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Capital configurations and trade-offs: How do families with children, wishing to move to a rural area, search for their new location in order to achieve desired forms of capital?

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ABSTRACT
Since the 1970s, the concept of counterurbanization has been used within geographical and rural studies to denote the demographic revival and growth of rural areas. However, little is known about how contemporary urban-to-rural migrants actually search for their future residence. This is unfortunate, as the increased use of internet search tools may become a crucial facilitator for significant counterurbanization by providing families key information about hitherto ‘forgotten’ places where they can, better than in the larger cities, achieve the specific stocks, or ‘configurations’, of social, cultural and economic capital they desire. Therefore, drawing on Contextual Inquiry based, semi-structured interviews with 8 Danish families in various parts of Denmark in spring 2018, the purpose is to shed more light on how families with children in practice use what we term information capital, i.e. online and offline search strategies, in order to find their ideal rural place to live. In this way, information capital becomes a kind of ‘auxiliary’ capital, which allows various types of families to identify and achieve exactly the configurations of capital they desire and, by this, increase their life quality. Within a dynamic, Bourdieusian capital conversion framework, the paper shows how the families must ‘sacrifice’ capital in order to achieve desired forms of capital, that is, make trade off between various forms of capital, as for example trading off economic for social capital.

Keywords: Bourdieus’s capital theory; configurations of capital; trade-offs between forms of capital; counterurbanization; information capital; home-comers; rural attractiveness; migration and internet search; contextual inquiry, Denmark.
1. Introduction

1.1. The role of internet search tools for contemporary counterurbanization

Since the 1970s, the concept of counterurbanization has been prominent within geographical and rural studies research (see e.g. Barry, 1976; Fielding, 1982; Dean et al., 1984; Cloke, 1985; Perry et al., 1986; Weekley, 1988; Champion, 1989; Lewis et al., 1991; Halfacree, 1994, 2008a; 2008b; Bosworth, 2010; Gkartzios and Scott, 2010; Bijker et al., 2012; Gkartzios, 2013; Gkartzios et al., 2017, Ma et al., 2018). According to one of the founders of this research agenda, counterurbanization – at times also called “turnaround migration” or “urban-to-rural migration” – can be defined as “the population revival and growth of ‘rural areas’, together with the corresponding population decline of the cities and large towns” (Halfacree, 1994, p. 164). This “chaotic conception” (ibid.) has broadly been used to describe demographic trends away from major cities towards the rural areas.

Causes for counterurbanization have been found to be complex, however place attractiveness in the form of the physical and social qualities of the location have often been emphasized by various studies (e.g. Halfacree, 1994; Svendsen, 2018). This includes, for example, beautiful nature, quiet life, a thriving local community and – especially what regards remote-migrants, for example from other countries – job opportunities (e.g. Bosworth, 2010; MacKrell and Pemberton, 2018).

Hence, we see that the triggering factors for counterurbanization are relatively well-described, and still today many rural dwellers carry within them what Pahl (1968, 2005) early on termed a “village-in-the-mind” – something that contains a major potential for contemporary urban-to-rural migration to peripheral areas otherwise characterized by depopulation and decline (Sørensen and Svendsen, 2016; Svendsen, 2018).

There is, however, little knowledge about how potential urban-to-rural migrants actually, in practice, search a future residence where they can improve their life conditions, including the role of internet search at various websites and social media. Not least, this includes studies of those families with children, who are mostly wished for in rural communities (Haartsen and Stockdale, 2017), many of whom are return migrants, often termed homecomers (see e.g. Clay and Price, 1979; Fertner et. al. 2015; Jansson and Bengtsson, 2018).

Despite the current interest in the so-called “spatial turn in media studies” (Jansson and Falkheimer, 2006), only a few studies can be found (Niedomysl and Amcoff, 2010; Golding, 2014; Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2013, 2016; Vilhelmson and Thulin 2013; 2016; Bijker et al., 2015; Lengyel and Jakobi, 2016; Lundgren and Johansson, 2017). Except from the work of Thulin and Vilhelmson,
these studies are however somewhat marginal in relation to this exact topic. This is unfortunate, as internet search tools indeed might be a comparative advantage for small peripheral communities rich on physical and social attractiveness, albeit – in comparison with larger towns and cities – ‘hidden’ in the media coverage and near absent at the internet. Hence, by offering free information about these ‘forgotten’ places, internet search tools might contribute to remedy a largely skewed media coverage of ‘undeveloped’ and ‘left behind’ rural hinterland versus ‘progressive’ and ‘culturally stimulating’ urban centers and thus help urbanites to realize themselves in rural settings. In other words, internet search tools might counteract negative stereotypes of the rural in the form of near-hegemonic discourses of rurality constructed by urban journalists and politicians (e.g. Halfacree, 1993; Pratt, 1996; Woods, 1997; Richardson, 2000; Svendsen, 2004; López-i-Gelats et al., 2009; Winther and Svendsen, 2012) and that act as barriers for potential migration and return-migration to these areas (Svendsen, 2018).

1.2. Purpose and new contributions

On this background, the overall purpose becomes to shed more light on how families with children in practice attempt to find the ideal rural place to live. As we shall see, this includes a simultaneous use of online and offline search strategies (Golding, 2014), where “virtual practices” (Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2016) seem to become an increasingly important part of people’s information gathering, allowing them free and easy access to relevant information through focused internet search. As we shall see, such a modern information capital seems to function as an important ‘auxiliary’ capital in identifying and achieving the stock – or configuration – of social, cultural and economic capital desired by the family.

Apart from contributing with new knowledge on how contemporary families with children in practice provide information about their future residence, we have two theoretical contributions.

