Rural Housing Market Hotspots and Footloose In-migrants

Eva Andersson

Dept. of Human Geography, Stockholm University, S-106 91, Stockholm, Sweden
e-mail: Eva.Andersson@humangeo.su.se

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Abstract

This study applies a housing market perspective on hotspots in northern, rural Sweden. It uses the concept 'hotspot' defined as places with rising house prices and in-migration of households with higher than average education and income. The focus rests on three places having the ideal characteristics of being a rural hotspot, located in three Swedish northern municipalities. These places are explored through ten interviews with 'footloose' households. The aim is to explore factors that shape rural housing market hotspots using stories from hotspot population households. The first reason for this study is that regional planning requests understanding to develop different regions and places for the future. Here the origins of hotspots are explored to understand the spread and sustainability of such developments. Second, housing markets in the countryside are more scantily investigated than in urban areas. In the unbalanced housing market with higher prices and limited supply in the urban areas hotspots in rural areas are not following traditional housing market theories, they are rather anomalies. Interviews with a specific footloose group of recent hotspot in-migrants are used in combination with knowledge about the housing market. Results show that although hotspots are locations with beautiful nature most households moved there because of finding jobs. The three areas have the 'extra' nature values and high status required for being a hotspot and a location for commuting to larger labor markets. The 'footloose' non-return migrants did find nice, cheaper housing that made them chose the area despite being strangers to the place. I suggest hotspots are the rare combination of footloose migrants and special places which make them difficult to develop elsewhere.

Keywords: housing market, migration, hotspots, rural, Sweden

Introduction

This is a study from a housing market perspective on hotspots in northern, rural Sweden. The northern counties' rural areas are normally portrayed as vast, forested areas with derelict and deserted houses and few possibilities for people to find jobs. Lately the successful mining industry in need of employees suffer from this long, ongoing trend in that they cannot find new staff or even housing in the northernmost parts of Sweden. Despite the mining industry, the general pattern of decline in population and economic activity accompanied by a housing market on the fall is the prevailing picture. In this sense rural housing market hotspots are rising against the trend. Rural housing market hotspots can be seen as anomalies and therefore worth exploring to increase understanding of rural housing markets and new possibilities of development.

In this study hotspots are defined as places with rising house prices and in-migration of households with higher than average education and income (Magnusson Turner, forthcoming 2012). This definition of hotspots is partly influenced by the now established tradition of thinking that educated inhabitants are important for creativity and innovation and the attraction of a place (Florida 2002). The concept hotspot is not more common in housing market studies (see for example Lepczyk *et al.*, 2007; Wang & Varady, 2005) than elsewhere, but is used to illustrate an active area, an area with high density of a phenomenon. The focus of the study will rest on three places, more or less consisting of the ideal characteristics of being a housing market hotspot, located in the Swedish municipalities of Nordmaling, Sandviken and Timrå. These will be investigated through ten interviews with footloose, in-migrating households concerning their housing history and their current housing and residential environment. Footloose denotes that the person has never lived in the area, has no family, friends or relatives there and is prepared to move on should there be changes in work or family life.

The aim is to explore factors that shape rural housing market hotspots using stories from hotspot population households. That is, a population with higher than average income, education and recent in-migrants with no former experience of the place. In the study, this described, footloose population is seen as vital for hotspots. If return migration is about evenly spread in the northern counties' rural areas, then the in-migration by unexpected footloose migrants makes all the difference and forms the basis for hotspots. The hypothesis is thus that the group of 'footloose' households is necessary for the emergence and development of hotspots. The preferences for a place are also forming the situation and image of the local housing market. The place becomes popular according to Bijker and Haartsen (2011). To understand what is 'extra' in these hotspots interviews are used to find the in-movers ideas.

Why then, are hotspots in a northern and sparsely populated part of a European country important? Firstly, regional planning needs knowledge in the matter of how to develop different regions and areas for the future. Hotspots are key to understand possible ways of development. This will include refining place-marketing used by municipalities to increase

attractiveness (Niedomysl, 2004). Also, there are several questions connected to the aim such as; what *households* if any, will live in the countryside and in hotspots? What are their needs, e.g. welfare needs? And when hotspots are found, what factors are needed to help spread such developments into adjacent or other areas? Why do hotspots occur, and how are they to be sustained into the future? This study will complement such knowledge (compare a Norwegian project, Regjeringen, 2012).

Secondly, *housing markets* in the countryside are scantily investigated compared to urban areas (Magnusson & Turner, 2003), and especially housing markets (prices and building) in rural areas together with the rural in-migration (Gkartzios & Scott, 2010). This is despite the rather strong Swedish focus on the rural in-movers (Amcoff, 2000; Amcoff *et al.*, 1995; Hjort, 2009; Lundholm & Malmberg, 2006; Niedomysl, 2008; Niedomysl & Hansen, 2010; Stenbacka, 2001). In many countries including Sweden the housing market is unbalanced; prices are higher and supply is limited in the urban areas. In this way hotspots in the countryside are not following traditional housing market theories about growth and decline; they are rather anomalies. Rural housing should not be hotspots in the housing market. The approach here is to explain and understand the prevalence and development of hotspots through housing histories of recent hotspot in-migrants. In their stories lays understanding of the flourishing of the place and local housing market.

In Sweden as in most other countries the general, national migration pattern over time is that of urbanization (Hjort, 2009; Håkansson, 2000). There have been waves of counter urbanization such as the so called 'green wave' in the 1970s (Wastenson *et al.*, 1991) but overall the urban population is increasing. In virtually all of the sparsely populated areas there is instead a population decline. There are exceptions such as bigger cities along the coast to the Baltic Sea in northern Sweden but they do not change the overall pattern. Hotspots in the countryside are anomalies to traditional housing market theories, anomalies which to my knowledge are not studied in the Swedish context apart from former research in research project connected to this study¹.

