

# CLASS AND RURAL TO URBAN MIGRATION

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## Abstract

The paper discusses rural to urban migration in modern Norway from a class perspective, focusing whether and to what extent actors in different social classes have distinct migration patterns. The analysis is based on Norwegian Census data from the period between 1960-90 (ten-yearly) and the Norwegian Migration Register, and traces the social (e.g. education, occupation, and income) and geographic mobility of all Norwegians born in 1965. Data about their parents' social background are also employed. The number of cases is approximately 9,000.

Theoretically the paper is based on a bourdieuan perspective. The point of departure is a hypothesis that young people from better-off rural families are the most likely ones to leave the countryside in favour of a more urban life, basically due to education motives. This is sought explained by employing Bourdieu's concepts of economic and cultural capital, and his claim that the objective class structures, which reflects unequal access to and composition of these forms of capital, should be related to differences in the structures of subjective lifestyle (*Distinction*, Bourdieu 1984).

## 1: Introduction

Norway — as several other modern capitalist societies — has over the last decades experienced an exodus from remote rural areas in favour of population concentration in more urban areas. This persistent 'emptying' of the countryside is usually evaluated in negative terms, as it depletes the rural societies of human resources, and preservation of the existing population pattern has become a political objective in many countries, especially so in Norway (White Papers 1996/97 and 1999/2000) and the other northernmost Nordic countries (Hanell *et al* 2002). Large amounts of public funding have been transferred to rural areas in order to strengthen their economic viability and thereby slowing down the rural to urban migration streams.

Much public funding has been directed towards the social sciences too, in order to get a better understanding of — and preferably identify the appropriate means to reverse — the processes underlying the rural to urban migration. One result is a huge body of literature on internal migration (Boyle *et al* 1998 for an overview), especially many studies focusing on *who* the rural migrants are and what their *causes* to migrate were.

A manifold theoretical perspectives have been employed in these studies. In this paper, however, we will direct the attention towards an explicit *class perspective* on rural youth migration, which to large extent seems to have been neglected within this field of study (Fielding 1992). This may be due to various reasons. Generally, traditional class based analysis has over the last decades gained less attention within the social sciences in favour of a focus on cultural factors, the so-called 'cultural turn'. So even more in studies of rural societies, which often has been considered societies less marked by class conflicts than their urban counterparts. Cloke and Thrift (1990:165) are critical to this presentation of the countryside and claims 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.*

Another, and far more pragmatic, explanation of special relevance for migration studies — which inherently begs for longitudinal methodological designs — has been a lack of appropriate data resources which allow for thorough analyses of the relation between geographical and social mobility (see Boyle *et al* 1998). This objection has lost some of its weight, however, at least in the Norwegian case, as new opportunities to link detailed longitudinal migration and census registers, even inter-generationally, have provided far more appropriate empirical data sets to work with (see section 3).

In this paper we attempt to utilise these data to investigate the class dimension of rural youth migration: *Are migration from rural to urban areas class structured, in that meaning that young people from different class fractions — as measured by their parents' class status — choice different migration careers?*

Theoretically the work is informed by Bourdieu's social theory, especially as outlined in his work *Distinction* (1984). This is a framework that invites to bridge class analysis perspectives with those emphasising 'cultural' and 'lifestyle' issues, as he do not deny the relevance of such concepts but rather attempts to integrate them with a class based analysis of social action — a strategy that seems fruitful also in migration analysis. First, however, we will review the em

empirical findings the existing rural to urban migration literature provides with relevance for the paper's research question.

## 2: Theory and previous findings

Literature reviews of migration research propose various typologies to categorise the manifold studies within the field (e.g. Shrestha 1988; Boyle et al 1998), but the main dividing line seems to be the one running between macro-oriented and micro-oriented approaches (Orderud 1998; Grimsrud 2000). The first category consists of studies that focus on larger societal 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 done from an 'economic' perspective, e.g. by analysing job 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, e.g. booms and recessions.

Other such macro, and often 'structural', studies take a broader 'sociological' perspective, cf. the restructuring literature. Marxist and neo-marxist contributions falls in this category, as they consider migration as result of 'deep structural' processes in capitalist societies (e.g. Shrestha 1988, Fielding 1992).

The *micro* perspective, on the other hand, 'individualises' migration streams by focusing on the migration decisions made by the actual actors. One important strand in this category is the behavioural approach, which also may be divided into 'economic' and wider 'sociological' sub-categories. The manifold surveys of migration motives are examples of this approach (e.g. Statistics Norway 1977).

