



Beautiful scenery, but no jobs

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Weak signals from the Finnish countryside

1

OUR FUTURE will be greatly shaped by the widely recognised megatrends of globalisation, the ageing of the population and urbanisation. But change is never a straightforward process. Even the most powerful dynamics of change are often offset by counteracting forces that buck the pervasive trend. Sometimes these counter-currents are reflected in weak signals – signs of new changes that seem to contradict mainstream concepts and trends.

The Finnish countryside is today sending out such weak signals. There is new demand for the countryside, which could change our conceptions related to issues such as well-being and sustainability. What expectations do Finns have about their countryside? What are the countryside's attractions? How can we interpret this? How can Finland's rural areas meet these expectations? This report aims to answer such questions by bringing together some of the key findings of various reports conducted as part of Sitra's Landmarks Programme during 2010 and 2011.

New demand feeding optimism

2

Optimism about the Finnish countryside has increased lately. This new faith in the future is based on new demand. Individuals are increasingly seeking well-being from the countryside, while at the same time society is looking to rural areas for new solutions in the context of building a global green economy

THE COUNTRYSIDE IS A STATE OF MIND. For Finns, the countryside signifies the opposite of a modern city – a place where crops are grown and livestock are raised in a setting that combines fields, lakes and forests. These were the summarised findings of both the Landmarks Barometer survey of Finns' images of the countryside, and a discourse analysis of media representations of the countryside.

The countryside gives people a sense of happiness and control over their lives.

To Finns the countryside represents both positive and negative aspects of traditional life. It preserves a genuinely unrushed lifestyle, but is at the same time so remote from events in the modern world that new developments only arrive there after a considerable time-lag. Only a third of Finns would connect the idea of "modern" with the countryside. Similarly people find it hard to associate the countryside with new innovative ways of working, or envisage it as a location for technological businesses.

Finns nevertheless seem to see the countryside as a good place to live – since almost 90% of the Landmarks Barometer respondents agreed with this idea. Spending time in the countryside is seen as an antidote to the demands of modern working life. It is a place where stress vanishes. (Figure 1)

The countryside gives people a sense of happiness and control over their lives. More than 90% of Finns see the countryside as an attractive environment. It is also perceived as being genuine, and having a sense of community. It thus produces the kinds of well-being that Finns may feel they lack. Regardless of the ages of respondents, the countryside is also seen as representing freedom.

Pleasant and genuine, but also remote from goings-on in the modern world. These images of the countryside to some extent seem contradictory.

The idyllic images highlighted in these surveys are not necessarily a great asset for the countryside. They could create a perception of the countryside as a rustic, stress-free haven where no one could imagine new modern professions arising. The downhill-skiing resorts located in rural Finland are seen by Finns as urban places, and not truly part of the countryside – as nine out of ten of the Landmarks Barometer respondents agreed.

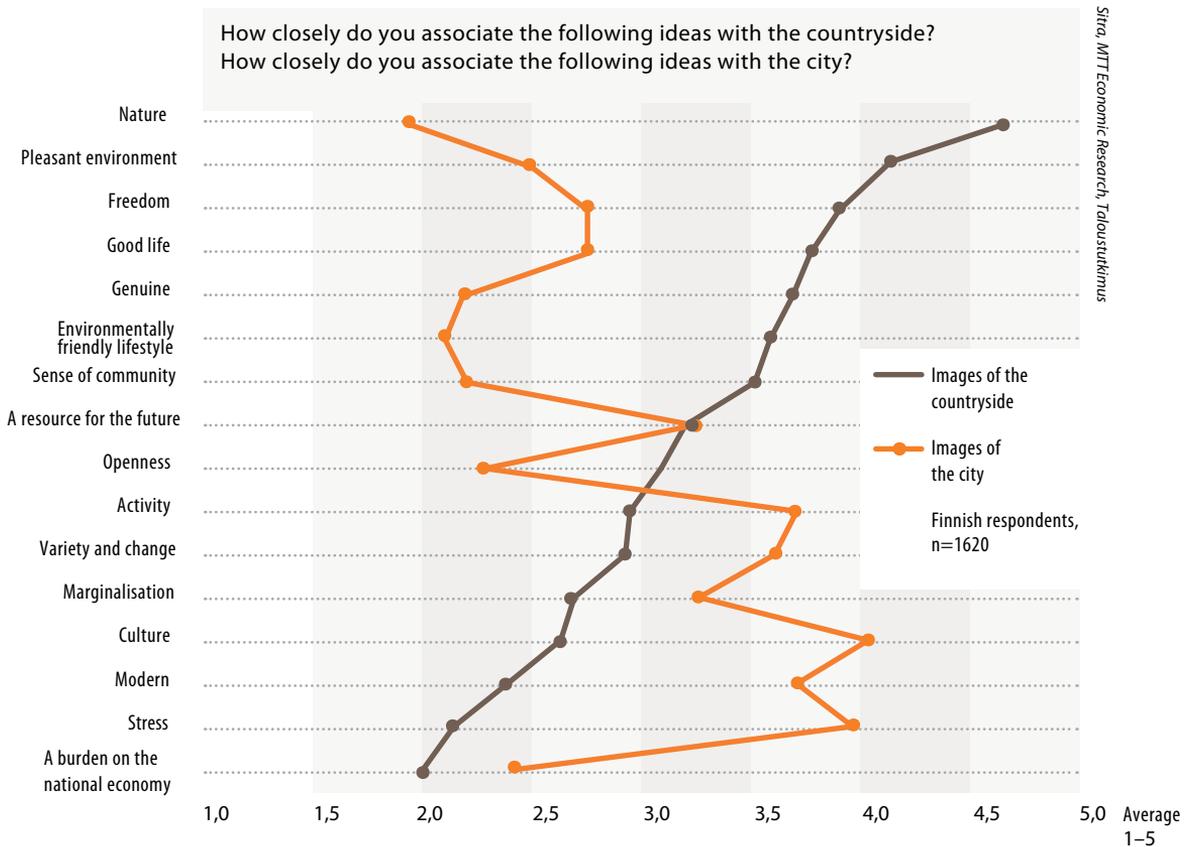


Figure 1. Images of the countryside and the city. (Source: Landmarks Barometer 2011)

