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**'Going rural':
Counterurbanisation in times of crisis**

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Summary

This research explores the potential of counterurbanisation in Athens, triggered by the economic crisis. Theoretically, the project is linked to wider discussions on counterurbanisation, that most western societies have been experiencing, highlighting the growth of 'rural lifestyle' preferences amongst urban residents. The Greek case contributes to these debates by exploring the potential of a crisis-led counterurbanisation and by highlighting its implications, beyond the impacts commonly cited in the literature, such as the colonisation of the countryside by middle-class residents. Empirically, the research draws on data from a household survey including a choice experiment, which investigates willingness to relocate as well as motivations, obstacles and residential preferences associated with this choice. The results confirm the potential of a crisis-led counterurbanisation, particularly amongst younger individuals. 151 out of the 300 participants in our survey expressed willingness to relocate within Greece, with 86% wishing to move to rural residential areas (such as villages, rural towns and in the open countryside), 66% admitting that this aggravated during the last 5 years, and 80% of those due to the economic crisis. Furthermore, the choice experiment results highlight the role of land, cultural opportunities, presence of international migrants, and distance from cities in the migration decision.

Περίληψη

Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει την τάση αντι-αστικοποίησης στην Αθήνα ως απόρροια της οικονομικής κρίσης. Σε θεωρητικό επίπεδο η μελέτη συνδέεται με την βιβλιογραφία που μελετά το φαινόμενο της αντι-αστικοποίησης που οι περισσότερες δυτικές κοινωνίες αντιμετωπίζουν ως αποτέλεσμα της αύξησης των προτιμήσεων για αγροτικό (ή εναλλακτικό) τρόπο ζωής από κατοίκους των αστικών κέντρων. Η ελληνική περίπτωση συμβάλλει σε αυτό το ερευνητικό πεδίο εξετάζοντας την ύπαρξη μίας τάσης αντι-αστικοποίησης σχετιζόμενη με την οικονομική κρίση και τις συνέπειές της. Συνεπώς η μελέτη αναδεικνύει εναλλακτικά κίνητρα πέρα από αυτά που συχνά αναφέρονται στην βιβλιογραφία, όπως η 'αποικιοκρατία' των αγροτικών περιοχών από μεσοαστούς. Εμπειρικά, η μελέτη βασίζεται σε δεδομένα που συλλέχθηκαν μέσω ενός ερωτηματολογίου το οποίο ενσωματώνει και ένα πείραμα επιλογής και εξετάζει την διάθεση για εσωτερική μετανάστευση καθώς και τα κίνητρα, τα εμπόδια και τις προτιμήσεις των ατόμων αναφορικά με τον τόπο προορισμού. Τα αποτελέσματα επιβεβαιώνουν την ύπαρξη μίας τάσης αντι-αστικοποίησης, κυρίως μεταξύ νεώτερων πληθυσμών, η οποία προκαλείται από την οικονομική κρίση. 151 από τους 300 ερωτώμενους θέλουν να μεταναστεύσουν εντός της Ελλάδας, με το 86% να επιθυμεί αγροτικές περιοχές (ύπαιθρο, χωριό, κωμόπολη), το 66% να παραδέχεται ότι αυτή η επιθυμία είναι εντονότερη τα τελευταία 5 χρόνια, και το 80% από αυτούς λόγω της οικονομικής κρίσης. Επιπλέον, τα αποτελέσματα του πειράματος επιλογής τονίζουν τον ρόλο της γής, της ύπαρξης πολιτιστικών δραστηριοτήτων, της ύπαρξης μεταναστών καθώς και της απόστασης από πόλεις στην επιλογή του προορισμού μετανάστευσης.

Introduction

This research project explores the potential of a counterurbanisation trend during the current period of crisis in Athens, Greece. Greece is currently in its sixth year of recession, experiencing the most severe economic crisis in living memory. In 2012, the country's GDP contracted for the fifth consecutive year bringing the cumulative decline for the five-year period 2008-2012 to 20.1% (Bank of Greece, 2013). In an attempt to avoid sovereign default, the Greek government signed in 2010 a bailout agreement with the EU, ECB and the IMF. In return for the rescue package, the Greek government agreed a three-year Memorandum of Economic and Financial Policies (IMF, 2010), involving a series of austerity measures and neoliberal policy reforms. Excessive recession combined with the austerity measures under the terms of the Memorandum resulted in unprecedented unemployment and job insecurity, severe income reductions, poverty and social unrest (see also Christodoulakis, 2012; Alogoskoufis, 2012; EC, 2013). The figures are revealing of the situation Greece is undergoing: unemployment has risen from 6.6% in May 2008 to 27.6% in January 2013 (42% for men and 48% for women aged 20-29) with 630,000 long-term unemployed in 2012 (186% increase since the first quarter of 2010); social services have been severely reduced while poverty, homelessness and crime are continuously increasing (Matsaganis and Leventi, 2013; Pagoulatos, 2012). At the same time indirect taxes have considerably increased (VAT was raised from 19% to 23%); new direct taxes have been introduced and wages in the public sector and pensions have been severely cut. At the end of 2012 average earnings were estimated to have fallen by 22.9% in real terms compared to 2009 (Bank of Greece, 2013). Matsaganis and Leventi (2013) also find deterioration in all inequality indices due to austerity policies and the wider recession for 2012. For the same period, 10.4% of the population can be classified as experiencing extreme poverty.

As the effects of the recession are more severely felt in the urban centres (see also Gkartzios, 2013), rural areas and, wider, the Greek provinces

are increasingly constructed as spaces of refuge from the economic crisis (Kasimis and Zografakis, 2013). Indeed, a counterurbanisation trend, involving a 'back-to-the-land' movement has been heavily reported in popular Greek (i.e. Eleftherotypia, 2013; LIFO, 2012a; 2012b) and international media (i.e. The Guardian, 2012; New York Times, 2012). Furthermore, a report by the Ministry of Rural Development and Food (2012) suggested that 68 per cent of the citizens in two major urban centres in Greece, Athens and Thessaloniki, wish to leave their city for the provinces, and 50 per cent would like to work in the agricultural sector. However, although highly discussed, little quantitative analysis has been carried out to actually investigate the potential on a counterurbanisation trend in Greece triggered by the economic crisis. This research explores this trend and aims to answer the following questions:

- What are the driving forces behind willingness to relocate?
- How do housing options, settlement types and socio-economic conditions determine this demand?
- What is the socio-economic profile of people wanting to move to rural areas?
- What are the obstacles discouraging counterurbanisation?
- What are the opportunities of counterurbanisation for policy-making, rural and regional development?

To answer these research questions, we use survey data from a questionnaire administered to a random sample of the urban population of Athens in April 2013. The survey combined a choice experiment exercise in which respondents were asked to make hypothetical choices between different destinations, each described in terms of alternative characteristics. Characteristics of the destination included housing options, the presence of (extended) family networks, the level of international migrants, cultural opportunities as well as distance from a city. Choices allow us to reveal the relative importance these characteristics play in the choice of destination.

