Growth and decline in rural Sweden
Geographical distribution of employment and population 1960–2010

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Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the combination of changes in the population and employment into sectors in rural Sweden for the period 1960-2010. The aim is to describe and analyze the demographic changes together with the labour market changes, and to account for the spatial outcome of these changes by considering the heterogeneity of rural areas. The analysis departs from the framework of rural restructuring, where changes in employment and population in rural Sweden are interpreted as local products of the global processes of technological development, social modernization and globalization. Empirically, the analysis is based on a combination of longitudinal censuses and register data on the Swedish population covering the period 1960-2010.

The first part of the aim is achieved by applying a life-course perspective and exploiting the longitudinal nature of the data. The life-course perspective distinguishes between historical time and the age of individuals, making it possible to situate changes in employment and migration on the individual level. The second part of the aim is achieved through developing a typology of rural Sweden by doing a cluster analysis on SAMS-areas.

The results show that rural change after 1980 was characterized by de-industrialization and the rise of the urban service sector. The period was also characterized by regional urbanization rather than local urbanization. Peripheral urban and rural areas based on industrial employment found themselves with a declining economic motor, which meant that people had to find their source of income elsewhere. The migration stream in this period was thus increasingly directed towards metropolitan or large city centers, and their rural surroundings within commuting distance. However, the more fine-tuned spatial typology reveals that also a few areas in the rural periphery have experienced growth, these areas are mainly attractive places based on various kinds of tourism. It can thus be concluded that different rural areas have experienced, and will continue to experience, the shift from manufacturing to services differently, where some areas have grown in both demographic and employment terms while others have declined. In this sense the heterogeneity of rural areas are a product of both growth and decline – of old development paths that is reaching their end and of new development paths that will continue into the future.

Keywords

rural restructuring, rural heterogeneity, manufacturing decline, agricultural decline, urbanization, rural typology, life-course perspective, cluster analysis, Sweden