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Everyday life in the rural idyll

In Finland today, rural areas are often seen as a place for recreation and leisure. Also the current residents of rural areas tend to have jobs, hobbies, and social life in nearby cities. For many, the everyday life is shaped by so called 'rurban' lifestyle – a hybrid between rural and urban living. Rurban lifestyle, based on commuting and connection to urban areas on daily basis, gives special meanings to place of home. Natural surroundings, beautiful sceneries, and possibilities to enjoy peaceful and clean environment are considered to be the most pleasant and alluring feature of rural living.

Also the claims from tourist industry, the preservation of nature and promotion of turning rural areas to holiday resorts tend to emphasize the cultural idea of 'pastoral idyll'. The scenery with cows grazing on the fields, and traditional farm houses is a visual symbol of pastoral idyll. At the same time, modern agriculture and forestry seems to be an inverse to the ideas built by rural tourism or by urbanites who dream about idyllic life in the country.

But what kind of relation to nature and rurality the modern farmers have? Those rural residents who still get their income from traditional livelihoods stress the importance of local and national food production, professional forestry, and the process of land cultivation itself as a means to keep the countryside vital. At the same time they highlight the close connection to nature and rural cultures they have due to their daily job. Farming is considered to be the best way to truly to learn, respect, and enjoy nature, the four seasons, and rural environment as a whole.

In this presentation I analyse the contrary meanings attached to rural areas – either as an idyllic sanctum for pastoral traditions or vital environment for industry and cultivation – in the context of everyday life of rural residents. The presentation is based on interviews and fieldwork conducted in 2009 as a part of my dissertation project.