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## **Conceptualising mobility in times of crisis: towards crisis-led counterurbanisation?**

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### **Abstract**

This study makes a novel theoretical and empirical contribution to the counterurbanisation literature. Firstly, the research offers a new conceptualization by drawing on the potential for a crisis-led counterurbanisation in Athens, Greece. Secondly, the paper employs a quantitative methodology, a choice experiment, to study such mobilities and examine the factors that may influence the choice of relocation. The results confirm the potential for a crisis-led counterurbanisation, particularly amongst younger and unemployed individuals. The findings are important for conceptualising mobility in times of crisis and for identifying areas that require policy attention due to the likely restructuring they will experience.

**Keywords:** counterurbanisation; crisis; choice experiment; Greece.

## **Introduction**

This study explores the potential for a counterurbanisation trend during the ongoing financial crisis in Greece and investigates, through a choice experiment applied to an urban sample in Athens, the factors that influence the decision to relocate and the selection of rural location. In particular, the research examines the role of land, family networks, distance from large cities, the presence of international migrants and cultural capital in the choice of rural settlement.

The paper aims to make a novel contribution to the literature in the following two ways. First, counterurbanisation has long been at the centre of the research agenda in rural and regional studies discussing the changing social composition of rural populations (see reviews in Mitchell 2004; Gkartziou, 2013). This paper advances the literature by widening the lens of counterurbanisation research through drawing evidence from Greece and thereby adding to the largely UK-US counterurbanisation narrative (see also Halfacree, 2008). The results of the study point to a ‘crisis-led’ counterurbanisation, especially amongst younger and unemployed individuals. The Greek case, therefore, adds new meanings to counterurban mobility (i.e. counterurbanisation as resistance to crisis) and thus offers alternative explanations to such contemporary residential movements, beyond the gentrification impacts widely acknowledged in the literature (Smith and Hingley, 2012; Philips, 1993).

Secondly, the paper contributes to the use and development of new methodologies in counterurbanisation research, and in particular the use of a choice experiment, responding also to calls for more quantitative research in the field (Smith, 2007). While there is some literature that has used choice experiments in studying urban-rural relocations, most of it has

centred on how different elements of the rural housing market influence individuals' location choices (e.g. Bullock et al., 2011). Studies have thus primarily examined the trade-offs people are willing to make between the attractions of the rural environment and practical considerations such as distance to workplace, schools, shops and other amenities. Socio-economic considerations including different aspects of the social and cultural environment (i.e. family networks, cultural capital) have been particularly neglected in the literature. The results of this study point to the importance of such considerations: urban migrants are more likely to select rural areas that are close to big cities, offer high cultural opportunities and have international migrants well-integrated into the local communities. Having land as well as a house was also highlighted as an important consideration through the choice experiment.

The paper is organised as follows: The next section revisits the literature on counterurbanisation and aims to provide the theoretical context for developing the hypothesis of a 'crisis-led counterurbanisation'. The Greek case is then presented along with the main variables that were used in the choice experiment. The methodology section presents the survey instrument and explains the choice experiment. The findings are presented in section 5 while conclusions and policy implications are summarised in the final section.

## **1. Researching counterurbanisation**

Ever since its conceptualisation (Berry, 1976), counterurbanisation has been a well discussed theme in rural and regional studies literature. The literature has explored in detail the socio-economic profile of counterurbanisers and the drivers behind urban dwellers' move to the countryside (Šimon, 2014). Research questions have centred on representations of rurality (i.e. what these movements mean for ex-urban residents and how they are linked with

questions of class and identity; see for example: Phillips, 1998). The policy implications of counterurbanisation have also been widely discussed, for example on planning and housing policy (Liu and Roberts, 2013; Gkartzios and Scott, 2013), and on shifting community power relationships and rural development narratives (Murdoch et al., 2003). The research has highlighted opportunities from counterurbanisation for economic development (Mitchell and Madden, 2014; Bosworth and Atterton, 2012), but also issues of displacement, social exclusion and housing unaffordability resulting from the colonisation of the countryside by middle-class groups (Best and Shucksmith, 2006).