The results in this report are expected to have important implications for planning. If a crisis-driven counterurbanisation trend is confirmed, rural

areas are likely to experience a significant increase in their population in the years to come. Efficient management of this migration flow requires some insight as to which areas, and with what characteristics, are likely to be more affected. It is therefore crucial to understand urban residents' preferences and factors that influence their choice of relocation.

1. Counterurbanisation: a literature review

The term counterurbanisation, coined in the 1970s by the American geographer Brian Berry (1976), broadly refers to a series of social phenomena concerning the relocation of residents from urban to rural (or relatively more rural) residential environments. Counterurbanisation has been at the centre of the research agenda in rural studies, as a result of diverse factors, including increased consumer preferences for rural living in western societies, technological innovations that have improved urban-rural linkages, governmental policies that support rural regeneration as well as economic cyclical and structural factors (see a review of different factors in Kontuly, 1998).

Mitchell (2004), in her review of the academic literature on counterurbanisation, observes that counterurbanisation has been interpreted either as a migration *movement* or a *process* of settlement system change, resulting in a deconcentrated settlement *pattern*. Each of these interpretations draws on different methodological approaches and scales of enquiry. For example, early research focused on what might be termed as *statistical counterurbanisation*, a preoccupation to describe counterurbanisation shifts, or a rural turnaround, drawing on quantitative analysis of national population data (for example: Champion, 1992; Cochrane and Vining, 1988; Fielding, 1989). However, research has increasingly explored *case counterurbanisation* as well, focussing on specific local case studies irrespective of wider urban-rural population dynamics (i.e. Halliday and Coombes, 1995; Rivera, 2007). Case counterurbanisation research has highlighted the spatially selective character of counterurbanisation (Boyle et al., 1998) and the uneven local and regional geographies of rural in-migration (Woods, 2005). Work here

has embraced qualitative methodologies, particularly after the 'cultural turn' in rural studies (Cloke, 1997). Nevertheless, researchers have also highlighted the need for more quantitative approaches to examine counterurbanisation in its national, regional and local contexts (see also Smith, 2007; Milbourne, 2007). As in this present research report, researchers have reported also on *potential counterurbanisation* trends (people's desire to move to rural areas), even where the migration has not been realised (for example: Niedomysl and Amcoff, 2011).

The research has shown that these movements differ in terms of motivations, the types of people they involve and the impacts they have on the communities of origin and destination (Mitchell, 2004). For example counter-urban motivations usually reflect dualistic distinctions between economic/employment rationality and quality of life/lifestyle considerations. Counterurbanisation in some cases tends to be associated with a very positive perception of rural living, emphasising the environmental, anti-urban and communitarian features of rural areas, and the existence of a 'rural idyll' has been well used to rationalise the migration decision (Halfacree, 1994; Walmsley et al., 1998; van Dam et al., 2002). Beyond such (pull-led) motivations, research has also demonstrated the importance of economic conditions (push-led) in counterurbanisation. Hugo and Bell (1998) for example discuss a welfare-led migration, where counter-urbanites take the opportunity of lower living costs in rural areas while receiving public benefits. Mitchell (2004) adopted a similar dichotomy by suggesting a typology which distinguishes, *inter alia*, between economic and quality of life motives associated with the migration decision. For example, Mitchell proposed:

- the term *ex-urbanisation* to describe the movement of middle class commuters to accessible peri-urban rural areas, motivated by environmental amenities associated with rural living;
- the term *displaced-urbanisation* to describe relocations motivated by the need for employment, lower costs of living and/or affordable housing and taking place in any geographic location that provides for these needs; and

- the term *anti-urbanisation* to describe the movement of urban residents whose driving force is to live and work in a rural setting. These residents are motivated by anti-urban motives (i.e. urban crime, the rat race) and pro-rural perceptions about rural life.

In terms of the people counterurbanisation involves, this normally refers to the out-migration of an urban middle class (Urry, 1995), particularly in European and North American contexts (Woods, 2005). Researchers have also explored the counterurbanisation of diverse case study groups, such as marginal settlers and misfits (Halfacree, 2001), lesbian households (Smith and Holt, 2005), artists (Mitchell et al., 2004), pre-retirement groups (Stockdale, 2006) and international return migrants (Ni Laoire, 2007). In this context, counterurbanisation has offered an exciting frame for studying wider rural social phenomena, such as the gentrification of rural space (Stockdale, 2010), the 'creative class' thesis in the rural context (Herslund, 2012) and the relationship between rural in-migration and rural development (Bosworth and Atterton, 2012).

The conceptualisation of counterurbanisation in the 1970s was useful, at least initially, because it helped to draw attention to a phenomenon which had heretofore been the subject of limited research. Counterurbanisation became the subject of considerable research interest not only in the USA and the UK, but also in other developed countries, 'escaping' its Anglophone boundaries (Boyle et al., 1998). Differences in counterurbanisation trends across international case studies demonstrate, *inter alia*, differences in the in the urbanisation history of the countries under examination, the planning systems and rural housing policies that regulate the countryside, as well as socio-cultural values surrounding rural living. Despite the internationalisation of counterurbanisation research, the dominant paradigm of counterurbanisation draws on UK and North American experiences (Brown and Schafft, 2011) and, as Halfacree (2008) points out, we need to carefully question the reproduction of counterurbanisation theory outside its Anglo-American origins:

Acknowledging how the production of any category is inevitably a selective process, we need to ask questions as to the appropriateness of taking 'counterurbanisation' as a concept from village England to Spain, Norway, Greece, Romania. One may question just how well counterurbanisation 'travels' (p. 485).

In Europe, a dominant narrative of counterurbanisation draws on England, whereby, this prolonged internal migration trend (Champion and Shepherd, 2006) is associated with the colonisation of the countryside from middle-class residents, motivated by particularly positive views surrounding rural living and rural lifestyle (Woods, 2005). The trend is also linked with the exclusion of lower income groups from rural settlements, due the limited supply of rural houses in the English context (Gallent et al., 2003). However, research from other European countries has shown very contrasting experiences and responses, including counterurbanisation as an opportunity for developing rural communities, linked with excessive housing construction and facilitated by the planning system, involving diverse social groups (not just the middle classes) and irrelevant to idyllic representations of rurality (Gkartzios and Scott, 2010; Grimsund, 2011; Stockdale et al., 2000; Paniagua, 2002). All these experiences highlight the need to widen the lens of counterurbanisation theory and include cases that embrace diverse economic, cultural and personal factors (Halfacree, 2008).

Our research aims to contribute to these debates by exploring the potential of a counterurbanisation trend in Greece. This research adopts a framework of studying counterurbanisation similar to the one proposed by Mitchell (2004), whereby counterurbanisation is construed as a physical movement from large (often metropolitan or urban) to smaller (often rural or non-metropolitan) places. Mitchell's relative definition usefully avoids the duality of looking at migration movements between exclusively 'urban' and 'rural' places, agreeing that these characteristics are complex and also socially constructed (see also Halfacree, 1993; Woods, 2011).

