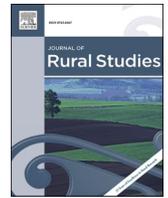




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Rural Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jrurstud

Village schools as a hub in the community - A time-geographical analysis of the closing of two rural schools in southern Sweden

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Rural development
Time-geography
Village schools
School closure
Everyday life
Spatial organisation

ABSTRACT

In rural areas, where schools are more distant, families' daily time-space arrangements are organised around the schools. When local schools are closed, the management of these daily arrangements is stretched even further as families face longer distances to services and new challenges in organising their daily lives. This article focuses on how the closure of rural schools impacts on the everyday lives of families and how a local school serves as a hub for children, parents, and others in the community. This case study was conducted over the course of several years, through field studies and interviews with families (parents and children) and policy-makers before and after two schools were closed. Specifically, the study examines how school closures affect everyday life in rural communities using a time-geographical approach to account for the complex patterns of daily activities, which are determined by local daily practices and social, economic, and geographical structures. By focusing on the rural school as a time-space hub, the analysis reveals that everyday life is organised around the school, which serves as the hub of activities where social networks are created and strengthened. The time-spatial analysis showed that school closures were seen very differently in the local community. The municipal council considered the school closures to be beneficial to the community, but families expressed a loss of life quality when they had to travel longer distances. The families also pointed towards the loss of social networks, thus given them less meaning and flexibility in their everyday lives. The analysis also highlights the potential of adding a time-geographical analysis to local policy-making, in particular in rural areas.

1. Introduction

In rural areas, there are fewer services within close reach and there are fewer service providers, such as schools, grocery stores and public transportation, to choose from. As a result, the coordination of rural lifestyles is more demanding, requiring longer travelling distances to access services (Wihlborg and Engstrom, 2017). The everyday life of rural residents, particularly for families with children, has to be managed with the resources available in the local area (Bagley and Hillyard, 2014; Cras, 2017). In rural areas where schools are more distant from each other and from families' homes, the school can become a hub around which families meet and organise their daily activities (Flint, 2011; Cedering, 2016). When local schools in rural areas are closed, the management of these daily arrangements is stretched even further as families face longer distances to services and new challenges in organising their daily lives. This article focuses on the time-space implications on families' everyday lives when rural schools,

which serve as a hub for activities in time-space, are closed.

As in most countries, education and schooling are compulsory in Sweden. Here, as elsewhere, the local school is often a symbol of the public institution of education and democracy, and plays several roles in the local community, both as a local institution and as an agent of education (Hargraves, 2009; Kvalsund, 2009). Local schools often reflect the collective local history of a community and encourage a sense of belonging in that community (Walker and Clark, 2010). In addition, local schools serve as a positive symbol of the future through their influence on the next generation (Woods, 2006). Since schools are generally publicly funded, they are subject to decisions by policy-makers. In Sweden, there is even legislation against additional funding for education (SFS, 2010:800; Prop. 1991/92:95). The rigid Swedish legislation and the growing forms of quality and performance management that guide education make it difficult to support very small schools (Rönnerberg, 2011; Pettersson and Näsström, 2017; Assmo and Wihlborg, 2012). The management of small local schools is limited not

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.09.007>

Received 3 September 2018; Received in revised form 15 April 2020; Accepted 7 September 2020

Available online 23 September 2020

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only by the number of students enrolled but also by access to competent teachers and funding for public transportation, physical structures, and facilities such as library services, health care, and lunches. Nonetheless, small local schools are mandated to provide the same educational quality and standards set out in national regulations (SFS, 2010:800). However, these schools have to manage the often conflicting interplay between local policies and the everyday lives of local residents. In rural areas there are commonly shortages of public resources, since the small populations pay less towards the public funding of services, but in rural area it is also more complicated to recruit competent teachers and other staff. The smallest schools are often seen as the least efficient, and these are thus the first to be closed. A political decision to close a local school often includes discussions on the function of the school (Hargreaves, 2009), the meaning of the school (Kvalsund, 2009), and the future of the local community (Kearns et al., 2009). Closing small schools in rural communities has been on the agenda for the last 100 years in Sweden as a consequence of urbanisation and new transportation systems (Amcoff, 2012).

This article presents and discusses the consequences of closing schools for the families and communities in the small Swedish municipality of Ydre, through a case study of the closing of two schools in a rural municipality. By analysing local schools at the intersection of national policies and local everyday life through a time-geographical lens, this paper demonstrates how local schools serve many functions in rural communities, often operating as the community's hub for activities in addition to educating the community's children.

This article proceeds in four steps. The next section provides a research overview of schools in rural areas, before relating them to the key elements of the theoretical framework: time-geography. The third section is a presentation of the case study of closing two village schools. Finally, the time-geographical approach will guide the analysis to an understanding of the school as a time-space hub.

1.1. Research design and field study methods

This paper builds on an ethnographic-inspired field study (Bryman, 2013; Alvesson and Sköldböck, 1994) of how the closure of village schools influences everyday life. The same field study was the main focus of Magdalena Cedering's PhD project (Cedering, 2012, 2016). The analysis includes 24 interviews with twelve families (Table 1). All families were interviewed before the village schools were closed and again after the changes had been in place for some months. The table below shows where the families live. The schools in villages A and R were closed, while the one in village H was kept open. Most families live in the countryside between the villages. The children from four of families (E, J, K and L) continued at the same school, but they were influenced by the discussions regarding the school closure. The locations H, R and T are shown in the maps below. T is a community centre in the

neighbouring municipality.

In addition to the household interviews, 12 interviews were conducted with policy-makers and staff from the local public administration. The case study location Ydre was initially chosen since it is where Hägerstrand conducted a study of the diffusion of innovations in the 1940s that laid the foundation for the time-geographical approach (Hägerstrand, 1953). The study of school closures became one case study of rural development in Ydre in post-industrial settings. We also analysed local economic development, civil society communities (Berry, 2013) and local policy-making (Assmo and Wihlborg, 2012).

Today, there are 3763 inhabitants in Ydre Municipality, a rural area with four villages that are categorised as localities based on Statistics Sweden's definition of localities as continuous settlements with at least 200 inhabitants (SCB, March 28, 2018). The main built-up area is Österbymo (O) (897 inhabitants). There are also three other villages: Asby (A) (186 inhabitants), Hestra (H) (458 inhabitants), and Rydsnäs (R) (282 inhabitants). Österbymo has a grocery store, a pharmacy, a health centre, a hotel, and a restaurant. There are also grocery stores in Rydsnäs and Asby, and the latter has a local co-operative of family farmers. Ydre is located between the regional centres of Linköping (88 km away) and Jonköping (93 km away), both of which have approximately 100 000 inhabitants, airports and main railway stations. The public transportation in Ydre consists of just a few daily regional buses. Daily transportation is a key factor in managing everyday lives, since distance, time, and access to travel determine when and where activities can take place (Berg and Ihlström, 2019; Cedering, 2016; Tillberg, 2001). As a resource daily transportation is therefore an important aspect of managing everyday activity patterns.

