

Dreaming of a Smallholding

Arild Blekesaune,* Marit S. Haugen and Mariann Villa†

Abstract

The article examines a phenomenon associated with the rural idyll – the dream of becoming the owner of a smallholding in the countryside. Much research and policy concern in Norway have focused upon rural–urban migration trends and the consequences of the urbanisation process on the sustainability of rural communities. Less attention has been given to the counter trend, that is, urban dwellers searching for a better quality of life in the countryside. The article is based on data from a Norwegian national survey and analyses a question measuring respondents' interest in buying a smallholding. The analysis involves an estimation of a regression model to determine which demographic, socioeconomic and attitudinal variables influence people's interest in buying a smallholding. Further, we were interested in their plans for the smallholding (farming, residence, second home) and the kind of influences these potential new smallholding owners might have on rural communities. Three categories of potential smallholders are identified: aspiring farmers, country-life lovers and recreation seekers. The results indicate that those who live in urban areas are more interested in buying a smallholding than those already living in rural areas.

Introduction

Although there has been a continuous trend in population decline in Norwegian rural areas since the 1960s, the dream of country life is very vivid among people (Villa 1999). The idealisation of rural life is not a uniquely Norwegian phenomenon but has been well documented in many advanced economies (Shucksmith *et al.* 1996; Ziebarth *et al.* 1997; Halfacree and Boyle 1998; Mauthner *et al.* 2001; Rouhiainen 2001; Meijering *et al.* 2007). Such a romanticised view of the countryside is often given the overarching term: the rural idyll (Short 2006). As Cloke (2003) puts it:

Somehow deep down in the early twenty-first century psyche there seems to remain longstanding, handed-down precepts about rural areas, marking them as spaces enabled by nature, offering opportunities for living and lifestyles which are socially cohesive, happy and healthy, and presenting a pace and quality of life that differs from that in the city. (Cloke 2003, p. 1)

According to Short the countryside has acquired a positive image as a contrast to the development of an urban society. The countryside offers a 'refuge from modernity'

(Short 1991, p. 34). Boyle *et al.* (1998) argue that the rural idyll represents an urban perspective of the countryside refracted through various media and not based on direct experiences. Dam *et al.* (2002) examine rural images and preferences and conclude that many people living in urban areas wish to live in the countryside, stating a preference for a green, quiet, spacious, orderly and safe residential environment, but that only a small group are in the position to act upon such preferences and actually move to rural environments. All the same, important changes in communication, both physical and electronic, have facilitated an increased freedom to choose where to live. The spread of second homes in the countryside alongside other forms of core-periphery relations suggests a reverse but time-shared mobility.

This article focuses on the rural idyll measured through an interest in buying a smallholding. It explores preferences for rural living as represented by those who report that they would be interested in buying a smallholding. In other words, we look at those who have an as-yet unrealised interest in buying a smallholding. The rural mobility literature has mainly focused on the real migration outcome, while in this study we look at the dream of having a smallholding. The focus is on what Bell (2007) calls the ideal moment of the rural. Even though dreams of buying a smallholding may be acted upon only in a fairly small number of cases, it is still important to examine the interest as an indicator of preference for rural living and the lifestyle associated with traditional country life. This might give a better picture of future opportunities and challenges for the rural communities than a focus on actual migration.

The Norwegian case

The research interest in rural issues dates back to the 1960s when the effects of the modernisation project after World War II was dramatic realised in the outskirts of many settlements and in primary industries (Haugen and Lysgård 2006). The research has mainly focused on demographic changes, rural-urban migration, changes in the primary industries, access to services and economic subsidies (Persson 1992; Almås 1994, 1999; Rye 2006; Berg 2007; Rye and Blekesaune 2007). The main political objective in Norwegian regional and rural policy has been to develop sustainable communities and societies all over the country, a policy which is confirmed in the latest government declaration (St. meld. no. 21 2005–2006). In recent years an additional research focus has been on the construction of rural images and identities (Brandth and Haugen 2000; Vik and Villa 2010). Haugen and Lysgård (2006) claim that the rural way of living has been regarded as the hegemonic norm for quality of life, and that this view has had an impact on rural politics and research. Research inspired by the social constructivist tradition has emphasised the importance of representations and images of rural life for people's preferences and its impact on migration choices (for example, Villa 1999, 2000; Berg and Lysgård 2004; Wiborg 2004; Haugen and Villa 2006; Rye 2006).

During recent years interest in country living has increased, judging by the attention it receives in media like magazines, newspapers and popular TV series focusing on people who have realised their dream of living in the countryside.² The choice is often explained as a search for a better quality of life, and as such, an aspect of individual self-fulfilment and achievement. The image of the rural idyll is closely

associated with farming (Blekesaune 1999), and public interest in smallholdings is increasing.³ However, many people may want to live in the agricultural landscape without actually carrying out agriculture. This is one of the crucial points for policy that relates to land management. Norwegian law is rather restrictive regarding the transfer of farms, and farm succession is mainly carried out through inheritance, a tradition protected by the distinctively Norwegian Allodial Act. In 2004 a total of 83 per cent of Norwegian farm ownership was based on inheritance (Rye and Storstad 2004). Owners are normally duty bound to settle on the property and farm the cultivated land for at least 10 years. The purpose is to achieve effective protection of agricultural production areas (Flemsæter 2009a). However, these regulations do not apply to the transfer of smallholdings of less than 10 ha, on condition that no more than 2 ha are fully cultivated (Flemsæter 2009b). That means that only smallholdings with less than 2 ha of cultivated land can be sold as a commodity on the open market. One implication is that traditional smallholdings easily can be converted to attractive second homes.

