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RURAL MOBILITIES AND URBAN NORMS

ABSTRACT

This article deals with everyday life in sparsely populated parts of northern Sweden. It investigates the relationship between local practice and political discourses. The discussion is based on fieldwork carried out in two northern municipalities. Empirical themes include everyday life mobilities and means of transport. The theoretical concepts of everyday life, community, place, and policy shape the analysis of processes pertaining to space and movement. In particular, the article discusses sustainable development as policy and argues for alternative understandings of social sustainability in relation to rural settings.

Keywords: everyday life mobilities, means of transport, sparsely populated parts of northern Sweden, place, policy, sustainable development, social sustainability

INTRODUCTION

> Our assessment is that there is an untapped potential for Sweden to accelerate responsible climate innovation with the help of [artificial intelligence], and that such an investment could give Sweden the lead internationally. (Galaz et al. 2021: 5.)

The above quotation points to a typical phenomenon when it comes to sustainability issues: high-tech and engineering solutions as the answer to a sustainable future. It is also in line with conventional theory on regional development. The task of designing a new type of society, such as one without cars or with electric cars only, is evidently alluring to the engineering community as well as to many regional planners. The underlying idea is a new kind of social and sustainable lifestyle, and a good society, created by specialised technocrats. However, this article presents another way of understanding social sustainability,[1] which points to the discursive level and the everyday local level. The rhetoric of sustainability often portrays the rural as unsustainable due to unemployment levels and population decline. But, when social sustainability is examined at a concrete level, as a lived reality, it can be understood as living and surviving in the specific local setting. As ecological perspectives seldom fail to include these kinds of perceptions of people, it is important to ask questions about how social sustainability is created and experienced at the local level (Wollin Elhouar 2014: 24).

From a place-based perspective (Casey 1996, 2009 [1993]), this study focuses on how everyday mobilities can be understood in terms of social sustainability from a rural point of view. Place, as both experience and a space for action, adds a specific local understanding as a complement to structural explanations (Mathiesen Hjemdahl 2002: 72; Wollin Elhouar

2014: 26). The social dimension of sustainability is often discussed in terms of social conditions linked to concepts like trust, security, and belonging. Here, the aim is to tie social sustainability to 'place' and, thereby, highlight the more concrete aspects of social sustainability and how they vary in different places. In other words, place matters when discussing rural living conditions.

In terms of the everyday, the following concept in relation to a geopolitical discourse is inspirational (Jansen 2009: 824): where the everyday is seen as a 'mode of representation of one's collective place in the world' and such places are 'ordered in a spatiotemporal hierarchy' (Jansen 2009: 824). It also reveals the importance of alternative understandings of social sustainability and possibilities other than the usual urban interpretations of sustainable ways of living. This article investigates technologies of transport and their roles in a sustainable future. In this context, Virilio's concept of dromology serves as inspiration, which can be translated as the logic of speed, which, according to Virilio, is a key factor in the Western and technocratic society. One fundamental factor here is the revolution of transport that 'will coincide with a characteristic change of arrival, with the progressive negation of the time interval, the accelerated retention of the time of passage that separates arrival and departure' (Virilio 1986 [1977]: 133). Virilio describes the means of transport as different 'vectors', speed carriers, or speed machines. As they are embedded in the speed norms, they are understood in a hierarchical way, with the aeroplane on top due to its speed. In this context, the following questions are pertinent: How can the means of transport manage to tie people together or keep them apart? When, how, and for whom do the different means of transport become useful and meaningful? How do these practices collide with discourses on sustainability?[2]