New demand for the countryside

Optimism about the countryside is increasing. About twice as many people believe that the importance of the countryside will grow in the future, compared to those who pessimistically feel that the countryside will decline in importance. As recently as two years ago, there were as many pessimists as optimists on this issue. Moreover, only a third of Finns believe that rural depopulation will further worsen, compared to two-thirds just two years ago. This optimism is most pronounced in the countryside itself, but people who call themselves city-dwellers also seem to feel that the countryside will become a more essential part of Finland. (Figure 2)

Indications of the origins of this optimism about the countryside can be seen both in the nature of Finns' hopes concerning the future of the countryside, and in the visions of businesses and decision-makers concerning the future development of various kinds of business opportunities in rural regions.

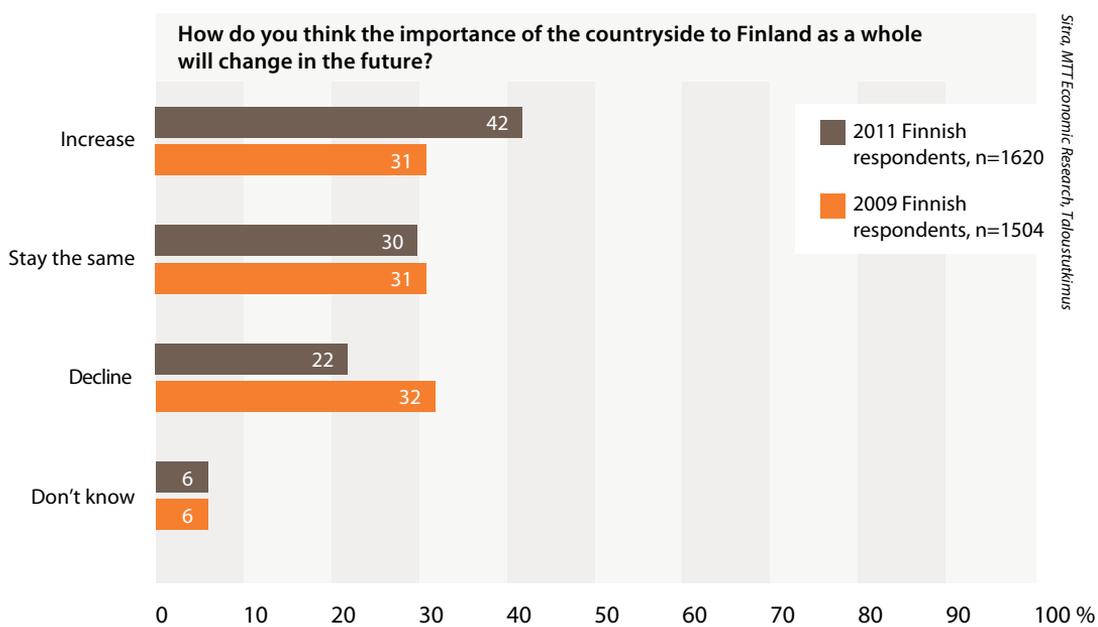


Figure 2. Optimism about the countryside is increasing.
(Source: Landmarks Barometers 2009 and 2011)

Finns' overwhelmingly most common desire concerning the future of the countryside is that organic and local foods should become more widely available (64% of respondents). The next strongest desire was that the countryside should become more accessible to everyone. The third most commonly mentioned factor was nature – with more than half of respondents desiring an increased appreciation of nature. About half of respondents agreed with a statement that the countryside should benefit from increasingly diverse business activity related to the growth of the green economy by 2025.

Such desires correspond well to the wishes of businesses, decision-makers and experts on rural issues, concerning opportunities for future developments in the countryside. Enhanced opportunities are particularly expected to arise in two areas: recreational services and experiences in rural settings; and green care services related to well-being. Other areas where successful future developments are expected, according to the findings of the Landmarks Barometer, include energy production, the refining of different kinds of biomass, and mining.

On the basis of the findings of Sitra's reports, two kinds of demand now face the Finnish countryside: the demand for well-being derived from rural environments; and the demand for solutions contributing to the development of the green economy. Finns' views concerning the countryside are changing. Most of all, their conceptions of the factors behind a good life are changing. New solutions are additionally needed in the contexts of global climate problems and dwindling natural resources. The countryside can respond to both individual needs and global problems.

Individual consumption and well-being

3

Consumers have taken a new interest in the countryside. Trend-setters are seeking out idyllic rural settings to give their lives balance, attracted by the countryside's greatest assets – nature and peace. The countryside has many of the elements needed for a good life.

