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Local Governance and Flexible Lifestyle in Rural Regions

Introduction

In this paper, we shall concentrate on to the relationship between local governance and multilocational dwellers in rural and regional development. Governance is an informal way of local decision-making, and the aim to engage citizens into the development processes in rural regions can also incorporate those people who share their lives in two or more locations.

Globalisation alongside with the wider utilization of modern and mobile technology is changing the relationship with time, place and space by enabling and maintaining connections despite the physical location. In consequence people are less than ever tied to one particular place and they are basically free to choose the location and time where to spend time, dwell or work. This development trend challenges the traditional ways of housing only in a single place and enables people to build their everyday lives in two or more locations. This kind of lifestyle, where people divides their lives in several locations may be characterised as flexible and multilocational. It is liable that these post-modern lifestyles are becoming all the more mobile and flexible and common at the same time. In this paper, the term *flexible lifestyle* is used to describe this kind of postmodern housing and working patterns.

Most of the people living flexible lifestyles share their lives between urban and rural locations. Summerhouses and old family homes are the most common examples of part time rural living. At the same time, the lack of human resources in declining rural areas is crucial question in the peripheral development policies. Therefore it should be worth to engage those people who live only

some periods of the year in their countryside residences to the processes of public – private cooperation. The question is, how this could be realized in appropriate manners.

Concept of Governance and Rural Regions

Practically until the 1980s, governance was not a word heard continually within the discussion about local/regional government or regional development. The term governance is now widely used and accepted across a variety of academics and practitioners. Theories of governance are united across disciplines in their concern with identifying and analysing a wide range of modes and mechanisms of co-ordination. Much of the literature refers to new forms of urban governance but there is emerging discussion about rural governance, i.e. complex webs of interdependencies of key actors and mechanism of rural policy formulation (Goodwin 1998, 5).

Governance can be understood as referring to the exercise of power within a given geographical territory. This is particularly a traditional definition of governance. Thus, there is no clear distinction between government and governance. Goodwin (1998) has described governance as a result of development of governing styles that can be described by the following:

- A complex set of institutions and actors drawn from within but also beyond government
- The blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues
- The power relations between institutions involved in collective action
- The autonomous aspects of self-governing networks of actors
- Getting things done without the use of direct authority, e.g. enabling

Hereby, governance can be defined as the institutional structures, policy and decision-making processes and rules (formal or informal) related to issues of public concern. Governance also implies a new set of practices, which challenges traditional understandings of government and public management and brought their wake new tensions and new difficulties (Miller, Dickson & Stoker 2000). However, key questions in relation to public concern are how power is exercised where power is situated in administrative structure, how decisions are taken and how enterprises have their say.

Thus, governance is broader concept than the government that can be understood only regulative. For instance, regional government addresses designed political units, whereas governance is broader and refers to the collective capacity to assess needs and opportunities, and to mobilise resources in response to them. Actually, governance has to be dealt within the concept of government. There has to be a clear differentiation into nation state, local state, society and market. Consequently, governance can be defined as a process of co-ordination of actors, social groups and institutions in order to attain appropriate goals that have been discussed and collectively defined in fragmented, uncertain environments (Le Galés 1998). Governance is ability to form integrated insight of development in a region between various actors and represent this unified strategy towards external actors and other levels of government.

According to Le Galés (1998, 496) governance is the capacity to integrate and give form to local and regional interests, organisations and social groups, i.e. the capacity to represent regions and organisations outside and to develop more or less unified strategies. The meaning of the concept refers to what happens beyond an organisation or region, the capacity to organise collective action; to build coalitions and partnerships directed towards specific goals. In this view, governance goes beyond the issue of efficiency and hierarchical structures and there is a need to investigate different types of legitimacy, power struggles and the creation of identity. It is not so matter what is so called “good governance”, but of highlighting the mechanism and processes which enable or prevent the achievement of regional development processes. In this context, public-private partnerships and regional policy networks can contribute to the process of rural development.