The empirical data used in this article come from a sponsored Vinnova (Swedish Research and Development Agency) research project with a focus on Sweden's innovation capacity for sustainable growth, called *Travelling in rural areas. Life circumstances for women and men.* I initially participated in the project by interviewing people and conducting observations in four Swedish municipalities (two in the north of Sweden, and two in the south). These observations were the starting points for the project. The data used in my dissertation were collected in two of these municipalities. The main data consisted of thirteen transcribed semi-structured interviews with people living in or close to sparsely populated areas in these two municipalities. In addition, the dissertation was based on field notes from the observations. The dissertation occasionally refers to secondary data from a third municipality in the southern part of Sweden and from an Australian municipality, located in what is known as the Australian outback. As for discourses on sustainable development, written sources were referred to, such as newspaper articles, research papers, and political documents. The data were interpreted with methodological inspiration from hermeneutics and phenomenology. The interview questions were clustered around certain themes of travelling, everyday life experiences, and environmental issues. The interpretation of the material was completed through several different steps, levels, and perspectives, where theory and method are in part interlinked and where the aim is to capture the whole as something more than the sum of its parts (Giorgi 2009; Jackson 2012).

THE URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

During fieldwork in the municipalities, I was often met by surprise that I had made the effort to visit people and their rural places in the north. Apart from representing the university as a staff member, I also represented Stockholm, the Swedish capital, and, as such, not only looked at the divide between town and country, but also the divide between the mega-urban capital and other parts of the country (Cloke and Little 1997; Shields 1992). There are tensions here in terms of self-identity, class, place, and power asymmetries (Cramer 2016), which can be traced back in history to the major industrial and structural changes in rural Sweden in the mid-nineteenth century (Hansen 1998; Hellspong and Löfgren 1994). For example, during my first visit to one of the municipalities, an employee said enquiringly, 'So, there are people who actually care about the sparsely populated areas?' A fellow employee explained, 'You know, the attitude we get up here, from the state and the politicians, is like, suit yourself!'

Comments like the above illustrate that place and belonging to a place are important parts of people's perceptions of and encounters with others. It also points to the fact that rural scepticism towards the state and its politics has a historical basis with a connection to today's rhetoric of sustainability, where an urban perspective dominates (Wollin Elhouar 2014). The kind of marginalised expression illustrated in the above quote is common for people living in the northern inland areas of Sweden. Many share the feeling of being nationally excluded, as the state power counteracts the northern inland areas. These experiences tie in to the national political climate in the nineteenth century. During this period, a speedy process of modernisation was initiated in terms of industrialisation, and changed settlement patterns. A consequence of these changes was relocation from the northern inland areas to towns and urban areas. The rapid industrialisation process initially benefitted the northern inland area, in that, due to the area's natural resources, small working communities of hydroelectric power and forestry industry workers were created. However, later on, and especially during the boom that occurred after World War II, development stopped in the region and, instead, manifested in the larger towns and urban areas. People then decided to relocate from the inland areas to the industrial towns on the northern coast and to the southern parts of the country (Wollin Elhouar 2014: 13; Hansen 1998). This historical context is important when interpreting the rural understanding of urban power.

The urban-rural divide can be interpreted from many different perspectives, both implicitly and explicitly. Existing stereotypes of the rural are often linked with words like idyll, harmonious, and contemplative, although they can also be connected with problems, lacking resources, and poverty (Shields 1992; Cloke and Little 1997). Even though the static dichotomy between 'the rural' versus 'the urban' tends to be challenged and critically discussed both inside and outside academia, for instance, in accordance with the concept of 'the urban norm' (see Sjöstedt Landén 2021; Lundgren 2020)—it is very much alive and kicking at individual and structural levels. When the rural is discussed, it is often contrasted to the urban. In that way, the urban is present when the rural is under debate, even if it is not specifically mentioned.