In the year 2000 a web page (Gardsbruk 2000) was established and became an important arena for selling, buying and renting farms and smallholdings in Norway. The website receives approximately 20,000 visits every month and at the time of writing it is experiencing an explosive interest in buying farms. According to Storstad *et al.* (2009) there are about 55,000 agricultural properties that are not permanently occupied in Norway.

This article explores preferences for rural living. The focus is the orientation towards rural-style living, rather than wholesale migration to rural areas. We categorise those who stated that they are interested in buying a smallholding, based on the plans they had for the holding. In the analysis we distinguish between those who want to buy a smallholding in order to start farming, those who want to use the smallholding as a residence and those who want to buy a smallholding and use it as a second home. The various choices may have different impacts for the local communities where the smallholdings are located.

The smallholding as an entrance to farming

Living on a working farm might be seen as the ultimate way of realising rural life. Lønning (2000) claims that rural living in many cases is motivated by the desire to establish a post-modern lifestyle in agriculture, which is thought to increase quality of life. One problem for those who want to become farmers through buying a smallholding is that the size of the holding allows only hobby farming. Even though the market for smallholdings is less regulated than previously it is still difficult to acquire a smallholding. A Norwegian study of owners of smallholdings found that most owners interviewed were not willing to sell their smallholding even they didn't live there (Mæland 2005). The most important reason for this was to keep the holding as a second home or for business reasons, as well as for maintaining the family tradition. The strength of the family tradition is illustrated when owners explicitly state that they were unlikely to sell a vacant holding 'as long as my parents are living' (Mæland 2005, p. 25). Another interesting result in Mæland's study was that the majority of both owners and interested buyers lived in urban areas. The potential buyers, identified as

lifestyle migrants, were most commonly young, well-educated and financially sound people with children. Motivations for buying a smallholding were to improve their living environment in general and for their children in particular, to get closer to nature, to obtain a place for business (agriculture or other), as well as an interest in old buildings and pleasant scenery (Mæland 2005).

The smallholding as the entrance to countryside living

The rural environment is often represented as a caring, safe, clean and quiet one. This image especially relates to notions of the ideal environment for raising children, and might represent an important element in discourses relating to migration to rural areas (Glendinning *et al.* 2003; Villa 2005). Rural life often evokes nostalgic feelings and might symbolically represent a flight from modernity (Short 1991; Holloway and Hubbard 2001). Bell (2006) argues that the rural idyll is an urban construction, manifested in diverse cultural forms and practices, on television and in poems and novels, music and movies. These strong and enduring rural images might contribute to rural areas becoming marketable commodities with a large demand for rural space and rural amenities (Dam *et al.* 2002, p. 462). In some cases this demand is seen as a gentrification of rural areas (for example, Phillips 1993), where affluent urban people find rural scenery and houses attractive places to live. Gentrification has been a structural phenomenon in, for example, British urban-to-rural migration (Cloke and Little 1990; Phillips 2005), yet it has not been described or problematised in Norway. In Norway, policy has mainly been concerned with the depopulation of rural areas and the depletion of human resources and services in rural communities (Aasbrenn 1989). In order to maintain rural settlement, various policy initiatives have been implemented. During the last decade we have seen a new trend where local rural communities are taking a more active role in promoting smallholdings for sale by mapping available properties to encourage in-migration and settlement. This was facilitated by an amendment in the Act relating to concessions in the acquisition of real property. Before 2004 it was only possible to buy a smallholding with less than 0.5 ha of arable land as a residence without being obliged to farm it, while the 2004 amendment increased the threshold size of the farming obligation to 2 ha (Konsesjonsloven 2003). An increased interest in buying a smallholding as a residence or second home might result in an increased competition among buyers and allow a new group of affluent people to enter the countryside.

A smallholding as a second home

The countryside is not only relevant for working and living, but also for recreation and leisure activities and experiences. Urban people buy second homes in rural communities with the aim of relaxing and enjoying recreational pursuits (Holloway and Hubbard 2001). Studies have pointed to the changes in rural areas, rural identities and rural-urban distinctions that are occurring parallel to increasing mobility and second-home ownership (Flogenfeldt 2004; Halfacree 2006; Hidle *et al.* 2006). A smallholding might be one option for those looking for a second home. Second-home ownership might also represent a first step towards urban-to-rural migration of a

more permanent nature, as observed in some western countries (Halfacree 2004). For urban people in Norway, rural living might be realisable through second homes, whose popularity is shown by a fourfold increase in their price since 1991, which is a higher price rise than permanent houses have achieved (Ericsson 2006).

New flexible labour markets and new communications have facilitated a more mobile lifestyle, as people may alternate between multiple homes, thus changing the nature of urban–rural interrelations (for example, by making them more visible or tangible). The consequences or implications of increased mobility are part of a larger discussion on globalisation, where places are said to become diluted and diffuse (Castells 1996). Urry (2002) speaks of a sense of ‘time-space-compression’, partly stemming from the rapid flows of travellers and tourists moving from place to place. Due to this increased mobility, both physical and virtual, there also are increasing similarities between ‘home’ and ‘away’ behaviour (Urry 2002, p. 161). However, theories on globalisation are nuanced with respect to the phenomenon of homogenisation throughout places. According to Castree (2003), the more linked that places become, the greater the demand for remaking place differences. These discussions are particularly relevant to the phenomenon of having a smallholding as a second home. Having a rural second home might represent an alternative lifestyle compared to everyday urban life, and buying a smallholding might represent a closer link to traditional rural life, compared to an ordinary second home.