The *movers* to the countryside has however been analyzed in the rich Swedish research tradition, both through interviews (Stenbacka, 2001) and with quantitative methods how they and their dwellings are dispersed (Amcoff, 2000), and what they prefer when moving to the countryside (Niedomysl, 2008; Niedomysl & Hansen, 2010) as well as how this migration is selective (Hjort, 2009). Also specific groups have been studied in the Swedish context such as families with children (Tillberg, 2001) and elderly (Lundholm & Malmberg, 2009). Also immigrants in the countryside have been of recent research interest (Hedberg & Carmo, 2012).

Apart from the movers themselves and their preferences; earlier research with concepts such as counter-urbanization (Champion, 2001; Mitchell, 2004) and rural gentrification (Glass, 1964; Phillips, 1993) are sources of inspiration to understand the phenomenon of hotspots. Similarly

¹ This research is part of the project Hunting for hotspots. Unequal urbanization in the Swedish countryside, financed by FORMAS, a Swedish research council.

concepts like rural in-migration as well as rural housing markets are useful to advance the specific research of rural housing market hotspots.

However this is not a study to bring forward the overall research on migration choices and preferences for the countryside, instead this study focuses on hotspots and how they can be understood. That is, it is not a study of households' choices but rather of the particular rural hotspots as places for in-migration. Though, it would be unwise to overlook the extensive research made in Sweden and internationally on the issue of moves to the countryside to look for clues when understanding hotspots. At the same time, having said it is a study of rural housing markets, it is an interview study of *perceptions* and *performances* in that particular housing market.

There is a lot of time and energy spent on the definition of *rural* and in many Swedish studies the rural are the areas not covered by land with at least 200 people and shorter than 200 m between the houses (e.g. Amcoff, 2000). This is following the longstanding definition made by Statistics Sweden (2008, p. 4). With such an exact definition the hotspots in this study are not rural. Though, in this qualitative study the countryside and the rural are used as equivalents for an even larger definition including villages of more than 200 people. This is because it includes the idea of people moving down the urban hierarchy, away from the metropolitan regions and the biggest cities in Sweden (Korpi *et al.*, 2011). Rural in this study is used according to the interviewed who stated they lived in rural Sweden.

After this introduction follows a literature review of earlier research and a study that forms the basis for defining hotspots in this paper. Next there is a section on method and material followed by the results section presenting the hotspots and the interviewed inhabitants. Finally there is a concluding discussion.

Literature review; rural housing markets and in-migration

Rural housing market hotspots are anomalies in the otherwise for granted taken imbalance and divide between economically and population wise gaining urban areas and the loosing rural areas. Over the last hundred years or so this imbalance of gaining urban areas and loosing rural regions has been the prevailing picture (Håkansson, 2000; Magnusson & Turner, 2003). In the discipline of geography, which offers a limited but suitable perspective in this paper, there seems to be rural geography somewhat against economic geography. Rural geography conveys an appealing picture of a landscape that ought to be kept up with attractive life styles that should be fought for in regional planning (Hjort, 2009). Taken harshly the economic geography tells us that living in rural locations are not sustainable because there are no jobs, no agglomeration advantages or enough productivity (Storper, 2011). However, recently a new economic geography could give way for thinking of justice, efficiency and geography all at the same time (Storper, 2011). That is; to think about regional inequalities in a justice perspective in economic geography. A consequence of this might be increased interest for factors that make people live in the countryside. That is to combine the knowledge of preferences for living

in the countryside with financial possibilities through commuting and of economic development in rural places such as hotspots. As is shown qualitatively in this study increased commuting has made hotspots develop against the traditional picture of the rural as declining.

First below are earlier research on rural housing markets and secondly on rural in-migration. Thereafter one important study specifically on hotspots in northern Sweden is referred (Magnusson Turner, forthcoming 2012).

Rural housing markets

In any area with depopulation, the housing sector is inevitably touched; prices of owner occupied houses and cooperative flats are decreasing and vacant, rented flats is a problem (Magnusson & Turner, 2003). Since the problem of depopulation is especially evident in the five northern counties in Sweden the problem of decreasing prices of housing is a reality and some municipalities even have demolished multifamily dwellings to escape the problem of vacant flats. Another problem connected to the rented sector, often municipality owned, is that the remaining rented flats easily turns into social housing rather than public housing as the owner occupied housing is cheap (Magnusson & Turner, 2003). Although this is a fairly suitable description of areas outside the cities and towns in the northern parts of Sweden there are at the same time in-migration. The in-migration is not large and the in-movers are mostly middle-aged families or older people (Hjort & Malmberg, 2006; Magnusson & Turner, 2003). Some scholars have tried to picture the changing population in the countryside as both dispersion and concentration at the same time but at different geographical levels (Håkansson, 2000). Håkansson studied the redistribution between 1810 and 1990 in Sweden and found that in recent times the population is more dispersed at the macro level and more concentrated at local and regional level (2000).

As the characteristics of hotspots in this study include increasing population this is where a healthy housing market can be found. I will show below that the hotspot inhabitants are aware of their sometimes very local hotspot; the hotspot being a small area in a municipality.

Interestingly there are competing arguments concerning households and housing in the rural housing market. According to, as it seems, an English debate on rural housing there is an exclusion of low-income households from rural areas. This is partly caused by rural gentrification and partly by lack of rural affordable housing (Moore, 2011; Morgan & Satsangi, 2011). In an American study the opposite is stated, that is the rural areas are the best opportunities for poor families to find vacant housing as well as affordable housing (Clark, 2012). These families are not primarily drawn by labor market forces, rather by housing and amenities such as quietness and nice schools for children.

Perhaps these arguments do not need to be seen as opposing each other in the matter of Swedish hotspots as there are ingredients of both. There are hotspots in northern rural Sweden where no housing is available nor is it that particularly affordable. However, the

important gap between prices in metropolitan regions of Sweden and these hotspots make some better off households feasible as in-migrants. The household does not have to be rich in its former context (similar to the American study) but when arriving in the rural hotspot they end up being better off than the long residing neighbors (similar to the English case) (Korpi *et al.*, 2011). There is Swedish research to support this argument that households moving down the urban hierarchy gain because of lower housing expenditures despite lower disposable income (Korpi *et al.*, 2011). This means the gap in prices is that wide (Statistics Sweden 2011), and wider than the gap in incomes. Lastly, rural housing markets is not a hot topic in rural research it seems. Even new construction in rural locations in Sweden has gained little attention (Amcoff, 2000, is an exception).

