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Mediatization at the margins: Cosmopolitanism, network capital and spatial transformation in rural Sweden

Abstract: The significance of mediatization in countryside settings is an under-researched topic in media studies. In this paper, based on qualitative fieldwork carried out in two rural areas in Sweden, we study how mediatization integrates the prospects of cosmopolitan social change. The current phase of the mediatization process, which imposes a more dynamic register of networked communication, nourishes a new type of cosmopolitan identity in the countryside. As shown in the study, this development is constituted by complex configurations of different forms of mobility and connectivity. We argue that these spatial processes are socially structured, meaning that certain social groups are better equipped, through the appropriation of network capital, for turning cosmopolitan dispositions into a transformative resource, a ‘cosmopolitan politics of place’. Such alterations of the social structure may successively destabilize the relationship between ‘the urban’ and ‘the rural’.

Keywords: mediatization, network capital, geography, rural studies, cosmopolitanism

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Introduction

The future of the Swedish countryside seems to be multifaceted. Currently, it appears as if many provincial municipalities and regions have to expect a continuing stagnation and depopulation. Since the politically radical counterurbanization of the 1970s, when occasional interruptions in the general urbanization-process arouse, most surveys have indicated that large cities will continue to grow at the expense of the province. At the same time, it is possible to discern tendencies which indicate a more complex and dynamic landscape – a landscape which, amongst others, contains phenomena such as shrinking cities and expansive rural
areas. This is illustrated when metropolitan areas – i.e. Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö, including their rural surroundings – become winners, with a population which is both young and proliferate. Other regions, however, receive a more ageing population, especially those which are closely associated with, and dependent on, smaller industrial towns and communities (Amcoff, 2003). This has caused some scholars to speak about metropolitanization rather than urbanization (see Cunningham-Sabot and Fol, 2009), which implies that the development goes from a manifoldness of provincial towns to a small number of expanding metropolitan areas. In Sweden, there are several examples of how some rural areas have taken advantage of this development, thanks to their being situated within comfortable commuting distance to expansive environments, or their being regarded as attractive destinations for tourists and holiday-residents from the larger cities.

It is therefore important not to speak of ‘the countryside’ in too general terms. Parallel with the urbanization process, different types of counter-urban processes are taking place – phenomena which, in international research, go by appellations as “rural gentrification” and “radicalization” (Halfacree, 1997, 2009), depending on which groups it is that migrate, and on the place-political intentions they have. Even today, radical movements reminiscent of the 1970s counter-urbanization still exist – movements which safeguard the authenticity, ecology, and independence of the place in a time of (and often as a reaction against) increasing global flows (see, e.g., Cresswell, 2004; Harvey, 1996; Herlitz, 2000). However, if we consider the metropolitanization process, we see that it articulates aspects of rural urbanization and gentrification, in which the quality of the countryside is measured primarily in terms of its status as an exploitable idyll.

Moreover, if we study individual places and municipalities, it is feasible to identify competing tendencies. The gentrification of the countryside hardly needs to stand in opposition to radical place-politics. The influence of the urban middle class regarding rural development can very well contain features of radicalization. In a reverse way, political plans of action for the survival of the local countryside can include a will to open the local community to the cultural and economic pluralism associated with urban settings, without constructing the countryside as a commercial spectacle, or marginalizing locally sedimented forms of life.

In this article, we claim that the inter-connected meta-processes cosmopolitanization (Beck, 2006) and mediatization (Krotz, 2007), through their problematization of spatial relations, contribute to a loosening of such states of opposition. Based on qualitative fieldwork (primarily interviews) in two Swedish rural districts, Storvik and Stenby municipalities (fictitious names), we want to initiate a theoretical discussion concerning how cosmopolitan place-politics – in which local commitment and global reflexivity are united via different media – could get estab-
lished in Swedish rural environments. Instead of drawing on the so-called “mediated cosmopolitanism” thesis (see e.g. Rantanen, 2005; Robertson, 2010), whose logic risks reproducing a too linear model of social change, we will stress in the analysis the growing significance of network capital (Urry, 2007) as an aspect of the mediatization meta-process, not least in relation to various forms of mobility. Our point of departure is that the countryside, in order to survive, needs to attract new groups – groups which can be involved in managing and developing the countryside in a so-called post-productivist era (Halfacree, 2006). Therefore, we will analyze in particular those interviews conducted with people who have actively chosen to move to, or acquire holiday/second homes in, Storvik and Stenby.

The article is introduced by a theoretical discussion about what a cosmopolitan politics of place may stand for and how different forms of social change relate to each other in a mediatized rural context. Thereafter, based on Halfacree’s (2010) theories of rural forms of consumption and in-migration, we will study the more specific question of how mediatization can create prerequisites for cosmopolitan place-politics in the Swedish countryside. Our overall conclusion is that the importance of mediatization can, to a great extent, be construed as an increasing dependence on network capital (Urry, 2007). On the one hand, network capital constitutes a local resource, an all-the-more important prerequisite for durable cosmopolitanization and place-political commitment to occur; on the other hand, it risks creating new power-geometries. We consider ‘durable cosmopolitanization’ as a multimodal movement of social change, imprinted with local diversity and commitment as well as an all-embracing global reflexivity regarding the relationship (and mutual responsibility) between the local community and the world as a whole.