The research findings have been diverse and sometimes even contradictory, pointing to the geographically selective character of counterurbanisation (Boyle et al., 1998) and the diversity of socio-spatial systems associated with the counterurbanisation experience internationally (i.e. multiple socio-cultural constructions of rurality resulting also in planning systems guided by contrasting attitudes to regulating the rural). As acknowledged by many in the field, much of this literature centres on Anglo-American contexts, which might have created a 'counterurbanisation imperative' in explaining such social mobilities (e.g. Hoggart, 1997; Halfacree, 2008). In England for example, a prolonged and continuous counterurbanisation (Champion and Shepherd, 2006) is usually associated with the colonisation of the countryside by older middle-class residents resulting in an increasingly exclusive countryside. However, research from other European countries has shown very contrasting experiences, including counterurbanisation as an opportunity for developing rural communities, involving diverse social groups (not just the middle classes) and irrelevant to idyllic constructions of rurality (Gkartzios and Scott, 2010; Grimsund, 2011; Paniagua, 2002).

By focusing on Greece, this paper argues that the economic crisis offers a different context for studying residential mobility, which enhances our understanding of counterurbanisation processes in line with calls to embrace diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts in counterurbanisation research (Halfacree, 2008). While mobility research is becoming increasingly important in the field (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014), there is very limited research on counterurbanisation in the context of the global financial crisis. Drawing on Mitchell (2004), counterurbanisation refers to a migration movement down the urban hierarchy, i.e. from more urban settlements (the city of Athens in this case) to more rural settlements. In particular, the study aims to explore the role of the current economic crisis as a driver for counterurban relocation through the application of a choice experiment (see also studies on potential counterurbanisation in: van Dam et al., 2002; Niedomysl and Amcoff, 2011). Therefore this paper discusses the *potential* for counterurbanisation by surveying an urban-based population and introducing the use of a novel methodology in counterurbanisation research.

## **2. The Greek case: crisis, mobilities and the rural promise**

The Greek economy has, at the time of writing (December 2014), been in recession for six consecutive years. In 2010, in an attempt to avoid sovereign default, the Greek government signed a bailout agreement with the European Union, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund which was followed by a second bailout in 2012. In return for these rescue packages, the Greek government agreed to a series of austerity measures and policy reforms. Excessive recession combined with the austerity measures under the terms of the Memoranda resulted in unprecedented unemployment and job insecurity, severe income reductions and poverty (Christodoulakis, 2012; Alogoskoufis, 2012).

For example, according to official figures, unemployment rose sharply from 7.9 per cent in 2008 to 25.5 per cent in the third quarter of 2014. Unemployment rates for the under-30s are particularly high: 49.5% for individuals aged 15-24 and 39.7% for individuals aged 25-29 (Elstat, 2014). The number of people whose income fell below the 2009 poverty line (adjusted for inflation) reached 45% in 2013 (Matsaganis and Leventi, 2014). Overall, 1 in 7 people were below the extreme poverty threshold in 2013, compared to 1 in 45 in 2009, while poverty rates were higher among younger households in urban areas (Matsaganis and Leventi, 2014). At the same time Greece performed poorly compared to the OECD average in terms of labour market security and quality of the working environment (OECD, 2014). Greece has experienced one of the largest falls in real wages across OECD countries (more than 5% per year on average since the first quarter of 2009). Furthermore, the risk of being unemployed is high, whereas unemployment benefits are among the lowest in OECD countries (OECD, 2014).

The dire economic situation has motivated an increase in outward migration. At the eve of the crisis, a study commissioned by the Greek government demonstrated that 68.2 per cent of residents in the two major metropolitan areas, Athens and Thessaloniki, had thought of moving to the Greek provinces (Ministry of Rural Development and Food, 2012). Furthermore, half of those willing to relocate (47.6 per cent) expressed a desire to work in the agricultural sector with 19.3 per cent of respondents having already organised their relocation. Most interestingly, 57.1 per cent were between 25 and 39 years old. The report appears to suggest the potential for a counterurbanisation trend, which is characterised by younger populations and, for some households, the desire to work in agricultural activities. Indeed, a 'back-to-the-land' trend has been heavily reported in the Greek and international

media, presented perhaps as an unproblematic solution to an urban-focused crisis (Eleftherotypia, 2013; New York Times, 2012). These representations of the rural (or, more precisely linguistically, of the province) increasingly construct the countryside as a space of refuge from the economic crisis (Kasimis and Zografakis, 2012). Kasimis and Zografakis (2013), however, have argued that the economic crisis and the return to agriculture are not exclusively related phenomena. The authors draw attention to a wide series of on-going counterurban mobilities that exhibit both necessity and choice, linked with ‘back-to-our-roots’ phenomena, but also with a new emergent spatial distribution of labour because of the economic crisis. Gkartzios (2013) also discussed a so-called ‘crisis-counterurbanisation’ in Greece. Through qualitative interviews with a small number of counterurban residents in the Greek provinces, the research demonstrated not only contrasting experiences of the perceived impact of the economic crisis between the city of Athens and the Greek provinces, but also the relationship between these counterurban mobilities, housing availability and family networks.