Rural in-migration

Internationally there is domination from the Anglo-Saxon research community in the number of publications on moves to the countryside (including rural gentrification², counter-urbanization and similar concepts). This domination in the research field is somewhat explained by the non-existence of the same phenomenon outside the European core countries such as Sweden (Hjort, 2009) and i.e. Norway (Grimsrud, 2011). It is even argued that the concept counter-urbanization should be used with caution in these countries or not used at all (Grimsrud, 2011). In this paper the focus is neither to develop concepts nor to discuss the actual counter-urbanization. Therefore the concept rural in-migration is used.

To lay the grounds for analyzing in-movers to the hotspots in my study I will refer to some studies of relevance in the large field of rural in-migration research. To start with, age is a factor of importance. Young people are less likely to end up in rural areas when moving than older people are. In Hjort & Malmberg (2006) young are defined as those 19 to 25 years. It is also known that some elderly not being dependent on travel-distance to work move to rural areas in Sweden and elsewhere (Jauhiainen, 2009; Lundholm, 2012). There is also a discussion of the baby-boomers that is, the comparably large cohort born in the 1940s and their expected, future higher residential mobility, maybe to the countryside (Andersson & Abramsson, 2011).

As mentioned above, for some families the motive for moving to the countryside is the search for cheaper housing (Clark, 2012). However the idea of living in the countryside has to be accepted and valued as positive, apart from finding cheap housing. The idea of the rural idyll and peace and quiet and the countryside as a decent place for bringing up children are all motives for rural in-migration (Bullock *et al.*, 2011; Mulder & Lauster, 2010; Stenbacka, 2001).

² Gentrification as a term is more readily used as a term for the change of an area culturally and population wise in both urban and rural research. Often the negative changes are described. I tend to describe the development of hotspots as something positive but there are also negative effects to be remembered, especially in articles on rural gentrification such as breakdown of local traditions, expensive housing etc. (Guimond & Simard, 2010).

The way people themselves were living during childhood also has implications for valuing the countryside (Blaauboer, 2011). Many movers are return migrants to where they have had summer cottages, relatives or where they grew up (Lundholm, 2012; Stjernström, 1998).

Periurban areas are described as receiving the largest amounts of in-migrants compared to remote rural areas as they offer possibilities of commuting to work (Hjort & Malmberg, 2006). Champion et al describe those being recent in-migrants to a rural location to commute longer distances and also those coming from larger urban areas commute longer distances than long term stayers in the countryside (2008). As my study includes recent rural in-migrants from big cities in Sweden the Champion et al study offers a basis for comparison.

This study deals with interregional migrants that form the 'footloose' population that builds up the possible in-movers to different areas. In a way they are the 'brave' and mobile in the Swedish society. So, what did catch them to their particular area of residence? There are studies of place attractiveness that help understand what makes movers chose the area but the preferences stated are not for hotspots alone. In a study by Nedomysl and Hansen (2010) migrants' job opportunities versus amenities were tested as reasons for migration. The population consisted of persons with university education, those with a bachelor's degree and those with an even higher degree, which can be compared to this study. For both groups job opportunities and the possibility of a career were more important than amenities. Amenities in the study were equivalent to either cultural entertainment facilities or outdoor activities and recreation. In their paper Nedomysl and Hansen question the sometimes strong focus on amenities in migration studies and name them preferences, not demand or needs. Compared to jobs or affordable housing, amenities do not deserve that much attention, they state (Nedomysl & Hansen, 2010). However, there is a large body of literature supporting especially cultural facilities as necessary to attract highly educated workforce (Florida, 2002).

Hotspots in northern Sweden, background

Sweden and the five most northern counties as a case for analyzing rural housing market hotspots is not a mere coincidence. In the counties of Gävleborg, Västernorrland, Jämtland, Västerbotten and Norrbotten, the population has steadily been declining since decades (Wastenson et al. 1991). Sweden is a divided country, where the economic activity and progress differ between north and south. The natural recourses are to a large extent found in the northern part, but industrialization and the subsequent urbanization are less prevalent in the north. In recent years however there is an interest in finding areas in these counties that can be defined as hotspots.

In an article by Lena Magnusson Turner hotspots have been defined quantitatively for the years 2000/2001, 2003/2004 and 2007/2008 (forthcoming 2012). The defined hotspots in that particular article are used in this study for the purpose of finding households to interview.

An important stand point in Magnusson Turner's article is that house prices are used as a predictor of future population growth, as population growth is rare in cities or areas with a housing stock valued below the cost of new construction (Glaeser & Gyourko, 2005). As this forms the basis of Magnusson Turner's empirical work a measure called Tobin's q is used, whereby a quota is calculated between the price and a construction price for owner-occupied homes (with adjustments) (Magnusson Turner, forthcoming 2012). The production price is assumed to vary between regions to a limited extent; however the market price for the same house varies considerably between regions in Sweden.

In the analysis made by Magnusson-Turner the larger cities (50 000 to 200 000 inhabitants) in the northern counties are taken away in order to investigate the rural areas. Moreover the remaining surface consists of about 640 areas of which those in small towns and cities are small and those sparsely populated are large³. 12 percent were classified as provisional hotspots in the study (76 areas, 69 000 individuals). Also Magnusson-Turner tested new construction of single family housing to be significantly different/larger in hotspots compared to other areas (Magnusson Turner, forthcoming 2012).

In Magnusson Turners study, all movers to the 640 areas in 2000 through 2008 were analyzed to find possible differences in movers to the defined hotspots (10 000 individuals) and other areas. Hotspots did have in-movers with higher incomes, and strikingly higher proportion of university graduates among them. The characteristic of higher income is not found in the general population of so called counter-urban movers in Lindgren (2003) but counter-urban movers with higher education than the long term residents is the same in that study. Finally an important result was that the odds for an area to become a hotspot were higher if it was located in a commuter municipality (defined by Statistics Sweden) (Magnusson Turner, forthcoming 2012). The location of an area is thus vital for the possibility of becoming a hotspot.

