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Sarper Neyse and Emma Lundholm

ABSTRACT

Counterurban migration is known to be driven by lifestyle motivations, in which employment considerations are more of an enabling factor than a driver. In this paper, the self-reported motives, along with labour-market and lifestyle outcomes, of counterurban migration are investigated. The focus is on trade-offs between work-related and lifestyle-related amenities for different subgroups based on recent survey data in Sweden collected from families with children in 2018–2019 who left metropolitan regions. The key results indicate that, overall, counterurban movers are satisfied with their decision and the majority cite the importance of lifestyle amenities over work-related amenities. Our conclusion is that, besides voluntary trade-offs, counterurban migration does not necessarily pose a trade-off between labour-market and lifestyle-related amenities since, to a large extent, individuals reported better outcomes in both areas. This study makes two contributions. Firstly, the data considers self-reported outcomes, including labour-market outcomes beyond income and lifestyle outcomes. Secondly, we explore individual characteristics of counterurban migrants in relation to post-migration outcomes in different destinations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sweden, like many other countries, is experiencing a population concentration towards metropolitan areas, while smaller regions and rural areas are lagging behind in terms of physical, human and financial capital (Niedomysl & Amcoff, 2011). Labour shortages are increasingly acknowledged as a problem (OECD, 2023), especially in smaller local labour markets, and there is therefore a need to attract labour to these regions through interregional migration. While vibrant urban lifestyles tend to attract young people to move to metropolitan areas (King, 2018), families with young children are at a stage of life where such preferences may be reevaluated in favour of other lifestyle pursuits. Contemporary studies on outmigration from metropolitan areas in Sweden suggest that families with young children are overrepresented in counterurban migration streams (Bjerke & Mellander, 2017; Sandow & Lundholm,

CONTACT Sarper Neyse sarper.neyse@umu.se
Department of Geography, Umeå University, Umeå, Sweden

2020). While, in general, long-distance interregional family migration has been documented as being driven by factors related to employment (Kulu & Milewski, 2007), moving downwards in the urban hierarchy is often associated with lifestyle motivations (Bijker & Haartsen, 2012; Niedomysl, 2011; Niedomysl & Clark, 2014).

Via the concentration of different types of capital, urban areas are associated with more competitive labour markets, intense knowledge spillovers and diverse consumption patterns from densely agglomerated households (Eriksson & Lengyel, 2019; Glaeser et al., 1992; Glaeser, 1999; Porter, 1990). In contrast, non-urban areas are more associated with localisation economies, sticky markets, tacit knowledge and lack of human capital. Moving from a metropolitan labour market to a smaller, local labour market could thus be assumed to yield worse outcomes in terms of labour-market-related amenities. But, if we want to investigate counterurban migration movements, we should take a multidimensional approach, including the aspirations and characteristics of individuals, along with regional variations. In addition, the perception of economic loss could also be considered through the lens of downshifting and voluntary simplicity as underlying driving forces (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Halfacree, 2008; Nuga et al., 2023). Although large cities may provide various lifestyle-related opportunities, such as diverse cultural and recreational activities, and the agglomeration of club goods (Buchanan, 1965), such amenities may not be adequate substitutes for smaller city or rural amenities, such as living in a more environmentally friendly way, having more time for self-development and family, and better management of stress from daily life, the lack of which can be counted as a push effect from larger cities (Hoppstadius & Åkerlund, 2022; Nuga et al., 2023). By this means, research on interregional migration should also include non-economic aspirations, previous ties with the region and perceived individual sacrifices in favour of other amenities such as lifestyle-related gains or family ties.

Aiming to investigate the welfare implications and trade-offs in terms of labour-market and lifestyle-related outcomes between different groups of counterurban-moving households, this study attempts to answer the following questions and their implications: 'How do individual characteristics impact upon the choice of destination?', 'How do counterurban migrants experience labour-market and lifestyle outcomes depending on individual and regional characteristics?' and 'Did those who experienced negative labour-market outcomes trade labour-market gains for lifestyle-related gains?' To answer these questions, we have employed broad-scale survey data from a sample consisting of families with children (up to 13 years old) who moved from three large metropolitan areas of Sweden: Stockholm, Malmö and Gothenburg, to non-metropolitan regions between the years 2017 and 2019. The main focus of the paper is on potential trade-offs between work and lifestyle-related amenities by different sub-groups, including the self-employed, women and return migrants, along with their counterparts. We compare perceived outcomes to determine the net gainers from counterurban migration proxied by two indices corresponding to labour-market and lifestyle outcomes. Thus, this study can contribute to enhancing our understanding of how young parents moving down the urban hierarchy perceive the labour-market outcomes in a broad sense in relation to lifestyle gains. Furthermore, by differentiating between migration destinations such as rural areas and medium-sized cities, we can contribute with a more nuanced picture of counterurban migration.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is concerned with counterurban migration, defined as the movement of urban residents downwards in the urban hierarchy (Mitchell, 2004). As Fielding (1982) remarked, in most cases, the presence of counterurban migrants does not impede urbanisation, but counterurban migration is nevertheless a phenomenon worth exploring. In this study, counterurban

migration is defined as households leaving metropolitan regions – in our case, Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö – and establishing themselves in a smaller, local labour market. Thus, this approach is similar to Halliday and Coombes's (1995), as they placed special emphasis on counterurban movements of leaving metropolitan areas. With this definition, we exclude movement within the metropolitan labour-market region in terms of suburbanisation, i.e., moving from city cores towards suburbs, and exurbanisation, which is also a downward migration while retaining employment ties with the urban (Davies & Yeates, 1991). This paper addresses counterurbanisation at an individual level and is confined to counterurban migration from metropolitan areas to non-metropolitan areas, rather than taking into account all movements downwards in the urban hierarchy. We prioritise metropolitan areas for several reasons. First of all, these areas are at the top of the urban hierarchy with the most diverse economic activities and competition in the labour market; therefore, metropolitan background might have significant economic outcomes for smaller regions (Roca & Puga, 2017) as also emphasised by the escalator region literature (Fielding, 1992; Gordon et al., 2015). Secondly, big-city problems such as pollution, congestion and security issues are most common in metropolitan areas, which might enable us to explain lifestyle-related out-migration more easily. Thirdly, since there are limits to the growth of cities, it is important to establish the frontiers of metropolitan capacities, in both economic and non-economic terms.

