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## Highly qualified rural youth: why do young graduates return to their home region?

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This paper addresses the motivations underlying migration decision-making in the case of young university graduates returning to their rural home region in Switzerland. Empirical results show the joint role of social ties, living environment, and job opportunities, although the weight given to each of these factors varies between graduates. Some strategies used by the graduates to cope with a limited labour market are furthermore identified. I argue that internal migrations are far from being the sole consequence of labour market conditions and that a greater appreciation of non-economic issues is needed.

**Keywords:** internal migration; return migration; brain drain; youth; highly skilled migrants

### Introduction

The migration of highly skilled people has been a recurrent topic of debate for several decades and on various political scales. In 1963, the Royal Society of London coined the term ‘brain drain’ to refer to the migration of British scientists to the USA and Canada following World War II. The term was then used to refer to migration from the Global South to Europe and North America, but has more recently also been used in other spatial contexts and notably in talking about internal migration between peripheral and central regions in more developed countries.

In the context of the widening participation in higher education, scholars have addressed the issue of graduates’ migration flows from various perspectives, and the notion of brain drain has been discussed and criticised as being an overly simplistic notion that implies an economic determinism (Crush and Hughes 2009). In addressing the various dimensions of migration flows, scholars have also talked about the phenomena of brain gain and brain circulation (Saxenian 2002). On an inter-regional level, many studies have highlighted the selectiveness of out-migration from rural communities characterised by the higher migration propensity of highly qualified young adults (Corbett 2007), creating both ‘winner’ and ‘loser’ regions (Hoare and Corver 2010). The attractiveness of central regions to the detriment of peripheral regions has thus been identified in a wide range of contexts, such as the UK (Fielding 1992b; Findlay et al. 2009), Belgium, and the Netherlands (Thissen et al. 2010), Italy (Iammarino and Marinelli 2011), and Switzerland (Schmidlin 2007).

Most studies on young graduates’ internal migration have focused on this dominant flow from peripheral to central regions, while return migration has received comparatively limited attention (Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011). Moreover, these studies have also often adopted a ‘macro-

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analytical approach' relying on census or register data (Boyle, Halfacree, and Robinson 1998). This literature, as pointed out by Niedomysl and Amcoff (2011, 657), has usually 'compared differences between the individual or regional characteristics of return migrants and non-return migrants to find clues as to their reasons for migration'. They consequently have not directly addressed the motivations of young graduates, and have not managed to satisfactorily explain why some people do one thing (migrate to central regions) while some others sharing the same profile do the opposite (return to their rural home region) (Fischer 1999).

An understanding of the motivations of graduates to return to their rural home region raises not only scientific issues in terms of conceptualising migration decision-making but also relates to political concerns in rural areas. Young adult out-migration is often seen as a threat to local communities (depopulation, decrease of economic activity, etc.), and thus attracting and enabling young adults to return is of utmost importance in the frame of the 'information' or 'knowledge' economy, where skills migration is seen as key in regional development (Belfield and Morris 1999; Stockdale 2006).

This paper precisely addresses return migration by focusing on migrants' self-reported motives in the case of a rural region in Switzerland, drawing data from a questionnaire and interviews. It also deals with a specific stage in the graduates' life course, the transition from university to employment, which despite its growing importance due to the wider access to higher education has received little academic attention. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: In the next section, the literature on internal migration is reviewed, with an emphasis on the underlying motivations of graduates returning to their rural homes; the following section discusses the research design and methods, and the final section presents empirical results on the reasons for which some young graduates go back to their home region after graduating from university and on the potential compromises (or trade-offs) between career and migration.

## Theoretical discussion

### *Traditional explanations of internal migration*

Traditional explanations – whether neo-classic or structuralist – of internal migration have put forward labour market-related factors. On a macroscale, the neo-classic approach regards migration as the rational adaptation to the wage differentials and employment opportunities of different regions (Hicks 1966). On a microscale, it considers migration as a strategy of individuals involving a more long-term investment in human capital (Sjaastad 1962). In other words, migrants are economically rational (*homo oeconomicus*) and independent of other people, places, and projects. It is assumed that individuals will move if there is a net gain to be made, and will choose the option that brings them the highest 'utility' (Pekkala 2003).

Many neo-classic conceptions have been challenged by structural perspectives. For scholars belonging to the latter current, people's decisions to migrate are determined by structural conditions and imperative constraints, and are rarely the result of a free rational choice (Lundholm et al. 2004). Labour migrants, for example, move to regions of economic growth because they are forced to do so due to the structural conditions of peripheral regions, such as the effects of a segmented labour market or the spatial mismatch between job opportunities and educational achievements (Gordon 1995).

It is interesting to point out, however, that similarities exist between both approaches despite their antagonism. Labour mobility appears on the whole to be a process of adaptation to the needs of the market. Both consider that workers are subjected to external forces, adjusting to the restructuring of regional economies, and that they obey the injunctions of the labour market through employment opportunities and wage levels (Lundholm 2010).

### *Internal migration ‘beyond the economic’*

Not all commentators, however, subscribe to a strictly neo-classic or structuralist interpretation. The agency of highly skilled migrants has been stressed so that migrants are not only merely subjected to external forces, but also have some freedom to choose between alternative residential regions (Findlay et al. 2009; Harvey 2009; Lundholm 2010). In addition, the complexity of the migration decision has been recognised, acknowledging it to be based on a variety of motives and not only on economic ones. Following Fielding’s call to approach the worlds of internal migration ‘beyond the economic’ (Fielding 1992a), Halfacree, for example, highlights the need to show greater appreciation of the ‘non-economic’ issues of migration behaviour, *balancing* rather than *replacing* work done within the economic tradition (Halfacree 2004, 239) (our emphasis).

