

Provincial Globalization: The Local Struggle of Place-Making

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the global presence in the local processes of place-making in a rural area in Sweden. As a result of increased competition – fueled by a reorganization of global capitalism – between places, symbolic strategies (i.e. place marketing and place branding) have become a central dimension of both urban and rural governance. As a consequent, places – while still being sites for the residents’ day-to-day life – are being turned into commodities in the market of potential investors and tourists to a great extent. Subsequently, this paper deals with how this global agenda affects a rural municipality in the Swedish countryside suffering from depopulation. The paper confirms earlier statements (Woods 2007) that globalization processes should not be considered as external forces reshaping and homogenizing rural villages; rather, globalization processes are locally negotiated. This, however, does not mean globalization has no impact on rural places. In these negotiation processes global and local virtues are intertwined but not evenly. In some municipal strategies, the impact of global discourses is more explicit, for example, policy-makers accept and incorporate strategies of place branding and policy networks while they neglect other aspects of a relatively standardized “place marketing tool kit”. Furthermore, the study shows that rural residents, also, consider the village and its global future carefully but differently from the policy-makers. The residents dislike expressions of urbanity and advocate a general small-scaleness as a strategy for the future.

Keywords: Rural, globalization, symbolic strategies, mediation, encoding/decoding

Introduction¹

Rural restructuring due to globalization has been on the agenda of rural studies for a while. There are several reasons for this, one being socio-economic transformations in which an economy based on agricultural production is turned into a service-based economy, including a view of landscapes as consumable (Marsden 1990; Cloke 2006; Fløysand & Jakobsen 2007; Halfacree 2007; Conradson & Pawson 2009). Another reason is spatial complexity as a consequence of time-space compression – fuelled by communication technology (Cloke 2006; Woods 2007; Paniagua 2009). This paper anchors these sometimes rather sweeping theoretical statements in an empirical case study of a rural village. It depicts the geopolitics of place in the context of cultural globalization; how local place is contested, but also negotiated and given meanings. Following Michael Woods' (2007: 502) call for place-based studies highlighting the micro-processes in which politics of the global and the rural become entwined, the article pays particular attention to the *symbolic* dimension of this global – local intertwining. More specifically, the focus is on the global-local mediation of the symbolic; how rural municipal symbolic strategies are adopted and enacted against a global backdrop, and how they are perceived by the residents. This mediation is a multilayered process; different actors – in this case municipal policy-makers vis-à-vis residents – relate to diverse strands of a multi-faceted globalization and "pull" the rural place in different directions.

After a brief presentation of the case study beneath, the article sets out with an unfolding of the concepts of globalization and post-industrialism, and how they bring symbolic practices to the fore. That is followed by a discussion on symbolic strategies and their route from urban to rural settings. The review of varied aspects of symbolic strategies is thereafter turned into arguments for theoretically approaching rural transformation as processes of mediation, in which Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model can be deployed. The following sections present the empirical findings on the local negotiation of globalization, underscoring that global discourses are decoded and negotiated at several levels; by policy-makers as well as by residents. The article ends with some concluding remarks: Theoretically, the article argues for the continuous relevance of a cultural perspective focusing the (ideological) struggles of meaning in which symbolic as well as material resources are at play. Empirically, the article opens up for a discussion on a rural future in which "re-ruralization" may be an alternative.

The Case Study

To illuminate the amalgam of local and global processes constituting a rural locality, the study is based on interviews with residents of a small village – let us call it Svenvik – in a rural municipality in Skåne, the southernmost province of Sweden.

Svenvik has about 280 inhabitants. It is within commuting distance from larger towns and it is about 120-140 km from Malmö-Copenhagen, the centre of the transnational Öresund region. Svenvik is idyllically placed by a lake with rich animal life, making it a quite popular tourist site, to which a camping and a canoe centre also contribute. There are a few small enterprises in Svenvik; most of the inhabitants commute to towns and villages in the vicinity. Historically, stonemasonry has played a vital role for the village and the whole municipality. Today, some old abandoned quarries remain in the surroundings, and there is a stone museum, established and administered by the local village community. Svenvik is situated in, and governed by, a municipality with 13,661 inhabitants², which is small by Swedish standards. In addition, the municipality suffers from depopulation related to industrial closures (displacements) and rationalizations. Manufacturing industry has long been the dominant sector of employment. Hence, problems associated with post-industrialization, more commonly linked to urban areas, have some relevance here. The municipal council has a Social Democratic majority.

In these settings I have interviewed seven residents in Svenvik, three women and four men, all of them between 35 and 60 years old. In the group there is a mix of locally born residents and in-migrants coming from villages in the vicinity or cities or towns in the province. In addition, I have interviewed three local policy-makers: the chairman of the municipal council, the administrative director of the municipality, and a project manager responsible for local development issues.³

The Multifaceted Globalization

There is a vast literature on globalization, especially since the 1980s. Over the years the focus has shifted from an emphasis on a quite uniform process to something more nuanced, multiple and multifaceted (cf. Tomlinson 1999; Savage et al. 2005: 2-7; Woods 2007: 491-2). A dialectic perspective has emerged and become dominant within social and cultural theory, emphasizing the articulation of global and local processes. A dialectic perspective means that globalization is not considered as an external force, homogenizing everything in its way. Instead, as Ulrich Beck claims, “‘Globalization’ is a non-linear, dialectic process in which the global and the local do not exist as cultural polarities but as combined and mutually implicating principles” (2002: 17). Also John Tomlinson recognizes the relational character of globalization and defines it as “complex connectivity”, referring to “the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern life” (1999: 2).