In the process of governance, the issue of power is important, but essential is to lay stress on policy making instead of decision-making. Specifically the observation of the operations of administrative structures is important. Relevant question is not 'who' but 'how'. The administrative and structural multiplicity is symbolising the present situation. Also the imbalance between the regions is evident. Thus, essential is to interpret and evaluate both the participation and importance of governmental as well as non-governmental units in formulating the local and regional policies.

Conventional core-periphery concepts are mostly based on distance costs. This emphasises that traditional regional policy focus is on improving transport and communications infrastructure (Copus 2000, 2). As Copus (2000, 11) notes the changes in the geographic constraints to many economic activities will mean that the economic potential of peripheral regions will be less closely related to location, and increasingly influenced by a variety of “aspatial” characteristics.

Hypothetically thinking, characteristics of regional governance may result in relative isolation from the core regions, which are widely seen as the motors of economic and social change. Regional strategies may promote entrepreneurship, human capital, institutional capacity and networking. However, it should always be noticed that regional strategy- and implementation processes are embedded in local culture of doing things together. Being successful, partnerships should always recognise the goal-oriented collaboration and real sense of networking.

Regional Development Policy in Periphery

The peripheral regions have been struggling against the image of offering mainly dead end jobs in a culturally unattractive milieu. Human capital can be key element through which small and medium sized companies in peripheral regions can overcome the problems activating their potential for regional development. From this point of view, regional policy have to develop strategies that could led to higher investments in human capital and lower barriers to import highly educated people.

Governance can not be seen to purely market or deliberately constructed order (hierarchy/plan) but it requires multiplicity and interactivity (Amin & Hausner 1997). Local action has moved to the foreground as an alternative. This applies both old industrial as well as rural areas. As societies and local communities have become more complex and fragmented innovative and entrepreneurial activities should notice collaborative strategy making, across organisational borders. Local and regional communities have themselves to organise to meet global challenges through local initiatives and regional policy frames.

It is widely noticed that territorial communities, themselves, must to confront the challenges of worldwide economic restructuring by indigenous innovation and flexibility. Local initiatives and culture of entrepreneurship are basic prerequisites for development on peripheral regions. Experts widely agree that regional polarisation has deepened and that peripheral regions will have to largely depend on themselves in shaping their own future. Peripheral regions have to face the challenges of international competition and adjust their scope of action and mobilise their resources (Legendijk 1999). The advantage of local action in the economic development process is that they may identify, mobilise and combine diverse potential local resources probably better than central policies can do. Central policies role is to facilitate access to information at the local level and promote the ability to make use of it. (Stöhr 1989).

Flexible Way of Living

Mobile technology gives people more liberties to move and arrange their lives also outside their annual vacations. Some people divide their lives between town and country in the form of summer housing. To others the demands on their jobs forced them to create innovative adaptations in their housing patterns. We can say that the flexible way of living is increasingly part of people's everyday life, even when the daily commuting is limited out of the definition. Flexible lifestyle widens the view both from urban - rural to urban – urban models and from national to international mobility.

In the western welfare societies, second housing is quite usual and well researched phenomenon. It is no doubt one fundamental part of the flexible lifestyle. The view of flexible lifestyle to housing is however somehow different than in the pure second housing research. It broadens the research of rural second housing from urban-rural interaction and leisure-related issues to the general post-modern patterns of multilocational housing and lifestyles. We can also widen the concept of flexible lifestyle from different models of multilocational housing patterns to more holistic view and analyse the changing relationship between individual, work and society through it. In summary, flexible lifestyle reflects the development of post-modern society in many ways.

In comparison to the second housing flexible lifestyle can also be a free choice, but it differs from it in that sense that flexible lifestyle could be something, which is against one's own desires. Another distinctive feature is, that people living flexible lifestyles are extremely hard or even impossible to find within statistics or registers. After all, the only way to get even a draft picture of the phenomenon is by viewing the amount of summerhouses. In 2007 Finland has 4.5 million households, and they owned nearly 480 000 summerhouses (Statistics Finland 2008). This means that over 10 percent of households have a possibility to divide their living between at least two locations.