Firstly, we use Bourdieu’s capital theory supplemented with the abovementioned capital form, information capital, which we have borrowed from management literature (Shawyun, 2009; Takahashi et al., 2017). In our context, we define information capital as, on the one hand, information technology and skills that allow people to achieve useful information acquired through online media such as google search, Google Maps and social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter); on the other hand, as ‘oldfashioned’ offline information acquired through traditional media such as newspapers and brochures, as well as first hand experiences of an area, for example through physical visits or information from one’s network.
Secondly, unlike Bourdieu (1986) we look at capital accumulation mainly as taking place as dynamic trade-offs between forms of capital. Thus, when moving to another place, individual families have to ‘sacrifice’ capital (for example, economic) in order to gain more of another form of capital (for example, social). In this way, each family attempts to achieve a desired configuration of capital, that is, specific compounds of capital (cultural, social, economic and ‘auxiliary’ information capital) at the household level.

1.3. Context, ideal types and research question

As we mentioned, we want to use a Bourdieusian capital framework (Bourdieu, 1986; 2000). We will do that within the context of rural studies (e.g. Svendsen and Sørensen, 2007; Bosworth and Turner, 2018; Svendsen, 2018), in this specific context allowing for a systematic investigation of the priorities and trade-offs a family might experience when moving to a rural location. In doing so, we draw on data and observations from partially CI based, semi-structured interviews with 8 Danish families in various parts of Denmark in spring 2018.

Unlike countries like Ireland and Greece, there is no significant signs of counterurbanization in Denmark. However, depopulation of rural areas has stopped, partly due to in-migration of refugees (Andersen and Nørgaard, 2018) and, generally, there seems to be a renewed interest of urban-to-rural migration (see e.g. Sørensen and Svendsen, 2016; Christensen, 2017; Hansen and Aner, 2017).

In our subsequent data analysis, we chose to categorize the 8 families into 3 ideal types: “the Relation family”, “the Practical family” and “the Practical-Relation family”. As will be seen, each type of family, by relocating, attempts to build up its own specific configuration of capital, consisting of cultural, social, economic and (auxiliary) information capital in varying volume and quality.

Hence, our research question becomes:

**How do families with children, wishing to move to a rural area, search for their new location in order to achieve desired forms of capital?**

1.4. Outline

In Section 2, we present previous studies. Section 3 describes the Bourdieusian capital framework, supplemented with information capital. In Section 4, we present our methods. Section 5 contains our results, followed by a Discussion in Section 6. Section 7 concludes.
2. Previous studies

As mentioned, our study directs focus on the on- and offline search strategies of families with children, wishing to move to rural areas. Consequently, in the following we will first look at overall findings within migration studies, including migration in a family perspective (from demand side) and place attractiveness (from supply side). Second, we will review studies that specifically deal with relocation decisions, including the increasing importance of internet-based search tools.

2.1. Reasons to move

Migration is a large, well-studied area within the sociological field. Overall, migration studies show that “we move to improve” (Clark and Maas, 2015, p. 54). However, there are many different perspectives on people’s key motives to move. Neoclassical theories view migration as an individual’s strategy to gain employment opportunities and career prospects. Here, migration decisions become informed rational choices between locations and their economic opportunities. Other perspectives highlight the importance of non-economic factors in migration decisions. Furthermore, empirical research shows that “migration patterns are also heavily influenced by social networks, environmental considerations, and location-specific contexts” (Vilhelmson and Thulin, 2013, p. 210).

The so-called life-course perspective emphasizes the variability of timing and sequencing of life events and also examines the diversity in social foundations (Geist and McManus, 2008, p. 283). Having a life course perspective is useful, as studies show that both age and partnership status influence individuals’ motives in relation to both planned and actual residential moves.

Based on large-scale surveys on migration and 11 interviews with interregional migrants who had moved to both rural and urban areas of Sweden, Swedish human geographer Thomas Niedomysl uses the life course perspective to develop a conceptual framework to analyze place attractiveness and migrants’ decision-making (Niedomysl, 2010, p. 100). Niedomysl finds that place attractiveness increases when the migrants’ needs, demands and preferences are met. Yet, the more factors they try to fulfill, the more limited the choice of destination becomes (op. cit., p. 100ff).

The life-course perspective offers a way to understand the attractiveness of locations in accordance with individuals’ changing needs, demands and preferences for a residence in different life phases, including their constraints and resources. However, the way the individual migrant weighs different alternative locations is complex, and people might not always be explicitly aware of their preferences. He found that all but one of the interviewees had used the internet as a way of complementing
newspaper advertisements during their search for a new residence. In two instances, the internet was used to search for a residence based on only a few criteria and without being limited by geography (op.cit., p. 106ff.). In our context, the life-course perspective is interesting, because it can help explain why migrants have a demand for a specific capital stock at a specific time.

We now look at how the digitalization of choice processes might influence relocation in order to connect this to our families’ search for a new location.

2.2. Moving decisions: the increasing role of digital technology

As mentioned, research have for long sought to understand how people make moving decisions. In making the relocation decision there can be a split between the wish to move and actually moving, often conceptualized as going through different decision-making phases (Kley, 2017, p. 35). According to Schwarz (2017, p. 17), the sociology of residential choice usually neglects choice processes and the digitalization of the field.

Digital technology is however becoming an integral part of everyday life for many people and will likely become a larger part of sociology (Lupton, 2012, p. 3ff.), here not least rural sociology one may add. This includes an online perspective that has the potential to provide a new angle on migration studies, as the easy and cost-free way of using the internet to obtain information might facilitate new reflections when considering a relocation.

