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# Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces. A Case Study of Regional Push and Pull Factors for BackMovers in Northern Iceland, the Faroe Islands and Northern Norway

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# ABSTRACT

The background for this project is the ongoing depopulation of peripheral Arctic regions due to the centripetal forces which have dominated industrialization and later on globalization. Over the years, measures have been undertaken to stop that process. This project tries to shed light on a part of these undertakings by putting focus on a special target group: people who have left the area and then moved back. The motives for these back-movers may be of interest for future actions and for counteracting the demographic problem. The study has its focus on a domestic migration context with life-style, education, work and social situation as pull and push factors. The impact on migrants and on the out- and in-bound migration destinations is also considered. A randomized semi-structured interview method has been used at a limited number of destinations. The choice of destinations for investigations has followed some principles: the interviewed people had moved back during the 1999-2009 period to the place where they were born. The main pull factor out was education and the main pull factor back was lifestyle. Housing was also important. The period of the migrants' life-cycle had also significance. It is of interest to know why certain persons reverse the flow and move back and if it is possible to combine the positive "life-script" with back-moving. Or to know if the negative "life-script" is really negative for those who share it.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

In many developed regions, especially in the Western world, centrifugal and centripetal forces are competing for steering migration flows. In 1957, Myrdal already pointed out the existence of an inevitable centripetal force coercing movements from the periphery of a region to its centre as a viable result of the industrialization process going on after World War II [1]. The process was considered to be a necessary and irreversible process causing ongoing depopulation of peripheral regions. This devastating development for the peripheral regions inspired a lot of research and incentives to alter the process, but nothing stopped it in

a more profound way. Especially the peripheries of the Nordic countries became fundamentally struck by depopulation like the rest of the North Atlantic region including Iceland, Greenland, Faroe Islands, Northern Norway and the Kola Peninsula in Russia [36], including the Maritime Provinces of Canada [2]. They were all supposed to decrease in population [3] by centripetal forces primarily based on economic decline, with unemployment as a result. Baumann (1998) blames *globalization* for that depopulation process and he looks upon globalization as a process which compels some of the inhabitants in a peripheral region to accept this development as a means to get happy and for others as a road to destruction [4].

The two diverse outcomes of the globalization process, mentioned by Baumann, illustrate two totally different views or theories on regional development. Myrdal's centripetal theory dominated the scientific discussion during the 1950s and 1960s, but during the 1970s and especially the 1980s counter centripetal theories gained ground, indicating a slightly beginning centrifugal force, inspired by different case studies (Brox, 1966; Beale, 1975; Liu, 1975; Berry, 1976; Gustafsson & Nilsson, 1988). One of the most noticed case studies questioned the outcome of investments in Northern Norway made by the regional fund for development of the war-struck region after World War II [5]. The counter centripetal force directed to the periphery could be promoted by endogenous development, relying on inherent possible viable conditions, developed and relied upon. contradictory theories confused and split the existing development research discourse and probably decreased the possibility for politicians to solve the depopulation problems, by its own inherent unmanageability [6].

Today, the centripetal forces are recognized as an inevitable development course, resulting in a necessity to find out recipes for the survival of the stricken peripheral regions, recipes sometimes regarded as artificial breathing. The impact of the activities has so far not altered the troublesome depopulation situation of young people in peripheral regions. Communities in peripheral regions often have a high fertility rate resulting in a young population which, in many cases, is regarded as a demographic prosperity, but connected with lack of higher education and professional skill it is rarely favourable for the communities [7]. Bukve (2008) finds that young people, especially women, leave peripheral areas in Northern Norway even if jobs are vacant there [8]. This may foster, among other things, a remaining male macho culture relying on conservative gender roles, since a lot of the women have left for urban jobs [9], [10].

The question is if these centripetal forces really are inevitable. Is it possible to find a centrifugal movement interspersed in the general centripetal development? The back-mover phenomenon may be such one [11]. This paper is an attempt, not to prove that thesis, but to investigate it by the use of some case studies from Iceland, the Faroe Islands and from Northern Norway.

