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Human Migrations and Mobility: Insights and Current Paths

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The Role of Geography and Territorial Planning in the Spreading of SARS-CoV-2

A Case Study on the Peculiarities of the Swedish Rurality

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ABSTRACT

This article studies the spread of SARS-CoV-2 at a local level in Sweden and the role of geographic features that might have influenced the path of the virus. Then, the differences between rural and urban contexts have been analyzed. Results showed that the Swedish rurality seems to have been hit less by the pandemic than the ones of many other Western countries, possibly because of its more advanced stage of rurbanisation and a better institutional government and planning of its former rural areas. On the other hand, other Western countries have chosen models which appear closer to the American one, in which the social and economic structure of the urbanized areas, from the hamlet to the metropolis, is disappearing in favour of a sprawl model that could have boosted the infection.

Keywords: SARS-CoV-2; Sweden; rurality; urban areas; rural planning.

1. INTRODUCTION

The SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, contrary to what has often been perceived by the population and expressed by the media¹ (Boterman 2020, 1; Lévy

¹ https://www.repubblica.it/esteri/2020/11/25/news/covid_il_mistero_di_parigi_cosi_la_ville_lumie_re_sta_reggendo_alla_seconda_ondata-275821064/?ref=RHTP-BH-I274746038-P1-S7-T1 [21/09/2021].

2020), does not seem to have hit cities and densely populated areas more violently than the isolated or rural ones in many Western countries. On the contrary, as suggested by the scientific literature (Casti e Adobati 2020, 9; Malatzky *et al.* 2020, 2-3; Cerino *et al.* 2021, 2), “[w]hen rural outbreaks did occur, they were more impactful”² (Malatzky *et al.* 2020, 2).

This pattern, nonetheless, is not consistent in every country: indeed, some Northern European countries such as Sweden (Florida and Melander 2022, 3), Denmark (Holmager *et al.* 2021), and Finland (Barrio *et al.* 2021) seem not to follow the trend. These countries have generally been hit less by the pandemic in comparison to the rest of the Western world (Kowall *et al.* 2021), despite having a high population rate living far from large urban areas, due to their demographic and geographical features.

This article analyses the geography of the infection at a municipal level Sweden, with a specific focus on the counties of Stockholm, Dalarna, and Norrbotten. Using the results obtained, it investigates the characteristics of the rurality and the territorial policies implemented focusing on factors which could have influenced, positively or negatively, the spread of the infection. In particular, the discussion focuses on rural, isolated, and mountainous areas, severely hit many Western countries, and on Swedish regions, generally scarcely populated and poorly connected, that have been hit more mildly, as it happened in other Nordic countries with similar socio-geographic characteristics.

According to the aims of this article, it seems important to premise some considerations: (i) the effects of population density on the spread of the infection are not denied; nonetheless, the supremacy among the factors that facilitate the infection is questioned, as supported by the previously cited literature; (ii) this article does not aim at evaluating the containment policies the institutions of the countries adopted to face the pandemic.

2. METHOD

The article analyzes Swedish epidemic data (at a municipal level), aiming at establishing possible relations between human geography and the spread of SARS-CoV-2 infection.

² This sentence well summarises the core of the cited literature.



Figure 1. – Number of Covid-19-related deaths per 100.000 inhabitants in Swedish municipalities (at different levels of detail), standardized with the average age. Maps 8–13 were taken on November 18, 2021, and show data from the beginning of the pandemic. Source: Socialstyrelsen <https://www.socialstyrelsen.se/statistik-och-data/statistik/statistik-om-covid-19/statistik-over-antal-avlidna-i-covid-19/dodsfall-per-kommun-covid19/> [26/02/2023].

Firstly, open-access municipal data have been studied, aiming at estimating the dimension of the infection in Sweden: data and maps from scientific studies and institutional websites dealing with SARS-CoV-2 cases and deaths have been analyzed. As concerns the temporal aspect data refer to reports from the ‘first wave’ (weeks 10, 20 and 30 of 2020)³ and to aggregated data collected until autumn 2021 that can be found in *Figure 1*. This choice has been made in light of the mild policies against the infection put into practice by Sweden, which left the Swedish socio-geographic context almost intact, since the measures taken were scarce.