The debate about the agency and motivations of migrants takes place in the wider context of individualisation theory within social sciences. In this, it relates to the work of prominent social theorists, such as Baumann, Beck, and Giddens, who argue that contemporary societies are characterised by the actors’ ‘disembedding’ from traditional social constraints, releasing them from traditional pre-written scripts dictating how they should live their lives (Rye 2011). The contemporary individual is then characterised by a level of choice and incentives that were unavailable to previous generations (Beck 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002, 232).

These trends mean a growing diversity in terms of life course and concern young people in particular. The transitions from childhood to adulthood stretch over an intermediary period of ‘youth’ (Jeffrey 2010; Valentine 2003) that is characterised by many potential changes to their personal, professional, and residential status. The very specific position young adults face in their life course has several impacts in regard to their migration behaviour. Events such as leaving the parental home, union formation (and dissolution), entering the labour market and changes in employment explain why they are a population group much more mobile than the average (Boyle, Halfacree, and Robinson 1998). Their life trajectories are more diverse, and staying in their home region is said to be just one of many options for young adults (Thissen et al. 2010, 429). The life-course position also influences migration motivations and residential preferences; for example, married couples are more likely to be attracted to a rural area than unmarried individuals, as shown in the case of Ireland by Stockdale and Catney (2012).

The individualisation thesis and the call to integrate non-economic factors do not mean the denial of the role of structures (Rye [2011], for example, speaks of structured freedom). Empirically, several studies have shown the importance of labour market conditions as stated by internal migrants (Owen and Green 1992), with specific regard to people migrating from peripheral regions with a truncated labour market to central regions (King and Shuttleworth 1995). However, several currents of migration research have called for the integration of non-economic factors, underlining the need to address the complexity of migration decision-making and to consider factors related to the social context and amenities.

Personal and social motives refer more broadly to the question of the analytical unit to be selected (Dieleman 2001). Historically, migration studies focused on the individual. However, when someone moves, the decision is made according to a certain social context and to the links he or she has with others (partner, friends, wider family context). King (2002) highlights the important effect of love and of the prospect of re-joining or following the partner in all forms of migration, while Harvey (2009) identifies the influence of family ties on migration, finding geographical proximity to family and friends to be one of the key factors affecting whether highly qualified people remain in a host country or return to their home country. Niedomysl and Amcoff (2011) likewise find social reasons to be the key motivation for returning migrants in Sweden, indicating that ‘there is clearly more to the picture than strictly economic

issues' (Niedomysl and Amcoff, 2011, 668). This shows that although attachment to the place where rural young people were born is no longer decisive in their identity formation (Jones 1999), social ties and sense of belonging still play an important role in migration behaviour.

Amenity-led migration or migrations of environmental preference prioritise quality of life and aesthetic considerations (King 2002). Amenities include various cultural and natural elements related to residential contexts – both rural (countryside, scenery, outdoor activities, etc.) and urban (culture, entertainment, etc.) (Gosnell and Abrams 2011). In a study on the international return migration of scientists, Harvey (2009) points out the importance of culture and lifestyle considerations, such as climate, culture, quality of life, and outdoor environment. On an inter-regional level, Rye (2011) stresses the importance of rurality, which is not to be seen as 'objective' but as a social construct influencing the migration intentions of rural youth.

There is another point to make with regard to internal migration and the importance of the labour market. Some literatures have shown that the relationship between work and residential choice is not as clear as it used to be: for example, some individuals adopt strategies or make concessions in order to avoid migration while coping with a limited regional labour market (Lundholm et al. 2004). This leads to three possible hypotheses. The first is the substitution hypothesis, which refers to long-distance commuting and suggests that some people may decide to make the most of transport infrastructures and the increase in speed potentials to commute over long distances and avoid moving to another region. The second (overqualification) and the third (underemployment) hypotheses consider the 'price' that some graduates are ready to pay in moving to a region with a truncated labour market. However, evidence supporting these last two hypotheses is still thin and ambiguous. While a certain level of job–education mismatch was found in rural coastal regions of Canada, for example (Corbett 2007), job–education mismatch is actually more often seen as an incentive to leave a peripheral region rather than a concession that people are ready to make in order to stay there (Iammarino and Marinelli 2011). Moreover, graduates usually seem to move to the more rural areas if they have the prospect of a full-time job there (Corcoran, Faggian, and McCann 2010; Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011).

For a deeper understanding of the multiple motivations of migrants, of the articulation of their various 'rationalities' and of migrants' adaptive strategies, it is necessary to go beyond simply adding social and cultural factors on to a neo-classical model of migration decision-making. As shown notably by Lahire (2010), each person inevitably carries a plurality of roles and ways of seeing, feeling, and acting. Moreover, his/her actions may be motivated, legitimated, and evaluated by multiple coexisting principles (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006).

Consequently, I argue that return migrations are to be addressed by adopting a wider approach than either the neo-classic or structural ones. I do not claim that economic factors or labour market conditions are not important, but that they are not the only ones to be taken into account. In the research project on which this paper is written, a 'micro-analytical' approach has been adopted (Boyle, Halfacree, and Robinson 1998) in the sense that the empirical work concentrated on the individual migrants and their decision-making. A questionnaire and interviews were conducted to identify the motivations – be they related to the labour market, social ties, living environment or financial aspects – of young graduates going back to their home region.

