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## 'Should I Stay or Should I Go?' - A Case Study on Young Women Leaving Rural Sweden

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# ‘Should I Stay or Should I go?’ - A Case Study on Young Women Leaving Rural Sweden \* ‡

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## **Abstract**

Labour market structures which offer fewer options to women than to men and relatively poor educational facilities are usually mentioned as main reasons why remote and economically weak regions are affected by selective out-migration and shortage of young women. Also traditional gender structures and “macho” lifestyles are often heard motives that influence the out-migration of young women from rural areas. This sex-biased out-migration has been ongoing for more than 40 years for some rural regions in Sweden.

This paper aims to analyse the out-migration of young women from the rural Swedish region Västernorrland. The theoretical frameworks are based upon the neoclassical macro theory of migration and the dual labour market theory in combination with the human capital theory. A qualitative method will be used in the analysis in this study. The empirical material consists of a literature review, a survey to 5,512 teenagers aged 14-17, expert interviews and interviews with young women leaving Västernorrland, returning to Västernorrland or moving in without any prior connection to the region.

The driving forces of out-migration of young women appear connected to studies and moving to jobs. In the household creating ages the findings suggest a return-migration flow with net in-migration as one result. For those who do not return the lack of employment possibilities in their profession appears to be the main reason for not returning.

**KEYWORDS:** Migration, young women, rural areas, education, unemployment

**JEL:** R23, J61

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## Introduction

Gender aspects have been largely neglected in the analysis of rural migration patterns. The out-migration of young adults has received some scientific attention, but only a few studies specifically address gender differences in migration patterns. The social and economic consequences of imbalanced sex ratios have received even less attention. Despite the long tradition of rural depopulation in almost all member states of the EU, this topic also remains under-researched.

The relatively old, and also ageing, population in Västernorrland County constitutes a long-term threat to the population development in the region as it may act as a push-factor for young people to out-migrate to “younger” regions. This seems to be a self-generating process of negative development spirals. From both a national and European point of view Västernorrland’s migration pattern seems to be not sustainable in the long term as natural population change as well as net-migration is negative. The Västernorrland County reached a peak in population in the middle of 1950s, with a little more than 280000 inhabitants. Since that the number has decreased with more than 10 percent. Particularly during the last 20 years, population decrease has been very rapid and placed Västernorrland as one of the most rapidly depopulating counties in Sweden (ESPON 2012).

In Sweden, as in almost all other countries, migration intensities are as highest in the ages 18-28. Especially out-migration intensities for younger women are high in out-migration regions where women seem to be more frequent than younger men among the young out-migrants. This is also valid for Västernorrland and then especially its predominantly rural parts.

[Table 1 about here]

The in-migration intensities for Västernorrland are, however, higher than the corresponding ones for Stockholm during all years. The problem is, thus, not low in-migration intensities among women in the ages 18-34 – instead the problem is that the out-migration intensities are much higher with net out-migration, skewed gender and age structures and then eroding reproduction potentials as results (Johansson & Rauhut 2012).

When comparing the labour markets in the two counties it must be kept in mind that the labour market in Stockholm is more female-friendly than in Västernorrland. It shall also be considered that the possibilities for higher education are better and more diversified in Stockholm than in Västernorrland – a phenomenon that ought to have some impact on the migratory movements

especially for the youngest women, i.e. in the ages 18-24. Today, more women than men go to higher education (ESPON 2012).

[Table 2 about here]

The aim of this study is to analyse the out-migration of young women from the Swedish rural and sparsely populated region of Västernorrland. This dual region is split between the more densely populated coastline and the sparsely populated interior. The development of Västernorrland will be contrasted to the development both in Sweden totally and to the development in the expanding and growing metropolitan region of Stockholm. This study proposes to answer the following questions: (1) what are the push and pull factors to migration, and (2) are the push and pull factors perceived differently by different actors in Västernorrland County?

The theoretical framework is based upon the neoclassical macro theory of migration and the dual labour market theory. The empirical material consists of a literature review, a survey to 5,512 teenagers aged 14-17, expert interviews and nine in-depth interviews with young women with ties to Västernorrland.

## Previous research

The employment changes that took place after the economic crisis in the early 1990s show three distinct patterns according to Persson *et al.* (2004:26f.). (1) The three metropolitan areas around Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö, but also Jönköping, show significant increases in employment; (2) coastal towns and university towns show a small increase in employment; and (3) rural and peripheral municipalities, and especially in the north of Sweden, show decreasing employment. Furthermore, the mismatch appears to be accentuated during the structural transformation after the economic crisis in the early 1990s. The labour required in the metropolitan areas is very knowledge-based and 'post-Fordist', while rural and peripheral areas have a more traditional and 'Fordist'-based production. Johansson & Persson (2001:20) argue that this has accentuated the regional polarisation over time.

Bengtsson & Johansson (1993:45f.) argue that the declining economic base in the northern Sweden, together with high birth rates and cut-backs in the female dominated public sector may generate a future migration flow to the south.

In the study by Eðvarðsson *et al.* (2007:50f.) it is concluded that many of the regions in the north of Sweden, including Västernorrland, has an obsolete branch structure, a slower growth than the national average and has lost, in economic terms, due to the de-industrialisation process. Rauhut and Kahila (2008:57-66) concludes that although modern sectors, e.g. the ICT sector, have grown

in Västernorrland, the old economic structures are still dominating. Consequently, the region has experienced a population decrease, a decreasing number of jobs (measured in full time equivalent employment), a decreased share of employed persons and a decreased share of persons aged 20-64.

The rapid growth of a modern ICT-sector in the Stockholm region has put that particular region in a special position in the knowledge economy: nowhere else in Sweden is the demand for specialised knowledge as high as in this region. Consequently, the Stockholm region will attract new labour, according to Persson (2002: 215f.). Not only labour will be attracted by this region, but also capital. Johansson (1996) notes that industrial investment and migration patterns were characterised by mobile labour and immobile capital, while the opposite can be said about the post-industrial investment and migration patterns. This will lead to an increased regional polarisation between centre and periphery (Johansson 1996:86ff. Cf. Chapter 4 in Johansson & Persson 1991).

