

## **The Continuous Re-creation of a Swedish Rural Community: Moose hunting, the School, the Church, Agriculture**

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### **Abstract**

This paper has its point of departure in how rural inhabitants reflect and act to maintain a viable local community in times of increasing urbanisation and globalisation. Two kinds of changes are discussed. First the kind of continuous changes, which are part of daily life, and that the inhabitants usually find ways to cope with. Two common trends in this category are that most people leave the village during daytime to earn their living and that the school, shop and other local meeting places are closing down. Second, I identify four types of more radical changes like “increase of market pricing relations”, “mobilisation to save meeting places”, “changed power relations in institutions” and “decrease in the agricultural sector”. To illustrate these changes I present four examples from a fieldwork in a parish of southern Sweden. The examples concern moose hunting, the school, the church and farming. As a conclusion the paper ends with four phenomena that are needed to maintain a lively local community.

- 1) *Means of support* that are locally based and that uphold a diversity of relations, not only instrumental. Some of them preferably organised as co-operatives investing for the good of the whole community and not only for individual inhabitants.
- 2) *Meeting places* to encourage social relations face-to-face in between work and household.
- 3) *Institutions* that symbolise place identity which both have a historical continuity and are open for contemporary society.
- 4) *A landscape* that is actively cultivated and with the knowledge of the place embedded.

These conclusions can be used to explore the more action-oriented question of “How rural policy may be formulated to better correspond with the inhabitant’s conception of a viable local community”.

### **1. Introduction**

#### *Concepts*

Though a lot of rural inhabitants spend most of the days in towns many of them are strongly engaged in their local community. The village action movement is an example of this engagement, with 4000 groups registered at the Popular Movements Council for Rural Development (Herlitz 1989). Irrespective of their activities the local action groups create and reproduce a place-related communality, establishing new ideas of what the place is (Berglund 1998:193). Out of several social identities (like nurse, bridge player or mother) place identity often constitutes a substantial part of rural people's social identity. Of course people also feel rooted in urban areas, but it is more likely in rural areas to find a sense of community connected to a place. It is also more likely that so-called indigenous cultural systems tend to be at the most visible in rural communities (Ray 1999:265). I make two basic assumptions. The first assumption is that many people feel related to a place, including its inhabitants and its history. This can be described by the Swedish concept of “*bygd*”, in English *local community*. The second assumption is that the societal change of western societies tends to break up the relations between people, place and history. This can be understood partly by the concept of *modernity*.

To investigate modern rural life the two assumptions about local community and modernity as well as the relationship between them are analysed. This is done by integrating local narratives and social actions with theories of identity, place, time, (high/reflexive, post or a-) modernity.

To understand what it takes for a place to become a home I use the Swedish term "*bygd*", a part of the term "landsbygd", which could be translated to "rural". Landsbygd means literally the part of the land that is cultivated and settled. "Bygd" in Swedish, "dwelling" in English and "bauen" in German all originate from the Old English and High German word "buan" (Ingold 2000: 185-188). The three concepts has since then diverged from the original perspective of "building/cultivating a world to dwell in", and we now use separate words for "to build", "to cultivate" and "to feel at home". In Swedish the words farmer (*bonde*), live (*bo*), cultivate (*odla*), build (*bygga*) and local community (*bygd*) are closely related, which shows that *bygd* has kept some of the connotations from the original word. *Bygd* thus makes it easier than any English term to encompass an ontological perspective of the world as something created through interaction between persons and their environment. "Dwelling" is closely related to *bygd*, but in the text I use the more common "local community". In the thesis I use my own definition of *bygd* as "a shared conception of interconnectedness between people and a place over time". This is expressed in dialect, buildings, food, clothes, business, traditions etc. The definition could also apply to local communities in urban areas. Another useful concept to understand peoples bonds to the place is Bordieu's "habitus" (1990). Habitus is expressed in the taken-for-granted practise of people, constructed through the relations between personal experiences and the structure of society. Bordieu use the metaphor "to have a feeling for the game" when he describes habitus.

