Does the Internet encourage people to move? Investigating Swedish young adults' internal migration experiences and plans

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Abstract

The Internet offers personalized and constantly updated information about opportunities and facilities at places far away. It stimulates distant personal contact and interaction via social media. Attention is thus increasingly being paid to the relationships between Internet use and traditional, physical forms of spatial interaction and movement. This paper explores possible associations between Internet use and internal migration, based on a 2009 survey of 750 young adults in Sweden. We explore Internet-based information seeking practices associated with actual migration experiences and with current plans to move to another place. Results indicate that many recent movers believed that the Internet influenced and facilitated their decision to move, and somewhat influenced their choice of destination. Many have also developed Internet-based communication practices that involve plans to migrate in the near future. Results suggest that the Internet reinforces intentions to move for a sizeable group, and also affects their migration motives.

(148 words)

Keywords

Internet, practices, interregional migration, migration plans, migration experience, information, survey, young adults

INTRODUCTION

Social research is increasingly highlighting the rapid spread of information and communication technologies (ICTs) (e.g., mobile telephony, computing, as well as the Internet and its various applications) and how the ongoing virtualization of society is affecting human spatial interaction and use of place. Most studies have so far concentrated on aspects of everyday life, not least how ICTs affect daily activity patterns, that is, people's use of time at various locations and associated physical travel and face-to-face meeting (for overviews, see, e.g., Gilbert, 2011; Haddon, 2004; Haythornthwaite and Wellman, 2002; Schwanen and Kwan, 2008; Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2010). In the present study, we shift our attention to a different scale, and ask whether extensive ICT use might affect longer-term and farther-reaching spatial decisions. Our study concerns the role of the Internet in internal (inter-regional) migration, people's considerations regarding where to live, and recurrent decisions to move elsewhere.

The context of migration decision making is complex, being structured by various drivers and motives (Boyle, 2009; Cooke, 2008, Niedomysl, 2011). People migrate for work-related and educational purposes, for household related reasons (e.g., when the family situation changes), to strengthen social ties, to change their housing, or to make a fundamental life change. So-called environmental motives, or quests for new milieus, are found to be increasing in importance, not least in the Nordic countries (Lundholm et al, 2004; Lundholm 2007b). At the same time, several "sedentary" factors are holding people back: place-based attachments and identities, dependencies on local social capital, and fixed ties to work and family (Fischer and Malmberg, 2001; Gilmartin, 2008; Gustafson, 2001, 2002). In the Nordic countries, surveys

of internal migrants show that the decision to move from one place of residence to another is perceived as more or less voluntary and made in response to current circumstances (Lundholm et al, 2004). People's propensity to move generally concerns the balance between gaining access to better life opportunities elsewhere and the need for place-bound stability. Arguably, this balance is affected by the enhanced information provided by the Internet, not least by information that addresses central migration motives.

Relevant to this discussion is the notion that the Internet reconfigures access to other places and regions (e.g., Dutton, 2009; Muhammad et al 2008) and that ICTs create new spatial conditions in which people can manage their lives (Janelle and Gillespie, 2004; Kesselring, 2006; Mokhtarian et al, 2004). Combined with extended networks of personal contact via digital media, people's abilities to make better informed migration decisions – as well as more impulsive ones – could really increase. A recent qualitative case study by the authors provides some evidence that the Internet supports people in seeking new jobs, better education, and new housing, and in establishing social contacts in a wider range of more distant places than before (Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2013). In this way, the Internet may well act as a driver of spatial mobility, making markets for labor, housing, goods, and services perform more smoothly.

Accordingly, there is reason to believe that the Internet might in the long run affect people's perception, decision making and behavior as regards migration frequency, destination and distance. However, research into the links between Internet use and migration are scarce, at least from an internal (within a country) perspective.[1] Addressing this gap, the explicit aim of

[1] An exception is a number of studies of the role of ICT in international migration, for example, how mobile phones and the Internet enable regular contact between labor migrants and their homes,

this paper is to explore evolving Internet-based communication practices[2] that might support people's spatial decisions and moves. An underlying hypothesis is that such practices affect and encourage interest in migrating elsewhere, an influence that also might impact future behavior. Our quantitative empirical study concentrates on individuals' own reflections on how Internet use and migration practices are related – both in relation to past practices and future intentions.