Pettersson (2002) highlighted the fact that depopulation and ageing in smaller regions, especially in northern Sweden, was not a problematic issue until the birthrate started to lag behind out-migration. Therefore, counterurban migration has been gaining importance for many reasons. Firstly, from the regional perspective, it is crucial for lagging regions to attract human capital to utilise in regional development, which can be a major challenge in a society like Sweden with wide territories but a relatively small population. Secondly, an increasing number of households may be discouraged from remaining in metropolitan areas due to high agglomeration and competition, increasing living costs and other big-city problems like congestion and pollution. These are particularly evident for middle-class, highly educated individuals who are seeking to preserve their lifestyles in a more affordable way (e.g., Bijker et al., 2013; Champion, 2005; Goodwin-Hawkins & Dafydd Jones, 2022; Halliday & Coombes, 1995; Karsten, 2020). A third reason is the revitalisation of the rural idyll and post-productivism, along with recreational pursuits such as organic production and sustainability issues, which are more embedded in localised economies that require a special kind of human capital, i.e., with tacit knowledge and vertically transmitted values (e.g., Brouder et al., 2014; Keskitalo et al., 2017).

Previous literature has documented the role of individual characteristics and motivations behind both interregional migration in general and counterurban migration as a specific phenomenon in Sweden. Regarding interregional migration in general, studies indicate that mobility increases with higher education levels (Brandén, 2013b; Fischer & Malmberg, 2001; Lundholm, 2007) and that interregional migration increases gross wage earnings at the household level (Åström & Westerlund, 2009). Evidence from the mainstream human capital model also emphasises the correlation between educational achievement and labour-market outcomes (Mincer, 1974) and, thus, the greater tendency to move. Lundholm et al. (2004) provided evidence that, overall, only one in four interregional migrants in Sweden gave more importance to economic amenities than lifestyle and social reasons. Later, these findings highlighting the importance of lifestyle and recreational pursuits were reinforced by Niedomysl (2010). More recently, Korpi and Clark (2017) highlighted the fact that employment might not be the primary motivation behind the decision to move. Mulder (2018) makes the case for also considering family ties beyond the household in understanding internal migration, alongside labour-market and other drivers.

Evidence in the literature for counterurban migration in Sweden can be traced back more than two decades. Lindgren (2003) was one of the first to document the characteristics of typical

counterurbanisers as relatively highly educated, elderly people who had moved out of the labour force. Along with previous evidence on ageing in rural areas (Pettersson, 2002), Hjort and Malmberg (2006) also drew attention to the same fact but, in addition, they stressed that rural areas were less popular than peri-urban areas among individuals with high incomes and education. Evidence on counterurban migration in Sweden also indicates a trend in outmigration from metropolitan areas as being overrepresented by families with young children (Bjerke & Mellander, 2017; Sandow & Lundholm, 2020). Although there is a multitude of motives for interregional migration in general, counterurban migration is particularly associated with lifestyle motivations (Niedomysl, 2011; Niedomysl & Clark, 2014).

Based on previous studies, there are reasons to believe that we will find different results for different subgroups. First of all, gender gaps vary across time due to the inclusiveness of institutions, cultural embeddedness and changing gender roles (see e.g., Smits et al., 2003). According to mainstream human capital models, women are expected to face adverse outcomes from family migration (Cooke, 2003; Mincer, 1978; Sandell, 1977; Spitze, 1984) due to higher gains by men in the labour market, which are expected to compensate for the losses experienced by their partners after the migration. In the Swedish case, contemporary research indicates more favourable outcomes for highly educated women (Brandén, 2013a). Plus, Brandén (2013a) also provided evidence that gender differences in income gains are considerably reduced when controlling for occupational characteristics. Secondly, regional ties might have both economic and social benefits, such as acquaintance with local markets and the feeling of social belonging (Adjei et al., 2016; Haartsen & Stockdale, 2018; Höllinger & Haller, 1990; Kramarz & Skans, 2014; Mulder, 2018; Mulder & Malmberg, 2014). For this reason, return migrants are expected to cherish social ties and family reunion as well as labour-market outcomes, due to the greater scope of kinship and additional networks, such as with friends and ex-colleagues. Therefore, we can pose two possible explanations: either local ties are beneficial for labour-market outcomes, or family-related motivations might lead to trade-offs at the expense of labour-market outcomes, as Gillespie et al. (2021) suggested. Regarding the self-employed, Eliasson et al. (2015) highlighted a greater representation of locals than newcomers among the self-employed. This coincides with the previous findings on the importance of regional ties, mentioned above, as an extension of their validity for self-employment as well. More recently, Habersetzer et al. (2021) revealed that home advantage and industry experience have different impacts at the core and on the periphery, confirming the importance of home advantage in smaller labour markets.

3. DATA AND METHODS

Many studies of the labour-market returns of migration measure income gains and/or employment status by comparing status the year before and the year after the move. In this study, we use self-reported labour-market outcomes as perceived by the migrants themselves. This measure covers a broader assessment of how they value their new situation compared to the situation before the move, and also includes an assessment of future career opportunities. We are studying the short-term effects as the migrants in the survey had moved within the previous three years. A long-distance move causes disruption in the labour-market situation of most movers and might entail gaps between jobs. This is especially true for the respondents in this survey, who have small children and are often in transition between employment and parental leave. This is a challenge when using figures such as annual register income data, because it might blur income and career gains. By using self-reported assessments, we capture the migrants' appraisals and experiences of the labour-market outcomes of their move, ignoring some of the temporary effects. Hence, the survey data produces more detailed results from an individual perspective because it contains a broader scope of features, such as daily life or satisfaction levels for

individual choices made with bounded rationality. Bounded rationality here denotes asymmetrical information and imperfect foresight, because individuals are making intertemporal decisions involving many uncertainties and risks, especially those who have no regional ties.

The empirical findings are based on a postal survey conducted in 2020, targeting families who moved away from the three metropolitan labour-market regions (Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö) during the period 2017–2019 to a municipality lying outside a metropolitan labour market. The families had lived in a metropolitan region for at least three years prior to the move, moved as an intact couple, and had at least one child under the age of 13. For all of Sweden, 5807 households fulfilled these criteria and the questionnaire was sent to one (randomly selected) spouse in each of these couples. A total of 2801 responses were received (48.4% response rate). The questionnaire included questions about the employment situation of the individual and their partner before and after the move, their motives for moving and self-reported outcomes of moving in terms of labour-market outcomes as well as other lifestyle-related aspects. Since we are interested in labour-market outcomes, we delimited the sample to those who were employed or self-employed after moving, resulting in 2249 respondents.

