

People's preferences for commuting in sparsely populated areas: The case of Sweden

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Abstract

In a time of decreased inclination to migrate and an increased place attachment, increasing the functionality of local labor markets. In regional development policy in Sweden, facilitating increased commuting over larger geographical areas is therefore viewed as enhancing the supply of competent labor in all parts of the country and decreasing spatial segmentation. Building on an analysis of data from a survey of Swedish residents' commuting and preferences, this paper focuses on commuting in a relatively sparsely populated area in northern Sweden. Further, the question of whether increased commuting is socially beneficial from a commuter's perspective is discussed. The point of departure is that the individual's context affects commuting behavior through social norms, geographical structure, and available infrastructure. With respect to travel patterns and mode choice, a gender gap is included in the analyses. The results show that the geographic and socio-economic structure of the labor market place time restrictions on people's commuting behavior and as a consequence, the daily reach in sparsely populated areas is restricted. Geographical structure, available infrastructure, and socio-economic factors (such as education, employment, and family situation) are shown to restrict women's access to the local labor market to a greater extent than men's. Further, the study shows that the inclination to commute declines rapidly when commuting times exceed 30 minutes, regardless of gender, transport mode, and socio-economic factors. Considering the provision of public transport in sparsely populated areas, the car is valued as the most preferred mode of transport when commuting. If regional growth is to be promoted by facilitating commuting over longer distances, a higher level of car dependency must be accepted in sparsely populated areas.

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