



## ARTICLE

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# The class structure of rural-to-urban migration

The case of Norway

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### Abstract

This article discusses the rural-to-urban migration of young people in Norway from a class perspective: To what extent do youth in different social classes have distinct migration patterns? Based on data from the decennial Norwegian Censuses (1960–90) and the Norwegian Migration Register (the Generation Database), the analysis traces the migration pattern of all Norwegians born in 1965 who grew up in a rural part of the country. The theoretical point of departure is a hypothesis that young people from better-off rural families are the most likely to leave the countryside in favour of a more urban life, particularly to take-up educational opportunities. This proposition is substantiated by the empirical analysis in the article, and is explained by the tendency of inter-generational reproduction of social class status and lifestyles, which encourages members of rural upper classes to migrate to urban areas, to a greater extent than among young people in the lower social classes.

### Keywords

class, migration, rural-to-urban migration, youth, Norway

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Norway, like most other modern capitalist societies, has in recent decades experienced substantial de-population in remote rural areas in favour of population concentration in more urban areas. Rural youth have contributed notably to the migration flows from the countryside to the cities, as many migrate to cities to find work or education. This persistent 'emptying' of the countryside is usually evaluated in negative terms, as it depletes rural societies of human resources (for an overview, see Stockdale, 2004). Development of sustainable rural regions and rural populations has become a political objective in many countries, and especially so in Norway (The Countryside Commission, 2004; White Papers 1996/97 and 1999/2000) and in other Nordic countries (Hanell et al., 2002). Large quantities of public funding have been transferred to rural areas in order to strengthen their economic viability and thereby slow down the rural-to-urban migration streams.

Much public funding has also been directed towards the social sciences in order to obtain better understanding of — and preferably identify appropriate means to reverse — the social processes that generate rural-to-urban migration. One result is the production of a substantial body of literature on rural-to-urban migration (see Boyle et al., 1998; for an overview of Norwegian literature, see Orderud, 1998), including studies of *who* the rural migrants are and what their *causes* for migration were. Particular attention is given to the migration of rural youth along the rural-to-urban dimension, as their migration practices have the strongest long-term consequences for rural societies. Rural youth migration practices have also been of interest within general youth research as their choices about out-migration have direct effects on life projects relating to the quality of life for rural youth (Rye, 2006a).

Many theoretical perspectives have been employed in these studies. However, in this article we will direct attention towards an explicit *class perspective* on rural youth migration, which to a large extent seems to have been neglected within this field of study (Fielding, 1992). This may be attributable to a range of reasons. Generally, traditional class-based analysis has received less attention in recent decades within the social sciences in favour of a focus on cultural factors, the so-called 'cultural turn' (Cloke, 1997). This is especially true in studies of rural societies, which have often been considered to be less marked by class conflict than their urban counterparts. Thus, rural societies have often been described as genuinely harmonious communities (Bell, 1992; Cloke, 1997; Murdoch and Pratt, 1993) and rural people's sense of 'togetherness' has been considered a defining element of the rural (Almås, 1995: 24). A common impression, for example as described by Sørhaug (1984, quoted in Wiborg, 1996: 19), is that 'the rural is characterized by social density and stability, interwoven social net-works and a fundamental idea of equality' (our translation). In a similar vein, Arnljot Løseth (1991) claims that the literature on social relations in rural areas has contributed to the idealizing of rural equality, thereby covering up the actual inequalities that do exist in rural communities, in the same way that lay rural people of all strata in the rural social structure seem to downplay conflicts and inequalities that exist in their communities. Paul Cloke and Nigel Thrift are critical of this understanding of the countryside and they claim that:

An understanding of social stratification in rural communities has been impeded by a neglect of class-based analysis. ... This aversion to notions of class reflects rural ideology which traditionally presents the countryside as an essentially classless society even if an unequal and hierarchical one. (1990: 165)

This harmonious model of rural life has also influenced rural-to-urban migration research. Few studies that have focused on class-related differences in migration practices have been undertaken in recent decades. If discussed at all, class is usually approached indirectly by way of analyses of lifestyle differences within the rural youth population. For example, Kåre Heggen et al. (2001) refer to studies by Gunnar Jørgensen (1994), Frøydis Eidheim (1993), Viggo Vestel (1996) and Peter Waara (1993), all of which identify distinct rural youth cultures in their study areas, and conclude that:

Much indicates that these differences follow a social divide, or conflict line, where extremes are established between an in-migrant middle social class and, on the other side, more traditional rural values related to locally rooted industry and the primary sectors [our translation]. (Heggen et al., 2001: 14)

Other studies have suggested similar divides among rural youth (for example, Fosso, 2004; Rye, 2006a; Skogen, 1999). However, most of these are in-depth qualitative analyses of rural youth cultures, where the relationship between class and migration behaviour is only one among a number of aspects that are studied. Researchers have more rarely approached the class-migration relationship directly, and even less frequently have they investigated it from a quantitative approach which allows for an assessment of aggregated differences in the migration patterns among young people drawn from different class levels (see literature review later for an overview).

In this article we will address this shortcoming by employing a class perspective and analysing the class status of the rural out-migrants from a quantitative angle: Is rural-to-urban migration primarily a strategy for young people drawn from particular layers of the rural class structure?

Another, and far more pragmatic, explanation of the lack of class-related studies within rural sociology, which is of special relevance for migration studies that inherently beg for longitudinal methodological designs, has been the lack of appropriate data sources which allow for thorough analyses of the relationship between geographical and social mobility (see Boyle et al., 1998). In particular, it has been difficult to estimate the impact of parents' social status on their offspring's future migration careers. However, this limitation has begun to fall away, at least in the Norwegian case, as new opportunities to link detailed public longitudinal migration and Census registers, even inter-generationally, have provided many new and appropriate empirical data sets with which to work (see the section on material and methods). In this article we utilize these data to investigate the class dimension of rural youth migration by analysing whether fathers' social class status — defined by income and educational levels — influences their offspring's migration choices.