3.1. Dependent variables

In our analysis, we study several outcomes. Firstly, we used a categorical variable for 'destination type' as the dependent variable for the logistic model. Destination type is based on a classification by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, in which municipalities are defined on the basis of population size, proximity to population centres and commuting patterns. The original nine categories were merged into: medium-sized towns, commuting municipalities, small towns and rural municipalities.

While investigating labour-market outcomes, we do not confine labour-market gains solely to income level as most of the previous literature has done (e.g., Åström & Westerlund 2009; Brandén, 2013a; Nilsson, 2001), but also include other amenities, such as interesting work tasks and compatibility with education, which enables us to gain a broader perspective on labour-market outcomes. From our perspective, income is insufficient and reductionist when seeking to represent career mobility; hence, in order to capture the perceived change in the general employment situation as well as the lifestyle-related outcomes before and after the move, we used self-reported data from the survey. To investigate how the movers perceived their labour-market outcome, we analysed questions formulated as: 'How has the move affected your employment situation regarding: (1) salary, (2) career opportunities, (3) interesting work tasks and (4) compatibility with education?' The response alternatives were a five-point Likert scale consisting of 'much worse', 'somewhat worse', 'unchanged', 'somewhat better' and 'much better' (coded as −2, −1, 0, 1, 2). These items were used to construct an index by summing the scores for labour-market outcomes, resulting in an overall score ranging from −8 as the lowest to 8 as the highest.

An index for lifestyle-related outcomes was constructed by applying the same procedure as for work-related outcomes using the questions: 'How has the move affected your opportunities to: (1) find the living environment you want to live in, (2) pursue your hobbies, (3) spend time as a family and (4) afford the type of housing you desire?' and (5) 'How has your experience of stress over organising your daily activities been affected?' We coded the answers in the same way as for work-related outcomes, and so the overall score range for lifestyle-related outcomes is between −10 and 10.

To analyse the trade-offs between work and lifestyle-related outcomes, we created a categorical variable regarding binary gains and losses compared to pre-migration outcomes. If the sum of the index score is positive, then the binary value of the related outcome is 1 and if the sum is negative, it is 0. Since migration is a costly procedure in both economic and non-economic terms, we considered the neutral values to be negative as well. Following this procedure, the first category, set as base outcome, represents losing in terms of both labour-market

and lifestyle-related outcomes. The second category is for the group gaining in terms of labour-related outcomes and losing in lifestyle-related ones and vice versa for the third category. The last category is for those gaining in both types of outcome.

3.2. Independent variables

We used a number of independent variables in the models. Individual characteristics were: income prior to moving, age, sex, education level and self-employment. Education level and quartiles of disposable income were derived from register data. 'Higher education level' denotes those who have completed at least three years of education after high school (*gymnasium*). A dummy variable was included for return migrants, proxied by at least one of the partners having grown up in the current destination. We created this variable to examine the impact of being familiar with the current region because we thought it might strengthen both labour-market and lifestyle-related outcomes via stronger regional ties. Another dummy was created for those retaining the same workplace after the move, because we might expect to see limited labour-market effects of moving for these respondents.

Another independent variable is the 'destination type' in both ordinary least squares (OLS) and logistic models. The specification is the same as our definition in the dependent variables section. We used this in an attempt to observe the impact of regional characteristics on work and lifestyle-related outcomes. Together with this variable, we included a dummy variable for municipalities bordering metropolitan areas, proxied by sharing a border with a metropolitan municipality. Households ending up in these municipalities still have a certain amount of access to the metropolitan region and might have other opportunities, but perhaps also drivers for making the move. Finally, we introduced a categorical variable for the metropolitan origin, setting Stockholm as the base outcome. Since metropolitan areas differ in various characteristics, such as population, location, average income and labour-market structure, this variable was introduced as a proxy for pre-migration experience and possible deviations in expectations.

We also introduced motives in the model to take the underlying drivers into consideration and thereby investigate potential trade-offs. We constructed an index of revealed preferences and their priorities, which is derived from the question: 'When it comes to work, education, and economics, how important were the following motives for the family's decision to move?': (a) your work, (b) your partner's work. We grouped the answers related to these questions into 'important' and 'not important' as dummy variables. If the impact is positive on the outcome, we assume that the outcome corresponds to the expectation. We also constructed an index for lifestyle motives based on the items to use as an independent variable. This index consists of five main motivations: 'having more time for family', 'personal development', 'more balanced lifestyle', 'desired environment and surroundings' and 'more opportunity to pursue hobbies'. In total, 1731 individuals answered all of these questions, choosing answer responses ranging from 1, 'not important at all', to 4, 'very important'.

After dropping the respondents who gave incomplete or ambiguous information to the relevant questions – for instance, those who selected multiple alternatives – we grouped their representations under the relevant sub-group. Considering all responses to both types of motivation and outcome, the total sample consists of 1721 households.

4. ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

We begin by presenting the descriptive statistics for individual backgrounds and motivations behind the counterurban move of our total sample and relevant sub-groups (Table 1). Then, we reveal the respondent-indicated relevant outcomes for each sub-group, together with their counterparts to determine the differences in both types of outcome, i.e., work-related and lifestyle-related (Table 2). Since our sub-groups may vary from their counterparts in terms of

Table 1. Individual characteristics and motivations of the sub-groups and their counterparts.*

Overall	Total	Normalized	Waged-employed	Self-employed	Men	Women	Newcomers	Return migrants
Total number	2249 (100%)	1721 (100%)	91%	9%	52%	48%	47%	53%
Age (mean)	38	38	37	40	39	37	39	37
Higher education level (%)	81%	82%	83%	72%	77%	87%	78%	86%
Voluntary loss in income (%)	34%	35%	33%	52%	35%	35%	34%	37%
Keep same work (%)	28%	27%	25%	44%	33%	20%	28%	23%
Income before move (mean in SEK)	328,284	329,340	323,541	396,280	369,736	285,692	323,004	336,612
Income after move (mean in SEK)	378,414	383,427	372,573	507,352	424,379	339,178	378,681	388,874
% Change in income	15%	16%	15%	28%	15%	19%	17%	16%
To surrounding municipality		375(22%)	20%	2%	11%	11%	16%	6%
Metropolitan origin								
Stockholm		62%	61%	72%	62%	61%	62%	61%
Gothenburg		24%	25%	16%	22%	26%	23%	25%
Malmö		14%	14%	12%	16%	13%	15%	14%
Work-related motivations (%)								
Important for respondent	42%	47%	42%	40%	40%	44%	41%	45%
Important for partner	42%	46%	42%	41%	38%	47%	42%	43%
Lifestyle-related motivations (%)								
More time for family	81%	85%	85%	89%	84%	87%	85%	85%
Personal development	54%	57%	56%	70%	55%	59%	61%	49%
More balanced lifestyle	84%	87%	87%	89%	85%	90%	88%	87%
Environment & surroundings	88%	90%	90%	92%	88%	92%	91%	88%
Opportunity for hobbies	57%	59%	59%	64%	57%	61%	59%	59%

Notes: *The column 'Normalized', denotes for the respondents who answered all the relevant questions.