Flexible lifestyle is challenging the traditional structures of society in several ways. This does not affect only the working and housing patterns but also the fundamentals of society such as the relationship between people and public administration and services. Mobile lifestyles may be considered within the questions of sustainable development and environmental issues for example by increasing pollution. On the other hand, flexible lifestyle may be considered as an environmental

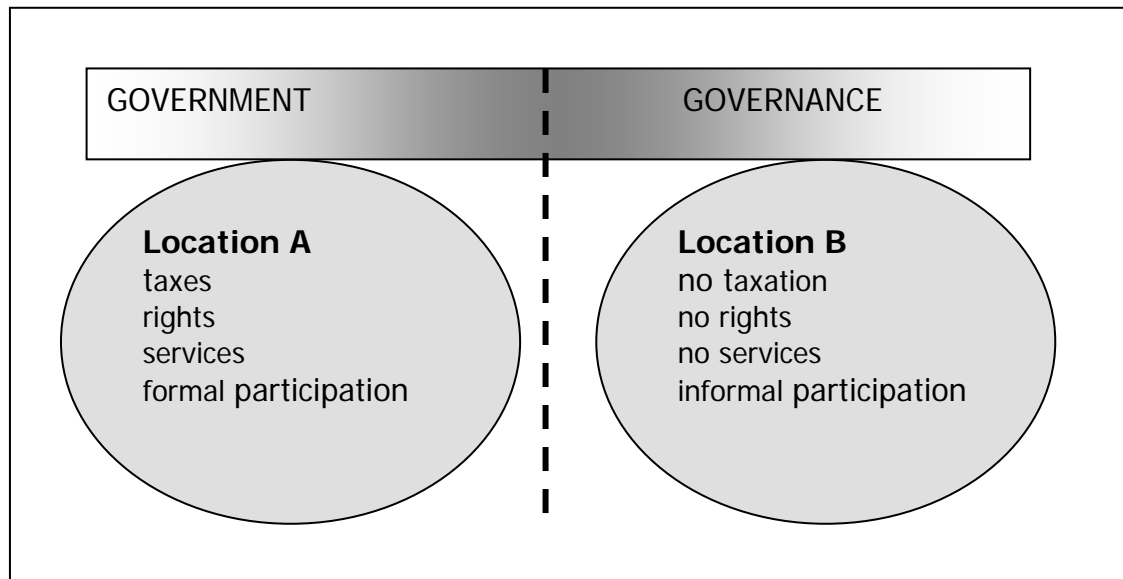
friendly way of living, because of the increasing utilization of modern and mobile technology, which may be used to decrease unnecessary travelling.

Flexible lifestyles diversify housing patterns and the traditional idea of local citizenship; hence people living flexible lifestyles are one way or the other the members of several municipalities. This part of population is a challenge to local administration: they are interesting because they certainly can offer new possibilities to local communities and development, but at the same time they are difficult to reach and control because of their constant mobility.

Flexible Lifestyle Challenges Regional Development in Rural Surroundings

Mobile and flexible lifestyles have different impacts on locality and local identity. One of the crucial challenges within increasing mobility is how to maintain the local identity and what impacts do the mobile and part-time dwellers have to the local community. This also includes the impacts in democracy and governance. In what ways the part-time dwellers are able to participate and influence the local administration and policies. On the other hand for those flexible living people, who have no juridical rights to the local society, the only possible way to be active towards local decision-making is to use the sorts of informal methods. The main question is, does local governance have inclusive or exclusive strategy towards flexible living people?

Even if you have two or more places where to live, authorities require that you have only one official address. In practice, at least in the Finnish case, you can be a member of only one local state or municipality. You pay taxes to that municipality and you have the right to participate in the local democracy and the right to get public services such as social secure or public education in that specific municipality (Picture 1). The polarization between official and unofficial home is clear and insuperable.