Thus, the research question of the article is as follows: Is migration from rural-to-urban areas class structured, meaning that do young people from different class fractions, as measured by their fathers' class status (income and educational levels), choose different migration careers?

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Literature reviews of migration research propose various typologies by which to categorize the many different studies within the field (for example, Boyle et al.,

1998; Shrestha, 1988), but one of the main divisions seems to be between macro-oriented and micro-oriented approaches (Boyle et al., 1998; Grimsrud, 2000; Orderud, 1998). The first category consists of studies that focus on larger social structures, and attempt to explain migration patterns as results of migration streams between regions with different characteristics due to uneven development processes. This may be undertaken from an economic perspective, for example, by analysing career migration between regional labour markets, studying the impact of regional wage imbalances, or more generally, the relationship between migration patterns and a number of economic parameters like booms and recessions (Carling, 1999). Other macro, and often structuralist, studies take a broader sociological perspective, as in the restructuring literature. Marxist and neo-Marxist contributions fall in this category, as they consider migration a result of 'deep structural' processes in capitalist societies (for example, Fielding, 1992; Shrestha, 1988).

The micro perspective, on the other hand, individualizes migration streams by focusing on the migration decisions made by the actual actors. One important strand in this category is the behavioural approach, which can similarly be divided into economic and wider sociological sub-categories. For example, it has been common to understand migrants as people in search of better paid jobs and better living conditions. Many surveys of migration motives follow a behavioural approach as the authors attempt to understand the full range of considerations — economic as well as non-economic — which the migrant takes into account in deciding whether or not to migrate (for example, Nordic Council of Ministers, 2002; Statistics Norway, 1977).

More recently, in the wake of a 'cultural shift' in the social sciences, migration research based on humanist social theory has broadened this last perspective by taking the meaningful, reflexive and purposeful character of migrants' actions into account. This perspective has primarily been employed in studies of counter-urbanization (for example, Halfacree, 2002; Villa, 2000, 1999) but is equally useful for rural-to-urban migration studies. Rather than identifying causal mechanisms underlying migration, these studies attempt to understand the complex life process, of which the actors' migration actions are a part. Key to this tradition is understanding how actors interpret different locations, such as 'the rural' and 'the urban', both factually and normatively. For example, if women perceive the rural location as dominated by a male culture (Grimsrud, 2000) or if young people define rurality in terms of dullness (Villa, 2000), they are less likely to settle down in rural areas in order to realize their life projects.

In different ways, these perspectives provide useful insights into migration processes. Following Boyle et al. (1998), they are complementary rather than conflicting, and in this article we will combine elements from several of these perspectives. Employing a 'micro-structuralist' perspective we recognize that, on the one hand, migration should preferably be analysed from the actors' perspective, and by taking the individual's social constructions as a point of departure when trying to make sense of their migration practices. Migration acts need to be understood in terms of their meaning rather than explained in causal terms: people do not migrate because some structural properties force them to leave the countryside; rather, migration patterns are the aggregate, unintentional by-products of individual actors' meaningful and purposeful actions based on their social constructions of their surroundings. However,

at the same time, the actors' choices are influenced by their position in society at large. People's social constructions, their attitudes and actions are not randomly given but are influenced by their location in the social structure. For example, women socially construct their life-worlds differently than men and thus they also develop different migration practices. Rural girls, for instance, are more likely to emphasize the dullness of rural life rather than the idyllic version of the countryside (Rye, 2006c). The same holds true with regard to other structural characteristics such as ethnicity and age. In this article we will pursue this reasoning with an examination of whether, and to what extent, class position impacts on actors' migration practices.

Such a theoretical position draws heavily on *structuration theory* (Giddens, 1984) and other similar social theories (for example, Berger and Luckman, 1967) which emphasize the reciprocity of structures and actions in social analysis. However, Anthony Giddens in his later works emphasizes the voluntaristic element in social life and, in particular, disregards the significance of class as an important variable in understanding the systematic characteristics of actors' social constructions and of their life projects (in particular, Giddens, 1994. See also Rustin's [1995] critique of Giddens). As suggested in the introduction, we find this unfortunate. While such theories emphasize the individuals' freedom, many Nordic youth studies rather analyse migrants' identities in the context of their social, cultural and geographical background and how this implies constraints on the rural young people's identities and patterns of behaviour (Paulgaard, 2002; Waara, 1996, 2002). These studies question the limits of the individualization theses in contemporary societies. Within this tradition, some studies rather emphasize the concept of 'habitus', from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bærenholdt, 1998; Wiborg, 2001). Drawing on Bourdieu, who shares the vision of formulating a sociology that recognizes the inherent reciprocity of structures and actors, but doing so without resigning from class analysis (1984; see also Jenkins, 2002), we will further focus on how class status has an influence on the migration choices the actors make.

More concretely, we employ the actors' social background — as measured by fathers' income and education levels — to examine whether and to what extent different rural class fractions develop different migration practices.

Undoubtedly, this reflects a rather simplistic understanding of class matters in the social sciences. Class relations are about far more than one's father's income and educational levels. However, the empirical data available does not allow for more sophisticated measurement strategies. More importantly, the chosen indicators of class status, despite their simplicity, do capture the essence of class as understood within the Bourdieusian theoretical tradition. For example, Bourdieu uses similar indicators of class position in his works (1988; 1984). Further, although such narrow operationalizations may impede the empirical analysis, previous debates on measurement of social class have nevertheless demonstrated the robustness of social class indicators. As Ketil Skogen concludes, '[c]lass analysis is as much a question of what is practically feasible, as of what theoretical foundation we want to employ. Fortunately "good enough" class models usually generate results very similar to those obtained by more sophisticated measures' (1999: 99).

