



UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI
DI PADOVA

Università degli Studi di Padova
Dipartimento di Scienze Storiche, Geografiche e dell'Antichità

Corso di Laurea Magistrale in Scienze Storiche

**The Rural Idyll and its Realities:
Temporal Imaginaries and Material Constraints in
Norwegian Rural and Urban Trajectories**

Relatore: Dott.ssa Laura Lo Presti

Laureando/a:
Siri Katinka Marcussen Fenre
Matricola: 2155543

Anno Accademico 2025/26

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to professor Laura Lo Presti, for the patience and guidance she has granted throughout the process of drafting this thesis. Her inspiring course *Map Mobilites: Critical and Creative Approaches* motivated me to pursue the field of human geography to investigate the ways in which people and places are interconnected and constrained by distance as well as real and artificial borders.

Secondly, this would not have been possible without the 12 participants generously sharing the stories of their migration trajectories, opinions, and dreams. Their openness as well as generously shared time is not taken for granted, and through their insightful answers I have gained a deeper understanding of the complexity of settlement choices. This thesis would not exist without them.

Thirdly, my heartfelt thanks goes to my family which has provided continuous support and encouragement in small and big moments throughout the process. The same is true for all my friends, and colleagues, which have acted as secondary supervisors on many an occasion. A special thanks goes to my dear friend Sofie, for reading every single word and providing invaluable proofreading.

Fourth, but not least, I would like to express my thanks to the Mobility Studies master programme at University of Padova and its professors for thought provoking and interesting courses. Above all, the international community and colleagues will stay with me as friends, reinforcing the great pleasure of shared mobile experiences.

Abstract

This thesis investigates migration decisions between Norwegian rural villages and cities by examining different conceptualisations of the rural by individuals with diverse rural-urban experiences. How do imaginaries of rural idyll and material realities shape migration decisions between Norwegian rural villages and cities? To answer this question, 12 semi-structured interviews have been conducted with individuals who have lived in rural Norwegian villages, most of whom now reside in cities. The theory of exurban timespace allows for an investigation of how temporal perceptions intersect with physical places as well as socially constructed imaginaries of rural idyll. Within the mobility paradigm and the politics of mobility, the material constraints of living in the rural Norwegian countryside are analysed as experienced friction of mobility. The findings indicate that people with rural-origin have a more nuanced view of rural idyll. Material constraints such as accessibility to services, geographical distance and transport needs influence the potential desire of returning to rural villages to a greater extent than temporal perceptions, indicating that the idea of rural idyll might be a predominantly urban idealisation. This thesis contributes to Mobility Studies by providing a Norwegian perspective of mobility decisions between the rural and urban spaces, especially considering temporal imaginaries connected to the Norwegian villages, or *bygda*.

Keywords: Rural idyll, Norwegian villages, Temporal imaginaries, Material constraints, Mobility decisions

Sommario

La presente tesi analizza come, nel contesto norvegese, diverse concezioni della ruralità da parte di individui con esperienze eterogenee di vita influenzino o abbiano influenzato le loro decisioni migratorie tra i paesi rurali e le città. Per rispondere a questa domanda, sono state condotte 12 interviste semi-strutturate con persone che in Norvegia hanno vissuto in paesi rurali, la maggior parte delle quali risiede ora in città. La teoria dello spazio-tempo *esurbano* consente di indagare come le percezioni temporali si intrecciano con i luoghi fisici, e con le immagini stereotipate dell'“idillio rurale”, costruite socialmente. All'interno del quadro generale della mobilità e della sua gestione politica, i vincoli materiali della vita nelle campagne norvegesi vengono analizzati secondo il concetto di “attrito esperienziale” della mobilità. I risultati indicano che le persone di origine rurale hanno una visione più sfumata dell'idillio rurale rispetto a chi ha origine rurale. I vincoli materiali, quali l'accessibilità dei servizi, la distanza geografica e le esigenze di trasporto, influenzano il potenziale desiderio di tornare nei piccoli paesi rurali in misura maggiore rispetto alle percezioni temporali, e ciò indica che il concetto di idillio rurale potrebbe essere un'idealizzazione prevalentemente urbana. La tesi vuole dare un contributo agli studi sulla mobilità fornendo una prospettiva norvegese sulle decisioni di mobilità tra gli spazi rurali e quelli urbani, considerando in particolare gli immaginari temporali legati ai piccoli paesi norvegesi, o *bygda*.

Parole chiave: Idillio rurale, Paesi norvegesi, Immaginari temporali, Vincoli materiali, Decisioni di mobilità

Table of Content

Introduction	7
Chapter 1 - The Norwegian Bygda Paradox	16
1.1 Norwegian Rural Settlement: Political and Economic Context	18
1.1.1 Historical Foundations	18
1.1.2 Regional Policies	20
1.1.3 Contemporary Challenges	22
1.2 Migration Patterns: The Rural Urban Divide	23
1.2.1 Historical Exodus and Contemporary Patterns	23
1.2.2 The Material Conditions of Rural Life	25
1.3 Cultural Constructions: the Rural Idyll	26
1.3.1 Imaginaries of Bygda	26
1.3.2 Between Imaginary and Reality	28
1.4 Positioning the study	31
Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework: Mobility, Timespace and the Rural	33
2.1 The Mobilities Paradigm	34
2.1.1 From Movement to Mobility	34
2.1.2 The Politics of Mobility	36
2.2 Planetary Urbanisation and Spatial Binaries	38
2.2.1 Beyond the Urban and Rural Divide	38
2.2.2 'Rurbanisation'	40
2.3 Temporality and Exurban Timespace	41
2.3.1 A Historical Change of Time	41
2.3.2 The Exurban Timespace	42
2.4 Degrowth	44
2.5 Theoretical Framework	46
Chapter 3 - Methodology and Methods: A Qualitative Interpretivist Approach	49
3.1 Research Approach	49
3.2 Research Design and Sampling Strategy	51
3.2.1 Qualitative Semi-Structures Interviews	51
3.2.2 Research Context	52
3.2.3 Sampling Strategy	53
3.3 Participant Selection and Data Collection	55
3.3.1 Participant selection	55
3.3.2 Data collection	56
3.4 Data Analysis	57
3.5 Ethical Considerations and Positionality	59
3.5.1 Positionality	59
3.5.2 Consent, Anonymity and Data Storage	60
3.5.3 Use of AI	60

Chapter 4 - Living the Idyll? Analysis and Discussion of Norwegian Rural-Urban Trajectories	61
4.1 - Against the urban? Rural idyll imaginaries	61
4.1.1 Rural Idyll Imaginaries	61
4.1.2 The Lived Rural Experience	64
4.1.2.1 Voluntary Community Work: ‘Dugnad’	64
4.1.2.2 ‘Everybody-knows-everybody’: Closeness and its costs	66
4.1.3 Imagined versus Lived - the Gap	69
4.2 - Temporal Perceptions	74
4.2.1 Urban and rural timespaces	75
4.2.2 Bodily expressions of temporal differences	78
4.2.3 Temporal Influence on Work and Lifestyles	81
4.3 - Material constraints	84
4.3.1 Work and Digital Connectivity	84
4.3.2 Housing and Gentrification	88
4.3.3 Access to Services	89
4.3.3.1 Health services	90
4.3.3.2 Schools and transport	92
4.3.4 Distance, Transport and Automobile Dependency	94
4.3.4.1 The Role of Private Vehicles	95
4.4 Migration Decisions Between the Urban and Rural	97
4.4.1 Migration Motivations: The Alluring Rural Village?	98
4.4.1.1 Imaginaries, Constraints and Temporal Shifts	98
4.4.1.2 Choosing the city	102
4.4.1.3 Returning to the Village?	103
4.4.2 Who can follow the dream? — Exurban Privilege and the Limits of Mobility	105
Chapter 5 - Conclusion: Between the Postcard and the Reality	109
5.1 Revisiting the Research Questions	109
5.1.1 Imaginaries of Idyll in Conflict with Material Constraints	109
5.1.2 Settling for Slowness?	111
5.1.3 The Practical Constraints of Settlement	111
5.2 Situating the Research	112
5.3 Limitations	113
5.4 Future Research and Closing Remarks	113
List of Tables	115
Reference list	116
Appendices	121

Introduction

This thesis investigates migration decisions between Norwegian rural villages and cities by examining how imaginaries of rural idyll intersect with material constraints. Norwegian villages are becoming increasingly depopulated, and centralisation policies with state services being withdrawn is a constant threat to the rural population. At the same time, spread-out settlement is rhetorically applauded and rural life continues to be regarded as the ‘good life’ (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 174). This is the centre of the *bygda*, or rural village paradox.

Rural idyll is often conceptualised as safe, close-knit communities, in slow, peaceful surroundings of beautiful nature (Cruickshank, Lysgård & Magnussen, 2009, 82). This imaginary is sought after by millions of Norwegians searching for small farms online, watching lifestyle TV programmes from the outer peripheries, and entering rural villages through direct or indirect access to one of the more than 420.000 second home cabins of the country (NTB, 2026; Overvåg, 2011, 155; Blekesaune, Haugen & Villa, 2010, 226). Life in the rural outskirts might have a different side beyond the image of cows grazing slowly in the sunset in the meadow by the red wooden barn. While dispersed settlement is still praised as a national characteristic of the long-stretched country with less than 6 million inhabitants, the state is withdrawing maternity wards, schools and police stations, changing the living conditions in the rural villages (Vik, Fuglestad & Øversveen, 2022, 203). This creates a material reality where geographical distances and mobility become precarious to the rural population, which constitute around 17% of Norwegians (Auerbach, Eidheim & Fimreite, 2024, 3). The remaining 83% of the population is urban, and arguably consumes ‘the rural’ through media and occasional visits. In order to better understand the Bygda paradox, the main research question is: *How do imaginaries of rural idyll and material realities shape migration decisions between Norwegian rural villages and cities?*

Historically, the rural has been central in the construction of Norwegian identity. When Norway gained independence from Danish rule in 1814, the urban leaders of the independence movement looked to the rural countryside in search of a new national identity (Storsveen, 2022). Inspired by the national romantic movement, the urban middle class defined the peasants as the “carriers of national identity” and the costumes, dances and fairytales from various rural villages became national symbols (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 3). The majority of the population were peasants and fishermen, and living scattered throughout

the fjords and valleys of the country they were only marginally tied to cities and centers of trade (Rokkan, 1967, 369). After the political system started out with an unequal electoral ratio in disfavour of rural representatives, peasants defied disparities in regional economic conditions and united in the defense of the periphery against the center (Rokkan, 1967, 371). This historically constructed association of rural life connected with national identity is central to understanding why rural idyll retains cultural power today.

The centre-periphery model emphasises the contradictory interests of labour and capital, and fishermen and farmers versus capital interest (Rokkan, 1967, 371). This political cleavage largely aligns with the oppositions between the rural and the urban. The Norwegian economy relied on the primary sector of fishing, agriculture, and forestry for centuries, remaining a poor country until the hydropower industry of the early 1900s entered, and the welfare state developed after the second World War (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 1; Vik et al., 2022, 202). After the discovery of oil and transition to a service economy in the 1960s, state services became centralised and migration to urban centers increased (Hanssen, 2020, 127). Meanwhile, natural resources based in rural areas have remained as the economic engine of the economy. While economic equality between urban centres and rural peripheries is higher than most other Western countries, social identities are split and centralisation policies divide opinions between the rural and urban population (Vik et al., 2020, 198). The united goal of the rural population in maintaining their interests against the urban centre echoes in contemporary politics, and the neglect of investment in the rural villages represent a crucial aspect of the Bygda paradox.

Norwegian regional policies are influenced by increased centralisation since the 1990s, with merges shrinking the numbers of administrative units (Auerbach et al., 2024). As municipalities and cities are the main welfare service providers, they carry extensive local autonomy in one of the most decentralized systems in Europe (Hanssen, 2020, 128). This has influenced a strong local identity, with national identity being less important than regional and rural affiliation (Auerbach et al., 2024, 5). Local autonomy and protecting agricultural subsidies were central in the 1972 and 1994 EU referendums which were voted down by the Norwegian population (Auerbach et al., 2024, 4). Norwegian values are closely tied to nature, with rural links to ancestors remaining important also to the four out of five Norwegians living in cities (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 10). While the intrinsic value of the rural remains important to all Norwegians, centralisation policies have contributed to a widening gap that

has continued to bring the rural population together in the fight for continued local autonomy, against the material constraints that threaten rural livelihoods.

The contemporary challenges of regional policies is characterised by the withdrawal of services like hospitals, schools, and police offices from rural areas while maintaining taxes, regulations, and bureaucracy in a state that has become less social-democratic, and more greedy (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Previously spread-out settlement and rural development have been supported by the state, for example with the placement of state institutions in rural areas, and more than 53 airports across the country (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 9; Vik et al., 2022, 198). The policy of decentralised concentration places public workplaces in regional centers, further away from rural villages, resulting in withdrawal of public offices and services from the local level (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Simultaneously, the rural population is decreasing and people are moving to urban centers. Meanwhile, the number of second home cabin owners are increasing, and people from cities circulate to rural villages to visit their cabin. This phenomenon has grown after the covid-19 pandemic, but even before this there were 420.000 cabins registered in 2011 (Overvåg, 2011, 155). With the economies of many municipalities being tight, several popular 'second home' municipalities try to increase their incomes by catering to the second home owners. This in turn leads to a gentrification process in which the local population sometimes struggle to afford housing in their own villages (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 62). Although inequality is not a great issue between rural and urban Norwegian spaces, the economic discrepancies between urban second home owners and the rural population losing access to services and jobs is creating tensions that influences the centre-periphery gap. The various ways urban and rural people use and experience a place might also affect how they construct and conceptualise rural imaginaries differently.

Unlike the neighbouring country Sweden, Norway has kept its scattered settlement pattern. Many rural regions face a considerable aging of the population, and a declining birth rate (Heleniak & Gassen, 2020, 50). This demographic shift also characterises the cities, but out-migration exacerbates this trend in rural areas. As the importance of agriculture and mining industries has declined, industrialisation and the development of the service economy has drawn young people from rural areas to the cities in search of education and work opportunities (Rye, 2006, 202). The desire to return is high, and cyclical migration, where youth return to their villages in later stages of life, also characterises the migration pattern of rural areas (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). Meanwhile, the state settles refugees in villages

with the support of municipalities in attempts to distribute the population across the country, and maintain demographic balance (Auerbach et al., 2024, 30). Meanwhile this group tends to move away after the mandatory two-year period (Vestby, 2018, 12). Another large group spending considerable time in many rural villages is the second home cabin owners. In recent times, and elevated by the Covid pandemic, an increasing number of cabin owners are relocating full time to the village, taking their urban remote jobs with them (Bratrud, 2024a, 222). However, the majority maintain the cyclical movement between the cities and the cabins spending time in rural areas predominantly for leisure. The potential returnees is the largest group keeping the villages alive, but material constraints such as access to work, and geographical distances leave many reluctant (Villa, 2000, 486).

Material constraints are shaping migration patterns by making life in the rural villages more complicated. Government incentives have made traditional industries of fishing, farming and forestry increasingly large-scale and automated, consequently decreasing the labour force (Vik et al, 2022, 203). The industrial and service economy is placing jobs in urban centers, and meanwhile work and affordable housing is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain in rural areas (Knudsen, 2020, 59). The digital economy with jobs in creative, consultant or service sectors is however increasing, and with this rise, the opportunities of working remotely has opened new possibilities of settlement (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 67). As these sectors and jobs are concentrated in cities, it is the urban population that gets the privilege of extended settlement choices. Physical distances for accessing work, health services and schools are increasing in rural areas concurrently with the centralisation policies of the state, and remote work makes it possible for certain groups to circumvent these material obstacles (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 62). Remote workers often migrate between the rural spaces and their jobs in the city, often maintaining social networks in the cities, and moving to the rural village for a slower paced life (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Remaining connected to the faster pace in the city, they negotiate their time between different spheres and create their own exurban timespace (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). This upper middle-class group might represent a smaller, but increasing segment of the rural population. Access to work remains pivotal for choosing a life in the rural village, however cultural constructions of the slower, rural idyll might also play an important part.

The idea of rural life as the ‘good life’ is historically rooted in Norway (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 174). Spending time in nature, hiking, and being autonomous are unquestionable

cultural values for many Norwegians (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 58). Inspired by national romantic sentiments, nature represents the “authentic, real, and free”, for the urban population that contrast it with the stress of the city (Bratrud, 2024b, 129). Many Norwegians create their image of rural areas through visits to second home cabins, a tradition where spending time with families, and being active in nature is central. While the modern cabins often feature broadband connection, modern amenities and great comfort, the original small cabins with no electricity or running water remain as the image of rural simplicity and idyll (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 59). The ‘authentic’, simple life in rural villages is often seen as natural and slow, posing as the contrast to the “gray, expensive, noisy and stressful” experience of the city (Bratrud, 2024, 207). Being free and in control of your own life, creates the desire of people in cities to relocate in search of the rural idyll, in an attempt to escape the perceived time compression and rush of the cities. While the imaginary of the rural as being slow, quiet, and safe might be predominantly urban-led, it might affect migration decisions in various ways.

Lived life in the rural outskirts is conceivably different from the rural idyll imageries. The cultural conceptualisation of rural idyll appears to be constructed mostly by urban visitors in rural spaces. Spending their time of leisure in second home cabins allows this predominantly urban group to consume the beauty and place, rather than engage with the political reality of it (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 61). Aside from material constraints and regional differences, social life in the rural villages is shaped by small communities, where everybody-knows-everybody (Farstad & Zahl-Tanem, 2021, 551). While reinforcing the idea of close-knit, safe idyll, it can also be perceived as claustrophobic social surveillance, especially by adolescents (Rye, 2006, 201). Whereas in the cities, the willingness to help out on a volunteer basis is decreasing, this practice of *dugnad* remains high in rural villages (Bygnes, 2017, 289). Social solidarity and mutual obligation compels the rural village to avoid the anonymity and individualism of the cities (Villa, 2000, 478). Representations of the rural are continuously negotiated, and while the rural social identity might align with the idyllic images in some respects, the material constraints of life in rural villages points to other truths. This brings us back to the *bygda* paradox, where urban populations, and to a certain extent the state, idealises rural life, while access to services, work, and affordable housing endangers a sustainable, rural life. It is precisely this discrepancy this thesis seeks to investigate closer.

Rural and regional research holds an important, and long standing tradition in Norway, influencing policy makers and delivering the knowledge base for welfare state redistribution

policies (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). Rurality is a contested concept that is negotiated between academics, politicians, and people (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). Traditional regional research has focused on more quantifiable socio-economic variables like education and labor markets (Orderud, 1998; Teigen, 1999). Stepping away from this functionalist tradition, the social constructivist approach focuses on ideas about rurality and culture (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006). The entanglement of the rural and urban, the so-called 'rurban' has become a greater area of interest. Geographical and sociological research have also paid great attention to out and return migration to rural villages (Wiborg 2003; Orderud 1998; Rye 2006; Villa 2000 and Haugen & Lysgård 2006). While migration decisions is a central part of this thesis, the emphasis of this study is on the lived experience of times and places, in line with the work of anthropologist Tom Bratrud.

This study contributes to the discipline of Mobility Studies through providing a close examination of how the experienced friction of mobility, as well as temporal perceptions of place, influences migration decisions between cities and villages in the Norwegian context. As a country in the far north with low inequality, a small population and modest cities compared to the global scale, the discrepancy between the rural villages and cities in Norway provides as an interesting example to examine spatiotemporal differences and rural imaginaries. The idea of rural idyll remains a contrast with urban life, despite 'rurbanisation' weaving the urban and rural fabric together across the planet.

In order to answer the main research question: *How do imaginaries of rural idyll and material realities shape migration decisions between Norwegian rural villages and cities?* 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews have been conducted with people having various experiences of life in the rural villages and cities of Norway. Applying a qualitative approach using reflexive, thematic analysis allowed four themes to emerge: rural idyll imaginaries, temporal perceptions, material constraints, and finally, migration decisions between the urban and rural. These four themes provide the structure for the analysis and discussion.

The secondary research question asks: *In which ways are perceptions of time and ideas of rurality impacting people's choice of residence?* In order to better understand the conceptualisation of rural imaginaries, and assess it against lived rural experiences, the theory of 'rurbanisation' shed light on the entanglement of the rural and urban (Caruso, 2001, 11). Further, a closer look at the cultural construction of places makes it possible to dissect the

ideas of rurality (Hämeenaho, 2013, 4). The social perceptions of rural idyll in Norway is investigated through the 2006 article of Haugen and Lysgård, which carefully examines the various aspects of the close-knit rural communities. Through these main theories, the first theme investigates the lived rural experiences against the imagined rural idyll.

The second theme of temporal perceptions is further answering the secondary research question of how perceptions of time and ideas of rurality are impacting settlement choices. While time has become a capitalistic measure of value since industrialisation in the 1800s, people perceive it differently, and attitudes of time are interwoven with understandings of places (Bratrud, 2024a, 215; May & Thrift, 2001, 5). Diving into the temporal perceptions is done through Bratrud's concept of exurban timespace and spatiotemporal decompression. When people migrate between the cities and the rural countryside, both physically, but also digitally, they create their own 'exurban' time (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). The experience of fast paced stress, rush and feeling of being stuck in traffic in the city is exchanged for the perceived calmness, and slower life in rural villages, in an attempt to escape the spatiotemporal decompression of the city (Bratrud, 2024a, 208). Central to the perception of time is also mobility and its speed, which is not neutrally guided by technology, but infused with power, and reliant on class, cost, and politics (Illich, 1973, 14; Cresswell, 2010, 162). Combined, these conceptualisations of place, speed, and time, allows for a greater understanding of how temporal perceptions influence migration trajectories between urban and rural spaces in Norway.

In order to better understand the mobility decisions of the participants, the second sub-question asks: *How are mobility options, access to nature and housing influencing settlement choices?* The third theme of the analysis dives into the material constraints of life in the rural villages. Mobility, justice, and automobile dependency is central to understanding better the infrastructure challenges that define the Norwegian countryside (Sheller, 2018, 49; Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, 331). Further, through the politics of mobility, and the related friction of mobility it is possible to analyse how people are asymmetrically affected by mobility constraints in rural Norway (Cresswell, 2010, 166). The centralisation policies of the state and municipalities, and the material constraints it imposes is investigated through the experienced effect it has on the 12 participants, as a deeper political analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. Lastly, the degrowth perspective illuminates the environmental and lifestyle dimension of rural migration decisions (Singh, 2019, 140). Altogether these are the

main theories informing the analysis and discussion of the participants migration trajectories between the rural and urban spaces.

In order to provide a comprehensive understanding the thesis is divided into five chapters. The background chapter dives deeper into the bygda paradox, and examines the political and economic context of Norwegian rural settlement. Next, it explains how historical and contemporary migration patterns influence the rural urban divide. Further it looks at how material constraints affect opportunities and lives in the rural villages, before moving on to cultural construction of the rural idyll. The chapter concludes with an investigation of the gap between the imaginaries and rural realities, and a positioning of the study.

In chapter two, the theoretical frameworks of the mobility paradigm and importantly the politics of mobility is considered. Additionally, the theories of planetary urbanisation and spatial binaries provide the foundations for understanding how ‘urban’ and ‘rural’ are social constructs. While the rural and urban distinction will be used throughout the thesis, as it is this imagined and real split that is being investigated, ‘rurbanisation’ provides the necessary frame for understanding that the dichotomy is more complicated than it might appear. Finally, the exurban timespace, degrowth theory, and the synthesised theoretical framework of the thesis provides the conclusion to the chapter.

Chapter three frames the qualitative methodology of this study. It outlines the research design, describing the process of qualitative, semi-structured interviews, the research context, as well as the sampling strategy. Next, the participant selection and data collection process is explained, before the chapter moves on the data analysis that is conducted using a reflexive, thematic approach. Finally, the ethical considerations of positionality, consent, and use of AI is considered.

The fourth chapter will answer the research questions in a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the 12 interviews conducted. As noted, the analysis is divided into the four themes of rural idyll imaginaries, temporal perceptions, material constraints, and migration decisions between the urban and rural. The chapter concludes with an examination of the exurban privilege and the limits of mobility in a closing analysis of who is able to follow the rural dream.

Finally, the fifth chapter revisits the research questions in the final examination of how imaginaries of rural idyll might conflict with material constraints. It also looks at what role temporal perceptions played in settlement choices, and how the reality of rural life might differ from the postcard image of the meadow in front of the red, wooden barn during sunset.

Chapter 1 - The Norwegian Bygda Paradox

Norway is a country characterized by spread-out settlement and substantially less centralized habitation than many other countries, such as the neighbouring country Sweden. The geography of Norway is defined by mountains, hills, fjords and valleys. This rugged landscape has greatly influenced settlement and created the villages still existing today. The long stretched country with 15 counties measures 384 483 square kilometers including the arctic island of Svalbard and Jan Mayen ('Norge', Great Norwegian Encyclopedia, 2026).

The Norse word *bygð*, or *bygd* in Norwegian, signifies to build and is defined as a land area with more or less spread-out settlement that constitutes a natural unit (*Bokmål dictionary*, Språkrådet & Universitetet i Bergen, n. d.). *Bygda* (plural) is a popular collective noun for rural villages and implies these areas of land as a whole. In Norwegian it is used not simply as a collective noun, but is rather a concept imbued with different meanings. According to the Great Norwegian Encyclopedia, a *bygd* is a geographically delimited area with spread settlement previously dominated by agriculture, forestry and fishing with processing industries based on these primary industries (Solerød, 2025). Importantly, a *bygd* or village, does not necessarily adhere to the municipal borders, and although all municipalities have a municipal centre, there can be several villages in the same municipality.

The Norwegian statistical bureau (SSB) neither uses the category village nor city, but rather sparsely populated area ('spredtbygd strøk') and densely populated area or urban settlement ('tettsted'). SSB defines an urban settlement as a cluster of buildings inhabited by at least 200 persons with a distance between buildings normally no more than 50 meters (SSB, 2025). These flexible definitions are used to make measuring easier, as areas change quickly in size depending on construction activities and changes of resident population. Sparsely populated areas consist of all lands, homes, and regions lying outside these defined urban bounds. This includes villages, although many villages might also have an urban settlement with a centre. Since 1992 city status has been an honorary, municipal designation rather than an official legal administrative unit and there were 108 official cities in 2022, spread in the 15 counties (Great Norwegian Encyclopedia, 2026). If a municipality has more than 5,000 residents and urban characteristics with concentrated housing and a concentration of trade, services and public institutions the municipal council can decide to grant city status without intervention

from the national government, unless ‘compelling reasons so indicate’ (Great Norwegian Encyclopedia, 2026). There is no linguistic or legal distinction between city and town in Norway, and both translate to *by*. Thus, the term city can be somewhat arbitrary following the municipalities’ own designations. The administrative centre of Volda municipality has around 7,000 inhabitants, while there are around 11,000 people in the whole municipality (SSB, 2025). Nevertheless, Volda administrative centre, with a regional hospital and university college, is considered a village. In this thesis, *bygda* and ‘the village’ will be used interchangeably, and henceforth refers to a place with less than 5000 inhabitants, unless specified otherwise.

There are recurring debates in Norwegian media about the future of the rural villages. As of the most recently available data, 83 % of Norwegian citizens live in cities, or urban settlements, while 17 % reside in sparsely populated areas, or in villages (Auerbach et al., 2024, 3). Although significant exemptions, the Norwegian countryside villages are today increasingly becoming depopulated. While the Norwegian state historically has supported spread-out settlement financially, there have been many changes since the 1990s. This is at the centre of the Norwegian *bygda*, or village, paradox, which has several dimensions.

The significant economic and political dimension of the *bygda* paradox is the fact that Norwegian politicians keep using rhetoric where the countryside is praised as significant, yet finances keeps being withdrawn from rural district areas, and schools as well as local hospitals face constant threats of being shut down (Cruickshank et al., 2009, 82). While dispersed settlement is still a valued characteristic of Norwegian geography and culture, in practice few political parties advocate for this anymore (Cruickshank et al., 2009, 86). Rather, they promote decentralised concentration, where workplaces and services are moved to regional hubs or medium-sized cities (Knudsen, 2020, 65; Vik et al., 2022, 203). However, the paradox is not only political. Culturally, the rural life and especially the *ideas* of the rural life is seen as the quality ‘good’ life, and many Norwegians living in cities, own or have access to second home cabins in rural areas, reinforcing this idea (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 174). As Haugen and Lysgård write, this has had a severe impact on both regional and rural politics and research (2006, 174). Norway can be defined by the contradiction between the idea of the good life in the countryside concurrent with population decline in rural villages, combined with the withdrawal of state support for services (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175; Vik et al., 2022, 203). Temporally, *bygda* can be defined by its perceived slowness and

authenticity, yet slowness is not necessarily available to all, and it is first and foremost second home cabin owners conceptualising the temporal aspects (Bratrud, 2024, 209).