Recreation and leisure time activities have been and still are important reasons for having second homes (Ericsson 2006). Ericsson shows that recreation increasingly might be analysed as representing different meanings, motives and dimensions in the usage of an area, for example, related to an intensive expansion of tourist centres or mountain areas. Recent Norwegian research has also focused on second-home owners’ willingness and ability to benefit local life in host communities (Nordbø 2008). However, most research attention on second homes has been given to purpose-built second homes, not second homes that have been converted from permanent dwellings. Converted smallholdings are, however, significant in debates concerning rural development and landscape changes (Flemsæter 2008).

Data and methods

This article is based on data from the *Norsk Monitor 2005* and *Norsk Monitor 2007* surveys carried out by Synovate Norway. These data were obtained in a two-stage process. Firstly, a random sample of people was contacted by telephone and asked to participate in a comprehensive survey of values. Then, those who agreed to participate received a self-completion questionnaire by post. The total number of samples was 3,849 in 2005 and 3,909 in 2007. Both samples are weighted by population weights developed by Synovate Norway and are representative of the Norwegian population aged 15 and above (Hellevik 2008). The analytical strategy describing different subgroups among those who are interested in buying a smallholding, requires a large data sample. Therefore, the results are based on samples from these two surveys combined.

Two different dependent variables were used in the analysis. The first variable was based on the question ‘How interested are you in buying a smallholding in Norway?’ The answers to this question are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Percentage interested in buying a smallholding in Norway*

	Percentages
Very interested	3
Fairly interested	5
A little interested	17
Not interested	63
Don't know	4
Already have a smallholding, not relevant	8
Total	100
(N =)	(7758)

Table 2: *Percentage preferred use of smallholdings (N = 7,163)*

	Percentages
To reside in and farm	10
Solely as a residence	10
Second home	6
Not interested	74
Total	100

Table 1 shows that a quarter of respondents are interested in buying a smallholding, varying from 3 per cent (very interested), 3 per cent (fairly interested) to 17 per cent, who are a little interested. In the questionnaires the group that said they were interested in smallholding ownership was then asked:

If you bought a smallholding in Norway, would you most probably live there and engage in farming, just live there without farming, or would you use it as a second home?

The answers to these questions are presented in Table 2.⁴ In this table, those who answered 'already have a smallholding' or 'not relevant' are excluded. The further analysis is based on the net sample of 7,163 people.

In order to answer the research questions, a regression model was constructed. This regression model estimates how various independent variables influence people's interest in buying a smallholding. Generally, multivariate analysis is preferred where it is possible to ask whether a situational factor has an influence on a response variable, controlling all other variables that could have consequences for the same response variable. Based on our reading of the ongoing discussion on rural representations and interest in smallholdings, 16 independent variables that were expected to influence the dependent variable (intention of buying) were selected.

We also take into account the fact that the interest in a smallholding is dependent on the intentions and plans for this holding. There are probably quite large differences between those who are interested in becoming farmers and those who want to

buy a smallholding as a second home. In this analysis a multinomial logistic model, also called polytomous logistic regression is used to test whether the independent variables have an effect on the wish to buy a smallholding, either to start farming, or to use it as a residence or a second home. The reference category consists of those who are not interested in buying a smallholding (see Table 2).

Demographic variables

The original gender variable is recoded into a dummy variable where men are coded 1 and women are coded 0. The age variable is recoded into three dummies, with age 60 years or older used as a reference category. The dummy labelled 'children' is based on the number of children living at home. All with one or more children are coded 1, while those with no children are coded 0. The variable urban is a dummy coded 1 if the respondent is living in one of the 22 most populated municipalities in Norway and 0 if not.

Socioeconomic variables

Social class is measured by seven dummies based on the question 'What kind of work do you have?' The first class dummy consists of unskilled workers and operators and is named unskilled workers. The second class dummy consists of top executives and general managers and is named top executives. The third dummy consists of employees with other executive positions in the service sector, and is named service class with other executive positions. The other employees in service sectors are identified in the fourth dummy called lower service class. The fifth dummy consists of all self-employed persons. The sixth consists of pupils, students and apprentices and is named students. The last dummy is named other outside the labour market, and includes those who have answered unemployed, retired, on social security or married without work, and the answer category is other. All these dummies are measured according to the group, skilled workers, which constitutes the reference category to which all classes are compared. The education variable is based on self-reported data concerning level of education, and as many as 48 per cent have classified their own educational level as high. These are defined into one group coded 1, while the others are coded 0. Family income is recoded into two categories of equal size; those in the higher half are coded 1 while those in the lower half of income are coded 0.

Farm interest

Two dummy variables that measure attitudes on two controversial questions connected to agricultural policy are included. The first variable is based on the general question: 'Below you will see a list of some socio-political aspects. Please read this list carefully, and tick the issues you think are important for Norway to solve'. From a list of 32 different political issues we have selected those who ticked the following statement; 'Maintain farm structure at the present level', and coded them 1, whilst all others are coded 0. The second variable on agricultural policy is based on the question 'Which of these factors do you think are the most important in order to support

Norwegian agriculture'. Here a dummy variable was constructed that identifies those who marked 'Preserve rural areas' with the code 1, while all others are coded 0. These two variables identify an interest in conserving agriculture and maintaining rural areas.

Outdoor activities

The next variables identifies the respondents' interest in outdoor rural activities. From a list of various activities, we created a dummy that identifies those who have engaged in hunting or fishing during the previous year. Further, a variable measuring interest in reading magazines about outdoor activities is included. This is an ordinal variable with the categories: not interested (1); somewhat interested (2); and very interested (3).

