



## “County residents take up the fight”: Representing rural resilience

By

Anna Sofia Lundgren & Karin Ljuslinder

### Abstract

Celebrations of local volunteering as a way to cope with cutbacks are frequent, not least within the media, where local initiatives are sometimes described as the solutions to downward spiralling trends in Swedish rural areas. This paper explores the production of meaning around rural resilience as the media covers initiatives in which rural populations have mobilised to ‘save’ threatened local services. Using the concepts of ‘patchy resilience’ and ‘cruel optimism’, the paper highlights how the news media attach rural areas and identities to a stereotypical rural imagery while also representing a resilience ideal that risks glorifying neoliberal responsabilisation.

**Keywords:** rural studies; media representations; rural resilience; volunteer initiatives

Lundgren, Anna Sofia & Ljuslinder, Karin “County residents take up the fight’:  
Representing rural resilience”, Culture Unbound, Vol 16, issue 1, 2024.

Published by Linköping University Electronic Press:

<http://www.cultureunbound.ep.liu.se> <https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.4285>



## Introduction and aim

Celebrations of local volunteering as a way to cope with cutbacks are frequent, not least within the media, where local initiatives are sometimes described as the solutions to downward spiralling trends in Swedish rural areas. Two examples can be illustrative:

In 2014, the Swedish weekly magazine *Land*, which focuses on life in Swedish rural areas, published an article about the challenges these rural areas face and the best ways to turn things around (*Land* 18 Sept 2014). For each challenge, two concrete and inspirational examples were given of local villages which have managed to meet that challenge. Although the challenges comprise quite advanced projects, such as “Building broadband and new media”, “Improving communications”, “Saving and developing the local school” and “Building new housing”, the focus is on how these challenges can be met without relying on the state, regions or municipalities. The tone is positive and the empirical examples convey an optimistic spirit.

Two years later, in 2016, the same magazine spotted what is referred to as a ‘new’ trend. This consists of rural populations taking civil action when community services are closed down. Under the headline: “The village revolutions that became successes” (*Land* 8 April 2016), taking over ownership of services is described as the pattern of the future for the countryside, and the article lists ten “exciting examples” of successful takeovers. It is argued that it is possible to detect a new energy and self-confidence among rural populations. The images used to illustrate this article all depict happy, smiling people.

These two media texts construct local volunteer initiatives to ‘take over business’ as desirable and positively charged, given the harsh situation faced by rural areas with diminishing and ageing populations. The way in which they are formulated is typical of what is often referred to as ‘resilience thinking’ (Scott 2013; Skerratt 2013); they take an interest in, and celebrate, communities’ proactive or reactive agency and treat the cutbacks in community services in rural Sweden during the last few decades as ongoing ‘disturbances’ or ‘threats’ that successful villages can manage. The articles’ admiring descriptions and illustrations of smiling faces create images of, and hopes for, a countryside that remains viable by means of local engagement.

But resilience thinking has been criticised for downplaying the way in which austerity politics has increasingly transferred responsibility for welfare services to local rural initiatives (cf. Enlund 2020). And, while volunteer initiatives are often described as increasingly important in regional policy (Rönblom 2014; Husu & Kumpulainen 2019), very little interest has been directed towards how such initiatives are also reflected in, and shaped by, more far-reaching public representations of this type of local response to change (Skinner et al. 2016). The

way in which spatial representations like the ones in *Land* magazine circulate has a bearing on people's worldviews as the media possesses moulding forces (Hepp 2012) that promote some perspectives on rural initiatives while discouraging others. Hence, the media representations are crucial aspects of the performance of spaces (and places) (Ek 2006); they partake in the ongoing politics of the rural, and are involved in a discursive struggle over the building of rural space (Woods 2010). This makes them important objects for further analysis. Hence, this paper addresses the news media coverage of six local initiatives situated in the Swedish North, where rural populations have mobilised to save threatened local services, with the aim of exploring the presence of resilience thinking, and how it interconnects with notions of rural space and identity. How are such initiatives – their reasons, phases and outcomes – represented by the media and how does resilience thinking take place within those representations? Acknowledging the spatial dimension when exploring how the media contributes to notions of rural vulnerability and resilience when representing such initiatives opens up space for new knowledge about how resilience thinking evokes specific capacities in vulnerable groups and areas (McRobbie 2020).

While the two introductory examples, above, suggest that the media perspective on rural resilience is consistently positive, the material studied in this paper revealed a somewhat more nuanced image. We suggest that specific understandings of media representations can be achieved by using the concepts of 'patchy resilience' and 'cruel optimism', which will be further described below. The paper's contribution lies in the exploration of how the media produces rural space and identity while consolidating resilience thinking as the standard way forward. It also lies within the theorisations of resilience as an incoherent ideal and resilience thinking as an approach that is produced by assemblages of human actions, space and the media.

## Rural resilience and media representations

Resilience thinking has been robustly debated during the last few decades. Initially emerging from theorisations within biology and ecology (Holling 1973), the concept of resilience has found its way into social and cultural studies of the rural. This has led to the raising of warning fingers. Some have expressed concerns that the translation of the concept would introduce a too-static view of social and cultural life as systems of static equilibrium (Pike et al. 2010). Others have highlighted problems related to the focus on disturbances of a supposed status quo. Such disturbances often tend to be comprehended as external threats, such as natural disasters or wars, which systems and societies then need to 'bounce back' from or 'bounce forward' to (Scott 2013). This is problematic, not only because

it portrays everyday life as somehow ‘undisturbed’, but also because it fails to acknowledge that social and cultural life is always in flux (Magis 2010; Skerratt 2013). For rural areas, this includes demographic processes such as ageing populations as well as processes of service withdrawal. Such processes constitute a constant presence as well as a constant threat of further blows and cutbacks (cf. Vigh 2008).

But the concept of resilience has also faced other criticisms. Since it often centres on practices at the local and individual levels, which are carried out in order to cope with problematic situations, it has been suggested that resilience thinking is inherently entwined with neoliberal ideologies (Neocleous 2013; Bracke 2016) – hence promoting liberal individualism, unrestricted competition, the deregulation of markets and reductions in public welfare expenditure (Harvey 2003). Celebrating local volunteering to cope with cutbacks is seen as supporting processes of responsabilisation (Joseph 2013; Caldwell 2015) and consolidating the neoliberal emphasis on regional growth that is already present within much rural policy (ITPS 2005; Hudson 2012; Husu & Kumpulainen 2019). Neoliberal influence also strengthens the focus on individual agency that often plays the key role in debates over rural resilience.

In this paper, resilience is taken as an entrance point to the study of contemporary operations of power through which processes of spatialisation and peripheralisation are negotiated (cf. Bracke 2016). This suggests a relationship between geographical space and power, and we turn here to Doreen Massey, who argues that space is “forever open to contestation” and is therefore continually changing (1994: 169). Massey (1991) emphasises that a place gains specificity from the networks of relations that are forming and have formed it, which implies that the significance of a space is related to processes of uneven geographical development and to the way in which such unevenness is comprehended and made significant. This means that the significance ascribed to the inland areas of northern Sweden is caught up in power dynamics that include both regional policy and local meaning-making. The latter includes articulations of the history of specific places as well as of imagined local identities and their perceived ability to display resilience and deal with setbacks. In order to enable an exploratory approach to how resilience thinking is constructed, we view resilience as a celebrated ideal whose meaning resides in particular articulations. In this sense, resilience is understood as a patchwork constituted by a wide range of ideas that are attributed to certain places, practices and positions, and then represented in the media.

