

THE WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRYSIDE FROM AN EASTERN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE: CASE OF MIGRANT WORKERS IN NORWEGIAN AGRICULTURE

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Received 26 July 2014; Accepted 5 November 2014

Abstract: In the wake of the EU enlargements in 2004 and 2007, large numbers of migrant workers from Eastern Europe in-migrated to the Western European countryside. In this paper I discuss how these migration streams in important ways challenge the dominant perspectives in contemporary rural studies, in particular their focus on lifestyle-related rural in-migration, on the post-productivist character of the countryside, and on the social constructions of the rural as idyllic space. These perspectives are examined based on qualitative material from in-depth interviews with 54 migrant workers in the Norwegian agricultural industry. These migrants' everyday experiences in the rural West add important nuance to the dominant scholarly images of rural idylls and dullness, descriptions of rural communities as less marked by class structures than urban regions, and traditionalist presentations of rural social life and communities.

Key words: Agriculture, International Migration, Norway. Labour Migration, Rurality, Rural Idyll, Rural Dull.

Oppsummering: Etter EU-utvidelsene i 2004 og 2007 flyttet mange øst-europeere til de vest-europiske landene for å arbeide i de rurale primærnæringene. I artikkelen diskuterer jeg hvordan denne flyttestrømmen utfordrer sentrale perspektiver i den bygdesosiologiske flytteforskningstradisjonen, spesielt fokuset på på livsstilsflytting, bygdas post-produktivistiske karakter og betydningen av at det rurale konstrueres som «idyllisk». Gjennom analyser av et kvalitativt datamateriale (dybdeintervjuer med 54 øst-europeere som arbeider i den norske landbruksnæringen) viser jeg hvordan forestillinger om byda ut fra dikotomien idyll/kjedsomhet og det rurale som et klasseløst og tradisjonsbundet samfunn er lite meningsfulle i analyser av de øst-europeiske innflytterne, ei heller av de vest-europeiske bygdesamfunnene.

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1. Migrant farm workers and rurality

Since the enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007², there has been an influx of citizens from the former communist states seeking work in the more affluent Western states (Desiderio, 2012). In 2013 officials registered 17.3 million persons with their place of residency different from their place of birth within the EU. Added to that is an unknown number of unregistered, mostly short-term, circular migrants, travelling across the continent. Romania and Poland represent the main sending countries (Vasileva, 2012), while Germany, UK, France, Spain and Italy top the list of receiving countries (European Commission, 2014). Contrary to previous dominant intra-European migration streams, a larger number of these migrants have arrived at rural destinations in the Western countries to work in low-skilled rural industries (Jentsch, 2007; Stenning and Dawley, 2009; Andrzejewska and Rye, 2012; McAreavey, 2012). The presence of seasonal migrant workers seems to have become a particularly important feature of contemporary agriculture in many Western European countries. In this paper I argue that these developments give rise to a number of challenges for the field of rural studies.

The Norwegian agricultural industry represents an interesting case in studies of the profound, multilevel and multidimensional economic, social and cultural changes in Western countrysides resulting from the East/West migration streams. While impacts vary across European nations, regions and localities – space matters, as Massey (2005) notes – Norway is an illustrative case in its demonstration of how the everyday life of the Eastern European labour in-migrants to the countryside differs from that of the permanent rural population. Norway, an egalitarian Western welfare society characterised by high material living standards and social cohesion, has experienced a high rate of work-related in-migration from the EU accession states (Friberg et al., 2012), with many finding work in rural industries, particularly agriculture. The scale of hired unskilled farm workers has increased substantially from a mere 4,300 workers in 1990 to the present-day figure of more than 24,000. Most of the migrants are seasonally employed, but in total they accounted for as much as 13 percent of the total labour input at the 45,000 Norwegian farms in 2012 (Holm, 2012). Recent information suggests that 17 percent of farms presently employ migrant labour (Storstad and Rønning, 2014). For the migrant workers, short-term employment at the Norwegian farms provides high economic gains but also displacement and disempowerment (Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010; Andrzejewska and Rye, 2011). For the farmers, the migrant work force provides inexpensive and docile labour but also changes the sociocultural work environment at the farms (Rye and Frisvoll, 2007). Furthermore, the availability of migrant labour may stimulate structural change in agricultural production at the regional and national levels, thus changing the rules for the farmers (Rye and Holm, 2013).

There have been relatively few studies of Eastern European migrant farm workers in rural communities in the West. The studies that do exist have discussed themes relating to the migrants' labour experiences, for example their wage and working conditions (Hoggart and Mendoza, 1999; Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010), their integration in the receiving rural communities (McAreavey, 2012), recruitment practices (Findlay and McCollum, 2013), and transnational practices (Andrzejewska and Rye, 2012). Others have analysed how migrant labour streams are intertwined with structural changes in rural communities (Kasimis et al., 2010) and the agricultural sector (Kasimis et al., 2003; Rogaly, 2006). However, little is written on how the migrant workers experience their everyday lives in Western Europe countrysides and, consequently, how they challenge existing theories on modern (Western) rurality.

This paper investigates the migrant farm workers' everyday lives in rural Norway and how their experiences resonate with key themes in contemporary rural in-migration literature. In particular, I discuss dominant narratives on migration to the countrysides that were developed in the wake of the cultural turn within rural studies in the 1990s (Cloke, 2006), and confront these with the perspectives of Eastern Europeans migrating to Norway to take up seasonal farm work. Accordingly, the paper critically addresses the inadequacy of contemporary rural migration literature in understanding labour-motivated migration streams, such as that of the farm migrant

² In effect, the enlargements applied to the European Economic Agreement (EEA), in which the EU member states plus three Western European non-EU member states (Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein) states take part. Thus Norway, this paper's case, is part of the common European labour market.

workers, and discusses how workers' experiences may suggest other, complementing perspectives in studies of rural migration.

More specifically, I present an analysis of qualitative material consisting of 54 in-depth interviews with migrant workers in Norwegian agriculture, and argue that their migration experiences demonstrate the need for more heterogeneous and multifaceted narratives about rurality. In particular, their everyday life experiences challenge the dominant narrative of the countryside as a traditionalist, classless blend of rural idyll and rural dull. The material demonstrates instead how migrant farm workers in Norway's agricultural sector experience a modernist, non-idyllic rural society that is not dull, and that is organised within a capitalist labour market framework, in which the migrants occupy working-class positions.

The paper's main conclusion, thus, is that international work-motivated in-migration to rural West Europe highlights the importance of establishing alternative theoretical frameworks for interpreting rural in-migration. In consequence, more nuanced narratives of contemporary Western European countryside emerge.

2. Three challenges to rural migration studies

The in-migration of migrant farm workers to rural Norway is apparently at odds with key ideas in contemporary rural studies. In particular, the experiences of these rural migrants challenge theoretical perspectives that a) apply a lifestyle approach in studies of rural in-migration, which often b) emphasise the rural as spaces of consumption rather than spaces of production, and relatedly, c) focus on the social constructions of "the rural" as idyllic spaces.