1.1 Norwegian Rural Settlement: Political and Economic Context

First, we will look into the historical development of the rural villages and how they became a symbol of ‘Norwegianness’ thanks to national romantic urbanites. The next section will explore the shifting district policies of the state. After looking at the political and economic contemporary challenges, we will see how migration is shaping the rural urban divide, from the historical exodus from the rural countryside to the cities and contemporary demographic patterns of youth out-migration from the villages and population aging. We will look into the material constraints of work, infrastructure and services. Then we are shifting the focus to cultural constructions of the rural *idyll*. We will see how urban imaginaries of villages are different from rural opinions and realities. Although societies, towns and villages across the world might become more interconnected and homogeneous, there are some social and practical differences that might still prevail. Lastly, the gap between lived experience and imagination will be discussed, before the chapter concludes with a positioning of the study in a brief discussion of why this case matters.

1.1.1 Historical Foundations

During the Viking Age and Middle Ages, approximately spanning the years 885 to 1319, Norway was a kingdom with the same name, the Norse *Nóregr*, (meaning the way to the north) and it was roughly located the same place as it is today (Thuesen, 2026). The political subjugation under Denmark lasted for more than four hundred years (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 3). Following the loss of Napoleon in Germany, the Swedish crown prince Bernadotte defeated Denmark and forced the Danish king to cede Norway to Sweden in 1814 (Rokkan, 1967, 368). Although Norway was a legal sovereign kingdom on paper, the administrative subordination to Copenhagen as well as linguistic and cultural dominance was predominant (Storsveen, 2022). It was the urban middle class in Norway that persuaded the Danish prince Christian Frederick to support and join the movement of independence. Despite being educated in Copenhagen and writing in the Danish language, this urban group with a majority having foreign descent were fully committed to the cause of Norwegian autonomy (Rokkan, 1967, 368). The constitution written in 1814 was based on principles from the Enlightenment, and ensuring legitimacy for their actions through explicit consent of a united people was a

great concern. After a short war with Sweden, the nation became an independent constitutional monarchy, however in union with Sweden under their king Jean-Baptiste Bernadotte, renamed Karl Johan (Storsveen, 2022). After 91 years with a shared foreign policy under the same king, Norway gained full independence in 1905 after a peaceful diplomatic process.

The independence movement and nation making process was dominated by the urban patriciate coming from the cities of Christiania (Oslo) with approximately 10,000 residents at the time, or the commercial city of Bergen with around 18,000 people in 1814 (Stortinget, 2014). Norway was at the time a rural nation of around 900,000 people with only 10% residing in cities (Stortinget, 2014). The leaders of the 1814 uprising had “few and often only impersonal ties with the native peasantry” (Rokkan, 1967, 368). Nonetheless, inspired by the National Romantic movement they looked to the rural countryside in search of a new national identity separating Norway from the neighbouring countries. These urbanites defined the peasants as the “carriers of national identity” and looked to the rural villages for folk costumes, dances and fairytales deciding on which ones would be the central national symbols (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 3). The farmers actually wearing the clothes and dancing the ‘typical’ dances were far less likely to view them as ‘typically Norwegian’ (Østerud, 1984). While the urban middle class had written and partially spoken Danish during the union, most people kept speaking various Norwegian dialects during the Danish Union. As a part of the nation building, a poor peasant’s son, Ivar Aasen travelled the country gathering rural dialects and invented a standard script, *Nynorsk* (‘New Norwegian’) while the already existing *Bokmål* (‘Book language’) and *Riksmål* (‘State language’) were based on Danish writing (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 6). While there was some division in the urban center about which language to use, Nynorsk users saw themselves as the true patriots and “authentic carriers of nationhood” (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 6). Aside from cultural and linguistic debates, the urban centers at the time also dominated the political scene.

Apart from the 10 percent living in cities, another 5 percent lived in agglomerations around coastal trading centers, iron works, sawmills or mines (Rokkan, 1967, 369). The majority of the population were peasants and fishermen, living scattered throughout the countryside and only marginally tied to the cities and centers of trade. While only marginally tied to the money economy, the rural parts of the country were incorporated into the political system,

howbeit the electoral ratio was 1:2 of urban to rural representatives (Rokkan, 1967, 387). This system was later altered, and although the peasants were deeply divided by regions with different economic conditions, they united in the defense of the periphery against the center (Rokkan, 1967, 371). In opposition to the urban elites they were not concerned with the survival of the nation and they cared even less for international affairs (Rokkan, 1967, 371). While many things have changed, certain differences remain central in one of the defining features of Norwegian society, namely the centre periphery cleavage.

1.1.2 Regional Policies

Norway has been defined by the influential sociologist Stein Rokkan as not split between left and right or rural and urban, but as having its main political cleavage between the centre and the periphery (Vik et al., 2022, 201). The differences between the urban and rural oftentimes, especially historically, align with the periphery and center in Rokkan's model from the mid-1960s. The model focuses on labour versus capital, and fishermen's and farmer's interests versus capital interest. Norway remained a poor country with an economy based on the primary sector, with fishing, agriculture, and forestry being important sources of income for centuries (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 1). Industries like hydropower came in the early 1900s but it was not until after the second World War with the long ruling Labour Party and its socialist government the Norwegian welfare state developed (Vik et al., 2022, 202). The middle class grew rapidly with the expansion of the welfare state and the service economy, especially after the discovery of oil in 1967 and 1969 (Hanssen, 2020, 127). While the rural areas were and to a high degree remain the center of the economical engine based on natural resources, state services became centralized and rural to urban migration increased. Rural places being the center of natural resource extraction and central to the national economy, while the political and financial centers remain in urban cities, represents the economic aspect of the bygda paradox.

Norway is a constitutional monarchy with 356 municipalities divided on 15 counties, following the centralisation policies initiated by the Conservative Party-led government and concluded in 2020 (Auerbach et al., 2024). As a unitary state, Norway's constitutional monarchy operates with three governmental tiers: national level, regional level with county municipalities, and local level with municipalities (Hanssen, 2020, 128). Similar to other Scandinavian welfare states, the municipalities and cities are the main welfare service

providers, making them the most decentralized systems in Europe (Hanssen, 2020, 128). Hence, cities have extensive local autonomy. In 1972 and 1994, EU referendums were voted down by the Norwegian population. Local autonomy and protecting agricultural subsidies were important reasons, and rural and peripheral voters were instrumental in the ‘No’ force (Auerbach et al., 2024, 4). In 1972 and 1994, EU referendums were voted down by the Norwegian population. Local autonomy and protecting agricultural subsidies were important reasons, and rural and peripheral voters were instrumental in the ‘No’ force (Auerbach et al., 2024, 4). This signifies that the centre-periphery, or rural-urban question, is a controversial debate in Norway.

Political debate around rural Norway has been centered around two competing logics: either, the rural has been seen as having intrinsic value, or, the rural has been viewed as an actor in a play about economic growth (Cruickshank et al., 2009, 75). During the neoliberal period from the 1980s, the intrinsic rural values of rural settlement and culture with allegedly forced migration and local freedom of action were pushed aside for the focus on economic growth, freedom to establish a business, and to migrate to any preferred location. Economic opportunities and job access are essential to all in the capitalist economy we operate and live within, hence place of residence will naturally influence political opinions (Auerbach et al., 2024, 13). The western world has seen a rise of nationalism and populism with rural voters more often reporting that they feel economically marginalised and treated as disposable (Auerbach et al., 2024, 2). However, Norway has a much higher degree of economic equality between the urban political centers and rural peripheries (Vik et al., 2020, 198). In contrast to evidence from the US, UK and France, Norway’s rural population is not more right-wing leaning when voting in parliament or local elections (Auerbach et al., 2024, 2). The populist right ‘Progress Party’ (FrP) in the multi-party system in Norway does not focus on rural depopulation and specific rural areas in their anti-immigrant, anti-environmental program, and rural voters more frequently turn to the agrarian Centre Party (SP), which is the single party consistently fighting centralisation policies and reversing structural reforms (Auerbach et al., 2024, 5). Auerbach, Eidheim and Fimreite (2024) argue that the rural-urban divide is a cleavage that is separate from the political left-right axis, with the rural identity being stronger than the urban one. This indicates that the social identity following the location of residency is important in Norway.

National Norwegian identities and nationalist sentiment is fairly strong compared to the other Nordic countries, exemplified for instance by Norway having the most nationalistic school curriculum (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 27). While the Norwegian national identity remains strong, Hylland Eriksen argues that the national identity is essentially a rural identity, with value placed on rural links to the home of their ancestors (1993, 10). District rural or urban affiliations are for many a greater element of self defined social identities than the national. Rural identifiers possess stronger place identities than urbanites (Auerbach et al., 2024, 3). Challenges in urban and rural areas are not always the same, and centralisation policies divide opinions between the rural and urban population.

1.1.3 Contemporary Challenges

Norway has had a political consensus of supporting rural development and ensuring even economic growth throughout the country with stable settlement patterns (Vik et al., 2022, 198). However, the policies carried out since the 1990s with closure of local police offices, hospitals and schools shows that the rhetoric differs from actual execution. Sociologists Vik, Fuglestad and Øversveen describe the new political economy as moving away from traditional social democratic welfare into a ‘greedy state’ that combines a large public sector with rolling back services in rural areas (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Meanwhile bureaucracy, controls and taxes are maintained, although several institutions with a rural focus, like the state agriculture bank (‘Statens Landbruksbank’) and the state fishers bank (‘Statens Fiskarbank’) that previously created jobs in peripheral areas, are merged into the more general ‘Innovation Norway’ (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Competition, export, innovation and development, as well as entrepreneurship is now considered most important for growth in rural villages and small peripheral cities (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Ambulance services have been centralised, several maternity homes and local hospitals in towns are closed, and the 2018 police reform led to the closure of many police offices in rural communities (Vik et al., 2022, 203). The education sector is also increasingly centralised with university colleges moving to cities, and the ones remaining being threatened with movement (Auerbach, 2024, 6). Although Norway is a country with less than 6 million inhabitants, there are 53 airports (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 9). However, the last few years have seen domestic routes shutting down, and ferry prices rising. According to an influential newspaper commentator “rural Norway is being built down service by service, institution by institution” (Åmås, 2020, as cited in Vik et al., 2022, 203).

The centralisation does not always mean relocation to the biggest cities, and sometimes public workplaces are relocated in fewer places, in what the government called ‘decentralised concentration’ (Difi, 2019). Norway’s 15 counties are increasingly centralising their services in more concentrated areas, in alignment with the municipality mergers concluded in 2020 initiated by the conservative coalition government (Hanssen, 2020, 129). This decentralised concentration continues to affect peripheral villages by withdrawing public offices and services from the most local level (Vik et al., 2022, 203). This affects migration to the rural areas as well as population decline.

The material withdrawal of the state coincides with a shrinking rural population; as of 2024, 83% live in urban settlements, compared to 77% in 2000 (Auerbach, 2024, 3; SSB, 2001). Meanwhile, the amount of people circulating to the rural villages to spend time in their second homes or cottages has increased with a record of 420,000 second homes in 2011 (Overvåg, 2011, 155). The second home phenomenon in Norway is causing tensions in different ways, notably through pressuring housing prices up in municipalities with large second home cottage property areas. Buying a house or an apartment is common practice in Norway, with incentives by banks and a strong state supporting the practice. The fact that thousands of Norwegians have second homes, undermines the opportunities of people living in or wanting to move to rural areas in entering the housing market (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 62). Many rural municipalities struggle with their economies, and prioritise catering for the part-time migrants visiting for recreation with development of new recreational property areas, while housing development for the local populations remains low (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 63). In the next section we will look closer at the migration patterns to and from the rural villages in Norway.

1.2 Migration Patterns: The Rural Urban Divide

1.2.1 Historical Exodus and Contemporary Patterns

The population in the rural villages in Norway has seen a steady decline in the last year, in similar fashion to the other Nordic countries (Heleniak & Gassen, 2020, 41). Although Sweden is different in its considerable centralisation policies since the mid-1950s, essentially removed people from the whole northern part of the country (Knudsen, 2020, 61). While Norway has kept its scattered settlement pattern, the demographics have changed. In most

regions, there is a considerable aging of the rural population, more than in the cities which are also currently experiencing the demographic shift of an aging population and declining birth rate (Heleniak & Gassen, 2020, 50). The old-age dependency ratio increased from 24% in 1990, to 30% in 2017, with rural areas aging faster (Heleniak & Gassen, 2020, 50). The decline of the rural population is also connected to outmigration, a phenomenon that is not new in Norway.

Historically, Norwegians lived spread-out, where they could find land to cultivate or water to catch fish. The majority of people were poor peasants that aimed at diversifying their income with fishing or other natural resource-based seasonal occupations, like timberwork, while also keeping some land (Rokkan, 1967, 371). In the 19th and early 20th centuries, approximately 860,000 Norwegians emigrated to America (Grytten, 2008). This phenomenon was propelled by economic stagnation during the 1880s, causing poverty and creating a chain effect as emigrants sent letters home that encouraged family and friends to follow (Grytten, 2008). The agriculture and mining industries have especially been influential to people coming from rural areas, who leave not necessarily because they want to, but rather due to opportunities being elsewhere (Rye, 2006, 202). Since industrialisation began in the 1850s, young people have moved to the cities for education and work (Heleniak & Gassen, 2020, 42). The net rural-to-urban migration pattern and urbanisation has remained consistent also after World War II, reinforced by the growth of the service economy and declining opportunities in traditional sectors such as agriculture (Hanssen, 2020, 127).

The contemporary pattern of migration to and from the rural villages is influenced not only by how many return to the villages after a period away, for studies, travels and work, but also by international migrants settling in the rural villages. Many refugees are settled for a two year period not by personal choice, but through state settlement schemes designed to distribute the population across the country (Auerbach et al., 2024, 30). This immigration has 'saved' rural population figures in many regions and villages (Vestby, 2018, 11), although many migrants leave after their mandatory period ends (Vestby, 2018, 12). While most second home owners move cyclically for leisure, a growing number are relocating to the rural village full-time (Bratrud, 2024a, 221). A large part of this in-migrant group are remote workers keeping their city-based jobs and higher salaries (Bratrud, 2024a, 222). The desire for rural life and actual migration behaviour is not necessarily linear. Grimsud (1999) notes that the desire to live in rural villages among young people is significantly higher than actual

population figures suggest (cited in Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). While this desire to relocate is present, movement does not always follow. Many who grew up in the countryside report a variety of reasons for their uncertainty about returning, for instance access to work, social networks and geographical distance as the primary material barriers (Villa, 2000, 486).

1.2.2 The Material Conditions of Rural Life

Rural villages need people to thrive, and people need a livelihood. Yet traditional industries of farming, fishing and forestry have become increasingly automated, large-scale, and less labour intensive due to government incentives (Vik et al, 2022, 203). The material conditions, such as access to jobs, schools and in some places affordable housing increasingly make rural life difficult to sustain. With the decline of the agrarian primary industry economy, jobs in the rural outskirts have become scarce concurring with the rise of the industrial and service economies that are predominantly urban (Knudsen, 2020, 59). Remote work has opened new possibilities of settlement, and after the coronavirus period the amount of people having access to home office and remote opportunities has increased (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 67). New labour structures heavily depend on physical infrastructure. Broadband connection or quality mobile network is widespread in the rural Norwegian countryside, including in leisure home areas (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 59). Both workers in knowledge-intensive business services such as consultants, as well as workers in the culture sector or high-competence public sector, oftentimes have access to remote working opportunities (Bratrud, 2024a, 222). These middle class part-time and full-time migrants relocating to their cabins or moving permanently, keep their city-based jobs and salaries in their 'exurban' life, shifting between urban and rural spaces.

Careers and oftentimes also social networks are maintained in the cities, causing many in this group to travel back and forth in circulating migration. Although many in this group seek a slower paced life, and experience a shift in rural areas, they remain connected to city life and the fast pace experienced there, either digitally or when travelling back and forth (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). This negotiation of time between different spheres creates new layers of time in their lives, conceptualised by anthropologist Tom Bratrud as the exurban timespace (2024a, 207). Whereas some of these privileged online workers migrated to the rural areas to escape what they experienced as long commutes in the cities, most people living in rural areas are heavily dependent on expensive private transport, costing both money and time (Milbourne &

Kitchen, 2014, 331). Physical distance for accessing work, health services and schools makes living in remote rural villages more costly. Most people rely on private vehicles, as public transport in rural localities is limited and, when available, often infrequent, sometimes restricted to a single daily departure (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Norway is defined by vast physical distances: a drive from the Russian border to the Southern part of the Northern counties can take up to 22 hours to complete, reinforcing the material costs of the centre-periphery divide.

When state services are withdrawn from the rural countryside it makes life more strenuous and precarious, especially living far away from health services. The centralisation of services, as described in part 2.2, translated directly to increased practical difficulties of living in rural peripheral villages. While many might dream of moving to the rural countryside, or returning to their home village, even self-sufficient rural life is not possible without functioning municipal services (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 58-59). In many places it turns into a negative spiral where less services makes it harder for people to move or return to the rural village, and when population decreases, it is even harder to defend the sustenance of the services. The reinforced material constraints make rural life more inaccessible and increases the differences between those who can afford increased costs and might have flexible jobs with more time for occasional commutes or home office, and those who can not (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 62; Bratrud, 2024a, 221). However, material constraints are not the only explanation of the rural-urban divide, cultural constructions of places can weaken people's desire to stay, move back, or enter the rural spaces for the first time.

1.3 Cultural Constructions: the Rural Idyll

1.3.1 Imaginaries of Bygda

The cultural construction of rural life in Norway has deep historical roots. Spending time in nature, hiking and being independent are considered 'typically' Norwegian values (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 11). Not only has this influenced rural, regional politics and research, but also personal and lifestyle choices. "The rural way of living has been and still is more or less regarded as the hegemonic norm for 'quality of life' in Norwegian society" (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 174). Rural values influence individual behaviour, with nearly 75% Norwegians going hiking in the woods or mountains over the course of a year, translating to roughly 3.4 million people (SSB, 2024). The construction of "Norwegianness" as a rural form

of life, closer to nature, moves back to the above mentioned National Romantic period, where middle class urbanites equalised rural Norwegian traditions as national norms in distinction to the previously dominating neighbouring countries (Rokkan, 1967, 368). Like other European nations, hiking and trekking became popular in the late 19th- early 20th century with nature and mountains representing “the authentic, real, clean, and free” for the urban middle classes, in contrast to “distressed city life and cultivated nature” (Bratrud, 2024b, 129). This consciously spent leisure time is connected to the creation of identity which is often tied to places people choose to spend their time.

The connection many people living in cities have with nature is less practical and concrete than in the past. Consumption of a place as a phenomenon has grown with social media and increased value placed on experiences over material goods in many layers of society (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). Creation of lifestyle and identity is connected to social status and more than before seen as a product of individual choices (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 174). The places we live or spend our leisure time is often a part of creating identities (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 174). With a historically large middle class and more than 400,000 second homes and cottages in Norway, a large proportion of people seek closeness to nature and use rural spaces for recreational activities and leisure consumption (Overvåg, 2011, 156). Many have a positive relationship with nature and the countryside and spend considerable amounts of time in their cottages during weekends, holidays and perhaps also during weekdays if the chance to work remotely is present (Bratrud, 2024a, 216). While cottages were once simple constructions without electricity, many present-day second homes feature modern amenities, broad band connection and remote working infrastructure (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 59). Autonomous life, far away from others, is still an unquestionable cultural value for many Norwegians (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 58). Densely constructed new cabin areas, often located in mountainous municipalities, may indicate that this value is becoming a construction rather than the lived reality for many.

The imaginary of rural idyll is connected precisely to nature, solace, the ‘authentic’ simple life, as well as slowing down time. “Whereas the city may be experienced as grey, expensive, noisy and stressful, rurality is experienced– or imagined– as green, quiet, spacious, and safe” (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Rural values are important and influence how many Norwegians live their lives, but perhaps more importantly how they want to live their lives, and the dream of a

‘good life’. This life is oftentimes closely connected to nature, and to living a ‘free’, autonomous existence. Being free and in control of your own time intertwines with perceptions of rural idyll and Bratberg’s concept of exurban timespace.

All people have their own experiences of time, but not all people have the financial or social capacities needed to control and decide over their time. Affluent urbanites with a good salary working in so-called knowledge-intensive jobs in the service sectors and culture industries are more likely to have flexible jobs with options of remote work. This gives them the opportunity of staying in their second homes for extended periods of time, and hence enter the physical and digital exurban timespace (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Seeking to escape what they perceive as time compression, rush and stagnance in the cities during commutes marked by traffic, they seek slowness in rural villages. Bratberg describes this experience of rural space as offering relief from urban time pressure as spatiotemporal decompression (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). The temporal imaginary of the rural countryside being perceived as slow is important in understanding why urban Norwegians seek rural spaces.

While the 83% of Norwegians living in cities ‘consume’ rural spaces in their spare time, seeking autonomy, closeness to nature and control over their time, modern existence requires contact with and access to services. When the country ‘shut down’ during covid-19 in March 2020 many travelled straight to their second homes in the rural countryside. The public health services in the municipalities these are located in were however not ready to receive thousands of people not even officially residing there, causing tensions between locals and part-time residents (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 58). This brings us to the material realities of life in the rural peripheries.

1.3.2 Between Imaginary and Reality

As we have seen, the different imaginaries of the rural areas are mostly constructed by people living in urban centers without daily lives in the rural spheres. Hence understanding more of what constitutes life in rural peripheral villages is crucial before disentangling what are imaginaries and what is reality. Groups of people residing in rural areas are not heterogeneous, and age, gender, occupation and geographical specificities make for different experiences (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). Rural villages are not separate entities, but connected to regional, national and global politics and social processes. Population decline,

aging and masculinisation of rural communities is a phenomenon in several countries including in Norway, that might make some villages more uniform, while others experience new meanings and become diverse (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). That said, differences between living everyday life in the rural countryside rather than the cities, makes for clashes in values and understanding of resources between the rural and urban population.

Second home cabins are often physically separate from local communities in rural villages, built as recreational enclaves (Overvåg, 2011, 156). This creates not only physical, but also social gaps between part-time migrants and local people, possibly creating tensions between the two groups. In Bratrud and Lien's field work, a farmer in the middle of Southern Norway reported that 'cabin people' repeatedly ignored local villagers and their way of life, in addition to the municipality prioritising construction of new second home areas, effectively dismantling pasture land (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 61). When second home owners travel to rural areas to spend time closer to nature, it is rather a consumption of beauty and place of exercising sports like skiing, biking and walking, than co-existing and utilising nature for practical purposes like farming, fishing or forestry. The cabin owners also put pressure on the housing market, both when inherited houses are kept as second homes by relatives having moved to the cities, but also by driving prices up in the most popular cabin municipalities (Overvåg, 2011, 159). Although being fully employed, some young people in full employment cannot afford buying a house, despite state incentives making this practice common in the Norwegian context (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 62). They report a loss of self-worth and a feeling that their lives are subordinate compared to that of the cabin people with ability to shift between A- and B-lives (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 62). Many smaller municipalities struggle with their economies, and some of these prioritise building recreational property areas to enhance their economy. While this is meant to boost the local economy, the municipality does not fully prosper because outside realtor investors, oftentimes located in urban centers, are the ones to invest and benefit the most off of these development projects (Vik et al., 2022, 203).

In rural villages, the populations and naturally social communities are smaller. People often have an overview of who everyone else is, in what is known as the 'everybody knows everybody' effect (Farstad & Zahl-Tanem, 2021, 551). Although this oftentimes is not literal, and people know of, rather than personally know, it is still this effect that provides for the

sense of tight knit, safe communities frequently associated with rural villages (Rye, 2006, 201). Although spacious places with known faces provide for perceived safe places of raising kids, teenagers and adolescents can experience this same familiarity as claustrophobic. Small or tight-knit communities are often recognised by social cohesion, and this cohesion and the watchful eyes of neighbours can be perceived as social control and difficulty in sticking out (Haugen & Villa, 2006, 209; Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 178). This is most frequently reported by young people, who are also an important out-migrant group, often leaving the villages for education and work in the cities (Rye, 2006, 201). The same group might return in later stages of life, for instance when raising a family of their own (Kloep et al., 2003, 106).

Small communities where people know each other might have a higher degree of social solidarity. The act of coming together voluntarily to help each other with practical things, either for one person or family, or the whole community, is known as ‘dugnad’ in Norwegian. The ‘dugnadsånd’ (willingness to volunteer) is reportedly stronger in tightknit local communities in the rural countryside rather than in the cities (Blekesaune & Haugen, 2018, 233). Stronger connections to primary sectors such as agriculture might be a part of the answer to why this happens. Although centralisation is making services and welfare systems less prevalent in the rural outskirts, a lack of political presence is likely less of a cause for this phenomenon, than the social cohesion and mutual obligation experienced in rural communities (Villa, 2000, 478). Urban centres on the other hand, are known to be more anonymous and individualistic. Norwegian cities are very small from a global perspective, yet the willingness to help out on a volunteer basis is decreasing (Bygnes, 2017, 289). This social fact is not necessarily contradictory to what urban Norwegians think of the countryside, rather it probably increases the image of rural idyll.

The gap between the social and political dimensions of life in rural villages is what brings us back to the bygda paradox. As urban inhabitants and to some extent the state keep romanticising rural idyll, the services and affordable housing development in rural areas are restricting life in countryside villages, effectively making life more difficult for the rural population. While the image of rural idyll is first and foremost an urban construct, many rural municipalities spend large amounts of money on marketing campaigns aimed at attracting young in-migrants (Vestby, 2018, 17). The hospitality sector is also willingly selling the pictures of small farms in the sunset as well as picturesque fishing villages in attempts to attract tourists (Vestby, 2018, 19; Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). People living in rural areas

have a different, and arguably more nuanced perception of rural idyll as they know the material restrictions of a life far away from service centers and cities. Still, it is not a homogenous group and Haugen and Lysgård reminds us that rural identities and representations are continuously being negotiated and renegotiated, both personally and collectively (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). Cultural imaginaries, especially of localities different from one's own, should be carefully scrutinised and investigated in relation to the material conditions and not least measures against the opinions of the people inhabiting the imagined spaces. This will be the first objective of the analysis in part 4.1.

1.4 Positioning the study

The background information provided is meant to give an overview of what the Norwegian village is, who lives there and the reasons why they choose to live there or to move. It explained material constraints such as access to jobs, services and transport infrastructure, but also the constructed ideas about the rural. The literature and information about this will make it possible to analyse the interviews made with people currently or formerly residing in Norwegian rural villages, and analyse their experiences with the constructions of rural imaginaries, as well as their lived rural reality.

My thesis is arguing that the concept of rural idyll is an urban middle class construction, the realities of material constraints such as access to jobs, services and transport shape the rural life and heavily influence former rural inhabitants desire and reluctance to return to the rural villages. Slowness is an important part of the rural idyll concept but remains a luxury that many cannot afford, maybe especially those residing in the rural villages. Mostly second home owners from the cities are the ones accessing this slowness, yet in the exurban timespace while they stay connected to the cities. Meanwhile, the slower paced village life is also reported as significant for the people formerly having lived in villages.

This thesis investigates the gap between the desire for the countryside on the one hand, and the material realities shaping rural life on the other. To better understand this divergence and the *bygda* paradox, the analysis of the thesis will focus on temporal imaginaries in the face of material constraints. Sociological and geographical research in Norway has focused more on out- and return migration to the rural countryside, as well as conceptualisations of *bygda* (Wiborg 2003; Orderud 1998; Rye 2006; Villa 2000 and Haugen & Lysgård 2006). This

thesis is closer to anthropologist Tom Bratrud's research on spatiotemporal decompression and urban to rural migration. The main focus in this thesis is about the material versus temporal aspect and how it affects migration decisions between the rural and urban spaces, hence both ways and not only migration to rural villages. Temporal imaginaries and ideas of the rural countryside in contrast to the material constraints is the main analytical framework that will follow in the analysis of people's preferred place to settle or spend their time. In order to analyse the four themes of rural imaginaries, temporal perceptions, material constraints, and migration decisions, the following chapter introduces the theoretical framework.

Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework: Mobility, Timespace and the Rural

In order to better understand the case of the Norwegian rural countryside and its intersection with global processes of migration, urbanisation and technological interconnections, we will dive deeper into the concepts of mobility, planetary urbanisation, exurban timespace and the degrowth paradigm.

The world today is characterised by increased movement more than any other period of time in history. Transport, goods, capital, people and ideas move more frequently and faster than ever. While these markers of globalisation and interconnectedness have been established facts especially since the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution with the spread of the internet in the 1990s, the so-called mobility turn in the social sciences only occurred in the early 2000s. Where globalisation theories analyse interconnection, and talk less of the actual physical, virtual, communicative movements occurring, this is at the centre of the mobilities turn, which examines all kinds of movement but also perceived sedentarism and stasis that are seen as the antithesis to mobility. The mobilities turn is not simply a claim emphasising the tendencies of faster movement and greater intensity of flows, mimicking the baseline of globalisation. It is rather a theoretical project “aimed at going beyond the imagery of ‘terrains’ as spatially fixed geographical containers for social processes” (Sheller & Urry, 2006, 209). Geographical location and space remain crucial, but these are not static and still, rather they are connected with communication technologies, people and other places in new ways that calls for new theorisations.

According to Sheller and Urry, the mobilities paradigm looks toward a new, mobile "smooth" world where cultural, social, and political practices are no longer linked to native places and populations. Despite the fact that the world is becoming more interconnected, the paradigm does not simply ignore nation states and territorial boundaries. Rather than giving a total description of the world the paradigm poses new questions, methods and theories creating new conversations and debates. The mobilities turn is an attempt to bring together the social sciences and humanities with an inclusive and elastic concept, enabling debate and unexpected research across diverse fields such as transport research, historiography and various social sciences (Biasiori, Mazzini & Rabbiosi, 2023, 2).

Physical places can seem uncomplicated and made up by geographical and demographic factors. But a place and the spaces constituting it are not just physical, but made up in the imaginaries of the people residing in, visiting, passing through or simply thinking about them. The socially constructed nature of places makes defining the rural, the urban, the ‘rurban’ and even the village a complicated endeavour. Our world is made up by socially constructed ideas that by many are experienced as mere everyday facts. The concept of time is likewise or perhaps even more complex to define, not just because of its intangible nature, but because of the wide range of ways different people in different parts of the world experience it.

In this chapter we will first look closer at the mobilities paradigm, from movement to mobility, to the politics of mobility. Next we will address spatial binaries and the boundaries of a place. Why are we often thinking in binaries such as the city versus the rural, and how can we move beyond that? The concepts of planetary urbanisation and ‘rurbanisation’ might provide some answers to these questions. Places and their socially constructed meanings are closely related to perceptions of time. Many describe feelings of time moving fast in the city ‘rush’ and slower in rural villages closer to nature (Bratrud, 2024a, 212). We will look into how movement between cities and remote rural areas is about more than physical relocation and digital connectivity, but is also imbued with perceptions of time in what is conceptualised as ‘exurban timespace’. In an attempt to better understand what constitutes future sustainable movement and ways of living we will investigate the degrowth thesis and its connections to mobility, speed and slowness. Lastly I will attempt to summarise the theories and how they will be used in the analysis of the thesis as a conclusion of the chapter.

2.1 The Mobilities Paradigm

2.1.1 From Movement to Mobility

Being human is being mobile. Mobility is not new, but a fundamental part of what it means to be human. The term mobility is broad and encompasses a scale ranging from the body and mobility of blood in our veins, to intricate systems of movement across continents. It is not only about movement within and through the physical body, but also the movement of machines, tangible items, and information through different channels. Hence it is a broad concept, and importantly a theoretical one. Through the lens of movement it is possible to investigate what is considered still and in place, in new ways. The breath of the concept

makes it somewhat vague, but it is also the reason why it becomes useful and interesting as an analytical tool that can be used across disciplines that in the realms of academia as well as political and corporate life tends to be disconnected in an increasingly specialised society.

While movement has often been taken for granted or treated as merely the opposition of sedentarism, being still, and in-place, the mobilities paradigm investigates movement of all kinds, also the so-called sedentarist states; stillness as the opposition to movement. The mobility paradigm challenges treating stability, meaning and place as normal, while distance, change and placelessness are considered abnormal (Sheller and Urry, 2006, 208). While Heidegger describes *wohnen* or dwelling as “the manner in which humans should inhabit the earth”, being content or in peace at home in one place, Sheller and Urry discard it as territorial nationalism, namely treating shared territory as the primary defining factor of national identity (2006, 208). While studies in geography, sociology and anthropology have utilised sedentarist theories in their studies, the theory of mobility reverses this and argues that the 21st century societies are to a greater extent shaped by change, placelessness and distance, than stability, meaning and place.

Mobility goes beyond mere physical movement, and looks at how physical movement, representations and practices are tied together (Cresswell, 2010). Although physically challenging to separate, in theory it is possible to dissect this entanglement and look at what movement means and how it is practiced. Cresswell argues that mobility exists in the same relation to movement as place does to location (2010, 160; 2006, 3). While movement is a general term, mobility is specific and needs contextualisation. Physical movement, the meaning of movement and the practice of movement together constitute particular patterns that can collectively be called mobility.

First, physical movement of people, ideas or things is the raw material of mobility. To understand physical movement it is often measured and mapped, with models being created for example in sport studies or by transport planners. These models often measure physical movement and make ‘universal’ models based on these.

Second, the meaning of movement can be viewed through representations of mobility. We transmit all sorts of meaning to mobility. Mobility keeps being represented in a myriad of ways, “(...) as adventure, as tedium, as education, as freedom, as modern and as threatening”

(Cresswell, 2010, 161). In the past mobile subjects were often viewed with suspicion, and the mobility of migrants and refugees are still seen as a threat by some people. Conversely, the right to mobility is seen as fundamental to modern Western citizenship, both in legal documents and as a taken for granted privilege by many people in the West. Moving and working slowly has connotations ranging from laziness to resistance. Third, mobility as practice looks at everyday mobile practices like walking and driving, but also the habits of these movements. How mobilities are practiced and what meaning we place upon the mobile experience is an important aspect of the politics of mobility.

2.1.2 The Politics of Mobility

Mobility is not a neutral endeavour. Who moves, how, when and under which conditions are important questions of the politics of mobility. The determinant factors of these politics play out at different scales, from international and national laws and policies, down to discrimination or freedom experienced by the body. Cresswell defines motive, speed, rhythm, route, experience and friction as six important elements of the politics of mobility (2010). To highlight the inequality of mobility we need to look at mobile friction.

The friction of mobility raises important questions of choice in movement. When does mobility stop, or slow down and is it a forced or voluntary halt in movement? Borders, infrastructure and cost are all important aspects of the distribution of friction. Physical distance of borders now matters less than who we are for getting past a border. Class, ethnicity, gender, nationality and religious belonging are group identity markers or structures heavily influencing the friction many experience when executing their mobility. Who is not stopped, can move easily, and only stop when they choose to would typically be a white middle aged person with a passport from a Western country. Racial profiling based on skin color or other identity markers force many into forced impediment of movement. This racist friction can also be impacted by rhythm.

Rhythm impacts who can move undisturbed. “Often certain kinds of people, possibly those with suspicious rhythms, are stopped at national borders – sometimes for hours, sometimes only to be sent back (Cresswell, 2010, 167). Older businesspeople are used to travel traverse an airport with ease and nonchalance while others, often younger people, face suspicion. Structural factors heavily influence and determine the politics of mobility and its related mobility injustice. A border crossing will feel different depending on who you are and how

likely you are to face difficulties and discrimination in your mobile patterns. The friction of mobility is closely related to the speed of movement.

The velocity of mobility is a crucial aspect of the politics of mobility. “Speeds, slownesses and immobilities are all related in ways that are thoroughly infused with power and its distribution” (Cresswell, 2010, 162). As Cresswell specifies, the speed of one person is often imbued with the slowness of another (2010, 162). Transport infrastructure dominates most inhabited places of the earth, and with the rise of increased traffic your speed has become a determinant of class (Illich, 1973, 14). Having the power and affordability of controlling your own time is not a common privilege. The faster you move and the easier you circumvent queues, the richer and more privileged you are. Upper-class wealthy people can circumvent traffic or queues with private airplanes or fast-track tickets shortening down time in airports. Meanwhile, lack of mobility options are sometimes looked down upon. “Those who must get around on their own power have been redefined as underdeveloped outsiders. Tell me how fast you go and I'll tell you who you are” (Illich, 1973, 14). Outside the realms of transport, slow movements can be associated with luxury due to its dependence on surplus of time. ‘Slow food’, as well as the slow city movements, can be criticised as bourgeois in its defense of their enclaves of interest instead of offering more general social transformation models (Tomlinson, 2007, 147). Inequality is inherent in most social processes, also those of mobility. Our rhythm, velocity and the friction we experience is a part of how we individually or as groups experience mobility.

The experience of mobility includes how we practice movement and our habits relating to it. The external world of expectations and compulsion influence our embodied practice of mobility (Cresswell, 2010, 161). Movement can feel painful, freeing, boring or fun. Outside structures influence our possibilities of movement and decide how far we can go, when and how. However, inner sensations of movement and motivations also shape our mobile experiences. Experiences of mobility are most clearly conceptualised on a narrow, bodily scale. These experiences are contingent on our (lack of) rights to move. Global and national politics determine the power of the passport you carry and the freedom you have to move or to stay safely still (Cresswell, 2010, 164; Sheller, 2018, 23). Mobilities are not practiced in a vacuum and in addition to access they are dependent on places. To better understand how and why people move, we need to look into the scales of which they are mobile and the spatial dimension in which mobility occurs.

2.2 Planetary Urbanisation and Spatial Binaries

2.2.1 Beyond the Urban and Rural Divide

The cities of our world are growing, and many of us now reside in a city. Our urban world is getting increased attention, as shown by the rise of distinct academic disciplines like urban studies, critical urban studies and urban political ecology. Within these urban disciplines the so-called ‘Urban Age’ has been gaining momentum as the new hype term for analysing our society in similar fashion to the technological society or the post-modern society (Lefebvre, 1970/2003, 2). The UN, demographers and a multifold number of social scientists have focused on the world crossing the groundbreaking threshold of more human beings living in the cities than outside of cities by the year of 2010, with estimates varying (Brenner & Schmid, 2014, 734). Sociologists Angelo and Wachsmuth dismiss this as “methodological cityism”, a one-sided focus on the city as a separate unit not acknowledging the interconnections and entanglements of the spaces and systems of the world today (2014, 20). They criticize the tendency of using urbanization and city as interchangeable terms. In a predominantly urban world, city-centrist thinking does not help to explain how not just the cities, but our whole planet is becoming urbanised.

Deeply ingrained into the common imagination is the division between city and countryside: centre or periphery, fast or slow, densely or sparsely populated, skyscrapers and apartment complexes or scattered houses and farms. The urban jungle against green nature, and fast-paced rush against slower, peaceful calmness. During the early industrialisation of the 19th and 20th centuries these many differences indeed ran deep. These strict lines separating the geographical spaces of the urban and the rural have however been contested and criticized in the last fifty years.

We could probably all instinctively say whether any given place was rural to us, rather than urban, but explaining why it was rural, not urban, and drawing a boundary line between urban and rural space on a map are altogether more difficult tasks.

(Woods, 2011, 3)

The imagined dichotomy of the rural and urban remind us of the obvious yet often forgotten fact that borders and ideas about places are social constructs. In his famous 1970 thesis, Henri Lefebvre claims that “society has become completely urbanised” (1970/2003, 1). Instead of the term ‘postindustrial society’, society being born of industrialisation and the succession of

this industrialisation, Lefebvre argues that ‘urban society’ better captures the tendencies, orientations and virtualities of our times. As agricultural production has lost its place as the most important sector in industrialised countries and the world economy, urbanisation and industrial agriculture changes the traditional features of the countryside. “The *urban fabric* grows, extends its borders, corrodes the residue of agrarian life” (Lefebvre, 1970/2003, 3). The emphasis Lefebvre places is not on the city as a collective agglomeration, but the dominance of the city over other areas, including the countryside. This ‘urban revolution’ as titled by Lefebvre heavily influenced other scholars and changed the dichotomy of rural and urban.

The rural and urban spatial binary is further deconstructed by sociologists Brenner and Schmidt in their theorisation of the urban. They argue that inherited, city-centric approaches reduce the urban to a territorially bounded settlement type or nodal agglomerations, while not acknowledging the fact that cities are not separate, independent units but bigger networks that connect to the areas around as well as other cities in a myriad of ways (Brenner & Schmidt, 2015, 47). Cities are not islands with some suburbs surrounding them before the scenery turns into green countryside. While visually still accurate for some places, it hides the fact of the intersecting infrastructure and economic systems entangling places, cities, villages and nature around the world.

Twenty-first century capitalism is creating a constantly changing world. Urbanization processes have radically accelerated and changed since the 1980s and hence the rural versus urban has become an analytically, methodologically flawed binary (Brenner & Schmid, 2014, 750). The urban has never been fixed or static, but rather a process that has continuously been connected to broader patterns of global capitalist development (Brenner & Schmid, 2014). Urbanisation and capitalism are processes that go hand-in-hand, and they perpetuate each other. In the same way as capitalism spreads and intersects with socio-cultural and political processes, urbanisation is a process integrating the densely populated spatial agglomerations we call cities with all other areas of the planet in a process occurring in both directions. “The urban *unfolds* into the countryside just as the countryside *folds* back into the city (...). Absorbed and obliterated by vaster units, rural places have become (...) swallowed up by an ‘urban fabric’ continually extending its borders” (Merrifield, 2011, 468-9). Rural places are not stand still separate units driven by their own centers, but rather an essential part of the

production systems of the world absorbed into the greater economic system. This entanglement is further characterized within the term ‘rurbanisation’.

2.2.2 ‘Rurbanisation’

Peri-urbanisation, suburbanisation, counter-urbanisation and rurbanisation are all concepts seeking to describe different facets of the entanglement of the rural and urban. Further complicating the task of defining this phenomenon is the fact that different authors apply different meanings to these terms, in different languages (Caruso, 2001, 10). “Rurban”, translated from the French *rural* and *urbain* (“rurbain”) often refers to the influence of the ‘urban way of life’ on countryside areas (Caruso, 11). It does not mainly focus on scenery and landscape, but demography and lifestyles of the ‘rural’ residents. The rurban is separate from suburban and peri-urban because it does not necessitate a direct link to a city, or even the existence of a city. What then constitutes an ‘urban way of life’, and how is the rural and urban physically connected?

“The ‘countryside’ is not just a physical place: it is also a socio-cultural space imbued with ideas about ‘rurality’” (Hämeenaho, 2013, 4). When looking into different imaginaries of places, group distinction and location can be important when trying to understand the cultural construction. Urban residents in Finland had a perception of the countryside and its “rural idyll” emphasizing the “significance of nature and rural lifestyles founded on ‘traditional’ values” and seeing it as a “space for ‘pastoral’ living and lifestyle” (Hämeenaho, 2013, 7). The vantage point was important also when youth in Norway residing in rural areas constructed ideas of the ‘urban’ and the ‘rural’. The rural life is seen as safe, small, with close relations where everybody knows everybody, while the urban city is seen as anonymous, risky and with impersonal relations (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). The downside of the familiar, close-knit rural village where everyone knows everyone is the perceived supervision, rumors and gossip, that challenges the ideas of the rural idyll (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 178). Social perceptions and constructions help us understand the complex multifaceted composition of places and the contrasts between the Nordic rural countryside and cities.

While cultural constructions of rurality “remain heavily laden with notions of stability, rootedness, attachment to place and localism”, Milbourne and Kitchen argue that

the so-called stabilities of the rural are fluid in nature (2014, 328). A range of mobilities influence rural places and rural imaginaries. People move constantly, also those coming from and living in rural villages in the countryside. Rural population change is not just a narrow, uni-directional, long-distance permanent movement of people, but a complex process of mobilities and demographic change (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, 327). In contemporary life boundaries are often blurred, and lifestyles are not necessarily dependent on the location of your residence. Physical and technological infrastructure ties together places in ways that often allows for relatively fast mobility between different places and people. Transport accessibility often differs between city agglomerations and villages in the countryside. Lack of access to frequent, stable public transport and car dependency create rural transport disadvantages. Car dependency can create a vulnerable situation especially for people living alone with disabilities or health constraints.

“(im)mobility represents a significant dimension of rural deprivation, with the closure of local shops, the centralisation of public and social services, and the retraction of public transport provision trapping some groups within local space and forcing others to employ complex coping strategies to access facilities and services that have relocated to other places”

(Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, 328)

Car ownership and dependency in remote rural areas is not just about being free to move, but about accessing life sustaining services and covering daily essential needs. The information and communication technology (ICT) has allowed some essential services to become available also in remote rural areas, but it is oftentimes dependent on good broadband connection. Information and the opportunity for some people to work remotely from home, does not however cater for all necessities in life. Centralisation of services like healthcare, education and retail maintains mobility injustices in many rural areas today, even if they have become ‘rurban’ in nature. Despite these difficulties, many people, perhaps especially urban city dwellers, keep a romantic view of the rural, remote village and the perceived abundance of time that is found there.

2.3 Temporality and Exurban Timespace

2.3.1 A Historical Change of Time

Modern interconnectedness has changed perceptions of time and space. In 1869 the transcontinental railroad in the US forced the more than 200 existing time zones into four, in

order to avoid crashing as well as allowing for timetabled trips for passengers (Cresswell, 2006, 10). Systematisation of time is an effect of industrialisation. The capitalist notion “time is money”, stamping in and out of fabrics, created a new distinction between work and leisure time. “Time, like money, increasingly became an omnipresent abstract measure of value” (Bratrud, 2024a, 215). In 1884, Greenwich time became the prime meridian and the world was divided into twenty-four time zones. This new ‘clock time’ was in contrast with the rhythm of nature and ‘task time’ governed by seasons and the rhythm on a farm or other non-industrial livelihoods in the countryside (Bratrud, 2024a, 214). Although these notions of time are not fixed contrasts, the industrial or post-industrial ‘clock time’ views time spent *not* working more often as value being lost.

Many have experienced an unease between the rigid, linear work time and more flexible, anti-linear home time. The tension between the two is often mapped on to place: to work late when it is supposed to be family time at home, in the weekends, or on holiday often leads to bad feelings because it represents a fundamental incompatibility between work-related feelings (which are about moving on) and family-related feelings (which are about staying put).

(Bratrud, 2024a, 215)

This discrepancy between different senses of time for different aspects of life can certainly apply to remote rural areas as well as bustling city life. Especially as the notion of losing time is exacerbated by digital technologies extending work connection and availability into leisure time and blurring spatial divisions (Bratrud, 2024a, 215). Construction of time is linked to work and money, but also and perhaps even more so to the perception of place. The notion of a slower rural pace is perhaps most clearly articulated by city dwellers.

2.3.2 The Exurban Timespace

While the contrast between the rural and urban can be, as we have seen, problematic, life in a bustling metropole will undeniably have some differences to life in places too small to be recognised as a town. In 1903 sociologist Georg Simmel diagnosed urban metropole life with its rapid succession of changing images as intensifying the nervous system of humans.

In producing these psychological conditions in every crossing of the street and in the tempo and multiplicity of its economic, occupational and social life, the metropolis creates a strong contrast to small-town and country life with its slower, more habitual, more regular rhythm in the very sensory foundation of the life of our souls.

(Simmel, 1903/2020, 6)

The strong sense of individualism in the fast-paced city is for Simmel in direct contrast to life in the countryside with closer relations and slower pace due to “quiet regularity of uninterrupted habits” (1903/2020, 6). A century later, Simmel’s analysis remains influential and useful for its examination of how external as well as internal factors shape different spaces and people’s perceptions of them. The experience people have of time is entangled with what attributes they assign to a place. This process goes both ways, and it is theorised as *timespace* (May & Thrift, 2001, 5).

People living in cities often experience time in remote rural areas as different (Bratrud, 2024a, 217). A contemporary citizen in the global north is likely highly mobile. As previously discussed, most people do not move once and then remain in the same place for the rest of their lives. In a study from Norway, anthropologist Tom Bratrud interviewed migrants from the city to the rural countryside. One group stayed part time in private cottages, while moving between the city and their vacation homes in the mountainous rural countryside. These “part-time-migrants” explicitly seek to escape the compression of time they experience in the city. The experienced pressure on time and space, for example due to commuting and long daily queues, is labeled *spatiotemporal decompression* (Bratrud, 2024a, 208). Long, daily commutes and being stuck in traffic is causing immobility and is often regarded as a time thief.

When people desire to ‘reclaim’ their time it shows that space and time are intertwined and the essence of time constitutes more than duration and sequence (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Part-time migrants from the city to rural villages in Norway remain digitally and physically connected to the city, moving in between these spaces and temporalities. The physical and digital movement between the rural and city spaces produce new layers of time in people’s lives, namely an ‘exurban timespace’ (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Hence they do not simply exchange ‘city time’ for ‘rural time’, they compose their own mix, negotiating new ways of practicing time and space. The exurban timespace is a mixture of ‘city’ and ‘countryside’ lifestyles, and it can be seen as a temporal dimension of the ‘rurban’. The exurban timespace is the differently perceived notion of time and space that happens when city dwellers physically move, but remains connected to the urban centres digitally and physically.

Migrants moving permanently from cities to rural areas can also be motivated to avoid perceived pressure on time and space, the ‘spatiotemporal decompression’. While the goal is similar to part-time migrants, they often seek a more permanent reorganisation of their time and space. “Rather than seeing the countryside as slower, it is primarily a place where they achieve a greater sense of autonomy than in the city” (Bratrud, 2024a, 209). Based on the comprehensive ethnographic study of Bratrud, the pressure on time and space, the ‘spatiotemporal decompression’ is something his interview subjects actively tries to move away from, mentally as well as physically. Important to note is the socio-cultural composition of his interviewees, primarily middle-class Norwegian citizens with means to relocate on temporary or permanent bases. While not representing the increasingly diverse demography of Norway, it still provides insight into why some people seek away from the bustling city. In order to better understand their desire for a different, slower lifestyle and to analyse how their perceptions of ‘rural idyll’ influences their choice of relocation, we need to take a look at the degrowth paradigm.

2.4 Degrowth

The capitalistic growth regime of increased global trade and consumption is driving our planet beyond its ecological threshold limit (Kallis et al., 2018, 297; Kitzmann et al., 2025). Since the mid-20th century we have exited the 10,000 year-long stable period of the Holocene, marked by climatic stability and a resilient earth system. The ‘Anthropocene’ marks the human epoch in which human activities have become the main force shaping the planet, and the reason why the earth is pushed beyond its safe operating space (Kitzmann et al., 2025, 12). While the term ‘Anthropocene’ is contested in hard sciences, social scientists often use it as a critique. However, ‘Capitalocene’, specifying that the crisis is driven by capital accumulation, not humanity in general (Moore, 2015). Further, the ‘Urbanocene’, highlights how the limits of the ecological threshold is connected with planetary urbanisation, as the ‘urban fabric’ now extends across the whole globe (Brenner & Schmid, 2015, p. 154). Industrial production and the Western capitalist system have been growing by using more resources and more people labouring in increasingly intensive, innovative ways. This system is dependent on increased use of energy and it has been possible also due to fossil fuel extraction. This very extraction is driving climate changes that increase the average temperature of the planet making food production and living conditions increasingly difficult across the world. Degrowth is the political and social process where energy and resource flows in and out of the economy is reduced, yet quality of life is maintained or improved

(Kallis et al., 2018, 292). It is a paradigm that investigates how new, or reclaimed, different ways of living and organising our societies can unfold in a way that is playing alongside nature, not against it. A shift in the current political and economic organization of society is not just desirable, but necessary if we want current and future generations to survive on a healthy, stable planet, according to the degrowth paradigm.

The concept of degrowth is a translation of the French *décroissance*, coined by the political ecologist André Gorz in the 1970s when he questioned the compatibility of economic growth and the survival of capitalism with environmental sustainability (Varvarousis et al., 2024, 486). Disappearing with the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s, the concept was revived at the turn of the century (Hennen, 2022, 5). It is interdisciplinary by nature, calling for a new political-economic system and a different conceptualisation of nature. As a result, research on this novel paradigm stems from both political science, economics, ecological economics, history, anthropology, and technology studies (Kallis et al., 2018, 293). However, degrowth is not simply academic. This normative concept has been created in conversations between social movements, activists and academics in an organic way between practice and theory (Kallis et al., 2018, 292). In this sense degrowth is less of a theory and more of a social movement.

Degrowth is closely connected to environmental justice. Although environmental struggles have often been assumed to be located in the global South while degrowth has been seen as located and relevant in the global North, the two share a core focus on environmental justice and equality (Singh, 2019, 138). While originating in rich, Western countries, the extremely unevenly distributed resources and power in the world is not ignored by degrowth scholars. Geographer Neera Singh points out that degrowth theory is inspired by the long history of post-development struggles in the global South (2019, 139). It is a common misconception that the degrowth movement aims to impose degrowth onto societies that need heightened material wellbeing and welfare for their population. Rather, the degrowth paradigm acknowledges that some societies need to rely on growth to achieve a certain level of material wellbeing. In this way the paradigm not only seeks to rebalance the tipping climate change, but also redistribute wealth and opportunities more evenly across the world. The paradigm has been criticized as imposing ‘voluntary frugality’, the turn to less consumption and more simplicity for the most rich nations and citizens is meant to be ensured through social and institutional support making simpler living possible (Singh, 2019, 140). Degrowth calls for a

closer connection between humans and nature, reconceptualising the meaning of wealth. Not as a material accumulation of commodities, but as satisfying human and societal needs.

The environmental movement of the 1970s idealised rural living and decentralisation as starting points of dealing with the climate and nature crises (Knudsen, 2020, 66). Meanwhile, present climate concerns have shifted focus to the cities where denser settlement and shared sustainable public transportation is seen as positive in reducing ecological footprint. Housing prices are however making cities unaffordable and with rising cost of living, for example in the Nordic countries, living in the city is not possible for ordinary wage-earners (Knudsen, 2020, 66). This pressure on housing is affecting urban qualities of living, and alongside ecological concerns it is pushing people out of the cities. City-based climate change solutions are aligned with centralisation policies, however they are not socially sustainable and drive people to search for affordable solutions outside of the city, possibly setting aside climate concerns for economic reasons. The degrowth thesis does not suggest one single option of what a degrowth based society will look like, leaving the broad, open question of how it can be conceptualised as a new way of living, in cities, peri-urban areas or remote rural villages.

2.5 Theoretical Framework

In order to analyse why people move from urban to rural areas in Norway, we need to understand what movement is and how mobilities are imbued with power caused by friction, rhythm, experience and velocity. Migration is not simply movement from point a to point b (Cresswell, 2006) and the politics of mobility display how movement and mobilities are not neutral but entangled with various meanings. The mobility paradigm also seeks to understand immobility, moorings and being still in place (Cresswell, 2010, 159; Sheller & Urry, 2006, 210). The continuum between mobility, immobility, stillness and movement is crucial when investigating why people move to the rural countryside, or perhaps choose to stay there for a certain period of time, before continuing their mobile journeys. So-called part-time migrants splitting their time between cities and the rural villages create their own 'exurban' timespaces that are also grounded on digital connectivity. The motivations of mobility and migration are rarely one-sided and straightforward. According to Bratrud's ethnographic fieldwork in Norway, many upper-middle class migrants desire and imagine a different life away from the city rush, yet in practice they combine habits of the city with sceneries of nature in rural villages. While traveling in search of closeness to nature and imaginations of a different,

slower life, the question of sustainability related to people's mobile practices and lifestyles remains open.

