

# Exploring Counterurbanisation in a Post-Socialist Context: Case of the Czech Republic

Martin Šimon

## Abstract

Urban-rural research in post-socialist countries has focused on urban transformation, the impact of international migration and the spread of suburbanisation; little attention has been paid to counterurban migration. The aim of this article is to propose a typology of counterurban migration strategies based on quantitative research in rural areas in the Czech Republic. Firstly, the article discusses the differences and similarities of counterurbanisation in western and post-socialist countries by bringing together counterurbanisation and post-socialist research literature. Secondly, detailed information about the counterurbanisation migration stream is provided on the basis of extensive field research. Thirdly, the article presents four basic types of counterurbanisation migration strategies, two lifestyle-oriented types and two economic-oriented types, based on household motivation, preferences and household employment location. The research demonstrates both general and specific features of counterurbanisation stream in the Czech Republic.

## Introduction

**R**esidential decentralisation is a major trend within the settlement system in the contemporary Czech Republic (Ouředníček 2007; Čermák *et al.* 2009). Almost all Czech cities with more than 10,000 inhabitants have experienced population losses in the last two decades which illustrates the significance of residential decentralisation (Šimon and Pospíšilová 2011). Migration to the countryside is observed not only in adjacent suburban areas but also in more distant rural areas. With gross simplification, it can be said that urban to rural flow consists of two migration movements: suburbanisation and counterurbanisation. These two migration movements have a different scope and range and therefore also a different impact on the spatial organisation of society. According to Champion:

'A key challenge is to find a satisfactory way of distinguishing metropolitan spill over from other forms of deconcentration, but questions also arise concerning the precise manner in

which counterurbanisation should be recognised, including the specification of the variables involved and the scale at which the test should be applied'. (Champion 1989, p. 28)

In this research I employ time accessibility modelling in GIS in order to distinguish remote rural areas from commuting suburban hinterlands.

Suburbanisation, defined as migration from cities to an adjacent hinterland, is one of the most extensive processes of population change in the Czech Republic (Ouředníček 2007). Because of its extent suburbanisation is an important topic for both academics and public administration. Suburbanisation can be seen as both a specific and a general process. On the one hand, suburbanisation in the Czech Republic has been conditioned by the specific circumstances of the post-socialist transition (Musil 1993, 2005; Barlow *et al.* 1994; Ouředníček 2003; Sýkora 2003). For example, restitution of land and the emergence of the mortgage market have significantly shaped the pattern and intensity of suburbanisation (Sýkora 1999; Vobecká and Piguet 2011). On the other hand, suburbanisation in the Czech Republic shares many similar characteristics with suburbanisation in western countries. Suburban migrants also tend to be younger families with children, well-educated and more affluent, and prefer to live in single-family houses with gardens (Ouředníček 2003; Špačková and Ouředníček 2012). Suburbanisation in the Czech Republic displays many characteristics in common with other post-socialist countries. For a more detailed discussion of suburbanisation research in post-socialist countries see Brade *et al.* (2009), Hirt (2007), Kok and Kovács (1999), Krisjane and Berzis (2012), Leetmaa *et al.* (2009), Schmidt (2011), Tammaru (2001), etc.

Counterurbanisation, defined as migration from cities to rural areas beyond the commuting hinterland (also counter-stream migration, see Mitchell 2004, p. 21, Figure 1.), has been rather neglected in both academic and public discourse in the Czech Republic. This article seeks to fill this gap in our understanding of residential decentralisation in the conditions of the post-socialist Czech Republic (Šimon 2011a). Two ways of seeing counterurbanisation are presented. The first view sees a distinctive post-socialist counterurbanisation. The situation in the 1990s in post-socialist countries was characterised by an out-flow of people who were unemployed or could not pay high rents from cities to rural areas (Dandolova 2001; Brown and Schafft 2002; Tammaru *et al.* 2004; Krisjane and Berzis 2012). Such a situation cannot be successfully explained by the thesis about environmentalism as a force for deconcentration which seems to be valid in the case of western countries (Geyer and Kontuly 1996). Therefore, there are grounds for discussing the existence or non-existence of a distinctive post-socialist counterurbanisation. The second view does not see counterurbanisation in post-socialist countries as significantly differing from counterurbanisation in western countries. Studies describe counterurban movers as middle class people moving from unpleasant urban areas to idyllic rural villages where they can fulfill their dreams (compare Grimsrud 2011 and Halfacree 2008). Urban and rural settings in both western countries and post-socialist countries share similar advantages and disadvantages; therefore it can be assumed that the counterurban migration stream in the Czech Republic as a post-socialist country does not significantly differ from counterurban migration in western countries (Halfacree 2008). Thus, by reconciling multiple ways of seeing counterurbanisation, this article

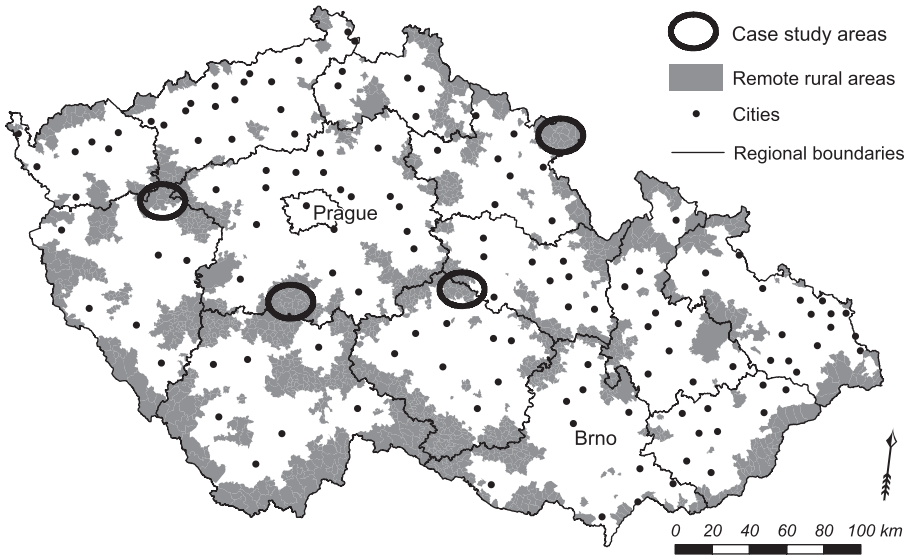


Figure 1: *Remote rural areas and case study areas*  
 Source: Author's GIS accessibility model.

contributes to our understanding of counterurbanisation in post-socialist countries using empirical findings from the Czech Republic.