*Modernity* is a term as frequently used as it is frequently criticised. A "first approximation" by the sociologist Anthony Giddens (1990:1) says that "modernity refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence". The worldwide influence is expressed by another social theorist called Arjun Appadurai (2000:1) who grew up in Bombay where he "saw and smelled modernity reading *Life* (.....), seeing B-grade films from Hollywood". A way to avoid historical and geographical categorisation is the term a-modernity used by Bruno Latour (1993). He suggest that we have never been modern, and that societal change is a matter of shifting contexts. Obviously there are continuities in the history of mankind, with several features that so-called traditional societies have in common with modern societies (often synonymous with Western). But modernity also brought discontinuities like the pace and the scope of change as well as modern institutions (Giddens 1990:6). According to Giddens (*ibid*:16-17) the dynamics of modernity derives from the separation of time and space, the disembedding of social relations and the reflexive ordering of social relations. To distinguish early modernity from today's mode of life terms like high or reflexive modernity are used. The term post modernity emphasise a new discontinuity without any grand theories to explain society. Theories of modernity do not belong to post modernity.

Rurality related to (late) modernity is problematic since rural communities so obvious are rooted both in time and space. Land, forest and water, and the activities historically derived from it, are contexts that give rural areas meaning which is the driving force behind the local engagement of many inhabitants, even though they are not farmers. But to view modernity only as a threat is not enough to understand rural conditions. Instead of a causal connection there is a paradox embedded in the concept of rural (or local) development: change implies strains as well as opportunities for the local community, depending on perspective. Development that may gain some people can lead to a loss in the qualities that characterises the rural community, such as landscape or social networks.

*Development* is a concept associated with modernisation, and a metaphor for something gradually growing. The object of growth has shifted from the 1800's and onwards, and now we have two alternative meanings. The most common is a neo-liberal definition of economic growth (Vail 1996) and another includes growth of justice, inclusiveness and sustainability in society (Korten 1990). When the expression "rural development" is used in Sweden it refers to both definitions depending on who is using it. The kind of rural development I study takes place when the local inhabitants act to make it possible for themselves and other to live in a place where they feel at home. Sometimes these actions are included in political initiatives like CAP<sup>1</sup> or Leader<sup>2</sup>, but mostly it concerns spontaneous every day actions without explicitly working for 'local development'. Local inhabitants rarely use the term development when they speak about voluntary work in the sport club or organising a market fair.

Another concept closely related to modernisation is *globalisation*, which usually includes a homogenisation in economic, political and social structures. One who have studied the effect of globalisation also on our perceptions of time and space is Bauman (1998). He means that mobility is the keyword of globalisation. Ingold (2000) is questions the concept of globalisation. In this model people and things are put somewhere, either in a very small place (local) or very large (global). Local-global presuppose a location of things and people, while a place needs activity, like inhabiting or dwelling. Instead of locals he talks about inhabitants who "make their way around in the land", where movement instead of destination is important (Ingold 2000:219-242).

### *The rural community*

To understand the local strategies of coping with the paradox of rural development a case study has been carried out, with participant observation and qualitative interviews. The disciplinary base is anthropology, with influences from human ecology, sociology, geography and history. The local community chosen is a parish of 500 inhabitants, named Locknevi. The name indicates that the place has been inhabited for at least 1000 years (Gerger 2002:6). The parish is situated in the province of Småland, and belongs to the municipality of Vimmerby, which is part of the Leader area "Astrid Lindgrens native place". The number of inhabitants has remained constant the last decades, in spite of the few jobs available locally. Most people commute to nearby small towns. There are about ten farms left of which a few are large enough to support a family.

## **2. The continuous re-creation of a local community**

This part concerns the first assumption about people's feelings related to a place. The empirical examples concern how the inhabitants reflect and act according to the slow transformations that take place at such a pace and on a scale that it may not be noticed in every day life. In other words, this section describes situations where the paradox of rural development can be handled, that is when most people do not view change as a threat. In accordance with the definition of *bygd* the examples are divided in the three concepts of identity (social relations), place and time.

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<sup>1</sup> CAP is the Common Agriculture Policy of EU.

<sup>2</sup> Leader is one of the common initiatives of EU, aiming at stimulating innovations to promote rural (economic) development. Leader areas are governed by a partnership consisting of private business (enterprises), public sector (local authorities) and idealistic sector (non-profit-making associations). The partnership should mirror a bottom up perspective.

