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Rethinking remote rural places in Finland

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Abstract

In this paper I will be discussing challenges facing remote rural places on the basis of two extreme (critical) cases. The paper considers remote places in a way that could best be described as participatory evaluation. Instead on focusing on participation in projects, participation will be seen more as a right of citizenship. The starting point is how remote areas are seen in Rural Policy. If remote countryside is not like other rural types, then what is it? The local circumstances can be discovered if the research methods can be made to release the available resources rather than suppress them. Giving voice to others has been aided by the increased use of qualitative and ethnographic research methodologies. In order to free maximum resources, I ended up using several research strategies. In the doctoral thesis I also ended up asking if a separate research and development path should be found for the remote rural areas in order to combat the negative development that differs from that of other countryside types and seems almost like a vicious circle. The research should be committed to the area in question and be supported by materials that are as authentic as possible. Life world that is deeply rooted in a certain landscape is seen as an ideal example of an authentic relationship with a place. The paper explores ways in which narratives can create spaces for participation. Narratives typically approach the complexities and contradictions of real life.

Keywords

Remote rural area, participation, place, ethnography, narrative, life story, case

Introduction

The key question for remote rural areas of whether all the resources available can be unleashed to participate in action and open interaction was considered in my doctoral thesis (Telinkangas 2005). The aim was to approach the question “Are remote rural areas dying” by giving a voice to those who have none, so that the story of the survival of remote rural areas will come to include areas remaining in the shadow of the “Great Story” of rural development. Participatory and developmental approach seeks to develop and strengthen remote communities through participatory methods. Rather than venture a simple definition of evaluation, Stern sees useful to consider there to be a number of major “types” of evaluation, each with its own purposes and associated methods. In participative or developmental type evaluation will come to resemble, in part, social development methods and approaches where the evaluator will become an actor or participant rather than an observer (see Stern 2005). Instead on focusing on participation in projects, participation will be seen more as a right of citizenship (see Hickey-Mohan 2004: 7-8). Who is exercising the village’s voice? In village research the village has often been approached through key persons who dominate people’s conscious realities. Villagers who have made their mark in organisational activities within the community have been perceived as key persons in the life of the village. The aim was to enter the communities to see if there were people or groups that remained outside the rural development work. Stories written by villagers about their own lives also paid attention to those villagers who had remained “outsiders” within the village. What could be said to maintain outsiders was their constant absence from the dominant representation. Simply put, they were not present in the dominant representation (see Cloke-Little 1997: 275-277). Those stories in a sense allowed them to help themselves as equal, “visible” citizens. They also gave visibility to the historical stages of the village. The paper concentrates on a working process and its influences when looked “through a narrow peephole of the remote village”. The local circumstances can be discovered if the methods of research will release the available possibilities rather than suppress them (Telinkangas 2005).

A starting point is how remote areas are seen in Rural Policy. Paths for the future of remote rural areas are differentiating from “urban adjacent rural areas” and “rural heartland areas”. These “sparsely populated rural areas” are often described in terms of what they are not in

relation to other types, something other (RPC 2004: 14-15). Dominant determination pays attention to problems but, in doing so, could it be naturalising remote countryside as an area of non-developing character? ¹ The countryside has turned towards population centres. This point of view mirrors cultural hierarchy. The future of a remote village is often seen as hopeless. Both positive and negative stereotypes contain distance in time and in space, they locate countryside in faraway places and distant past (Sibley 1995; Tuan 1977/2001).

Different locations

The two locations chosen for the study represent two extremes in rural development problems. Circumstances that in one area would be perceived as “normal” are in the other area seen as a problem, and vice versa. A general view is that single case studies cannot be used to generalise, and therefore promote scientific development. Flyvbjerg (2001), however, considers this a misunderstanding because “formal generalisation as a source of scientific development is overrated just as much as the power of a good example is underrated”. The generalisation of case studies may increase through the selection of critical cases. How do critical cases evolve and how can they be identified? When the aim is to obtain the greatest amount of information in a given problem or phenomenon, a representative case or casual sample may not be the most appropriate strategy. A typical or average case is often not the most productive when it comes to acquiring information. Atypical and extreme cases often present more information because they prompt operators to act and activate several basic mechanisms in the situation being studied.