In a similar way, the concept of the rural is closely linked to the politics of infrastructure. In this article, the rural is defined from a broad cultural analytical perspective, and is closely linked to concepts of modernity, national identity, and meaning. Rural life is framed

by national political decisions as well as the process of globalisation and its effect at the local. The force of global neoliberalism and national political policy has led to structural transformations that sharpen the conditions for the inland areas in terms of local income and job opportunities (see Cramer 2016; Lundgren 2020). When the global logic is growth, it becomes logical from a political perspective to neglect the inland areas. In the following empirical examples from a few specific inland places in northern Sweden, it will become clear that infrastructure projects and infrastructure cutbacks are part of this logic. Thus, growth and infrastructure go hand in hand. When people move away from the inland areas to the growing coastal towns, national politicians decide to invest in train communications. In doing so, savings are made on bus communications in the inland areas. One effect of this is that sustainable politics favours urban lifestyles and movements. How, then, can we grasp this from a socially sustainable point of view? In the following section, this is illustrated by empirical examples of different means of transport.

THE SUSTAINABLE BUS

'Every penny taken from road infrastructure to public transport and railway investments strengthens a sustainable infrastructure.'[3] This kind of not-so-nuanced rhetoric represents one of the dominating political discourses on sustainable development. The quote is also a significant example of the kind of rhetoric that interviewees opposed.

In a sense, this quote is conventional and in line with global research and standpoints relating to global sustainability. In other words, this is the dominant understanding when discussed at discursive levels. Nobody can have missed that public transport has represented the good and that cars have represented the bad in this context.[4] So, what is the problem here? To answer that question, let us see how some of the interviewees in the rural settings reasoned about public transport and sustainability.

> The bus comes at 5.30 am, except for Fridays. So, you can take the bus down to the town, the central area. … This is where the hospital is situated, and the dental service, for example. So, you set off at 5.30 am and arrive at 10 am. Then, you have three hours to do your errands. Preferably, you'll want to get something to eat as well. Then, you'll have to go back, at around 1 pm. … It really sucks. (*middle-aged woman*)

The woman referred to in the quotation above lived in a fairly remote village. She cycled to work in the village, which meant that she did not need to travel by bus on a daily basis. However, when she did need the bus service, which we can assume was on a fairly regular basis, it was obviously not the most flexible or suitable alternative.

Attitudes towards commuting by bus differed due to where in the municipality the interviewees lived and worked. Some of the interviewees were able to commute on a daily basis, whilst others explained that the bus was not a viable option at all. To use or not use the bus in the everyday was also situation-based. Public transport—buses in this particular everyday context—worked fairly well in travel between villages that were connected to the main road and were not too far from the central village or the largest town. But, even if that facilitated commuting in a certain sense between home and work, taking the bus to town for shopping and dining was not particularly tempting nor if interviewees travelled around the area a lot. One obvious reason for this was the distance. An

man in his seventies I interviewed, who lived close to the main route, explained:

> My everyday life consists of meetings almost every day so I travel all over, to different places. ... The car is of course crucial. It is not possible, in a modern society, in this modern society and in this hamlet, to not have a car. I mean, for me it would be impossible to adjust to taking the bus to meetings and all. Completely impossible. Completely hopeless. There are no buses to these places.

This comment and others like it point to a central point in the discussion about 'sustainable development'. On the one hand, it highlights the political discursive claim that the car is the most important reason for unsustainable carbon emissions; yet, on the other hand, it shows rural people's efforts to have an everyday life that functioned.

When people planned their everyday mobility, they did so with a focus on flexibility and speed, because that was what society demanded. In some rural settings, this automatically meant that the car was the only viable means of travel. The bus was simply not capable of making many rural lives socially sustainable. In spite of the democratic, collective, and environmentally friendly dimensions of the bus, it was not the first choice for many rural inhabitants. As Virilio (1986 [1977]) claimed, it was sometimes more accurate to understand the historical development of the Western world in terms of a dromocratic revolution than a democratic one (see also James 2007: 29). With this statement, Virilio meant that dromology in a sense was a more important factor than democracy in terms of analysing development and its influence in Western societies.