In any case, the intention of the present study is not to inquire in depth into the theoretical details of class and migration but to present an analysis which indicates to

what extent class-related variables such as fathers' education level and income may have affected actors' migration practices in the Norwegian case, and, if so, to indicate the structure of these impacts.

## WHO ARE THE MIGRANTS? EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Some migration studies have attempted to map how structural characteristics of migrants impact their migration practices. For example, we know that females migrate more often than males; that job seekers are more likely to migrate than others; that youths often migrate for educational motives; and that the most migratory age group consists of people in their twenties (for example, see Orderud, 1998). However, very few empirical studies have explicitly inquired into the class patterns in migration streams. This is even more so when the topic is limited to *rural-to-urban* migration. Still, there are some empirical results to be found in the literature that may shed some light on the research question posed here. In the following discussion, we focus on those studies that have employed quantitative research design to allow statistically valid analysis of the broader population and thus are the most relevant ones for the present study.

First, there are many migration studies which have examined the relationship between education and migration from rural areas. Basically, these studies show that education is a major driving force in migration (Coté, 1997; Fielding, 1992; Statistics Norway, 1977). This applies to young people who leave the countryside to enrol at higher education institutions, which are usually located in urban areas, and also to adults seeking urban labour markets to make the most of their formal qualifications. It is also well documented that young people, whether of rural or urban origin, tend to reproduce their parents' educational level. Taken together, this implies that offspring of well-educated rural parents are more likely to migrate than offspring of less educated rural people. However, we have so far found no previous studies that empirically document the detailed nature of this two-step relationship.

Very few studies have been carried out which investigate any direct causal relation between social class status, as measured by *one's parents' social background*, and migration careers. An exception is Guy Coté (1997). His analysis, based on British longitudinal data, indicates that non-migrants come from families in which the fathers have less than average education. Their fathers also have less prestigious occupations than the fathers of those who leave their place of origin.

In studies of the relation between one's *own social class position* and migration career, similar findings are recorded. Migration is more a middle-class than a working-class phenomenon, though the conclusions of different studies are ambiguous. Statistics Norway's migration motives survey in the 1970s found, for example, that people in the category of 'technical, scientific, humanist and artistic' occupations were over-represented among migrants, but so were those in manufacturing, construction, mining and quarrying (Statistics Norway, 1977). Coté's findings are also unclear at this point. However, they indicate that migrants — like their fathers — have higher wages and more education than non-migrants.

Ottar Brox (1984) found in his study of a rural community at the Norwegian coast that it was those in the lower *and* upper parts of the class pyramid who were most likely to depart for an urban destination. The former, and by far the largest, group left due to the absence of opportunities in their rural community. Having no ownership of land or other productive capital, their home locality offered few chances for employment. The latter group on the other hand left in response to attractive prospects in the city, where they could draw on their inherited capital resources and expect to join the urban middle class. Another study using empirical data from the same area (Nicholson, 1975) reaches slightly different results, concluding that persons from the primary sector are under-represented among the rural-to-urban migrants, while persons from the tertiary sector are more likely than average to leave the countryside.

The conclusion in Keith H. Halfacree and his colleagues' (1992) quantitative study of British migrants from different occupational groups may be representative, even though this study considers all kinds of migration. The authors note that:

[t]he relationship between occupation and migration seems to be more complex than earlier writers have suggested. The occupation groups most likely to be recent movers, apart from those who have never worked (many of whom are students), were 'other non-manual', semi-skilled manual workers, and office workers, with managerial, administrative and skilled manual workers being the least likely to have moved recently. (Halfacree et al., 1992: 168)

## SOURCES AND METHODS

The empirical analysis in this article is based on data from the so-called Generation Database (GD), which contains data from the decennial Norwegian censuses in 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990 for all Norwegians born in 1955, 1960, 1965 and so on. All routine census variables are included in the database, such as occupation, education, income and housing.

These data are further linked with data from the National Migration Register. This contains information on every single migration incident between the 435 municipalities in Norway. The average size of each municipality is 10,000 inhabitants. This makes it possible to trace the migration career of any individual at a very detailed level. Various other public registers are also linked, for example, the income register, the schooling register and the death register. The most important feature of the GD data set, however, is the link between data for any individual and their parents. This allows the tracing of inter-generational geographical and social mobility; in this case, the analysis of the relationship between social background, as measured by parents' social class position, and migration praxis.

No data set is perfect and there are, of course, weaknesses related to such public registers as those employed here; in each case the data has been collected for administrative rather than for scientific purposes. For instance, data on important variables are missing; 4 per cent of cases are excluded from the analysis altogether, as information on place of birth is missing. Additionally, there are no data on social background and educational attainment for 6 per cent and 2 per cent of cases,

respectively. However, the missing cases do not appear to follow a systematic pattern and should thus not influence the results. One must further take into account that the measurement of chosen indicators may be imprecise. For example, reported income may not equal actual purchasing power. Some persons, such as the self-employed, may lower their reported income level in response to tax rules. Others receive substantial fringe benefits from their employers which do not have to be reported in their tax returns, and some simply do not report their income at all. In short, there may be a considerable gap between *registered* income and real purchasing power. 'Years of schooling' may also be a deceptive indicator of educational attainment, as the 'content' of each year of schooling may vary. Data at hand nevertheless appear very reliable, largely due to what appears to be Norwegians' sense of duty and willingness to comply with the state's eagerness to map the lives of its citizens. No serious flaws of the GD data set have been discovered in the course of this study, or by other researchers who have employed the data for other purposes.