Lifestyle attitudes

In order to understand various attitudes associated with rural life we included three variables based on the following statements: 'I like to have a pleasant and beautiful environment', 'I prefer to live a quiet life' and 'Life in the countryside is more fulfilling than urban life'. These statements are measured by five ordered categories from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). Those who answered, 'don't know' or did not answer at all are coded in the middle category of 3. A similar five-category variable was added, measuring the respondents' wish to improve their possession of material goods based on the statement; 'I am not able to afford all the material goods I would like'.

The variable year identifies the changes between the two surveys and is coded with the value 0 for the first survey in 2005 and 1 for the last survey in 2007. Descriptive statistics for the independent variables are given in Appendix 1.

Findings

Interpreting the findings in Table 3 is complex because the logistic model is nonlinear and the logistic scale is so abstract that we often used simplified interpretations of the coefficient's sign character and the *P*-value that shows the statistical significance of the coefficient. A positive sign coefficient implies that an increased value on the independent variable leads to an increased probability of selecting this particular choice. If the sign of the coefficient is negative, an increased value on the independent variable implies a lower probability of opting for this alternative. In addition to the logit coefficients and their standard errors, the coefficient is marked with one asterisk (*) if it is statistically significant $P = 0.005$ and with two asterisks if $P = 0.001$.

Table 3 shows that women are more interested than men in buying a smallholding in order to start farming. There is also a clear and distinct trend for younger people to be more interested in becoming farmers on smallholdings than older people. Further, the class dummies show that those in the lower service class are less interested in buying a smallholding and becoming farmers. The most typical characteristic of those who want to run the holding as a farm is that they are much more engaged with questions of agricultural policy than the others. The significant positive coefficients

Table 3: *Parameter estimates of a multinomial logistic model estimating different interests with the buying of a smallholding*

Dependent variable:	Reside and farm		Solely as a residence		Second home	
	Logit coeff.	SE	Logit coeff.	SE	Logit coeff.	SE
Independent variables:						
Characteristics:						
Men (man = 1, women = 0)	-0.257**	(0.095)	0.257**	(0.092)	0.154	(0.118)
Age dummies (Age 60+ as reference)						
Age 15–25	2.416**	(0.200)	1.646**	(0.210)	0.387	(0.249)
Age 26–39	1.795**	(0.178)	1.966**	(0.171)	0.137	(0.191)
Age 40–59	1.370**	(0.166)	1.361**	(0.164)	0.189	(0.189)
Children (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.150	(0.098)	0.018	(0.093)	0.247*	(0.125)
Urban district (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.028	(0.094)	0.243**	(0.090)	0.513**	(0.112)
Socioeconomic variables						
Social class (dummies with skilled workers as reference):						
Unskilled workers	0.043	(0.162)	0.073	(0.162)	-0.325	(0.254)
Top executives	-0.060	(0.238)	-0.226	(0.225)	0.320	(0.241)
Service class with other executive positions	-0.120	(0.174)	-0.176	(0.156)	0.101	(0.193)
Lower service class	-0.367*	(0.183)	-0.414*	(0.166)	-0.045	(0.200)
Self-employed	0.264	(0.205)	-0.027	(0.204)	0.286	(0.241)
Students	-0.161	(0.170)	0.012	(0.175)	-0.638*	(0.271)
Other outside labour market	-0.093	(0.133)	-0.138	(0.128)	-0.220	(0.173)
Higher education (yes = 1, no = 0)	-0.152	(0.099)	0.277**	(0.093)	0.088	(0.116)
Family income in highest half (yes = 1, no = 0)	-0.039	(0.093)	-0.134	(0.092)	0.196	(0.121)
Farm interest variables:						
Maintain farm structure (agree = 1, not agree = 0)	0.574**	(0.088)	0.156	(0.091)	0.059	(0.117)
Preserve rural areas (agree = 1, not agree = 0)	0.403**	(0.097)	0.037	(0.088)	-0.006	(0.111)
Outdoor activities variables:						
Been hunting or angling during the last year (yes = 1, no = 0)	0.435**	(0.104)	0.103	(0.103)	0.0312*	(0.126)
Interest in reading about outdoor activities (1 = not interested – 3 = very interested)	0.413**	(0.068)	0.357**	(0.067)	0.378**	(0.084)
Lifestyle variables						
I like to be in pleasant and beautiful surroundings (1 = totally disagree – 5 = totally agree)	0.000	(0.043)	-0.020	(0.041)	0.134*	(0.058)
I prefer to live a quiet life (1 = totally disagree – 5 = totally agree)	0.053	(0.039)	0.000	(0.037)	-0.053	(0.047)
Life in the countryside is more fulfilling than urban life (1 = totally disagree – 5 = totally agree)	0.494**	(0.038)	0.421**	(0.035)	0.206**	(0.042)
Search for more material goods (1 = totally disagree – 5 = totally agree)	0.082**	(0.030)	0.050	(0.029)	0.107**	(0.037)
Other independent variables						
Year (2005 = 0, 2007 = 1)	-0.038	(0.086)	-0.064	(0.082)	-0.205*	(0.104)
Constant	-6.675**	(0.359)	-5.637**	(0.341)	-5.028**	(0.422)
Likelihood ratio χ^2 (df = 72) = 1347.834 N = 7163						

* $P < 0.05$ and ** $P < 0.01$ in two-tailed tests. SE, standard errors.

on the variables 'maintain farm structure' and 'preserve rural areas' mean that those who agree with these statements are more interested in taking up farming than those who are not interested in buying a smallholding. This might indicate that those who want to buy a smallholding in order to start farming are usually oriented towards a traditional farm lifestyle. Further, the outdoor activity variables show that the interest in farming is most widespread among those with interests in hunting and fishing and other outdoor activities. The lifestyle variables show that those who think that rural life is more fulfilling than urban life, and those who wish to improve their material goods, are more interested in starting farming than those who are not interested in buying a smallholding. There are no significant differences in interest in farming among respondents living in rural and urban areas. We choose to label this group 'aspiring farmers'.