The families were selected using a snowball method (Bryman, 2013), and they were all affected by the school closure in different ways. The interviews were conducted in the families' homes, and in most cases both the adults and the children (aged three to 17) participated. We call them 'families' as this is how they refer to themselves, including the single parent family. The interviews were semi-structured, focusing on the daily activities within the family and their experience to have constraints and resources. All interviews took approximately 2 h and included discussions about their weekly timetables, including activities, social patterns, transportation choices, and family management. A time-space map of their everyday lives was thereby produced. This approach allowed for a discussion on what would happen to their time management if the school closed. The follow-up interviews were carried out by phone after two of the four village schools had been closed, and were structured around their answers in the first interviews and focused on their adaption to the new situation. All interviews were recorded and transcribed by one of the authors.

The analysis is framed in the time-geographical approach and highlights everyday patterns in time-space. This started during the interviews when the families described their timetables, their everyday

Table 1
Families in the sample.

Family code	Where they live	Distance to old school (km)	Distance to new school (km)	Supportive family nearby?	Adults working outside the municipality (number of adults in household)	Children in household
A	Village R	1.0	10.2	Yes	1 (2)	1
B	Countryside	4.3	14.7	Yes	0 (2)	3
C	Countryside	1.5	19.3	Yes, in T	1 (2)	1
D	Countryside	7.4	17.8	No	1 (2)	2
E	Countryside	12 km, no change – same school		No	1 (2)	2
F (single parent in sample)	Countryside	15.5	31.8	Yes	1 (1)	1
G	Countryside	17.5	29.8	Yes	0 (2)	5
H	Countryside	10.1	20.5	Yes	0 (2)	3
I	Village R	1.0	Moved to other municipality	Yes	1 (2)	2
J	Countryside	17 km, no change – same school		Yes	1 (2)	2
K	Countryside	7 km no change – same school		No	1 (2)	2
L	Village H	1 km no change – same school		Yes	0 (2)	2

activities, and the resources and constraints they experienced. The timetables were translated into time-geographical illustrations of the individual paths, as shown in Figs. 4 and 5 below. This illustration positions places on the x-axis. The y-axis shows time over the day and merges from the bottom. Time, the y-axis, is the parameter that can be used to interpret change. That is, a vertical line shows that the individual stays in one place (also called a station) such as the home, while a sloping line shows the individual's movement between places or stations (Hagerstrand, 1982). By comparing the individual path before and after the schools closed, we can visualise the changes in everyday life patterns.

The analysis below focuses on how the time-space management of daily life changed after the school closures. Common patterns are combined and illustrated through the daily patterns of family Carlson. The selection of situations and statements from interviews has been made to show arguments and patterns that appeared more frequently in several families. The detailed analysis below illustrates how the closure of the village school constrains the daily activity patterns of the families.

2. Research on rural schools

Researchers have paid attention to rural schools from several perspectives, such as education, geography, and other social aspects. Schools in rural areas are often smaller in size, even if there is no internationally accepted definition of what counts as a small school. One of the leading scholars, Hargreaves (2009), who carried out several studies of village schools in the West, sets the limit at 100 pupils in a research overview. In a Latvian study (Šūpule and Sōholt, 2018), small schools are defined as those with fewer than 90 pupils, while a Swedish study sets the limit at 20 pupils (Lind and Stjernström, 2015), but there are also studies including schools with up to fewer than 150 pupils (Wilson and McPake, 1998). Another way of defining a small and rural school is by focusing on teaching approaches. Pettersson and Näsström (2017) define a village school as having such a low number of pupils that there are age-heterogeneous classes, and few or no teachers for children with special needs.

Kvalsund (2009) overview of Norwegian school research calls for more knowledge about the link between the school and the community. This concern is also voiced by several other researchers (Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009; Hargreaves et al., 2009; Andræ Thelin and Solstad, 2005). All these studies, from partly different perspectives, highlight the pupils' everyday lives both within and outside the school and the importance of analysing how this links the village school to other places and organisations in the community. Schools located in sparsely populated areas highlight the unique conditions of the place, its local history and its surroundings more than schools in general (Beach et al., 2019; Johansson, 2017). There is also research showing that parents who actively choose to support a village school are more likely to have lived in the rural community for a longer time than parents who choose to let their children commute to a school further from home (Walker and Clark, 2010).

Village schools can be seen as part of society's welfare system and in light of their social functions (Gielsing et al., 2019). Although rural schools are technically an extension of the national educational system, rural residents view school buildings as meeting places (Kvalsund, 2009). Kearns et al. (2009) concluded, in a study of remote schools in New Zealand, that rural schools can be seen as informally owned by the community's residents. The informants there felt explicitly ignored by the municipal council when schools were closed, and the local people also lost an important meeting place. In the case study on which this paper focuses, Cedering (2016) saw similar collaboration between schools and residents. In addition to providing education, the schools functioned as a meeting place connecting the homes, school, people, and places in the school catchment area. Many people who live in the same rural area for most of their lives view their local school as a symbol of

their local culture, their origin, and their childhood, as well as a symbol of the future of the village (Christiaanse and Haartsen, 2017). Clearly, in this context, schools serve an important function for rural communities by ensuring that the village continues to be viable (Walker and Clark, 2010), creating a symbiotic relationship between school and community (Kearns et al., 2010).

Rural schools have often been seen as somewhat inadequate, not providing education of the same standard as a school in an urban area, and reflecting a general dichotomy surrounding urban-rural environments, where a village school is often judged based on how well it measures up against larger schools (Hargreaves et al., 2009; Kvalsund, 2009). There are national regulations, and often also funding, that demand equal educational quality irrespective of the size of a school. However, such legislation is based on how schools are organised in urban areas (Kovács, 2012). There are, for example, indications that principals of rural schools have less formal education (Pettersson and Näsström, 2017) and have difficulties finding well-educated teachers (Šūpule and Sōholt, 2018).

The location of the school is also an important parameter for children's networks (van der Burgt, 2006; Gustafson, 2006; Cedering, 2016). Children play with other children from the same school, and the children whose friends live in the immediate area therefore spend most of their time in their own residential area. The children who, on the other hand, have friends at a greater distance from their place of residence spend less time where they live. Studies have shown that children link social relations to places where they spend time (Herulin-Norinder, 2007; Van der Burgt and Gustafson, 2013). On the other hand, Gielsing et al. (2019) indicate that public facilities such as primary schools do not impact on residents' social place attachment.

The arguments above indicate that village schools can function as a hub in local communities. A research overview of Finnish case studies concludes that there is a "systematic emphasis on the regional significance of a local school" and that "village schools have been forced to consciously take part in the development of the surrounding community by functioning as a hub for community activities" (Kalaoja et al., 2009, p. 111). Schools can be seen as multifunctional community centres, and are central for identity formation and social patterns in rural communities (Onicescu et al., 2012). In line with this, the connection to the place is threatened when local schools are closed (Witten et al., 2007). The process of closing a school is often initiated when the population decreases. Schools are closed because of the perception that closures are cost-effective, a view that carries more weight than promoting a local rural community (Hargreaves et al., 2009; Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009).

