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To cite this article: Adams Ria-Maria (2023): Hunting a 'good life': young lifestyle migrants in Finnish Lapland, *Polar Geography*, DOI: [10.1080/1088937X.2023.2182383](https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2023.2182383)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937X.2023.2182383>



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Published online: 27 Feb 2023.



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Hunting a 'good life': young lifestyle migrants in Finnish Lapland

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on young lifestyle migrants in Arctic Finland, individuals who can be described as active agents of their own fate in having made a conscious choice to move to a place they consider worth living in. Drawing on long-term ethnographic research, the study brings to light newcomers' motivations for migrating to a geographically remote area and discusses structural conditions that support the process of moving to Finnish Lapland. The search for personal wellbeing and a desire to construct "authentic" lifestyles in rural environments emerged as driving factors for young people who consider moving to the Arctic. While access to nature and nature-based leisure activities proved to be the most attractive feature of the region, opportunities to work in the tourism industry, well-connected transport infrastructures and educational opportunities also figured significantly in the migrants' decisions. Social media channels play a pivotal role as a platform promoting their lifestyle. In engaging regularly with young people who have moved to the Arctic, where they pursue their chosen lifestyle in a harsh climate with high living costs, the research challenges the prevailing argument in the lifestyle migration debate whereby middle-class people move to places with lower living costs and sunny climates.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 10 June 2022
Accepted 15 February 2023

KEYWORDS

Arctic immigration; Arctic youth; lifestyle migration; Finnish Lapland; youth well-being

Introduction

On a cold winter night in March 2022, I find myself a passenger in a mini-van speeding on ice-covered roads in Finnish Lapland alongside three enthusiastic tourists from South America who are eager to spot the northern lights. Equipped with cameras, meteorological apps, navigation aids, hot tea and snacks, we are heading north to find a cloudless spot and an unobstructed view. Our driver and guide, a 20-year-old lifestyle migrant, moved to the northern Finnish town of Rovaniemi four years ago, and is pursuing his dream: hunting for the northern lights. During the northern lights season this young entrepreneur and student spends his nights outdoors, either alone or in the company of tourists or friends, in the hope of capturing what is the mesmerizing spectacle of nature. On a broader level, he has been captivated by the lifestyle that the Arctic region offers him:

I found out that this amazing adventure is actually called my life. Since I came to Finland, I believe that I have learned how to enjoy little things like a hike, a sunset and hanging out

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This article has been corrected with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

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with friends. But the one thing that always makes me happy is nature. I just love being outdoors hiking or hunting the northern lights. (young male)

This young man is part of a growing group of young migrants discovering the Arctic region as a place that fulfils their aspirations of a good life. A documentary titled ‘Lapland Dreaming’ aired in early 2021 by Yle, the Finnish national broadcasting company (Satimus & Neuvonen, 2021), tracked young people in their life-changing processes of moving from urban areas to remote towns in northern Finland. The success of the documentary reflects a growing interest among young people in constructing lives that differ from the mainstream, urban lifestyle. Like the lifestyle migrants in this research, the people featured in the program emphasized their individual agency by implying they had been able to transform their lives through their own actions (also see Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Korpela, 2014). Tellingly, their search for ways to live a good life went beyond seeking a high income. Eimermann (2015) suggests that lifestyle migrants should be studied in the context of social rather than economic motivations for moving. Indeed, rather than being concerned with earning high salaries, they were content with jobs that allowed them to pursue ‘authentic’ lifestyles enabling them to live in unique landscapes (Benson, 2013).

Three research questions underpin this study: (1) What motivates young lifestyle migrants to move to an Arctic environment? (2) What underlying structural conditions contribute to the young people’s decision to choose Finnish Lapland as their place of residence? (3) How do they promote their lifestyle through social media to the public? Together, these questions comprise a multi-dimensional framework yielding a better understanding of lifestyle migrants, one highlighting how young lifestyle migrants express their search for a ‘good life’.

The Arctic region of Finland is often pictured and romanticized through images of rough landscapes, magnificent northern lights, vastness and emptiness and an exotic winter wonderland. As Barraclough et al. (2016) point out, the North is imagined as a supernatural place where myths and metaphysical phenomena have prevailed until the present day. Eimermann (2015) notes that romantic perceptions of the rural North are among the main reasons why lifestyle migrants might choose to move to rural Sweden. These images are shared through social media channels such as Instagram, YouTube and TikTok, and attract not only large numbers of tourists to the region (Huddart & Stott, 2020) but also lifestyle migrants. Benson and O’Reilly (2016) categorize the motives of moving for lifestyle migrants under the headings ‘the rural idyll’, ‘the coastal retreat’ and ‘the cultural/spiritual attraction’ (p.6). It is the outdoor idyll, which offers nature-based activities, that seems to be the main driver for young people moving to the Arctic region. Seeking out an idyll, an environment that is geographically remote, climatically extreme and inspirational to live one’s life in, reflects the increasing individualization of society, in which the self has become responsible for inventing and defining the course of its life. In other words, the self has become a project that needs to be actively shaped, developed and expressed (Korpela, 2014). Surprisingly, the young lifestyle migrants in the present study view where they live as a rural idyll, even though the majority of them reside in the capital of Finnish Lapland, Rovaniemi, which offers access to infrastructures that rural towns lack. They readily drive far into rural areas to hunt the northern lights and to engage in a variety of outdoor activities. The images on their social media accounts reflect their outdoor activities, the pristine nature and promote the rural idyll, rather than capturing the everyday life in an Arctic city.