# 2. THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Centripetal forces. As described above, most theories on regional development circulate around centripetal and centrifugal forces. The *Neoclassic Macroeconomic Theory* is based on the importance of centripetal forces as a development motor based on a labour intensive sector constituted by a high level of

technology and capital intensive production striving for an economic state of equilibrium. To achieve that equilibrium, labour is transferred from less productive sectors, often existing in geographical different areas and regions, to more productive sectors, normally found in regional or national centres, requiring unlimited access to labour supply [12]. This makes work as both a key push factor, but also a pull factor for migration. The concept of work-sharing, first elaborated by Durkheim [13] as the key factor for industrial development and later on the globalization process of today, underpins the need for a flexible labour force and hence a strengthening of the centripetal forces [14], [15], thereby signifying work as a pull factor with education as the most important background factor for development [16, Jennissen, 2007]. During the 1970s, the concept of counterurbanization began to circulate. The "pure" countryside on commuting distance in the outskirts of big cities became popular for living among metropolitan people. They were looked upon as refugees from the urban congestion, especially for families with children [18], [19]. Congestion and shortage of housing facilities to reasonable prices seem during the 1980s to have changed work from being a pull factor to become a push factor for many. Centripetal forces, for some people, were regarded as coercing you to do something reluctantly, but with a hope to come back some day [20]. It seems as lifestyle and other social factors here are counted for as centrifugal or at least counter centripetal pull factors.

The Neoclassic Microeconomic Theory is connected to the centripetal forces but is based on an individual choice with rational and fully informed decisions-makers. Pull factors dominate and the pull is a wish to live where the individual finds it best to live based on individual cost/benefit analysis [21]. The theory can, however, not explain why people from certain areas move to certain places without the optimizing of costs and benefits.

Network theory stresses the importance of contacts and knowledge for the decision to move [22] and emphasizes historical, cultural, colonial and technological linkages between migrants destinations in a mix of push and pull factors [23, Jennissen, 2007]. Jennissen, 2007 finds that network theory explains why migration flows are an ongoing phenomenon by stressing the arising of institutions, strengthening the linkages between immigrants and the countries they come from. Adey (2010) finds that "societal contexts shape the way mobility are treated and understood" [24]. The New Economic Theory of assumes that decisions are rarely Miaration individually taken, but by the family and the aim is not just about maximizing the income, but also about minimizing risks, like unemployment or social problems [25].

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Centrifugal forces. Centrifugal forces may differ in character depending on those who are migrating. Even if tourists are not migrants, there may be some interesting statements in what MacCannell (1992) calls the two flows of movements which cross each other's routes without interference: tourist flows from the rich world to the poor world and refugee flows from the poor world to the rich world. He calls them "empty meeting grounds" [26].

The tourist flow expects to find the same conditions at the destination as at home, while the refugee flow, which can be compared to ordinary migrants, is expected to accommodate to the conditions at the place they flee to. Push and pull factors also vary totally: push for refugees — migrants — and pull for tourists. This indicates that the centrifugal forces are unpredictable to some extent and aside from a lot of debate books during the 1960s and 1970s, few theories have been launched about centrifugal counter forces.

Among the theories which appeared at last, congestion theories were the most frequent. They coped with the urban congestion situation in order to minimize its negative impact on all sorts of bottlenecks in urban flows, especially traffic congestions [27].

Spin-off effects were another field of studies during the late 80s and beginning of the 90s. Big companies located at the centre of the region could create spin-off effects in the peripheral regions with lower costs per unit [28]. Favourable presumptions in the periphery, like natural conditions, were seen as attractive for these spin-off effects. A diversified regional policy was regarded as a more viable way to develop the periphery.

Karlsson et al. (2009) stress stronger emphasis on the growth potential of the region, encouraged by tailored public contributions. EU had started, forced by its several enlargements, to reorganize its regional policy from rural farm support to optimal use of local potential (1990) [29]. The enlargement in 2004 increased the necessity to form a policy including the former East European member-states with their vast areas of sparsely populated settlements. Actions against depopulation resulting in a more polycentric union were on the agenda [30], [31].