For the sake of clarity we have chosen to focus on a single birth cohort only, the 1965 cohort. The life careers of the subjects were traced up to the mid-1990s, when they reached the age of 30. At that age, most individuals were likely to have settled down, often with a family, and were more likely to migrate only sporadically during later stages of their lives (Boyle et al., 1998). Dead persons (3.1 per cent of the original birth cohort) were excluded from the analysis.

### Rural and urban

Any empirical analysis of rural-to-urban migration depends on which definition is employed to delimit the categories of 'rural' and 'urban'. We will not enter into this debate here. Rather, we have chosen to use the Statistics Norway index of municipality centrality (1994). This index classifies the municipalities into seven categories ranging from central to peripheral, or rural to urban, in terms of distance to and size of the nearest administrative centre (data from 1990). We have further merged Statistic Norway's categories into three categories:

- 'Rural areas': The 193 most peripheral municipalities. About 14 per cent of the total Norwegian birth cohort of 1965 was born in these municipalities.
- 'Urban areas': The six most central municipalities, including the capital, Oslo. About 26 per cent of the 1965 birth cohort was born in these cities.
- 'Semi-urban areas': The remaining 236 municipalities. About 60 per cent of the birth cohort was born in these municipalities.

Inevitably, these categories are very broad. For example, the 'semi-urban' category ranges from municipalities that in many regards are rural, though not sufficiently so to fall into the 'rural areas' category, to municipalities such as Fredrikstad which have a population of more than 70,000 inhabitants. To condense the analysis, however, we have not found it feasible to work with more nuanced categories.

The analysis focuses on those who grew up in a rural area, a total of 8,714 individuals in the data set. Where a person 'grew up' is defined by his/her residence at the age of 15, in 1980, rather than the place of birth. As families tend to be more immobile once their children have started school than before compulsory school age

(that is, usually, when the parents are over 30 years old, see discussion earlier), this seems the best indicator of where a person spent the major part of his/her youth. However, strictly speaking the article more precisely discusses experiences of the part of the Norwegian birth cohort of 1965 that was *raised* (rather than *born*) in rural areas. This implies that persons in the 1965 birth cohort who did not live in Norway at the age of 15 are excluded from the analysis.

As has already been noted, the chosen measurement may introduce a class bias to the measurement which has implications for the analysis. Within the rural population at any given point of time, the people most likely to be residing in rural areas for shorter periods are parents and their offspring in the rural elite. Many of these are urban both in upbringing and lifestyle, and the parents may migrate to rural areas only to take skilled employment in the rural labour market, awaiting better work opportunities in the cities. Thus, some of the informants may have spent the better part of their childhood and adolescence in urban areas. This generates some disturbance in the data and needs to be taken into account when discussing the results.

### Migration careers

Many possible migration careers for persons growing up in rural municipalities are divided into five categories:

- 'Non-migrants': Persons who have never migrated out of the rural municipality where they grew up.
- 'Returners': Persons who have out-migrated from the rural municipality where they grew up but who have later returned to their home municipality.
- 'Rural migrants': Persons who have out-migrated from the rural municipality where they grew up and in 1997 lived in another *rural* municipality.
- 'Semi-urban migrants': Persons who have out-migrated from the rural municipality where they grew up and in 1997 lived in a *semi-urban* municipality.
- 'Urban migrants': Persons who have out-migrated from the rural municipality where they grew up and in 1997 lived in an *urban* municipality.

### Measurement of class

The data have been analysed by means of a multinomial logistic model (Long, 1997; Long and Freese, 2003) in order to estimate the probability of individuals becoming non-migrants, returners or (semi-urban/urban) migrants, for various groups of rural youth with reference to their fathers' education level measured in total years and to their fathers' annual wage incomes, ranged in nine income groups. Since the categories on the migration career variable have no natural ordering, we use multinomial logistic regression, also called polytomous logistic regression. While this model is mathematically a simple extension of the binary logistic regression model, interpretation is difficult due to the large number of possible comparisons (Long and Cheng, 2004).

The measurement of education is based on the Norwegian standard classification of education (Statistics Norway, 1989). In our analysis, this standard is grouped into

seven values, where each value indicates the total time which the level of education normally takes to complete. In our analysis, we use the fathers' education in 1970 as the base, but we have supplemented with information from 1980, 1990 and 1995 in 30 cases with information missing in 1970. The fathers' incomes are measured by 'nine-tiles', where their real income is recoded into nine groups, in order to handle the problem with skewed distribution of the income variable. This variable is based on information from 1967, but for some cases with substantially higher incomes in 1975, 1985 or 1995, we have adjusted their values up to a higher nine-tile than they have in 1967. In addition, we have estimated a model with an interaction term by including a variable which is a product of the fathers' level of education multiplied by the fathers' incomes. This term tests whether the effect of the fathers' income co-varies with the value of the fathers' level of education.

We have chosen to use income and education levels of fathers rather than of mothers or a combination of these, as measurement of the informants' class position. This approach reflects the inherent gendered character of class in Norwegian society, where the *family's* class position traditionally has stemmed from the *male householder's* location in the class system. A recalculation of the present analysis, substituting fathers' income and educational levels with those of mothers, yields similar but less clear-cut results.

All taken together, the measurement of social class roughly reflects, though does not completely replicate the logic of Bourdieu's class scheme (1984). While the relative distribution between income and education levels addresses the horizontal axis in his scheme (the *composition* of capital), these variables in combination with the interaction term address the vertical axis (the *volume* of capital). Thus, the model demonstrates how the effect of one type of capital is dependent on the score of the other.