More recently, in the wake of the 'cultural turn' in the social sciences, migration research based on humanist social theory has widened up this last perspective by taking the reflexive and constructivist nature of the migrants actions into account, especially in studies of counter-migration (e.g. Halfacree 2002).

These perspectives provide, in different ways, useful insight into migration processes and, following Boyle et al (1998), they should be considered complementary rather than as conflicting each other. In this paper we will combine elements from several of these perspectives, and use what may be labelled a '*micro-structuralist*' perspective. This implies regarding migration acts, and the aggregate migration streams these generate, as results of reflexive choices made by actors. At the same time, however, these choices are considered informed and influenced by the actors' position in the class structure. Choosing such a theoretical position we are obviously in debt to the social theory of Bourdieu (1984), which we implicitly will draw on in the following.

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Few previous studies have — according to our knowledge — explicitly worked from such a perspective. 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 migration literature that may shed some light on the research question posed in the previous section.

Firstly, there are many migration studies which have examined the relation between education and migration from rural areas. Basically, these document that education is a major driving force of migration (Statistics Norway 1977, Fielding 1992, Coté 1997:56). This applies to youth people who leave the countryside to enrol at a higher education institution, which usually are located in urban areas, or adults seeking to urban labour markets to make the most out of their formal qualification. Also knowing that young people, whether rural or urban of origin, tend to reproduce their parents' educational level, this would imply that children of well educated rural parents are more likely to migrate than off-spring of less educated rural people, in order to achieve their parents' educational level.

We have so far found no previous studies, however, that actually document the detailed nature of this two-step causal relationship (parents' educational level → off-springs' educational level → rural to urban migration) empirically.

Regarding the direct causal relation between social class status, *as measured by one's parents social background*, and migration careers, the works of Coté (1997) is the only source of empirical result we have encountered so far. Coté's analysis based on British longitudinal data indicates that non-migrants come from families where the fathers have less than average educational level. Their fathers also have less prestigious occupations than the fathers of those who leave their place of origin.

Turning to studies of the relation between one's *own social class position* and migration career similar findings are found. Migration is more a middle than working class phenomenon, however, the conclusions are rather ambiguous in this regard. 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 was also those manufacturing, construction, mining and quarrying (Statistics Norway 1977). Coté's findings is also ambiguous at this point, however, they indicate that the non-migrants – just as their fathers – have lower wages and less education than the migrants.

Brox (1984) found in his non-representative study of a rural community at the Norwegian coast that it was those in the lower *and* upper parts of the class pyramid that were most likely to depart for a urban destination. While the former, and by far the biggest, group were leaving due to the absence of invested interests in their rural community, e.g. ownership of land or buildings, the latter group left because of attractive prospects in the city where they expected to join the urban middle class. However, another study using empirical data from the same area (Nicholson 1975) reaches somewhat 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 the average to leave the countryside.

Thus, the conclusion in Halfacree *et al* (1992) quantitative study of British migrants may be appropriate, even though this study considers not rural to urban migration only but discusses 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.(p. 168)*

Halfacree *et al's* analysis of the relationship between 'social class'<sup>1</sup> and migration generates similar results, indicating that professionals and managerial *and* skilled manual workers are the least mobile, while skilled non-manual workers *and* low-skilled and unskilled manual workers being the most mobile (1992).

Of some interest is also the research done on counter-urbanisation in Britain, showing that this kind of migration primarily is a middle/service class phenomenon. However, one should take care not to generalise findings from urban to rural migration studies to the contrary phenomenon, rural to urban migration studies as these are two genuinely different and contextually influenced phenomena.

### **3: Material and methods**

The empirical analysis in this paper is based on data from the so-called 'Generational Database' (GB) established by the Norwegian Social Science Databases (NSD).<sup>2</sup> This contains data from the ten-yearly Norwegian censuses in 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990 for all Norwegians born in 1955, 1960, 1965 and so on. All regular census variables are available, such as occupation, education, income, place of living, housing etc.

This data is further linked with data from the National Migration Register. This contains information on any single migration incident between the 435 municipalities in Norway, their average size being 10.000 inhabitants, since their birth. This makes it possible to trace the migration career of any individual at a very detailed level. Various other public registers is also linked up, e.g. the death register and the schooling register. The most important feature of the GD data set, however, is the link between data for any individual and their parents / grandparents. This allows for tracing the inter-generational geographical and social mobility; in our case to analyse the relationship between one's social background as measured by parents' social class position.

