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How migrants with “choices” choose their destination: towards a conceptual framework of place attractiveness in a migration context

Thomas Niedomysl
thomas.niedomysl@ibf.uu.se

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How migrants with “choices” choose their destination: towards a conceptual framework of place attractiveness in a migration context

Thomas Niedomysl
Institute for Housing and Urban research, Uppsala University, PO Box 785, 801 29 Gävle, Sweden; e-mail: thomas.niedomysl@ibf.uu.se

Abstract. The purpose of this paper is to examine what it is that makes some places appear more attractive than others in a migration context, in order to arrive at a conceptual framework whereby place attractiveness can be better understood. The empirical material for this paper mainly draws upon interviews that were carried out with migrants who seem to have considered at least one alternative in their search for a suitable destination. The conceptual framework, which comprises the main result of the paper, suggests that needs, demands and preferences are central components for understanding place attractiveness in a migration context. It is argued that the attractiveness of places increases with the successive fulfilment of these factors; but on the other hand, the more factors a migrant seeks to fulfil in his or her destination selection, the fewer the choice possibilities.

1 Introduction

It has become tantamount to a tradition within migration research to assume that people move to improve their situation in one way or another (see Sjaastad, 1962; De Jong and Gardner, 1981; Halfacree, 1995). One of the key objectives for migration researchers has been to understand how and why people come to decide which destination is the most suitable when faced with other available possibilities. During the late 1960s to the 1980s such issues were given much attention (Walmsley and Lewis, 1993). From their desks, behavioural geographers tried to come up with suitable models and concepts that could be used to better understand the processes of migration decision-making. While many of these models were quite sophisticated and complex they seem to have had limited success since their usefulness has yet to be demonstrated. In retrospect it has been suggested that these efforts can be regarded as an attempt to retrieve positivism without abandoning “an ultimate belief in the value of seeking out empirical regularities as the basis for law-like generalisations” (White and Jackson, 1995:117).

From this it follows that migration researchers had to try new ways of understanding migration decision-making. One path that seemed promising was to engage more fully with the individuals that constitute the object of study, that is, to turn to the migrants themselves. Therefore, in-depth qualitative approaches
in migration research increased in popularity during the late 1980s and 1990s and the emphasis on migration decision-making seems to have shifted towards a wider “biographical approach”. The biographical approach is best explained as an approach that attempts to understand an individual’s migration decisions in the context of the past, the present and the projected future as the individual perceives it (Findlay and Stockdale, 2003). Migration decisions were previously thought of more as “one-time events”, but nowadays there is an emphasis on the migration decision from the perspective of the entire biography of the migrant (Halfacree and Boyle, 1993).

In Sweden, Andersson (1987) pioneered the biographical approach in his studies on urbanisation processes and provided a first attempt to understand the destination decision with a biographical approach (see also Hägerstrand, 1970). Another Swedish example of the employment of a biographical approach to understand general societal changes is provided by Tollefsen Altamirano (2000) in a study of seasonal migration between the North and the South. However, there is still a paucity of qualitative work that has concerned itself with understanding the decision-making process of destination selection from the perspective of the individual. While Kåks and Westholm’s (1994) and Stenbacka’s (2001) studies of migration to the countryside constitute two valuable Swedish exceptions, they do not explicitly focus upon the destination selection process. In addition to being somewhat confined to rural areas, these studies do not explicitly focus upon whether the migrants considered alternative destinations or not. For example, Lansing and Mueller (1967) showed in their survey from the early 1960s that a majority of migrants had only one seriously considered feasible destination. More recent work provides further support for the claim that most migrants appear to have few real alternatives (Abramsson, 2003; Niedomysl 2006a) and Lu (2002) have shown that migration is by no means a guarantee for ending up with better residential conditions after migration. Therefore it would be valuable also to focus upon migrants who seem to have had other alternatives when making their destination decision. Such an approach would provide a different perspective and also an opportunity to explore place attractiveness more carefully.

2 Purpose

The overarching purpose of this paper is to examine what it is that makes some places appear more attractive than others in a migration context in order to arrive at a conceptual framework whereby place attractiveness can be better understood.