Connectivity also means the involvement of power. Not everyone is connected to the same distant agents or nodes; some connections are truly *inter*-connections, while others are typical one-way connections or they are accessible to just a few. Relational thoughts on place are elaborated by Doreen Massey (1994, 2005) who

considers interrelations as essential in geography. These interrelations constitute a global power geometry in which access to the networks is very unevenly distributed:

This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it (Massey 1991: 25-26).

Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1996) has also made valuable contributions to a nuanced concept of globalization, stressing the disjunction of processes. Globalization is complex; it cannot be reduced to transnational economic flows between global financial centres in the world. Besides flows in *financescapes*, there are movements of people in *ethnoscapes*, global circulation of images and symbols in *mediascapes*, diffusion of technological devices in *technoscape*, and a global spread of political ideas, narratives and key words in what Appadurai calls *ideoscapes*. These flows are not parallel, they do not emanate from the same centre and they do not reach the same nodes. Although interlinked they constitute five different network structures with different centres and peripheries, where the tension and friction between them contribute to the complexity of globalization.

The mediascapes and the ideoscapes are of particular interest in the context of provincial globalization. Considering the impact of globalization on rural localities, it is easy to "fall back" on a functionalistic model of diffusion in which globalization trickles down from the top, reaching lower (institutional) levels in order of scale. Such a model would imply that rural residents encounter globalization first and foremost from above, i.e. through the governance of their municipality or through external forces. However, current transformations of mediascapes blur boundaries. Globalization cannot be regarded as a huge linear communication model of sender-receivers in which rural societies are the last link. In the mediatized and media-saturated world there are always communication collaterals making connections in a non-linear and asymmetrical manner. Hence, people get in touch with, and experience, globalization in many different ways. This relates to Appadurai's discussions of the global imaginary and the work of imagination. Appadurai insists on the importance of electronic mediation and migration to produce a global imaginary – not just to the few, but to everybody (1996: 2-9). Thus, people's daily interaction with "non-local" images, people and technologies contributes explicitly to the re-definition of the local place itself (Savage et al. 2005: 7). It is not hard to imagine that this process of re-definition is pertinent for residents as well as municipal leaders.

These different arguments about globalization as relational, dialectic, mediatized and multifaceted illuminate two aspects of certain pertinence for this study. First, the local dimension of globalization and its negotiated deployment means that globalization is best studied locally, in place-based studies where the

different threats and interconnections are followed (Woods 2007). This is particularly relevant on the basis of the argument that for most people globalization is primarily experienced from home ground (Tomlinson 1999: 9). Second, emphasizing flows, connectivity and interrelationships as the core of globalization, there are no theoretical warrants for the sometimes taken-for-granted association between globalization and cities (cf. Savage et al. 2005: 4; Cloke 2006; Woods 2007; Cruickshank 2009). The vast literature on "the global city" deserves a counterpart.

After Industrialism

Post-industrialization is a theme related to globalization, which describes the re-organization within capitalism itself. The concept refers to a new global division of labour in which the Western world to a large extent is drained of manufacturing industries, since the same industries are now to be found in low-wage countries, very often in the east.⁴ Hence, from a Western point of view post-industrialization is associated with (among other things) an increased focus: on production of services and experiences, on consumption, and on the significance of image (Lash & Urry 1994). In such a context, place is considered as a commodity – something to be consumed (Urry 1995). These processes concern rural areas as well, which have been transformed "from landscapes of production to landscapes of consumption" (Cloke 2006: 19).

In an often cited article, "From managerialism to entrepreneurialism", David Harvey (1989) describes the consequences of post-industrialization for urban governance. He argues that post-industrialization has contributed to new competition between places. To survive, places must attract investors, creative entrepreneurs and tourists: "The task of urban governance is, in short, to lure highly mobile and flexible production, financial, and consumption flows into its space" (Harvey 1989: 11). To do that, public facilities and provision of services for the urban inhabitants have to stand back for local economic development and the creation of an attractive public image. External judgements are more important than ever. This brings to the fore how reflexivity and self-monitoring are of central concern in late modernity – not only to individuals as Giddens (1991) argues, but to institutions as well (cf. Lash & Urry 1994: ch. 4).

Such transitions have paved the way for place marketing, city-branding and (public) image management. These are related terms, sometimes used synonymously, although place marketing is a broader term including practices of regeneration, branding and advertising. Branding is symbolic practices; a marketing strategy to ascribe certain features to things (products, services, organisations) in order to define them for intended target groups – and create emotional bonds between them and the consumer (Hemelryk Donald et al. 2009: 7). Hence, place branding is about the production of a public image, charging a place with sym-

bolic value in order to curb and govern the construction of meaning of the place. To do that, both discursive and material components are used; slogans are produced, as are spectacular buildings. The discourses of place marketing and image management are good examples of how ideoscapes – the global diffusion of ideological frameworks – are working. In a post-industrial society marked by neoliberalism, commodification and marketing are taken for granted and consumable places become self-evident. Urban and rural development are part of a general image culture (Jansson 2001), continuously reproduced by the symbolic work of commercial as well as non-commercial institutions, like planning departments, tourist boards, marketing agencies, creative industries, media industries and many others. However, to consider image management as a global discourse spread in ideoscapes does not mean it is diffused evenly in the world. Image management represents a power geometry in which the central nodes are placed in the wealthy Western world from which the strategies are diffused.

To summarize, post-industrialism is a significant process behind rural restructuring which highlights symbolic strategies. The global agenda of these symbolic strategies is to a large extent dictated by Western metropolitans. The question is, then, which strategies are "offered" to the places beyond the metropolitans?

