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CONSTRUCTING THE NEW RURALITY - CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES (OF A RECENT SHIFT?) FOR SWEDISH RURAL POLICIES

JEL classification: Q16, Q18, R22

Paulina Rytkönen*

Abstract. *This article highlights the outcomes of the implementation of the New Culinary Country program implemented in to facilitate and speed up the emergence of the new rurality in Sweden. Based on results from focus groups and one group interview conducted in eight landscapes/counties during 2013 and a state initiated evaluation of the NCCP, the study answers the following questions: What does the NCCP mean in terms of governance? How is power distributed and if possible, which are the con-*

sequences of this new governance regime? Which are the main challenges and opportunities of and for the NCCP? The results show that the NCCP has led to a higher degree of regional coordination of actions and resources at regional level. Cooperation and coordination in turn have proved to be the main factors behind the most successful experiences.

Keywords: *New rurality, Rural development policies, Rural governance, Regional development, Sweden.*

1. Introduction

Since Sweden became a member of the European Union, the domestic market conditions for agriculture have constantly deteriorated. As a result, a shift away from only promoting continuous productivity gains has been set in motion and a wider concept of rural and even regional development has become an important component of agricultural policies. This re-orientation reinforces a process that was set in motion by the transformation pressure exerted by the agro-food market, but that has become stronger and stronger.

In the academic discussion, the responses to current process of agro-food globalization and negative transformation pressure are denominated as the study of the new rurality. This wide research area grasps many orientations, such as: (1) The conceptualization of the territory, landscape changes, cultural and social processes and relations (Trubek 2008); (2) The shift of focus in policies from agriculture to a broader rurality (Westholm et. al 2008); Changing consumer behavior and price building (Goodman 2002); The emergence of Localized Agri-Food Systems Approach (LAFS) where the main focus has been put on cultural and territorial aspects (Arfini et al 2012); The emergence of short food chains, community supported agriculture, the valorization of previous marginalized lands, rural migration within the EU, et cetera (Rytkönen 2013); Farm diversification (Löföling 2014). There are also numerous studies that focus on farm

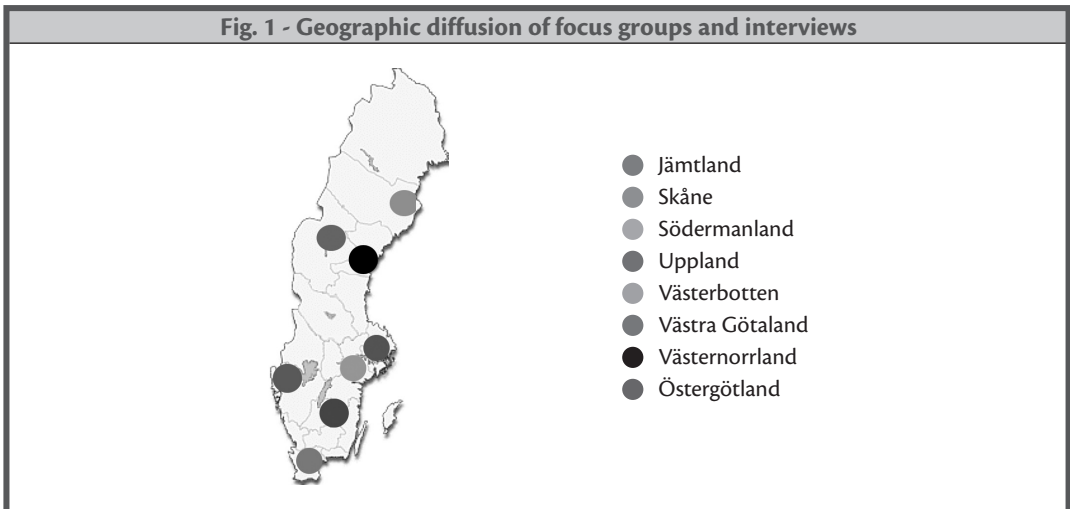
* Södertörn University.

administration, or target environmental aspects. No previous studies have highlighted the recent policy changes, thus increased understanding of the nature and impact of policy change is an urgent matter.