Interest in buying a smallholding as a residence is more common among people in urban areas than people living in rural communities, and it is more common among people with a higher education. Men are more interested than women in buying a smallholding as a permanent residence without farming. The age dummies show that people below 60 years of age are more interested in a smallholding as a residence than older people, but the age effect is not as linear as it is for those who want to start farming. The class dummies show that those in the lower service class are significantly less interested in smallholdings as a residence. Those who are interested in buying a smallholding solely as a residence are interested in reading magazines and books about outdoor activities but they are less involved in fishing and hunting than those aspiring to become farmers. However, like those who want to become farmers, people who want to buy a smallholding as a residence tend to report that rural life is more fulfilling than urban life. In the following discussion they are labelled 'country-life lovers'.

As for an interest in buying a smallholding as a residence, urban people are significantly better represented than rural people of those who want to buy a smallholding as a second home. Another finding is that the wish to buy a smallholding as a second home tends to be a family project as it is more common that the potential second-home owners have children living at home. Other characteristics are their hunting and angling activities, their interest in reading magazines and books about outdoor activities and their positive attitude towards rural life. Those who want a smallholding as a second home are also more interested in material goods and having pleasant and beautiful surroundings than people with no interest in buying a smallholding. This might imply that those who want to buy a smallholding in order to use it as a second home are mainly interested in having a place for recreation and outdoor activities. They are what we label 'recreation seekers'. This is the only group where we can see a significant decrease in interest between 2005 and 2007, which might be a temporary effect of the initial downward tendency in the holiday home market in Norway in 2007.⁵

Discussion

Our concern in this article has been to identify the people interested in buying a smallholding and to explore the potential use of the smallholding as a farm, a

residence or a second home. A second aim was to discuss what kind of influences these potential new smallholding owners could have on rural communities.

Our analysis shows that the dream of a smallholding is more present among urban than rural inhabitants. This might indicate that the smallholding as a symbol of the rural idyll and the ultimate way of realising rural life is mainly an urban construction. However, among the potential smallholders who want to start farming there are no differences in interest among respondents living in urban and rural communities. This presents another insight into dreaming of a smallholding, compared to previous findings that report that interested buyers generally live in urban areas (Mæland 2005). Our analysis differentiates this view and extends our understanding of this interest by using a representative national survey showing that potential buyers of smallholdings have different plans and preferences concerning the use of the smallholding.

Finally, we have expanded the description of the potential buyers into three ideal types based on their aspirations, interests and characteristics: aspiring farmers want to buy a smallholding in order to start farming, country-life lovers want to use the smallholding as a residence and recreation seekers who want to buy a smallholding in order to use it as a second home. In other words the potential buyers consist of people with different ideas and preferences for their smallholdings, and this might represent different outcomes for rural communities. As seen in Table 2 these groups are fairly similar in size, though there are more who want to farm or just live on the smallholding than those who wish to buy a smallholding as a second home.

Aspiring farmers

Aspiring farmers are engaged with questions concerning agricultural and rural policy and they are interested in nature-based activities like hunting and angling. This indicates a rural orientation towards a traditional farm lifestyle. They tend to be young and therefore are in a phase of life where they are about to establish themselves with their own family and professional career.

As it is hardly possible to make a living just from farming a smallholding with less than 2 ha of cultivated land, this means that the smallholders either need to diversify into additional businesses on the farm (for example, food processing, direct sale of farm products and farm-based tourism), start another business, or have an off-farm job in addition to farming. Another interesting finding is that women express more interest in becoming farmers than men. This is in line with previous findings showing that women are more likely to run smaller farms (Haugen and Brandth 1994). The aspiring farmer group is the only one in which urban people are not over-represented. This might represent a renewing of the farming community. In the longer term, by giving children roots on a family smallholding, they are presenting new generations with the possibility of engaging in farm and rural life. Aspiring farmers might hence represent an important contribution to maintaining rural communities and the farming society. However, in order to understand the motivations and plans of this group in more depth, further information about their characteristics and orientations would be needed.

Country-life lovers

Those who want to buy a smallholding solely for the purpose of rural residence are different from those who want to farm, as evidenced by their lower interest in agricultural and rural policy. However, they have the same preferences for country style living. The lack of interest in rural policy could indicate that they have another approach to rurality. As this group is more represented by urban people than was the case of aspiring farmers, one could suggest that their potential concern for conserving rural areas might be activated at a later stage. The group of country-life lovers consists of people with a higher education who are found across all ages and family characteristics. By this they might represent a group with greater social and cultural diversity in rural communities. Country-life lovers have some of the characteristics known from previous research on rural gentrification. They are an affluent group looking for the right houses in rural areas and their migration is probably less dependent on the local labour market. Even though country-life lovers represent an important contribution to the rural community they might be less locally bounded with respect to social and cultural life. If by their economic resources country-life lovers displace potential aspiring farmers this might change and weaken local farm traditions. On the other hand, they can represent an innovative resource and thereby a renewal of rural communities.

Recreation seekers

Recreation seekers highlight the importance of pleasant and beautiful surroundings. This is consistent with previous research that suggests that urban people buy second homes in rural areas for purposes of recreation and relaxation. The urban view might be more explicitly focused upon the quality of the rural scenery, while this is probably a more taken-for-granted quality among rural dwellers.