In Sweden, there has been a long tradition of closing small schools. As early as 1842, the first Swedish Education Act required all parishes to organise free education for all children aged seven to twelve. In 1862, the responsibility for education was transferred from the church to the state. In 1882, schooling became compulsory for all children. At that time, the country was rural, whereas by the turn of the century industrialisation and urbanisation had taken off. The number of schools peaked in 1931 at over 15 000, but by 1970, when a general educational reform was implemented, there were fewer than 5000 schools. This reduction was not only due to urbanisation but also to the poor quality of small schools and the higher efficiency of larger schools in urban areas (Amcoff, 2012). Since urbanisation is still increasing in Sweden and challenging the functions of local and regional assignments (Lidström and Pierre, 2017), small schools in rural areas are still being closed. In Sweden, approximately 850 schools were closed during 1991 and 2010, but due to lack of definitions of rural schools there are no clear figures for this. However, a study of all school closures showed that this did not affect students' results (Taghizadeh-Larsson, 2016).

3. The time-geographical approach – theoretical framing

Time-geography is based on the notion that places are constantly remade through human activities being performed and structures being

created (Pred, 1984). Time and place are combined and co-constructed (Hägerstrand, 1985). What qualifies as rural changes with time and place, and the meanings and contents of rurality also change (Rye, 2006). Rural schools and everyday life will be analysed through the lens of time-geography, which will be presented in the next section.

3.1. The time-geographical framing

Time-space is exactly that – the combination of time and space (Hägerstrand, 1974). Time is a continuum, along which the lives of all individuals, aspects of nature, and physical artefacts make their paths through time-space. Consequently, all processes take place somewhere and proceed in time. Time-geography provides tools for mapping processes within geography and over time. It answers the questions of where and when processes take place.

Here, individuals are seen in broad terms because they are all bodies that can claim a part of the time-space as a way to make changes and perform activities. An individual can be a human moving from one place to another and taking up space for his or her travelling. However, in this approach, an individual can also be a building, taking up a specific place for as long as the building stands in that place. This perspective means that time-geography emphasises the co-creation of humans, nature, and other actors, and shows how landscapes are formed by human interaction (Hägerstrand, 1970). This approach allows for analyses of the interplay between human activities and physical places. It also allows for analyses of how and why welfare and development are unevenly spread (Bernhard and Wihlborg, 2015; Milbourne, 2010).

Time-geography has an integrative approach that aims to include all processes in a specific section of time-space. Therefore, the ambition is to visualise and allow for analysis of the interplay of social and natural processes and to bridge the disciplinary divisions of contemporary academic analyses (Hägerstrand, 2009). This ontological openness has made the approach applicable to a broad range of processes from natural sciences to human sciences (Thrift, 1983), but this openness has also been criticised for being a theory about everything. The fundamental idea is that everything is local somewhere. This localism is included in the notion of time as an ever-continuing process going on in all local places. Hägerstrand captures this when he writes that all 'local processes are interbedded into each other in complex chains' (Hägerstrand, 2009 p. 22). The built environment sets a structure for which activities can take place at certain locations, such as a school building (Wihlborg, 2011; Ellegård and Vilhelmson, 2004). This analysis will focus on the resources and constraints and the additional concept that has emerged through our abductive research approach – i.e., the time-space hub.

3.2. Resources and constraints in the time-geographical framing

Central to all processes is the need for resources. The broad meanings of resources in the time-geographic approach are made more visible through a contrasting concept: constraint. By focusing on experienced constraints, the remaining resources are made visible.

Time-geography focuses on three types of constraints for any individual's or actor's possibilities to act and take place in time-space: the capacity constraints, the coupling constraints, and the authority constraints (Hägerstrand, 1985; Ellegård; Nordell, 1997). The capacity constraints are primarily connected to the capacity of the individual. That is, individuals have different capacities limited by different constraints. For example, human individuals cannot fly without a machine to reach distant places.

The coupling constraints are expressed through the individual's relations to his or her context. This includes everything that limits the individual's coordination with other people and physical artefacts. For example, in order to fly humans need to 'couple' their body into an airplane. They have to be on time at the right gate, or 'station', to catch the plane. Coupling constraints also make us meet deadlines since we have to collaborate with and reach others to live our daily lives. Capacity

and coupling constraints are mainly restricted by individual (personal) causes – biological, mental, intellectual, and spatial (Ellegård and Nordell, 1997).

The authority constraints extend into the social relationship and include everything that has a power to direct the actor's actions and thereby limit his or her action space. Constraints of authority are primarily expressed through restrictions imposed by laws and regulations (formal institutions), but can also be viewed in terms of discourses, norms, and culture (informal institutions) related to attitudes and values that exist in a community (Hägerstrand, 1985; Ellegård; Nordell, 1997; Wihlborg, 2000). To get on the plane, to use the same illustration again, the individual has to have the right documents and tickets for the trip, assuming that he or she can comply with the authority constraints expressed by these demands.

The time-geographical conceptualisation of constraints allows for a power analysis (Giddens, 1984), since the focus is on how resources are formed and managed within the limitations of constraints. The unique interplay of resources and constraints establishes a local order at each unique station, related and limited in time and space.

3.3. The village school as a time-geographical station

The individual path passes through different stations in time-space. A station is a place where resources and constraints are arranged for specific activities, like a home, an airport gate, a school, or a bus stop. These are places where everyday life takes place in time-space. The time-geographical illustration shows the processes, illustrated by a line following the individual in time-space (Friberg, 2008).

A school is a specific station arranged to fulfil certain aims expressed through authority constraints. A schoolyard is often demarcated by a fence that establishes a physical coupling constraint, geographically limiting the school and thereby also who can access the school. The activities in the school are arranged in relation to the space in the school and available resources, such as classrooms, chairs, computers, tablets, and other tools, but also the number of teachers, pupils, and other staff (the capacity of the school). The activities conducted are related to and constrained by legislation and formal rules such as the curriculum (authority constraints).

The school is a station positioned in relation to the local community, and depends on outside resources such as available transportation (public transportation and access for drop-off), other buildings, the working hours and patterns of parents, and organisations like after-school care and other public services. At a specific station, the actors create a certain order that is temporally defined (Wihlborg, 2000). One of the cornerstones of time-geography is that the degree of detail can vary in the period studied (Hägerstrand, 1982; Ellegård, 2001; Wihlborg, 2005). Here, we see each family as a unit with rules, structures, norms, and values that fit into the family's everyday patterns and that make time use different, since there are other projects going on in the family at the same time. A time-geographical approach focuses on how individuals in everyday life use resources and overcome constraints in time and space (Ellegård, 2001). Thus, time-geography provides opportunities to carry out a detailed analysis at different levels such as which activities are intended to save the schools.