Table 2. Respondent-indicated outcomes regarding different sub-groups, presented in percentages.

Work-related outcomes (%)	Total		Waged-employed		Self-employed		Men		Women		Newcomers		Return migrants	
	Better	**Worse**	**Better**	**Worse**	**Better**	**Worse**	**Better**	**Worse**	**Better**	**Worse**	**Better**	**Worse**	**Better**	**Worse**
Salary	32%	28%	34%	27%	15%	43%	28%	29%	36%	28%	29%	28%	35%	29%
Career opportunities	21%	38%	22%	38%	15%	45%	21%	40%	22%	37%	21%	35%	21%	42%
Interesting work tasks	29%	19%	29%	19%	28%	21%	28%	20%	31%	20%	30%	18%	28%	22%
Compliance with education	11%	13%	12%	12%	5%	23%	11%	13%	12%	12%	13%	12%	10%	13%
Lifestyle-related outcomes (%)	Better	Worse	Better	Worse	Better	Worse	Better	Worse	Better	Worse	Better	Worse	Better	Worse
Find desired environment	85%	3%	85%	3%	89%	5%	84%	3%	86%	2%	83%	3%	87%	2%
Pursue hobbies	56%	20%	55%	19%	63%	21%	58%	17%	53%	22%	55%	21%	57%	18%
Spend time as family	73%	3%	73%	4%	79%	2%	73%	4%	74%	3%	72%	5%	74%	2%
Afford desired house	82%	3%	83%	3%	77%	3%	80%	3%	84%	3%	79%	3%	85%	3%
Stress from daily life	57%	9%	56%	10%	66%	6%	57%	9%	57%	10%	57%	10%	56%	9%
Satisfaction levels (%)														
Overall satisfaction (fairly satisfied)	25%		26%		19%		25%		25%		24%		27%	
Overall satisfaction (very satisfied)	66%		66%		71%		65%		68%		68%		64%	
Overall satisfaction (total)	91%		92%		90%		90%		93%		92%		91%	

sample size, we applied Pearson's chi-square test and Cramer's V to test the significance of our results. Therefore, all the interpretations given in Table 2 in the next section are statistically significant according to these tests. Lastly, the table also reveals individually indicated overall satisfaction levels for each group.

Our first model is a multinomial logistic regression, where the dependent variable is the type of region. The base outcome is a mid-sized town because this type is the closest to metropolitan areas in the urban hierarchy in terms of both work and lifestyle-related features. Using the same individual characteristics, along with the metropolitan origin, we have added two important independent variables: 'work-related motivations' and 'lifestyle-related motivations', to investigate how different motivations have an impact on the selection of place. We used this model, together with the descriptive statistics, to investigate how individual characteristics and aspirations influence the choices made by families with regard to our first research question so that, in further models, we can observe how their motives correspond to post-migration outcomes. In other words, this procedure was employed to evaluate the success of their migration in relation to different pursuits.

Then, we have employed two OLS regressions using the indices created for work-related and lifestyle-related gains as dependent variables with auxiliary extensions. Firstly, we have a model that sets motives and individual characteristics with metropolitan origin as independent variables. In the second step, we added the regional characteristics of the destinations and a dummy for moving to surrounding municipalities. Finally, we introduced lifestyle-related outcomes into the work-related outcome model and vice versa. These are to determine whether there is a trade-off between the two types of gains or whether the counterurban movers can cherish both amenities at the same time without any sacrifice. Keeping in mind that correlation does not mean causation, we hypothesise that both work and lifestyle are inseparable components of an individual's daily life, and we expect them to have a parallel impact on each other, regardless of the place. Meanwhile, when we consider the type of regions, we also hypothesise that, as we move down the urban hierarchy, we expect lifestyle-related amenities to become more significant, and vice versa for work-related amenities.

Lastly, we have used another multinomial logistic regression where the categorical variable is 'gain', which takes values from 0 for those losing in terms of both outcomes as the base outcome to 3 as net gainers in both. Our independent variables are individual characteristics, metropolitan origin and municipality type with a dummy for municipalities bordering metropolitan areas. This enables us to explore the comparative impact of the two different types of outcome and overall gaining and losing. Therefore, our last model gives us possible trade-offs for different counterurban movers.

5. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 1, below, shows the individual characteristics and motivations of different sub-groups. All the statistics except the 'total' column are calculated according to the normalised sample, in which all the respondents answered all our relevant questions. The motivations indirectly enable us to gain a first indication of trade-offs between outcomes. The first salient fact is that more than 90% of the households are wage-employed, and these are significantly more highly educated than the self-employed households. However, the self-employed are more prone to voluntarily sacrifice household income in favour of lifestyle-related outcomes. This is in line with the emphasis on motivations; whereas labour-market-related motivations are slightly more important for the wage-employed, both in terms of the respondent and the partner, all five major lifestyle-related motivations are more important for the self-employed.

The sample consists of equal numbers of men and women. The proportion of women having a high education level is more than 10 percentage points higher than for men, while men have

higher earnings both before and after migration. The proportion of women retaining their previous job is around 13 percentage points lower than that of men. Both work and lifestyle-related motivations are more important for female respondents, which is unexpected according to mainstream human capital model. However, this gap becomes greater when respondents are asked about the importance of the work of their partner as a motivation behind migration, with women tending to cite their partner's work as a motive more often than men do. Return migrants make up more than one quarter of our population. We see that return migrants are the most educated sub-group and they are earning more than newcomers, both before and after migration. In addition, this group is less likely to keep the same job as before the move. This result is consistent because the importance of work-related motivations, both for respondents and partners, is higher among return migrants than among newcomers. If we look at the lifestyle-related motivations, there is a slight difference, in that newcomers are more likely to state lifestyle-related pursuits.