Research on the internet’s influence on the choice to migrate within a country is however still limited (Vilhelmson and Thulin, 2013, p. 210). Though studies about online media use by migrants are attainable, these are foremost in an international context, examining the meaning of social media in international migration networks (e.g. Siapera and Veikou, 2013; Dekker et.al., 2015; Komito, 2011).

Thulin and Vilhelmson are among the few researchers, who have studied the relation between the use of the internet and internal migration (Vilhelmson and Thulin, 2013; Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2014; 2016). Because gathering information online is so easy, it becomes a daily habit for many even though they are not actively planning to move (Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2016, p. 265ff.).

Moreover, in their questionnaire survey from 2013, based on 756 answers from Swedes between the age of 20-29 (Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2013, p. 211) they found that most Swedish young adults have developed internet-based practices as part of their decision-making process, when it comes to a potential or actual residential move study (op.cit., p. 214). On this background, Vilhelmson and Thulin conclude that the internet may in the long-term influence people’s perception, decision making
and behavior when it comes to migration frequency (ibid.). However, in the end, the internet might have no important impact on people’s migration decisions at all, as the internet is simply a tool to more effectively reach a migration decision (op.cit., p. 211).

By investigating how people combine online and offline methods to form an impression of the desired location, we will in the following form a broader picture of what supports potential urban-to-rural migrants in making the right choice.

3. Theory

Though few have utilized the capital framework in practice, the interaction, or *conversions*, between the different forms of capital has previously been researched in rural studies (Svendsen and Sørensen, 2007; Bosworth and Turner, 2018), including internal migration studies (Svendsen, 2018). Besides, the individual concepts of Pierre Bourdieu have been used in other migration studies, both dealing with international and internal migration (e.g. Erel, 2010; Benson, 2014).

3.1. Accumulating forms of capital

Our measurement of the families’ priorities is based on interview data understood through the lenses of Pierre Bourdieu’s forms of capital. Bourdieu’s work is organized around three central concepts: habitus, field and capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 94).

In order to explain different societies’ structures and dynamics, one must recognize the existence of various forms of capital (op.cit., p. 119). According to Bourdieu, capital is accumulated labor through history, embodied in either things or human beings; it structures the social world and ensures that the society is not based on chance offers or miracles. It takes time to achieve capital and with its potential to produce profit, it means that not everything is “equally possible or impossible” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 341-342).

Bourdieu identifies three fundamental forms of capital; *cultural capital, social capital* and *economic capital* as well as *symbolic capital* which is granted all forms of legitimate capital within specific fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 119). Though they are all valid, the relative value of each capital both depend on the field, time and situation where they are used (op.cit., p. 98).

In the following, we will constrict ourselves to the cultural, social and economic capital, and our operationalization of them, as symbolic capital is less relevant in our context.
Economic, social and cultural capital

According to Bourdieu, economic capital is “the root of all the other (...) transformed, disguised forms of economic capital”, although these disguised forms never are “entirely reducible to [economic capital]” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 252). Hence, he talks about “the brutal fact of universal reducibility to economics” (op.cit., p. 252-53). Both social, cultural and symbolic capital can be transformed into economic capital and in the same way, economic capital can be converted into the other forms of capital. This takes place in accordance with a law of mutual convertibility of forms of capital (op.cit., p. 243), also termed A general science of the economy of practices. This is however done by agents with varying levels of efforts and time-use (‘conversion work’, cf. transaction costs), depending on the individual field on the one hand, and the powerfulness of the individual (or group) within this particular field on the other hand. Some things can just be bought (openly, crudely). Other things need to be obtained, more or less disguised, through social capital in the form of resourceful networks which take time to build and cultivate (ibid.). In line with this, Bourdieu defines economic capital as capital “which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights” (ibid.).

In relation to migration, economic capital is likely to be a factor. Relocating to another municipality might be a way of lowering the family’s cost of living. The surplus of economic capital can either be spent on goods or – in a trade-off setting – converted into more leisure time, allowing agents to build up more cultural or social capital.

Social capital refers to the collected resources that can be found in an individual’s or a group’s network and which the individual or the group can benefit from in socio-economic terms (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 248). Bourdieu describes social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a “credential” which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (...) The network of relationships is the product of investment strategies (...) aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term” (op.cit., p. 248-249).

How much social capital an individual possesses depends on the connections and size of the network and on the amount of capital the individual and the group overall possess. Social capital is therefore not independent of the other capital forms but exerts a multiplier effect, hence boosts the
individual’s overall capital stock (op.cit., p. 249). In this perspective, social capital may be seen as a ‘master capital’ (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2016).

Social capital is relevant to our study, for example if the families – many of them potential homecomers – consider moving closer to the children’s grandparents to strengthen the relationship and ease everyday life with added help. Some might also want to move to an area, which is known to have a strong community ties, in order to improve their network.

Bourdieu (1986, p. 243) argued that cultural capital can be found in three different forms or states: the embodied (incorporated), objectified and the institutionalized. The first state, embodied cultural capital, can be described as “long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body” (ibid.). That is, it refers to how individuals’ work to improve themselves, for example by the acquisition of culture or a specific physical appearance (op.cit., p. 244ff.). Habitus is closely linked to embodied cultural capital, as Bourdieu describes habitus as an “open system of dispositions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992: 133). Hence, one may interpret embodied cultural capital as that part of habitus, which relates to productive, socioeconomic action that is legitimate within a field, hence accruing social recognition, i.e. symbolic capital. The second state, objectified cultural capital, refers to collections of cultural goods such as for example paintings, books and instruments, while the third state, institutionalized cultural capital, refers to certificated academic qualifications (op. cit., p. 247ff.).