Moreover, our research responds to Smith's (2007) and Milbourne's (2007) call for more quantitative research in rural studies focusing on counterurbanisation. In particular, the present research draws on a household survey incorporating a choice experiment. Choice experiments have been used before to inform counterurbanisation choices, with the focus, however, being on how the elements of the rural housing market influence individuals' locational choices (see Bullock et al., 2011; and references therein). Studies have thus primarily examined the trade-offs people are willing to make between the attractions of the rural environment and practical considerations such as distance to workplace, schools, shops and other amenities. Socio-economic considerations such as the extent of immigrant presence, cultural opportunities or the existence of a family network have not received attention in the literature. This study thus aims to contribute to this literature too by providing additional considerations behind re-locational choices. However, before the methodology is discussed, the following section explores the research on counterurbanisation in Greece in its, unique perhaps, socio-economic context.

2. Counter-urbanisation in Greece?

In discussing the main elements of Greece's rural economy and society Damianakos (1997) points out the country's 'fluidity of cleavages between urban and rural zones' (p. 193), instead of a separation of these, as exemplified in England and other industrial European regions (Murdoch and Lowe, 2003). The idea of a mosaic of blurred or coexisting urban and rural spaces and identities, essentially constituting an urban-rural continuum, are most developed in Damianakos (2001a, 2001b, cited in Zacoboulou, 2008) and in other Greek pioneering research projects (for example: Damianakos et al., 1997). In this continuum, urban and rural spaces, networks, socio-economic activities and identities were never truly separated, due to the county's late urbanisation and industrialisation processes. Damianakos (2002) for example reports on the magnitude of social and geographical mobility of Greek farmers, who migrated to urban

areas particularly after the 1960s, but never lost connections with their (rural) areas of origin. Thus, the peasantry has been a major influence of the Greek (urban) modern society, which at a national scale resembles the characteristics of a village society, a fact that, according to Damianakos (1997), not only separates Greece from the rest of western European societies, but also explains Greece's own version of a 'skewed' capitalism. In this context, Damianakos (2002) rejects the term peasant in the Greek case and substitutes it with the term urban-peasant to highlight this fluidity of identities between urban and rural spaces. Examples of such urban-rural 'double social identities' constitute phenomena such as urban-based residents traditionally maintaining land, small farming activities (mainly for family-consumption) and housing in rural areas of origin.

In light of these urban-rural coexistences, the task of searching for counterurbanisation becomes even more exciting. Halfacree (2008) for example supports the need for acknowledging all these diverse social, spatial and cultural factors in discussing counterurbanisation. The Greek literature has demonstrated evidence of such migration movements, highlighting the role of provincial towns in sustaining a rural population and in providing an alternative to residents from urban metropolises (see also Gousios, 1999; Koutsou and Anthopoulou, 2008). However, the population trend that is most prominent in rural Greece is the growth of international migrants in these localities, following the collapse of central and eastern European communist regimes (see research developed by Kasimis, 2010; Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2005; Kasimis et al., 2003, 2010). These authors demonstrate the positive implications of such mobilities for the rural economy (particularly in agriculture, livestock and the construction industry), but also highlight the migrants' contribution to a wider social rural development (such as demographic revival of depopulated areas and maintenance of social cohesion), notwithstanding problems of xenophobia.

Arguably, the current economic crisis has coloured more than anything else the contemporary socio-economic and political landscape in Greece,

with on-going articles and debates regarding its origins and possible treatment in academic, policy and various media circles. As discussed in the introduction, the deterioration of the country's financial condition has been treated with two EU/ECB/IMF orchestrated bail-outs, accompanied by a package of austerity measures, involving public sector cutbacks, reductions in wages and resulting in unprecedented unemployment levels. In this context of an economic crisis, a study commissioned by the Greek government (Ministry of Rural Development and Food, 2012) involving residents in Athens and Thessaloniki demonstrated that:

- 68.2 per cent of respondents have thought of moving to the provinces (or eparchy as described in the report);
- half of those willing to relocate (47.6 per cent) would like to work in the agricultural sector;
- 19.3 per cent of the respondents have already organised their relocation;
- 57.1 per cent is between 25 and 39 years old.

The report appears to suggest the potential of a counterurbanisation trend, which is characterised by younger populations and, for many households, the desire to work in agricultural activities. Indeed, a 'back-to-the-land' trend is heavily reported in the Greek (i.e. LIFO, 2012a) and international media (i.e. New York Times, 2012), presented perhaps, as an unproblematic solution to an urban-focused crisis. These representations of counterurbanisation are significant because, as Halfacree (2008) argues, the 'more culturally imaginative dimensions of counterurbanisation also come through in the way the phenomenon is represented in popular tellings of the counterurbanisation story' (p. 489-490). In the Greek context these representations of the rural (or of the province) might construct a resilient countryside that offers some solutions to crisis-hit urban households. Kasimis and Zografakis (2013), however, have argued that the economic crisis and the return to agriculture are not exclusively related phenomena. The authors draw attention to a wide series of on-going counter-urban mobilities that exhibit both necessity and choice, linked with 'back-to-the-roots' phenomena, but also with a new emergent spatial distribution of labour because of the

economic crisis. Gkartzios (2013) also discussed a so-called 'crisis-counterurbanisation' in Greece, triggered by the economic crisis. Through qualitative interviews with a small number of counter-urban residents in the Greek provinces, the research demonstrated not only contrasting experiences of the perceived impact of the economic crisis between the city of Athens and the Greek provinces, but also the relationship between these counter-urban mobilities, housing availability and family networks.

Greece would be a paradoxical case of both housing availability and strong family ties in a northern European context, but it would share similar characteristics with other southern European countries (Alesina and Giuliano, 2007). The argument of a more family-oriented society in the European south is not new. King (2000), for example, highlights southern Europe's 'special case of capitalism', characterised by late industrialisation, large agricultural and tourism sectors, speculative urban development and family-based informal economy. Researchers have extensively discussed the role of the family in the development of the welfare state in Greece and southern Europe (Katrougalos, 1996; Papadopoulou and Roumpakis, 2013). Dalla Zuanna (2001) talks about familism in Italy and the Mediterranean region, to describe societies where most people consider their own utility and family utility as being one and the same thing, resulting in distinctive social and economic phenomena when compared with the European north (see also Alesina and Giuliano, 2007; Reher, 1998). Allen et al. (2004) demonstrate how important, in southern Europe, the distinctive meaning of family is in relation to housing provision, particularly for young people when they get married and access owned (i.e. family) property. Indeed, levels of home-ownership in Southern Europe are exceptionally high (Mulder, 2007; Castles and Ferrera, 1996). In Greece, according to the Greek census of 2001, the levels of home-ownership nationally were 80.5 per cent, while in the rural context the percentage of home-ownership was up 97 per cent. In this context, Gkartzios (2013) suggested that on the one hand the availability of extended family networks and housing suggest a form of support and inclusion for the people who relocate to the Greek provinces in times of crisis and have access to such networks and resources. On the other

hand, this also highlights the social exclusion of young people who either have no access to such resources or are not willing to use them motivated by a need to shape their own independent biographies, a form of exclusion discussed in the literature also as 'exclusion of dreams' (Shucksmith, 2004).