The emphasis of this study has been delimited to the New Culinary Country Program (NCCP), a policy package that has become a key part of the state led effort to support the new rurality. The NCCP was a government initiative launched in 2008 as a combined effort to speed up the emergence of the new rurality in Sweden, as well as to cope with typical post-industrial questions, for example the creation of job opportunities that can replace those of a disappearing industry. Some of the questions to be answered are: Has the NCCP been efficient in promoting the transition towards the new rurality? Has the NCCP influenced forms of cooperation, the distribution of power and the degree of autonomy of stakeholders at regional level? And if so, how? Which are the main differences between regions? Which are the main expressions of the NCCP at regional level? Which are challenges and opportunities for the future of the NCCP?

2. Methods and sources

This article is mainly based on seven focus groups¹ conducted during 2013 in the counties of Jämtland, Skåne, Södermanland, Uppland, Västerbotten, Västernorrland and Östergötland (figure 1) and one group interview conducted in, Västra Götaland with the participation of 105 key stakeholders at regional level, such as representatives of farmers and food artisans and food processors' organisations, Country board administration (here after CBA), municipalities, leaders of important rural development and food projects, NGO's, farmers and food producers, regional representatives of the national farmers' association, tourism organisations, local universities and other knowledge centers.



¹ Some complementing interviews were also conducted with Mattias Dernelid, brand manager for Smakriket (The taste kingdom), a brand for artisan food owned by one of the largest wholesale companies, Martin&Servera (10th of January 2014); Helene Oscarsson, CEO of Vreta Kluster in Östergötland, (7th of October 2014) and Bo Källstrand, Governor of Västernorrland, Interviewed 5th of December 2013.

The counties were selected with the aim of getting a representative sample of Sweden. Since part of the purpose of the study is to understand the dynamics between stakeholders, focus groups were considered as the best method. In a focus group, participants work with questions pre-determined by the researcher. As participants work through the questions together answers are generated through a dynamic discussion that allows for a deep understanding. Focus groups also enable reaching a large number of informants during a short period of time (Tursunovic 2002).

3. Policies for the new rurality - a conceptual discussion

The concept of governance is normally used to describe how government and non-governmental organizations cooperate and interact, how power is distributed within the state but also outside. It can also be used to create conditions for ordered rule and collective action (Stoker 1998, p.18). Goodwin (1998) proposed that the new rural governance includes the capacity of agents and stakeholders to act. He argued that the study of the new rural governance should include how *social, economic and political* interests are articulated in rural areas. This is critical for the understanding forms of power and the goals and interests within a governance structure and to answer questions of who is involved in governance and who is excluded.

Power dependence between stakeholders is another important area of study. This is essential to understand coordination of territories, resources and people, or the lack of it (Goodwin 1998). The latter can also be studied through an analysis of territorial governance, which has been defined as “*the process of territorial organisation of the multiplicity of relations that characterize interactions among actors and different, but non-conflictual interests and construction of a shared territorial vision*” (Davoudi et. al 2008:37). It is of course possible to criticize this definition starting from the vast research that actually highlights the presence of conflictual interests in any process that includes rurality. However, if interpreted as an ideal model for territorial governance it can be used to understand success or failure of defined goals depending on how close or how far a particular case is from this ideal.

A further proposition is to study the creation of regimes, partnerships or co-operation groups; and the capacity to achieve policy goals (Goodwin 1998). Some of which can be visualized through quality schemes that are used to organize and structure relations within alternative agro-food networks (Higgins et. al 2008:15-27). The latter can also include network analysis, within which networks are understood as linked together through external or internal agency and within which stakeholders sometimes join forces to meet various challenges (Murdoch 2000, pp. 407-419).