In a study by Nilsson (2001:19) two cohorts were studied, born 1968 and 1985, over the period 1985-1995. One third of the city bound domestic migrants in Sweden left the city region during the studied time and almost two out of three of them returned back to their original labour market region. The result is a loss in labour as two thirds will stay in the city regions and not return. These findings are in line with the findings by Johansson & Persson (2000:16). They concluded that the small and local labour markets were losing labour to the labour markets of the metropolitan region and major towns. Especially the Stockholm region attracts both persons who move there because they have got a job as well as unemployed persons (Johansson & Persson 1999:162f.). The study by Rauhut *et al.* (2008:45-52) show that the migration flows are from the periphery and rural areas towards metropolitan areas and university towns. About half of the domestic migrants are in the ages 20-35. These results support the findings by Eliasson *et al.* (2007:77, 92).

Lundholm (2007:35) notices the dramatic increase in the number of students among the inter-regional migrants in Sweden 1970-2001. She also finds that the share of migrants in working age (18-64) decreased during the same period. These findings support the results by Johansson *et al.* (2004:16) where it is concluded that only roughly 40 per cent of all domestic migration is related to the labour market during the 1990s.

## A theoretical framework

In the international research it is recognised that women have increased their share of international migrants since 1945 (Castles & Miller 1994:8). Especially with regard to development theories,

research on migration has undergone a feminisation process. Nevertheless lots of methodological and theoretical work remains before the research on migrating women has caught up with the research on migrating men (Kofman 1999). To better understand the processes behind migration, a short overview on the most common migration theories is given with particular regard to gender issues.

### *The neoclassical macro theory of migration*

The neo-classical macro theory of migration explains labour migration by wage differences and unemployment between the area of origin and the area of destination (Ranis & Fei 1961, Todaro 1976). Consequently, if one sex is over-represented amongst the migrants this can be explained by higher net gains of migration for that sex.

Decision is taken by using the classical behavioural push-pull-model with intervening obstacles. Poverty, social exclusion, unemployment and an insufficient housing situation are examples of push-factors, while prospects of higher income, to get a (better) job, better access to services and better housing are examples of pull-factors (Lee 1966). Sex differences in migration relates to how men and women are affected by push- and pull-factors in the areas of origin and destination.

Expansive regions with a larger demand for labour than actually can be met regionally or nationally will stimulate migration; in these regions job prospects are good and the wages in the modern and expanding sector are higher than in other sectors. Labour will be transferred from economically less developed sectors to modern and knowledge-based ones (Fisher & Straubhaar 1996:64-74). When the labour demand in the expanding regions has been met, wages will be relatively lower, and unemployment relatively higher in these regions. As a result, the demand for labour will subside. Wage differentials and differences in unemployment between two regions are both push and pull factors for migration (Massey *et al.* 1993:433-434). The big difference between expanding and retarding regions is instead the employment size – in the expanding regions where the increased demand resulted in a transfer of people from the retarding regions, the amount of jobs and workers are larger than before while the contrary is the case in the retarding regions (McCann 2005:192-193). Even these development paths are in line with the neo-classical theory even if the outcome will be a divergent development and even polarisation between differing regions as a consequence of external or internal factors or chocks. A new equilibrium is reached but the attractiveness of the regions is quite different after than before the transformation process. This means that the push and pull-factors will be quite different as “big is beautiful” often is one central ingredient among the migration motives that are associated with jobs, flexibility and urban life styles. This kinds of reasoning has been developed in human capital

based economic theory where individuals are assumed to undertake long term calculations where migration can be seen analogical with an investment in future wellbeing (Todaro 1969, 1976, 1989, Harris and Todaro, 1970). One central assumption is that the migrant is rational – at least *ex ante*.

### *The dual labour market theory*

As mentioned earlier the migrant is rational from the supply side of view according to the human capital theory simultaneously as demand side consists of several differing segments. This situation results in several labour market segments with little mobility and substitution between these, but high mobility and substitution within them (Johansson 1996:71-73). In the post-industrial society, the production factors are more complementary compared to the industrial society where they more easily substitute each other.

The Dual Labour Market Theory argues that most migrants originating from rural areas have a low education. Usually the migrant is unemployed or has a marginal position at the labour market in the area of origin. The person will climb in the social hierarchy in the area of origin when they emigrate – regardless of what job they pick up in the area of destination (Piore 1979). According to Morokvasic (1984), women demand less than men and constitute a more flexible labour force. For rural young men staying may be more beneficial than leaving. Rural labour markets tend to offer better job opportunities for men with low formal education, e.g. in agriculture or handicraft enterprises where manual skills and personal relationships matter more than school leaving certificates (Bye 2009). Women rely much more on formal educational credentials for their economic security than men (Corbett 2005).

The decision whether to migrate or not does not only take economic considerations into account, but has also a socio-cultural dimension. Women in rural regions where economic and social structures offer no future other than being a homemaker and mother are willing to take any job just to leave the area. In this respect, patriarchal structures and the low compatibility of family and career may constitute a major push-factor for these women (Morokvasic 1984).

### *Hypotheses*

In line with the above mentioned theories the following hypotheses are generated:

1. The *neoclassical macro theory of migration* sex differences in migration relates to how men and women are affected by push- and pull-factors in the areas of origin and destination. Poverty, social exclusion, unemployment and an insufficient housing situation are examples of push-

factors, while prospects of higher income, to get a (better) job, better access to services and better housing are examples of pull-factors. The migration flows will be directed towards the modern and expansive sectors.

2. The push and pull-factors will be quite different as “big is beautiful” often is one central ingredient among the migration motives that are associated with jobs, flexibility and urban life styles. This kind of reasoning has been developed in *human capital based economic theory* where individuals are assumed to undertake long term calculations where migration can be seen analogical with an investment in future wellbeing.

3. The *Dual Labour Market Theory* argues that most migrants originating from rural areas have a low education. Usually the migrant is unemployed or has a marginal position at the labour market in the area of origin. The person will climb in the social hierarchy in the area of origin when they emigrate – regardless of what job they pick up in the area of destination.

4. Women in rural regions where economic and social structures offer no future other than being a homemaker and mother are willing to take any job just to leave the area. ‘Macho’ life-styles, patriarchal structures and the low compatibility of family and career constitute a major push-factor for these women. This is a distinctive *gender related aspect* of the causes of migration movements from rural areas.