Inspired by the writings of Tsing et al. (2019), and their notion of the ‘patchy Anthropocene’, we refer to this ambiguous yet seemingly uniform ideal as ‘patchy resilience’. ‘Patchy’ is an ambiguous word, argue Tsing et al. It casts light on the

tension between policy and its consequences; between political directions of will and the myriad of more or less organised efforts to cope with their various effects. The notion of patchiness also refers to the – not always coherent or comprehensive – components, or patches, of which the notion of resilience is constituted in the studied media reports. While Tsing et al. (2019) focus on more-than-human space and time in landscapes that are increasingly dominated by industrial forms, we limit our focus to the assemblages where, *inter alia*, political decisions, local initiatives, notions of space and the media interact in the production of (always) patchy resilience. Focusing on the ways in which the media constitute spaces where such articulations are performed, this perspective opens up the possibility of understanding the agency that resides in the media. Thus, agency is not primarily connected to whomever is responsible for a particular text, but to the media as a space for particular articulations. This theoretical stance implies that we have viewed the media's representations of the cases as utterances in the Foucauldian sense – seen as neither more nor less 'real' than other utterances.

News media was chosen because it is still considered the most important source of current information and is also the one most widely distributed (*Mediebarometern* 2021; McQuail 2010). Most people read a morning paper, with half of the population having a subscription, and a majority read the digitalised version of their newspaper. While much has been written about how rural communities have responded to, and themselves communicated meaning around, situations involving the impending threats of closures, cutbacks and diminishing and ageing populations (e.g. Forsberg 2010; Cras 2017; Lundgren & Nilsson 2018, 2023; Enlund 2020), less attention has been directed towards how the situation plays out in news media, where content is beyond the control of local villagers and disseminated across larger audiences (but see Skinner et al. 2013, 2016). Previous studies suggest that representations in the media are of great significance for how rural identities and futures are perceived. It has also been concluded that the news media has helped to shape a narrative about the rural north of Sweden as dying (Andersson 2013) and as a space that, from an urban capitalist perspective, is perceived as empty and available for exploitation (Dahlberg-Grundberg & Örestig 2016). Studies of news media reports on the Swedish rural North have also identified a slight tendency towards rural populism, whereby rural and urban areas are represented as antagonistic (Nilsson & Lundgren 2019).

Importantly, however, the media does not consist of a uniform, unambiguous voice in the ongoing constitution of geographical space, but produces texts from various perspectives that are open to a diversity of interpretations. While the media can be seen as a key source of insights into community responses, the meaning it produces is never a pure reflection of the local population's views or of the situations they describe. As suggested by Stuart Hall (1997), the concept

of ‘representation’ highlights the way in which any effort to describe something always introduces new aspects – angles, voices or just different choices of words – and therefore also always produces new meaning. Hence, representations within the media reports reflect, but also shape, community members’ perceptions (Skinner et al. 2016) as well as both reflecting and shaping the spatial imageries and identities connected to the ‘rural’ (Cresswell 2014; Fast et al. 2018). It is this shaping, or performative capacity, of what is published in the media that makes scrutiny of the media so important, since it has the potential to promote and set the agenda (McCombs 2014) for certain aspects of rurality, rural practices and rural identities. When the media corresponds with other authoritative voices, such as policy texts, in how to understand rural volunteering, its performative capacity can indeed be seen in terms of a moulding force (Hepp 2012).

## Methodology

The empirical material for this study consists of contemporary media representations of rural initiatives to save local services, all localised in rural parts of northern Sweden. To find these representations, we used the web-based archive Mediearkivet/Retriever to locate relevant local and national news articles. Because the word ‘resilience’ was not used explicitly, and hence was not suitable as a search word, we first conducted a broad search of local newspapers covering sparsely populated areas in northern Sweden, for news articles about volunteer initiatives and activities. For this first broad search, we used multiple search terms, including: ‘volunteer’ (frivillig), ‘closure’ (stängning) and ‘shutdown’ (nedläggning), together with ‘rural area’ (landsbygd) and ‘sparsely populated area’ (glesbygd) together with potential services such as ‘school’ (skola), ‘shop’ (affär), ‘cottage hospital’ (sjukstuga) and ‘refugee reception’ (flyktmottagning). The search yielded over 300 000 hits, a majority of which dealt with political decisions where rural populations figured only as passive audiences trapped in hopelessness and powerlessness.

Because we were not seeking representativity, but were interested in finding examples of voluntary rural initiatives suitable for an analysis of resilience thinking, a second, more refined, search was conducted. We wanted to include everything that had been written about a selection of individual cases that, according to the first search, had proven to have the characteristics we were interested in. They focused on what de Haan et al. (2018: 313) call ‘citizen initiatives’ that “formally or informally organised groups of citizens who are active and contribute to the public domain”, and covered processes whereby such initiatives had ‘taken things into their own hands’ and mobilised to ‘save’ local services that had been faced with cutback decisions from county councils, municipalities or commercial actors.

The second search therefore included using the specific names of the places and services in question.

A purposive sample of six local cases was chosen for further study. Because we were specifically interested in sparsely populated areas in the north of Sweden, they were all localised in villages of between 200 and 8000 inhabitants in the counties of Västerbotten and Västernorrland. Each of these respective places certainly had their own specific challenges, but the media representations of the cases seldom described such specificities, but rather focused on rural similarities. To restrict our investigation to more recent situations, they all took place between 2000 and 2020. This is a time period when critical political changes were taking place, not least a strengthening of neoliberal ideology. The cases concerned the closure and takeover of important services: one petrol station, one hospital, three schools and one local grocery shop. Together, the six cases featured in approximately 140 news items spanning both local and national media.

The news items were analysed in terms of text and illustration, and the narratives of rural vulnerability and resilience that each set of news items represented – separately and together. The six cases were reported in the media with between 12 and 34 news items per case, spanning periods of between two and 20 years. Including *all* of the items addressing each case meant that both celebratory texts like the ones in the introductory examples and more critical or pessimistic texts could be studied. Most texts were published in local newspapers, primarily *Västerbottens-Kuriren* and *Västerbottningen*. Only a handful of articles, specifically regarding one of the cases, reached the national press.

A qualitative text analysis was performed. In our first analytical step, all the media reports on the respective initiatives were read through and their respective storylines were documented. This included making notes on events that stood out as important and singled out in the news reports – e.g. decisions to cut back on a specific service, initiatives to protest decisions or the outcomes of initiatives – and on the type of focus, activities, identities and emotional responses with which each phase was associated. It also included making notes on whose voices were represented.

An important reflection regarding the division into phases is that it brings with it images of linear and temporal movement (cf. Woods et al. 2012). In that sense, dividing events into phases risks obscuring the relational and dynamic character of space, place and identity, as described by Massey (2005). This calls for caution, and we want to stress that pinpointing the ways in which different phases and emotions are represented was not our main goal; the first analytical step served the primary aim of describing the overarching tendencies against which the following analyses were conducted. We report the results of this first analytical step in the following section.

