth in rural areas have been previously approached in Nordic research. It is not a systematic literature review; instead, the research approach is more reflective and hermeneutic. The review is part of *The Future of Nordic Youth in Rural Regions: A Cross-national Qualitative Longitudinal Study in four Nordic Countries* (2022–2025) research project, which aims to generate knowledge on the lives, experiences, and perceptions of young people living in various sparsely populated and rural areas.

The overview is divided into an introduction and four thematic but loosely chronological chapters. The first chapter examines the life courses of young people in agrarian societies, as the Nordic countries largely were in the early 20th century. Thematic focal points include the significance of work in young people's lives and the role of expanding education in shaping rural youth. The second chapter starts from the period after the Second World War, when migration to cities accelerated. Although rural depopulation is not a straightforward development, questions concerning staying or leaving have been at the center of research on young people in rural areas for a long time. The third chapter examines the welfare state reforms after the Second World War, such as the birth of the comprehensive school, from the perspective of young people in rural areas. Issues of regional equality placed rural youth in the spotlight in a new way in the 1960s and 1970s, which was also reflected in the discourse on exclusion towards the end of the century. The final chapter brings us close to the present day and looks at rural youth in an increasingly globalised world. The urban-rural dichotomy has not lost its grip but takes on new meanings in present-day culture. On the other hand, digitalisation, for example, has diminished the role of the physical location and provided opportunities for multi-locational rural youth.

Foreword

Youth and changing rural regions in the Nordic countries: an overview of history and research priorities is part of a research project covering four Nordic countries of Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark titled *The Future of Nordic Youth in Rural Regions: A Cross-national Qualitative Longitudinal Study in Four Nordic Countries* (2022–2025). The goal of the project is to generate information on the lives, experiences and perceptions of young people living in various sparsely populated and rural areas – from the challenges facing the youth to their aspirations for the future and their relationship with their home region. The research project is based on qualitative follow-up studies of 196 young people and young adults born on both sides of the turn of the millennium in Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. The research areas of the projects are located in ten geographically, culturally and economically diverse regions, ranging from southern Denmark to the sparsely populated Sápmi region of northern Finland.

The research is funded by the *Future Challenges in the Nordics* research programme. The goal of the programme is to focus research on issues in the humanities and social sciences that involve significant future challenges in the Nordic countries, both socially and culturally. The research programme is funded by *Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland*, *Riksbankens Jubileumsfond*, *the Finnish Cultural Foundation*, *Svenska kulturfonden*, *Stiftelsen Brita Maria Renlunds minne* and *Familjen Kamprads stiftelse*.[1] One such future challenge relates to the future of rural regions. Among high-income countries, the Nordic countries stand out as an exceptionally sparsely populated region. In terms of both the surface area and the population living in rural regions, the Nordic countries rank among the top OECD countries. However, regional differences within the Nordic countries have increased. For a long time, rural regions in all the Nordic countries have experienced migration loss. Diminishing services, school closures, long distances and ageing populations are all challenges that have concrete consequences for young people's daily lives in the various Nordic countries.

An important premise of our research project is the desire to place the challenges facing rural regions in a broader historical context, which is often missing in youth research focusing on the present challenges. Many of the phenomena affecting the lives

1 See: https://futurenordics.org.

of young people in rural and sparsely populated areas, such as migration, changes in economic structures or education policies, involve long-term development trends with broad structural, cultural, and political dimensions.

Youth and changing rural regions in the Nordic countries: an overview of history and research priorities aims to contribute to meeting this need for basic knowledge for the purposes of historicisation and contextualisation. Its aim is to provide a concise overview of the changes in rural youth in the Nordic countries since the first half of the 20th century. In addition, the overview examines what research has been done on rural youth in the four participating Nordic countries and what research priorities can be identified.

The Future of Nordic Youth in Rural Regions research project is coordinated by the University of Jyväskylä and includes *Umeå University* in Sweden, *Oslo Metropolitan University* in Norway and *The Rockwool Foundation* in Denmark. The following national research projects are involved in the collaborative research: *Inequality in Youth – A Qualitative, Longitudinal Research Database* (research professor Ingunn Marie Eriksen and statistical researcher Patrik Lie Andersen, Oslo Metropolitan University), *A Future of Staying? A Qualitative Longitudinal Study of the Everyday Life of Marginalised Youth Living in Rural Areas in Denmark* (research professor Jeanette Østergaard, The Rockwool Foundation), *Youth in transitions – A qualitative longitudinal study on education and career trajectories among young people in rural Sweden* (professor Maria Rönnlund and associate professor Aina Tollefsen, Umeå University), *Rural Generations on the Move: Cultural History of Rural Youth, 1950–2020* (academy research fellow Kaisa Vehkalahti, University of Jyväskylä) as well as *Youth in time – a qualitative longitudinal study* (university lecturer Päivi Armila, University of Eastern Finland).[2]

We extend our warmest thanks to Lauri Julkunen, PhD, who has done a remarkable job in bringing together research published in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark over the past decades and outlining the main areas of research concerning youth and rural areas. It has not been an easy task, as the literature spans several countries and language areas, many disciplines and a long historical period. However, the end result is a report that provides a concise, incisive and scientifically insightful package of information on research on young people in rural areas. Thanks to our Nordic project team Maria Rönnlund, Aina Tollefsen, Ingunn Marie Eriksen, Patrik Lie Andersen and

2 See: https://www.funore.org.

Jeanette Østergaard for contributing to the planning of the overview as well as providing comments at various stages. Special thanks to the project's domestic collaboration group, where questions related to rural areas and youth have been discussed and the manuscript commented on by Helena Ristaniemi, Ville Pöysä, Maria Vanha-Similä and Päivi Armila.

We warmly thank the *Future Challenges in the Nordics* programme for providing research funding and supporting the unique Nordic research cooperation. Thanks to the Language Services at the University of Jyväskylä for translating the original Finnish manuscript into English. We warmly thank the Finnish Youth Research Society for accepting this overview into its publication programme and for making it available to a broad readership.

Oulu, 20 June 2023
Kaisa Vehkalahti, head of the research consortium
The Future of Nordic Youth in Rural Regions: A Cross-national Qualitative Longitudinal Study in four Nordic Countries

Introduction: Who are the rural youth?

The kids of London say that they're bored
The kids of London say there's nothing to do
(I'm so bored)
The kids of London say that they're bored
The kids of London say there's nothing to do
But do they know what's it like in Pihtipudas?

In their 1979 song, Pihtipudas-based punk band Ratsia sang about kids living in London who didn't understand their privilege of living their youth in the urban centre of happenings and coolness. It was quite different to live in a remote small community in remote Finland, a double periphery which made London seem like it was on another planet. However, the lyrics of the band's frontman and lead singer, the then 19-year-old Jyri Honkavaara, do not yearn for London, but instead find content for the punk-spirited youth in the bleakness of the local milieu, aware of its shortcomings in relation to the youth ideals of the time. The young people of Pihtipudas knew something about life that the global centres of youth culture had no notion of. This overview describes and highlights the transformation of sparsely populated areas, which has created the conditions for the experience Honkavaara crystallises in his lyrics. The overview focuses on a specific geographical area, which includes Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, in other words the Nordic countries, with the exception of Iceland. It is assumed that the kids of Pajala, Snåsa, Farstrup or, for instance, the Faroe Islands also have knowledge and experiences that resonate with Honkavaara's lyrics.

A punk band does not represent the kind of youth that tends to be associated with rural and sparsely populated areas. This speaks as much about the urban nature of youth cultures as it does about the rigidity of the image of the countryside. As a word, *rural* harks back to an agrarian primary production and way of life, even though the role of agriculture as a livelihood has been on the wane for at least a century. It is true that agriculture has long held a dominant position in rural areas, but the change over the last 100 years has been rapid and drastic. In the media discussion, the countryside has become a fixed construct whose state and future most people have an opinion on.

Alongside agricultural economy, the rural concept carries with it a dual imagery of idyll and decline (e.g., Haugen & Villa 2006b; Eriksson 2010a). If the countryside is viewed in an idealistic light, recent change can be seen as a tragedy, deterioration of the idyll and decline. But if the countryside is seen as a backwater belonging in the past, perhaps it is right that it should give way to development and progress. Clearly, this is a politicised and charged subject in many ways, as is evident in the discussions on the possibilities and constraints of life for young people in rural areas.

This overview aims to diversify the conceptions of rural youth and youth in the Nordic countries by bringing together previous data and research from different disciplines. Although the overview only includes literature from four Nordic countries,[3] research concepts and discussions around the topic are transnational. Nordic research has developed in sync with international discussions (see, e.g., Panelli 2002; Panelli, Punch & Robson 2007). In addition to social science research on youth, geographers have also become increasingly interested in children and young people in remote areas in the 2000s (see Gough 2008). Although the regional focus is on the Nordic countries, the broader international discussion is reflected in the overview through thematic emphases such as the multifaceted relationship between gender and rural areas, transitions in the lives of young people in rural areas, and the question of regional identities and experiences of belonging.

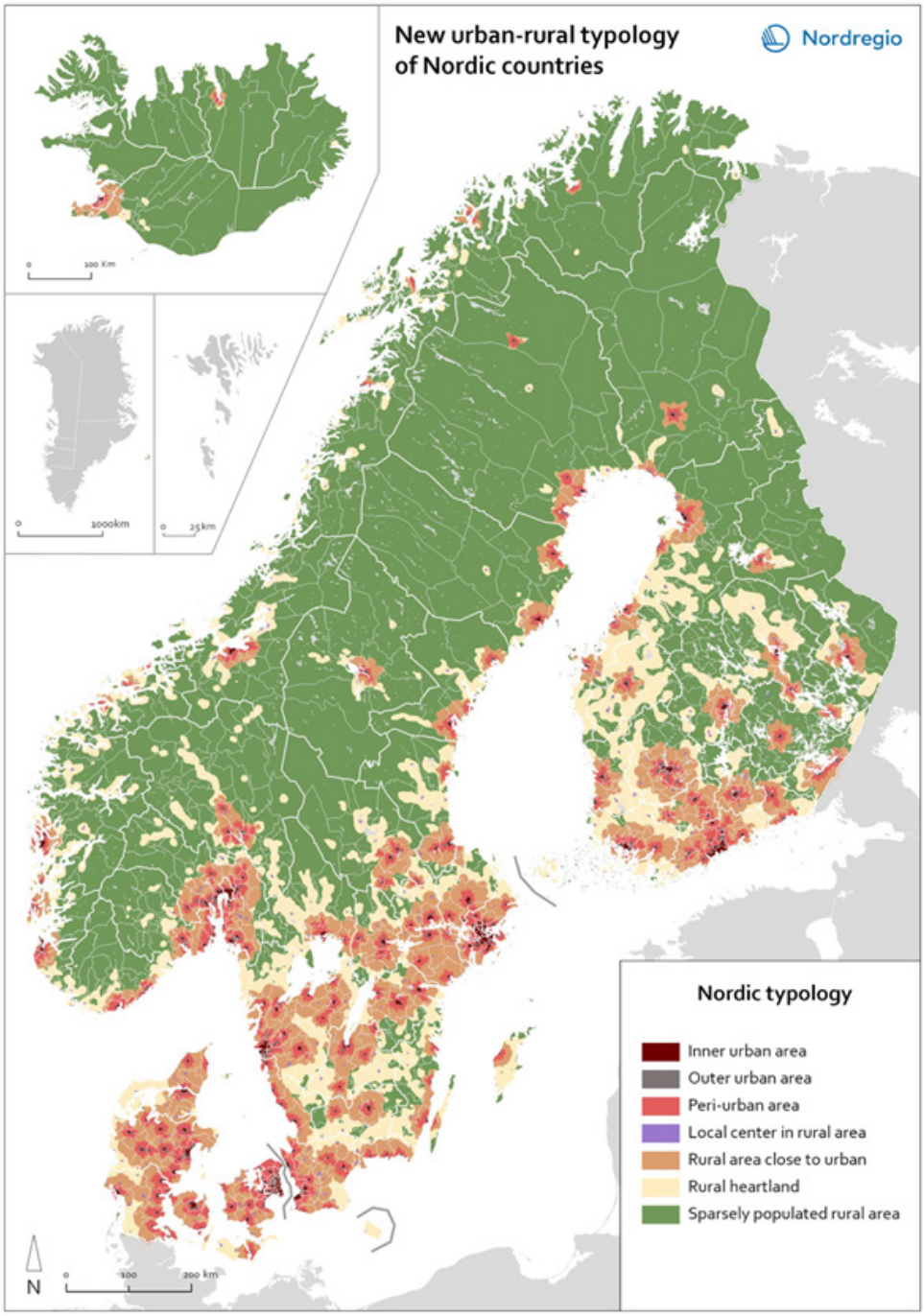
Previous research has been approached phenomenon-based, limiting the focus to what is already known about rural youth in Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway, rather than on the methods, theories or data used, for instance. The overview does not aim to be systematic because of the breadth of the subject, but is rather descriptive and hermeneutic in nature. In terms of time, the overview is limited to the development of the last 100 years. While rural areas have naturally undergone changes throughout history, the last hundred years are key when examining the challenges facing the countryside today. Depopulation, declining services, gender disparity and the sharp decline in agriculture can all be understood in the light of developments that started at the beginning of the 20th century.

3 Finland's role is to some extent emphasised both in terms of the literature used as well as the examples.

DIVERSE COUNTRYSIDE

The definition of countryside is not straightforward, but is subject to discussion in regards to time and place. Precise definitions for use in, for example, statistics, often start from population density. To illustrate, the OECD definition of rural municipalities includes municipalities with a population density of fewer than 150 inhabitants per square kilometre (see Statistics Finland 2003). However, these types of definitions are poor at identifying differences between rural areas, prompting efforts to complement them with classifications based on geographic data. The Finnish Environment Institute's seven-tier regional classification, as one example, divides rural areas into four categories according to certain criteria: local centres in rural areas, rural areas close to urban areas, rural heartland areas, and sparsely populated rural areas (Helminen, Nurmio & Vesanen 2020). The same geographic data-based classification has also been used by Nordregio, the Nordic research centre for regional development and planning (see Map 1). As can be seen from the map, rural areas are diverse, ranging from sparsely populated areas in the north to areas around regional centres and local centres. Moreover, the problems are not the same everywhere: in Finland, for example, rural challenges, such as the ageing population, mainly affect sparsely populated rural areas. In contrast, peri-urban areas are doing well by many measures (see Vihinen 2004, 428–433; Tuuva-Hongisto, Pöysä & Armila 2016, 22; Sireni et al. 2017; see also Pettersson 2001).

This overview takes an investigative approach to rural areas, without committing to a specific definition, but recognising the charged connotations, the difficulties of exact definitions and the diversity of rural areas. However, there is still a desire to retain the concept of the countryside, rather than to replace it with, for example, the concept of remote areas or periphery (cf. Tuuva-Hongisto 2018, 25). Defining the countryside invariably involves a discursive exercise of power. Many researchers have pointed out that the rural or regional peripherality is usually constructed dichotomously in relation to the urban and often also as subordinate to the urban (e.g., Paasi 1995; Alasuutari 2011; Eriksson 2010a; Eriksson, Nielsen & Paulgaard 2015). The concept itself is also an expression of the transformation of modernisation: growing cities needed an antithesis rooted in agrarian culture and primary production. The collapse of the agricultural economy has in turn created new meanings for the countryside (see Svendsen 2004). From a constructivist perspective, rather than being a physically defined area, the countryside can be conceptualised as a social process which is the result of action and interaction rather than a spatial-material premise for dwelling and living (e.g.,



Map 1. Nordic countries according to the new geographic data-based regional classification. Source: Nordregio.