## Methodology and material

The questionnaire from which the empirical material for Västernorrland region has been collected was made in 2009/10 by the National Youth Board in Sweden by two researchers at the University of Mid-Sweden. The response rate in the 8<sup>th</sup> class of the primary school was between 82 and 87 per cent for five of the municipalities (100 per cent in one municipal and 75 per cent in another); at the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the secondary school the response rate was around 75 per cent in four municipalities, 97 percent in one and 55 and 58 per cent in the remaining two municipalities. In total, 5512 pupils answered the questionnaire: 1,503 girls and 1,461 boys in the 8<sup>th</sup> class of the primary school (in total 2,964 pupils in 8<sup>th</sup> class) and 1,194 girls and 1,354 boys at the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the secondary school (in total 2,548 pupils at 2<sup>nd</sup> year’s secondary school) have answered questionnaire. The survey asked questions about most aspects of the youngsters’ lives and the areas of school, leisure, work, future, safety, health and society were analysed and published in a report in 2010. Besides the data and analyses made in the report by Dahlin & Boustedt (2010) we have also had the possibility to utilise some of the non-published material from the questionnaire.



The selection of the expert interviews was made in close cooperation with the national stakeholder of the SEMIGRA project, *Länsstyrelsen i Västernorrlands län*. Nine respondents accepted to be interviewed.<sup>1</sup> Three of the respondents were mayors, one worked at the Länsstyrelsen i Västernorrlands län, one at the National Labour Board (Arbetsförmedlingen), one researcher at the Mid-Swedish University who has done extensive research on youth in Västernorrland, one representative for the Swedish Enterprises, one representative for the Chamber of Commerce in Västernorrland and one representative for the Confederation of Swedish Trade Unions (LO). One of the interviews took place at the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) in Stockholm, three of the interviews were made over telephone and five interviews were held at the work place of the respondents. After the interviews have been transcribed all respondents were sent a copy for review.

Nine women in the ages 25-34 were interviewed. Two of them are out-movers, one is a permanent stayer, one is an in-migrant with no prior attachment to the region and five are return migrants. The selection of these respondents was not randomised: we put a notice on Facebook that we looked for respondent to interview for this project. Three interviews of the young women took place at their work places and the remaining six took place in peaceful cafés with good possibilities for a conversation on private and personal matters; two of the interviews were in Stockholm and the remaining seven in Västernorrland.

The questions for the expert interviews and for the young women followed a semi-structured interview guide, which was the same for all case study regions in the SEMIGRA project. In line with the standards of qualitative methodology regarding semi-structured interviews, the validity can be considered good while reliability is non-existing (appendix 1 and 2).<sup>2</sup>

## Empirical results

### *The statistical picture*

#### **Age-specific migration intensities among young women aged 18-34**

In order to investigate the impact of ages on the migration pattern for younger women the migration intensities have to be disaggregated in three different groups according to their position in the life cycle: (1) Women in studies and labour market entries (18-24 years); (2) Women after

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<sup>1</sup> One additional mayor, one director of local development and one director of a Social Office (Socialtjänsten) declined the invitation to participate.

<sup>2</sup> The possibilities of replication of the interviews are limited as the results are, to some extent, dependent on the interviewer. Furthermore, it is scientifically impossible to generalise the results of qualitative interviews into a general “truth” (Robson 2002).

finalised studies but in beginning of labour market careers (25-29 years); and (3) Women in the household creating ages (30-34 years).

The disaggregation demonstrate quite different patterns concerning in- and out-migration with regard to Västernorrland – from out-migration during the study and youngest ages to in-migration in the household creating ages. The high migration intensities in the youngest age group will result in out-migration for the whole category 18-34. Johansson & Rauhut (2012) stress that both intensities are higher in Västernorrland than in the Stockholm region. The high migration intensities for the youngest ages (18-24 years) are in line with the observed fact for other regions in Sweden. Contrary to the expanding Stockholm region Västernorrland shows a migration deficit.

The picture changes when the age group 25-29 is analysed. The out-migration intensity has dropped a lot for Västernorrland while the in-migration intensity is almost the same. The result is that the out-outmigration surplus for the age group 18-24 years has been changed to an in-migration surplus for ages 25-29.

In the ages when the entrance to the labour market is most frequent the mobility is lower but the return migration is probably higher. Many of the former out-movers are now returning for work. This phenomenon is more highlighted in cohorts in the ages 30-34 when the household and family creating is even more frequently occurring. In these ages the migratory movements are however hampered because the bonds to the new residence region is tighter as a consequence of jobs, houses and two income households (Johansson & Rauhut 2012).

### **Wage differences**

The average incomes in Västernorrland are lower than for Stockholm and Sweden as a whole 2000-2009. While the average incomes for women in Västernorrland was 81.2% of the incomes for women in Stockholm and 96.6% of the incomes for women in Sweden in 2000, the average incomes for women in Västernorrland had increased to 81,9% of the average incomes for women in Stockholm in 2009 but decreased to 96.4% for women in Sweden. In any case, the incomes of women in Västernorrland are lower than in Stockholm and Sweden.

[Table 3 about here]

### **Intra-regional differences and disparities**

Västernorrland is a county with a dual character. The costal part is the more populated with a more diversified economic structure while the inner part of the county is more sparsely populated and even more traditional in the sense that rural activities are more important for incomes and

employment. The inner areas are the ones suffering most with regard to the structural transformation of the economy and with out-migration as the interior of Västernorrland has an old traditional industrial base (Johansson & Rauhut 2012).

[Table 4 about here]

From Table 5 the dual character of Västernorrland is clearly shown. The only municipality that has a positive net-migration most of the years is Sundsvall. This is a city with relatively low unemployment, a university, large hospital, and a relatively female-friendly labour market with a large service sector. The opposite situation can be found in the former regiment town Sollefteå and in the old industrial municipality Kramfors. Here the unemployment is high, education possibilities few, skewed gender and age structure, “un-friendly” labour market for women and a standardized labour force.

[Table 5 about here]

Sundsvall has experienced positive population development as a consequence of net in-migration as well as natural population increase. This is the most favourable population development in long term. Both Timrå and Örnsköldsvik have seen a net increase with regard to total population development but only as an effect of net in-migration.