In the second analytical step, we explored how initiatives were explicitly and implicitly embedded in context, such that the media reports were made comprehensible from a perspective of space, spatially related politics and identities. We looked for how the media reports included references to places and areas – specific villages or types of area – in order to explain the initiatives. This enabled analyses of how spatial relations were constructed and imbued with certain power dynamics, but also how rural populations were variously represented as actors in and victims of the reported initiatives. We have used the concepts of ‘spatial imageries’ and ‘rural identities’ to highlight the notions of rural space and identity that were produced in these representations.

We then discussed the storylines, their contextualisations and the notions of space and identity they contained in relation to evolving debates on rural resilience. Two concepts were chosen as specific entrances to these discussions: ‘patchy resilience’ and ‘cruel optimism’. While the former, inspired by Tsing et al. (2019), emphasises the incoherent concurrency of the resilience thinking represented, the latter, inspired by Berlant (2007), opens up space for analyses of the ideological directions encouraged by the positive values with which resilience was articulated by the media.

## The media narratives

The media narratives were all structured around four central phases, which each focused on different aspects of the reported cases: the threat of closure, resistance to those closures, successful takeovers and new closures. Typically, these phases were entangled in different ways depending on the angle of the news piece, and often appeared in the same news item. We have separated them below for clarity.

*1. Reporting the threat.* The first phase entails the news that a local service is threatened with closure. Contextualising descriptions are provided of the local area and its population, together with brief histories of the local services, along with information about who took the decision and on what grounds. The first reports on decisions or proposals to withdraw services are perceived by journalists – and the villagers who are given a voice in the media reports – to be negative for the local area. This is given extra weight through descriptions of the villagers’ feelings of disbelief, depression and dismay. Villagers often admit to having been taken by surprise by the decision; saying that they see it as a mockery and feel anger, hopelessness and powerlessness. Repeatedly, the quoted villagers link the decision to the viability of their future. The decision to withdraw a service is constructed as a threat to the conditions of viability for the local area, and sometimes also as a symbol for the hardships of life in rural areas in general (cf. Larsson 2018; Enlund 2020).

2. *Reporting resistance.* The focus changes as the narratives begin to represent local protests. This second phase focuses on villagers' defiant reactions and emphasises their stated determination to 'fight' and give decision-makers a 'match'. It is often noted that villagers 'joined together collectively'. This second phase comprises concrete expressions of not wanting to cave in, and of local organisation. It is dominated by affective expressions of anger, commitment and fighting spirit. Primarily, the focus is on efforts to convince decision-makers to change their decisions, but also nascent plans for taking things into their own hands. Sometimes resistance is connected to rural struggles in other areas, thus creating significant connections between the local situation and the situation and power of action shown in other places or at other times. Other forms of defiant practices are also suggested in the texts as villagers are quoted about their plans. Consistent with recurring articulations of the decisions as 'death blows' that will destroy all chances of a local future, villagers argue that they will literally be forced to move away from the area if the decision is carried through: "then we'll move", "we'll sell the house and move away". Regardless of whether fighting or moving away are suggested as possible lines of action, they are always represented by the media as defiant practices that will be undertaken primarily as a politicised response to the policy decision being criticised.

3. *Reporting successful takeovers.* The third phase is mostly separated from the first two, and generally takes place some time later because protesting and preparing takes time – anything from a few weeks to around three years. This phase is about describing the successful takeover of the threatened service. It contains descriptions of the practical circumstances of the takeover, such as holding meetings, the setting up of associations or cooperatives, and collaborating with local businesses. The value of this phase is emphasised through representations of villagers' positively charged feelings of hope, joy and confidence, which contrast starkly with the feelings that were present within the other narrative phases. This third phase is also characterised by feelings of exhaustion after intense commitment, as well as relief, joy and a sense of empowerment expressed by villagers as the threatened service is restored. It contains pride about having accomplished things together, and village community is emphasised as being of particular importance, as is the oft-mentioned 'renewed faith in the future', connecting the initiatives with the temporality of rural space.

4. *Reporting new closures.* A fourth phase is common in news items published some time after the takeovers. This is about reporting the final closure of the service (this phase was present in all cases except that of the petrol station). This phase is often preceded by reports of new difficulties arising after the first takeover. When villagers are quoted, they describe feelings of disappointment and resignation. Sometimes reports are confined to short notices of bankruptcies and closures –

the reasons for which are always described as economic. After the fourth phase has been covered in the reporting of the community service, reports usually cease. Even though the problems and risks associated with losing the service remain and continue to affect the local population, the lack of an identifiable ‘topic’ – the threat of closure, protests, takeovers, closures – to which news texts can be connected, means that the situation disappears from the media, only appearing again as reminders in reports on related issues.

### **Producing rural space and identity**

Two approaches to resilience were apparent in the studied material – packaging initiatives as either sudden or processual. On the one hand, there was a desire to identify and report significant and reportable events; to “saturate coverage of events over a short period of time”, before turning to something else (see Altheide & Snow 1979: 238; van Dijk & Poell 2013). The first articles in particular, about the respective initiatives, focused on an initial incident that was easy to package as a singular acute ‘threat’ – often a decision to withdraw a service. These incidents seemed to have been necessary in order to catch the eye of the media. They tended to reproduce an understanding of resilience practices as rapid reactions to unforeseen crises.

This approach of focusing on specific events was paralleled, however, by constant contextualisations that situated them in troubled geographical space – by means of either long descriptions or short sentences or word choices. These contextualisations also comprised references to previous events, creating continuity over time. This type of contextualisation reproduced an understanding of resilience practices as embedded in an ongoing situation of rural decline and vulnerability, where threats were comprehended as the results of longstanding processes, rather than hitting suddenly and out of the blue (Magis 2010; Skerratt 2013). While the two approaches actualised different interpretations of resilience practices, they also worked together to produce both spatial imageries and rural identities.

#### *Spatial imageries*

Permeating all four phases were efforts to situate the represented initiatives in space. Not only were the local circumstances described, but the situation of rural areas in Norrland in general was given significance, and the reports hinted at a common understanding of the specific vulnerabilities of this space. Such comments indirectly suggest a certain degree of spatial insensitivity on the part of decision-makers (Skinner et al. 2016). Often, but not always, explicit critical references to rural policy were communicated in the material, either by the

journalist's indignant statements or by quoted villagers who leveraged criticism making it clear that the decisions being challenged were interpreted as examples of a spatially unjust situation marked by a general urban normativity.

Reports on decisions are thus instantly articulated within a negatively charged discourse on Swedish rural areas as marked by a downward spiral, and by being badly and unfairly treated by national rural and regional policy (cf. Nilsson & Lundgren 2021). In this sense, the volunteer initiatives are by default included in a strong narrative about rural decline (cf. Andersson 2013; Lundgren 2017); there was a constant undercurrent in the media representations presenting northern rural areas as problem-laden. When reporting on the protests against closing down a petrol station, its decisive significance for the region was established by quoting one of the villagers: "We want to keep the petrol station. We don't want a depletion of the area" (*Västerbottens-Kuriren*, 7 March 2001). Similarly, one news item contends that losing the village shop has further effects:

It's not just the shop that disappears, with the shop the village also loses [...] Apoteket and Systembolaget, Schenker, DHL, Bussgods and Svenska spel. [...] What will happen to [the petrol and diesel pumps currently placed outside the shop] is not entirely clear, but as it looks right now, the opportunity to buy fuel [locally] will also disappear. (*Lokaltidningen*, 13 Nov 2013)

In addition, when the topic of a specific news item was a successful takeover, and the focus was on the villagers' pride in having succeeded, the spatial embedding often reminded the reader of the difficult circumstances through comments such as: "It's about the survival of the village" (*Västerbottens-Kuriren*, 14 Nov 2016). Such embedding also included choice of words, such as the word 'saved' in headlines like: "Village saved its school" (*Västerbottens-Kuriren*, 8 Jan 2016), which relentlessly reminds readers of the previous threat.