Our paper is structured as follows: First, we elaborate on the role of Internet-based practices in a migration context, and how migration might in principle be affected. This contributes to the theoretical understanding by adding a new perspective to migration research and the study of ICT. We then present our data; a survey of a representative sample of Swedish young adults, aged 20–29 years, with recent experience of internal migration and future plans to move. This age group was chosen because of their established high level of Internet use (Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2005) and a substantial increase in their interregional migration frequency in recent years (Lundholm, 2007a). We then retrospectively investigate the extent to which the Internet was perceived to have affected their most recent move and whether or not it was expected to influence their future migration plans. In a concluding section, we discuss our main findings in regards to evolving Internet-based practices and potential implications for migration decisions, choice of destination, and related priorities and motives.

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facilitate the development of transnational families, and have implications for the nature of being a migrant (D'Haenens et al, 2007; Diminescu, 2008; Paragas, 2008).

[2] We here define Internet-based communication practice as the regular use of the Internet for information seeking (i.e., about the surrounding world) and personal communication.

THEORETICAL APPROACH: THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF THE INTERNET IN MIGRATION DECISION MAKING

Approaching the potential relationships between Internet use and migration requires an initial understanding of migration motives and the role of information in the decision making process. In the large body of migration literature (see, e.g., Boyle, 2009), there are various theoretical perspectives which make various assumptions as to the key motives that trigger people's decisions whether or not to move. Influential neoclassical theories and human capital approaches view migration as an individual strategy to obtain higher income and/or improve one's employment opportunities and career prospects. Migration decisions are assumed to be well-informed rational choices between economic opportunities at various locations (Greenwood, 1975; Yankow, 2003). Other perspectives stress the importance of non-economic factors in determining migration decisions (Courgeau, 1995; Golledge, 1980; Graeme, 2007). Empirical research continually demonstrates that migration patterns are also heavily influenced by social networks, environmental considerations, and location-specific contexts (Fischer and Malmberg, 2001; Lundholm, 2007b; Warnes, 1992). These are complex factors, and their relative weights change over the course of a person's life (Beige and Axhausen, 2006; Niedomysl, 2011).

Regardless of the motives that are supposed to trigger or constrain people's decisions to move, these decisions are always shaped by people's access to information about opportunities at various locations. In reality, available information is not perfect or unbiased (DaVanzo, 1981; Gibson et al, 2010). Furthermore, information gathering is an activity that

entails costs (in terms of time, money, and cognitive effort), explaining, for example, why many potential migrants may consider only one or a few destinations. For some years, however, the Internet has provided an alternative way of accessing relevant information; an alternative that could affect or even potentially transform migration decision making (Kuhn and Skuterud, 2000; Stevenson, 2009; Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2013). As a node and channel for information, the Internet is characterized by large volumes of information, easy access anytime and anywhere for most people (at least in societies like the Nordic countries), low transaction costs, high interactivity, and often instant updates or feedback. Information can be personalized on demand and matched to individual preferences in relation to central motives for migration – labour markets, housing markets, education, available leisure options, local environmental characteristics, and local social networks and contacts – in principle, for almost any place. This could reduce the friction of distance and encourage migration, alter migration intensity and distance, and change the ranking of motives and preferences.

Focusing on decision making practices helps improve our understanding of the role and implications of Internet use. Halfacree and Boyle (1993) claim that the decision to migrate is not made while placing the rest of one's life on hold. Migration decisions are predicated on action and activities in time and space, not contemplation, and these practices crucially involve information gathering, social communication, and interaction with other people. These activities are performed in the social settings and routines of everyday life and are central elements in exploring, fulfilling, and implementing the potential migrant's aspirations, plans, and decisions to move. It is reasonable to believe that Internet-based practices play an increasingly vital role in these activities. The Internet has dramatically changed how people access information and provides central support for many life decisions, not least among young people; when leaving high school for further education, planning for longer

international journeys, or looking for a job (Frändberg, 2010; Thulin, 2004). A recent study of international migration demonstrates that the Internet plays a crucial role in producing images of new possibilities, lifestyles, and locations, fuelling aspirations and desires to move (Burrell and Anderson, 2008).