Post-Industrial Governance and Symbolic Management

City-branding, i.e. the symbolic packaging of cities in order to reconstitute them, started as a metropolitan phenomenon but has spread also to towns and smaller places (Nyseth & Granås 2007). Branding may have different aims. In some cases it is used to create a new region, for example the transnational Öresund region (Ek 2003; Falkheimer 2006), or to market whole nations (Roosvall & Salovaara-Moring 2010). In other cases image management is part of coming to terms with an industrial past: in the service economy of the Western world, no place wants to be depicted as a centre of manufacturing industry. Old factories have to be "funkified" (Waitt & Gibson 2009: 1224) – turned into something spectacular such as a cultural arena, or fancy offices for companies within, for example, the symbolic industry (cf. Willim 2005).

To carry out these procedures of image management, resources are required: symbolic experts as well as economic means. Very often these projects involve policy networks, i.e. formations of public-private partnerships as a kind of governance networks, implying an obvious risk that political questions are turned into administrative or technical ones, which means de-politicization (Harvey 1989; Scott 2000; Ek 2003). The development of place-marketing as a professional field has led to certain standardization of deployed strategies and of themes brought to the fore. Richard Ek (2003: 29) distinguishes four typical development strategies: the physical upgrading of the territory; exploiting local history and local culture in cultural strategies; spectacles; and marketing. A "catchy slogan", a waterfront, an

industrial area turned into designed cafés and bars, a spectacular building working as a landmark, a big sport event or a festival with a historical theme are all common means in these processes – which can be encountered in all parts of the world. Thematically there are particular themes that have acquired global impact, for example creativity, cosmopolitanism and sustainability. Manchester (Young et al 2006) and Nuremberg (Macdonald 2009) are just two examples of cities aspiring to appear as "the cosmopolitan city". Likewise, in the wake of Richard Florida's theories on the creative class as the key to urban development, there are many cities describing themselves as "creative cities", for instance Amsterdam (Oudenampsen 2007) and Wollongong (Waitt & Gibson 2009). These examples hint that image management works as both a means and consequence of globalization.

History is often a usable component in place marketing, not least due to its flexibility. Specific details can be highlighted, while others are neglected, quite similarly to the way history is used when the narrative of a nation is created (cf. Hall 1992). In *Difficult Heritage* (2009) the anthropologist Sharon Macdonald studies how the city of Nuremberg relates to its Nazi past, including its Nazi architectural heritage. The city's relation to this has swung over the years, which indicates the historical shifts concerning the ideas of place and heritage management. During certain periods the heritage has been seen as a burden obstructing the symbolic work of projecting the image of a "lively, modern and creative city" (Macdonald 2009: 99). In the latest phase of image management, however, the city has adopted the slogan "the City of Peace and Human Rights", manifested with a new Documentation Centre on the Nazi regime (Macdonald 2009: ch. 6).

Within the discourse of image management there are tendencies which can be read as reactions towards a global urbanity. In American urban planning a neo-traditionalist trend is identified, which attempts to create places – through architecture and published "historical newsletters" – echoing of an America long gone. "Authenticity", "community" and "the good life" become the symbolic values the policy-makers evoke, in order to attract people who find the globalized world scary (Till in Cresswell 2004: 95-6).⁵ This should be related to what has been called "the ruralization of the urban", which Cloke (2006: 19) describes as a "striving for a set of virtues in the city which are more commonly associated with the rural – seemingly fundamental and permanent virtues such as protection, solidarity, community spirit and identity". A current example is the emergence of urban village communities in many Western cities today. Altogether, this illustrates that there is scope for local negotiations and options beyond the global symbolic main roads, in spite of certain global standardization of symbolic strategies.

Symbolic Strategies and the Meaning of (Rural) Place

All these efforts and investments shed the light on the relationship between image management and the meaning of place. With a point of departure in Lefebvre's (1991: 38-39) conceptual triad of produced space, constituted by *spatial practices* (perceived space), *representations of space* (conceived space) and *spaces of representation* (lived space), one may conclude that the image management operates within the representations of space, which obviously is not the full story of the meaning of place (cf. Halfacree 2006, 2007). The produced public image has to compete with other representations, such as journalistic ones and representations produced by others – residents themselves, for instance. In addition, there are contributions from cultural practices such as literature, film and music (Cresswell 2004: 82). Besides representation of space, there are spatial practices and the lived space of everyday life. As Cresswell puts it: “Places are never finished but produced through the reiteration of practices – the repetition of seemingly mundane activities on a daily basis” (2004: 82). Thus, the meaning of place is never fixed; its permanence is imagined, carved out through the processes producing space (Halfacree 2006: 50). Place is always contested, a battleground for struggles of meaning.

From this it follows that places have to be considered as multilayered cultural formations. And again, this includes urban as well as rural places. Structural transformations take place in both settings: the majority of manufacturing factories are displaced from the cities in the West – as is the majority of farms in the countryside. Extrapolating that sentence, one may say that while the factory has become the fancy office of a marketing agency, the farmhouse is turned into a second home for the marketing manager. Halfacree's (2006: 44) definition of rural space as a “socially produced set of manifolds” emphasizes that the rural has to be considered in social, cultural and economic contexts. This implies, according to Cloke (2006: 19), that “rurality is characterized by a multiplicity of social spaces overlapping the same geographical area, so while the geographic spaces of the city and the countryside have become blurred it is in the social distinction of rurality that significant differences between the rural and the urban remain”.