Cosmopolitanism, media and social change

In the book The Cosmopolitan Vision, Ulrich Beck (2006) describes cosmopolitan society as an all-embracing structure of glocal flows, practices, and experiences. Together they constitute a socially stratified and stratifying meta-process, which Beck denominates as cosmopolitanization. It seems obvious that various forms of media strongly contribute to this development, wherein people are increasingly exposed to, and affected by, global occurrences and impulses – culturally, socially, and materially. The lifeworld becomes potentially more diversified and de-territorialized. It is not, however, to be understood as a linear ‘effect’ of mediated messages, but as an interplay through which people’s encounters and social experiences in turn shape their, often routinized and ritualized, engagement with the media. Therefore, the concept of cosmopolitanization (in the broadest sense) does not necessarily mean a generally deepened cosmopolitanism. Rather, a cos-
The metropolitan spectrum evolves, in which there are significant differences between groups who can appropriate and intellectually recognize the increasing possibilities to form culturally sophisticated and reflexive lifestyles, and those who perceive “time-space compression” (see Harvey, 1990) as a threat to their own sense of community. Consequently, cosmopolitan society also includes backlashes against the overall glocal dynamic: strengthened barriers, exclusion and cultural conflicts.

This is also why we in this study regard cosmopolitanization as a ‘meta-process’. One may debate whether this is the appropriate term; for instance, Beck points out that cosmopolitanization implies a condition that often expands as the “side effect of actions that are not intended as ‘cosmopolitan’ in the normative sense” (Beck, 2006, p. 18) – typically located at the macro-economic and political levels of society. Thus, cosmopolitan transitions seem to be subordinate to the meta-process of globalization. At the same time, whereas Beck himself does not label cosmopolitanization a “meta-process” (the concept is not actively implemented in the book) his definition does present it in such terms: “a non-linear, dialectical process in which the universal and the particular, the similar and the dissimilar, the global and the local are to be conceived, not as cultural polarities, but as interconnected and reciprocally interpenetrating principles” (ibid, p. 73). This cultural alteration from within is on the one hand an irreversible process, but also, on the other hand, multimodal – a movement that may trigger defensive impulses:

When I speak of cosmopolitanization and anti-cosmopolitanization as two competing and contradictory movements, I understand them both as consequences of the progressive internal cosmopolitanization of reality. There is no necessary relation between the internal cosmopolitanization of national societies and the emergence of a cosmopolitan consciousness, subject or agent, regardless of what some cultural theorists seem to think (Beck, 2006, p. 74; italics in original).

Furthermore, the very term cosmopolitanism may be defined in various ways. In its classical and politicized guise, cosmopolitanism concerns a universal value stressing the individual’s responsibility towards mankind. This perspective permeates Habermas’ (2003) reasoning about dialogical communication in a post-national society, as well as Martha Nussbaum’s (1996) moral-philosophical thoughts concerning global responsibility and compassion. In more cultural and anthropological contexts, cosmopolitanism has instead been illustrated as a reflexive, explorative attitude towards cultural differences, as in Ulf Hannerz’s (1990) classical text about a complex world-culture and Cheah and Robbins’ (1998) postcolonialist work on hybridization. Despite their fundamental differences, what these perspectives have in common is that they carve out the image of cosmopolitanism as a particular social and ethical attitude towards the surrounding world and the Self. Globalization compels such cosmopolitan approaches to an
increasing degree; but at the same time, one should notice that cosmopolitanism is primarily constituted by banal, often commercially exploited processes (Beck, 2006).

Applying the term in the context of rural place-politics, we will use an integrated view of cosmopolitanism – a view which accentuates that cosmopolitanism is comprised of a will to engage in the Other and this person’s rights as a human and cultural being, as well as a subjective disposition to (re)negotiate the ethical foundations of the Self. Ultimately, cosmopolitanism, as described by Delanty (2009), concerns bridging the gap between Self and Other, and between familiar places and other places, through “situations of immanent transcendence [...] where the constitution of the social world is articulated through cultural models in which codifications of both Self and Other undergo transformation” (p. 70).

According to this approach, cosmopolitanism is not shaped through worldwide state systems, but via the successive internalization of ‘world openness’. Accordingly, the cosmopolitan openness to the world and the willingness for self-transformation not only correspond to a readiness to reassess the prevalent social order but also to a readiness to protect the ethical and cultural foundation of this social order in relation to exploiting powers. Cosmopolitanism must, therefore, be seen as a critical perspective in which social change – the will to imagine and establish alternative social formations – constitutes a core value. With its radically extended communication resources and its ability to create awareness about society’s incomplete character, the mediatized society has created new conditions for this kind of ethos to spread to new regions – socially and geographically. In other words, people can become “more cosmopolitan” (see Nowicka and Rovisco, 2009). In every person there is an intrinsic cosmopolitan potential which may be actualized through different learning processes, not least in the shape of mobility (geographical, social, virtual). Several studies, both qualitative (e.g. Kennedy, 2009) and quantitative (Gustafson, 2009; Mau, 2010; Pichler, 2008), have been able to demonstrate an increased cosmopolitan orientation amongst people who have experience with inter-/transnational migration, and amongst highly educated, urban and medially reflexive groups (Olofsson and Öhman, 2007; Phillips and Smith, 2008; Pichler, 2008).