3.4. The village schools in ydre – the case study

In this section, the case study will be presented by describing the municipal decision-making process and the consequences for the families. The municipality of Ydre, where the case study was conducted, decided to close two of its four schools. Three of the original schools (including one of the schools that was kept open) had fewer than 50 pupils. We categorise these schools as village schools based on their low number of students, the schools' locations, and their age-heterogeneous classes, all of which are parameters in line with the definitions used in previous research.

3.5. The processes of school closures in Ydre Municipality

The public economy in Ydre has been under pressure for a long time, and local taxation is high in comparison with the national average. Still, unemployment is relatively low, mainly since the regional labour market allows for daily commuting by car (Statistics Sweden, 2018; field notes). Thus, there was a need to cut costs for local schools, which in Sweden are fully funded by the municipalities.

There is a long history of school closures in rural areas, even in more modern times (cf. Amcoff, 2012). That is, the studied municipality is not unique. According to data from the local school museum, in 1869 the municipality had fifteen schools: one was permanent, seven were ambulatory, and seven were nursery schools. In the 1930s, there were 26 schools (Fig. 1).

In the 1960s, a national school reform was implemented that dramatically reduced the number of schools, and three modern schools were built: one in Asby (A), one in Rydsnäs (R), and one in Österbymo (O). In the 1970s, a new school was built in Hestra (H). By 1971 only four schools remained (Fig. 2), and since 2009 only two (O and H) remain.

Between 2002 and 2010, the number of pupils in the municipality decreased by 175 (about 33%). The discussion to close one or two schools had been on the agenda for a long time, but the formal decision was not taken until 2009 and the schools were closed in autumn 2009. The municipal council decided to maintain the schools in Österbymo (O) and Hestra (H) (Fig. 3). The school in Österbymo has pupils from pre-school to grade nine (age fifteen). The schools in Asby, Rydsnäs, and Hestra only had classes up to grade four (age ten).

The local political decision to close the schools in Asby and Rydsnäs was met by protests both in the specific communities and throughout the municipality. Torch-lit processions, demonstrations, and debates with politicians were organised. Some parents even joined political parties to influence the municipal council from the inside (Assmo and Wihlborg, 2012). They also questioned which facts the council used to make its decision and provided alternative economic assessments of the schools in Asby and Rydsnäs. A group of parents even made a formal application to the national authorities to run an independent school, in line with the national legislation, but they were not approved due to the low number of potential students (Assmo and Wihlborg, 2012). In other cases, it has been shown that resistance to school closures can lead to a suspended or

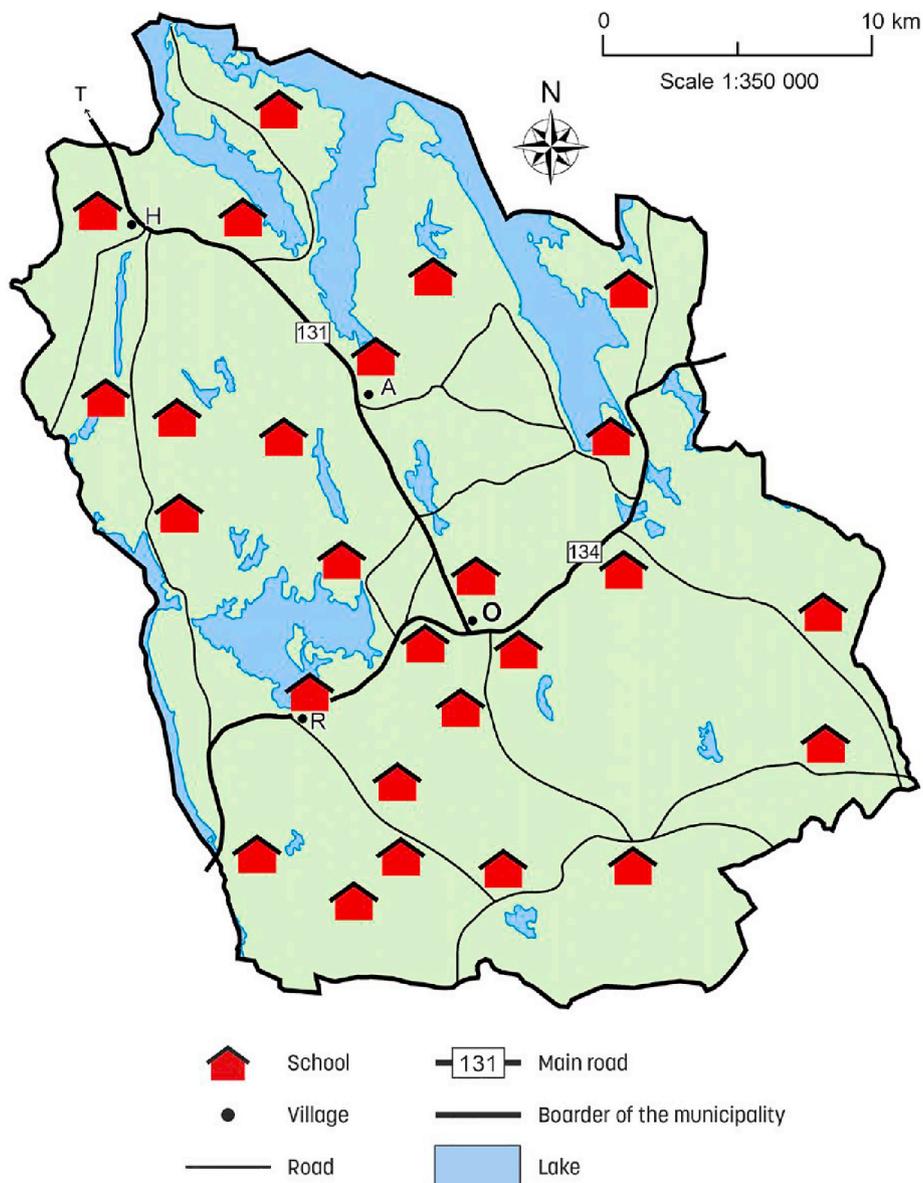


Fig. 1. Location of schools in Ydre Municipality at the 1930s.