Method and material

Ten interviews were performed in three hotspots in the northern part of Sweden. The hotspots were chosen in order to have slightly diverse structure. Nordmaling, with the area *Lögdeå* close to the sea and halfway between two cities, Timrå with the area *Tynderö* by the sea in a traditional area for summer houses and farms within commuting distance to bigger cities and lastly, Sandviken, with the area *Högbo* formed by being a longtime iron industrial area with interviewees living close to the small town.

As the aim was to explore factors that shape hotspots, the recent in-migrants and non-return migrants were of special interest together with those with the household characteristics that theoretically form hotspots (higher education, higher income, and children). These are the

³ The areas used are so called SAMS areas, small area market statistics, formed by municipalities and homogenous in tenure forms and largely conforming to named neighborhoods in cities.

movers that possibly would not move there hadn't it been a so called hotspot because they are in reality considered 'footloose' and could have chosen any area. When trying to understand hotspots they are the special interest by both moving there because it already is a hotspot and by forming the actual hotspot. The sample of respondents in this paper is therefore largely of the same kind, and variation is mostly found between place-contexts, although the three areas were chosen because of being a hotspot defined in the same way.

The wish list of requirements for respondents and her/his household was the following;

1. Higher than average education (both partners)
2. Higher than average income (in the area)
3. Households with children
4. Recently (4 to 8 years) moved to the area not being a return migrant (preferably from a bigger city)

All interviews started with the moving history of the respondent that is, a story telling the moves from early childhood until present including reasons for moves, evaluation of housing, neighborhood, the family composition, education, work, choice of location, daily activities etc. This moving history did form the basis for the questions that followed in the interview. The focus was then set on the present housing.

Respondents

Persons 'qualifying' as part of building up or forming the basis for the hotspots were identified through phone calls from lists of in-migrants to the respective areas in the municipalities. That is, households with a higher than average education and income, coming from distant municipalities or abroad, having children in school-age and not being a return migrant. The requirements were asked on the telephone before actually visiting the area for an interview. The requirements were essentially met but the study did not really need quantitative measures of the characteristics. As the chosen geographical areas in the three respective municipalities are relatively small the amount of households⁴ to approach was limited. However lists of in-migrants from the municipalities were a useful tool. When calling some households did not meet the requirements (50), some households did not respond (9), and some households did not want to participate (4).

⁴ On the lists for in-migrants given by the municipalities; Lögdeå had 206 persons year 2000-2006, Sandviken had 407 in movers, 2007-2011; (to the areas Östanbyn/Västanbyn and Stensåtra) and Tynderö had XXXX.

Table 1. Number of households not meeting the requirements in some or several ways, number of households that did not respond and number of households that did not want to participate.

Municipality	Households	Did not meet the requirements	Did not respond	Did not want to participate	No. of interviewed
Nordmaling	Lögdeå	4	1		3
Sandviken	Högbo	6	3	1	3
Timrå	Tynderö	40	5	3	4

For Timrå the number of calls to households not meeting the criteria was the highest (40)⁵, Table 1. It seemed like the return-migration was frequent as well as moves from the close, big city of Sundsvall (about 30-40 km) which made it difficult to find informants. Those who did agree on an interview were sent a letter or an e-mail with information on the project as well as contact information to the researchers. The interviews were performed late October to beginning of November 2011. In order to separate the respondents in the results section below they are numbered according to Table 2, labeled F or M for female or male, and age and place is given in brackets. Also, respondents' names are changed.

The goal was to find households where neither spouse originated from the area, and this criterion was met with one exception. At the time for the interview the respondent was asked to give the moving history and other information of their partner as well. The respondents moved to their current housing between 2003 and 2007.

⁵ 14 of the Tynderö households who did not meet the requirements were return migrants, 8 did not have a university education, some were retired and another 14 did not meet one or several of the requirements, whereof the most important not coming from the big city of Sundsvall nearby.

Table 2. List of respondents in the three areas and their; sex, year of birth, tenure form, where they recently moved in from and area where they grow up, income, education, label in text and family status.

		Sex	Year of birth	Tenure form	Moving in from	Income per month (before tax)	Education	Label in text	Status
Nordmaling									
1	Sofie	f	1970	Home ownership, house	Stockholm 2005	30-40 000	both masters degree, husband nurse	(1. F, 41, Lögdeå)	Married, children 3, 6, bonus 12, +expecting
2	Sandra	f	1977	Home ownership, house	From Umeå 2006	50-70 000 when both are working	Master of engineering	(2. F, 34, Lögdeå)	Cohabiting, children 3 years and 9 months
3	Ulrika	f	1971	Rental, house	Örnsköldsvik via Gräsmyr	40 -50 000 (if she had a job as socionom)	Bachelor of Science in Social Work, Partner truck driver	(3. F, 40, Lögdeå)	Cohabiting, son 4
Sandviken									
4	Karin	f	1969	Home ownership, house	2005 from Stockholm, 2007 to house	70-100 000	Doctor, partner doctor	(4. F, 42, Högbo)	Married, children 7, 9
5	Åsa	f	1974	Home ownership, house	From Umeå 2001-2003, to house 2003	70-100 000	Master of engineering (both)	(5. F, 37, Högbo)	Married, children 5, 7
6	Ove	m	1954	Home ownership, house	From Toulouse 2008/2009	125-150.000	Both engineers	(6. M, 57, Högbo,)	Married, children 12, 15
Timrå									
7	Ivona	f	1955	Home ownership, house	Poland, from Sundsvall 2004. Partner Sundsvall	40-50 000	Engineer, partner haulage firm	(7. F, 57, Tynderö)	Cohabiting (child nest leaver)
8	Ola	m	1975	Tenant cooperative, house	From Gothenburg 2001 to nearby Härnösand. Partner from area	50 000	Teacher, partner teacher	(8. M, 42, Tynderö)	Married, children 5, 3 years and 7 months
9	Ernst	m	1945	Home ownership, house	From Stockholm 2007,	30 000, pension	Engineer, partner primary school teacher	(9. M, 66, Tynderö)	Married, children 38, 35
10	Karina	f	1965	Home ownership, house	Västerås 2004, husband Kungälv	30-40 000	2 year upper secondary, partner vocational edu.	(10. F, 46, Tynderö)	Married, child 11