3. Methodology

To investigate the potential of counterurbanisation amongst Athenian residents (excluding students who live in Athens due to their studies), empirical data were gathered through a household survey, involving face-to-face interviews. As discussed previously, counterurbanisation in this project refers to the centrifugal relocation of residents from the city of Athens to the Greek provinces, which could be interpreted as both urban and rural. Damianakos (2002) for example discusses the uncertainty in classifying the Greek population as either urban or rural due to the spatial equivalence of economic, political and socio-cultural identities. However, for the purposes of the quantitative methodology adopted in this paper, the destination of the potential relocation is classified as 'open countryside', 'village', 'rural town', 'town' and 'city' drawing on standard classifications used in the Greek census (Table 1).

Table 1: Settlement types used in the survey

Settlement	Description	Greek Term
Open countryside	Outside existing plan	Υπαιθρος (εκτός σχεδίου πόλης και εκτος ορίων οικισμών)
Village	Less than 2,000 residents	Χωριό / Οικισμός
Rural Town	2,000 – 10,000 residents	Κωμόπολη / Ημι-αγροτική περιοχή
Town	10,000 – 100,000 residents	Πόλη / αστική περιοχή
City	Above 100,000 residents	Πόλη / Μεγάλο αστικό κέντρο

The survey was administered to a stratified random sample of urban residents in the city of Athens. The geographic distribution of the sample was proportionate to the distribution of the actual population in the different regions of Athens based on Greek National Statistics. The survey was pretested through face-to-face interviews over a week in early March 2013. Data collection took place in April 2013 by a professional marketing company. There was no need of training of the interviewers, as these had experience working on choice experiment methodologies. The survey administration resulted in the collection of 300 questionnaires. Interviews took place at the respondents' home. In each region a street was randomly selected to serve as the starting point for household selection. Given the starting point, interviewers proceeded in a predetermined manner, selecting every 3rd household they encounter in the sample. For each starting point an equal number of interviews was allocated (8-9). In each household selected, screening questions were used at the beginning of the interview to examine respondents' eligibility for participation in the study. In the case that more than one household member were eligible to participate in the survey, the last birthday rule was enforced to ensure a random selection of the person to be interviewed. The research company first contacted the selected households by phone and arranged an interview at a suitable time. A total of 300 interviews were conducted out of a total 1,112 contacts, implying a 63% refusal rate.

The questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part A explored the willingness of the respondents to relocate to rural localities as well as their motivations and obstacles associated with the choice. Part B included a choice experiment exercise where individuals were asked to state his/her preferred alternative among different profiles. Finally, Part C questioned the socio-economic background of the respondents.

Choice experiments are a stated preference valuation technique where individual preferences are elicited with the use of questionnaires (Louviere et al., 2000). Preferences are then used to estimate values for the characteristics of a good under consideration. Originated in the fields of transport and marketing, where they were mainly used to study the trade-

offs between the characteristics of transport projects and private goods, respectively, choice experiments have recently been applied in other fields more notably, in the estimation of the monetary values of environmental goods and services (Hanley et al., 1998). Theoretically, choice experiments are grounded in Lancaster's characteristics theory of value (Lancaster, 1966). Lancaster proposed that consumers do not derive satisfaction from goods themselves but from the attributes they provide. Accordingly, in a choice experiment application respondents are asked to choose between different profiles of the good under consideration, each described in terms of certain attributes and the levels that these attributes take. By varying the attributes levels using an experimental design the researcher can create different goods. Choices are then used to explore the trade-offs respondents are willing to make between the attributes of the good and to infer respondents' valuation assuming a utility maximizing principle behind individual choice.

An experimental design is used to create choice cards for choice experiments (Hensher et al., 2005). The experimental design is concerned with how to combine attribute levels into profiles of alternatives, and profiles into choice cards. Since full factorial designs, containing all the possible combinations of the attributes levels are inefficiently large to present to respondents, design techniques are used to construct fractional factorial designs that only use a subset of choice tasks from the full factorial design with desired properties. The significant progress in modelling choice behaviour during the last decade resulted in new strategies for constructing experimental designs and new software programs for advanced design development (Ngene 3.0). Recently, there has been a move to more efficient designs. Efficient designs minimize the standard errors obtained from the data collected using the experimental design to allow for more reliable parameter estimates for the model under consideration.

Based on previous exploratory research (Gkartzios, 2013) and choice experiments applications examining characteristics influencing urban to rural migration trends (Bullock et al., 2011), we opted for five different

attributes regarding the characteristics of the destination: type of housing; distance from cities; presence of family in the relocation area; presence of first and second generation migrants; and cultural opportunities. The employed attributes and their levels are presented in Table 2. Arguably the choice of relocation destination could be significantly constrained by the employment location. We therefore did not include employment opportunities in the set of our attributes, as this would likely dominate the rest. Consequently, respondents were asked to make choices conditional that the employment opportunities are not different between the alternatives in each choice card.

Table 2: Attributes and their levels

Characteristic of destination	Levels
Type of house	Flat/Apartment House without land House with land
Presence of family	Yes No
Presence of immigrants	Low: Almost no international immigrants in the rural destination Medium: First generation immigrants High: Second generation immigrants integrated into the local community
Cultural opportunities	High: The local community is very active in cultural events. Low: Very limited opportunities for cultural goods.
Distance from cities (settlements above 100,000 residents)	Low: less than 20 km Medium: 20-60 km High: more than 60 km

The type of housing could take three levels: 'flat' which corresponds to the typical settlement type in Athens, 'house with land' and 'house without land', both corresponding to housing types found more commonly in the provinces. This attribute aimed to examine the potential of a 'back-to-land' motivation, which has been heavily featured in international media (for example: New York Time, 2012) and also explored in Anglophone literature (Halfacree, 2006), although not usually in quantitative research. For example to what extent opportunities for land (and presumably for subsistence farming or hobby farming) inform the decision to relocate? In the Greek context Kasimis and Papadopoulos (2013) have argued that these 'back-to-the-land' mobilities are realised easier by younger and more educated households. However, the authors point to difficulties faced by these households who might be driven by idyllic and nostalgic constructions of rurality, but are faced with unexpected difficulties of running farming businesses and living in the countryside.

The family attribute draws on the literature around family discussed earlier and the research question posed by Gkartzios (2013) on the role of family networks underpinning these counter-urban mobilities (at least in deciding the destination of these relocations). This attribute could take two levels: presence or absence of family networks in the relocation area.

The attribute on the presence of international migrants draws on the extraordinary growth of international migrants in Greece the last 20 years (see also Kasimis, 2013). This attribute distinguished between first and second generation migrants. This attribute offers, in a quantitative fashion, an exploration of the extent of xenophobia among Athenian residents, an issue that has received considerable attention in Greece and worldwide, given the high electoral support for the far-right party in the recent elections (see Doxiadis and Matsaganis, 2012).

