

# Chapter 4

## “The Rural” Intervening in the Lives of Internal and International Migrants: Migrants, Biographies and Translocal Practices

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### 4.1 Introduction

One aspect of population exchange in rural areas is the movement that was identified in the 1990s, and which is often referred to as a process of counterurbanisation. In the 1990s, parts of the Swedish countryside experienced an inflow of people with an urban background. This counterurbanisation movement was explained partly by outside effects, such as increasing opportunities to live in more peripheral areas and commute to work (Amcoff, 2000), and partly by inside effects, such as values and desires for a way of life that could be realised in a specific rural location (Stenbacka, 2001). While many, primarily British, studies theoretically argued for this process as following on from the view of the countryside as a rural idyll (Mingay, 1989; Little & Austin, 1996), the movements in Scandinavia were explained by a desire to live in the countryside among forests and lakes, social networks such as family ties or the opportunity to move to a vacation house. The growing enchantment for rural living, though, seemed to build upon quite different processes and a variety of methods, which contributed to multiple understandings of the rural and the exploration of the concept of rurality.

A more recent process of rural in-migration in Sweden concerns international movements. For some rural areas in Sweden, the beginning of the 21st century meant an emerging trend of in-migration of households with diverse backgrounds. International migrants were most likely to be found in the border regions earlier on, if we consider rural areas and regions to be a distance from the central parts of the country. Border regions in the periphery have a tradition of population exchange with the neighbouring countries, Finland and Norway. During the most recent years, we have been witnessing a trend involving both dispersion and diversity. International migration now affects most rural regions in the country but to different

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degrees and not only the Nordic countries are represented. Some municipalities now host more than 50 nationalities.

These two kinds of migration movements, counterurbanisation involving internal migration from the city to the countryside, and international migration flows involving forced as well as voluntarily migration, raise questions about the meaning of the rural as a living environment and how individuals experience rural living with respect to biographical background and reasons for migration. From the view of Swedish “peripheral” municipalities, the migration issue is a crucial one since many regions and smaller localities suffer from population decline and related problems with the supply of public and private service. While population increase due to natural growth (births) and internal migration does not contribute to positive figures to a sufficient level, recent strategies have evolved around international migration. These strategies have a predecessor in so-called place-marketing campaigns devoted to an internal audience (Niedomysl, 2004) and events focused upon return-migrants. The strategies directed towards international migrants can take various forms. One is closely connected to the place-marketing campaign, involving municipalities’ struggles to present themselves as appealing living environments at fairs abroad, for example in the Netherlands or Germany. Another strategy is directed towards the reception of refugees, which to an important extent may involve preparing and planning for public authorities and public services within the municipality.

This chapter aims to discuss the rural as a space for living and to explore a variety of ways of experiencing rural life in Sweden with the point of departure being the internal migration wave of the 1990s and in the international migration movement taking place during the beginning of the new century. The migrants’ earlier place experiences and contemporary spatial networks are crucial. A fundamental question is: how do translocal experiences and practices contribute to building the meaning of the rural? The idea here is that these two studies merged into one will lead to a new and progressive understanding of the rural.

### ***4.1.1 Rural Places and Scale***

One point of departure in studying the rural is a relational understanding of place (Massey, 2005). Every locality has a position at a never-ending scale of places. The scale is a fluid one, and places are experienced in relation to other places. Life in a rural setting involves connections to urban areas, and a prerequisite for rural life is a rural-urban network in both professional and private manners. But rural areas are also in a network with other rural areas. These networks can be materialised by flows of capital, goods or people but they can also be immaterial, as ideas and feelings are involved in connecting certain places. Feelings of solidarity or sympathy may evolve around, for example, common living or migration experiences. The awareness of the meaning of such relations have given rise to ideas of place and networks of places, and maybe the most cited statement is the one from Doreen Massey:

Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a larger proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a

far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent. And this in turn allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local. (1994, p. 154)

Every locality is then part of a network of places. The countryside is understood as global space, with the reservation for the varieties in impact globalisation between different rural localities (Woods, 2007). Talking in terms of transnationalism or translocalism, the content of such a concept is often summarised as social, economic and political aspects of the networks, involving circulation of ideas, information, products and money. Moving towards the empirical material for this study, it is appropriate to link such place-networks to the human activities connected to them. Communication is important, as well as other linkages which could be practised through work, relatives, consumption or leisure activities.