3 Research design

The empirical material for this research mainly draws upon 15 interviews carried out in two phases. First, four interviews were undertaken during January and February 2003 as a first step towards a better understanding of place attractiveness. These four interviews can be seen as a pre-study where an opportunity was given to learn about how to approach place attractiveness in a migration context for the second phase of interviews. One of the lessons drawn
from these first interviews was that it might be problematic to approach attractiveness by interviewing migrants who, more or less, only seemed to have made a choice between staying in place or moving to one particular destination. It would arguably be more valuable to interview migrants who had considered more than one destination, as they are likely to have reflected more extensively upon issues relating to the attractiveness of different places.

Thus, if interest is in interviewing migrants who have been facing more than one choice opportunity, some sort of strategic sampling procedure is necessary. More extensive studies carried out soon after the first four interviews (see Niedomysl, 2006a; 2006b) provided an opportunity to find a suitable group of migrants to interview in what could be described as the second phase of research. This was done via a survey to a random sample of 1000 interregional migrants. The questionnaire contained five open-ended questions, two of which dealt with migration motives (discussed in Niedomysl, 2006b) and three questions dealt with factors influencing destination selection (discussed in Niedomysl, 2006a). In addition, respondents were asked if they were interested in participating in an interview. The information given by these five questions made it possible to select migrants who seemed to have faced at least one other real choice opportunity when deciding upon where to move. Of course, it can reasonably be assumed that the overwhelming majority did have a choice between staying in place and moving.

Partly on the basis of the information given in the questionnaire, but also on the basis of the respondents’ age and type of destination etc, eleven migrant households were selected and interviewed during October and November 2004. In terms of occupational status, three of them were students, one was unemployed, two were employed, two were self-employed and three were retired. Four of the migrants had moved to rural areas and seven had moved to urban areas, all of them to the middle and northern parts of Sweden. The ages ranged from 24 years to 70 years with an average age of 48. In nine out of eleven cases only one member of the household took part in the interview. A few extensive question topics guided the interviews, but the interviews are better described as free-floating conversations that often centred on maps that the interviewer had brought along. The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and two hours and took place in the home of the respondents. They were taped and transcribed verbatim in all but one case (due to poor tape quality) and some stories clearly not relevant were omitted. The names of places and the respondents have been changed in the text to ensure anonymity.

It is worth noting that a detailed road map of Sweden was brought along to the interviews by the interviewer so that respondents could point out places they had considered as potential destinations. This was a simple and successful attempt to ease the asking of questions about the decision making process (e.g. why the decision was made to go to this place instead of some other place and which factors were influential in that decision). For instance, asking the question “Were there any other places you considered and could you point them out for me?” and showing them the map, usually resulted in a more detailed, vivid and interesting account of the destination selection process. A simple procedure was
employed in the analysis stage whereby the interviewer read the transcribed interviews several times and underlined relevant sections. Comparisons were then made between similar topics in different transcripts in order to find correspondences. Themes, patterns or ideas that seemed useful, interesting, surprising, etc. were noted as they emanated from the comparisons and after that the transcripts were re-read to see if other understandings or nuances would emerge. Re-reading the transcripts was particularly valuable in the development of the conceptual framework (discussed below).

There are some methodological issues that are problematic when trying to gain insight into place attractiveness by interviewing migrants about their decision-making process. It is well known that these kinds of studies are hampered by memory recall when respondents may perhaps only recall the main events and influences and ignore secondary factors (Stockdale, 2004). Further, Stockdale (2004:174) argues that “it is widely recognised that, with hindsight, respondents are likely to put a more favourable and rational interpretation on their actions and lifetime events … [and] may be keen to portray their actions and experiences in positive terms rather than appear to have made mistakes or failed to achieve their expectations”. Moreover, it is presumably unavoidable that it is easier for the interviewer to understand some migrants better than others - for instance, by having similar preferences or experiences. Whether this leads to more relevant or interesting questions or to simply taking things for granted is uncertain. It may therefore be appropriate to note that the subjective character of place attractiveness and the general importance ascribed to migration decisions tentatively increase the risk of drawing too far-reaching conclusions from interviews.

4 Analysis and discussion

The results of this research will be presented as a conceptual framework that emerged from the interviews and from other closely related research on place attractiveness and migration (Niedomysl, 2006a; 2006b). This framework will briefly be presented and then its various components will be discussed and motivated in light of the findings.