Secondly, as concerns the geographic analysis, in addition to the cited literature, interviews and information requests have been used. Prof. Marcia Markus⁴ has been interviewed to better understand the Swedish school system organization and Olivia Malm⁵ has provided precious information about the Swedish welfare system. Moreover, Region Dalarna and Dalatrafik have provided useful data about the public transport in Dalarna County. Moreover, onsite analyses of the territories performed by the author have had an influence on the article and, lastly, digital tools such as Google Earth, Google Maps, and OpenStreetMaps have been used.

3. RESULTS

As stated in the introduction, Western rural areas were heavily hit by the pandemic; nonetheless, the analysis of the maps concerning Sweden seems to reveal a different trend: in a generally more patchworked framework, it seems almost impossible to notice higher rates in the extremely numerous rural areas of the country, even if some exceptions can be found in some extremely isolated and remote areas of the Northwest; on the contrary, the most densely populated and industrialized areas seem to have suffered the infection majorly. It is the case of the county of Stockholm, where the infection hit hardly the most peripheral municipalities, often located around the terminal stations of the *Pendeltåg*. In the rural Dalarna and the cold and isolated Norrbotten, the context does

³ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00168-021-01071-0/figures/1> [13/05/2022].

⁴ Teacher of English language learning and teaching at Dalarna University, Sweden.

⁵ *Socionomprogrammet* student at Dalarna University, Sweden.

not seem to show clear, geography-related trends. Rates are high in Borlänge (an industrial city, the biggest in Dalarna, a logistic hub, but also an area with some social problems), Orsa, and Vansbro (scarcely populated and without important infrastructures) for what concerns the first county and in Övrekalis, Arjeplog, Kiruna, and Gällivare (all of them are far from the coast and the first two are isolated and scarcely populated) for what concerns the second. On the whole, also thanks to the delay with which the virus hit the country and to the lower population density, Sweden suffered a less violent pandemic impact some other Western countries (Kowall and Standl 2020).

Stockholm county partially lies outside of the Swedish context: in fact, the capital is a global city that does not share many of its characteristics with the rest of the country. The flourishing economy, the welcoming attitude towards the refugees the Swedish government has had in the last decades (Palme 1965; AA.VV. 2020, 53), and the fact of being the main mobility hub of Scandinavia result in a cosmopolitan county, populated by people who come from all over the world, for many reasons. This is why the territory seems to be more bounded to the global cities network (Sassen 2005, 27), hectic, and open to economic liberalism. Ultimately, the metropolitan area of the capital is less bounded to the traditional values of the Swedish territory, from the social democracy to the *lagom*. For what concerns the impact of the infection, Stockholm's population seems to be less used to social distancing and to following recommendations of the institutions (which are extremely more popular in Sweden than in other countries, where restrictions were applied), meanwhile it seems more inclined to live in community, typical characteristic of people who live outside of their country of origin (Caselli 2010, 60-61). This is what the Swedish-Italian filmmaker Erik Gandini (2015) highlighted: he underlined, for example, how the Somali community rejected the accommodations they were offered during the pandemic not to "leave their elderly alone" (Guareschi 2020, 21)⁶. In fact, the greatest part of the infections happened far from the central neighborhoods, in socially difficult areas, among the worst in Europe for crime rates (AA.VV. 2020, 56)⁷, which are also the ones where the types of job make working from home impossible (Guareschi 2020, 21). The central municipalities seem to be hit less together with the area which

⁶ Translation by the author.

⁷ Based on Migrationverket (Swedish immigration administration) data.

faces the Baltic Sea, still not bound to the modernity of the capital, due to the difficult infrastructure development⁸.

Analyzing these data, peaks in the most socially difficult areas, like in the outskirts of Stockholm and in municipalities like Borlänge, come as no surprise given the demonstrated correlation between the social and economic unrest and higher rates of SARS-CoV-2 infection (Johansson and Bennet-Brack 2020, 2-5). On the other hand, data concerning higher rates in important and populated or extremely isolated municipalities (and not in rural or rurban territories) open a geographic reflection on these territories and their differences from other rural contexts in Europe.