### 4.1.2 *Two Studies in One*

In the study on the internal migrants, narratives around work, leisure and social ties expressed the way the rural is part of a network of places, involving other rural areas as well as urban ones, thus pointing at the translocal character of the rural. Similarly, for the international migrants, the networks are stretched out to be translocal. How should we understand the networks involving several localities, rural and urban places and spaces? What kinds of needs do the linkages fill? This chapter will follow a structure that builds on the migrants’ experiences within three fields: *communication and the production of networks* of places through translocal relations, and how they influence the *local society* and local relations on the one hand and *physical environment and nature*<sup>1</sup> on the other hand. Alongside that, I will show that it is possible to add a counterbalance to the differences often focused upon concerning international migrants, in particular refugees, and internal migrants. Something that will be explored is the chance to focus on values, attitudes and practices that occur among international as well as national rural dwellers, in order to scrutinise the meanings that are connected to the rural as a living environment. Focusing on the similarities within diversity – that is, common experiences, interests or characteristics among the internal and international migrants – does not mean that resources devoted to, for example, the reception of refugees, introduction and integration should be decreasing. But it does pay attention to the fact that there is a risk of ruinously focusing on differences and at the same time underestimating common interests and common experiences and practices.

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of nature is in this text used the way it is used in the Swedish language: “the green outdoors” includes forests, lakes, parks and gardens. Spending time “in nature” is spending time outdoors. To gain strength by spending time “in nature” means that watching the landscape or spending time outdoors is to have a relationship with nature and to use it for recreation or healing or other reasons.

The starting point of this work is two migration studies, both based on in-depth interviews within two research projects. In both studies, rural areas close to medium-sized towns as well as more remote areas were included. One was carried out at the end of the 1990s (Stenbacka, 2001) while the other one was carried out in 2009 and 2010. The first one explored the reasons behind migration to rural areas in the Mälaren region and the consequences at the household level and the society level. Twenty-nine individuals in twelve households were interviewed. The households that were chosen were composed of families with children, retired couples, single male or female households, such as single mothers, as well as couples without children. The households had migrated from an urban to a rural area and their everyday life could be analysed in terms of various everyday practices directed towards the local community, towards the countryside and towards the house. The second study took place in a region in the north of Sweden and focused on international refugee migration to rural areas; families with children as well as single male or female households and one single mother.<sup>2</sup> The primary material for this study is interviews with 23 individuals in 16 households.<sup>3</sup> In this study, everyday life is structured around communication and networking, the local social environment and the physical environment.

## 4.2 Translocalism and Rural Migration

### 4.2.1 *Seizing the Rural Migrants*

As an introduction, I will combine the themes of translocalism and rural migration. This is needed because of the urban bias often involved in studies on international migration (also see Hogan, 2004). The knowledge of international migration, its effects on a structural as well on an individual level, to a large extent builds upon studies in urban areas. Smith (2001), however, has paid attention to practices that are localised at “one pole of translocality”, for example, in Mexican villages, Chinese factory towns or “even in the countryside”. Smith’s arguments are familiar in the sense that they build upon a perspective implying that everything has its roots in the cities and metropolitan areas, whether it be socio-economic opportunities, cultural or consumption practices or communication and travel. Using this way of seeing the urban-rural relation, it is easy to regard the rural as only mirroring the urban, with no explanatory power of its own, as merely a geographical dimension. The aim of this work is to go beyond such normative urbanised explanations and to elaborate

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<sup>2</sup> The interviewees come from the following countries: Afghanistan, Burma, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Thailand and Uzbekistan.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the interviews with these 16 households also involved a child or two in the family. In addition, 12 adolescents and 11 civil servants were interviewed, but the data generated from them are explored in other texts (such as Stenbacka, 2001).

on “the rural power” and on how the rural as an environment affects the transnational or translocal practices and networks. Nevertheless, Smith makes an important statement concerning “the taking place” of transnational practices. The historically mediated context (in which he includes geography) will force us to pay attention to the emplacement of mobile subjects. To conclude, the geographically mediated context, concerning, for example, urban vs. rural, forest vs. desert or village vs. suburb, will make an indispensable contribution to the context of transnationalism. In this case, it means that we will investigate internal and international migrants’ experiences of life in a rural environment and how this life is regarded through a lens of a translocal biography and how it involves translocal practices.

There is now a consensus concerning speaking of countrysides in the plural; there is not one countryside but several different places containing different translocal ruralities. It is more fruitful to discuss the continuous transformation of different countrysides rather than trying to catch one certain feature or the essence of the rural. The contemporary trends of internal and international migration flows into rural areas have interested researchers in several parts of the western world. In the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, the main focus was to grasp the phenomenon of internal migration to rural areas. This was conducted with different perspectives and methods, such as statistical analyses of migration movements and classifications of municipalities (Champion, 1989), a discussion on the rural-urban continuum (Bell, 1992), the rural idyll and the gender aspects of such an “idyll” (Little & Austin, 1996; Forsberg & Gunnerud Berg, 2005) and also the rural understood as social processes and social representations (Halfacree, 1993). The perspective taking diversity into account has led to several studies on subdivisions of the rural population, like the middle class, amenity migrants but also more marginalised groups (Cloke & Little, 1997). Later, the often repeated distinction between the urban and the rural has been supplemented with discussions on the rural-urban interrelations (Munkejord, 2006).