2.1 Lifestyle-motivated rural in-migration

First, while the classical theme in rural migration studies has been rural out-migration (Woods, 2011, 179; Rye, 2006a), in recent years scholarly interest has shifted towards rural in-migration and counter-urbanisation processes (Milbourne, 2007; Halfacree and Rivera, 2012). Integral to this change of focus is the use of new models of explanation. Migration research traditionally centred on various processes of economic restructuring and argued how these processes "forced" rural actors to leave the countryside. For example, the decline of agricultural employment and parallel industrialisation had people relocating to urban centres. The rise in employment in urban tertiary sectors similarly drained rural regions of jobs and, thus, population. Today these "economic" approaches are supplemented, and in some cases totally replaced, by models of explanation that study migrants' relationship to the non-economic sphere of everyday life. For example, several rural studies have analysed how actors, often from the affluent urban middle classes, make use of rural and urban localities as resources in their efforts to construct their life projects (see Milbourne, 2007). In one case in point, Villa (2004) employs the concept of the life-phased countryside to demonstrate how certain actors, e.g. parents and pensioners, identify a better life in rural regions. For other life phases, such as for youths in their twenties, an urban setting possibly represents a more attractive place to live (Rye, 2006b).

Thus, rurality, both the rural locality's representations and practices (Halfacree, 2006), is conceived of as a context that offers resources for active, empowered and self-reflexive actors in their search of "the good life". In Halfacree and Rivera (2012), the former of these authors neatly summarises the overarching approach to rural in-migration by quoting his own 1994 work, which has served as a key reference in many studies over the last two decades:

While for a few migrants the rural character of the destination was largely incidental, for almost all involved this character played a key role in the move. In particular, the imagined, supposed positive natural or social quality of rurality prompted choice of a rural residence (Halfacree, 1994, quoted in Halfacree and Rivera, 2012:97).

Grimsrud (2011) conducted a critical review of rural migration literature in which she notes that by and large this literature has relied on evidence from the British case. In her review she focuses on the migration of the middle classes and identifies "rural in-migration as mainly related to a desire for a rural lifestyle" (2011:642) as a construction widely accepted by scholars.

Among other things, she claims this perspective has been uncritically generalised to other national contexts and, I would add, to quite different kinds of migration phenomena than those actually empirically examined.

This is most unfortunate. Such a lifestyle approach to analyses of rural in-migration fails to account for, among other things, work-motivated migration to rural regions, such as of the farm workers analysed in this paper. The very fact of migration is inherently inscribed with social inequalities (Urry, 2007), which influences both motives and outcomes for migration. Dimensions of class, gender, ethnicity and other aspects of social injustice all impact the possibility to move and to migrate (the levels of motility). As noted by Bauman (2007), mobility represents freedom and human agency. Thus, to the affluent, empowered actor, rural in-migration possibly represents a choice and a realisation of lifestyle preferences, as, for example, for the wealthy urbanite acquiring a second home in the countryside. For some, economic factors really are secondary. However, I will demonstrate how the migrant farm workers' migration runs counter to this perspective in most regards, as their very entry into Norwegian agriculture and rural communities, by and large, is caused by their relationship to the rural productive (economic) structure and, more specifically, to the demand for disciplined labour within the agricultural industry. The traditional quality-of-life perspective holds less value in analysis of this group.

2.2 The rural as spaces of consumption

Second, the post-enlargement labour migration to Western countrysides relates to the very character of the late modern rural economy. Scholars of present-day rural society often stress the changing economic fundament of the countryside, which is described as in transition from sites of production to sites of consumption (Bell, 1994; Urry, 1995). The emerging post-productivist countryside's attractiveness is supposedly no longer based on the extraction of natural resources but on rurality's potential as a provider of life quality: its natural beauty, its harmonious social fabric and its traditional way of life for the locals, for the in-migrants and for the urban consumers of rurality (e.g., tourists). Thus, and as noted above, the typical rural in-migrants portrayed in the contemporary literature do not migrate to the countryside for economic purposes, and definitively not for employment in the primary industries, but rather to benefit from the countryside's "softer" qualities.

Once more, the experiences of seasonal farm workers run counter to such portraits of late modern rurality. An understanding of these rural in-migrants, their motivations and their everyday lives primarily demands an in-depth analysis of how the economic basis of rural communities and agriculture has changed. Furthermore, these migration streams are also instructive in demonstrating the lasting *productivist* character of present-day rurality. Changes in the structure of the rural economy, in agriculture and the other rural industries, still hold the potential to reshape the sociocultural fabric of the countrysides, such as I will demonstrate is the case in Norway.

2.3 Social constructions of rurality

Third and finally, the focus on lifestyle-related in-migration, which seems detached from the economic base of rurality, is further reflected by the theoretical reorientation within the social sciences in the wake of the cultural turn. This has also strongly influenced the field of rural studies (Cloke, 1997, 2006), as scholars have shifted from accounts of what the rural "is" to investigating how ruralities are socially constructed. With relevance to migration research, the symbolic representations of the rural as idyllic and/or boring (the rural idyll/dull) have gained much attention. As Berg and Forsberg (2003:175) note:

Attention turns, in other words, to how the rural is perceived, which is important because behaviour and decision-making – e.g. concerning migration – are influenced by people's perceptions of the rural.

However, research on the social representations of rurality often takes the perspective of the rural majority population, leaving out the perspectives of marginalised rural actors. In this

paper, I explore the heterogeneity in rural lives and suggest alternative social constructions of “rurality” from the perspective of seasonal migrant farm workers.

2.4 Heterogeneous ruralities

In short, this paper suggests that by studying rural populations alternative to those belonging to the majority population – the latter of whom, in Philo’s (1992) expression, represent “Mr. Average” – far more complex portraits of contemporary rural migration processes and countrysides emerge. For the migrant worker, these are countrysides in which the rural idyll and dull do exist; however, these are also social constructions with different meanings and implications. This is a result of their economic motivation for migration to the rural West, where their everyday lives are located in a highly productivist sociocultural context.

3. Studying migrant farm labour

The analysis builds on material from qualitative in-depth interviews with 54 migrant farm workers in three study areas in Norway in 2006 (see Figure 1). Each of the study areas, which are demarcated by municipality borders, represents a typical sub-system of Norwegian agriculture, in terms of production, farm structure and use of migrant labour (e.g. size of work stocks and their length of employment). They also represent quite different versions of the Norwegian countryside and rurality.