In terms of regional aspects, we see that more than 60% of our counterurban movers have their metropolitan origins in Stockholm and, among these, self-employment is overrepresented compared to the other two metropolitan areas, Gothenburg and Malmö. This coincides with previous evidence on the advantage held by larger cities in terms of entrepreneurship over smaller regions due to more diverse human capital composition and a wider range of available skills (Martynovich, 2017; Roca & Puga, 2017). Another significant result is that almost a quarter of our sample end up in municipalities that share a border with a metropolitan municipality. This might be interpreted as a considerable proportion of our movers choosing a destination in close geographical proximity to the metropolitan areas.

Figure 1 gives an overall picture, illustrating the comparison of distributions between outcomes in aggregate terms, according to which the values for work-related outcomes are more or less uniformly distributed around the mean value of zero, while the distribution for lifestyle outcomes is negatively skewed with a mean value higher than 5 points. Table 2 presents respondent-indicated outcomes, plus overall satisfaction levels. To interpret work-related outcomes, in general, we see that more respondents indicating a better rather than a worse salary and interesting work tasks, while the opposite is true for career opportunities. For the majority, compatibility with education is unaffected by moving as only around one in ten reported better or worse outcomes. However, there is a strong improvement in lifestyle-related amenities, with 91 percent of respondents indicating high satisfaction levels overall. When we compare sub-groups with their counterparts, self-employed individuals have significantly worse outcomes in terms of all work-related outcomes except 'interesting work tasks', which is insignificant. Looking at the lifestyle-related outcomes, affordability of housing is worse for the self-employed, and

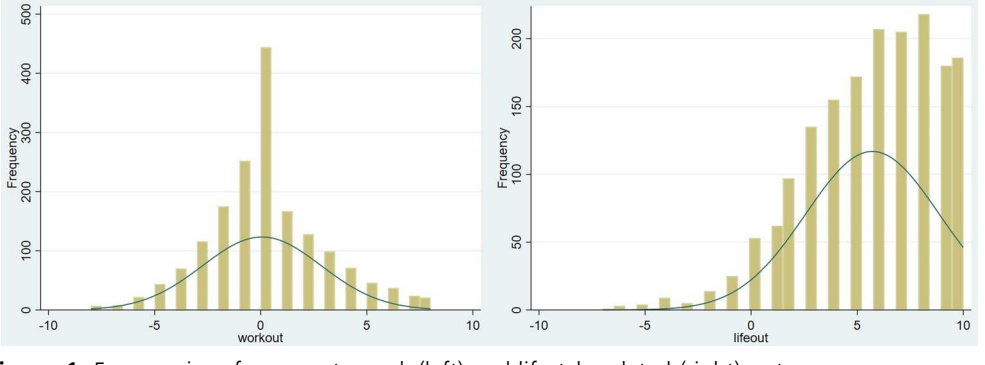

Figure 1. Frequencies of aggregate work (left) and lifestyle-related (right) outcome scores.

this fact is understandable because affordability is expected to be strongly dependent on salary. However, self-employed households have significantly better opportunities to pursue their hobbies, and are dealing with less stress than their wage-employed counterparts.

Women indicate better work-related outcomes than men. Also, women are more inclined to indicate that they have achieved their desired environment and housing than men, and the only lifestyle-related outcome that is lower than that of men is the opportunity to pursue their hobbies, although, here too, more than 50% of women indicate an improvement. Meanwhile, it is worth highlighting that women reveal the greatest overall satisfaction level, at 93 percent, when compared to other groups. These results contradict previous mainstream literature, which suggests that women are tied migrants and lose out in favour of overall family gains, with the gains of their partner predicted to exceed their losses. Lastly, despite significant salary gains for return migrants, the compatibility of their work with their education is lower than that of newcomers. In lifestyle terms, return migrants are better off in terms of desired environment and housing than their counterparts.

6. REGRESSION RESULTS

The results of our first regression are shown in Table 3, below, and give a hint about choice of destination in relation to individual characteristics. The most important result in this regression is that, as we move down the urban hierarchy, work-related aspirations fade away and lifestyle-related aspirations become more dominant and significant. This means that places higher in the urban hierarchy are more associated with labour-market motivations, whereas smaller regions are expected to yield better lifestyle-related outcomes. While neither previous income level before the move nor gender has any significant impact on the selection of place, highly educated people tend to choose larger local labour markets. This might be a reinforcing result for the claim that highly educated people are looking for better work-related outcomes. While return migrants seem to be more likely to choose destinations in the upper part of the urban hierarchy, i.e., mid-sized towns, we find evidence that working-aged people in the later stages of their working life are more likely to choose smaller labour markets. This suggests that people who are no longer at the beginning of their career are more likely to prefer to downshift within the labour-market in favour or cherishing rural amenities, such as recreational activities or a rural idyll, whereas younger human capital tend to choose destinations in larger places, as we hypothesised. Furthermore, self-employed individuals are also strongly associated with smaller places. Keeping the same job after the move is associated with commuting municipalities. Lastly, the distribution of households from different metropolitan origins follows the same pattern of counterurban hierarchy in terms of population, i.e., as we move down from Stockholm (largest) to Malmö (smallest), we see that households from larger metropolitan areas are over-represented in the upper urban hierarchy, and vice versa. Therefore, we can conclude that regions higher in the urban hierarchy attract younger and more qualified workers who are mostly return migrants from the capital, Stockholm, and relatively more interested in labour-market-related amenities as wage-employed workers than their counterparts. This step-by-step tendency turns out to be the opposite as we move down the urban hierarchy.

Our second regression is an OLS model for work-related outcomes (Table 4), along with extended estimations considering regional impacts and lifestyle-related outcomes as additional independent variables. Our models are significant overall and the first variable we have is the work-related motivations of the household. As expected, this is our most significant independent variable, which means that work-related expectations are strongly met as better outcomes. Secondly, we observe that partners might have opposing interests and outcomes, which could be interpreted as an intra-family trade-off. The dummy variable for women is insignificant in all our models in Table 4.

Table 3. Multinomial logistic regression for the selection of place (Model 1).