Speed has always been a driving force in the modern Western world. As travelling long distances takes up a fair amount of time, society is intensively focused on mobility (Augé 2009). Speed, this relationship between time and space, plays here a decisive role (Virilio 1986 [1977], 1989, 2000; James 2007). Following this time-pressing logic, the bus as public transport appears restrictive and is, therefore, a rather unsustainable means of transport. The interviewees found the bus inflexible due to few departures and long routes. Compared to the car, thus, for them, the bus was not a viable alternative.

Another important dimension of rural residents dismissing the bus was related to the local context and its way of transporting more than just bodies. In this context, it was not a paradigm of speed that governed, but something that was intertwined with specific rural modes of the everyday and its connection to things (Stewart 1996). As one 50-year-old female wild-life entrepreneur explained:

> We wouldn't make it without the car, the trailer, or the animal transport. We need to take the animals to the vet on a regular basis. We have to buy animal feed for six horses, three dogs, and one cow on a regular basis. And it's a long way. To transport all of this takes time, it needs space and it is heavy. … We also have to pick up visitors and guests, and then drop them off.

The local inhabitants' need to transport more than their own bodies—like waste, timber, and animal feed—was difficult on a bus. According to the travellers, a bus transported people collectively, and only functioned as long as it offered sufficient routes between relevant places. In this context, the bus could also be seen as a maker of social sustainability or a constructor of friction. The data show this in relation to gender

dimensions. I interviewed some of the women who used the bus, because they lived and worked close to the bus route. They expressed mainly positive attitudes towards bus journeys shared with others, since travelling together created social meaningfulness and a sense of community. They said that these regular get-togethers on the bus allowed for chats and discussions, or simply a sense of belonging. However, the interviewees also expressed negative attitudes towards long standstills and disturbing others. Significant in the data were complaints about the bus, mainly voiced by peripheral inhabitants. There was, thus, a difference between being a central rural dweller and a remote dweller in the municipality.

The bus can also be understood as symbolic, in the sense that it acknowledges the existence of the village. It is important to bear this in mind when interpreting feelings of discontent when the bus service is reduced or abandons a particular village. How, then, can the bus be understood? Why is it that people see the bus as important even when almost nobody uses it? In this context, it does not matter if a person never uses the bus on an everyday basis and will consequently not miss the bus on a personal level. Rather, the feelings tie in to feelings of abandonment at an existential level, because if the bus disappears it symbolises that the village will also disappear. If the bus route remains intact, it adds recognition to the specific village. If the bus exists, it means that the village exists, and, if the village exists, it means that people live there. Thus, it signals that there is political concern for the few people who live there and that they are not forgotten from the national perspective. Rational growth arguments for abandoning the bus are difficult for villagers to understand, because these arguments do not take individuals or places into consideration. They are rather equated with the abandonment of the village and can also be interpreted as broken trust or a broken contract between the citizen and the state. Research has shown that, in general, citizens in Sweden experience a higher level of social trust in the state than people in other countries (Rothstein 2000). However, in the northern inland areas, the social capital in terms of trust and belonging is directed instead towards the local community, and trust in the nation among northern inland inhabitants has a history of being rather low compared with that among people living in the southern parts of the country (Hansen and Goine 2006).[5]

THE TRAIN AS THE ENVIRONMENTAL HERO

> The rail traffic up here is just for tourists who can take this Bush line, you know. There is no passenger transportation, we can't even go to the town. … There used to be a major railway junction here once. Now, the inland railway is just for goods traffic, it carries timber and that's it. (*60-year-old man*)

Historically, trains and railway investments have represented concepts like 'modernity', 'future', and 'hope', and still impact the rhetoric of sustainable development. On 30 August 2011, one of Sweden's major newspapers wrote: 'The government invests five billion on infrastructure. … 3.6 billion will cover the railway and 1.4 billion will cover roads.' The optimistic hope for the future in railway investments was also reflected in interviews with most of the municipality's employees. At the time of my visits, a major railway line was partly constructed. This huge investment was clearly surrounded by a strong modernity and speed discourse that pointed towards how much time travellers would gain by using the train instead of the bus. The line officially opened in 2010,

and is a high-speed railway line on the northeast coast.