The first study area (Lier) is located in the vicinity of Oslo, Norway’s capital in the Southeastern part of the country. It has a large agricultural production, primarily in fruit and vegetables. These rely on large migrant labour stocks during harvest, and in some cases about 200 workers were employed on one farm. The second study area (Ullensvang) lies between high mountains in the inland part of the Hardanger Fjord on the West Coast, a part of the country often portrayed as the archetype of traditional rural Norway, attracting a large number of tourists during the summer season. The nearest city of some size is Bergen, two hours’ drive away. The agricultural sector in the municipality relies on the small-scale production of fruits and recruits a large number of migrant workers in the summer season, not only for harvesting purposes. The type of production, however, combined with the smaller size of farms, generates a work stock structure where there are few workers employed at each of the farms, in many cases only one or two. The third study area (Midtre Gauldal) is a traditional family farming district in the central part of Norway, located one hour’s drive from Trondheim. The key agricultural activity is small-scale dairy farming. Given that family labour provides most of the labour input, relatively few migrant workers have been attracted to the area, and none of the farms employs more than a very few workers.

In all these rural municipalities the immigrant population has been and remains small, reflecting the situation in Norwegian society at large. Immigration laws and regulations were until recently rather restrictive, and most of those arriving in the country settled in urban regions (Brochman and Kjeldstadli, 2014). At the time of the study, the immigrant share of the permanent population in the study areas was between 2.8 to 7.6 percent. Only a very few (< 0.2 percent) were from the Eastern European state that took part in the EU enlargements in 2004 and 2007 (Statistics Norway, 2014). However, these statistics do not include the many short-term, often circular, migrant farm workers. Supplying manual labour, they fulfill important functions in the local agricultural production systems during summer and harvest seasons, then disappear during the winter season. For some production lines, e.g. vegetables, fruits and berries, the migrant workers are pivotal for the upkeep of the entire industry. Nevertheless, despite their important role in the local rural economy, migrant farm worker populations often were an invisible element in the sociocultural spheres of rural communities (see Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010).

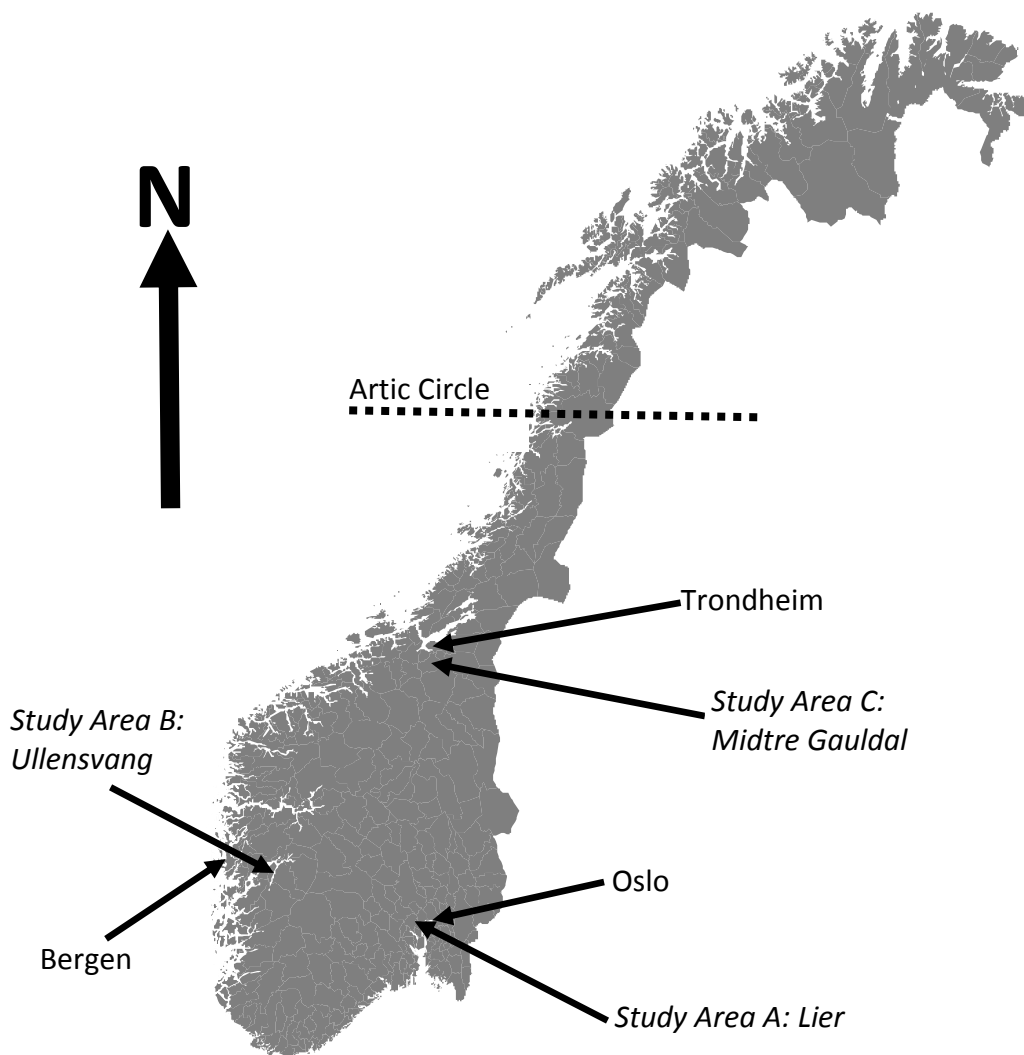


Fig 1. Map of Norway and location of three study areas.

The informants were sampled to capture both the “typical” migrant worker experience and the variation among them; this was done following a purposive sampling approach (Patten, 1990; Bryman, 2008). In each study area, the research team first surveyed all farms utilising migrant labour and then approached a selection of farms that reported employment of workers matching certain characteristics. The objective was to obtain a variety of informants along variables of gender, age, nationality and length of stay, as well as, on the farm level, type of agricultural production and size of migrant work stock. Such heterogeneity within the sample was achieved. Males constituted three quarters of the sample. Informants’ ages spanned between 18 to 54 years, with an average of 33 years. Half of the sample reported employment in the home countries, with a good blend of manual and skilled occupations. About 20 percent were students. A quarter (25 percent) were unemployed in their home country, however, only a very few informants reported that they had looked for work in the homeland. The educational level was high: only four informants reported a primary education only, while the remaining were evenly divided between secondary and tertiary educational levels. The majority of the sample (two out of three) lived with a partner, and half of those had children. The partners or children had never travelled along with the farm workers to Norway, though some of them would make shorter visits.

The interviews usually took place at the farm and were conducted in English, Norwegian or Polish, by members of the research team, including as needed, a professional interpreter. Reflecting the predominance of Polish citizens among migrant farm workers (Rye and

Andrzejewska, 2010), the majority (42/54) of informants were from Poland; for that reason, a Pole was recruited to the research team as well. Transcripts of all interviews were produced either in the language of the interview (Norwegian or English) or in English translations of interviews conducted in Polish. Polish to English transcription/translation of the latter was done by the Polish research team member, who subsequently helped other team members in their readings and interpretations of these transcripts.