The aim of the article is to propose a typology of counterurbanisation migration strategies based on quantitative research in rural areas in the Czech Republic. The typology is based on recent theoretical advances (Mitchell 2004) as well as on extensive field research. Firstly, a discussion of post-socialist and counterurbanisation literature is presented. Secondly, detailed information about counterurbanisation migration streams gained from extensive field research is provided. Thirdly, four main types of counterurbanisation migration strategies, two lifestyle-oriented strategies (ex-urbanisation strategy, anti-urbanisation strategy) and two economic-oriented strategies (family livelihood strategy, rural entrepreneurship strategy) are presented. Finally, a discussion of similarities and differences between the Czech counterurbanisation experience and that of other post-socialist and western countries is put forward in order to set the national case study presented here into a wider international context.

### The contribution of counterurbanisation and post-socialist research

Before embarking on the counterurbanisation typology, two relevant research fields need to be discussed briefly. Both counterurbanisation research and post-socialist research provide an important theoretical and methodological background to the presented study, although with different implications. Counterurbanisation research started and has advanced furthest in the most urbanised countries (Champion 1989,

1998; Grzeszczak 1996). The findings from countries which have already undergone a counterurbanisation experience, provide useful examples or case studies for those countries which are currently experiencing or may experience it in the future. Such a comparison is fruitful in the case of post-socialist countries. The specific conditions of urbanisation under socialism and delayed residential decentralisation in former socialist countries provide a different context for counterurbanisation (see Musil 1993, 2005; Andrusz *et al.* 1996; Tammaru 2002; Hirt 2007). To sum up, both counterurbanisation research and post-socialist research offer useful insights for researching residential decentralisation and deconcentration in post-socialist countries.

### *Counterurbanisation research*

The concept of counterurbanisation has been in dispute since its origin (Gordon 1979; Mitchell 2004). After two decades of its existence academics were still disputing the nature and significance of counterurbanisation phenomena (Champion 1989). For example, some considered counterurbanisation as 'a challenge for socio-theoretical geography' (Vartiainen 1989), others struggled with the 'counterurbanisation definitional conundrum' (Halliday and Coombes 1995). After another two decades of research academics were still occupied with 'making sense of counterurbanisation' (Mitchell 2004) and challenging the overall value of the concept itself (Ferrás Sexto 2009). Detailed overviews of counterurbanisation research are provided elsewhere (Fuguitt and Beale 1996; Geyer 1996; Boyle, Halfacree 1998; Grzeszczak 2000; Mitchell 2004; Ferrás Sexto 2009; Phillips 2009). The task of adjusting the concept of counterurbanisation to conditions in the Czech Republic requires some explanation concerning definition, scale, settlement features, spatial framework and social characteristics.

Firstly, so as not to add more confusion to the basic concept, Mitchell's definition of counterurbanisation (see Mitchell 2004) was utilised in the research. According to Mitchell (2004) counterurbanisation is defined as a migratory movement from larger settlements to less concentrated settings. The choice of this definition is based on the following rationale. The Czech Republic is a highly urbanised country with a relatively stable settlement system. Changes in population distribution in recent decades have been relatively small in comparison with the classical phase of industrial urbanisation (Hampl *et al.* 1999; Hampl 2005; Čermák *et al.* 2009). Thus it is appropriate to see counterurbanisation as a migratory trend within the settlement system and not as a stage of urban development (Champion 2001; Ouředníček 2007).

Secondly, I would argue that the national level is an apt framework for researching counterurbanisation in the case of the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic is a small country with a highly integrated settlement system and a single dominant capital city, thus, it is suitable for the study of counterurbanisation on a national scale (Champion 1998). A similar conclusion is supported by long-term mobility research where centrifugal/centripetal shifts have been gaining greater importance than inter-regional shifts (Čermák *et al.* 2009).

Thirdly, the Czech Republic has a very fragmented settlement structure, which has at least two consequences for counterurbanisation research. One: the national

settlement system consists of a very large number of municipalities, especially smaller ones. Almost 28 per cent of the 6,249 municipalities have fewer than 200 inhabitants and 59 per cent have fewer than 500 inhabitants (Czech Statistical Office, own calculation). Such a detailed administrative division of territory provides a substantive basis for monitoring population changes. Unfortunately, this advantage is reduced by shortcomings in official migration statistics (see Librová 1997; Ouředníček 2007 for details). For example, a significant number of migration moves are missing from official statistics. There is a legal obligation to change one's registered place of residence after moving, but in practice this does not have any coercive power. Accordingly, a lot of people avoid changing their official place of residence because it entails excessive bureaucracy. To sum up, it is believed that official migration statistics do not provide sufficient data to develop a typology of counterurban migration strategies. Extensive field research is necessary to overcome the deficiencies of the available data. Two: The impact of counterurbanisation on affected municipalities can be more profound due to the relatively high proportion of newcomers in relation to local people (Šimon 2011a, 2011b). In the case of small rural municipalities, the impact on the local community of a few counterurban migrants with greater cultural or financial capital can be substantial (Ouředníček *et al.* 2011). Counterurban migrants who move to a rural village could easily become local community leaders making a positive contribution to local development.

Fourth, the established task in counterurbanisation research of discerning between counterurbanisation and suburbanisation (Champion 1989, p. 29) is dealt with by time-accessibility modelling in GIS. The measurement of suburbanisation and the delimitation of urban and suburban areas in the Czech Republic has been the focus of several studies where the latest methodological advancements were applied (Vobecká and Piguet 2011). Thus, counterurbanisation is defined as a migratory movement from urban areas to rural areas beyond suburban commuting zones. A time-accessibility approach with weighted time impedances according to city size, is used to delimit relevant rural areas for counterurbanisation research. Further details are described in the Methodology section.

Finally, it might be argued that a definition of counterurbanisation should include migrants' motivations (see Mitchell 2004 for a review). A different approach was chosen for two practical reasons. Firstly, no previous survey focusing on counterurban migrants was conducted in the Czech Republic. Secondly, the data from official migration evidence does not include the migrant's motivation for moving. This information was collected until 2005, but the data was still unusable for counterurbanisation research as the categories of migrants' motivations were inappropriate (Drbohlav 1992; Librová 1997). Therefore, an explorative approach was applied. The migration motivations of counterurban migrants were not included in the research definition of counterurbanisation, but rather were one of the outcomes of the research. Counterurbanisation, therefore, is defined spatially as a migration from cities to rural areas beyond the suburban commuting hinterland, without referring to migration motivations.

It should be noted that there has been a rather unbalanced acceptance of counterurbanisation in post-socialist countries. For example, in Poland and Slovakia it has not aroused any significant interest among researchers (Podolák 1995; Grzeszczak 2000).

On the other hand, it has been a focus of research in Estonia (Tammaru *et al.* 2004), Latvia (Krisjane and Berzis 2012), Hungary (Bajmócy *et al.* 2011) and the Czech Republic (Ouředníček 2007). In countries such as Bulgaria or Romania, where there is an overall tendency to depopulation, counterurbanisation is seen as a synonym for deurbanisation, defined as a decrease in the urban population (Dandolova 2001). In the unique context of the former East Germany a new concept of *Stadt Schrumpfung* has been employed (Bontje 2004). For an overall overview of internal migration across European countries, see the report by Rees and Kupiszewski (1999).