I draw on the work of Benson and O'Reilly (2016), who distinguish lifestyle migrants from other migrants in that their 'search for a better way of life' (2016, p. 3) reflects the wider lifestyle choices that individuals make in the hope of achieving a good life. Lifestyle migrants often describe their choice to move as motivated by living a 'more meaningful life' (Benson, 2016). The term 'lifestyle migrants' in academic debates is mostly used to refer to older persons moving to southern destinations in their 'golden years' (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015; Benson & O'Reilly, 2016; Fauser, 2021; Korpela, 2014). This work challenges the perception of age as the primary driver and argues that young people have mobility patterns and motivations similar to those of older persons, making the former an important group for study and comparison. Young lifestyle migrants hope to find a new way of life that resonates with their aspirations of a fulfilling life in a remote place (also see Benson & O'Reilly, 2016). Moreover, they illustrate how the search for the 'exceptional individual' stands out against going along with the masses (Grønseth, 2013). What is more, projecting such a presence on social media has grown to be a significant tool in promoting the chosen lifestyle.

To date, there has been no work focusing specifically on (young) lifestyle migrants in Finnish Lapland. In fact, a large gap remains in the literature on what is a growing group of lifestyle migrants in communities throughout the Arctic, where living costs tend to be higher than elsewhere and weather conditions extreme. Lifestyle migration has mostly been discussed in the light of people moving to places with a 'pleasant climate', lower living costs and a 'slow pace of life' (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014b; Korpela, 2020). Eimermann (2015) has contributed to closing this gap through his research on Dutch migrant families in rural Sweden, who were not daunted by the prospect of going to a place with a colder climate, stagnating economy and decreasing population. Carson et al. (2018, p. 183) consider personal motives for migrating to the Arctic to be location-specific in terms of desired consumptive experiences, previous familiarity with the destination, business-related goals, as well as 'the temporal and technological dimension of mobility and self-employment'.

In studying lifestyle migrants in the Arctic in detail, the research makes the following contributions: First, it challenges the perception that lifestyle migrants search for 'warm and sunny' destinations with lower living costs. Indeed, it highlights that lifestyle migration can also take place in cold and remote regions with harsh climatic conditions. Secondly, it adds a perspective to the Arctic immigration debate beyond the discourses highlighting hardships and the difficulty of integration, focusing on structural conditions of why Finnish Lapland is an attractive location to settle in. Thirdly, it aims to understand the motivation and experiences of young lifestyle migrants who search for the authenticity of rural Lapland while living in the region's more urban areas.

A conceptual framework: young people in an era of lifestyle choices

Young people all over the world live in an era where cultures are fluid clusters of norms, and find themselves confronted with constant change (Collier, 2013). Woodman (2020, p. 40) reminds us that youth studies by definition are concerned with questions of temporality. Thorpe (2012) emphasizes that lifestyle migration among young people is a facet of young people transforming their identities in complex ways as part of a reconfiguration precipitated by globalization. Cultural practices of young people, including decisions on migrating, are fundamental elements in the phase of personal transition into adulthood.

According to Collier (2013, p. 61), the social consequences of migration depend upon how immigrants relate to their host societies. Cohen et al. (2013) distinguish between lifestyle mobility and lifestyle migration, the latter typically associated with a ‘one-off lifestyle-led transition’. The concept of ‘neo-nomadism’ highlights mobility, fluidity and individual agency, while ‘bohemian lifestyle’ places more emphasis on structures and destinations (Korpela, 2020).

In this study I use the term ‘lifestyle migrants’ to refer to young people from affluent nations who have moved to northern Finland in order to find a more meaningful life, one in which nature-based activities play a key role (also see Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Korpela, 2020). In contrast to the case of refugees and work migrants, for lifestyle migrants, nationality, residence permits, visas and insurance play an important role in being able to stay (Korpela, 2014).