This paper takes its point of departure in Neoclassic Microeconomic Theory applied to counter centripetal forces based on an individual choice with rational and fully informed decisions-makers, but also in counter centripetal forces with push factors based on economic and non-economic preconditions at the core. Among non-economic conditions, life-cycle and life-style seem to be reciprocal concepts, well worth to bear in mind when planning by authorities for facilitating for out-movers to decide for a move back. It is also applied in Network Theory as an explanation for the rather common wish to go to places where previous out-movers have settled with their linkages to the places of

origin and well-known cultural circumstances for the migratory.

The ambition is to examine if the motives for the centrifugal forces are unpredictable or irrational by studying motives for back-moving to place of birth or of growth. An inspiration to the study has been an investigation made in the 1980s in Sweden, by Gustafsson & Nilsson [33], where 51 back-movers to a small place in Northern Sweden were interviewed about their motives for moving back. The main reason claimed by the respondents was a wish to move to their "grave", which meant a longing for being buried at their birth place and available housing, mostly their birth house.

Most of the findings stem, however, from a study of back-movers in the North Atlantic region funded by Nordic Atlantic Co-operation (NORA), Faroe Islands [32]. A randomized semi-structured interview at a limited number of destinations was used to get satisfactory information. The choice of destinations for investigations followed some principles: the interviewed people had moved back during the 1999-2009 period to the place where they were born or grew up. The destinations should be located within the North Atlantic coastal peripheries with entities possible to cope with statistically and consist of around 1,000 inhabitants. The interviews were conducted during 2010 and 2011 in the Northern and Eastern coastal area in Iceland (56 interviews), in the peripheral parts of the Faroe Islands (33 interviews), and in a small municipality in Northern Norway (21 interviews), in total 115 interviews.

The interviewed entity was the household and they were interviewed after moving back to their place of birth. The 115 interviewed households were structured after eventual partner status as back-mover or in-mover. This structure was as follows:

BB - Both husband and wife are back-movers.

BI - Husband is back-mover, wife is in-mover.

IB - Husband is in-mover and wife is back-mover.

Bf - Single woman is back-mover.

Bm - Single man is back-mover.

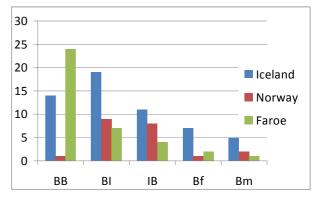


Fig. 1. Household structure when interviewed, N =115 [32].

They were asked about reasons and motives behind both out-moving and back-moving. The age of

the interviewed persons when they were interviewed was in average around 30-35 or 41-50 years. About 90% had left their home area before the age of 25. The average age when moving back was 36 and the typical age when moving back was 25-35. A fourth returned already before 25 and the average number of years for stay away was 18.

In short, most interviewed persons were young and came back when they were in their late 30s in average. The questions in the questionnaire were semi-structured with following-up questions:

Why did you move? Where did you move? Why did you move back? How is your situation now?

Specific demographic data were also asked for in the questionnaire.

# 3. FINDINGS

# 3.1. Motives for moving out: Centripetal forces

The overwhelming most important centripetal force was the lack of higher *education* at home: 79% of the interviewed stated education as the reason for their moving away. The rich supply of education possibilities outside the region was a strong pull factor. It was a *sine qua non* situation for those who wanted to achieve higher education. *Work* played a minor role but constituted all the same a pull factor. Examples of pull factors for education were: "good courses", "requested education available only there", "to structure my knowledge and get better competence", "education gives job possibilities". Many were clear about what they wanted to study and what they wanted to use the education for.

