

Relocation as a strategy for families in search of a sustainable everyday life outside the metropolitan areas

Erika Sandow^{1,2}, erika.sandow@umu.se

Emma Lundholm^{1,2}, emma.lundholm@umu.se

¹ Centre for Demographic and Ageing Research, Umeå University, Sweden

² Department of Geography, Umeå University, Sweden

Extended abstract

Introduction and aim

Despite present urban growth, it could be acknowledged that urban living might not be perceived as socially sustainable for all. Living in increasingly crowded metropolitan areas may present challenges in organising everyday life such as; access to affordable housing, time-consuming commutes to daycare, school and work, and access to amenities and resources for leisure activities. In this paper, we study families who have moved out from metropolitan areas and settled in a smaller setting, focusing on their motivation for migration and how they experience their reorganisation of everyday life in their new place of residence.

Recent migration figures reveal that there are increasing numbers of counter-urban moves, mainly to the sub-urban countryside and dominated by families with young children (Statistics Sweden 2014; 2015). This group is often identified by local politicians and planners as particularly desirable migrants to attract, partly since in-migration of families with children counteract the trend of population ageing in many parts of the countryside. Much earlier counter-urban research has rather narrowly focused on moves to specifically rural areas, however moving from a larger to a smaller urban setting is a much more common practice (Sandow & Lundholm^a, forthcoming). Therefore, aiming to catch a variance in preferred destinations, we are focusing on experiences of young families moving from the three large metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö to various types of non-metropolitan areas.

Based on survey data, the objective of this study is to analyse to what extent are families' migration motives are influenced by considerations of different aspects of organisation of everyday life in place of origin and destination.

Background

Counterurbanisation can be defined as migration movement downwards in the urban hierarchy (Mitchell 2004). While various aspects of counterurbanisation has been studied, the underlying motivations was for a long time moderately addressed in previous research (Halfacree 2008). In recent years, the general conceptualisation of counterurbanisation as the movement of middle class families starting a new life in an idyllic rural setting has been criticized as being too simplistic and consequently reducing the complex interplay of factors affecting decisions to move (Bijker et al. 2013; Grimsrud 2011; Stockdale 2014). Researcher have sought to broaden the view of the counter-urban migrant and incorporate movers and rural destinations that does not fit the "typical" counter urban movement (Halfacree 2008; Grimsrud 2011; Bijker et al. 2013). In a Swedish context, Hedberg & Haandrikman (2014) have described the diversity of

international migration to rural areas in Swedish. Increased attention has also been given to lifestyle factors within migration narratives, e.g. community, meaningful activities, climate, proximity to amenities, novelty and health. Elements of self-reflexivity can also be present, as well as escape from perceptions of a stressful urban life (Benson and O'Reilly 2009). Looking beyond economic aspects of migration, community and social context have also been scrutinised, especially when it comes to migration outcomes and the post-migration phase (Casado-Diaz 2009). In this aspect counterurbanisation has been framed as a form of lifestyle migration (Eimermann 2015).

It can be argued that the preconditions for counter-urban migration have changed in the last decades. The rapid urban growth implies societal challenges, were for instance, a crowded housing market in many metropolitan areas makes it more difficult to fulfil an aspiration of home ownership. Families with young children may deploy a strategy to accept longer travel times to work in search of suitable and affordable housing. Another strategy could be to relocate to a smaller labour market in order to find housing and work at a shorter and more acceptable distance. The development of transportation, information and communication technologies in the last decades, increased geographical and time flexibility of labour markets - where many workplaces are less tied to a particular location and given working hours - create new spatial conditions in which people can manage their everyday lives and facilitate their decision to move from highly urbanised areas (Vilhelmson and Thulin 2013).