In light of this reasoning, it is important to adopt a realistic view of to what extent and in what respects different individuals and groups can be expected to develop a cosmopolitan ethos, not least in rural contexts. When we discuss the ‘good cosmopolitanization’, we do not refer to any absolute fulfillment of philosophical ideals. The concrete social expression of cosmopolitanism is always situated. Cosmopolitan dispositions are negotiated, actualized and subdued in relation to specific time-space-contexts (see Kendall, Woodward, and Skrbis, 2002, pp. 106–108).
To further clarify the place-political potential of cosmopolitanism, we may relate Delanty’s notion of the “cosmopolitan imagination” to Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) perspective of “lived space”. The production of space is not, according to Lefebvre, just about material resources and representations, but also about ideological, imaginary processes in which sedimented patterns of interpretation (“residual” or “dominant” – cf. Williams, 1977) are set against new visions. The potential of cosmopolitanism as a place-political project consists in its general disposition of reflexively imagining processes of social change, where both Self and Other are problematized. This not only relates to a spatial perspective, but also to Other times, that is, those historical works, for example the countryside, which previous generations have created and future generations are meant to manage. Through this perspective, we want to free cosmopolitanism from its traditional position as an intellectual ideal – associated with an urban elite, and often extended in the shape of more or less universal doctrines on global integration. Because cosmopolitanism is seen as a resource for social change it can also become the basis for a renewal of rural politics of place.

This brings us to the question of mediatization. At the basic level, we follow Krotz’s (2007, 2008) notion of mediatization as a meta-process, that is, a socially-driven process that saturates and conditions other processes at various social levels. Based on the idea that communication is the foundation of all human action and all actors’ “social constructions of reality”, mediatization implies that the maintenance and development of social lifeworlds, institutions and societies – and the relationships between them – are becoming increasingly dependent on, and moulded by, media technologies, representations and institutions (Hepp, 2009; Livingstone, 2009). Grasping this multidimensional phenomenon requires a contextual approach, as Roger Silverstone (2005) argues: “[It] requires us to understand how processes of communication change the social and cultural environments that support them as well as the relationships that participants [...] have to that environment and each other” (p. 189; see also Lundby, 2009). This complexity means that the more concrete implications of the concept must be contextually defined and analyzed.

In our study, the analytical significance of mediatization appears at two levels: the lifeworld and the local place (politics). Firstly, mediatization sustains

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1 Actually, Silverstone discusses the concept of mediation, but as Livingstone (2009) notes, the relationship between mediation and mediatization is partly a question of language. When it comes to the dialectic analysis of entire communication environments, British English-speaking scholars tend to stick to ‘mediation’ (Couldry, 1999; Silverstone, 2005), while Scandinavian- and German-speaking scholars traditionally have used the concept of mediatization (Fornäs, 1995; Hjarvard, 2008; Krotz, 2007; Lundby, 2009). In most cases, like in this quotation, the elaborations of the concepts overlap.
a culturally pluralized and extended lifeworld. However, there are no self-evident patterns to this kind of transformation. The impact of mediatization has various manifestations in different social contexts and integrates everything from banal experiences of global cultural flows to more active cosmopolitan commitments. Secondly, mediatization implies that the politics of place become increasingly dependent on communicative resources in order to circulate alternative visions and representations of place. Via spatial representations and practices, not least the establishment of various rurally-based and/or -oriented online communities, the structure of lived space may also be successively modified. Together, these two aspects assert that cosmopolitan politics of place in a mediatized society benefit from the possession of network capital (Urry, 2007, ch. 9). According to Urry, network capital refers to “the capacity to engender and sustain social relations with those people who are not necessarily proximate and which generates emotional, financial and practical benefit (although this will often entail various objects or technologies or the means of networking)” (ibid, p. 197). The term thus captures both the material resources (broadband, hard- and software, etc.) that are needed to create glocal connectivities and the communicative competences, relations and experiences which individuals and groups draw on in various communicative, potentially place-political practices. We will return to the significance of network capital, as a power dimension of mediatization, in the upcoming analysis.

**The study**

This study is part of the research project *Rural Networking/Networking the Rural*. The aim of this project is to promote an understanding of the conditions and developmental potential of the Swedish countryside in transitional times, characterized by increasing mediated connectivity (Andersson and Jansson, 2012). While the overall project draws on qualitative as well as quantitative data in order to grasp ‘the globalized countryside’, the results presented in this article are based on our qualitative ethnographically-oriented field studies. The empirical data are comprised of personal interviews revolving around issues such as media use, local engagement, belonging, and mobility, which have been complemented with, or rather supported by, observations, longer stays in the local communities, and studies of public documents and local media.

The field studies have been conducted in two different areas: one in the southwest of Värmland and the other in the northeast of Skåne. These areas have

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2 The present study is part of the project *Rural Networking/Networking the Rural*, funded by the Swedish research council FORMAS (2008–2012).
been strategically (but also practically) chosen based on their geographical location in the margins of expansive regions. Both places are within a one-hour drive to a mid-size town or city, but are at the same time suffering from the infrastructural limitations of the Swedish countryside. Both regions have rich natural resources and therefore the potential for tourism. Hence, regarding socio-demographic aspects, these places may very well be compared to other rural areas in Western/European countries. Due to research-ethical reasons, we have anonymized the names of these places; thus, in Värmland we have studied ‘Granby’, located in ‘Storvik’ municipality, and in Skåne we have studied ‘Svenvik’, located in ‘Stenby’ municipality. In total, we have interviewed 27 people: 12 in Stenby and 15 in Storvik. The majority of participants have been interviewed in their capacity of being ‘inhabitants’ of the respective areas, but a few municipal politicians and officials have also been interviewed. The interviewees have been selected via what might be called a ‘strategic snowball selection’, in which people in local networks (for example, a rural association) have been contacted, and who have then recommended other possible informants. Consequently, we have managed to include people who have lived in the area all their lives, as well as in-migrants with varying degrees of local anchoring.