The lifestyle of young migrants can be well characterized, in terms used by O’Reilly and Benson (2016, pp. 4–5), as seeking ‘authenticity, implying simplicity, purity and originality’ and an effort to go ‘back to the basics’. Lifestyle migrants are relatively affluent individuals of all ages who move and take up full- or part-time residence in places that signify, from the perspective of the migrant, a better quality of life (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009, p. 609). The growing phenomenon of lifestyle migration has implications on a societal level in addition to its impact on individual life courses (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009). In lifestyle migration, agency and creativity are viewed as vital capacities in adjusting to novel daily routines, including enhancement of personal wellbeing (Grønseth, 2013, p. 4). Long and Moore (2013) talk about the ‘sense of achievement’ and how satisfaction with life and the ‘feel-good factor’ have become important constructs to explore in research on lifestyle migration. For young lifestyle migrants, migration is a key step in their self-realization project and in the process of searching for the ‘intangible good life’ (Benson & O’Reilly, 2016, p. 1). This group of migrants can be characterized as people who have made a conscious decision about *how* and *where* to live (Torkington, 2010). Arctic regions seem to be particularly attractive as a place for people seeking self-transformation, featuring as they do relatively small communities surrounded by extensive wilderness. Moreover, the Nordic welfare state enables young lifestyle migrants to pursue their chosen lifestyles in a safe environment, as it offers reliable infrastructures, accessible health and social services as well as promising employment and educational opportunities.

Encouragingly, a look at the literature on adventure tourism helps to understand the reasons for lifestyle migration in high latitudes. Huddart and Stott (2020) emphasize that ‘adventure’ is not only a matter of how wild, high or extreme activities are as such, but rather reflects the attitude that shapes the values of adventure tourists. The scholars argue that key to adventure travel – its added value – are opportunities to get to know the destination through physical activity, cultural encounters and experiences in nature (Huddart & Stott, 2020, p. 3). In adventure tourism research, ecological and economic aspects are highlighted in addition to social and individual changes. Tervo-Kankare et al. (2018) suggest that tourism industries in Finland should focus more on the impacts of tourism activities on the environment and the sustainability of the Arctic tourism regions. On a similar note, Fay and Karlsdóttir (2011) have argued that we would do well to reflect on tourism-related employment and to track social changes brought about by the expansion of Arctic tourism resulting from climate change. van Rooij & Margaryan’s (2019) findings show how entrepreneurship in the tourism industry can be a powerful catalyst for lifestyle migration, yet at the same time may inhibit integration into the local

community. According to a study among lifestyle migrants in Norway by Iversen and Jacobsen (2016), the motivations for becoming entrepreneurs in the tourism industry are driven by lifestyle choices. Berbeka (2018, p. 393) has examined the value backcountry skiers give to remote Arctic destinations and concluded that the experiences, motivations and meaning that the skiers gained from the region derived from the connection to nature ('beauty, wilderness and remoteness'), ski touring in unspoiled powder, access to independent trails and a bond with like-minded people. Thorpe (2012) looked at young lifestyle migrants through the community of snowboarders and concluded that this group of young people could be analyzed through the lens of 'action, alternative and extreme sports economy' (2012, p. 317)

Early work by Giddens (1991, p. 6) points out that 'lifestyle' refers only to the pursuits of the more privileged groups or classes and that 'the poor are more or less completely excluded from the possibility of making lifestyle choices'. Indeed, it is a privileged group of migrants who have access to certain forms of self-actualization. This privilege is systemic and structural, and is negotiated through the actual practice of lifestyle migration (Benson, 2014; van Rooij & Margaryan, 2019). Their privileged status notwithstanding, the young migrants discussed in this study struggle at times with finding sufficient financial means to maintain their chosen lifestyle. It is vital to recognize in their case that choosing a certain lifestyle does not automatically imply they have the financial means to sustain it; in other words, young lifestyle migrants are not spared from working hard towards their goal of being able to stay in the host country. Significantly, applying an ethnographic approach has yielded insights into the creative ways which young lifestyle migrants maintain and sustain to finance their way of life, these including a willingness to do work in jobs which they may be overqualified for. In the literature, life as a lifestyle migrant is not primarily characterized by economic hardship or the search for financial security (Torkington, 2010, p. 102); rather, it appears to be driven by the search for a better life in a broader sense than a high(er) income. Hence, I argue that lifestyle migrants are not necessarily motivated by lower living costs – given that living costs in the Arctic are significantly higher than in more southern regions. What draws young lifestyle migrants towards the Arctic region, and northern Finland in particular, is the desire for an authentic lifestyle, one they believe will resonate with the 'idealized versions of the self' (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2014a). This entails engaging in a variety of nature-based activities and often documenting and promoting the lifestyle through social media.

Research methods and ethical considerations

This research was mainly conducted between October 2019 and March 2022 in the course of several periods of fieldwork in Finnish Lapland ranging from one six-month stay starting in the winter of 2020 to several visits that varied from two weeks to an entire summer in duration. Altogether I spent one year in Finland, in the towns of Kolari, Kemijärvi, and Rovaniemi, conducting empirical research focusing not only on lifestyle migrants but also studying Finnish young people's wellbeing and (im)mobility more extensively (Adams et al., 2021; Adams & Komu, 2021; Komu & Adams, 2021). The research was funded by three different projects.¹

Multiple returns to the field, an approach discussed by Howell and Talle (2012), have allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of my participants, their processes and contradictions regarding lifestyle migration. As Barnard (2012) notes in this regard, each return to

the field yields new empirical data and new insights in different periods of time. I have met up with some of the participants frequently over a period of four years, which has allowed me to gain broad insight to their personal lives and to see changes in their ways of living.