Work had minor importance although it was a clear pull factor. There were, however, push factors. For some women, it was a conscious step since it was not always socially supposed for them to work, just be married. Centripetal forces could also consist of social conditions, which were more complex and rather individual. Examples of the individual motives were: "Living with grandmother", "together with mother", "parents moved". Obviously, part of the family followed the children and decided to move away with them. For more grown-up out-movers, parents were not an option: "Boy-friend lived there" or simply "friends". Accommodation was an important factor: "The school dormitory almost a home place", "house owned by the family". However, there were also push factors. Most of them had negative social pressure as a bearing motive: "Being a single mother", "parents' divorce", "own divorce", "no women", "family problems ", "housing problems ", "gossiping".

A strong push factor for a few of the outmovers was longing for *change*. This change was about

"testing something new", "adventure", "few women", "dull and boring", "something different at a different place", "challenge", "to see the world", "fresh air", or "wanting to live with husband/girlfriend/boyfriend". In this case, the push factor coincided with the pull factor.

Common for most of the out-movers were motives connected to the *Neoclassical Macroeconomic Theory* with its stress on allocation of resources to centres for optimal reasons as the basic explanation for migration. But some of them had reasons mainly based on *Neoclassic Microeconomic Theory* with its stress on individual choice (e.g. a personal wish to move to places they presumed would meet their needs and wishes.). *Network Theory*, with its stress on the significance of cultural factors, also played a role due to already established contacts at the place where they were going to.

# 3.2. Motives for moving back: counter centripetal forces

When they moved out, education was the main pull factor. When the education period was over, the centripetal forces seemed to lose a lot of power while non-centripetal factors increased. Work became more important than education, since work was essential for living. But since work was available at the centres of a region or nation according to both Neoclassic macroand microeconomic theories, there should be no pull effect concerning work as a push factor from the centre. There must be something according to the Network theory saying that culture and connections are important that turned work to become a major counter centripetal pull factor. Of the interviewed, 36% referred to the Rational choice theory factor lifestyle with their motives. When the respondents put lifestyle as the most important push factor making them move, they must have found the lifestyle where they lived for the moment not being optimal. It could be uncomfortable feelings with urban lifestyle like: "homesick", "I belong to this place", "I miss my relatives", "both our parents live here", "no family within 100 miles". But the lifestyle motives referred mostly to positive situations, especially like: "I want my children to be raised here", "I got day-care", "I got a child and I moved home so I could have help with baby-sitting". Counter centripetal forces as push factors were also connected to the accommodation or housing situation at the centre: "prices are lower here", "I already owned two houses", "we bought a house a year before we went back", "we moved into my parents' house".

Congestion was a considerable motive: "you always have to queue up and you must always pay for car parking", "there is always stress", sometimes a mix of mental and physical stress: "there is light everywhere, light pollution". Others felt being outsiders: "life is tiresome", "isolation", and one said frankly that "he needs to be a bigger part of the community".

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Others did not find any push factor (14%). Half of the households who found no push factor contained one in-mover each. For two of the respondents, there were neither push- nor pull-factors. They just had to move back despite their wish to stay where they were. The reason was an obligation or coercion to come home and take care of parents and may be regarded as both a push factor — living at a wrong place when needed — and a pull factor — a wish to take care of relatives.

# 3.3. Circumstances after moving back pull factors fulfilled

The pull factors for moving back could be described in terms of *environmental* pull factors, *social* pull factors, *economic* pull factors, and *work* pull factors.

Environmental circumstances. Most of the back-movers were satisfied with their environment after the move: 75% (30% very satisfied). Nature played a significant role as pull factor: "nature is close", "almost don't need TV", "enormous experiences", "can't find a better place", "freedom", "unique", "not comparable to concrete environment", "short distance".

It was, however, not only nature that pulled as a contrast to the "concrete" urban environment, but also the social environment and its way of living. Longing for rural life became a pull factor in form of counter centripetal forces: "child friendly", "relaxed community", "closeness", "safety", "in-formal", "one goes to the coop store for a reason, not to be tempted".