Representations of takeovers were thus always also representations of rural space, as the media texts interwove the main topic with contextualising descriptions of concrete conditions and rural imagery. But although negatively charged imagery dominated, there were also representations of rural areas as spaces of specific engagement and community. Such representations highlighted a sense of community, affinity and a history of having (been forced into) taking responsibility (cf. Cras 2017; Enlund 2020; Gotfredsen et al. 2021). Representations of space gained extra power from being connected with other rural places where services had been threatened – regardless of whether they had lost them forever or succeeded in taking something over – thus forming relations between different villages. Such articulations contributing to a sense of rural specificity

and communality also draw upon the experience of other places, thus reaching beyond the physical boundaries of individual villages (Massey 2005).

While the media certainly reported criticism of the decisions, its tendency to contextualise the initiatives provided comprehensible information, which, at least at times, led to naturalising the type of decisions leading up to the initiatives. Not much was indicated, however, about the many different reasons why this situation prevailed; the unwelcome decisions were debated, but the different political considerations leading up to those decisions often remained unaddressed.

### *Rural identities*

In the news items, villagers are repeatedly described as united and their reactions and initiatives as rooted in popular sentiment. Rural identity is produced through references to villagers being assertive, strong-minded and action-oriented: “County residents take up the fight” (*Folkbladet*, 29 Dec 2016). It is also suggested that these characteristics have a history:

[T]he chairman then led a sing-along where the consistent theme was that if something is to be done, we must do it ourselves. The song was composed for the inauguration in August 1999, but the text felt just as relevant on this day. (*Västerbottens-Kuriren*, 13 Sept 2004)

Such references to similar and – presumably – shared experiences in the past, such as when it is stated that the ‘battle song’ had actually been composed five years earlier for another event (*Västerbottens-Kuriren*, 13 Sept 2004), contribute to producing a rural space and identities that derive power from this connection with past time (Massey 1994).

Throughout the phases, most news items included the voices of both villagers and decision-makers. It is clear that the journalists specifically desired to make the villagers’ voices heard. In that sense, the texts partially avoid what Haraway (2004: 87) has called a “political semiotics of representation”, where villagers are only spoken *about* but never allowed to have their own voices heard (see also Duggan & Peeren 2020). Instead, the media texts construct a seeming neutrality by also offering space to representatives of the people (cf. Altheide & Snow 1979: 238; van Dijk & Poell 2013). Villagers are themselves made active in the descriptions of rural self-images through their repeated allusions to being – and being forced to be – strong and inventive. Their voices often evoke specific forms of agency:

- Service is not something that anyone should expect others to create. You have to create it yourself, says [chairman of the parents' council]. (*Västerbottens-Kuriren*, 8 Jan 2016)
  
- We all strongly believe in this. We have worked a lot for this and we have a good climate of cooperation in the village. That's a must in sparsely populated areas, says [chairman of local industrial company]. (*Västerbottens-Kuriren*, 21 Jan 2017)
  
- Typically, in [name of village], there is fighting spirit. People join together and solve problems that arise. We get nothing for free, we have to fight for everything we want. (*Västerbottningen*, 23 June 2016)

Taken together, these representations produce a sense of rural unity and similarity. This was partially accomplished by historicising hints that the present conflict is not unique but that rural populations have a history of having to 'fight for everything'. Rural identities were described as resilient in that they are constantly prepared for changes, have a history of resisting threats, and are thus associated with the successful survival of rural areas. They are often also closely connected to a sense of morality; they constitute the essence of a moral rural 'we', as opposed to immoral (often implicitly urban) 'others' (Nilsson & Lundgren 2019; Berglund-Lake 2020).

Rural unity is also given specific meaning when villagers are referred to by simply using the village name as the active subject of sentences or by referring to villagers by using the collective term 'the people': "Therefore the people in [the village] have fought for a long time to keep [the petrol pumps]" (*Västerbottens Folkblad*, 21 Sept 2007) or "The people in the area rose up in defence of their school" (*Västerbottningen*, 5 April 2013). The struggle was represented both as saving welfare services and also as a struggle against deceitful or ignorant ruling elites. The antagonism is made clear in headlines such as "The people's revolt against betrayal and watered-down welfare" (*Folkbladet*, 29 Dec 2016) and sentences such as "With the closure of village schools, the rug is pulled out from under villages that are fighting hard for their development" (*Västerbottningen*, 14 June 2013).

In line with this, initiatives are described as exemplars of democracy. Villagers taking things into their own hands are even defined as *more* democratic than the rule of elected politicians. They are positioned as both moral and sensible actors in a battle against immoral political decision-makers, who, upon reversing their decisions, are described as having 'listened to reason', or, as in the quote below, having 'come to their senses':

– It was good that the municipal management came to their senses. This is how democracy should work, that the people rule. Democracy has won, says [parent]. (Folkbladet, 2 Nov 2016)

Our analysis of the media narratives, as they followed and revealed the processes of protesting decisions and taking over local services, shows that they appeared to represent quite coherent demands. Conflicts were primarily framed as being between villagers and politicians, and the respective groups were portrayed as united. As long as the media did not detect hints of internal disagreements that could be interpreted in terms of conflict – and they did not in any of the studied cases – this logic prevailed. This does not necessarily mean that no internal conflicts existed, but that no such conflicts were communicated by the media (see Forsberg 2010). In this sense, the representations support and reproduce a general tendency within rural studies to focus on, and reproduce, cultural homogeneity (Panelli et al. 2009).

Forsberg (2010: 80) uses the phrase “vulnerable noisiness” to describe the visibility generated in rural protests, and how it tends to stand in the way of nuance. Her argument resembles the way in which Butler (2016) has conceptualised protest as a state that, despite its seeming unity and strength, is inherently conditioned and constituted by vulnerability. This simultaneity of vulnerability and resilience requires discussion. It is important to remember that the type of struggles studied here are by definition constituted by vulnerability, both the spatial vulnerabilities that contribute to uniting villagers as a group (although they may certainly suffer these vulnerabilities differently) and the vulnerabilities involved when interpretative precedence is unequally distributed among villagers. Furthermore, the media’s representations of rural identities as united, strong and resilient were only true during the phases focusing on protest and takeovers – and only for a period of time.