Picture 1. The present on – off situation of multilocal dwellers and local administration.

In those places where you live unofficially the only way to affect the local decisions are also unofficial. Local government has no obligation to take account the needs or opinions of the second house dwellers. When we know that the prevalence of flexible lifestyle is rising we must ask should it have more visible and active role in the local decision making? Do the people living flexibly have some rights or duties to their second or third home municipalities? The main question is how to organize the active participation of citizens living multilocally. As Cabus (2003:2) says, active participation is very difficult to organize without engagement structures of some sort. The increasing mobility of people makes it even more difficult.

According to (Le Galés 1998) the capacity of regional governance is reflected in its ability to integrate and give form to a variety of local and regional interests, organisations and social groups, and to develop more or less unified strategies. In rural Europe, these groups traditionally consist of permanent residents and in the most traditional communities of old families, where the positions are more inherited privileges than based on activity or personal skills, and in the same time the part time residents are neglected.

To avoid continued weakening of their competitiveness and to take full advantage of their endogenous potential, peripheral regions need to form new technological, organisational and entrepreneurial knowledge. One crucial possibility to overcome problems in human resources and to import innovative potential is to attract high-qualified staff to move into these regions (Raunio 2001).

When we think of flexible lifestyle and local governance as described before in this paper, following research questions raises up:

- Are part time dwellers interested and willing to participate in the local decision making?
- Is there room for part time dwellers to take part in to the local governance – or are doors closed?
- Does the local governance recognise flexible lifestyle, not as a burden but as a positive challenge?

During the recent research project concerning flexible lifestyle in Finland was interviewed totally 97 persons living multilocally in the way that can be called flexible lifestyle. Preliminary analysis shows that official and unofficial home mixes up in peoples mind and the different roles between them are blurring. The presume is that this is in contradiction to the thinking in public administration, which is always either – or, when flexible lifestyle needs more like both – and approach.

There seems to be a twofold attitude towards local citizenship. According to the first opinion local citizenship is completely administrative question and it has nothing to do with normal life. The relationship is limited to voting and the usage of a certain public services. In the second view the local citizenship is embedded in many ways to the everyday life and it unfolds in attachment to house, place, social surrounding and natural and built environment rather than to the municipality per se.

As a matter of fact, many of the interviewed felt that local authorities were strongly turned inwards and they were not at all interested in their doings, problems or ideas. They have a strong feeling of being vagrants or free riders in their unofficial homes. At the same time they emphasized that through informal social interaction and communication they have some influence on the local matters. Quite often the influence became apparent in unintended ways.

The mobilisation of human resources is central to development process in peripheral regions. Sustainable, bottom-up based development, depends on the qualification of the local agents and the availability of know-how in its varying forms. Regional human capital consists of specific skills, entrepreneurship, organisational capacity and innovative spirit (Rohr-Zänker 2001, 47). The importance of R&D activities has been little. There is lack of key industries and new fields of

economy. Peripheral regions are under-supplied with people with these capabilities. From this point of view the exclusive strategy towards part time dwellers is disadvantageous to the local development.

One prerequisite for attracting well-educated people into peripheral regions is to improve the region's image. Rohr-Zänker (2001, 65) suggests that the construction and marketing soft locational factors should become an important part of the economic policy pursued in peripheral regions. These factors can be used in attracting both permanent and part time inhabitants.

In summary, modern rural or regional development policy can not be based on plans initiated by hierarchical co-ordination or public institutions but it should be based on the principles of partnership and on the capability of the different private and public organisations to communicate one with the other and to promote common projects. Thus, local and regional government and regional development organisations can not only use hierarchical co-ordination between the policies of the various private and public actors but they should rather define flexible mechanism of governance of the relationships between the various public and private actors including flexibly living people. In future flexible lifestyle should be taken into the consideration in development policies more seriously than today.

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