TREND-SETTING CONSUMERS HAVE ALREADY BEEN ATTRACTED BY THE CHARMS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE. Factors promoting well-being, including space, peace, recreation and unhurriedness, came out on top when Finns were asked in the Landmark Barometer surveys what the countryside means in their lives today, and what it might mean to them in ten years time. (Figure 3)

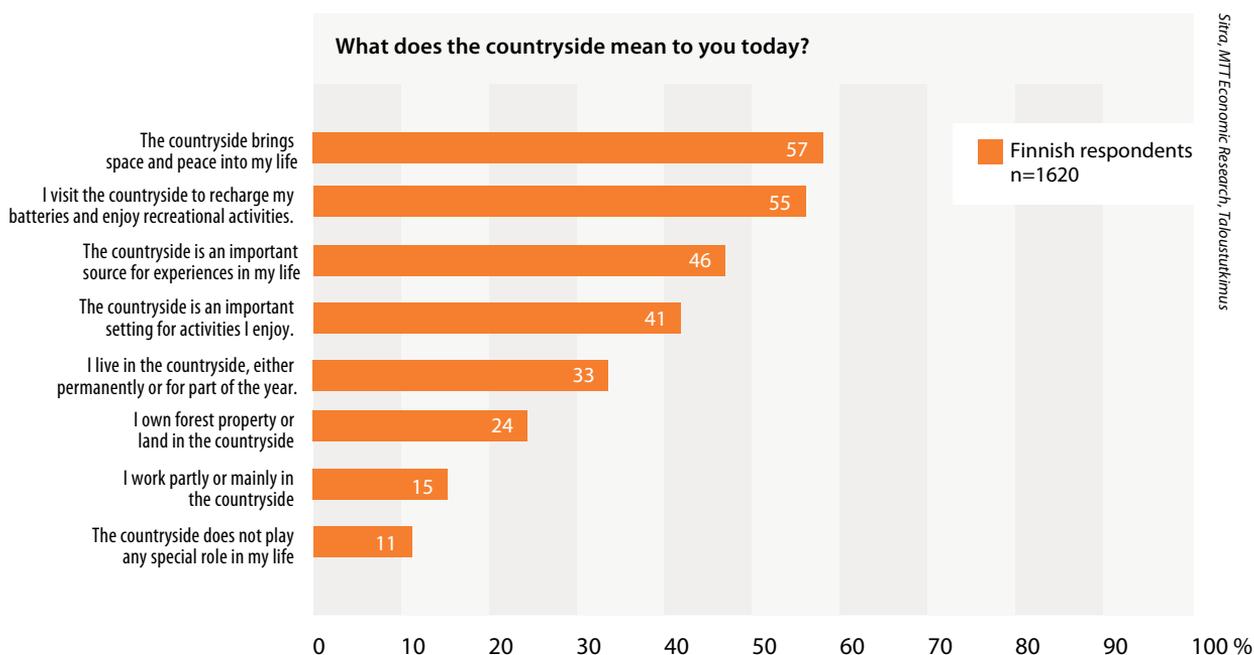


Figure 3. The importance of the countryside to Finnish survey respondents today. (Source: Landmarks Barometer 2011)

Future attractions

- *living rural settings*
- *sense of community*
- *local food at hand*
- *ecological natural environment*
- *ecological energy solutions*
- *sufficient services*
- *functioning network connections*
- *sustainable transportation*
- *leisurely pace of life and privacy*
- *cherishing local cultures*

Source: Hienonen 2011

The countryside also means activities: about 40% of all Finns want to enjoy activities and realise their dreams in the countryside. For one in three, the countryside is significant as a place to live, either permanently or for part of the year. One in four Finns also felt that owning forests or other property in the countryside is important to them. Only one in ten respondents felt that the countryside plays no special role in their lives.

The results of the Barometer Surveys confirm the findings of a trend analysis conducted for Sitra by Kati Hienonen, which indicate that consumers are getting interested in the countryside in a new way. The consumption trend-setters interviewed by Hienonen are seeking something to balance their daily routines, and they see ethics, ecological sustainability and genuineness as important. The characteristic peaceful natural settings of the countryside attract such consumers, who are known as LOHAS consumers due to their interest in "Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability". The roots of LOHAS consumption are decades old, but today this kind of consumption with an ecological emphasis has become widespread, and businesses have responded to this new demand by providing products and services that correspond to these green values.

Hienonen's analysis identifies several groups of trend-setting consumers who seek a good life in the countryside. WLAN roamers appreciate freedom and independence. People working in the creative and IT sectors are particularly keen to set themselves up as entrepreneurs from a rural base, if this is made easy in practical terms. Stylish slow consumers' choices combine efficiency and pleasure in a search for eco-luxury. They are keen consumers of local and organic foods, who also appreciate opportunities for outdoor recreation and activities. Organic urbanites are keen on urban farming, cycling to work, and other ways to improve the quality of urban life. They also enjoy local tourism.