## RESULTS

It is worth remarking on the univariate distribution of the rural 1965 birth cohort across the migration categories, which is displayed in Table 1. In 1997, less than a third of the cohort were 'non-migrants' (31 per cent). Another 12.1 per cent had migrated back to the municipality in which they spent their adolescence, after having lived

**Table 1** Migration careers of the rural 1965 birth cohort in Norway. Percentages. (N = 8714)

<i>Migration careers</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
Non-migrants	31.0
Returns	12.1
Rural migrants	13.4
Semi-urban migrants	26.1
Urban migrants	17.4
Total	100.0

Source: Generation Database (Authors' own calculations).

**Table 2** Multinomial logistic regression model estimates of relative risk ratios of fathers' income and educational levels on offspring's migration careers.

	<i>Model 1</i>			<i>Model 2</i>		
	<i>RRR</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>RRR</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Returners <sup>1)</sup>						
Father's education	1.098	.020	< .001	.980	.061	.750
Father's income	.991	.016	.552	.853	.068	.045
Interaction (ed*income)				1.016	.008	.052
Rural migrants <sup>1)</sup>						
Father's education	1.061	.019	.001	1.018	.061	.759
Father's income	.978	.015	.151	.927	.072	.330
Interaction (ed*income)				1.006	.008	.466
Semi-urban migrants <sup>1)</sup>						
Father's education	1.170	.016	< .001	.986	.048	.776
Father's income	1.005	.013	.706	.803	.051	.001
Interaction (ed*income)				1.024	.007	< .001
Urban migrants <sup>1)</sup>						
Father's education	1.218	.018	< .001	1.011	.057	.844
Father's income	1.040	.015	.008	.817	.058	.005
Interaction (ed*income)				1.026	.008	< .001
LR Chi-Square	293.25			312.25		
Degrees of Freedom	8			12		

Source: Generation Database (Authors' own calculations).

<sup>1)</sup>: 'Non-migrants' is the comparison group or base category.

RRR: Relative Risk Ratio, which resembles the odds ratio given by logistic regression.

S.E.: Standard error of RRR.

p-value: Probability associated with statistical significance.

Place of residence in 1997.

The 1965 Norwegian rural birth cohort (N = 8714).

elsewhere for some time. The rest of the cohort comprised permanent migrants. Among these, the most popular destination was one of the semi-urban locations. Further, a substantial number — one of six in the rural 1965 birth cohort — had travelled all the way to the other end of the rural/urban continuum and settled, at least temporarily, in one of the six major Norwegian cities.

These results counter the public myth of a countryside about to be abandoned, an impression often presented in the public debate in Norway. For every urban migrant (17.4 per cent), there are more than two persons (31.0 + 12.1 per cent) still living in the municipality where they were raised. There are substantial gender differences in the migration practices of the rural 1965 birth cohort in Norway, as elaborated upon elsewhere (Rye, 2006b). For example, men are nearly twice as likely to be 'non-migrants' as women (39.3 per cent and 22.2 per cent) whereas women are more likely to migrate to all other destinations on the rural to urban scale than their male counterparts.

The data reveal differences in migration practices related to the social background of the members of the rural 1965 birth cohort. Table 2 shows four outcomes which compare 'returners' with 'non-migrants', 'rural migrants' with 'non-migrants', 'semi-urban migrants' with 'non-migrants', and 'urban migrants' with 'non-migrants'. The coefficients in Table 2 are presented as relative risk ratios (RRR), which correspond to odds ratios in the more familiar binary logistic regression model. In Model 1, we present a simple model which estimates the effects of fathers' education level and fathers' income on the children's migration careers. Then, we estimate a second model (Model 2) by including an interaction term which is a product of the two independent variables in the first model.

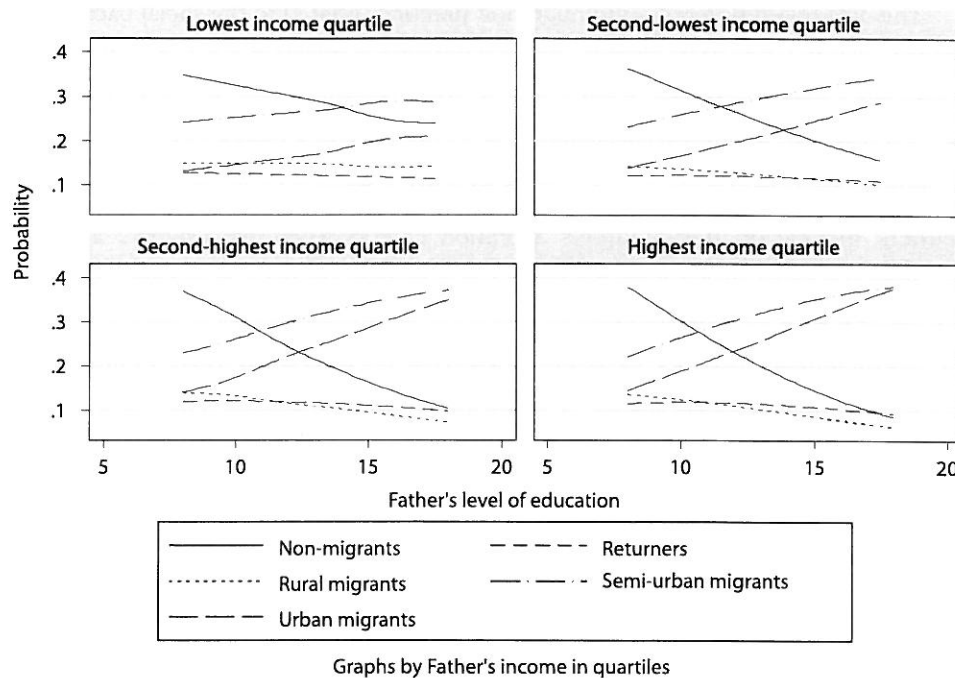
One challenge in using multinomial logistic models is that these models generate a huge number of parameters, and it is easy to be overwhelmed by the complexity of the results. Since the group 'non-migrants' is the comparison group in Table 2, we can interpret the RRR in Model 1 in this way: After controlling for father's income, the odds of being a 'returner' rather than a 'non-migrant' increase about 10 per cent (odds multiplied with 1.098) for each one-year increase in father's education. The odds of being 'rural migrant' rather than a 'non-migrant' increase with 6 per cent, the odds of being 'semi-urban migrant' rather than a 'non-migrant' increase with 17 per cent, while the odds of being an 'urban migrant' rather than 'non-migrant' increase with 22 per cent for each one-year increase in father's education. This implies that father's education is a much more significant predictor of offspring's migration career than father's income, which is only statistically significant for the 'urban migrants'.