4. DISCUSSION

As previously highlighted, Sweden has suffered the negative effects of the pandemic less than many other European countries and even less its rural territories, vast and numerous as previously before. In this paragraph the geographic causes, if any, will be investigated, with a specific focus on the urban-rural dichotomy.

Firstly, Sweden might have suffered less the negative effects of the pandemic for demographic, cultural, political, and temporal reasons. In fact, the low population density, the geographic collocation at the Northern borders of Europe that delayed the arrival of the infection, the great readiness of the country for a pandemic⁹, and the high digitalization rate (Zeidler 2020, 66 and 69)¹⁰ might have attenuated the pandemic effects. Also the high rate of highly educated people¹¹ and the low rate of social exclusion (given the generous welfare system) might have mitigated the consequences since both factors are inversely proportional to the spreading of the infection (Johansson and Bennet-Brack 2020, 2-5). Moreover, from a cultural point of view, some aspects of the

⁸ Except for Varmdö in which, nonetheless, a part of the population lives on islands.

⁹ <https://www.ghsindex.org/country/sweden/> [18/09/2021].

In the last report before the pandemic, Sweden ranked 7th (out of 195 countries) in the general index and third for what concerns “Real time surveillance and reporting”.

¹⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20200414-2> [22/11/2021].

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_attainment_statistics#_Level_of_educational_attainment_by_age [21/11/2021].

lifestyle of the Scandinavian country might have attenuated the consequences, like the compliance with rational values (Inglehart and Welzel 2010, 3), the high trust citizens have in public institutions¹² (repaid with the substantial respect of the recommendations of the health authorities¹³) the architecture based on wide and uncrowded indoor spaces, and on the Swedish habit to spend much of the free time outdoor (and to live in strict contact with natural spaces), even in winter, also thanks to the *allemansrätten*: the right of transiting, staying, and using some natural resources also in private areas. The urban policies that make pedestrian and cycling mobility accessible even in winter might have helped as well. Once more, the Swedish real estate market, heavily influenced by public entities, promotes the presence of small family units, guaranteeing the possibility to live alone both to young and elderly people. The fact that Scandinavian citizens are less bounded to their house (that is not often owned, but rented) and to family relations results in the fact that they usually live closer to their working or studying place than to friends or family members, generating less cardinal social relations (especially intergenerational ones) and commuting compared to the majority of the other European countries¹⁴. In fact, commuting is much more common on a weekly basis than on a daily one, as demonstrated by the numerous public transport lines and railway services which are active only on Friday and Sunday evenings. Additionally, the personal relations appear to be less numerous, strict, and frequent and seem to be regulated by the typically Swedish concept of *lagom*, literally, *just enough, not too much*, with a distinctly positive meaning. It is important to say that the lower intensity of the social relationships (at least of the caring ones) in Sweden is considered part of the social democratic identity, which aims at “freeing women from men, kids from adults, sons from parents, elderlies from sons [and at the fact that] relationships must be free and independent from social, economic, or familiar boundaries” (Guareschi 2020, 12)¹⁵. This distance, also physical, between the people in the country is also

¹² <https://data.oecd.org/gga/trust-in-government.htm> [21/11/2022].

¹³ <https://news.google.com/covid19/map?hl=it&mid=%2Fm%2F0d0vqn&gl=IT&ceid=IT%3Ait> [23/01/2022];
<https://www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se/smittskydd-beredskap/utbrott/aktuella-utbrott/covid-19/statistikoch-analyser/analys-och-prognoiser/rapport-om-rorelse--och-rese-matt/> [23/01/2022].

¹⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/e/e5/CH03M03_TT2018.png [18/01/2022].

¹⁵ Translation by the author.

confirmed by some elements of the new popular culture, as can be seen in some memes which have been shared even by the Swedish embassy in Rome¹⁶, which ironically underline how the rules on social distancing were part of the Swedish society even before the arrival of the pandemic. The fact that, generally, Swedish people live farther from their dear ones is confirmed by the phenomenon of the *julpost*¹⁷.