Destination	Model 1	
Mid-sized town	*Base outcome*	
Commuting municipality		
Work-related motives	−0.361***	(0.14)
Lifestyle-related motives	0.093***	(0.02)
Log-income before move	0.114	(0.10)
Woman	0.142	(0.14)
High education	−0.622***	(0.18)
Return migrant	−0.548***	(0.14)
Self-employed	0.096	(0.28)
Keeping same work	0.840***	(0.15)
Age	−0.398***	(0.13)
Age squared	0.005***	(0.00)
Metropolitan origin		
Stockholm	*Reference*	
Gothenburg	0.267	(0.17)
Malmö	0.834***	(0.21)
Constant	4.727*	(2.68)
Small town		
Work-related motives	−0.201	(0.13)
Lifestyle-related motives	0.094***	(0.02)
Log-income before move	0.047	(0.09)
Woman	0.037	(0.13)
High education	−0.243	(0.18)
Return migrant	0.189	(0.13)
Self-employed	0.851***	(0.25)
Keeping same work	0.209	(0.16)
Age	−0.098	(0.13)
Age squared	0.002	(0.00)
Metropolitan origin		
Stockholm	*Reference*	
Gothenburg	0.547***	(0.16)
Malmö	0.985***	(0.20)
Constant	−1.062	(2.75)
Rural		
Work-related motives	−0.479***	(0.16)
Lifestyle-related motives	0.215***	(0.03)
Log-income before move	0.084	(0.10)
Woman	0.038	(0.16)
High education	−0.492**	(0.20)
Return migrant	−0.331**	(0.16)
Self-employed	1.095***	(0.27)
Keeping same work	0.210	(0.18)
Age	−0.387***	(0.14)
Age squared	0.005***	(0.00)
Metropolitan origin		
Stockholm	*Reference*	
Gothenburg	0.707***	(0.19)
Malmö	1.028***	(0.23)
Constant	2.024	(2.97)

(*Continued*)

Table 3. Continued.

Destination	Model 1
Pseudo R-squared	0.05
Log-likelihood	−2184.4053
N	1721

Notes: * Denotes $p < 0.10$, ** denotes $p < 0.05$ and *** denotes $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are shown in parantheses. $p > \chi 2 = 0.000$ indicates that the model is jointly significant.

Table 4. OLS models for work-related outcomes.

Work-related outcomes	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Work-related motives (respondent)	1.080*** (0.15)	1.081*** (0.15)	1.102*** (0.15)
Work-related motives (partner)	−0.324** (0.15)	−0.317** (0.15)	−0.307** (0.15)
Lifestyle-related motives	0.037* (0.02)	0.043* (0.02)	0.145*** (0.03)
Woman	−0.015 (0.14)	−0.018 (0.14)	−0.035 (0.14)
High education	−0.592*** (0.17)	−0.588*** (0.17)	−0.548*** (0.17)
Return migrant	−0.168 (0.13)	−0.085 (0.13)	−0.059 (0.13)
Self-employed	−0.826*** (0.23)	−0.760*** (0.24)	−0.758*** (0.24)
Keeping same work	−0.462*** (0.16)	−0.609*** (0.16)	−0.642*** (0.16)
Income quartiles			
1	*Reference*	*Reference*	*Reference*
2	−0.191 (0.19)	−0.187 (0.19)	−0.161 (0.19)
3	−0.523*** (0.19)	−0.495*** (0.19)	−0.490*** (0.19)
4	−0.775*** (0.19)	−0.750*** (0.19)	−0.732*** (0.19)
Metropolitan origin			
Stockholm	*Reference*	*Reference*	*Reference*
Gothenburg	0.818*** (0.16)	0.806*** (0.16)	0.768*** (0.16)
Malmö	0.879*** (0.19)	0.937*** (0.19)	0.767*** (0.20)
Type of region			
Mid-sized town		*Reference*	*Reference*
Commuting municipality		0.005 (0.18)	0.004 (0.18)
Small town		−0.322* (0.17)	−0.303* (0.17)
Rural		−0.122 (0.20)	−0.126 (0.20)
Surrounding municipality		0.491*** (0.18)	0.388** (0.18)
Lifestyle-related outcomes			−0.147*** (0.04)
Constant	−0.089 (0.43)	−0.187 (0.43)	0.044 (0.43)
R-squared	0.09	0.10	0.10
N	1731	1724	1724

Notes: * denotes $p < 0.10$, ** denotes $p < 0.05$ and *** denotes $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are shown in parantheses. $p > F = 0.000$ indicates that the models are jointly significant.

High educational level is associated with slightly worse work-related outcomes compared to lower education. It is, however, worth noticing further that most of our respondents, around 82%, are highly educated and there is not much variation between them. Higher income quartiles are also associated with negative outcomes, in addition to the results for high educational level. Having ties and becoming accustomed to the region have no significant impact in any of the work-related outcome models. Meanwhile, self-employment and retaining the same job are strongly associated with worse outcomes. Also, having a metropolitan origin in Gothenburg or Malmö is associated with better work-related outcomes.

Our auxiliary regressions suggest that the type of destination region itself does not have any significant impact on work-related outcomes, except for bordering municipalities. Moving to

these municipalities yields better work-related outcomes in overall terms, when controlling for the negative effect of retaining the same workplace. Introducing lifestyle-related outcomes leads to a significant negative sign, indicating individual trade-offs between lifestyle and work-related outcomes. However, having lifestyle-related motivations is positively associated with work-related outcomes, indicating that there is no general contradiction between lifestyle motives and work-related outcomes.

Table 5, below, consists of three OLS models for lifestyle-related outcomes, as explained in the methods section. Model 5 includes individual characteristics and both lifestyle-related and work-related motivations of both respondent and partner. Regional characteristics are added in Model 6 and work-related outcomes are introduced in Model 7. As expected, lifestyle-related motivations have the most significantly positive impact on outcomes. Women do not have worse outcomes in any of the models. Therefore, as they experience no significant overall work-related loss, women also encounter no deterioration in any lifestyle-related outcomes when compared to men. We remember from the descriptive statistics that women were more eager to obtain lifestyle-related gains than men, but we do not see significantly better outcomes compared to men. Work-related motivations are positively associated with lifestyle-related outcomes and when we introduce work-related outcomes in Model 7 the motivations variable becomes more significant and stronger. This reinforces our hypothesis that a group of pursuits can also yield better outcomes in other types of amenities.