Cultural capital might also be an important factor for migrating families. A family’s wish to live at a place where they can participate in (highly distinguished) cultural events can be seen as a way of strengthening embodied cultural capital, legitimate in the local/regional and/or national field and hence related to social recognition (symbolic capital). Similarly, relocating to a better school district can be seen as a way to enhance the children’s institutionalized cultural capital. Although Denmark is a small country, there still is considerable cultural differences. A change of location might evoke some worries about whether the family will be able to – or should – adapt to the new environment. This is also to say whether their current embodied cultural capital will match (social class, tastes, clothing, dialect etc.), or whether it will be worthwhile to achieve new embodied cultural capital in the new location (and thus modify their current embodied cultural capital). As we shall see, this ‘matching’ is far more problematic for families, who are not homecomers.

Information capital

Our attention on the families’ search process and their use of the internet created a need of a fourth form of capital, information capital (Shawyun, 2009; Takahashi et al., 2017), in order to clarify how
the families’ possibilities to obtain and use information facilitate their moving considerations. We found evidence that the families’ use of this ‘auxiliary’ information capital can be divided into two different types: online information capital and offline information capital.

**Online information capital** is information that can be acquired through the use of online media as social media and search websites such as e.g. Google and Google Maps. To obtain this form of capital requires the skills and knowledge to find and sort through the massive amount of data that is available on the internet. This relates to the ‘new mobilities’ paradigm formulated by Sheller and Urry (2006), investigating a ‘mobility turn’ that entails more focus on emergent “new forms of ‘virtual’ and ‘imaginative’ travel (…) being combined in unexpected ways with physical travel” (op.cit., p. 207).

**Offline information capital** is information that can be acquired through traditional media such as newspapers and brochures. It also entails having local knowledge and resources to form first-hand experiences of an area, for example by visiting it in person. However, it may also resemble social capital, in the way that information can be obtained through utilizing the information capital inherent in one’s network.

Information capital is relevant to our study as it provides an important foundation for the families’ moving considerations by working as a facilitator – or auxiliary tool – for identifying the three other forms of capital. For example, by using their online information capital to find information on average square meter prices and other expenses, the families can easier determine whether a location is within their economic frame. Similarly, when researching institutionalized cultural capital, for example schools, both types of information capital come into play, as information can be obtained both through official school websites, via network or by visiting the schools. Similarly, written testimonials from people who already live in the municipality can also be obtained through both types of information capital, depending on whether they are found on for example a website or in a brochure.

### 4. Methods

We studied 8 families search for a new location. The families all consisted of couples between 27 and 54 of age, with at least one child living at home. All interviews were carried out in spring 2018. They had a duration of about 1 hour in average. All are fully transcribed. The families have been anonymized. We used the qualitative data analysis software NVivo to structure our data and, through this, the families could be divided into three different types corresponding to their priorities and, hence, the specific configuration of capital they were looking for at their future location.
Overall, we assess the internal validity to be high, primarily due to data triangulation (Yin, 2004, p. 9). Hence, we combined – and compared – data collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, contextual inquiry, observations and (informal) chatting. It goes without saying that interviews with 8 families is a low number and, in perspective, more interviews should definitely be made in order to test our hypothesis of three types of urban-to-rural migrant families.

4.1. Selection of informants

Prior to our search for informants, we made a list of criteria that the candidates had to fulfil (Yin, 2014, p. 95). The criteria were: 1) Families with children living at home, 2) Actively considering moving to another municipality, 3) Being able to read Danish as the relevant websites are in Danish. We searched for and found informants in various ways.

We created a post on Facebook calling for families who lived up to the criteria, which we asked our network to share. We also shared the post in several Facebook groups. We also approached three real estate agents, who agreed to send our invitation to participate in an interview to some of their customers, as well as various associations.

4.2. The interviews

Out of the 8 families, 6 families were interviewed face-to-face. The first 10 minutes of the interview was used to get to know the family and get an overview of how their search process had progressed until then, including online and offline strategies. Then a contextual inquiry (Beyer and Holtzblatt, 1998) was carried out, that is, interviewing the interviewees while they engage in relevant practice – in this case, searching the internet. The main interview was carried out immediately after the contextual inquiry. In this interview, we first wanted to get the families’ thoughts on how the internet had influenced their search process. We also wanted to uncover why they planned to move from their current location and what they were looking for in their future residence, as well as what they liked to spend their time on. This we did in order to know which forms of capital they sought to boost by moving. In order to investigate whether their moving considerations were guided by their habitus, we also asked them about their childhood home.

The interviews were all carried out in the families’ own home, except for one, which was carried out in a group room in the University of Copenhagen’s library. By being in the families’ home and seeing their neighborhood, we were able to – in a friendly, informal atmosphere – get a better
understanding of their current living situation and follow their thoughts when talking about the needs and wishes they had for their future home, both in the formal interviews and in informal chatting.

The other two families were interviewed over the phone and did not take part in the contextual inquiry part. It did not seem relevant to include them in this, as they had already decided on their future location. These families were instead interviewed over the phone, in order to get their thoughts on relocating. The phone interviews eased our planning and spared us the cost of travel. A disadvantage in this situation was however that we could not get a sense of the families’ current housing and location besides from their own description. Furthermore, we could not observe how the informants reacted to a question. Besides this, we felt like the families committed themselves to the interview and speaking over the phone did not hinder the flow.