Secondly, it seems important to reflect on the peculiarities of the Swedish rurality, especially if compared with the one of other European countries, in light of the different behavior of the infection in the two contexts. In Sweden, the 87% of the population lives in urban areas, which are built-up areas of at least two hundred inhabitants¹⁸. Of these, 62% have less than 1,000 inhabitants, 86% have less than 5,000 and only nine (out of more than 2,000) have more than 100,000 inhabitants¹⁹. This means that the country has a predominantly rural population: citizens have typically urban lifestyles, jobs (in the tertiary or quaternary sectors), and services even in small villages or towns. This is more and more common in western countries, where it is unusual to find communities whose economy is based on the primary and secondary sectors even in rural or mountainous areas (Charrier 1991, 76-77). Overall, only analyzing the Swedish demographic distribution, problems similar to other European countries' ones arise: the territory presents an irregular demographic diffusion, for what concerns both the development axes and the density variations, with many medium- or small-sized towns united by a complex network of relations (in the Swedish case, with wider distances). Nonetheless, a deeper analysis of the territories reveals significant differences between the Swedish rural regions, their culture, public administration, society, and economy and those of other non-Nordic European countries. The deeper attention to the rural areas is

¹⁶ https://www.facebook.com/misweden/photos/?ref=page_internal [06/01/2022]; <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10158492235337936&set=a.10150286337817936> [06/01/2022]; <https://www.instagram.com/swedenitaly/> [13/02/2022].

¹⁷ Literally, Christmas mail, it refers to the Swedish habit of sending letters and postcards to friends and family members for Christmas. Before Christmas, PostNord offers discounted stamps and enhance the capacity of mailboxes. For more information: <https://www.postnord.se/jul-och-nyar/jultips-privatpersoner> [13/02/2022].

¹⁸ <https://www.scb.se/MI0810/> [03/05/2023].

¹⁹ <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/environment/land-use/localities-andurban-areas/pong/statistical-news/localities-and-urban-areas-2018/> [15/01/2022].

a typical characteristic of Nordic countries²⁰, usually characterized by a lower population density, a ‘difficult’ climate, and territories rich in forests, lakes, and islands. Added to this is the strong presence of the state in the citizens’ lives, with a rich and well-structured welfare system reaching, by definition, everyone and everywhere, and that, thanks also to an extremely generous parental leave, allowed parents to care for their children at home. This results in a series of social, cultural, economic, administrative, and legal practices that makes it possible to reduce the isolation (also perceived) of the small communities in Sweden. The governmental investments in broadband in rural areas²¹, the digitalization of public and private services, and the high digital competencies of Swedish citizens (also of the older ones) make it possible to work, study, and buy or use services directly from home²². Also the healthcare system is excellently digitalized, thanks to the unified website *1177.se* and to the homonymous telephone number, which offers assistance and complements the territorial healthcare units: *vårdcentralen* is the name of the centers of first-level assistance, where family doctors, dentists, nurses, social workers, and pediatricians can be found and where vaccinations and simple exams can be carried out. They are in the administrative centers of each municipality and in the main urban areas²³ (Swedish municipalities are a lot wider than the ones of the majority of other European, especially Mediterranean, countries). Also the hospitals are widespread (one every 47,000 inhabitants in Dalarna: almost one in every municipality) and, where the scarce population density makes this capillarity, the *sjukstugor* (mid-level services which are open 24/7 for emergencies)

²⁰ As exemplified by the presence of some ideologically rural parties, as the *Centerpartiet*.

²¹ <https://www.government.se/4adb0c/contentassets/3d8c0f8317224257859ba46dea31a374/a-rural-development-programme-for-sweden> [16/01/2022].

²² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20180115-1> [21/11/2021];
<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/desi-digital-public-services> [21/11/2021];
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ecommerce_statistics_for_individuals#General_overview [21/11/2021];
<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20180620-1> [21/11/2021].