### *Post-socialist research*

Dealing with counterurbanisation research in the post-socialist Czech Republic, requires a few remarks on 'post-socialism' in general and on its relation to counterurbanisation research in particular.<sup>1</sup> Studies of counterurbanisation in post-socialist countries (Brown and Schafft 2002; Tammaru 2002; Brown *et al.* 2005) are rare in comparison with studies of counterurbanisation in western countries (Champion 1989, 2001; Geyer 1996; Hoggart 1997; Boyle and Halfacree 1998; Mitchell 2004); a more detailed elaboration of counterurban migration stream and its underlying factors remains unknown in the case of post-socialist countries. Additionally, analysis of internal migration in post-socialist countries has focused on urban to rural migration, without further distinction between counterurbanisation and suburbanisation (Heller 2000; Tammaru *et al.* 2004). Moreover, studies of counterurbanisation in post-socialist countries are often inaccessible to a wider international audience, due to the linguistic diversity of the region (see Timár and Fekete 2010 for further discussion of 'information impermeability' in the case of feminist geographies in Central and Eastern Europe). The unique opportunity to test the validity of western counterurbanisation concepts in the unique transitional framework of post-socialist countries, remains open (Brown and Schafft 2002; Musil 2005; Jauhiainen 2009).

In general, post-socialism has been a common denominator for diverse research in the former socialist bloc. It gained the widest international attention in the first years after the fall of the iron curtain, when several transition theories were published (Stark 1992; Pickles and Smith 1998). Studies of nationwide changes, such as a shift towards democracy and free market transition, were complementary to studies of particular changes, such as urban transformation or regional development (e.g. Enyedi 1998; Pickles and Smith 1998; Hampl *et al.* 1999; Sailer-Fliege 1999; Kostinsky 2001; Ott 2001; Turok and Mykhnenko 2008). Most studies evaluating transition in an urban context were labelled as post-socialist (or post-communist, post-totalitarian). Changing times and the emergence of a new generation of scholars, led to a need for self-reflection and critical examination of post-socialist research (Bodnár and Poledna 2009; Jauhiainen 2009). As Musil (1993) earlier pointed out, urban development in post-socialist countries has been far from homogeneous. Therefore, it is more apt to talk about different varieties of post-socialism or different paths of post-socialist development. Growing dissatisfaction of scholars, with vague definitions of 'post-socialism', has led both to criticism of the concept itself and to further theoretical exploration (Hörschelmann and Stenning 2008).

In this study, 'post-socialism' is used as a conceptual category which encompasses a specific 'post-socialist condition' (Stenning 2005a, 2005b), in our case mobility in general and migration into rural areas in particular. 'Post-socialist condition' is seen as a hybrid social formation conditioned by two simultaneous transformations. These transformations are designated as (1) post-totalitarian and (2) post-industrial (Musil 2005; Hampl 2007). Counterurbanisation in the Czech Republic is influenced by both these transformations. The discussion of the interconnection between counterurbanisation and twofold transformation, shows the differences between post-socialist countries in mobility patterns and their underlying features.

Counterurbanisation seen in the framework of post-totalitarian transformation, is a result of the socialist economic downfall. The breakdown of socialist industry due to a lack of competitiveness, had a profound impact on the national labour market. The rise of urban unemployment, together with the higher cost of living in cities pushed people into rural areas, where they seek employment opportunities. More secure jobs in agriculture, opportunities in the grey economy and family and kinship networks served as a survival strategy for former urban residents (Brown and Schafft 2002). As Brown and Schafft (2002) put it: '... population deconcentration may not reflect positive movement toward opportunities or amenities as is true of "counterurbanisation" in much of the west, but rather result from economically coerced moves by persons with no other viable options.' However, such an explanation has only partial validity. Firstly, identification of the breakdown of socialist industry as a reason for population deconcentration, is a reasonable explanation only in *under-urbanised* countries (Sjöberg 1992; Szelényi 1996). Such countries underwent late socialist urbanisation, driven by centrally planned industrial growth. Migrants to growing industrial cities kept their family or kinship ties to their rural area of origin, where they could seek shelter after the socialist economical downfall. However, a similar scenario is far less probable in countries which were already urbanised before the socialist period (such as the Czech Republic). Secondly, the different paths of post-socialist transformation could trigger or suppress population deconcentration (Tamaru *et al.* 2004). Two examples are presented here:<sup>2</sup> the Czech Republic and Hungary. The Czech version of post-socialist transformation prevents the rapid decline of industry and subsequent growth of unemployment. General residential mobility was rather low, with no significant deconcentration tendency (Čermák 2001). Highly regulated housing rents have protected the less affluent population from being pushed away from cities (Mikeszová 2007). The situation in Hungary was different. The Hungarian version of post-socialist transformation was characterised by rapid industrial downsizing and rapid growth of unemployment. In the early 1990s, migration from urban areas to adjacent and remote rural areas, marked a trend towards population deconcentration (Kok 1999; Brown and Schafft 2002). Both previous urbanisation experience and the path of the post-socialist transformation shaped counterurbanisation tendencies in the course of the post-totalitarian transformation.

Seen in the framework of the post-industrial transformation, counterurbanisation is a result of broader changes that shape contemporary societies. The most important of these for counterurbanisation research are, in the author's opinion, changes in the nature and localisation of work, changes in lifestyles and changing mobilities (e.g. Beck 1992; Urry 2000). Two examples from the most recent research in the Czech

Republic are taken into consideration. Firstly, changing commuting mobilities allow a greater disproportion between the localisation of work and the localisation of housing. This includes increased car use, a greater percentage of commuters, longer commuting distances and an increase in non-daily commuting (Ouředníček 2011). Additionally, more jobs tend not to have a strict spatial destination. This includes working from home, un-localised work, jobs with a temporal location, etc. (Novák 2011a, 2011b). Secondly, growing societal differentiation and changing lifestyles have an impact on mechanisms shaping population distribution. For example, the age structure of migrants moving from cities to (1) urban, (2) suburban or (3) rural areas was very similar in the first part of the 1990s. After 15 years of transformation this migration pattern changed significantly. People aged 35–50 move more often to suburban or rural areas, younger people aged 25–35 prefer urban areas and older people aged 50–70 move more often into rural areas (Czech Statistical Office, own calculation). The change of migration patterns over the course of life illustrates differences between the first years of transition and 15 years later, where different localisation requirements in particular phases of the life-course gained crucial significance for migration. Location matters more after socialism.