The material consists of interviews, focus group discussions and detailed field diary entries based on periods of participant observation during the fieldwork. While in northern Finland, I actively participated in activities popular among the young lifestyle migrants: I went on northern lights hunts and nature hikes, hung out at popular cafes, bars and restaurants, attended gatherings and parties, visited nature destinations during all seasons, visited some of the migrants in their homes and traveled with some of them for many hours in the region. In addition, for several years I have analyzed and followed the migrants' Instagram accounts, these being key tools through which they share their life(style). Following Brettell's (2003, p. 4) advice to listen to the voices of immigrants themselves, examining *how* the lifestyle migrants tell their stories and *what* meanings they assign to their actions has been essential in my understanding their agency. The analysis proper was preceded by a manual process of classifying, coding and interpreting the material following Bernard (2006), who emphasizes the value of finding and coding themes that appear in both field-notes and interviews.

The participants in the study comprised 16 young people representing 14 different nationalities who had lived at least six months in Rovaniemi and surrounding towns. Most of the young lifestyle migrants were based in Rovaniemi, the capital of Lapland, a safe and comfortable urban environment with access to services, education and health services as well as ready transportation links to a variety of destinations. The migrants ranged in age from 16 to 29 years. For purposes of this research, 'young' is defined as in the Finnish Youth Act (Finnish Youth Act, 2017), which regards persons up to the age of 29 as youths. The majority of my interview participants had lived more than two years in northern Finland and intended to stay longer. All of the interviewees had moved to Finnish Lapland on their own, without their parents or relatives. The youngest had come to study in Finnish high schools (often as exchange students) and extended their stays. Most of the young people were located through personal contacts, with 'snowballing' then serving as an effective tool to find more interlocutors. None of the research participants were married or had children at the time of conducting the research. Some were in relationships with other lifestyle migrants, some were single, and still others had formed romantic relationships with locals after coming to live in Finnish Lapland. While some of the young lifestyle migrants were still enrolled at colleges and universities in their home countries and in the process of finishing their education, others already had a profession. Interestingly, many of them chose not to pursue careers in the fields they were trained in but opted instead to work in the tourism sector. Some migrants worked for established tourism companies (especially at the beginning), while others started their own businesses with 'northern lights tours' – catering to the most popular activity among tourists.

In keeping with a general ethical practice, I refrain from mentioning the participants' countries of origin or ethnicity because of the risk of their being identifiable. In northern communities, where people tend to know each other well, being the only immigrant from a particular country would make a person immediately recognizable. All potential participants were made aware that participation was voluntary and that they would be anonymized. Research among young people requires a sensitivity to the fact that power relations between the researcher and the young people are unequal in terms of age, resources and

status (Cieslik, 2003). In addition, I have been careful not to share sensitive interview content within the community to protect the research participants' anonymity and maintain their trust.

Structural conditions of the region and its migration context

Migration between countries and regions is increasing and the Arctic is no exception to this trend (Heleniak et al., 2020). With outmigration being a problem in the region, the debate on the viability and sustainability of Arctic towns has frequently pointed to the importance of young people in the community (Karlsdóttir et al., 2020). This concern stems from the tendency of local young people to leave remote northern towns, these being communities which offer fewer education and work opportunities, are far away from other towns and are perceived as lacking leisure activities (Adams et al., 2021; Komu & Adams, 2021). Running counter to this tendency is the growing number of lifestyle migrants who are discovering the Arctic as a mesmerizing place, one they feel attracted to and where they see opportunities to live a fulfilling life. Many of the young lifestyle migrants are based in the capital of Rovaniemi; only a very small percentage live in the rural municipalities of Lapland. The migrants perceive themselves as nature-based enthusiasts who feel connected to and use rural areas for their work and leisure-time activities. Paradoxically, in living in the city and making use of the vast nature outside it, the migrants do not significantly contribute to the 'viability and sustainability' of rural Finnish communities.

Heleniak (2018) remarks that the policies of Nordic countries have long been generally welcoming towards work migrants, who are especially important for rural regions with declining populations. Given the strong economies of the Nordic countries, Finland, among other Arctic destinations, is likely to remain a highly desirable destination for all types of immigrants (Heleniak, 2018, p. 57). These circumstances urge a keener discussion of immigration in Finnish Lapland, one that focuses on groups of migrants who consciously choose to come and stay in this region.

Finland's population is aging and declining faster than that of any other European country, and the country will need immigrants during coming decades to maintain its labor force (Heleniak et al., 2020; Somerkoski, 2021). From the migrants' point of view, the Nordic countries are billed as having the world's highest living standards, in terms of not only personal income but also well-functioning public services and social equity (Collier, 2013, p. 19). Before the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2019, Finland counted around 270,000 foreign-born immigrants, which is around 4.8 percent of the total population (Busk & Jauhiainen, 2022). By 2022, the number had risen to 444,031, or some 8 percent of the population despite the pandemic (Statistic Finland, 2022). The estimate for the year 2050 is that the number of immigrants will reach the one million mark (Somerkoski, 2021). In 2020, there were 3060 foreign-born residents in Rovaniemi, a city with a total population of some 63,500 inhabitants (Statistics Finland, 2022).