The imaginations and social constructions of a place can be crucial drivers of mobility and migration choices. The idea of rural idyll is rooted in pictures of beautiful nature and imaginations of lifestyles founded on traditional values. The degrowth thesis can contribute to clarify if sustainable practices connected to images of rural idyll are relevant for the motivation of rural living in Norway. Often it is urban residents that create these images of the rural, as demonstrated by Hämeenaho's research in Finland (2013). Rural villagers themselves have characterised the city as anonymous and risky, while highlighting socially close-knit communities where "everybody knows everybody" as an important feature of the rural village. In order to better understand mobility choices we need to move beyond spatial binaries and the dichotomy of the urban and the rural. The influence of 'urban' ways of life on the countryside is coined 'rurbanisation' and this is a useful lens in which to investigate ways of living and possible lifestyle differences between city centres and rural villages. Planetary urbanisation discards both the urban rural division and the predominant focus on cities, or methodological 'cityism' in the social sciences. It allows us to understand how spaces and locations are not separate units, but interconnected entangled systems that connect both nature, urban city-centres and the countryside with its villages in a dynamic process. In order to analyse the characteristics of the rural village and understand people's motivation to live there, planetary urbanisation reminds us that rural places are not stand still separate units driven by their own centers, but rather essential parts of the production systems of the world and absorbed into the greater economic system.

Centralisation processes change service offers and influence mobility options in remote villages. The urban imagination of rural idyll with its perceived stillness and slow speed is obscuring the many ways in which mobility plays out for people living in villages. Milbourne and Kitchen (2014) highlight the immobility of small rural places where its inhabitants are often constrained by centralisation of services and become increasingly dependent on private automobiles for mobility as other options are lacking. Through the mobilities lens it is possible to analyse how mobile options or restrictions influence people's everyday lives and affect their desire to move to or away from rural areas. Mobility choices might shape migration to or away from the rural villages, and the sustainability and environmental impact of these are crucial questions within the degrowth paradigm.

The degrowth paradigm is a broad system analysis combining a range of academic disciplines founded alongside a social movement of activists attempting to practice different ways of living. This thesis aims to better understand how the rural village in Norway is experienced and why people choose to go there. While the degrowth theory can provide insight into the motivation of migration, and shed light on its macro scale causes and effects, I will only apply parts of this theory as its economic and broader environmental implications are beyond the scope of this thesis. In order to understand the migration experience of the 12 participants, we first need to look at who the respondents are, and the methodological choices that guide the analysis.

Chapter 3 - Methodology and Methods: A Qualitative Interpretivist Approach

The main research question in this thesis examines how imaginaries of rural idyll and material realities shape migration decisions between Norwegian rural villages and cities. As this research question concerns how individuals subjectively construct and experience rural imaginaries, a qualitative interpretivist approach has been adopted (Bryman, 2016, 33). Migration decisions can be highly individual, but are nonetheless shaped by structures enabling or restricting movement. The politics and friction of mobility constitutes the framework guiding both the theory and the methodological choices of this thesis (Cresswell, 2010). In order to better understand imaginaries and the concept of idyll, semi-structured interviews with people with diverse rural-urban experiences were conducted. The interviews were carried out in Norwegian in order to ensure natural conversations with the participants. In depth-interviews have allowed for a deeper understanding of the participants' temporal perceptions, which is crucial in order to answer the supporting research question of this thesis which looks into how perceptions of time and ideas of rurality impact people's choice of residence. In this chapter we will investigate why a qualitative approach is ideal for investigating rural urban imaginaries and material constraints in Norway, and see how the research was carried out.

The chapter is organised in five sections. The first begins by establishing the epistemological and ontological foundations of the study (3.1). Section 3.2 outlines the research design and sampling strategy. Further, the participant selection and data collection process is accounted for in 3.3, before moving to the data analysis process (3.4). The last section is dedicated to ethical considerations and positionality, covering consent, anonymity, data storage and use of AI.

3.1 Research Approach

There are different ways of approaching social science, and the social world in which we live. Questions of how the social world is constructed, causes of change, systems or people themselves for example, are ontological, and these questions shape how research is conducted (Bryman, 2016, 4). A constructivist ontology views social phenomena as dynamic processes that constantly change and are reformulated by the practices of the people involved (Bryman,

2016, 4). Constructionism opposes the objectivist stance that social entities “can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors” (Bryman, 2016, 28). Different social sciences may apply different methods and argue for diverging views, but in human geography a constructivist ontology is not uncommon (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). Human beings constantly change and shift their opinions and this will inevitably influence social interactions and systems upheld by people.

There are two kinds of constructivist positions (Bryman, 2016, 29). The first is antithetical to objectivism, and claims that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being made by social actors. The second meaning of constructivism relates to the role of the researcher, and the fact that the social science researcher’s account of the world and of different social phenomena are also constructions (Bryman, 2016, 29). They can not be regarded as definite versions of social reality, but will always present a specific version of it (Bryman, 2016, 29). This is true also for this research. When conducting the interviews, the aim is to let the interviewees’ own opinions, meanings and definitions shape the analysis and remain visible in it. Even so, the filter in which the researcher understands the answer, and the connections made to the theories and broader literature will shape social science research and also this thesis. The positionality of the researcher, and her or his ‘locus of enunciation’, meaning background and locality, are also important. Positionality shapes research, and hence it can be crucial to expose and be honest about one’s background. We will come back to the ethical considerations and my own positionality later in this chapter.

According to interpretivist epistemology, that is ‘theory of how knowledge is produced’, social processes, institutions, and also physical places are attached with meaning, and this meaning is created collectively by people (Bryman, 2016, 28). This social realm, where meanings are produced, negotiated, and renegotiated is not clear-cut and straight forward, and hence it can be difficult to simply make a hypothesis, test it with precise measurement techniques and then produce a definite answer with two lines under the answer (Bryman, 2016, 4). The main research question of this thesis is: ‘How do imaginaries of rural idyll and material realities shape migration decisions between Norwegian rural villages and cities?’. Applying a social constructivist perspective is essential in order to investigate imaginaries and ideas of the rural, because the images, ideas, and meanings people have related to the rural are subjective, and precisely negotiated and renegotiated. The focus is the lived experience and practiced mobility of people, and in line with Creswell, movement from A to

B is not the same as socially produced, experienced and meaningful motion, as mobility (2006). This is why qualitative methods are the most suitable for this thesis.

As opposed to a quantitative approach, this research is qualitative in its nature. While the possibility of a clear distinction is sometimes debated, quantitative, more objectivist research uses measurement and emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2016, 31-32). Qualitative research applies a constructivist ontological position, and an interpretivist epistemological orientation. This stands in opposition to the objectivist, natural science, positivist epistemological orientation that is common for quantitative research (Bryman, 2016, 33). In this thesis, the aim is not to measure or quantify data, but to understand how imaginaries and material realities shape the views of people migrating between rural and urban spaces in Norway. Qualitative research aims to be sensitive to how participants interpret their social world (Bryman, 2016, 36). The objective is not to find a definite cause of why the social phenomenon of migration is happening, but rather understanding what influences people's perception of the rural and the urban, as well as how material realities shape their decisions of where to live and settle. Applying a qualitative and interpretivist ontology allows me to investigate these questions. The phenomenon of rural idyll is a socially constructed imaginary and hence cannot be measured numerically in an objective manner. Alongside a constructivist and interpretivist stance, using a qualitative method is the natural choice for researching and understanding these issues. In the next section we will take a closer look at the qualitative methods applied in this thesis.

3.2 Research Design and Sampling Strategy

3.2.1 Qualitative Semi-Structures Interviews

This thesis is based on 12 semi-structured online video interviews. As opposed to quantitative structured interviews, qualitative interviews place greater importance on the interviewees point of view, rather than the researchers' own concerns (Bryman, 2016, 466). In this thesis this is crucial, as one of the goals is to understand how the participants experience different places, and what meaning they attach to them.

While surveys can be qualitative, with open questions and smaller sample sizes, understanding socially constructed imaginaries is easier done through interviews (Bryman, 2016, 36). Semi-structured interviews provide a chance to modify and ask follow-up questions, and they allow participants to give their own account of rural experience while

retaining the flexibility to follow unexpected paths (Narayanasamy, 2009, 293). Other qualitative methods such as ethnography are also ruled out, due to the time-consuming, costly fieldwork it requires – further, the diverse group of people interviewed for this thesis lives in different locations, leaving this method not feasible in practice (Bryman, 2016, 423). Focus group discussion is unsuitable for the same reason of dispersed locations of the participants in the research. Semi-structured interviews conducted online allows for flexibility of time and locality, as well as during the interview process itself. This approach aligns with the mobilities paradigm, which calls for methods attentive to the lived experience of movement and place (Sheller & Urry, 2006, 208). In human geography the walking interview is a methodological approach meant to encourage the interviewees engagement with physical spaces and localities, allowing for associations to occur through being in the spaces discussed (Büscher & Urry, 2009, 104). This is an interesting method, however, looking into migration over long distances makes this method complicated and unsuitable for a thesis investigating geographically distant localities.

As interviews were conducted online, it was flexible for the interviewees to fit it into their schedules, also allowing the possibility of rescheduling, which occurred a few times due to sickness. Although full body language is neither as visible nor as readable as in person, evidence suggests that online interviews do not significantly reduce the capacity for a trusting comfortable connection between the interviewer and the interviewee (Bryman, 2016, 492). This fits well with my experience throughout the 12 interviews. Online video interviews can suffer from fluctuating internet connections, affecting the conversations and possibly the transcripts (Bryman, 2016, 492). In two of the interviews, a few audio connection problems occurred, but these were resolved, and did not compromise the information nor the transcripts. Online interviews made it possible to interview people in geographically diverse locations, and even conduct the interviews from abroad. In the next section we will look closer at the scope and context of the thesis.

3.2.2 Research Context

The personal motivations behind the choice of topic of the thesis has been to better understand rural spaces and its specificities, as well as cultural variations and its possible connections to places and their size and localities. Norway is a long-stretched country with a small population and spread-out settlement, with strong values placed on nature and the autonomy of the individual (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 11). With small cities compared to global

standards, it has an interesting geography in which to investigate the differences, similarities, and perceptions of rural and urban spaces in Norway. The Norwegian welfare state, or ‘the Nordic model’, ensures fewer economic differences between cities and rural villages, making the country different from other Western nations and their characteristics of social and political rural-urban divides (Auerbach et al., 2024, 3). Norway has 15 counties, with the Northern ones being the geographically largest and arguably most distinct materialistically. Understanding better the *bygda* or village cultures across the country has been one of the main goals of the thesis. The recent fieldwork of anthropologist Tom Bratrud in his own village in the mountain regions in the southern part of Norway on urban to rural migration and temporal perceptions provides important data of rural and urban encounters (2024a, 2024b). To better understand these themes and spaces, I wanted to interview people with experiences from different parts of the country.

3.2.3 Sampling Strategy

Through purposive sampling the aim was to find people with diverse rural-urban trajectories. An important aspect of purposive sampling is to find participants relevant to the research questions (Bryman, 2016, 410). The goal of the sampling was to find people with experiences from diverse parts of Norway, and especially from rural areas. Being a native Norwegian was an advantage when looking for interviewees. Although my personal network became important, the first interviewee contacted was the main character in a documentary about the experiences of a Middle Eastern migrant coming to rural Norway. Snowball sampling is a common method for qualitative interviews and happens when the researcher initially samples a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these suggest other participants they know with similar experiences or characteristics (Bryman, 2016, 415). After a successful first interview, the snowball method was employed and the interviewee suggested another person that agreed to meet. It is a valuable method with which to get access to new participants highly relevant but unknown to the researcher (Noy, 2008). The snowball method also contributed to diversifying the participant group.

Qualitative sample sizes are not easily defined, and can range from 1-2 interviewees for life story interviews, to 150 in certain cases (Bryman, 2016, 416). It can even be difficult to know how many will need to be interviewed at the onset of a study before theoretical saturation is achieved (Bryman, 2016, 416). I had not yet decided on the number of interviewees, but aimed at around 10 in order to go in-depth in the interviews with time to ask questions of

various topics. Qualitative research prioritises depth over breadth, and 10 in-depth interviews generate rich data about lived experience (Bryman, 2016, 394). Out of the final total of 12 interviews, 3 interviewees were found through the snowball method, and further 2 were suggested by personal contacts. The remaining 7 were people already known and in my own social network, something that will be further discussing the section of ethical considerations and positionality at the end of this chapter. What is crucial regarding a small sample size is to not generalise inappropriately from the data, and this will serve as a guiding note throughout the analysis chapter (Bryman, 2016, 418).

One concern was that the interviewees would be a homogenous group, especially regarding ethnicities and class. There are limits to how heterogeneous a small sample of people can be, and although diversity in the group is valuable, it can also cause difficulties in the analysis process. The goal of this thesis is not, however, statistical representativeness, but deep qualitative understanding of the senses of place and migration decisions themselves (Bryman, 2016, 418). Missing from the sample size are people older than 50 years, as well as younger than 25. There is a slight female majority with seven out of 12 being women, but this does not cause a serious imbalance. Younger women are overrepresented, with six out of seven being in the 25-30 age range. This might shape the findings on rural idyll and mobility decisions in particular ways. In the group of 12 people, nine of them are ethnically Norwegian and three are born, and fully or partially raised in another country.

The fact that the participants are predominantly middle-class provides an interesting theoretical connection to Bratrud's concept of exurban timespace, which is a space created and inhabited by the middle class (2024a, 207, 220). The ability to afford slowness can further relate to the degrowth theory and its connection to lifestyle choices (Varvarousis et al., 2025, 487; Cresswell, 2010, 164). The middle-class majority among the participants also has implications regarding material experiences, as the cost of housing and transport might be a smaller problem for this class than it would be for working class people or those incapable of working. Income and class belonging can, however, provide important information of the participants' mobile abilities, within the framework of mobility justice (Sheller, 2018, 44).

3.3 Participant Selection and Data Collection

3.3.1 Participant selection

The selection criteria of the participants following the purposive sampling was to locate people with direct experience of living in the rural countryside of Norway, the goal being to find people that had spent years living in both rural and urban spaces in Norway. The migration trajectories of the participants varied; four grew up both in rural and urban spaces, two grew up in big cities; five in rural villages: and one in a semi-urban small town. To diversify the selection, including people with immigrant backgrounds was crucial, and having three people with backgrounds growing up in million sized cities of countries in the Middle East and South East Asia adds highly valuable outside perspectives, on both rural and urban Norwegian spaces as well as on cultural aspects. Five of the participants are men, two with immigrant background, and seven are women, with an overrepresentation of the 25-30 age range.

Table 1 - Participant sample

	Participant	Gender (M/F)	Migration Trajectory	Age range	Occupation	Mobility Type
1	Anna	F	Rural, urban	25-30	Medical student	Leaver
2	Maja	F	Rural, urban	25-30	HR consultant	Leaver
3	Maria	F	Urban (abroad), rural, urban	25-30	Musician	Leaver
4	Karin	F	Rural, urban	25-30	Public health student	Leaver
5	Ebba	F	Rural, urban	25-30	Festival manager	Leaver
6	Henrikke	F	Rural, urban, rural	25-30	Teacher and student	Returnee
7	Kristine	F	Rural, urban, rural	40-50	Public transport advisor	Returnee
8	Moheb	M	Urban (abroad), rural	30-35	Social service Student	In-migrant
9	Tareq	M	Urban (abroad), rural	30-35	Electrician	In-migrant
10	Håkon	M	Rural, urban, semi-rural	30-35	Journalist	Leaver
11	Fritjof	M	Urban, rural, urban, semi-rural	40-50	Freelance location scout	In-migrant
12	Frode	M	Semi-urban, urban, semi-urban	40-50	Employment advisor	Returnee

The mobility types are categorised with rural Norway as the starting point, and the participants mobility choices from adult age and forward. All of the categories: ‘leaver’,

‘returnee’, and ‘in-migrant’ have migration trajectories that allow for investigations of the experienced friction of mobility (Creswell, 2006, 3). The in-migrant, meaning someone arriving from the outside, can provide important information about the imaginaries of the rural, and rural idyll from an outside perspective. The in-migrant and leaver groups are important when looking at the ‘rurbanisation’ theory of Brenner and Schmid, as their migration between urban and rural spaces provide insight into differences and similarities of the urban and rural (2014, 750). In-migrants and returnees are groups that are crucial when investigating the exurban timespace concept, as they might combine elements from the cities when going to rural spaces (Bratrud, 2024a, 223). Although these mobility types provide a useful overview of the participants, categories are analytical simplifications and the migration trajectories and mobility types of people are complex. It is important to note that five of the ‘leavers’ are in the 25-30 age range, which makes the probability of further movement highly likely.

3.3.2 Data collection

The aim of the interview guide has been to explore the themes of rural imaginaries, temporal perceptions, material constraints and migration decisions. The questions were developed after a preliminary reading of the literature and theories of chapter two. Table 2 provides an excerpt of the questions asked in relation to the themes and theoretical rationale of the thesis. See appendices B for the complete interview question guide.

Table 2 - Interview questions, themes and theoretical rationale

Theme	Questions	Theoretical rationale
Rural imaginaries	6. What are your thoughts about romanticisation of villages? (with ideas of rural idyll) - Do you think it is something mostly people in cities do?	Question six asks directly about the romanticisation of rural images, drawing on Hämeenaho’s study of rural idyll conceptualised by urban residents (2013, 7), as well as Haugen and Lysgård's study of Norwegian rural life with close-knit, safe villages upholding certain ideas of rural idyll (2006, 177-78).
Temporal perceptions	7. How do you experience time in the villages compared to bigger cities? Does your perception of time change?	Drawing on Bratrud’s exurban timespace, question seven look into how participants perceive time in different space (2024a, 217)

Theme	Questions	Theoretical rationale
Material constraints	11. Which practical issues are important for you when choosing where to live? (work, social network, services, infrastructure)	Question 11 dives into the material reality of location with Cresswell's concept of politics and friction of mobility being the lens in which to understand how mobile abilities connect to practical restraints and prerequisites.
Migration decisions	16. Where do you dream about living in the future (city or rural village)? Why?	Cresswell's politics of mobility is crucial also for question 16, which probes the participant to reflect on dreams and connect them to specific rural or urban spaces.

The guide is structured around these themes as each theme maps onto a theoretical lens from chapter 2; questions of time to exurban timespace; questions of material constraints to friction of mobility; questions of imagining the rural to rural idyll construction; and finally questions of migration decisions to politics of mobility, and as a bridge to connect the previous three. These themes will also be the guiding structure for the analysis of chapter 4.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted online using the Jitsi Meet video conferencing platform. The interviews were all conducted in Norwegian, allowing for easy and natural communication between the interviewees and myself, also for the foreign born participants that have lived several years in Norway. The quotes were translated to English for the thesis, using DeepL. The interviews lasted from 45-90 minutes, with most lasting between 50-60 minutes. The audio and video from the interviews were stored after informed consent was retrieved from all participants, more about this in the section about ethics following the data analysis part.

3.4 Data Analysis

This section describes the process by which the interview data was transcribed, coded, and developed into four themes analysed in chapter 4.

In order to handle the participants' personal data with care, the interview files were stored securely on a private Dropbox online cloud account. Dropbox's own Artificial Intelligence feature provided preliminary transcriptions of the interviews, which were then thoroughly

checked and edited manually to ensure the words and their meanings were correctly transcribed. The AI feature produced a preliminary transcription only, and manual control was necessary to ensure that accuracy, meaning and dialects had been captured correctly.

The data was analysed using a reflexive thematic approach. This method of coding and analysing data systematically allows the researcher to focus on data in various ways, for example by looking for particular aspects of a phenomenon across the data set such as I have done here (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 58). Unlike discourse analysis, which is a research approach requiring familiarity with complex theoretical perspectives, reflexive thematic analysis remains more flexible during coding and analysis of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 58). The reflexive approach emphasizes the active role of the researcher in the coding and theme generation process (Braun & Clarke, 2022, 13). As a Norwegian researcher investigating the topics of Norwegian people's imaginaries and migration choices, my knowledge of the country and my own experiences, as well as curiosities around the research questions developed before the interviews, shaped what I noticed when coding the material. The transcripts were carefully read, and during the preliminary reading all quotes relevant to the research questions, as well as those being striking or surprising were extracted as the raw data material.

The coding of the interviews were both deductive, from the theoretical framework, and inductive, drawn from the participants themselves (Bryman, 2016, 21). Inductive and deductive codes often influence each other, in this case the material from the data set was carefully examined to see if there were common themes unrelated to the theories occurring in the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 58). The deductive codes became the four main themes of the analysis: rural imaginaries, temporal perceptions, material constraints, and migration decisions between the rural and urban. Excerpts and quotes were organised under these four headings, with keywords after each quote making comparison between participants easier.

Following the six-phase framework to reflexive thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke, after familiarising myself with the data, the initial codes, similar to the four main themes but not yet fully developed, were created (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 61). Next, themes and sub-themes were identified, checking for areas of overlap and similarity. After this, two themes were discarded, as they were too diverse and wide-ranging, not coherent with the other themes, and hence beyond the scope of the thesis. Lastly, the four main themes were chosen as they have

a singular focus, are related but do not overlap, and directly addresses the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2012, 66). With 12 participants, the decisions of coding manually allowed for an intimate engagement with the dataset, and time to reflect back to the interviews and answers while extracting data and creating codes and themes. Unlike software-assisted coding the participant language and meanings become more clear.

3.5 Ethical Considerations and Positionality

3.5.1 Positionality

Having personal familiarity with the context as a Norwegian researcher studying Norwegian rural life is an advantage when it comes to easier access to interviewees through personal networks, linguistic access and cultural understanding. Human geographer Gillian Rose builds on Haraway to argue that all knowledge is partial and marked by the specific circumstances of its production (1997, 308). Rose reminds us that knowledge production is situated, cannot claim universality, and is connected to power (1997, 308). Deciding research projects, ways of collecting data, how to handle data and importantly how to interpret the data are crucial tasks of the researcher, and they are all imbued with power. Even transparent reflexivity about one's position as a researcher does not remove the power aspect of producing knowledge (Rose, 1997, 318). Growing up in a town close to the capital city, I have far more knowledge of Norwegian urban spaces than rural ones. As a Norwegian studying Norwegian cultures also provides a risk, for example the risk of romanticising, or perhaps condemning rural idyll. While attempting to maintain critical distance has been a goal throughout the research, being explicit about my assumptions in the introduction is one way I have tried to manage the tension of being close to what is being researched.

Among the interviewees are two family members: a first cousin once removed, and an uncle. To manage this conflict of interest I treated them exactly the same way as the other interviewees, with the same protocol and questions, and level of analysis and anonymisation. The inclusion of these two family members, their interviews and handling of data can be considered ethically important moments that need to be handled with care and reflexivity (Guillemin and Gilliam, 2004, 262). As their migration trajectories as well as personal and work experiences are highly relevant to the research, it was important to include them. After the interview, I have taken additional precaution in handling the data confidentiality, including in social settings. While the snowball method has been important, so has personal network and three of the interviewees are personal friends. The same procedure of

anonymisation, confidentiality and attempted unbiased handling of the data and analysis applies also here.

3.5.2 Consent, Anonymity and Data Storage

As mentioned above, while the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, the thesis and most of the literature is written in English. Conducting interviews and communicating in the native language of the participants, or the second language they are most comfortable with ensures fewer misunderstandings, and strengthens the informed consent. Informed, written consent was obtained from all participants previous to the interviews. Both written and oral explanations of how the data would be used were given. Their identities have remained anonymous with pseudonyms used throughout the thesis. The data have been stored securely in a private account on the online cloud platform Dropbox, and will be deleted when the thesis is completed, after a maximum of five months.

3.5.3 Use of AI

While using Claude for chapter structure suggestions, and Notebook LM to help locate the page of specific sources, this thesis is written and made entirely by me. All digital tools, such as the online meeting platform Jitsi, and the cloud storage Dropbox have been explicitly mentioned in the methodology chapter. I take full responsibility for the research process and production of this text.

This chapter has established the reflexive thematic analysis and qualitative approach that forms the basis of the methodology of this study. The three themes of rural idyll imaginaries, temporal perceptions, and material constraints will guide the analysis of the varied rural urban trajectories of the 12 participants.

Chapter 4 - Living the Idyll? Analysis and Discussion of Norwegian Rural-Urban Trajectories

4.1 - Against the urban? Rural idyll imaginaries

In order to answer the research question of how imaginaries of rural idyll and materialist realities shape migration decisions between rural villages and cities, we will begin by exploring the theme of rural imaginaries. We will look into how the rural is imagined against the urban. Further we will investigate whether the romantic idea of a close-knit village where everybody knows each other and are happy aligns with the lived rural experiences of the participants (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). The imaginaries of the rural might go beyond idyllic pictures, and we will also look into the negative imaginaries and stereotypes people from the outside have regarding villages. This is to ensure that not only the literature's reflection of rural imaginaries and idyll is represented, but also the imaginaries the interviewed participants are confronted with.

First, we will look at the imagined rural space, and the romanticisation of the rural. Next, we will look into the lived experiences of social life in the rural villages, in order to have a closer look of what the rural life actually looks like for the interviewees. Finally, we will consider the contrasts between the imagined rural idyll and the lived experiences of rural villages, in order to understand better whether the romanticisation of the rural is an urban phenomenon, and whether the rural idyll imaginaries proves to be a considerable contrast against the urban.

4.1.1 Rural Idyll Imaginaries

Eight of the participants interviewed grew up in the rural countryside, and two of them ended up there following the immigrant settlement scheme of the state. Of the remaining two, one arrived from a million-sized Asian city when she was around nine years old, whilst the other moved from Oslo to a rural village at the same age. Hence, the imaginaries of the rural will be investigated mostly through the eyes of people already familiar with rural spaces. The focus will also be on how the participants perceive other people's imaginaries of the rural.

Fritjof has lived most of his life in urban and semi-rural areas close to the city. When he was nine years old, his parents moved to a rural village. Expecting mountains, villages and

coziness, he explains how he was influenced by his parents' opinions. After four years he moved back to the city by himself, but as he described it, he is still a dreamer.

What's amazing, as someone once said to me, is that nature... Nothing is ever quite the same, whereas as soon as you walk into a town or city, you're in an urban space that's been designed with a specific feeling in mind. And there's loads to like about urban spaces, and I can really miss them and think they're brilliant. Really, I love them. But nature has this... No two trees are the same, not a single blade of grass is the same. Everything is, in a way, just God's creation in such an... incredible... primal, unpredictable way. So, in a way, you could say that the forest inspires creativity, because everything is so creative and free-spirited.

The feeling of a creative, free space is how Fritjof described being in nature. Comparing it to a pre-determined planned urban space, his enthusiasm for the rural, natural environment is clearly evident. Rural idyll is often emphasising the significance of nature, viewing the rural as a space for pastoral living and lifestyles (Hämeenaho, 2013, 7). As Fritjof described it, rurality is often imagined as green, quiet and spacious (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Although Fritjof, who has lived many years in cities, acknowledges his affinity for urban spaces, his description of the alluring, natural environment is arguably a romanticisation of the rural.

Romanticisation of farm life is one of the most common idealisations Ebba is met with by people coming from cities. Fritjof, Kristine and other participants also mentioned the imagery of cows grazing in the sunset next to a picturesque red barn. Ebba further explained how this idea plays out during summers in the countryside.

I do notice it (...) where we have our mountain pastures. We're there, of course, because we have to look after the cows in the barn. So, in a way, I'm at work when I'm there. And it sort of happens quite often, because our mountain pastures are by the road. And it happens that people slow down and take photos, and I get the feeling that it's very much like, 'oh, there are some locals' and then I feel it becomes very idealised.

Ebba is becoming a character in the literal picture bypassers are taking in the attempt of capturing their idealised images in real time. For the bypassing cars, which Ebba believe is mostly second home owners and other tourists, rural living and farming is framed as idyll and for them the image becomes real when they see this live snapshot of idyll (Hämeenaho, 2013, 7). Perhaps this is a lingering extension of the idealisation the environmental and degrowth movement placed on rural living in the 1970s (Knudsen, 2020, 66). The contrast to the city

and specific action occurring in the rural countryside is contributing to the idyllic narrative. While Ebba does not mind the occasional photos, other experiences with outsiders visiting her village has made her angry.

While working in the local museum of a famous Norwegian writer coming from her village, Ebba experienced visitors talking slower to her, and amongst themselves speaking of ‘real local characters’, making her feel like she was put on display. This exotification certainly showcases the dark side of the outsider, perhaps urban, views of rural imaginaries. This demonstrates clearly how rural spaces are not just noted for its physical, actual attributes, but are constructed culturally by the ideas people carry with them (Hämeenaho, 2013, 4). Outsiders seem to look actively for attributes that can separate rural from urban spaces, even when these do not exist. Sometimes, however, the imaginaries created from the outside originate in ignorance, such as when Ebba was asked in a serious tone from a classmate whether they had electricity at home. In a way this shows the prevalence of the methodological cityism people might carry with them, having the mindset that a city is a completely separate unit from rural spaces (Angelo & Wachsmuth, 2014, 20). Not being willing to see or understand the interconnections between rural and urban spaces might enforce the rural idyll imaginary to live on.

