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Landscapes of Tourism Development in Sweden

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Tourism development is entangled in the challenge of defining success. Although the tourism industry is categorized as an elusive industry based on experiences and with consumers co-producing the highly subjective products, productivity and development in tourism is predominantly measured through quantitative methods such as number of over-night stays and economic yield. More qualitative approaches are found both in research with studies regarding various impacts of tourism on the host society and in the field of practice through user generated reviews. Either way, the focus is on the outcome of a commercial transaction.

The work presented here shows an approach to assessing the development of tourism in Sweden that puts the tourism producer in the centre of attention. The agency of the individual working within tourism is focused upon and the research question relates to the longevity of tourism workforce: does the geography of individuals with their main annual income within tourism during the full period of 2000-2010 correspond with the geography of what is generally held as the most successful tourism destinations? This question is explored through a spatial analysis of a combination of data. The first data set is the official statistics on the tourism industry in Sweden, counting over-night stays and number of companies classified as tourism in accordance with the European Union's recommendations of Nomenclature of Economic Activities. The second set contains information derived from a longitudinal population register that contains micro-level information about all individuals in Sweden. This latter kind of information has recently been made available for research purposes in Sweden and some other northern European countries and allows for creating global analyses of the development in larger geographical entities.

The issue of assessing tourism development and outcome is in many ways a question of caring about all factors within the production chain of this industry. The aspect addressed in this study is the fluctuation of individuals engaged in tourism. Unless new dimensions of success and failure are added to the prevalent themes within education related to tourism, the assessment will continue to focus on direct economic yield. A more holistic understanding of the effects of tourism is vital as tourism development is applied as a means to rejuvenation and survival for regions experiencing out-migration of people and economic capital. An understanding that needs to be present in the knowledge creation on basic as well as more advanced levels within academia but also and not least among practitioners and planners.

The results of the study described above will be presented as A3-sized colourful maps, creating a visual experience that encourages questioning of how and why tourism development is measured.