Following this demographic development, migrants can be seen as a valuable asset in making Arctic regions more viable while at the same time benefiting local communities more than mere tourists, as they earn and spend money locally. Increasing immigration could offset the anticipated trend, and yet not many immigrants are expected to settle in Lapland. In this light, the young lifestyle migrants are a possible exception to this negative trend, as they consciously seek to move to and settle in the Arctic region.

Grenier (2007) highlighted the importance of Rovaniemi as a polar tourism destination that stands out in northern Europe, offering a variety of services with a well-developed tourism infrastructure. Tourism has grown steadily since 2007, with the estimated number of incoming flights in 2022 exceeding the pre-pandemic level of 2790 (Finavia, 2022). This growth has resulted in a greater demand for tourism providers, which young lifestyle migrants are eagerly responding to. In addition, the increasing number of flight destinations makes it easier for young lifestyle migrants to travel and connect with their places of origin. With hunting the northern lights and other tourist activities in Finnish Lapland largely confined to the winter months, young entrepreneurs have limited opportunities for a steady income. Accordingly, many of them travel during the summer months and return to Rovaniemi when the tourism season and the university year start. Carson et al. (2018) question the seasonal lifestyle and its longevity; I would argue that it in fact accords quite well with that of the young lifestyle migrants, who are not concerned about having a steady job with a regular income.

In order to understand why lifestyle migrants distinguish themselves from other migrants, it is helpful to look at the prevailing immigration literature on the region. The topic of immigration in Finnish Lapland is mostly examined from the perspective of integration and resilience (Uusiautti & Yeasmin, 2019a; Yeasmin et al., 2020) although there is work discussing the integration process in more positive terms, such as ‘hopes and happiness’ in the context of labor market integration (Yeasmin, 2017). Immigration to the Arctic region has been criticized as lacking effective ways to integrate immigrants into the region (Uusiautti & Yeasmin, 2019b, p. 2). The social adaptation and integration processes of marginalized women have been discussed from a socio-ecological perspective (Yeasmin & Koivurova, 2019), highlighting successful integration and offering suggestions on how immigrants and locals can better adapt through increased interaction (Yeasmin & Koivurova, 2019, p. 84). Yeasmin (2018) urges that socioeconomic support be provided for the integration of immigrants to the Arctic, with special attention to be paid to the marginalization of immigrant women.

Negative images seem to dominate the Finnish academic debate in immigrant youth research, with educational trajectories being one frequent topic (Holmberg et al., 2018). Other concerns include imbalanced membership contests (Harinen et al., 2005), criminality (Salmi et al., 2015) and imbalanced working careers (Busk & Jauhiainen, 2022). Complex positionalities among ethnic minorities in peer affiliations are frequently highlighted (Kivijärvi, 2014), as is the risk of peer victimization (Strohmeier et al., 2011). When discussing immigrants in Finland, one frequently hears words such as ‘respect’, ‘cooperation’ and ‘cultural tolerance’ (Somerkoski, 2021), especially in the context of realizing that the future economy needs more immigrants. According to Somerkoski (2021), attitudes towards labor immigrants and children in Finnish rural areas are more positive than attitudes towards unemployed immigrants and refugees. Moreover, Western immigrants are viewed more positively than immigrants from war zones and crisis areas (2021, p. 207).

The group of lifestyle migrants in the present study differs significantly from the above-mentioned groups – labor immigrants and refugees – as their primary goal is not integration into the mainstream society’s culture. In fact, they narrate their migration as a trajectory away from negative images of immigration towards a description of ‘a fuller and more meaningful way of life’ (Benson & O’Reilly, 2016, p. 4). Instead of highlighting struggles, although they have their share of these, lifestyle immigrants seemingly shift their focus to positive features of their new home, such as the beauty of the nature

around them. This redirects the focus of research on lifestyle migrants accordingly. While my research results show that young lifestyle migrants also experience frustration with their host culture, have language issues (most of them do not speak Finnish fluently), feel lonely and misunderstood, their prevailing perception still is a positive one, as they claim to have consciously chosen a particular way of life in a particular location.

Pursuing a good life: motivations for moving

The main reasons why young lifestyle migrants choose to move to Northern Finland lie in the perception that the area has a relatively good infrastructure that affords easy access (by plane, train and car), offers a high standard of education, is a safe place to live and features a unique nature, including temperature extremes. Hence, the structural conditions discussed earlier on can at the same time be perceived as principal motivations for moving.