### *Identity and social relations in Locknevi*

Relationships with other inhabitants were historically maintained through work during weekdays and attending church service on Sundays. This pattern gradually broke up from the 1940's, and in the 1970's only a few people were included in these kinds of relations. Sport activities among the male inhabitants has since the 1940's grown in importance as a way to keep up the social relations. Politics, hunting and associations were other, not so widespread, activities. Several female informants who moved to Locknevi during the 1970's spoke to me about their difficulties to get to know other people. In the village shops nobody spoke to them, and when passing the houses they only saw the curtains move. It took years before they talked to some of the neighbours.

In the beginning of the 1980's new kinds of social relations started to develop when one of the women who had moved to Locknevi invited other women to aerobics groups in the school. The mobilisation to save the local school grew partially out from the aerobic group. The next step was that the different sport clubs, including the gymnastics, established a common association. As their first task the association put up notice boards in the villages and as their second task they distributed a local newsletter to all inhabitants. The newsletter also helps to maintain social relations even for those at a distance, those who have moved from Locknevi or for other reasons may (like research) subscribe to it. Another association was established to run the rural community centre (bygdegård) and arrange activities like study circles. There were already many old associations, associated with the church, Red Cross, temperance movement, farmers association, the local folklore society and political groups. When these got involved in a larger context covering the whole community many of them became more vital. A lot of activities, old and new, are now engaging many of the inhabitants.

Identity according to Mead (1939) is created in interaction with other people, but he did not say much about the role of the environment that is crucial in the construction of a place identity. One definition of identity building on Mead's theories is "the names we call ourselves" (Charon 1995:80). The reason that people in Locknevi gave for their engagement in the activities organised by the many associations is that they call themselves inhabitants of Locknevi. The categories and symbols that make up a person's identity serve dual functions. Identities are socially constructed and vice versa they construct society. Among the different communities that form the greater society Wenger points out communities of practise, as the "basic building blocks of a social learning system" (2000:229). Considering the engagement in the associations I suggest that Locknevi is a community of practise constructed by the names people call themselves, i.e. inhabitants of Locknevi.

Especially in western societies the same person has several social identities, and place identity could exist parallel to professional identity, gender identity etc. One way of describing differences in terms of identity is sociocentric and egocentric relationships between the individual and the society (Schweder and Bourne 1984). A sociocentric solution subordinates individual interests to the good of the collectivity, while in the egocentric solution society becomes the servant of the individual. A person with a sociocentric identity is defined as a daughter of or neighbour of someone, and becomes a component in a field of social relations. With an egocentric identity you become someone through your personality, style, professional ability etc. In rural contexts a sociocentric identity is more likely to be evoked.

Connected to the concept of identity are theories of social relations. Fiske (2000) recognises four universal models of relations; Communal sharing, Authority ranking, Equality matching and Market pricing. In order to interact there has to be an agreement on which relational form is concerned. In rural

communities like Locknevi communal sharing is the norm, and rather common also in practise though authority ranking is also common in many situations. With modernisation market pricing leads to a gradual shift from sociocentric identity towards egocentric identity.

### *Relations to the place of Locknevi*

The only places to meet during wintertime are the school, the rural community centre and the church. The last shop closed in the beginning of the 1980's. In the summer the inhabitants meet at the beach that was restored and enlarged with public money and local working force. Barnyards are semi-public places that are getting fewer as the farmers are closing down.

To maintain relations to the place people often tell anecdotes about different farms and other places they visit. Especially during hunting it is common to stop and remind the others when a moose passed there or some other event took place. The different places where the hunters go to wait for game have their own names that refer to significant features or events.

The following three real-estate purchases show other ways to keep relations to a place. A man, who lives outside Locknevi, wanted to sell his parent's house when they died. Instead of getting a market price he wanted to sell to a family with children because there are too few children in the local school. His behaviour was highly appreciated by the inhabitants. An interpretation is that the well-being of the community was more important than his own (economic) well-being, an example of socio-centric identity. The second example is when six siblings sold their deceased parent's small farm to a German family when one of the brothers could not afford to buy. The German family now lives there all year round and cultivates the land. The brother visits them sometimes and he shows them how the heating system works etc. An interpretation is that he cares about the farm in itself (the place) in spite of who owns it. The last example is when the church sold the old priesthouse. A family with three children who had lived there for several years wanted to buy it but the church asked for a market price, which the family could not afford. The family moved and most people consider the church greedy and unsympathetic towards the community. An interpretation is that the church finds its own well-being more important than the well-being of the local community.