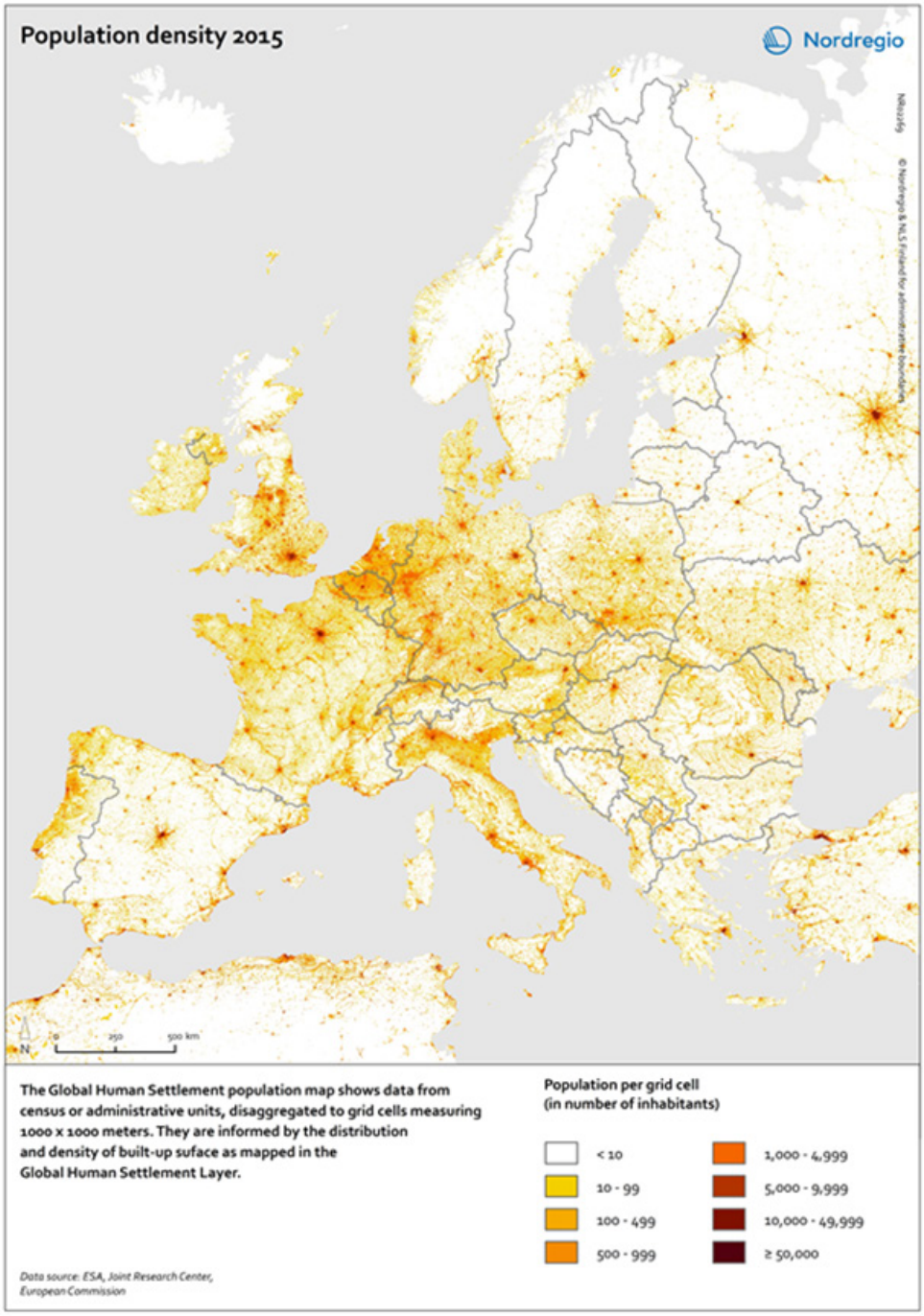
Massey 1994). From this point of view, it may be more meaningful to approach the lives of rural youth through an opportunity structure than through geographical place of residence (see Bæck 2016, 439).

THE NORDIC COUNTRIES AS A REGION

Occasionally, the overview refers to remote or sparsely populated areas in addition to rural areas.[4] Indeed, sparse population is a feature that distinguishes the countries covered by this overview, even Denmark, the most densely populated of the countries, from the rest of Europe (see Map 2). Finland, Sweden and Norway are divided between the more densely populated south and the very sparsely populated north. The northern regions cover more than half of the countries' surface area, but only about 10% of the population lives in these regions (Balsvik & Drake 1994; Eriksson 2010b, 98; Pedersen & Moilanen 2019a, 33). The north has also historically been poorer with smaller farms, while manorial settlement and large farms have been concentrated in the south. The division between the sparsely populated North and the urban South is also evident on a symbolic level, in cultural images and perceptions. The North is often seen as more traditional, more authentic and often more primitive than the South (e.g., Paulgaard 2002, 96-97). Although Denmark is smaller than the other Nordic countries, there has also been a lot of discussion recently about regional divisions, cultural stereotypes of rural areas and the concentration of certain problems in sparsely populated areas such as the northern parts of Jutland (e.g., Nørgaard 2011; Bloksgaard, Faber & Hansen 2015; Eriksson, Nielsen & Paulgaard 2015; Pedersen & Gram 2018, 623-624).

In addition to their sparse population and similar climatic conditions, the Nordic countries have many other things in common. The nations are historically intertwined in many ways. Sweden and Denmark are kingdoms dating back centuries, while Norway

4 There are, of course, differences in the concepts related to the countryside between countries and languages. For example, the Finnish word for countryside, *maaseutu*, is best represented by the Swedish word *landsbygd*, which has a neutral or positive connotation. In contrast, the Swedish word *glesbygd* has a more negative connotation and is most similar to the Finnish words for *sparsely populated area* and *remote region*: *harvaanasuttu alue* and *syrjäseutu*. See Frånberg 1996, 22. This distinction corresponds to some extent to the English terms *rural area* and *countryside*. However, the word *rural* is widely used in research to cover both remote and rural facets.



Map 2. Population density in Europe in 2015. Source: Nordregio.

and Finland are young and were still poor countries at the beginning of the 20th century (Norway became independent in 1905 and Finland in 1917). Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden for some 800 years until 1809, when it became a grand duchy under Russia until its independence. Whereas Norway was a kingdom of its own in the Middle Ages, it was then in union with Denmark and subsequently with Sweden between 1812 and 1905. The fifth Nordic country, Iceland, was part of Denmark as an autonomous territory and eventually as a union state until 1944. Relations between the countries, in terms of trade, migration and culture, have been close for centuries. By Western European standards, countries industrialised and urbanised relatively late, and the figure of the peasant took on a central symbolic, ideological and political significance as part of the emergence of nation states. The countryside and rural imagery have continued to play an important role in the national identities of the countries. (Sörensen & Stråth 1997; Wiborg A. 2004, 419; Östman, Talvitie & Suodenjoki 2021, 403.) Moreover, the countries share a long history of influence from the German cultural sphere, reflected in the dominance of the Lutheran church, among other things.

Today, the Nordic countries are primarily known for what is known as the Nordic model or the Nordic welfare state, which combines a market economy with comprehensive public social security and the ideal of social justice. The Nordic model has its roots in the social reforms of the mid-20th century, and the post-World War II period in particular is considered the golden age of its construction (see Hilson 2008). Perceptions of the Nordic countries and Scandinavia abroad are almost invariably positive today, even to the extent that this has given rise to astonishment and parodies (see Booth 2014). The countries have a reputation for being wealthy, stable, economically active, egalitarian and having a high quality of life (see, e.g., Østergård 1997). The Nordic countries are also often considered to be very child-oriented countries, taking care of the welfare and rights of their youngest citizens (e.g., Brembeck, Johansson & Kampmann 2004, 11–17). On the other hand, it is not that far back in history when, even in these latitudes, people died of starvation in the countryside, child labour was common practice and child poverty was dealt with by having public auctions, where children were given to the highest bidder to work for and be fed by them (e.g., Engberg 2004). The historical examination of the youth of rural areas also offers new perspectives on the Nordic welfare state and its history.

Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway are fairly similar countries by many measures (see up-to-date information in Grunfelder et al. (eds.), 2020). Yet it is a reasonable question to ask whether there is anything that unites the youth of their rural areas.

There is, of course, a certain common 'geography of opportunity' (see Paulgaard 2019), including, for example, long distances and a pressure to move away on the threshold of adulthood, but the differences among the young people, be they regional, social, linguistic, or ethnic, cannot be ignored either. For example, wealth disparities have historically been and continue to be a central factor in shaping the different life paths of young people in rural areas. For some, it is specifically the experiences of deprivation and poverty that have been at the heart of being a rural youth (see, e.g., Virkkunen 2010). Then again, for the youth of Sápmi (the land of the Sámi), a sparsely populated area has meant different things than for the peasant youth of the agrarian heartlands. The Nordic countries also include regions that are not only sparsely populated but also geographically (and sometimes culturally) distinct, such as the autonomous regions of Åland, the Faroe Islands (Føroyar), and Greenland (Kalaallit Nunaat). Many of the sparsely populated areas are located in frontiers, which has created a distinctive setting for rural youth, whether in the Tornio river valley, Karelia or the border region between Denmark and Germany (e.g., Waara 1998; Jukarainen 2003; Yndigegn 2003). Although this overview refers to rural youth as a singular entity, in practice we are dealing with different types of positionally constructed youths.

RURAL YOUTH AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT

In recent years, youth research has been criticised for its urban focus. According to the critics, urban youth has been made the norm and expectation, with rural youth seen as a kind of periphery of youth. A similar urban focus has, according to critics, also characterised education research. (Hargreaves, Kvalsund & Galton 2009; Farrugia 2014; Beach & Öhrn 2019; Farrugia & Ravn 2022.) It can be suggested that a similar blindness to the countryside is also visible in the history of modern youth, whose core themes have included youth problems and youth cultures defined with an urban focus (see, e.g., Aapola & Kaarninen 2003). In modernisation theories, the countryside has long represented a stagnant and traditional culture that was even supposed to give way to dynamic and industrialising societies (see, e.g., Haapala & Lloyd 2018, 10). Although urbanisation has been a clear trend in the 20th century, in recent decades the idea of progress as a shift from the agrarian to the urban and industrial has been put in a new light, not only because, at least in the Nordic countries, the period of industrial societies seems to remain rather short.

Despite the metrocentricity or 'methodological urbanism' of youth research (see Tedre & Pöllänen 2016), young people in rural areas have not been completely forgotten in research. The effects of urbanisation on rural areas began to be considered early on, which led to an interest in rural village schools and the academic performance and future visions of rural youths (see Solstad 1978; Råberg 1979; Mäntykorpi 1986). These themes have also been at the centre of later research. The economic depression of the 1990s and the subsequent discourse on youth unemployment and exclusion brought equality issues into the spotlight, with regional perspectives also coming into the picture. In addition, Finland's and Sweden's accession to the EU in 1995 brought regional issues to the forefront of politics in these countries. During the same year, a European research project (RYPE) was launched to have a comparative look at the lives, attitudes and inclusion of rural youth in Finland, Sweden, Germany, Italy and Estonia (see Helve (ed.) 2000). In the early 2000s, a new EU-level project (PAYPIRD) was launched to examine, among other things, the impact of political actions on the exclusion of young people in rural areas (see Jentsch & Shucksmith 2004). A third major comparative study has focused on the youth of the Barents Sea region, referring to the northern parts of Sweden, Finland, Norway and north-western Russia (see Soininen 2002; Waara 2002; Kiilakoski 2016). In addition, an extensive report of young people in remote and rural areas and the research carried out on them was published in the early 2000s as a joint effort between Nordic youth researchers and the Nordic Council of Ministers (see Helve (ed.) 2003). At the turn of the 1990s and 2000s, there can even be said to have been a kind of momentary boom in research on rural youth, which spawned extensive international research projects as well as individual studies at national level (e.g., Waara 1996; Soininen 1998).[5]

The overview is divided into four thematic chapters, which are presented in a loosely chronological order. The first chapter, "Youth in an agrarian culture", examines the life courses of young people in agrarian societies, as the Nordic countries largely were in the early 20th century. Thematic focal points include the significance of work in young people's lives and the role of expanding education in shaping rural youth. The second chapter, "The Call of the City", starts from the period after the Second World War, when migration to cities accelerated. Although rural depopulation is not a straightforward development, the question of staying or leaving has been at the centre

5 For more on the project behind this overview, see the foreword.

of research on young people in rural areas for a long time. The third chapter, "Rural youth in the welfare state", examines the welfare state reforms after the Second World War, such as the birth of the comprehensive school, from the perspective of young people in rural areas. Issues of regional equality placed rural youth in the spotlight in a new way in the 1960s and 1970s, which was also reflected in the discourse on exclusion towards the end of the century. The final chapter, "Changing lifestyles and identities", brings us close to the present day and looks at rural youth in an increasingly globalised world. The urban–rural dichotomy has not lost its grip, but takes on new meanings in present-day culture. On the other hand, digitalisation, for example, has diminished the role of the physical location and provided opportunities for multilocational rural youth.

Youth in an agrarian culture

Today, primary production constitutes only a fraction of the Nordic economy, but at the beginning of the century the situation was different: in Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, a large part of the population lived off the land, forests and the sea. The percentages ranged from around 40% in Denmark to over 70% in Finland (see Figure 1). When looking at traditional agrarian culture, yeomanry, or a subsistence and lifestyle based on land ownership, is often seen as dominant. However, agrarian communities were notably heterogeneous, and the life course of a young person depended to a large extent on the gender and social group into which they happened to be born. In Finland, for example, in the early 1900s (before the land reforms) more than half of the young people in rural areas were children of the landless population, that is, tenant farmers and farm workers (Markkola 2003, 129–130). The countryside was also home to people not directly living off the land: nobility, artisans, industrial workers and civil servants such as clergymen and teachers, whose numbers varied from region to region. Indeed, being a young person in an agrarian culture could have meant many different things, depending on the person's background.

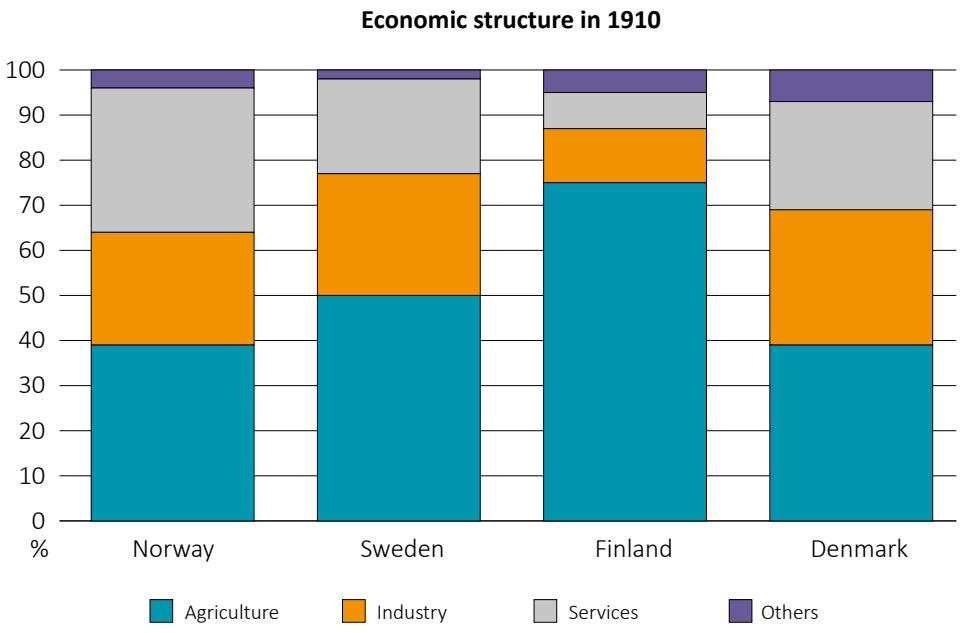


Figure 1. Source: Pöntinen 1983, 46.