### **Patchy resilience**

It seems beyond reasonable doubt that rural volunteer practices are central to upholding everyday life, as well as in dealing with processes of change, regardless of whether this happens through acquiescence or resistance (Skinner et al. 2013). This image was certainly present in the media reports, where the successful initiatives were described as simultaneously necessary for, and intrinsic to, rural resilience. But, despite their obvious similarities in structure and content – not least their efforts to use words such as ‘restore’ or ‘save’, thus arranging narratives in terms of a discourse of resilience, as bouncing back from a temporary setback (Scott 2013) – the media narratives did not fix coherent meanings of ‘rural

resilience'. The reports must rather be viewed as patches placed side by side, constituting only a treacherously homogeneous image of resilient rural activities that seemed to draw strength from different sources, not least global neoliberal discourse and historicised notions of rural identity and experience.

This became even clearer when scrutinising the notions of agency that were closely connected to the practices following from resilience thinking. Using Tsing et al.'s (2019) conceptual tool of 'patchiness' for noticing the differences within resilience thinking, we saw that the celebrated agency moved in various directions. Sometimes rural resilience seemed to reside in the collective of villagers as an inherent agentic characteristic, while at other times it was connected to the agency of individual enthusiasts. It could be connected to the ability to manoeuvre with the established channels of democratic influence, such as knowledge about, and the persistent courting of, decision-making bodies, but also to the ability to think and act 'outside the box' and 'get things done' outside of the established channels. Hence, when faced with final closures, the media sometimes wrote about *new* creative initiatives, for example villagers' efforts to market and sell the now empty premises after a shop had closed to families prepared to renovate them, or to use a closed school as asylum accommodation.<sup>1</sup> Resilience was thus connected to a range of concrete practices, as well as to different ways of exercising agency.

In the patchwork of rural resilience, one actor is strikingly absent: nature. This might be considered surprising because much research on rural imageries emphasises the importance of nature (e.g. Short 1991; Halfacree 1995; Baylina & Berg 2010). However, the word 'nature' only surfaces a few times in the material and always in paragraphs trying to contextualise initiatives by capturing the pros and cons of a specific area. 'Nature' is then articulated as a 'natural asset', together with selling points such as 'bus connections', 'rich association life' and, always, 'proximity to community services' (e.g. *Västerbottningen*, 16 March 2017). This absence of what is otherwise evoked as a key concept in discourses on the 'rural' ('nature') is indicative of a difference, and suggests the presence of another, concurrent discourse. In this discourse, rural resilience is instead centred around community services and economic budgets, and is hence localised within the power relations between rural populations and local and regional political bodies. While a few studies have recognised non-human categories such as 'nature' as having resilient agency (Duggan & Peeren 2020), the media studied here primarily emphasises patches of *human* agency. If and when human actors seem to be included in collaborative assemblages, it is not together with 'nature', but with, for example, the 'economic budgets' and 'rural policies' with which humans interact.

However, the focus on human agency also displayed a patchiness, or selection, since some villagers received more media space than others: individuals and groups who had the opportunity to engage in the processes and organise them.

This became clear in the way that many news items were centred around and emphasised the significance of individual enthusiasts – often local entrepreneurs or people holding office within local associations – who became representatives of the village ‘we’ (consolidated by supportive quotes from villagers in their capacities of being parents, commuters, potential patients or just ‘villagers’). Missing from the reports were any practices that might have been taking place at the unruly edges (Tsing 2015) of the initiatives, beyond the focus on what the media reports singled out as proper events and actors.

Adding to the ambiguity of resilience was the close connection with emotions. While the emotions of villagers tended to be construed as being what drove the narratives and provided them with a special spirit, emotions were also represented as affecting commitment. Woods et al. (2012) have described how initiatives tend to become increasingly unstable with time as initial energetic feelings change and people become more and more overwhelmed by feelings of exhaustion and disillusionment, sometimes resulting in them giving up protests. However, despite the presence of such seemingly non-resilient feelings in the media representations, the norm of resilience persisted; the rather rickety patches of information that constituted the cases within the media managed to produce resilience thinking and acting as an unthreatened ideal. Even though the thinking and acting were very different in character – and even though there were also patches representing setbacks and the vulnerabilities of rural subjects – they tended to primarily emphasise the local ability to act and persist.

The concept of patchiness (Tsing et al. 2019) highlights the many and complex ways in which resilience thinking comes into existence. But it is important to also be aware of the presence of non-resilient traces within the media representations. Even though, for example, the feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness and despair presented within phases one and four were not portrayed as an ideal, or as part of resilience thinking, their presence in the material has much to say about the affective atmospheres of rural areas (Lindberg & Lundgren 2022). Rather than just exemplifying patchy gaps in the norm of rural resilience, such feelings are themselves indicative of the conditions necessary for resilience thinking to take hold in the first place. Their presence illustrates the vulnerabilities that resilience thinking tries to control, but also its inability to do so.

## **Cruel optimism**

In the media narratives, the decisions initiating the series of articles are always positioned as unwelcome, and the village initiatives therefore mark welcome performances of rural optimism, commitment and resilience. The struggles to save schools, shops or petrol stations are made symbolic of the promise of a local

future and a living countryside (Nilsson & Lundgren 2018). This symbolism is further charged with optimism through the representations of villagers' positive emotions. Such representations manifest a connection between the symbols of local welfare and villagers' well-being, such that the symbols and villagers' bodies become intertwined: the village 'is' happy or, indeed, angry (Woods et al. 2012).

Berlant's (2007) concept of 'cruel optimism' is indicative of the patchiness that the notion of resilience seems to accommodate within the media representations. According to Berlant, 'cruel optimism' names a relation of attachment to an object of desire, and the cluster of promises that this object makes. It refers to "compromised conditions of possibility whose realisation is discovered either to be *impossible*, sheer fantasy, or *too possible*, and toxic" (2007: 33). By constructing resilience as a celebrated object of desire, or 'cluster of promises', the media texts produce images of rural areas that satisfy any desires that readers might have for soothing reassurances that good things will come to those who work hard, and that rural populations are evidently and specifically fit for the task. That is an image that reinforces several notions related to rural life. It confirms rural self-images of (being forced to display) independence, and it keeps alive the hope for a living countryside.

Reflecting upon the hope that is being relentlessly connected to the 'cluster of promises' made by resilience as an object of desire (cf. Ericson 2021), it might be productive to consider what are *not* presented as likely alternatives. For example, the media does not call upon old aristocracies or new squirearchies to keep rural areas resilient (e.g. Duggan & Peeren 2020). This comes as no surprise given the area under study. Neither are hopes for the future articulated in terms of changes in distribution policy, and subsequent increases in budgets leading to new possibilities for the local presence of welfare services. In a few cases, hope is connected to persuading politicians to reverse their decisions, but the overall, though unspoken, hope is directed towards local initiatives.

There is reason to reflect carefully upon the (cruel) optimism implied when notions of resilience become normative. Inspired by Berlant, Bracke (2016: 64) warns that resilience thinking frames inequalities as temporary situations to be overcome by resilient subjects. Hence, the optimism within resilience thinking, and indeed the feelings of empowerment and community expressed by the villagers who participated in the initiatives studied here, does not only conceal the patchiness of resilience. It also encourages understandings that may in fact undermine some of the promises that the object of desire is making, such as the promise that practices of resilience will resolve the vulnerability of the rural area as though it were a temporary situation.

