There and back again?
Dutch lifestyle migrants moving to rural Sweden
in the early 21st century

av

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Abstract


This thesis has a twofold aim. First, it studies motivations and decision processes of Dutch families moving to rural Sweden, with a focus on Hällefors municipality in the Bergslagen area. Second, it explores how this migration flow can be conceptualised within migration theory. The results of the study are presented in four papers.

The migrants’ characteristics are explored using variables from the Bergslagen Database. This is complemented with data from interviews with municipality officials, project leaders and Dutch families in rural Sweden. The theoretical framework consists of literature on counterurbanisation, the creative class thesis and lifestyle migration. The creative class thesis has inspired many rural place marketing projects and efforts to attract the ‘right type’ of people to stimulate rural development. Based on the interview study, I argue that lifestyle migration research offers most apt insights into the act of migration within the wider life trajectories of these Dutch families.

The thesis offers new empirical data that suggest amendments to be made to the academic definition of lifestyle migration. Additional contributions consider the novel geographic direction of the migration flow (northwards), the destination (a deprived area) and the structure framing the decision process; a local authority and its deliberate attempts to attract new residents from abroad. The findings suggest transcending four binaries. First, in the context of an integrating EU, the thesis adds international dimensions to the initial story of internal counterurbanisation. Second, these flexibly mobile families transcend and combine issues of urbanity and rurality through access-facilitating technology and cheap means of long distance transport. Third, this study reiterates the importance of production as a complement to consumption in lifestyle migration research. Finally, the thesis adds dynamic issues of transience to the static permanent-temporary binary of migration.

*Keywords*: lifestyle migration, international counterurbanisation, creative class, place marketing, Emigration Expo, Bergslagen Database, interview study, Dutch families, rural Sweden, 21st century.

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