Both the post-totalitarian transformation and the post-industrial transformation, help us to understand the nature of counterurbanisation in post-socialist countries. In the author's opinion, counterurbanisation in post-socialist countries is shifting its main focal point from economic driven (post-totalitarian) counterurbanisation, to life-style driven (post-industrial) counterurbanisation. The post totalitarian form of counterurbanisation is more pronounced in countries that urbanised late and in less prosperous countries (Tammeru *et al.* 2004; Krisjane and Berzis 2012), whereas the post-industrial type of counterurbanisation is more pronounced in countries that urbanised early and have been more successful in transforming themselves (Bajmócy *et al.* 2011; Šimon 2011a). An additional factor influencing counterurbanisation in post-socialist countries is delayed suburbanisation and metropolitan growth (Häußermann 1996). The existence of specific post-socialist counterurbanisation is an open hypothesis based on knowledge of mobilities in post-socialist countries and on research experience. Empirical research from the Czech Republic and comparison with research results from other countries is required to accept or reject the hypothesis.

## Methodology

The selection of research methodology and methods has a crucial impact on potential results in counterurbanisation research (Halliday and Coombes 1995). This article employs a set of standard methods which are put together in order to investigate the nature of counterurbanisation phenomena in the Czech Republic. In contrast with the selected approach, any previous attempt to assess the extent of the counterurbanisation migration stream in the Czech Republic has been done with the use of official migration statistics collected by the Czech Statistical Office (Šimon 2011a). Unfortunately, these data suffer from several serious deficiencies (see Librová 1997 for a review) and tell us little about the structure of the counterurban migration stream and its impacts in localities. Furthermore, they cannot be used to locate individual



Table 1: *Selected rural areas*

	Broumov region	Chotěboř region	Kralovice region	Sedlčany region
Population size	17,264	22,698	22,158	22,013
Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	234.8	309.5	659.3	448.7
Number of settlements	37	101	176	120
Number of municipalities < 500	7	22	33	11
Number of municipalities 500–2000	5	7	8	9
Number of municipalities 2000 <	2	2	3	2
Rural population change in 2001–2007	–166	62	124	–137

Source: Czech Statistical Office, own calculation.

counterurban migrants in municipalities. Therefore, in accordance with its research aims, this study deliberately opts for a different approach based on extensive field research and the use of more qualitative methods. The overall research design consisted of three steps: (1) Delimitation of remote rural areas and subsequent selection of case study micro-regions; (2) A supplementary email based survey in all municipalities in selected micro-regions; (3) A field survey in municipalities; interviews with counterurban migrants.

The current study is based on 81 interviews with counterurban migrants conducted in four micro-regions in remote rural areas of the Czech Republic, during the years 2010 and 2011. The remote rural areas were delimited using accessibility modelling in GIS. The aim was to select remote rural areas beyond 'normal commuting distance' from urban centres where the majority of jobs are located. Only municipalities that were more than 25 minutes driving time away from the nearest urban centre (a city with more than 10,000 inhabitants, 134 in total) were eligible for further selection. Those cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants were allotted between five to 30 additional minutes of driving time according to their population size. The defined time accessibility threshold is beyond an acceptable commuting distance for the majority of the population (Lindgren 2003). 1,573 out of 6,249 rural municipalities (29.7 per cent of total area; 9.3 per cent of total population), met these criteria. Four micro-regions included for the most part in remote rural areas, were selected (Figure 1). Three represent so called 'inner peripheries' (Musil and Müller 2008) and one is a border region (Table 1). The overall aim was to select rural areas which are most representative in the Czech Republic. Interviews were conducted in all of four selected regions, but only in municipalities with less than 2,000 inhabitants. The size of 2,000 inhabitants is the generally accepted threshold for a rural village in the Czech Republic (Czech Statistical Office 2008).

The supplementary email based survey was carried out to detect the presence/absence of counterurban migrants; municipal representatives in all municipalities in the selected micro-regions were addressed. The short questionnaire asked the municipal representatives about the volume of migration from urban areas and migration in total, about the possible pull factors for counterurban migrants into their municipality and about the number of urban migrants living in the municipality without registering there. The overall return rate was 45 per cent, but together with

data from official migration records the data collected shed further light on local dimensions of counterurbanisation. For example, large numbers of unregistered newcomers living permanently in municipalities were reported.

The method of selecting migrants in case study areas was based on an elementary assumption that 'everyone knows everyone else in a village'. This assumption was taken for granted and employed in research design. A random walk through each village provided the opportunity to inquire about the presence or absence of 'newcomers from cities' who had settled in the neighbourhood 'not long ago'. The number of local people spoken to varied according to the village size and the number of its local settlement parts. Identified migrants from urban areas were further sorted. Only those migrants who identified themselves as living in a neighbourhood were interviewed. Second home and recreational cottage users, or other types of temporary migrants, were not included. Migrants who were not present and those registered in a municipality, but living elsewhere, were also not included. Quite surprisingly, of all migrants addressed only five per cent refused to be interviewed. In total, 81 interviews with newly-arrived migrants from cities were conducted. The method described above made it possible to locate real counterurban migrants in the case study areas. Such location is not possible by using official migration statistics. The utility of the selected method is further supported by finding that 35 per cent of migrants in the respondents' group living currently in rural municipalities were still officially registered as residing in their urban area of origin, which makes them invisible in official migration statistics as well, as in municipal population registers.<sup>3</sup> The format of each case study with individual migrants was a standard semi-structured interview followed by an in-depth interview focused on themes and questions relating to counterurban migration (migration, housing, employment, mobility, neighbourhood and community, quality of life, etc.). The length of both types of interview ranged from 30 minutes to 3 hours depending on the migrant's willingness to talk. The interviews were conducted in the summer months in 2010 and 2011, on both weekdays and weekends.

### Counterurban migrants in the Czech Republic

A majority of migrants were from Prague (58 per cent), followed by regional capitals (17 per cent), other cities (23 per cent) and abroad (one per cent). The main sources of counterurban migrants are rapidly changing localities in Prague and declining industrial cities. Nevertheless, the rural 'pull' factors are far more important than urban 'push' factors. Of the study sample, four fifths of migrants are from a family household, half of them are living together with children and 20 per cent are living alone. The proportions of men and women are balanced. A short description of demographic, educational and employment structure, together with an analysis of migration motivations, is a crucial step towards a typology of counterurban migration strategies.