The range of Norwegian TV-shows showcasing nature, hiking and remote rural living was mentioned by Henrikke, Fritjof, and Frode as a reason for the “strikingly awful lot of romanticisation” of rural villages, as Fritjof put it. The Norwegian cultural values of hiking, nature, authenticity and the autonomy of the individual might explain why the 23-year old reality TV-program ‘*Der ingen skulle tru at nokon kunne bu*’ (‘Where nobody would have thought anyone could live’) is one of the most popular shows on the state channel NRK, with more than 1,1 million viewers of the new episodes (NTB, 2026; Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 10, 7). The series shows lived life in the remote rural outskirts, focusing on distances to commercial centers and often attempts at subsistence farming. It arguably reinforces the false notion of rural life as stable, rooted and static (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, 328). This might perpetuate a national imaginary of romantic rural life. It also reinforces the idea of rural life as the ‘good’ life, especially for Norwegians living in cities (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 174). The long standing success of ‘*Der ingen skulle tru at nokon kunne bu*’ and persistent high viewing figures indicate that the idealisation of the rural is neither a new nor declining phenomenon.

Frode believes that the idealisation of the rural occurs partly due to the nationalistic romanticism telling Norwegians that the '*bunad*' (national costume), dairymaid and rural life in general are typically Norwegian in its character, and learning these things in school as children maintains these notions. With the Norwegian curriculum being the most nationalistic among the Nordic countries, Frode is not wrong to attribute the idealisation to Norwegian history lectures (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 27). With urbanites such as the ones visiting the home village of Ebba dominating the creation of the rural idyll as connected to rural peasant life, the history of the urban elite inventing the national romantic ideas of the rural life being the designator of Norwegianness repeats itself (Rokkan, 1967, 368; Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 10). Romanticisation of the rural continues, and it is not only done by urban people, but also by out-migrants from rural villages and towns. Maria and Frode pointed out that many of their friends from home become nostalgic after moving away, posting on social media about the beauty of the midnight sun and northern lights in Northern Norway, for instance. Showing this off might have a connection with the autonomous life, far away from others, still being an unquestionable cultural value for many Norwegians (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 58). Meanwhile these out-migrants do not necessarily move back home, pointing to the fact that there might be other more important factors influencing their settlement choices, rather than the idyllic rural nature. This will be further discussed in section 4.4 about migration decisions. Now, we will take a closer look at what rural life actually looks like to the people growing up or moving there.

4.1.2 The Lived Rural Experience

4.1.2.1 Voluntary Community Work: '*Dugnad*'

Several participants mentioned the '*Dugnad*', or voluntary community work, as an important part of life in rural communities. It is often organised before specific events, for fundraising purposes, or to maintain shared or private property. Two of the participants growing up in rural villages have the impression that community volunteering is taken less seriously in the cities. They report that it feels easier to slip away from it, and that people perhaps only join if they have a child involved in a certain organisation, or through school or kindergarten. This aligns with studies reporting that the '*dugnad* spirit' is stronger in the rural countryside compared to the cities (Blekesaune & Haugen, 2018, 233). Maja attributes the strong *dugnad* spirit to the desire of the local communities to keep traditions alive.

At a christening or confirmation, you can expect up to 15–20 cakes. And that's because people say, 'I can bake', or 'I can sort something out', 'I can cook'. (...) People are keen to contribute something. But I think I've sort of... I haven't experienced this much when I've been in cities. There, people expect you to either have a caterer or, in a way, to arrive at a table that's already laid. There aren't as many offers to help out.

Maja experiences a clear distinction between the willingness to help out in the rural village, compared to in the city. With the cities often being more anonymous, responsibility might get spread out and decrease (Rye, 2006, 201). Cities do not have the same singular local community as rural villages, and the size of the population clearly plays an important role.

Kristine feels a greater sense of responsibility for the community on the small island she returned to, and experiences that most people feel a strong sense of responsibility towards the local community as a whole. When she returned to the island, a big group of people turned up to help her move in. Kristine attributes this *dugnad* spirit also to the fact that everybody knows everybody. The city, being more anonymous, makes it easier to opt out. Karin explained why this is not so easy in rural spaces.

But in a village, people really do notice if you don't turn up. You sort of get swept along, perhaps. (...) It's a bit like that if you want... at least now, if the village is to survive and we're to keep the facilities we have, we're simply dependent on people turning up. And I feel that this is, in a way, forgotten a bit, but you're dependent on having a few really passionate people who take the lead and keep things going.

Karin described the voluntary community work as crucial in keeping the village alive and thriving, implying that the service offer is under pressure and dependent on the active contribution of locals to prevail. The material constraints of the rural villages is a theme we will return to in the third section of this chapter. Karin also emphasised the relevance of someone taking initiative. It might be easy to forget that things do not happen by themselves, someone has to care, plan, think and execute before the rest can join in. Maria similarly stressed the importance of the initiators. Social cohesion and mutual obligation are often more strongly felt in rural communities, explaining why it is not necessarily an option not to show up to a *dugnad* (Villa, 2000, 478). The rural social space is in this sense distinctly different from the urban ones, where anonymity and large groups of people often removes the feeling of a coherent local community. Ebba is working as a manager for a big, yearly festival in her home village, and while she is the only official employee, around 350 people

contribute as volunteers during a full week leading up to the festival. While Ebba has an ambivalent relationship with her local village, “(...) that week restores my faith in humanity”. Cities can be perceived as impersonal, anonymous and even risky, and the notion of rural life as a close-knit space where people care and contribute to the community is in this case proving the rural idyll to be true (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). The 350 people helping out at the yearly festival is an example of a distinctly rural experience, as this is not likely to happen in a city at this scale. This could correlate to the notion of urban centers conceptualising time in different ways, and viewing it more as something that is measured, taken, or given, in a more individualistic sense than in rural areas (Bratrud, 2024a, 215). While this also connects to temporal perceptions, this will be explored further in section 4.2. The spirit of cooperation might be a practice reinforcing rural idyll, but as Maja stated, receiving help means that help is expected in return. It helps build trust, but is also a form of informal social obligation, where you get tied up in a perpetuating social exchange (Mauss, 1925/1995, 17). Not escaping the obligations or gaze of the community is a part of the small sizes of the rural village.

4.1.2.2 ‘Everybody-knows-everybody’: Closeness and its costs

In rural Norwegian villages, the populations are small, varying from a few hundred people to a few thousand. The common phenomenon of everybody knowing everybody is also known as *bygdedyret* (‘the village animal’). This has affected the social experience in the village for all the 12 people interviewed, however in various ways in different phases of their lives.

Kristine found it difficult while growing up.

The thing is, when you were 16 – or rather, when I was 16 and a bit of a rebel – it was sort of... it felt really awkward that in villages everyone knows who you are, and everyone knows pretty much everything about you, and you can hardly do anything without the neighbours finding out

The lack of privacy was the most distinct effect of growing up with social closeness. The perceived supervision is one of the downsides of the close-knit rural village life (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 178). Finding space to test boundaries and rebel is in this case lacking in the rural spaces, while in the cities the anonymity is greater. Karin, Ebba, Maria and other participants reported similar accounts of growing up in small communities where choosing one’s friends is not always an option, as there are not enough people to choose from. While Karin said “I don’t know if I should call it social control”, she explained that everyone knows what you are doing, making it hard to stand out. Anna confirmed Kristine’s experience that

while it can provide a sense of safety, it may also feel “a little bit like you're being watched” and as a consequence “you might feel like you have a little less freedom to do what you want or be who you want to be”. The literature suggests that young rural women experience the countryside as more controlling and constraining than young men do (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 178). While assessing this fact is beyond the scope of this qualitative thesis with 12 interviews, six out of seven interviewed women elaborated on the difficulties, as well as the good part of everybody knowing everybody. Meanwhile, only one out of three men growing up in the rural villages and towns mentioned it as difficult. Fritjof also focused more on the difficulties of moving from the city to the rural village, rather than the lack of anonymity and surveillance.

It's been... tough. Because you're scared of that sort of thing when you're young, but it all worked out in the end. I made friends when I moved to Skåbu – not many, but a few cool guys who were a bit older, in a way. And I had a nice time there too. But it was tough coming from Oslo (...), speaking ‘properly’, (...) and, well, it was obvious who we were and who they were, and (...) I could tell – in a way – from my classmates, and from the teacher, and from everything – that we were, in a way... different, and didn't have the qualities you needed up there.

Accessing the small social community was not easy, and with everybody knowing everybody, social coherence was tested when Fritjof arrived from the city with his parents, being different. Here, the Norwegian center-periphery conflict, with underlying stereotypes of the city and the rural came into play (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 63; Rokkan, 1967). Maja described how individualism decreases in the village, where greater emphasis is placed on who your family is and what gender you are, echoing Fritjof's experience of arriving in the rural village. Although currently residing in a semi-rural village close to the city, being a rural ‘leaver’ might influence the negative emphasis placed on rural life, as this group is more likely to focus on the downsides of rural visibility (Kloep et al., 2003, 102). While this happened in the 1980s, Fritjof, as Karin, believes the differences between youth in the rural villages and the cities have decreased with the rise of social media, though he argued that he thinks it is “probably much worse” moving from the city to the countryside, as opposed to in the other direction. This shows that the rural and urban are indeed tangled into a rurban fabric that makes strict separation of the two less meaningful in many cases (Caruso, 2001, 11). The influence of the internet has shifted the opportunities of work, and impacted both the materiality of rural villages as well as temporal perceptions, themes we will return to in 4.3.

Frode works in a small town, counseling people in the surrounding villages regarding unemployment and work. He described stories of rumours travelling faster than people, and sometimes heavily affecting lives even when they are not true. The rumour and gossip culture is a part of the everybody knowing everybody phenomenon in many rural villages, and shows that it is a darker side to the idyllic narrative of community and safety (Kloep et al., 2003, 96). Henrikke has a colleague who, after an incident at work, was reluctant to buy a beer at the supermarket, knowing that people would see them, know about it, and silently judge. The gossip, rumours and perceived supervision make up precisely the dark side of the everybody knowing everybody phenomenon (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 178). It can make life in the rural village agonising and difficult for the people experiencing it. In the rural villages, opinions spread fast and Maja has seen outsiders as well as villagers gain reputations, in turn facing social exclusion, not receiving invitations to social gatherings. This overt ostracism certainly happens in cities as well, but in the rural countryside it becomes highly visible and arguably impacts the person facing it more because there are no other communities or groups of people to rely on nearby. This might cause isolation and desire to move away. In Kloep and her colleagues' study of rural Wales, the social closeness and perceived surveillance was the main cause of young people wanting to leave the village, some of them strongly stating that they never wanted to return (Kloep et al., 2003, 102–103).

Contesting this narrative, Kristine described a substantial shift in her relationship with social visibility. Choosing to return to her rural village as an adult with two small kids, it is precisely the closeness and everybody knowing everybody that makes it feel like a safe and good place to live. Life phases and age heavily influence the perception and opinions people have on the 'everybody-knows-everybody' phenomenon. This aligns with the literature's connection of differing opinions of the close relations in rural spaces (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177; Kloep et al., 2003, 92). Kristine further described a contrasting narrative to the social exclusion, and has experienced social life as easy to access, regardless of whether you have an active circle of friends or not. Having children might reinforce easy integration, and was mentioned by Frode, Fritjof and Karin as an 'easy way in'. Frode elaborated on the speed of rumours in the rural village and pointed out that they are not always negative, and a good reputation, for instance when a newcomer participates and contributes in local activities, might get people to view you as a great asset. While earning his reputation with time after

contributing greatly to the local community through music, leisure activities and working at the local grocery store, Moheb attributes this as unique to tight-knit, rural villages.

About 2–3 weeks ago, I wrote a Facebook post saying that I’m looking for a job after I finish my degree in social work. Do you know who liked and shared it? It’s people who live in the rural village. None of them are people I’ve met in Oslo or here in Volda or anywhere else. It’s just the people in the countryside. So that warmth, that care, that closeness—you don’t get that in the city.

Moheb finds the support and backing he receives from the rural village, several years after moving away, touching. Growing up in a big city abroad with a completely different culture, and having spent time in Norwegian towns as well, it is notable that Moheb finds the care and closeness to be most predominant in the Norwegian rural village. The social cohesion is often stronger in rural communities, strengthening also the *dugnad* spirit (Villa, 2000, 478). The closeness is evidently a double edged sword, but while you seem to pay a higher price to stand out or to get to know people, the reward is seemingly likewise high.

While certain social facts, such as the *dugnad* and how the various consequences of everybody knowing everybody seem to make rural life different from the urban, Karin and Ebba pointed out that they see fewer differences between cities and villages now than they did growing up. The celebration of pride in the local village and immigrants settling all over the country are some of the things they mentioned that make social life more similar regardless of the size of the place. This reflects the ‘rurban’ theory, stating that the urban way of life influences the countryside and created an entanglement of the two, rather than separate units (Caruso, 2001, 11). In the next section we will examine more closely the idealisations and stereotypes of the rural spaces against the rural lived experiences.

4.1.3 Imagined versus Lived - the Gap

The imagined rural idyll does not fit seamlessly with the lived experience of life in rural villages. The imagery of the red barn in the sunset with a couple of cows grazing calmly in the meadow, or the ‘perfect’ picture of someone skiing down from a peak in the summer with the sun in the background, are alluring pictures. Kristine, growing up in a rural village, is one of the participants that are not completely convinced by the idyll, believing that it is taken a bit too far.

I think that when you come from the countryside and move back to the same village, you know what you're getting into, because the thing is, there are quite a few people who've romanticised the countryside and, for example, moved here. And then there's a lot more to organise than you've given it much thought. (...) It can be dark and dreary during the winter months. (...) At least in the summer, I live in what's like a postcard, in a way. And it is *that* lovely. But there's also another side to it that you need to be aware of, in a way. Because it's not just the postcard. It's also that it shifts in winter and the power goes out.

While the actual rural life sometimes does look like a postcard, the practical reality of that life is hidden from view making the idealisation more of a dream than a reality. Kristine described newcomers moving there with that dream in mind, not taking into consideration in this specific case the strain of commuting at sea in the dark, cold winter, possibly with kids going to extracurricular activities after school, for instance. The friction of mobility experienced here is a theme that will be further investigated in part 4.3 of the analysis (Cresswell, 2010, 166). Infrastructure and mobility options can easily curb the dream of the picturesque outskirts. Idealising the rural outer peripheries is something Frode recognises in himself.

I'd really love to live on a *lighthouse*, for example. It'd be awesome, but then I think, 'Oh my God, how am I going to get my Coke and tobacco then?' Right? So there are some challenges with that, kind of. You kind of have to weigh the pros and cons, figure out what's realistic.

Frode is conscious that this is only a dream, and is not willing to sacrifice all the comforts of civilization to pursue his settlement fantasies. Frode believes the media with its selection of tv-programmes picturing the beautiful countryside influences the images many people have of rural Norway. This describes the desire many people have for the rural aesthetic without wanting to sacrifice service provision living through the isolation it causes (Bratrud, 2024a, 224). Frode realises it is a curated representation, not a lived reality.

Håkon believes that people moving to rural villages from the city might experience a small shock, not being able to access food after eight pm, and with the neighbour knowing everything about you after two days, paying attention in case anything new might happen. This reflects the bygda paradox where the rural spaces are applauded as important while material realities are being withdrawn (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Looking closely at the imaginaries of the rural with the lived reality reveals many contrasts. Fritjof, being a

self-described dreamer, is nonetheless sceptical of the dream of a small farm people are carrying with them in great numbers.

I think a lot of people have this kind of small-farm dream that's very idealistic, and they don't realize that, okay, then you have to get behind the wheel of a tractor, then you have to get to work with a shovel, then you need chains there (...) It takes money to buy a tractor, it takes infrastructure to be able to fill up that tractor with fuel. There are tons of little things like that... So it's probably a good fit for some people, and not for others (...) and I think there's a lot of clichés about glorifying that (...) life.

Fritjof is criticising precisely the discrepancy between the idyllic picture and idea and the practical reality of farm life, or life in remote rural places. This exemplifies that the idea of the good life in Norway is still connected to the rural life, while more than 83% percent of Norwegians currently live in cities, further removed from the actual life (Auerbach et al., 2024, 3; Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 174). The imaginaries of farm life being the epiphany of rural idyll are strong.

In section 4.1.1 Ebba described the mountain pasture life where strangers in passing cars took pictures of her. She is often met with people sighing 'ah, how lovely' when they learn about the farm and mountain pasture of her family. However, Ebba discards the romantic idea people have of a farm. "It's so stressful and messy, and there's so much responsibility". As one example, she described the bloody work of handling uterine prolapse, where the cows need to be put on a rack, rinsed, then have their uterus pushed back in. Meanwhile she admits that a summer's day with good weather in the mountain pasture, apart from being snapshotted by passing cars, can be as idyllic as it seems and occasionally she enjoys bringing friends from the city to share the experience. Aside from the heavy labour involved in farming, Karin mentioned the mental strain of the profession which is lonely by nature, and not really highly regarded in society. She has seen trauma being passed on when a new generation takes over a farm. These are stark contrasts to the sunset image of the cows grazing happily, making the cultural construction of idyll apparent (Hämeenaho, 2013, 4). Life in the rural villages is as complex and multifaceted as in the cities, yet an idealised image of farm life lives on in people's minds.

Maja has grown up on a small farm and understands the romanticisation of the rural saying there is something very "Norwegian" about it, but believes people from the city might never

be able to relate to what it is actually like. The invention of the Norwegian as synonymous with the rural, nature, and village life is reinforced by the retold story of the nation's national romantic history in school curricula, and lives on in the minds of people from the rural villages (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 4, 41). Imaginaries do not solemnly live in the mind of people from urban areas, and romanticisation might occur everywhere. Cultural constructions can be particular and geographically limited, but they might as well be national (Hämeenaho, 2013, 4). Frode attested that no Norwegian he knows travels abroad and describes the streets of Oslo when explaining what country they are from. It is rather the idyllic scenery of rural fjords, mountains and nature, or picturesque fishing villages of Lofoten that are showcased. He agreed with Maja that this is the imagery of what is typically Norwegian, and also pointed out the irony of Oslo perhaps being what is actually most typical, considering it has the largest population of any Norwegian city. Nationalistic ideas and imageries of Norway is a broader idealisation of the rural that to some extent might bridge the gap of the centre-periphery division, with both urban and rural populations sharing the pride of the “typically Norwegian” (Hylland Eriksen, 1993, 11; Rokkan, 1967, 369). The urban second home owners might idealise rural life without understanding the lived reality of rural spaces, but the nationalistic ideas of the exquisiteness of Norwegian nature is commonly shared by many Norwegians.

The rural idyll is leaning on the pictures and imageries of beautiful, tranquil nature. What this image omits is the fact that Norwegian weather in many of the most picturesque coast lines and mountain regions have months of rain, darkness, fog and snow. It is not just TV channels and social media that feed people with the striking landscape in great weather. Several municipalities have themselves spent large amounts of money on marketing campaigns showing precisely these images, in attempts to mitigate depopulation and attract in-migrants (Vestby, 2018, 17). Kristine believes it is not just urbanites romanticising the rural, but also her fellow villagers, in a somewhat strategic attempt to attract tourists and newcomers. In her opinion the direct involvement of locals is much more impactful than fancy campaigns rolled out by municipalities. Meanwhile, the big tourism sector in Norway contributes to the idealisation of nature and rural spaces, willingly selling the idyll of the small farms in the sunset or picturesque fishing villages (Vestby, 2018, 19). The rural is not just an imagined idyll, it is sold as a lucrative commodity (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). The social construction of rurality becomes apparent through the instrumental and strategic marketing of the rural. The urban population, oftentimes not familiar with the actual life in rural villages

might willingly buy this image, maintaining and reinforcing the idyllic narrative through consumption of idyll on TV, social media or through leisure time visits to their second home cabins. However, the social life and practical realities in rural Norway is not just characterised by idyll.

As seen in 4.1.2 the social closeness comes with its cost, and while social cohesion creates safety and comfort in some cases, such as when moving in or after the passing of a relative, it can place limitations on the individual, leaving them feeling constrained or even controlled. Frode explained that you might have to portray yourself as something different than what you really are. This makes city life more attractive in the risk seeking phases of early adult life (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 178). The rural village life is certainly more complicated than the idyllic images. The ‘village animal’ is often a double-edged sword. However, the support and *dugnad* spirit remain stronger in the rural village. Karin explained that while news nearly travels faster than a phone call, the support she instantly received when her grandfather died was enormous, emphasising that the local community really is present when something happens. This is not something she would have seen happening in a city, where the willingness to reach out and help out unasked is not as strong (Blekesaune & Haugen, 2018, 233). Maja agrees that the difference between the cities and rural villages is noticeable.

Many rural communities—or people in the countryside—might be a little more reserved. But I think that once you get to know them, you’ll make a friend for life. There’s a different kind of loyalty when you’re out in the countryside than when you’re in a city.

The social process takes longer time and is more precarious in the rural village, where there are fewer people to lean on and choose between. The rural idyll of safe, close relations is evident in the account from Maja (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). There are qualitative differences between the more impersonal ties in the city, where friendships are experienced as less stable and more planned, than the long-standing loyalty in the rural village. Tareq regularly pays visits to the village he spent many years in, saying that the feeling he gets there is like being part of a greater family, and compares it to Norwegians going back to visiting relatives in the rural countryside, keeping traditions alive. The rural tight-knit idyll is in this case fairly close to the lived experience (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). Sitting down and talking to the store manager, drinking coffee in the middle of the day is certainly not

something that usually occurs in the city, and it might connect to different temporal ideas, a theme we will look closer at in the next part of the analysis.

With lived experiences, the rural population have a more nuanced perception of rural idyll as they know the material restrictions of a life far away from service centers and cities. The early morning when the power might have run out, and the long transport stage getting to school and work show the other side of the postcard of beautiful landscapes bathed in sun. While the sample size of this qualitative research does not allow for firm answers to the questions of whether the romanticisation of the rural is only an urban phenomenon, the participants show us that while they know the real life behind the pictures, they are prone to the occasional dreaming themselves. The influences of marketing campaigns by the municipalities or tourist operators might not impact this group, but the extensive selection of TV shows, as well as social media posts keep the rural idyll alive and ongoing.

The idyll is still easier imagined by the urban gaze, than of the people living with all costs of the tight-knit small communities. While diffuse social control can curb the feeling of individual freedom, the sense of community and the *dugnad* spirit seem to remain higher in the rural villages than in the cities. Finally, it is important to note that people living in the rural villages of Norway are not a homogenous group, and representations and identities are continuously negotiated and renegotiated, both individually and as a group (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). The rural idyll imaginaries remain a contrast to the urban, first with its pictures of spacious nature and happy animals, and second with the idea of the close-knit, safe village where everybody knows everybody. While this is undoubtedly a characteristic distinct from the cities, it is as we have seen a double edged sword. Next, we will see how temporal perceptions of the rural influences the real and perceived differences between the rural and the urban.

4.2 - Temporal Perceptions

The entanglement of spaces and temporal perception was clear in this study, as all of the participants reported different ways of experiencing and sensing time. Shifting experiences of time are influenced by places and location. This is part of the core argument for the timespace concept developed by May and Thrift (2003, 5). We will see some perhaps surprising findings on where the participants experienced calmness, autonomy and satisfaction in

relation to their experience of time. With six of the 12 participants being women in their late twenties, it is important to note that the social aspect of their lives may be impacted by being in an uncertain phase characterised by change in terms of moving more often, entering the work market and establishing relationships. This arguably makes this group's perception of slowness, pace and place more interesting, as their life phase is uncertain and might be stressful in itself. Four of these grew up in villages, while two of them moved from villages to cities when they were 9 and 12 years old.

First, we will look at the contrasting impressions of time between the cities and rural spaces. Second, we continue to see how the experienced pace of time manifested in the bodies of the participants. Third, we look at how temporal differences affect the work and lifestyles of the participants.

4.2.1 Urban and rural timespaces

Several participants described experiencing time differently in rural settings compared to urban ones. These differences spanned from how social life was organised, to the pace of traffic and sensory impressions, and the effects of living next to or in nature in rural areas. One of the participants, Fritjof, experienced the sensory elements of cities as demanding.

You're reminded of a whole host of things in the city. When are people out? When is the sun shining on that sidewalk café? When does the tram stop running? When does the tram start running? (...) There are tons of things like that that (...) I don't necessarily want to, or have the capacity or ability to take in without it affecting me a little.

The rhythm of the city is influencing the participant involuntarily. Simply being surrounded by traffic, having to navigate transport and making choices for how to move, or being confronted with the constant movement and decisions of other people is cognitively demanding for Fritjof. The density of buildings also seems to make him worried about accessing sunlight, and cause yet another concern on his mental checklist. The sense of not having full control over the space around you, as well as feeling overwhelmed by sensory impressions in the city is at the core of Georg Simmel's description of the city (1903/2020, 6). Fritjof explained the involuntariness of the sensory impressions, and it relates directly to how a succession of changing images intensifies the human nervous system, according to Simmel. The city seems to force the participant to notice its rhythm and pace, simply by the mere quantity of transport options, people and architecture. The space makes Fritjof notice

time and pace, in a lived example of spatiotemporal decompression, which according to Bratrud is about perceived pressure on time and space (2024a, 208). This sense of being pulled in different directions echoes the participants' direct contrast between urban and rural spaces.

You can also sit in the city waiting for something and feel like time is passing slowly. But in a way, there's a big difference, because time in the city is like that—the clock never stops, in a way. It just goes on and on and on. I mean, it feels like you're part of a much faster-paced world, whereas as soon as you get out into quieter areas where there's less going on, you feel like time stands still and moves much slower, I'd say.

The pulse of the city is experienced by Fritjof as fast and continuous, with no space for intervention or regulation of this pace; even if sitting still and waiting, the pace around is noticeable. This pressuring sense of time is an expression of spatiotemporal decompression, but further seems to prevent feelings of autonomy for Fritjof. Bratrud's Exurban timespace is exactly conceptualising this shift of moving away from the pressure of time in the cities to find a new layer of time in rural, more quiet places (2024a, 207). Fritjof is nearly 50 years old, and regularly moves between the city and rural outskirts where he lives. While he described feeling tied to the city due to work and family commitments, he simultaneously searches for calm, quiet places and spends as much time in nature as he can. Choosing to move permanently to a cabin in the woods for these reasons places him in the exact same category as Bratrud's participants of middle aged, upper middle-class citizens shifting between the cities and countryside, creating a third timespace between the two (2024a, 221). Although Fritjof predominantly grew up in urban areas, participants with rural backgrounds reported similar experienced differences of the city and of villages.

The perception of cities feeling faster and often more stressful, while rural time seems to move slower, was reported by 11 out of 12 participants. Ebba, however, did not agree that the city is where the stress occurs.

I feel like I don't get stressed out by being here in the city. I know a lot of people can get stressed out by it, but we live in a really quiet neighborhood (...) and I don't really mind being on the subway during rush hour, you know. (...) I actually think, at least where we live now, that it feels like things move slower here. A little slower. I grew up right by the main road, after all. So there's always a lot of noise at home, you know.

Cities are more than their downtown areas, and the sizes of Norwegian cities, even Oslo, create parts of the city which look more like suburban areas. As Ebba grew up on a busy farm next to a big road, the pace at home is very different from the city. Notably, her job is currently managing a yearly festival in the village she is from, meaning that in Oslo she is working remotely from home, while working when in the village means meeting people and organising things in practical locations. This can almost be seen as a reversal to Bratrud's exurban timespace. For Ebba, time is not moving faster in the cities, but on the contrary the stress is found in the village where her job is located and her network of family, friends and colleagues is wide. This might enforce the perception that the exurban space created in the rural areas is a space inhabited by the urban middle class, while people originally from rural villages have different relationships with rural spaces, and hence different perceptions of time when being there. That said, two other participants growing up in countryside villages reported time as moving slower in the village, even when families and friends demanded their time and attention. While Karin is a friend of Ebba growing up in the neighbouring village, her experience when returning to the village is different.

I do think it's much quieter. I notice that I'm less stressed when I'm at home than I actually am in the city. I feel that when I'm sitting inside in Oslo, I feel like I'm missing out on things. That I should be out and doing something (...) whereas when I'm at home, it's like there's always something that needs to be done (...) I feel that, at least in my head, there's less stress. (...) these are tasks that don't require as much mental effort from me to take the initiative to come up with things (...) or use my brain to bring people together, since (...) everyone who's home kind of joins in.