4.1 A conceptual framework

The conceptual framework, shown in Figure 1 below, is designed to facilitate the understanding of place attractiveness in a migration context. It is structured as an instrument of analysis that should be able to provide insights into individual migrants and their decision-making as well as into migration on an aggregated level. The core of the framework has a pyramidal shape that consists of three levels: Needs, Demands and Preferences. Needs refer to basic requirements; factors such as having a safe and affordable dwelling. Demands refer to more or less non-negotiable factors that must be fulfilled for a certain destination to be selected. Preferences refer to factors that can be regarded as “that something extra”. Both demands and preferences should be considered parts of the same preference order, where demands are more important than preferences.
Figure 1. A conceptual framework of place attractiveness in a migration context.

On each side of the pyramid scale indicators have been placed showing *Degree of place attractiveness* and *Number of choice possibilities*, respectively. This illustrates that the greater the extent to which a place may fulfill the needs, demands and preferences of a migrant, the greater the attractiveness of such a place. At the same time, however, when the degree of place attractiveness increases due to the successive fulfillment of these three factors, the number of choice possibilities decreases. That is, the more factors a migrant may wish to fulfill in his or her destination selection, the fewer choice possibilities will be available.

4.2 Needs

It may perhaps seem a bit too detailed to start with needs as the basis for the conceptual framework, since needs in this context should primarily be understood as basic requirements necessary for survival. Noteworthy is that none of the interviewees explicitly spoke about needs or used the term in the way it is used here; needs clearly seem to have been taken for granted. The selection procedure for the interviews in this research, mainly focusing on migrants who seemed to have had choice opportunities in their destination selection, is also important to keep in mind as a possible explanation why none of the interviewees explicitly mentioned needs. Nonetheless, it is argued here that needs are fundamental in order to understand attractiveness (even in developed countries such as Sweden). The reason is simple since it is quite obvious that no voluntary migration will occur to places where there is no potential for surviving (available housing, etc). While this is a factor often taken for granted, it is nevertheless essential for understanding how and why destination choices are made since it rapidly narrows down the number of choice possibilities (available at a certain point in time and budget). This is presumably why none of the interviewees spoke about needs in that way – it is irrelevant for them to consider “impossible” destinations. Needless to say, their search behaviour was guided to places where housing was available.

Further support for the inclusion of needs in the framework is given by recent survey research on destination preferences in Sweden (Niedomysl, 2006a).
When long distance migrants were asked about why they decided to move to a certain neighbourhood instead of moving somewhere else, the most common answer turned out to be that they had no or few other opportunities. Consider also for instance a homeless person whose only preference would be to satisfy his or her needs (to find a dwelling, any dwelling whatsoever). In such extreme cases, needs arguably fill up the pyramid. However, if the concept needs is relaxed somewhat to include aspects wider than just those necessary for survival it becomes more useful, but also more complex, and makes it problematic to separate needs from demands (discussed below). For example, living on welfare instead of having a work-related income or having a dwelling with a basic standard might perhaps seem so fundamental that it is not even considered when thinking about migration. This may be said to illustrate that any simple distinction between needs and demands might be difficult to make. As indicated by the dashed lines in Figure 1, the separation of needs and demands is not rigid. It should also be noted that what can be considered as needs might change somewhat over the life-course since, for instance, those interviewees who had retired were no longer dependent on work to make their living. The life-course is however of more general relevance for the conceptual framework and will therefore be addressed more explicitly later on in the paper.

4.3 Demands
While needs were more or less unspoken during the interviews, demands were clearly more prominent - even if the specific term was mainly used by the interviewer. Arguably, the inclusion of demands in the conceptual framework is well motivated since it was apparent that if the interviewed migrants could not satisfy their demands, no migration would occur or the attractiveness of the place would be considered extremely low. As noted earlier, making a rigid distinction between needs and demands is not necessarily useful. In some situations a demand may tentatively turn into a need and vice versa. Moreover, since demands are understood in the framework as factors that must be fulfilled for migration to take place but are not necessary for survival, it seems natural to add this extra level in addition to the somewhat softer meaning usually implied in the word preferences. That demands should be included in the conceptual framework can also be motivated by the fact that there were plenty of factors in the interviews that cannot be regarded as needs, but still important enough to support the assumption that migration would not take place unless some factors were present at a certain destination. For the interviewed students, one perhaps self evident demand was access to higher education; for others, moving to a house or moving close to relatives were factors so important that if they would not be fulfilled, no migration would presumably have taken place. It also turned out that using the term “demand” was very valuable when interviewing migrants, and it has been useful to think in terms of demands in the analysis stage afterwards as it helps distinguishing between the factors that really matter in migration decision-making and those that are less important.