By combining contextual inquiries (Beyer and Holtzblatt, 1998) with semi-structured interviews we use these two methods in a new way. We find that the contextual inquiries help us integrate the internet, as it makes us able to observe and interview the families while they use the internet. We tried to arrange the interviews with the families so that both parents could be present and give their thoughts on what they find to be important when searching for a new home. This was possible in 5 out of the 8 cases. In the other 3, only one of the adults was interviewed.¹

[Table 1 here]

5. Analysis

While the families all have differences that make them unique, they also have similarities – hence our three ideal typical families. Six out of the 8 families are living through the same life-course phase. Hence, providing good conditions for their children is the main triggering factor for their decision to move, or – in the case of the two Practical-Relation families – to stay in the vicinity. However, which

¹ According to Holtzblatt, contextual inquiries provide and validate understandings quicker than traditional ethnographic methods, such as observations and out-of-context interviews. This because it validates the understandings together with the users at the same time as they are developed, her point being that: “Only users know why they do what they do” (Holtzblatt, 2002, p. 881). While contextual inquiry can also be used in offline settings, we use it with an online perspective. According to Kuniavsky (2003, p. 160ff.), contextual inquiry is a method, which can be used to uncover the needs, problems and behavior of a specific website’s users. Having its roots in anthropology and ethnography, the main idea behind the method is to observe people in the environment where they use the website. There are also examples of other researchers who have used CI in combination with other methods like interviews and questionnaires. For example, Leedy and Guin (2006) studied the social transition of purchasing an engagement ring online and in-store.
‘configuration’ of capital they look for is highly dependent on whether they are potential homecomers and long for strong social capital, or whether job considerations and economic capital have the highest priority.

In the following, we first analyze the 4 Relation families, then the 2 Practical families and finally the 2 Practical-Relation families.

5.1. The Relation families

In Figure 1, we have depicted how the various forms of capital are related and shown their individual importance to what we term the Relation family type, to which 4 families in our sample belonged. They consist of young parents in their start 30s with small children (Table 1). The circles of each form of capital vary in size, in order to show their assessed individual importance to the families. The arrows show the tradeoffs the families make when deciding where to live. A bold arrow indicates that the capital takes precedence over the other capital, while the dashed arrow indicates the opposite. Information capital surrounds the other forms of capital due to the families using information as a catalyst for obtaining the other forms of capital within this specific relocation context. The type of information capital, which is emphasized in bold, indicates which information the family mostly rely on when searching for a place to live.

Social capital: family, friends and strong local communities

As can be seen in Figure 1, the Relation families are strongly influenced by social capital, as they are homecomers who wish to move closer to their family and network and, besides, search for a strong local community. In other words, in these families at least one of the parents come from the area. For example, Jane and Lasse have a wish to “return to the roots” and have considered moving back to Northern Jutland ever since they had their children. Similarly, Line and Kent want to return to Funen, as most of their family live there. They do not feel like they have much network in their current location, something they had not given much thought before having their son. Therefore, they are now willing to spend time commuting in exchange for living closer to their family. Line explains:

"It’s actually people who are moving us now. We moved to this place because of work, now it’s family and friends who move us in the other direction."
The Relation families are the type of family that is most influenced by the location of their relatives and friends and let their search process be guided by this, in order to live closer to them. Moving back to the roots and securing the children’s relationship to grandparents are examples of their wish to strengthen their social capital. Through this, the grandparents can become a greater help in the families’ daily life, for example by babysitting. By also including their friends in their location choice, the families improve their opportunity to nurture their relations and, in that way, maintain or even increase their social capital.

For the Relation families, it was also important to find an active local community with a social life for the children. The best example of a family wanting a good local community is Sofie and Simon. When hearing about a cozy village community, they drive around to get a sense of the area, while also looking into the local schools. Sofie explains: “Where we will eventually move to, the area will be just as important as the house”.

It is important for them to be a part of a local network where people talk and help each other. As it was expressed by Sofie: “Maybe you could get a gin and tonic when the children are playing. Or help each other move firewood”. Line and Kent went to see a building plot they had found on the internet. While looking at the plot, the neighbors came out to talk with them. They told them it was an area with many children, which the couple found important. Line explains:

> And the kindness we were met with there! For me, it also made a difference that you could feel that there is this sense of neighborhood, that people are interested in who you are, and we really felt welcome.

Anders and Julie also have thoughts about their children’s environment. Currently they live in a big city and have concerns about letting their oldest daughter ride her bike to school. Therefore, they seek a safer local area with opportunities for the children. Anders tells about their considerations:

> Yes, I think that’s something that would appeal to me in an area, if I knew there were activities for the children. So that they can form friendships with others through team sports.

Hence, the Relation families are strongly concerned about moving to a well-functioning local community. It is important for them to move to an area where there is possible to form strong
networks, so that both children and adults can build plenty of social capital, for example by participating in local associations or socializing with neighbors.

*Economic capital: flexibility and job considerations*

Though having considerations about their daily economy and their jobs, the Relation families choose to convert economic capital into social capital by striving for economic freedom and use the flexibility to gain more time with their children, family and friends. An example of this is Sofie and her family, who have decided that they want to be able to work part time and consequently they have to move a bit further out of Copenhagen. However, if they move too far to the north, Sofie finds she will not be able to keep her job, “because it’s already on the verge of being too far away for me now”.

The considerations of getting a job closer to a future location were also present in the other Relation families. Kent and Line are moving closer to their family on the island of Funen. They both planned to keep their jobs, but it was still important for them to know that there were job opportunities in the area. Before making the decision to move, the family had to figure out whether they could uphold their current living standard with the extra costs of commuting across the bridge. Kent explains:

> So it’s a bit of a change in the way that we get closer to the family, but in return there will be some things related to work that are going to be a bit harder to fit in.

Moving closer to their relatives became possible when Jane got a new job in Northern Jutland. The job therefore had a great impact on their possibility to move closer to the rest of the family. While one of them have always commuted, moving to a peripheral municipality means that Lasse will get a higher mileage allowance, compared to what Jane received when she commuted from their home near Aarhus.