The pace of the city is causing feelings of restlessness for Karin. Meanwhile, being home on visits, helping out with practical tasks such as painting a wall or collecting the sheep with her family in the fall is allowing her to destress. Unlike Ebba, who also has her work in the village, being on the family farm allows Karin to wind down, and creates a sense of slowness and ease. Interestingly, social life being less organized makes Karin less stressed, and enables her to mentally relax. Simmel's conceptualisation of urban sensory pressure is evident also in this case. The more than hundred years old analysis still resonates with the description of rural life as having a slower, more regular rhythm of life (Simmel, 1903/2020, 6). Rural time feels less stressful for Karin and allows for more spontaneous social meetings. To her, this allows her to relax, while for Ebba it is precisely the spontaneity of neighbours constantly stopping by at her parents' farm that makes the village more stressful and faster paced than the city, where she does not mind having to plan social interactions. Ebba emphasised several

times her ambivalent relationship to *bygda* and also recalls dreaming of the city and its anonymity when she was younger, dreaming of escaping the social visibility such as many rural youths do (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 178). Another participant moving to a remote rural village when he was 19 without a network recalls the silence of the village as a social silence, and reports on loneliness and learning how to be bored. The situation of one's social network seems to influence the value placed on the quiet rural spaces by the participants.

Fritjof and Karin's perceptions of time moving faster in the city, and the pressure this evokes in them resonates also in the other 9 participants' answers, in various expressions of spatiotemporal decompression. Ebba shows us a different experience, with work in the village, a family farm with an open door policy and the main road causing stress that she escapes when being in the city. Social life, access to networks, and loneliness is often influenced by locality, but not always, and networks can differ in size in the city as well as rural areas. In the next part we are investigating how the silence of rural villages and of nature has influenced the body and mental wellbeing of the participants.

4.2.2 Bodily expressions of temporal differences

Perceptions of time and experiences of different paces can manifest also in our bodies. One of the participants arrived in Norway from a million-sized city in the Middle East. After a few months in a big village where the family was comfortable, they were sent to a remote village surrounded by forest for a two-year mandatory settlement period. This took a heavy toll on the mental health of Moheb, who was 19 when they arrived.

It was snowy and cold and a new country, right? (...) And you still have those mental health issues you arrive with, right? And that points to that... that inner calm there, and you really find peace there. You get a deep, deep peace of mind, inner calm where we lived. And that led to the mental health issues—the thoughts and flashbacks and experiences I've had—coming up very quickly. Right? That led to me being very mentally exhausted (...) we had been on autopilot for a while, while fleeing, where we were only concerned with finding a safe place. Safety, stability, food, rent, moving forward. We haven't thought much about what's happened—until—you're put in a place where it's completely silent. Completely, completely, completely silent.

For someone carrying the weight of war experiences, the contrast to a remote rural village in Norway could not have been greater. The silence Moheb experienced was both literal, with

forest surrounding the small village, but also social, explaining that there were very few people his age to hang out with. This case can be an inverted example of exurban timespace, and shows how the calmness and peace of the countryside is a perception created by people who can afford to shift between city and rural spaces (Bratrud, 2024a, 221). To Maheb, the silence did not provide tranquility, and being in the remote village was not a voluntary decision, rather one made for his family by the Norwegian government. Hence, it showcases how the politics of mobility and in this case immobility is imbued with power (Cresswell, 2010, 162). Tareq, the cousin of Moheb, has also lived many years in a Norwegian village. Now, this has affected his relationship to cities.

Tareq grew up in the same million-sized Middle Eastern city as Moheb. After 11 years in the Norwegian outskirts, which he described as having a slower pace, his views of big cities are completely different and this change was felt on the body.

My family lives in Istanbul. So that was a really big city. Also, when I visited it for the first time, I became sick. And there was just so much noise there, and all the honking and stuff. I couldn't stand it. (...) So when I visited my family for the first time, I was... I had a headache, and I think that made me feel a little sick. So, yeah, it was a bit strange.

The sensory experiences and especially sounds caused headaches and unrest for Tareq, to the point where he felt sick. While he says he usually recovers after being there some days, he still thinks it strange how much things have changed. This shows that habit of place can change even a person growing up in a million-sized city, manifesting itself when returning to big cities. The contrast between Istanbul and even Oslo is huge, and although this contrast does not come as a surprise, bodily symptoms still tell us that the disparity is great.

The change of pace between rural and urban areas is felt in the body by several participants. Håkon grew up in a remote village, but has lived and worked several years in the city. He explained how people haste through Oslo during rush hour, trying to get places quickly. “You automatically just start walking, walking faster”. While Håkon appears a relaxed guy, he is not immune to the ‘city pace’ and the spatiotemporal decompression people are trying to avoid (Bratrud, 2024a, 208). Maria similarly appears as a relaxed person, and while she does not seem to mind the crowds and pace experienced in Oslo, she explained how it influences her: “You might not really relax until you’re actually home and about to go to sleep, you know”. Several participants (Karin, Kristine, Maja) described their bodies as

more relaxed when being in rural spaces, closer to nature. Fritjof described the health benefits of the outdoor life he leads when he is in rural spaces.

I'd say you can feel it in your body—it's calming and healthy. I don't know who would argue with that, but if you... spend a lot of time outdoors, get some sun, let the sun hit your body, go swimming, go skiing, stay active, and are out in nature in general, people tend to feel really good and look great as a result.

In the opinion of Fritjof, everyone benefits from being active and outside. While these are not activities reserved for people in the countryside, having easy access was important to Fritjof and other participants. Importantly, one participant noted that she spent less time walking because she needed a car in the village and used to walk and use public transport when living in the city, showing how automobile dependency might also affect lifestyles (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, 331). She did however also appreciate the easy access of nature and hiking routes. In the exurban timespace, not everyone has the access to shift between different spaces in search of the easiest and most tempting places to be active.

For Moheb, his relationship with rural stillness and slow pace changed with time, especially as his relationship to nature shifted. An older neighbour and later close friend showed Moheb how to appreciate nature, something that Moheb still enjoys today, now going on weekend trips in his self-built camper van. Currently living in a much bigger village with around 7000 people, he does not see himself ever moving to a similarly remote place, partly because the completely quiet places still scares him. His relationship with nature has changed greatly; he described the bigger village he currently lives in with warmth.

There's a fantastic fjord, there's nature, and there's so much to do. I once wrote that nature can help you reconnect with your soul. Nature can cleanse your soul, you know? And without you even realizing it. So if you had told me that 11 years ago—that, yeah, people say nature cleanses the soul—I would have laughed at it.

Moheb described nature as now having a distinct positive influence on his wellbeing and soul. Without being able to delve deeper into the lifestyle choices of the participant, the ways in which nature is affecting him positively associate to the positive effects of the

degrowth paradigm, that places value on time spent in nature, rather than on monetary growth (Kallis et al., 2018, 292). While the rural slow pace initially stirred mental difficulties, contesting Simmel's notion of the tiresome city on the minds of people, the changes Moheb has gone through now affirm rather than contest the theory of Simmel. Another participant, Frode who is in his late 40s, reported changing appreciation and desire for the rural areas after living 16 years in the same small village. Frode reported that despite the fact that Norwegian cities all are in close proximity to nature, having immediate access right from one's doorstep lowers the effort needed to make use of it, and gives him a sense of peace.

The perceptions of time have proved to influence not just participants' perceived difference of rural and urban spaces, but also manifest themselves in their bodies. While not merely as positive experiences, most of the rural experiences of slower time have proved to be experiences allowing the participants to wind down. In the next section we will see in greater detail whether the temporal experiences in the cities and rural villages have influenced the lifestyles and work lives of the people interviewed.

4.2.3 Temporal Influence on Work and Lifestyles

Temporal perceptions are felt strongly by several of the participants, and for one of them it even influenced her decision to relocate for a period of time. Henrikke is from a medium-sized rural village, but has spent several years in the city.

I find that I don't spend as much time getting from A to B. That was probably my biggest time thief when I lived in Oslo. And it was an energy drain, too—constantly having to rush to the subway, for example, or plan how long it would take to get from one place to another. It was like that every single day; I had to plan how long it would take. And if you missed the first options, you kind of had to take the next one. (...) The pace is completely different here. The only thing I have to keep up with here is work, so to speak. Other than that, there's really nothing else. So life moves a little slower. And it's more meditative, in a way. So I feel like you might make better use of your time here.

Moving around is easier in the small village Henrikke now lives in, not having to worry about the schedule of public transport and planning her every move. Though being stuck in traffic is common in cities, she spent surprisingly large amounts of time and energy on movement in the city, especially considering how public transport can seem like fast

options, with the metro avoiding the streets for example. In contrast to other rural accounts of long distances affecting everyday life, Henrikke lives close to her place of work in the village and can avoid the time lost to commuting. She is able to escape the spatiotemporal decompression that used to put pressure on her everyday life (Bratrud, 2024a, 208). In her case, the rural place and short distances allow her to not be caught in the friction of mobility (Cresswell, 2010, 166). Her perception suggests that she finds the rural timespace to be more relaxing than the urban one. Less commuting is not the only reason for this. Henrikke explained:

Besides that, of course—and this was a big reason for me to come here—I had a job where I felt I was really burning myself out. It was either an overwhelming amount of work or almost none at all. And I lived in a tiny little room in a shared house, in a building that was falling apart. It was really not ideal living there. Suddenly I started thinking, ‘Why?’ ‘Why am I hustling for this when I don’t really see the point?’ So it was really nice for me to come here.

The shifting pace of work, combined with the time spent getting around town put so much pressure on Henrikke that it made her reconsider not only her job, but her living situation and location as well. The stress of the shifting amounts of work, combined with a high cost of living made existential questions surface. Temporal relief in rural life with a different rhythm provided escape from unsustainable urban pace. In a way, Henrikke is entering the exurban timespace when she escapes the spatiotemporal decompression and moves to the rural village (Bratrud, 2024a). As she keeps in touch with friends and has returned to visit the city on a few occasions, she creates her own exurban timespace, not losing her connection with the city. The sense of time she experienced in Oslo is also an example of the capitalist value our society places on time, as well as money, as having omnipresent abstract value (Bratrud, 2024a, 215). Henrikke is taking an active choice in opting out of the ‘rat race’ of the city, where friends of hers describe having three or four jobs to make ends meet, being exhausted going from job to job. Another participant, Kristine, described her previous job in the city in similar terms: “there was an expectation that things should have been done yesterday”. The pace is distinctly faster in urban centers, either with heavy workloads, or requiring several jobs. This is not to say that jobs in the districts can not be fast and demanding as well; however, the sum of work, commuting, experiences of immobility, as well as higher costs of living puts higher pressure on people in the cities.

Kristine has relocated to the village she grew up in, and she explained how it has changed some of her daily habits.

There's more space... and I really notice it, like when I'm strolling through the woods on my way to the ferry in the morning and stuff. I find myself much more able to just stop for a moment and listen to the birds singing and things like that. You have a lot more of that kind of space here.

Although she used to walk to work in the city as well, she says she never used to do this kind of thing in Oslo. After returning home three years ago with her newly started family she notices the difference in time as a feeling of increased acceptance of the fact that things take more time. Living on a small island with no cars, she has to cross the fjord with a ferry or private boat to get to her car, and then further by bus to arrive at her job in the city. Working remotely two days a week is important to make this possible for her. Although the commute is long, she still reports a slowing down of pace and more relaxed atmosphere. Like Henrikke, she has avoided spatiotemporal decompression. Her opportunities of mobility allows her to enter the exurban timespace, commuting to work in the cities part-time (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Kristine seems to appreciate the slower, rural time, while she admits loving the city and it being an important part of her identity.

Another participant, Maria, is in her late 20s and loves her life in the city. Unlike Henrikke and Kristine, she is more conflicted regarding spending time in the rural village.

I feel like I'm not very productive. And that life kind of stands still when I'm there. So I can't stay there very long—more than a week, and I've had enough. But that can also be nice if you want to relax.

When visiting her home in a remote village on the west-coast, she spends time with family and friends, as well as in nature where “you get a lot of time to philosophize about your life”, as she described it. This does not seem to provide great relief to her, and it might be due to her work in the city. As a musician, the network she has in the city is important to her, both in terms of her career, and also for creative input. This reminds us of Moheb's feeling of being stuck in the rural space where “nothing is happening”. For Maria, the timespace she prefers to be in is in the city. Going back home seems to cause feelings of a setback to her, yet it still provides a space to relax. This reminds us of the ambiguity of temporal

perceptions, and while all participants agree on the fact that time seems to move slower in rural spaces, it is highly individual what feelings the faster city pace and more quiet rural pace evoke.

4.3 - Material constraints

In order to live somewhere, you need an income, food, housing and access to health services and schools. While many might take these factors for granted in Norway, they provide crucial and increasingly hard to access for the people living in rural villages. In this section, we will look into how access to work, housing and services such as transportation, infrastructure, schools and health care are proving to be material constraints for the rural population of Norway. We will see some of the effects the Norwegian municipalities with a high number of second homes or cabins, so-called ‘cabin municipalities’, have on the local population. Accessing affordable housing in these municipalities is becoming increasingly difficult. Further, we will look into the effects of the centralisation policies of recent years. The threat of schools and hospitals shutting down seems to loom over rural villages, especially the most peripheral ones. While the objective is not to go into detail of the economic and political structure of the centralisation policies, through the eyes of the 12 participants we will get a closer look of the material constraints shaping life in the rural areas of Norway.

4.3.1 Work and Digital Connectivity

Making a living is a prerequisite to settle somewhere, and with subsistence farming being rare or non-existent in a country with less than 3% arable land, people need different kinds of livelihoods. How and where we work has changed greatly in the last 100 years, with industrial agriculture and the rise of the service economy moving work away from many villages (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Nevertheless, the population living in rural Norway requires services and maintaining these services requires people. Although increased centralisation is pushing jobs out of villages, the ICT-revolution has made it possible for more people to return, or move to rural spaces (Knudsen, 2020, 59). Karin and Håkon both grew up in remote rural villages, and both of them believe that the option of remote work is crucial to avoid depopulation of their villages. Kristine has recently returned to the small island where she grew up after a busy career as a politician in Oslo. “When it comes to the jobs that are relevant for me to get hold of, I’m quite dependent on the internet, as it means I can work from home at least two days a week, and sometimes three.” For Kristine, returning to her

village might not have been possible if the job she could get was not flexible. While opportunities of remote work is growing, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, it increases dependency on stable network connections and may widen the gap between those with flexible jobs that can be conducted online, and those with physical jobs, for example those involving people (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, 329). We will return to the topic of class and migration in section 4.4. While Kristine's job is located almost 100 kilometers away from her home on a small island, the opportunity of working from home makes it possible to live there with two small kids. She is a part of the middle class that can access work in the city, and still spend her time and live in the rural village (Bratrud, 2024a, 221). The friction of mobility is reduced thanks to the option of working remotely (Cresswell, 2010, 166). This shows us that digital connectivity is not just a tool, it is what allows people with access to certain jobs and the salaries that follow the option of living also in rural remote places.

To sustain life in the rural villages, both Karin and Håkon believe that the opportunity to work remotely should increase, drawing people from the cities, and maybe especially out-migrants growing up in the rural villages like themselves to return. They point to the benefits of having a wider range of options when finding a job, as well as the chance to commute. Henrikke, currently living in a small village on the West Coast, explained how many of the residents there commute into the slightly bigger centers for work. She has other thoughts about what draws people to live in locations such as hers.

But I don't know if it's really that important to have those sort of mad, crazy, fantastic jobs, for example. I don't know if, for people who settle in the countryside, that's where their... That what's matters most to them. Perhaps it's more important to make the most of the afternoons, then, perhaps? Or maybe it depends a bit on how long you've lived here and things like that. I think it's important.

Henrikke explained that while there are many highly educated people living in her village, the location of work is not the main reason why people live there. This might precisely confirm Bratrud's (2024a, 207) concept of the exurban timespace, where the privileged middle class combines life in the picturesque village while maintaining jobs and salaries from elsewhere. While these people commute, they might prefer working remotely, such as Kristine described. However, for Henrikke, the motivation is different and her main priority when living in the village is not having a fancy job, but rather having access to the nature around and living an everyday life with reduced friction of mobility (Cresswell, 2010, 166).

Kristine seems to place higher value on the opportunities she sees in rural spaces, rather than on having multiple opportunities of work, but being forced to live in the city.

In the opinion of Maja, Norwegian people seem to have become more picky when choosing their jobs, and explains how the family business in Sunnmøre on the West Coast has received very few Norwegian applicants. She contemplates whether slightly lower salaries is the reason why fewer people apply to work in the hotel of her family. This might again point to the study of Bratrud on middle class citizens aiming to keep their city based jobs and the salaries that come with them, also when relocating to rural areas (Bratrud, 2024a, 221). Maja is suggesting that being particular about what job you are willing to do, will make a rural livelihood less possible.

For Moheb and Tareq, being a foreigner in small rural villages did not pose an obstacle to accessing jobs, even before they comprehended the language. Regarding settlement of migrants, Moheb was however highly critical about the lack of screening for skills and education when placing families or individuals in remote rural villages.

Do you work with fish? OK. Those islands are really well known for their fish. Fantastic. Go for it. Don't be silly and, for example, if you see that someone is coming to Norway and they'd like to continue their education, or would like to do something else, but you settle them somewhere completely different.

Although settlement of immigrants is beyond the scope of this thesis, Moheb is pointing to the simple but important logic of following both skills and desire when choosing where to settle. In his case, not choosing where to stay felt like a prolonged 5 year long waiting period before his actual life could start. The mobility injustice of being caught up in this kind of immobility due to the strict settlement schemes of the government made the jobs available to himself and his family very limited (Sheller, 2018, 49). Although Moheb did not complain, had he been able to live in a different location, perhaps a more urban one, his options of work would have been much greater.

Tareq found various jobs, especially during the summer and other vacations, substituting for the janitor, or cleaning public places. Being alone in a small remote rural village seemed to be surprisingly easy for him. He explained further:

Actually, in small towns, it's much easier to find a job than in cities. I don't know what it's like elsewhere, but where I lived, we were offered summer jobs, for example, by the local council; we could apply for them, and we were offered them. (...) It was a bit of a positive thing in small towns. Everyone knows each other, and news spreads very quickly. Right? And so if you managed to do a job really easily, that was a good thing. Because everyone knows about it, it makes it much easier to find a new job every time.

Word of mouth worked as a positive mechanism in Tareq's case, repeatedly securing him jobs because he was well known and gained a reputation for being a reliable and good worker. In his case, the immobility he faced being tied to the small village in the settlement program, did not impose any limitations in terms of accessing jobs (Cresswell, 2010, 166). Rather, personal contacts and the tight-knit community was beneficial, and as he explains himself, gave him chances he might not have gotten in a city.

One of the participants, Moheb, believes that many rural villages are transformed into industrial areas, and as municipalities are merged, people are urged to move to cities. While industrial areas could provide jobs, housing and services are not maintained in the same areas, possibly creating longer commutes for the people working in these industries. Meanwhile, another participant, Frode, thinks it is hard to assess whether the districts are being de-prioritised or not.

I think that perhaps some districts account for quite a lot of value creation, yet they may not get much back in return. The money ends up in places other than where it is actually created. I think there are plenty of examples of this. (...) And perhaps, for example, in Lofoten, which relies heavily on tourism, not all of that money ends up in Lofoten. ... Quite a lot of it does, mind you, but it may end up in the hands of just a few people.

Frode expressed frustration over the fact that the people contributing to keep the economic wheels of the country turning, does not necessarily benefit. While workers in the rural villages contribute to the national wealth in industrial sectors such as the fishing industry, the energy sector and offshore engineering, to name a few, the service access in these rural areas remains limited. The state collects high taxes, yet services are being withdrawn from rural areas (Vik et al., 2022, 203). This could prove as an example of what Vik et al. conceptualise as the greedy state (2022, 203). We will have a closer look at access to services later in this part. First we will see how, despite the challenge of maintaining a steady job in rural areas, people remain.

4.3.2 Housing and Gentrification

Life in the rural villages has deep historical roots, and only a few generations ago, most Norwegians lived predominantly in the countryside. While urbanisation in Norway is not slowing down, the cost of living is increasing, especially in the cities (Hanssen, 2020, 127). This is heavily influencing access to the housing market.

You can see that it's extremely expensive to live in the city. Oslo has always been expensive, of course, but now you can see that house prices are rising in all Norwegian cities. And I have friends who've bought... massive houses, in a way. 150–200 square houses for 5 million, and then you see someone buying in Majorstua who gets 25 square, so to speak. So, it's just that, to a certain extent, it's not possible to get any more space in the cities, and so people have to move out a bit and spread out a little. (...) We can't all just gather in a few places. If we do, we'll miss out on so much – both the diversity of nature and the places that once were will disappear completely

The discrepancy of how much space you get in Oslo, compared to in the home village of Karin in the Eastern part of the country, is striking. In Karin's opinion, continuous extension of the cities seems strange when the options out there are so vastly different. This reflects the centralisation pressure in the city, caused by housing pressure and market forces, as well as climate concerns justify living in the urban centres, while the cost puts immense pressure on ordinary earners (Knudsen, 2020, 66). Fritjof shares the scepticism towards applauding the urban centers and the housing situation found there. "You think, 'Oh, it'll be so cozy here,' and then it's 40 square meters, with neighbors everywhere. That can be a bit of a pain". He further elaborates on the lack of space to park your bicycle or your car. The friction of mobility in the cities is connected to the dense housing situation, causing other practical problems than in rural spaces (Cresswell, 2010, 166). Both Karin and Fritjof seem to prefer the benefits of having more space. Meanwhile, Fritjof is sceptical of the trend of looking for or buying a smallholding farm in the countryside, and then not being able to cope with all the practical tasks following the buildings, as well as not realising how much money it takes to maintain the property. Kristine similarly agrees that people, especially coming from the cities, underestimate the hard work of maintaining a smallholder or an actual farm. Ebba, being in the situation of deciding whether to succeed her father as the next farmer or not, acknowledges that it is not simply a place to live, rather it is a lifestyle and "requires a major lifestyle change".

Henrikke, having recently relocated to a remote rural village from Oslo, finds the question of whether the city or village gives her a better life difficult.

It depends on your circumstances. If I'd been living in a small basement apartment here, I might not have enjoyed myself as much as I do now that I live here in a house all to myself with a yard, you know.

While certain qualities are distinctly different between cities and rural villages, affordability is crucial. A notable problem causing difficulty accessing the housing market in rural areas is the second-home phenomenon. Remote rural villages are increasingly depopulated, and the remaining population is aging (Heleniak & Gassen, 2020, 41). While some of the houses remain empty, others are inherited and used as second-homes. Meanwhile local people are struggling to access the housing market in several places. There is however also a large sector around cabin development. With more than 400.000 second home cabins in Norway, certain 'cabin municipalities' seem to prioritise cabin development over local housing (Overvåg, 2011, 155; Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 62). These are often located in mountainous regions or along the coast. Close to the home village of Karin, her sister-in-law is struggling to buy a house, because other people are buying houses and using them as second homes, driving up the prices. Both specific second home enclaves, but also buying houses in the village leads to gentrification and difficulty for people trying to settle down in the rural villages (Overvåg, 2011, 156). This practical problem is causing frustration for people in rural areas, and sometimes creates tension between the locals and the so-called 'cabin people' (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 62). While urban and rural spaces are not as distinct and different as they might sound like, the dichotomy between them becomes evident in the case of housing. Next, we will see how centralisation has put further pressure on the living situation in rural Norway.

4.3.3 Access to Services

While the most important services to consider arguably is the health sector as well as education, having places to socialise and meet other people is also an important part of life to many people. Maja grew up in a rural village, but moved to the city when she was 12. While returning every summer to see her family, one of the reasons she is reluctant to ever move back, is the distance to cities, as well as the lack of social services. Being single she is concerned about the limited selection of other single people, as well as a lack of places to meet strangers in social settings. Leavers of the rural villages sometimes feel restrained and to a certain extent oppressed by the perceived narrowness of rural reality (Kloep et al., 2003,

103). The restricted service environment in rural villages makes the wider selection in the city more appealing to Maja. Getting to know new people and having greater options of different activities is also something she feels she would miss out on in the rural village. Meanwhile, difficulty of transportation and not living centrally is a great concern to her. This influences access to healthcare as well.

4.3.3.1 Health services

Access to services such as schools, healthcare and public transport is not increasing but is in fact being scaled back by the state (Vik et al., 2022, 203). This makes life in the rural villages difficult. Karin explained the gravity of the question of centralisation.

No, I find it a bit difficult, because I do understand, in a way, that things need to be streamlined to a certain extent across the board. Because, after all, society has to function as a whole, but from the perspective of someone who's from a rural area, I think it's a real shame. It really weakens the local community. You really feel the impact when you lose jobs and lose access to services. We've had a lot of protests over the years—to keep the local hospital, for example. And keep the emergency room. And the thing is, if we lose, say, the emergency room, it'll take us two and a half hours to get to the next hospital.

Karin is describing the necessity of having services available, and the fight her local community seems to be fighting on their own. While economic distribution is a complex question, if the local hospital is shut down the distance to the emergency room becomes a problem. Mobility justice is at play here, with the state holding the power of possibly removing the services needed in the village and surrounding area (Sheller, 2018, 49). Karin further explained that while there are many cabins in the area, whose owners enjoy having access to health facilities when they are needed, she does not see them fighting to maintain this provision of healthcare services, as they do not live there permanently. Having greater freedom of mobility, the 'cabin people' move between the cities and their cabin and get access to services in several locations. This group does not experience the same friction of movement which is highly evident for the people living in rural spaces when looking into their service offer and the distances they need to tackle daily (Cresswell, 2010, 166). Growing up in the neighbouring village of Karin, the question of healthcare is similarly integral to Ebba.

That's something that makes me really, really angry. Healthcare services in particular. There was some talk (...) about whether they were going to close the maternity ward at the hospital in Tynset. The centralisation of healthcare

services in particular makes me very, very angry. (...) Then the nearest places, Elverum or Trondheim, are two and a half hours away. It's so important that people get the help they need. That they can feel safe. That it feels safe to live at home. It makes me furious, yes.

The matter of accessibility of services and possible shut down of them, is not just a question of spending time in your car – it is a question of safety. Ebba explained that living in Oslo currently feels very safe to her, precisely because the availability of several hospitals and health services is so big, and proves as a stark contrast to life at home. This is something that makes her more sceptical of possibly moving home as well. Again, mobility justice is jeopardised for the rural inhabitants, constantly having to fight for their service offer that they pay as much taxes as everyone else to maintain (Sheller, 2018, 49; Vik et al., 2022, 203). Fritjof grew up and has spent most of his life in urban or semi-rural spaces closer to cities. When discussing centralisation, he was playing with the thought of a doctor moving to the rural outskirts and starting a private clinic, as a way of bridging the gap between the lacking health services. Meanwhile, Karin, growing up in a remote rural village, explained how dependent rural spaces are on the public healthcare sector, and that the possibility of private, rural healthcare does not exist as of now. This would also have created differentiation in rural spaces as to who could afford this offer, and who could not.

Maria, growing up in a small village on the West coast plainly stated when asked about her thoughts on centralisation of services, “I’ve actually been a bit against it myself. Because I think people who don’t live there themselves don’t realise how difficult it is”. In the region she grew up in, the mountains and fjords make transport dependent on private vehicles and ferries. This greatly affects access to health services. Maja explained how this directly affected her mom in labour.

Just one example is that when I was born – or rather, when my mum was about to give birth to me – I was in the inner part of Sørnmøre. And there, you’re dependent on the ferry, of course. And that ferry stopped running at 11 or 12 in the evening. So they had to make an exception for her when she was about to give birth. She couldn’t give birth at home.

The chance of her mom having a safe birth was completely dependent on the ferry cooperating and helping her move to the hospital in time, which is 40 kilometers away with the ferry, and around 70 kilometers without. The friction of mobility would have increased further if the operators of the ferry had not made the extra effort to run the ferry after closing

time (Cresswell, 2010, 166). The slowness of movement is in this case imposed by geography and location of the public services, and quite different from chosen slowness for leisure time (Cresswell, 2010, 162; Bratrud, 2024a, 221). The main issue of access to services like healthcare in rural areas is the physical distance to reach the services, not the quality of the service itself. Frode describes the situation in Finmark of Northern Norway where a closed mountain pass could mean life or death for a woman in labour, if maternity wards are not present.