## **Methodology and case study**

### *Spatial context*

This paper addresses the migration behaviour of young university graduates coming from Canton Jura in Switzerland. This French-speaking region, located in the north-west of the country, shares the usual characteristics of a peripheral and rural region given the spatial context of Switzerland.<sup>1</sup>

In 2010, there was a total of 70,000 inhabitants (ranked 20th out of 26 cantons in size). The demographic growth is less dynamic than that of the country as a whole (population increase of 2.0% in Jura versus 9.2% in the whole country between 2000 and 2010; ranked 22nd). There is an overrepresentation of low-skilled workers and of jobs in the agricultural and industrial sectors, and consequently, an underrepresentation of highly skilled workers and jobs in the service sectors. The *per capita* income in Jura accounts for only 70% of the Swiss value (ranked 26th).

Switzerland has been characterised over the last four decades by rapid metropolitan growth (mainly in Zurich, Geneva–Lausanne, and Basel), from both a demographic and an economic point of view (Rérat 2012; Rérat and Lees 2011). While this has not been the case in Jura, the canton is not far from Basel, Switzerland's third largest city; however, since Basel is German-speaking, the language barrier prevents Jura from fully benefiting from its proximity to this city.

### ***Identification of the target population***

This paper is taken from a wider research project whose aim was to investigate the various migration patterns and behaviours of young graduates from Jura (Rérat 2013). The target population for this study has been defined as all young people coming from Canton Jura (that is to say, whose family lived in the region when they left high school) who graduated from university between 2000 and 2010.<sup>2</sup> Almost all of them had to move to attend university, meaning that they had the first experience of migration on their own, of living in an urban residential context and of building social ties outside their home region.

In the search for subjects for the study, it was not possible to send a survey questionnaire to a random selection of graduates, as no address lists exist. Therefore, the snowball sampling method was chosen instead. However, this is usually used for small-scale exploratory samples in the absence of a sampling frame (most notably in the case of a hard-to-reach population), and it is rather unusual to implement it to produce a large sample in the frame of a quantitative survey. Yet in this case, the risk of not gathering a sample big enough and of the over/underrepresentation of certain population groups was reduced, given the relatively small size of Jura, the strong sense of belonging (and commitment to these issues) among those living or coming from there, the fact that the author comes from the region and the widespread use of virtual social networks among a population of young highly qualified adults familiar with information technology (IT).

Sixty of the researcher's acquaintances (friends, university colleagues, etc.) belonging to the target population were sent an email which presented the research objectives and requested the email addresses of other relevant graduates. When a new address was received, the same message was sent, creating a multiplier effect. An email was also sent to all members of the cantonal administration, and a press conference was organised for that purpose a few days before Christmas, a period during which most graduates visit their family.

This approach was found to be very successful: 550 emails were received by the researcher and 1,280 individuals were identified. A total of 924 people filled in the online questionnaire (response rate of 72%), of which 498 were university graduates, and thus formed the sample addressed in this paper.<sup>3</sup> The sample represents more than 40% of the total number of university graduates coming from Canton Jura between 2000 and 2010.

More important than the proportion of the target population that received and completed the questionnaire is the issue of representivity (particularly where non-probability sampling methods, such as the snowball approach, are used). Biases may occur, as the probability of each member being reached is not equal. As there is little official data available, only a few comparisons can be made between the target population and the sample. They show very few noticeable differences (such as the overrepresentation of graduates from the University of Neuchatel, since the researcher studied and works there, and thus had more contacts there). However, these differences

relate to features that neither increase nor decrease the propensity to return to one's home region, and therefore do not affect the reliability and representivity of the sample.

Graduates were asked about their migration trajectory (former and current places of residence), profile (position in the life course, professional career, etc.), motivations (factors taken into account in the migration decision), and opinions of their home region. In accordance with the mixed method principles that guided our research, qualitative information was also collected to complete the statistical results. Plenty of space was given for comments on the questionnaire, in order to obtain comments and remarks. Ten in-depth interviews were also conducted with graduates before sending out the questionnaire, covering differing cases in terms of migration behaviour, marital status, and type of degree. They gave input to the questionnaire design and were then used in the interpretation of statistical results.

According to the survey, 40% of young people from Canton Jura (199 of the 498) who graduated from university between 2000 and 2010 have since returned to live there. The others have mainly settled in the other French-speaking regions of Switzerland, while about 7% live abroad. The factors explaining their spatial distribution within Switzerland are linguistic regions (only another 7% live in a different linguistic region), city size, and location of universities.

Features of the graduates themselves also appear to influence whether or not they return to their home region. Although gender appears to make no difference, the graduate's position in the life course does. For example, graduates who have started a family are more likely to return (57.6%) than graduates without children (33.6%). For graduates living in a couple, the propensity to return is reduced if their partner comes from another region (20%; partner from Jura: 63.1%) or also has a university degree (35.3%; without: 45.3%). Few differences are found in respect to the area of study; this may be explained by the need to use broad categories (e.g. social sciences, humanities, etc.) due to the number of observations (some more significant differences might be found by taking into account more specific fields of study). The propensity to return varies more between employment sectors, as will be later discussed.

This paper focuses on the important minority of graduates who have decided to return to their home region and investigates their motivations in making this choice (the choice of location within the destination region is not addressed here).

## Results and discussion

In this section, the reasons for return migration are considered in the light of the survey results, in order to form a typology of young graduates on the basis of their motivations. Qualitative material taken from interviews and comments made in the questionnaire is then used to gain more understanding of the different types of return migrants, and finally working conditions are compared in an attempt to identify any strategies implemented by graduates to make a return possible.