The interaction of international migration and the rural has been researched from several interesting perspectives – but not in terms of values and living preferences as was the case within the counter urbanisation paradigm. Without claiming to be able to grasp the full range of the research, I will point to some contemporary research areas. One is concerned with labour migration, which has given rise to a large number of studies concerned with the impact of foreign-born workers in rural areas. One study from Virginia takes account of both the immigrant and industry perspective (Gozdziak & Bump, 2004), and a study from Iceland uncovers questions regarding attachment and the meaning of home (Skaptadóttir & Wojtyńska, 2008). Working conditions and recruitment of a foreign-born labour force is discussed in a study from Norway (Rye, 2007). Not as common is the focus on planning and international migration but Mirafab and Mcconnell’s (2008) study is an exception. There are studies on lifestyle migration, mostly among European citizens migrating to Scandinavia, as well as on Dutch and German migrants and second-home owners (Eimermann, 2009; Müller, 1999). Love migration is another theme and is a concern also within the Scandinavian context, involving images of Russian women moving to Norway and Thai women migrating to Sweden (Flemmen, 2007; Hedman,

Nygren, & Fahlgren, 2009). Another area for research, not considering reasons for migrating, is on the rural as a “white” haven and as a place for a certain kind of racism connected to ideas about the rural as representing the core of the nation and ideas about who belongs or not (Neal & Agyeman, 2006).

These quite diverse orientations within the broader field on rural migration to the western countries does not limit itself to a short conclusion. The point is that the limited scope of this study should be seen in the broader light that reminds us about the relativity of spaces as well as the outcomes of the always present categorisation of migrants.

#### 4.2.2 *Biographies and Translocal Practices*

A biographic approach gives an important contribution to understanding the way individuals and households experience the place of living and how they look upon their future. Such a perspective can also contribute to explaining expectations and doubts regarding certain environments or ways of living. In the study on the *internal* migration, this was explored in terms of earlier experiences of the rural in terms of growth, relatives, and second homes in rural areas but also experiences of the urban, like heavy traffic, lack of suitable houses or an experienced “tough social climate”. In the study on *international* migrants, earlier experiences were also present during the interview. As many of the respondents fled from a war zone, lived in camps and experienced uncertainty and fears about health and life, to live in a peripheral rural setting first and foremost is seen as “peace and quiet” in a positive sense. To be able to take a walk in the streets, to let the children walk to school and to have a flat of one’s own is primarily spoken of in positive terms. The sparsely populated municipality is described as strange in the beginning, as no people are out in the streets, but after a while it is possible to get used to this.

The two studies have been based on the stories of the migrants and their roles as actors. As individuals migrate, we experience several places involving relatives and friends, work and leisure, memories and feelings. This means that we also belong to several places, a condition that has been conceptualised as place polygamy (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) or “flerstedstilknytninger” (i.e. connections to multiple places, Munkejord, 2009, p. 20). These concepts embrace the way individuals have multiple place attachments and connect different places with each other. Peoples’ belonging to places is also fluid and changes over time and the intensity may vary. Individuals are now part of constituting networks of places and people, connected in social activities, imaginations, memories and expectations on the present and the future.

The respondents will be termed internal and international migrants. The international migrants have a refugee status, which is important as part of their biographical background, but at the same time the label “refugee” is misleading as it puts most of the focus on the past and not as much on the future, while the term “international migrant” or “transnational” pays attention to the individuals as actors with intentions and possibilities. It is not to say that the refugee experience is irrelevant but

rather to say that intentions and goals are just as important for individuals with this background as for voluntary migrants.

The way individuals and households use the place where they live and how they experience possibilities and constraints are connected to biographies, including the past, the present and the future (Boyle, Halfacree, & Robinson, 1998). The themes that will be investigated all involve such feelings; they can be considered opportunities but also constraints. The multifaceted experiences can be stressed as an obstacle for the possibility of saying anything about people’s complex relations to places – or they can be seen as the very core of the knowledge needed in terms of the rural as a living and more specifically a “receiving” environment. The three investigated themes – “communication and networks”, “local society” and “nature” – all take the rural place as the point of departure, which means that the study subject is individuals’ everyday geographies.