This becomes increasingly clear as neoliberal notions of responsabilisation become confused with responsibility as ethical interpersonal care and consideration

(Butler & Athanasiou 2013). The idea that was present throughout the studied material – that rural populations are better off taking responsibility themselves and that this is indeed their future – encourages neoliberal policy tendencies to make rural areas responsible for their own growth (ITPS 2005; Hudson 2012). However, the confusion between responsibility and responsabilisation also contributes to a situation where the “domain of morality absorbs and deflects the economic and political crisis” (Butler & Athanasiou 2013: 103). Hence, the production of resilient rural areas and subjects as a celebrated norm contributes to the depoliticisation of this very political process.

While the moral aspects were not present in the media texts in the sense that rural populations were described as being expected to take action, the presence of emotions seemed to play a crucial but ambiguous role. On the one hand, representations of anger and disappointment were strongly connected to value systems (cf. Woods et al. 2012) and used to highlight antagonisms between rural populations and the politicians who made decisions that were seen as ‘death blows’ for the communities. On the other hand, the presence of emotions sometimes seemed to deflect the focus. The media’s emphasis on the positively charged feelings expressed when processes seemed (at least momentarily) to have reached a satisfactory solution surely constituted accurate and at least highly comprehensible descriptions of people’s feelings when their hard work had paid off. This means, however, that the focus was directed, at least in part, towards the work put in, the satisfaction (and exhaustion) felt and the democratic significance of the initiatives – rather than towards the issue of distribution policy or criticism of a democracy that makes rural populations feel they are less worthy as citizens (cf. Lundgren & Nilsson 2018). In this sense, the media contributes to constituting what James (2015) refers to as the ‘Look, I overcame narrative’ at the heart of postfeminist rhetoric. In the cases examined here, this is a narrative that tends to avoid the precarity and vulnerability of the spatial position in which the represented villages and villagers found themselves, and thus often foregoes discussions of resilience (Bracke 2016). However, according to James, the ‘Look, I overcame narrative’ also encompasses the implicit question of why other villages and villagers did *not* overcome. One can thus ask whether the representations of resilience thinking and acting also indirectly produce notions of its opposite: that villages and villagers who do *not* display the same engagement and commitment are somehow responsible for their own vulnerability – and, by extension, for their futures slowly becoming reliant upon more urban areas.

## Concluding remarks and reflections

This study took its point of departure in the broad tendency to represent rural resilience as a celebrated ideal and a condition of opportunity for rural areas. Focusing on media representations of rural villagers' efforts to protest when services were threatened with closure and to take them over, the paper contributes with descriptions of how the media forms a structure for narrating rural initiatives containing four recurring phases, thus representing resilience as both an ideal and a necessity. Resources deployed in this pursuit were the contextualising notions of rural areas and of specific qualities ascribed to rural identity. The paper further contributes with an understanding of how the media produces rural space and identity while consolidating resilience thinking as the standard way forward. The contribution also relates to theorisations of resilience as an incoherent ideal and resilience thinking as an approach produced by assemblages of human actions, space and the media.

Recent debates around the concept of resilience have highlighted important aspects, four of which we would like to address in conclusion. Firstly, there is a need to acknowledge that it is not only sudden changes, such as war or natural disasters, that constitute 'disturbances' of the kind that local communities need to adapt to. More slow-moving processes of change, such as long-term restructuring processes, may also qualify as ongoing 'disturbances' (Pike et al. 2010; Sjöstedt 2020; Kvarnlöf 2022), which push rural populations into a state of constantly needing to perform resilience. There was a simultaneous tendency to contextualise the cases by recognising the historicity of the exposed spatial situation. Thus, a constancy shone through whereby rural areas and populations emerged as specifically resilient, interpreted in terms of being assertive, strong-minded, action-oriented and prone to taking responsibility. Hence, the media representations implicitly suggested that, rather than being an ideal whose constitution is dependent upon successful repetitions within public discourse, resilience was evoked as a positively charged characteristic residing in vulnerable (e.g. rural) groups and areas (cf. McRobbie 2020).

Secondly, we identified a need to reflect upon the relationship between resilience thinking and neoliberal discourse. It has been argued that resilience thinking tends to obscure structural inequalities (Harrison 2013; Bracke 2016), and the concept has been criticised for encouraging vulnerable rural communities to take personal responsibility, thereby (in a sense) accepting cutbacks and the withdrawal of welfare services (cf. Joseph 2013; Caldwell 2015; Enlund 2020). We have suggested that the media constructions of resilience as an ideal imply a 'cruel optimism' in the way in which they celebrate resilience while papering over the spatial precarity and responsabilisation connected to it. However, we have used the expression 'patchy resilience' to also shed light on how, in the media

representations, resilience as an ideal never really succeeds in fixing the meaning of rural areas and identities, but coexists with the constant and destabilising presence of rural vulnerability. The latter is not, however, being given weight in the representations because reportable events (notified decisions, demonstrations, takeovers, bankruptcies) and the emotions they stir up in specific groups of (rural) people take centre stage, and the reasons behind unwanted decisions are seldom explored further.

Thirdly, there is a need to recognise the ambiguity of direction within resilience thinking, rather than debating whether resilience is about bouncing back to a previous 'state' or continuously bouncing forward into something new (Scott 2013). As is clear from the above, the media's representations of resilience show that, as an ideal, it tends to comprise different types of practice that make sense from different ideological standpoints. The journalists' positive cheering and representations of villagers' positively charged feelings surrounded the successful endeavours to take over businesses under private or cooperative management and the narratives about subsequent local community. Hence, we argue that, rather than discussing whether resilience is about bouncing back or forward, there is a need to start noticing the often patchy – multiple, ambiguous and contradictory – movements that emerge when resilience is performed. One part of this recognition of indeterminacy of direction concerns the way in which the media's representations of resilient rural subjects fulfil different purposes; they give people what they want in terms of countering condescending stereotypes of rural populations as being passive and dependent, and at the same time they depoliticise and reinforce neoliberal policy that supports cutbacks to central services.

Fourthly, we stress the importance of questioning the focus on *people* as actors that theorisations of resilience often unproblematically build upon. Despite the fact that the concept was originally drawn from the research field of ecology, few studies have highlighted the collaborations that form what is defined as resilience, e.g. collaborations between people, conditioning contexts, nature, policy, cultural imageries and – in this case – economic budgets, notions of history and the specificities of the media as a space for producing and disseminating knowledge. To fully explore the potential of such a perspective, the increasingly interactive uses of social media and other potential actors would also need to be included in the assemblage. There is also a need for more in-depth studies that, in the words of Tsing (2015), acknowledge the polyphonic assemblages that constitute rural life and initiatives. Guided by the method of noticing, one way forward may be to also explore activities taking place at the unruly edges of studied phenomena – wherever that may take us.

## Endnotes

1 Such efforts included an awareness of the need to create jobs and attract incomers (and that without the lost services this would be even more difficult than it had been before) (cf. Niedomysl 2008; Nilsson & Lundgren 2021).

## Acknowledgements

This study was part of the research project “Rural resilience: Ethnographic perspectives on voluntary practices in rural Norrland” and funded by the Swedish Research Council [dnr 2018-01582].

## Authors

**Anna Sofia Lundgren**, professor in Ethnology at the Department of Culture and Media Studies, Umeå University, and affiliated with Centre for Demographic and Ageing Research. Research interests include rural studies, green transition and critical digital health studies. She is presently PI for the ongoing project “Rural resilience”, and is the editor of *Makt, moral, motstånd: Engagemang för norrländska landsbygder* (2020).