Drawing upon survey research on migration motives (e.g. Niedomysl, 2006b) it seems warranted to suggest that what people usually regard as their
main, or most important, migration motive closely corresponds to demands in Figure 1. For instance, work-related migration motives are usually prominent reasons for long-distance migration (Clark and Huang, 2004; Niedomysl, 2006b) and it seems reasonable to expect that employment is a demand that has to be fulfilled for migration to take place. However, it is quite often argued that survey research on migration motives neglects the fact that the reasons why people migrate are rather complex (e.g. Jones, 1990; Halfacree, 2004). The conceptual framework might be helpful to illustrate such complexity and how it influences place attractiveness in a migration context. According to the framework, demands constitute one part, but do not necessarily give a full picture. For most migrants, finding work is not necessarily enough - it has to be interesting or well paid - and for various reasons people may choose to search for employment in some regions but ignore others. This discussion leads to the top of the conceptual framework.

4.4 Preferences

As has already been hinted at, demands and preferences can be seen as parts of the same preference order, and as shown in Figure 1, demands are more important than preferences. It is however not easy to make a distinction between demands and preferences since such distinctions depend so strongly upon the situation of the migrant. Factors that are viewed positively by the migrant (“as that something extra”, but could nevertheless be compromised, are rather indicative of what preferences are all about in this context. Obviously then, preferences are highly diverse and can be almost anything, ranging from factors that are very difficult to define such as having a positive feeling towards a place, to very concrete issues such as whether a house has a red colour or whether there is space for having a small garden, etc. The Karlssons’ first visit to what would become their new home makes a rather illustrative case for the complexity of preferences:

Mrs Karlsson: “I was very disappointed about the house when I first came [here] … I didn’t even want to go inside the house. I said ‘No, I am not moving here’ [imitating her husband:] ‘You’re crazy, we have made an appointment. We have to go up and say hello, we have to walk around at least!’ So we went in and looked around and thought that the colours were awful. There were so many negative things. I could not see anything else. But then we walked up to the edge here [points towards the back of the house] and walked towards the sea and I just said that ‘Yes, lets go back inside and make a bid!’ Then he said [her husband] ‘You’re crazy, it’s not in the sea we’re supposed to live’.”

Obviously, Mrs Karlsson had some preferences e.g. regarding colours etc but the wonderful water view made her re-evaluate the importance of those preferences and reconsider her priorities. However, to judge from the majority of the interviews, it is not always as easy as this example would suggest to estimate the importance of certain preference factors in the destination decision-making process. In some cases preferences seem to have had a very decisive impact, in particular when demands could be fulfilled at a number of destinations, but in other cases preferences were mentioned more or less in passing. The quote above
shows furthermore that people do not necessarily always know their own preferences explicitly.

Even when it comes to leisure activities, which at first might be considered to be preferences, it is not always easy to make meaningful distinctions. For instance, gardening is a hobby of the retired Andersson couple who emphasised the importance of moving south to a warmer climatic zone, while hunting is a hobby of Mr Nilsson, who strongly stressed the importance of moving to a region where there are no wolves to threaten the life of his hunting dog, and for Mr Svensson moving to a destination without a golf course nearby seemed completely out of the question. However, whereas the Anderssons eventually decided upon a place in a warmer climate zone (even if other factors were more influential) and the Svenssons ended up in place with a golf course nearby, Mr Nilsson ultimately decided to move to a region where there is in fact a population of wolves. This brief illustration shows that making easy distinctions is not always feasible, even if much can be learnt from trying to do so as it clearly helps sharpen the focus of analysis.

4.5 Resources and constraints
But there is also another important aspect relating to the number of available opportunities and the importance placed upon the interviewee’s emphasising particular aspects. For instance, there are plenty of golf courses in the region where the Svenssons looked for a place to move to, and the Anderssons had other choice opportunities within the same climatic zone. But for Mr Nilsson there was a risk of wolves in most of the regions that he considered, which left him with few other alternatives and seems to have made him reconsider the importance of that specific aspect. This discussion points to the importance of the “situation” of the individual migrant and the resources and constraints faced by him or her. There can be many kinds of constraints (see e.g. Hägerstrand, 1970) and they can regulate the number of opportunities available in a migration context. It seems as if different life-phases also correspond to different types of constraints, but it is important not to over-generalise since constraints vary significantly between different individuals, in part depending on their resources. Some people are victims of discrimination or have less developed social networks, to give two examples. According to the interviewees, most important are economic constraints since housing costs more or less determine where people can afford to live. Mr Johansson illustrated this:

Mr Johansson: “I’d rather have lived closer to Gävle and we did find a house that we made a bid in Ockelbo [place relatively close to Gävle]. Really nice place. Tremendously charming house, one of those houses that have a special atmosphere ... But then it came to bidding and we could not keep up, it became too expensive.”
Interviewer: “How did it come about that you started your search in the Gävle area rather than in the Västerås area [Mr Johansson had relatives in Västerås]?”
Mr Johansson: “No, it was because of the house prices, quite simply.”
Interviewer: “Did you look down there [in Västerås]?”
Mr Johansson: “Well, you know as soon as one steps south of the Dala River (Dalälven), the prices go up at once and then it gets too expensive.”
Interviewer: “Did you start to search down there or…?”
Mr Johansson: “Yes, we have been looking all over. We have been looking down in Småland also. But it is not cheap down there either, it’s the competition with the Germans.”

Economic resources clearly determined how the search processes developed for most of the interviewed migrants. The Karlsson family, who moved from Stockholm and were looking for a safe and child-friendly rural location in a house with a water view, started their search just north of Stockholm. They soon realised that their housing demands and preferences would entail spending too much money to be fulfilled in the vicinity of Stockholm so they gradually extended their search further north where prices are lower. Similarly, the Svenssons started their search in an area that their daughter had said she liked, but the housing prices were high and, even if they presumably could afford to buy a house in that area, it would mean having to give up some interests such as travelling.

These two last cases are also illustrative in terms of time-spatial constraints, but in quite different ways. For the Svenssons it was important not to end up too far from their daughter so their search space was restricted by the time it took to travel from their daughter’s house to possible destinations. Mr Svensson explained that eventually, when their daughter had children, and if the children got sick, they would like to be able to come at short notice and then being 30 km away is much better than 100 km. For Mr Karlsson moving shortened his commuting trips every other week by at least three hours, saving time to be with his family and, in a sense, migration was seen as a way of easing some of the time-spatial constraints. Life phases are also important in the presence of different sets of constraints. The Svenssons, for example, sold their house a couple of years prior to retirement and moved to an apartment so that when they retired, they would be free to move. At a stroke, they thereby increased their financial resources and reduced their constraints. When Mrs Jonsson was asked whether she had thought about moving to a place nearby, her answer showed that the availability of public transportation can be very important.

Interviewer: “Hammarö was never an alternative?”
Mrs Jonsson: “Yes, well I would have liked to live out there, but the communications are so bad. One bus per day, so it’s… well, maybe a couple more but… it is not possible to live there.”
Interviewer: “And if the communications had been better?”
Mrs Jonsson: “Mmm, there is a place called Bärstad… I could imagine living there.”

Other, quite different examples included the students where rapid access to an apartment was essential. It is quite common that students get accepted for education programmes at very short notice, giving significance to basic needs as relevant for place attractiveness in a migration context for a significant migrant population even in developed countries. Some Swedish university cities have in fact promoted a housing guarantee as part of promotional campaigns to attract students.

In the context of this discussion about constraints, methodological problems deserve to be re-emphasised since there is a risk of drawing wrong or too far-reaching conclusions from the interviews. Constraints may be difficult to tell
other people about and are perhaps also difficult to recognise or admit to oneself. For instance, people may choose to stress certain aspects that they feel more comfortable talking about - and it must be kept in mind that people do not always have full information. Thus, instead of mentioning that they could not afford to buy their “dream house”, interviewees may choose to stress something more positive with what they did achieve by their migration decision (however compare Stenbacka, 2001, chapter 5).

Another factor that emerged via the interviews was the use of the Internet as a significant factor of influence or guidance. This instrument for facilitating the search processes could be seen as a resource reducing some constraints and is therefore particularly interesting as an illustrative example of how informational constraints may be reduced. While newspapers, personal contacts and real estate agents may previously have been seen as the most important sources of information to prospective migrants (Cadwallader, 1992), this may have changed with the rapid extension of the Internet. Most Swedes today have Internet access (Ellegård and Vilhelmson, 2004). As far as the present author is aware, little is known about how the Internet has changed the ways in which migrants use the abundance of easily accessed information in a migration context; but to judge from the interviews conducted in this research it can be concluded that all migrants, with the exception of an elderly woman, had effectively used the Internet in their search. In some cases the Internet can be seen as a complement to traditional newspaper advertisements, but more informative (more extensive descriptions and pictures) and definitely a more effective instrument (easily allows for extensive or intensive searching). Most interviewees used the Internet in an effective way complementing other sources of information. For instance, one of the interviewed students described how she had become somewhat of an expert in surfing the web for apartments and explained how this was necessary because she did not have the time nor the money to fly down to Lund from Stockholm every weekend to visit available apartments. When she found a really interesting apartment she had a friend living in Lund go and look at the apartment (which they bought shortly afterwards).