Thus, while there are blurred boundaries between the city and the countryside due to, among other things, mediation and mobility, there is still an imaginative structure of rurality, defined to a large extent in opposition to the urbanity. The question is how this imagination is related to the symbolic work of the post-industrial rural municipality. For example, do rural municipalities through their symbolic work reinforce or undermine that distinction? It is particularly interesting in times of mediatization, when global mediascapes provide the most “peripheral” municipal policy-maker with the image management strategies of the global metropolitans. There are some empirical studies that illuminate these questions. Swedish municipalities – especially rural ones – have increased their investments

in place marketing to attract in-migrants, according to Niedomysl (2004). He concludes that these efforts have had poor effects, at least in quantitative terms, and suggests further qualitative explorations. One such example is the report *Place reinvention in the North* (Nyseth & Granås 2007), in which the authors summarize how places and municipalities in the north of Scandinavia have dealt with, and adapt to, globalization processes. They identify many strategies similar to those in the cities, for example, short-term flagship projects (often with cultural connections) and branding campaigns (Nyseth 2007: 148-50). In line with Harvey's argument about the new entrepreneurialism, Nyseth argues that the competition between places is a significant reason behind the transformations: "This competition has been partly forced and stimulated by new indexes produced by researchers and consultancies, e.g. creativity indexes, sustainability indexes, urban indexes, and so on" (Nyseth 2007: 151). The authors of the report also found a range of different economies in the regions, from Fordist economies to economies based on knowledge, service and consumption. Worth noting is that these differences did not correlate with the transformations: some places were in the middle of reinvention processes – with an economy based on manufacturing industry (*ibid.*). In line with the logics of post-industrialism, the researchers also found many examples of image management projects in which public, civil and business actors co-operated in governance networks (Nyseth 2007: 153). Another interesting feature of the study, directly related to image managing, is that it is possible to discern very different directions among the applied strategies. Some places work in extension of the rural and invest in nature, offering either the "authentic" experience of peacefulness or a site for spectacular and exotic adventures, like extreme sports (Granås & Gunnarsdotter 2007). Either way underscores that nature is there to be consumed. Other places, however, have adopted very "urban" approaches, giving rural places almost metropolitan silhouettes with "culturalized" old industry plants (Benediktsson & Aho 2007). In relation to the previous discussion on blurred boundaries, these could be regarded as tendencies to blurred boundaries also on an imaginative and representational level.

Rural Transformation Through the Lens of Mediation; an Analytical Approach

To empirically grasp the symbolic aspects discussed, there are good reasons to turn to the term "mediation", since, as Woods argues, "globalization processes are *mediated* through and incorporated within local processes of place-making" (2007: 494, *my italics*). An obvious advantage of the term is that mediation means something else than transmission. To think in terms of mediation, as media scholar Roger Silverstone argues, "requires us to consider it as involving producers and consumers of media in a more or less continuous activity of engagement and disengagement with meanings which have their source or their focus in those

mediated texts, but which extend through, and are measured against, experience in a multitude of different ways” (1999: 13).

Inspired by Macdonald (2006), who has deployed this rather media-specific way of thinking on tour guides in Nuremberg, I want to deploy it in a rural context. That implies a focus, not only on rural place, but on its ”production” as well as ”consumption” – which connects to Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model, originally intended for studying ideological reproduction through television news (Hall 1980a). The model has been deployed outside media studies, for example in urban development (Jansson 2005) and, as mentioned, in the context of tour guides (Macdonald 2006). It has, as I see it, three qualities rendering it particularly relevant in the context of provincial globalization. First, Hall makes a point that the produced (”encoded”) meaning and the consumed (”decoded”) meaning are two separate things; there are no such things as behaviouristic responses or passive transmission in processes of mediation; there are interpretations and appropriations of symbolic material. Hence, the municipal encoding of an area through material and symbolic means has to be interpreted by, in this case, the residents and visitors. Second, since the interpretation is not determined, there will always be a struggle of meaning. This means that ideology is always at hand in processes of mediation. Strong interests want to pull the interpretation in different directions. Through theorizing, Stuart Hall identifies different positions of reading, constituted according to their relation to the dominant ideology. This further denies communication processes as transmission of meanings. It also indicates that the meaning of place is negotiated and struggled over (as is further discussed later). Third, the theoretical model is cyclical and thereby processual. The encoding is preceded by a decoding, which in the rural case means that the municipal staff are not only encoders – they are also decoders of globalization discourses.

Governing a Rural Municipality

To scrutinize the mediation of global processes, and the rural negotiation of globalization, I have studied a small municipality in the south of Sweden. The social and demographic statistics are not happy reading for the municipal council. The population decreases yearly by 90 persons, and in January 2008 it was down to 13,661. Of the residents, 19% have post-secondary education, compared with 35% for Sweden as a whole. The proportion of unemployed is 8%, slightly over the national average of 6%. The manufacturing industry is the largest sector, employing 39%, which is over twice the national average of 17%. The average income in the municipality is 235,000 SEK (\approx 22,000 Euro) per year, whereas the Swedish average is 252,000 SEK. In addition, the municipal composition of age compared to the national average shows that the municipality has an under-representation in ages between 25 and 35, whereas the ages over 60 years old are somewhat over-represented.⁶

According to Sven Svensson, the Social Democratic chairman of the municipal council, the municipality is in the middle of a third critical structural transformation in a short span of time: the first was the closure of the textile industries in the 1960s, and the second was the closure of the large paper mill in the beginning of the 1980s. And quite recently they have experienced the displacement of a larger factory supplying the car industry, which was employing 550 people. The largest company today is in the wood industry. The company is doing very well, steadily increasing its production. Still, due to modernization, it has reduced the number of employees by more than 50%. When describing the municipality and the challenges it is facing, Sven Svensson considers the lack of railways in the municipality as a huge problem, especially since the public transport is underdeveloped. It means that commuting residents are more or less dependent on private cars. He also mentions the lack of a regional centre, a main town with public and commercial facilities. Instead these services are scattered among the handful of villages in the municipality. The public image of the municipality is a great problem perceived by all the interviewed policy-makers. It has a reputation of being dreary, as they put it. In addition, an extensive survey study, carried out by Statistics Sweden, shows that the residents are more dissatisfied than in other Swedish municipalities.