The attribute on cultural opportunities at destination is informed by emerging theories surrounding the role of creativity and culture in economic growth, mobilities and development trajectories. Notably, Charles Landry's and Richard Florida's concepts on 'the creative city' and

'the creative class', have been well promoted within urban regeneration narratives focussing on the clustering of creative businesses in cultural quarters in order to: create new markets and trends; create culturally diverse places to attract a mobile class of culture consumers; and, redevelop post-industrial sites (Florida, 2002; Landry, 2000). While these ideas are heavily debated and discussed in urban studies, there is far less research which explores creative economies in the rural field (Scott and Gkartzios, 2013). In our choice experiment this attribute takes two levels, regarding the level of cultural events and goods at the destination (i.e. high or low).

The last attribute, distance from cities (defined here as settlements with more than 100,000 population), aimed to shed light on the locational characteristics of the settlement that respondents are wishing to relocate. Distance could take the levels '0-20 km', '20-60 km' or 'more than 60 km'. The first level roughly reflects a suburban area within easy access from a city. The second level corresponds to provincial settlements (either urban or rural) which are reached within an hour from a city. The third level involved more than an hour drive to reach a city and therefore would correspond to a remote, presumably rural, locality.

An efficient design was developed in Ngene 2.1 to create 12 choice sets, which were blocked in two versions. Respondents thus looked at six choice cards each, and were asked to state which profile they preferred among the two residential options and a status-quo alternative that involved the continuation of their current urban living. A cheap talk script asked respondents to truthfully state their preferences keeping in mind that results can provide useful policy recommendations and will inform policy making (Cummings and Taylor, 1998). Table 3 presents an example of a choice card.

Table 3: Example of a choice card

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

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive statistics (N = 300)

Sample

The characteristics of the sample who took part in our survey are briefly described in Table 4.

Table 4: Socio-economic characteristics of the full sample

Characteristic	Mean (St Deviation)
Gender (male=1)	0.50 (0.50)
Age (18-34)	0.32 (0.47)
Age (35-54)	0.35 (0.48)

Age (55+)	0.33 (0.47)
Children under 18 (yes=1)	0.27 (0.44)
Employment (Full-time, >30 hours)	0.36 (0.48)
Employment (part-time, 15-30 hours)	0.03 (0.17)
Employment (part-time, < 15 hours)	0.017 (0.13)
Not working (includes unemployed, retirees, housekeepers)	0.59 (0.49)
Unemployed	0.16 (0.37)
Education (no education)	0.007 (0.08)
Education (Primary School)	0.18 (0.39)
Education (High School)	0.46 (0.50)
Education (Undergraduate degree)	0.15 (0.36)
Education (Post-graduate degree)	0.20 (0.40)
Net monthly household income	2.62 (1.30) Corresponds to €1000- €1500

Constructing the city and the countryside

All 300 respondents were asked to name up to three words they associate with the words 'village', 'province' and 'city' (similar methodologies have been used in other research projects, for example van Dam et al., 2002; Rye, 2006). The purpose of these questions was to explore, in a descriptive fashion, the lay characteristics, symbols and ideologies that these different settlements are associated with in the Greek context. Previous research (Gkartzios, 2013) has suggested that these settlement distinctions are more important, than the terms 'urban' and 'rural' which

are usually used in Anglophone literature. This point agrees with earlier discussions on separating urban-rural spaces and identities in the Greek context (Zacopoulou, 2008). Laschewski et al. (2002) also suggest that rurality in the German context is a rather secondary concept, usually subordinated to more widely accepted ideas such as region, peasant or periphery.

These questions created a large number of data, which are ordered in Table 5 (p. 25) by frequency (limited to the most five popular responses in each case) in order to discuss the most dominant constructions surrounding those terms. Our data generally demonstrate very positive representations of the village and the province, which are almost similar. Indeed, most frequently cited associations regarding the village draw on positive aspects of rural living, commonly referring to peace and quiet, fresh air, the presence of nature and biodiversity, farmland and the quality of human relations. The only negative attribute attached to villages (but less frequently cited compared to other responses) was gossip. Very similar responses were given in relation to the word province which is a much broader term in Greek for a series of settlements (both urban and rural) outside the urban metropolis. As Table 5 demonstrates the province is also associated with notions of better quality of life (i.e. no stress, relaxation), better social relationships (i.e. warm human relations) and a better natural environment (i.e. nature, fresh air). Negative associations were also present in the responses, but again at lower frequencies, and referred to the following three characteristics: the lack of medical services, a small or closed society and, finally, gossip.

The dominant positive constructions surrounding the village and the provinces fit very well with notions of the 'rural idyll' which is heavily discussed in international literature (Bell, 2008; Woods, 2011). The discourse of an idyllic countryside is linked with notions of pre-industrial nostalgia, resulting from the intense urbanisation and the subsequent dereliction of the English industrial city, though it has also found expression in North American culture (Bunce, 1994). The literature has highlighted that these constructions are particularly prevalent amongst urban households (like in the present survey). Such constructions are

powerful because, firstly, they inform and rationalise the migration decision. The literature has demonstrated many cases of counter-urban mobilities triggered by notions of idealised ruralities (Halfacree, 1994; Walmsley et al., 1998; van Dam et al., 2002). Secondly, such constructions are important, at least when they demonstrate the interests of particular agents in policy making, because they can find their way in policy debates and policy prescription which regulates the countryside (Satsangi et al., 2010). For example, the hegemony of discourses regarding an idyllic countryside (which constitutes a resource to be enjoyed by urban residents, but, at the same time, a resource which is not allowed to evolve and develop) has created acute problems of housing affordability and socio-spatial exclusion in rural Britain (Best and Shucksmith, 2006; Shucksmith, 2012). However, it should be noted that such phenomena do not necessarily travel outside the contexts they are studied in (see for example Lowe's (2012) essay on the universality of Anglo-Saxon rural sociology).

Contrary to the above observations, the city is commonly associated with negative attributes. These predominantly highlight environmental problems and pollution (i.e. exhaust gas, noise, traffic), lack of quality of life (namely stress and lack of communication) and unemployment. Positive attributes were mentioned as well, but to a lesser extent. These referred to the variety of services that can be found in cities, evidenced by responses such as: entertainment, more activities, and, generally, more options. Collectively, the responses demonstrate particularly polarised discourses regarding life in the city and the provinces. While no major differences were observed between the provinces and villages, the representations between the city and the provinces were strikingly opposed. As suggested in the literature, it is expected that such contrasting views will have a significant impact on residential preferences, whether these are realised or not (see also van Dam et al., 2002).