### *Importance of factors in return migration*

Of the 13 factors suggested in the questionnaire, five are seen by more than two-thirds of graduates as important or very important in their decision to return to Canton Jura (Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> The first of these is proximity of friends and family (34.7% important and 40.7% very important), followed by job opportunities (34.8% and 39.4%), the rural setting (36.7% and 36.7%), the suitability of the living environment for starting a family (29.4% and 37.6%), and attachment to the region (33.7% and 36.7%).

As revealed by these results – and this was even clearer during interviews, when people could express themselves more freely – the decision to return to one's home region is the result of a

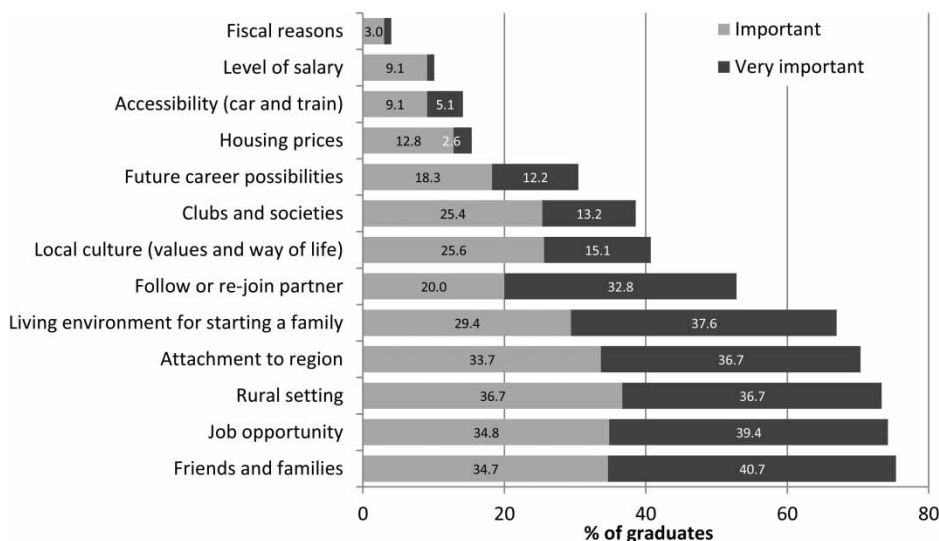


Figure 1. Motivations to return to the home region (percentage of ‘important’ and ‘very important’ responses) (Source: questionnaire).

conjunction of factors related to personal life (social ties and attachment),<sup>5</sup> the labour market, and the living environment, with strictly economic criterion playing a marginal role. While job availability appears to be an important motivator for young graduates (although a quarter of graduates esteem this factor to be at the most ‘moderately important’), issues regarding career and salary seem to be minor. Factors generally not perceived as essential include housing price, accessibility, and tax system. This may indicate that their role is negligible in the decision to move, or may be explained by the fact that these elements are no more favourable in Jura than in other cantons (which is indeed the case with regard the last two criteria<sup>6</sup>).

As well as stating which factors were important to them in their decision to return to Jura, graduates were asked to identify the prevailing motivation from the list (Figure 2). Job opportunity appears in first position, but it is worth pointing out that two-thirds put forward another factor; these individuals may have seen employment as something that facilitates a return move that is actually driven by other, mainly social, reasons. Indeed, the three motivators most popular among these two-thirds are linked to social ties: friends and family, partner, and attachment to the region (among them, these were chosen by 54.2% of the interviewees). Living environment appears to be a less important motivator, as less than 1 person in 10 mentions it; the weight of the other factors (fiscal reasons, level of salary, local culture, etc.) is even weaker.

### *Typology of migrants according to motivations*

The results presented above concern all graduates from Canton Jura returning to their home region. However, this population is not monolithic and differences among the graduates are hidden beneath the aggregate trends. In order to get an idea of this diversity, multivariate analyses have been carried out.

First, a principal component analysis was conducted on the motivations in order to get a smaller subset of variables.<sup>7</sup> Table 1 shows the factor loadings after rotation (if above 0.4). The items that cluster on the same components suggest that component 1 (26.1% of total variance) represents attachment to the region and social ties in general, component 2 (15.2%)



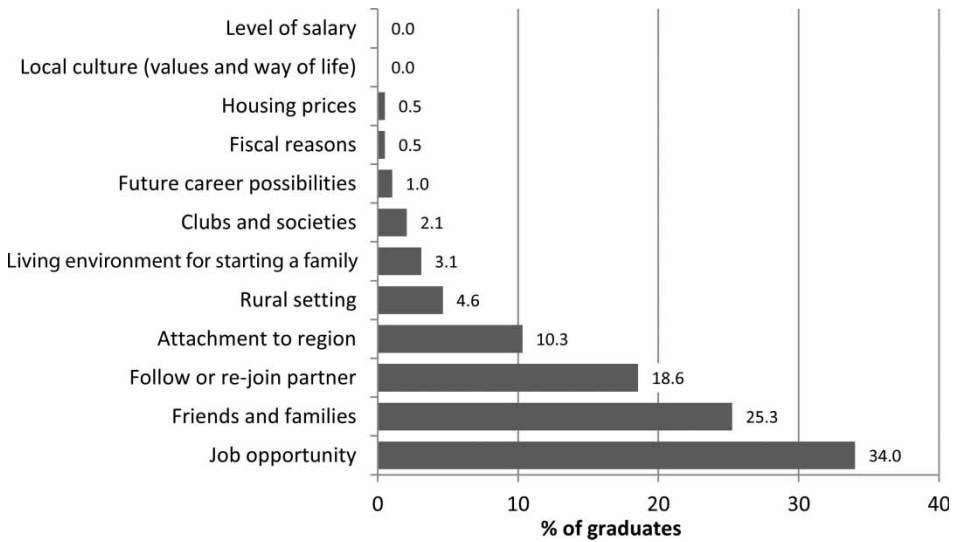


Figure 2. Prevailing motivation to return to the home region (%) (Source: questionnaire).

accessibility and cost of living, component 3 (14.8%) the labour market, and component 4 (11.2%) the partner (and the family).

