

Migration and regional development in Nordic rural context – Lessons from international seminar in Seinäjoki

Markku Mattila & Mika Raunio

It is said that in globalizing world urbanization is a megatrend. In some parts of the Western world, urbanization or population concentration is associated with a declining birth rate. In Finland, for example, population growth is only dependent on immigration, and part of the country threatens to desert, especially as the working-age population moves to the largest population centers. How do the rural regions survive, while being squeezed between these lines of development?

Migration Institute of Finland, Seinäjoki Unit is currently working on these questions. The research and development project "Migration as an engine of vitality for municipalities" (www.muuttomoottori.fi) uses migration research while seeking solutions to these problems. The project focuses on K-8 municipalities that are situated around the city of Seinäjoki (Alavus, Ilmajoki, Isokyrö, Kauhava, Kuortane, Kurikka, Lapua and Seinäjoki) in Southern Ostrobothnia, Finland.

The key questions includes the chicken-and-egg-dilemma: Is it possible to have sufficient economic development outside of few growth centers and even rural areas in order to foster adequate quality of life and attractive places to live for potential migrants, and vice versa? Is there economic growth without the centralization that is pivotal feature in urbanization? How other positive aspects linked with urbanism – such as civilization, know-how, internationality and diversity – evolve in more rural environments? These development paths then refer to counter-urbanization mostly in term of lacking agglomeration of people and congestions, not as qualities of social or economic life. Moving against the grain then refers to development of an attractive, rewarding and both charismatic and adherent habitats outside of few city-regions.

International seminar on Migration and Regional Economic Development, subtitled In Search of New Stories for Rural Urbanization was organized by the project "Migration Engine" on 29th October, 2019. The following texts on the interface of regional develop-

ment and migration studies are based on the presentations held at the seminar. The texts are presented here as such an order that they move from theoretical and political approach to quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Mika Raunio and Markku Mattila seek to develop a conceptual framework to tackle with these questions. What is the field of choices for migrants? They introduce the approach and further develops the concept of field of choices to serve as a focusing device for the analysis and maybe even for forthcoming policy design.

Teemu Makkonen and Petri Kahila dig deeper into regional policy and write about how to apply recently introduced "vitality policy" as a tool to attract people to move to the rural areas. Vitality policy is a holistic approach that combines wellbeing of citizens and other "soft-issues" to more traditional and narrow business development policies.

Høgne Kalsø Hansen provides interesting insight to population development and labour market dynamics in Denmark's peripheral areas. According to results based on quantitative register data he suggests that specific nature of rural areas should be better understood and considered in terms of research and policy.

Rhiannon Pugh and Mats Lundmark introduce the case of the old industrial town of Karlskoga. It has been a home town of Alfred Nobel and Bofors company but has until last few decades underwent rapid structural change. Case sums up many crucial challenges of those locations that struggle to be attractive for the highly educated labour who require more than just a proper working place to move in.

Together these articles discuss the problems of in-migration, regional attraction, economy and population in theoretical and practical level in Nordic rural context. We believe that the ideas and frameworks outlined here could be useful for both further research and policy design to foster the development in small towns and rural areas.