The interviews with the municipal staff reveal that they do take these problems seriously. They have initiated a range of activities, on different fronts, to come to terms with the structural problems, especially the depopulation which they consider the key problem. Following the analytical approach discussed previously, these activities can be considered as encoding practices. First, they have made staff recruitments; an administrative director from the business world and a project manager responsible for development issues were employed in 2008 (and both have been interviewed). In addition, they are planning to recruit a marketing director, who partly is going to replace the information officer they had earlier. The new administrative director considers this replacement as a central matter for a more offensive marketing strategy. Second, the new administrative director has started the implementation of a new organization structure inspired by Lean⁷ in order to provide better services to local enterprises and to citizens. Third, the municipal council has launched a long-term vision; in six years (2015) the municipality should have 15,000 *proud* residents. Education, communication and transport, housing and enterprising are prioritized areas. In addition, civic engagement and participation are central in the municipal program – as well as knowledge, creativity, culture and marketing, according to the press release. Fourth, the municipality officials have intensified their networking activities. They are highly aware of the conditions of the network society. To cope, Sven Svensson says that his strategy is to appear everywhere and in all kind of networks: “because you never know where the opportunities emerge”. Hence, he and his colleagues participate in a number of different networks, crossing geographical as well as political bounda-

ries. This is a necessity, he says, and continues: “The key to our municipal development is not to be found within the municipality”. Their networking activities mean that the municipality has: developed strong bonds with local enterprises, for example through arranging a lunch for industrial people every month; established diverse contacts with universities in the region; developed cooperation with other municipalities in the region; and revitalized contacts with their twin towns in northern Europe. They also keep themselves informed of what happens in the EU regarding rural development. Not least, they have made surveys among the residents (and plan to do so regularly) to improve their relationship.

Thus, a lot of “encoding” activities are going on or have been initiated, or are still in the planning stage. So far no evaluations have been made, but the interviewees experience a vast difference compared to how they used to work. They realize that they have to do something because if they cannot turn the depopulation around, the revenue from taxation will decrease steadily. Some investments have already paid off. For example, the network engagement of the chairman of the municipal council has put them in contact (almost accidentally) with a Danish architectural firm, which has subsequently bought attractive land in one of the villages (Svenvik) for building a large housing area (80 houses) with ecological houses. Another achievement is that they have succeeded in getting a regional LEADER office (Woods 2005: 150) placed in the municipality. Of particular interest for this paper are the explicit and implicit symbolic aspects of the municipal strategies. By “explicit symbolic aspects” I mean discursive symbolic strategies, i.e. marketing and media strategies, whereas “implicit symbolic aspects” refer to the symbolic meaning of other processes. For example, fundamentally the whole process of reconstitution has an implicit symbolic value. It signals: “In times of crisis this municipality does not become completely powerless to act”. In this perspective the new Lean-inspired organization is interesting – originally an idea that the administrative director brought from the industry. The main goal is rationalization of the municipal routines and daily business, but the symbolic effect is not innocent. For example, the reorganization has led to a number of invitations to gatherings and workshops – some organized by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise – where municipal representatives have presented the municipality and the implementation of Lean. There are also symbolic aspects on home ground. In the local newspaper there have been articles in which representatives of the local industry comment on the municipal reorganization in a positive way. The representatives especially appreciate that they themselves, the local industries, appear explicitly in the organization plan. The long-term vision also has virtues of image management. The launch was a big thing, described by the administrative director in the following way:

We used a method, frequently used within business, where you try to see things from above, partly your own organization, partly the surrounding world. This process provides issues which then are discussed in different workshops. Hence, a group of us went away for two and a half days with loads of data of different kinds. Com-

munication was central in the setup; you have to be able to communicate your conclusions. Immediately when we got back – it was a Friday – we called our local newspapers and said that on the following Wednesday, we would present our long-term municipal vision. It's probably the fastest visionary work process in Sweden ever!

Regarding the symbolic, the vision is successful. It is a recurrent subject in local newspapers, it appears on the municipal website, and most of the residents are aware of it. Problematic, however, is that there is no earmarked budget for the project, and there are no strategy documents on how the goals are to be fulfilled. The modest concrete content so far indicates that the symbolic value may have been the top priority.

From implicit to explicit symbolic aspects: as noticed in the quotation above, contacts with the media are an important strategic aspect of the municipality's work. The administrative director considers the local media as key actors in "encoding" the municipality's public image – which is not without problems for the image management:

The newspapers are quite critical here. There is competition in the newspaper market, which I think is an important reason for that criticism. From my industrial background I know the importance of getting access directly to your target group, without the distortion of middlemen. Right now, the residents experience the municipality mainly through the local papers, but we are going to start a small community paper. Thus, our message will reach every citizen in 9000 households, four times a year. It will be financed through ads, so the costs are no problem. And the funny thing is that it is the local newspaper that will produce it – they are usually very keen to criticize us!

The media, and in this case journalism, may provide means as well as obstacles to the image management. Hence, media strategies have a key function in symbolic work since media attention is a goal in almost all its practices. The development of media and communication technology has undermined traditional media enterprises' monopoly of media production, allowing more agents to be producers. Bypassing traditional media could be important for subcultures – as well as municipal councils.