The interviews

The length of interviews varied, but they lasted about one to two hours. The interviews were semi-structured with an interview guide, but flexible in the order and depth according to respondents' answers. They were performed in the municipality building for practical reasons, with one exception (at respondent's home in Högbo). The interviewer is a female former human geography student who worked with interviews with similar content in her bachelor thesis. The interviewer's background, coming from the biggest city, Stockholm was revealed by dialect but in most cases resulted in elaborated descriptions of motives for moves and descriptions of areas which benefited the study. A contact person in the municipality provided most kindly both lists of in-migrants as well as a place in the municipality-building for

interviewing. The environment might then be considered quite neutral grounds for both interviewer as well as respondent.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. However the intention was not to perform a text analysis but instead to explore and understand their reasons for moving to the hotspot, their thoughts about the area and housing market, the household's composition and characteristics, as well as understanding their daily activity pattern. All this was in line with the aim to understand hotspots through interviews with key households.

As part of the interview guide, vignettes were designed to allow comparison of responses to certain prescribed situations. Vignettes are short hypothetical stories of persons in specified situations relevant to the topic of the research. Interviewees were asked to respond to these vignettes by, for example, offering advice or giving a judgment of the situation. They were further asked to provide an explanation of their response. This method enabled examination of different households' interpretations of a uniform situation and was helpful in elucidating important issues. Three vignettes were designed to explore different aspects of hotspots: living in an area of beautiful nature in the countryside with the drawback of limited service compared to the city, about the house prices and migration in the area, and lastly about the importance of living in the countryside with the possibility of spending relatively less on housing contra work opportunities.

Vignette 1) *A couple in their mid-30s is living with their two children, 3 and 5 years, in an apartment in the city. Shops and daycare are located within walking distance. They are thinking about moving to a house in an area 50 km from the city with beautiful nature and approximately the same price as the current dwelling. What would you recommend them to do? To stay in the city, or to move to the beautiful area with a limited supply of service?*

Vignette 2) *If people in general in the area were to describe this area, would they say it is on the rise or fall? When it comes to house prices and in-migration?*

Vignette 3) *A friend has found a cheap house in the countryside and is able to sell her/his apartment expensively and get a surplus from it. The disadvantage with the new housing is that it is located far away from the workplace and that there is no equivalent, advanced job opportunity in the place. What would you suggest your friend to do?*

The way the respondents were selected, not being return-migrants nor coming from close by, did bias the material in the direction towards them moving there for job opportunities. As is shown in the following section almost no-one had relatives or family close by (Olas' wife). Although not being the main reason they could have moved there because of beautiful nature or the particular landscape as an important component. Another limitation is that out of 10 respondents three were men. This was not intended, but the result of more women than men being able to/assenting to participate. This will give a broader picture on living in a hotspot from a woman perspective; where there might be such a perspective.

Presentation of hotspots

This paper will refer to a previous study as a backdrop to the interviews (Magnusson Turner (forthcoming 2012)).⁶ The analyses made to identify hotspots are made in a study by Lena Magnusson Turner and referred further in the literature review section above. As can be seen from Figure 1 hotspots are either found in the recreational areas in the mountains close to the Norwegian border or along the coast to the Baltic Sea. The areas in the mountains lie close to skiing facilities or in some cases close to towns. All the areas along the coast have access to transport facilities like roads and railway and are likely to be hotspot of commuting type.

Figure 1. Northern Sweden municipalities (boldest borders) and small areas, SAMS showing hotspots. Three case municipalities, Nordmaling, Timrå, Sandviken, underlined with study areas Lögdeå, Tynderö, Högbö, in balloons. (Data from Magnusson Turner (2012), authors map.)

⁶ Grant from FORMAS, no. 2008-5509-12449-34 principal researcher Lena Magnusson Turner, NOVA, Norway.

Nordmaling municipality has about 9 000 inhabitants and is located about 55 km away from Umeå in the north and 55 km from Örnsköldsvik in the south. Lögdeå village has about 400 inhabitants. Sandviken municipality, with the core in an industrial town, has 37 000 inhabitants. The environment, the area where the interviews were conducted was the most 'urban' one. Timrå municipality has about 18 000 inhabitants and the village of Söråker about 2 000, which is the closest village with a shop for people in Tynderö.⁷

Hotspots and in-movers

In the following, factors found in interviews that build /shape housing market hotspots are explored. That is factors that would possibly catch these 'footloose' individuals and households to make the move to an unknown place. These moves that make a place stand out in comparison to all the thousands of other rural places in rural areas. Movers to hotspots are contrasting to return-movers who have a certain place attachment and are more easily drawn back to the same familiar place. The hypothesis is that the group of 'footloose' households is necessary for the emergence of hotspots. The preferences for a place are also forming the situation on the local housing market. To understand what is 'extra' in these hotspots interviews are used to find factors.

The way the respondents were chosen; no return-migrants, was to optimize the possibility of understanding hotspots. Probably other than return migrants are difficult to find in the regular non-hotspot, northern Swedish countryside (Kreft *et al.*). In a way, finding these kinds of households is in itself a proof of the area being a hotspot as earlier studies of in-migrants to the countryside have found lower income and education as important characteristics of rural in-movers in general (Hjort & Malmberg, 2006; Lindgren, 2003). In order to approach the aim the material was coded into several well specified themes and in the end grouped as results under the following themes; 1) respondents reasons for moving to the hotspot, 2) the house and housing market at the hotspot, 3) respondents thoughts about countryside living, 4) households' daily activities and mobility, 5) comparison of the different hotspots. The order of the accounted interviews below is firstly Lögdeå then Högbo and lastly Tynderö.

Reasons for moving to the hotspot

A vital criteria for a place to be defined as a hotspot is a growing population and thereby the reasons for in-migration is of interest.