The semi-structured interviews revolved around the informants' everyday life experiences in Norway. They were also questioned about their lives in their home countries, motivation for migrating to Norway and future plans and aspirations. The interviewers did not explicitly ask for the informants' views on the rural – neither in a general sense nor in their impressions of the Norwegian countryside specifically. Thus, the material does not allow for an analysis of their social construction of rurality per se. Rather, the analysis examines their “lived ruralities” (Halfacree, 2006); their daily experiences in a Norwegian rural and agricultural setting. Occasionally, the informants would also provide explicit reflections on how they perceived their surroundings. For example, many of the informants emphasised the “beauty” and “peacefulness” of Norway on their own initiative. Thus, the interviews provide interesting insights into their experiences as rural actors that contrast with the traditional images of rural life.

Interviews were imported into the NVivo software for qualitative analysis. The material was first coded according to pre-established categories, then re-read twice, following both a thematic structure and as individual biographical narratives to gain a holistic understanding of the migrants' everyday lives as migrant workers. In this process, which was also informed by reflections on the literature in the field, the topics structuring this paper's analysis emerged from the material.

The approach of the study is analytical rather than statistical generalisation (Yin, 2009:38). The in-depth analysis of informants' experiences with and perspectives on Norwegian rural life has made possible the development of a substantiated understanding of how these social categories relate to the phenomena in the study contexts. While the *transferability*, in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) term, of the presented findings to other contexts may vary, insight into the informants' perspectives on rurality is theoretically interesting in the many ways they challenge and add nuance to existing knowledge on the social construction of rurality. This logic of research inquiry requires ample sensitivity of the time/space context of the material.

First, the analysis is embedded in the *Norwegian* case. Norway's agricultural industry is characterised by a small scale, decentralised and family farming mode of production (Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune, 2008). Traditionally, family members have provided most of the labour input, and today's extensive use of foreign migrant workers is a new feature of the industry. In part, this was due to the restrictive regulation of labour-motivated immigration to the country prior to the EU enlargement in 2004. This changed as a direct effect of the establishment of a common European labour market, which overnight removed immigration restrictions for prospective Eastern European labour migrants (Rye and Frisvoll, 2007). For many reasons, Norway became an attractive destination for Eastern Europeans. Norwegian society is characterised by material welfare, in urban as well as in rural areas, and has furthermore relatively small wage differences between low skill/high skill occupations. Moreover, it was not affected as strongly as most European states by the global economic crisis beginning in 2008. As a result, the many Eastern Europeans migrating to Norway's countryside came to a far more cohesive society than, for example, Albanian labour migrants found in the Greek countryside (see Kasimis et al., 2010).

Second, the informants were interviewed in 2006 when the post-EU enlargement, East-to-West labour migration flows were still in the making. The different aspects of migrant labour had yet not been institutionalized, e.g. in terms of wage and work conditions, which typically would vary from one farm to the next (Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010). This led to more diverse practices, experiences and evaluations, both from the workers' and their employers' perspectives, which one assumes is reflected in the material present in this paper.

Relatedly, the strategy of interviewing a large number of informants was due to the heterogeneity within the migrant work stock. This invited a sampling strategy that might include the many and different work-life contexts. The strategy also affects how results are interpreted; while the emphasis in this paper is on what emerges as collective experiences and perspectives among the migrant workers, their individual lives as migrants in Norway are of course “unique”. Actually, the very lack of uniformity in the migrant workers’ perspectives on rural life demonstrates the need to develop more “open” descriptions and theories of rurality. This present paper represents but one attempt to add such nuance by directing attention to migrant farm workers in Norway and their alternative social constructions of rurality.

4. The emergence of alternative ruralities

The discussion of the material is organised in four sections. Each reflects and problematises one theme in traditional, dominant representations of life in the countryside, present in both lay and academic discourses on rurality. The first theme is that of rural idyll, the presentation of the rural as idyllic space. The second, related to the first, is the idea of the downside of the rural, the rural dull. The third theme is the class character of rurality or the absence of such, as rural communities – and in particular Norwegian ones – are often portrayed as egalitarian. Fourth and final, the application of the dichotomy of traditional and modern is examined.

I will claim that these themes invite alternative interpretations when approached from the perspective of a minority rural population such as the farm migrant workers.

4.1 De-socialised rural idylls

The literature on the social constructions of the rural has emphasised the dominant appreciation of the countryside as idyllic space (Short, 2006). Central to this notation is the perceived naturalness of rural life; people live closer to “nature” in the countryside and have more harmonious ways of life. The pure aesthetic character of the countryside, the rural landscapes, brings about quiet peacefulness to its population, which is lost for residents of grey cityscapes in urban areas.

Such qualities were also noted by the farm labour migrants in our material. Without solicitation they mentioned the beauty of Norwegian nature as an attraction drawing them to work in Norway in the first place, and as a quality that enhanced their everyday lives during their stays. A typical quote is that of Dimitris³ from Latvia, who declared that:

My dream is to travel around to see Norway; it's a beautiful country. Latvia is straight, but here you have the mountains and white nights, and in North of Norway, this midnight sun. I see something different and beautiful here. I'm happy I've come here. (Dimitris, 35 yrs, Latvian)

However, whereas the naturalness of the countryside is often connoted with positive social qualities, e.g., “peacefulness” and “quietness” (Rye, 2006b), for the migrants, the beautiful Norwegian nature is by and large devoid of social implications, and, as such, is an asocial quality.

The evaluation of the Norwegian countryside is related to the farm workers’ reflections on two other features traditionally associated with rural life: the social density and transparency of rural societies. Common statements in lay-actors’ descriptions of rurality are that “everyone knows everyone” and other similar phrases. For the migrant worker in Norway, however, this is not the case. On the contrary, they often feel neglected by the local community and report they have very little contact with and knowledge about their Norwegian neighbours. In the interviews, very few reported social relationships with locals other than their employers, the farmer, and his/her family. Indeed, some of the informants were genuinely intrigued by the lack of social life in their rural surroundings.

I have no Norwegian friends – where would I find them? It is rare to come close to people; in Latvia we spend time together in evenings, friends and family. That rarely

³ All informant names are aliases.

happens here. At 12 o'clock on Sundays, it is all empty in the "Town" centre, it's like nobody was living here at all. (Vladimir, 35 yrs, Latvian)

In most respects, the migrant workers consider themselves to be non-members of the rural communities in which they live and work. They may assume, in accordance with their own experiences with rural life in their homeland, that there exists a vibrant local community. However, they do not conceive of themselves as members of these local cultures, nor do they feel welcome. As Alina (34 yrs, Polish) reflected, the workers "are isolated from them [the Norwegians], they keep a distance from foreigners."

Only a few of the informants actually reported any social intercourse with the local community, or other migrant farm workers, in part due to the often very long work hours, for some also work on weekends. Thus, 42-year-old Stefan from Poland reported having no social interaction with the locals: "I have none; you just sit here and eat something after work because you're tired." He said that some of his younger workmates occasionally would go to discos in the nearest city, however, this was not appreciated as the "boss [farmer] didn't like it because they were not efficient" the day after. As concluded by Karol, an 26 years old Pole: "This is only work and earning money."