Place marketing is another explicit symbolic aspect. Until now marketing has been an activity with relatively low priority in the municipality, but a shift is at hand. When the new marketing director takes up his/her duties, his/her main task will be to brand the municipality. Until then, it is a matter for the project manager. The lack of economic resources is a problem, however, and her plan is to turn the marketing project into a LEADER project – an EU-supported project in cooperation with the local industry and associations of the civic society (cf. Woods 2005: 150). This would guarantee a proper budget, because, as she says, it is too important to end up in any half-measures: "I'm not talking about producing brochures or putting a film on YouTube. The top priority is to figure out what we are going to market! If that isn't clear we can put in an endless amount of money without any results". The first step in the marketing project is to prioritize potential inves-

tors and potential residents. Tourism is downplayed at the moment, not least since the competition is so hard. The project manager is a bit sceptical towards the "rural trend" of idyllicism: "every rural municipality with self-respect makes an effort to get tourists – it seems like everyone has beautiful nature, peace and quiet and some tourist sites".

What, then, does this say about the globalization in the rural municipality in southernmost Sweden? Summing up the municipal actions, one may say that these different strategies illustrate quite well Woods' argument that globalization is "incorporated within local processes" (Woods 2007: 494), rather than penetrate the local. Yet it is important to stress that even though globalization is negotiated and hybridized locally, a rural municipality does not have a central position in "wider power-geometries" (ibid.: 497). Local policy-makers are more often on the receiving end of globalization than being the initiators of flows and movements. In spite of that, the study brings the aspects of negotiation to the fore, a central term in the encoding/decoding model. Global discourses are not mediated passively through local policy-makers. They are decoded (interpreted) and thereafter appropriated and practised – encoded – in a locally adjusted form. A quotation from the chairman of the municipal council illustrates this:

Google is fantastic! If you just curious you'll find all you want. Browsing the web, creating networks and using your own lived experience – that's the way one works today! [...] You have to be careful with trends, but there are always tendencies that need consideration; do they mean problems or benefits for the municipality? As a local politician you need to take account of what is happening in the surrounding world; you have to read a number of books and newspapers – and keep informed of what is happening on the web.

The statement can be connected with the presence of buzzwords, drawn from global discourses, in the municipal long-term vision. At the same time, however, it is important to note that the main goal of the vision is *not* an increased amount of visitors and entrepreneurs, which would be the case if determination or imperialism were involved. The present goal of an increased population and of changing its attitude towards the municipality ("proud residents") illustrates the presence of negotiation in the global-local relationship.

If the project of the long-term vision is characterized by negotiation and locally shaped appropriation, there are other aspects in which the reproduction of dominant ideologies is more explicit. In these cases the policy-makers make a "preferred reading" of the global discourse and its ideological content. The municipal engagement in policy networks is such an example. The municipal staff has no (political) doubts about running projects or cooperating with industry. Collaborations are taken for granted. As discussed earlier, governing through policy networks implies certain risks of de-politicization, since questions tend to be treated as technical rather than political. Embedded conflicts are played down in favour of the appearance of consensus (Zukin 1995: 271). As an expression of a global discourse, the principle of policy networks is particularly strong due to the explicit

support from the political establishment. It is, for example, possible to consider LEADER, the EU programme for rural development, in which representatives from municipality, industry and the civic society have to cooperate in order to qualify, as a strong support for network alliances within rural development. A remaining question concerns the residents, their relationship to the surrounding world, and their decoding of the municipal strategies.

Living in a Rural Idyll

A common denominator among the interviewed residents is an engagement, to varying extent, in a local village community, to which more than half of the population belongs. The village community marks the village in different ways, which become obvious in the interviews.

When the residents talk about Svenvik, almost all of them express an appreciation of its peacefulness and of having nature right at their doorstep. Both locally born residents and in-migrants are pleased with the village and its environment, and many of them convey negative feelings about cities and city life. Some of the in-migrants from cities emphasize that nature is not enough for moving to the countryside; it has to be a socially vital village where you can make friends and experience community. The small-scaleness seems to attract. Ulla, a woman in her 30s, originally from a larger city, puts it thus: “In wintertime you meet everybody when skating and everyone helps to shovel the ice. And in summertime you meet at the same place while bathing. To know everyone provides a special kind of feeling”. She also talks about the disappointment she felt when the small school in the next village closed down. Today her children have to go by bus to a larger school farther away. Ulla has her own marketing agency with several clients around Malmö (where she lived earlier), something she comments upon with a smile: “I don’t like to go to Malmö – it’s too hectic and too many people”.

Since the residents care a lot about Svenvik and its future, several of the interviewees are very engaged in the village community. The association does not solely focus on local heritage, which otherwise is common in the Swedish countryside; instead they arrange different activities – a cooking course for men, for example – and they act as a pressure group in questions about local development. Hence, the residents and their activities are a significant aspect of the character of the village. They make the place/village through their routinized practices and their daily interactions – the spaces of representations in Lefebvre’s terms. In addition, they contribute symbolically to the village (representations of space) through different representations, creating links to the past as well as to the future. Their “symbolic work from below” includes, for example, a yearly arranged music festival and a local portal on the Internet, including a community paper. Furthermore, they have established a museum to display the local heritage of stonemasonry and a track where one can see the old quarries. Yet their top priority dur-

ing recent years has been their engagement with the development plan of Svenvik. With the help of an acquainted architect, the village community has produced a new detailed development plan which they have handed over to the municipal council.