Table 5: Can you tell us three words you associate with: the 'village'; the 'province'; and the 'city'? (top five responses ordered by frequency)

1st choice	2nd choice	3rd choice
Constructing the 'village' ('χωριό')		
Peace/Quiet (13.3%)	Fresh air (14.3%)	Fresh air (11.1%)
Fresh Air (11.3%)	Peace/Quiet (12%)	Peace/Quiet (9.8%)
Nature (11.3%)	Nature (9.3%)	Nature (9.1%)
Farmland (5%)	Farmland (5%)	Nothing (5.4%)
Animals (5%)	Animals (5%)	Human contact (5.1%)
Constructing the 'province' ('επαρχία')		
Peace/Quiet (17.3%)	Peace/Quiet (12.2%)	Nothing (13.3%)
Better quality of life (8%)	Warm human relations (7.4%)	Peace/Quiet (11.2%)
Relaxation (6%)	No stress (7.1%)	Better quality of life (8.4%)
Nature (5.7%)	Fresh air (6.8%)	Fresh air (8%)
Village (5.7%)	Nature (5.7%)	Warm human relations (8%)
Constructing the 'city' ('πόλη')		
Noise (15.7%)	Exhaust gas (14.3%)	Stress (10.8%)
Exhaust gas (11.7%)	Stress (13%)	Exhaust gas (8.5%)
Stress (10.7%)	Heavy traffic (10.7%)	Noise (7.5%)
Crowds (5.7%)	Noise (7.3%)	Lack of communication (6.4%)
Heavy traffic (4.7)	Unemployment (4%)	Heavy traffic (5.1%)

These polarised perceptions between life in the provinces and life in the city of Athens are also evidenced Table 6, which describes very positive representations of living in the provinces, compared to perceptions of satisfaction with life in the city of Athens. For example, 72% of our

sample views positively life in the provinces and only 5% of them negatively.

Table 6: Perceptions of living

Question	Mean
How satisfied are you with your life in Athens?	
Very dissatisfied	0.14
Dissatisfied	0.17
Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	0.38
Satisfied	0.24
Very satisfied	0.06
What's your opinion for life in the provinces?	
Very negative	0.00
Negative	0.05
Neither negative nor positive	0.20
Positive	0.50
Very positive	0.22
I don't know	0.03

Since our research aims to investigate preferences associated with counter-urban migration, the respondents were presented with a screening question asking them whether they had considered a relocation. Only respondents admitting having at least considered relocating were then asked to complete the choice experiment task. Of the 300 interviews performed, 183 individuals (61% of the total sample) replied that they have considered moving out of Athens. Of those, 32 were willing to migrate to a different country (10.6% of the total sample). Excluding individuals declared unwilling to relocate and those willing to migrate abroad, we are left with 151 individuals (50.3%) for the subsequent analysis.

4.2 The choice experiment (N = 151)

The sample

Table 7 summarizes the socio-economic background of the 'counterurbanisation sample'. Approximately 52% of our sample are men. 71% of our sample are aged between 18-54 while 28% is above 55. Of this sample, 82% are currently living in a flat in Athens. A significant 55% has lived in a rural area before, while it is worth noting that almost half of the sample (48%) owns a second house in the Greek provinces. This demonstrates the urban-rural coexistences in the Greek case discussed in the literature review.

Table 7: Socio-economic characteristics

Characteristic	Mean (St Deviation)
Gender (male=1)	0.52 (0.50)
Age (18-34)	0.29 (0.46)
Age (35-54)	0.42 (0.50)
Age (55+)	0.28 (0.45)
Children under 18 (yes=1)	0.28 (0.50)
Employment (Full-time, >30 hours)	0.40 (0.49)
Employment (part-time, 15-30 hours)	0.03 (0.18)
Employment (part-time, < 15 hours)	0.02 (0.14)
Not working (includes unemployed, retirees, housekeepers)	0.55 (0.50)
Unemployed	0.22 (0.41)
Education (no education)	0

Education (Primary School)	0.16 (0.37)
Education (High School)	0.48 (0.50)
Education (Undergraduate degree)	0.16 (0.37)
Education (Post-graduate degree)	0.21 (0.40)
Net monthly household income	2.65 (1.28) Corresponds to €1000- €1500
Housing type: Flat	0.82 (0.38)
Housing type: House with land	0.03 (0.18)
Housing type: House without land	0.15 (0.35)
Have you ever lived in a rural area? (yes =1)	0.55 (0.50)
Do you own a second house in a rural area?	0.48 (0.50)

To examine whether a self-selection is present, we tested whether the counterurbanisation sample of 151 respondents willing to migrate is different with regards to socio-economic characteristics from the sample declaring unwilling to move out of Athens (N=117, we excluded individuals willing to migrate to another country). Testing suggests that the two samples are not different in terms of education (p-value=0.42), income (p-value=0.64), gender (p-value=0.45) or employment status (full-time: p-value=0.47; part-time: p-value=0.18; less than 15 hours: p-value=0.46; not working: p-value=0.19).

However, a significant difference is found with respect to age and unemployment levels. Mean age for the sample willing to relocate is 45.7, which is significantly lower than the mean age (51.3) for those willing to continue living in Athens (p-value= 0.0054). Our results therefore suggest

that younger cohorts, who are likely to be more severely hit by the crisis, are more likely to relocate to rural provinces. This is in line with the study commissioned by the Ministry of Rural Development and Food (2012) which reports that 57.1% of the individuals willing to move out of the two biggest urban centres in Greece are between 25 and 39 years old.

Furthermore, our evidence suggests that the sample willing to relocate experiences significantly higher unemployment rates (P -value=0.0062). Unemployment is 21.9% for the counterurbanisation sample and 9.4% for those not willing to move. Evidence suggests that younger age groups are particularly hit by the crisis. In the last quarter of 2012, unemployment rates sat at 42% for men and 48% for women aged 20-29, and 21.6% for men and 29.2% for women aged between 30-44. This is higher than 16.9% for men and 19.9% for women being more than 45 years old (Matsaganis and Leventi, 2013). Young people find it increasingly difficult to get a job as new entrants in the labour market, given the severe hire freezes as a consequence of the crisis. At the same time job insecurity is higher among young people who face an increased risk of losing their jobs relative to more senior workers. This is the case even during good economic times but is found to be aggravated in times of severe recessions as the one Greece is witnessing (Verick, 2009).

Crisis counterurbanisation

Respondents declared having considered moving out of Athens were then asked a series of questions aiming to examine whether this decision relates to the ongoing economic crisis and its effects. In this respect, we first investigated how likely respondents are to move to a more rural area in the next five years. 55% of our sample declared being either likely or very likely to relocate. A follow up question was then asked examining whether respondents were more willing to relocate at that time compared to 5 years ago. 66% admitted that they were more willing to relocate at that time. Those respondents were then asked whether this is related to the economic crisis. The overwhelming majority (80%) replied positively. The results of the survey therefore provide support for a crisis-led

counterurbanisation trend that is discussed in Greece in both media and academic cycles (see also Gkartzios, 2013; Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2013). Respondents were finally asked where they would like to move to. The anchors were 'the open countryside', 'a village', 'a rural town', 'town', 'the same or different city' (see also Table 1, p. 15). 86% of the sample expressed willingness to relocate to rural settlements, such as a rural town, a village or even the open countryside, which reinforces the argument that citizens in the urban centres are increasingly seeking to 'go rural', as alluded in the title of this research. Table 8 summarizes the questions aiming to explore the potential of a crisis counterurbanisation.