On the basis of the factor loadings obtained by each graduate for the four factors, a hierarchical cluster analysis (Ward logarithm) was conducted in order to establish a typology. The number of groups (four) was chosen by examining the dendrogram. The validity of the clustering has also been tested by crossing it with qualitative materials. Figure 3 shows the average factor loadings for the individuals in each group; a value below 0 does not mean that the factor is not important in absolute terms but that it is less important in comparison with the other groups of graduates.

Table 1. Summary of the factor analysis results for the motivations of return migration (Source: questionnaire).

Items	Rotated factor loadings			
	Attachment and social ties	Cost of living and accessibility	Labour market	Partner and family
Job opportunity			.84	
Future career possibilities			.84	
Level of salary			.66	
Follow or re-join partner				.89
Friends and families	.62			.47
Clubs and societies	.69			
Attachment to region	.88			
Rural setting	.79			
Living environment for starting a family	.67			.48
Local culture (values and way of life)	.77			
Accessibility (car and train)		.66		
Fiscal reasons		.82		
Housing prices		.76		

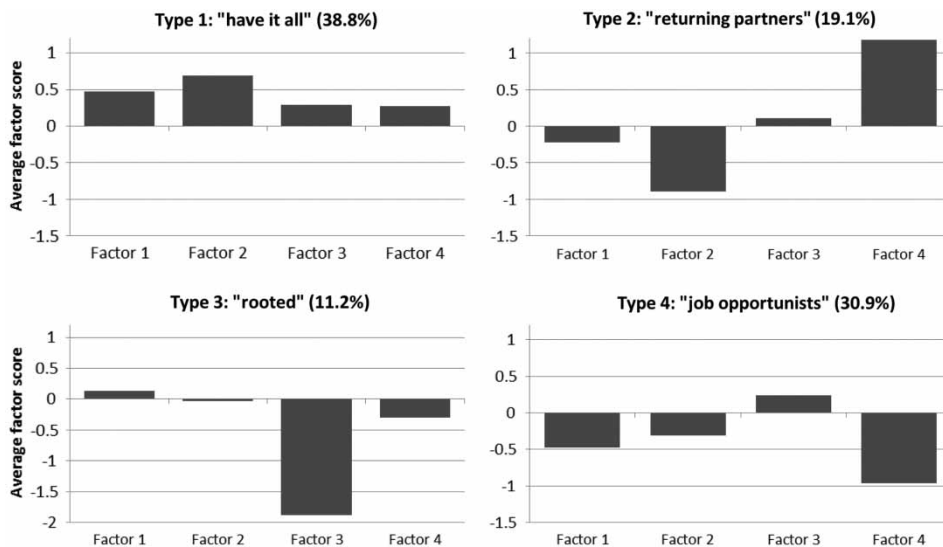


Figure 3. Average factor loadings according to the four types of graduates (Source: questionnaire). Factor 1: attachment and social network. Factor 2: accessibility and costs of living. Factor 3: labour market. Factor 4: partner and family.

In total, 38.8% of the young graduates living in Canton Jura fall into the first group of graduates. They ‘have it all’ by returning to their home region, as they have valued more than the other graduate groups all four factors (attachment and social ties, accessibility and cost of living, the labour market, and partner/family). For them the choice to return was clear, especially if they had a job to go to:

I have always been attached to the region. [...] Even when I was studying in Zurich, I used to come back to my parents quite often. It was a way to recharge my batteries. [...] I believe I can adapt to any place, but I am feeling good here. I was happy to be able to come back. Moreover [...] my job, it worked out really well. And we have some rather amazing scenery here I think! (*Female, veterinarian*)

The decision can also be taken jointly by partners after a few years spent in urban areas during their studies or at the beginning of their professional career:

What was important was to be able to come back close to our families, to our friends, for the community life, but on the condition of finding a job that was relevant to my degree. (*Male, graduate in management, in a couple with a university graduate from Jura*)

We really realised the quality of life we had in Jura when we left it. The greenness, the quietness, reasonable costs of living, the people ... We could equally have moved to another rural region but our friends and families would have been too far away. (*Male, graduate in IT, in a couple with a university graduate from Jura*)

The second group accounts for almost a fifth of the returning graduates. The returning partners are characterised by a higher score related to personal life (partner, proximity of the family, and children-friendly environment). This was the prevailing reason, even though a job opportunity was a condition as well:

I came back to Jura mainly because my partner at that time lived there, but also because I found an internship as a lawyer. (*Female, graduate in law*)

Graduates belonging to the third group (11.2%) are distinguished by the fact that job-related factors were much less important for them than they were for the other three groups. This can be explained by an overrepresentation within this group of long-distance commuters. At the same time, their attachment and sense of belonging to the region (as shown by the repeated use of 'here' in the quotes) is higher than the average, and they are thus qualified as 'rooted'. These were some reasons that they returned:

My roots are here! (*Male, graduate in agronomics*)

As I grew up here, I have all my points of reference here [...] so that I feel at home here ... (*Female, graduate in social sciences, teacher in high school*)

Salaries are not at all attractive in Jura. [...] I have not come back for the salary or for the working conditions but for the living environment and for my family and my friend circle. [...] It is really for my social life that I left Geneva and came back to Jura. (*Female, graduate in social sciences, teacher in secondary school*)

The fourth group represents 30.9% of the sample and has been labelled 'job opportunists'. The migration choice seems to have been more open for them than for the others. They might have been single at the time of the decision (or had a partner from another region) and it was a job opportunity that finally led them to return:

I had not planned to return to the region. At least, not so early, but I got an opportunity to work that I could not decline ... (*Female, engineer in environmental science*)

After graduation I went back to Jura to my parents because I did not have the means to rent a flat. I then decided to take the bar exam. I looked for a job in the [*French-speaking part of Switzerland*]. I have finally stayed in Jura as it is here that I received the job offer that was the most interesting for me. Without this job I would certainly have moved to another canton ... (*Female, lawyer*)

The findings of the typology have several implications for an understanding of young graduates' return migration. Firstly, they show that migration decision-making is not only based on multiple motivations but also influenced by four dimensions (labour market, social ties, living environment, and financial aspects), the articulation of which varies among graduates. It also reveals the degree of intention and the stage when the decision was made to move back to the home region: for some graduates, coming to the decision seems to have been easy, while for others the decision was not as straightforward but was eventually triggered by a job opportunity.

### ***Concessions between work and residential choice***

This section addresses the question of whether graduates returning to a peripheral region make concessions between their career and their migration behaviour. Elements related to their current job are compared between graduates living in different places (Jura or elsewhere) to address the hypotheses of long-distance commuting, underemployment, and overqualification. Finally, the structure of the labour market is discussed in terms of its constraints and opportunities.

Most graduates living in Jura work within its boundaries, but an important minority (17.4%) commutes out of the canton. Return migration is thus explained by job opportunities not only within Jura, but also in the neighbouring regions. However, it is interesting to note that graduates who have returned to Canton Jura do not commute longer distances on average than graduates in the rest of Switzerland. Distances between places of residence and of work were defined as the crow flies between the centres of municipalities, and no difference in the distance commuted is found when all graduates are taken into account (Table 2). If 'sedentary' workers are removed (people living and working in the same municipality, who are, of course, more numerous in

Table 2. Graduates' employment status and length of commute (Source: questionnaire).

Variables	Modalities	Graduates living in Jura	Graduates living elsewhere	Total	Statistical test
Activity status	Working	185 (39.9%)	279 (60.1%)	464 (100%)	Chi-square $p < .1$
	Looking for a job	6 (27.3%)	16 (72.7%)	22 (100%)	
	Not looking for a job	8 (66.7%)	4 (33.3%)	12 (100%)	
Types of job	Total	199 (40.0%)	299 (60.0%)	498 (100%)	Chi-square Non-significant
	Full time (100%)	116 (37.9%)	190 (62.1%)	306 (100%)	
	Part-time I (50–90%)	63 (42.9%)	84 (57.1%)	147 (100%)	
	Part-time II (less than 50%)	7 (50.0%)	7 (50.0%)	14 (100%)	
Average length of commute	Total	186 (39.8%)	281 (60.2%)	467 (100%)	Analysis of variance Non-significant Analysis of variance $p < .001$
	Total of employed graduates	14.3 km	16.5 km	15.6 km	
	Without 'sedentary' workers	19.4 km	28.7 km	24.2 km	

the biggest urban centres outside Jura), graduates living in the rest of Switzerland in fact appear to cover longer distances (28.7 versus 19.4 km). In other words, long-distance commuting may be a concession to enable settlement in a rural region, but such a strategy exists in urban centres as well (this is the case of people commuting from one city to another, taking advantage of the dense railway network; see Rérat and Lees 2011).

The second hypothesis relates to underemployment, which could be more frequent in a rural region. According to the survey, a great majority of graduates, whether in Jura or elsewhere, have a paid occupation (Table 2). A slight difference is observed between the regions in terms of the proportion of non-employed graduates (whether actively seeking work or not), but the numbers in question are very small. There are slightly more graduates working part time in Canton Jura than in the rest of Switzerland, but the difference is not significant given the small number of individuals that are concerned. When those who do work part time were asked why, no difference was found between the regions for the following items: 'no full-time job found', 'continuing vocational training', and 'voluntary work'. The only (small) difference observed concerns people who stay at home to look after children.<sup>8</sup> On the whole, the hypothesis of underemployment can be dismissed, as the only slight differences between the regions seem to be explained by an overrepresentation in Jura of households with children.

The third hypothesis – overqualification – was addressed by asking graduates about the relevancy/adequacy of their current position to their studies with regard to socio-professional status, the tasks they have to fulfil, the skills acquired at university, and their salary. The only difference between graduates living in Jura and those living elsewhere regards the level of salary (Table 3). More graduates in Jura state that their salaries are adequate for their level of qualification, which could be partially explained by the overrepresentation of teachers (see below), who usually reach a stable position and a good salary earlier in their career than others (e.g. people working in higher education as a teaching and/or research assistant). Thus on the whole, the hypothesis of overqualification among returning graduates has to be rejected as well.

Table 3. Perceptions of relevancy of current job to education (Source: questionnaire).