Four municipalities are fighting against depopulation and unfavourable population development and structures. The capital of Västernorrland, Härnösand, shows a population decrease that is a consequence of negative natural population change - the figures concerning net-migration are positive. This seems, however, not to be an effect of in-migration of women in the ages 18-34 – instead it must be an effect of families and older person that move to the larger service supply in Härnösand. The same seem to be valid concerning Sollefteå that show the same migration pattern.

This problematic situation is even more pronounced in the two communities with the most unfavourable population development. Both Kramfors and Ånge are in this category. In this case the negative population change is a function of both net out-migration and natural population decrease. The result will be an even more accentuated negative spiral with regard to the preconditions for a long term positive population development.

The dual Västernorrland is a function of economic structure as well as demographic development. Out-migration of younger women reinforces this duality both as consequences of direct and indirect effects. Direct effects in the sense that the population will be more skewed with regard to age and gender, indirect in the sense that the image will be changed in a more “male-oriented” direction, a development that hamper future in-migration of younger women in the out-migration

areas. This is a self-fulfilling process that can erode the future preconditions for a positive population development in long term. Instead for convergence within the region the result will be divergence and eroding reproduction potentials especially in inner part of the county (ESPON 2012).

### *The youth survey*<sup>3</sup>

With regard to the *way of life* of the pupils the political interest increases with age and the sex differences are marginal. The difference is however very marked when origin is analysed: the interest in politics is significantly higher amongst pupils with non-Nordic origin compared to pupils with native and Nordic origin. The political activity amongst the youth in the 8th class of the primary school and at the 2nd years of the secondary school in Västernorrland is higher than the national average activity for youth in the same ages. Young women are significantly more interested in societal questions than young men in the 2nd year in secondary school: 51% of the young women express such interest while only 38% of the young men do so. With one exception, the differences in social behaviour are relatively small; the different social behaviour is related to a marked café culture among young women. It is unlikely that having access to more cafés is the major cause for leaving the hometown. Instead, the café culture among young women is probably an indicator for a desired life style which the young women perceive to exist in the major metropolitan areas in Sweden.

In 8th class almost 20% more girls than boys *intend to migrate*, and at the 2nd year of secondary school about 78% more girls than boys intend to leave! This is a huge sex difference. The higher intentions to migrate among girls relative to boys can be assumed to be connected with the intention to study. In a sparsely populated region as Västernorrland all educations at secondary schools are not available in every municipality, i.e. to move to another town may be a necessity to get the desired education. The situation is partly similar when it comes to university studies: although there is a university in the region, it cannot offer more than a limited number of educations.

Considering the *future plans of the pupils*, more boys than girls would like to work after primary school. The wish to work is 44% higher among 16 years old boys leaving primary school than among the same girls. The situation is the opposite when studying the wish to enter an education at secondary school: 73% of the girls wish to do so, but only 63% of the boys. To study at secondary school is 16% higher among the girls than boys. The differences between the sexes to

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<sup>3</sup> This section is based upon the findings in Dalin & Boustedt (2010).

study in the home town are very small, but the girls have a much higher wish to study in another town: the wish to study in another town is 46% higher among girls than boys at the age of 16.

The major conclusion from the survey is that there are some sex specific differences that may influence the willingness to migrate from Västernorrland. In some cases the sex specific differences show remarkable results, e.g. that 40% of the girls who participated in the survey have bullied, threatened or harassed other pupils, while only 31% of the boys have done so. Being bullied, harassed and threatened is a potential “push” factor for migration. Furthermore, a quite larger share of the boys argues that girls are favoured in school than the share of girls arguing that boys are favoured in school.

The major difference is apparently not related to sex, but to origin. The group of pupils of non-Nordic origin show e.g. a high willingness to tertiary studies, a higher political activity and a higher willingness to migrate. In several of the municipalities the results for questions on being a victim of sexual harassment, assault, robbery and being threatened are published and the picture given for these questions are a quite sad reading: pupils of non-Nordic origin are to a far greater extent victims of sexual harassment, assault, robbery and threats than native/Nordic pupils. They are also being bullied in school to a higher degree than pupils with native and Nordic origin. The “push” factor for leaving the region as soon as possible ought to be higher for the group of youngsters with non-Nordic origin than for youngsters with native or Nordic origin.

### *Expert interviews*

There is a difference in the willingness to migrate between the sexes. The general opinion of the respondents is that young women are more willing to migrate than young men. Several of the respondents did, however, point out reasons for moving, which, primarily, are not related to education or labour market aspects: (a) especially media is communicating a view that the city life and the urban life style is something superior and desirable; (b) by tradition, many young adults are encouraged to travel after they have left secondary school “to see the world”. They are told that “they can always return when they want to settle down”. These two life style aspects do, however, not give any explanation per se why there are more young women than young men migration from Västernorrland.

In general, the labour market situation for the young adults is described in terms of “bad”, “terrible” and “disaster”; only one respondent has the view that the labour market situation for the school leavers is good in Västernorrland. The labour market in Västernorrland is sex segregated; women are over-represented in education as well as health and care sectors, while men are over-

represented in forestry, industry and manufacturing. None of them offer any great career possibilities.

Many of the respondents stressed that their opinion is that employers work actively with gender equality; the problem lies rather in the structure of the labour market. The tendency is that women are more likely to enter professions previously dominated by men; men entering professions dominated by women are fewer. Two respondents said that sex might have some impact on the career possibilities; four respondents stressed that what really matters is age, contacts and ethnicity. With one exception, the respondents stressed that the young adults with an immigrant background have even more difficult than the native in the same age to get a job. Many employers talk about meagre language skills, but in fact a foreign surname is enough to get rejected in the recruitment process. Several of the respondents talked openly about a widespread discrimination against immigrants in the region. At the same time, they were convinced that more immigrants are needed in Västernorrland. Some employers would like to employ immigrants, but far more employers do not wish to even if they say so. One of the respondents argued that immigrants are only good for jobs at e.g. McDonalds and hard physical jobs, and these jobs are getting fewer and fewer in the region.

In the public opinion it is often perceived that if there only were jobs in the rural and peripheral parts people would not move away from there. This view was not confirmed by the respondents; the picture is far more multifaceted than just being a question about jobs and having access to higher education.