Recreation seekers might represent a group of more ambivalent importance for the rural society. On the one hand, they might be of crucial importance for the local economy, for example, by spending money during their weekend and holiday stays. On the other hand, they might displace others who would like to buy the holding in order to farm or settle down on a permanent basis. In the most popular rural second-home areas, conflicts relating to duty-bound settlement on the property, agricultural land, local taxes and nature preservation commonly occur. In such conflicts recreation seekers might represent a cultural and political force towards which the local population might become somewhat alienated. However, recreation seekers who buy vacant smallholdings will be part of an already existing rural settlement structure and thus have more opportunities to socially integrate in the rural society than those in a typical holiday residence area.

Conclusion

In identifying three groups of potential smallholders, our analysis may be of importance for ongoing discussions on rural policy and rural mobilities. A growing interest in owning smallholdings evidently leads to different consequences depending upon

the buyers' aspirations. However all three groups' orientations and positive attitudes towards country living indicate a potential that they will make a valuable contribution to rural society.

In future, strong rural images, increased mobility and improved communications might lead to rural areas becoming even more marketable commodities, encouraging a larger demand for rural space for living and recreation. One aspect of rural mobility is the increasing use of second homes, and accomplishing a dream of buying a smallholding might be an example of this, but also might become part of a permanent move to the country. Parallel to this, many original owners are giving up farming and moving into urban locations, which could potentially increase the numbers of smallholdings for sale. Our study, however, indicates that the number of potential buyers outnumbered the number of vacant smallholdings. The change of smallholdings into residences and second homes might eventually undermine the traditional farming culture, but on the other hand the influx of well-educated and dedicated newcomers might revitalise the rural communities.

If rural communities are to take advantage of the evident interest in buying smallholdings owners should be encouraged to sell their vacant holdings if they themselves do not plan to utilise them. Another option for local authorities would be to plan for heterogeneous settlement, including the creation of new smallholdings. As the geographical area might influence the supply and demand for smallholdings, there is no clear answer as to how to accomplish universal success across rural Norway in relation to smallholdings and the potential influx of newcomers into rural areas. Either way, there are clear policy implications associated with different types of in-migrants such as aspiring farmers, country-life lovers and recreation seekers – all of whom might contribute to the vitality of rural communities in different ways.

Notes

* Corresponding author.

¹ This is a joint project by the three authors, whose names are listed alphabetically.

² The lifestyle magazine *Lev Landlig* (see Baylina and Berg 2010), newspapers *Adresseavisen* (2007) and *Nationen* (2007, 2008), popular TV programmes like 'Farmer' and 'Jakten på kjærligheten' and 'Himmelblå'.

³ Gardsbruk (2000). The establishment of the webpage aimed to facilitate the trade of smallholdings and was partly the work of the Norwegian Farmers' and Smallholders' Union (Norsk Bonde- og Småbrukarlag), the environmentalist youth organisation Nature and Youth (Natur og Ungdom), and the Norwegian Rural Youth Association (Norges Bygdeungdomslag). In October 2008 only 132 vacant smallholdings were available for sale or rent. However, not all the smallholdings and farms for sale throughout Norway are registered at this site.

⁴ When as many as 18 per cent expressed themselves as only a 'little interested', we can ask whether they are likely to act upon this interest. One alternative could be to select those who expressed themselves as being 'very interested' and 'fairly interested', but then less than 1 per cent of the sample would have been interested in buying a holding as a second home. This would probably be an underestimate of the potential interest documented by Mæland (2005).

⁵ Statistics Norway (2008).

References

- Aasbrenn, K. (1989) Uttynningsssamfunnet. Det demografisk uttynnede – men ikke avfolkede – utkantssamfunn. (The thinning-out community –sparsely populated but not depopulated areas). *Tidsskrift for Samfunnsforskning* 30 (5–6) pp. 509–519
- Adresseavisen (2007) Endelig er gårdsdrømmen oppfylt (Finally, the dream of a farm is fulfilled). 9 February 2007
- Almås, R. (1994) The rise and fall of agricultural policy cycles. From planned economy to green liberalism. *Journal of Rural Studies* 4 (1) pp. 15–25
- Almås, R. (1999) *Rural development – a Norwegian perspective* Report 9/99 (Trondheim: Centre for Rural Research)
- Baylina, M. and N.G. Berg (2010) Selling the countryside: representations of rurality in Norway and Spain. *European Urban and Regional Studies OnlineFirst*. Available online at <http://eur.sagepub.com/cgi/rapidpdf/0969776409356215vi> Accessed 17 March 2010
- Bell, D. (2006) Variations on the rural idyll. Pp. 149–160 in P. Cloke, T. Marsden and P.H. Mooney eds, *Handbook of rural studies* (London: Sage)
- Bell, M.M. (2007) The two-ness of rural life and the ends of rural scholarship. *Journal of Rural Studies* 23 (4) pp. 402–415
- Berg, N.G. (2007) Social and cultural geography in Norway. From welfare to difference, identity and power. *Social and Cultural Geography* 8 (2) pp. 303–330
- Berg, N.G. and H.K. Lysgård (2004) Ruralitet og urbanitet – bygd og by (Rurality and urbanity – countryside and city). Pp. 61–76 in N.G. Berg, B. Dale, H.K. Lysgård and A. Løfgren eds, *Mennesker, steder og regionale endringer* (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag)
- Blekesaune, A. (1999) *Agriculture's importance for the viability of rural Norway* Report 8/99 (Trondheim: Centre for Rural Research)
- Boyle, P., K. Halfacree and V. Robinson (1998) *Exploring contemporary migration* (New York: Longman)
- Brandth, B. and M.S. Haugen (2000) From lumberjack to business manager: masculinity in the Norwegian forestry. *Journal of Rural Studies* 16 (3) pp. 343–355
- Castells, M. (1996) *The rise of the network society* (Oxford: Blackwell)
- Castree, N. (2003) Place: connections and boundaries in an independent world. Pp. 165–185 in S.L. Holloway, S.P. Rice and G. Valentine eds, *Key concepts in geography* (London: Sage)
- Cloke, P.J. (2003) *Country visions* (Harlow: Pearson Education)
- Cloke, P.J. and J. Little (1990) *The rural state? Limits to planning in rural society* (Oxford: Clarendon Press)
- Ericsson, B. (2006) Fritidsboliger – utvikling og motiver for eierskap. (Second homes – development and motives for ownership). *Utmark* 1/2006 Available online at <http://www.utmark.org/> Accessed 11 June 2008)
- Flemsæter, F. (2008) Smallholdings as second homes: when your second home is your home. Paper presented at the 17th Nordic Symposium in Tourism and Hospitality Research, Lillehammer, 25–27 September
- Flemsæter, F. (2009a) Home matters: the role of home in property enactment on Norwegian smallholdings. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift – Norwegian Journal of Geography* 63 (3) pp. 204–214
- Flemsæter, F. (2009b) *Geography, law, and the emotions of property. Property enactment on Norwegian smallholdings*. PhD thesis, Department of Geography (Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology)
- Flogenfeldt, T. (2004) Second homes as part of the new rural lifestyles in Norway. Pp. 233–243 in C. Hall and D. Muller eds, *Tourism, mobility and second homes: between elite landscape and common ground* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press)
- Gardsbruk (2000) Home page. Available online at <http://www.gardsbruk.no> Accessed 17 March 2010