While daily economy is not their main priority, the Relation families still see the benefit in changing their location and getting more for their money. Jane tells about their decision to move north:

> Down here you can only get a fraction of a house compared to what you can get in Vesthimmerland, so that has also been very important. We can get more of what we want for the money we could borrow.
Cultural capital: seeking good schools

The families are very focused on letting their children grow up in a good, secure neighborhood. Similarly, their search for good childcare and schools show that they are strongly influenced by wanting to secure their children’s institutionalized cultural capital. A good example is Line:

[The kindergarten] is one of the things I weigh the most. He’s starting kindergarten around the summer vacation and it’s very important for me that we can make that transition as easy as possible.

Likewise, Kent and Line had thoroughly researched childcare and schools through their network and on multiple websites. Kent found that although it is nice to hear personal experiences, he preferred also having numbers, e.g. on how many students go on to higher education. They only had two friends in their desired location, so Kent found that the information they got was “a little hear-say and jungle drums”.

‘Auxiliary’ capital: Using information capital to make the search process easy and efficient

In order to find institutions, which will secure the best foundation for their children’s daily life and future education, the Relation families draw on their online information capital by searching the internet and their offline information capital by asking their network. By seeking small schools, small class sizes and a good child-to-staff ratio, they believe there will be more time and attention for their own children and, in this way, they try to secure that their children will obtain a higher amount of institutionalized cultural capital.

To find a location where their priorities are met, all families use their information capital. Though the families are very capable in their media practices and use their online information capital in their search process, they especially value offline information capital in getting real life experiences, both by hearing testimonials from others and exploring an area themselves. Hence, social capital is crucial in order to be able to provide information capital, not least offline information capital.

The Relation families started their search for a new home online. They found that the internet eases the process of searching for information about a future location. “It’s not so easy to go there if you live far away as we do”, as Jane explains. The families typically began their search for a new home when they started having children. Line finds that when searching on Google, she needs to know what she is looking for. She therefore primarily uses Facebook to get information about what goes on in
the area: “Then you slowly start to realize that a lot of things are happening that you find interesting, and I think that has helped entice me”.

5.2. The Practical families

The Practical families are represented by two couples, namely Trine and Juan, who are in their late 20s, and Mia and John, who are about 30 years. The configuration of capital of the Practical families is shown in Figure 2.

[Figure 2 here]

Economic capital: staying close to jobs

As can be seen, these families are strongly influenced by economic capital. None of them are homecomers, and their relocation is primarily guided by a wish to stay close to their current jobs. For this to be possible, it is necessary for them to have a strong focus on their daily economy.

John and Mia would like to stay in Copenhagen, where they currently live and work, but cannot afford the house they want there. It became a possibility for them to move further away from their jobs when John found it a viable option to have a longer commute: “It has changed a lot that I realized I can work on the train and get the hours registered”. Therefore, they have now extended their search area to outside of Copenhagen. They want a large house and in order to get this, they have decided that they can accept a relatively tight economy.

Trine and Juan’s main reason for moving is to get closer to his job, as he currently spends three hours a day on transportation. This leaves little time for the family and other activities. Trine explains: “When we look for an apartment, we first search for something that lives up to our criteria for a reasonable price and enough square meters”.

For the Practical families, economic capital in form of jobs and incomes strongly influence their location choice. In contrast to the Relation families, they are not willing to move too far away from their current jobs or get new ones. Therefore, they have decided to max out their budget, in order to stay close to their work. By minimizing their commuting time, they do however get more time with their family. To make sure that they spend their economic capital optimally, the families make budgets and weigh their options.

Social capital: well-functioning local community and safe environment
Because the Practical families highly prioritize their jobs, living close to their families and friends becomes a minor priority. Hence, they tend to exchange social capital for economic capital. They are willing to trade off living near their relatives for being close to their jobs, that is, prioritizing economic capital. However, as the Relation families, they want to find a strong local community where their children can feel safe. But as they don’t come from the area, to get the right ‘match’ seems more problematic and time-consuming than for the Relation families. For example, Mia and John looked for “a city that looked very child friendly”. Therefore, they scrutinize the area and the houses for sale by car, but also by using Google Maps to look at potential neighbors’ gardens to see if there are swing sets, in order to secure that there are other children living there. To avoid unsafe neighborhoods, the couple is willing to accept a longer commute. They also research who live in the area, by looking into how people vote and their educational level, comparing it to their own preferences.

The Practical families also want a good local community for their children but whereas the Relation families emphasize the more relational aspects, the considerations of the Practical families are more related to a safe environment. Still, they do want to give their children the opportunity to build social capital by finding a neighborhood with other children.

*Cultural capital: childcare and schools*

Similar to the Relation families, the Practical families draw on their information capital when they seek good childcare and schools, in order to secure their children's future institutionalized cultural capital. The Practical families generally have a wish to attend cultural events, but it is not so important that it becomes a criterion in their search process. By prioritizing their children over participating in cultural events, they make a tradeoff between their wish to strengthen their own embodied cultural capital and instead spend time with the children.

*Information capital: using primarily online search*

To find a location that lives up to their expectation of capital available, the families make use of the fourth, auxiliary form of capital, we have termed information capital, and which functions as a tool to identify the other three forms of capital. During their search process, they use both their online and offline information capital in the sense that they rely equally on media practices and real-life experiences. The couples have been searching for a new location for about a year, using Danish real estate pages. When finding something of interest, they turn to Google Maps to look at the street view and calculate distances.
Mia and John feel that the internet has influenced their search area: “I can’t even see there is an alternative”, as John said. As mentioned, not least the distance to work was of importance. John highlights how Google Maps helped them realize that Holbæk was only a one-hour commute away, because: “When we looked at a map, we thought that Holbæk was totally ridiculous”. And Trine explains her and Juan’s use of the internet thusly: “It has just been a tool for finding something at all. Otherwise I think it made the ‘jungle’ a bit easier to navigate”.