Table 5. OLS models for lifestyle-related outcomes.

Lifestyle-related outcomes	**Model 5**	**Model 6**	**Model 7**
Lifestyle-related motives	0.697*** (0.01)	0.696*** (0.01)	0.698*** (0.01)
Work-related motives (respondent)	0.207** (0.09)	0.186** (0.09)	0.244*** (0.09)
Woman	−0.142 (0.09)	−0.113 (0.09)	−0.115 (0.09)
High education	0.281** (0.11)	0.269** (0.11)	0.232** (0.11)
Return migrant	0.291*** (0.09)	0.177** (0.09)	0.172** (0.09)
Self-employed	0.097 (0.15)	0.016 (0.15)	0.032 (0.15)
Keeping same work	−0.425*** (0.10)	−0.224** (0.10)	−0.262** (0.10)
Income quartile			
1	*Reference*	*Reference*	*Reference*
2	0.156 (0.12)	0.176 (0.12)	0.165 (0.12)
3	0.064 (0.13)	0.037 (0.13)	0.005 (0.13)
4	0.158 (0.13)	0.120 (0.13)	0.074 (0.13)
Metopolitan origin			
Stockholm	*Reference*	*Reference*	*Reference*
Gothenburg	−0.299*** (0.11)	−0.259** (0.11)	−0.208** (0.11)
Malmö	−1.109*** (0.13)	−1.157*** (0.13)	−1.097*** (0.13)
Type of region			
Mid-sized town		*Reference*	*Reference*
Commuting municipality		−0.067 (0.12)	−0.066 (0.12)
Small town		0.123 (0.11)	0.103 (0.11)
Rural		−0.021 (0.13)	−0.029 (0.13)
Surrounding municipality		−0.702*** (0.12)	−0.671*** (0.12)
Work-related outcomes			−0.063*** (0.02)
Constant	0.809*** (0.28)	0.984*** (0.28)	0.969*** (0.28)
R-squared	0.60	0.61	0.62
N	1731	1724	1724

Notes: * Denotes $p < 0.10$, ** denotes $p < 0.05$ and *** denotes $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are shown in parentheses. $p > F = 0.000$ indicates that the models are jointly significant.

Furthermore, highly educated individuals significantly improved their lifestyle-related gains compared to people with a lower educational level. We previously saw their losses in work-related outcomes but now it seems as though this is partly due to a trade-off between amenities. Being a return migrant increases the likelihood of experiencing better lifestyle-related gains, as expected. When it comes to the impact of income, the highest income quartile is associated with better lifestyle outcomes. Retaining the same job gives relatively worse outcomes than starting a new job at the destination.

In contrast to work-related outcomes, migrants with their origins in Stockholm metropolitan area report better lifestyle-related outcomes than those from Gothenburg or Malmö. Therefore, we can say that there is a trade-off between amenities among the metropolitan hierarchy, i.e., Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö, ranked from the largest to the smallest. Regarding destination region, again we see no impact from any of our types of regions apart from surrounding municipalities. Moving to surrounding municipalities is also associated with a trade-off between outcomes when compared to their counterparts who move further away from metropolitan areas.

The results of our last multinomial logistic regression, shown in Table 6, suggests that the only group systematically losing out in both types of outcome are those retaining their previous workplace after migration. While return migrants, entrepreneurs and highly-educated individuals seem to be equally represented in both categories, women seem to be overrepresented as the net gainers in both types of outcome. While differences in socioeconomic levels do not have a statistically significant impact, originating in a smaller metropolitan area, especially Malmö, is associated with a trade-off in favour of work-related outcomes. This result is consistent with the hypothesis that larger cities yield better economic outcomes (Roca & Puga, 2017; Combes et al., 2012); therefore, labour-market pursuits and gains could be expected to be relatively higher for individuals moving from a smaller metropolitan area. Also, moving to a municipality adjacent to a metropolitan area is associated with a bilateral trade-off between outcomes since the sign of having a net gain in both outcomes is significantly negative. Lastly, rural areas yield better results for both types of outcome, which can be interpreted as meaning that the most rural end of the urban hierarchy is associated with relatively more favourable outcomes compared to other types of region. This result, along with a higher mean for lifestyle-related outcomes, reinforces the previous evidence that counterurban migration in Sweden mostly consists of lifestyle migration. Nevertheless, when we extend labour-market pursuits to non-pecuniary gains, such as more interesting work tasks and compatibility with educational background, this result contradicts the assumption that smaller places are associated with lower labour-market gains.

7. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Although this study has focused on individual gains from counterurban migration, the results provide some input to regional perspectives on counterurbanisation processes by directing the spotlight towards aspects of the regional relocation of labour and the labour-market outcomes of counterurban movers. The counterurban moving couples in our study are to a large extent highly educated professionals who could potentially provide an important inflow to smaller local labour markets. In general, many of those who move down the urban hierarchy seem to find suitable positions in their new local labour markets, with interesting work tasks and good compatibility with education. However, the average score on the work-related outcomes index is lower among highly educated individuals and among those who were in the higher income quartiles before the move. This could be because those in higher positions in the metropolitan labour-market before the move perceive a larger gap in aspects such as career opportunities in their current smaller, less diversified local labour market. This means that the results

Table 6. Multinomial logistic regression for the trade-offs between amenities.

Destination	Model 1	
Work – Lifestyle – base outcome		
Work + Lifestyle –		
Woman	−0.170	(0.31)
High education	0.240	(0.43)
Return migrant	−0.008	(0.30)
Self-employed	0.827	(0.80)
Keeping same work	−1.924	(0.44)
Income quartile		
1	*Reference*	
2	−0.899*	(0.40)
3	−0.348	(0.42)
4	−0.532	(0.46)
Metropolitan origin		
Stockholm	*Reference*	
Gothenburg	0.881**	(0.37)
Malmö	1.155***	(0.38)
Type of region		
Mid-sized town	*Reference*	
Commuting municipality	−0.284	(0.41)
Small town	−0.127	(0.39)
Rural	−1.450***	(0.53)
Surrounding municipality	−0.257	(0.39)
Constant	−0.463	(0.57)
Work – Lifestyle +		
Woman	0.185	(0.22)
High education	−0.057	(0.26)
Return migrant	−0.302	(0.21)
Self-employed	−0.140	(0.39)
Keeping same work	−0.380*	(0.22)
Income quartile		
1	*Reference*	
2	−0.286	(0.30)
3	0.243	(0.31)
4	0.362	(0.32)
Metropolitan origin		
Stockholm	*Reference*	
Gothenburg	0.045	(0.25)
Malmö	0.348	(0.27)
Type of region		
Mid-sized town	*Reference*	
Commuting municipality	0.117	(0.26)
Small town	0.280	(0.27)
Rural	1.089**	(0.45)
Surrounding municipality	−0.270	(0.24)
Constant	0.802**	(0.39)
Work + Lifestyle +		
Woman	0.417**	(0.19)
High education	−0.009	(0.23)
Return migrant	−0.093	(0.19)

(*Continued*)

Table 6. Continued.