The negotiation with the municipality over the detailed development plan has proceeded for several years, and a certain bitterness with the policy-makers is evident among the residents. They are not content with the way the municipal council governs: they think the municipality should be more attentive to the local residents, especially the engaged village community which, in spite of its members' deep engagement, never had received any credit. The municipality's administration of the detailed development plan – which has been “unprofessional” according to the residents – was an upcoming subject in almost all of the interviews. Still, after many years of civic work, the work with the plan is not yet initiated. But the residents are not only criticizing and complaining. Some praise the small-scaleness, which makes it possible to negotiate directly with the municipality, something they realize one cannot do everywhere. Just like the municipal policy-makers, the interviewed residents realize that their village is a rural idyll with huge potential for exploitation. They recognize the potential improvements also for them: opportunities for better public service and facilities, maybe even a country shop. But the residents seek a restricted or at least controlled exploitation, so that local resources – for example the view over the lake and the open spaces in front of the lake – are maintained, since these are central in the community life. When asked explicitly about the municipality's work in relation to Svenvik, most of the interviewed residents are sceptical for different reasons. Some are scared that Svenvik will be over-exploited, whereas others think the local governors talk too much and act too little. Ingvar, a man who was born in Svenvik, is upset with the municipality's aesthetic prioritizations:

Instead of providing public facilities the municipality puts money into rebuilding streets, pavements and bus stops and they put up designed streetlights in the larger villages [...] If the facilities are okay and you feel secure in your day-to-day life, then I think people might accept a road that is a bit bumpy. The municipality has reconstructed all the centres in the larger villages – with the help of expensive consultants, of course. In one of the villages it turned out that buses could no longer pass the central roundabout, because it had become too small. So I maintain that they invest in the wrong things.

The reconstructions Ingvar mentions were carried out some years ago; but also more recent municipal activities, like the long-term vision, are met with a certain scepticism, even though the reactions are blended. There is appreciation that the municipality does something, and several of the interviewees think the visionary goals are relevant. As Alan, very active in a local development group (subgroup to the village community), puts it:

I can see how they [the policy-makers] think: they need to anchor their work among the citizens, and they have to start with something positive. Overall, the basic idea is

good, I believe – it's a citizen perspective. But the vision has to be filled with content without being daft. That's the challenge!

The municipality's weakness with taking action is a recurrent theme in the interviews. A woman, Eva-Britt, describes how she has searched for an action plan for the long term-vision on the municipal website, but she could not find any. That confirmed her general view of the municipality: "It's a lot of catch phrases and buzzwords, whereas I want something tangible. I've even written a letter to the editor about that". The interviewees' earlier experiences of the municipality explicitly mark their attitude towards the new vision. They have long experience of municipal lack of money. Stig has lived in the municipality since the 1970s, when he and his family moved to Svenvik in an act of counter-urbanization. He has been engaged in the village community almost since then:

We've seen too many projects – initiated with red carpet and all – go down the drain. They have all vanished as soon it becomes serious or starts to cost. Once, for example, we were appointed municipal ambassadors, getting pins, badges, flyers and stuff, and we took part in a lot of meetings. But it all vanished after a while. The new vision sounds good, but over the years I've learned not to have an opinion until I see something really happening.

As mentioned, however, the residents do not only sit back and grumble; they also take action. They have strong opinions on local development which they convey through the village community. The residents advocate a development strategy that enhances in-migration – while taking present residents into consideration. They welcome tourist flow – as long as the tourists respect the nature and spend money locally. The residents are positive towards the new building project, which they think may enrich the village – and they appreciate the ecological focus. However, some hesitation is expressed about the target group: who are going to afford moving to these rather expensive houses? Ulla really appreciates the ecological line, but at the same time she is afraid the houses will be turned into second homes for wealthy people from Copenhagen. If so, their chance of getting a country shop and other public facilities will decrease – as will the municipal tax revenues.

In any case, their long-standing engagement and their acting as a pressure group have resulted. For example, the public transports have been improved and it seems that their proposed detailed development plan for the village will get through without too many modifications. Ingvar has a clear idea of the municipal strategy – and how it differs from his own view:

If you are going to invest in Svenvik – and I know the municipality wants to do that – it has to be in something substantial. It's not enough telling potential residents that "the view over the lake is marvellous – and you can paddle canoe!" No one today has the time or the money to move to a place just because of the view! Well, maybe pensioners, but they're not the target group in this case. For ordinary people, working five days a week, the view is just the icing on the cake; useful when you have guests, but you can't live on it. But the municipality is convinced that the peace and quiet and the environment in itself will attract people. Instead, we try to convince

them to invest in a small day nursery. That's what attracts families with children! The municipality has to be pro-active in this case – one can't wait and see if families move in. Good service already in place is fundamental to a modern family! That's the basis of day-to-day life, and then comes the rest. I think that's the way to draw people from the cities.

This is a different view of the strategies for the local development. Less rhetoric and symbolic, more focused on public improvements, to support present residents as well as future ones. The residents do believe in marketing, but also in this case they have a different view than the municipality. As Stig, who is partly working with marketing, puts it:

I think the municipality should invest in less badges and glossy brochures and do more proper marketing to attract more residents. Why not going on a serious recruitment tour in Malmö?⁸ There's the place to tell about the nature, the environment, the atmosphere and the low housing prices!