### **4.3 Translocal Rural Spaces from the Perspectives of Internal and International Migrants**

A question to be explored is “in what ways do values and experiences differ or coincide regarding the perspectives from the individuals involved in these two studies?” In relation to this, it should also be considered how migrant biographies affect the experiences of the rural as a living milieu. This is interesting as planning activities today focus on presumed differences and group belonging, while we know less about the possible similarities within diversity; the occurrence of common experiences but different biographical backgrounds is here based on being either an internal rural migrant or an international refugee.

#### ***4.3.1 Communication and Networks***

As stated earlier, rural places are connected to several places in the world. Through the activities and networks of individuals, spatial interactions between different rural places, but also between urban and rural contexts, are an ongoing process indicating a condition of constant restructuring of places (Stenbacka, 2001). Various communication techniques allow people to maintain closer contacts with their previous (home) societies, also involving them in different kinds of social and economic – translocal – networks.

The analysis of the internal migrants showed that in several cases, the Swedish migrants migrate to a social network, an existing network or a non-existing but presumed one. They may look for a house close to relatives or friends or close to a place they already know from when they were younger or from holidays (Stenbacka, 2001). It may also be the case that households move to a rural place that represents a place in their past, the place where they grew up or spent the summers (Forsberg & Carlbrand, 1993). But the wish for a rural living environment or even a “rural way of

live” does not mean rejection of the urban. The belonging or attachment to several places may also be part of the attractiveness of rural areas, as the multi-place experiences may contribute to strengthening positive place-experiences in peripheral areas (Munkejord, 2009). The possibility to live in one place, have a vacation home somewhere else, and keep in contact with relatives and friends as well as travel to new places makes the place for living an attractive place in-between the excursions. The households in the study in Mälardalen stress the importance of keeping contacts with the city. Commuting on a daily basis, as well as weekend trips for cultural events or visiting grown children in metropolitan areas are examples of such recurrent activities within a Swedish context. Friends and activities are important, and a common dream is to own a house with a big garden in the countryside and a flat in town. There is a common wish to hold on to at least two geographical contexts, and each context is experienced in relation to the other.

Sometimes I long for an urban life, like . . . Stockholm . . . to get the cultural stuff. I mean, not to have to travel for hours and find somewhere to stay. A lot of money just to visit the theatre or an art exhibition. (Birgitta, Swedish background)

It is an oscillating feeling. I would really like to move back into town. / . . . / But I would also like to have a country estate with horses; I would like to have it all! / . . . / a flat in the centre of town and a big house in the countryside. But economically it does not work. (Elisabet, Swedish background)

The connections to other kinds of environments, like a city, may be discussed from the viewpoint of opportunities to join certain activities, but these connections may also involve other people and transgress international borders. In-migrants with an *international* background show that relations to other places are materialised in relations to other individuals; it may be something that is practised regularly through physical visits, remittances transferred to other parts of the world, phone calls or chatting on the internet. Such relations may also to different degrees be active in mind and body, “resting” or kept as memories, ready to activate when possible or needed. Social and economic networks extend beyond the singular link between Sweden and the home countries (see also Thompson, 2009, p. 372). Many of the respondents talk about relatives and family members in other countries, leading to translocal networks and a mix of local practices, what may also be referred to as hybridisation (Canclini, 1995).

An effect of the international migrants’ transnational lives is that many of the contacts with relatives and friends are now via the phone and the Internet. Mobile phones, for example, play an important role in “building and maintaining a sense of community and connection to others” (Thompson, 2009, p. 360). Many migrants stress the importance of these technological advancements. It means that social networks can be spread even though they are practised at home. When asked about the frequency of contact with “home”, and the relatives there, Aras answers:

Sometimes once, sometimes eight. It depends. There are so many relatives that you should keep in contact with. She [my wife] has ten brothers, me too. Many phone calls. The family is much closer in Iraq. (Aras, international migrant)



In this statement, Aras implicitly states that relations are closer in Iraq than in Sweden, and that he is combining these two ways of living; everyday practice is filled with relational understandings. Another aspect of the intensity in translocal communication by the phone or Internet is that social life to a large extent takes place in the home, where, for example, the computer is, and not in other people’s homes or in the street, which may have been the case in the home country. If the household has most of the family in one place in the home country, and if there are relatives from different generations, it is possible to have regular contact, and children may spend a lot of time on the Web. On the other hand, if in the home there is only an elderly mother or father with no computer skills, it is harder to keep in contact because phone calls may be too expensive. Anyhow, for many of the interviewees, contacts with the native country are in fact more frequent than contacts within the local society.