In agreement with the scientific ethical principles, all the interviewees have been anonymized.

The modalities of change: between gentrification and radical place-politics

The future of the Swedish countryside contains a series of potential scenarios in which every individual municipality or place must be judged based on its unique prerequisites. In rural studies, however, a number of theoretical models have been discussed where, in particular, the middle class’ hegemonic appropriation and exploitation of ‘rural idylls’ are set against more radical alternatives for a socially and ecologically sustainable rural development in a post-productivist context (see e.g. Halfacree, 1997, 2001, 2007). (Another scenario is of course stagnation and depopulation.) The problem with these types of models is, however, that they risk reproducing the polarization between the city and the country, as well as exaggerating the discrepancy between gentrification

3 The authors want to thank Joice Tolentino (previously a student in the Global Media Studies MA programme at Karlstad University) for conducting interviews with international in-migrants in Storvik.
and radical place-politics. In the long run, this leads to a cementation of those positions and metaphors.

In concordance with Halfacree’s (2010) theories of contemporary forms of rural consumption, which mainly concern the consumption of the countryside, we imply instead that the social change of the countryside must be seen as complex and ambiguous, where the influence of the surrounding world – in the form of, for example, migration, tourism and other forms of mobility – includes competing visions and forces among them. Therefore, we want to regard the social change of the countryside as multimodal, in which gentrification and radical place-politics should not be seen as separate modalities, but instead as kind of overlapping structures which in themselves are multimodal. We further claim that a cosmopolitan politics of place, through mediatized self-reflexivity in relation to places, mobilities and ideologies – fosters imaginations and practices which hold the potential to transcend simplified dichotomies.

To illuminate these conditions, we will relate Halfacree’s perspective to our own results from Granby and Svenvik. More particularly, our discussions will be guided by Halfacree’s three metaphors of rural consumption: the ‘bolt-hole’, the ‘castle’, and the ‘life-raft’. While the first two metaphors correspond with the mobilities and processes of change which we earlier called radical place-politics and rural gentrification, respectively, the life-raft denotes primarily different types of temporary residence, notably summer residence ownership. Through these metaphors we can not only show the multimodality of rural transitions; we are also able to further illuminate the status of mediatization and cosmopolitanization as meta-processes, harboring contradictory, sometimes conflictual movements and expressions.

(a) The bolt-hole

The first metaphor is represented by the counter-urbanization of the 1970s and similar radical ambitions to leave the rationalized life of the city in order to build up an alternative social order in harmony with nature. In many cases, these attempts have stranded because of socioeconomic limitations and mere homesickness (Halfacree, 2009). However, Halfacree (2010, p. 252) emphasizes that many radical initiatives have also survived and developed into something more than just identity-political negations of the city life, and have, amongst others, led to the establishment of small environmental technology corporations and other activities which merge current distinctions between the center and periphery.

One could see the community of Svenvik as being the fruit of the 1970s’ rural ‘migration’. Furthermore, it is an illustrative example of a civic grass-root
initiative which has not only survived but has also contributed to place-political transformation. At the onset of the 1970s, Svenvik was on its way towards gradual extinction. A couple of years earlier (1967), the then-teenage Ingvar had left Svenvik; in an interview with us more than 40 years later, he tells us that back then he thought that “the last place on earth that [he] would settle down in was Svenvik”. But he returned. Because in the middle of 1970, something happened to Svenvik: Several of the emigrated daughters and sons of the village returned and were joined by a number of urban emigrants. Ingvar explains that he and his wife hesitated before they decided to move back: “I had mixed feelings. On the one hand, we did not find the place to be livable; on the other hand, we were not confident enough to move to the city”. However, they took the plunge and had children, and the village began to grow: “And we told others that it is nice to live here – ‘aren’t you going to move here?’ – and then we got the hang of it, and then we had more kids and then we got fellowships and a community center and everything”.

Evy and Erik moved from Malmö during the 1970s to find a different life in the countryside and eventually ended up in Svenvik in 1974. They liked it instantly and tell us about the collective pioneer spirit which prevailed in the village.

Evy: We have ended up at the right place because there are quite a few people here who are on the same wavelength as us – people who want to be involved and who play music. With age, we have slowed down, but we have had so much fun here [...]. We have had festivities with kids crawling about who have had just as fun as we did. Now it’s time for the grandchildren instead [laughter].

Social solidarity and engagement have been two salient ingredients in the development of the village. The commitment has emerged from the meeting between counter-urbanizers, returnees and those who have been faithful to Svenvik, which means that the radical vein has undergone a successive conversion; nevertheless, ever since the counter-urban wave of the 1970s, the village community has represented the hub for both social and place-political activities, and is still today a radical force. The impetus is, and has always been, the demand that the village develops in the direction that its members want. That means expansion – without too much effect on the uniqueness of the village, meaning the traces of the former stone-industry, the lake view and the public lakeside recreation area. Enthusiastic members of the village community devote several hours per week to various projects. Allan, who has lived in Svenvik his whole life, describes how the internet has facilitated their work:

Allan: You compile statistics and mail around. A few of us, however, don’t have computers, but then the neighbor comes over with paper so that we don’t have to phone around.
This is a good way because then people can answer when they have time, and if it is something special then we'll have a meeting.