Some respondents mentioned that there is a deeply rooted disbelief on the future in Västernorrland. The de-industrialisation process has made the region leave industrialism, but it has not yet managed to enter post-industrialism; to many people the image of being “a loser” still clings on to the region of Västernorrland. Most municipalities in Västernorrland are considered everything but ‘cool’ to live in, they are regarded as rural, peripheral, industrial and declining. The two cities, Sundsvall and Örnsköldsvik, are ‘cool’ in a regional perspective; but taken as a whole the region is not regarded as ‘cool’ by young adults. The view of the stayers as ‘lazy losers’, in-actuate and without ambition is often given by media. While three respondents rejected this as a downgrading myth, three others gave more nuanced explanations.

A majority of the respondents also mentioned one important thing: the marketing of the region must be better. The self-esteem of the region is low – the image of the region must be improved so that the population – and not just the young adults – actually can see all the good things and all possibilities that actually exist. The inflow is needed to attract key competences and population; if

the region is unable to attract newcomers, it will actually be very difficult to keep the present population in the region.

None of the respondents thought that the school is doing a good job in preparing the young adults for the step into the labour market. The general criticism is related to three things: (1) the educations produced do not match the demand of labour – and this mismatch is devastating since the youngsters have to move to get a job; (2) the school system and its leadership is stuck in the industrial economy, e.g. a majority of the schools appear to think that future jobs still exist in forestry, industry and manufacturing. Consequently, the leadership in the schools can be questioned. (3) Several of the respondents were not convinced that the liberalisation of the school system in the late 1990s actually improved the quality in education; several schools offer education that may attract pupils, but they will be unemployable when they graduate.

### *Interviews with young women*

Most respondents moved immediately after they finished secondary school. In this age most of their friends also moved. For the returnees only some of their friends actually left Västernorrland. Possibilities of getting a desired education, which in most cases was not available in Västernorrland, or better opportunities to get a job was mentioned as main drivers of their migratory decision. Two women mentioned an urban life-style as a pull-factor.

Among the areas of destination for the out-migrants, towns with universities or university colleges are mentioned (Umeå, Luleå, Östersund, Göteborg, Uppsala, Norrköping, Skara, Karlskrona) as well as Stockholm (better job opportunities), but also an intra-regional migration towards the coastal towns of Västernorrland. Luleå and Umeå are the towns mentioned most often by the respondents as areas of destinations for the out-migrants, not Stockholm as expected.

[Table 6 about here]

The motives for returning vary. One woman, who have had a very international career, suddenly faced a situation where Västernorrland was the only place she could get a job. She misses the urban life-style, but is not sure that she will move again. The other returnees left the region to study, with the intention of returning. During their stay outside Västernorrland they actively kept their social networks and ties to the region. One of the returnees was not accepted for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of her studies and she became unemployed. She experienced psychological problems due to this and decided to return to Västernorrland after one year of unemployment. In total, two of five returnees did not return happily, but by necessity.

The respondent who moved to Sundsvall with no prior attachment to the region did so because she was offered a job. She originates from the interior of an area further up north in Sweden and Sundsvall was then relatively close to home. One respondent had always lived in Västernorrland; she has all her friends and family there. At several occasions she has considered moving to get an education or a job. At time being she has a temporary job in the elderly care sector.

Four of the five returnees mention the importance of being close to friends and family as a motive for returning. Also that the rich nature and that Västernorrland is a safe place for children to grow up in are mentioned. The other respondents do not say much about this.

In one way or another, all respondents ask for more and better communications to other major cities in Sweden, by rail and by air. Some of them also highlight the need for better educational facilities and more jobs to the region; then there would be no need for them to move. One respondent would like major investments in culture, schools and the care sector. Furthermore, one respondent would like Västernorrland to be more international and open-minded and one respondent regrets that most people in the region complain about almost everything without doing anything themselves to improve the situation.

Three respondents mention the racism and discrimination of immigrants in Västernorrland. One of the respondents seeks an excuse for this by saying that it is probably not different in other parts of Sweden. Open racism and White Power-music are also mentioned. One of the respondents describes a situation where her work colleague, who was married with a non-European immigrant, had a husband who felt so insecure because of the racism in Sundsvall that he refused to move there.

The mentality in Västernorrland is described in a quite colourful way by five of the respondents. There is a strong regional identity. Especially the respondents from Örnsköldsvik are proud of their ice hockey team. As a Swedish in-migrant to Västernorrland it is difficult – but not impossible – to be accepted. You basically need someone local to “let you in” into the social life. Students from other parts of Sweden only get in touch with other in-migrants. Two respondents argued that it is far easier to get accepted if you enjoy fishing, hunting and driving snow-scooter; this is described as the ‘macho-culture’ in the region by one of the respondent. One respondent tells a story she experienced herself: a friend of a friend who was from Stockholm became the target for slandering and everybody was talking behind her back. When she met this person herself it turned out to be a very social and outgoing person... and very different from the kind of person the locals usually met. The respondent complains about this and concludes that this is not a very welcoming way to meet in-migrants from other parts of Sweden.



Few of the respondents have a clear picture if there is a surplus of men in the region or not. They referred to that this might be the case in the smaller communities in the region, but not in the town which they lived in. The main causes for an eventual surplus of young men is explained simply by women have an ambition to get an education; one respondent claims that women are more adventurous than men. Although the respondents only have a vague idea of the causes for a surplus of men, they have earlier in the interview commented that a lot of their friends, usually women according to themselves, have moved away. They have also commented the impact of their friends' – if many of their friends moved so would they. Two of the respondents also mentioned the city life-style as something desirable. Two of the returnees emphasised that they considered themselves lucky since they actually have had the possibility not only to return back home again after their studies, but also to get a job within their area of education.

## Analysis

The first hypothesis stated that poverty, unemployment and low incomes will be push-factors and jobs, higher incomes and access to better housing will be pull-factors. Furthermore, the migration flows will be directed towards the modern and expansive economic sectors. The empirical materials support this hypothesis for Västernorrland. Unemployment is high and incomes low; consequently, access to housing is limited and well as prospects for the future. In Stockholm, the situation is different.

Four of five young women who have returned to Västernorrland have done so because they were offered a job; the person with no prior ties to the region moved in when she was offered a job. Having a job means income, a good housing situation, closeness to friends and family and hopes for the future.

