Young adults in rural tourism areas

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Many rural areas have experienced an out-migration of young adults. This trend is somewhat worrying since it results in a decreasing population and also a smaller proportion of the population being of childbearing age. A great deal of hope has been placed in tourism as a way to reduce the depopulation of these areas. Tourism has proven to have both positive and negative impacts on rural areas, but few studies have focused specifically on young adults. In this thesis, important topics are how tourism affects the opportunities for young adults to make a living in those areas, and how tourism affects how these areas are perceived among young adults. The main contribution of this thesis is to illuminate how tourism affects conditions for young adults in rural areas – a topic that has rarely been considered in tourism research. The thesis utilized a mixed method approach. A quantitative study based on micro-data on individuals examined the mechanisms by which tourism affects population change among young adults. Interviews were conducted in the case study area – Sälen, Sweden – to investigate these mechanisms in depth. Finally, the rural–urban dichotomy was explored in a conceptual study that asked how tourism affects the perception of a village as either rural or urban. The thesis reveals that tourism has a substantial impact on the adult transition, mainly due to easier access to the labor market and a good supply of jobs during the high season. Further, the large number of people passing through a place creates flows of opportunities to make friends, get a job, or just meet people. All of these factors contribute to high mobility in these places and to the perception of them as places where things happen. The high mobility in Sälen implies that fixed migrant categories (such as stayers and leavers) are largely insufficient. The tourism environment creates a space that is always under construction and continually producing new social relations, which are mainly perceived as opportunities. Conceptualizing this as a modern rurality is a way to move beyond the often implicit notions of urban as modern and rural as traditional.

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