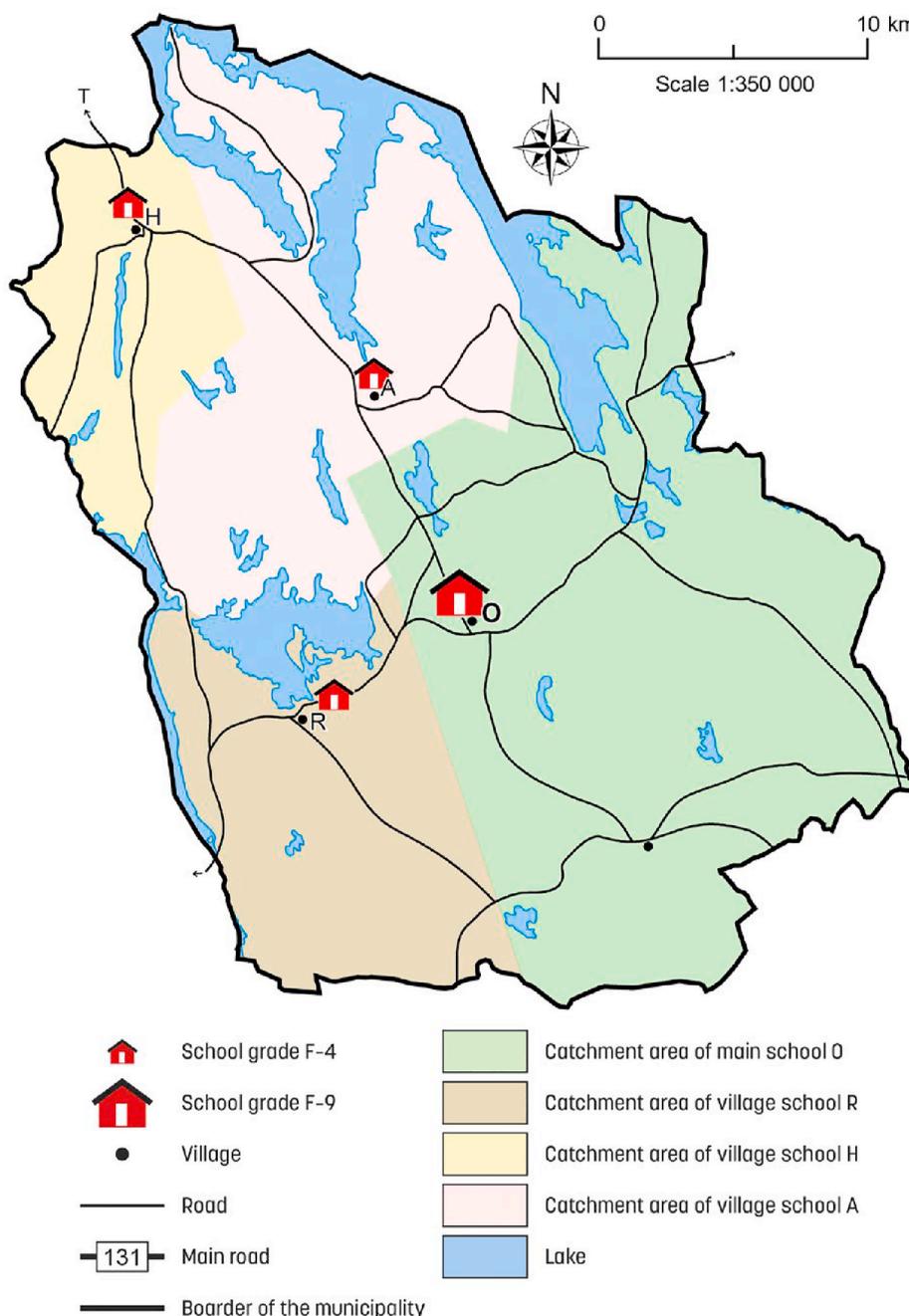


Fig. 2. Location of the four schools in Ydre from 1971 to 2009.

postponed political decision (Taghizadeh Larsson, 2015).

In our follow-up interviews, several of the families could see the decision from a wider perspective, and one of the parents said:

We are getting more and more depopulated, but this has a long history. On the other side of this hill there was a school when my father was a child. It was closed down in the late 1960s. If we had fought for that school, then it would just have been my two children and two more children from the neighbourhood there today. It would have been impossible. There are limits to how small a school can get. The development is going on all the time. The municipality has to save our tax money and we have to trust that the accountants know their work and that the policy-makers can make the right decisions.

This indicates that, over time, some of the villagers have accepted changes. Research from Danish rural areas shows that those still living in villages accept changes like closing rural facilities if they believe these

changes will ensure the village survives and the conditions in the village will improve (Egelund and Laustsen, 2006). Although time changes and new routines come into place, people are willing to adapt. But how did closing the schools actually change the families’ daily activity patterns?

3.6. Welcome to the Carlson family – a time-geographical mapping before and after the school closure

To illustrate the changes in everyday life, we use one situation from the Carlson family (C) that is characteristic of several of the families’ experiences. The Carlson family, who live just outside Asby, includes a nine-year-old daughter, Carrie, her mother, Charlotte, who works in the village, and her father, Conny, who commutes and sleeps away from home two nights each week, which is not uncommon for the parents commuting in this rural area (Table 1).