Svenvik – a Relatively Contested Place in the Swedish Countryside

A local place is contested. There are many forces pulling it in different directions and, as discussed earlier, there is a manifold of social spaces “overlapping the same geographical area” (Cloke 2006: 19). Svenvik is at the same time an exploitable rural idyll, as the municipal policy-makers like to view it, and the site of the residents' daily business. The residents experience, maybe not a clash, but at least friction between these two spaces. Picking up a theoretical thread from earlier, it could be expressed as a disjuncture between the symbolic meanings created (“encoded”) by the policy-makers and those experienced (“decoded”) by the residents. There seems to be a mismatch between their imaginative representations of a future Svenvik. It is not that the residents do not see post-industrial threats that globalization is bringing, i.e. the threats the municipality acts upon. It is rather that the residents interpret them differently. This could be traced, among other things, to different access to globalization, which brings us back to the role of mediation and the “global diffusion of global discourses” in mediascapes. Roger Silverstone comments on the dynamic and multifaceted character of mediation in a vivid way:

Mediated meanings move between texts, certainly, and across time. But they also move across space, and across spaces. They move from the public to the private, from the institutional to the individual, from the globalizing to the local and personal, and back again. They are fixed, as it were, in texts, and fluid in conversations. They are visible on billboards and web-sites and buried in minds and memories (1999: 15).

There are many ways – mediated and non-mediated – to experience globalization for the rural residents, and many of these ways bypass the municipality. On the basis of the amalgam of their lived experience and mediated meanings, the resi-

dents create their own accounts of Svenvik and its future in a globalized world – and they take action to realize it. Their action in turn may cause ripple effects and have consequences in other parts of the global network. In this way the residents may, if not change, at least alter sections of the power geometries of globalization, which justifies a term like provincial globalization. Furthermore, this conflict is the consequence of overlapping social spaces – associated with different media spaces. The making of Svenvik is a struggle, although a relatively calm one, and as Chantal Mouffe (2000) claims, such conflicts are productive. Consensus is not a goal in itself; the conflict is a sign of a vitality in public life and a deliberative democratic process.

Concluding Remarks

When Paul Cloke discusses the future of rural studies, especially vis-à-vis the cultural turn, he is concerned with “the depoliticizing tendencies of a cultural focus” and argues for a repoliticizing:

[W]hen the conceptual fruitfulness of the cultural turn is pursued in conjunction with a more critical analysis of power relations there is a potential to add significantly to the broader understandings of, and critical importance of, rural policy agendas (2006: 26).

I believe that a focus on mediation; the struggle and interplay of meaning between the symbolic and the material, an approach with roots in the Centre of for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (cf. Hall 1980b), is a passable – and relevant – road to go. This could be the “cultural” crossroad where Rural Geography and Media and Cultural Studies meet for mutual inspiration – as Peter Jackson (1991) once proposed. Such a perspective has in this study led to valuable insights regarding the “micro-politics of negotiation and hybridization” which is the core of globalization’s re-fashioning of rural places (Woods 2007: 502).

Finally, a comment on the rural future. Concerning Svenvik, three distinct municipal strategies are discernible in the study, all of them connected with the interplay of meaning between urbanity and rurality on a representational/imaginative level. First, it is possible to market the municipality in general and Svenvik in particular as the rural idyll; the peaceful and quiet antithesis to the urbanity discourse. In such representational imagination the qualities of beauty and closeness to nature are brought to the fore, which in turn are associated with the virtue of authenticity (cf. Bell 2006; Granås & Gunnarsdotter 2007). Second, another route is to affirm urbanity and create a “sense of the city”. This is an expression of the much-discussed “urbanization of the rural” (Cloke 2006: 18; McCarthy 2008; Woods 2009). It is, for example, possible to trace urban aesthetics in rural rebuilding projects (cf. Benediktsson & Aho 2007), communicating some kind of aesthetic up-to-dateness. A very different example is the emphasis on the possibilities of commuting in the municipality’s marketing material. In this case, the rural vil-

lage becomes similar to suburbia: a place for private withdrawal and family life – in contrast to the city with its professional connotations. It seems that the municipality in the present case study blends these two strategies, on the one hand asserting the beauty of, and wilderness around, Svenvik, and on the other hand reconstructing village centres in an urban fashion. There is a third strategy, however. Some essential similarities exist between what has been called "ruralisation of the urban" (Cloke 2006: 19; Woods 2009: 853) and the residents' views on the local development. Both can be seen as reactions to (urban) large-scaleness due to rationalization processes. In both cases there are demands for community spirit and small schools and day nurseries in the neighbourhood. In short, what is pursued is a general small-scaleness, which is not "gated" or closed, but serves as a solid and secure ground for the practices of everyday life. Just like the first alternative, this one is heavily marked by the imaginative city, shaped as the latter's antithesis as it is. Is it time for a re-ruralisation of the rural?

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Notes

- 1 This study is part of "Rural Networking/Networking the Rural", an ongoing research project financed by Formas, the Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning.
- 2 The number is from 2001-01-08, according to the municipality's website.
- 3 The interviews were carried out during the spring of 2009. All interviews were between 50 and 150 minutes, following previously designed interview-guides.
- 4 As Patrik Åker (2008: 92) notes, a linked document on Latvia's official webpage contains an open invitation to industrial investors – emphasizing the low wages and the low commitment to the trade union in Latvia (<http://www.tartu.ee/data/SMARTlocationFinal.pdf> 2010-01-10). Thus, poor working conditions may be used in the marketing of a nation.
- 5 There are many similarities to 'gated communities', despite the absence of gates.
- 6 All figures are from 2008-01-01, except those regarding unemployment which are from March 2009. Source: Municipal Facts, Statistics Sweden [Statistiska centralbyrån], www.scb.se/kommunfakta.
- 7 A method for rationalization within manufacturing industry. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lean_Manufacturing.
- 8 The city of Malmö has almost 300,000 residents and is about 110 km away.

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