All of the above propositions include an in depth understanding of the structures through which rural areas are governed. Issues such as degree of autonomy of rural areas versus the degree of centralization of rural policies by the central state are key issues to understand the cause of restructuring (Woods 2011). The concepts and positions are also of value for this particular analysis, but in this article the emphasis will be put on *forms of cooperation at regional level* to answer the question of how the NCCP has influenced regional governance, e.g. the forms of cooperation; *the level of autonomy and centralization* of stakeholders vis-a vis regional authorities, to answer the question of the degree and efficiency of top-down, respectively bottom up strategies at regional level; *the distribution of power*, to answer the question of which strategies/constellations are efficient in promoting the new rurality through the NCCP; and the expressions and

challenges that varying regional strategies give rise to. The *efficiency of the policies* will also be discussed in relation to the mentioned concepts² *Efficiency* is in this case understood as the capacity of regional governance to promote diversification, achieve regional coordination of stakeholders and resources, produce synergies and stimulate the creation of activities and practical solutions that will sustain the new rurality, translated into festivals, markets, regional umbrella brands, geographical indications, cooperation between producers and stakeholders, et cetera. The study is delimited to the regional level.

4. The productivist regime vs. the new rural regime - a background

Like in other Western European countries, Sweden implemented agricultural policies that aimed to promote a rise in productivity at farm level during a large part of the 20th Century. The decline in number of farms was, until the late 20th Century, desired since it enabled the transfer of labour from agriculture to the industry. But since the 1990's and especially after the Swedish EU membership, the competitive power of Swedish agriculture declined rapidly (especially vis a vis its European competitors) and the decline in number of farms accelerated. In 1990 there were 96560 farms, and in 2002 the number had been reduced to (almost 27 percent) (Jordbruksstatistisk Årsbok 2002 and 2012). This called for measures, not the least to stop the depopulation of rural spaces.

The decoupling of agricultural subsidies in 2003 offered a possibility to rephrase policies and a totally new course was set to create a shift of policies from a focus on agricultural production to a broader rural development goal (Government document 2003/04:137 and SOU 2006:101). The shift is described as highlighting "place based firms" (farms and other rural firms) as a new and strategic resource for future growth (SOU 2006:101).

The shift was accentuated in 2007, when the government re-named the policy to "Sweden the New Culinary Country program" (NCCP). The initiative was financed through the Rural Development program through modulation, e.g. transfer of funds from traditional agricultural policy instruments to environment improving measures and rural development. Therefore, part of the funds that previously were channeled to farm support now is granted to new areas. An evaluation of the goal achievement of the NCCP shows that primary production, e. g. traditional agriculture has received a marginal amount of the funds (only 6%) (Kontigo 2013).

Although it seems that this might be a totally new political focus, it is partly an old vine in new skin. The initiative widened agro-food policies to include large and small scale food elaboration, tourism, public procurement, restaurants and also some social goals. As can be seen below, parts of the initiative really represent an effort to promote the new rurality and others aim to promote a more general post-industrial development and employment policy.

² With the exception of the term regime, that in most cases is used to highlight the mentioned issues at a higher level of aggregation (e.g. national or international).

Tab. 1 - Overview of the NCCP

| Focus area/goals of the NCCP* | |
|---|--|
| 1. | General goals |
| a. | New work opportunities (20 thousand new jobs) and increased economic growth in rural areas and villages. |
| 2. | Public food |
| a. | More SMEs (farms and firms) participating and winning contracts in public procurement |
| b. | Increased quality of public food |
| 3. | Primary production |
| a. | The share of farmers comfortable with her/his choice of work increases |
| b. | Increased production and increased profitability |
| c. | More young people applying to agricultural educational programs |
| 4. | Processed food |
| a. | Increased production and profitability |
| b. | More food companies (20% to 2020) |
| c. | Double food exports |
| d. | More SME contribute to export growth |
| e. | Access to well-educated personnel that masters the know-how |
| 5. | Food tourism |
| a. | Increased number of guest nights in rural areas by 20 % to 2020 |
| b. | Increased number of farms that offer lodging, farm store, farm restaurant, etc. |
| 6. | Restaurants |
| a. | Increased profitability |
| b. | More restaurants with high standard. |
| Source: Jordbruksdepartementet 2008. * Today there is a sixth focus area that was formulated after the first evaluation of the program in 2013. The new focus area is trade and includes food wholesale, retail and consumers (Regeringen 2013). | |

The goals that have a direct relevance for rural areas are number 1a; 2a; 3a, b, c and 5 a and b. The other goals influence rural areas only indirectly. An evaluation of the goal achievement of the NCCP was presented in 2013 shows that the goals were in general are difficult to measure³. But the evaluation looked only at the macro level, therefore the following analysis is of high relevance for understanding the true impact of the NCCP.