The Practical families also draw on their online information capital in order to identify, which houses they can afford, and calculate the distance to their work. In this way, their online information capital is used to find the most efficient way of spending their economic capital. In contrast to the Relation families, the Practical families generally rely more on their online information capital as a tool to find the right location.

The Practical families however also find it important to get a sense of the area in real life. For example, Mia and John to a certain degree rely on experiences from their network. Besides, they like to experience an area for themselves. John explains their procedure:

\[ Simply just get everybody in the car and then we’ll drive in that direction [he points]. Then we drive through some towns to get an idea about how they feel like. \]

5.3. The Practical-Relation families

Finally, we include two so-called Practical-Relation families, namely Mette and Hans, who are in their 40s, as well as Vera and Preben, who are about 50. The configuration of capital in Figure 3 shows that the considerations of the 2 Practical-Relation families are equally influenced by social and economic capital.

[Figure 3 here]

Economic capital: using a maximizing strategy

Like the Practical families, the two Practical-Relation families focus on their economy. However, they represent a different type of practicality. They seek to maximize what they can get from their economic capital, by securing that their investment is sensible and will provide them a sound economic foundation for their retirement. Hans says: “We would rather compromise on the house in order to live the life we want economically”.
Both couples are restricted by having to sell their current houses before being able to fulfill their plans for moving. They also have specific thoughts about how long they think they will be living in their next location. Therefore, it is important for Vera and Preben that they are able to pay off their debt within reasonable time.

Both families would like to find a house in a scenic location close to the area were they currently live. However, since this type of location is often quite expensive, they find that they might have to compromise on this need, as they do not want to spend all their economic capital on the house.

**Social capital: maintaining social networks**

Staying near the area were they currently live was of great importance to both Practical-Relation families. Mette primarily wants to stay in the town, due to her daughter: “Her relationship to friends, network. That she can stay. That’s actually the most important thing for me”.

Vera and Preben, who are about 20 years older than most of the families, originally met in a local folk high school. As they still share the network from this time, they are reluctant to leave the area. Vera explains how the fact that Preben is relocating from Eastern Jutland influences their considerations: “It’s also about where he would feel most at home”.

In sum, the Practical-Relation families are primarily interested in maintaining their current social capital. They feel they have roots in their current local community and enjoy the familiarity. This feeling of familiarity seems to be what the other families wish for in their future local community. By staying in their local area, the Practical-Relation families maintain the social capital they have already built in their local community.

**Cultural capital: status quo**

The Practical-Relation families did not articulate many thoughts on childcare and schools. As their children are happy in their current schools this acts as a reason for why the families do not expect to leave their current area, and also why they have not been researching educational possibilities. The families instead emphasize maintaining their children’s institutionalized cultural capital by letting them stay in their current schools.

**Information capital: using primarily offline search**

Even though they have local knowledge, The Practical-Relation families still use their online information capital to research for example the price level and local surroundings, but mostly within
their current municipality. Like the other family types, the couples also started their search on Danish real estate pages. They also used Google Maps to check the local surroundings, e.g. distance to neighbors, the water and the city as well as opportunities for public transportation.

Like the Relation families, the Practical-Relation families’ search process also seems to have developed into a form of hobby, as they use it to pass time. Even though both families’ relocation has been put on a temporary standby, because they need to get their houses sold, they still look at possible houses. Where Mette keeps updated on new houses by following local real estate agents on Facebook, Vera and Preben use notifications from real estate agents if a house close-by is up for sale. They use it as a fun feature when they are driving somewhere. Vera says:

*And then I quiz him, it’s so and so many square meters and it’s also something about finding out where the prices are in relation to it. It has become sort of like a sport.*

As the only family type, the Practical-Relation families also looked in the weekly newspaper. However, they found the information limited.

Because the families primarily look at houses in their current municipality, they do not find that the internet has expanded their search area. However, Hans still finds that the internet has influenced their moving considerations: “Of course it has, because we found the houses we have been looking at online”.

The Practical-Relation families draw on their local knowledge of the municipality but also acquire information from their network. Vera and Preben started looking into a neighboring municipality because of suggestions from their network. Vera explains: “Instead of just rejecting it, we should maybe try open up the possibility”. Again, we see the close connection between information capital and social capital.

As the families mostly look at houses in areas they are already familiar with, they primarily draw on their local knowledge. Vera for example knows which areas will prolong her commuting time and also highlights how Preben has been able to use her knowledge about the area. Both families drive to the area of interest, to get their own sense of the location. Vera finds that pictures can be deceiving and therefore she and Preben prioritize experiencing the houses for themselves in order to “feel and sense the possibilities”.
6. Conclusion

For long, the concept of counterurbanization has been widely used within geographical and rural studies (e.g. Halfacree, 1994). The triggering factors for counterurbanization are well-described, however little is known about how potential urban-to-rural migrants search for their future residence in practice. Therefore, our research question became:

*How do families with children, wishing to move to a rural area, search for their new location in order to achieve desired forms of capital?*

This includes the increasingly popular internet search tools, which seem to be an increasingly important facilitator for counterurbanization by providing key information about hitherto ‘forgotten’ places in rural areas. Therefore, drawing on semi-structured interviews with 8 Danish families in various parts of Denmark carried out in spring 2018, the purpose was to shed more light on how families with children wishing to move to a rural area *in practice* look for the ideal place to live. This was analyzed within a Bourdieusian capital theory framework (Bourdieu, 1986), in which we tried to further develop the notion of ‘capital conversion’ into capital *configurations* and *trade-offs*. In doing this, we supplemented social, cultural and economic capital with a fourth capital form, *information capital*. By the families, information capital was used as a kind of ‘auxiliary’ capital to identify their future residence as well as the ‘configuration’ of capital they could build there.