- Glendinning, A., M. Nuttall, L. Hendry, M. Kloep and S. Wood (2003) Rural communities and well-being: a good place to grow up? *Sociological Review* 51 (1) pp. 129–156
- Halfacree, K.H. (2004) Rethinking 'rurality'. Pp. 285–304 in T. Champion and G. Hugo eds, *New forms of urbanization. Beyond the urban–rural dichotomy* (Aldershot: Ashgate)
- Halfacree, K.H. (2006) Rural space: constructing a three-fold architecture. Pp. 44–62 in T. Marsden, P.J. Cloke and P.H. Mooney eds, *Handbook of rural studies* (London: Sage)
- Halfacree, K.H. and P. Boyle (1998) Migration, rurality, and post-productivist countryside. Pp. 1–20 in P. Boyle and K.H. Halfacree eds, *Migration into rural areas: theories and issues* (Chichester: Wiley & Sons)
- Haugen, M.S. and B. Brandth (1994) Gender differences in modern agriculture: the case of female farmers in Norway. *Gender & Society* 8 (2) pp. 206–229
- Haugen, M.S. and H.K. Lysgård (2006) Discourses of rurality in a Norwegian context. *Norwegian Journal of Geography* 60 (3) pp. 174–178
- Haugen, M.S. and M. Villa (2006) Rural idylls or boring places? Pp. 181–195 in B.B. Bock and S. Shortall eds, *Rural gender relations: issues and case studies* (Wallingford: CABI)
- Hellevik, O. (2008) *Jakten på den norske lykken. Norsk monitor 1985–2007* (Hunting Norwegian happiness. Norwegian monitor 1985–2007) (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget)
- Hidle, K., J. Cruickshank and L.M. Nesje (2006) Market, commodity, resource, and strength: logics of Norwegian rurality. *Norwegian Journal of Geography* 60 (3) pp. 189–198
- Holloway, L. and P. Hubbard (2001) *People and place: the extraordinary geographies of everyday life* (Harlow: Prentice Hall)
- Konsesjonsloven (2003) *Lov om konsesjon ved erverv av fast eiendom (Act relating to concessions in the acquisition of real estate property)*. Lov-2003-11-28-98. Lovdata Available online at <http://www.lovdato.no/cgi-wift/ldles?doc=/all/nl-20031128-098.html> Accessed 26 March 2010
- Lønning, D.J. (2000) *Bønder i soloppgang?* (Farmers at sunrise) (Ål: Boksmia forlag)
- Mæland, H. (2005) *Mange vil ha, men få vil selje! Småbruk som ressurs for busetting* (Many want to buy, but few are willing to sell! Smallholdings as resource for settlement) (Bø: Telemarkforskning)
- Mauthner, N., L. McKee and M. Strell (2001) *Work and family life in rural communities* (York: York Publishing Services)
- Meijering, L., N. van Hoven and P. Huigen (2007) Constructing ruralities: the case of the Hobbistee Netherlands. *Journal of Rural Studies* 23 (3) pp. 357–366
- Nationen* (2007) Småbruk solgt for 5,2 millioner. (A smallholding sold for NOK 5.2 million) 6 June
- Nationen* (2008) Jan Erik fant sin drømmegård. (Jan Erik found his dream farm) 2 October
- Nordbø, I. (2008) Second-home owners – just a nuisance? Paper presented at the 17th Nordic Symposium in Tourism and Hospitality Research, Lillehammer, 25–27 September
- Persson, L.O. (1992) Rural labour markets meeting urbanisation and the arena society: new challenges for policy planning in rural Scandinavia. Pp. 68–94 in T. Marsden, P. Lowe and S. Whatmore eds, *Labour and locality: uneven development and the rural labour process* (London: David Fulton)
- Phillips, M. (1993) Rural gentrification and the processes of class colonisation. *Journal of Rural Studies* 9 (2) pp. 123–140
- Phillips, M. (2005) Differential productions of rural gentrification: illustrations from north and south Norfolk. *Geoforum* 36 (4) pp. 477–494
- Rouhiainen, V. (2001) Driving a Toyota in Adidas clothes? The rural image in Finland. Pp. 62–74 in I.R. Eðvarðsson ed., *Bright summer nights and long distances. Rural and regional development in the Nordic-Scottish context* (Akureyri: University of Akureyri)
- Rye, J.F. (2006) Leaving the countryside. An analysis of rural to urban migration and long-term capital accumulation. *Acta Sociologica* 49 (1) pp. 47–65
- Rye, J.F. and A. Blekesaune (2007) The class structure of rural-to-urban migration. The case of Norway. *Young – Nordic Journal of Youth Research* 15 (2) pp. 169–191