Despite these developments, little quantitative analysis has been carried out to investigate the potential of a counterurbanisation trend in Greece triggered by the economic crisis. This is not surprising, as beyond these recent contributions towards a ‘Greek counterurbanisation story’, research in Greece has demonstrated little evidence of counterurbanisation, unlike the experience of most western European countries. Cases of population revival in rural Greece have been reported in the literature, but these are associated with increases in international migrant workers, following the collapse of central and eastern European communist regimes, rather than a counterurbanisation trend (see Kasimis, 2010; Papadopoulos, 2012).

### **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 The survey instrument and data collection**

To investigate the potential of counterurbanisation amongst Athenian residents as well as their residential preferences for relocating, a survey was administered to a random sample of urban residents. The survey first included a series of questions exploring respondents' willingness to relocate along with obstacles to this decision and then introduced the choice experiment task. The last part of the survey gathered data on participants' socioeconomic background. The survey was pretested through face-to-face interviews over a week in early March 2013. Data collection took place in April 2013, and was conducted by a professional marketing company with prior experience in administering choice experiment studies. The survey administration resulted in the collection of 300 questionnaires. Interviews took place face-to-face at the respondents' homes. To ensure a random sample, in each region of Athens a street was randomly selected to serve as the starting point for household selection. Given the starting point, interviewers proceeded in a predetermined manner selecting every third household they encountered to be part of the sample. For each starting point an equal number of interviews was allocated (8-9). The research company first contacted the selected households by phone and arranged an interview at a suitable time. In each household selected, a screening question was first asked to examine a potential respondent's eligibility for participation in the study. The sole criterion was that respondents were over 18 years old and lived permanently in Athens, therefore excluding students who were only residing in Athens for the duration of their studies. The geographic distribution of the sample was proportionate to the distribution of the actual population in the different regions of Athens based on Greek National Statistics. In the case that more than one household member was

eligible to participate in the survey the last birthday rule was enforced to ensure a random selection of the person to be interviewed.

### **3.2 The choice experiment exercise**

Choice experiments elicit individuals' stated preferences with the use of questionnaires (Louviere et al., 2000). Originating in the fields of transport and marketing choice experiments have recently been applied in other fields (Hanley et al., 1998). In a choice experiment respondents are asked to choose between different profiles of the good or policy under consideration (here, destination profiles), each described in terms of certain attributes and the levels that these attributes take. By varying the attributes' levels, using an experimental design, the researcher can create different specifications of the good being studied. Choices are then used to explore the trade-offs that respondents are willing to make between the attributes of the good and, assuming that a utility maximizing principle underlies individual choices, to infer how much respondents value those attributes.

Five different attributes were used to describe the potential rural destination: type of housing; distance from cities; presence of (extended) family in the relocation area; presence of first and second generation international migrants; and cultural opportunities. The selection was based on literature review, previous exploratory research (Gkartzios, 2013) and previous choice experiment applications examining characteristics influencing urban to rural migration trends (Bullock et al., 2011). The employed attributes and their levels are presented in Table 1. Arguably the choice of destination could be significantly constrained by employment opportunities at destination. Employment opportunities were thus not included in the set of the attributes, as this would be likely to dominate the other attributes in the alternatives and

would not allow trade-offs between those attributes to be revealed. Consequently, respondents were asked to make choices conditional upon employment opportunities being similar across the alternatives in each choice card.

[Table 1 around here]

There are three levels for house type: ‘flat’ which corresponds to a typical apartment-style residence in Athens; ‘house with land’; and ‘house without land’, both corresponding to housing types found more commonly in the provinces. This attribute aimed to examine the potential existence of a ‘back-to-land’ motivation (Halfacree, 2006), which is not a factor usually explored in quantitative research. For example, to what extent do opportunities to own land inform the decision to relocate?