WORK AND UPBRINGING

In previous research, children and young people living in an agrarian culture have been studied primarily from the perspective of working and growing up in a hard-working lifestyle (e.g., Korkiakangas 1996; Coninck-Smith 1997; Sjöberg 2004; Engberg 2011; Olsson 2011; Markkola 2018). Research has highlighted how children were socialised at home from an early age to ideals of obedience and working hard, on the basis of which it was hoped they would in time raise their own offspring. Until the early 1900s, the home was a larger economic and upbringing unit than the present nuclear family. It was a household which, in addition to parents and children, included servants, grandparents and sometimes also other relatives (e.g., Egerbladh 1989). According to the Lutheran three estate doctrine, power in the household belonged to the master, to whose orders children and young people had to conform (see, e.g., Brembeck 1986; Lilieqvist 1991, 123–165; Karonen 2002, 14–17; Tuomaala 2005). Socialisation took place intertwined with everyday life, partly through religious customs, but above all through work. Traditional rural upbringing can be described as the transmission of tacit knowledge (e.g., Aukia 2010), as a particular way of life was grown into by participating and doing, through practice and routines.

Work was started as soon as it was physically possible, usually from the age of under 10 (Lilieqvist 1991, 102–122). At first, the children carried out smaller auxiliary tasks, such as looking after younger siblings, carrying water and firewood, and picking berries. As they grew older, they moved on to more demanding and heavier work, such as herding, feeding cattle and, for girls, milking. For Sweden, for example, research has underlined the importance of certain types of auxiliary work done by young people, such as herding, not only for their everyday lives but also as part of the family economy (see Sjöberg 1997). Although some tasks were common to children and young people in all Nordic countries, there were also regional variations: for example, in the fishing communities of northern Norway, the emphasis was naturally on auxiliary tasks related to fishing (see Edvardsen 2011). Those of confirmation age, around 15 years old, were already expected to participate in the same work as adults. For impoverished families in particular, the work of children and young people had an important economic role alongside socialisation, which was later reflected in conflicts when rural children were to be brought into the educational system. (See Szabó 1971; Sjöberg 1997; Schrumpf 1997; Aukia 2010, 131–188; Virkkunen 2010, 170–172.)

In addition to work, previous research has paid close attention to the agrarian gender system and gender as a structuring factor in rural people's lives (e.g., Thorsen 1993; Niskanen (ed.) 1998; Löfström 1999; Östman 2000). It was precisely through the division of labour that gender differences and hierarchies were upheld in agrarian culture. Growing up into working life took on the meaning of gender socialisation, as the work children did began to be separated into girls' and boys' tasks between the ages of 12 and 14. The division of labour has even been noted to have defined what it meant to live as a girl, a boy, a man and a woman in an agrarian society (see Östman 2000; Engberg 2011, 335–336; Markkola 2018, 167–168). Although work was divided by gendered norms, in practice it was also possible to be flexible when necessary, especially in the case of women entering male jobs (Markkola 2003, 131–135). Gendered work has also been central to the visual representation of the countryside, whether in the visual arts or in advertising (see Vallius 2014). Although research has emphasised the gendered division of labour in agrarian culture, gender was not only constructed through the male–female dichotomy, but also through generational relations. For example, becoming a man meant not only separating oneself from women's work, but also abandoning the things that belonged to boyhood, that is, maturing (e.g., Johansson 1989). It has also been pointed out that the pre-modern conception of gender in rural areas may have differed considerably from the 19th century middle-class way of conceiving of gender as a binary system (e.g., Löfström 1999; Männistö-Funk 2019).

Childhood and adolescence in the countryside was largely a time marked by work, even to the extent that it has later been debated whether adolescence in the countryside existed at all as an age period separate from early childhood and adulthood. On the other hand, work was also a legal obligation for a long time: in Finland and Sweden, for example, there was what was known as "compulsory service" until the late 19th century. Children and young people working was something that was taken for granted, and was not restricted by law in the same way as industrial work in cities. Work was seen more as part of household management and socialisation. (See Engberg 2011, 331–332; Coninck-Smith 1997; Sjöberg 2004; Olsson 2011; Markkola 2018.) It has been suggested that the need for child labour began to decline significantly only with the mechanisation of the countryside, which occurred on a large scale around the middle of the 20th century. However, even after that, the value of work remained a mental construct in rural upbringing culture. (See Perlinge 1995; Sjöberg 1997; Vehkalahti 2014; Laurén & Malinen 2021.) It is indicative that, before the introduction of comprehensive social legislation, work was also the primary form of poor relief in rural

areas. The most glaring example of this which affected rural children and young people is the practice of child auctioning, known throughout the Nordic countries, whereby children and orphans (mainly aged between 10 and 15) from destitute families were auctioned off to the highest bidding household for labour and subsistence. Although the practice was criticised from early on, in some places it continued into the 20th century. In Finland, for example, the practice was abolished by the Poor Relief Act that entered into force in 1923, but it continued unofficially into the 1930s. (See Rahikainen 2002; Engberg 2011, 337–339.)

GROWING UP

In addition to gender, family wealth had a significant impact on the future a young person faced. Especially in poorer, landless rural families, young people started working outside the home at an early age. Generally, it was only in wealthy farming families that there was enough work at home for all the children. For most people, the means of subsistence meant either going to work as a servant or, from the late 19th century onwards, to work in the city. On the other hand, for many, time spent as a servant was the only possibility to learn agricultural work if their parents belonged to the agricultural labour force, for example (e.g., Markkola 2018, 165–167). In general, rural youths became servants – maids and farmhands – at around 15 years of age, after their confirmation, sometimes even earlier. This age was determined by the young person's social background, place of residence and also their position in the sibling group. The period of service could last up to the age of 30, after which people usually married and, if possible, settled down in a house of their own. The servant phase was such a characteristic part of young people's lives that research has even considered it to be an institution that built rural youth. (See Dribe 2000; Markkola 2003; Rahikainen 2003; Engberg 2011.) The proportion of servants in the rural population varied widely by region. In the fertile regions of Denmark, for example, up to about one fifth of the population were servants in the 19th century, but in eastern Finland the figure was much lower (Morning 2003, 80–83).

In the Nordic countries belonging to the Lutheran cultural sphere, confirmation played a central role as the boundary between childhood and adolescence, after which responsibilities and rights in the local community increased (e.g., Morning 2003, 80–81). The period from confirmation, which was a prerequisite for marriage, to

the actual marriage was usually quite long in an agrarian culture. During this period, young people had opportunities for freer, also romantic, socialising with each other. Young people met each other in church, in the fields working together, and at communal festivities linked to the annual cycle. (See Leeuwen & Maas 2002; Markkola 2003, 150–151; Waris 2003, 113–116.) Across the Nordic countries, there was also the tradition of night-time visits ('bundling') by boys to the storehouses that served as girls' sleeping quarters during the summer (see, e.g., Leeuwen & Maas 2002, 104–107; Markkola 2003, 149). Night-time visits provided opportunities for private interaction in a culture where people lived in cramped conditions and private spaces were practically non-existent (e.g., Pohjola-Vilkuna 1995, 75–81, 102–103). Premarital sexuality was forbidden in principle, but it was long condoned (e.g., Waris 2003, 118), and illegitimate children, for example, were not unusual. Prospective spouses were usually found in the same social group; in practice, maids married farmhands and farmers married farmers' daughters, although there were exceptions (e.g., Markkola 2003, 152–153). It has sometimes been assumed that modernisation displaced homogamous marriages, that is, marriages based on the social similarity of the spouses in rural areas, but data collected in northern Sweden show that marriages within one's own reference group even increased in the early 20th century (see Leeuwen & Maas 2002).

It is often thought that the youth of the past married at an early age. However, this is not the case for young people in rural areas in the Nordic countries. The long period of service was one of the reasons why the average age of marriage rose to close to 30 years (e.g., Jacobsson 2000). For example, in rural Sweden in the early 1900s, the average age of marriage was 28 for men and 26 for women. Remaining unmarried was also relatively common. The marriage age was influenced, among other things, by social background, with landless people marrying older than farm owners. (See Lundh 2013; Egerbladh 1989, 246; Morning 2003, 85–87.) The Nordic countries mostly followed what is known as the Western family model, where a young couple set up their own household when they married. In Eastern Finland there were also large families following the Eastern family model and the age of marriage was also lower than in the West (e.g., Waris 2003, 110–111). If a married couple succeeded in acquiring their own farm, marriage also meant economic independence, both from their childhood home and from their place of service. However, until the legislation of the early 20th century, women were subject to coverture and thus both economically and legally dependent on their spouses (see, e.g., Markkola 1986).

SCHOOL AND EDUCATION

Perhaps the biggest change affecting the lives of rural children and youth in the 19th and early 20th centuries was the expansion and institutionalisation of popular education, which has also featured prominently in previous research. The Nordic countries were international pioneers in the establishment of compulsory education. The first legislation on compulsory education for rural children in Norway dates back to 1739. Over the course of the 19th century, popular education was developed and compulsory education was extended in all the Nordic countries. Finland was the last to introduce comprehensive compulsory education in 1921 (see Tuomaala 2004, 66–75; Ahonen 2021, 15–24). Compulsory education and the primary school system brought with them permanent school buildings in rural areas and the idea of education that belongs to everyone. In the process, education was gradually transferred from being the responsibility of the church to that of the state. Before the institutionalisation of the primary school system, rural schools had mainly been ambulatory parish schools focusing on reading, writing and the Christian doctrine. However, the transition from ambulatory schools to primary schools took place at different times in different regions, and ambulatory schools continued to operate in some places until the mid-20th century. (See Richardson 1999, 43–58; Stugu 2001, 114–115; Wiborg S. 2004; Buchardt, Markkola & Valtonen 2013; Keskitalo, Lehtola & Paksuniemi 2014. 16; Larsen 2017; Lahtinen 2018; Solstad & Andrews 2020.) Popular education based on the compulsory education system was developed with rural areas in mind, and the increase in school attendance came specifically from rural children. For example, in Finland in 1910, before compulsory education, almost every child in the city attended school, but only less than half of the children in rural areas (see Huuhka 1955, 39). The spread of popular education in Finland was markedly slower than in the other Nordic countries (see Figure 2). This was due to the late introduction of compulsory education and slower urbanisation than in the other countries.

Despite education being compulsory, not all children went to primary school, but instead it was possible to acquire basic knowledge, for example, through home schooling, which was especially used by the gentry (see, for example, Ahonen 2021, 15–24). In practice, children from different backgrounds had different learning pathways (see, e.g., Buchardt, Markkola & Valtonen 2013; Sandin 2018). Illustratively, in Denmark, where compulsory education is considered to have begun with the 1814 reforms, there were in fact five different school laws, one of which governed rural schools. For example,

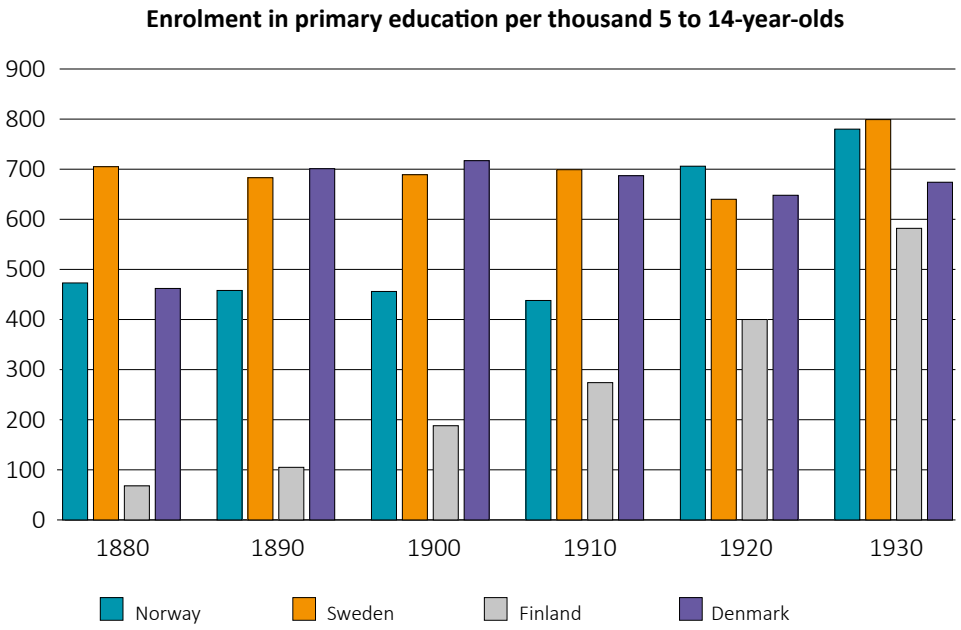


Figure 2. Source: Lindert 2004, 91–93.

rural schools had fewer lessons and a narrower curriculum than urban schools. (See Coninck-Smith 1997, 149–151; Larsen 2017; Jacobsen 2018, 96–99.) Despite early efforts, it was not until the reforms after the Second World War that a primary school common to everyone became a reality in all the Nordic countries. In principle, it was possible to move on from primary school to higher levels of education, but in practice this was still rare in the early 20th century. Secondary schools – grammar schools or vocational schools – were very rare in rural areas (see Michelsen & Stenström (eds.) 2018). For example, in the Finnish countryside in the 1930s it was still more common to go directly from primary school to working life than to continue one's education (Rahikainen 2003, 166; Huhtala & Tähtinen 2014). In all the Nordic countries, the separate or parallel school system put children and youth in rural areas in an unequal position compared to the urban population. Gender, on the other hand, did not play such a central role in rural schools as it did in city schools, which until the middle of the century were divided into girls', boys' and co-educational schools. In Finland, for example, girls and boys attended primary school equally in rural areas, and education was usually organised as co-education (see, e.g., Hakaste 1992).

Previous research has paid attention not only to popular education, but also to other educational movements that were interested in the intellectual development of rural children and youth. For example, the folk high school movement based on the ideas of the Danish philosopher N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872) spread throughout the Nordic countries, all the way to the eastern part of Finland (see Tuominen 1999), and had a great impact on the associations in rural areas. According to Grundtvig, all people, including the poor in rural areas, should have the opportunity for self-development and education. Folk high schools provided an alternative educational route alongside grammar schools and universities, which were only accessible to a small number of people. (See Niemelä 2011, 68–168; Korsgaard 2015; Bunge 2018.) In Finland, Grundtvigianism inspired not only the establishment of folk high schools but also the youth association movement ('nuorisoseuraliike'), which spread throughout the country at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Youth associations provided rural youth with recreational and educational activities and fostered peasant culture (e.g., Niemelä 2011). Also in Sweden, associations supporting the rural identity were established (for example *Jordbrukare-Ungdomens Förbund*), which sought to emphasise the importance of agriculture and the peasant way of life, especially for young people (Waara 2000, 54–55). In addition to these, there were other important movements in rural areas in the early 20th century, such as the labour movement, temperance movement, cooperative operations movement, and Christian revivalist movements, which began organising activities for young people early on (see, e.g., Nieminen 1995; Östman, Talvitie & Suodenjoki 2021, 391–401).

Through primary schools and the emergence of associations at the end of the 19th century, the rural population became incorporated into the modernising civil society and the nation-building, tinged with nationalism and based on the ideal of linguistic and cultural integrity. Popular education had a variety of aims: on the one hand, it stemmed from philanthropy inspired by the Enlightenment; on the other, it was a top-down process which sought to civilise, modernise and nationally harmonise the "common people". (See Tägil (ed.) 1995; Männikkö 2001; Stugu 2001; Tuomaala 2004.) For minority groups, the harmonising nature of popular education usually meant that they had to adopt the dominant national language and culture, which at worst cut off their roots in the culture of their home. Such assimilation policies were applied, for example, to the Sámi, who until the 1960s attended school either in Finnish, Swedish or Norwegian, with Sámi only as an auxiliary language (see Elenius 2001; Keskitalo, Lehtola & Paksuniemi 2014; Andersen 2018; Hansen 2018). A

similar fate also befell the Inuit population of Greenland under Denmark, the Kven of Finnish origin in northern Norway and, to some extent, the Karelian-speaking Eastern Orthodox population living in the Finland-Russia border region. (See Elenius 2001; Hansen 2018, 197–198; Uusitupa & Koivisto 2021.) Consequently, popular education was by no means about progress or improved opportunities for everyone.