**Karin Ljuslinder**, associate professor in Media and Communication Studies at Umeå University, Sweden. Her research includes media representations of phenomena such as disability, population ageing and rurality. She is active in the research projects “Liveable disabilities” (PI Lotta Vikström) and “Rural resilience” (PI Anna Sofia Lundgren).

## References

- Altheide, D.L. & Snow, R.P. (1979): *Media Logic*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Andersson, D. (2013): Nybyggarland eller avfolkningsbygd? Platsberättelser i och om Vilhelmina,” *OKNYTT. Tidskrift för Johan Nordlander-sällskapet*, 3–4, 13–28.
- Baylina, M. & Berg, N.G. (2010): “Selling the Countryside: Representations of Rurality in Norway and Spain,” *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 17:3, 277–292. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776409356215>
- Berglund-Lake, H. (2020): Gör om, gör rätt! Doroteaupproret på föreställd gemensam grund. In: Anna Sofia Lundgren (ed.), *Makt, moral, motstånd: Engagemang för svenska landsbygder*, pp. 51–77. Umeå: Umeå University.
- Berlant, L. (2007): “Cruel Optimism: On Marx, Loss and the Senses,” *New Formations*, 63, 33–51.

- Bracke, S. (2016): "Bouncing Back: Vulnerability and Resistance in Times of Resilience," in: J. Butler, Z. Gambetti & L. Sabsay (eds), *Vulnerability in Resistance*, pp. 52–75. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Butler, J. (2016): "Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance," in: J. Butler, Z. Gambetti & L. Sabsay (eds). *Vulnerability in Resistance*, pp. 12–27. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Butler, J. & Athanasiou, A. (2013): *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Caldwell, W.J. (ed.) (2015): *Planning for Rural Resilience*, Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Cras, P. (2017): *Landsbygdssamhällets medborgarskap: En studie av organisering av service och infrastruktur i gränslandet mellan det ideella, kommersiella och politiska*, Uppsala: Institutionen för stad och land.
- Cresswell, T. (2014): *Place: An Introduction*, London: Wiley Blackwell.
- Dahlberg-Grundberg, M. & Örestig, J. (2016): "Extending the Local: Activist Types and Forms of Social Media Use in the Case of Anti-Mining Struggle," *Social Movement Studies*, 16:3, 309–322. doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2016.1268955
- de Haan, E., Meier, S., Haartsen, T. & Strijker, D. (2018): "Defining 'Success' of Local Citizens' Initiatives in Maintaining Public Services in Rural Areas: A professional's Perspective," *Sociologia Ruralis* 52:2, 312–330. doi.org/10.1111/soru.12173
- Duggan, C. & Peeren, E. (2020): "Making up the British Countryside: A Posthuman Critique of *Country Life's* Narratives of Rural Resilience and Conservation," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 80, 350–359. doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.10.011
- Ek, R. (2006): "Media Studies, Geographical Imaginations and Relational Space," in: André Jansson, & Jesper Falkheimer (eds), *Geographies of Communication: The Spatial Turn in Media Studies*, pp. 45–66. Göteborg: Nordicom.
- Enlund, D. (2020): *Contentious Countrysides: Social Movements Reworking and Resisting Public Healthcare Restructuring in Rural Sweden*. Umeå: Umeå University.
- Ericson, M. (2021): "Vad var det vi sa? Affekt, krisberedskap och hopp om krisen," *Kulturella Perspektiv*, 30, 1–8.
- Fast, K., Jansson, A., Tesfahuney M., Ryan Bengtsson, L. & Lindell, J. (eds) (2018): *Geomedia Studies: Spaces and Mobilities in Mediatized Worlds*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Forsberg, A. (2010): *Kamp för bygden. En etnologisk studie av lokalt utvecklingsarbete*. Umeå: Umeå University.
- Gotfredsen, A.C., Enlund, D., Goicolea, I. & Landstedt, E. (2021): "Precarious Leisure in a Teenage Wasteland? Intertwining Discourses on Responsibility and Girls' Place-Making in Rural Northern Sweden," *Journal of Youth Studies*. doi:10.

1080/13676261.2021.1957086

- Halfacree, K.H. (1995): "Talking about Rurality: Social Representations of the Rural as Expressed by Residents of Six English Parishes," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 11:1, 1–20. [doi.org/10.1016/0743-0167\(94\)00039-C](https://doi.org/10.1016/0743-0167(94)00039-C)
- Hall, S. (1007): *Representation*. London: Sage.
- Haraway, D.J. (2004): *The Haraway Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Harrison, E. (2013): "Bouncing Back? Recession, Resilience and Everyday Lives," *Critical Social Policy*, 33:1, 97–113. [doi.org/10.1177/0261018312439365](https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018312439365)
- Harvey, D. 2003. *The New Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hepp, A. (2012): "Mediatization and the 'Molding Force' of the Media," *Communications*, 37:1, 1–28. [doi.org/10.1515/commun-2012-0001](https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2012-0001)
- Holling, C.S. (1973): "Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems," *Annual Review of Ecology and Systematics*, 4, 1–23. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2096802>
- Hudson, C. (2012): "New Subject Positions for Non-Traditional Actors or Business as Usual in the Strong Region Discourse?" in: S. Andersson, K. Berglund, E. Gunnarsson, & E. Sundin (eds), *Promoting Innovation*, pp. 68–90. Stockholm: Vinnova.
- Husu, H.-M. & Kumpulainen, K. (2019): "Promoting Neoliberal Ideology in Finnish Rural Community Development: The Creation of New Moral Actors," *Local Government Studies*, 45:6, 893–912. [doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2019.1635015](https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2019.1635015)
- ITPS (2005): *Regionalpolitiken som tillväxtpolitik: Retorik och substans i den regionala utvecklingspolitiken*. Östersund: Institutet för tillväxtpolitiska studier.
- James, R. (2015): *Resilience and Melancholy: Pop Music, Feminism, Neoliberalism*. Alresford, UK: Zero Books.
- Joseph, J. (2013): "Resilience as Embedded Neoliberalism: A Governmentality Approach," *Resilience* 1:1, 38–52. [doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.765741](https://doi.org/10.1080/21693293.2013.765741)
- Kvarnlöf, L. (2022): "Landsbygder i brand: Kroniska kriser och krishantering i periferin," *Kulturella Perspektiv*, 31, 1–8.
- Larsson, E. (2018): "(De)Politicizing Pregnancy-Related Risk: Gender and Power in Media Reporting of a Maternity Ward Closure," *Health, Risk & Society*, 20:5–6, 227–240. [doi.org/10.1080/13698575.2018.1532072](https://doi.org/10.1080/13698575.2018.1532072)
- Lindberg, J. & Lundgren, A.S. (2022): "The Affective Atmosphere of Rural Life and Digital Healthcare," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 95, 77–85. [doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.07.020](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2022.07.020)
- Lundgren, A.S. (2017): "Befolkningen åldras! Starka diskurser om svaga platser," in: B. Nilsson & A. Öhman (eds), *Brännpunkt Norrland: Perspektiv på en region i förändring*, Umeå: h:ströms.
- Lundgren, A.S. & Nilsson, B. (2018): "Civil Outrage: Emotion, Space and Identity in Legitimisations of Rural Protest," *Emotion, Space and Society* 26, 16–22. doi.