Besides considering housing and the possibilities for pursuing two careers, young families face other factors that add more complexity to the migration strategies and demand for compromises, such as children's schools, friends and leisure activities. Non-metropolitan areas might also be considered as attractive living environments in general, and especially for children. There is also some evidence of a hidden potential of rural migration in Sweden, as more people express that they would prefer living in the countryside or in a small community than actually do so (Niedomysl & Amcoff, 2011). Furthermore, while it has repeatedly been noted that the rural idyll seems to have an appeal to families, few studies have focused on the social geographies and everyday lives of children in rural areas (e.g. Matthews et al. 2000). In Sweden recent changes in political and socio-cultural perspectives on work and family life (e.g. changes in salary/education levels between sexes and a more gender neutral parental leave system) has created new conditions for the organisation of everyday life. What this may mean for counterurbanisation motives and experiences of post-migration life is yet to be explored. Accordingly, the preconditions for counter-urban migration have changed in the last decades and it is time to revitalise counterurbanisation research.

While the search for a different and socially sustainable way of life could be meaningful for all migrants, the characteristics of the expected everyday life after the migration are diverse and specific to the location and to individual aspirations. However, studies on post-migration life in relation to counterurbanisation has been scarce. In Norway, Munkejord (2006) found that post-migration rural life often implies less "time wasting" in urban commute, allowing more time for family and leisure, and access to more "urban" activities (e.g. attending concerts and shopping) than expected. This suggests that rural and urban elements are interrelated in the migrants' everyday lives. There is therefore a need to scrutinise how various aspects in families' everyday life shape their migration decisions and experiences, not only pre-, but also post-migration.

Scientific novelty

Following the call to revitalise counterurbanisation research and challenge what has become the established narrative of counterurbanisation (Bijker et al. 2013; Halfacree 2008; Stockdale

2014) this study will analyse counter-urban migration within a framework that takes into account the interplay of factors in the migrants' everyday life. The focus on organisation of everyday life in relation to access to place-bound resources will shed new light on how the interconnections between different domains of the migrant's life contribute to contemporary counter-urban migration in Sweden.

This study builds on register studies where we have studied who the counter urban moving families are in terms of their professions prior to migration and their migration history. In a recent study (Sandow & Lundholm^a, forthcoming) we found a small but steady outflow of families, mainly to medium-sized or small towns. The highly educated are overrepresented among these families, thus providing potential for an inflow of competence to the receiving areas. Contrary to expected, the assumed flexibility in time and space among *knowledge sector professionals* does not seem to enable them more than others to pursue counter-urban moves. Instead, *public sector professionals* characterise families making a counter-urban move to all destination regions, while also men with a profession within *arts and crafts* to a higher extent move with their family to more rural areas. In a follow up study on return migration (Sandow & Lundholm^b, forthcoming) we found that contemporary counter-urbanisation in Sweden is partly return migration. One third of all counter-urban moves are return migration. People born in a more rural area are more likely to make a counter urban move than others. Return migrants are highly educated and high income earners, compared to other counter urban movers. And it is more common that the families return to the female spouse's birthplace and her relatives. An intergenerational network at the destination when making a counter-urban move is important. In addition to these register studies our survey will tell us more about how work and family balance are expressed in migration motives by the counter urban moving families.

Method

In the current study we use a new survey (Feb 2020), conducted in order to explore families' migration strategies and explore patterns of diversity among counter urban moving families with regards to socio-economic factors and choice of destination. By collecting data in a survey, we can capture the importance of factors not available through register studies (i.e. lifestyle factors and organisation of everyday life in relation to work, commuting, housing, lifestyle, family situation and geographical context). The survey will provide us with information on the respondents' perceptions of aspects of the everyday life before the move and main migration motives, as well as information on their post-migration life.

In order to provide a wider analysis of counter-urban migration, the focus is not limited to specific destinations, such as rural areas, but embrace all moves from the metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg to all parts of Sweden; cities, towns and small settlements. Hence, the focus here is not on suburbanisation, but rather on moving the whole family project out of the metropolitan context (based on Statistic Sweden's definition of a metropolitan area) to another type of region, downwards in the urban hierarchy. The survey is based on postal questionnaires directed to one (randomly chosen) adult in a family with young children (under the age of 13); who have lived at least three years in one of the metropolitan areas before migrating. A representative sample is selected by assistance from Statistics Sweden aiming at about 3000 completed surveys.

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