The spread of popular education was not a unidirectional development among the rural majority population either. Research has highlighted how in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark the agrarian conception of childhood as a period of socialisation into labour clashed with modern ideals of childhood in primary schools, and how there was sometimes intense opposition to the schooling of rural children (see Szabó 1971, 23–24; Nissen 1973; Sjöberg 1996; Tuomaala 2004; Edvardsen 2011). It was not just a matter of principle, but for many households the children's work contribution was important. When at school, children were freed from the domestic workforce, and patriarchal control at home was replaced by the authority of the state in the form of the teacher. Compulsory education was fought against in rural communities well into the mid-20th century (e.g., for Sweden, see Sjöberg 1996). Teachers tried to keep students in school, but absences were a constant problem. For instance, in Denmark it was eventually decided to fine families if a child was absent from school without a valid reason (see Nissen 1973). Research has stressed that opposition to education cannot be explained solely by economic reasons or hostility towards education, but that there was also a struggle over which form of schooling best suited local rural interests (see Sjöberg 1996). In practice, compromises were made everywhere, with rural children attending school only part-time and being allowed to stay at home during the busiest periods (see, e.g., Andresen et al. 2011, 32–36).

In an agrarian culture, life courses followed a fairly predictable pattern, with young people learning to carry on in the roles they were born into, with no room or even need for options or personal discretion. Nevertheless, the transition from childhood to adulthood was also a complex process, and adolescence in the sense of dependency could last a very long time.[6] Above all, descent and gender influenced the kind of life path a young person had ahead of them. As highlighted in previous research,

6 Recently, discussions in youth research at the global level have addressed the delays and the related problems of transitions in young people's lives, such as finding employment and starting a family. Historical examination shows that this is not a new phenomenon. See, e.g., Smith-Hefner & Inhorn 2021.

the traditional view of agrarian childhood and youth as a period of socialisation into work gradually began to change in the 20th century. Propagation of education was slow, but economic changes also offered young people in rural areas new prospects and opportunities, and joining the generational agrarian chain was no longer a given. The migration trend from the countryside to industrial centres began in the Nordic countries already at the end of the 19th century, but it only started to become visible in the form of declining numbers of young people when the rural birth rate started to fall in the mid-20th century. Since then, the change in the rural areas has been accelerating.

The call of the city – youth on the move

Permanent migration was relatively rare in agrarian culture. In the 1920s, for example, more than 70% of rural residents in Finland and about half in Denmark lived in their municipality of birth and an even larger proportion in their county of birth (see Johansen 2002, 219; Malinen, Eilola & Frigren 2021, 132). Today, the situation is the opposite, with fewer and fewer people growing up from childhood to adulthood in the countryside. Instead, people go to become adults in the city, with its jobs, schools, services, urban culture and a multitude of potential spouses. For rural youth, urban migration has become not only a global trend and statistical fact, but also a cultural norm (e.g., Farrugia 2016). In addition to those who migrate, this has had an impact on young people who decide to resist the call of the city and stay in the countryside (e.g., Turpeinen 2023). Although migration from sparsely populated areas to population centres has been a long-term trend, it has also included various periods of acceleration and deceleration. At the end of the 20th century, the unidirectionality of migration has also been questioned, and urban–rural migration has become a topic of discussion alongside rural–urban migration. Migration studies have quite a long history, and the main focus of research has been on the shift into modernity from the perspective of internal migration (see, e.g., Lento 1951; Aro 2007a). For young people in rural areas, the focus has been on the underlying factors, preferences and motivations for migration.

All the Nordic countries became urbanised during the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, but at different rates. At the beginning of the century, Finland was clearly the most agrarian and least urbanised of the countries, while Denmark was the most urbanised. In 1920, more than 40% of the Danish population lived in urban areas. The same proportion was only reached in Finland in the 1960s (see Figure 3). As late as 1950, more than 70% of young people in Finland lived in the countryside (Haapala 2003, 76). This was partly due to the resettlement policy after the Second World War, when around 100 000 new farms were created to resettle the more than 400 000 residents of the territories handed over to the Soviet Union. Half of the evacuees were resettled in rural areas, although they were – perhaps because of their rootlessness – more likely to move to the cities as soon as possible (Haapala 2004, 234; Sarvimäki, Jäntti & Uusitalo 2009, 13, 17–19). It has been estimated that Finland is still somewhat "behind" the other

Nordic countries in terms of urbanisation (Aro 2007b). The difference in the rate of development can also be seen when looking at the share of agriculture in the economic structure of the countries. In Finland, the role of agriculture was still dominant in the 1950s, after which the change was rapid (see Haapala 2004).

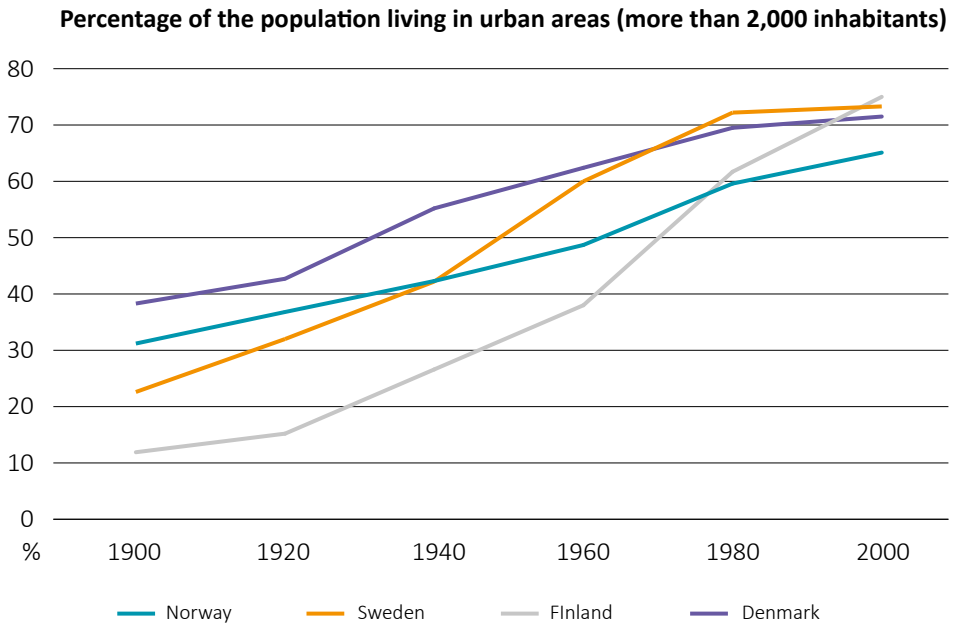


Figure 3. Source: Christiansen et al. (eds.) 2006, 356.

RURAL–URBAN MIGRATION

Rural–urban migration was reflected in the demographic structure of rural areas with a delay, as the birth rate in rural areas remained higher than in urban areas until the middle of the century (e.g., Edvinsson, Garðarsdóttir & Thorvaldsen 2008; Haapala 2004, 236). Finland's agrarian nature thus also explains its higher birth rate compared to other countries. Despite urbanisation, Finland's rural population continued to grow until the 1930s (Haapala 2004, 236). During the final stages of the Second World War and in the years following it, larger than normal age groups were born in all the Nordic countries (see Figure 4). In Denmark and Sweden the peak was in the mid-1940s, in Finland and Norway a few years after the war. In Finland, the momentary increase in

birth rate was the largest, and most of those known as the baby boomers were born in rural areas (Haapala 2003). However, as they became adults in the 1960s and 1970s, these young people left their parents' agricultural livelihoods and moved to the cities. The labour demand in rural areas fell dramatically, due in part to mechanisation, and small farms could not support themselves as they had done in the past. The factors that attracted young people to the cities were industrial jobs and institutions of higher education, to which an increasing number of young people headed. The baby boomers had a concrete experience in their lives of the transition from a predominantly agricultural society to an urban and industrial one. (See Haapala 2003; Poikolainen 2017.) Although Finland experienced the most drastic structural change after the Second World War, other Nordic countries also saw an increase in migration, growing cities and a boom in residential construction (e.g., Sejersted 2011, 262–264).

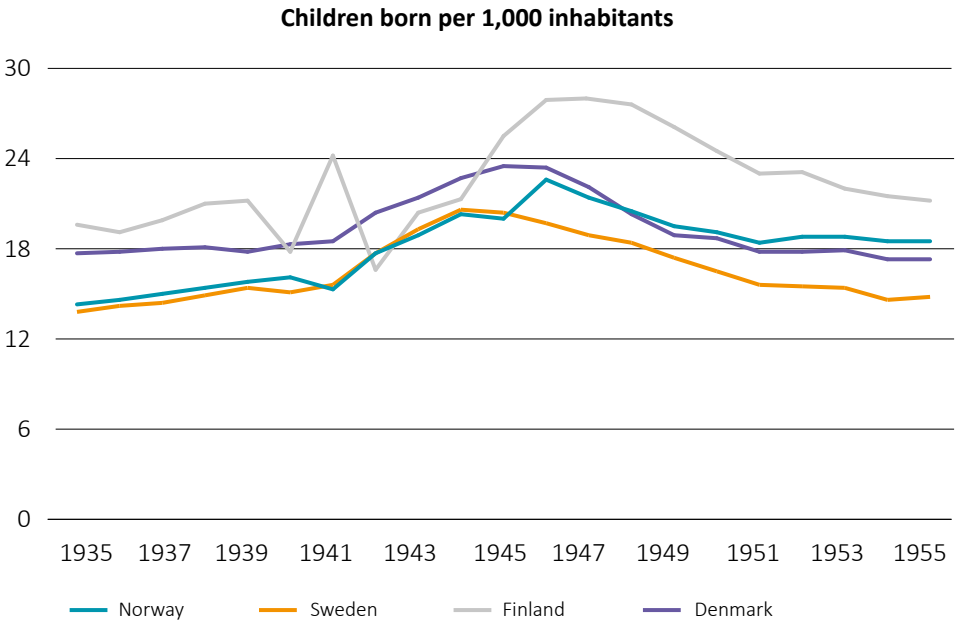


Figure 4. Source: Mitchell 1998.

In the light of the long-term urbanisation development, it is not surprising that specifically issues of migration have also been at the core of the research on rural youth (e.g., Paunikallio 2001; Tuhkunen 2002; Svensson 2006; Penttinen 2016). The topic has also been associated with politico-administrative interests, as areas with migration

loss have wanted to find out whether they could improve young people's satisfaction and thus their willingness to stay in the area (e.g., Jurvansuu 2000). The first studies on rural–urban migration among young people appeared in Finland and Sweden as early as the 1960s, during the period of the most intense structural change. The study was primarily concerned with the identity of the migrants and the background factors that influenced their decision to migrate. Among other things, the study found that good school performance was predictive of migration and that girls were more likely to migrate than boys. (See Neymark 1961; Valkonen & Kukkonen 1966.) The selective nature of rural–urban migration has continued to interest researchers. In particular, gender and social background or social class have been found to influence – often intertwined with – the propensity to migrate (e.g., Nilsson 2001; Rye 2006a; Svensson 2006).

Findings from across the Nordic countries show that young women in rural areas are clearly more willing and ready to migrate than young men. This phenomenon has long historical roots. In Sweden and Finland, for example, this tendency is already visible in statistics from the 1920s (see Lento 1951, 69–76; Karperstam & Håkansson 2021; see also Figure 5). In Swedish research, the phenomenon has been called the exodus of young women from the countryside (Johansson 2016) and the Pajala effect ('Pajala-effekten'), after a small municipality in the northern part of the country, from which women have been found to migrate to southern cities much more often than men (see Löfgren 1991). For the regions they have left behind, this has of course meant an imbalance in the number of men and women, which in turn has been thought to make it more difficult for men, especially those staying in the countryside, to find a spouse and start a family. When considering the long historical continuum of the phenomenon, it can be assumed that already in the agrarian culture men were more attached to a particular house and place of residence than women were. In addition, at an early stage, cities offered industrial jobs suitable for women, as well as childcare and domestic work, which they had been used to doing in the countryside since childhood (see, e.g., Markkola 1986; Rahikainen 2007; Virkkunen 2010, 175–178).

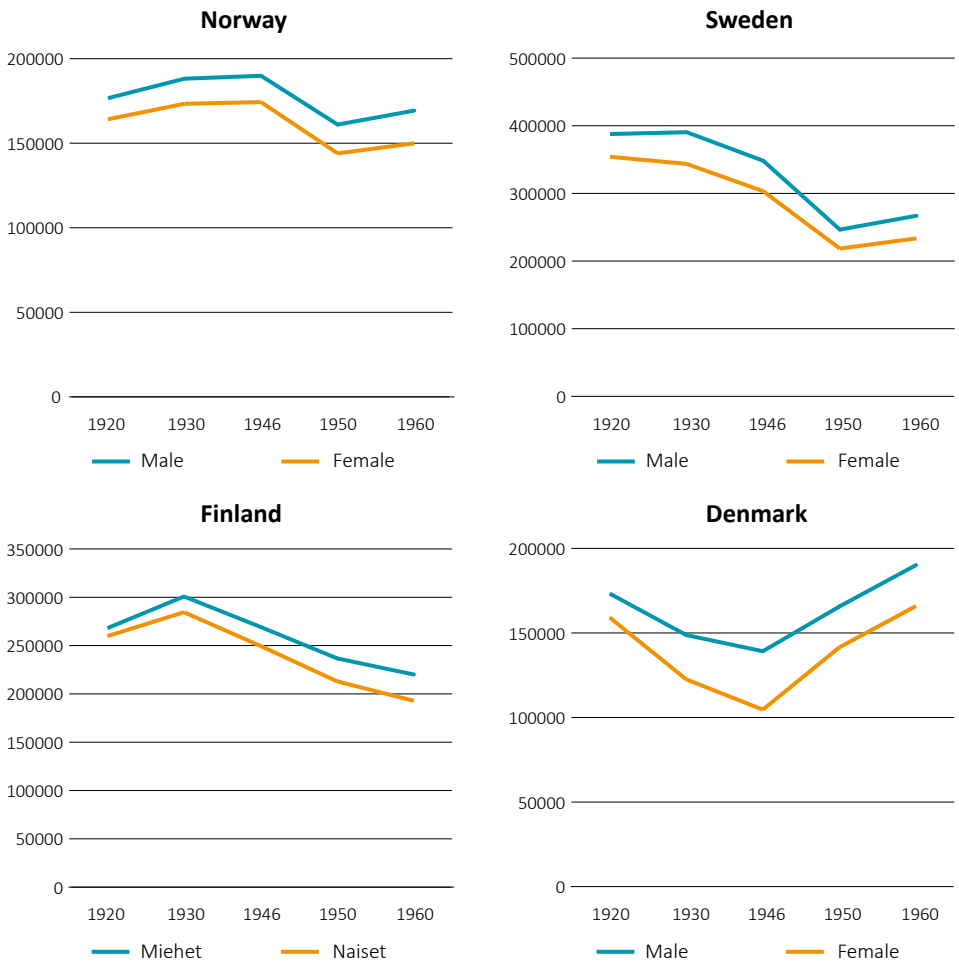


Figure 5. Men and women aged 15 to 25 living in rural areas in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark between 1920 and 1960. Source: Statistics Finland.

There have been several attempts to explain the gender-based selectivity of migration, and it is clear that it is impossible to find a single exhaustive explanation. Migration research has traditionally approached migration through economic motives such as employment, price levels and career development. In these instances, women's higher migration rates have been explained by the fact that cities have offered them more educational opportunities and service sector jobs than rural areas, while rural areas have offered more typically male jobs. In addition to this, research has also highlighted cultural factors that contribute to women's higher rates of rural–urban migration

compared to men. Based on data collected in northern Norway, it has been suggested that one reason for this phenomenon is the prevailing masculine culture in rural areas, which some women feel alienated from. According to this proposition, the rural environment is gendered as a "male periphery" and offers women a narrower horizon of opportunities than it does to men (see Dahlström 1996; see also Rye 2006a; Rauhut & Littke 2016). More recent research has also made similar observations: girls and women feel that the city offers them more freedom, while boys and men are more satisfied with their life in the countryside (e.g., Rasmussen 2011; Bloksgaard, Faber & Hansen 2015; Johansson 2016; Käyhkö 2017; Armila, Käyhkö & Pöysä 2018b; Pöysä 2022). On the other hand, it has been noted that not all young women are alienated by the countryside, and for some, traditional gender roles may even act as an attraction (see Grimsrud 2011a).