#### *Demographic characteristic of migrants*

The demographic structure of the counterurban migration stream differs from the general age-standardised curve of migration intensity (e.g. Boyle *et al.* 1998) in at least

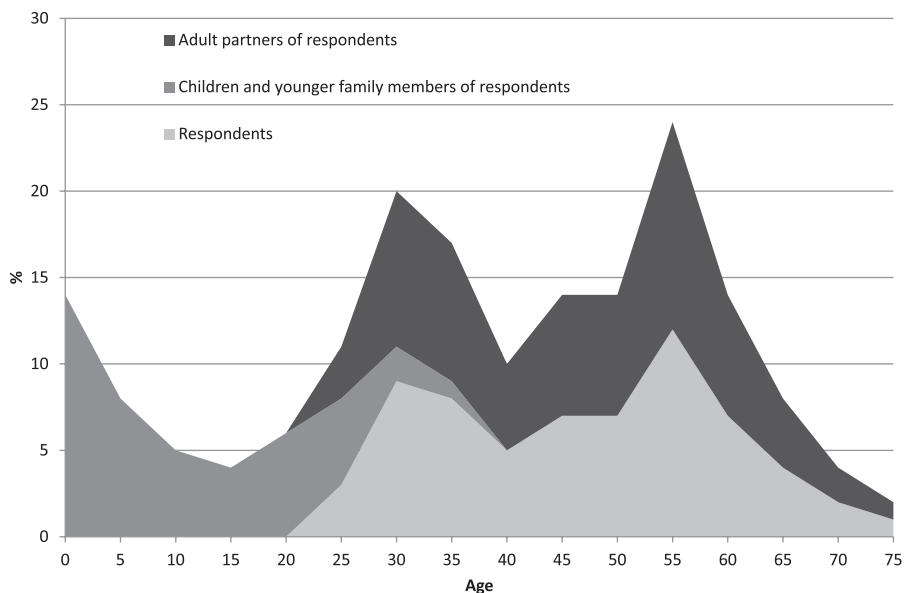


Figure 2: *Age structure of counterurban migrants*  
 Source: Author's research.

two aspects. Firstly, there is a lower peak in the childhood and young adulthood categories. Secondly, there is significantly higher share of middle aged and older age groups, which are often retired or near to retirement. These findings are consistent with counterurbanisation literature, which links concentration processes with productionism (job and career related migration to urban areas) and deconcentration processes with environmentalism (non-economic or amenity oriented migration to rural areas) (Geyer 1996). The demographic structure of counterurban migrants is further divided into three groups: respondents of the research, adult partners of respondents, and children and younger family members of respondents (Figure 2). Three groups according to position in life-cycle are significant in the research respondents group. The first group are 'young counterurbanites', who moved to countryside in child-bearing or child-raising age; the second group are 'empty nesters', who moved after the children left the common household; and the third group are 'third age migrants', who moved to rural areas shortly before or after retirement. Interestingly, the share of 'third age migrants' in the counterurban migration stream is high and it is expected to grow further in coming years. The anticipated growth of 'third age' counterurban migrants is supported by population ageing research and migration data analysis. According to population ageing predictions for the Czech Republic, the percentage of people aged 65 and over will more than double to 31 per cent between 2004 and 2050 (Rychtaříková 2009). Additionally, migration data reports show that the proportion of migrants from urban to rural areas who were aged 50–70 grew by about 60 per cent between the periods 1992–1994 and 2005–2007 (Šimon 2011a). Therefore, recent population

Table 2: *Educational structure*

Education	Share of migrants (%)	Average age in group
Primary school	4.9	47.5
Apprenticeship	19.8	52.6
Grammar school	40.7	46.4
University education	32.1	53.4

Source: Author's research.

Table 3: *Employment status*

Employed	53%
Maternity leave	9%
Retired	29%
Unemployed	9%

Source: Author's research.

developments offer a large pool of potential 'third age' counterurban migrants. The educational structure of migrants shows a reasonable balance between low, medium, and highly educated people (Table 2). This suggests that counterurban migration is not dependent on education. Furthermore, in contrast with other counterurbanisation studies (Lindgren 2003; Andersen 2011) no significant relation between age and education was found. The values of Pearson's correlation coefficients between age and education level were low ( $R = 0.03$ ).

### *Work and mobility patterns*

The employment changes and commuting patterns help us to understand work related aspects of counterurbanisation in the Czech Republic. According to employment status, displayed in Table 3, only 53 per cent of migrants are active in the labour force whereas the rest are retired (29 per cent), on maternity leave (9 per cent), or unemployed (9 per cent; often voluntarily). This is in line with other studies which describe counterurbanisation as non-economic migration (Halfacree 1994). The non-economic nature of counterurbanisation is further reflected in employment changes linked to urban-rural migration. Half of migrants did not change their employment with their migration, while another half of migrants who are in the labour force have done so. One third said their salary declined, one sixth experienced a rise in their salary. The rest report no significant changes in their earnings. Change of employment is also reflected in commuting patterns of counterurban migrants. In sum, almost 45 per cent of migrants work in their destination area, 55 per cent of working migrants (24 per cent of all migrants) commute to work to their urban areas of origin, although only 20 per cent of them commute on a daily basis. Five per cent of economically active migrants have a job without a stable place of work and four per cent work from home.

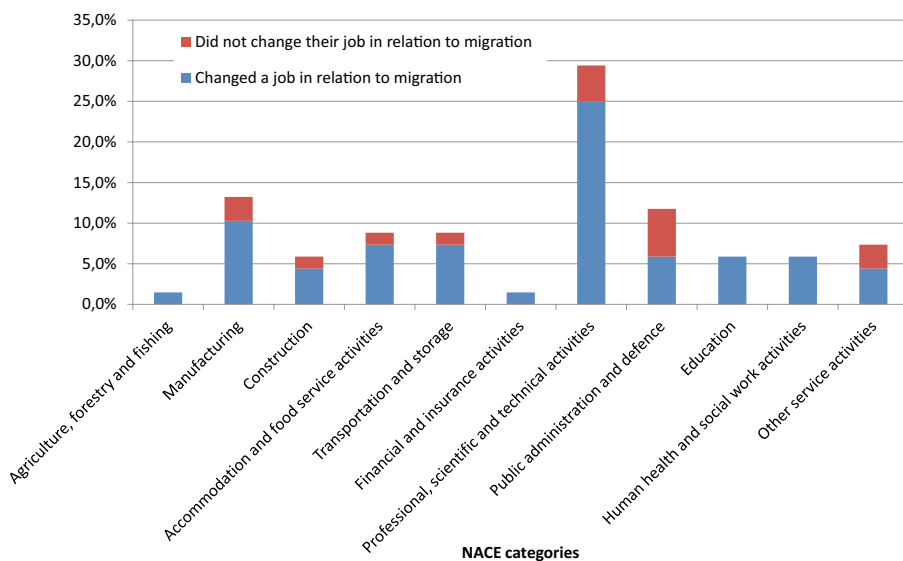


Figure 3: Occupational structure of counterurban migrants  
Source: Author's research.