Furthermore, viewing the situation from perspectives that are focused on understanding and action, it is more important to account the deeper reasons for a given problem and its affects than describe the symptoms and their frequency. Representation that is based on random sampling rarely manages to produce this kind of deep understanding. Flyvbjerg gives the following practical advice for finding the most critical cases: look for a case that is most likely or the least likely. The selection criteria for case studies are not exclusive. Rather, a case may be extreme as well as critical, as are the cases referred to in this study. An information oriented selection will maximise the information benefit: Cases are selected on the basis of their expected information content. Extreme (rare) cases contain information on unusual cases that may be problematic or particularly useful in certain specified ways. Critical cases, on the other hand, contain information that allows logical argumentation: If this applies (doesn't apply) to this case, it can (cannot) be applied in

other cases (Flyvbjerg 2001: 66-87). Strategically selected critical cases may therefore contain information that refers to the entire subject, in this case remote rural areas.

The studied places lie in the zone between Eastern and Western cultures. The clearest cultural boundary goes diagonally between Western and Eastern Finland. While Western Finland has been an example of the material ethnological peasant culture, Eastern Finland is seen “the true home of traditional folklore in the spirit of Kalevala”. In this in-between land lies the so-called Kairanmaa, the birth place of author Pentti Haanpää. Kairanmaa is part of the swamp plain of Suomenselkä. The landscape left the villagers at a loss for words: “The village doesn’t look like anything, it just exists.” They lived in the environment from day to day, they did not look at it. In Päijät-Häme the value of scenery is recognized and acknowledged. Lake Päijänne and the surrounding landscape have attracted holiday housing into the area since the beginning of the 20th century. The landscaping project of Saaristotie (“Archipelago Road”) became a key plan in the region for the tourist industry. The area belongs to the scenic “Lake District” and the hilly area of Lake Päijänne. It has been compared to “the national scenery” of Finland.

Life world that is deeply rooted in a certain landscape is seen as an ideal example of an authentic relationship with a place (Jackson-Smith 1984). In both studied areas a significant percentage of the village’s forest property is owned by people outside the village. In Kairanmaa attitude towards both, holiday housing and forest owners who lived permanently outside the village, seemed to form a “zone of contradiction and anxiety” (Sibley 1995: 32), although the members of a hunting club had a special standing within this group. In the region of Päijät-Häme, holiday housing forms an essential part of the local communal life. Significant difference between Kairanmaa and Päijät-Häme was seen in the attitude towards those who had moved away from the region. In Kairanmaa the concept of “outsiders” was typical, anyone who has moved away from the village was no longer part of “us”. In Päijät-Häme, on the other hand, people born in the region are their “own” and seen as locals even if they lead their occupational lives elsewhere, and it was difficult, or even impossible, for people who have moved from somewhere else to fit in. In Kairanmaa, remaining in one’s native place might be taken as a sign of inability or childishness (Telinkangas 2003; 2005).

Sibley stresses that we have to think critically about the concepts “margin”, “marginality” and “exclusion” and ask whether or not groups are from their own perspective marginalised or excluded, and what the social consequences are for those categorised in this way. A remote village can have a low tolerance for social difference or spatial heterogeneity. Inclusions and exclusions are rooted in particular histories and they might be a localised account of the issues (Sibley 2006: 401-403). Cloke and Little give a warning against the strict and static interpretation of marginality, and an advice to evaluate people’s marginality as having fluid nature. Different people can be excluded at different times, in different social circumstances. Marginality also fluctuates according to the understanding and the abilities of perception and comprehension between the observer and the person observed (Cloke-Little 1997: 272-280). There is a danger that a focus on certain “obvious” others lack the depth of sustained, empathetic and contextualised research necessary to “do justice” to the individuals, groups and places concerned. This giving voice to others has been aided by the increasingly significant adoption of qualitative and ethnographic research methodologies (Cloke 2006: 447-450).