In addition to gender, parents' educational background has been found to affect young peoples' propensity to migrate, with the offspring of the highly educated being more likely to migrate. This phenomenon is more attributable to the culture of migration adopted by middle-class families than to their financial resources. (See Kauhanen & Tervo 2002; Rye 2011; Rosvall, Rönnlund & Johansson 2018; Rönnlund, Rosvall & Johansson 2018.) Some grow up in a climate where migration is seen as a natural development – so they inherit a 'culture of migration' more strongly than others (Svensson 2006; Rye & Blekesaune 2007; Komu & Adams 2021; Turpeinen 2023). For the middle-class youth, moving to the city may be easier than for those from working-class backgrounds, who, when moving (for example to a university town), have to undergo a "class shift", that is, to move to a new socio-cultural environment (see Trondman 1994). Class background also has an impact on what is seen as a life that is successful and worth pursuing. For some, moving into the city represents moving forward in life, while staying in the countryside represents stagnation. In this context, it is higher education and career advancement that are seen as measures of success. (See Tuhkunen 2002; Ollila 2004; Komu & Adams 2021.) As a result, the educational and career aspirations of the young people in rural areas have been found to be quite strongly hereditary (see, e.g., Rönnlund 2019). In addition to family background, schools have been found to play an important role in whether young people are encouraged to move elsewhere or whether the possibility of staying in their home area is supported (e.g., Lanas 2008; Rosvall, Rönnlund & Johansson 2018; Beach et al. 2019).

Perceptions and the prevailing societal discussion also have an impact on the willingness of young people in rural areas to migrate. If cities are referred to as "growth

centres" and rural areas as "peripheries", it can be difficult for young people to resist the migration trend (see, e.g., Jukarainen & Tuhkunen 2004; Ollila 2004; Tuhkunen 2002; Pedersen & Gram 2018). For a young person, migration is more than just a change of geographical location; it also raises and often forces reflection on questions of personal life course, identity and belonging (e.g., Wiborg 2001). On the other hand, research found as early as in the 1990s that, alongside work and education, the third most important factor that young people cite as a reason for migrating is seeking new experiences, which means that cities are automatically attractive because of the opportunities they offer (e.g., Waara 1996; Soininen 1998). Research has sometimes referred to the "cappuccino hypothesis", meaning the consumer culture offered by cities which attracts especially young women to migrate, although there is no strong evidence to support this hypothesis (see Rye 2006a, 202). However, it has been shown that men and women have different priorities when it comes to migrating. For example, for women, the emphasis is on maintaining a social life in addition to the educational opportunities available (see Rasmussen 2011). In contrast, young men have been found to reflect on migration more in relation to the local ideal of masculinity (see Pöysä 2022).

Research has been keen to uncover the factors and motivations behind young people's rural–urban migration. However, in practice the phenomenon is more complex than a superficial examination of push and pull factors would suggest (e.g., Lundholm et al. 2004). The situation in which a young person makes the decision to migrate is not unexpected, but a certain kind of orientation is acquired through the background influence of the home and school (see, e.g., Viinamäki 1999). While people sometimes refer to the flexible identities of the postmodern era, research shows that young people in rural areas do not weigh anchor on flimsy grounds but have to thoroughly reflect on their lives under the conflicting pressures of individual needs and desires and communal norms (see Tuhkunen 2007; Gaini 2015; Bloksgaard, Faber & Hansen 2015; Juvonen & Romakkaniemi 2019; Pedersen & Moilanen 2019b). Moreover, young people are not on the same footing when it comes to migration, but their position in social relations shapes their horizons of possibilities. In addition to gender and class background, belonging to a sexual minority, for example, can affect the willingness to migrate if the young person feels that they are not accepted or are unable to fulfil their life in the way they want in the countryside (see, for example, Tuhkunen 2002, 52; Taavetti 2016).

REMAINING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE AND URBAN–RURAL MIGRATION

After the peak years of the 1960s and early 1970s, migration slowed down throughout the Nordic countries, which even led to discussions about a trend reversal or counterurbanisation. Reasons suggested for the slowdown in the urbanisation trend include the expansion of the welfare state, which brought public service jobs also to the countryside, and a deliberate regional policy, which was particularly strong in Norway. The levelling off of the trend was most apparent in Denmark, with the population of the Copenhagen area, for example, falling for most of the 1970s. (See Hansen 1989; Vartiainen 1989; Court 1989; Borgegård, Håkansson & Malmberg 1995.) Research has also more generally questioned the notion of unidirectional urbanisation. Certainly, not all rural regions are areas of migration loss. Rural areas close to cities, for example, have continuously gained new residents, including young people (see Pettersson 2001; Hjort & Malmberg 2006 for Sweden), and moving to the city does not always mean moving to the metropolitan area, but to the nearest regional centre (see, e.g., Pedersen & Moilanen 2019b). Youth migrating away from rural areas has not been a

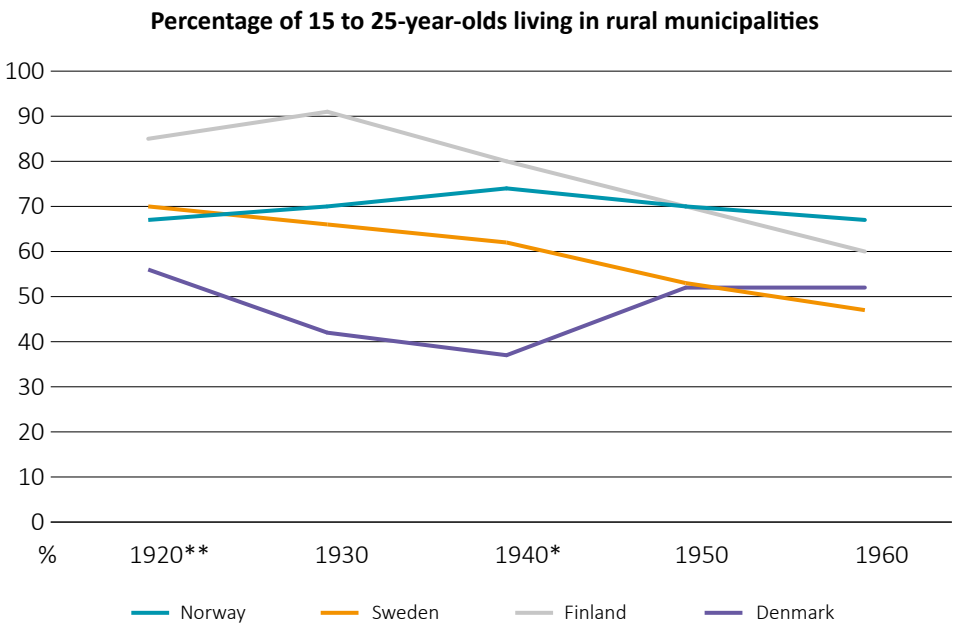


Figure 6. Source: Statistics Finland. *For Norway 1946. **For Denmark 1921.

one-way trend in the past either, as can be seen in the graph below (see Figure 6). In Denmark, for example, the proportion of young people living in rural areas increased significantly in the 1940s.

The levelling off of urbanisation in the 1970s later proved to be only temporary, but it brought new themes of urban–rural migration and remigration into the research discussion and spawned, among other things, research on the willingness of urban residents to migrate to the countryside (e.g., Haliseva-Soila 1993). Young urban–rural migrants have been found to be a diverse group and no clear unifying factor can be identified (e.g., Haartsen & Thissen 2014). Like rural–urban migration, urban–rural migration is influenced at least by age, gender, family situation and impressions. According to research, economic reasons are not as important a motivation for urban–rural migrants as social bonds and networks, for example. (See Stenbacka 2001; Grimsrud 2011b; Nørgaard & Andersen 2013; Emerek & Kirkeby 2015.) It has also been found that even if young people move away from the countryside, some return once they have completed their education and started a family; whereas the city attracts young people with its abundance of opportunities, the countryside can mean a safe, clean, affordable and therefore attractive place to live for a family (e.g., Villa 2000; Pehkonen 2005; Rye 2006a; Gaini 2015; Haley 2018). Gender also plays a role in remigration: women are more likely than men to move from rural to urban areas, but also more likely to return in later life (see Johansson 2016).

Recent research has focused not only on migrants but also on those who, for one reason or another, do not migrate to the city but choose to stay in their place of birth (e.g., Yndigegen 2003; Paulgaard 2016; Stockdale, Theunissen & Haartsen 2018; Tuuva-Hongisto 2018; Forsberg 2019; Mærsk et al. 2021). Remaining or staying has been found to be a gradual process that involves a considerable amount of thought and activity on the part of the young person. One thing that clearly unites those who remain is a willingness to do the kind of work that is available in sparsely populated areas, or, alternatively, a willingness to compromise on the field in which they work. Those young people who remain in the countryside often also value outdoor activities more than others, which would be more difficult to pursue in the city. (See Adams & Komu 2022.) In addition, those who dream of remaining in the countryside have been found to share a certain yearning for freedom, whether it is related to the possibility of freely enjoying nature or self-employment (Tuuva-Hongisto 2018). Research clearly shows remaining as an active choice and a meaningful life strategy for young people, rather than being "stuck" or unable to seize life's opportunities (see, e.g., Pöysä 2022).

In a culture of the 'mobility imperative', remaining can even be seen as a more active decision and choice than migrating (Lanas, Rautio & Syrjälä 2013, 397).

MIGRATION AND IMMIGRATION

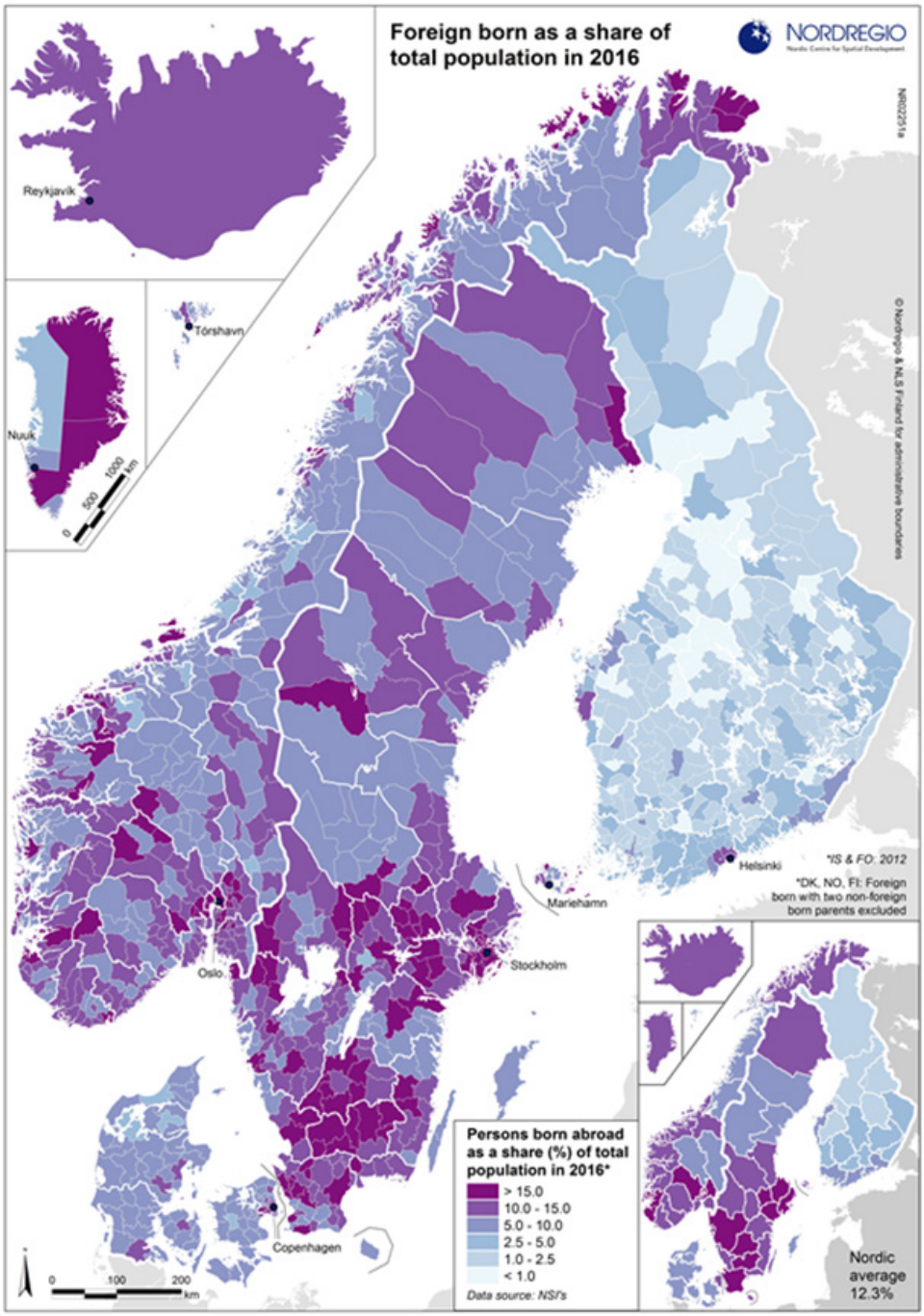
In addition to internal migration – or lack of migration – the demography of rural areas in the Nordic countries has been affected by emigration and immigration. In the 19th century, masses of people from the Nordic countries, like from many other European countries, left to earn a living across the Atlantic. Some of the emigrants stayed, but others returned, bringing with them new customs and influences to their home communities (see Ostergren 1988, 289–322). High birth rates and a simultaneous decline in infant mortality ensured that emigration to America did not yet translate into depopulation in rural areas. Immigration, on the other hand, was relatively limited until the middle of the 20th century. Of course, the Second World War caused massive population movements in the Nordic countries as well, but they were mainly temporary, except for the evacuees from Karelia and Petsamo. Sweden received an influx of refugees during the war, from Norway and Denmark as well as Finland. In addition, about 70,000 children were sent from Finland to other Nordic countries, mainly Sweden, to safety during the war. Of these, about 15,000 remained permanently in their new country of residence. (E.g., Svanberg 2009, 161; Nehlin 2014.)

Immigration began to increase in the 1960s, especially in Sweden, with the industrial centres of the country attracting young people not only from the countryside but also from abroad, from Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey and especially Finland (see Borgegård, Håkansson & Malmberg 1995; Svanberg 2009, 164). In Finland, the pressure of migration to the cities was so intense that there were not enough jobs for everyone. As a result, many people tried their luck on the other side of the Gulf of Bothnia. The emigration to Sweden affected the rural youth in particular, as two out of three emigrants were aged between 15 and 34 and the majority came from sparsely populated areas in Northern Finland. In the peak years between 1966 and 1970, around 125,000 people moved from Finland to Sweden, which was reflected in a temporary drop in Finland's population. The migration resulted in a growth of Swedish cities, especially Stockholm and Gothenburg, which attracted the most immigrants. This phenomenon had evident consequences in Finland, where already small municipalities were depopulated of people of the most active working and family-forming age. Some

later returned to Finland, but for those who moved permanently, their old home region remained a place of childhood memories and nostalgia, to which they returned for summer holidays at the most. (See Myrskylä 1978, 18, 26–28; Häggström, Borgegård & Rosengren 1990; Reinans 1996, 71; Korkiasaari & Tarkiainen 2000, 139–159; Snellman 2003, 12–28, 223–233.)