Model 2 shows that the relationship between father's education and father's income is much more complicated when we include an interaction term between these two variables. The disappearance of statistical significant effects of father's education in Model 2 indicates that the effect of education is connected with father's income. The RRR of father's income and the interaction term between father's income and education, show that an increase in father's income has a minor influence on the probability to be a semi-urban migrant if the father has low educational level. On the other hand, increased income has a positive influence on the probability to be a semi-urban migrant if the father has a high educational level. We see a similar pattern among 'urban migrants'. In other words, father's education has a strong impact on

**Table 3** Joint effects of fathers' income and educational levels on offspring's migration careers (likelihood ratio chi-squares) (N = 8714).

	<i>Chi-Square</i>	<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Model 1:			
Father's annual wage income	13.96	4	.007
Father's years of education	221.01	4	< .001
Model 2:			
Father's annual wage income	14.92	4	.005
Father's years of education	0.50	4	.974
Interaction term (Income * Education)	19.01	4	.001

Source: Generation Database (Authors' own calculations).



**Figure 1** Plot of predicted probabilities of various migration careers, based on fathers' level of education and father's income divided into quartiles. Prediction based on a multinomial logistic model.

Source: Generation Database (Authors' own calculations).

urban migration. However, this applies primarily in cases where the fathers also have high income levels. Even if there are fewer significant parameters in Model 2 than in Model 1, the explanatory power increases by a statistical significant chi-square on 19.0 in Model 2.

The correlation between fathers' education and fathers' income is 0.34. This correlation indicates potential problems with collinearity in our models and can result in misleading estimates of the real effects from the two independent variables. Therefore, Table 3 compares the model estimates in Table 2 with estimates from each independent variable separately. These estimates are based on likelihood-ratio tests which are more accurate than the ordinary asymptotic z tests in Table 2. Further, the significant interaction in the second model indicates that the interaction term avoids the potential problem with underestimation of the unique effects from each of the independent variables, and strengthens the assumption that the models are robust.

The joint effects in Table 3 confirm the pattern from Table 2. At a general level, taken together these two models point to three important findings:

- Fathers' educational level has a strong effect on the offspring's migration practice. More specifically, the results indicate on average that offspring of

well-educated fathers are far more likely to out-migrate than those with fathers with low educational levels (Model 1).

- Fathers' income has a weaker effect on children's migration careers than fathers' educational level (Model 1).
- However, the model with the significant interaction term (Model 2) shows that the effect of fathers' education disappears in cases where fathers' income is low. This shows that the level of a father's education and his income level depend on each other.

A graph with predicted probabilities for each outcome is useful in presenting the results from the multinomial logistic model in some detail. Figure 1 presents four plots that show predicted probabilities for different migration careers as affected by fathers' level of education and income. In order to simplify presentation, we have categorized fathers in four groups rather than in the nine discussed earlier.

Figure 1 shows the distinct effect of fathers' educational level on migration practices in Norway. Comparing the extremes, the model predicts a probability as high as 0.76 for offspring of the most educated and best paid fathers for leaving the countryside in favour of 'semi-urban' or 'urban' destinations ( $0.38 + 0.38$ , respectively). Only a very few of these remain in the municipality where they were raised. For those with the least educated and least well paid fathers, on the other hand, the probability of migrating to semi-urban or urban destinations is only 0.38.

The figure shows that not only do the overall migration tendencies differ between social classes, the *type* of migration also varies according to the father's educational level. Members of the rural upper social classes migrate about equally often to 'urban' and 'semi-urban' destinations. Among out-migrants from lower social classes the pattern is not so simple. For example, those with the least educated and least well paid fathers are about twice as likely to migrate to a 'semi-urban' destination as to an urban destination.

## DISCUSSION

Nordic research on rural youth has emphasized the heterogeneity in their social and cultural environments, both within and between countries (see Dax and Machold, 2002; Helve, 2000, 2003; Jentsch and Shucksmith, 2004a). For example, Birgit Jentsch and Mark Shucksmith differentiate between 'remote' and 'accessible' rural regions (2004b). The barriers to migration for youth from the most peripheral rural societies are considerably higher than for those living in rural municipalities within commuting distance to an educational centre. Further, Norwegian rural youth would appear to have better access to higher education than do their counterparts in other Nordic countries, due to the decentralized higher educational system in Norway (Heggen, 2003: 154). It is important to not generalize findings from the Norwegian case reported in this article directly to the other Nordic contexts. However, there are reasons to expect that similar class-related processes impact migration behaviour of young people in other rural regions in the Nordic countries.

Data at hand contain information about a limited number of variables describing the objective location of actors in the geographic and social space (place of residence, income, education, etc.) and do not allow for in-depth analyses of the underlying process that generates the observed results. However, building on the existing body of knowledge within the research field, we are able to suggest three strategies to explain the class-structured differences we have identified in Norwegian rural youths' migration practices, which we also would expect to be of relevance in other contexts.