In addition to distance and geography, the cost of maintaining public health services, including the professional environment sometimes required, is however also necessary to consider, as centralisation is not a straightforward issue. Håkon expressed a nuanced view of what he believed should remain local and accessible.

I do think there are probably some services that one... could benefit from centralising, in order to create a better professional environment around certain things. But then I also think there are some services that you rely on not being too far away. Like when primary schools are closed down, so that children aged 7 or 8 have to take the bus for an hour each way to school, and it's a three-hour journey to the nearest maternity ward – in that case, I think there are some things that have gone a bit too far.

Håkon explained that he does not think people should expect to be able to move anywhere they desire, and have services aligned with their location, but acknowledges that the real distances makes life difficult in small places. He is describing precisely the friction of movement caused by necessary services being far away (Cresswell, 2010, 166). This clearly affects life in the rural areas and separates it greatly from the situation in the cities. Kristine and Frode similarly believed certain services, in particular specialised health services, would benefit from bigger professionalised environments. Meanwhile Håkon, Kristine, Frode and all the other participants believed that keeping especially elementary schools in the villages is crucial to sustain rural life.

4.3.3.2 Schools and transport

The schools in rural villages are often small, and Maria's class in elementary school consisted of seven pupils, and occasionally merged classes with the grade above or below. The case is similar on the island in which Kristine grew up on the South coast of Norway, where they have managed to maintain their kindergarten and the elementary school with classes up to

third grade. After that, the pupils need to cross the strait with the ferry, before taking the bus about 30 minutes to school. Not just school children, but the elderly are completely dependent on the ferry in order to live on the island. Mobility justice is vulnerable in rural settings, and the state does not necessarily provide the services it guarantees in the city (Sheller, 2018, 49). While it is the counties that are responsible for public transportation, it is the smaller municipalities that are funding the schools. Both Kristine and Frode point out that the weak economy of the municipalities, which are responsible for running the schools, is the reason why so many rural schools are shut down or threatened to become shut down. The economic decline is a driver for rural discontent, and intensifies centre and periphery conflict (Vik et al., 2022, 197). The closing of schools and services is not a one sided issue, but for many rural citizens it can be seen as an example of the greedy state, collecting high taxes and not delivering basic services in return (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Further, when schools are shut down in rural villages, the commute increases. Kristine works in a county, a separate economic unit of administration, and points out that the transportation needs created when shutting down the schools is good neither for the environment, nor necessarily profitable for either the municipality or the county. In addition to this, the social cost for children growing up in rural spaces also plays a role. Two of the Norwegian participants growing up in the rural countryside reported that during their upbringing getting to places required their parents taking them around, or biking themselves. Accessing friends is a part of the rural mobility cost, and having mobile options to do this is a requirement not just for education, but for social participation as well. In Milbourne and Kitchen's study of rural Wales, the lack of public transport turns the rural into a space of "forced immobility" unless parents have a car, or in Karin and Håkon's case that you have a bicycle and the ability and time to use it to access the friends living close enough. While the friction of mobility is mostly seen as a negative, in certain instances the effort of moving brings meaning into social relationships (Cresswell, 2010, 166). Karin reported that an effect of the great distances and dependency on her parents or a bike, was making even closer friendships while growing up, precisely because of the effort required. Meanwhile, accessing available health services and schools in rural villages still relies on the scarce availability of transport options, and it does not always have positive connotations.

4.3.4 Distance, Transport and Automobile Dependency

Norway is a long-stretched country and settlement remains scattered also outside of the most populous greater Oslo area in the South East. The distances between towns, and not least from rural villages to towns and cities, vary a great deal.

Here we are speaking about a county that takes a day to drive through—or rather, not just one county, but three counties that take a day to drive through. And just driving through them at full speed. So what it's like out in the far north, from Vardø down to Brønnesund— From Vardø to Brønnøysund is kind of like driving the entire length of Italy, I think. (...) I think it might be more that people don't understand what it's actually like to live in Northern Norway. They don't understand the distances involved. (...) We're talking about logistics here.

Frode expressed frustration over politicians and people in other parts of the country not comprehending the actual distances at play in the Northern parts of the country. “There aren't that many of us, but we're very spread out”. Growing up in the North and spending most of his adult life there, he now lives in a small town North of Trondheim, located in the middle of the country. This creates greater friction of mobility (Cresswell, 2010, 166). Karin, another participant, explained that North of Trondheim, infrastructure is “pretty bad”, and that people predominantly need a car in order to get around, again reflecting the private vehicle dependence in rural villages (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, 331). Tareq, spending his first two years in the North Eastern part of Finmark, described it as a difficult place to live, with public transport being practically non-existing, and the vast nature creating a sense of void. This might challenge the degrowth paradigm that advocates for a life closer to nature with less growth and money spent on building infrastructure (Singh, 2019, 140). Getting around in the North requires time. On the North Western coast of the Southern part of the country, the fjords and mountains can hinder travels.

So we need to improve the options. But then again, we also have natural conditions that limit what we can do. You can't exactly run a train from Ålesund to Geiranger, given all the mountains. That would surely have cost a couple of billion or something like that.

Maja described how you can not simply opt for a different route. Nature is precisely the foundational factor influencing infrastructure development and transport options. Even if you can afford the expensive flights from the nearest small airport, the road to reach it is sometimes closed during winter.

After Henrikke moved back to a rural remote village in the region of her parents a while ago, she had an increased desire to travel. While living in Oslo, she did not go home more than a few times a year, but living by herself in the village has changed this.

What I've noticed is that I get this urge to get away. For example, I might drive into Sogndal once a week. In a diesel car, you know. Or when I was here on winter break, I kind of felt like, "Ah, I need to get away." So a colleague and I traveled to Dublin. And this Easter break, my mom and I went to Stockholm. In a way, you sort of get that feeling... (...) It can happen that you get a little stuck in a small place. And that might have something to do with your work and things like that, but you also feel like just travelling.

It seems like the changed pace and remoteness of her village life is increasing her need to leave the village and have other experiences. For Henrikke, driving her car to meet her parents once a week is her 'embodied practice' used to overcome the stuckness she might be feeling in the rural village (Cresswell, 2010, 162). For Henrikke, her urge to get away shows that rural life requires more high-speed mobility to remain tolerable to her. This is an example of exurban timespace in practice, where she combines time and qualities of the city with that of rural life, trying to make the most out of both of them (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Anna explained similarly that if she were to live in a remote rural village again, being near to an airport is crucial to her, as maintaining contact with her social network of friends and family is not something she would trade off to live in a rural village. While the rural timespace is desirable to Henrikke and Anna, they do not want this life at all cost, and negotiate it within their own creation of exurban time. Maintaining social networks while living in a rural village requires more time and higher cost than in cities. Although the considerable distances in Norway means that the cost would be high also between cities. Anna emphasised that she would also spend a great deal of money and time on flights living in Tromsø, visiting family in the South, going from city to city. Meanwhile, getting from a rural village to the nearest airport oftentimes rely heavily on access to a car.

4.3.4.1 The Role of Private Vehicles

With public transport being very limited across rural Norway, private vehicles play a crucial role, not just for the freedom of movement, but to access necessities as we have seen in relation to work, healthcare and schools. While Tareq lived close to his school where he attended a Norwegian course, being without a valid drivers license caused difficulties.

The bus service was really bad (...), so the first thing I did when I moved to the village was to get my driver's license. I started driving school before I actually began my Norwegian language course. Yes, because it's difficult. If I missed the bus at half past three, the next one wasn't until nine. And then I'd take the bus again, which took another two hours. By then it was eleven o'clock.

The limited options were causing him to spend his whole day on a single errand, such as going to the optician for glasses, or getting to his drivers lessons. This clearly shows how slowness is related to power, in this case heavily restricting the movement of individuals, in this case not even choosing to live there, but being settled by the state (Cresswell, 2010, 162). Moheb faced a similar situation, and described the feeling of frustration when whole days were wasted going to the doctor and finding that the appointment got cancelled. The limitation of available local services have consequences deeply felt by rural inhabitants (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Not having seamless transportation in the rural areas might not be a surprise, but not being able to access crucial services without it influencing and restricting the rest of your day-to-day life is crucial. In their study of rural Wales, Milbourne and Kitchen found that 94% of the people considered a car essential to live in the rural area (2014, 331). With Norway having even greater distances, it comes as no surprise that all the 12 people interviewed underlines the dependency of private vehicles when living in rural areas. Moheb struggled daily in the first wintery months of their time in a remote rural village, having to take the only available bus at 6 am, waiting at least an hour before their Norwegian course started, and then waiting another 1,5 hours before they could return home. With no option of working officially in this period, affording the €4-500 drivers licence was not an option. Moheb and his family tried talking to someone in the municipality about their issue, and were met with "yes, that is just what it is like". After a year facing the same problems, they asked for a meeting with the mayor and the politicians. Seeing that the municipality was receiving more refugees, they were worried about others having the same experience.

Because, they need to get their act together. We can't have it like this. (...) So we had a serious talk with the mayor. And my dad was like, "You know what? You should try our life. You're coming with us tomorrow. You're going to drop your kid off at daycare in this cold weather without a car. You're supposed to come along to the Norwegian language class. You'll have to wait and do this and that. Either you have to support us with... with transportation in some way, or you'll have to find a solution.

Moheb is describing how taking matters into their own hands was the only option when facing a slow bureaucracy that was not willing to change, and that the politicians did not

seem to understand the situation that was different from their own. The perseverance of Moheb and his family is impressive, especially in a less flexible country with strict rules. While the municipality received money for every refugee they received, Moheb did not see any of this money materialise in actual measures meant for them. This is an even starker example of the greedy state withdrawing even earmarked resources away from peripheries and the people that are meant to benefit from them (Vik et al., 2022, 203). After some time, the city council in the Moheb's village made a resolution and eventually provided financial support for the drivers licences that were secured for his family and other refugees in the municipality. Moheb recalls it as a day of great victory and joy. The difference after becoming mobile citizens was enormous for Moheb. The friction of mobility was greatly reduced, and the imposition of slowness, which impacted most parts of life was changed (Illich, 1973, 14; Cresswell, 2010, 166). Settling in rural spaces creates different problems of mobility than in the cities.

Maja described life in the rural village without the car as being trapped. She explained that it is common practice to use Facebook groups to organise unofficial rides for low prices. This practice might be attributed to the *dugnad* culture of giving an extra hand and helping each other in remote rural areas. With the state withdrawing services, people become more dependent on each other (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). Kristine, working in a southern county with the aim of getting more people to use public transport commented that she does not think people can expect the same transport schedule as is offered in the cities, referring to economic cost as well as the environmental impact of having a bus running empty rounds. She has now started driving occasionally, to get from the public ferry to the bus stop as a step in her close to 100km commute to work in the city. Mobility access is a matter of power, both on the individual state, but also more structurally from the part of the state (Sheller, 2018, 49). While the most crucial reasons for transport is to access healthcare, work and schools, other services and reasons also make movement important in the rural areas.

4.4 Migration Decisions Between the Urban and Rural

In this final section of the analysis and discussion, we will shift focus to the decisive factors shaping the migration and settlement choices of the participants to better understand their unique motivations for choosing life in the rural villages or in the cities. So far we have seen the various ways in which rural imaginaries, temporal perception and material constraints

impact rural life, and in many cases pose a contrast to urban life. Now we will examine more closely the motivations and concerns the participants have regarding their migration and settlement choices between the urban and rural. In this way, the main research question of how imageries of rural idyll and material realities shape migration decisions between Norwegian rural villages and cities will be answered.

Second, after analysing and discussing the migration motivations of the participants as well as the possible rural returnees among them, we will examine in which ways class background and occupation influence the possibility of settling in the rural villages. Third, the final section of this chapter is dedicated to a synthesis of the three research questions.

4.4.1 Migration Motivations: The Alluring Rural Village?

4.4.1.1 Imaginaries, Constraints and Temporal Shifts

Out of the 12 participants, five of the six oldest have returned to or remained in rural and semi-rural locations. First we will see whether or not rural idyll imaginaries have directly impacted their rural settlement choices.

The phenomenon of everybody-knowing-everybody was initially a push factor for Kristine, when she moved away from her village at the age of 16. However, while not completely romanticising the concept, making the decision of returning to her rural home village was partly based on the idea, and in this case reality, of a close-knit socially cohesive village. Family roots and “a lot of close relations” are more important to her now, showing that the rural social idyll is not simply a fantasy (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). To Kristine, the material constraints do not pose a great challenge to the rural idyll. On the contrary, having a community that helps each other out with proper *dugnad* spirit makes her less concerned of the power suddenly going out, feeling more prepared for it in the village than she would have elsewhere (Blekesaune & Haugen, 2018, 233). Although romanticisation is not the reason Kristine returned to her village, the positive sides that are often idealised stood as a more important choice for her migration decision than the material constraints of living remotely.

Henrikke likes to consider herself a person that could live in an outer periphery village, just like the ones portrayed in *Der ingen skulle tru at nokon kunne bu*. After having moved back to a rural village, about an hour from where she grew up, she has realised that is not realistic for her. Living in the centre of a small village, being able to see people and staying close to a

hospital is much more important to her than having a picturesque life in the outer periphery of the country. The imageries we construct regarding places is tied to both experiences, dreams and longings, oftentimes perhaps influenced by the popular media, but importantly also negotiated and renegotiated between people, or by oneself (Hämeenaho, 2013, 4; Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). Material constraints play into the future Henrikke envisions for herself, echoing the accounts of all the other 11 participants. Frode similarly believes that the opportunity of jobs, schools for kids and health services is vital if people would want to move to rural villages, “unless, of course, you’re one of those super-romantic types who really wants to live in isolation”. The quiet, tranquil image of a farm in the sunset is precisely showcasing nature in the foreground, with neighbours, other people and service offers far removed from the picture. The rural idyll image might be a remnant from the environmental and degrowth movement of the 1970s, however it is kept alive by various TV programmes, social media and in the common imagination of people (Singh, 2019, 140; Hämeenaho, 2013, 7). Eleven of the participants, including the two people coming from foreign big cities place greater importance on material constraints rather than ‘idyllic’ isolation. Fritjof, however, has taken a conscious move away from the city, currently living in the semi-rural outskirts of the greater Oslo area in a cabin in the woods.

I've lived the complete opposite life—and I really have lived the complete opposite life. I've kind of lived in townhouses, or lots of apartments in Majorstua and around the city (...) and was—as I recall—very, in a way, “proper”—a proper job, well-dressed, nice cars—I felt very “proper” and lived in urban neighborhoods. And then I realised that I'd been working my way away from that, to the point where I actually had to ‘get down and dirty.’ Get in touch with nature. Feel that there's a little movement in things. That the city, in a way, is too neat, too tidy, and too clean.

The material constraints of handling the road and chopping his own wood was part of the reason Fritjof moved further away from the city. Seeking the opposite of his ‘clean’ city experience, getting in touch with nature and the land around him has proved to be a migration trajectory in line with his imaginaries of the rural idyll (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). Meanwhile, both his job as a freelance location scout in the commercial sector, and his family relations, tie him to the city, showing how the friction of mobility is not something he is able to negotiate away, neither is the importance of accessing a job (Cresswell, 2010, 166; Rye, 2006, 418). Living in the semi-rural outskirts of a village close to Oslo is the compromise giving him access to both sides of the rural and urban, in his own exurban timespace (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Making settlement choices is rarely a one-sided decision, and for

many of the participants the relatively easy accessibility of services plays a vital role in their migration decisions, both now and for future settlement.

It has to be a viable way of life. It has to actually be a job. It has to be these kinds of opportunities that make people consider actually living here (...) The things that make that person consider moving back. And what are they? A sense of security is one thing, of course. Naturally, you feel secure in the place where you grew up, perhaps, but you have to be confident that these same opportunities actually still will be there when you eventually plan to move back.

Frode emphasised the crucial point of being able to make a living, in a village that is not being built down, little by little by a state no longer supporting the rural outskirts (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Greater choices of grocery items, pubs and stores is the main difference he cites between villages and small towns, and these are not important factors to him. Accessing work, and not losing necessary services such as electricity, a bathroom and access to a grocery store is what matters for Frode when making his choice of settlement. With hospitals, schools, and police stations being withdrawn from the local periphery, living in a small town or big village is a choice Frode is content with (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). The risk of losing access to the services you pay taxes to maintain is a constant threat to the sustainability of life in the rural villages (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Affording life in places where crucial services such as hospitals or schools are shut down, makes mobility costs greater, and the dependency on costly private vehicles increases (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, 331; Sheller, 2018, 49). Despite these substantial challenges, many people keep fighting for life in the rural periphery, and some of them have strong temporal motivations to do so.

“The calm of nature” is the first thing Henrikke mentions when asked about what she experiences as the best part of the rural countryside. This reflects the degrowth perspective of finding meaning beyond wealth, and rather prioritising a closer connection between humans and nature, echoing Henrikke's assessment of the stillness of nature as being the best part about the rural villages (Singh, 2019, 140). Kristine names the calmer pace as one of the reasons why she intends to remain in the village for the rest of her life. The rural idyll with its green, quiet spaces is not only imaginary, but a factor pulling people like Henrikke and Kristine to return (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). The qualitative difference between a

fast-paced city like Oslo, and the tranquility and natural peace and pace in the villages draws them to return to the rural villages.

Frode is contemplating returning to the small town where he grew up. While he lived in a small rural village, working as a teacher for 16 years, he always thought he would one day return to the city where he studied. Relocating to a small town closer to that city has made him realise that something changed within him during the years in the village.

I've sort of started to appreciate things moving a bit more slowly, maybe, and nature too. Access to nature. (...) I don't want to move back to Trondheim. And it's about the traffic, stress and chaos. There's always something going on (...) I'd like to enjoy the big city for shorter periods of time. I've had my fill through the trips I've taken.

For Frode, the urban shifted from being a pull factor with its social variety and larger size, to becoming the stressful and noisy place that is precisely the antidote to the rural idyll imaginary with nature more closer and a slower pace (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). The mobility constraints were seen as more strenuous in the city with the experienced friction of mobility greater there, imposing involuntary slowness, for example in the chaos of traffic (Cresswell, 2010, 162; Bratrud, 2024a, 208). By choosing a different timespace, the small town, Frode deliberately escapes the spatiotemporal decompression he experiences in the city (Bratrud, 2024a, 208). Similarly, Fritjof is eager to avoid the spatiotemporal decompression that influences not only his perception of time, but his mental state as well.

In this day and age, with so many people crammed together, living in small apartments, waiting in line for the tram, and all that—I think it's a good thing, in a way, to be able to step away and not let anything other than your own thoughts influence your mind while you're somewhere. And that is sort of nice.

The physical and mental noise experienced through dense settlement, public transport, and small apartments is something that disappears when Fritjof enters the forest in the outskirts of the village, despite the proximity to the city. This is one example confirming Simmel's theory that urban speed intensifies the nervous system of humans (1903/2020, 6). Navigating between the rural and urban spaces he enters his own exurban timespace, regaining the sense of autonomy that is compromised by the rush in the city (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). The

movement between different timespaces allows Fritjof to access both the “incredibly relaxing” nature, and also the “vibrant and wonderful” city as well. The ambiguity of the desires many of us might carry within, searching for a timespace we enjoy and feel comfortable with makes the exurban timespace, where it is possible to create your own layer of time, shifting between the perceived temporal qualities of places is an attempt of getting the best of both worlds. While six of the interviewed participants growing up in rural villages indeed travel back and forth to visit family and friends, they are currently living in cities.

4.4.1.2 Choosing the city

Urban centers in Norway are far away from the global scale of cities, with only six major cities or urban areas exceeding 100.000 people (Statistics Norway, 2025). Although the scale of Norwegian cities is fairly small in population in global comparison, the difference between the Norwegian cities and the rural villages with sizes ranging from a few hundred people to around 5000 is considerable. Education and job opportunities, as well as greater social variation, draw many people growing up in villages to the cities (Rye, 2006, 418; Kloep et al., 2003, 91). In this part we will explore how the urban pull factors and the possible rural push factors shape the migration decisions of the participants that are currently living in cities.

If you're looking for that stability, or a bit more peace and stability, and sort of a sense of being at one with nature, then I really do think the village is the place to be. (...) When I go back to the village, I can't stand being there for very long. Because I get totally... I almost get kind of... (...) I go crazy, you know... I'm not used to that life anymore. I've become a city girl, haha.

Despite agreeing that the nature around the village creates peace, to Maria this slower timespace is not appealing, but rather agonizing to her. As a musician she finds inspiration from the people she interacts with or passersby in the cities, experiences the city as the place she feels free to be herself and that lets her express herself as she likes. This reflects the notion many youth in rural villages have of the *village animal* with the visibility in the rural village making anonymity in the city a tempting escape (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). Her understanding of the city is not as a place of decompression where she feels pressured or stuck, on the contrary it is the rural village that causes these feelings in Maria (Bratrud, 2024a, 208). As we have seen in 4.1, age is an important factor influencing the view people in rural villages have of the everybody-knows-everybody phenomenon, which is a double-edged sword and an important push factor for people leaving the villages (Haugen &

Lysgård, 2006, 178). However the opinions regarding the social cohesion of rural life changed with age for many of the participants.

For Karin, the social closeness of the village is not the reason why she is now living in the city – rather, as a young person she appreciates the flexibility of going out any afternoon to meet with friends and doing something. The availability of transport, education opportunities, people and events is what is keeping her in the city for now, reflecting the urban pull (Kloep et al., 2003, 93). While being unsure of whether or not she will remain in the city, the possibility of having kids is something that might draw her back to the village. Meanwhile, relevant job opportunities makes the thought of returning less appealing, as she does not see herself shifting sectors just in order to move back home. Even so, Karin is one of the possible returnees to the rural countryside.

4.4.1.3 Returning to the Village?

The three participants over 35 all mention the influence of life phases on migration decisions. Reaching your 30s might be the time where permanent settlement choices become more relevant to people. For Kristine and Maja, being young and single have been reasons why they have chosen to live in the city for many years. Henrikke, currently in her first year as a returnee, is not sure of whether she is a ‘village person’ or a ‘city person’, feeling belonging to both the city, and her rural roots.

There’s something about the fact that everyone, or at least the people I know here, have all lived in the city and then come back. So we’re all drawn to urban life. A lot of us, anyway. At least for either long or short periods of our lives. The question is whether you want to stay there or not. And I’m one of those who don’t know. I’m still trying to work out where I’m meant to be.

While life phases have influenced her settlement choices so far, Henrikke seems to be at a crossroad. Urban life with its social and cultural availability and greater work and education options provide an important pull factor drawing many people away from the rural villages (Rye, 2006, 418). While always thinking she would end up in the rural village, she is not certain what will happen, and similarly to Karin and Ebba, it depends on the prospect of having a family. Access to social networks and family is also crucial to several participants. Moheb is torn between his appreciation for the rural calm, and socially close-knit qualities of

village life, and wanting to live closer to his family that has already moved to the city. There is yet another reason that pushes him away from desiring city life.

No. And I'm not a big fan of Oslo. There are many reasons. One of the biggest reasons—number one, actually—is the way Norwegians look at you, right? Like an immigrant. Every time I visit my family, whether I'm at the store or anywhere else, I can clearly see how they look at us. I can't stand it.

The sense of alienation he feels in the city stands in contrast to the way he is treated in the village. While the racism foreigners and new countrymen experience is a topic beyond the scope of this thesis, it is crucial what this individual case tells about the perception Moheb has gotten in the rural villages, feeling included and as part of the community. Besides staying closer to his family, access to nature, and proximity to the airport are the important factors pulling him closer to the greater Oslo area, hoping to settle in a semi-rural location (Kloep et al., 2003, 93). Anna also mentioned access to an airport as important, in order to visit friends and family if she is to remain living far away from them. Otherwise, living in a big village or small town with a young population and easy access to nature are the main factors pulling her towards rural areas. While accessing work is crucial to Anna, centralisation of services is not mentioned by her or Moheb as a factor pushing them away from the rural village. To others it is significant.

I do think there are probably some services that one... could benefit from centralising, in order to create a better professional environment around certain things. But then I also think there are some services that you rely on not being too far away. Like when primary schools are closed down, so that children aged 7 or 8 have to take the bus for an hour each way to school, and it's a three-hour journey to the nearest maternity ward – in that case, I think there are some things that have gone a bit too far.

Håkon explained that he does not think people should expect to be able to move anywhere they desire, and have services aligned with their location. Meanwhile schools and maternity wards are non-negotiables that make him reluctant to move back to the remote rural village he grew up in. The infrastructural withdrawal of the state is causing a friction of mobility that is a price Håkon does not believe he is willing to pay to return to the remote rural (Vik et al., 2022, 203; Cresswell, 2010, 166). Family ties still makes him think about the opportunity of returning, but living in the semi-rural location close to Oslo where he is now, is what he

prefers. As a journalist, access to jobs are heavily restricted in the rural outskirts, pulling him closer to cities (Kloep et al., 2003, 91).

Material constraints such as accessibility to services, geographical distance and transport needs influence the potential desire of returning to rural villages to a greater extent than temporal perceptions, indicating that the idea of rural idyll might be a predominantly urban idealisation. The rural slowness comes with the cost of friction of mobility for most people, meanwhile the ones that are able to afford living in the exurban timespace may be able to reduce this friction.

4.4.2 Who can follow the dream? — Exurban Privilege and the Limits of Mobility

Mobility and migration is not always a matter of choice, and various ways of friction impose mobility restrictions for people, for example based on your passport, income and health situation (Sheller, 2018, 49; Cresswell, 2010, 166). Class background and occupation influences the possibility of settling in rural villages. The disparity between urban second home owners and the local rural population can create crucial differences in accessibility of the slow, rural spaces. This might give certain people access to the exurban timespace between the city and the rural countryside, while others might experience the speed in rural spaces as friction of mobility and imposed stagnation (Cresswell, 2010, 162). Centralisation policies and an increased withdrawal of public services, such as transport, schools and hospitals from the rural villages makes life in the periphery increasingly difficult (Vik et al., 2022, 203). Culturally, rural life is considered the ‘good’ life, although many Norwegians live in the cities. With many owning or having access to a private second home cabin, they are able to experience this idea of rural life, while locals in rural villages see their services being withdrawn (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 174). Meanwhile the group of urban people entering the rural spaces often moves back and forth between the rural and urban in their own exurban timespace, being able to choose from the best of both worlds (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). This discrepancy is at the heart of the bygda paradox, and in this section we will look closer at freedoms and restrictions of the participants' mobility and how it influences their options of moving freely.

As seen in section 4.1 there are many discrepancies between the rural idyll imaginaries and the lived experiences of life in the rural countryside. Karin believes that the second home cabin owners from the cities might not realise the implications of moving to the rural villages,

pointing out that daily life and leisure time on the cabin makes for different lifestyles. The private vehicle dependence with oftentimes having no option but to drive to the groceries, or face a one and a half hour walk might be an invisible friction to people travelling on vacation to their second home, and the locals facing this every day (Cresswell, 2010, 166). Choosing to settle in the rural villages is hence something Karin believes is done mostly by people growing up there, as they have experience with the mobility restrictions and limited service offer. This might be one of the reasons the exurban timespace becomes so appealing for the people settling in the rural villages, because it allows them to keep being in touch with the world outside of the material restrictions, either digitally or through weekend visits back in the cities (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). This group of migrants, coming from the cities themselves, often represent the urban upper middle class, with access to remote work and salaries that lets them escape parts of the friction of mobility, affording the cost of frequent transport and eloping from the requirement of daily commutes (Cresswell, 2010, 166; Bratrud, 2024a, 221). As seen in 4.3., transport and mobility in rural villages are dependent on many factors, such as personal cost and withdrawal of state services.

All of the 12 participants interviewed move in different ways between the rural and urban spaces, displaying various migration trajectories and consequently fitting into the exurban timespace category in various ways. Moving from the city back to her home village, Kristine has secured a job in which she is able to work remotely two days a week, while travelling to the city the other three. She is moving between city time and rural time in order to maintain her job, which allows her to sustain the cost of life in the village. Mobility is costly with dependence on a car to take her to her bus commute, as well as a private boat for the days in which the ferry is not running. Although Kristine partly fits into the exurban category, the second home cabin owners are arguably making her life costlier, as the large amounts of cabins drive the prices of houses up (Bratrud & Lien, 2021, 62–63). Even so, belonging to the middle class and maintaining a job in the city is her strategy of keeping life in the rural village financially secure.