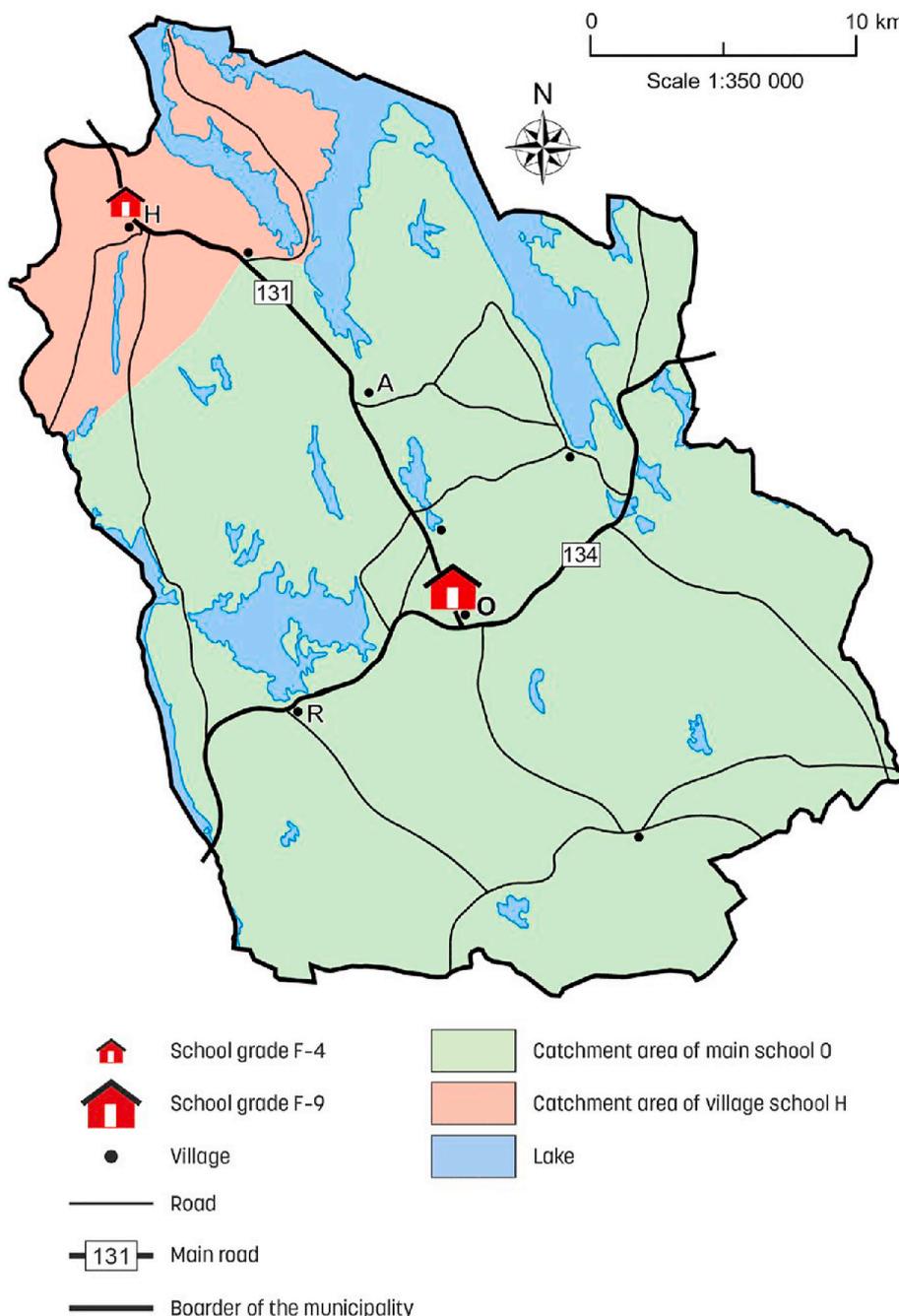


Fig. 3. Location of schools in Ydre Municipality after the school closures in 2009.

Charlotte works outside the home, like most women with children in Sweden. But since her workplace is closer to the school than that of her husband, she has more responsibilities for the children’s daily activities. This is in line with several studies with time-geographical approaches on daily life in Sweden (Berg and Ihlström, 2019; Cedering, 2016; Friberg, 1990; Tillberg, 2001). Their daughter, Carrie, has activities in the nearby city Tranås (T), 35 km away, twice a week, and they usually go there at weekends to meet relatives and friends or to shop. The Carlsons’ rural life depends on the services in the village, but is also closely integrated with services in the nearby urban areas.

As long as the village school in Asby was open, the Carlsons had a simple but car-dependent everyday life (Fig. 4). This illustration includes three key stations in Asby (A): their home, the school, and Charlotte’s workplace. On this particular day, when Conny is working away from home, Carrie has a swimming class in Tranås (T). The

individual path, which has to be read from the bottom up, shows how Charlotte (black line) and Carrie (green line) both start their day at home. Charlotte drives with Carrie to Asby for school and to her own work at eight in the morning. She drops Carrie off so she can play in the schoolyard before the school day starts.

At two o’clock in the afternoon, Charlotte picks Carrie up and they drive to Tranås. There is a short time window so Carrie had some snacks in the car before going to the swimming class. This indicates a capacity constraint that Carrie has to eat something before swimming class. After the swimming class, they do some grocery shopping and have dinner at the grandmother’s house in Tranås before going back home to Asby.

To contrast with this, the Carlson family mapped their activity patterns after the school in Asby was closed. After the closure, Carrie now has to travel an additional 9 km to her new school (Fig. 5). The daily arrangement shows that Charlotte now first has to drive Carrie to Asby

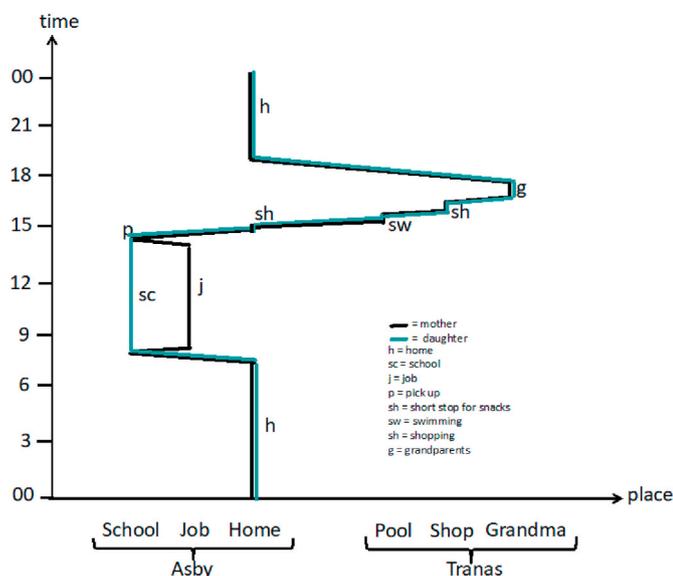


Fig. 4. The Carlsons' Tuesdays when the children went to the village school in Asby. Mother Charlotte (green line) and daughter Carrie (black line). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the Web version of this article.)

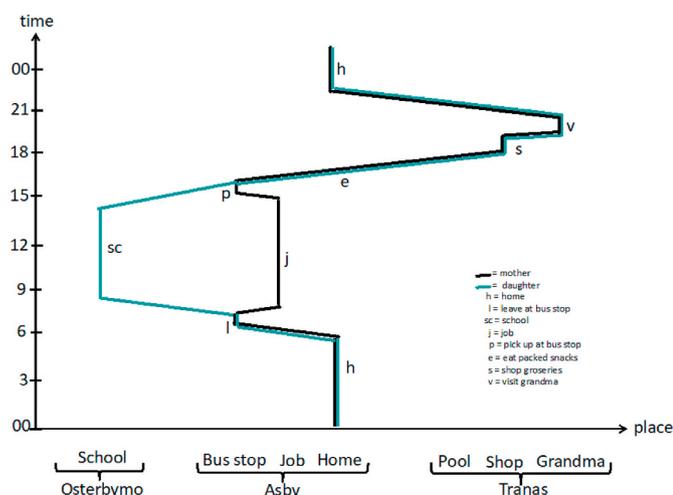


Fig. 5. The Carlsons' Tuesdays when the children went to the school in Österbymo (O). Mother Charlotte (green line) and daughter Carrie (black line). (For interpretation of the references to colour in this figure legend, the reader is referred to the Web version of this article.)

in the morning so she can catch the bus, and they have to be there exactly when the bus passes along the main road. This indicates a stronger coupling constraint compared to the former flexibility when she could play in the schoolyard in the morning. They also have to leave home half an hour earlier. In the afternoon, Charlotte again has to meet the bus on time. Since the bus journey has extended the school hours, they have no time to go to swimming lessons. They have lost the time-space window to reach Tranås in time for the swimming lessons, an increased coupling constraint that was added to their daily life by the decision (authority constraint) to close the school in Asby.

These two illustrations show changes in everyday activity patterns. The short windows to catch the bus in the morning and the afternoon make up a strict coupling constraint since they have to be there on time. Such a constraint has the power to decrease the flexibility of daily activities. This constraint is added to the family by the political decision to close the school in Asby. This is an authority constraint expressed by

when and where the buses are organised and made up by the location of the school and the re-organisation of the day. The family cannot change the time of the swimming lessons and thus they have to skip this kind of organised activity. They have discussed whether the grandmother could pick Carrie up and take her to Tranås, but she cannot always be there on time since she also has other activities. Many families in this study, especially those who had lived in the village for several generations, had generous support from grandparents, siblings, and cousins living in the area. These additional resources in the community made everyday life smoother and increased the single households' flexibility when the school closure changed their everyday management.