Social circumstances. Most of the back movers were satisfied with social circumstances, even if the figure was lower than for the environmental circumstances: 66% (23% very satisfied). An explanation can be that the natural environment is still in their memories and in many ways unchanged while the social context is continuously undergoing changes. Reasons for being very satisfied were: "great diversity in activities", "good security net", "relatives", "good contacts to other people", "this is home", "we know everybody", "plenty of offers".

Economic circumstances. Most of the respondents (72%) were satisfied with the situation after they had moved back and 14% of them were very satisfied. They especially pointed to the low living costs like housing as an important reason for the satisfaction. A reason for the low living costs, beside the generally low costs in the periphery, was the possibility to take over parents' house when a generation shift occurred. Another possibility was to remake owned summer houses or abandoned farm houses or out-buildings to permanent living.

Work circumstances. Full time occupation (all in the household have full time or part time occupation) was the situation for 69% of the households. 14% were entrepreneurs, like farmers, fishermen or with a

company of their own. Since some of the back-movers moved when they had become retired, the figure for unemployed was low. The only type of household with high unemployment rate was house-hold with a single female back-mover, probably because of personal problems about combining maternity with proper work offers or simply because of the fact that it was easier to cope with unemployment in a familiar context.

# 3.4. Circumstances after moving back pull factors not fulfilled

Environmental circumstances. There were only a few negative comments over nature in itself, but over people's behaviour: "dirty", "people don't take care of nature". The rural lifestyle did not always meet the back-movers' expectations. Those not satisfied stressed general things like "traditional gender roles", "lack of day-care", "lack of service", "tourism no solution", "lack of activities", "I miss city life", "bad school", "I gave it two years and we bought a house and now I can't move", "extremely bad infrastructure", "poor offer for children", "village like".

Social circumstances. The 14% of the back movers not satisfied with the social conditions could be categorized in physical place isolation, like "too small place", "isolated in winter", "few things to do", "miss a house of their own", or in social isolation like "difficult for single people", "too much social control", "gossip", "you have to work to get part of a social network", and lack of development opportunities like "I miss professional social environment", "I miss cultural arrangements", "few sport activities", "more places for grown-ups".

Economic circumstances. Those who were not satisfied (24%) pointed to various circumstances like "living costs in a small community actually higher than in city", "poor service creates longer transports", "entrepreneur difficulties", "low pay area", "low social security", and "unemployment".

Work circumstances. Of the back-movers, 11% lived on beneficiaries of different forms, like retired, disablement pensions, early retired or temporarily on social security.

# 3.5. Structure differences in general

There were certain characteristics that separated the types of households. Households with a female in-mover had more children in average than other household types probably due to the wish for a calm environment for the children to grow up in, something that may be a bigger concern for the mother. Choice of destination shows that female out-movers moved to smaller places, difficult to figure out why. Households where both partners were back-movers had not been to other places than the first ones they moved

to. The reason for that may be a common need for education and when that was finished, they moved back. Households where the man was in-mover were less satisfied with the present environmental, social and economic situation. Gustafsson & Nilsson [33] find in their report that the respondents were divided by gender in their view on the back-moving place. The male back-mover moved to the place, the roots, not to people since they had often left the place during the back-mover's stay away. Female in-movers moved to the people at the new place and organized often a social context. A male in-mover has obviously not that talent or will to establish social networks and this is why they seem less satisfied with the move.

# 4. CENTRIPETAL AND COUNTER CENTRIPETAL FORCES

Since education functions as oil in the machinery created by centripetal forces, it is no wonder that it is referred to as the most important motive making people at young age move to the centre of a region or nation. Many of the interviewed also seem to understand the value of education as a means to get a wanted job. After education, the primary goal for their move out was now fulfilled. Now they could look after suitable jobs and if they returned home, the community had gained a lot: education and experience.

The *Neoclassic macroeconomic theory* has not a total impact on these choices; it is rather the other types of theories that explain why those who move back actually once moved away. There are certain indications on a shift of attitudes during the 1970s regarding the centripetal move as a temporary move.