Figure 3 displays employment categories according to the standard economic and occupational classification (NACE). Three salient features of occupational structure are worth mentioning. First, a wide variety of occupations was found in the respondents group, in both intellectual and manual work. Second, a majority of migrants changed their job in relation to their migration, almost always within the same occupational categories. Third, a large proportion of the 'professional, scientific and technical activities' category consists of so called 'self-employed' people, which encompasses a wide range of various professionals working on their own. In the case of counterurbanisation, 'self-employed' people usually work from home and commute rather irregularly. A short description of employment and commuting patterns of counterurban migrants stresses two important features of counterurbanisation in the Czech Republic. Firstly, counterurbanisation is primarily non-economic migration. Despite a lack of employment opportunities in remote rural areas, counterurban migrants are outside the labour force or are able to cope successfully with the local labour market. Secondly, counterurbanisation is facilitated by changes in the labour market. In a post-industrial economy fewer jobs are tied to a particular place or given working hours, which expands options for residential environment choice.

### *The motivations of migrants*

In order to understand the driving forces behind counterurbanisation migration, motivations and perceptions of rural migrants are explored. Although explanations for counterurbanisation given in the literature are diverse and often contradictory

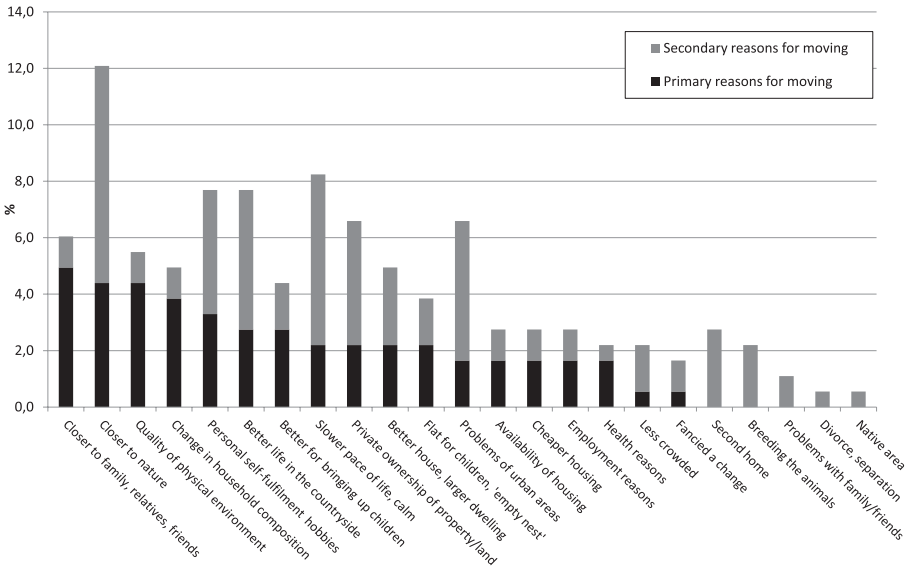


Figure 4: Stated migration motives

Source: Author's research,  $n = 182$ .

Note: Migrants were asked to report the reasons for relocation. Subsequently, they were asked to select most important one which was considered as primary reason. The rest (if any) was considered as secondary reasons.

(Halfacree 1994), a detailed exploration of stated migration motives shed further light on this study. Figure 4 summarises reasons for moving provided by counterurban migrants. More than one reason could be given.

A great variety of stated migration motivations can be identified, among both primary and secondary reasons (Figure 4). Such variety reflecting the complexity of urban to rural migration is also reported by several other studies (Halfacree 1994; Boyle and Halfacree 1998; Mitchell 2004; Gkartziou and Scott 2010). The most important primary reasons are: (1) Being closer to family, relatives, friends; (2) Being closer to nature; (3) Quality of physical environment; and (4) Change in household composition. The most important secondary reasons embrace: (1) Being closer to nature; (2) Slower pace of life, calm; (3) Better life in the countryside; (4) problems of urban areas; and (5) Personal self-fulfilment (hobbies). It should be noted that migration motives are subject to post-evaluation and rationalisation, certain migration motives might be understood differently by different migrants, and some migration motives might overlap with others. Looking at the information presented in Figure 4 in more detail, firstly, a comparison of primary and secondary reasons indicates that a positive image of the rural and a negative image of the urban is more pronounced in secondary reasons than in primary ones. Migrants might have a tendency to prioritise family related reasons over environment related ones in their ex post-rationalisation of migration. Secondly, lifestyle related motivations are more

pronounced than economic related motivations. Thirdly, household changes: (1) Change in household composition; (2) Better environment for bringing up children; (3) Leaving a flat for children or 'an empty nest' are important triggers of counterurban migration. It was discovered during interviews that an enlargement or a reduction of family size is often a decisive factor activating spatial mobility in accordance with residential preferences. Fourthly, the importance of housing changes: (1) Private ownership of property/land; (2) Better house, larger dwelling; (3) Availability of housing; and (4) Cheaper housing, is in accordance with a long-term preference for single family housing in the Czech Republic (Housing Attitudes in the Czech Republic 2001). Almost all migrants (98 per cent) moved to a single family house whereas their previous place of residence was mostly in a housing estate (45 per cent) or in a tenement building (40 per cent). Fifthly, a rather surprising result is the low percentage of migrants who included second housing in their migration decision. In fact 42 per cent of migrants previously used their rural place of residence as a second home,<sup>4</sup> but almost none of them counted their second home experience among their stated migration motives. In sum, reasons for counterurban migration are diverse, shaped more by lifestyle or dwelling preferences than by economic considerations. Counterurbanisation in the post-socialist Czech Republic is therefore similar in this respect to counterurbanisation in western countries (Halfacree 1994; Halliday and Coombes 1995; Rivera 2007; Bijker and Haartsen 2011) and varies from the counterurbanisation described in other post-socialist countries (Dandolova 2001; Tammaru 2001; Brown and Schafft 2002; Brown *et al.* 2005; Bajmócy *et al.* 2011). The distinction between western and post-socialist countries is also blurring. A recent survey by Bajmócy *et al.* (2011) found that the counterurban migration flow in Hungary is comprised of both economic motivated and lifestyle motivated migrants.

Motivations behind counterurbanisation reflect a broader perception of the rural and of life in the countryside (Halliday and Coombes 1995; van Dam *et al.* 2002). Rural areas are seen by counterurban migrants as less concentrated settings with a better and more spacious environment, closer to nature, with better housing options and a slower pace of life, enabling a more full-valued lifestyle. Analysis of Czech counterurban migrants' narratives identified two major salient features of their rural related discourse (Šustrová and Šimon 2012). Firstly, rural areas are seen predominantly as a place of consumption; production or work related aspects of rural areas are only marginally noted. Such a perception is consistent with the age structure of migrants (Figure 2) as well as with their stated migration motives (Figure 3). Secondly, rural areas are seen almost completely in terms of the physical quality of the environment; the social quality of the environment is of secondary importance. In contrast with popular discourses about rural *Gemeinschaft*, the vast majority of migrants did not move to a rural area to seek an idealised rural community. However, they are keen to 'join in' or even start new activities that are beneficial to the community after they move in (Šustrová and Šimon 2012).