We found that the families had different characteristics and that they could be divided into three ideal types, depending on their moving considerations: The Relation families (4 families), the Practical families (2 families) and the Practical-Relation families (2 families).

The Relation families were by far the family type that were most influenced by social capital. They were all homecomers, who prioritized living close to their relatives and friends. Besides, they searched for a local community where the whole family could build a network. By having these priorities, they accepted having to live further away from their jobs or get new ones. This can be seen as a trade-off, in which economic capital was ‘sacrificed’ in order to achieve more social capital. The families cared about finding good childcare and schools which showed that they had an interest in their children's institutionalized cultural capital. However, taken together, cultural capital played a minor role. The families especially valued getting information about different locations from their personal experiences or hearing from others. In this, they primarily drew on their offline information capital.
In contrast, the Practical families were mostly influenced by economic capital. Not being homecomers, their attention was especially on how their economic frame provided them with opportunities and restrictions for securing the location closest to their jobs. This priority took precedence over living close to their network, hence they traded off social capital for economic capital. However, social capital did play a role for them as well, as they prioritized giving their children a safe neighborhood to grow up in. Furthermore, it was also important for these families that there were possibilities for good childcare and schools in the area so that their children's institutionalized cultural capital would be strengthened. Yet, overall cultural capital influenced the families the least. In their search process, they drew equally on both types of information capital. They used their online information capital to search the internet for specific information, largely based on numbers, while the offline information capital was used to get a sense of the area.

Finally, the Practical-Relation families were equally influenced by economic and social capital, thereby resembling the two other types, though in different ways. They prioritized finding a location that gave them economic freedom, and they felt a familiarity with the local community and sought to maintain their current network. The possibility for building cultural capital was less important. The children’s institutionalized cultural capital played a minor role, as they were already enrolled in school. Where the other family types had to make trade-offs and move away from their current area, the Practical-Relation families found that the best opportunities for achieving their desired forms of capital were to stay close to their current dwelling. Therefore, they relied on their offline information capital, by drawing on their local knowledge. However, they also were dependent on offline information capital, as they used their online information capital both to imagine their lives in the possible house and to research specific numbers.

By applying the different forms of capital to analyze what influenced the families in relation to a relocation, we were able to create their individual configurations of capital that made it clear which capital stock they prioritized to achieve by relocating. This clarified how the families had to acknowledge that some considerations had to be set aside, if their main priorities were to be fulfilled. Some tradeoffs were necessary. Hence, unlike what is the case in the original Bourdieusian capital framework, conversions are not only leading to conversion work but also to prioritizing and ‘sacrificizing’ capital, that is, trade-offs between various forms of capital.

Hence, our study showed that the various forms of capital influenced the families’ search for a new location in different ways, depending on family type and, partly also, life-phase. What seemed most important for the families was that they could see the opportunities in the location and picture
their daily lives there. In this respect, their information capital became crucial, both online and offline information capital. Interviews with only 8 families however make our study rather explorative, and more research should be undertaken to test our hypothesis of three types of urban-to-rural migrant families.

Accordingly, municipalities and local communities should consider the importance of the combination of high quality on- and offline information in order to ‘sell’ themselves and attract newcomers and, moreover, take into account the specific wishes of the abovementioned three types of families with children.
Table 1. List of interviews with families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Background</th>
<th>Length of interview (minutes)</th>
<th>Type of family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Line*, age 32  
Kent*, age 30  
Son, nearly age 3 | The family wish to have their own house closer to their relatives. | 55 | Relational |
| Jane*, age 31  
Lasse, age 32  
Twin boys, nearly age 3 | The family want to move back to the area where they grew up and where their relatives still live. | 30 | Relational |
| Julie*, age 28  
Anders*, age 34  
Julie’s daughter, age 10  
Daughter, age 4  
Baby on the way | The family is looking to buy a house to get more space and a garden, preferably close to their relatives. | 85 | Relational |
| Sofie*, age 32  
Simon, age 34  
Son, age 3,5  
Son, age 6 months | The family are very open towards different living arrangement. They have both considered buying, renting or moving into a house share. However, it is important that it is close to their friends. | 74 | Relational |
| Trine*, age 27  
Juan, age 29  
Son, age 6 months | The family want to live closer to Juan’s work and the city. They are looking to buy an apartment, because nothing is up for rent. | 42 | Practical |
| Mia*, age 31  
John*, age 30  
Daughter, age 3  
Son, age 1 | The family lives in an apartment in Copenhagen. The family is looking to buy a house with a garden and because of the prices in Copenhagen, they are seeking other areas. | 77 | Practical |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Relation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mette*</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Hans*</td>
<td>After having known each other for a couple of years Mette and Hans are now looking to buy a house so they can move in together</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Practical-Relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mette’s daughter, age 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hans’ daughter, age 11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vera*</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Preben*</td>
<td>Vera and Preben have been dating for some years and now want to move in together. They are looking to either buy or build a house together. They would like to live close to the nature.</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Practical-Relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vera’s daughter, age 16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Present at the interview.
Figure 1. The Relation families’ configuration of capital.
Figure 2. The Practical families’ configuration of capital.
Figure 3. The Practical-Relation families’ configuration of capital.
References


Kley, S., 2017. Facilitators and constraints at each stage of the migration decision process. Population Studies 71 (S1), S35–S49.