Table 8: Crisis-counter-urbanization questions

Question	Mean
How likely are you to move to a more rural area in the next 5 years?	
Very unlikely	0.16
Unlikely	0.29
Likely	0.39
Very likely	0.16
Compared to 5 years ago, would you say that you are more willing to relocate today?	
Yes	0.66
No	0.34
If yes, would you say that this is mainly due to the current economic crisis?	
Yes	0.80
No	0.20
Where would you like to move to?	
The open countryside	0.05
A village	0.44

A rural town	0.37
A town	0.13
Same or different city	0.01

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

Model specification

A Random Parameters Logit (RPL) model is used to analyse the stated choice data to allow for preference heterogeneity in the population. Under an RPL specification the stochastic component of the utility is segmented into two parts; one part is correlated over alternatives and heteroskedastic over individuals and alternatives, and the other part is independently and identically distributed (iid) over alternatives and individuals (Hensher and Greene, 2003). Individual-specific parameter estimates can be derived given the observed individual choices.

In this context, the utility a respondent i derives from an alternative j in a choice situation t is given by:

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

where X is a vector of observed attributes associated with rural living and e is the random component of the utility. Parameter estimates are generated using 100 Halton draws, and all attribute parameters are assumed to be normally distributed in the population. A normal distribution allows respondents to have positive or negative values for the attributes under consideration.

Econometric estimation results

Table 9 accommodates the results of the random parameters estimation. The coefficients correspond to the marginal utility of each attribute level. A positive and statistically significant coefficient for 'house with land' and 'house without land' indicates that respondents hold positive values for moving to houses compared to their current urban living in flats. The coefficient for 'house with land' is higher implying that this is the most preferred alternative for housing. Contrary to our expectations, we did not find a significant coefficient for 'family' implying that the presence of family networks in the destination is not an important consideration in the choice of a relocation area.

Table 9: Econometric estimation results

House without land	1.42*** (0.30)
House with land	2.26*** (0.49)
Presence of family	0.31 (0.42)
High presence of immigrants	-0.24 (0.53)
Medium presence of immigrants	-0.41* (0.23)
High opportunities for cultural activities	0.93** (0.40)
Medium distance from cities	-0.62 (0.44)
High distance from cities	-1.21** (0.60)

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

We further find a negative and statistically significant coefficient for medium presence of international migrants (as opposed to low). The coefficient becomes, however, insignificant for high immigrant presence. Combined, these results imply that respondents are reluctant to migrate to areas with high presence of first generation migrants that might be less integrated in the local community. However, if we treat this as a proxy for xenophobia, our data shows that xenophobia eliminates as migrants become integrated. Areas with second generation international immigrants are not treated differently compared areas with low immigrant presence.

Our results further reveal the importance of cultural capital in the relocation decision. High cultural opportunities in the rural destination contribute positively to respondents' utility, mirroring the suggestions of Scott and Gkartzios (2013) that new or return migrants in the Greek provinces not only value cultural opportunities, but also actively contribute to local cultural activities (both commercial and non-commercial). As the researchers argue, the relocation of these urban crisis-hit residents could result in new values surrounding community development and engagement in arts, informed by notions of social solidarity and a strong commitment to forging new ways of thinking and of creative expression.

Finally, our analysis suggests that respondents are happy with medium distances from cities, but dislike areas that can be reached within more than 1 hour drive from cities. Provincial settlements within 60 km from cities are thus the most preferred option.

Barriers to counterurbanisation

Given the interest of this sample to move out of Athens, we then asked the respondents (through an open-ended question) to describe the reasons they have not relocated so far. The responses were coded and grouped, and the most frequent responses are shown in Table 10. Respondents were not asked to give only one reason (therefore the responses do not add to 100%). The responses suggest that despite

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

Table 10: Barriers to counterurbanisation

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

5. Discussion

Our data indicate high levels of potential mobilities (both counter-urban and international), triggered by the economic crisis. In particular, of our 300 sample of residents in Athens, 183 individuals (61%) have considered relocating, with 32 willing to migrate abroad (10.6%) and the remainder 151 (50.3%) within Greece. These 151 individuals form our potential 'counterurbanisation sample'. 86% of these are wishing to relocate to rural residential areas (such as villages, rural towns and in the open countryside). 66% admits that this willingness aggravated the last 5 years, and, of those, 80% attributes this to the economic crisis. This

suggests that rural areas, and, wider, the provinces, are viewed, at least in the minds of these urban dwellers, as spaces of refuge in times of crisis (this is also suggested by Kasimis and Zografakis, 2012; Gkartzios, 2013). In this context our survey demonstrates polarised representations regarding quality of life in the city and in the provinces. While the city is commonly associated with negative attributes such as environmental pollution and compromised quality of life, villages and, wider, the provinces are constructed as places that offer better quality of life due to a series of both physical (nature, farmland, fresh air) and social features of the countryside (peace and quietness, warm relations, etc.) (see also Halfacree, 1994). Although such constructions are not necessarily representations of fact, it is expected that they will have a significant impact on future residential relocations.

The sample willing to relocate to the provinces is relatively younger and is significantly more hit by unemployment compared to the sample declaring unwilling to move out of Athens. These two characteristics (age and unemployment) as regards the potential counterurbanisation of Athenian residents contrasts the experience of counterurbanisation in Britain for example, which is commonly associated with the migration of older or pre-retirement groups to the countryside (Stockdale and MacLeod, 2013; Lowe and Speakman, 2006). Our findings, however, agree with other crisis-led counterurbanisation movements discussed in academic literature (Gkartzios, 2013; Hugo and Bell, 1998; Mitchell's (2004) suggestion of displacement-urbanisation) and also in Greek policy reports (Ministry of Rural Development and Food, 2012). Furthermore, our data does not point to any significant differences amongst the two samples with regard to education, income and gender. This would also suggest a more inclusive experience of counterurbanisation (across different socio-economic groups), rather than a trend restrictive to the middle classes as commonly described in international literature (Woods, 2005).

The vast majority of the counterurbanisation sample (82%) lives currently in high density apartment blocks commonly found in Athens, suggesting that their relocation would result in a different housing type (this

preferred change is also evidenced in the choice experiment). 55% of the counterurbanisation sample has lived in rural areas before, and it is worth noting that almost half of this sample owns a second house in the Greek provinces. These characteristics highlight that the urban population in Athens is not necessarily disconnected from the rural or provincial resource (through property, family ties, background, etc.). These groups therefore could hardly be seen as external to the rural, contributing to processes of rural gentrification (Philips, 2010). Instead, these mobilities demonstrate Greece's urban-rural coexistences and 'double social identities', as discussed by Damianakos (2002).

The choice experiment results further point to a 'back-to-the-land' motivation. The option of a house with land is the most highly valued attribute, suggesting that the potential relocation could also be associated with activities such as subsistence farming and hobby farming (see also Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2013).