No data set has 'perfect' quality and there is of course weaknesses related to such public registers as those employed here. The data provided seems to be very reliable, though, especially due to Norwegians' willingness – and sense of duty – to comply with the state's eagerness to map the lives of their inhabitants. No serious flaws of the GD data set have been discovered in the course of this study, nor by any of the other researchers that have employed the data set for other purposes.

For the case of clarity we have chosen to focus on a single year class only, the 1965 class. The person's life careers are followed up to the mid 1990s, when they have reached the age of 30. At that age most are likely to have settled down, often with a family, and are most likely to migrate only sporadically during later stages of their lives (Boyle et al 1998). Dead persons (3.1 per cent of original year class) are excluded from the analysis.

#### ***Rural and urban***

Any empirical analysis of rural to urban migration depends on what definition that is employed to delimit the categories of 'rural' and 'urban'. We will not enter into this debate here.

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<sup>1</sup> As measured by the classification adopted by the advertising industry in England at the time of the study, due to the research design (Gallup Poll). The authors remarks the theoretical shortcoming of this categorisation.

<sup>2</sup> Data employed in this paper is supplied by Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSSDS) and Statistics Norway (SN). Neither NSSDS nor SN are responsible for the analysis presented.

Rather we have chosen to use the Statistics Norway index of municipality peripherality (Statistics Norway 1994). This index classifies the municipalities in seven categories ranging from central to peripheral, or rural to urban, due to distance to and size of the most nearby administrative centre.

- 'Rural areas': The 193 most peripheral municipalities. About 14 per cent of the total Norwegian year class born in 1965, was born in these municipalities.
- 'Urban areas': The six largest municipalities, among them the capital Oslo. About 58 per cent of the 1965 year class was born in these cities.
- Semi-rural areas: The remaining 234 municipalities. About 14 per cent of the year class born was born in these municipalities.

The analysis is based on those who grew up in a rural area, a total of 9081 individuals in the data set. Where a person 'grew up' is defined by his/her place of living at the age of 15, in 1980, rather than their place of birth. As families tend to be more immobile when their children are youngsters than before compulsory school age (that is, usually, when the parents are 30 plus years old, see discussion above), this seems the best indicator of where a person spent the major part of his/her youth.

### *Migration careers*

Their manifold possible migration careers for persons living up in rural municipalities are grouped into five categories, which distinguish between:

- Non-migrants: Persons who never have migrated out of the rural municipality where they grew up.
- 'Rural migrants': Persons who have out-migrated from the rural municipality where they grew up and today (1997) live in another *rural* municipality.
- 'Semi-urban migrants': Persons who have out-migrated from the rural municipality where they grew up and today (1997) live in a *semi-urban* municipality.
- 'Urban migrants': Persons who have out-migrated from the rural municipality where they grew up and today (1997) live in an *urban* municipality.

Table 1 shows the overall distribution of the rural 1965 year class according to these categories.

**TABLE 1. MIGRATION CAREERS AMONG THE 1965 COHORT FROM NORWEGIAN RURAL AREAS (%).**

Migration careers	Percent
Non-migrants	31.0
Returners	12.2
Rural migrants	13.4
Semi-urban migrants	26.2
Urban migrants	17.2
Total	100.0
(N=)	(8522)

Originally, there were 9081 persons in the rural 1965 year class (death persons excluded). For 559 of these we lack data on father's education, and these persons are left out of the further analysis. We have no reason to suspect that this have any impact on the results.

#### 4: Empirical analysis

The empirical analysis represents a rather rough attempt to copy the logic underlying Bourdieu's two dimensional social class scheme, which uses volume and composition of economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1984). Due to limits to the data set, the analysis has to rely on information of income and educational level of the individual's father in 1980 only.