In addition, the village community has their own website which is used, among other things, to announce meetings and to publish their ongoing correspondence with the municipal authorities. Thus, possession of network capital holds significance for both the unity and the place-political commitment in the local context. It is important to see how network capital, largely accumulated via counter-urban migration, is expressed as a collective resource in which individual competences and contacts benefit from the joint activities. When the members and their activities are brought together, new interfaces towards the surrounding world are created. It is, however, to a limited degree that the village community as such ‘connects itself’ to the global arena. Global connectivity is rather established via lived experience, as in the case of Harriet, a board member of the association, who had traveled to and lived in the USA and China, amongst other places, before moving to Svenvik a couple of years ago.

Consequently, it is important not to label technology as such as having a cosmopolitan significance; instead, it is the possibilities for new encounters in the local context which hold the potential to cosmopolitanaize the politics of place. We can illustrate this by using a reverse example from Storvik, which shows how new media may be used as a barrier against a threatening outside world – even as a counterweight against cosmopolitan experiences. Sabine is one of many Dutch citizens who have settled in the municipality over the last decade via summer residence and various regional migrating campaigns. She is in her sixties and works in healthcare. When she was younger, she frequently traveled to different parts of the world, which is something she no longer is motivated to do; instead, her house in the Swedish countryside has come to become the place in which she wants to spend the rest of her life. Her disassociation from long-distance travel is accompanied by a disinterest in international news and the pulse of the city life:

Interviewer: Are you more focused on what's happening around you here?

Sabine: Yes. I have a very small world [laughs] ... and I like it. I hate aggressiveness, so why to watch international news? It's just about aggressiveness, I don't like it. I had a newspaper in Holland and I wouldn't want it anymore. And they called me, “why, don't you want to have newspapers?” “No, sir”, I said ... “I will have a newspaper when you have half of your newspaper for positive news and half of your newspaper for negative news. Then I'll actually buy them, but not now ...” It's much negative energy that comes from ...

Interviewer: So you think the newspapers here are different?

Sabine: Yes, I think so.

Interviewer: How do you feel that?
Sabine: There is not so much aggressiveness in the area ... but I don't read the negative news ... I don't like it ...

Interviewer: And do you think the news here, or the newspapers, have less negative news because it's Sweden, another country, or because you are living in the countryside?

Sabine: Because it's the countryside. I think so.

The media, especially those with global and/or urban orientation, are described by Sabine as an explicit threat to the harmony she has found in Storvik – in which the countryside stands as the ultimate symbol for stability and security. In the interview she also explains that she sometimes writes chronicles for an online-forum for Dutch expatriates. These chronicles are specifically about Swedish customs and traditions. Hence, her creation of an individual media space replicates the moral geography of fixity (Cresswell, 2006) in which only a few media types can fit – for example the local newspaper – and in which new media are used to confirm established traditions. The countryside is appropriated according to the characteristic formula of the ‘bolt-hole’, celebrating above all the non-cosmopolitan qualities of the countryside, that is, its shielding position in relation to the misery of the world (cf. Chouliaraki, 2006; Robertson, 2010) as well as to network society. At the same time, as an illustration of the complexity of the cosmopolitanization meta-process, Sabine herself serves as an example of those social transformations which some rural areas are undergoing today.

(b) The castle

Halfacree’s second metaphor, ‘the castle’, is likewise characterized as a subjective effort to establish a non-urban lifestyle. Yet it is more about an affluent search for one’s own place than a radically different non-capitalistic social order. The archetype for the ‘castle-builder’ is the rural in-migrant or counter-urbanizer who prefers no other group to enter and alter the countryside which he or she has territorialized. For these more or less affluent class-fractions, it is the “rural idyll” – and, consequently, a socio-cultural homogeneous environment (Murdoch and Marsden, 1994, p. 232) – that prevails, which also creates a kind competition, as the ‘castle-builders’ tend to be attracted to similar environments. In Stenby municipality, we have been able to distinguish parallel tendencies, particularly among newly established summer residents, who have invested considerable amounts in alternative housing. These second-home owners have objected to the expansion of Svenvik, and the establishment of permanent lodgings in previous green-field areas.
However, as Halfacree (2010, p. 254) points out, the aestheticized mobility of the middle class is not always expressed in such an anti-cosmopolitan manner. Rural gentrification-processes, as a whole and in their individual expressions, are multimodal and imprinted with emotional as well as economic investments (see also Woods, 2005). They also embody shifting mobility types, with shifting ethical orientations. From our field studies, we conclude that mobility in itself often constitutes an ethical process of transformation, through which the subject reconsiders his/her frames of references and shapes a more reflexive and relational stance towards place and belonging.

An illuminating example of this reflexivity can be found in one of the interviews with an in-migrated Dutch citizen in Storvik. Although Mirijam was born in the Netherlands, she resided for quite a while in the USA, including New York and San Francisco, living with an American man. She also lived in other countries before she moved to the Swedish countryside with her family and present husband, who has had a second home in the neighborhood before. Mirijam is well-educated and together with her husband, she runs a company focusing on healthcare combined with a bed & breakfast, all of which fit in the 18th century farm tenancy. The scenario can be seen as a typical reflection of rural gentrification, with emphasis on glocal business and aestheticized production of place, where economic as well as emotional investments permeate the lifestyle. Mirijam says that the investment in place has successfully made her more and more rooted, and that the access to ICT networks is a precondition for this anchoring-process to take place.