³ The evaluation divided the five main goals into 16 part goals, of which 11 disclosed an unclear development only five showed a clear positive development (Kontigo 2013). Failure was explained as a result of unrealistic and badly defined goals. For example the main employment goal is extremely difficult to measure since the agro-food sector is undergoing a text book example process of creative destruction. Old companies and farms are disappearing at a fast rate, while new firms and farms with new scopes and business ideas are emerging. Moreover, many farms diversify as a strategy to cope with negative market pressure. Results are also influenced by how the NCCP work has been organized at regional level.

5. The structure of the NCCP at regional level and forms of cooperation

The structure of the NCCP at regional level and forms of cooperation can reveal which type of governance has articulated at regional level to implement the NCCP. In several of the counties regional NCCP groups have been founded to coordinate activities, facilitate the interchange of experiences and create synergies. Such groups are found in Jämtland, Skåne, Västerbotten, Västernorrland and Östergötland. Results show that the existence of an NCCP group influences the impact of the NCCP on the emergence of new rurality activities. But coordination for other purposes can have the same positive effect. This is the case in Västra Götaland, where the tourism sector, through the Västra Götaland Tourism Board, initiated a cooperation with Lokalproducerat I Väst (Local food in the West)⁴, not for the purpose of NCCP work, but to improve the access of local food as part of destination development and in a few cases making food as the main goal of tourism. This alliance has generated favorable effects for the achievement of NCCP goals.

In Uppland there is no organized NCCP work but there is some degree of coordination through the food artisan/farmer alliance “Bondens Mat I Uppland”⁵, through which they organize the yearly “Farmers’ own food festival”, developed a food map with information of all members, farmers markets and other activities. In Södermanland there is no NCCP group, but group food artisans created a cluster, “Sörmlands Matkluster”⁶, to coordinate activities, such as food walks and festivals. This is however a relatively small group, one of the main topics brought up by the respondents during the focus group was the discord between various stakeholders, including the CBA. They concluded that producers can sell everything to the Stockholm market; therefore they don’t need to cooperate.

Another influencing factor is the formulation of regional NCCP strategies. Two counties had in 2013 formulated strategies for their NCCP work, namely Skåne and Södermanland. In Skåne the strategy is divided into a food strategy and a beverage strategy. The formulation process has been an important tool to move the process forward, since a large number of stakeholders were involved during parts of the process. In Södermanland the situation is different. The county board administration formulated a strategy and asked key stakeholders to retrospectively legitimize and adopt the strategy. This created a problematic situation because stakeholders believe that the provincial government competes with them rather than to facilitate their work.

The main conclusions of the focus groups is that (1) coordination of resources and stakeholders is a key to achieve success, (2) the articulation of a legitimate NCCP strategy speeds up the creation of synergies and promotes cooperation between different types of stakeholders, for example farmers and chefs, farmers and schools, food artisans and stores, food artisans, stakeholders, (3) that the CBA (Country Board Administration) can facilitate the NCCP work but also obstruct it. A facilitating attitude leads to more positive effects. There is also an important difference between the South and North of Sweden, since market conditions in the North are tougher, especially for farmers that are rapidly decreasing in numbers; (4) that a bottom up,

⁴ Lokalproducerat I Väst is an advisory/consultancy firm that also organizes a network of local food producers in the province of Västra Götaland.

⁵ The farmers’ food in Uppland, <http://www.bondensmatuppland.se/hem>

⁶ <http://www.matkluster.se/>

inclusive practice promotes the spread of the new rurality, increases the economic potential of a region - because it leads to different forms of cooperation that creates synergies. While a top down approach creates the opposite results (Rytkönen 2014).