Variables	Place of residence	Irrelevant/ inadequate	Somewhat irrelevant/ inadequate	Somewhat relevant/ adequate	Relevant/ adequate	Total	Statistical test
Socio- professional status	Jura	6 (3.5%)	15 (8.8%)	48 (28.2%)	101 (59.4%)	170 (100%)	Mann- Whitney Non- significant
	Elsewhere	12 (4.5%)	25 (9.3%)	69 (25.7%)	162 (60.4%)	268 (100%)	
Tasks to fulfil	Jura	3 (1.8%)	22 (12.9%)	66 (38.8%)	79 (46.5%)	170 (100%)	Mann- Whitney Non- significant
	Elsewhere	18 (6.7%)	36 (13.5%)	75 (28.1%)	138 (51.7%)	267 (100%)	
Skills acquired during studies	Jura	8 (4.7%)	15 (8.8%)	72 (42.4%)	75 (44.1%)	170 (100%)	Mann- Whitney Non- significant
	Elsewhere	16 (6.0%)	42 (15.7%)	79 (29.6%)	130 (48.7%)	267 (100%)	
Salary	Jura	15 (8.9%)	29 (17.2%)	50 (29.6%)	75 (44.4%)	169 (100%)	Mann- Whitney $p < .05$
	Elsewhere	28 (10.4%)	47 (17.5%)	114 (42.5%)	79 (29.5%)	268 (100%)	

The quantitative results suggest that there are no significant trends of underemployment and overqualification among graduates living in a rural region. The substitution of migration with long-distance commuting blurs the links between migration and the labour market, but this is not specific to peripheral regions. In other words, the decision to migrate is generally accompanied by a job that is reachable and does not require the graduate to make significant compromises regarding the working conditions.

However, these general trends do not mean that no individual strategies or concessions exist, but that they are either rare (i.e. statistically non-significant) or at least not more frequent than in other spatial contexts. Concessions were mentioned by a few people in the questionnaire comments and interviews; some quotes are included below.

Long-distance commuting, for example, was stated as a way of coping with a restricted local labour market:

I love Jura and now I take a 2¾ hour round trip every day in order to be able to live there with my boyfriend. (*Female, biologist, works in Bern*)

What made me stay in Jura despite my three hours of commuting every day is that my friends and acquaintances, and my activities, are in Jura. Then there was also the fact that I really appreciate this region with this quietness that we cannot find in cities. (*Male, graduate in law, works in Bern*)

Some have had difficulty finding a job that is relevant to their education. To apply for a job for which one is overqualified is one possible strategy:

I have an MA in Humanities [...], I have settled [*in Jura*] with my family, but I am unemployed (with some odd jobs). I have come to the point of applying for jobs as a secretary or cashier. (*Female, graduate in humanities, in a couple with a man from Jura, unemployed*)

It has to be noted that such a strategy seems not always to be successful in enabling graduates to return to and stay in the region, as shown by some graduates who did not manage to return to Jura:

The prevailing element [*in the decision not to return*] is that I have not found a job in my field or got a single interview [...] and this even for positions with a lower level of qualification than mine. (*Female, graduate in social sciences, lives and works in another canton*)

Table 4. Employment sector of graduates (Source: questionnaire).

Employment sector	Graduates living in Jura	Graduates living elsewhere	Location quotient <sup>10</sup>
Teaching	35.7%	10.8%	3.3
Public administration	17.8%	13.6%	1.3
Health and social services	10.8%	13.6%	0.8
Architecture, engineering, and environment	8.6%	5.7%	1.5
Media and culture	5.9%	7.9%	0.8
Non-governmental organizations	5.4%	5.0%	1.1
Lawyers, notaries, and trust companies	4.9%	3.2%	1.5
Banks and insurance companies	3.8%	5.7%	0.7
Other services (IT, trade, etc.)	3.8%	7.2%	0.5
Industry	2.7%	6.8%	0.4
Higher education	0.5%	20.4%	0.0
Total	100%	100%	1.0

In the qualitative material, another strategy aiming at facilitating return migration was identified: allowing the regional employment structure to inform the choice of employment sector. This seems to be the case for some graduates who take up further study to qualify as teachers (teaching is one of the main sources of employment in Jura). The following stories provide evidence of this<sup>9</sup>:

I looked for a job in my field of study for years. If I had wanted to limit myself to psychology, I would have had to move to another canton! Fortunately I have changed my choice of profession in order to stay in Jura, and now I am very happy with my job as a teacher. (*Female, graduate in psychology*)

I have decided to do a BA in French literature in order to be able to teach. For three reasons. First to be sure to get a job and not to spend six months here, six months there, an internship here, a fixed-term contract there ... [ ... ] Then because I like teaching and most of all because it will enable me to stay in Jura. Otherwise, with an MA in Social Sciences, it is not that easy to find a job in Jura and I want to stay here. So it's also a strategy to be able to live in Jura. (*Female, graduate in social sciences*)

This concession was not directly addressed in the questionnaire, but some quantitative results seem to back up this observation (Table 4), since one-third of university graduates living in Jura are teachers, versus one-tenth of graduates in other locations. In other words, 70% of graduates working as teachers have returned, which is well above the proportion of 40% observed for the total of graduates from Jura.