Mirijam: We started this conversation with saying that I didn’t really have roots, or my family doesn’t really have roots. But I discovered then, thanks to Sweden ... that I started to love Sweden, I started to love Värmland, and I’m getting attached to it. [...] I didn’t want to live too far out in the country so ... it’s still, I think it’s very central where we are living. We live out in the country, but still, it’s 45 minutes to go to Karlstad or 20 minutes to go to Storvik. So, that’s one of the reasons, because of the unspoiled nature ... and you know, with the internet it doesn’t really matter where you are. It’s the experience ...

Mirijam’s story illustrates how a cosmopolitan life biography can move towards an increased spatial anchoring without becoming less cosmopolitan in an ethical respect. This underlines that cosmopolitanism cannot be equated with rootlessness (see e.g. Bude and Dürrschmidt, 2010; Calhoun, 2003; Pichler, 2008), and that cosmopolitanization integrates, even fosters, a diversity of ‘localist’ desires and expressions. Mirijam’s cosmopolitan experiences and values (which are particularly reflected in her focusing on the value of mutual respect, commitment, and ‘open doors’ between people of different backgrounds, particu-
larly in regards to the relationship between the locals and the migrants) have obviously worked as a kind of a bridge, linking her to the local society, and have successively turned into a strong commitment to the place. This process reminds us of Beck’s (2006) and Delanty’s (2009) view of the potential of the dialogical imagination, and provides evidence for the fact that mobile life-paths, especially if they span over further geo-cultural fields, cultivate an increased reflexivity regarding questions of self-identity, inclusion and exclusion. Resonating with Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst’s (2005, p. 207) discussion on “elective belonging”, Mirijam’s story shows how reflexive and creative place-making processes may explain the resonance between glocal life-stories and countryside settlement.

In line with Halfacree’s reasoning, we claim that this type of life-biographies may contribute to a problematization of the dichotomy between the city and the country. Individuals like Mirijam and her family can, on the one hand, contribute to new social dynamics within the rural context and, on the other hand, establish connections between the city and the country. As witnessed in Mirijam’s above citation, new media play a pivotal role. For the bridging to occur, it is necessary that the counter-urban movement does not imply drainage of network capital (Urry, 2007). This dynamic is given further illumination when Mirijam describes the international courses which are carried out at the farm:

**Interviewer:** These people you said you receive here ... they are from all over the world, right?

**Mirijam:** Yeah, they come from all over the world. Mainly at the moment they are from Europe. But everywhere in Europe. But we also had somebody that was coming from India and Australia, so it’s from everywhere but ... it’s not really so important.

**Interviewer:** And how do you get these people to know about your work? Through a network or ...?

**Mirijam:** Yes. It’s a huge network. Internet of course, but mainly through different networks that we are having. And our sales and marketing office in the Netherlands that takes care of that now. However, that’s actually a point to think about. Because we have picked it a little bit wrong to be living here, because people traveling ... it is difficult because now they have to fly to Oslo, Gardemoen, for there are no direct flights to Karlstad. If you want to have a flight from Karlstad it’s so amazingly expensive that people don’t do that, so that is a big problem. It almost makes us decide to move somewhere else because of this reason.

Even though Mirijam feels that she is part of the global networks on a private level, thanks to the internet, and has succeeded in creating interest for her company via her mediated international contacts, there are, nevertheless, infrastructural limitations which obstruct the interpersonal relations that the company relies upon. Cosmopolitan place-politics, therefore, seem to be dependent
on network capital on a collective/structural level as well as on an individual, entrepreneurial or private, level. This should not, however, be interpreted as if network capital by itself (or ‘the media’ for that matter) produces ‘cosmopolitans’. Our point does not concern ‘mediated cosmopolitanism’, let alone that mediated connections contribute to the formation of the so-called banal cosmopolitanism (Beck, 2006), but the fact that the possession of network capital sustains the mobility of people with cosmopolitan experiences, frameworks and dispositions – and thus, indirectly, the prospects for social and spatial change in rural areas (as well as elsewhere).

(c) The life-raft

Halfacree’s (2010) third metaphor, ‘the life-raft’, derives, like the first two metaphors, from a symbolic, reproductive distinction between the city and the countryside, where the traditional life forms of the countryside are affirmed and appropriated through a kind of mundane urban criticism. Here, however, city life has not been abandoned but complemented with a vitalizing contrast – usually in the form of a holiday home. According to several studies (see, e.g., Garvey, 2008; Quinn, 2004), a desire to handle and mould urban identity remains via the temporary rural settlement, meaning that identity is formed in a dualistic urban-rural interplay. In the Scandinavian context, ‘the life-raft’ is certainly a more multifaceted phenomenon than in many other European countries because the urban dominance has a weaker historic anchoring, and holiday homes of various kinds – ranging from sports-cabins and boathouses to grand family farm tenancies – are a relatively widespread phenomenon. Nevertheless, rural holiday homes are often created as an arena for a kind of ‘banal life politics’ in which the increased volatility of (late) modern working life is balanced by a more vertically orientated interest in, for example, local cultural heritage and various projects of small-scale cultivating (cf. Löfgren, 1999).