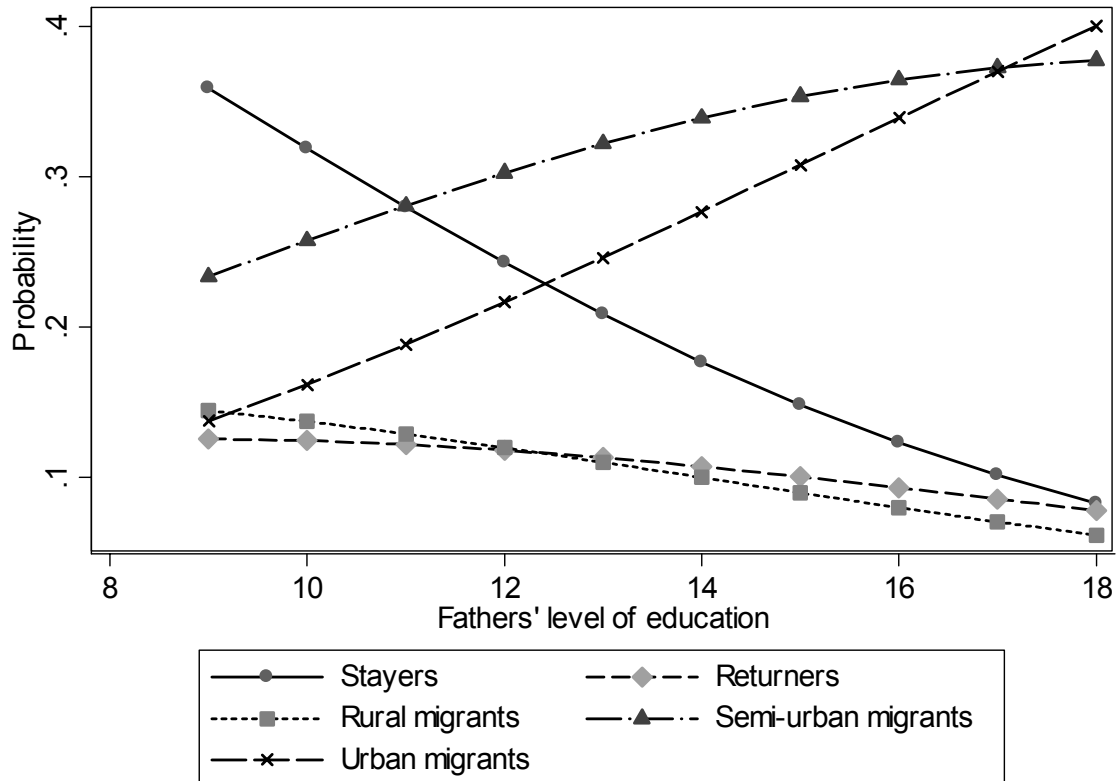
The data has been analysed by a multinomial logit model (Long 1997, Long & Freese 2001) in order to estimate probabilities to become non-migrants, returners or (semi-rural/urban) migrants for various groups of rural youth due to their fathers' education level measured in total number years and their fathers' annual wage incomes in 1980 measured in number of 100 000 Norwegian kroner (NOK). In addition, we have include an interaction term by including a variable which is a product of fathers' level of education multiplied by fathers' income to test whether the effect of father's income varies depending of the value of father's level of education. One challenge in using a multinomial logit model is that the model includes a lot of parameters, and it is easy to be overwhelmed by the complexity of the results. In table 1, we present only the maximum likelihood ratio chi-squares to show the unique effect from each of the independent variables in the multinomial logit model on the children's migration careers.

**TABLE 2. EFFECTS FROM FATHERS INCOME AND EDUCATION IN 1980, ON THEIR CHILDREN'S MIGRATION CAREER IN 1997 (LIKELIHOOD RATIO CHI-SQUARES) (N = 8522).**

	Chi-Square	Degrees of Freedom	p-value
Fathers annual wage income in 100 000 NOK	4.250	4	0.373
Fathers years of education	289.873	4	< 0.001
Interaction (Income * Education)	4.760	4	0.313

The results of the likelihood-ratio chi-square tests show that fathers' education level has a statistically significant effect on children's migration career, while neither income nor the interaction between income and education have any significant effects in the multinomial logit model.

A graph with predicted probabilities for each outcome can be a useful way to present the results from the multinomial logit model. Figure 1 presents a plot to show how predicted probabilities to end up in different migration careers are affected by their fathers' level of education.