In my earlier work (Adams, 2020) I have pointed out that young migrants move to Finnish Lapland to pursue a high-standard education. Eimermann's (2015) findings bear out this perception; that is, in the case of lifestyle migration opportunities to study – as well as to work if possible – play an important role in the decision to migrate,

I wanted to go north and not somewhere south of Scandinavia. I wanted winter and snow. I really didn't want to go to one of the partner universities in the south. I had never been in Scandinavia before and I was very happy when I was accepted here [University of Lapland] for my studies. (young male)

Like this young man, some of the research participants had come for internships or short-term, seasonal work and then decided to extend their stays after discovering the quality of life in the Arctic region. This accords with the findings of Cook and Romei (2020, p. 83), who argue that in young people's lives 'the relationship between place, education and employment' matters in combination with 'immaterial aspects of place such as experiences of belonging and attachment'. Moreover, young people tend to invest in education and training that enable them to remain or return to places in which they experience belonging (Cook & Romei, 2020).

Another example is that of a young female who had moved to Northern Finland for studies, claiming that the quality of education would be better but, even more importantly, the pressure to succeed would not be as overwhelming as in her home country. This argument echoes Maehara (2013, p. 97) observations among Japanese immigrants, who problematize the heavy pressure to succeed in Japanese education and thus dream of migrating to places that which offer an education that will be highly valued on the (Japanese) job market but which also offer them a more relaxed way of life. Finnish Lapland offered some of the young people exactly that kind of life, with the additional attraction of peaceful surroundings and safety.

The majority of newcomers to Finnish Lapland only stay for the duration of their internship, studies or work contract. However, the lifestyle migrants continually point out how they have come to value life in Lapland so much that they are constantly on the lookout for ways to extend their stay: Some have started their own businesses (mostly related to the tourism industry), found local employment or enrolled in Finnish universities. Lynnebakke's (2021) work reminds us, however, that lifestyle migrants' migration processes may change over time; her findings show the significant incidence of changes in aspirations and decisions to migrate within migrants' new country of residence (2021, p. 776).

What the young immigrants in this study have in common is that they are newcomers from other cultural backgrounds and have moved to Finnish Lapland with no or very limited previous social connections to the place. In other words, they did not have family ties, a partner or friends living there prior to their arrival. This, however, does not mean that they did not have strong connections to their social networks and families in their home countries. In fact, their situation back home was not a key factor in their decision to immigrate. They could mitigate feelings of not belonging to their chosen community in Lapland because many of them were able to maintain connection with their families and had frequent trips back 'home'. For some lifestyle migrants, it is geographically and financially feasible to visit their countries of origin on a regular basis, while others lack the means to travel the long distances back home. With the travel restrictions during the Covid pandemic some of my interlocutors were unable to see their families for more than two years. But despite the hardship of not being able to spend time with their families and friends back home, their perception of Finnish Lapland and willingness to pursue their lifestyle there did not change.

To conclude, the structural conditions that the Finnish welfare state provides, including job opportunities, especially in the tourism industry, emerge as principal motivations in addition to pursuing a nature-oriented lifestyle. Despite the distance to their countries of origin, young lifestyle migrants in Finnish Lapland each seem to find ways to keep up family ties, greatly facilitated by the region's ready access to transportation infrastructures.

Hunting a good life: a nature-based lifestyle

What makes northern Finland, along with Sweden and Norway, exceptional when it comes to pursuing outdoor activities is a right called *jokamiehenoikeus* (lit. 'every man's² right'), or 'freedom to roam' (Ministry of Environment, 2016). This right allows everyone in Finland to move freely on foot, skis or a bicycle everywhere except for private yards or farmland. It also applies to waterways in all seasons. Furthermore, everyone is allowed to stop and stay overnight (for example in a tent) as long as the site chosen is a 'good distance' from settlements. Other provisions include permission to pick berries, mushrooms and flowers and to fish with a rod and through ice. The restrictions when moving freely in nature take the form of prohibitions against littering, disturbing others (human and animals), harming and cutting trees and collecting moss, lichen, soil or wood. Hunting and fishing are also prohibited, as is the use of motorized vehicles without permission (Ministry of Environment, 2016). Young lifestyle migrants make great use of this 'freedom to roam' and have repeatedly mentioned how 'lucky', 'blessed' and 'privileged' they feel to live in a place with such extensive freedoms.

However, according to some town officials of Rovaniemi, the 'freedom to roam' is not always understood correctly, especially by young foreign entrepreneurs. Apparently, small, independent tour operators – some run by (lifestyle) migrants – bring their customers to public fireplace shelters rather than building, renting or buying their own facilities. Young lifestyle entrepreneurs tend to see such complaints as directed towards 'others in the industry', not them.

When asking young lifestyle migrants about their perceptions of nature, they give extensive descriptions featuring words such as 'calming', 'beautiful', 'magical', 'rough' and 'energizing'. This attitude towards nature is also captured in statements like the following:

We live in a perfect place (young female)

My happy place is under the northern lights (young male)

The best adventures happen on the road (young male)