6. Distribution of power at regional level

The distribution and allocation of power is decisive for the facilitating goal achievement and policy efficiency at regional level. Differences in the distribution of power at regional level are visualized below. The results of the focus groups show that there are four main stakeholders and the degree of autonomy and even progress concerning goal achievement was dependent on which one of these stakeholders issued the greatest influence over the NCCP work. The four stakeholders are food artisans, primary producers/farmers, tourism industry and public agents.

| | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Food artisans Jämtland Västernorrland | - - - - Skåne - - - - | Primary production Östergötland Västerbotten |
| 3. Tourism Västra Götaland | | 4. Public agents Uppland Södermanland |

The results show that in counties where the tourism sector, food artisans or primary producers' interests were more dominant stakeholders had worked out forms of cooperation that are including and initiatives are more or less bottom up. This facilitates goal achievement and coordination of resources. In the counties where the public sector is the leading agent, by power struggles and conflicts are representative features.

In Östergötland the NCCP work is organized under the umbrella of Vreta Kluster, and incipient cluster in which representatives of main stream conventional agriculture are leading, but food artisans and consultants are also present. Funding is channeled from the regional authorities to the leadership of the cluster and thereafter funds are distributed to the cluster members based on various projects (Helene Oscarsson, Interview 2014-10-07).

In Västerbotten it is the regional office of the National Farmers' Association that acts as convenor and locomotive for different activities. Funding from the Rural Development program is issued by the CBA. In Jämtland food artisans are dominant. This is not surprising, since the 1970's established a food artisan cluster that is leading even at national level. Other stakeholders moved in the village of Ås, where the national center for artisan food is located. Synergies are expected to increase. (Rytkönen et al 2013).

In Västernorrland the dominant stakeholder is the food artisan association Smakstart Västernorrland in cooperation with the Swedish Rural Economies and Agricultural Societies that act as a node for activities concerning rural development in general and the NCCP in particular. Västernorrland is a late starter compared to other Swedish counties, but coordination of activities and a broad inclusion of stakeholders and agents has been a condition for funding set by the CBA (Interview with Bo Källstrand, Governor of Västernorrland 2013-12-05).

In Västra Götaland the leading agent is the tourism industry. This county discloses a deep contrast between coastal and inland areas. Most efforts are concentrated on the exotic coast, by

offering lobster safaris and other activities connected with small scale fisheries. A common feature the above named experiences is that the dominance of tourism, primary producers and food artisans, does not exclude the existence of other types of stakeholders, but the interests of the leading stakeholder leaves a mark on the strategies and activities that are undertaken.

In Södermanland and Uppland the dominant stakeholder is the CBA. The most extreme case is Södermanland, where the CBA has developed strategies and posteriorly asked stakeholders to validate them. In Uppland there is an incipient cooperation between stakeholders. In both counties the CBA has taken the role of main stakeholder. This is perceived by respondents as generally negative, since developed strategies lack legitimacy amongst the people that are supposed to achieve them.

Skåne is the only example where there is a general balance between stakeholders. Stakeholders are organized under the umbrella organization of Livsmedelsakademi (Food Academy) and the CBA has played a key role in supporting the formation of a regional governance model. It is also Skåne that has achieved the most concerning the NCCP. Some of the results are applied research, the articulation of a beverage strategy, increased number of successful activities such as the Skåne Food Festival, just to mention a few.

In Uppland, Västernorrland and Västerbotten there is an alliance between food artisans and primary producers, which is considered a success factor. In Västerbotten and Västernorrland the rapid decline of agriculture forces stakeholders together.

The main conclusion concerning the distribution of power is that the efficiency of the NCCP in promoting the new rurality is generally negative or insufficient when public agents are the leading stakeholder.

7. Autonomy versus centralisation

Looking at autonomy and centralization of the NCCP work can help us to understand which strategies are more efficient in the achievement of the goals of the NCCP.

Autonomy means that stakeholders have or are in the process of articulating a model for inclusive regional governance, while centralization means that the government controls the exercise of power and decision making is done without stakeholder participation (Woods 2011). Looking at Autonomy versus centralization offers understanding of the potential of top down, versus bottom up policies for promoting a shift towards the new rurality.

Skåne, Västra Götaland, Jämtland and Östergötland disclose the highest degree of autonomy. This has meant that strategic decisions have been made by stakeholders and resources have been allocated on the needs that respective leading stakeholders consider most important. In Östergötland for example an important focus of the NCCP work has been to open up possibilities for winning public procurement calls for local farmers. In addition, the work at Vreta Kluster is organized around specific primary products, and stakeholders (farmers, food artisans, researchers and consultants) all team up around each product. Best results have been achieved in these three counties.