We can decipher this as a cosmopolitan impulse in the sense that it concerns a relativization of the Self in relation to residual local forms of life and the landscape of the past, as well as to existential questions regarding the individual’s role and responsibility to the world as a whole. This does not imply that holiday homes should be seen as the key to a more cosmopolitan society. However, in our material as well as from previous research, one can see that the enduring attractiveness of the rural ‘life-raft’ stems from its ability to place the individual in a kind of oceanic state of universal belonging in time and space. In this context, the access to network capital has a very different role than in the previous two examples. The nature of network society, through
which the subject is ultimately reduced to an information node, stands in direct opposition to the rather metaphysical resonance which ‘the life-raft’ represents. The endeavor to take a break from the mediatized society risks being accompanied by a feeling of dissonance – partly because the media gradually becomes more difficult to flee from, and partly because the own ‘de-mediated’ vacation-project might be experienced as a non-justifiable privilege, or a distinction (cf. Bourdieu, 1979/1984), in relation to the rural aspiration for equal communication resources.

For one of our informants, Stellan, the five summer weeks spent in Granby Bruk (a former glassworks community close to Granby) imply an existential reconnection to his roots, as well as a self-reflexive assessment of his own identity. During the summer months, the little community, beautifully located by a lake, flourishes when descendants of the old factory workers visit their inherited as well as newly established properties. During his upbringing, Stellan lived in a number of different places around the world – such as Uppsala, Paris and the Congo – and can therefore not point out a specific origin for his own life biography. Rather, it is Granby Bruk, which he has visited every summer of his life, that occupies this position. As long as he is working, it will not become a permanent residence, however, but will function solely as a form of recreation – to go out on the lake and into the wilderness, “to truly experience wild nature ... away ... from civilization and the social relationships and everything ...”

As a young boy, Stellan often thought it was depressing to hear the elders talking about the closed-down plant which cast a constant shadow over the place; but since the beginning of the 21st century, when an EU-project was established to create heritage tourism in the area, the atmosphere has become more positive. He has begun to reaffirm his family roots and to engage more in local projects:

To go here is to make a time-travel back in time – it is an industrial culture, and the gender roles are very cemented, which I also fall into; I end up more seldom in the kitchen and more often out amongst vehicles and outside chopping wood, and when we have workdays and have to grub out on the cape, then it’s the women who show up in aprons bringing coffee while we chaps sit there outside and enjoy drinking it [laughter], so it’s quite patriarchal structures that are activated here. Well, I belong to the younger of us, and it’s still the older generation who decides. My wife and I have discussed this a lot – the old-fashioned gender roles that almost force themselves upon you. And sometimes I put on an apron and stand with my wife, serving coffee, which is regarded as a peculiarity in this context ... [laughter].

[...]

It is quite refreshing with all the Norwegian, German and Dutch summer-guests who pop up in the neighborhood as a cosmopolitan contribution to this extremely local and historically conscious group, which I, my father and uncle and other rooted relatives kind
of cultivate ... And it is very good that others enter our community. But it is hard to piece together these different cultures, because it is hard for these continental summer-guests to sort of get into this ... at the same time they want to.

Here, the universalist, even existential, cosmopolitan impulse, discussed above, is supplemented with more culturally conditioned intersections in time and space – a ritualized, annual condensation by which Granby Bruk turns into a temporary micro-cosmos of meetings, negotiations and reflections. Stellan’s story shows how temporary residence creates possibilities as well as limitations for cosmopolitan place-politics to occur. On the one hand, people like Stellan contribute to the cultural encounters and collisions, particularly via their varied life-narratives and horizons of interpretation (with Granby as joint reference point), which may, to a certain extent, create prerequisites for cosmopolitan reflections and dispositions. Stellan’s own view of the relationship between himself, ‘the elders’, and ‘the continental summer-guests’ can be seen as an ethical articulation of the cosmopolitan politics of place, ascribing equal value to both ‘roots’ and ‘routes’. On the other hand, the social change of the local community is tied to the exceptional period of the summer months. Stellan’s performative problematization of gender roles can remain a peculiarity which does not have to invoke any further confrontations or negotiations. Cosmopolitanism thus thrives in a kind of experimental workshop reminiscent of Michel Foucault’s (1967/1998) notion of heterotopia – an “other space” with its own clearly demarcated rules of inclusion and exclusion. Despite the intense will for mutual understanding and inclusion, Stellan’s story intimates that some groups risk seeing themselves as strangers who cannot, or dare not, lay claim to the place and its authenticity.

If we look at Stellan’s own situation, which is typical for the mobile middle class, it gives a snapshot of Harvey’s (1996) ideas on the significance of “authentic” space as a desirable asset and hotbed for radical place-political ideas (though in the shape of a temporary “life-raft”). The paradox in this context is, however, that the (re-)vitalization of Granby Bruk, meaning its incorporation within network society via the tourism industry, which is then based on the special cultural heritage and idyllic qualities of the place, has made it more difficult for Stellan to create the much-desired pocket of tranquility and peace. The reason for this is that there is now ‘more pressure’ within the community, in the shape of various events in which he is expected to engage, combined with his professional life and its communication taking up more time.

I feel like I keep scraping the surface, as if I don’t have a good idea of what’s going on. It feels as if I want to be involved and have control, then I would have to raise my own media-intensity; it must become much higher. And this is a direct conflict with how I
feel – because I notice that this is deeply related to existential values of cultivating your relationship and having time to fade into each other. So this stands in direct conflict with being off with my wife and to unwind and calm down... To communicate with her or to be connected and communicate about a whole lot of things that stresses me up, so this is a pretty difficult conflict.