This new high-speed line has many infrastructural advantages for the northern areas that are in line with the dromology of speed marking our (post-) modern society globally (Virilio 1986 [1977]). However, from an inlander's everyday travelling perspective, the advantages did not seem all that clear. Several of the interviewees thought that the train investment in the north was good, although many also said that they personally would not be able to commute by train because the line was situated along the coast and they lived and worked in the inland area. Thus, while the line seemed more or less irrelevant for them, they were not against it because it appeared to be a good thing for others (see also Bylin et al. 2011). The interviews, therefore, revealed a pattern of positive attitudes towards the train and the railway in general, yet more ambivalence with regards to personal travel.

The complexity that appears in the narratives about the train illustrates a process of negotiation between policies as carriers of power (Shore and Wright 1997) and alternative individual experiences and opinions. The immediate understanding of the train as a positive phenomenon can be read in relation to sustainability discourses, where the train is seen as the solution to the problem due to qualities like speed, accessibility, and environmentally friendly associations. This picture is, thus, nuanced from a place-based perspective. The train does not exist as an alternative for the interviewed inlanders, a fact that in itself illustrates the discrepancies between discourse and lived experiences.

Another consequence of sustainability politics is the geographical unfairness for people living in Sweden's sparsely populated inland areas. Infrastructure investments on direct coastal lines can also be seen as an example of a process that complicates the mobility patterns in the inland areas. While there are obvious advantages with these investments in terms of accessibility in the north, they can also be interpreted as the creation of periphery, or peripherification, where prioritising direct rail lines on the coast or bus routes along the main road means other priorities are neglected. In short, investing in a railway is possible due to cut backs on bus routes in the inland areas (Eriksson 2010) and neglect of the inland line that is only used for timber and tourism. In other words, taking the train is a possibility for people living near the coast and railway stations, whereas among those with little access to a rail or bus route neither form of travel is beneficial. This policy clearly illustrates a political priority on central spaces and mobilities. Consequently, neither the train nor the bus is capable of creating social sustainability when viewed from the peripheral perspective.

THE CAR AS THE EVIL POLLUTER

> P-Å: People need the car…because it is a certain way of living up here… they need to be able to go places and do the things they are supposed to do. … This is a rural place, the roads are not properly ploughed during the winter season, and that means two decimetres of snow and then people are not able to go places, to their jobs. They live in a small village a couple of miles from work. They, therefore, need a car that can get them there. Additionally, people heat their houses with firewood here and because of that they need to transport the firewood by trailer or scooter. I mean… not having a trailer up here… is like…
> E: Not existing?

> P-Å: Basically no. Everyone has a trailer in order to haul… they need the trailer for everything they do. They have to drive four miles to the refuse station. … It is not like in the city, where someone comes for the rubbish. Here, we have to go and get rid of it all ourselves. So, you have to have a big car. Just in case anything happens, you wouldn't want to get squeezed at once.

In many of the interviews, the car was talked about as being interlinked with life itself. For most people, everyday life in a northern village was simply not possible without a car. From this perspective, the car was obviously the most prominent maker of sustainability for the locals. Specific place-based conditions like geography and climate were also relevant factors. Here, a car was synonymous with safety and the ability to avoid accidents due to snow, slippery roads, long distances, and poor visibility. Thanks to the car, everyday mobilities were made possible and flexible. The importance of a large car was stressed by more or less all of the interviewees.