3.7. Everyday life after the closure of the schools

In almost all of the families, travelling by private car was a key to working out the everyday schedule. One single mother had even reduced her working hours to meet the school bus on time every day. The majority of the parents found it stressful to be on time for activities when the children could no longer walk on their own to the village school. The coupling constraints were also an authority constraint that reduced the quality of life for many families. For children, parents are a resource; for school-age children in rural areas, the parent's ability to drive them to activities is essential. The lack of public transportation is a restriction in the children's everyday lives. After the school closure, all the interviewed families lost their flexibility for after-school activities and there was no compensation in time from the school. It was also complicated for the children to visit new friends whom they got to know at their new school, since that would mean they would miss the bus home. This is an authority constraint. Instead, the children stayed at home after school more on weekdays. This shows that the school is a station where several other activities take place and are coordinated by children, siblings and parents, especially in the mornings and afternoons. The school is a hub for several activities.

Both the children who had attended the closed schools and the children who remained at school in Österbymo were affected by the new arrangements. For all the children, the old friends live closer than the new ones. After the school closures, both local attendance and the number of local playmates were reduced. When the children play with their new friends in the schoolyard during the school day, their social interaction has spread over the wider new school catchment area (Figs. 2 and 3). In line with Oncescu and Giles (2012), this study shows that the children's activities in their spare time are characterised by whom they play with in the schoolyard. The access to other children at school is a resource, and it is a hub that creates social patterns. However, there are also studies (e.g., Gieling et al., 2019) that argue that closing a primary school does not lead to a loss of place attachment since children also meet each other in other contexts. However, the time-geographical mapping of everyday life in this study shows that the closing of the village schools imposed coupling constraints on the children when they rearranged their time together.

When the children no longer met in the schoolyard, they also stopped arranging after-school playdates and their networks and numbers of friends declined. This shows that the village school is a hub, where children in the same school catchment area build social connections and become important resources for each other. These networks were not replaced when children met at other places. Some of the interviewed families described how relatives and close friends of the parents could be a resource to keep up networks and help children in the village maintain networks. This also shows how the resources in the village had to be rearranged after the village school was closed.

When there was a small village school, all of the children played together in the schoolyard – a form of age and gender integration, which has also been noted in other studies (Kvalsund, 2000). The children's social networks at the larger school, as mapped in the time-space schedules during the interviews, became less age-mixed and gender-mixed, as only children in the same grade have their breaks at

the same time. This new situation also influenced their social networks (a resource in daily life) during their spare time. This re-arrangement in time and space of the schoolyard and its regulations limited children's spatial and social freedom to choose where they want to play during breaks as well as whom they want to play with. This is an authority constraint that affects the children's activities and their perception of the place. For some children, the village school had been a social restriction through the limited range of playmates with common hobbies. The spontaneous play during their spare time that the children had when they went to school in their own village was lost when they had to follow the strict timetables of the buses. Several children in the study pointed out the importance of digital media for maintaining contact with new and old friends when they started attending the larger school. However, this can be a consequence of the children growing older between the two interviews and thereby also having improved their digital media competencies and resources.

3.8. Daily life with a new school

During the follow-up interviews, almost all the families revealed that they had discussed moving to Tranås or other places to make everyday life easier. However, only one family had moved and they also had other reasons in addition to the school closure. None of the families saw Österbymo, the municipal centre, as an attractive alternative since the services there are still limited.

In addition, the children experienced how the closure of the school had changed their everyday lives. The majority of both the children and the parents talked about the school bus as the main change resulting from the closure of the village schools. The school bus stops in several places and does not take the main road to the new school. This means that the travel time is longer and the distance is perceived as longer by the children travelling on the school bus: "Yes, it seems that Österbymo is further away every time we go, because the bus stops many times, so it takes longer." (Anna, age 9.)

Clearly, the children believe time and place are closely linked to perception of distance. It also shows that Anna notices the time spent on the bus as a long activity every day. She compares her current situation (i.e., commuting by bus) with the time she spent at the local village school:

Anna: Now we don't use the playground here in our village, because there are not many kids playing there anymore. We used to go there during school sometimes. First there were lessons and after that we went to the playground together. But it was also fun to go there in the afternoon and at weekends. Interviewer: Do you mean you don't go there because there is no school in the village anymore? Anna: Yes Interviewer: Why don't you go there? Anna: It's not as fun, and I don't know the kids anymore.

Anna's experience shows that when the activity pattern of the children in the schoolyard changes, they also change their use of other places in the local village. When the children no longer meet spontaneously after school at the local playground, they do not use the playground in the same way. The new large school in Österbymo has age homogenous classes, the children here mainly play with friends in their class, rather than the children from their own village. This is a constraint that hampers the children's ability to make friends in other age groups who live in same village. The main consequence is that they are less connected to the village and more to their specific age group at school. These different perspectives on local resources in the community and their time-space basis were not considered in the municipal decision-making process. The decision was instead based on the quantifiable economic costs and the national regulations, which seemed to give a positive outcome. The new costs (e.g., for travelling, re-building the remaining school, demolishing the closed school buildings, new social networks, and re-arranging everyday life) and the costs of the lost resources (e.g., friends in the village, social networks, and the identity of the village) were not included in the calculation before the decision.

3.9. The school as a hub in the community

Throughout our fieldwork, which also had a broader focus on local development, informants returned to the role of the local schools as a hub in society. This may have been a reaction to the ongoing local political discussions regarding the closing of two of the community schools. However, it can still indicate that the schools have several functions in the community, not just for those who attend the school such as pupils, teachers, and other members of staff.

In Asby (A), the school had been located very centrally, next to the church and the grocery shop, which is a co-operative of eight local farmer families. Here, it was clear that the closing of the school affected the community, including the local farmers' co-operative shop, and one of those running the shop said:

It really made a difference. Now it is quiet in the village. But we also notice that there are no parents passing by for milk and bread on their way home when picking up the children. We have also lost some deliveries to the school; there were some small purchases from the school and the staff, even if most stuff had to be organised by the municipal public procurement system.

The village school had organised many families' everyday lives in the way that they combined activities such as picking up their children and shopping in the village. Because they no longer stop to pick up their children, they do not stop at the local shop. The school had a function of locating several activities in the village; it was a hub that generated related activities that were part of completely different projects than educating children.

A similar change took place in Rydsnäs, where the school also had had a central location in the village, close to the bus stop. Some small shops and most people living in Rydsnäs could see the playground and the school. The time-space mapping of daily activities after the closure of the school also showed that the families now left the village during the day. Most of the interviewees related similar stories about the changes in the village, which was quiet and empty without the sound of children:

Rydsnäs has changed, as the sound of children is the sound of life and the future of the village. Generations of children have been running around in the schoolyard. Now it is silent and the village feels empty and sad. (Sarah, retiree and long-time resident of village R.)