“Sense of Place” is a concept developed by Relph (1976). He sees the concept consisting of the physical space, the activities taking place there, the meaning of those two and the spirit of the place. With this definition it is possible for people to carry an image of the place irrespective of where they are. It is obvious that people in Locknevi have a strong sense of place, but it is getting more difficult to practise this since there are fewer public places and the locality of the community are divided into several more private places. Discussions of place and modernity is a big field in geography. A common standpoint is that time-space relations are compressed and that place is becoming less important (Harvey 1993, Appadurai 2000). Others reject this and argue that there are new power relations that make way for new interpretations of what place is (Massey 1993). The boundaries of a local community like Locknevi are shifting depending on contexts. Or maybe there are no boundaries but a perceived place that exists when people act and communicate.

The interest in the local, the place, the landscape and the feeling of belonging associated with this has lately been questioned. Lippard (1997) writes about the lure of the local, and she wonders "... how a multicentered world can be wrested from the control of multinational corporations to assure a certain local legitimacy of the projects of home and place". The landscape is also political, besides other meanings. An important agricultural issue is how the possession of land is an aspect of place that highlights power relations (Newly et. al.1978).

### *Relations to the history of Locknevi*

Many inhabitants are conscious about the history of Locknevi. To be viewed as a real inhabitant it is more important to have ancestors in the community far back, than to be actively engaged in the local associations. A sign of the importance of old times is that many people were involved in study circles about genealogical research about 15 years ago. Another example is the various written records. The local association of retired people have, together with a researcher who moved back to Locknevi, written two reports about work and the school in the community concentrating on the period before 1950's. A similar but older text is an ethnographic book from 1812 written by the local cantor. Many inhabitants have read it and quote parts from it that describe the character of people from Locknevi. In the 1950's and 1960's the vicar collected cuttings about Locknevi from the local newspaper. These are kept in five files by the local folklore society, an association that arranges the homestead day every summer and is responsible for restoring some old buildings. Two situations illustrate the presence of the past. A 85-year old woman, who moved to Locknevi as a teenager, told me with tears in her eyes about when the church of her native village burnt down. It happened in the 1700<sup>s</sup>. A hunter spontaneously lent me some framed letters from the middle ages concerning legal disputes in his village.

Also recent history is important, and many old people are still upset about the reform 1971 when Locknevi was incorporated in the municipality of Vimmerby. They say that they lost their independence and that Locknevi historically belongs to another cultural context than Vimmerby.

The concept of time has also been discussed in relation to modernisation. Historically time was linked to place, but they became separated (Giddens 1990). In traditional societies a place is where social activities take place and it has a time dimension of "now". Also in late modernity co-presence, i.e. social interaction face-to face, is important. But the local here and now is affected by social actions far away in time and space. We have different perception of time according to context. When living off the land like farmers do it is more likely to view time as circular, as compared to when we have an urban surrounding which evokes a perception of time as linear. Societal change is by neo-classical economists perceived as something deterministic, based on a linear perception of time. A way to overcome this polarising is the concept of an expanding present (Bergson 1996). The inhabitants of Locknevi are living in a kind of expanded present, when they in daily life are conscious about the past and even use it for common activities, which creates new memories to relate to.

### **3. Four processes of change**

In this part I turn to the second assumption about the more radically societal changes called modernity (high, reflexive, post or a-). I identify four processes of change that the inhabitants discuss in terms of conflicts, fights or problems. These processes illustrate how people reflect and act according to changes that might imply discontinuity in the history of their community. In line with the paradox of rural development a situation that is perceived as threatening for some people, could be viewed as a possibility for others. There is a tendency that people who have moved to a village are more willing to act either to promote change or to stop change, like closing down the school. Those who are born in the village sometimes feel expectations not to differ from the majority, and prefer to wait and see rather than take an initiative. Differences between people can also follow other criteria, like gender, generation or class. Different contexts can activate different perspectives for the same person, like the landowner who talked about forestry from a business perspective during an interview and later during hunting talked about the game and the forest in terms of beauty, memories and feelings.