Even those who did interact with locals were conscious of their marginal position in the community, regardless of their participation. An illustrative case is that of Darek and Anna, a Polish couple who had returned to the same settlement over several years. They lived in the same house as one local farmer who functioned as an important node in the social life of the community. Besides this being helpful in terms of finding work, they often met the many locals visiting their landlord's house. Yet their integration in the local community was still limited:

Because everyone knows we are living with [the landlord], we have names. We are not anonymous, like all those "polakkers" around in [the community]. Nobody knows anything about them ... We are known by the community but not a part of it. We are still strangers. (Darek, 32 yrs, Polish)

Nevertheless, the social fabric of their everyday life is both dense and transparent for the migrants along other dimensions. First, their social sphere is intimately interwoven into that of their employers' households. Most are quartered in one of the farm buildings or in provisional structures nearby. Moreover, migrants often work side by side with the farmers, in particular on the smaller farms. On larger farms the migrants live and work side by side with other migrants. Spaces for private life and intimacy are few. For Grzegorz, a 27-year-old informant from Poland who worked at a large farm for three months, everyday life in Norway resembled that of the television program "Big Brother". He felt incarcerated and as though there was nowhere to escape to, though without the TV cameras. "You are close for 100 days, and you always see the people every day." Given the long working hours, few are able to or even interested in keeping up a spare-time social life outside of the social sphere of the farm and the work. Off-work time is devoted to resting and socialising with other migrant workers. Thus, the lack of interest from the "locals" is considered not to be a problem, as shown in a quote from Karol:

Norwegians are not interested in making friendships with us. ... I miss these contacts but there is no time for them as well. I meet other Poles, we visit each other but generally we are too tired to do anything. (Karol, 26 yrs, Polish)

On the other hand, it is common for the workers to socialize with their employers and members of their households, both during the working stay (e.g. sharing meals with the employers' households) and in the off season (e.g. by farmers visiting them in their home countries). Thus, despite their lack of integration into local civic society, migrants often become strongly integrated into the socio-economic sphere of the production unit (Rye, 2007a).

4.2 Opportunities in dullness

In the literature on rurality, the image of rural idyll is often supplemented with its opposite, the rural dull. While the urban area stands for change and novelty, energy and dynamism, the countryside represents standstill and stagnation (Berg and Lysegård, 2004; Rye, 2006b). Such a duality is also present in the migrants' experiences with Norwegian rurality. However,

once again their rural dull is different in important ways than is usually described in the literature. On the one hand, “the rural dull” summarises everyday life better for the farm migrants than for any other category of rural residents. The migrants work longer days and perform more physically demanding and monotonous work, e.g. the manual harvesting of berries and wood chopping, than most other employees in the Norwegian labour market. Among the interviewees, working days of 12 or more hours, six or even seven days a week was usual during the most labour-intensive periods of the harvesting season.

Long working days mean little time for leisure. The favourite spare-time activity was resting and preparing for the next day’s work. Some of the informants reported fishing in the local waters as a hobby during their stay. This is illustrative in that it requires very few economic resources, only a fishing rod and some bait, and it can actually help save money as the fish can be eaten. Other forms of amusement were rare, though some told about evenings out (often enjoying inexpensive moonshine or liqueurs brought from their homeland). Others had travelled in Norway to explore the country before or after their work periods, though they did so on low-cost budgets.

In short, the migrants are in Norway to work and make money and not to have fun or to bother about Norwegian dullness, as echoed in Karol’s earlier statement, “This is only work and earning money.”

On the other hand, their stays represent anything but a dull way of life. Quite the contrary, the very experience of working in Norway and, more importantly, the wages they earn, provide for new and exciting opportunities for the migrants in their homeland. For example, many had savings plans for buying new homes or setting up small businesses. In addition, some of the younger informants emphasised their view that working in Norway represented an adventure resembling that of the “Grand Tour”. By leaving their familiar social environments in the homeland, maybe moving out of their childhood homes for the first time, travel to Norway becomes a ticket to explore the world and a chance to manage one’s own life. Jan said that this, in addition to the money, was the main outcome of his stay in Norway:

Mainly to care for myself and live on my own. Maybe preparing for real life, because I’ve been studying now, and soon I will have to prepare for the real life. (Jan, 26 yrs, Bulgarian)

In effect, seasonal work in Norway further translates into opportunities when returning home. For many migrant workers the income earned in Norway during a few months of summer, which often is many times their annual income in the homeland, is a ticket to changing their regular lives. Illustratively, the informants would rarely complain about poor lodging in Norway but would rather emphasise how their stays enabled them to buy a larger apartment back home.

4.3 Classless rurality?

Rural communities have often been perceived as societies that are less structured according to class than cities. Rural areas are perceived as the not (yet) industrialised part of modernity, a residual category of modernity (Newby, 1980:9) that is still informed by the logic of pre-capitalist, traditionalist social structures (Cloke and Thrift, 1990:165). This applies even more to the Norwegian/Scandinavian rurality, as these societies have different histories of land-holding systems than, for example, Britain (Berg and Forsberg, 2003: 180f). They are typified by a lack of a rural aristocracy, strong family farm traditions, and right-to-roam laws, including the right to walk on private land and pick wild berries.

In effect, “post-class” perspectives have come to dominate contemporary rural migration research, where rural in-migration often is interpreted as actors attempting to escape the negative qualities of the modern, industrialised class society of the cities. What attracts the typical in-migrants, according to the contemporary literature, is the rural idyll and other aspects of rurality that are not embedded in the conditions of production but rather in practices of consumption, in particular those rooted in aesthetic qualities of the countryside (nature). In other words, modern rurality is often conceived of as an essentially harmonious community (Bell, 1992; Murdoch and Pratt, 1993; Cloke, 1997) where people live in peace with each other

and with nature, by and large free of social conflicts rooted in labour conditions. In Sørhaug's formulation, the rural is commonly viewed as "*characterised by social density and stability, interwoven social networks and a fundamental idea of equality*" (Sørhaug, 1984, in Wiborg, 1996:19 [my translation]). Neo-Marxist approaches are scarce in contemporary rural migration research, as are other theories that explicitly use class and labour relations, including exploitative work contracts, as their starting point of analysis of rural social structure.

Insofar class issues have been emphasised, these studies often have focused on the rural middle class and their tacit, implicit and unconscious practices, bringing them into conflict with others in the countryside, such as the rural labour class. The rural middle class is often represented often by wealthier in-movers to the countryside, e.g. the literature on rural gentrification (Phillips, 1993, 2005). Far less attention is given to the various categories of rural "others" who occupy the lesser privileged positions in the rural community, e.g. travellers (Bell, 2006). In Cloke's argument, the exposed position of marginalised groups becomes overshadowed by the dominant discourse of the rural idyll, which "renders terms like 'rural poverty' or 'rural deprivation' illegible, since life in the country never can be 'poor' or 'deprived'" (Cloke 1994).