Västerbotten and Västernorrland constitute a special case. Due to the difficult market conditions for farmers in both counties the CBA plays a larger role, still leaving some degree of autonomy to active stakeholders. Results are positive, although current market conditions hamper future potential.

Both Uppland and Södermanland disclose a high degree of centralization and most or all

decisions are made by the CBA. The participants in the focus groups noted that there is a huge potential for economic growth, but that the actions of the CBA and their detailed control over available subsidies limit their possibilities.

8. Expressions of the NCCP at regional level

A considerable number of activities that promote the new rurality take place in all regions. In several places regional NCCP groups to coordinate actions have been initiated. These groups contribute with the territorial coordination of resources, they facilitate synergies and enable the diffusion of knowledge. In Skåne for example, Smaka på Skåne (taste of Skåne) has regular meetings with a panel of retail stores. The panel members help to solve logistical problems so that local food can reach the stores. In several of the counties speed-dating between stores and farmers/food artisans, and between chefs and farmers/food artisans are organized. This helps creating new sales opportunities, but also offering the producers feedback on their quality and knowledge about what the market wants. Food festivals and/or the food logistics of other large activities are promoted. For example in Östergötland, there is a lot of emphasis on promoting local food on large sport tournaments, in Västerbotten the NCCP group is coordinating all food events and food logistics in the celebration of the National Cultural Capital that will be going on in Umeå (one of the main cities) throughout 2014.

Place based branding, using the name of the county or landscape is an important expression of the process of territorialization and all focus groups concluded the positive influence of the NCCP on that process. One of the measures adopted by the government at the beginning of this program was the appointment of NCCP ambassadors in each Swedish landscape. In some cases the geographical limits of landscapes coincide with those of counties and some do not. Nevertheless, these appointed ambassadors have played a crucial role in the promotion of the NCCP in their regions. They have become symbols of their landscape. Moreover, a number of umbrella brands, using the name of the landscape/county have been established to promote regional food.

Brands (or trademarks) can be divided with reference to their status. A relevant such in this case the budget brands, which are used to turn to broad audiences and premium brands used when companies want to reach an audience that is willing to pay a higher price for the product, in exchange of experiences and qualities that together provide a sense of class, prosperous and distinctive from the mass market (Parment 2006). In this case the umbrella brands are used to mediate a feeling of belonging to the local consumer and add a sense of localness to bulk products and more exclusive foodstuffs. According to Mattias Dernelid (representative for the artisan food brand Smakriket at the whole sale company Martin&Servera), these regional brands work well on the brand's home (regional) market.

The results indicate that working with terroir and territorializing, e. g. using territorial attributes in food production and marketing activities is increasing rapidly. The counties that show most progress share some important features: 1) The CBA facilitates (and does not take over) the coordination of activities and long term planning; 2) There is a functioning NCCP group or other entity with long term commitment that coordinates actions; 3) Leading individuals in the group have a clear territorial thinking.

A shortcoming in the presentation above is the lack of available statistics that enables a separation of traditional farm diversification and farm activities from that of the new rurality. However, the National Board of Agriculture notes that the number of new work opportunities in less

favoured areas and rural areas is larger than the number of closures. Most of these work opportunities are created by self-employment in micro businesses (Jordbruksverket 2014).

10. Matlandet (Food country) or Pratlandet (talk country)

The results of the focus groups show that the main critique is that the shift in policy has led to a vast increased number of projects in which the local stakeholders, and especially farmers and food artisans are expected to participate in. These projects are considered to take too much time from the producer's own productive and economic activities. In addition, most projects are granted for a period of one year and the entities applying for the projects are often local organizations and NGO's. Since these local stakeholders need to survive on a year to year basis, every year they need to apply for new projects, which they sometimes do at the expense of previous positive outcomes. Thus the funding system might be counterproductive since it does not stimulate to long term investments.