²³ Such as in Särna, Älvdalen, and Grycksbo in Dalarna or in Vittangi and Karesuando in Norrbotten, with populations which are rarely above 1.000 inhabitants and go from the 300 inhabitants of Karesuando, in the municipality of Kiruna, to the 1.800 of Grycksbo, in the municipality of Falun. For more information:
<https://www.1177.se> [21/11/2022].

are present. Moreover, it seems important to underline that traveling by public transport or train (even by taxi if other services are not available) for medical reasons is often free in the country. Moreover, public transport contributes to significantly enhancing the quality of life in the rural, insular, or mountainous areas of Sweden: the network is often extremely wide (also thanks to services such as the *flextrafik*, the on-demand lines that can be activated when necessary, and the *nattrafik*, which connects the main urban areas to the smaller villages until late at night) and the rides are frequent. Vehicles are usually modern and lines cover all the urban areas (even the smallest ones) in a digitalized, integrated, and intermodal system which is rich in hubs, in small towns too, in which lines coming from small villages (*by* in Swedish, which can also be composed by only a farm) converge. To demonstrate the high quality of public transport services, a few examples can be taken into consideration, such as the wide network of ferries which comb each inhabited island of the Stockholm archipelago, every day, using icebreakers if necessary, delivering also small goods, groceries, and newspapers to islands inhabited, sometimes, only by a family. In Norrland, especially in Norrbotten, however, the most impressive fact is that tiny stations, serving villages populated by a few tens of people, are still rich in (also long-distance) railway services: it is the case of Murjek and Nattavaara (150 inhabitants together), with two rides per direction a day between Stockholm and Narvik, in Norway, in addition to the regional traffic. Lastly, it seems important to highlight that in rural areas public transport services are often merged with school buses and goods delivery²⁴, to reduce costs. The result of these policies is clearly visible in the statistics: the number of kilometers²⁵ per inhabitant carried out by bus services in Dalarna – to which those available through the *flextrafik* should be added – six per inhabitant per month²⁶.

Furthermore, the school system features good territorial extensiveness: each county has at least a university, often with more branches and every municipality manages at least a high school, in which a number

²⁴ <https://www.bussgods.se/om-oss> [13/03/2022].

²⁵ Data received by Region Dalarna and Dalatrafik and collected from the public transport programme of the province of Brescia (Agenzia del TPL di Brescia 2019).

²⁶ These data can be compared, for example, to those of one of the most hit provinces of Northern Italy, mainly rural and mountainous, but heavily populated and densely industrialized, where two kilometres per inhabitant are available (one third). It is also important to underline that the service is mainly urban and it includes the kilometres offered by a high-frequency metro service in the city of Brescia.

of courses are offered. Middle, primary, and nursery schools are located wherever needed and the system allows the presence of schools only for the first grades, in order to make it possible for younger students to attend the classes as close to home as possible. An example of this attention is represented by the high rate of countryside schools (eleven out of twenty-five) in the municipality of Falun, Dalarna.

The above-described socio-cultural and territorial context, united to the generous public investments and to the fact that small urban areas, also thanks to schools, healthcare centres, and transport services, become a reference hub for the surrounding villages, makes the growth of an economy based on commerce possible. In fact, almost all supermarket companies created a brand dedicated to small shops in the countryside, often called *nära* (near). Moreover, where the scarcity of population density makes these activities economically unsustainable, small, unstaffed supermarkets flourish (as in some peripheral neighborhoods, some islands, or some rural villages)²⁷. Consequentially, additional services arose, also thanks to the use of agents (*ombud*), which allow the citizens of small urban areas to use pharmaceutical services, buy newspapers and public monopolized items (alcoholic beverages, tickets and travel cards, gambling services), use delivery and reception services. Gas stations and small supermarkets hosting agents become meeting points for the local communities, since they usually also sell coffee, beverages, sweets, pastries, and fast meals. As a result, a virtuous cycle emerges, also thanks to the important investments in public accommodations, sports venues, and countryside libraries. In addition, strong and important associationism is clearly visible: it is usually managed by the *byalag*²⁸. This creates lively areas, even if small, in which elderlies and people with disabilities or at risk of social exclusion can continue to live, supported also by the efficient municipal home care (*hemtjänst*, in Swedish), which reaches each house of the territory, even daily, if necessary.

In conclusion, the Swedish rurality appears to be at a more advanced quality stage the one of many other Western countries it seems that the process of sociocultural urbanization of the rurality is more complete

²⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/06/unstaffed-digital-supermarkets-transform-rural-sweden> [17/01/2022].

²⁸ Assemblies of citizens of neighbourhoods or small urban areas which have a fundamental importance in the relationships with the municipal institutions, in the cultural and social lives, and, in the most virtuous cases, in the management of convenience stores and nursery schools.

or, at least, that this process in the Scandinavian country has not only involved the economic side, but also the one regarding public and private services, the lifestyles, the attention to the people as individuals, thanks to the strategic investments made by the institutions²⁹.