The existence of cultural opportunities at the destination is also a significant consideration. This echoes the role of local culture and of creative economies in attracting urban residents. Scott and Gkartzios (2013) have argued that in-migrants in Greece are not only attracted by cultural opportunities, at least in the way that these mobilities are discussed in the context of Florida's (2002) creative elite. More importantly perhaps, counter-urban migrants to the Greek provinces actively contribute to creativity and culture through a series of bottom-up cultural activities, both commercial and non-commercial, but with a strong community focus. These potential mobilities therefore could result in new creative opportunities, offering perhaps new ways of thinking community resilience in times of crisis. Nerlich and Doring (2005) for example discuss the impact of the foot and mouth disease in Britain, certainly a period of crisis for the British countryside, on creative expression and community resilience. Policy makers therefore should recognise and promote the potential of an emergent cultural economy in provincial localities in times of crisis.

Respondents are somewhat reluctant to move to places with high concentration of first generation international migrants, which one could argue is an indication of xenophobia. Instances of xenophobia have increased from the growth of international migrants (including illegal immigrants) in the city of Athens and have shaped a discourse of national populism frequently played out in Greek politics (see Doxiadis and Matsagnanis, 2013). It is not uncommon in the literature for urban residents to construct the countryside as a foreign-free and crime-free space (for example Yarwood, 2001), especially through the idyllic lenses life in the provinces is portrayed in our survey. It is interesting however to see that this attribute is a significant characteristic for choosing the preferred relocation, given the level of international migrants in rural communities and their positive contribution to the Greek rural economy (Kasimis et al., 2003). It should be noted that this attribute is not significant when it involves second generation migrants.

Distance is also an important consideration with respondents opposing to distances longer than 60 km from a city, suggesting that the rural destination they wish to relocate is not a remote rural area, excluding long distance counter-urban moves.

Family did not emerge in the choice experiment as a significant attribute for deciding the (potential) relocation. This contrasts with earlier qualitative work by Gkartzios (2013) who found evidence of significant assistance (both economic, symbolic and emotional) offered by the extended family to households who decided to relocate to the Greek provinces. The difference between the two projects might lie in the fact that while this research explores the potential attributes of a relocation (not materialised), the research discussed by Gkartzios (2013) focuses on relocations which were actually undertaken by the respondents. In other words, while the exploration of relocation might be more idealistic regarding the destination not taking into account family networks and family property, the reality of counter-urban mobilities (at least in a period of economic crisis) might be dictated by family networks and housing availability as already suggested.

Our data suggest that 55% of our counterurbanisation sample declared being either likely or very likely to relocate. The most important barriers to counterurbanisation have been employment and family obligations linked with the current residence. In fewer cases the barrier to counterurbanise was due to lack of own house, the economic cost of relocation and the lack of social network at destination.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, our findings suggest a potential counterurbanisation trend that entails all elements of Mitchell's (2004) ex-urbanisation, anti-urbanisation and displaced-urbanisation. On the one hand, the potential relocation of Athenian residents is informed by a preference to relocate to areas in close proximity to cities, to houses (presumably bigger than existing flats and with land opportunities), and by idyllic constructions of the rural (or of the province) associated with these settlements, closely linked with Mitchell's ex-urbanisation and anti-urbanisation movements. On the other hand, the role of the economic crisis in the decision making highlights the prevalence of displaced-urbanisation, whereby households (especially younger in our case) are motivated to migrate to rural localities because of unemployment, lower costs of living, available housing, etc. This would suggest a fusion of taxonomies commonly suggested in counterurbanisation research, rather than a need to classify counterurbanisation on the basis of distinct characteristics that form the relocation decision (see also Halfacree, 2001).

These results have important implications for planning. Given the stated preferences for rural (or more rural) residential environments evidenced in our survey, rural areas and rural towns are likely to experience a significant increase in their population in the years to come. Our data suggest that rural localities in close proximity to cities (within 60 km) are the most preferred areas. The growth of population in these localities could have both positive and challenging implications for local communities. For example, more residents in these localities could result

in greater levels of community engagement, growing levels of collective and grassroots cultural activities (Scott and Gkartzios, 2013) and greater opportunities for entrepreneurialism (see also Bosworth and Atterton, 2012; Stockdale et al., 2000) diversifying the rural and regional economy. This is particularly likely since individuals willing to relocate are young. Given also the preferences for houses with land, these movements could result to increased levels of an informal, exchange economy, triggered by activities such as subsistence and hobby farming. Furthermore, the growth of urban-based migrants in provincial settings motivated by idyllic constructions of these destinations could result in the growth of environmental lobbyism in these localities (aiming to preserve the rurality that they have relocated for), but could, potentially, clash with other development and community interests (as it has been the case with the growth of counter-urbanite middle class migrants in the British countryside, see for example Murdoch et al., 2003).

More rural case study research employing both ethnographic and quantitative approaches, as well as analysis of the results of the most recent census of population in Greece (2011) could investigate a series of phenomena resulting from these mobilities. What is the evidence of statistical counterurbanisation in Athens and in other Greek cities? To what extent preferences for relocation, like the ones described in this report, will be met? Is the rural destination the end product of these mobilities, or a short term solution to the ongoing crisis? How is the countryside redefined and contested by the return of these crisis-hit urban dwellers? What values new or return residents place at the communities of destination? What does the influx of such residents mean for shifting (and contested) meanings and practices of community (drawing on Liepins, 2000)? What are the power relations of new migrants and established residents in shaping local policies? What geographies of exclusion and inclusion emerge from the relocation of crisis-hit households? And, finally, how are discourses of sustainability, nationalism and resilience played out in the Greek rural development context resulting from these crisis-led mobilities? These questions demonstrate some critical issues to be further

explored regarding the counterurbanisation of urban residents in times of crisis.

7. Outputs

The results of this study were first presented in leading international conferences during the summer of 2013. Two papers were presented at the European Society for Rural Sociology congress¹ and the European Network for Housing Research conference² respectively. The coordinator of this research organised a special session at the European Society for Rural Sociology congress on 'Mobilities in Times of Crisis'³, involving 12 papers discussing similar processes in European countries. The authors of the report presented this research at various seminars organised in Universities in the UK and Ireland throughout the year (Newcastle University, Aberystwyth University, Queen's University Belfast and University College Dublin). One paper is currently submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal and one paper drawing on the choice experiment methodology will be presented at the next Trans-Atlantic Rural Research Network (TARRN) conference⁴, as part of finalising a collaborative special issue on rural mobilities.

¹ <http://www.florenceesrs2013.com/>

² <http://www.enhr2013.com/>

³ <http://www.florenceesrs2013.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/9WG.pdf>

⁴ TARRN is a collaborative research network involving rural social scientists in five Universities in the USA and the UK (Cornell University, Penn State University, Newcastle University, Queen's University Belfast and University of Aberdeen), see also <https://tarrn.wordpress.com/>

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