Several research strategies

There are few Finnish rural studies that have used ethnographic methods. Ethnographic research is problematic and surprising work in a certain specified context. According to Geertz an ethnographer’s task is to inscribe social discourse (Hammersley-Atkinson 1995: 16-23; Geertz 1973: 19). Because of globalisation at least multi-sited ethnography is needed in the examination of complex places (see e.g. Alasuutari 2006: 89). Ethnographic approach includes both methods of fieldwork and the interpretation of culture; ethnography as a process and a product (Jackson 1989: 172). The strategy of participation in doctoral thesis can be described as participatory action research that is seen to work with “hidden transcripts” and voiced resistance (see Cornwall 2004: 82).² Instead, action research was the most popular strategy used. Participatory research was simply made as a descriptive term for a collection of varied approaches which shared a participatory ethos. It is crucial to describe a process along which the study is carried out. Participation requires local preparatory work that pays attention to people's own skills. Above all, a process of participatory action research is intended to solve real, practical problems in a certain specified context. The work should be carried out in a way that would best suit the context

without the need for a binding prearranged plan. The way that people approach the work should be determined by the people involved in it. The chances of success are dependent on social change. Participatory research boosts the research subject's self-esteem and helps them to utilise their skills in a conscious premeditated way. A person's knowledge can then increase on the basis of how they reflect on their own actions (Telinkangas 2005; 2006). Results of the study are determined as the interplay of a local and theoretical knowledge. The study is in a way testing a local experience while questions emerge from weaknesses of this knowledge (Greenwood-Levin 2003: 146-152).

"Spatial purification" has been considered a key phenomenon in the organisation of social space. One group or one person can dominate the entire will reality. Domineering actions happen routinely, a crucial part of the problem is that it is unnoticeable (Sibley 1995). Maybe the rural reality has often been seen as a perspective generalised from agriculture. Rural studies should not only be more open to the circumstances of the remote rural areas and their inhabitants, they should even provide them voice (Telinkangas 2003; 2005). One way of getting to grips with the complexity of social world is to use several research strategies. Various viewpoints seek ways to recount the story of the researched areas in a way that frees available resources, instead of shackling them. Cases generate concrete, practical, and context-dependent knowledge. Within the main case of Kairanmaa was received all three strategies described. Case studies often contain a substantial element of narrative. Good narratives typically approach the complexities and contradictions of real life. To the same extent a narrative approach is seen typically as pursuing the diversity and conflicts of real life (Flyvbjerg 2001).

A remote location as a place of a person's lived and experienced perception introduces a different aspect to the research that diverts from cartography. The viewpoint of humanist geography involves emphasises on the personal qualities of a place, and the concept of place attaching meanings, emotions and memories to a place (Karjalainen 1987). The research process of my doctoral thesis showed the significance of villagers' own voices and of letting the special characteristics of the studied communities influence the character of the research of those communities. The process of working with the story of a village, reminiscing, writing and collecting the historical material, and editing the book, convinced me of that while examining the remote rural places it is important to strive for authentic

information and to have some degree of commitment with the subject in question (Telinkangas 2003; 2005). Later I found these aims in a study by David Sibley (1995), which considers exclusive tendencies.

A relationship of trust, whether the trusted is a person or an institution, contains elements of power, dependency on the trusted and vulnerable. Researching the inhabitants of remote rural places, the knowledge that the researcher is “one of us” engenders a more trusting and open relationship (cf. Ward 2005). A researcher starts a process by making a helpful gesture or act to the informant, who reacts with a kind reciprocal gesture. These mutual exchanges resemble the exchanges found in anthropology and create a strengthening circle of trust. A personal relationship might raise locally significant questions an important theme of the research. Even emotions mediate knowledge from the subject of the research and help to analyse the material. An interpretation creates preconditions for understand. Unlike cognitive interpretation and understanding, emotionality and shared experiences offer preconditions to a deep, authentic understanding. Thick description forms the foundation stone of interpretation without which an authentic understanding would not be possible (Denzin 1989b: 33).

“Memory makes the future visible in the present”³

In the following chapter I will be discussing ways in which narratives can make remote rural areas visible as multi-sided places with several meanings and interpretations, instead of homogenous, often idealised or associated with remote past. “Narrative” is seen here as a general concept that includes different kinds of narratives and narrative materials and “story” as a particular concept that includes stories told by villagers concerning both the past and the present, both fictive and real. In popular tradition it can even be impossible to make a difference between false and true. The task of popular storytellers was to tell good stories. Autobiographical reminiscing does not involve trying to find historic, objective truths. Subjective truths that a person trusts also tend to have an impact on him and, to that extent, are true and real. It is more significant to make a study of ways in which villagers are telling stories. A rural reality approached through fieldwork was questioned with only minimal conceptual framing of narrative research.