In the second hypothesis states that migration motives are associated with jobs, flexibility and urban life styles. The some of the interviews with experts and young women this is highlighted. The urban life style is perceived as something positive and desirable, while the rural life style is perceived the opposite. Some of the returnees miss the urban life style, while some consider the urban life style as overrated. This hypothesis is, at least, partly confirmed.

Hypothesis three argues that most migrants originating from rural areas have a low education; they are unemployed or have a marginal position at the labour market in the area of origin. The person will climb in the social hierarchy in the area of origin when they emigrate regardless of what job they pick up in the area of destination.

The motives for leaving Västernorrland are dominated by studies and work. Youth unemployment is high in the region and for those who leave secondary school the risk of unemployment is high; for those who want to study the educational facilities for tertiary education are limited in Västernorrland. In both cases it can be assumed that the persons leaving Västernorrland have a relatively low education, i.e. an exam from secondary school. This gives some support for the third hypothesis. Nevertheless, the third hypothesis also states that the migrants have a marginal position at the labour market. The very high share of young unemployed in Västernorrland who are in labour market programs indicate a marginal position. Persons who have been unemployed for very long and/or in labour market programs for very long usually do not have the needed resources to move. This hypothesis is, at most, partly confirmed.

In the fourth hypothesis it was argued that women in rural regions where economic and social structures offer no future other than being a homemaker and mother are willing to take any job just to leave the area. 'Macho' life-styles, patriarchal structures and the low compatibility of family and career constitute a major push-factor for these women.

Although there are indications of 'macho'-life styles and presence of racism in Västernorrland, there are no support for patriarchal structures and low compatibility of family and career constituting a major push-factor for these women. On the contrary, employers appear to work actively with these issues. Consequently, this hypothesis finds no empirical support. To what extent a gender segregated labour market can be considered as a patriarchal structure is beyond the scope of this study.

## Concluding remarks

The aim of this study is to analyse the out-migration of young women from the Swedish rural and sparsely populated region of Västernorrland and two questions were proposed to be answered: (1) what are the push and pull factors to migration, and (2) are the push and pull factors perceived differently by different actors in Västernorrland?

The push-factors for out-migration of young women appear connected to studies and moving to jobs; the pull-factors appear to be related to educational facilities, jobs and the urban life style. In the household creating ages the findings suggest a return-migration for women who are lucky to find a job in Västernorrland with net in-migration of women as one result. For those who do not return the lack of employment possibilities in their profession appears to be the main reason for not returning.

The youth survey, the expert interviews and the interviews with young women all identify the lack of jobs, limited educational facilities and the urban life style. These aspects are also identified in previous research.

The labour market for women is, by tradition, dominated by jobs in the public sector, and in particular in schools and in the care sectors. The new, modern and expansive sectors prefer to expand elsewhere. These jobs are usually created in the private sector. Consequently, women who are interested to work in these sectors have to move. Seen from a regional planning perspective this is a rather delicate issue as e.g. higher education and labour market policies are determined at the national level and not at the regional. More research is needed to identify how regions can design regional policies, without interfering with the national, so that they can break a vicious development.

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## **Annex 1: Interview guide - experts**

### **Reasons for age- and sex-selective out-migration**

Do you perceive different degrees of willingness to leave (district) among your female and male pupils? If this is the case: What are from your point of view the main reasons for these sex-specific differences? Do you think that girls have different aims in life than boys?

How do you assess the occupational outlook for school leavers in (district)? Do you think that the labour market conditions for young women and young men in (district) are equally difficult or do you believe that career entry is easier for one sex? If so: why?

Is it important to know the right people and to pull strings to get a job/ an apprenticeship training position in (district)?

Do you think that young people in general and young women in particular would stay in (district) if the local job situation in was better or are there other important reasons to move away?

Does the image of rural areas play a decisive role when young people reach the decision to move away? Is it maybe “uncool” to stay in (district)? Are there sex-specific differences?

Do the pupils at your school frequently discuss the topic moving “away from rural Sachsen-Anhalt”? Is it safe to say that it is quite common that young people think about leaving (district) after they have graduated from school or finished vocational training?

What about those who stay in (district)? In the media, they are often portrayed as lazy losers without drive and ambition. Do you think that this characterisation fits or is it just a malevolent stereotype? Do you know of enterprising graduates of your school who have been successful with their business ideas?

Where do – according to your experience – young people move to? Are there sex-specific differences in the most popular destinations? Have you noticed any changes in recent years, e.g. that young people increasingly move the large urban centres in the East instead of heading to Western Germany?

### **Consequences of age- and sex-selective out-migration**

Is the “deficit” of young women perceivable in everyday life?

Do you have the impression that the deficit of young women negatively affects (municipality)/ your school/ (association)? If so, how?

It is often argued that if „women leave, rural regions die“. Do you agree? Do you think that the disproportionately high out-migration of young women affects social life in (municipality)?

And what about the remaining young men? Do you think that the lack of young women negatively affects their self-perception, e.g. if they not only feel excluded from the labour market but also from the partner market?

### **Opinions on possible approaches**

What actions should be taken against the out-migration of young people in general and young women in particular? (e.g. in the fields of infrastructure, image of (case study region), advancement of entrepreneurship, commuting, teleworking, etc.)

Do you think that concepts to limit out-migration or to promote return-migration should be gender-specific? Do you reckon that girls have different priorities in life than boys that should be considered in the strategy development?

Are there any projects at your school to prepare the pupils for the local labour market? Are there concepts systematically targeted on girls / boys (e.g. measures to spark interest in “male” occupations among the girls)? Do you have the impression that the division in “male” and “female” occupations is deeply rooted among employers and school leavers?

Politicians, businessmen, scientists and representatives of the Employment Agency sometimes talk about an upcoming skills shortage in Eastern Germany. What is your impression about this topic? Do you think that the labour market conditions for young people in general and young women in particular will improve over the next few years?

How do – to your mind – the opinions regarding the labour market situation and the future economic prospects of (district) and Sachsen-Anhalt held by parents, teachers, vocational advisors etc. influence the plans of young people? If your pupils asked you where to look for a job or an apprenticeship, what would you advise them to do? Why?

