Abstract


Key words: gender, farmwomen, female farmer, relational place, socio-culturally constructed countryside

This study investigates farmwomen in Finland from a human geographic point of view, deriving its theoretical framework primarily from rural geography and feminist geographies. The empirical analyses deal with female farmers’ tasks and roles, and factors conditioning them. Special attention is devoted to the gendered conventions, whereby a typical farmwoman, unlike her husband, is a newcomer to a farm in the sense that she has moved to the place where her husband was born. On this basis, the key issue of this study concerns the significance of gender for an individual’s interpretations of a place, seen as socially constructed.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods are utilised in analysing the data sets that have been collected from smaller farms in eastern and south-central Finland by means of semi-structured interviews, theme interviews, and a survey. Most of this empirical material originates from two comparative research projects, “Causes and Mechanisms of Social Exclusion of Women Smallholders” (European Commission, TSER, Fourth Framework Programme) and “Hva er et Skikkelig arbeid? Unge Voksnes Møte med et Arbeidsmarked i Omstillning i Nordens Periferier” (Nordisk Samarbeidsnemnd for Samfunnsforskning, NOS-S).

The empirical findings give support to the view that the professional position of a Finnish female farmer is relatively strong, and most women feel equal to their husbands. Farmwomen actively construct their personal roles, which implies that there is no single identity of a Finnish female farmer. However, most farmwomen see domesticity, which includes especially child-care at home, as an essential part of their work and identity, and they tend to regard this orientation as their own conscious choice. In contrast, a farm does not provide a single woman with similar possibilities. Farmers’ teenaged daughters do not see farming as a relevant option, and thus they orient themselves towards other careers.

A woman, who is a newcomer to a farm, tends to experience the farm in a different way from her husband who has lived there most of his life. Typically, she does not share the feelings and meanings that her husband associates with the farm. Also, a farmwoman's experience in the countryside as a whole is found to be different from the conventional connotations of rural living environments.