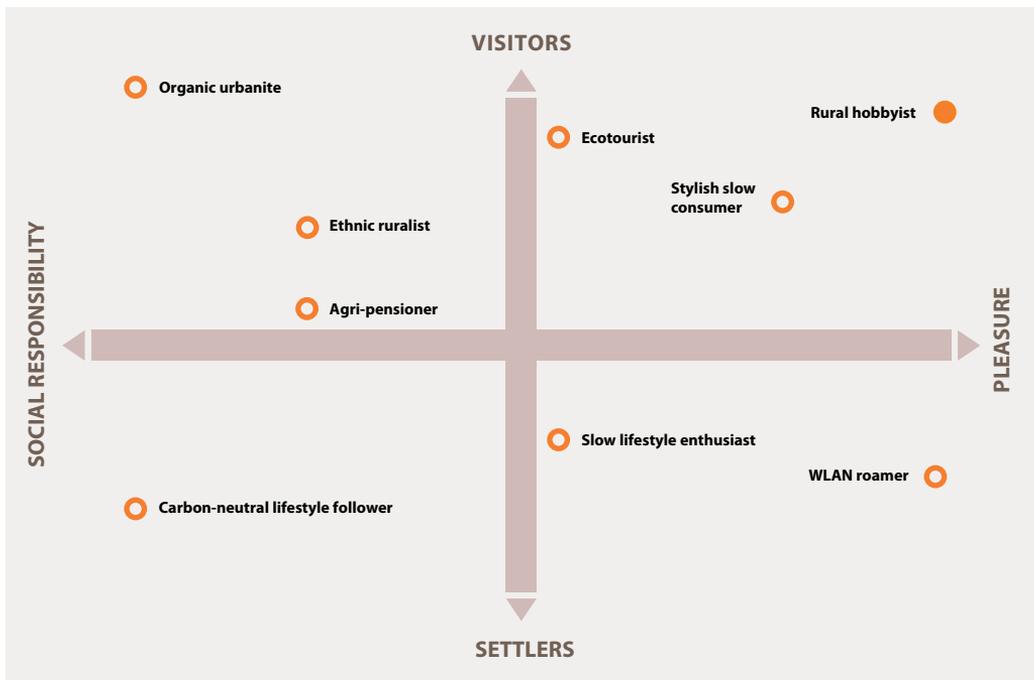


Figure 4. Trend-setting consumers in the rural context. (Source: Hienonen 2011)

Ecotourists are prepared to stay for longer periods in rural holiday destinations. They see local traditions, specialities and food cultures as important elements of rural lifestyles. Uncontaminated food and healthy lifestyles attract slow lifestyle enthusiasts who desire more leisure time to achieve balance in their lives. Agri-pensioners are a wealthy group able to take advantage of residential well-being and care services.

Ethnic ruralists enjoy meetings between cultures. They seek a sense of security and a meaning to their lives from the community. Rural hobbyists are keen to exploit accessible and favourable amenities for their preferred activities in their leisure-time destinations. Carbon neutral lifestyle followers are opinion-shapers who seek to minimise the ecological impacts of their homes and their everyday lives. (Figure 4)

The demands created by these different groups of consumers can be met in many ways. But other factors in addition to scenic rural settings are clearly essential.

A well-being surplus

Finns perceive factors including health, security, freedom, justice, a pleasant occupation and a convenient and stress-free everyday life as the most important elements of a good life. It is in these same issues that people experience a “well-being deficit”, in the sense that their desires concerning these considerations are not fulfilled to a level corresponding to their importance. However, levels of satisfaction with these lifestyle aspects today apparently increase progressively for people living in progressively more rural residential environments. (Figures 5a and 5b)

The greatest differences between people living in rural and urban areas concern opportunities to enjoy natural settings, the material prerequisites for a good life, and opportunities for recreation and leisure activities. But in these cases perceived levels of importance and levels of satisfaction nevertheless correspond well, since for example opportunities for people to enjoy their hobbies are not as favourable in the countryside as in cities, rural residents do not rate the importance of these considerations as highly as city-dwellers. People living in the countryside do not necessarily expect urban levels of services, and they have chosen to make their home in line with their wider lifestyle priorities.

This reflects how the levels of well-being experienced in practice do not correspond to the picture of well-being given by statistical indicators. Even if the levels of employment, income and accessible services in remote rural areas are poorer, local residents may still feel they have a good life. Living in the countryside is a choice – and for increasing numbers of people a wider lifestyle choice.

Young people are starting to see the attractions of the countryside.

This finding reflects a debate that has been going on in Finland recently about a need for moderation in life, and the real importance of work and consumption. The constant striving for material gain has been questioned. The significance of leisure time, human relationships and physical exercise in contributing to our happiness show how the countryside can be central to happiness policies. The countryside has a kind of “well-being surplus” that is sufficient to benefit visitors as well as rural residents.

Young people are starting to see the attractions of the countryside. According to this year’s Landmarks Barometer, one in five Finnish 15–24-year-olds believe they could be working partly or mainly in the countryside in ten years, even though only about 5% of them today work there. Many also envisage moving to the countryside, since about 35% of this age group believe they could be mainly or partly living in the countryside in ten years time, though only about 20% of them live there today. This indicates that it is not only middle-aged people originating from the countryside who wish to move there – but also young urbanites who see an unspoilt environment and other aspects of the countryside as factors behind the kind of good life they desire. Many people working in creative occupations would also choose to live in pleasant rural settings, so the scenery really does make a difference.

According to the Landmarks Barometer, as many Finns would like to move to a more rural setting than their present home as to a more urban environment. The process of urbanisation may have passed its peak in Finland – at least in terms of attitudes if not in numerical terms as yet. The weak