The family attribute draws on the literature around the significance of extended family networks in Southern Europe (Papadopoulos and Roumpakis, 2013). Dalla Zuanna (2001) talks about familism in the Mediterranean region, to describe societies where most people consider their own utility and the utility of their family as being one and the same thing (Alesina and Giuliano, 2007; Reher, 1998). This has significant implications for living arrangements and may be particularly relevant for the choice of destination. Gkartzios (2013), for example, suggested that the presence of extended family networks and the availability of housing offer a form of support and inclusion to the people who relocate to the Greek provinces and who have access to such networks. The family attribute could take two levels: presence or absence of extended family networks in the relocation area.

The third attribute draws on the significant growth of migrants in Greece during the last 20 years (Papadopoulos, 2012). Kasimis (2013) reports that most immigrants in Greece are from Balkan countries (accounting for almost two-thirds of Greece's official "foreign population"), followed by immigrants from the former Soviet Union. This attribute distinguished between first and second generation migrants, hypothesising that the latter are more active and visible in local community and political affairs, and aimed to explore the extent of xenophobia among Athenian residents, an issue that has received considerable attention, given the proliferation of the far-right Golden Dawn political party. Electoral support for Golden Dawn has been high in the larger cities, worst affected by crime and with high numbers of illegal immigrants, and among young and unemployed individuals (Doxiadis and Matsaganis, 2013).

The attribute referring to cultural opportunities at destination is informed by emerging theories surrounding the role of creativity and culture in economic growth, mobilities and urban development trajectories. Charles Landry's (2000) and Richard Florida's (2002) concepts of 'the creative city' and 'the creative class' have created intense debates in urban studies about the potential of cities to attract a mobile class of culture consumers as part of their regeneration and economic development strategies. In the choice experiment, cultural opportunities could be either high or low. The high cultural opportunities attribute reflected destinations with an active local community, where a series of cultural events takes place throughout the year (for example local music festivals and exhibitions). Conversely, low cultural opportunities would correspond to a location that only offered a limited number of cultural events, for example only during the summer months.

The final attribute, distance from cities (defined here as settlements with a population greater than 100,000), aimed to shed light on the locational characteristics of the settlement where

respondents would relocate. The question of distance has been the subject of considerable debate in counterurbanisation research (i.e. how far somebody needs to move to be considered a counterurbaniser? see Boyle et al., 1998). Research has considered both long-distance (remote rural) and short distance (peripheral rural) relocations (e.g. Ford, 1999; Grimsrud, 2011), while other work examines both long distance and short distance counterurban mobility (e.g. Stockdale et al., 2000). In the choice experiment, distance could take one of three levels: '0-20 km', '20-60 km' or 'more than 60 km'. The first level roughly reflects a suburban area within easy reach of a city. It is important to consider these relatively local moves because, as Milbourne (2007) argues, researchers have been preoccupied with longer distance relocations. The second level corresponds to a move to provincial settlements (either urban or rural) which can be reached within an hour from a city. The third level involved a journey of more than an hour to reach a city and therefore would correspond to a more remote, presumably rural, location. The terms urban and rural were intentionally not used in the choice experiment to avoid presumptions being made regarding those settlements and their characteristics.

An efficient design was developed in Ngene 1.1 to create 12 choice sets, which were blocked in two versions. Respondents thus looked at six choice cards each, and were asked to state which profile they preferred among the two rural relocation options and a status-quo alternative that involved the continuation of their current urban living. Respondents were asked to state their preferences truthfully, keeping in mind that results could provide useful policy recommendations and would inform policy making. Cheap talk scripts reminding respondents about the importance of replying truthfully are often used in stated preference studies and are found to significantly reduce hypothetical biases (Cummings and Taylor, 1998). Table 2 presents an example of a choice card.

[Table 2 around here]

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 Descriptive statistics**

The socioeconomic background of the sample is summarized in Table 3 below. The first column refers to the full-sample of 300 respondents, whereas the second column reports the socio-economic characteristics for the ‘counterurbanisation’ sub-sample.

[Table 3 around here]

Since the study aims to investigate preferences associated with counterurban migration, respondents were first asked whether they had considered relocating. Only respondents who admitted to having considered relocating were then asked to complete the choice experiment task. Of the 300 interviews performed, 183 individuals (61% of the total sample) replied that they had considered moving out of Athens. Of those, 32 were willing to migrate to a different country (10.6% of the total sample). Excluding individuals who were unwilling to relocate and those willing to migrate abroad, 151 individuals (50.3%) were left for the subsequent analysis.

Approximately 52% of the ‘counterurbanisation’ sub-sample were men, 71% were aged 18-54, while 28% were older than 55. While 82% of this sample lived in a flat in Athens, a

significant 55% had lived in a rural area before, while almost half (48%) owned a house in the Greek provinces.