When trying to convert marginalised areas into “our world” (see Cloke 2006: 450), remote places have been separated from their own past. The working process of a village book became some kind of village identity project which guided people’s views about themselves and about what they intended to be like in the future. Identity was built while we reminisced about times and places and talked about them (Telinkangas 2003; 2005). One way of approaching individual person’s experiences of particular places is to use biographical methods (see e.g. Denzin 1989a: 7). Narrative material in the study comprised different stories and documents, and old documents, such as letters, obituaries and diaries, that were found in lofts and attics. The material described the turning points in the villagers’ lives. The villagers’ own stories help to understand their experiences and interpretations of reality. Stories tell us about how they see themselves and understand their lives. The research process involves the researcher’s interpretation of the research subjects’ own interpretations. It is the outcome of double understanding (Flyvbjerg 2001; Jackson 1989; Geertz 1973).

Oral history, and life stories that give form to real life experiences, help villagers towards a future of their own making. In giving people a past and helping them to see how their own stories fit into the changing character of the place in which they live, tradition can help people understand where they stand and, and where they should go (Thompson 1978: 225-226). While writing their own life stories and those of their village, the inhabitants adjust personal events to the historical context, including both that which they were and that which they may become. This material mediated both individual and shared experiences. Life stories are firmly connected to places. A person can introduce an expertly detailed description of places where he has lived. Different life stages will follow us: the past is involved in the present which in turn will leave its marks on the future. Since the places we have experienced will always be biographically coloured, their contents will soon be “tuned over” to the physical form of the environment (Karjalainen 1987: 22-23).

Stories contain knowledge, experience and emotions. The story has a start, a middle part, and an end, and the parts follow each other chronologically. A storyline is created to link the various events together to form a single story. During the process collected small stories can open up the conflicts of everyday life better than complete autobiographies.

Creating of self belongs to the themes of “an open world”, and the crucial element of creating is the production of something genuinely new and unforeseen. In this sense, “the narrative world” can be seen as open (Sintonen 1999: 44, 51).⁴ The rural reality of place depicted in the study were open also in the sense that the essence of being a villager has been considered flexibly and seen forming in different ways and with different kinds of connections.

The village book process in Kairanmaa was carried out by a study circle of an open college, which consisted of twelve elderly people who lived in the village permanently. Thirty villagers or people who had used to live in the village wrote in the book, and a large number of people came to reminisce in the meetings or the events organized by the study circle. As well as adding an authorizing dimension to the research, reminiscing is about acquiring material. It makes it possible to treat one’s own memories and experiences as interesting and significant qualitative material. Reading their life stories aloud and discussing them with others, members of the group created new understanding of life and its problems. They not only “created and re-created themselves, but also the culture” (see Denzin 1989a: 63-64). Villagers’ own stories consisted of literal life stories and other stories told about local life and people, as well as oral tradition produced in written form in the process. As research materials, oral tradition and (life) stories are closely linked for oral tradition is often presented as a form of life story (Thompson 1978). A life story is a story a person tells about his own life to somebody else (Roos 1988; Bertaux 1981). The core of a life story lies in the way that a person sees who he is, and how he became that person. The concept of identity approaches this quality of a life story. Through the process of autobiographical writing the inhabitants of a remote village can construct their own identities or the identity of their village, and their possible futures (Vilkko 1995; Flyvbjerg 2001).

Many of the villager’s stories were multiperspective: they were told from many different viewpoints and recount a period of the village’s history while describing personal life experiences. The participants were producing their own life stories in this manner almost without noticing it in various chapters than describe the history of the village (Risse 2000). Stories follow the popular pattern of story telling. It is a method of repeating a past experience in one’s mind, and usually the order of the sentences is similar to the order of

the actual events. Occurrences are explained and evaluated. The possibly complex form of the story is a result of the amount of evaluation in the description of the experience (Vilkko 1997: 93-94, 104-108).⁵ In the orientation of the story the writer describes the scene, or the village in question. In the evaluation part of the story the writer can recall his own memories of the events: “From my childhood days I have many memories ... “. The expertly detailed description of a working process in the following life story is connected to the evaluation.