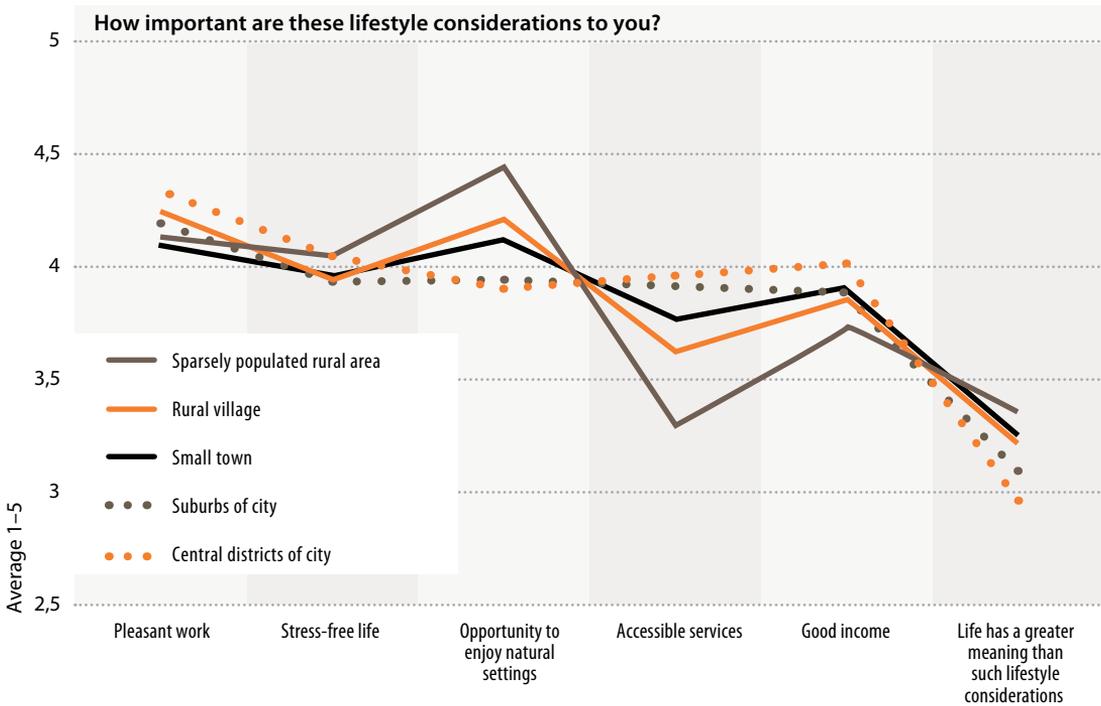


Figure 5a. The importance of different aspects of lifestyle to people living in different kinds of residential environment (Source: Landmarks Barometer 2011)

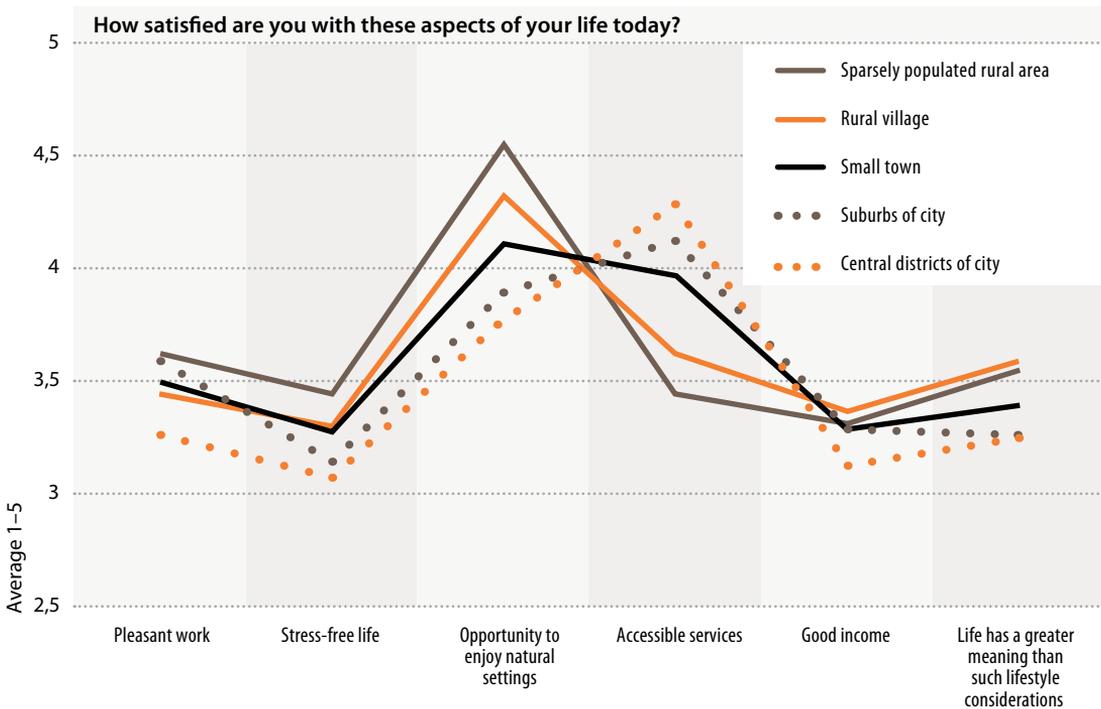


Figure 5b. Satisfaction levels concerning different aspects of lifestyle for people living in different kinds of residential environment (Source: Landmarks Barometer 2011)

signals from the countryside are getting stronger, and also influencing the future visions of city-dwellers.

People will move to the countryside if they can find jobs there. The countryside should not therefore be marketed only as a place to live, and the opportunities it holds as a place to work or start a business should be reassessed – particularly from the viewpoint of young urban residents. Young people should not be made to adopt traditional ways of living and working if they do not wish to. There is no need for them to follow in the footsteps of their forefathers. New technologies are needed as well as pitchforks. Road and telecommunications links must function well to enable people moving into the countryside to build up their own networks. The newcomers must also be given the space they need.

Remote but still available – new ways of working

More and more Finns are organising their lives around two or more base locations, living, working, enjoying leisure activities and requiring services in various localities.

They adopt this kind of multi-locality in an attempt to bring more of the elements of a good life into their own lives, including unhurriedness, variety and meaning. This kind of mobile lifestyle centred on more than one base location is particularly significant for the countryside, since it enables the development of new networks and creates potential for innovation.