⁷Numbers according to the municipalities' homepages;
(<http://www.nordmaling.se/default.aspx?di=1109&ptid=0>)
(<http://www.sandviken.se/kommunpolitik.4.1ac5f13f90d6619d47fff88.html>)
(<http://www.timra.se/kommun-och-politik/kommunfakta/befolkning/>), accessed June 1, 2012.

The first and most important reason for the move to the respective hotspots was finding a job. An example of this is Sandra (2. F, 34, Lögdeå). As an engineer she finished her education at the university 330 km away and after that just happened to get a relevant job in Nordmaling. The local labor market is not large but there was this suitable company. Nor she herself, neither her partner, had any experience of the municipality or the area. Her partner came from Linköping in the south of Sweden and she came from a town further north in Sweden. The couple has accepted that he will probably not get a job in Nordmaling and therefore has to commute to either Umeå or Örnsköldsvik, both 55 km away. For now he works in Örnsköldsvik. This is similar to the Champion et al. study of rural England where in-migrants from far away and recent in-migrants could put up with long commute to work (2008).

While getting a job is said to be the most important, there are a lot of exceptions and twists to that. Reasons intertwined with finding a job is for the two other respondents in Lögdeå moving in with a partner, Sofie (1. F, 41, Lögdeå), and moving there because of beautiful nature but ready to move to get a more suitable job, Ulrika (3. F, 40, Lögdeå).

For the respondents in Högbo, Sandviken the reason to move only because of jobs was even more evident for the highly skilled professionals working at the locally sprung, but global large company (compare Niedomysl & Hansen, 2010). If work was to change, or better opportunities showed up elsewhere they were all ready to move on, Karin, Åsa and Ove (4. F, 42, Högbo, 5. F, 37, Högbo, 6. M, 57, Högbo). This was despite having children in schools and having lived several years in the same place. One problem pointed out was the close connection between the housing prices in this so called remote small town and the large company. If the company had to put people on leave the houses would be difficult to sell according to one respondent, Ove (6. M, 57, Högbo,). He and his wife had already made alternative plans and he said this was really no problem since neither of them was born in Sandviken, "*we don't have that connection*" (6. M, 57, Högbo).

The contrast to respondents in Högbo was the respondents in Tynderö, (Ivona, Ola, Ernst, Karina) in that they seemed the most rooted/attached to the place after a rather short time and was also the least educated. Two of the four respondents had moved there because they wanted to live precisely there, by the sea and in this particular *environment* beneficial to their health, as pensioners. It was Ivona (7. F, 57, Tynderö) and Ernst, (9. M, 66 Tynderö) the latter received income from early retirement already when moving there. Two of the households still had children living at home whereof one household also moved there because of the beautiful nature Karina (10. F, 46 Tynderö). Interestingly two of the households did inherit their property and wanted to move there because of memories of school vacations, Karina and Ernst. The respondents themselves grew up in the south of Sweden (Västerås and Stockholm). A third household (8. M, 42, Tynderö) moved in on the wife's parents' land and owned the house as tenant cooperative. That is, there were inheritance and long-time family relations to this place Tynderö (Stjernström, 1998).

All respondents were typically from areas close to the countryside or in the countryside, that is, they had lived in similar environments as children as they now lived in (the result is similar to that of Blaauboer, 2011). This means that apart from moving to one of the hotspots because

of jobs, the idea about living in the countryside was fairly important. This was important to all but one respondent in Högbo, Ove (6. M, 57). Most respondents did think it was important for children to live in a nice, calm environment offered by the place they had chosen. As in many other aspects there was a scale of emphasize from Tynderö rating highest via Lögdeå to Högbo where respondents did not much emphasize the beautiful nature. None of the respondents did really mention cultural facilities as a reason to move which is also found in the study by Niedomysl and Hansen (Niedomysl & Hansen, 2010), but stated as important to attract highly educated in other contexts (Florida, 2002).

The house and housing market

A housing market being on the rise is a necessary sign of a hotspot and respondents reflected on that (though not using or being communicated the concept of hotspot). Interestingly the two respondents owning their house in Lögdeå said they paid more than was 'normal' for a house in the area, they were told by neighbors afterwards Sofie, Sandra (1. F, 41 and 2. F, 34). *"Everybody says he [her husband] bought it too expensively"* Sofie said (1. F, 41). There can be several reasons for this; one is that prices have risen rapidly without settled people really noticing, it is similar to that in urban regions. Another reason is just locals telling newcomers they do not know the area by saying 'urban people' were duped. Moreover, the recent immigrants in this study have been used to far higher prices in their destination of origin, especially if these were metropolitan regions in Sweden.

However the respondents typically said they got a big and cheap house since they were coming from areas and cities where housing is both scarce and much more expensive. Especially Ernst, (9. M, 66 Tynderö) who sold a house in Ekerö, Stockholm which the household had had for 30 years found it a bargain moving to Tynderö. Also Karin, (4. F, 42, Högbo) explained that they had *"jumped off the housing career in Stockholm"* and that's why they could afford their current big house in Högbo.

Everybody in Lögdeå and Tynderö thinks their house has increased in value during the few years they have lived there. Many have renovated/rebuilt and said this is partly the reason for the increase, but importantly they also said they know of an increase in prices in general in the area. In Högbo respondents referred to the large company's ups and downs that maybe affecting their house price, but the impression was the houses had kept its value or increased. Also new construction was noticed as a sign of a good location for the value of their house, which was pointed out by the renter in Lögdeå and the respondents in Tynderö.

In my understanding of a place turning into a hotspot the perception of residents in that place is vital. In order to investigate the respondents' ideas about their area having signs as rising prices and few available houses a vignette was used. The interviewer asked *"If people in general in the area were to describe this area, would they say it is on the rise or fall?"*. The vignette was phrased the same way to all respondents.