In recent decades, immigration has increased in all the Nordic countries. Indeed, with low birth rates, a large share of population growth, especially in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, has resulted from immigration (see Grunfelder et al. (eds.) 2020, 26). The highest level of immigration by far has been in Sweden, while in Finland, for example, net immigration was negative until the 1980s (see Hilson 2008, 191). Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s immigration was still mainly migration, at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century the majority of immigrants were refugees or asylum seekers from outside Europe (see, e.g., Rosvall 2017, 524). Increasing immigration has also brought new residents to rural areas. In Sweden, the principle of resettling arriving refugees in all parts of the country was adopted in 1985 (see, e.g., Svanberg 2009, 166-167). Similar policies were also adopted in Denmark, Norway and Finland (see Larsen 2011; Sotkasiira 2018, 11–12; Herslund & Paulgaard 2021, 4–5). The justification for dispersing the resettlement has been to prevent segregation of neighbourhoods and promote integration (Larsen 2011; Herslund & Paulgaard 2021, 4–5). As Map 3 illustrates, in Sweden and Norway, foreign-born people are evenly distributed throughout the country, while in rural areas of Denmark and especially Finland, the number of immigrants is relatively low. In addition to permanent residents, the countryside is also populated seasonally by, for example, foreign berry pickers and agricultural contractors (see, e.g., Eriksson & Tollefsen 2018).

There has been some research on rural youth with an immigrant background in recent years. The research has focused on issues related to integration, for example. For Denmark and Norway, it has been noted that young refugees relocated to rural areas are particularly challenged by long distances, lack of public transport and limited social contacts. Integration into the countryside has been found to be facilitated by the immigrant having also lived in the countryside in their country of origin. (See Herslund & Paulgaard 2021.) As for Sweden, research has looked at issues such as the integration of newcomers into the rural school environment (see Johansson 2019). Like other young people, young immigrants are prone to moving to the city when they grow up. The reasons are all too familiar: better employment and education opportunities (see Kivijärvi 2016). On the other hand, racism, for example, is not highlighted as a reason



Map 3. The proportion of those born abroad by municipality in 2016. Source: Nordregio.

for migration; on the contrary, it is perceived as more of a problem in cities than in small towns (see Kivijärvi 2016; Rosvall 2017). Municipalities in sparsely populated areas are happy to receive immigrants to make up for population loss. Immigrants have become a panacea for the sparsely populated areas of eastern Finland, for example, where they are expected to cure the region's age structure and negative migration figures. This can even lead to unrealistic expectations of immigrants. (See Sotkasiira 2016.)

Still, in the early 20th century, it would have been misleading to refer to migration as a matter of choice for the youth. Place of residence was determined by where it was possible to earn a living, and few had the opportunity to continue their studies after primary school. Adolescence as a phase of making choices is a relatively recent phenomenon in itself (see, e.g., Löfgren 1991). Although we now talk about young people's choice of where to live, in practice, the act of moving or staying is based on a complex web of different perceptions, attachments, structures, social relations, dreams and needs. The commonly known motives for moving to the city, such as studies and work, are only a starting point requiring deeper analysis (see, e.g., Lundholm & Malmberg 2006; Rauhut & Littke 2016; Nørgaard & Andersen 2013). Research has also pointed out that, in addition to the reasons and factors behind young people's migration, attention should be paid to the consequences of migration; although from the perspective of the rural areas, rural–urban migration appears as a problem that needs to be addressed at its root causes, there is evidence suggesting that young people who have moved to cities are relatively satisfied with their lives (see Lundholm & Malmberg 2006).

Rural youth in the welfare state

The rights of children and young people were an early focus of attention in Nordic societies. Previous research has highlighted the role of the Nordic countries as pioneers in both the development of compulsory education and child protection and the reduction of child mortality (see, e.g., Satka & Eydal 2004; Andersen et al. 2011; Sandin 2012; Jacobsen 2018). The birth of the welfare state has also been a central perspective in the Nordic history of childhood and youth (see Vehkalahti 2022). However, the public discussion concerning the youth was for a long time highly urban-centred: both youth problems and youth cultures seemed to be localised to urban environments, streets, dance halls and working-class neighbourhoods (e.g., Kaarninen 2003). Rural youth emerged as a distinct group in social discussion only after the Second World War, when there was a renewed focus on youth in society in general (e.g., Puuronen 2006; Vehkalahti 2013). In the emerging Nordic welfare states, there was a growing focus in youth policy and youth research on issues of inequality and social problems (see Gudmundsson 2006; Forkby 2014). Similarly, the school reforms of the 1960s and 1970s were set in motion by the ideal of social justice. In this equation, young people in rural areas began to look like a group whose lives were threatened in many ways by rapid social change.

STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Although agriculture had long been in a state of transition and the Nordic countries were becoming rapidly industrialised from the late 19th century onwards, it was only in the decades after the Second World War that the share of primary production finally collapsed. The change was most drastic in Finland (see Figure 7), but also in Sweden, for example, the share of the population engaged in agriculture fell from 30% to 5% during the 1960s and 1970s (Flygare 2008). The economic and cultural change was reflected on a concrete level, for example, in the names of the agrarian parties that emerged at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries: references to the countryside and peasantry were now replaced by a move towards the political centre.[7] However, the

7 In Sweden, the *Bondeförbundet* (Farmers League), founded in 1913, was renamed *Centerpartiet* (Centre Party) in 1957, the Finnish *Maalaisliitto* (Agrarian League),

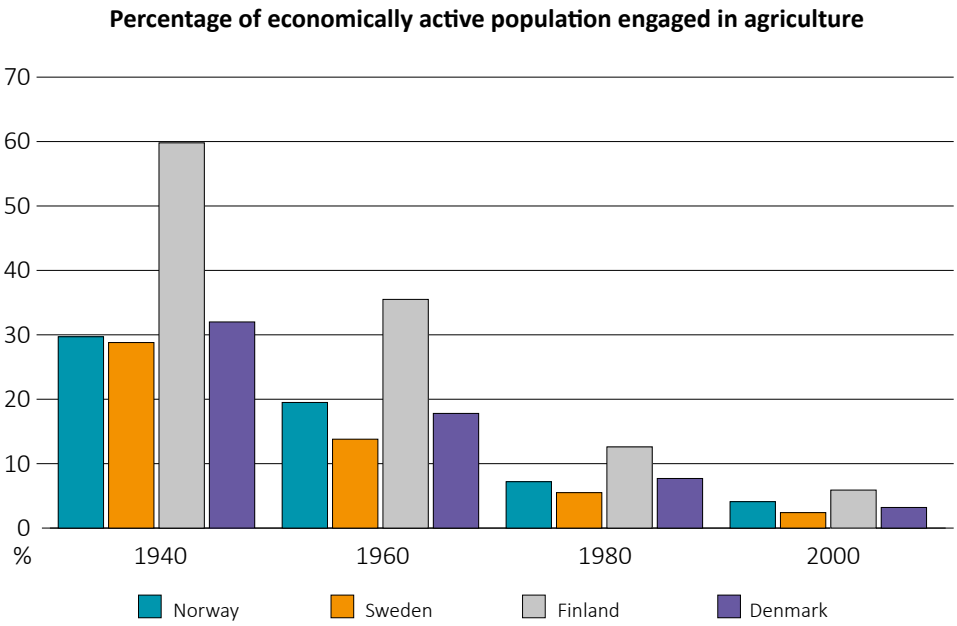


Figure 7. Source: Christiansen et al. (eds.) 2006, 360. Also includes forestry and fishing.

parties continued to emphasise regional issues, including decentralisation, although the new strategy was to attract voters from the urban population as well (see, e.g., Arter (ed.) 2001; Ruostetsaari 2008, 223–227). In the welfare states that swore by modernisation, the countryside lost its former ideological and idealised meaning and also increasingly acquired negative connotations (e.g., Peltonen (ed.) 1996; Winther & Svendsen 2012, 468). On the other hand, the countryside began to take on new meanings. In Denmark, for example, a discourse emerged that increasingly associated rural areas with village communities and active and organic lifestyles, rather than primary production (Svendsen 2004). At the same time, the agricultural industry was being modernised and the agrarian gender system was being renegotiated. The patriarchal household as the basic unit in agriculture was replaced by the family farm,

founded in 1906, became *Suomen Keskusta* (Centre Party) in 1965 and the Norwegian *Bondepartiet* (Farmer's Party), founded in 1920, became *Senterpartiet* (Centre Party) in 1959. The Danish *Venstre* (Left) has an agrarian background, but it is not entirely comparable to the previously mentioned parties. See Arter (ed.) 2001.

which reduced the traditional authority of the patriarch and moved agricultural families towards a middle-class nuclear family model. Farming began to become an entrepreneurial activity instead of a way of life, one occupation among others. (See Högbacka 1998; Villa 2000; Silvasti 2003; Flygare 2008; Sireni 2008.)

Although the post-World War II restructuring and urbanisation is sometimes spoken of as an almost natural, inevitable development, in reality it was a complex economic and social process and partly a result of a deliberate policy (e.g., Haapala 2006). The consequences of this structural change were started to be addressed at an early stage through regional policy measures. For instance, in Finland and Norway in the 1960s and 1970s, during the period of the greatest structural change, the aim was to keep the whole country populated and vibrant despite urbanisation. In Finland, the state started to support sparsely populated "development areas" through investments and tax relief, among other things. The expansion of welfare states also had significant consequences for regional policy in itself, as new jobs in education, health and social services were created in sparsely populated areas, especially in the 1960s and 1970s. (See Villa 2000, 481; Haapala 2004; Vihinen 2004, 404–407; Tervo 2005; Hartikainen 2016.) In Norway, regional policy efforts have been the strongest, and the political consensus on the issue remains strong (see Cruickshank 2006; Lindqvist (ed.) 2010, 19–34). Regional policy was and to some extent is still made within the framework of the welfare state, although in the 2000s the pursuit of regional equality has been accompanied by talk of promoting regional efficiency and competitiveness instead of providing public support (see Tervo 2005).

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Perhaps the most important welfare state reform for young people in rural areas was the birth of a comprehensive school (*peruskoulu* or *grundskolan*) that was equal for all. Already in the early 20th century, reforms had been introduced in all the Nordic countries to harmonise the educational paths of the population. However, in practice, the parallel school system, which offered a separate educational pathway for those aiming for higher education, remained in place until mid-century (see Buchhardt, Markkola & Valtonen 2013). In the reforms after the Second World War, the dismantling of the parallel school system was eventually started. Sweden led the way, with its first comprehensive school experiments dating back to the 1950s. The official start of the nine-year

comprehensive school in Sweden was in 1962. Similar reforms were also undertaken elsewhere: In Norway, the nine-year comprehensive school was introduced in 1969, and in Denmark, the seven-year comprehensive school, which had already started in 1958, was extended to nine years in 1975. In Finland, discussions on comprehensive schooling began in the 1960s, and the reform was finally introduced in a gradual process during the 1970s. (See Richardson 1999, 72–78; Wiborg S. 2004, 90; Telhaug, Mediås & Aasen 2006; Ahonen 2021.) Although there were differences in the school systems established in the different countries in the 1960s and 1970s, research has referred to the 'Nordic model in education', which is united by, among other things, publicly provided and free education, and the pursuit of social justice and income equality. After the Second World War, the Social Democratic Party, which rose to prominence in Sweden, Norway and Denmark in particular, played a key role in the reforms. (See Wiborg S. 2004; Antikainen 2006; Blossing, Imsen & Moos (eds.) 2013.) In addition to the drive for equality, there was a desire to do away with a strongly nationalising approach to education in primary schools, which improved the educational status of, for example, the Sámi language and people. The Sámi themselves were also active in the reform work in order to realise their educational rights. (See Aikio-Puoskari 2006; Hansen 2018, 200–201; Andresen 2018, 266–267.)

Although comprehensive education was promoted as an equality project, there were also economic justifications for it. In Finland, for example, there had already been discussion in the 1960s about a wasted "talent resource" that remained untapped when, for practical reasons, the educational path of children and young people, especially in rural areas, ended with primary school. This argument was used in the comprehensive school debate especially by the country's traditional agrarian party, the Agrarian League (now the Centre Party), which promoted the equalisation of educational differences between rural and urban areas. Comprehensive schools put rural talent resources to work for the country's economic growth, while aiming to ensure that educational paths were not determined by place of residence but by the young person's talents and interests. (See Niitamo & Multimäki 1964; Ahonen 2002, 175; Ahonen 2021, 24–30.) The spirit of reform also extended to other levels of education. For example, vocational education and training was developed strongly in Finland after the wars, and the network of vocational schools expanded. Although schools were mainly located in regional and sub-regional centres, they ensured that young people did not have to move very far from their home region to pursue a vocational qualification. In fact, decision-makers hoped that a dense vocational school network would serve the

development of sparsely populated areas. (See Laukia 2013, 231–234; Hartikainen & Hurmalainen 2016, 47; Michelsen 2018.) In the 1960s and 1970s, efforts were also made to improve rural youth's access to higher education. From the perspective of the capital city, remote regional centres, such as Oulu and Kuopio, got their own universities, which made it possible for young people in rural areas to pursue higher education within a reasonable distance from their homes (e.g., Poikolainen 2017, 11). A large number of new higher education institutions were also established in other Nordic countries. In Sweden, for example, the number of university students increased more than tenfold between 1940 and 1970 (see Richardson 1999, 61, 170–177).

In the 1980s, welfare states were faced with new challenges (see, e.g., Nordlund 2000). The state-run organisation of services became challenged ideologically, and globalisation began to change the states' economic basis. In addition, the economic recession of the early 1990s led to cuts in the public sector, especially in Finland and Sweden, which prompted a lot of discussion, even about dismantling the welfare state. In the countryside, the cuts were particularly targeted at female-dominated service sectors, which in some cases made rural areas even less attractive to women (e.g., Högbacka 1998). In education policy, the transition was followed by what is referred to as the neoliberal shift, which could be seen in all the Nordic countries; whereas the post-World War II comprehensive school reforms had been aimed at advancing social justice through equal education for all, now the new buzzwords in education were freedom of choice, rationalisation and competitiveness. Comprehensive school, as it was originally built, was subject to a thorough redefinition. (See Ahonen 2002; Antikainen 2006; Telhaug, Asbjørn Mediås & Aasen 2006; Wiborg 2013; Blossing, Imsen & Moos (eds.) 2013; Lind 2019.)

The new education policy was evident in rural areas in a wave of small school closures in all Nordic countries, and this trend continued into the 2000s – although the reforms have not been identical in all rural areas (see, e.g., Karlsdóttir et al. 2019, 26–33). Traditionally, the Nordic countries had had a dense network of schools, as a result of the desire to keep school distances reasonable for pupils in sparsely populated areas. Some small schools were closed down already in the 1960s, as the baby boomers grew out of school age (see, e.g., Autti & Hyry-Beihammer 2014), but by the end of the century the situation changed also at the level of principles. In Finland, for example, 1992 saw the abolition of the statutory maximum distance for pupils' commuting to school. This made it possible to gather pupils from a larger area than before. Around 65% of the small schools with fewer than 50 pupils in the country were closed down

between 1990 and 2010. (See Ahonen 2001; Autti & Hyry-Beihammer 2014.) The trend towards the closure of village schools also gave rise to a large amount of new research, which sought to investigate, for example, the impact of school closures on local communities and the reuse of school buildings (e.g., Tedre & Pöysä 2015; Villa & Knutas 2020; Autti & Hyry-Beihammer 2014; Villa, Solstad & Andrews 2021; Åberg-Bengtsson 2009; Lundgren & Lundgren 2016). In addition to comprehensive schools, vocational schools were also subject to closures, which also pushed secondary education further away from homes (Hartikainen & Hurmalainen 2016, 51–52; Kettunen & Prokkola 2022, 54–55).