**FIGURE 1. PLOT OF PREDICTED PROBABILITIES FOR CHILDREN TO END UP IN DIFFERENT MIGRATION CAREERS, BASED ON THEIR FATHERS' LEVEL OF EDUCATION. MULTINOMIAL LOGIT MODEL.**

## 5: Discussion

The empirical analysis gives several interesting results. Most striking is the relative clear class structure that seems to affect rural to urban migration. The probability of out-migration from rural areas differs considerable between youngsters from different social classes, as these are conceptualised in this paper. Comparing the extremes, the model predicts a probability as high as .79 for offspring of the most educated fathers for leaving the countryside in favour of 'semi-urban' or 'urban' destinations. For those with the least educated fathers, on the other hand, the comparative probability is down to .34. In other words, migration seems to be a far more common strategy for members of the upper rural social classes.

Also Cotê (1997) found that 'urban migrants' on average (not only rural to urban migrants) had better educated fathers than others. However, these findings from the England in the 1970s were not so strong and unambiguous as those found in the Norwegian data set.

However, according to the model it is primarily social class background in terms of *cultural* capital that matters. The inheritance of economic capital does not influence the migration probability, as shown by the statistical insignificance of the income variable in the model. The statistical insignificance of the interaction term (education \* income) corroborates this. What matters, thus, are your father's educational level and not his economic resources. In terms of Bourdieu's class scheme this implies an 'bisecting' of the class scheme, as the economic ele



ment becomes irrelevant in order to understand what factors contribute to increase the probability of out-migration. In short - in relevance to the issue discussed in this paper; rural to urban migration, the bourdieuan *two*-dimensional class scheme preferably can be simplified into a *one*-dimensional scheme.

It should be underlined, however, that this does not amount to saying that economic capital is irrelevant in studies of societies in general, or that Bourdieu's basic logic is 'falsified' by these results, or anything else to that effect. Our claim in this paper is a modest assertion that *in analysis of the class structuring of rural to urban migration* it is primarily the cultural capital that matters.

Figure 1 furthermore shows that not only does the overall migration tendency differ between social classes. Also *type* of migration varies. Members from the upper rural social classes migrate about equally often to 'urban' as 'semi-urban' destinations. Among out-migrants from lower social classes the pattern is not so simple. For example, those with the least educated fathers are about twice as likely to migrate to a 'semi-urban' destination than to an urban destination. 'Return migration' is also more common for this group.

### ***Reproducing social positions***

These results may be interpreted in different ways, and we shall here only suggest a few possible explanation strategies. Firstly, it is not very surprising that offspring of well-educated fathers are more likely to migrate than other youngsters in rural areas. This is basically in accordance with what one should expect, cf. the literature review above. The *strength* of the pattern is more unexpected. Figure 1 comes close to indicating that staying in the home municipality seems to be out of question for some rural groups. On the other hand, 'urban migration' is a solution only for the very few in the lower layers of the rural social structure. In other words, father's educational level is a very good predictor of a person's future migration career.

Firstly, I will propose some explanation for the high migration rate of the offspring from homes with high cultural capital resources. Plainly put, youngsters from these homes 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 these youngsters staying in the rural society would most likely imply a social degradation. Their well-educated fathers are likely to hold privileged positions (medical practitioners, teachers etc.) that are impossible to obtain without formal qualifications.

However, 'urban' and 'semi-urban' migrants from the upper rural social classes do not only *reproduce* the cultural capital of their parents. If that was the ambition, they could have gone to the city and spent a few years at an university or a college, then returned to their home municipality in order to pick up the positions kept by their well-educated fathers in the rural society. A status as 'returners' would equally well - or even better - been compatible with reproduction of their parents' social class status. By not only migrating to a urban destination - but also staying there - they choose *another* social trajectory than their parents, both literally in terms of geography, but also socially as they situate themselves within the urban rather than the rural class structure.

This often implies a profound change of social position, as they thereby enter quite another (in bourdieuan terminology) 'social field', the *urban* social system. In many regards we may expect this urban 'social field' to be of a somewhat different structure, and following another

logic, than the rural counterpart. For example, to be among the most educated persons requires far more years of schooling in a university city than in a peripheral municipality. The same applies to other elements of cultural capital resources, e.g. knowledge of arts. In other words, we may expect that a person's cultural capital have a lower 'exchange value' in urban areas than in a rural society. Thus, even though they represent the well-educated upper class in the rural society, they often enter positions quite far from the uppermost layers of the urban social hierarchy.

### ***A two-step process?***

One way of explaining why offspring from the upper rural social classes remain in the cities, and does not return in order to pick up the positions held by their parents, is to consider their rural to urban migration as result of a two-step process. The first step explains why they decide to leave the rural municipality, the second step way they chose to remain in the city.