By stressing the importance of individual choice, like *Neoclassic microeconomic theory* and the importance of cultural circumstances, like *Network Theory*, as relation factors between homestead and goal for migration, the initial decision, but also the direction for the move were facilitated. This is revealed in the mentioned motives by the interviewed about family bonds and housing opportunities at their homestead. Where the *New economic theory of migration* had a great impact on the structure with its stressing on minimizing the risks with migration is uncertain.

Counter centripetal forces, found in this study, point to both push and pull factors. *Environment* and *social* pull factors have a significant impact on the motives for moving back, while the urban *lifestyle* in contrast to the rural one has a considerable push effect, especially around the concept of *congestion*. Another study from Sweden confirms this mix of driving forces [33]. In that study made among people who moved back to their homestead from 1961 to 1981, with 51 interviewed persons, there were 4 critical points in the lifecycle of the interviewed for the willingness to move

back: age of children, parents' infirmity, own crisis and retirement.

Kåks finds out, by conducting interviews with young people in Sweden, two different life-scripts or views on how life ought to be lived [34]. One life-script had an offensive view implying self-realization, by widening the geographical horizon and pushing grownup life as far away as possible into the future. The other life-script had a defensive view, implying a wish to remain where you are with family and children. The interviewed found that the first life-script was experienced as positive and meaningful, while the other one was regarded as something you got stuck in, resulting in a boring job and a frustrating family life. Regardless of that somewhat philosophical or ideological discussion, it is of interest to know why certain persons reverse the flow and move back and if it is possible to combine the positive life-script with backmoving or if the negative life-script really is negative for those sharing it. If so, it indicates that change is an important push factor. The home place is too small or too easy to understand, it requires more to satisfy for achieving a rich life.

# 5. CONCLUSIONS

Following Bauman's critic of the globalization impact, the forecast for the peripheries seems to be an irreversible depopulation process [4]. Martin opposes that view by launching a *reflexivity* process where different actors in the globalization process try to understand each other's needs and see if it is possible to meet them by accommodation to each other [35]. Inhabitants neither have to leave for survival and nor have to go under by staying. Local culture in this case can be either a tool for development, but in an adapted form or it can be a signature for an obsolete but still qualitative culture, possible to show for and/or prosper by tourists.

The reflexivity process connected to and got oxygen from the emerging counter-centripetal forces. These forces show a swing in the attitudes to both core and centre. The apprehension of urban life with its components of above all congestions seems to be part of the roots to that swing, the apprehensions which can be put together under the label of lifestyle, urban versus rural. This can also be shown by the average age for back-moving, 36 years, but with two peaks around 25-30, and after 40. Gustafsson & Nilsson found out from their rather few interviews (51) that the move back mostly was motivated either by the situation for the children - starting school - or by retirement [33]. For the society, the back-movers were looked upon as an asset and politicians stressed that it is necessary for young people to move out and find new ideas and experiences and it is not necessary that the in-movers Journal Settlements and Spatial Planning, vol. 4, no. 1 (2013) 87-94

are back-movers, but it is easier for back-movers to meet the needs of the society.

This study can only relate the apprehensions to back-movers, but it can anyway add to migration theories some motives, like life-style and housing, found behind both out-moving and in-moving migration processes. It is obvious that back-moving is a counter-centripetal force relying mainly on longing for a rural life-style.

This longing is normally coined by sudden access to housing or work at their homestead and often initiated at a certain time in their life-cycle, either accentuated by their parents becoming old and they want or are forced to leave their house or by becoming parents and looking for a calm growing-up environment for their kids.

The depopulation of rural areas in many countries in both Europe and in North America, based on centripetal forces, call for more research on how to encourage centrifugal forces. Also the new situation in countries within the Euro zone reveals new motives for back-moving since conditions seem to be easier for survival in the countryside.

For politicians in peripheral regions with depopulation trends, the people's motives to move back are essential for planning and it is easier to find the motives among back-movers since they are identifiable in contrast to presumptive in-movers.

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