Destination	Model 1	
Self-employed	0.229	(0.34)
Keeping same work	−1.130	(0.20)
Income quartile		
1	*Reference*	
2	−0.387	(0.26)
3	−0.043	(0.28)
4	0.073	(0.28)
Metropolitan origin		
Stockholm	*Reference*	
Gothenburg	−0.202	(0.22)
Malmö	−0.914***	(0.24)
Type of region		
Mid-sized town	*Reference*	
Commuting municipality	0.189	(0.23)
Small town	0.355	(0.23)
Rural	1.615***	(0.42)
Surrounding municipality	−0.549***	(0.21)
Constant	2.424***	(0.35)
Pseudo R-squared	0.07	
Log-likelihood	−1439.2222	
N	1724	

Notes: *Denotes $p < 0.10$, ** denotes $p < 0.05$ and *** denotes $p < 0.01$. Standard errors are shown in parentheses. $p > \chi 2 = 0.000$ indicates that the model is jointly significant.

deviate from the mainstream human capital model (Mincer, 1974) when studying counterurban migration compared to other types of interregional migration.

Our results suggest that self-employed individuals, i.e., entrepreneurs, are associated with lower urban hierarchy destinations and with stronger lifestyle-related motives. Lifestyle aspirations seem to be achieved, although members of this group obtain less than their wage-employed counterparts in terms of work-related outcomes. This could be a beneficial outcome from both an individual and a regional perspective because, while the self-employed individuals achieved what they wanted, smaller regions also appreciate the human capital arriving from metropolitan regions, who can yield beneficial outcomes in terms of new skills and amenities brought from larger cities, as previous studies have suggested (Martynovich, 2017; Roca & Puga, 2017). We did not find any evidence of negative labour-market or lifestyle-related outcomes for women compared to men among the couples studied. Equal gains for women and men confirm previous studies of gender differences in self-reported work-related migration outcomes (Gillespie et al., 2021) and register income (Brandén, 2013a). In terms of overall satisfaction levels, our study of counterurban migrating couples finds that women may even benefit more than men from their migration experience. This is one important contribution of our work to the relevant literature. Also, confining the gender gap solely to the pay gap might be misleading because both internal motivations – such as interesting work tasks or better compatibility of work with education – and non-pecuniary external motivations – such as more career opportunities – should be counted as important determinants of a healthy working life. Further research could investigate whether there is a gender difference whereby men do not gain as much as women from interregional migration in the case of counterurban moves compared to other types of migration and whether women, hence, have less to lose in terms of career from moving down the urban hierarchy. Regarding return migrants, our findings suggest that, while not

losing in labour-market terms, return migrants, especially highly educated ones, are the sub-group with the greatest and most significant lifestyle-related outcomes. A probable reason for this, as documented by Sandow and Lundholm (2023), is family-related motives, which played a significant role, as also suggested by Gillespie et al. (2021).

Considering the regional characteristics, we see that the type of region alone is insufficient to explain any of the outcomes, but it seems as though the aspirations of different sub-groups are coded into different types of region within the urban hierarchy, as the logistic regression suggests. However, our results show that rural areas are associated with the net aggregate gains category. While the bordering municipalities category significantly portrays the characteristics of the higher urban hierarchy in terms of better work-related outcomes over lifestyle-related ones, this is reasonable because these regions can be considered extensions of metropolitan areas, being within commuting distance. Furthermore, when we control for the metropolitan origins of the households, we see a clear pattern that, as we move down the metropolitan hierarchy, work-related outcomes yield better results, while the opposite applies for lifestyle-related outcomes. This follows a similar pattern to the counterurban hierarchy in terms of the expectations and aspirations of households. So, we might claim that the relative outcomes are due to the interactions between individual and regional characteristics. Additionally, while labour markets are more or less steady and limited within different types of region and individuals tend to have an idea about these labour markets and choose among various sectors, the lifestyles in different types of region are more complex and depend on the preferences and aspirations of individual households. In other words, individuals experience more limitations and less freedom in the labour market but more flexibility and choices when it comes to lifestyle. Work entails more obligations than lifestyle, therefore leisure and lifestyle more accurately represent the individuals and their self-realisation. This might be a reason behind the dominance of lifestyle-related pursuits over work-related pursuits, or individuals who are willing to trade labour-market gains in favour of lifestyle-related gains.

We also saw that an important proportion of the income lost in favour of lifestyle-related pursuits was voluntary, i.e., strategic, and the mean score for lifestyle-related outcomes is six points higher than the mean for labour-market-related outcomes. Making a voluntary trade-off between work and lifestyle seems to be associated with self-employment, a sub-group experiencing relatively less favourable work-related outcomes than the wage-employed. Those retaining the same workplace are estimated to gain fewer benefits from both types of outcome and are overrepresented in the group who experienced loss in both outcomes. A probable reason could be that retaining the same workplace is associated with longer commutes and this seems to have a negative effect on the perceived outcomes of the move. This effect becomes significantly stronger for those in municipalities bordering metropolitan regions, as expected. This also illustrates the challenge in attempting to delimit the phenomenon of counterurban migration using administrative borders to capture those who leave the metropolitan area. One limitation of our study is confining the concept of counterurban migration solely to individuals moving from metropolitan regions to non-metropolitan regions. Further research could investigate different patterns of counterurban migration, such as via a counterurban cascade matrix, including counterurban migration from sub-metropolitan areas to relatively smaller regions. In addition, an inquiry into how working-life arrangements such as commuting or remote working function, not only as facilitators of counterurban migration, but also as aspects that affect the outcome of counterurban moves, could be an enlightening avenue for further studies.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, EL, upon reasonable request.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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ORCID

Sarper Neyse http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2931-4372
Emma Lundholm http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2014-7179

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