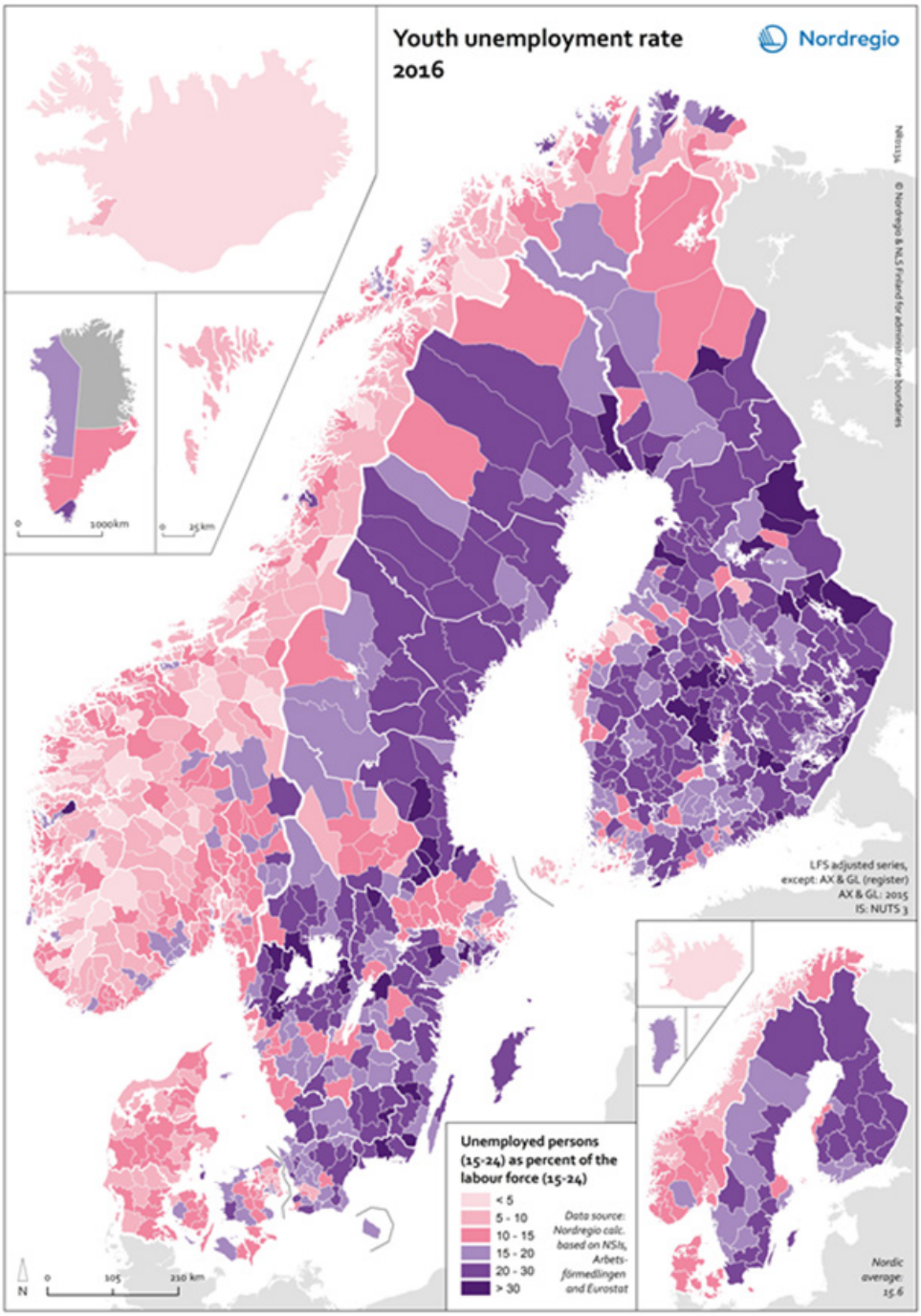
The closure of local schools has meant increasingly long distances to school for young people in rural areas. Whereas in the agrarian culture the journey to school was made on foot or by skiing, today it is usually by car. In the worst cases, young people have to spend several hours a day moving between home and school, in taxis or on buses. Research has paid attention to how the long journey to school concretely separates young people from their local community for a large part of the day. In addition, young people in rural areas often have less free time due to long commutes to school. On the other hand, the bus may become an important and enjoyable social space for pupils on their way to school (see Lanas 2008, 65–66; Harinen 2012; Tuuva-Hongisto, Pöysä & Armila 2016, 39–43; Käyhkö 2016). Besides the long distances to school, research has also pondered whether young people in rural areas are in an unequal position when it comes to school curricula. For example, in Sweden, it has been noted that education and education policy today has a strong urban voice that sees city life as the norm and that young people in rural areas are not even encouraged to develop strong ties to their local community (see Beach et al. 2019). As a counterbalance, place-based education has been proposed, in which the curricular content is adapted to the local culture as well as the economic and social environment (e.g., Lanas 2008; Solstad & Andrews 2020, 298). In Lofoten in northern Norway, for example, an experiment in place-based education was carried out as early as the 1970s, in which the local cultural heritage and the fishing industry central to the area were placed at the heart of education (see Solstad 1981).

EXCLUSION AND REGIONAL INEQUALITY

In addition to questions of education, research has also been concerned with regional inequalities and the risk of exclusion of young people in rural areas. One of the factors

behind the discussion was the recession of the 1990s, which left behind high youth unemployment, especially in Finland and Sweden (see Map 4). (See Julkunen 1998; Carle & Julkunen 1998; Järvinen & Vanttaja 2001; Muilu & Onkalo 2002; Hiltunen 2011.) Researchers and politicians woke up to the fact that, despite the expansion of education, not everyone was able to make a smooth transition from school to working life. From the point of view of regional equality, the question was whether living far from population centres put young people at risk of being excluded from education and working life (see, e.g., Helve (ed.) 1998; Paju 2004; Ollila 2008; Olofsson & Wadensjö 2012; Tuuva-Hongisto 2019). Most attention has been paid to intra-urban segregation, but there has also been a lot of discussion about problems accumulating in sparsely populated areas. For example, a register study on the life paths of a cohort of Finnish youths born in 1987 found clear regional differences in unemployment and receiving income support, among other things. However, it was not found to be of major significance whether the young person lived in a rural area or in the local centre of a sparsely populated area (see Ristikari et al. 2016, 66-83). Also for other Nordic countries, it has been noted that sparsely populated areas have a somewhat higher proportion of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) (see Karlsdóttir et al. 2019, 40–42). In addition to the risk of exclusion, research has paid attention to regional differences in health and wellbeing (see, e.g., Karvonen & Rintala 2004). On the other hand, there are also differences between the countries: in Norway, for example, no significant differences in unemployment, youth wellbeing or academic performance have been found between urban and rural areas. Instead, there is evidence suggesting that young people in sparsely populated areas have lower levels of stress and mental health problems than urban youth do. (See Rye 2006b, 412; Eriksen & Andersen 2021.)

The transition between comprehensive school and secondary school is seen as a key factor in a young person's later life, also in terms of potential exclusion. For young people in rural areas, this transition is particularly significant, as they often have to consider not only the decision on further education but also whether to attend school from home or move to another location, for example to a dormitory, as secondary level schools are located in increasingly larger centres as a result of centralisation policies (e.g., Kivelä & Ahola 2007; Armila, Käyhkö & Pöysä 2018a; Rosvall, Rönnlund & Johansson 2018; Stenseth & Bæck 2021; Vehkalahti & Armila 2021). In the Nordic countries, almost all young people go on to secondary education after comprehensive school, either in an academic track, that is, general upper secondary school, or in vocational



Map 4. Unemployment among 15- to 24-year-olds in the Nordic countries in 2016. Source: Nordregio.

education and training (see Olofsson & Wadensjö 2012, 15). However, dropping out of secondary education is more common in rural than in urban areas (e.g., Pedersen & Moilanen 2019a, 27; Karlsdóttir et al. 2019, 18). One reason for this is that in rural areas, boys in particular are more likely to choose vocational education and training,[8] which can lead to them being attracted to jobs with low educational requirements while they are still at school. Another proposed reason for dropping out of school is the difficulty for young people from rural areas to integrate into their new school's community (see Bæck 2019). On the other hand, research has raised the question of whether the tradition of scepticism towards education in agrarian culture continues to influence the attitudes of young people, especially boys, so that their studies remain shorter than those of urban dwellers[9] (see Heggen 2000; Paulgaard 2015).

The concept of and discourse on exclusion has also been criticised as being black and white and stigmatising. It has also been noted that being left out of work or education does not necessarily mean that a young person feels excluded (see, e.g., Paju & Vehviläinen 2001). Firstly, young unemployed people in rural areas have been found to be a diverse group, and young people develop different strategies to cope with unemployment (e.g., Muilu & Onkalo 2002; Hiltunen 2011; Juvonen & Romakkaniemi 2019). Secondly, critics argue that the discussion is too narrowly focused on education and working life, because one can also be excluded from leisure activities, social life, hobbies or opportunities for influence. In these respects, young people in rural areas are clearly at risk. Place of residence imposes constraints, for example, on physical activities for young people in rural areas, where there are few facilities, organised activities and peer groups, and young people may not even want to do sports after long school days (see Armila 2016; Armila 2020; Kivijärvi et al. 2021). In the early 1900s, there were still several civil society associations active in the countryside, organising a variety of activities for young people, often ideologically or religiously oriented. Today, there are few municipal youth facilities in rural areas, and youth services often rely on

8 The vocational education and training systems in the Nordic countries range from school-based (especially in Finland and Sweden) to apprenticeship-based (in Norway and Denmark). In practice, all of the systems have features of both. See Michelsen 2018.

9 Research has referred to "The Law of Jante", made famous by the Danish-Norwegian writer Aksel Sandemose, which describes the oppressive atmosphere in a small town where any effort towards self-development, such as higher education, is viewed in a suspicious light by the community. See, e.g., Pedersen 2018.

mobile forms of work (see, e.g., Tormulainen & Kauppinen 2022). In terms of social life, living in the countryside can mean, for example, limited opportunities to form romantic relationships, as has been observed in the case of Finnish girls (Käyhkö & Armila 2021). Research has also considered whether rural youth feel that they have fewer opportunities for influence than their urban counterparts – an experience of exclusion that tends to result in passiveness (see Johansson 2017). Differences have been noted between the countryside and cities, for example, in the kind of citizenship young people are raised into: rural vocational schools emphasise practicality and localism, while in cities young people are more clearly integrated into the globalised information society (see Kettunen & Prokkola 2022).

Education, employment and related equality issues have dominated the discussion on young people in rural areas within the framework of the welfare state. In the early days of the welfare state, regional policy measures were seen as an essential part of building an egalitarian society. Today, this is no longer self-evident. The emphasis on competitiveness has even given rise to a new negative image of the countryside as unproductive and uncompetitive (see Eriksson 2010b). Service cutbacks and centralisation policies have led to young people in rural areas having to make their choices of education and place of residence under increasing pressure (e.g., Käyhkö 2016; Vehkalahti & Armila 2021). In the 2000s, moving into cities has accelerated again, which has even led to talk of a new 'great migration'. In Finland, for example, the development has affected areas already suffering from migration loss in the eastern and northern parts of the country. In turn, migration gains have been concentrated in increasingly fewer areas, in what are known as growth centres and peri-urban areas. This development has been found to further exacerbate the division of regions into "winners" and "losers" in terms of both economic resources and young population (see Tervo 2005; Aro 2007b; Kytö & Kral-Leszczynska 2013; Moisio & Sirviö 2021). It is clear that the question of regional equality is not going to lose its relevance in the near future.

Changing lifestyles and identities

If the rural–urban migration of the 1960s was still characterised by a shift from agrarian to industrial societies, in recent decades the rural youth have made their life choices in an increasingly globalised post-industrial culture permeated by digitalisation (e.g., Paulgaard 2002; Bloksgaard, Faber & Hansen 2015). This change has even prompted the question of whether it is meaningful to look at young people's lives from the perspective of where they live. When youth cultures are transnational, comprehensive schools offer almost the same curricula for everyone, and the opportunities offered by the internet and social media are equally accessible to rural youth, it can be tempting to think that location no longer matters in young people's lives. In the most optimistic assessments, the new information technology was seen as a saviour of the countryside, as young people plugged into the virtual world would no longer need to move away. (See Lægran 2002; Waara 2002; Bæck 2004.) Although lifestyles in rural and urban areas have been converging since the second half of the 20th century (e.g., Villa 2000), research shows that place still plays a key role for young people, both as a delimiter of the horizon of opportunity and through questions of identity (see, e.g., Bloksgaard, Faber & Hansen 2015; Pedersen 2018). Young people continue to reflect on their place in the world in relation to their home region, albeit in an environment of increasing flow of information and media. From a historical perspective, the change has been gradual: digitalisation did not bring the city to the countryside, but the cross-regionalisation of rural youths' everyday life began already with the popularisation of radio and television, at the latest (see Lamberg 2018).

YOUNG PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR HOME REGION

A key theme of previous research has been the relationship of young people in rural areas with their home region. Research has early on pondered whether rural youth feel a sense of belonging to their local community and way of life (e.g., Mäntykorpi 1986; Paunikallio 1997). Young people have been found to form different types of

relationships with their home region: some become attached to local traditions, while others distance themselves from it early on and want to move away as soon as possible (e.g., Waara 1996; 1998; Lähteenmaa 2006; Penttinen 2016). On the other hand, many feel their relationship is conflicting: when they are away, they miss the countryside and value the natural environment, for example, but long distances, remoteness and lack of opportunities are detrimental to their wellbeing (e.g., Tuuva-Hongisto, Pöysä & Armila 2016, 22–34; Käyhkö 2017; Pedersen 2018; Svendsen 2018). A sense of wellbeing and identification with the countryside does not automatically mean that young people see their future in the rural area. This means that strong attachment does not necessarily correlate with reluctance to move. (See Rönnlund 2020; Pedersen & Gram 2018.) Nonetheless, the notion of belonging has been considered to play a key role in the differing life paths and educational choices of the rural youth (see, e.g., Juvonen & Romakkaniemi 2018). In a broad sense, belonging entails close emotional and social ties to a particular place and community. However, the phenomenon also has a political dimension, as it is not just a matter of an individual's orientation, but of a process that takes shape communally.[10] This can be seen, for example, in the case of young immigrants who have recently settled in a rural area, where the local community may not even want to have a sense of belonging (e.g., Wernesjö 2015). Central questions include what contributes to the development of a sense of belonging for some people, and why others are more likely to feel alienated from their place of residence.

Belonging to a place and the formation of a place-based identity have been examined primarily in terms of gender. Several studies have found that rural structures provide different experiences for girls and boys, men and women. For boys and men, the rural environment often provides space and opportunities for male-typical activities, such as hunting, fishing and various repair and construction projects requiring manual skills, which tie boys and men not only to a place but also to a certain rural masculinity. (See Waara 1996; Bye 2003; Stordal 2017; Armila, Käyhkö & Pöysä 2018b; Eriksen & Andersen 2021; Pöysä 2022.) From an early age, boys may start to establish a concrete and autonomous relationship with their local environment, for example by building huts or treehouses (Kjørholt 2003; Stordal 2017). As they get a little older, many of them move on to mopeds and cars (and snowmobiles in the

10 For a theorisation of the concept, see, e.g., Harris, Cuervo & Wyn 2021.

northern regions), extending their territory and leisure time to places such as petrol stations. For Norway, research has focused on the car culture (*råner*) of young men from rural working-class backgrounds, through which ties to the local environment are created and a certain kind of masculinity is reproduced (see Lægran 2002; 2007; Rye 2006b).[11] In addition, research has noted that rural education may also create deeper experiences of belonging for boys by emphasising, for example, male-dominated fields and hobbies (see Rönnlund & Rosvall 2019).