A recently produced scenario envisages that multi-locality will increase, reinforcing the green local economy considerably. At the same time people will shift from a life of searching for experiences to a more meaningful life where experiences are not disposable goods. In this kind of world a new working culture would take shape, with the countryside playing a central role.

Multi-locality

Multi-locality, the concept of living and working in multiple locations, is becoming more widespread as more people choose to spend their time in several meaningful locations in their lives, and repeatedly move between them. This may be a matter of free choice or privilege, or it could be forced on them by circumstances. This mobility may be linked to people's housing situation, the nature of their work, their leisure time preferences, or their social relations.

- Adapted from a definition published by the Centre for Tourism Studies at Savonlinna in 2007.

Source: Hiltunen et al. 2007, ref. Haukkala (ed.) 2011

Businesses based in the countryside can also hire remote employees based in cities. Remote work does not only involve employees heading off to the countryside, since well functioning data communications networks also make workers based in cities available to businesses with rural locations. This can enliven rural livelihoods, since, for instance, elite designers or technology specialists need not live in close proximity to a production plant, but can instead contribute to the work of a rurally based business from wherever they wish to be based.

The Landmarks Barometer indicates, however, that young people do not favour conventional remote work, and indeed not everyone is keen to combine their workplace and holiday location with the risk that their working hours would eat into their leisure time. This means that the countryside is unlikely to become a remote branch office for urbanites.

Data communications networks are nevertheless crucial, since holiday residents and other people passing through will require the same kinds of communications channels that they use in cities. The countryside will form part of global networks for both economic and cultural reasons. The old idea that cities represent culture and the countryside lacks culture is becoming outdated as networks spread beyond geographical boundaries.

Businesses based in the countryside can also hire remote employees based in cities.

Multi-locality is on the increase, and the green local economy is growing stronger.

Local choices for work and the economy

Better data communications networks today enable remote working in many fields. This particularly benefits rural regions. A new kind of green local economy is crystallizing around Finland as consumers understand the significance of the green economy and local solutions in the context of mitigating climate change. Increasing opportunities for remote work and the movement of people attracted by rural locations away from growth centres are both supporting the dispersal of workplaces and the population. Most significantly, living in the countryside is perceived as being meaningful, and the culture of consumption associated with cities is no longer the preference of the majority.

Source: Pöyry Management Consulting 2010

Local solutions to global problems

4

The better availability of organic and local food is among the things Finns most desire from the countryside. Ecological lifestyles and locally produced renewable energy are particularly valued by young people. The countryside is ideally equipped to make the most of the new opportunities presented by the bioeconomy. There is plenty of demand for local solutions that address global problems.

THE GREEN ECONOMY LIES CLOSE AT HAND. The scope of the demands facing the countryside is not limited to farming and tourism, although there is a need for services in the countryside related to the good life people desire. About half of those surveyed in the Landmarks Barometer would like to see new kinds of businesses within the green economy growing in the countryside. In this way rural areas can respond to global needs in the context of mitigating climate change. The growth of the new green economy illustrates Finns' ability to envisage new ways to utilise the countryside. Their perceptions of the countryside are not limited to images of idyllic rural scenes, and this enables it to develop in new directions.

The better availability of organic and local food was among the things Finns said they would most desire from the countryside by 2025. Well over 60% of all respondents expressed this desire, and the percentage was higher still among the youngest age-group, 15–24-year-olds. This illustrates the new political associations of food, which is no longer just a raw material for feeding our bodies, since today considerable attention is given to the aesthetic and ecological impacts of food production. The related demands evidently remain unsatisfied, since ecologically conscious consumers in cities have begun to grow their own produce, cultivating their own small landholdings using the methods they favour. The desire for organic food among young people and supporters of the Greens is reflected in this idea of becoming a small-scale farmer and contributing to improvements in food production.

The commercial utilisation of rural resources is a natural element of young people's future dreams. People may also find careers in the use of local renewable energy sources. There is a need for new, simple and economic means to produce heat and electricity communally from renewable resources. The surveyed 15-24-year-olds gave a higher priority to renewable energy, local solutions within the green economy, and ecological lifestyles than older age-groups, when asked in the Barometer to list the most burning rural development issues.

In the future the countryside will not only live from conventional crops and timber. Researchers have also been looking at other resources, including fungi. Mushrooms and other fungi can be used to produce medicines and innovative materials, including durable building and packaging materials made of chitin derived from cellulose through fungal processes. This “myco-economy” could well bring new jobs to provincial regions, and perhaps even to localities where spacious premises are available following production cuts in the paper industry.

The increasing use of wild berries, for instance in medicinal and cosmetic products, would even more obviously bring new jobs to the countryside. Developments in the bioeconomy might also lead to the utilisation of previously underused natural resources, such as algae, in the chemicals industry and other sectors. The consequent new products, derived from local natural raw materials, could replace the hazardous or otherwise problematic substances in use today. The rechanneling of funding for research and product development to encourage the more diverse use of natural resources would also be a favourable strategy for the countryside.

Utilising local material cycles

Getting new technological innovations onto the market is a slower and more complex process than exploiting the demand for services related to scenic settings or well-being. Little is yet known about the new opportunities the bioeconomy could bring to the countryside. These opportunities do not spontaneously become evident in discussions on the internet or in surveys of consumers’ desires.