Social network also involves obligations. Ibrahim and Hanna have contact with their relatives almost every week. Mostly they discuss everyday matters, what life is like in Eritrea and in Sweden. The question of remittances is also brought up.

They ask if we have got a job. If we say “no”, they do not ask for money, but if we should say “yes, we have a job”, they expect us to send money to them. (Ibrahim, international migrant)

Communicative practices affect immigrants’ social networks and how they look upon themselves and perceive themselves in the local society. Recurring questions from relatives in the home country about economic assistance may, for example, affect feelings of success or failure. If you have the chance to send money it can make you feel better but if you have no such opportunity, it may create feelings of despair and hopelessness. Networks within Sweden are also based on a combination of social and economic factors. One man from Uzbekistan recounts how he and another man regularly travel to Gothenburg to shop for groceries at a store with a range that widely exceeds that of the local shops. They buy commodities not only for their own families but also for many others. He mentions that they have had plans to open some kind of business where they live, using these contacts in Gothenburg. This may serve as an example of another recurrent theme; contacts with “compatriots”, a social network that is located across Sweden and which involves many phone calls and visits.

The networks within the country also involve a political dimension. One man says that he speaks about local politics with his friends in a southern municipality in Sweden: “We discuss the living conditions and compare our situations.” National networks may in this sense be seen as something that makes rural living easier: you share your experiences and compare other environments and so everyday life is put into a wider context, involving feelings of ambiguity and thoughts of moving but also feelings of attachment and a wish to defend a certain way of life.

A striking difference when we compare the internal and the international migrants, and take a time context into account, is that firstly there has been an important change in communication technology involving the Internet and the possibilities to phone, chat or email. These contacts and the use of such technologies are much

more pronounced in the study of the international migrants, performed about 12 years later. But time and advanced technology is not the only answer; even more obvious is the importance of biography and how the migration experience lead to certain translocal communication practices that sometimes stay within the national borders and sometimes transgress the borders of nation-states. There is a need both to build up a sense of “community” despite the dispersion of households and also to exchange and share experiences. Thompson comments on the intersection of community and networks by saying that while communities are ideationally constituted through cultural practices, “social networks” are constituted through interaction and exchange and that there is a complex interplay between communities and networks (Thompson, 2009, 359ff).

We know from earlier studies that households in rural areas are involved in spatially spread social networks, developing communication strategies to other parts of the country or in the world. People themselves integrate the rural and the urban, and build identities with the point of departure in several contexts, a kind of double morphology (Berlan-Darque & Collomb, 1991). We will now turn to the theme of local society and community, to see how the translocal relations are active in the process of interpreting and living the local.

### *4.3.2 Local Society and Community*

In this study, local society and community are investigated through the social relations that are built in the local context and the way they are explained from the geographical, rural, context. Thus, it involves social networks just as the previous theme did, but has the physical locality as point of departure. It involves such geographical aspects as a smaller number of people live close in the municipality centre but also they are also live peripherally in relation to metropolitan parts of the country and with a distance to larger cities, so life and local social relations are affected by the rural or small-scale context. It is about everyday practice as well as about the verbal, outspoken and transferred construction of the rural social life in every day talk.

The analysis of internal migrants showed that a close-knit society and a feeling of “community” was one reason they preferred a rural or a small-town living environment. In a Swedish context, this involves aspects of being seen and that your well-being is of concern for other people in the surroundings. It is practised in the way neighbours keep an eye on each other, each other’s children or properties. It is about knowing each other’s habits and noticing deflection (Stenbacka, 2001). One woman discusses concerns for and of neighbours:

If there is no light on, is he ill or has he gone away or what? It is easier to help each other in a way. I think so, and you are more dependent on each other. (Gunilla, Swedish background)

Similar reflections are made concerning the advantages of letting the children grow up in a rural setting. Schools are smaller, if something is wrong with a child you

will know about it and it is also possible for the children to move around, using the forest for playing.

In the city you are more anonymous. / . . / one of the kids was missing, and soon someone was on the phone asking if it is ok that our kid was there. That would not happen in town. (John, Swedish background)

There are also negative aspects of closeness and visibility. Social disadvantages in smaller societies or peripheral locations have to do with gossip and control, and the way you have one life in your own view and one life in the eyes of other people (Stenbacka, 2001; Haugen & Villa, 2006). One woman with a Swedish background, who lives by herself, experiences how people around her notice how she acts, if she has visitors etc., which can have a preventative effect as she avoids doing certain things or visiting certain places. This may, for example, prevent her from visiting the local pub.