Sandra answered that her area is on the rise, that there are no vacant houses except for those that are beyond repair because old people had lived there for a long time not having the resources or strength to maintain. She even knew of some families renting and waiting for a house to be available in the area. For Ulrika (3. F, 40, Lögdeå) who lives closer to the sea the most obvious sign on the area being a hotspot was the building of new housing. Some new houses seemed to be leisure houses but they were big and some of them turned into permanent housing when the owners retired. Ulrika³ uses the word “maffig” to describe the houses as big, impressive and possibly expressing a sense of luxury and wealth. This is maybe also in relation to her situation of renting a small house. Sofie also describe Lögdeå as a hotspot (though not using the concept) and does so by comparing with another area which has traditionally housed industrial workers. Since the industry shut down the reputation has even deteriorated and people living in Lögdeå agree housing is really cheap there.

Although living in an attractive and rather pricy area of Sandviken the respondents in Högbo still did not believe bluntly in a beneficial development for the area. The housing market depends too much on the success of the large firm in the municipality they said, for them to really believe in the rising prices for a long time period. Despite this no decrease in prices, rather increases had been visible to them.

Concerning Tynderö the respondents seems to be proud of living there because it is an area known for its beautiful nature since long. Increasing house prices as well as shortage of available housing is something more or less taken for granted. Three of the respondents had the possibility of inheriting or moving into family property (Ernst, Karina, and Ola through his wife). Karina says that about “90 percent” of the residents in Tynderö has connections to the place, they are either born there themselves and are coming back to stay permanently or have been living there all their lives. She herself inherited valuable land close to the sea and has been met with suspicion and envy since they moved there. There is no doubt about increasing prices and Ernst, Ivona and Karina has renovated and rebuilt which has added value to their housing they say.

Value of living in the countryside

In vignette 3 the value of living in the countryside and affording a house contra the availability of a wider range of jobs was the focus. Respondents themselves said job was the most important factor for moving but how did they answer when they were supposed to give a friend advice about living in the countryside contra availability of jobs? So, let's go deeper in the respondents' answers and find out *why* the countryside is a good residential environment.

As Sandra (2. F, 34, Lögdeå) puts it “*I do think the countryside is to prefer compared to the city. It is ok to live in the city a couple of years, when you are young and don't have any children and wants to live it up*”. To try the commute for a period of time, is also suggested. Ulrika (3. F, 40,

Lögdeå) says the answer is obvious; to purchase the house; and it is worthwhile to commute. Sofie (1. F, 41, Lögdeå) advised the person to check if there is a school close by because with little communication life could otherwise be unsustainable.

Karin (4. F, 42, Högbo) would not tolerate having no job or a job not fitting her competence just to be able to live in a house in the countryside. Åsa would also advise the person not to take on a less inspiring and developing job because of a house in the countryside. Ove (6. M, 57, Högbo) did value the income from a qualified job and said his wife did too. The respondents in Högbo were the most educated and the ones with the highest incomes of the respondents, which might explain their advice to the hypothetical person stay in the city.

Ivona (7. F, 57, Tynderö) first of all said to check the standard of the house to live well. An interpretation of that is that she herself plans to stay on as a pensioner and that time is soon coming. Ola (8. M, 42, Tynderö) advised the hypothetical person to stay in the city because to have a suitable job is important. Another advice against moving to the cheaper house and rather stay in the city, was connected to the age of the children. If children are 10-13 or so you should stay in the city, said Ernst (9. M, 66, Tynderö). Also Ove (6. M, 57, Högbo) preferred not to live in the countryside, it is boring for the children, he said. Compared to the respondents in Lögdeå Ernst and Ove had the experience of having older children which can explain their standpoint.

Karina, Ernst and Sofie reflect on the possibility of choosing different lifestyles and possible changes in prioritizing work and economic resources. Maybe you have to diminish your material demands if there are no suitable jobs. Persons moving to the countryside have to weight job versus leisure and standard.

In short they were not overwhelmingly enthusiastic for living in the countryside, not for everyone. A serious choice had to be made if the job situation was not sure or including lower status. They know that they themselves valued the environment enough to make the choice, and moved there for a job, but they advised others to think over the job situation.

Daily activities, mobility

Following the discussions above, a hotspot has to offer the daily lives of individuals and households to be sustainable, that is the life-puzzles with time and space restrictions has to be realizable for households (Tillberg, 2001). This can be true for many places but particularly for rural housing market hotspots to be chosen by a picky group of 'footloose' households that can chose another place if life becomes too demanding to organize.

Setting the scene for the daily life of households includes knowing about family composition. The households in Lögdeå all consisted of families with children in the ages 0 to 12 years. This meant they had children in daycare and in the local school to leave in the morning and pick up

in the afternoon. In these households the women were the ones working closest to home and thus performed most of these daily short trips. The men worked in either Umeå or Örnsköldsvik about 50 km away respectively. Also shopping groceries were mostly done in the center of Nordmaling by the women. As Sofie put it; *"Since my husband commutes he cannot do the large purchases and therefore we shop at the local ICA-store"*. There is an extensive literature pointing to gender differences being more pronounced in the countryside and these interviews/cases are illustrative examples (Tillberg, 2001) (Forsberg, 1997; Shuttleworth & Gould, 2010). Even though the women have a university degree (higher than their husbands) the logistic demands in the countryside makes them caught in traditional gender roles. They bear a larger share of reproductive work than their male partners.

The children in the Högbo households were slightly older (5-15 years) than those in Lögdeå. The parents in Högbo had higher degrees, two were PhDs. Karin had the experience of commuting far Stockholm-Västerås and Åsa commuted from Sandviken to Skellefteå during week-ends, and Ove currently commutes to Linköping once a week. None of the respondents in Högbo went shopping in the local ICA because they all took the car for work and then could make their shopping in central Sandviken or even in Gävle. Ove drove his children there every day for the international school. These respondents did not use public transport. There were many signs of another approach in conducting the daily life which was partly connected to the area being located close to Sandviken but my interpretation is that they are also signs of another life style. These respondents had not chosen the country life in the same way as those living in Lögdeå and were not ready to sacrifice any of the things a life in the city could offer. And they had the incomes to realize it. The respondents in Högbo gave signs of being the most mobile and urban, but at the same time enjoying the leisure activities in the country side and in a small municipality.