### Reproducing social positions

The higher likelihood of rural-to-urban migration among members from the rural upper social classes would appear to be related to the logic of inter-generational reproduction of social class positions in Norway. In particular, this explains why offspring of well-educated rural fathers drift toward the major cities as, in most cases, these persons have no other possibility than migrating to places where higher educational institutions are located if they are to reproduce their fathers' positions in the social class structure. For example, all of the four major Norwegian universities are located in one of the major cities that constitute the 'urban' category in this article.<sup>1</sup> Thus, for young people in the rural upper classes, staying in rural areas most likely, and for some necessarily, would imply a social degradation from an inter-generational perspective. Their well-educated fathers are likely to hold privileged positions (medical practitioners, teachers, etc.) that are impossible to obtain without acquiring formal higher education.

However, it is noteworthy that 'urban' and 'semi-urban' migrants from the rural upper social classes do not only *reproduce* the cultural capital of their parents. If that was their ambition, they could have gone to the city and spent a few years at a university or a college, and then returned to their home municipality in order to obtain positions similar to those of their well-educated fathers. Their status as 'returners' would have been as high as, or even better than, their fathers' class status. By not only migrating to an urban destination, but also staying there, they actually chose *another* trajectory than that of their parents, both geographically *and* socially, as they situate themselves within the urban rather than the rural class structure.

Compared with the effect of fathers' education, it is harder to explain the much weaker relation between *economic* capital and migration patterns. The general pattern is that a higher income increases the effect of education. One explanation may be that reproduction of 'economic' social class status is not so much dependent on geographical mobility (see also Rye, 2006b). In order to reproduce your parents' high educational level, going to the city, at least for several years, is unavoidable. Economic reproduction, on the other hand, may take place just as well within the context of the home municipality. Actually, in some instances geographical *immobility* is the basic prerequisite, for example, for those inheriting family enterprises.

It should be noted that income level may not measure the level of economic capital resources very well, especially in rural areas. Traditionally, ownership of physical capital, in particular land, has played a very important role in forming the rural class structure. Holders of such capital, such as farmers and other self-employed persons, often report a low income level even though their stock of economic capital may be

considerable. For example, control of natural resources may be important for one's position in the rural class structure regardless of the income generated from this ownership. By employing income level as the sole indicator of economic capital, thus, primarily well-paid wage earners are singled out, at least in the Norwegian case. They are likely to have at least some formal education and, as income and educational levels are correlated, the effect of income on migration may then disappear in the statistical analysis.

### Subjective and objective calculations

The discussion of inter-generational reproduction needs to be supplemented. Rural youths do not migrate simply in order to reproduce the social structure in general or, more specifically, their fathers' social class status. Rather, the social reproduction of class should preferably be perceived as an unintentional side effect of actors' everyday life actions. The challenge, thus, is to understand why different class fractions have different patterns of behaviour, or more specifically, generate different migration practices. Why do Norwegian rural upper class members tend to choose out-migration more often than those from rural lower classes?

One possible explanation may be that out-migration simply is more rewarding for some rural groups than for others. Rye (2006b) has examined the long-term effects of rural-to-urban migration in terms of educational and income attainment. The study clearly indicated that migration is far more beneficial for migrants from rural upper classes than for those originating in the lower echelons of the rural social structure. Generally speaking, it is important not to confuse *causes* and *motives* of migration with its *effects*; for example, rural youths' migration decisions are not results only, or even primarily, of their explicit calculations of future economic and other kinds of returns (Grimsrud, 2000). However, in this case the reasons why migrants from the rural upper social classes do well in urban locations also help to explain why they are more likely to leave the Norwegian countryside in the first place.

More specifically, our claim is that the different subjective calculations of future consequences of migration made by members of the classes are likely to affect their propensities to migrate. For example, teenagers from rural upper social classes, more or less consciously, make their calculations of future returns based on previous experiences of their consociates, that is, other migrating members from the rural upper class. They tend to do well in the city, even when compared to the 'natives' of the cities (Rye and Almås, 2004). For those in rural upper social classes, expectations of life in the city will thus look brighter than for members of the rural lower classes, as the latter also base their impression of life in the city on the experiences of their class counterparts.

In other words, better objective results of rural-to-urban migration among rural upper class members translate into higher subjective calculations, thus increasing the attractiveness of rural-to-urban migration within this group. The outcome is a higher rural-to-urban migration propensity among persons in the Norwegian rural upper classes, as displayed in Figure 1.

Once there, they are more likely to actualize the expected returns and to make a good living in the city. Subsequently, in a similar way, they serve as role models for

others of their class who contemplate rural-to-urban migration careers. Thus, the class character of causes, motives and outcomes of rural-to-urban migration is reproduced.

### Lifestyle migration

Another related strategy to explain the higher probability of migration among rural youths from the upper social classes focuses on rural classes' differing cultural orientations, as described in Bærenholdt's analysis of the co-existence of two modes of rural life: the 'locals' and the 'mobiles' (1998). For example, Coté (1997) suggests that well-educated persons are more universalistic and less place-bound than persons in the working class and, one would expect, farmers. These attitudes are transferred inter-generationally, so that some rural children and teenagers develop similar universalistic values as their parents despite their rural upbringing. Thus, it seems more 'natural' to offspring of well-educated parents to leave their home municipality and explore the city.

This is also reflected in the fact that the rural upper social classes have lifestyles which are more urban, such as more sophisticated food and dress habits, or better knowledge of what is typically thought of as urban culture (for example, going to theatres and operas). The fact that most well-educated parents are likely to have been living in a city in their youth, when they gained their educational qualifications, lends credibility to such a hypothesis. In Bourdieusian terminology, the parents transfer an urban *habitus* to their children, which makes them prefer what can be only delivered by migration to a city. As noted earlier, many of these parents may also have resided in urban locations during parts of their offspring's childhood, implying that this segment of rural youths has first-hand experience of life in an urban social environment. Similarly, they have weaker family ties to the rural area. For example, whereas many farm boys develop a rural habitus where farming represents the way to 'the good life' (Rye, 2006a), the typical offspring of a rural doctor are more likely to develop an affinity with the urban background of their parents. Differences in rural youth cultures observed by many researchers (cf. Heggen et al., 2001) are probably reflections of such mechanisms of inter-generational reproduction of lifestyles.