The number of graduates working in the other employment sectors is generally in line with the economic structure of Canton Jura, which shows the influence of the regional labour market on the likelihood of return migration. In Jura, there are more people working in teaching and public administration than in the rest of the country. The location quotient of three private sectors is also higher than elsewhere in Switzerland. These sectors are (1) architecture, engineering, and environment, (2) non-governmental organisations, and (3) lawyers, notaries, and trust companies. The proportion of jobs in higher education, banks, and insurance companies, other services (such as IT) and industry, however, is comparatively low. This last result might appear surprising in an industrial region, but is explained by the fact that most firms are subcontractors that do not require qualifications as specific as a university degree.

## Conclusion

This paper has addressed the rationale behind the return migration of young university graduates in the case of a peripheral and rural region in Switzerland. Interviews and a questionnaire

provided empirical material with which to analyse graduates' self-reported motivations in their decision to return, and the concessions they made in their career choices in order to do so.

On the whole, return migration can be regarded as resulting from a conjunction of factors related to social and personal life, living environment, and the labour market. Firstly, the importance of job opportunities in the decision to return to the home region appears quite clearly in the motivations of the majority of young graduates. While this observation may seem to be consistent with traditional explanations of internal migration, which stress the central role played by the labour market, our results have challenged a strictly economic interpretation. Wage levels and future career opportunities, for example, are considered by graduates to be of secondary importance, hinting to the value placed on factors other than financial or economic considerations.

Our analysis of graduates' motivations shows that the decision to return is more than simply a logical output of the labour market. Attachment and sense of belonging to the region, for example, are central; the rural living environment and quality of life are also part of the narrative of returning migrants. Even more important are the social ties he or she has built: the desire to live close to one's partner, family and friends, and to enjoy community life, is central to many migration behaviours. This complies with the results of other studies that have also adopted a micro-analytical approach focusing on the discourses of migrants (see for example Corbett 2007; Harvey 2009; Lundholm 2010; Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011).

Some scholars have postulated that the links between migration and the labour market may not be as clear as they used to be (Lundholm et al. 2004). This research gives original and evidence-based results in this respect. Underemployment, overeducation, and long-distance commuting do not appear more frequently among young graduates in Jura than elsewhere. Thus the idea that graduates make concessions in their career in order to return to their home region is dismissed at an aggregate level. In fact, most graduates seem to move back to their home region or to decide to stay with the prospect of an adequate job (Corcoran, Faggian, and McCann 2010; Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011). Nonetheless, as indicated by interviewees participating in this study, some individuals implement certain strategies in order to make a return possible and to cope with a restricted labour market (long-distance commuting, choice of employment sector, etc.).

These results illustrate the need to adopt a wider approach in addressing internal migration, by acknowledging the agency of migrants as well as the non-economic worlds of migration, as stated by Fielding (1992a) and Halfacree (2004). Return migrants are not mere subjects of external forces, and nor do they simply obey the injunctions of the labour market. In reality, economic aspects may sometimes act simply as a facilitator of migrations that are primarily motivated by more social and cultural factors. Thus, migration decision-making appears to be embedded in the specific life-course position of young graduates and related to transitions that impact upon their professional, social, and residential status. Moreover, migrants are not a monolithic group, as shown by the diversity among the subjects of this study.

Still to be explored is the question of whether these results are specific to the life-course transition considered in this study, or whether they can to some extent be generalised. Are different trends likely to occur in other spatial contexts, other life-course transitions and other levels of education? These issues need to be more thoroughly addressed, as does the fact that internal migration is a declining form of mobility in Switzerland, with the exception of highly qualified people (Schuler et al. 2007). More empirical work is thus needed to address the reasons for this decline and to investigate the other forms of mobility that may have replaced it.

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## Notes

1. It is important to note that what is meant by peripheral and rural is highly context-dependent and varies greatly between countries.
2. University graduates represent a limited – but rising – proportion of young adults (about 15%), as the Swiss education system also places importance on other forms of education, such as apprenticeships and professional training.
3. The remaining 426, which are not addressed in this paper, were graduates of further education in applied science (vocational training) and graduates due to participate in further full-time education.
4. The question asked was ‘What was the importance of the following elements in your decision to stay or to come back in Canton Jura?’ Interviewees could choose a response from a five-point Likert scale (‘not important at all’, ‘not very important’, ‘moderately important’, ‘important’, and ‘very important’).
5. The importance of social ties is also shown by other factors, such as the desire to re-join one’s partner, the local culture (particularly people’s values and way of life), and the clubs and societies of which graduates are members.
6. These items were on the list in order to establish a comparison with the motivations of young graduates who have not returned. In the case of graduates deciding not to return, fiscal reasons were the factor with the weakest importance, although Jura is one of the cantons with the highest taxes.
7. The PCA was conducted with SPSS on the 13 items (the Likert scale was considered as a continuous scale) with orthogonal rotation (varimax). The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis,  $KMO = .79$ , and all KMO values for individual items were above the acceptable limit of .5 (Field 2009). Bartlett’s test of sphericity  $\chi^2(78) = 883.85$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PCA. An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each component in the data; four components had eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of 1, and these components combined explained 67.3% of the variance.
8. Of the 67 graduates for whom this was the case, 37 (55.2%) live in Canton Jura and 30 (44.8%) elsewhere ( $p < .1$ ).
9. In Switzerland, to become a teacher requires a university degree, and then a two-year course in a teacher training college. This decision is thus made after the bachelor degree or, more often, after the master’s degree.
10. Location quotients characterise the employment structure of graduates in Jura in regard to the rest of Switzerland by comparing the share they represent. If a quotient is equal to 1, the share of the given sector is similar in both cases. A quotient of 1.1 (resp. 0.9) would mean that the proportion was 10% higher (resp. lower) in Jura than elsewhere.

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