Clearly, the village schools had functions other than just being schools – they were hubs. They had been used for many other things than educational purposes. The school buildings were used as meeting rooms at festivals, for information meetings, and as theatres, and the school sports centres had been used for evening events and by local sports clubs. In particular, the annual autumn market attracted a lot of people and the village school was open all weekend. The central locations of the schools in both villages also made them natural meeting places, as shown in the study by [Kearns et al. \(2009\)](#). Several parents mentioned how they regularly met at the schools, which was a resource for keeping the members of the community connected.

A school can even be seen as an emotional and social hub of a community. Sarah, the retiree in Rydsnäs, highlights that the school brings life to the village. In particular, elderly people in the village see children as a resource and appreciate their games and joy. In addition, Sarah also points to the longer time-dimension when she says that the school has been there for a long time and has connected generations of villagers to each other because it was a place where the children's parents and grandparents played. This was lost when the school was closed, and the village became empty. School age children also lost their connection to the village when they no longer attended the village school.

The school was a hub connecting different projects that people conducted in their everyday lives. It even connected generations, keeping the local history and place alive. There were meetings and sports activities, and it became a market place several times during the year and brought people together. Even if the villagers could see the potential to use the school for other types of activities, there are explicit

authority constraints expressed through national legislation and EU regulations regarding educational quality, safety issues, and public procurement. These are clear expressions of authority constraints that limited the action space for the villagers to make more resources available for local development. They also constrained the discretion of local policy-makers to value local resources in other ways and make other decisions. The additional values of the local school that the inhabitants tried to show were not considered in the public reports that promoted the closing of the two local schools, a view in line with other research on the conflicts between local values and development (Taghizadeh-Larsson, 2016). This clearly shows that even in a small municipality the inhabitants do not have the power to manage their local resources and keep an important local hub.

4. The local school as a hub – concluding remarks and discussion

This case study, which focuses on the closure of two out of four village schools in a rural municipality in Sweden, shows how integrated a school is in daily life, not just for the children, but also for the wider community. However, the decision to close the schools did not consider how the families would adapt and react to the new circumstances and how they would manage the new time-space constraints. The school closures resulted in less time and flexibility for the families and their daily lives. They lost valuable social networks, contacts and resources that brought meaning to village life. These findings show that time-space analyses can make other resources visible and help decision-makers to develop policies that can improve life quality and make everyday life more sustainable for people in rural areas.

4.1. The schools as local hubs

By focusing on the village school as a hub in the community, the analyses have revealed the added values of village schools (Cedering, 2012, 2016). This is in line with international research on village schools (Kvalsund, 2004; Hargreaves et al., 2009; Kearns et al., 2009; Lind and Stjernström, 2015; Onescu and Giles, 2012). The local schools were a hub since they addressed several ambitions and projects in the community in addition to simply being a resource as a place for education, in line with Hargreaves (2009) and Witten et al. (2007). There were even arguments that local businesses were creating resources in trust and forming new networks by meeting at the school, which is also in line with international research on regional development (Beugelsdijk and Schaik, 2005; Westholm, 2003). Kearns et al. (2009) show that the local school can function as a resource for the whole village since it promotes networks in the local community that stretch far beyond education. There were several groups that met at the school. The village school is seen as a meeting place that encourages residents, schools, and local communities to interact. Our time-geographical approach shows which types of constraints the individuals and households as units experienced when the schools were closed. The analysis showed that there are several relationships between small rural schools and their local communities. The school also had functions other than education and served as a hub in the community for the everyday lives of families with children. When the school was closed they lost this hub and its connection to several other resources in everyday life. They lost former connections and daily meetings with others in the community, which had provided support and flexibility in time and space as well as the feeling of belonging to a community.

The analysis reveals that the closure of village schools imposed new constraints on the everyday life patterns of families in several ways. Travelling further by bus placed explicit coupling constraints on daily activities, requiring more complex arrangements and time planning. The spatial structure of how schools are organised affects how families conduct their everyday lives. Several families were negatively affected by new constraints in terms of loss of flexibility, and no longer viewed

schools as hubs in the community. In addition, others in the community who had used the school facilities or enjoyed having the children around found that the closures negatively affected their everyday lives.

4.2. The new local orders

The time-geographical analysis show how resources and constraints are re-arranged due to changes. After the village schools were closed, the established local orders were changed in many respects and new orders were formed. The political decision to close the school was a new authority constraint for the whole village, changing the daily living patterns of most residents. This constraint opens up the possibility of a chain of new capacity and coupling constraints in daily life. What was seen by the municipal council as necessary financial and management decisions, were by the families often experienced as practical constraints of daily activity patterns and loss of flexibility. These new constraints were directly imposed on the families affected by the decision to close the two village schools. However, as shown above, the general public in the village also expressed that they experienced the school closure as a constraint. A single decision taken by the municipal council resulted in a web of re-arrangements of daily lives. Some parents shortened their working hours in line with the bus timetables, sacrificing part of their wages. New orders were formed, such as grandparents and neighbours regularly picking up and looking after children after school. These networks were a resource that was more readily available to those who had lived in the area for longer time. The parents also had to allocate additional time for driving to social activities. All these new resources were secured via individual arrangements to manage the new constraints that had emerged as a result of the municipal decision. None of these costs for the families and others were seen as a cost in the municipal budget and decision. When the village lost its school, it also lost a hub that performed several functions other than just educating children.

Those who argued for closing the schools had a different interpretation of the village school and the related costs. In addition to the financial arguments, they argued that the village school provided a low quality of education, isolation, small groups, and social vulnerability. Such constraints were not expressed by those who had to change schools. Instead, the school had been seen as a local hub, even before the political decision was made to close it.

The overall impact of the political decision to close the two village schools is that the families had to ‘pay’ in several ways, in terms of time, increased commuting and transportation, lost social relations, and re-arrangements of their everyday lives. In addition, residents with no direct contact with the schools were also affected.

It was also clear that the larger school in Österbymo did not become a local hub in the everyday lives of the inhabitants of Asby and Rydsnäs. As the school was so far away, there was no historical glue (for generations living in the area) and it did not become a meeting place or a service point – i.e., they still saw Asby and Rydsnäs as their home. To conclude, our time-geographical approach has shown how to map and analyse policy decisions and other structural changes that affect everyday life. It could be used as a tool in planning and policy-making that will allow for more sustainable rural life, since the consequences at household level can be made visible and can contribute other knowledge for political decision-making.

Authorship statement

For the manuscript: “Village schools as a hub in the community – A time-geographical analysis of the closing of two rural schools in Sweden” both authors Magdalena Cedering and Elin Wihlborg meet the authorship criteria and hereby certify that they have participated sufficiently in the work to take public responsibility for the content, including participation in the concept, design, analysis, writing, or revision of the manuscript. Both authors have contributed equally to this

work. Furthermore, each author certifies that this material or similar material is not under consideration for any other publication. We confirm this statement by the December 5, 2019.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the research council FORMAS, Sweden (grant 2011-1811-20331-45, Ydre 2.0), for the opportunity to carry out this research. We are also grateful to our informants and the municipality of Ydre, who have shared their perceptions and experiences to make this research possible.

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