In the bioeconomy, the countryside will not have to be satisfied with the role of merely producing natural resources and raw materials. Distributed solutions for the bioeconomy can be devised in the shape of small-scale bio-production facilities that both obtain their raw materials and distribute their products on a local scale. The distributed bioeconomy can utilise local material cycles, with raw materials, i.e. various forms of biomass, being used where they are found. This reduces both transportation costs, and the related harmful emissions. A new set of replicable small-scale facilities could spring up alongside the large, centralised industrial systems typical of industries based on the use of fossil raw materials.

At best, these facilities will function as a local network with their by-products utilised as raw materials by neighbouring plants to enable local material flows to operate as efficiently as possible within closed cycles wherever feasible. Agricultural by-products and wastes, for instance, can be used to produce biogas and other biofuels, with residual materials utilizable as organic fertiliser. This will enable the recovery and local recycling of the vital phosphorus nutrients that are bound up in plant material. Local organic fertilisers can then be used instead of imported chemical fertilisers.

The whole issue of fertilisers is crucial, because phosphorus reserves are dwindling, and there is a need to rethink the whole chemistry of agriculture. Using locally produced nutrients would also reduce transportation, creating benefits in the shape of reduced costs for farmers, and a smaller carbon footprint for agriculture, on top of benefits related to nutrient recycling. The resulting organic

fertiliser can then be used in the production of local, organic foods, creating another example of how one production process can facilitate other favourable forms of production.

Such linkages build up confidence in the scope for new kinds of livelihoods. With energy, fertilisers and other products derived from biomass produced in small, interlinked facilities around the countryside, denser clusters of new jobs can be created. If facilities using biomass to generate energy can at the same time provide residuals usable as raw materials for other kinds of production, as described above, the advantages of the bioeconomy become clearer as employment opportunities are compounded. In the distributed bioeconomy the dominant ethos is no longer “nimby” (not in my backyard), but instead “pimby” (preferably in my backyard). People will like to have such beneficial and problem-free facilities near their homes, for the local jobs and local products they will create.

The dispersed distribution of different kinds of production facilities will clearly create more local workplaces. This in turn means that more services will be required locally, and a positive spiral of local development is generated. City-dwellers dreaming of the chance to move to the countryside will get a chance to live the good life in the setting of a rural village. But to ensure that the countryside maintains its attractiveness, new solutions will have to be developed in accordance with people’s desires related to well-being and ecological considerations.

The bioeconomy

The concept of the bioeconomy encompasses all forms of production that utilise renewable biomass materials generated by living organisms through assimilation. All raw materials obtained from plants can be considered as biomass. The bioeconomy also encompasses the productive utilisation of biological processes involving enzymes and bacteria. In the bioeconomy care is also taken to safeguard the natural ecosystems that produce biomass by working eco-efficiently, using energy and materials sparingly, and recycling wherever possible. The bioeconomy is a response to the global problem of climate change caused by the current fossil economy.

Well-being for the whole of Finland

5

Previously prevalent images will vanish as people start to see the countryside in a new light. Many changes are already possible today, but it is unlikely that everyone's desires for the countryside will be realised. The development of rurally based businesses is vital to the future of the countryside. There is also plenty of scope for designing new services that will use the countryside's assets to build success stories.

EXPECTATIONS AND HOPES DO NOT ALWAYS COINCIDE. The Landmarks Barometer reveals interesting contradictions, since Finns do not always believe that their desires relating to the countryside will actually be realised. Accessibility is the issue that concerns them most. Although just over half of all respondents wish to see the countryside accessible to everyone by 2025, less than a third believe that this will actually happen. Even fewer believe that local solutions will provide a viable alternative to centralisation: less than half of the 44% of respondents who see this as desirable. (Figure 6)

The increased availability of organic and local foods is widely desired – and also confidently expected. But at the same time more than half of the Barometer's respondents believe that agriculture will continue to become more intensive, although only a fifth hope that this will happen.

These responses reflect genuine demands. If people hope that businesses will grow in the countryside – such as tourist attractions or well-being services – they will probably be willing to go there to use these services. But the contradictions described above reflect a lack of confidence in rural policies, which may have considered threats and defended interests, but not done so much to consider opportunities presented by global trends. Little consideration has also been given to the ways the countryside could create well-being for the whole of Finland. Future rural policies must be demand-centred to ensure that Finns' desires concerning the countryside can be fulfilled. The emphasis must be shifted away from defending the interests of specific groups to the interest of the whole country.

There is little focus as yet on the countryside as an environment for business. A discourse analysis conducted by Alasuutari & Alasuutari of press coverage revealed that the countryside is most closely associated with politics (60% of the articles studied), but also to some extent with equality, environmental issues, health and well-being, and art and culture. The development of businesses will however be vital if it is assumed that the future success of the countryside must be based on demand