In the first place, these individuals may seek out for urban destination for a period of a few years in their 20s, in order to gain educational qualifications, as suggested above. At this stage, the intention may be to return to the home municipality. During the stay in the city, however, the premises for deciding where to settle down often change dramatically. For one thing, they may encounter their future spouses who most likely come from other parts of the country, and this makes it difficult to return to their home municipality. At least one of the parts have to give up his or her plans of returning, and a likely outcome of the couple's negotiations is a compromise of settling down in the city where they met. Secondly, many kinds of educations qualify them for jobs which simply do not existing in their home municipality, for example the daughter of the teacher who gains a Ph.D and decides to stay in the university city in order to follow her academic career. Thus, returning is out of question for many 'urban migrants'. Thus, long-term permanent rural to urban migration should be consider as the cumulative result of a series of choices (getting education, finding a spouse, being employed etc.), of which none where directly about where to live in the long run.

This is not so much the case for those migrating to the city not in order to get higher education but rather for occupational motives. These, among which we expect to find many from the lower rural social classes, more easily bring their vocation back to the countryside.

### ***Cultural orientation***

Another way of explaining the higher probability of migration among rural youth from the upper social classes is to focus on their cultural orientation. Cotê (1997) suggests for example that well-educated persons is more 'universalistic' and less place bound than persons in the working class and, one would expect, farmers. These attitudes are transferred inter-generationally. Thus, it is more 'natural' for offspring of well-educated parents to leave their home municipality and explore the city.

Further, one may expect to find that the upper rural social classes have lifestyles which is more 'urban', such as more 'sophisticated' food and dress habits, or better knowledge of what is typically though of as 'urban' culture (e.g. going to theatres and operas). The fact that most well-educated parents is likely to have been living in a city in their youth, when they gained their educational qualifications, lends credibility to such an hypothesis. This implies, in Bourdieuan terminology, that the parents transfer an 'urban' *habitus* to their children that makes them preferring what can be only delivered by migration to a city.

In other words, members from the upper rural 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 from other layers in the rural social structure. The latter group, then, stay behind in their home municipality because they do not hunger for what is on offer in the city, neither education nor other 'urban' qualities.

### ***Economic reproduction***

We find it more difficult to explain the non-existing relation between *economic* capital and migration patterns. Why is it that offspring from homes with high and low economic income is equally likely to leave their home municipality, as shown in table 2?

One explanation of this finding may be that the reproduction of 'economic' social class status not is so much dependent on geographical mobility. In order to reproduce your parents' high educational level, going the city, at least for some years, is unavoidable. Economic reproduction, however, may just as well take place within the context of the home municipality. Actually, in some instances geographical *immobility* is the basic pre-requisite, for example for those inheriting family enterprises.

It should be noted that income level may not measure very well economic capital resources, especially not in rural areas. Traditionally ownership of physical capital, in particular land, have played a very important role in forming the rural class structure. Holders of such capital, e.g. farmers and other self-employed persons, often report 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 sole indicator of economic capital, thus, primarily well paid wage earners are singled out. Those are likely to at least have some formal education<sup>3</sup>, and the effect of income on migration then may disappear in the statistical analysis.

## **6: Conclusions**

All in all, the analysis in this paper suggests some interesting characteristics of rural to urban migration. We have documented empirically a strong class aspect of rural to urban migration processes. Rural youths' migration careers are very strongly related to their social class position, as defined by their parents' capital resources. Those originating in the upper rural social classes are much more likely to migrate than others. Also the relative distribution of migration destinations varies, as those from lower rural social classes more often migrate to semi-urban areas. However, it is only the *cultural* capital component that matters. Parents' stock of *economic* capital does not impact their offspring' migration careers.

We have suggest some tentative explanation of this findings, however, the existing knowledge about migration process does is not able to fully explain the reasons behind the differing migration logic in different social classes. This would require other and 'thicker' types of data than those at hand for the time being. In particular, an analysis of possible differences in 'cultural dispositions' between migrants and non-migrants, and between members of the various rural social classes, may be informative. Such data may be able to decide whether, and eventually to what degree, there are links between social class background, cultural orientations, or

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<sup>3</sup> Father's educational and income level is highly correlated.

*habituses*, and migration careers. These are questions that will be addressed as part of one of the authors' on-going Ph.D.-project, which includes collection of a quantitative data set focusing on more 'subjective' and 'cultural' variables.

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