During the 'interim peace' we had to prepare for the Continuation War in the production of energy, and the foreign trade was at a standstill. They started to make coal wood in the government forest. The workmen came from several villages and nearby provinces. The men built lean-tos in the forest, and there they would lodge and sleep in the summertime. With winter came the coal wood the hauling. Then there were as many men as could fit in. The stable of 30 horses called 'government stable' had been repaired the previous fall for the logging horses. The horsemen were of the age groups which were not at the front. There were thousands of cubic meters of lumber because the charcoal burning took years. The charring plant was situated on the site of a former nursery garden, about one hundred meters from the yard of the house. There was built a charcoal cabin where several men were lodging. The state's fuel department VAPO was founded in the year 1940 or so to take care of the country's power production. VAPO bought lumber and had it burned into charcoal; cars run with gas of charcoal and wood ... More people were needed when charcoal was stacked, covered and pulled down. The charcoal was crushed, sifted and sacked, then they were stored and stamped with a VAPO stamp. My family did the stage after the unloading with a factory-made crushing mill that had to be ground... There were seven charcoal pits altogether..

In the decision the story's lessons are described and the conclusions are drawn (Telinkangas 2003: 13-14; 2005: 131-132).

It was hard and sooty work, but the people were happy, talked and laughed. Even the severeness of the international political situation could not dim the sense of humour of the loggers. There were no respirators back then, and so people were sooty both inside and outside. A sauna was prepared every night, and at the time charcoal pit pulled down also in the morning, because the pit had to emptied all the way through from the beginning to the end into the surrounding field where they would cool before being stored.

Written area

I emphasize the cultural viewpoint by depicting the remote area as Kairanmaa. Kairanmaa both exists and does not exist. Kairanmaa was generalised to present some kind of rural perspective through which author Pentti Haanpää watches the world. Since his death in 1955, and already when his collected "Stories" were published (1946), he has been one of the most widely-read Finnish writers. Haanpää was to represent the country folk and connected to the concept of being a "true Finn". He lived close to the people and wrote about them with no irony or pity. His irony and satire were always aimed at the ruling powers and institutions. He did not look down at the common folk, but from the same level. There was a tendency to see him "a jack who depicted other jacks". Nevertheless, he was a professional writer (Sallamaa 1996: 15-16).

Remoteness unites. The inconveniences of remoteness can only be shared with others who have experienced the same. Life's hardships have created their own humour that often told about the "cold carnival" of life. Humour carried people through the worst times. Anecdotes usually enlighten those aspects of human experience that are most likely to be left aside during documentation of historical events. The mental context of humour can be said to put its stamp on the aesthetic of resistance and culture of challenge (Knuutila 1992).⁶ People wrote about incidents which required genuine survival and such stories were seen as especially important. Genuine survivors (cf. Haanpää) were remembered and respected (Telinkangas 2003: 36-37; 2005: 133-135). Kari Sallamaa (1996) observes how "the simple aspects" of oral storytelling engaged in by ordinary folk are turned into literary fiction. Haanpää liked to listen to creative storytellers and people who were good at laughing and used such people as key characters in his books and stories.

Folk traditions do not involve mechanical repetition, but creative renewal of common heritage. According to Sallamaa (1996), the turning of folk tales into literary art can be likened to "alien word"⁷ forcing into a strange system and changing it. The language of ordinary folk is linguistically rich and contrary to the standard language period. The forms of standard language have been transferred to the language of ordinary folk in a parody form, and from there back to literature. "Alien word" is not an independent external element. Rather it forms a dialogue with the other structural forms of the work at a high

level, through the understanding of the author or the reader. This is how Sallamaa recognizes mediation between stories, anecdotes and literary works. Haanpää's humour is related to the "critical laughter of ordinary folk". His narrative approach does not vary from the mentality of ordinary country folk in the north of Finland in character.