### **Moose hunting and hunting tourism. An example of increasing market pricing relations**

Many people who have left Locknevi return for moose hunting every year. At these occasions' relations between people, place, and history are confirmed through an activity where land is actively used. Since it is mostly the landowners and their relatives that are members of the hunting teams, and since most of them have quit farming and many have even moved out from Locknevi, the moose hunt can be viewed partly as a compensation for farming. Hunting is an activity that in different forms has been a part of human culture for ever, but the tradition with hunting teams for moose is only about fifty years old in Sweden, while hunting smaller game individually has a longer tradition. The importance of hunting seems to be to strengthen the bonds to the place, but also the forest, animals (game and dogs), and to (male) friends. Other features are the excitement and an opportunity to step out of civilisation. This corresponds to research showing different aspects of hunting (Adelswärd 1996, Ekman 1991: 64-76). Despite social change there is a cultural continuity in hunting. How the meat is distributed, who gets the trophy, who is included in the team, how the game should be treated both when shot and when slaughtered, the great importance of equipment are in many ways similar to societies of hunters and gatherers.

Women and hunting is a combination that gradually becomes more common, but it is still problematic. There are some women engaged in moose hunting in Locknevi, but most of them drive the game and only a few shoot. One middle-aged woman born in Locknevi and still living there has been hunting since she was young. She was a member of a big hunting team but is now only hunting in her own forest together with her son-in-law and his friends. "She probably wanted the meat", is a comment from her former team. To hunt for the meat is not serious and the fact that she is a woman could be an explanation for that judgement. Another woman in her forties has moved to Locknevi as an adult and started to hunt. She and her husband are members of a hunting team together with some neighbours. A tensed situation arose when she invited a young German woman knowledgeable about hunting. Though it is allowed to invite friends to the hunt this was not accepted by the team. The others did not say anything but showed their disapproval in different ways. An interpretation is that the local identity was too weak. As a woman who had moved in to Locknevi she did not really belong to the hunting team and when she brought a female foreign guest the link became too weak. Since then she has become more accepted with good relations to the other hunters.

A relatively new phenomenon is 'hunting tourism' that started in the 1970's when prices on land began to rise and the moose stock increased. Hunting permits was leased for several years and for small sums. In the last fifteen years foreign tourists pay to hunt for a week at a time. This is increasing in much of the country and in Locknevi there are some landowners that are leasing out weekly permits to German and Danish hunters. There are also examples of hunting teams that have paying guests from Denmark. Many landowners try to find a balance between on the one hand getting an income when farming is not so profitable, and on the other hand to contribute to the local hunting tradition as a way to keep a viable community. Both perspectives, the economic and the cultural, are needed to maintain a rural community.

The problems with hunting tourism according to the inhabitants of Locknevi can be categorised in three kinds.

- A cultural problem. Trough the money the relations between hunter, forest and game are changes which thereby changes the meaning of hunting. The price gives instrumental values to what used to be intrinsic values. Expressed by the hunters themselves as "The money has ruined the hunt" and "With hunting leasing the ethics are gone".
- A social problem. Relatives and friends that return to Locknevi for hunting might not afford hunting when the prices go up. The same holds for inhabitants that don't own land. It is already hard to attract young people, which partly could be explained by the high costs. This evokes the question of

how the local identity is created.

- An ecological problem concerning game preservation. Most of the Danes hunt without a Swedish guide, and they are accused for “shooting everything that moves”. It is also supposed that they consume a lot of alcohol. By these reasons people are worried about that they don't stick to the hunting regulations, and explain the decrease of raw deer from this. The Germans have Swedish guides and are supposed to stick to the rules. The hunters of Locknevi assume that those who pay want something out of it, and lack solidarity towards regulations and game preservation.

My interpretation of what happens when the local hunting meets hunting tourism is in terms of the modernisation process. When the moose hunt is taken out of its context of a male network that confirms the community, the meaning is changed to a source of income for the landowner. To make this possible the hunting must become a part of the market economy, which many hunters oppose. To put a price you have to redefine the context from a relation to an object that could be measured. An object is something that you can have claims on, it becomes a resource that you can own or use (Evernden 1987). Tourism in general involves a risk of objectifying "the other" (Urry 2002). Of course hunting before also was a way to provide but it was direct (meat instead of money).