In other words, young men have made the countryside their own through means of transport and activities that have not necessarily been as accessible to girls and women. Girls in rural areas, on the other hand, have been found to have a more conflicted attitude towards their living environment and the prevailing norms of living as a woman, and previous research has highlighted girls' talk of moving away and the negative aspects of rural areas (e.g., Öhrn, Asp-Onsjö & Holm 2017). Girls have been noted to find social pressure, for example in the form of gossip, more problematic than boys (see Haugen & Villa 2006a; Käyhkö 2017, 16–17). Gossip can be seen as the flip side of social closeness, through which a community seeks to ensure its continuity, but which is seen by young people as an unnecessary intrusion into their private lives and an intergenerational exercise of power, often related to the control of sexual behaviour (Holmila 2000; Waara 2000; Käyhkö & Armila 2021). Whereas gossip has weakened girls' attachment to the countryside, traditionalism has been pointed out as offering opportunities for establishing roots. Research has examined, for example, how local history and knowledge of it has influenced young people's experiences of belonging to a place. Young people in rural areas form a relationship with their place of origin not only in relation to the present, but also to the past reflected in stories, customs and traditions, which can be important in terms of both the young people's identities and their plans for the future (see Vehkalahti & Ristaniemi 2022; Ristaniemi 2023). In addition, girls have been found to value a close relationship with the natural environment and animals (see Wiborg 2004; Käyhkö 2017; Ristaniemi 2023).

11 The fact that young men are using transport to familiarise themselves with their local area can also be seen as a historical continuum. Before mopeds and cars, distances were covered on bicycles, which gained popularity in rural areas faster than in cities in the Nordic countries. In the early days, the bicycle was a characteristically masculine and important status object for young men, expanding their life sphere and enabling them, for example, to accompany their partners home from dances. See Österman 1967; Männistö-Funk 2010; 2012.

While the rural gender order remains in many ways traditional and gendered role expectations hold firm, research has also highlighted new crossings of boundaries. In terms of rural masculinity, the change has been reflected, among other things, in men's relationship to fatherhood: fatherhood is no longer based only on socialisation related to work, as fathers are more comprehensively involved in upbringing and take their children with them on hunting trips, for example (see Brandth 2016). Moreover, with the decrease in manual labour and the replacement of primary and industrial sectors by, for example, tourism, masculinity has been found to have become more flexible and to put less emphasis on physical work capacity (e.g., Brandth 1995; Brandth & Haugen 2005). Even in the forest industry, which has traditionally been a very male-dominated sector (Kaunisto 2009; on the logging tradition, see also Johansson 1994; Snellman 2000), there are signs of a loosening of gender boundaries (see Bradth & Haugen 1998; Follo 2002). Changes in rural women's lives and roles have been a clear focus of research since the 1990s, when feminist perspectives became more common in rural studies (e.g., Frånberg 1996; Wiborg 1998; Sireni 2008; Olsson & Ruotsala (eds.) 2009). With respect to women, attention has been paid, for example, to redefinitions of the role of the rural woman, in situations where the daughter of a farm has stayed on the farm and has been required to step into what is seen as a masculine position in agrarian culture, or alternatively to engage in agriculture while simultaneously doing paid work (see Oldrup 1999; Högbacka & Trast (eds.) 2000; Silvasti 2003). In recent years, attention has also been paid to the gendered countryside from the perspectives of boyhood and girlhood studies (e.g., Pöysä 2022; Ristaniemi 2023).

PERSISTENT AND CHANGING IMAGE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

Research has noted that while rural and urban livelihoods and lifestyles are becoming increasingly similar, there remains a strong cultural dichotomy. The countryside is still often portrayed in the media through the dual imagery of idyll and backwardness (e.g., Rouhiainen 2001; Vepsäläinen & Pitkänen 2010; Eriksson 2010a; Alasuutari 2011). The image of the countryside is produced in the media, in political discourse and in popular culture. For Sweden, for example, it has been noted that films and TV series portray rural areas in a predominantly negative light: sparsely populated areas are presented as narrow-minded and backward places which young people want to leave as soon as possible (e.g., Björklund 2010; Eriksson 2010a; 2010b; Stenbacka

2011; Eriksson, Nielsen & Paulgaard 2015). This also has an impact on the lives and thoughts of the rural youth, as their relationship with their home region is not formed in isolation, but through interaction with cultural perceptions and discourses (e.g., Svendsen 2004; Ollila 2008; Sørensen & Pless 2017). Negative representations may increase the willingness to migrate. Those who choose to stay in the countryside are susceptible to being stigmatised as "losers" or someone who still lives at his childhood home as an adult (e.g., Beach, From, Johansson & Öhrn 2018; Pedersen & Gram 2018). The impact of a negative rural image is increasingly pronounced today, as young people are connected to global youth cultures through social media, for example, and can easily compare the ideal youth presented in the media stream with their own lives (see, e.g., Harinen 2012). In addition to cultural images, recent research has paid attention to young people's own perceptions and attitudes towards the countryside (e.g., Rye 2006b; Sørensen & Pless 2017; Rosvall & Rönnlund 2019).

The increased juxtaposition between the countryside and the city also has the potential to provoke backlashes. If young people in rural areas feel that they are marginalised in public discussion and that decisions concerning them are made in cities, anti-modern and anti-urban identities may become attractive. Young people may be attracted to the idea of a "heroic hick" (Rosenqvist 2003) and identify with the negative image of the countryside conveyed by the media. Rural identity may be built on the denigration of urban values, for example through racist provocation, as has been seen in Sweden (Areschoug 2022). The intensification of the rural–urban dichotomy can be seen, for example, in the debate over the protection of wolves and other large predators in Norway, Finland and Sweden. In rural areas, the protection of wolves is often seen as a city-based activity that disregards local people's views. The question has therefore become a symbolic dispute beyond its own scope, over whose knowledge and experience is worthy of attention. (See Skogen 2001; Johansson 2017.) Class and gender have also been found to play a role in the debate on wolves: boys with working-class backgrounds, who also generally have the most positive image of the countryside, are the most strongly opposed to wolf protection (see Skogen 2001; Rye 2006b).

Of course, there are significant regional differences between the different rural areas, and local identity is by no means universally established in relation to the cities. For example, for the Sámi, one's place in the world is defined more in relation to customs and traditions inherited from previous generations (e.g., Ristaniemi 2023). Research shows that Sámi youth today have a fairly strong awareness of their background (see Nystad et al. 2017). Indigenous peoples may perceive the pressure of globalisation as

a threat to the preservation of local traditions. On the other hand, research has found that Inuit youth living in Greenland, for example, select influences from global youth cultures without it threatening their attachment to the local culture (see Rygaard 2003). Indeed, globalisation-related concerns have often been found to contain stereotypical perceptions of sparsely populated areas as inherently traditional and thus in need of protection (Paulgaard 2002). Research has also highlighted young people in sparsely populated border areas, for whom the awareness of living on the boundary between two countries and cultural areas may become a more important part of their identity than living in the countryside. These young people have been found to find reflections of themselves not only in the youth of their own country but also in those living on the other side of the border, whose life they usually have a good understanding of (see Waara 1998; Jukarainen 2001; Yndigegn 2003).

MULTILOCAL RURAL YOUTH

In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to the various intermediate spaces and grey areas of rural and urban life. It has been noted that the countryside and the city alternate as places of residence in many peoples' life courses, and that many people identify as rural and urban at the same time (see Villa 2000; Paunikallio 2001). Many young people continue to foster a rural identity after moving to the city, and those who have come from the same region may become an important local community in the city as well (e.g., Wiborg 2004; Pedersen 2018). Thus, the rural–urban dichotomy can easily obscure various forms of multilocal rural youth. From a historical perspective, the distinction becomes even more complicated: for example, livestock and small-scale farming were long part of the urban environment and thus part of the lives of urban youth, while urban families belonging to the gentry used to spend their summers in the countryside in their own or rented summer houses throughout the Nordic countries. In addition, the rural environment and fresh air had a central importance for educational movements such as the Scouts, which mainly attracted urban youth (e.g., Skogen & Wichstrøm 1996; Löfgren 2009, 204–221; Lundberg 2018).

A large part of the population still spends some time of the year at summer cottages, as a part of the rural community and environment. After the Second World War, summer cottages were democratised from a pastime of the gentry into a way of life for the masses, and today they can even be referred to as a characteristically

Nordic phenomenon (see Figure 8 for the number of cottages). The summer cottage has become a means of staying connected to rural life in an urban culture for many people. (See Tress 2002; Flognfeldt 2004; Vihinen 2004, 421–424; Periäinen 2006; Müller 2007; Hiltunen & Rehunen 2014.) However, the relationship of today's youth to summer cottages may differ from previous generations: research shows that while young people enjoy the peace and quiet of nature at summer cottages, they also want to integrate digital technology into the cottage experience (Poikolainen 2022). The summer cottage is not the only way for young people living permanently in the city to have experiences of the countryside; research has also focused on other forms of interaction between the countryside and cities (see, e.g., Paunikallio 2001). A very recent phenomenon that has been examined is the impact of the closure during the COVID-19 pandemic, when young people who had moved out of the countryside temporarily returned to their places of origin. In the case of Finland, it has been noted that young people's reactions to the situation varied: some found the return stressful and restrictive, while others enjoyed the peace of nature and the new closeness to their childhood home (Vehkalahti, Armila & Sivenius 2021).

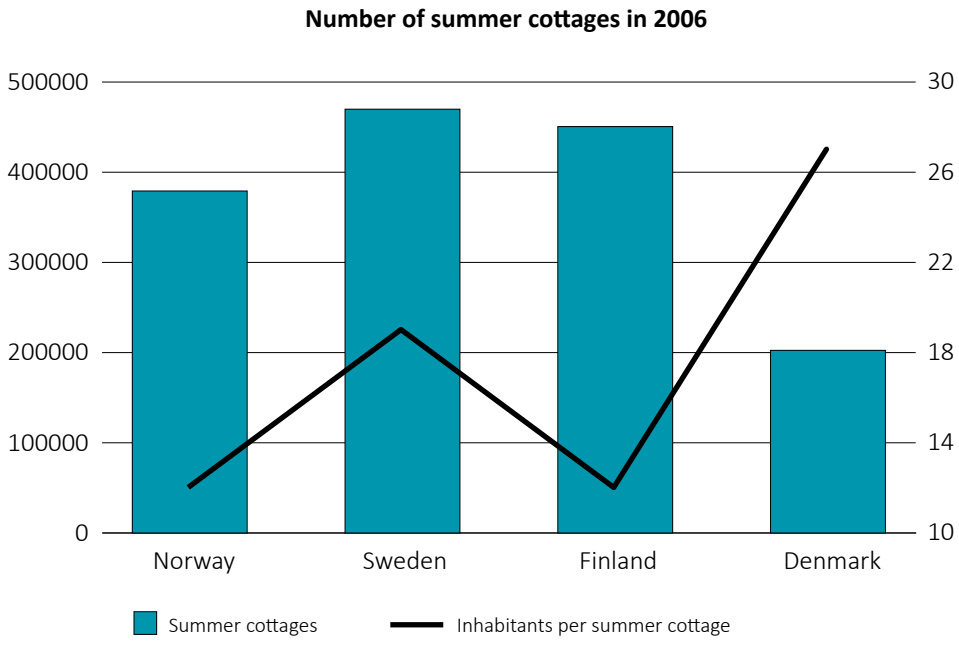


Figure 8. Source: Müller 2007.

Conclusions

Although this overview is not an actual historical study, it raises the question of how today's rural youth appears in relation to the past and previous generations. This is a difficult question, because the last century has seen not only a huge economic change, as agricultural livelihoods lost their dominant position, but also a change in the meanings attached to the countryside: the close link built between a region, a place, a landscape and a livelihood began to crumble, and the countryside was no longer an obvious (rural) economic area, but a remote, peripheral, developing or sparsely populated area, something that was juxtaposed with growing urban areas. It is a completely valid question to ask whether the rural youth of today live in the countryside in the same sense as the young people of the agrarian culture, whose lives were less pressured by migration and educational norms. On the other hand, certain material preconditions have remained relatively unchanged despite economic and cultural change. The lives of young people in rural areas are still characterised by long distances, limited social circles of people of the same age, few formally organised activities and an open environment offering opportunities for a variety of activities in nature.

Numerous studies have looked at the Nordic countries as a coherent and comparative group, and this is the tradition to which the present overview also belongs. It is really a matter of choice whether to emphasise the similarities between these countries (in relation to the rest of Europe or the rest of the world) or the differences; both can be found in political history and also in geography. In terms of the transformation of the countryside, Finland and Denmark are at the two extremes: the former was the last to urbanise and industrialise, the latter the first. It can be conservatively estimated that the rural transformation was the fastest and most intense in Finland, especially from the mid-20th century onwards. The structural change hit hardest in the sparsely populated agricultural and forestry-dominated areas of eastern and northern Finland, which still stand out from the rest of the country in terms of, for example, unemployment. Despite these gradations, both research themes and social discussions have been remarkably consistent in the Nordic countries, especially since the post-World War II period, when interaction between countries increased and similar social reforms were implemented across the countries.

Looking at the continuum of research on young people in rural areas, it is fairly easy to see that it has been linked to the concrete transformation of the countryside.

The rural youth became a focus of academic attention in the 1960s and 1970s, when change was most rapid and the Nordic countries were more broadly waking up to the disappearance of the agricultural society. The first research themes included the reasons for migration and the education of young people in rural areas. In the midst of ongoing social change, the aim was to understand what was happening and what the consequences were for rural areas. At the same time, questions of regional equality raised their head, directing attention towards disadvantages, lack of opportunities, social problems and negative stereotypes of rural areas. Research themes have been quite similar in all the Nordic countries, but – as far as can be concluded from this overview – Denmark seems to lack the tradition of rural studies typical of Finland, Sweden and Norway, into which questions concerning young people in rural areas have been naturally integrated. This explains in part why Danish research is represented less in the overview than research from the other countries.

Young people in rural areas have, of course, been studied from the perspectives of many different disciplines and research traditions. Methodology plays an important role in determining the kind of information the research produces. Historical research, for example, has generally had to rely on demographic sources produced by the authorities and on sources based on memory and traditions, which have provided a certain picture of the life of young people in rural areas. Through quantitative demographic sources, it has been common, for example, to approach rural–urban migration as the movement of a particular "surplus population" from one place to another. In contrast, contemporary research uses a variety of survey, interview and observational data, which bring depth to young people's migratory movements as well as, for example, to issues of identity. Historical sources do not capture young people's personal worlds of experience as adequately, as they often give an overly static and simplistic picture of rural youth in the past. The variety of sources contributes to the difficulty of making historical comparisons, and historical research has also approached the subject through slightly different questions, as can be concluded from the chapter on youth in agrarian culture in this overview.

The first studies on rural youth focused on measurable phenomena such as migration and academic performance, but by the end of the 20th century, research became increasingly constructivist and deconstructive in nature. Today, the countryside is typically viewed as a socio-cultural entity, where places, communities and identities intertwine to produce different experiences for different people. For example, the role of gender in rural–urban migration was recognised early on, but in recent decades the

focus has shifted to whether girls and boys become attached to rural areas differently, and the reasons behind this difference. For whom do rural areas provide objects to identify with and what kind of communal practices does this entail? It can be assumed that in the future, rural youth will be viewed not only from a binary gender perspective, but also from the perspective of gender and sexual diversity. In addition, there have been efforts to challenge the prevailing image of the countryside by highlighting the differences between sparsely populated areas and their inhabitants. In the Nordic countries indigenous studies, for example, have played an important role, not only in making the diversity of rural areas visible, but also in criticising the emphases of previous knowledge and research.

The history of rural youth is to a very large extent the history of the modernisation of adolescence. Youth was shaped into what is now known as an age of making individual choices and "becoming something" at the same time as the Nordic countries were transitioning from agricultural to industrial and subsequently to service societies. There has been a tendency to look at development from the perspective of urban environments, including emerging youth cultures and problem discourses. However, the same development also affected young people in the countryside through a kind of negation: when the city became a haven for a new kind of youth, the pressure was felt in the countryside either to move to the city, to live in a more urban way, or to respond to this development through the counter-culture, as in the example of the punk band Ratsia mentioned at the beginning. In the song "Kids of London" (*Lontoon skidit*) one can read multiple, even trans-generational layers of experience, although formally it would seem to talk about a lack of things to do. The song's "Pihtipudas" represents not only a geographical place but also a history, a set of customs, expectations and attitudes, a way of life that requires adaptation for some young people to fit in. Some, on the other hand, become rooted in the countryside from an early age and remain at home there through adolescence and adulthood.

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