Comparing with the sample not being willing to move away from Athens (N=117; excluding individuals willing to migrate to another country), the counterurbanisation sample was not found to be different in terms of education (p-value=0.42), income (p-value=0.64), gender (p-value=0.45), or employment status (full-time: p-value=0.47; part-time: p-value=0.18; less than 15 hours: p-value=0.46; not working: p-value=0.19).

However, a significant difference was found with respect to age and unemployment levels. Mean age for the sub-sample willing to relocate was 45.7, which was significantly lower than the mean age (51.3) for those who wished to continue living in Athens (p-value= 0.0054). These results suggest that younger individuals, who are likely to be more severely hit by the crisis, are more likely to wish to relocate to the provinces. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that the sub-sample who were willing to relocate experienced significantly higher unemployment rates (p-value=0.0062). Unemployment is 22% for the counterurbanisation sub-sample and 9.4% for those not willing to move.

## **4.2 Crisis counterurbanisation**

Respondents who declared that they had considered moving out of Athens were then asked a series of questions aiming to examine whether or not this decision related to the ongoing economic crisis and its effects. In this respect, the questionnaire first investigated how likely respondents were to move to a more rural area in the next five years. 55% of the sample declared that they were either likely or very likely to relocate. A follow up question then

asked whether respondents were more willing to relocate at this particular time compared to five years ago. 66% of respondents admitted that they were indeed more willing to relocate than they had been five years previously. Those respondents were then asked whether this willingness to relocate was related to the economic crisis. The overwhelming majority (80%) replied that it was. Respondents were finally asked where they would like to move to. The options given were ‘the open countryside’, ‘a village’, ‘a rural town’, ‘town’, ‘the same or different city’. 86% of the sample expressed their willingness to relocate to rural settlements, such as a rural town, a village or even the open countryside (see Table 4 for an explanation of these terms as they are used in the Greek census). The results of the survey therefore provide support for a crisis-led counterurbanisation trend in Greece, as suggested elsewhere (Gkartzios, 2013; Kasimis and Zografakis, 2013). Table 4 summarizes the questions used to explore the potential of a crisis-led counterurbanisation.

[Table 4 around here]

We next turn our attention to the characteristics of the destination that influence the choice of the potential relocation. This is highly relevant from a regional planning perspective given the inevitable demographic and social restructuring of rural areas in the years to come.

### **4.3 Model specification**

In the choice experiment task respondents were presented with six choice sets each containing two relocation alternatives and the option to continue living in their current location. Each alternative was constructed from different combinations of the levels of

attributes, and in each choice set respondents were asked to choose their most preferred alternative.

The choice data were analysed using a Random Parameters Logit (RPL) model. The RPL model allows the utility coefficients associated with each attribute to vary randomly across respondents and therefore can accommodate preference heterogeneity in the population (Hensher and Greene, 2003).

Under an RPL specification, the utility a respondent  $i$  derives from an alternative  $j$  in a choice set  $t$  is:

$$U_{ijt} = \beta_i X_{jt} + e_{ijt}$$

, where  $X$  is a vector of attributes and  $e_{ijt}$  is the stochastic component in the utility.

The probability that an individual  $i$  choose alternative  $j$  in a choice set  $t$  is:

$$\Pr_{ijt} = \int \left( \frac{\exp \beta_i X_{jt}}{\sum_k \exp \beta_i X_{kt}} \right) f(\beta) d\beta$$

,with  $f(b)$  being the mixing distribution. Utility coefficient estimates were generated using 100 Halton draws, and all attribute coefficients were assumed to be normally distributed in the population. A normal distribution allows respondents to have positive or negative values for the attributes under consideration.

#### 4.4 Econometric estimation results

Table 5 presents the results of the random parameters estimation. The coefficients correspond to the marginal utility of each attribute level. A positive and statistically significant coefficient for ‘house with land’ and ‘house without land’ indicates that many respondents hold positive values for moving to a house. The coefficient for ‘house with land’ is higher implying that this is the most preferred alternative for housing. Contrary to expectations, the coefficient for ‘family’ was not statistically significant implying that the presence of family networks at the destination is not an important consideration in the choice of a relocation area. This contrasts with earlier qualitative research (Gkartzios, 2013) which highlighted the role of family networks in counterurban relocations, although the two research projects draw on different methodologies and sample sizes, discussing either potential or actual relocations. However, the results of this choice experiment might highlight an opportunity for the emancipation of younger Greek migrants who are willing to consider counterurban mobility irrespective of family networks and resources, although further in-depth case study research would be required to more fully explore the role of family in such decisions.