It is easier to be anonymous in town. Easier than here. And that is why I feel that . . . going out at the local pub, it doesn't lure me . . . but God! Go out and see some people. I mean there are plenty of people and it is not that they are all going to look at me but . . . (Birgitta, Swedish background)

Everyone knows everything about everyone, and that is something you need to get used to. They know more about you than you do yourself. / . . / It doesn't matter what you do, there is always something to talk about and it doesn't matter who you are or how long you have lived here. (Anette, Swedish background)

There are also aspects of the small-scale social life that are connected to networks and possibilities. It may be easier to find an arena for local activism, to create and to be part of an informal or formal network that can be activated, for example, in work with local festivals (Ekman, 1999) or at times of threat, such as changes within the provision of welfare services, like the closing down of a school or a shop (Berglund, 1998). In addition to such bottom-up movements, the relation to “the local power” is also often described in terms of closeness and informal channels in sparsely populated areas or smaller municipalities. A disadvantage of such local networks is that the same individuals tend to have the high positions, which prevents renewal; once you are in a network, you reinforce each other's status while it can be hard to enter such a network. From a gender perspective, there is also status involved in different kinds of networks, where, for example, male networks are in more powerful positions compared to female (Stenbacka & Tillberg Mattsson, 2009).

When the international migrants are analysed, similar kinds of contextual characteristics associated with rural areas are brought up. Because of the biographical backgrounds and migration histories, international migrants have little knowledge of Swedish society, the welfare system organisation and labour market characteristics (for example, administrative issues around entrepreneurship). If they are also refugees, they are directed to a destined municipality in the country, often with no previous knowledge about the location, climate and character. Within this discussion, the advantage of the small-scale society is formulated in terms of the possibilities that lie in “being close to important people or key persons”, like civil servants from the municipality office, integration projects or the local employment

agency. These key persons are not distant official servants, but to a higher degree are seen as individuals who are easy to approach (also see IM-gruppen, 2007).

Another aspect concerns the experience of “being seen” as an individual rather than as an anonymous migrant. It involves a discussion of the differences compared to metropolitan areas where you are seen as a collective of in-migrants, while in a village you are an individual with individual characteristics (also see Bergström, 2001). There are also negative aspects of closeness and visibility. A report by the board of integration (Integrationsverket) discussed how feelings of being seen as deviant and “identified” may exist (Integrationsverket, 2000). The advantages of “small-town-care” can thus turn into disadvantages. This is true when it comes to formal networks and services as well. For individuals or households, it is positive to get the feeling that the civil servants are out walking in the streets and you are close to the place where decisions are made. For civil servants, it has another side. Diana from Sudan tells about her engagement in a women’s association and how she had to face some problematic situations as she was inviting the newly arrived women to meetings and seminars. Some men called her ugly names and she was looked upon as a real danger for other in-migrant women.

I had to speak with the men to make them understand that a women’s network is not dangerous. The purpose is not to be against the men. (Diana, Sudan)

Such reactions, and the gender aspects of these reactions, are discussed in other interviews too, and this raises questions of the meaning of the small-scale. On the one hand, it may reinforce a desire for control as it is important to behave “correctly” in the eyes of others. On the other hand, it may have been the small-scale network that made it possible for this woman to speak to the men and discuss the purpose of the meetings. Such antagonisms may lead to adjusting behaviour, backing off and trying to follow another way of action, trying to stand tall or considering moving. Ali-Reza from Iraq works as an interpreter. He has moved from the smaller municipality to a neighbouring larger town. He prefers not to work as an interpreter in the smaller municipality. Those who he will be interpreting for he knows too well and it can become a sensitive situation. He feels that they also have expectations that he cannot fulfil and he says that there is a risk of individuals using gossip in situations where he is supposed to work as a civil servant.

Everyone knows everything about each other and there is so much bullshit. (Ali-Reza, Iraq)

Being such a key person in a small-scale society has also meant that he is viewed as a friend instead of as a professional, which leads to expectations of him “being there” 24 h a day and to questions from migrants about what is considered to be unfair treatment, including accusing him of giving some people certain favours. Referring to these examples, it can be stated that a close-knit society may involve negative social control. Social control does not only involve gender; age is also an issue as is the power relations between parents and children. A small-scale social environment results in increased opportunities to know where the children are and this is seen as positive from the view of parents. The international in-migrants may also view the rural locality as a good environment to grow up in.