The story of the roomy and safe car—like the story of the nonfunctioning bus—is associated with the local place. Things, place, and action interact in this sense (Casey 1996, 2009; Stewart 1996). It is also an obvious expression of poor infrastructure. The comparison with the city 'where someone comes and picks up the rubbish' and where everything you need is in close reach creates a perception of the a lack of infrastructure as unfair (Fainstein 2010). Given that the car can be understood as part of the everyday mobilities and as something that people have a close relationship with, it is fuelled with agency on its own terms. The car, thus, becomes synonymous with movement, and even becomes movement. This machine and its imminent capacity for flexibility in turn create opinions of sustainability, in that, thanks to the car, it is possible to move. It becomes possible to conquer time-space with a minimum of restriction. Our everyday life is always situated in place. When we sense our place-based everyday life as possible and functioning, instead of restricted and impossible, we also have a sense of trust for the social community and a sense of social sustainability.

Narratives about the car also illustrate tensions. The car is contested in national policies and is often seen as an environmental villain. This ties in to the national community's experiences of exclusion. During a visit to a municipality office, the employees talked about a tax reduction on petrol that they regarded as a disadvantage for rural inhabitants who must travel long distances. One employee said:

> We got a tax reduction on petrol that was meant for driving on duty. But, that doesn't really help, since 50% of driving is outside duty times, such as going shopping or taking the children to their afterschool activities. So, for us up here, this reduction doesn't actually make any sense. The big winners are the city folks, because they don't need to take the car in the first place. They can choose not to and can instead take the train or the bus.

This comment shows how rural inhabitants claim that rural ways of living are particular yet also neglected by urban-placed politicians. Comments like these were interlinked with a sense of inequality. When cars and driving practices were discussed in the interviews, it was clear that the subject was sensitive. The answers were interwoven with tensions that had to do with the climate rhetoric in terms of driving. The interviewees were perfectly aware that, at a discursive level, driving and car ownership were seen as environmentally unfriendly and out

of date. But, the tensions and comments such as the one above also point to a gap between climate policies and the reality of rural life. To some degree, climate policies include ideals of a carless future, which in principle can be claimed as positive and responsible sustainability politics with regard to serious climate research. However, as the ethnography shows, these types of centrally governed decisions made in accordance with climate visions can create tensions in rural areas, where dependence on the car is high, as well as make people feel guilty for not living in urban areas. In other words, urban norms in politics that work perfectly well for urbanites may at the same time create obstacles and have unfair effects on rural dwellers in terms of movement capacity and choices of action. These narratives can be linked to experiences of exclusion from the national community. As the political rhetoric on infrastructure and environmental issues are generally experienced as relating to urban ways of living, people in more rural areas tend to feel that the national interest does not concern them or that they do not belong to the national community. In the long run, these experiences lead to mistrust in society and the common good (Rothstein 2000; Putnam 1992, 2000), which may in turn fuel several parallel societies instead of a democratic and inclusive society with trusting citizens.

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In this context, it is clear that sparsely populated places are not central in the dominant political discourses on sustainability. Sustainability issues are mainly concentrated on urban lifestyles, while questions about how to work for more sustainable life forms in rural areas are to a large extent ignored. This can also be linked to the classic Brundtland definition, which points to the importance of today's practices for coming generations. It, therefore, follows that much of what is happening in contemporary rural areas will determine the possibilities of future generations to take responsibility for their own lives and actions. The sustainability perspective, thus, brings a time dimension to such analyses in terms of the effects of today's decisions.

What are the effects of the infrastructural changes in the northern parts of Sweden? When it comes to national understanding, historically Sweden has a self-image of being a leading modern nation. It also stands out internationally when it comes to sustainability and technology (Galaz et al. 2021: 25). The image of being a leading sustainability nation is a prestigious one and it is in this context that the importance of infrastructure and modernity should be understood. This discourse dominates people's minds and self-narratives. In addition, concepts like the environment and nature have a high value for national Swedish self-understanding in general (Warde et al. 2018) and perhaps more so for northern Swedes (Sörlin 1989).