[Table 5 around here]

Furthermore, a negative and statistically significant coefficient is found for the medium presence of immigrants (as opposed to low). The coefficient becomes, however, insignificant for high immigrant presence. Combined, these results imply that respondents are reluctant to migrate to areas with high presence of first generation migrants. However, if this is treated as a proxy for xenophobia, the data shows that xenophobia declines as migrants become more

active members of the local community (with a greater presence in schools, local community activities and political representation). Areas with second generation international migrants did not seem to be treated differently in choices compared to areas with a low immigrant presence.

The results of this study further reveal the importance of cultural capital in the relocation decision. High cultural opportunities at the destination contribute positively to respondents' utilities, mirroring the suggestions of Gkartzios and Scott (2015) that new or return migrants in the Greek provinces not only value cultural opportunities, but also actively contribute to local cultural activities.

Finally, the analysis revealed a negative marginal utility associated with destinations more than an hour from the city. Provincial settlements within 60 km of cities were the most preferred option.

The Alternative Specific Constant (ASC) is specified in the utility of the status quo alternative (Scarpa et al. 2005). A negative ASC would thus indicate that respondents attached a negative utility to their current living and in principle favoured relocation to rural settlements. However, the econometric results point to a negative but not statistically significant ASC.

#### **4.5 Barriers to counterurbanisation**

Respondents from the counterurbanisation sub-sample were finally asked, through an open-ended question, to state the reasons why they have not yet relocated. A content analysis was

performed and the responses were coded and grouped. The most frequent responses are shown in Table 6. Multiple responses per individual were allowed. The responses suggest that despite willingness to relocate, employment (i.e. responses such as ‘my work is here’ or ‘I will not be able to get employment on the island I want to move to’) and family obligations (i.e. responses such as ‘my children live here, I want to help them and be close to them’, ‘I don’t think my family wants to leave’, ‘my kids have their own life and friends here now’) linked with the current residence are the most significant barriers to counterurbanisation. In fewer cases the barriers to counterurbanisation were due to lack of own house, the economic cost of relocation and the lack of social networks at the destination. Despite these issues, it should be noted that 55% of the subsample considered their relocation as either likely or very likely.

[Table 6 around here]

## **5. Conclusions**

This paper examined the potential for counterurbanisation amongst urban citizens in Athens, Greece. A choice experiment was used to investigate the importance of various characteristics of the destination on the decision to relocate and the choice of destination. The results point to a crisis-led counterurbanisation trend in Greece especially among younger and unemployed individuals. This finding is important because it adds new representations of mobility to the existing research (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014), in contrast to the established research on counterurbanisation which tends to focus on middle class colonisations of the countryside and on older or pre-retirement migrants (Stockdale and MacLeod, 2013; Lowe and Speakman, 2006). These findings, however, corroborate earlier evidence in the academic

literature (Hugo and Bell, 1998) and also in Greek policy reports (Ministry of Rural Development and Food, 2012) on the role of economic factors in counterurbanisation.

Counterurbanisation in the context of this study represents a mobility of resourcefulness and, which consequently, may add new expectations, values and struggles to the Greek countryside (drawing on Murdoch et al, 2003). Rural areas are increasingly presented and imagined as resilient places and perhaps a new ‘rural idyll’ is being produced amongst urban residents that does not replicate the pastoral mythology that has been well discussed in Anglo-American contexts but instead is associated with the prevailing socio-economic conditions and might contribute to of the literature conceptualising resilience and vulnerability to crisis (Pike et al., 2010). Gkartzios (2013) for example observed a difference in how the city and the Greek provinces are constructed as regards the economic crisis, while other researchers in the field have also suggested the emerging role of the Greek countryside as a space of refuge (Kasimis and Zografakis, 2012). Inherent in these arguments of a different, crisis-led counterurbanisation ‘story’, is the fact that counterurbanisation research has been largely shaped by researchers and case studies in Anglo-American contexts (Halfacree, 2008; Woods, 2005). The findings of this study therefore not only diversify the research on counterurbanisation (in terms of the social groups it involves and what new agents might become important in rural development narratives), but also challenge the dominance of the UK-US academic discourses on the subject.