Stellan shows indications of a somewhat dystopian future scenario, in which the status of Granby Bruk as a ‘life-raft’ is no longer evident but must be created more by himself through discipline and reflexive strategies. The situation is largely tied to mediatization, individually (the feeling of not being comfortable without being able to connect, the feeling that you miss too much and cannot manage the practical matters of everyday life) as well as structurally (that even the countryside should be connected to the technological and normative structures of network society). Stellan is currently thinking of getting a wireless modem for next summer in order to handle e-mails during the first and last week of his vacation and to keep a stringent online-discipline in-between.

Today’s digital mediatization has, in other words, an ambivalent meaning in relation to local cosmopolitan practices of the vacation period. The development causes two complementary sides of cosmopolitanism to end up in conflict with each other. While mediated interconnections and networks promote those kinds of meetings which (potentially) generate cultural reflexivity (cf. Beck, 2006) – directly (in the form of mediatized contacts) as well as indirectly (by facilitating mobility) – the same networks pose a possible threat to the existential reflexivity which constitutes the more universal side of cosmopolitanism (cf. Nussbaum, 1996). The access to network capital, meaning the potential to be mobile and interconnected (Urry, 2007), implies, henceforth, that high demands are placed on the individual’s ability (and in a more political sense even on society’s institutional, normative structures) to differentiate in order for this asset not to result in a social and technological dependency, where cosmopolitan ambitions end up as mere surface-play, or spectacles. The example of ‘the life-raft’ illustrates that cosmopolitanism, in order to receive deeper signification as a place-political project, demands not only space, a place, but also time – time for encounters and time for contemplation. A more cosmopolitan understanding of the concept ‘network capital’ implies that it is not primarily about a one-dimensional increase of the number of contacts and movements, but rather about a qualitative phenomenologically-rooted moral capacity to be able also to refrain from connectivity and mobility in given circumstances. This is yet an illustration of the complexity of the cosmopolitanization meta-process which through its various everyday realizations also reproduces social distinctions.
Concluding discussion: network capital as a transformative force

Mediatization is a multifaceted meta-process (Krotz, 2007) which affects different spheres of society in different ways. From the contextualized studies and discussions presented in this article, we conclude that a salient component of mediatization, and likewise a reproductive force within this, can be defined as the *structurally conditioned social dependence on network capital*. To analyze how people and institutions relate to and, in various ways, make use of network capital, is thus a relevant way of understanding and explaining the *power geometries of mediatization*.

As illustrated in the examples of both the ‘bolt-hole’ and ‘the life-raft’, network capital has, however, an ambivalent meaning in relation to cosmopolitanization in the sense that the mobility resources themselves can be used in ways that are not beneficial to the reflexive process of change that we have discussed here. Rather, they may reinforce or raise new barriers or construct cosmopolitanism as a symbolic façade – something which has also been discussed in previous studies (e.g., Young, Diep and Drabble, 2006). When it comes to the future prospects of the countryside as a sustainable and attractive habitat, we have, nevertheless, chosen to focus on the transformative power that network capital provides within the process of cosmopolitanization. The main reason for this is that the access to network capital promotes the circulation of people, ideas, and opinions which cosmopolitan dispositions presuppose. Without reducing this to a discussion about ‘mediated cosmopolitanism’, our three thematic analyses have illustrated how the access to, notably, the internet creates, in many ways, bridges and overlaps between life forms which otherwise tend to be reproduced (concretely and symbolically) as strictly ‘rural’ or ‘urban’, where the ‘rural’ is un-reflectively understood as something non-cosmopolitan.

This implies in turn that the establishment of a cosmopolitan politics of place, with network capital as a resource, is something completely different from ‘rural urbanization’. The ex-centric cosmopolitan outlook stands in direct opposition to this kind of process. The dominant position of urbanization should certainly not be neglected in this context, nor should the immanent tendencies of network society to reproduce cities themselves as cultural and economic nodes. However, with networked media follows a potential to challenge and supplement the more unidirectional flows which have throughout the modern era constructed the city as the center, not just structurally, but also in representational terms, as a mythological, mediated center (Couldry, 2003). In our studies, this potential is shown, particularly in the form of various kinds
of urban-rural reflexivity and critique. In this way, the basic forms of counter-
urbanization, which we initially crystallized as ‘radical place-politics’ and ‘rural
gentrification’ are increasingly interwoven.

Our basic point is that the fate of the countryside as a socially sustainable
and coherent environment can be influenced by the transformative force of
network capital, whereby the relationship between the city and the countryside
assumes a more complex form. Above all, the significance of network capital
for the structures of production, as well as for the construction of identities,
entails that the very idea of ‘the countryside’ must differentiate. This must not
be perceived as technological determinism but as a perspective that places
human resources and social life at the center of analysis. Network capital is
not accumulated by access to technology as such. Instead, it is based on how
technology (and other social and material resources) is appropriated and used:
which possibilities for reflections, interchanges, and interactions that different
individuals and groups seize. In this article, we have primarily pointed out how
network capital interacts with different forms of socio-cultural mobility and
encounters in local contexts, paying particular attention to how cosmopolitan
experiences and dispositions can contribute to actualizing the transformative
potential of network capital.

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