When analysing the effects of infrastructure changes in the north of Sweden, it is clear that the different types of transport are related to one another. When politicians decide to invest taxpayers' money in train communications, savings must be made on bus communications. In terms of the expanded train line, the process seems to be one of peripherification, whereby only people who live close to the coast and railway stations can be classified as central rural dwellers. Meanwhile, others who live further away are constructed as even more remote and peripheral inland dwellers. Not only do these people become distanced from the train, they also have little access to buses. In practice, as the car is the only viable means of transport in these areas, it is, therefore, socially sustainable. People often have no other option than the car

for commuting or activities in their spare time. Therefore, some sustainability policies, such as tax increases on petrol, are unfair in specific time-spaces, such as rural areas, where there are no alternatives. This is linked to a discussion about modernity, where the claim that the car is a necessity can be interpreted as classic modernity linked to technology. However, much of the debate about sustainability has been linked to the ideal of a carless future in rural areas and can thus be classified as Modernity 2.0. Lately, the debate has turned towards electric cars, which in a way can be understood as the upgraded version of modernity, Modernity 3.0. These discourses rely on high-tech and engineering solutions for a sustainable future.

In order to highlight complications like those between the centre and the periphery, between policies and lived experiences, I have stressed the importance of the social dimension of sustainability. In this context, social sustainability is partly interpreted as people's possibilities to live in the places they want to live in. It is important, however, to nuance the concept of social sustainability, because it is somewhat ambiguous, for example, in terms of collisions with other dimensions of sustainability. As we know, socially good lifestyles have a tendency to collide with the ecological definitions of sustainability. Thus, emphasis is placed on social dimensions in order to draw attention to the unfair effects from a time-space perspective and to point to the problem of urban norms in sustainability policies.

In this article, the intention has also been to stress the importance of contextualising the concept of social sustainability. Without a contextual understanding of sustainability, the concept is difficult to grasp and use in an academic way. Social sustainability is rather hollow and insignificant when defined in its own abstract way, and tends to remain at the rhetorical and political level. In order to go beyond this abstract level, the ambition has been to empirically show the importance of place-specific understandings of social sustainability. This approach has shown what the requirements for social sustainability look like in rural Swedish contexts and how it differs from urban understandings.

Social sustainability is about people's lifestyles and their possibilities to choose them in accordance with other aspects of sustainability. Social sustainability is also closely linked to political discourse, in that sustainability issues mainly follow the logic of urban lifestyles. While there have been some medial and political improvements in rural conditions in recent years, discussions about how to improve sustainable life forms in rural areas still lags behind. When improving social sustainability in an urban setting, efforts are often focused on how to improve security, community, safety, and trust. Such improvements in urban areas might include things like more street lighting. In rural areas, by contrast, the issues are on a more basic and existential level, focusing on questions like the following: How can people live in the places where they want to live? How can everyday life work in terms of having access to workplaces, schools, shops, hospitals, and other necessary infrastructures?

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NOTES

1 Social sustainability as a concept has evoked increased interest and in recent years has been developed in different ways. Some perspectives focus on aspects like individual sustainability, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), leadership and workplace issues, and animals and nature (Osika 2018: 124).

2 This article is based on my dissertation, entitled 'Do we belong to the future of Sweden? An ethnological study of everyday life and sustainability in the northern sparsely populated area' (2014). The purpose of the dissertation was to investigate how social sustainability is constructed, experienced, practised, and performed in a field of tension between local everyday life and political discourses. Everyday actions were studied in relation to the life experiences and the rhetoric on sustainable development. Empirical themes included mobilities and means of transport, work and leisure time practices, and experiences of time and tempo.

3 This statement was made by a spokesperson for the Green Party in a local Swedish newspaper, *Trelleborgs Allehanda*, published on 7 November 2013.

4 This discursive opinion of the 'evil car' has been challenged by the electric car as a 'hopeful saver'.

5 As people tend to identify with several positions, it can be assumed that social trust in the nation, the state, and politicians tends to be rather floating and moveable.

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