### **The fight for the school. An example of mobilisation to save meeting places.**

This example contains two processes of change. One is the diminishing number of meeting places. The other process of change is the mobilisation triggered by a threat. The most well-known Swedish example of inhabitants mobilising to keep the local school is Drevdagen in the 1980's (Halvarsson 1999). In other local communities it is the local shop that is threatened and there are parallels between what a shop and a school means to a local community (Kajser 1999). In Locknevi the last shop closed in the beginning of the 1980's before the development of new kinds of social relations that made mobilisation possible. A few years later the municipality suggested that the school be closed, because of too few children, and move the children to the neighbouring community which had become bigger than Locknevi. The school was built in the 1940's representing progress and wealth. Not only parents, but also other inhabitants were engaged in the struggle to keep the school going when the authorities wanted to close it.

A mother who had moved to Locknevi some years earlier took the initiative to mobilise the inhabitants against the decision. She engaged not only other parents but also other inhabitants, one of them a returning researcher who specialised on local schools and who presented facts that made it difficult for the authorities to ignore the protest. Not all inhabitants engaged and the fight made peoples opinions visible in quite another way than before. The school is situated in the northern part of the community and some of those in the southern part already preferred the bigger school in the neighbouring community closer to them. The woman who took the initiative is also a politician, and another local politician from the same party spoke in forward to the decision, which evokes hard feelings from many inhabitants. After a while the fight succeeded, and the school could continue, but only for a year or two at a time. In the last years the school has had classes up to fourth grade, often in B-form, i.e. different grades in the same class. In 2002/2003 eight children was registered and the school closed down in June 2003.

This example can be viewed both as a success and as a failure. It is common that a threat of losing the school activates place identity and the inhabitants mobilise. The success here was that the mobilisation like in many other villages led to other initiatives, which will still exist when the school is closed. It was also a success that the school continued another fifteen years. The failure is that Locknevi lost another of its few meeting places and workplaces. In the future it becomes difficult for the children to create relations with each other and with the place. Many conflicts have been avoided because people trust each other since they went to school together. Yet another consequence is that the boundaries of the

community changes, as Locknevi is gradually merging with the neighbouring community. The fusion of the two parent-teacher associations into one some years ago was a step in that direction.

**The conflict between the priest and the church council. An example of changed power relations in institutions.**

This example concerns a conflict between on the one side the members of the church council and on the other side the new priest. The church in Locknevi was built in 1903, when the population decline already had begun though there were still more than 2000 inhabitants. The church council has since many years been dominated by a couple who was powerful when Locknevi had its own local authority before 1971. The wife is a daughter of the last head of the local government board, and the church council has served as an unofficial local government board. Three priests have quit because of the powerful church council, and the new priest was conscious about the situation when he arrived in 1996. He became very popular and soon the church services attracted more people than they had for a long time. One example of his many new ideas is the yearly “hunting service” before the moose hunt, with a stuffed moose, beer and pea soup in the church.

Two years ago the priest got tired of not being able to make any decision on his own and after a fight before Christmas he closed the church and told the parish that “it’s me or them”. Unlike traditional ways of handling a conflict he called the newspaper. Some people in Locknevi answered in the same public way and distributed a call in favour of the priest. Many added their name but many preferred to be neutral, not only those who were born in Locknevi but also some of those who had moved there. A few people took a stand for the church council. Finally the priest stayed and the old couple and a few other elderly people left the church council. They also left other associations connected with the church, and they do not attend church service anymore. The new church council consists mostly of the same people that engage in the local associations. Some visible changes are that the church visitors applaud when there are musicians in church and that the churchwardens are casually dressed.

An interpretation is that the church has changed identity from an institution representing the old community (when Locknevi was a municipality) to representing modern rural development as one of many local associations. In this case the change was so abrupt that some people literary stepped out of the community. Different interests like in this case do not have to lead to conflict, but when the change is abrupt there is a risk that the persons involved distrust each other and the situation.

**Farmers and the cultivated landscape. An example of decrease in the agricultural sector.**

Since centuries Locknevi is characterised by smallholding, with an open landscape in the Central Valley and small plots in the forest. The farms are almost the only local working places and they represent the major part of the economical activity. There are about ten farms left, three or four of them providing full time work and two of them with employees. Many others live on a farm and grow some hay for the horses. Everybody is aware of the decline of farms, and both farmers and others talk about it as a problem.