The two main challenges are the decreasing number of students in agricultural secondary school programs and the rapidly decreasing number of farms, especially in the northern part of Sweden. This was illustrated by the Chairman of the NFA in Jämtland through the following quote:

"When there is more than 150 kilometers to the next farmer and one cannot borrow a filter - then one becomes a loser"

One conclusion is that the decline in number of farms presents severe problems, not only for the future articulation of the NCCP. The argument of stakeholders is quite clear: Without food, no there can be no culinary country! The decline can be illustrated through the dairy sector. According to statistics, the number of dairy farms in Jämtland decreased from 372 in December 2001 to 151 in December 2012, in Västerbotten the number of farms was 529 in 2001 and 258 in 2012, in Västernorrland it was 344 in 2001 and 132 in 2012, in Skåne it was 1043 in 2001 and 426 in 2012, in Östergötland it was 590 in 2001 and 309 in 2012 and finally in Västra Götaland it was 1981 in 2001 and 865 in 2012. (Svensk Mjölk 2013). There is, however, an important difference between the north and the south of the country because in the South there are other economic alternatives and the number of large cities is larger, while in the northern part and especially in the inland of Sweden, primary production is essential for the local economy.

Another important conclusion is that bureaucracy is still seen as a large problem when people want to start food production. Producers need to keep contact with a large number of authorities, rules are difficult to interpret and implementation is quite varied. This is confirmed by Bonow et al (2013), who concluded that local food and health regulations for fisheries in the four municipalities that form the delimited area for the PDO Kalix Ljörom varies between individual inspectors. While some of the fisheries were forced to refrain from using the preparation facilities for other purposes during the 11 months when there is no vendance harvest, while other municipalities gave permission for other uses (Bonow et al 2013).

11. Concluding remarks

Returning to the questions asked in this article: Has the NCCP been efficient in promoting the transition towards the new rurality? How has the NCCP influenced forms of cooperation, the distribution of power and the degree of autonomy of stakeholders at regional level? Which are the main differences between regions? Which are the main expressions of the NCCP at regional level? Which are challenges and opportunities for the future of the NCCP?

Four indicators were selected to answer our questions. The first, *forms of cooperation at regional level*, shows that NCCP groups have been formed in Jämtland, Skåne, Västerbotten Västernorrland and Östergötland and in Västra Götaland the tourism sector indirectly drives the NCCP agenda. Although the leading stakeholders in each county have directed the focus of the NCCP to reflect their own interests, these groups are efficient in coordinating efforts and resources as well as promoting the new rurality through the NCCP. Since conditions and strategies vary results are more or less successful. Contrary to the previous, in Uppland and Södermanland where the degree of coordination is less pronounced, results are also less positive.

The second and third indicators, *the level of autonomy and centralization and the distribution of power* indicate that the best results have been obtained by counties in which stakeholders are relatively autonomous and that represent the interests of either agriculture, food artisans or the tourism industry, (e.g. private sector). An important lesson is that the role of the CBA should be to facilitate and not to control development in detail. The two examples in which the CBA is the leading stakeholder, Uppland and Södermanland, clearly show that when authorities implement a top-down approach development might be hampered. Although this might seem as a plea for a more liberal approach when implementing rural development policies, the argument of stakeholders is that a detailed meddling from the CBA consumes time and energy that stakeholders need to conduct their businesses. But there is a contradiction in this argument, because respondents also criticized the NCCP for being too vague and a clearer direction was desired.

The last and fourth and last indicator is the *concrete outcomes and challenges* for the NCCP. There are many activities at regional level, such as umbrella brands, food festivals, markets and fairs and geographical indications. Regional coordination and the degree of autonomy of stakeholders vis-à-vis the CBA are directly correlated to the number of expressions of the NCCP and of their efficiency. Consequently Skåne, Västra Götaland and Östergötland have achieved the highest efficiency in the implementation of the NCCP, Västernorrland and Västerbotten are half way, struggling with the negative market conditions of the agro-food sector in the north of the country, while Uppland and Södermanland disclose the least efficiency.

Finally, there is a vast critique towards the NCCP. The main challenge for the future seems to be the underlying process of structural rationalization that each year forces many farmers to close down their operations. In spite of the critique and of the challenges, the NCCP has during a few years facilitated the transition of agriculture to a broader rural development.

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