## **Annex 2: Interview guide – young women**

### **Introduction and questions on the individual social network:**

Have you noticed that there are more young men than young women in (municipality/ borough)? Can you think of any reasons why this is the case?

Please look back at the last ten years. Have female friends of yours or family members between 15 and 30 left (municipality/ borough)? If yes: in which phase of their life did they move away? What were their reasons for going away? Where did they move? If you also have male friends/ family members that have left: Are there any differences (e.g. age at out-migration, destination, reasons...)?

Are you still in contact with the friends/ family members that have moved away? Do they sometimes come back for a visit? If you talk about their moving away: do they regret the move? Have they ever talked about coming back to (municipality/ borough) or Sachsen-Anhalt? If yes: why? Are their plans serious or rather vague and non-committal? Or do they advise you to move away?

Do you know of any young women or men that have returned to (municipality/ borough)? Do you know why they came back? Do you think this was a good idea?

Do close family members of yours live around here?

### **Migration: Decision-making and residential “biography”**

Have you always been living in (municipality/ borough)?

*For “Stayers”:* Have you at some point in your life thought about leaving (municipality/ borough)? If yes: in which phase of your life? Where did you plan to move to? What were the main reasons for considering a move?

*For return- and in-migrants:* What have been the crucial factors for moving (back) to (municipality/ borough)? Looking back, do you think that it was a good decision to move (back) to (municipality/ borough)?

Would you describe the residents of (municipality/ borough) to be open and welcoming vis-à-vis new inhabitants?

Was it easy for you to (re-) settle in (municipality/ borough) or have problems occurred that you didn't expect? If yes, what kind of problems have you had to deal with? Did you ever consider leaving (municipality/ borough) as a result of these difficulties? Have you developed specific strategies to overcome the problems you described?

### **Professional life and voluntary work:**

Are you currently gainfully employed or working as an apprentice or trainee? Is your place of work nearby and well accessible?

How did you find this job/ apprenticeship training position? How long did you search? Did you also apply for jobs/ apprenticeships elsewhere (in other parts of Sachsen-Anhalt/ Germany/ abroad)? Did you use personal connections to get this job? What would you have done if you hadn't landed this job?

If you are not gainfully employed: Are you actively looking for employment or an apprenticeship position? Have you considered to start your own business or to continue schooling? If yes: in which area? If no to both questions: what are your plans?

Are you part of a club/association/church/party/citizens' initiative in (municipality/ borough)? Are you volunteering somewhere else?

**Family life:**

Are you single or do you have a partner? If yes: do you live together? If you don't live together: Does (s)he live in the same or a neighbouring municipality? Is one of you more rooted in (municipality/ borough)? If yes: who and why?

Is your partner economically active? Does (s)he work nearby or does (s)he commute? If yes: is (s)he a long-distance commuter? Do you see each other every day or only over the weekend? If no: Is (s)he still in school or an apprentice/ trainee? Have you already talked about his/her future (professional) plans?

Do you plan to have children or do you already have children? If yes: Do you think that (municipality/ borough) is a good place for them to grow up? Do you think your children will (want to) live (around) here when they are grown up? Would you advise your children to stay (around) here or to move away when they finish school? If yes: why and where?

**Attitudes on living in a rural municipality**

What do you like about living in (municipality borough)? We have already talked about the "surplus" of young men here. Do you think that it is better/ more beneficial/ easier to live in (municipality borough) for women or for men? Please give reasons for your opinion.

What do you miss in (municipality borough)? Is there something that bothers you? If you could change anything (around) here, where would you start?

**Table 1** Female in- and out-migration intensities for Västernorrland's (Y) and Stockholm's (AB) counties 2000-2010. Ages 18-34. Source: Statistics Sweden. Statistical Data Base.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>ABin</b>	11,6	11,2	10,1	10,0	10,0	10,0	11,1	11,2	10,6	10,4	10,3
<b>ABout</b>	6,8	7,0	7,1	7,2	7,0	6,8	6,5	6,7	6,5	6,3	6,4
<b>Yin</b>	11,9	10,1	12,5	12,0	12,1	12,0	12,3	11,3	11,1	11,2	11,0
<b>Yout</b>	16,3	14,6	16,2	14,5	14,9	14,9	14,3	14,7	14,1	14,2	13,6

**Table 2** Female in- and out-migration intensities for Västernorrland's (Y) and Stockholm's (AB) counties 2000-2010. Ages 18-34. Source: Statistics Sweden. Statistical Data Base.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
<b>ABin</b>	11,6	11,2	10,1	10,0	10,0	10,0	11,1	11,2	10,6	10,4	10,3
<b>ABout</b>	6,8	7,0	7,1	7,2	7,0	6,8	6,5	6,7	6,5	6,3	6,4
<b>Yin</b>	11,9	10,1	12,5	12,0	12,1	12,0	12,3	11,3	11,1	11,2	11,0
<b>Yout</b>	16,3	14,6	16,2	14,5	14,9	14,9	14,3	14,7	14,1	14,2	13,6

**Table 3** Average income of work 2000 and 2009, 1000's SEK. Source: Statistics Sweden.

		Sweden	Stockholms län	Västernorrlands län
Men	2000	213.8	261.3	199.1
	2009	282.1	333.3	264.3
Women	2000	146.6	174.5	141.7
	2009	206.8	243.1	199.3

**Table 5** Female net-migration intensities for the municipalities in Västernorrland 2000-2010. Source: Statistics Sweden.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Ånge	-3,7	-4,9	-2,5	-1,0	-2,7	-4,2	-0,8	-6,2	-5,2	-4,3	-3,1
Timrå	-2,3	-2,7	-1,5	1,4	-0,5	-3,2	2,9	0,5	1,2	-1,4	-0,2
Härnösand	-4,5	-4,1	-1,8	-0,4	-0,6	-1,6	-2,5	-4,0	-3,5	-0,8	-2,3
Sundsvall	0,1	-0,3	0,4	0,6	1,2	0,5	0,8	-0,5	1,4	1,2	0,5
Kramfors	-7,1	-5,8	-1,8	-3,5	-2,6	-1,2	-4,7	-2,6	-5,4	-5,6	-3,2
Sollefteå	-7,3	-2,5	-1,0	0,1	-3,5	-1,1	-3,6	-1,8	-6,1	-1,3	-2,7
Örnsköldsvik	-2,5	-2,2	-2,0	-0,5	-1,6	0,4	1,1	-0,6	-0,3	-1,9	-0,9