### *The impact of migration*

In order to understand the impact of migration, various aspects of urban/rural life are compared. Table 4 summarises average scores of different aspects of life changes

Table 4: *Impact of migration on quality of life*

Age groups	Average scores in groups			
	Total (20–75) ( <i>n</i> = 81)	20–35 ( <i>n</i> = 15)	36–55 ( <i>n</i> = 33)	56–75 ( <i>n</i> = 33)
Personal satisfaction	1.56	1.67	1.61	1.45
Housing	1.47	1.33	1.38	1.63
Family relations	2.28	2.13	2.06	2.56
Neighbourhood relations	2.06	2.53	1.91	2.00
Quality of environment	1.26	1.00	1.27	1.36
Accessibility of services	3.19	3.50	3.30	2.94

Source: Author's research.

Note: Respondents evaluated different aspects of life changes related to urban-rural migration on scale from positive (1) to negative (5).

related to urban-rural migration, divided into three age groups. Respondents were asked: 'How do you evaluate changes related to your migration concerning following aspects?' A change of (1) personal satisfaction; (2) housing; (3) family relations; (4) neighbourhood relations; (5) quality of environment; (6) accessibility of services, was evaluated on scale from positive (1) to negative (5).

Most positively perceived is a change in the 'quality of environment' followed by 'housing' and 'personal satisfaction'. 'Family relations' and 'neighbourhood relations' are slightly positive whereas 'accessibility of services' gained the worst score. The sequence of aspects shown is in line with stated migration motives (Figure 3). Further study of Table 4 shows that younger age groups are primarily driven by environment considerations and are less satisfied with 'accessibility of services' and 'neighbourhood relations'. Evaluations by the middle-aged generation follow the average values of the sample as a whole with one exception. Their evaluation of 'family relations' after their urban to rural move is surprisingly positive. The interviews suggested that the middle-aged generation no longer need to take care of their children and are free to start a new life in the countryside, so their evaluation of changes in 'family relations' is positive. In contrast with the previous two groups the older age group perceive 'accessibility of services' less negatively. Older age groups tend to be less autonomous and more dependent on family relations and therefore negatively evaluate the change in their 'family relations'. To sum up, evaluation of life changes related to urban-rural migration is generally positive with the exception of 'accessibility of services', although differences were found between different age groups.

### *Typology of migration strategies*

The typology of counterurbanisation migration strategies (Table 5) summarises main types of strategies adopted by counterurban migrants in our research. Although the typology is based on one national case study it offers a methodological tool which can be used to compare counterurbanisation migration strategies across countries. The typology is based on household motivation, household preferences and



Table 5: *Typology of counterurbanisation migration strategies*

Types of migration strategies	Household motivation	Household preferences	Household employment
Ex-urbanisation strategy	Lifestyle oriented (consumption)	DWELLING in destination – Household seeks environmental and social amenities associated with rural dwelling.	Maintain strong employment link to urban areas. At least one adult member employed in urban area of origin.
Anti-urbanisation strategy	Lifestyle oriented (consumption)	DWELLING in destination and NOT WORKING in urban area – Household seeks environmental and social amenities associated with rural dwelling and working.	Close up employment link to urban areas. One/both partners outside labour force, employed at destination or unemployed.
Family livelihood strategy	Economy oriented (production)	ECONOMIC NEED – Household seeks primarily to satisfy their economic needs (housing, cost of living, employment, etc.); environmental and social amenities associated with rural areas are secondary.	One/both partners employed at urban area of origin or at destination or unemployed/outside labour force.
Rural entrepreneurship strategy	Economy oriented (production)	ECONOMIC PROFIT in destination – Household considered environmental and social amenities associated with rural areas as appropriate for setting their business activities.	Create strong employment link at destination. At least one adult member employed at destination.

Source: Author.

household location. The household motivation indicator discerns whether the primary motivation, reported by migrants, was lifestyle or economy-oriented. Migrants perceive rural areas predominantly either as spaces of consumption or as spaces of production. The household preferences indicator further differentiates a main motive for migration into rural areas. The preferences of migrants indicate their main attraction to rural area and more importantly also the expected way of life in the countryside and future use of rural space. The household employment location indicator specifies where a household employment links are. It is conceived as a *supplementary* indicator because differentiation of contemporary family and household arrangements, together with a loosening of localisation requirements for jobs, makes employment links less decisive. Thus, four types of counterurbanisation migration strategies are identified.

Firstly, the ex-urbanisation strategy is primarily driven by the lifestyle motivation of a household which seeks the environmental and social amenities of rural areas. A household applying the ex-urbanisation strategy dwells in a rural area, but maintains strong employment links to urban areas. This strategy is employed by 23 per cent of migrants. The employment link to urban area is mostly maintained by just one adult member of a household.

Lucie is 54 years old and has been tramp her whole life. She likes to travel through the country, hike, play guitar and bivouac. With her second husband, Petr, she moved to a rural house to be closer to nature. Unfortunately for her, she has to commute to work to a city twice a week. She worked two subsequent shifts and slept in the office in between. She did not like her job but she does not want to be unemployed. Lucie hopes that she will overcome this in the next few years and then she will have more time to enjoy rural life as a pensioner.

Secondly, the anti-urbanisation strategy is also driven by a household's lifestyle motivation, but in contrast with the ex-urbanisation strategy, adult household members end their employment links with urban areas. This strategy is utilised by 67 per cent of migrants, 70 per cent of whom are outside the labour force, while 30 per cent are employed at destination. Therefore, it is more suitable to discern between those working in urban areas (Ex-urbanisation strategy) and those not working in urban areas (anti-urbanisation strategy). Ending employment links to urban areas does not necessarily imply creation of new employment links in rural areas (compare with Ford 1999; Mitchell 2004).

Jakub and Jana are middle-aged urban professionals who have fulfilled their dream of peaceful rural lifestyle. They were tired of high-speed urban life and they wanted to live in a big house with a garden. They moved to a farmhouse in the rural village where their great-grandfather originated. They did not have to search for a new job in the region, as they both telecommute. Jakub is a freelance artist and Jana is a proofreader. They are very much involved in community life, gardening and renovating a house. They both conceive slow pace of life in rural areas as a healthier lifestyle.

Thirdly, the family livelihood strategy is primarily motivated by household economic considerations; the social or environmental amenities of the rural area are of secondary importance. In contrast with counterurbanisation migration strategies in other post-socialist countries, the family livelihood strategy is only marginally utilised (four per cent). This supports the author's hypothesis which expects a

prevalence of lifestyle driven counterurbanisation strategies in early urbanised and more economically advanced countries, in contrast with the prevalence of economically driven counterurbanisation strategies in late urbanised and less economically advanced countries.