These results on such potential mobilities have important implications for regional policy and planning. It should, however, be noted that it is not possible to know whether or not these movements will actually take place, due to the hypothetical nature of the experimental methodology used. Given the stated preferences for rural (or, relatively more rural)

residential environments, rural areas and rural towns are likely to experience a significant increase in their population in the years to come. The choice experiment suggests that rural localities in close proximity to cities (within 60 km) are the most preferred areas for relocation. This also suggests that rurality in the minds of these urban residents is not associated with remote natural environments, but, instead, is easily reached from a city pointing to a dynamic urban-rural relationship rather than a radical change in lifestyle inherent in mobilities captured by the ‘back-to-the-land’ movement.

The growth of population in these localities could have both negative and positive implications for local communities. Higher levels of unemployed residents in rural areas could pose challenges for the local labour market. Furthermore, the growth of urban-based migrants in rural settings could potentially clash with other development and community interests (as it has been the case with the growth of middle class migrants in the British countryside, see for example Murdoch et al., 2003). On the other hand, more residents in these localities could result in greater levels of community engagement and growing levels of collective and grassroots cultural activities. The existence of cultural opportunities at the destination was a significant consideration in the choice experiment. This echoes the role of local culture and of creative economies in attracting urban residents, aspects of community life that might be given more attention in times of crisis (Gkartzios and Scott, 2015).

The influx of such migrants could also result in greater opportunities for entrepreneurialism as already suggested in the literature, diversifying the rural and regional economy and changing the dynamics of local labour markets (see also Bosworth and Atterton, 2012; Stockdale et al., 2000). This is particularly likely since individuals willing to relocate are younger and potentially in search of new employment opportunities. Such migration presents an

opportunity for economic growth in rural areas which could be supported by the introduction of regional policy incentives to encourage entrepreneurial activity, especially among younger people. Such policies could be aimed at key economic sectors with a view to restructuring the rural economy by moving away from traditional industries and encouraging growth in, for example, the service and knowledge-intensive sectors.

The discussions above also suggest that significant opportunities for growth exist for small provincial towns located between 20 and 60 km away from large cities such as Athens. These towns provide the infrastructure and services required by many migrants, while being conveniently located with respect to the city and its many amenities. Forward-looking local administrations could attempt to attract inward investment by new businesses or businesses seeking to relocate from the city, by encouraging the in-migration of a skilled young workforce from the city.

Given also the preferences for houses with private land, these movements could result in increased levels of agricultural activities including farming as well as subsistence and hobby farming. Kasimis and Papadopoulos (2013) report that between 2008 and 2011, 17,000 people moved to rural areas to work in the primary sector. The authors, however, also point to the difficulties faced by households who relocate to the countryside driven by idyllic constructions of rurality, but are confronted with the challenge of running viable farming businesses and living in the countryside.

Respondents are somewhat reluctant to move to places with high concentrations of first generation international migrants, which could be interpreted as an indication of xenophobia. Instances of xenophobia have increased since the growth of migrants in the city of Athens

and have shaped a discourse of national populism frequently played out in Greek politics (Doxiadis and Matsagnanis, 2013). However, this attribute is not significant when it involves second generation migrants who have a greater presence in the local community (schools, local politics, etc.) and might be seen as more integrated in the local community. This highlights the importance of policies targeting the social inclusion of international migrants.

Future research needs to further investigate the evidence of alternative forms of counterurbanisation, beyond the well discussed cases of affluent counterurbanisers. In the Greek context, quantitative and qualitative research is necessary to explore the extent to which preferences for residential relocation, like the ones described in this paper, are met as well as the impacts of such mobilities on local labour markets and local development strategies. Internationally, we call for a new research agenda that looks the geography of local and regional mobility in the context of wider macro-economic issues such as crisis and global political and economic uncertainty. Central to these debates are conceptualisations of resilience and vulnerability to crisis emerging from new agents entering the countryside. It is imperative that these cases are as diverse and inclusive as possible, geographically, culturally and linguistically, to resist the homogenisation of ‘counterurbanisation stories’.