**Table 6** Personal profile of the respondents

	Age	Employment	Contract form	Why move?	Why return?	Leisure activities	Social networks in the region
1	33	Student	--	Studies	Unemployment	Out-doors, shooting	Very strong
2	30	Municipal	Permanent	Studies	Got a job	?	Very strong
3	31	Government	Temporary	Studies	Got a job	?	Very strong
4	30	Municipal	Permanent	Studies	Unemployment	Cultural activities	Some
5	33	Municipal	Permanent	Studies	Got a job	?	Very strong
6	34	Region	Permanent	This person is not from Västernorrland	She moved in when she was offered a job	Carpeting, loves to build things for the house	Few
7	25	Private	Temporary	To see the world, then studies	Will not return	Cultural activities	None
8	25	Private	Temporary	To get away from Väster-norrland, to see the world, then studies	Will not return	?	None
9	29	Municipal	Temporary	Consider moving to get a job or studies	--	Seeing the family	Very strong



**Table 4** Unemployment 1996-2010. Source: Swedish Public Employment Service

		Labour force 16-64 years						Youth 18-24 years					
		Total		Women		Men		Totalt		Women		Men	
		Open unemployment	In LM programs	Open unemployment	In LM programs	Open unemployment	In LM programs	Open unemployment	In LM programs	Open unemployment	In LM programs	Open unemployment	In LM programs
1996	Stockholm	6,1	1,8	5,7	1,7	6,6	1,9	8,6	3,2	8,2	3,1	9,0	3,2
	Västernorrland	<b>8,5</b>	<b>3,5</b>	<b>7,5</b>	<b>3,1</b>	<b>9,4</b>	<b>3,9</b>	<b>14,6</b>	<b>8,3</b>	<b>13,3</b>	<b>7,7</b>	<b>15,7</b>	<b>8,7</b>
	Ånge	8,0	4,0	7,1	3,5	8,8	4,4	13,5	12,5	12,9	12,4	14,0	12,6
	Timrå	10,3	4,6	10,1	4,7	10,6	4,4	18,5	11,8	17,7	11,6	19,3	11,9
	Härnösand	6,9	3,7	5,3	2,6	8,4	4,7	11,5	7,6	9,9	6,0	12,9	9,1
	Sundsvall	8,8	3,1	7,9	2,7	9,7	3,4	14,6	6,5	13,7	6,4	15,5	6,7
	Kramfors	8,1	4,8	6,3	4,3	9,8	5,3	13,9	10,9	9,9	9,7	17,5	12,0
	Sollefteå	8,6	4,1	6,7	3,5	10,4	4,6	16,6	10,1	14,0	9,1	18,8	10,9
	Ömsköldsvik	8,2	3,1	7,9	2,7	8,4	3,5	14,6	8,4	14,0	8,0	15,1	8,8
	Sweden	7,4	3,1	6,9	3,0	7,8	3,2	11,2	6,4	10,8	6,4	11,5	6,4
2000	Stockholm	2,5	0,6	2,4	0,6	2,7	0,7	2,3	0,7	2,2	0,6	2,4	0,8
	Västernorrland	<b>5,6</b>	<b>2,6</b>	<b>4,5</b>	<b>2,3</b>	<b>6,7</b>	<b>3,0</b>	<b>6,1</b>	<b>4,5</b>	<b>5,1</b>	<b>3,7</b>	<b>7,1</b>	<b>5,2</b>
	Ånge	5,3	2,5	4,4	2,3	6,2	2,7	7,3	6,4	5,6	6,3	8,9	6,6
	Timrå	5,9	3,7	5,1	3,6	6,7	3,8	7,1	7,5	7,0	5,9	7,2	8,8
	Härnösand	6,1	2,7	4,4	2,0	7,7	3,3	6,6	4,7	5,2	3,8	7,9	5,6
	Sundsvall	5,4	2,4	4,5	2,1	6,3	2,7	5,4	3,5	4,8	2,6	6,0	4,3
	Kramfors	6,8	2,9	5,1	2,2	8,3	3,5	6,8	6,0	5,6	5,1	7,9	6,7
	Sollefteå	6,3	2,7	4,1	2,1	8,3	3,2	7,5	4,0	5,2	3,8	9,5	4,1
	Ömsköldsvik	5,1	2,6	4,0	2,4	6,0	2,8	6,1	4,8	4,8	4,2	7,2	5,3
	Sweden	4,1	1,6	3,8	1,6	4,5	1,7	4,4	2,5	4,0	2,3	4,8	2,6
2010	Stockholm	3,4	1,7	3,3	1,7	3,5	1,7	3,6	2,0	3,2	1,7	4,0	2,4
	Västernorrland	<b>5,0</b>	<b>4,5</b>	<b>4,4</b>	<b>4,2</b>	<b>5,5</b>	<b>4,7</b>	<b>7,0</b>	<b>10,8</b>	<b>6,3</b>	<b>8,7</b>	<b>7,7</b>	<b>12,6</b>
	Ånge	5,1	5,0	5,2	5,4	4,9	4,7	7,9	12,8	6,7	12,2	8,9	13,3
	Timrå	5,2	5,1	4,8	4,8	5,6	5,4	8,4	13,6	8,2	11,5	8,5	15,3
	Härnösand	4,5	4,3	3,5	3,9	5,4	4,6	8,2	7,4	7,0	5,8	9,3	9,0
	Sundsvall	4,8	4,1	4,2	3,9	5,3	4,3	6,6	9,4	5,8	7,9	7,3	10,9
	Kramfors	4,8	5,2	4,1	5,0	5,5	5,4	6,4	12,6	5,8	10,4	6,9	14,3
	Sollefteå	6,7	5,4	5,8	4,8	7,6	6,0	8,9	15,0	7,8	12,7	9,9	17,0
	Ömsköldsvik	4,9	4,3	4,6	4,1	5,2	4,5	6,4	11,7	6,0	8,7	6,7	14,5
	Sweden	3,9	3,0	3,5	2,9	4,2	3,1	4,8	6,2	4,3	5,2	5,3	7,2