Accessing work within or close to rural villages can provide a big challenge, so is working within your specific field. For Henrikke, what type of job she could access is important to her, but it does not necessarily have to be related to her field, despite her six years of higher education. “I’m not that concerned about a high salary. It’s more about how you feel and whether you’re happy with it”. While it is precisely educational opportunities and a diverse

job market that draws many people to the cities, in the future, Henrikke does not see this as a major pull factor drawing her to the city, as she is considering settling in the rural countryside (Rye, 2006, 418). Prioritising and seeking calm and nature, Henrikke lives in alignment with the degrowth notion which calls for a closer connection between humans and nature (Singh, 2019, 140). Meanwhile, her more frequent travels between the rural village and other cities, as discussed in 4.3, is precisely an example of the navigating between the exurban timespace between the rural and the urban (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Kristine described that while her job is in the middle of the village is closeby, she knows of many people in the village with higher education that commutes to jobs in the town about an hour away, and that also may combine these with remote work.

Tareq and Moheb were placed in remote rural villages by the state in the mandatory settlement program for refugees. During those years, and particularly before accessing drivers licences, their mobility was heavily restricted and they had no chance of freely moving between the rural and urban timespaces, excluding them from the exurban category. Now, Tareq lives closer to a town and he explains the desire of having access to both rural and urban spaces. Working as an electrician, remote work is not a question he has the luxury of considering. While getting his drivers licence dramatically decreased his friction of mobility in the rural remote village he used to live in, he now prefers to stay in a village with closer proximity to a town (Cresswell, 2010, 166). He wants the “best of both” and states that this is not possible living 9-10 miles from the nearest town. While his work is not in the city, where salaries are often higher, he also cannot work remotely. Meanwhile, navigating between the city and rural village still lets him create his own exurban time, now placing him in the category of people that are able to relatively freely choose where to settle (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). Consequently he is free to follow the dream of living wherever he desires.

Mobility justice is not just influenced by personal finances, but can be heavily restricted by structural hindrance imposed by the state when not providing adequate public transport in rural spaces (Vik et al., 2022, 203). The rugged geography of Norway and expense of infrastructure development is unquestionably an important factor to consider. But with more than 40 airports in a country of less than 6 million people, the state has proven to heavily subsidise spread out settlement. Even so, the private vehicle dependency across the rural areas of the country remains soaring (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, 331; Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 175). While class, income and the flexibility of remote work are crucial for the freedom

to live wherever you prefer in the spectrum from outer periphery to inner city centers, the withdrawal of state services affects all of the people that wish to settle in rural villages.

Ultimately, the migration decisions of the participants reveals that the rural 'idyll' remains an imaginary, while the material constraints of actual life in the rural villages is not simply imbued with romantic slowness. The exurban privilege is not something everyone can afford, and the cost of mobility, and access to remote work remains limited and attached to the friction of mobility for many. The mobility of justice of people wanting to, or living in the rural villages remains restrained by the state, and its closing down of services like maternity wards and schools, making life in the rural outskirts increasingly difficult. The final, concluding chapter synthesises the ways in which the bygda paradox has affected the participants.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion: Between the Postcard and the Reality

This thesis set out to investigate how imaginaries of rural idyll and material constraints influence the migration decisions between rural villages and cities in Norway, drawing on 12 in-depth interviews with people with diverse rural-urban experiences. Despite the sizes of Norwegian cities being considerably smaller than the global average, the cities and rural villages in Norway are characterized by differences beyond its population numbers. Rural imaginaries intersect with the reality of life in rural villages in various ways. The migration decisions of the participants have been analysed through the themes of rural idyll imaginaries, temporal perceptions, and material constraints which guided the analysis and discussion. This chapter synthesises the key findings, addresses the research questions as well as the limitations of the study, and situates it within the broad field of Mobility Studies. Finally, we will take a brief look at the future of *bygda* as well as possible directions for future research.

5.1 Revisiting the Research Questions

5.1.1 Imaginaries of Idyll in Conflict with Material Constraints

How do imaginaries of rural idyll and material realities shape migration decisions between Norwegian rural villages and cities?

To most of the participants, material constraints play a predominant role in their migration decisions. It is the distances between the home and state services like hospitals and schools that makes several of the people currently living in cities reluctant to return permanently to their villages. The friction of mobility poses a significant threat to the sustainability of rural life, showing that the politics of mobility matter greatly in the participants' settlement choice (Cresswell, 2010, 166; Sheller & Urry, 2006, 213). The dependency on private vehicles is severely impacting the lives of those residing in rural villages, especially Moheb and Tareq, before they obtained their drivers licence and a car (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014, 331).

Meanwhile the responsibility of the car dependency can be placed on the state, which has increased centralisation and withdrawn or threatened to withdraw services, including public traffic, especially since 2019 (Difi 2019; Vik et al., 2022, 203). Both the 9 participants with rural background, and the two people moving to *bygda* in adulthood have a nuanced view of rural idyll. While not naming it as the most important reason for potentially or actually choosing rural life, almost all of them appreciate the slower pace they experience in rural

areas, indicating that the rural idyll imaginary indeed is not simply an idealisation (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 177). Meanwhile, one of the participants, Maria, growing up in a remote rural village from the age of 9, stated that the stillness of the village made her “go crazy” after spending more than a week visiting family, demonstrating that the quiet and closeness with nature is not the first choice of everybody, even though they are culturally accepted as qualities of the ‘good’ life (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 174). For one of the participants, Fritjof, the rural idyll he is experiencing in the forest in the outskirts of a village close to the city has provided the escape he was seeking from the spatiotemporal decompression he found stressful in the city (Bratrud, 2024a, 208). The contradictory experiences of Fritjof and Maria might challenge the century old theory of Georg Simmel, claiming that the urban occupational, economic and social speed intensifies the nervous system of human beings (1903/2020, 6). It might also indicate that people simply prefer different kinds of pace.

Social networks in the home village might indeed also make the tight-knit villages not just a safe idyllic space, but also a place where participants struggle with everybody-knowing-everybody. Most of the participants mentioned the *dugnad* spirit to be stronger in the rural villages, with help and support being readily available. Meanwhile, opting out of this social obligation was not an option as social cohesion stands strong in the villages (Villa, 2000, 478). The rural-origin participants reported struggling more with the social visibility in the villages when they grew up, indicating that which phase of life people are in largely decides what they consider idyllic and positive, or strenuous and restrictive (Haugen & Lysgård, 2006, 178). For Kristine this was an important push factor when moving away at 16, and yet the safety and closeness was what pulled her back after having two kids and moving back in her 40s.

Material constraints, such as access to jobs and the potential of increased centralisation is a major reason for why five of the participants growing up in rural villages, but currently living in cities, are unsure whether they would like to return or not. For Fritjof, Maja, and Anna who partly grew up in the city, material constraints are keeping two of them close to the city, but Fritjof nevertheless seeks the idyll in nature, keeping in proximity due to work and family reasons. Anna wants to move to a big village, in order to be close to nature, but have the accessibility of a social network as well as relevant work. Her childhood in the remote rural

village has influenced this desire, implying that the knowledge of the rural, not an imagined idyllic fantasy, matters more to her than the material constraints she might experience living there. Finally, Maja is certain she does not want to return to rural life, preferring the city or suburbs when settling down. To her, the rural idyll has its downsides and the material constraints like geographic distances to services are not things she is willing to compromise on, especially as a young, single adult.

5.1.2 Settling for Slowness?

In which ways are perceptions of time and ideas of rurality impacting people's choice of residence?

Maja and Maria are the participants who seemed to appreciate the perceived slower timespace of the rural village less, rather pushing them away from rural life, than pulling them towards it. Henrikke, having recently relocated to the rural village from a hectic work life with much time spent on transport, appreciates the slower pace of the countryside. On the other hand, she has travelled more, both to destinations abroad and to visit family, compared to while she was living in the city, making her enter the exurban timespace where she shifts between the rural and urban (Bratrud, 2024a, 207). This echoes the desire of many of the participants in wanting access to services and social networks, but maintain the slower pace and closeness to nature that the rural villages provide. The temporal perception of rural life being a slower life seems true for the six participants residing in rural and semi-rural places. While four of them had experience with the rural life from before, Tareq and Moheb have had to get used to the slowness, which initially provided discomfort, especially for Moheb.

The perception of time was not the decisive factor for five of the people living in rural locations, but oftentimes was rather combined with access to social networks, or to nature. For Fritjof it was however the slower pace and peace he experienced in the rural, natural environment that has most heavily influenced his migration decision of settling in the rural village, albeit close to the city.

5.1.3 The Practical Constraints of Settlement

How are mobility options, access to nature and housing influencing settlement choices?

The material reality and constraints they place on life undoubtedly influences the settlement choices of the five participants currently residing in rural villages. Geographical distances and difficulty of transport was the most frequently mentioned practical constraint that influences the migration decisions of the participants, alongside access to work as the fundamental baseline. The ones choosing to return know what restrictions geography and limited public transport play for life in the rural village, and they also seem to appreciate the slower pace. This is true also for Moheb and Tareq, but having access to a drivers license and private vehicle profoundly changed their experience of living in a remote rural village. This concrete reduction in the friction of mobility undoubtedly makes rural lives more comfortable and even possible (Cresswell, 2010, 166). Even Kristine, who is reluctant to use private vehicles advocating for environmental concerns and working with public transport, admittedly acknowledges the importance of the private vehicle in order to move around and live in rural areas. Despite these challenges, certain qualities attracted the six people living in rural spaces more than it discouraged them. Easy access to nature was mentioned by Frode and Henrikke as very important when deciding to live in the periphery. Although nature and geography complicates daily movement, none of the participants said anything negative about living close to nature and dealing with all sorts of weather. Even when explaining how in the winter, power outages sometimes occur, Kristine simply saw this as a part of rural life. It was, however, mentioned by several when they were asked about the romantic rural idyll images. Although the postcard picture does indeed exist on a beautiful summer's day, and is experienced as the epiphany of rural idyll by the second home owners and tourists entering the island of Kristine, or driving past the mountain pasture of Hedda – it remains an idyll, detached from a cold winter morning, where driving far to fetch the bread you need is a part of the daily reality.

5.2 Situating the Research

The findings suggest that the material constraints of transport and service access matter more than imagined rural idyll in settlement decisions. Rural policy makers should take into consideration that infrastructure investment and decentralised services is not simply about convenience, but is what makes rural life viable. The cultural concept of rural idyll is more frequently idealised by urban second home owners, and rural-origin participants hold a more complex, less romanticised view of idyll. Public and policy discourse should be sensitive not to simplify the discussion of rural life and settlement in the periphery.

This thesis contributes to Mobility Studies by providing a Norwegian perspective of rural-urban migration trajectories, especially considering how temporal imaginaries influence settlement choices. Applying reflexive thematic analysis of 12 semi-structured interviews has allowed for intimate knowledge of the various obstacles and pull factors influencing the mobility choices between urban and rural spaces.

5.3 Limitations

Investigating rural urban trajectories using qualitative interviews naturally creates a limited sample size. While representation of people from all parts of the country was not possible, one of the 12 people interviewed being from Northern Norway, provided valuable information from a region that is most distinct from the others with greater geographical distances between cities. The sample size was predominantly female, ethnically Norwegian, and middle class. Six out of seven female participants were in the same age range between 25-30. These characteristics shaped the findings. Interviewing nine people between 25 and 35 provided valuable insight into how life phases influence settlement choices. With the rural population rapidly aging and decreasing, the voices of the younger generation are crucial in rural-urban mobility research. Future research would benefit from a larger sample with more diverse backgrounds, as well as longitudinal follow-up of returnees to the rural villages.

5.4 Future Research and Closing Remarks

While the sample of this study is predominantly ethnically Norwegians, the insight from the two participants coming from million sized cities abroad, straight to the remote rural villages in Norway proved an invaluable perspective. Settlement of immigrants has been strategically employed by small municipalities to increase their population figures. The effect this has on the impacted migrant families would be an important and interesting future research opportunity. Several participants pointed to the fact that settlement choices need to be made by individuals, and not happen through forced policies. Meanwhile, migration trajectories are rarely one-sided, and the mobility between rural and urban spaces indicate that people prefer having access to both rural villages and cities.

The Norwegian bygda paradox of applauded spread-out settlement and state withdrawal is a multifaceted phenomenon that would benefit from further studies of the social, economical,

and political implications. The future of the rural villages facing depopulation and state service withdrawal is an important focus of study, both in the Norwegian context, and abroad.

As we have seen, it is not only urban onlookers that romanticise rural spaces. However, when someone with rural experience idealises the rural, they maintain the realistic knowledge of the practical constraints, seeing beyond the beautiful sunset image, knowing that a long winter with possible power outages will arrive, not long after the perfect postcard day is gone.

List of Tables

Table 1 - Participant Sample.....	55
Table 2 - Interview questions, themes, and theoretical rationale.....	56-57

Reference list

- Angelo, H., & Wachsmuth, D. (2015). Urbanizing urban political ecology: A critique of methodological cityism. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 39(1), 16–27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12105>
- Auerbach, K. R., Eidheim, M. R., & Fimreite, A. L. (2024). Rural but not radical right: The rural-urban cleavage in Norway. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 1–35. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12292>
- Biasiori, L., Mazzini, F., & Rabbiosi, C. (2023). Introduction. In L. Biasiori, F. Mazzini, & C. Rabbiosi (Eds.). *Reimagining mobilities across the humanities: Volume 1, Theories, methods and ideas* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003278665>
- Blekesaune, A., Haugen, M. S., & Villa, M. (2010). Dreaming of a smallholding. *Sociologica Ruralis*, 50(3), 225–241. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9523.2010.00513.x>
- Blekesaune, A., & Haugen, M. S. (2018). Ageing in Norwegian rural and urban communities. *European countryside*, 10(2), 232.
- Bokmål Dictionary. (n.d.). Bygd. In *Språkrådet & Universitetet i Bergen*. Retrieved May 8, 2026. <https://ordbokene.no/bm/8281>
- Bratrud, T. (2024a). The exurban timespace: Spatiotemporal decompression among urban-rural migrants in Norway. In A. M. Holand (Ed.), *Time in our times: Stretching contemporary understandings of time* (pp. 207–224). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111428970-009>
- Bratrud, T. (2024b). Becoming an outdoors person: Identity transformation through nature activity and social media in Norway. In S. K. Beames & P. T. Maher (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of mobile technology, social media and the outdoors* (pp. 180–191). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003367536-19>
- Bratrud, T., & Lien, M. E. (2021). The cabin, the village and the city: Negotiating belonging in times of crisis. *Norsk antropologisk tidsskrift*, 32(2), 55–71.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative psychology*, 9(1), 3.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper (Ed.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology: Vol. 2. Research designs* (pp. 57–71). American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-004>
- Brenner, N., & Schmid, C. (2014). The 'urban age' in question. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 38(3), 731–755. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2427.12115>
- Brenner, N., & Schmid, C. (2015). Towards a new epistemology of the urban?. *City*, 19(2-3), 151–182.

- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social Research Methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Büscher, M., & Urry, J. (2009). Mobile methods and the empirical. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 12(1), 99–116.
- Bygnes, S. (2017). Welcome to Norway! Da «flyktningkrisa» kom til Norge [Welcome to Norway! When the "refugee crisis" came to Norway]. *Tidsskrift for Velferdsforskning*, 20(4), 286–301. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.2464-3076-2017-04-03>
- Caruso, G. (2001). *Peri-urbanisation: The situation in Europe. A bibliographical note and survey of studies in the Netherlands, Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and the Nordic countries* (Final Report). DATAR (Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale). Université catholique de Louvain.
- Cresswell, T. (2006). *On the move: Mobility in the modern Western world*. Routledge.
- Cresswell, T. (2010). Towards a politics of mobility. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 28(1), 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1068/d11407>
- Cruickshank, J., Lysgård, H. K., & Magnussen, M. L. (2009). The logic of the construction of rural politics: Political discourses on rurality in Norway. *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography*, 91(1), 73–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0467.2009.00307.x>
- Difi. (2019). *Digitalisering, kompetansebehov og effektivisering gir desentral konsentrasjon: Om utvikling i lokaliseringen av statlige arbeidsplasser* [Digitalization, competence needs and efficiency give decentralized concentration: On development in the location of state workplaces] (Difi-rapport 2019:4). Direktoratet for forvaltning og IKT.
- Guillemin, M. & Gillam, L. (2004). Ethics, reflexivity. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(2), 261–280.
- Hylland Eriksen, T. (1993). Being Norwegian in a shrinking world: Reflections on Norwegian identity. In A. C. Kiel (Ed.), *Continuity and change: Aspects of contemporary Norway* (pp. 11–37). Scandinavian University Press.
- Farstad, M., & Zahl-Thanem, A. (2021). Social transparency in rural areas in Norway: Promoting safety or social control? *Sociologia Ruralis*, 61(4), 661–682.
- Grytten, O. H. (2008, March 16). The economic history of Norway. In R. Whaples (Ed.), *EH.Net Encyclopedia*. Economic History Association. <https://eh.net/encyclopedia/the-economic-history-of-norway/>
- Hanssen, G. S. (2020). Becoming urban: The emergence of an urban policy in rural Norway. In *A modern guide to national urban policies in Europe* (pp. 127–148). Edward Elgar.
- Haugen, M. S., & Lysgård, H. K. (2006). Discourses of rurality in a Norwegian context. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 60(3), 174–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00291950600889947>
- Haugen, M. S., & Villa, M. (2006). Big Brother in rural societies: Youths' discourses on gossip. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 60(3), 209–216.

Hämeenaho, P. (2013). In search of the rural idyll? Developing the residential rural areas in Finland. In L. Silva & E. Figueiredo (Eds.), *Shaping rural areas in Europe: Perceptions and outcomes on the present and the future* (Vol. 107, pp. 181–195). Springer.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-6796-6>.

Heidegger, M. (2002). *Building dwelling thinking*. Poetry, language, thought, 154, 1-26. [Original 1951].

Heleniak, T., & Gassen, N. S. (2020). The demise of the rural Nordic region? Analysis of regional population trends in the Nordic countries, 1990 to 2040. *Nordisk Velfärdsforskning | Nordic Welfare Research*, 5(1), 41–58. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.2464-4161-2020-01-05>

Hennen, S. (2022). *Concepts of justice in the degrowth debate* (Working Paper No. 179/2022). Institute for International Political Economy, Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Recht Berlin.

Illich, I. (1974). *Energy and equity* (Vol. 6). Harper & Row.

Kallis, G., Kostakis, V., Lange, S., Muraca, B., Paulson, S., & Schmelzer, M. (2018). Research on degrowth. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 43(1), 291–316. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-102017-025941>

Kitzmann, N. H., Caesar, L., Sakschewski, B., & Rockström, J. (Eds.). (2025). *Planetary health check 2025* (Planetary Boundaries Science [PBScience]). Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research.

Kloep, M., Hendry, L. B., Glendinning, A., Ingebrigtsen, J. E., & Espnes, G. A. (2003). Peripheral visions? A cross-cultural study of rural youths' views on migration. *Children's Geographies*, 1(1), 91–109. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733280302189>

Knudsen, J. P. (2020). Dealing with rural-urban economic welfare challenges in the Nordic countries—A theory-based overview. *Nordisk velfärdsforskning / Nordic Welfare Research*, 5(1), 58-69.

Lefebvre, H. (2003). *The Urban Revolution*. (R. Bononno. Trans.). University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1970).

Mauss, M. (1995). *Gaven: Utvekslingens form og årsak i arkaiske samfunn* [The gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies] (T. H. Eriksen, Trans.). Cappelen Akademisk Forlag. (Original work published in 1925)

May, J., & Thrift, N. (Eds.). (2001). *Timespace: Geographies of temporality*. Routledge.

Merrifield, A. (2011). The right to the city and beyond. *City*, 15(3–4), 468–476

Milbourne, P., & Kitchen, L. (2014). Rural mobilities: Connecting movement and fixity in rural places. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 34, 326–336.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2014.01.004>

- Moore, J. W. (2015). *Capitalism in the web of life: Ecology and the accumulation of capital*. Verso.
- Narayanasamy, N. (2009). *Participatory rural appraisal: Principles, methods and application*. SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9788132108382>
- Noy, C. (2008) Sampling Knowledge: The Hermeneutics of Snowball Sampling in Qualitative Research, *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11:4, 327-344.
- NTB. (2026, January 6). 'Der ingen skulle tru at nokon kunne bu setter digital seerrekord'. *Bergens Tidende*.
<https://www.bt.no/kultur/i/GxGVOL/der-ingen-skulle-tru-at-nokon-kunne-bu-setter-digital-see-rrekord>
- Orderud, G. I. (1998). *Flytting – mønstre og årsaker: En kunnskapsoversikt* (NIBR prosjektrapport 1998:6). Norsk institutt for by- og regionforskning.
- Overvåg, K. (2011). Second homes: Migration or circulation? *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 65(3), 154–164.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00291951.2011.598237>
- Rokkan, S. (1967). Geography, religion, and social class: Crosscutting cleavages in Norwegian politics. In S. M. Lipset & S. Rokkan (Eds.), *Party systems and voter alignments: Cross-national perspectives* (pp. 367–444). Free Press.
- Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges. *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3), 305–320.
- Rye, J. F. (2006). Heading for the cities? Gender and lifestyle patterns in rural youths' residential preferences. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 60(3), 199–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00291950600889988>
- Sheller, M. (2018). *Mobility justice: The politics of movement in an age of extremes*. Verso.
- Sheller, M., & Urry, J. (2006). The new mobilities paradigm. *Environment and planning A*, 38(2), 207-226.
- Singh, N. M. (2019). Environmental justice, degrowth and post-development: Making connections. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, 2(2), 138–158.
- Simmel, G. (2020). The metropolis and the life of spirit (J. D. Boy, Trans.). *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 21(2), 188–202. (Original work published 1903)
- Solerød, H. (2026). Bygd. In *Store norske leksikon*. Retrieved May 8, 2026, from <https://snl.no/bygd>
- Statistics Norway. (2026). *Kommunefakta: Volda*. <https://www.ssb.no/kommunefakta/volda>
- Statistics Norway. (2025, October 27). Population and land area in urban settlements. <https://www.ssb.no/en/befolkning/folketall/statistikk/tettsteders-befolkning-og-areal>

Statistisk sentralbyrå. (2024). *Friluftsliv og idrett, levekårsundersøkelsen* [Outdoor recreation and sports, Survey of level of living]. <https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/idrett-og-friluftsliv/statistikk/idrett-og-friluftsliv-levekarsundersokelsen>

Storsveen, O. A. (2022, September 15). Norway in 1800: A half-Danish nation? *Nordics.info*. Aarhus University. <https://nordics.info/show/artikel/norway-in-1800-a-half-danish-nation>

Stortinget. (2014). *The Constitution of Norway: 1814–2014* [Brochure]. <https://www.stortinget.no/globalassets/pdf/grunnlovsjubileet/brosjyre-engelsk.pdf>

Teigen, H. (1999). *Regional økonomi og politikk*. Universitetsforlaget.

Thorsnæs, G. (2026). Byer i Norge. In *Store norske leksikon*. Retrieved May 28, 2026, from https://snl.no/byer_i_Norge

Thorsnæs, G., Solerød, H., & Butenschøn, P. (2026). By. In *Store norske leksikon*. Retrieved May 28, 2026, from <https://snl.no/by>

Thuesen, N. P., Thorsnæs, G., & Røvik, S. (2026). Norge. In *Store norske leksikon*. Retrieved May 29, 2026, from <https://snl.no/Norge>

Tomlinson, J. (2007). *The culture of speed: The coming of immediacy*. Sage.

Varvarousis, A., Kallis, G., Cattaneo, C., Sekulova, F., Tsagkari, M., Slamersak, A., D'Alisa, G., March, H., Akbulut, B., Brossmann, J., Conde, M., Asara, V., & Roy, B. (2025). Beyond the urban shift: Towards a relational degrowth spatial politics. *Sustainability Science*, 20(2), 485–498. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-024-01590-7>

Vestby, G. M. (2018). *Fugleperspektiv på tre tiår med stedsutvikling*. By- og regionforskningsinstituttet NIBR, OsloMet.

Vik, J., Fuglestad, E. M., & Øversveen, E. (2022). Centre-periphery conflicts and alienation in a resource-based economy. *Norsk Geografisk Tidsskrift - Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 76(4), 197–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00291951.2022.2111270>

Villa, M. (2000). Rural life courses in Norway: Living within the rural-urban complementarity. *The History of the Family*, 5(4), 473–490.

Wiborg, A. (2003). *En ambivalent reise i et flertydig landskap: Ungdom fra distriktene i høyere utdanning* [Doctoral dissertation, Universitetet i Tromsø].

Woods, M. (2011). *Rural: Key ideas in geography*. Routledge.

Østerud, Ø. (1984). *Nasjonenes selvbestemmelsesrett*. Norwegian University Press.

Appendices

A. Consent form in English

The Rural Idyll and its Realities: Temporal Imaginaries and Material Constraints in Norwegian Rural and Urban Trajectories

The interview will take approximately: 40-60 minutes

1. I have been given the opportunity to review the information, ask questions, and have received satisfactory answers.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason and without negative consequences.
3. I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview at any time, upon which the material will be deleted.
4. I consent to the interview being recorded on audio/video.
5. I understand that I will be sent quotes and given the opportunity to correct any factual errors.
6. I understand that all information I provide will be treated confidentially.
7. I understand that my identity will remain anonymous if I wish, in all reports and publications. This is done by changing my name and concealing details that could reveal my identity.
8. I understand that the transcription of the interview will be analysed by the researcher.
9. I understand that my words may be translated and quoted directly.
10. I consent to the researcher publishing documents containing quotes from me.
11. I understand that a combined analysis of the content from my interview may be used in: Master's thesis/dissertation and project archives.
12. I am free to contact all those involved in the research for further clarification and information.

By signing this form, I confirm that:

1. I am participating voluntarily in this project. I understand that I do not need to participate, and I can stop the interview at any time.
2. Quotes from the interview may be used as described above.
3. I have read the information sheet.
4. I do not expect to receive any benefit or payment for my participation.
5. I have been able to ask questions, and I understand that I am free to contact the researcher with any questions I may have in the future.

Research participant's signature:

Participant's signature: Date:

Researcher's signature:

I confirm that the participant has given informed consent to participate in this study.

Researcher's signature: Date:

Researcher:

Name: Siri Katinka Marcussen Fenre

Department: Department of Historical and Geographic Sciences and the Ancient World
(DiSSGeA)

University of Padova

Email: sirikatinkamarcussen.fenre@studenti.unipd.it

Phone: +47 95883904

Supervisor:

Name: Laura Lo Presti

Department: DiSSGeA, University of Padova

Email: laura.lopresti@unipd.it

B. Interview Question Guide

1. What is your full name and how old are you?
2. Can you tell a little about what kind of place you grew up?
 - Have you lived in cities or villages after that?
3. What expectations did you have before moving to the city/the countryside before you came there?
 - Was it as you expected?
4. In your opinion, what is the difference between cities and villages in Norway?
5. Do you experience life to be better in cities or in villages?
6. What are your thoughts about romanticisation of villages (with ideas of rural idyll etc)?
 - Do you believe it is something mostly people in cities do?
7. How do you experience time in the villages compared to bigger cities? Does your perception of time change?
 - How is it different?
 - Do you notice the difference in your body?
8. Do you have another lifestyle in the village compared to the city?
9. Does your consumption change in the village compared to the city?
10. Has the climate crisis, environmental concerns or a wish for another lifestyle affected where you live?
11. Which practical issues are important for you when choosing where to live? (work, social network, services, infrastructure)
12. What are your thoughts on centralisation of services?
13. What kind of transport do you use when living in the village?
14. What role does transport play in the rural villages?
15. How does internet connection affect your life in the villages?
16. Where do you dream about living in the future (city or rural village)? Why?
17. Are there any places you feel like you belong?
18. Do you feel that it is more or less social living in villages versus cities?
19. “Everyone knows everyone”, what is the best and the worst about this concept?
20. What is your experience with traditions in the villages?
21. Do you experience people to generally be different in cities versus in rural villages?
22. What has it been like for you to integrate into the places you have lived?

23. What do you believe needs to happen for more people to settle in rural villages in Norway?
- do you believe it is a good idea?
24. What are your thoughts about Norwegian policies where immigrants are settled in rural villages and places far from the cities?
25. Do you think the rural Norwegian villages how they look like today will survive?