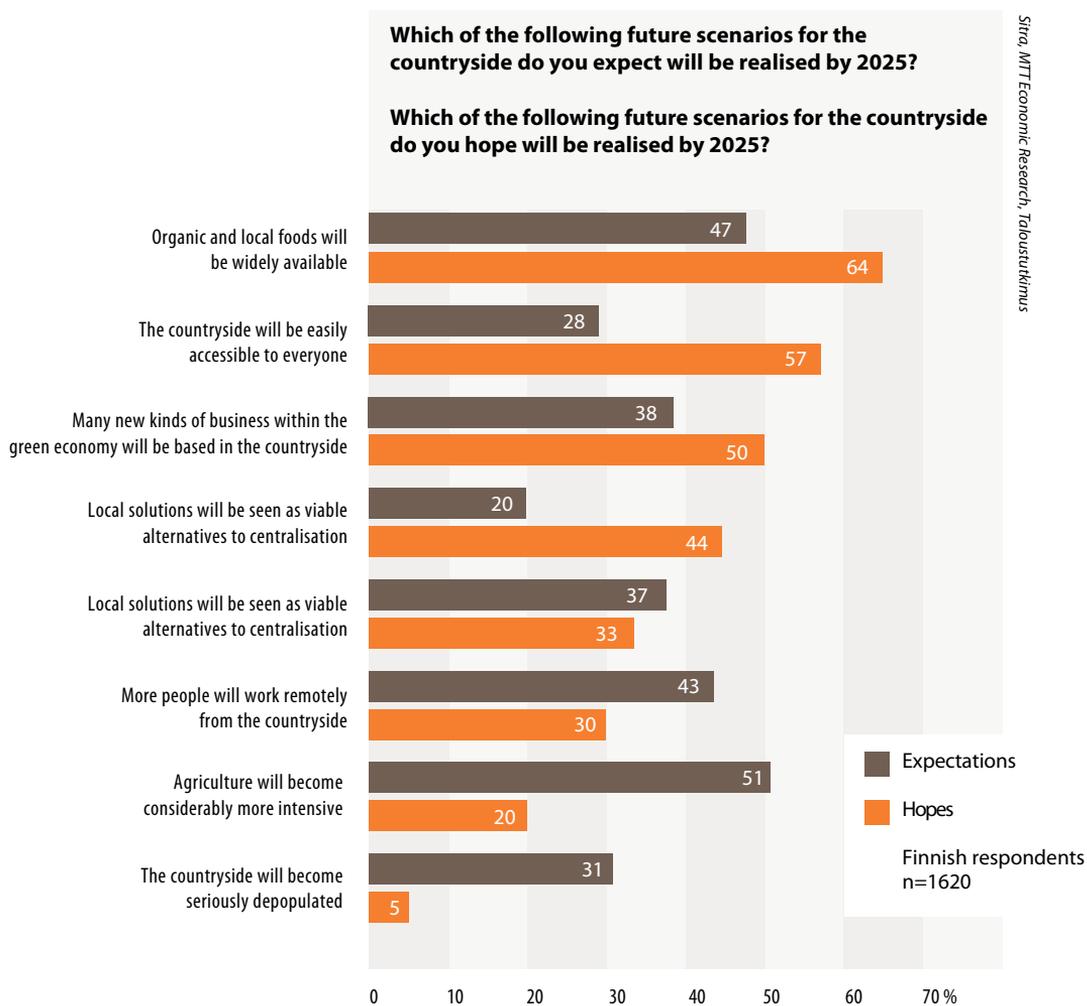


Figure 6. Desires and expectations related to the future of the countryside (Source: Landmarks Barometer 2011)

from outside the countryside itself. Such success cannot be achieved by first defining suitable businesses for the countryside, and then supporting only them. Focusing on typicalities does not promote innovation. Instead, the focus should be on creatively shaping new products from the countryside's resources. Service design processes can help to make the countryside's assets into success stories.

Service design processes can help to make the countryside's assets into success stories.

New states of mind

The countryside will not remain unchanged, and it does not need to. Rural areas can provide many people with exactly the kinds of jobs and homes they have always wanted. By enabling networked and sustainable lifestyles, the countryside can meet consumer-citizens' need to live a better life. The industrialised Finland of the 20th century with its structures and ways of thinking can become a more human-centred and nature-based country in the 21st century, with rural and urban areas no longer seen as opposites, but as complementing each other. After all, as many as 40% of Finns feel that they have both an urban and a rural identity. Although the countryside can in many ways be described as a state of mind more than a place, its locality should not be forgotten. It is not sufficient for the countryside itself to be only this kind of abstract perception. It must also continue to be a place where things happen. Its vitality cannot be based on good will or financed exclusively through subsidies; and it must instead be built up by enabling businesses and people to thrive there. Jobs will remain in the countryside if steps are taken to address challenges such as climate change and the increased pace and mobility of today's lifestyles. This can help to promote sustainable development both in Finland and globally.

In a sense the future of the countryside is already here, in the shape of weak signals, smaller and larger signs of change, and new hopes. Many new developments are already possible. Aesthetic services based on natural resources can already be offered, and the same is true for well-being services. The ways we use natural resources are being reassessed. People can work remotely from the countryside at least for some periods of time. The conversion of biomass into energy has already begun, distributed production solutions for the bioeconomy are being planned, and organic farming is today more viable than ever. But the most promising factor of all is that a new generation is taking an interest in living and working in the countryside. The human resources exist to make new rurally based businesses work.

Future rural policies must be demand-centred to ensure that Finns' desires concerning the countryside can be fulfilled.

OPPOSITES

outdated ↔ *modern*

unchanging ↔ *changing*

old ↔ *new*

remote ↔ *near*

similar ↔ *different*

farming and forestry ↔ *the bioeconomy*

production ↔ *services*

THE SEEDS OF NEW JOBS – factors behind demand

- 1 Cultural and natural environments*
- 2 The sustainable use of natural resources*
- 3 New technologies*
- 4 Eco-efficient homes and transportation*
- 5 A renaissance in primary production*
- 6 Distributed production*

The future of the countryside is already here, in the shape of weak signals, smaller and larger signs of change, and new hopes. Many new developments are already possible.

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Riitta Nieminen-Sundell is a sociologist interested in past and future trends who is currently specialising in studying ongoing changes in western lifestyles, and particularly new trends in working life and consumption. Nieminen-Sundell herself dreams of living in rural Finland, though she is presently based in England. She has previously worked as a foresight specialist for Nokia and Sitra.

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