To have access to such nature, young lifestyle migrants need to have mobility. Like their Finnish counterparts who have stayed in Lapland (also see Komu & Adams, 2021), they mention the importance of owning a car, snowmobile or bike in a place where public transportation is insufficient. Cars are their main mode of transportation and despite high fuel prices a car is still the cheapest, most convenient and efficient way to access the nature destinations in the north. While the young lifestyle migrants of this study said they respect nature, they did not address the effects of their lifestyle, which consumes a great deal of resources: driving long distances in the region or flying between Rovaniemi and their home countries. Tervo-Kankare et al. (2018) suggest that tourism industries should pay more attention to the impacts of tourism activities on the environment and the sustainability of the Arctic tourism regions in Finland. From the young migrants' perspective, purchasing a car and getting a driver's license is a major milestone in access to the region. Road trips in Finnish Lapland are popular, but travels often extend to Swedish Lapland and Northern Norway, as these also offer many locations where one can hunt northern lights, camp or hike and engage in water sports, ski-tours, snowboarding, nature photography and the like:

I really value the nature here. I love it here. I come from a big city and to have all this space here around me – it's just amazing. I feel this connection to nature here and I feel that I belong here. In my heart I am a Finn, because I love everything about this place. (young male)

The difficulties that young lifestyle migrants experience are often connected to Arctic weather conditions: Cameras may not work properly for long periods of time in low temperatures; road and weather conditions may make driving dangerous; cars can get stuck in snow; or bookings may be canceled due to bad weather, resulting in lost income. Moreover, the outdoor activities which the young people engage in require clothing and equipment that keep them warm in the extreme winter conditions. Interestingly, Torkington (2010, p. 99) discusses how lifestyle migrants tend to look physically similar, wearing the same style of clothes, which is the case also among the lifestyle community in Finnish Lapland. The clothes need to be practical and are usually of high quality in order to make long winter outings possible.

It can be argued that easy access to nature, a desire to pursue a nature-based lifestyle, as well as the equipment needed to do so, become central elements in the search for the building blocks of a good life. The equipment, clothes, cars and activities all cost plenty of money, which motivates the young migrants to find work. Indeed, the lifestyle migrants in Northern Finland are re-creating themselves through nature-based activities, supporting the argument put forward by Benson and O'Reilly (2016, p. 3) that lifestyle migration is 'an escape to self-fulfillment and a new life – a recreation, restoration or rediscovery of oneself, of personal potential or one's 'true' desires'. Thus, it can be said that they are active agents with regard to their own lives, consciously 'hunting' for what they consider a good and meaningful life.

Promoting a good life: social media showcasing lifestyle

As important as it might be to live to the full what one has chosen as a good life, it has become fashionable to promote that lifestyle to others. Today, young people live in an

era where social media are an essential part of their lives and where images of distant places are visible on small screens everywhere in the world. In recent years, the number of 'social content creators' has exploded worldwide, a trend which has naturally brought with it more social media accounts promoting rural regions such as Finnish Lapland. Social media has made young people's lives more visible and outwardly oriented (Wyn, 2020) and, according to Torkington (2010, p. 104), the trend towards international lifestyle migration is flourishing partly because of the spread of mass information and the possibilities of social media. The Arctic region is a unique destination for many nature photographers who want to share their experiences through various social media channels. Social media accounts with Arctic images have gained popularity, with thousands of followers waiting for new images of the North. The stories and feeds on platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, Youtube and TikTok provide them with images of the region's expansive nature, snow, northern lights, adventurous hikes, wilderness cabins, campfire shelters (*laavu*), ice swimming, snowmobile or biking tours, sunrises, sunsets, night skies, ski tours, nature spectacles, animals and – center stage in those images – the lifestyle migrants themselves. The pictures and short videos are accompanied by music with titles such as 'Paradise', 'Happy', 'Inner Blossoming', 'I will die here' or 'Lovely'. Posts also include short comments highlighting the feelings evoked by the place:

Stunning views, untouched nature and an incredible feeling of adventure. Have you ever felt that feeling of having done something amazing? It was this feeling that I had climbing the hill and watching the sunrise. (young male)

Collect beautiful moments, not things. /We will never get enough of seeing this beauty in one of my favorite places in Finland. (young female)

Look at the sky and wonder. /Celebrating the lifestyle of the Arctic/So blessed to live in this paradise. (young male)

The self-chosen descriptions for Instagram profiles highlight the outdoor connection and include portrayals of the authors such as 'aurora hunter', 'wanderer', 'outdoor person', 'discoverer of the tranquility of northern nature', 'nature photographer', 'storyteller', 'content creator', 'arctic lifestyle photographer', 'Nordic-souled' and 'traveler'.

Some of the lifestyle migrants have tens of thousands of followers on their social media accounts, which they use not only to share images of the region but also to promote their tours for tourists. These tours often set out to view the northern lights and offer a money-back guarantee if there are none to be seen. The price of such northern lights hunting tours during the time of research was around 150 euros per person. Depending on the where clear skies could be found, the guides would drive hundreds of kilometers during a single tour, crossing borders into Sweden and Norway to find clear skies. Some of the lifestyle migrants also offered packages including road trips to the neighboring countries, with Rovaniemi being the starting and returning point. Here, one sees lifestyle migrants using social media accounts not only for self-presentation but also as platforms to earn income, making their way of life possible. In this respect, using social media is not only a choice but also a necessity.