We thought that Europe only would be cities, and no villages. That there is no small town or small village, everything is a city. But when we arrived we got this place, and we saw that it was good for the children. A good place to grow up in / . . . / they should not be acting like they do in town / . . . / (Ibrahim, Eritrea)

We are happy because children are free here. They can go biking, they can laugh, and they can play as they want. It is safe here, and free. They are happy with this freedom. (Nur-Aftab, Afghanistan)

A rural environment is seen as a preferred environment for children to grow up in, something that has been stated in other studies on migration into the countryside (Valentine, 1997; Stenbacka, 2001). One aspect that should be paid attention to in this context is the way the rural municipality is considered in relation to other spaces. For the international migrants, these spaces may be rural or urban areas in the home country, sometimes characterised by war and violence. For the native Swedes, such spaces may be Swedish metropolitan areas or towns. However, this analysis highlights the necessity of treating space as something created in relation to other spaces. This is something that makes comparisons complex; I will nevertheless devote the next section to such an undertaking.

There are some characteristics that seem to be connected to rural areas, irrespective of the background of the interviewed. These characteristics can be summarised as the rural as a place offering close social relations, including a safe place to grow up for children and as a place where the small-scale society involves social control with the concomitant advantages and disadvantages. In rural areas and in smaller municipalities, social control is often described as positive: children are safer, it creates a feeling of visibility and means that you are seen as an individual. The dark side of this is when “care” turns into normative thinking and control over people’s practices. Social control is also, to significant degree, a gendered practice. In its negative sense, social control may prevent you from doing certain things and may make you adjust to what is expected. It may also involve certain expectations on in-migrant women, including a collective view on what is accepted.

While the internal migrants often have a previous locally based network as they move into a village or smaller municipality, international migrants lack that kind of social tie. The international migrants thus devote a lot of time to the Internet and mobile phones. Place attachment may be built upon social networks as described above, but as we shall see, nature and the physical aspects of the rural also are involved in processes of anchoring or feelings of belonging.

### ***4.3.3 Spending Time Outdoors and the Meaning of Nature***

For the *internal* migrants, nature is named as one important element and as a way to materialise the intentions behind the change of living environment. One often quoted reason behind migrating is to have a greater chance to partake in outdoor activities, such as sports, fishing, berry-picking, barbecuing or simply being able to see the seasonal changes through changes in vegetation, light and animal life. Three different practices or attitudes towards nature were identified among the respondents

in the 1990s: activities such as the use of what nature provides (berries, mushrooms, fish or garden products), an appreciated backdrop to one's own living environment and also the feelings and embodying, feelings for gratitude for just being able to "be part of nature" (Stenbacka, 2001). One woman describes how nature is a place for retreat and recovering:

When I feel that something is wrong, I go out into the woods. To be by oneself, to be alone and go through things. That is so good. Compared to staying in town. You do not have that possibility. You gain strength by staying outdoors. In the summer, we stay out all the time. We live outdoors. First thing we do, breakfast or coffee in the garden, and we have built a porch where we sit all night. (Gunilla, Swedish background)

Staying outside is also connected to social, collective activities with friends or relatives: hiking, fishing and barbecuing as well as learning how to take care of what nature provides (Stenbacka, 2001).

I want to learn. I want to be with the older ones, see how they do it, to learn. You go out picking rosehips, and you dry them. And to know the temperature. /.../ they smoke their own fish out here. That is how I want it to be. (Anette, Swedish background)

Another recurrent attitude is that the green areas in the cities are not enough. It has to do both with the need for being alone or at least with a limited company and with the wish for the unordered vegetation and the excitement that lies in the unexpected meeting with animals, weather changes or other interactions with what is considered to belong to the broader concept of nature. Birgitta says that "...in the city /.../ you may go to a park, and that is not enough for me. /.../ I want to walk over the meadows, listen to the mockingbird. . ."

While Bell (1992), drawing on a study on the English countryside, said that there are some moral and community-oriented aspects connected to the respondents' arguments around the practise of using the countryside (hunting, for example), there was more individual well-being and less of disparaging the urban way of living in the Swedish study. The woman who appreciates the mocking bird goes on: "/.../ It is quality of life, it is greater than the cultural activities in the city [theatre, art exhibitions], but of course, a bit of culture now and then." This woman illustrates the always present notion of the need for both what is considered to be urban and what is considered to be rural.

Regarding the international migrants, their relations to nature and the physical environment are often referred to as something unknown initially. In some cases, it even caused feelings of uneasiness, because of the first impression of waste and wilds. After some time and when the different seasons of the year become familiar (climate, light etc.), the landscape may be an appreciated surroundings. Some also tell about outings to special places which may be used for barbecues, fishing or hiking. When one family from Iraq, with a refugee background, explains the way they use their surroundings, they use words similar to Gunilla's statement above, about staying outdoors. They also refer to the need or the wish to stay outdoors in the summer time; it seems that being in the rural physical environment, spending time fishing, gardening or socialise with friends is something that becomes both necessary and naturalised. The daughter in the family says:

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

Only for sleep are we back / . . . / sometimes we go with the car, sometimes we bring the tent, then you can have a rest if you are tired. And we are barbecuing, and you can dip your feet into the water. And when something is pulling [a fish] everyone wants to see what it is. (Aras, Iraq)

Two women have made the journey from Afghanistan to northern Sweden as quota refugees. They speak about similar but also different experiences: “It is good that there is this nice forests and the nature everywhere, but we go to school and after that we go home.” The landscape is a nice backdrop but as a newcomer, it is not so clear how a different climate and a different landscape can be used. People also have different feelings concerning openness in terms of mountain or coastal areas or more overgrown areas such as deep forests (Williams & Harvey, 2001). In smaller municipalities or villages, there is also a lack of parks or planned public spaces. The Swedish right of common access involves the right to hike or barbecue in most of the nature surroundings, which is one reason for the absence of planned parks in nature close villages. However, there may be a need for some organised space for outdoor activities.

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

The comparison of internal and international migrants point to a common experience of the rural as intervening in their lives, and their narratives embrace attitudes towards the physical surroundings (in this case, nature and green environments) and meanings of nature that are both common but also suggest different needs. First, it is shown how nature and outdoor activities may be talked about as a basic need, and how it is impossible to stay inside in the summer. Swedish and international migrants, refugees as well as voluntary migrants, even use the same kinds of expressions, such as “we are outdoors all the time”. Also, the importance of what nature provides, like fish or berries, is a recurrent theme among the respondents in both studies. It is also important to pay attention to the lack of public “arranged” space in smaller Swedish municipalities. While the internal respondents did not express such wishes, it seems that households with various international backgrounds pay attention to needs for more planned green spaces, simply because of the wish to use nature as a second living room and because of the ambiguous attitudes towards how to use the physical environment, especially in the beginning.

Another important notion is that the physical environment will always have an effect on humans and lead to certain practises. These practises may be characterised by rejection or attachment. Considering the results from these two studies, it seems that “nature” is something that insists on getting a reaction or being paid attention to, it is getting close and it is something that is hard not to notice and act towards. For some people, it can be a reason to migrate to a rural area, for others it has become a welcomed part of life.

## 4.4 Conclusion

An important finding from this study considers the spatially rooted ingredients of the rural; there exists a “common language” for expressing the content of life in a rural setting. Peace and quiet, freedom and a stronger sense of community are common words for both internal and international migrants. But the reasons for using the words are quite different. While peace and quiet from the internal-Swedish point of view refers to the contrast with the noise and tempo in bigger cities; the immigrants refer to violence, threats and traffic far beyond Swedish levels. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note the similarities and the common goal to live in an environment that is good for the children and that makes life easier. The wish to be part of something that is not too big, but to have the possibility to be seen as an individual may also be some kind of common goal in life. Biographies do have an explanatory power but there are no clear or linear relationships in these explanations. This work also points out the need for a relativity approach when studying place. The experiences, appraisal and appreciation or rejection of one area is though built upon images of what the other offer as well. Spaces for living and acting need to be understood in relation to each other.

It is through the intentions of people that we can come close to the values associated with a certain way of living and it has been shown that rural areas may satisfy the wants and needs among households with different backgrounds but with similar expectations and goals. This is of importance not only for studies within local development but also for work on integration and social cohesion. Such projects or measures are often occupied by differences and to overcome distance while “the gap” may not be that huge or existing at all, and certainly not within all types of values or attitudes. It is possible to add a counterbalance to the differences often focused upon, among the majority population and international migrants, and refugees in particular. It is possible to focus on values, attitudes and practises that occur among international as well as national rural dwellers.

The migration act does not only involve the physical re-location of an individual, a household or a family. New relations are also established between different localities. As the new relations develop the actors involved live in a continuous condition of negotiating and synthesising; places are lived and in the acts of living, several places and place experiences are merged. Referring to the narratives of the international migrants, it is clear that communication is crucial; holding on to the relationships with relatives and friends is a necessary part of life. It is a way to make sense of this merging of experiences and helps in understanding the place they left as well as the place of living.

This chapter has shown that the values connected to rural living can be of a “general” character despite variations in migration biography. Regardless of being an internal or an international migrant, rural identities or in-migrant identities are not fixed, or do not develop as a given outcome from similar backgrounds or experiences. Rather, attitudes towards the rural as a living environment develop from the intentions individuals and households have, and these intentions may exist independent of biography. Even though biography is part of the explanation, it does not



mean that it demands similar biographies to create similar rural identities or attitudes. Rather, it seems that we must regard “the rural” as an intervening subject, the rural as material and social space is a powerful actor in the building of identities and the development of practices.

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