Nevertheless, the class-structured conditions of the migrant farm workers' everyday lives in rural Norway are striking. Their very presence in Norway is due to their willingness and ability to sell their labour on the Norwegian agricultural labour market. The wage and working conditions are poor, often even worse than what is required by labour market regulations (Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010), and they occupy the least attractive positions in the rural social structure.

This is recognised but only rarely emphasised by the workers. They willingly trade hardships during their stays in Norway for the wages they make in the fields. Bartek does physically demanding work 10 hours per day, under work and living conditions he admits are precarious, even health-threatening, yet he is content:

You can damage your health but you do that consciously. Because you save everything [you earn] here, you eat badly and so on, so that you can earn a lot during that month.
(Bartek, 24 yrs, Polish)

Their everyday life in Norway is to a large extent defined by their position as paid labourers in the farm enterprises. The labour contract defines their use of time, often with only marginal time for leisure activities, and their social environment, e.g. their place of living, as noted in this paper. The relationship between the farmer and labourer is that of employer-employee, where the former extracts a surplus value of the latter's work and where this character of exchange is required for the very continuation of the relationship.

Moreover, the migrant workers are among the most marginalised on the Norwegian labour market, given their poor wage and labour conditions. As in most Western countries, wage levels within farming are generally low compared to other trades. For example, according to tariff agreements, the present minimum hourly pay rate for unskilled farm workers is 12.8 Euros compared to 19.3 / 17.3 Euros for unskilled workers in the construction sector and in the hotels and restaurant sector, respectively (Tariffavtalen 2012-2014; Riksavtalen 2012-14). Moreover, migrant farm workers earn less on average than the domestic agricultural work force (Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010). They also seem less protected by labour regulations, e.g., working hours are often far longer than allowed by Norwegian labour laws. As discussed elsewhere (Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010), the migrants are also disempowered in a number of other ways, e.g. by linguistic and other cultural barriers, which lead to their everyday lives depending on the employer's mercy.

Importantly, trade unionism is more or less absent among the migrant workers in Norwegian agriculture, making it difficult to articulate a collective voice or to organise collective action.

The class character of the social relationship between the migrants and their hosts, the employers, does not imply that the relationship is perceived as exploitative by the parties. On the contrary, many workers emphasise what they see as their employer's fair and equal treatment. Anna, partner of the aforementioned Darek, strongly appreciated this aspect of

working in Norway. She did describe the relationship with her employers as surprisingly pleasant:

... but I was shocked to see it can be so good. We can sit down and have a coffee, and just sit and talk, and they don't call me "Miss" or anything like that. That's a difference between Norwegian and Polish people I think, because when you meet people that are older than you in Poland you can't just call them by their name, you have to say "Miss" or "Mister" or something. This creates distance. It's not good. (Anna, 25 yrs, Polish)

However, while the relationship is not interpreted in class terms, nor is it perceived as exploitative, the migrant workers are implicitly aware of their subordinate position in the farm's micro-social cosmos. The subordinate role as worker is converted into that of the friend after work hours, as noted by Juris: "I don't feel exactly as a worker; I know what I have to do, but after work it's just like friends." Karol's response similarly demonstrates the complicated boss/friend role of the farmer:

The boss is a very nice boss, a very good boss, even though there are some problems with the wages, this stuff and... I think I'm a friend to him and that's true. That's true. (Karol, 26 yrs, Polish)

As such, the class relationship is transformed into a version of paternalism, which is preferred by both parties, the farmers and their workers. As illustrated in the above quote, it is the informal friendship quality of the social relationship that is expected to guarantee fair treatment, not formal labour contracts or other regulations. Even in the case of disagreements about wages and working conditions, this does not necessarily disqualify the employer as a decent person. The migrants often take the perspective of the farmer, who, they believe, like themselves, faces economically tight times in the agricultural industry.

The mutually respectful relationship between farmer and migrants, though in terms of power quite asymmetrical, is appreciated by the workers. It provides some sense of dignity to their subordinated position, which nevertheless is acknowledged. As Dimitri noted, "you cannot lie to yourself and say that we were treated there on an equal basis." Yet, in contrast to work relations the informants had experienced in their homelands, the paternalist mode of the farmer/worker relationship has its benefits, as Robert reflected:

Here the boss [the farmer] is like a father to us. If I need something [name of farmer] will go to the shop and get it for me. Once he took the workers to the Jacuzzi and they were drinking, and the day after they had a hangover, which he understood very well, because he had one himself. In Poland, the bosses don't care about you. There you have to work, and if you die someone else is taking your job, as simple as that. It's because there are a lot of people in Poland, but here in Norway the atmosphere is very good. (Robert, 31 yrs, Polish)

Many of the migrant workers reported attending their farmer's family functions during their stays (e.g., weddings), and that the farmers similarly would visit them in their home countries. Such social interaction often increased as time went on, and workers returned to the same farms several summers in row. The relationships were strongly appreciated, as Andrzej tells:

I was at his [the farmer's] daughter's baptism. We have known each other for many years and then I was treated as a family member; it was very pleasant. (Andrzej, 30 yrs, Polish)

The impression of dense social relations in the off-work sphere is supported by farmers' statements (Rye 2007a). In other words, the employer-employee relation covers a far more multi-fibered set of social relations than those directly related to work. This is welcomed by many, especially given the sparseness of other social ties to the rural community.

4.4 Traditional and modern (affluent) ruralities

In the not-yet-industrialised image of the countryside's social fabric, the rural represents traditionalism, whereas the urban connotes modernity. The dichotomy holds associations to distinctions between less/more developed societies, and, further, less/more affluent societies in

terms of material welfare. The perspectives of the migrant farm workers in Norway demonstrate the inherently relative character of such black-and-white dichotomies. For the informants, the social world they experience while in rural Norway in many regards is more modern, developed and affluent than that of their homeland, whether they originate from rural or urban regions in Eastern Europe.

Most important, everyday Norwegian life is one of affluence, both in households and in public life. Norwegian farmers have, according to the Eastern European standards of the migrants, high incomes and, in general, abundant material welfare. Moreover, the migrants themselves earn high incomes compared with what they are able to make in their homelands. As Massey et al. (1993) note, the disjuncture in living standards between sending and receiving countries makes low wages seem generous to the migrant. This is also evident in the material. For example, Slawek was very content with his wages, even though they were lower than for Norwegians.

... compared to the Norwegian rate it [my salary] is laughable. As far as I know their basic rate is 150 NOK [18.47 EUR] per hour minimum and we have a lot less. ... It is affordable for us because there are different conditions, different rates for everything in Poland ... in Poland you couldn't save so much money in one-and-a-half years as you earn here in three months. (Slawek, 24 yrs, Polish)

In addition, the Norwegian welfare state arrangements look generous to the informants in the interviews. For example, some workers were surprised by the sick leave pay arrangements in Norway (100 percent pay from first day of sickness), and that even the migrant workers qualified to receive various social benefits from the government while in Norway. Thus, for the informants the Norwegian countryside is seen as an affluent rurality.