- org/10.1016/j.emospa.2017.12.001
- Lundgren, A.S. & Nilsson, B. (2023): "For the Good of the Village": Volunteer Initiatives and Rural Resilience," *Journal of Rural Studies* 102, 103104 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2023.103104>
- Magis, K. (2010): "Community Resilience: An Indicator of Social Sustainability," *Society & Natural Resources*, 23:5, 401–416. [doi.org/10.1080/08941920903305674](https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920903305674)
- Massey, D. (1991): "A Global Sense of Place," *Marxism Today*, June, 24–29.
- Massey, D. (1994): *Space, Place, and Gender*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Massey, D. (2005): *For Space*. London: Sage.
- McCombs, M. (2014): *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- McQuail, D. (2010): *Mass Communication Theory*. London: Sage.
- McRobbie, A. (2020): *Feminism and the Politics of Resilience*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Mediebarometern 2021*, Ohlsson, J. (ed.). Göteborg: Nordicom, Göteborgs universitet.
- Neocleous, M. (2013): "Resisting Resilience," In: P.A. Hall & M. Lamont (eds), *Social Resilience in the Neoliberal Age*, pp. 2–7. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Niedomysl, T. (2008): "Residential Preferences for Interregional Migration in Sweden: Demographic, Socioeconomic, and Geographical Determinants," *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 40:5, 1109–1131. [doi.org/10.1068/a39177](https://doi.org/10.1068/a39177)
- Nilsson, B. & Lundgren, A.S. (2018): "'For a Living Countryside': Political Rhetoric about Swedish Rural Areas," *European Urban and Regional Studies*, 25:1, 72–84. [doi.org/10.1177/0969776416679216](https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776416679216)
- Nilsson, B. & Lundgren, A.S. (2019): "Morality of Discontent: The Constitution of Political Establishment in the Swedish Rural Press," *Sociologia Ruralis*, 59:2, 314–328. [doi.org/10.1111/soru.12226](https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12226)
- Nilsson, B. & Lundgren, A.S. (2021): "Between Party Politics and Local Identification: Political Responses to a Rural Protest," *Space & Polity* 25:1, 97–111. [doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2021.1879634](https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2021.1879634)
- Panelli, R., Hubbard, P., Coombes, B. & Suchet-Pearson, S. (2009): "De-Centring White Ruralities: Ethnic Diversity, Racialisation and Indigenous Countrysides," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 25:4, 355–364. [doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2009.05.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2009.05.002)
- Pike, A., Dawley, S. & Tomaney, J. (2010): "Resilience, Adaptation and Adaptability," *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, 3:1, 59–70. [doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsq001](https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsq001)
- Rönblom, M. (2014): *Ett urbant tolkningsföreträde? En studie av hur landsbygd skapas i nationell policy*, Umeå: Jordbruksverket.

- Scott, M. (2013): "Resilience: A Conceptual Lens for Rural Studies?" *Geography Compass*, 7:9, 597–610. [doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12066](https://doi.org/10.1111/gec3.12066)
- Sjöstedt, A. (2020): "Kroniska kriser och feministiska kamper," in: J. Hobbins, E. Danielsson & A. Sjöstedt (eds), *Genus, risk och kris*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Short, J. (1991): *Imagined Country*. London: Routledge.
- Skerratt, S. (2013): "Enhancing the Analysis of Rural Community Resilience: Evidence from Community Land Ownership," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 31, 36–46. [doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2013.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2013.02.003)
- Skinner, M.W., Joseph, A.E. & Herron, R.V. (2013): "Spaces of Resistance or Acquiescence? Learning from Media Discourses on the Evolving Role of Voluntarism in Ageing Communities," *Environment and Planning A*, 45, 438–450. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a45209>
- Skinner, M.W., Joseph, A.E. & Herron, R.V. (2016): "Voluntarism, Defensive Localism and Spaces of Resistance to Health Care Restructuring," *Geoforum*, 72, 67–75. [doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2016.04.004](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2016.04.004)
- Tsing, A.L. (2015): *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Tsing, A.L., Mathews, A.S. & Bubandt, N. (2019): "Patchy Anthropocene: Landscape Structure, Multispecies History, and the Retooling of Anthropology," *Current Anthropology*, 60, 186–197. [doi.org/10.1086/703391](https://doi.org/10.1086/703391)
- van Dijk, J. & Poell, T. (2013): "Understanding Social Media Logic," *Media and Communication*, 1:1, 2–14. [doi.org/10.17645/mac.v1i1.70](https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v1i1.70)
- Vigh, H. (2008): "Crisis and Chronicity: Anthropological Perspectives on Continuous Conflict and Decline," *Ethnos*, 73:1, 5–24. [doi.org/10.1080/00141840801927509](https://doi.org/10.1080/00141840801927509)
- Woods, M. (2010): "Performing Rurality and Practising Rural Geography," *Progress in Human Geography*, 34:6, 835–846. [doi.org/10.1177/0309132509357356](https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132509357356)
- Woods, M., Anderson, J., Guilbert, S. & Watkin, S. (2012): "'The Country(side) is Angry': Emotion and Explanation in Protest Mobilization," *Social & Cultural Geography*, 13:6, 567–585. [doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2012.704643](https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2012.704643)

## Sources

- Folkbladet* 2 Nov 2016: "Många har lagt ned mycket tid och kraft" (Per Dahlgren).
- Folkbladet* 29 Dec 2016: "Folkets uppror mot svek och urvattnad välfärd" (Anne Pettersson).
- Land* 18 Sept 2014: "Bästa knepen som lyfter landsbygden: 10 utmaningar för framtiden" (Torbjörn Österholm).
- Land* 8 April 2016: "Byrevolutionerna som blev succéer" (Torbjörn Österholm).
- Lokaltidningen* 13 Nov 2013: "Björkseles butik läggs strax ned" (Eric Nordlund).

- Västerbottens Folkblad* 21 Sept 2007: "Åskilje Livs lever vidare" (Sven Björkland).
- Västerbottens-Kuriren* 7 March 2001: "Bybor ockuperar bensinmack" (Urban Viklund).
- Västerbottens-Kuriren* 13 Sept 2004: "En disig och mulen förmiddag".
- Västerbottens-Kuriren* 8 Jan 2016: "Byn räddade kvar sin skola" (Tom Juslin).
- Västerbottens-Kuriren* 14 Nov 2016: "Affären kan snart öppnas på nytt" (Elin Stormare).
- Västerbottens-Kuriren* 21 Jan 2017: "Ideella krafter ska ge bränsle till Åmsele" (Tom Juslin).
- Västerbottningen* 5 April 2013: "Samhällsservice behövs även på landssbygden" (Petter Bergner).
- Västerbottningen* 14 June 2013: "De kämpar för sin skola och sin hembygd" (Fredrik Bjärnesand).
- Västerbottningen* 23 June 2016: "Affären räddad – bensinmack på gång" (Peter Kärr).
- Västerbottningen* 16 March 2017: "D7-bygden visar upp sig" (Fredrik Bjärnesand).