Petra is a 27 year old blue-collar worker; she grew up in the city and spent almost her whole life there. She likes shopping in malls, going to cafés, strolling through the city. Petra and her husband are very family-oriented people; they like to have a lot of children. After a fourth child was born, their housing situation became critical. They can neither rent a bigger flat, nor stay in their current small flat. They have to move. The only suitable housing choice they could afford was a small dilapidated house in a remote rural village. Petra is not happy with life in the countryside; she wants to move back or at least closer to the city.

Fourthly, the rural entrepreneurship strategy is primarily motivated by household economic considerations; environmental and social amenities associated with rural area are seen as an appropriate setting for their business activities. Households create strong employment links at destination. The rural entrepreneurship strategy is also a marginal counterurbanisation migration strategy (four per cent), so the economic impact of such migration is rather small.

Martin is a middle-aged bachelor who has moved out to a rural area near mountains to start a tourism business. He runs his own travel agency focused on mountain adventure trips and two retired pay with several employees. Martin wanted to move close to the mountains and invest there in tourism business earlier, but he had to earn start-up money first. His enterprise is successful and he is planning another investment. He walks in the woods and takes photographs in his leisure time.

It is interesting to note that the proportion of those who seek economic profit in rural areas is roughly similar to that of those whose move to a rural area was prompted by economic necessity.

A comparison of counterurbanisation migration strategies shows a prevalence of lifestyle driven motivations, with economically driven motivations less pronounced. Counterurbanisation in the Czech Republic therefore contributes to the post-productivist transformation of the countryside; for counterurban migrants, rural areas are places of consumption rather than production. The evaluation of overall impact of counterurbanisation on Czech rural areas is twofold. On the one hand, the impact on the rural population measured in terms of the number of newcomers to rural municipalities, is modest. Counterurbanisation in the Czech Republic is a secondary migratory movement. The high number of rural settlements and also the dispersed nature of counterurban migration mean that rural municipalities are selectively influenced by urban to rural migration. The impact of counterurbanisation on cities is also small, especially in comparison with intensive suburbanisation. On the other hand, the real importance of counterurbanisation is in the qualitative impact of newcomers. Although quantitatively measured migration to rural areas is a necessary precondition, subsequent lives in rural communities are more important (Halfacree and Rivera 2011). Counterurban migrants positively influence rural communities in the Czech countryside with many positive examples, where newcomers from cities use their social, cultural and financial capital to increase the quality of life in their new place of residence (Šustrová and Šimon 2012).

## Concluding remarks

This study presents a detailed discussion of counterurban migration streams in the Czech Republic based on field research in remote rural areas. Counterurbanisation is primarily non-economic migration driven mostly by lifestyle oriented motivations. Counterurban migrants seek quality of life and lifestyle rather than work in rural areas. The demographic structure of counterurban migrants includes both younger and older age groups, but the latter tend to prevail. Further growth of 'third age' counterurban migrants is expected in view of recent demographic trends. No significant relation between age and education was found among the respondents. The non-economic nature of counterurbanisation is further supported by work characteristics and mobility patterns. Only half of counterurban migrants participate in the labour force, the rest are retired, unemployed, or on maternity leave. Of all working migrants, 55 per cent commute to work in their urban areas of origin, but only 20 per cent of them commute on a daily basis, others doing so irregularly. A great variety of occupations were found among the respondents. Counterurban migrants utilise the possibilities of the post-industrial division of labour where fewer jobs are tied to a particular place and given working hours, making migration to remote rural areas more feasible. The analysis of stated migration motives shows a great diversity of motives behind counterurbanisation migration decisions and further underlines the importance of lifestyle and dwelling preferences, together with perceptions of rural life and household changes. Almost all migrants moved from housing estates or tenement buildings to single family houses. The impact of migration on quality of life is mostly positive, especially when 'quality of environment' or 'personal satisfaction' is concerned, with the exception of 'accessibility of services'. Some specific differences between age groups were found in the impact of migration on quality of life.

The typology of counterurbanisation migration strategies summarises the main types of strategies employed by counterurban migrants. It clearly shows that counterurban migration in the Czech Republic differs significantly from economic driven counterurbanisation described in other post-socialist countries (e.g. Brown and Schafft 2002). The Czech Republic was, in contrast with other post-socialist countries, already a highly urbanised and industrialised country before socialism (Hampl 2005). The inter-generational links between urban and rural inhabitants resulting from previous rural to urban migration, was therefore very weak in early urbanised countries in comparison with countries where intensive urbanisation occurs lately during socialism. Missing intergenerational links to rural areas and the specific path of Czech post-socialist transformation where no rapid growth of urban unemployment was presented, prevent economic driven counterurbanisation. Counterurbanisation in the Czech Republic is more similar to counterurbanisation in western countries (e.g. Boyle and Halfacree 1998), although with some limitations (Grimsrud 2011). A prevalence of lifestyle related migration motives, non-economic nature of migration, and perception of *rural idyll* is similar to western countries. In contrast, counterurbanisation in the Czech Republic is not a class-related phenomenon; such explanation does not seem adequate in Czech equalitarian society. An anti-urban discourse is much less pronounced in the migration narratives; Czech cities have very low levels of segregation and crime, even housing areas with socialist *panelaks* are not

in decay. The majority of Czech counterurban migrants do not seek rural lifestyle, but a lifestyle in a rural environment, a revival of rural *Gemeinschaft* is not particularly important for migrants. Rural environment is perceived as a place where a change to a more desirable lifestyle can be achieved. Other differences are resulting from a development of settlement system and a changing housing market. However, such a broad comparison of counterurbanisation between groups of countries should be used cautiously; differences in national contexts and particular geographical frameworks used are of crucial importance. A further and more detailed elaboration of counterurbanisation in a comparative perspective is required (Bajmócy *et al.* 2011).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In doing this, I strongly sympathise with Hörschelmann's and Stenning's appeal not to ignore research on post-socialist change in the dominant English-language geographical discourse (Hörschelmann and Stenning 2008). Counterurbanisation research is a good example.
- <sup>2</sup> Another case is countries with substantial ethnic minorities, e.g. Estonia (Tammaru 2002).
- <sup>3</sup> Macešková and Ouředníček (2008) estimate the share of unregistered migrants in some suburban municipalities at 20 or 30 per cent. According to preliminary results of the 2011 Czech census, more than 10 per cent of total population does not live in their officially registered place of residence (Czech Statistical Office, own calculation).
- <sup>4</sup> The high share of counterurbanites that used their rural place of residence as a second home, should be treated cautiously. It covers ephemeral as well as long term use of a second house by counterurbanites; it probably says a little about the majority of second home users who might have no intention of living in rural areas permanently as counterurbanites. For further details about second housing in the Czech Republic see Fialová and Vágner (2009).

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**Martin Šimon**

Department of Social Geography and Regional Development

Faculty of Science

Charles University in Prague

Albertov 6

Praha 2

Prague 12843

Czech Republic

e-mail: martin.simon@natur.cuni.cz