The “modern” character of Norwegian everyday life is further evident at their workplace in other ways, e.g. farming practices. Many of the migrant workers were impressed by Norway’s high-tech, scientific agricultural production methods, and they wanted to learn from these:

... for me it's interesting to work with farming; to produce cherries and to increase the production. I try to grow them like they grow the cherries here. (Marek, 36 yrs, Bulgarian)

Other informants extended this perspective to the managerial behaviour of their farmers, which they found less formal and more egalitarian than in their homelands. The very fact that the farmer, their employer, at times would work side by side with them in the field, performing the same manual tasks, surprised some of the informants. Their inclusion in the farm family’s social sphere was also noted and appreciated by the workers.

The “modern” impression also applied to Norwegian (rural) society at large. In particular, they were impressed by how they were treated by the representatives of the Norwegian state (e.g. immigration, police and tax office personnel). Back home in Eastern Europe, they often felt like they were treated without respect by representatives of the bureaucracy:

But here I feel dignified as a person. And it has nothing to do with the money, and stuff like that, like most people think. Also the institutions, the way they treat you here, I just love it. It is very nice. It is difficult for you Norwegians to understand, because you like to complain. For me ... the tax department, the [police sergeant], and everyone, they are so helpful, so kind, they return your call. In Poland nobody cares. That's the difference, in Poland nobody cares about you. (Karol, 26 yrs, Polish)

In other words, they experienced Norwegian society as better, in the sense of a more balanced relationship between the government and the people.

Thus, for migrant farm workers, the traditional/modern dichotomy, e.g. visible in levels of affluence, is not first and foremost applied to make sense of the rural-urban relationship. They instead apply an East-West dimension. As such, Norwegian rurality is defined as a part of modern Western Europe, though possibly not as modern as urban Norway, of which the migrants, in any case, had little personal knowledge and experience.

However, interestingly, the migrants did not emphasise the affluence of Norwegian society very much in the interviews. The fruits of the Norwegian welfare state were largely not directly accessible to themselves, due to their marginal position (as “guest” workers) both in structural terms (e.g. wage levels) and culturally (e.g. knowledge on welfare rights). Rightly, the informants felt excluded from mainstream Norwegian society and were not part of the general societal affluence.

5. Lifestyle and economic perspectives on migration

The everyday lives of the migrant farm workers illustrate the heterogeneity of rural in-migrants to Western European countrysides. These migrants differ from other rural in-migrants in most respects: in how they experience, conceptualise, negotiate and shape their countryside lives. This, I will claim, calls for invoking a broader set of analytical perspectives in order to better make sense of contemporary rural in-migration. Currently, the dominant quality-of-life approaches in rural migration research are still relevant but not sufficient, and need to be complemented by other perspectives. In this section I will reflect on some possible approaches.

5.1 The economic approach

First, this paper’s material shows the importance of acknowledging the very economic fundament of international labour motivated in-migration to rural regions. The migrant agricultural workers deviate from mainstream domestic rural in-migrants in terms of motivation and reason for movement. Contrary to many, possibly most, domestic rural in-migrants, the Eastern Europeans do not seek work in the Norwegian countryside to realise some sort of personal life goal in the countryside. It is not the much-discussed quality-of-life aspect of rurality, the rural, that invites them to leave their home communities in Eastern Europe. While the farm workers often find (rural) Norway to be a beautiful place, this beauty would never be a major reason to migrate. It is the economic benefit of work in the agricultural industry that stands out as the key motivation for migration to rural Norway. They take interest in rural Norwegian communities due to the vast availability of unskilled job positions in the agricultural labour market, plus its relative high wage levels. While the adventure of going abroad is noted by some informants, in particular those younger and not yet providing for family members, this is a secondary motivation. In short, as several of the informants stated: They come to work and make good money.

This is not to say that these migrants are beyond discussing quality of life; it’s just that their life goals have a different orientation in terms of geography, that is, in their home communities in Eastern Europe. The economic profits extracted in the Norwegian fields are subsequently invested in projects that help them realise their goals when back in their home countries. Some informants talked at length about their plans to use their earnings to build a house or set up a small firm back home, or to invest in their children’s education. Others were using their income to support their families’ everyday lives back home; for example, to pay for regular costs of living – rent, clothing and food – or to buy medicine for their family members.

Thus, for these migrants the rural represents spaces of production (income) more than spaces of consumption, and definitely not spaces of recreation (Marsden, 1998). Rural living is not a goal per se, but is considered instrumental to enhancing their quality of life in a different place.

Thus, Norwegian rural space is, more than anything, a place of opportunity. The Norwegian countryside is seen as a place to harvest resources, however, these resources are to be invested elsewhere, that is, in the homeland communities where they feel belonging and spend most of their lives. As a result, the migrant farm workers have fewer vested interests in Norwegian rural society than most other segments of the rural population.

5.2 The seasonality of farm work migration

The interview materials further demonstrate how the social distance of migrant farm workers in Norwegian rural spaces is reinforced by their subordinated positions in the economic structure. As noted, the migrants are predominantly seasonal workers holding low-skilled positions within the agricultural industry. They have lower wages and far poorer working conditions compared to

the domestic rural populations, both within agriculture and other branches of the rural labour market (cf. Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010). These differences are stark and observable to the locals, who shun these jobs and distance themselves socially and culturally from the migrant workers. In effect, the in-migrants constitute a distinct category within rural communities.

This became particularly evident with regard to the informants who were part of larger work stocks, which often were exclusively made up of migrant workers except for the farmer and other managers. In some segments of Norwegian agriculture, e.g. strawberry production, manual work is now developing towards a division of labour following lines of nationality or even ethnicity (Martin, 1993). Farmers and a minority of domestic agricultural workers are doing few or none of the manual tasks at the farms, as these increasingly are taken over by workers from abroad. This is a new phenomenon in Norwegian agriculture (see also Rye, 2007b) but commonplace elsewhere, e.g. the U.S. (Harrison and Lloyd, 2013).

Nonetheless, as noted above, the class dimension of farm labour migration is rarely emphasised in lay or academic discourses. As discussed above, this is in part traceable to the migrant workers' largely seasonal presence in the Norwegian agricultural industry and rural communities. Agricultural production and, thus, its demand for labour, follow the biological rhythms of the growing season. One result is that migrants are observed in the rural communities primarily during the harvest seasons, disappearing in other parts of the year. They are not seen, literally, as full members of the local community.