The culture of silence is typical of these kinds of rural village communities. Tacit knowledge (see e.g. Polanyi 1966) is an integral critical factor when people try to place themselves. It is not enough merely to try and capture the spoken words, we should also try to understand the contextual, unarticulated knowledge of these special areas, which manifests itself in mannerisms, silence, humour and the unspoken, secret continuation of traditions. Will an outside observer consider the main event to be that which is spoken of the most, or that of which people remain silent? We often fail to recognise those things that are ever present. That which is most familiar may in the end be the least known. Could we not consider that same rule to apply to the methods used in rural development? We concentrate on recounting the success stories and remain silent about that which is typical of the majority of Finnish countryside.

Instead of having stable cultural categories and identities, borderlands are seen as areas which are defined by meeting, struggle and change. As Chamberlayne et al. (2000: 321) argues, biographical methods were adopted as a means of achieving a deeper and more complex understanding of how hidden social capital might be brought into play. When it was analysed whether this kind of work based on nostalgia for home could in its part add to the social capital of remote rural places, it seemed that the bridging experienced in these kinds of innovative cooperative relationships may be so extensive that it can eventually turn into bonding (Bærenholdt 2002; Putnam 2000). With the aid of the concept of diaspora was highlighted the fact that in the lives of emigrants, the perspective will extend beyond the borders of a village, municipality or even country. In culture research, the concept of diaspora has often been used to indicate the diversity of the identification processes in an increasingly global world. Cultural change is dynamic, it combines new and old. Unlike the abstract concept of globalisation, the concept of diaspora focuses on concrete meanings and relationships that unite different places beyond national borders. Emigration from Kairanmaa has been "aggressive". Before the Second World War,

emigrants left for North America and since the war, mostly to Sweden. This challenges the dominant determination of village and its relationship to the concepts of identity and place.

Lehtinen (2006: 46-51) argues that place can now be seen as a collection of stories, meetings, events and crossings in time and space.⁸ A man approximately 55 years of age writes from Lidingö in Sweden:

My summer holiday this year came late and was short, but unique. I had no idea that it would be the start of such a long and deep dive into childhood memories ... During this visit, I was alone and had no-one forbidding me to turn into someone's yard and stopping, as had happened during a few previous visits when I drove through the village. Even though I only lived in that village for ten years, those years were significant. Since then, in my heart, I have considered myself a villager, regardless of everything else that has happened in my life. I only came to realise this now, having read the history of the village. Things, and even complete strangers, seemed somehow familiar (Telinkangas 2005: 172-174).

Our understanding of time shapes our experience of the character of a place. The concept of time is not the same for a small child than it is for an adult, nor is his experience of place (Tuan 1977/2001: 185-186). Belonging to a group of people sharing the same cultural identity makes us feel at home, it gives us a strong feeling of togetherness, security and familiarity (Hall 2003: 94). Every one of us come from somewhere and needs anchor points in our lives. A remote location may be significant to someone, who has at some point in their lives experienced it first hand. Mobility and associated perception of the world as an unsteady and uncertain place, throw doubt into the established concept of village as a place. On the other hand, they make us yearn even more for that which is familiar and safe (Massey 1994: 160; 2003: 53, 62).

The intention was to implement the project in an optimum way for the village. It was started without a binding advance plan. In doing so, was managed to reveal another side of the concept of remoteness. The project created connections not only in Finland, but also further afield. The progress of the project could be described with the use of a framework established by Paasi (Knuuttila-Paasi 1995: 56-58). It was based on cultural-social division "ours" vs. "yours" and regional divisions "here" vs. "there", these two types of divisions are closely connected. The starting point was similar to that of village activities, where

those participating in the work were considered to be “us/here”. In the initial stages, attempts were made to extend the work to involve those bystanders, who represented elements of the past that were needed for charting the village history. In the second stage the project expanded, or was expanded, to involve villagers that had moved away. This meant that villagers who had emigrated elsewhere in Finland and abroad were all considered as belonging to “us”, even if they currently lived “there”. Because recounting past forest work became such a key part of the process, even individuals for whom the village had been a place for forest or other types of work and who remembered events from their time in the village, were invited to take part.