However, in one case at least, the interviewed household used the Internet in a somewhat different manner by simply searching the Internet for a few criteria (country house with a piece of land where they could do some forestry and small-scale farming) all over Sweden instead of particular regions. Of course they visited a few places before they decided where to move, but the Internet clearly determined which places to visit. Another household effectively facilitated their search by using the Internet with a few distinct criteria in mind: a house with a view of water, located somewhere between Stockholm and Sundsvall and not exceeding a specific sum of money.

Even if the Internet may have reformed search processes somewhat and increased the awareness space, it has not removed traditional influences like those of friends and relatives, which are still extremely important. The Svenssions who moved to Köping said that they were inspired by their daughter’s father-in-law who had been brought up in Köping and had told them it was a great place.
This made them look more closely at the town, and when they had decided upon Köping as their destination, the father-in-law gave further advice:

Mr Svensson: “If you want to live in Köping’, he said [the father-in-law], ‘then you should live in Vinberg’ and it is this neighbourhood.”
Mrs Svensson: “You don’t know those things, like which neighbourhood is the nicest to live in.”
Mr Svensson: “The best reputation so to speak. So then we searched here.”

Even if the Svenssons used the Internet as an important tool in their search process, it is quite obvious from the quote above that traditional information from friends and relatives still exerts considerable importance.

4.6 Geographical levels
It is important to acknowledge another aspect that the conceptual framework does not explicitly take into account: the fact that people who migrate over long distances may consider the attractiveness of places on different geographical levels. For instance, while short distance movers are typically thought to make their residential choices based on a local scale (Dieleman and Mulder, 2002), long distance movers may consider a wider range of potential destinations ranging from regions to neighbourhoods. As a general rule of thumb, the interviews indicated that the number of opportunities increased on more detailed geographical levels. For instance, only a few migrants seem to have considered more than two regions to move to, but most of them considered a number of alternative locations within a city or municipality. This is also supported by recent survey research on residential preferences in Sweden where a large sample of long-distance migrants were asked why they decided to move to the destination they did and to specify important attributes on different geographical levels (Niedomysl, 2006a). The results of that study show how the number of contemplated factors rises as the spatial resolution increases. That is, on a regional level few but important factors were mentioned (social and occupational factors that can be seen as needs and demands) whereas on the neighbourhood level a large variety of factors were mentioned that were more related to preferences (even if in fact many respondents reported that they had few other opportunities, suggesting the importance of needs at this level as well). It follows that it is necessary to consider how needs, demands and preferences are matched geographically to really understand place attractiveness in a migration context (for example, see Roseman, 1971).

4.7 The importance of the life-course
It is no coincidence that the importance of leisure activities was emphasised by the older interviewees (Warnes, 1992; Rodriguez et al, 1998), and arguably the life-course is paramount for understanding place attractiveness in a migration context. As described by Boyle et al (1998), “the essence of the life-course approach is that the unit of analysis becomes the individual sited in geographical, social, historical and political space and that the study of the household or family becomes the study of conjoined life-courses”. The life-course approach allows
for diversity by acknowledging that individuals, while perhaps belonging to a certain life-phase, may not necessarily act in similar ways (for further discussions see Elder, 1994 and Warnes, 1992). One of the strongest findings from the interviews reveals that place attractiveness is best illustrated and understood from a life-course perspective. As argued above, the degree of place attractiveness depends upon the degree to which needs, demands and preferences may be fulfilled at a certain place. Since people during different phases of the life-course also have different needs, demands and preferences, a life-course perspective is very valuable.