- Rye, J.F. and O. Storstad (2004) *Trender i norsk landbruk. Frekvensrapport.* (Trends in Norwegian agriculture. Frequency report) (Trondheim: Centre for Rural Research)
- Short, B. (2006) Idyllic ruralities. Pp. 133–148 in P.J. Cloke and T. Marsden eds, *Handbook of rural studies* (London: Sage)
- Short, J. (1991) *Imagined country: environment, culture and society* (London: Routledge)
- Shucksmith, M., P. Chapman and G.M. Clark (1996) *Rural Scotland today. The best of both worlds?* (Aldershot: Avebury)
- Statistics Norway (2008) Decline in holiday home sales. Published 15 August 2008. Available online at http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/10/14/10/eiendomsoms_en/arkiv/ Accessed 17 March 2010
- Storstad, O., M. Forbord and R. Almås (2009) *Boplikt i landbruket – bolyst eller botvang? Report 2/09.* (Duty-bound settlement in agriculture – attraction or constraint?) (Trondheim: Centre for Rural Research)
- St. meld no 21 (2005–2006) Hjarte for heile landet. Om distrikts- og regionalpolitikken (A heart for the whole country. About rural and regional policy) (Oslo: Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development)
- Urry, J. (2002 [1990]) *The tourist gaze* (London: Sage)
- van Dam, F., S. Heins and B.S. Elbersen (2002) Lay discourses of the rural and stated and revealed preferences for rural living. Some evidence of the existence of a rural idyll in the Netherlands. *Journal of Rural Studies* 18 (4) pp. 461–476
- Vik, J. and M. Villa (2010) Books, branding and boundary objects: on the use of image in rural development. *Sociologia Ruralis* (doi 10.1111/j.1467-9523.2010.00506.x)
- Villa, M. (1999) Bygda – sosial konstruksjon av ‘trygt og godt’. (The rural community – social construction of ‘safe and good’). *Sosiologi I Dag* 24 (4) pp. 31–52
- Villa, M. (2000) Rural life courses in Norway: living within the rural–urban complementarity. *The History of the Family: An International Quarterly* 5 (4) pp. 473–490
- Villa, M. (2005) *Bygda som bustad.* (Rural areas as place of residence). *Report 1/05* (Trondheim: Centre for Rural Research)
- Wiborg, A. (2004) Place, nature and migration. Students’ attachment to their rural home places. *Sociologia Ruralis* 44 (4) pp. 416–432
- Ziebarth, A., K. Prochaska-Cue and B. Shrewsbury (1997) Growth and locational impacts for housing in small communities. *Rural Sociology* 62 (1) pp. 111–125

Arild Blekesaune*

Department of Sociology and Political Science
Norwegian University of Science and Technology, N-7491 Trondheim
Norway
e-mail: arild.blekesaune@svt.ntnu.no

Marit S. Haugen

Centre for Rural Research
University Centre Dragvoll, N-7491 Trondheim,
Norway
e-mail: marit.haugen@rural.no

Mariann Villa

Centre for Rural Research
University Centre Dragvoll
N-7491 Trondheim
Norway
e-mail: mariann.villa@rural.no

Appendix 1

Descriptive statistics of independent variables in Table 3. Minimum, maximum and percentage with value 1 for dummy variables, and means and standard deviation (SD) for continuous variables ($N = 7,163$).

Dummy variables	Min.	Max.	Percentage with value 1	
Men (man = 1, women = 0)	0	1	44.69	
Maintain farm structure (agree = 1, not agree = 0)	0	1	37.39	
Preserve rural areas (agree = 1, not agree = 0)	0	1	64.36	
Been hunting or angling during the last year (yes = 1, no = 0)	0	1	26.51	
Family income in highest half (yes = 1, no = 0)	0	1	48.99	
Children (yes = 1, no = 0)	0	1	44.73	
Higher education (yes = 1, no = 0)	0	1	47.63	
Urban district (yes = 1, no = 0)	0	1	43.33	
Year (2005 = 0, 2007 = 1)	0	1	50.15	
Social class				
Unskilled workers	0	1	6.67	
Skilled workers (reference)	0	1	15.64	
Top executives	0	1	5.80	
Service class with other executive positions	0	1	11.17	
Lower service	0	1	11.77	
Self-employed	0	1	4.90	
Students	0	1	6.09	
Other outside labour market	0	1	38.96	
Age dummies				
Age 15–25	0	1	7.59	
Age 26–39	0	1	21.57	
Age 40–59	0	1	41.84	
Age 60+ (reference)	0	1	29.00	
Continuous variables	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
Search for more material goods (1 = totally disagree – 5 = totally agree)	1	5	2.664	1.434
Interest in reading about outdoor activities (1 = not interested – 3 = very interested)	1	3	1.448	0.648
Life in countryside is more fulfilling than urban life (1 = totally disagree – 5 = totally agree)	1	5	3.451	1.450
I like to be in pleasant and beautiful surroundings (1 = totally disagree – 5 = totally agree)	1	5	4.050	0.970
I prefer to live a quiet life (1 = totally disagree – 5 = totally agree)	1	5	3.930	1.121