Memories of childhood and wartime

An adult's reminisces of childhood experiences are often followed by a longing to awaken the ability to see the world like a child sees it, participating with their whole being with the shapes, colours, movements, sights and sounds of the world outside and the nature. There is, however, a vast difference between the first recollection of a place or environmental experience of an adult, even those able to recall childhood memories, and that of a child (Matthews 1992: 1; Tuan 1997/2001: 19, 185-186). When recalling their childhood, the narrator will draw on events from their own childhood and their present day understanding and interpretation of childhood events. Childhood memories are reshaped continuously throughout a person's life. Our understanding of childhood is shaped at moments when the recollections occur (Korhonen 1996).

Locations play an important role in the self-development of a child. Locations are not remembered as they really were. Rather, they are remembered for what they gave to the child. When describing locations they are familiar with, children use images which locate places into categories of dangerous or scary. Children develop strong emotional affective relationship with locations, a sense of place. Matthews (1992) considers the atmosphere of a location an emotional tie, which will develop in time between people and locations. From an early age, children develop emotions towards their milieu, which in turn produces strong positive and negative images. Children possess a strong affective understanding of nature. The importance of emotional state is not only significant when describing a child's affinity with a particular location. Their reactions often vary greatly from those of an adult when describing the kinds of environments that they would consider most acceptable.

War time was a different, dramatic time, and therefore made an impression on children. When studying changes in Finnish society and culture, Second World War and the post-war years have often been described as “key experience”. War time has been considered an exceptional period of time in folklore, and has therefore been avoided at interviews in order to secure material from periods other than those that were viewed as exceptional (Snellman 2003). The events of the war time had the most impact when relatives died or were injured in battle. The significant landmarks of Finland’s history were woven into the different life stages of ordinary individuals. A moment in time only becomes significant when seen in the historical context that gives it sense or position. According to Korkiakangas (1996) a person who experienced Second World War as a child will have different kinds of memories than someone from another age group. Experiencing war time as a child may be recalled as a turning point in a course of one’s life, as a kind of end of childhood. The sudden and dramatic experiences, positive or negative that mark a person's life, or problematic situations in which a person experience a crises, are described by the term “Epiphany” by Denzin (1989a; 70-71; 1989b: 15-19, 125-131). What is essential in an experience like the one described here is that something somewhere is “clarified, revealed” to the person and the experience changes them in some way.

The myth about a harmonious locality has lived persistently. The ideal of the unity is crystallized in a phrase “the spirit of Winter War”. However, differences of opinion, clashes can make visible different formations of pictures of the world and help to perceive and understand the underlying circumstances. Philo (1997) focuses in his article on evaluating, appreciating and understanding different, other kinds of people and spaces in the countryside. Chaotic situations have often been sanitised into a standard order of value with respect to private property and materialistic set ups. The housing activities from the 1940s through till the 1960s caused occasionally periods of chaos, a shake-up of the existing order, which could in part be compared with places described by Philo (1997: 19-50). The local community is made up of several contemporaneous communities and generations whose experiences of regional consciousness on these cultural borderland places can differ. Risse (2000) calls an event in which two persons compare their life experiences “autobiographical communication”. It can be considered necessary to understanding another person and the fact that he is different.

Conclusions

Cloke (2006: 27) writes that where the cultural turn is deployed without accompanying critical analysis of power relations, it misses out on the political impacts of emancipatory social practice and politics. Correspondingly when the conceptual fruitfulness of the cultural turn is pursued in conjunction with a more critical analysis of power relations there is a potential to add significantly to the broader understandings of, and critical importance of, rural policy agendas. Development processes studied broke the operational borders of villages: who belonged to the village and who didn't? After the research processes ended, attempts were made to return the situation in the villages back to how it was previously and once again take care of the affairs of the village centrally. There is a tendency to assume that things have to go on being the way they always were. This is paradoxical: the dominant individuals try to develop their villages, whilst at the same time retaining the reins of power. They are consequently unwilling to welcome individuals with development resources or to allow them to take centre stage.