Taken together, rural youth from the Norwegian rural upper social classes migrate to the city because the city represents 'the good life' for these actors, contrary to perceptions of 'the good life' among members of other layers in the rural social structure. Moreover, many of them are more familiar with the experiences of migration, as we expect their parents also — on average — to represent the most mobile segment of the rural population. The non-migrants, on the other hand, stay behind in their home municipality because they do not hunger for what is on offer in the city, neither education nor other urban amenities, and neither do they have the same family traditions for employing migration as a means to pursue the good life. However, these are hypotheses that cannot be fully addressed by the present type of data but require further research.

By and large, the reported results reflect findings in previous literature. In particular, the hypothesis that growing up in a well-educated family enhances the likelihood of rural-to-urban migration is supported. This interrelationship seems even stronger in the Norwegian case than in the two English studies referred to (Coté, 1997; Fielding,

1992). On the other hand, the present findings contradict Brox's (1984) claim that the lowest segments of the rural class structure also have higher than average tendencies to out-migrate. However, it is difficult to compare the different studies, as they are based on different research approaches and also differ in terms of geographic context and historic period of data collection.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analysis in the article illuminates some interesting aspects of rural-to-urban migration by young people. We have documented the strong class aspect of rural-to-urban migration processes in Norway; rural youths' migration careers are strongly related to their social class position as defined by their fathers' capital resources. Those originating in the rural upper social classes are much more likely to migrate than others. The relative distribution of migration destinations also varies, as those from rural lower social classes more often migrate to semi-urban areas. However, it is primarily the *cultural* capital component of the social background that matters. Fathers' stock of *economic* capital, when measured in terms of income, has less influence on their offspring's migration careers.

These findings are explained by lines of arguments focusing on structural and lifestyle aspects of rural-to-urban migration, or rather, by combining these kinds of explanations. The logic of social status attainment makes rural-to-urban migration more beneficial for rural upper class members. This is apprehended by actors in rural areas, making such migration a more likely strategy for those from the upper classes. Furthermore, we have suggested that the rural upper classes represent a more urban lifestyle that encourages and arranges for out-migration for their offspring. Thus, rural youths from the upper classes in Norway 'naturally' choose to migrate to urban areas, often in order to gain educational qualifications, and in due course to gain attractive job opportunities.

In other words, behind the apparently individual lifestyle choices made by actors, which lead some to 'prefer' to migrate from rural to urban areas while others do not, there are structural characteristics that make such migration more likely for some groups than for others. This generates a class bias in Norwegian young people's migration streams.

## A micro-structuralistic perspective

In this article we have employed a structural approach to migration studies that takes into account the individual, purposeful and reflexive character of migration. We find this perspective fruitful in analysis of migration data. Undoubtedly, rural-to-urban migration considered as a macro-level phenomenon is the cumulative result of actions of individual actors, that is, migrants who are reflexive and intentional in their behaviour. Thus, rural-to-urban migration is not something forced upon individuals but rather an unintended side effect of their intentional actions. However, to emphasize the voluntary character of migration behaviour and, at the same time, point to the structural characteristics of migration is not self-contradictory. Rural youths' likes

and dislikes for rural and urban environments — their social constructions of where the good life is to be found — are influenced by their position in the overall social structure, as are their actions (Rye, 2006c). In this article we have, in contrast to the dominant trends within contemporary youth research (Skogen, 1998), suggested *class* as one of the dimensions of the social structure which warrants further examination in order to gain a better understanding of rural-to-urban migration. The empirical analysis clearly indicates that migration practices are class structured, or at least, have a class bias to them. This needs to be better accounted for in migration research.

Such research should incorporate analyses of the gendered character of migration practices. As emphasized by Agnete Wiborg (2003), class and gender aspects of rural-to-urban migration seem to be inherently interwoven. For example, Kåre Heggen (2002) has shown that higher education careers are seen to be more attractive for rural girls than their male counterparts. However, based on the present analysis we may hypothesize that this applies most to girls originating in the higher echelons of the rural class structure, and in particular those raised in well-educated families. There may also be differences in the impact of class background between genders. Our initial analysis, not reported here, indicates minor differences in this regard, but further analysis is required. Furthermore, better understanding of the workings of economic capital in rural areas is needed; for instance, what kinds of income and wealth matter, and how should they be measured? Also, the relation between rural class and rural lifestyles, between rural youths' position in the social structure and their mediations of these into migration practices, deserves further attention. Finally, the present analysis examines the experience of the 1965 birth cohort. This cohort was the first to benefit from the 'educational explosion' which occurred in Norway during the 1970s and 1980s, in the course of which greater numbers of young people than before enrolled at higher educational institutions (Heggen and Olsen, 1995). Further analysis should compare this birth cohort's experiences with those of previous and later cohorts to analyse the effects of the expansion of education on inter-generational reproduction.

Most of these issues are difficult to address in depth by means of large quantitative sources, such as the Generation Database, and they should preferably be examined by means of qualitative research designs. However, the present analysis clearly demonstrates the relevance of statistical analysis of the overall relationships between class background and migration practices, which are more difficult to trace in qualitative research designs, and illustrates the importance of incorporating class perspectives in the theoretical toolbox for studies of rural youth.

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## Note

- 1 In 2006 two former colleges were renamed as universities: The agricultural college at Ås, located one hour's drive from Oslo, the capital of Norway; and Stavanger University, which covers a wider range of disciplines, located in the fourth largest city of Norway.

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