The respondents in Tynderö were the most heterogeneous group since Ernst was a pensioner and Ivona intended to have early retirement. Karina and Ola correspond to the households in Lögdeå and Högbo and their children were in the ages 0 to 11 years. The shopping of groceries Ivona did in the local ICA in Söråker to support the local business, she said. Also, Ernst supported the local business in Söråker. The little shop in Tynderö closed a long time ago. Ola and Karina did travel longer to do the weekly shopping once and a while because it was cheaper. Karina has a cleaning business and said she did not take on jobs too far away because she was not used to that from when she lived in bigger cities. Her son, 11 years go by school bus and it all works well, but as she says; we do often have to give him a lift for activities and visiting friends.

Comparing the hotspots

Concerning Lögdeå it is the area with informants with the least economic resources. They were aware of in-migration and increasing house prices in the area and not the least knew the boundary to the adjacent Rundvik where no signs of hotspots were to be found. (Rundvik can

be described as the remaining part of the municipality owned flats turned into social housing rather than being what is truly is, public housing, because the owner occupied housing is cheap (Magnusson & Turner, 2003)). These households had the longest commute to a city but could reach two labor markets within the day and were counting on a new railway to improve the commute. They all had chosen the traditional, local and popular house style, and as in-migrants they could afford people saying they were possibly paying too much for the house.

The environment, Högbo, where the interviews were conducted was the most 'urban' one. Similarly the respondents were the ones with the most 'urban' life style. They really did not want to live in the countryside too far from a city. Leisure activities are available and even great in Sandviken as one respondent said, Ove (6. M, 57, Högbo).

The respondents in Tynderö had the closest relation to the particular area even though they themselves have never lived there. In Tynderö, it was explained; farmsteads had been for 2-300 years in the same families. It is a traditional area for upper class summer vacations since long. Karina described difficulties of being accepted and to *"enter"* an area where people had lived for generations. She even went that far as *"it depends on who you are as a person if you can handle all the resistance that can be when you are new in the countryside"*, it is a *"farmer-mentality"* she concluded. The close attachment to the particular area also resulted in stigmatization of outsiders is one interpretation.

All respondents made 'black hole' moves, that is, they did not know anybody beforehand (except for Ola's wife). This was mentioned as a problem by households with small children because they had no back up when leaving and picking up at daycare or school, or when children fell ill or for events in the evening.

Possibly connected to the weak attachment expressed by especially those in Högbo, all respondents were prepared to move again if job opportunities changed or ceased. For the two households in Tynderö having or soon having pension, nothing but serious health issues were to drive them away from that beautiful chosen hotspot.

A limitation to this particular study is that far from all mechanisms that possibly build these hotspots are taken into account. Here the preferences and perceptions of households in the place are taken into account and why they moved there is analyzed to understand the development of a hotspot.

Conclusions

Though hotspot as a concept is not widely used in housing market studies or rural studies, it proved valuable while exploring important factors in the development of specified rural areas regarding higher educated in-migrants as well as relatively wealthy in-migrants. Also the fact that footloose, in-migrants could be found proved key in the study. Though originally in the design of the study, this particular footloose population of non-return migrants without family,

friends or relatives in the area, proved surprisingly vital in the understanding of the formation of the hotspots.

Rural housing market hotspots in Northern Sweden are built up by several factors. There are those related to the perception of the place and choice of the place by the households and those factors laying the ground for a hotspot; having to do with the geographical location. These factors are found in both economic geography studies as well as migration choice and preference studies.

Geographical location and interplay with households forming hotspots

Interestingly there are as stated above, competing arguments concerning households and housing on the rural housing market. According to, an English debate on rural housing there is an exclusion of low-income households from rural areas. This is partly caused by rural gentrification and partly by lack of rural affordable housing (Moore, 2011; Morgan & Satsangi, 2011). In an American study the opposite is stated, that is the rural areas are the best opportunities for poor families to find vacant housing as well as affordable housing (Clark, 2012). These families are not primarily drawn by labor market forces, rather by housing and amenities such as quietness and calm schools for children.

As discussed above these arguments do not need to be seen as opposing each other in the matter of Swedish hotspots, as there are ingredients of both in my case studies. There are hotspots in northern rural Sweden where no housing is available nor is it particularly affordable. However, the important gap between prices in metropolitan regions of Sweden and these hotspots make some households with resources realistic as in-migrants. The household does not have to be rich in their former context (similar to the American study) but when arriving in the rural hotspot they end up being better off than the longtime resident neighbors (similar to the English case). This means the gap in house prices is that wide to help form hotspots.

As such it is a question of affordable housing in the taste of families with children. However, there are other basic requirements such as commuting distance to a labor market. This labor market might even be just about reachable, according to time and space restrictions for a family with children. But the advantages of the living environment make it worthwhile to commute.

Household perceptions and lifestyle forming the hotspots

When it comes to the urge for having something of one's own, owning or having a nice house they are also driving factors for hotspots (compare Stenbacka, 2001). Nobody in this study complained about their housing and all of them renovated to improve. In addition my understanding is that the interviewed persons regarded their area as the best, most prestigious in the municipality, that is if all areas were ranked theirs was at the top end. This

perspective of the area might be necessary for the development into a hotspot. The inhabitants' perception produces the imagination of the place.

The three areas in the study all had one or two characteristics being that special to attract the 'footloose' non-return migrants. For Lögdeå it was the sea and the nice traditional housing and similarly for Tynderö it is the sea and the gate way to the world heritage area of the High Coast that were mentioned. Högbo is located adjacent to recreational area and an area of great industrial, historical value. The areas all give the 'extra' value and status for which a longer commute is worthwhile. Despite not originating from the area these values were spotted by 'footloose' in-migrants when finding work in the region. *These perceptions and values, together with attractiveness of a possible work commute and affordable housing, form the basis for a rural housing market hotspot.* As a consequence these hotspots are not transferrable to just any rural location, instead there are intrinsic interplays between several geographical specific location factors as well as in-migrants' household characteristics. To find these factors in work towards a development into a hotspot, the combination of 'pure' economic studies (work, house prices, transport) and 'rural idyll', in-migrant kind of studies (preferences, back to the land, justice in residential location) are essential.

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