5. CONCLUSION³⁰

It appears, as highlighted in the previous paragraphs, that the rural, mountainous, and insular Swedish areas evolved following the pace of the cities of the 20th century, on the trail marked by the hamlet or the village. It is, in fact, rich in public and private services and social, economic, political, and cultural liveliness. It is not without reason, in fact, that the Swedish rurality is one of the only two in Europe, together with the Irish one, in which a demographic increase is expected³¹. Moreover, rural Swedish citizens have great digital competencies³², a higher occupation rate than any other territory (also urban) in the EU³³, and one of the lowest NEETs rates in the Union³⁴. On the contrary, many other Western countries, including a lot of European ones, especially in the South of the continent, have substantially abandoned its rural and mountainous areas, progressively cutting basic public services, especially in Southern Europe (Camarero and Oliva 2020) and aiming at its revamp-

²⁹ Like the ones Falun municipality is promoting in its small urban areas in terms of social housing and charging stations for electric cars. For more information: <https://www.kopparstaden.se/samarbeta-med-oss/byggprojekt/status-nyproduktioner/sundborn> [17/01/2022]; <https://fev.se/el/ladda-elbilen/ladda-efter-vagen.html> [17/01/2022].

³⁰ This study could clearly be extended including data of other nature (such as medical- and statistic-based studies), a chance that was not possible to develop in this context and that will leave stage for future research. These conclusions are, therefore, to be considered as partial.

³¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210520-1> [17/01/2022].

³² <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/edn-20200207-1> [17/01/2022].

³³ [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Employment_rate,_persons_aged_20%E2%80%9364,_by_degree_of_urbanisation_2015_\(%25\)_RYB17.png](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=File:Employment_rate,_persons_aged_20%E2%80%9364,_by_degree_of_urbanisation_2015_(%25)_RYB17.png) [17/01/2022].

³⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/en/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210520-1> [14/10/2022].

ing throughout unlikely touristic flows (to the attraction of whom the main part of the EU funds is destined) (Lucatelli 2020, 189-194) and top-down policies (Navarro-Valverde, Cejudo-García, and Pérez 2021). These practices often lead to deep inequalities in terms of accessibility between rural and urban areas, which resulted in the depopulation of some territories (Nisticò 2020, 118) and the breakdown of local communities. In fact, even where the number of inhabitants does not change, the local population, not finding an answer to its necessities in the services of the territory, is forced to move to bigger towns, leaving space for higher social classes that see the countryside or the mountain as a *buen retiro* (which reminds the gentrification process studied in the urban areas) (Phillips 1993) from and to which commute daily towards the workplace. Consequentially, a totally car-based system is often outlined even in Europe (Debernardi 2020, 61-62); in fact, some kind of long-distance private mobility is necessary to use services, more and more private and less and less public, often located next to the main road infrastructures in commercial areas, in a pattern which is close, also due to the substantial lack of institutional control, to the American sprawl (Caiani *et al.* 2015; Swiss Confederation and European Environment Agency 2016, 98-106), to which the definition of “scattered city” (Secchi 1989, 255) is extremely similar. On the other hand, the Swedish rurality could count on wider support (also economic) from the institutions, which allowed economic, political, and social development in line with the one of the cities, maintaining the demographic structure of the hamlet or the village of the 20th century.

In conclusion, Swedish small urban areas seem to be economically lively (also thanks to the internal commercial economy created by the staff of the public services) and socially and culturally cohesive, also thanks to a heterogeneous population. This hypothesis is supported by a study (Aboukorin, Han, and Mahran 2021) exclusively on metropolitan areas which suggests a greater proliferation of the virus in radial and concentric context than in areal ones, due to the better distribution of services. Following this path, the distribution and capillarity of services in Sweden, with a more careful and ordered planning (Christaller 1980), and in the territories with an areal demographic distribution could have created less thick and intricate relations among the “many small or medium-sized clusters which are affected by multidirectional and rhizome-like commute patterns” (Casti 2021, 99). This type of commuting and territorial relations, in fact, is one of the characteristics of hardly hit territories.

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