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## Tables

Table 1: Attributes and their levels

Characteristic of destination	Levels
Type of house	Flat/Apartment House without land House with land
Presence of family networks	Yes No
Presence of international migrants	Low: Almost no international migrants in the rural destination Medium: First generation international migrants High: Second generation international migrants (for example: presence in schools; participation in local community activities; participation in political parties and local governance)
Cultural opportunities	High: The local community is very active in cultural events (for example, frequent festivals and art-led activities organised by local community groups and local authorities) Low: Very limited opportunities for cultural goods (for example only a festival in the summer months)
Distance from cities (settlements above 100,000 residents)	Low: less than 20 km Medium: 20-60 km High: more than 60 km

Table 2: Example of a choice card

<b>Assuming that the following three options were the only choices you had, which one would you prefer?</b>			
<b>Destination characteristic</b>	<b>Relocation alternative A</b>	<b>Relocation alternative B</b>	<b>Relocation Alternative C</b>
Type of house	Flat	House with no land	Current residence
Presence of family	Yes	No	
Presence of international migrants	Medium	Low	
Cultural opportunities	Low	High	
Distance from city	20-60km	<20km	
I prefer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Table 3: Socio-economic characteristics of the sample

Characteristic	Full-sample (N=300)	Counterurban sample (N=151)
	Mean (St Deviation)	
Gender (male=1)	0.50 (0.50)	0.52 (0.50)
Age (18-34)	0.32 (0.47)	0.29 (0.46)
Age (35-54)	0.35 (0.48)	0.42 (0.50)
Age (55+)	0.33 (0.47)	0.28 (0.45)
Children under 18 (yes=1)	0.27 (0.44)	0.28 (0.50)
Employment (Full-time, >30 hours)	0.36 (0.48)	0.40 (0.49)
Employment (part-time, 15-30 hours)	0.03 (0.17)	0.03 (0.18)
Employment (part-time, < 15 hours)	0.017 (0.13)	0.02 (0.14)
Not working (includes unemployed, retirees, housekeepers)	0.59 (0.49)	0.55 (0.50)
Unemployed	0.16 (0.37)	0.22 (0.41)
Education (no education)	0.007 (0.08)	0

Education (Primary School)	0.18 (0.39)	0.16 (0.37)
Education (High School)	0.46 (0.50)	0.48 (0.50)
Education (Undergraduate degree)	0.15 (0.36)	0.16 (0.37)
Education (Post-graduate degree)	0.20 (0.40)	0.21 (0.40)
Net monthly household income	2.62 (1.30) Corresponds to €1,000- €1,500	2.65 (1.28) Corresponds to €1,000- €1,500
Housing type: Flat	n/a	0.82 (0.38)
Housing type: House with land	n/a	0.03 (0.18)
Housing type: House without land	n/a	0.15 (0.35)
Have you ever lived in a rural area? (yes =1)	n/a	0.55 (0.50)
Do you own a second house in a rural area?	n/a	0.48 (0.50)

Table 4: Crisis counterurbanisation questions

Question	Mean
How likely are you to move to a more rural area in the next 5 years?	
Very unlikely	0.16
Unlikely	0.29
Likely	0.39
Very likely	0.16
Compared to 5 years ago, would you say that you are more willing to relocate today?	
Yes	0.66
No	0.34
If yes, would you say that this is mainly due to the current economic crisis?	
Yes	0.80
No	0.20
Where would you like to move to?	
The open countryside (outside settlement plan)	0.05
A village ( < 2,000 residents)	0.44
A rural town (2,000 – 10,000 residents)	0.37
A town (10,000 – 100,000 residents)	0.13
Same or different city ( > 100,000 residents)	0.01

Table 5: Econometric estimation results

Attribute	Coefficient (St error)
House with land	2.26*** (0.49)
House without land	1.42*** (0.30)
Presence of family	0.31 (0.42)
High presence of international migrants	-0.24 (0.53)
Medium presence of international migrants	-0.41* (0.23)
High opportunities for cultural activities	0.93** (0.40)
Medium distance from cities	-0.62 (0.44)
High distance from cities	-1.21** (0.60)
Alternative Specific Constant	-0.43 (0.33)
Coefficient's standard deviation	
House with land	3.41*** (0.45)
House without land	1.74*** (0.31)
Presence of family	1.97*** (0.30)
High presence of international migrants	1.75*** (0.28)
Medium presence of international migrants	1.04*** (0.32)
High opportunities for cultural activities	1.73*** (0.28)
Medium distance from cities	0.73** (0.34)
High distance from cities	1.16*** (0.32)

Note: \* p < 0.1, \*\* p < 0.05, \*\*\* p < 0.01.

Table 6: Barriers to counterurbanisation

Reason	Percentage of the sample referring to this reason
Work-related reasons	45.7%
Responsibilities in respect to children	27.2%
Wider family responsibilities	14.6%
Lack of own property to move into	13.2%
Economic reasons	6%
No social networks in the provinces	4%