This seasonality makes the migrant farm workers less inclined to construct themselves as full members; rather, they take the position of the visitor, as *guest* workers. They develop interpretations of themselves as "victims" of unfair labour relations, or as "suppressed" or "exploited" rural citizens, either individually or collectively. For these reasons, collective actions among the workers are less likely. This stands in contrast to the urban migrant working class, which more easily forms migrant communities, e.g. as illustrated by Wills et al. (2010) in London and Friberg, and Eldring (2011) in Oslo. In other words, as seasonal migrants, they are "here" (in the Norwegian rural community) but yet they are always "there" (in the homeland rural/urban community). Thus their lives are inherently divided between the sending and receiving communities (Rieber, 2009), their presence ultimately temporary and of a short-term character (cf. also Andrzejewska and Rye, 2012).

5.3 Duality in social position frame of reference

The seasonality of the farm work further instils a double set of standards for assessing their own situation as Eastern European migrant workers in Norwegian agriculture and rural society. Paradoxically, the very poor wages *according to Norwegian labour market standards* count as, and really are, high incomes *according to homeland standards*. Some migrants make more in a few summer weeks in Norwegian strawberry fields than they would make in a year back home, if they had work at all. Nieswand coins this "the status paradox of migration" (2006).

Thus, the migrants' core rationale for migration is poverty and lack of opportunity at home. Yet, the opportunities in their homeland resulting from their work in rural Norway are plenty. The migrants are able to use their Norwegian incomes to improve their social position in their homeland communities (see Rye and Andrzejewska, 2010).

In effect, the migrants are located in contradictory positions in the two social systems: In rural Norway they are deprived and disempowered, socially detached from mainstream society. In their Eastern European homelands, they are affluent and empowered. For the farm work migrants, it's likely their improved and relatively well-off position in their homelands is more important than their place in the lower social strata of (rural) Norwegian society, where they constitute a rural social underclass. As often noted in migration literature, "[I]n the case of temporary migration there is a sharp distinction between work and the social identity of a worker, which is situated in his/her home country" (Piore, 1979).

It needs to be added that the individual migrants' frame of reference depends on his or her migration context and wider life situation. For example, as some of the workers found that their seasonal farm work was temporarily extended, taking on the character of year-round

employment, so would they start to expect and demand better treatment, both by employers and the local community. There are also important gender differences, as the migration project varies between males and females, the latter more often applying a family perspective to their migration (Rieber, 2009). Similarly, migrants with a higher educational background have other motivations, expectations and outcomes than low-skilled migrants. Other differences run between age groups. These important differences invite further analysis, which will demonstrate the internal heterogeneity, not only among different rural in-migrant streams, as focused on in this paper, but also *within* the category of rural migrant workers not emphasised here.

5.4 New perspectives in migration research

In total, the in-migrant streams of workers into agriculture and other rural industries need to be approached from perspectives better able to capture the specifics of the migrant farm workers' situation, such as the economic basis and class character of their migration practices, the implications of the circular and seasonal properties, and the adherent dual frame of reference. Important here would be different immigration literature (see, e.g., Hirschman et al., 1999), in particular the works on transnational migration (Vertotoc, 2009; Faist et al., 2013).

Another central approach is a better understanding of the differences between national labour markets and national and international regulations of the flow of labour. For example, the influx of Eastern European workers into the rural primary industries of Western Europe in recent years is largely a result of the implementation of free movement of labour within the EU.

Also, in many other respects, key explanations of rural in-migration are located in the extra-rural and also supra-national contexts. For example, for the Eastern European migrant farm workers, the design of the welfare state has a profound implication, as it defines many of the key characteristics of the labour market (e.g. standards for wage and working conditions) as well as social support outside of the work-life sphere (e.g. social assistance, health care, etc.).

Another example is the importance of national agricultural policies. In the Norwegian case, they have generated a small scale and family farming character of agricultural production, which in effect implies that most migrant farm workers are employed on small farms where the farming family actively takes part in the work (Bjørkhaug and Blekesaune, 2008), thus inviting a more intimate employer-employee relationship. However, just as important an influence is the very tight economy in the agriculture industry, in Norway and elsewhere in Western Europe, which works to lower work-life standards both in terms of wage and working conditions.

The configuration of social forces that produces rural intra-European labour-motivated in-migration is likely to differ between national contexts. The Pole migrant worker in affluent, cohesive Norway has other experiences than the "illegal" Albanian in the Greek countryside struck by economic crisis and financial austerity. Studies in countrysides other than the Norway's would only add further knowledge about diversity in Eastern European labour migrants experiences in the Western Europe.

Importantly for such research, the present study clearly demonstrates the need for rural migration researchers to take more interest in issues usually not central to rural studies of migration: international migration, labour markets, welfare arrangements, agricultural policies and so on, to better understand work-motivated migration to the countrysides. Furthermore, by listening to other minority groups in rural communities, future research will also provide more nuanced accounts of everyday life in Europe's countrysides.

6. New ruralities, new rural studies – key issues

In conclusion, the migrant farm workers illustrate the fluid, or in Bauman's (2007) term, "liquid character" of contemporary Western countrysides. This fluidity is apparent in the material analysed in this paper, in a number of aspects. The migrants' seasonal but often recurrent employment represents a form of circular rural migration, where the actors are flowing in and out in adherence to biological rhythms of agricultural production. At the collective level, the migrant farm workers represent a phenomenon of permanent circulation. Further, the presence of the farm migrants contributes to (further) erasure of traditional rural borders, as

it demonstrates the translocal character of rural communities. Finally, the material amplifies how the symbolic aspects of rurality become more diverse; rurality comes to hold different meanings, resources and functionalities for different categories of rural migrants and segments of the permanent rural population.

The migrant farm workers provide perspectives that could help to better analyse class relations in the countryside. The heterogeneity in the rural population originates in part, but not exclusively, from the different groups' location in the countryside's economic structures and class structures. These groups have a profound effect on the social fabric of rural communities. For migrant farm workers, it is their relationship to the productive sphere of rurality, their position within the agricultural industry, which defines the key parameters for their everyday life in a rural space. Their position as a seasonal, docile and disempowered work force gives them both unprivileged positions in Norwegian rural space and, at the very same time, provides resources for enhancement of their social status in their homeland. This produces fertile ground for potential conflicts with the local rural population, but also explains the absence of complaints.

The study presented here demonstrates how migrant farm workers challenge and add important nuance to dominant academic discourse on rural in-migration. The contemporary rural studies literature on rural in-migration, focusing on quality-of-life approaches, with concepts of rural idyll, dullness and traditionalism at the centre, is poorly suited for analysis of the current stream of Eastern European migrant workers into the Western European countryside. In consequence, farm labour migrants represent an alternative interpretation of rural Norway, based on their very different experiences with Norwegian rural society as compared to that of the majority Norwegian rural population.

By including accounts of the many other marginalised groups' experiences in rural Europe – in all its diverse national, regional and local contexts – more nuanced perspectives would be gained, both enhancing the scholarly understanding of this important form of rural in-migration and, further, also producing better accounts of contemporary countrysides and the economic processes transforming them.

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