Seen from outside: The farmers play an important role locally, not so much as food producers though. Most people seems not to care so much about the food quality or were the food is grown. Only a few, well-educated persons, prefer ecological food. Many women cook and do not buy semi-manufactures. Farmers are instead appreciated as agents of local culture and as landscape keepers. They are in a concrete way upholding the relations to the place by cultivating the land. In some part of Locknevi the fields are abandoned and people worry about that it soon will become overgrown with weeds. In one of the villages a younger couple have sheep besides their full time job in the town, and thanks to them the landscape is still rather open. Now they are divorcing and selling the sheep which will affect the whole

village. All inhabitants know who is living on the different farms, and how they are running their farm. Those who live on a family farm since generations have a special role as “real” inhabitants. A young farmer, who mistreats the farm and the cows, was excused in the presence of me by the inhabitants in a way that goes against their conception of a respectable farmer. They know his background and don’t want to blame him.

Seen from inside: The farmers are both local inhabitant and professional, and there is a widening gap between the two identities. The local farmers association stresses the professional role, and at a yearly market-day at the community centre they placed themselves a little apart from the other activities. One of the two biggest farmers views the farm and not the community as his home. Outside his farm he is as much from Småland as from Europe, he says. The other big farmer is very active in several local associations, including farmers association and very well known in Locknevi. Some young farmers prefer the company of other farmers even if they live in another district, and many farmers are sceptical towards rural development like Leader and other modern projects. There seems to be a mutual ignorance between farmers and other rural inhabitants, which probably will increase in the future. To change identity from being food producer to landscape keeper is something many farmers have to reflect on in the future (Flygare 1999).

Farmers are still important for the community but the question is if the farmers manage to let the community be important to them. The farmers are becoming fewer and fewer, which undermines the importance of farming in rural communities. This is undermining rural communities since the cultivation of land is a crucial way to maintain relations to place. Focusing on the process of landscaping is an alternative to putting a price on different objects in the landscape as the rural policy of EU (CAP) does (Olwig 1993).

#### **4. Conclusion**

To understand how the inhabitants of a rural community reflect and act according to change, we first have to know what it means to be an inhabitant. An answer to this could be: It means that you uphold relations to other inhabitants, to the place and to its history, that the social relations are sometimes reciprocal, that all kinds of relations (to people, place and history) are elaborated in practice and that you among other social identities also present yourself as an inhabitant of a community, i.e. you have a place identity. Other ways to express this is that to be an inhabitant of a local community you have to dwell there. Since many people commute they have to find ways other than through work to maintain the relations or to dwell.

The next step will be to discuss change. Societies have through history been characterised by mobility and influences, though at different paces and scales. This implies that a community always has to be re-created. The activities and reflections presented are part of a continuous re-creation of the community, helping the inhabitants to balance change and tradition.

The four examples of moose hunting, the school, the church and agriculture all illustrate situations that evoke conflicts or fights and show what could happen when the relations are not possible to maintain, or when the cultural models are violated. Out of the four processes of change that the examples illustrate I have identified four phenomena that are crucial to maintain a viable local community.

- Means of support that are locally based and that uphold a diversity of relations, not only instrumental. Some of them preferably organised as co-operatives investing for the good of the whole community and not only for individual inhabitants.

- Meeting places to encourage social relations face-to-face in between work and household.
- Institutions that symbolise place identity which both have a historical continuity and are open for contemporary society.
- A landscape that is actively cultivated and with the knowledge of the place embedded.

One possible interpretation of the four processes of change is that they represent a discontinuity that could be threatening for the Swedish countryside. The time-space relations that give meaning to, and thus create, the community are in these examples replaced by other relations which change the meaning and thereby the whole phenomenon of the community as a dwelling-place for the inhabitants habitus. But others welcome what some people perceive as a threat. Since there are different views in a local community one challenge for the decision makers is to complement the economic and legal policy instruments with methods for handling conflicts, social learning and other communicative instruments that empower the inhabitants to act in ways that maintain the local community without conserving it or completely renewing it.

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