For instance, being a student is often associated with a relatively carefree time in life and it could perhaps be expected that students have many choice opportunities, being less tied to place and can seemingly move around quite freely. However, students are also a group with specific demands – access to higher education as the most obvious – that separate them from other groups. One of the interviewed students had decided to move from Stockholm because her boyfriend’s grades were not high enough to begin the kind of education he desired in Stockholm. When Stockholm was no longer an option both of them felt a desire to live elsewhere, not necessarily in Sweden, something they presumably share with many other young couples. Since she already had completed many of her courses for a law degree, it was essential for them to move to a place with a university offering law studies. This narrowed down the number of opportunities quite drastically to five places in Sweden and from there they let their preferences guide them, the most important of which was experiencing something other than living in a large city and locating near some close friends (further narrowing down their alternatives).

In the cases of the two families with young children that were interviewed, the Karlssons and the Lindgrens, their life-phase was also very prominent, but in somewhat different ways. What they had in common, however, was that they had their children’s well being as the top priority in their migration decision (Bailey et al, 2004). The Karlssons moved from Stockholm since they felt that it was not a good place to bring up a child in. In their view it had become too unsafe and stressful and they wanted something else for their seven-year-old, which led them to the countryside. But migration can also go in the opposite direction as it did for the Lindgren family, also with the children’s best in mind. They had been living in a sparsely populated region, and wanted to move to a city where their children could grow up with greater supply of (non-gendered) leisure time activities. Notably, in this case the parents would presumably have stayed if it had not been for their children. Children and grandchildren seem to be highly important also in other phases of life, like for Mrs Svensson who motivated her migration by her wish to live close to her daughter and, eventually, her grandchildren so she and her husband perhaps could help out with babysitting etc (for other examples of migration, care and linked lives, see Bailey et al, 2004). Therefore, the concrete content of needs, demands and preferences in the conceptual framework obviously changes over the life-course.
5 Summary and concluding remarks

The purpose of this paper has been to examine what it is that makes some places appear more attractive than other places in a migration context, in order to arrive at a conceptual framework whereby place attractiveness can be better understood. This framework was developed in part by way of interviews with a small group of long distance migrants and in part by drawing upon other closely related research mainly on place attractiveness and migration in Sweden. With support from these sources, it has been argued that people about to migrate guide their search behaviour to find the most desirable location, which may be thought of as a match between the household’s needs, demands and preferences on the one hand, and the resources and opportunities available to them on the other. At the same time, migrants always act under a variety of constraints depending on their individual circumstances and this influences their opportunities. Moreover, the successive fulfillment of needs, demands and preferences will lead to a successive decrease in the number of choice opportunities. However, the greater the extent to which these factors may be fulfilled at a certain location, the greater its attractiveness.

The conceptual framework suggested by this paper is admittedly simple, but arguably useful as an instrument of analysis that should be able to provide general insights into individual migrants and their decision-making. People may move to certain places for seemingly diverse and complex reasons, but in addition to the framework, one of the main findings of this paper emphasises the usefulness of a life-course approach as it may provide a structure that brings some order to what would otherwise risk being a too subjectively understood attractiveness. While needs, demands and preferences may be useful as a general conceptual framework, they do not suffice for a fuller understanding of the search process and place attractiveness. Perhaps the net was cast too widely in this paper with the use of a very diverse sample of respondents, but on the other hand, it forced a more general framework. Future research may benefit from paying more attention to the difference that life-phases make. The conceptual framework should be applicable also for understanding place attractiveness from the perspective of migration flows between places, even if the discussions of this paper have mainly focussed upon individual migrants. More focus upon the life-course and geographical levels may then be useful.

It might also be relevant to reflect upon some additional issues that have sprung from the interviews as they relate to other research on long distance migration. Recent survey research on migration motives has shown the importance of work-related migration motives as the main driving force behind contemporary long distance migration in Sweden (Niedomysl, 2006b) as elsewhere (e.g. Clark and Huang, 2004). In light of the conceptual framework presented here, it seems warranted to suggest that access to work should be seen as a demand, but there is still plenty of room for preferences to guide searching for a destination within commuting range from the workplace. In which case it is central to achieve a geographical match of needs, demands and preferences.

While the conceptual framework, the importance of the life-course and constraints should be seen as the main contributions of this paper, another
noteworthy finding was the use of the Internet in the migrants’ search behaviour. The Internet provides new opportunities to create new forms of search behaviour and the interviews showed that most migrants make extensive use of the Internet in their search for a new destination. This has definitely paved the way for greater opportunities to find “new” places and a more effective search, particularly in areas where the potential migrants have no previous personal contacts. But the importance of the Internet should not be exaggerated as the interviews also showed that in most cases personal contacts are as important as ever before.

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