This era of social media could be seen as part of the reason for an increase in young people wanting to move to an area depicted through images of 'wilderness', 'silence' and 'periphery'. According to Somerkoski (2021, p. 220) the influence of social media makes communication easier, with English being used as the primary language of communication

targeting an international community. None of the participants in this research discussed the downsides of social media.

While the majority of my interlocutors might be active in maintaining social media accounts, there is, interestingly, also a group who have consciously decided not to be on social media. One of the latter mentioned during an interview that she ‘didn’t feel the need to promote her lifestyle to anyone’ and she ‘hadn’t considered signing up on any social media accounts’. Again, it becomes apparent that the young lifestyle migrants act as individuals, with each one creating precisely the kind of lifestyle they perceive as meaningful. In this light, it can be argued that lifestyle migration is an exercise of the ability to live what one considers a better kind of life as well as of the feeling of being able to control the direction of one’s own life, both courses being important aspects of personal wellbeing (Fischer, 2014; Stammler et al., 2022).

Conclusions

In this contribution I have shown that the concept of lifestyle migrant is applicable to young people who move to rural Arctic regions. Accordingly, there is reason to expand the scope of the debate from middle-class people moving to sunny and warm destinations with low living costs to include the growing group of (young) people seeking a good life in harsher and more expensive regions. What makes young lifestyle migrants’ way of life remarkable in the Arctic is the way in which they construct their daily lives around nature based-activities and promote their chosen lifestyles on social media. An unexpected insight of this research has been the extent to which lifestyle migrants engage with the nature around them while opting to live in the city of Rovaniemi, a comparatively urban environment.

The motives explaining why young lifestyle migrants choose to move to Finnish Lapland spring from a combination of ready access to nature and encouraging employment and educational opportunities. Also facilitating the lifestyle is the popularity of Finnish Lapland as a winter tourism destination.

Their entrepreneurial spirit and their resourcefulness in earning a living in order to stay in Lapland is notable. The empirical examples have shown the special connection that they have formed with the surrounding nature and how they make use of this nature in their daily lives. Moreover, the insights in the present case suggests that the hardships of integration that are highlighted in the Arctic migration debate (Uusiautti & Yeasmin, 2019a; Yeasmin et al., 2020) are only partly applicable in the case of particular groups, such as the lifestyle migrants. This shows that a more nuanced perspective on immigration is needed, especially in Arctic communities. In this light, this work puts forward a new analytical perspective on immigration in Arctic regions beyond Finnish Lapland.

It is important to acknowledge, as Benson and O’Reilly (2016) suggest, that migration is not a one-off move to a single permanent destination but that the search for a good life continues as an impulse in the migrants’ daily lives. The participants in this study might choose a different lifestyle later on in their lives and leave Finnish Lapland at some point. Ultimately, it is the agency of the young migrants that will determine how long they stay and if and when they move again. Thus, it can be argued that lifestyle migration is aspirational in terms of what people can become but also what the specific kind of life they choose offers them (Benson & O’Reilly, 2016, p. 5; Lynnebakke, 2021). While, as I have noted, the literature on Arctic tourism can partially help to understand the phenomenon of lifestyle

migrants, more contributions from a social science perspective are needed if we are to gain insights into the challenges of changing communities throughout the Arctic.

It is important to point out, however, that not all young immigrants to Lapland fall into the category of lifestyle migrants who intend to stay long term. In fact, where suitable work, educational opportunities or social networks are lacking, most young immigrants, like their Finnish counterparts, opt to move to bigger cities in the southern parts of the country or make plans to move to other countries (also see Adams, 2020; Yeasmin et al., 2020).

The Arctic can be perceived as a place where, in O'Reilly's (2016, p. 117) words, individuals are 'free to hunt out their own, privatized version of a good life'. In this sense, hunting a good life in the distant, cold Arctic communities can be seen as individual lifestyle migrants fulfilling a goal of self-realization. These empirically grounded insights should enhance further academic discussions in other Arctic regions where the group of lifestyle migrants is increasing. It would be especially important to target future research on local communities and people who have lived in the Arctic for generations and to chart their perceptions of newcomers pursuing their individualistic lifestyles. The young lifestyle migrants are contributing in many ways to Finnish society: They spend money, pay taxes, use local services, pursue their education in local institutions and rent homes, which, given the current demographic, calls for further research on how to find better ways of integrating this group of migrants into Arctic communities.

Notes

1. University of Vienna, 'uni:docs' Fellowship program; Finnish Academy funded 'WOLLIE' project ID 314471, and the ERC advanced grant project 'InfraNorth' project ID 885646.
2. This right applies all to genders.

Acknowledgements

This publication was supported by the University of Vienna through the uni:docs fellowship program, the Finnish Academy-funded project *Live, Work or Leave? Youth – wellbeing and the viability of (post)extractive Arctic industrial cities in Finland and Russia* (grant number 314471) and was finalized as part of the European Research Council's advanced grant project 'InfraNorth' (Project-ID: 885646)

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by University of Vienna; Finnish Academy [grant number 314471]; European Research Council [grant number 885646].

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