In the doctoral thesis I ended up asking if a separate research and development path should be found for the remote rural areas in order to combat the negative development that differs from that of other countryside types and seems almost like a vicious circle. The research should be committed to the area in question and be supported by materials that are as authentic as possible. The two locations chosen for the study represent two extremes in rural development problems. Circumstances that in one area would be perceived as "normal" are in the other area seen as a problem, and vice versa. This research setup highlights the importance of location. Remote rural places have been made even more remote by ignoring its connections, created by active migration of people. According to Massey (2003), there is geography of boundaries instead of geography of acceptance. Those who are currently defined as outsiders could be linked as belonging to a place.

If remote countryside is not like other rural types, then what is it? This is what this paper seeks to find out through the aid of ethnographic fieldwork. In order to free maximum resources, I ended up using several research strategies. The research process involves the researcher's interpretation of the research subjects' own interpretations. It is the outcome of double understanding. A process of participatory action research is intended to solve real, practical problems in a certain remote context. One way of approaching individual person's experiences of particular places is to use biographical methods as was used in the

village of Kairanmaa. Life stories link people and places, give them feelings of togetherness, security and familiarity. They unite people even beyond borders.

Stories can give visible form to a written area of Kairanmaa, an area that does not exist as an administrative place. While creating new spaces for participation marginality could be seen “as much more than a site of deprivation”, “a site of radical possibility” (see Cornwall 2004). Or maybe a part of the task will be to name “neglected spatialities, to recognize strange cartographies, fluidities and blank figures”. There is however a danger that we manage only to mystify not sharpen our understanding of the rural spaces (see Cloke 2006: 25-26).

Notes

¹ According to the development prospects, the types of rural areas can be characterised as follows: (i) Urban-adjacent rural areas. These areas have the most favourable development prospects... Most of the urban-adjacent rural areas are located in southern and western Finland... (ii) Rural heartland areas. These areas are dominated by primary production... Most of these municipalities are also located in southern and western Finland. (iii) Sparsely populated rural areas. These areas are threatened by a vicious circle of negative development trends: young people are moving out, services are declining, agriculture is losing its diversity, there are not enough new jobs to compensate for the disappearance of the traditional ones, the number of old people is growing and the pressure on the economic carrying capacity of the municipalities is overwhelming. The short growing period and other natural conditions make it very difficult to develop primary production. These municipalities are located in eastern and northern Finland (RPC 2004: 14-15).

² In Kairanmaa the forgotten history of a forestry village was transformed into a force of development. “Hidden histories” have been the resources of resistance and identity. Undoubtedly the village book work was also guided by a secret hope to find some benign time behind the present-day, a time the existence of which would lift the village back on its feet regarding both itself and the others (Telinkangas 2003; 2005).

³ In doctoral thesis (Telinkangas 2005) I examined how villagers define their own place with the help of life stories and simultaneously anticipate their own future and how the identity of a villager and a village is constructed in reminiscing about times and places and in telling others about them. Karjalainen (1995: 15) puts it: “Memory is that which makes the future visible in the present”.

⁴ Sintonen (1999) supports Paul Ricoeur’s argumentation about narrative identity.

⁵ Vilkkö (1997) argues that the analysis of Labov and Waletzky’s simple oral recounting helps to analyse autobiographies (Labov & Waletzky 1967, Labov 1972). The narrative is divided into suitable sections through the use of a narrative scheme. The schemes originate from two sources: linear storytelling (Labov & Waletzky 1973/1967; Labov 1972) and hierarchical story tree (van Dijk 1980).

⁶ According to Luigi Lombardi-Satriani, folklore that has been observed as the culture of the oppressed shows that ruling cultural values and universally recognised truths are limited and historically untenable. Lombardi-Satriani calls the methods, procedures and expressions used by the oppressed to defend themselves against their oppressors and cut the tentacles of the hegemonic culture in their lifetimes, the culture of challenge (Knuutila 1992: 71).

⁷ Sallamaa (1996) supports Mihail Bahtin's argumentation about the dialogue-like nature of language. According to Bahtin, a word belongs to a language system and therefore is familiar, "alien" i.e. borrowed from someone else, or in use as "own" word.

⁸ Lehtinen (2006) discusses actual challenges to the concept of place as a starting point a definition of Doreen Massey: "places are collections of stories"; woven together out of ongoing stories, as a moment within power-geometries, as a particular constellation within the wider topographies of space, as open and as in process (see Massey 2005: 130-131).

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