An important question is whether this development also more profoundly changes our perceptions and understandings of place. According to Dutton (2009), the Internet "reconfigures" access to people, services and information in two important ways. First and most obviously, it changes how people do things, such as seek information and communicate with others. Second, the outcomes of these activities also fundamentally change: the sort of information we obtain and how frequently, what we know and understand, and the people and places we know and keep in touch with. As information flows more freely online, even across regional and national boundaries, making it much easier to explore employment and education opportunities and attractive places of residence, it is reasonable to assume that individual migration horizons will expand. For example, in a study of job search activity and labour mobility, Stevenson (2009) demonstrates that Internet use actually intensified people's information seeking activities, causing them to read more ads, apply for more jobs, and expand search beyond their local labour market area. By changing people's understanding and knowledge of places, online activities and routines could thus affect their migration propensity, frequency, and destinations and change their motives for migrating. Certain migration motives could be encouraged and strengthened by frequent and continuous information updates, alerts, or feeds on job opportunities, housing, and education in particular desirable locations and environments.

In a previous study based on in-depth interviews with urban young adults, we found that migration decision making practices are also increasingly affected by the growth of online social interaction, not least networking services such as Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, IM, blogs, Skype, and e-mail (Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2013). Research further demonstrates that information that circulates through social networks and personal contacts is of particular importance when people make major life decisions (Castells, 2007; Cross et al, 2001; Niles and Hanson, 2003). In regards to migration, social networks often involve the spread of information and of personal images, ideas, and conceptions of other places (Axhausen, 2008; Stjernström, 1998). The Internet enables people to have a more socially and spatially extended network of friends, family, acquaintances, and colleagues to contact when considering their "dreams" or intentions to move (Larsen et al, 2007; Wellman, 2001). Such online networks are extremely valuable in the pre-migrant phase, for example, to obtain insider-specific knowledge of places and local opportunities or to get help finding an apartment (Hiller and Franz, 2004). Overall, there are some evidence that the evolution of Internet-based practices for social interaction could advance people's understanding, awareness, and curiosity about other places, broadening their spatial horizons and conceptions (Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2013).

So far, we have identified several arguments why the Internet could have implications for people's long-term mobility decisions. A subsequent hypothesis – addressed in the following sections – is that the Internet will have an encouraging effect and stimulate people's interest in migrating. Facilitating more effective migration planning and implementation, in addition to broadening the perceptions of place and opportunity, Internet-based information and contact could encourage dreams and aspirations of moving elsewhere, including to more distant places. Moreover, the reconfiguration of access to extended spatial information could

modify people's long-term mobility decisions and affect their migration preferences and motives.

However, ongoing virtualization might also entail effects pointing in other directions. Theoretical approaches initially developed to understand the implications of ICT for daily mobility and travel (Hjorthol, 2002; Mokhtarian and Salomon, 1997) suggest that Internet use might also suppress migration. Increased virtual access to people and activities in other locations could, in principle, enable people to remain settled (Kesselring, 2006; Muhammad et al, 2007; Ory and Mokhtarian, 2006). Teleworking combined with long-distance commuting might, for example, be a substitute for internal migration. Moreover, the Internet and mobile telephony could help to sustain regular social contact with friends and family living at great distances (Axelsson, 2010; Diminescu, 2008; Komito, 2011). ICTs could thus, in principle, both encourage and repress the desire to migrate. Finally, it is also possible that the evolution of Internet-based practices and mobility strategies may have no profound implications for people's migration decisions at all: the Internet might be used simply as a tool for more effectively implementing migrations decisions that would have been made anyway.

In the following we cast light on the perceived role and implications of Internet use for migration by investigating Swedish young adults. We focus young people because they are greatly experienced Internet users with highly developed online practices, habits, and skills (Findahl, 2012), and because they are more likely to migrate than other groups (Lundholm 2007a, 2007b). In Sweden, the physical and virtual mobility strategies of young adults are shifting rapidly. Apart from very high and growing levels of Internet use and virtual mobility (Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2005, 2010), actual migration propensity is increasing after decades

of stability (Lundholm, 2007a). There is also evidence of stagnating, and even decreasing, levels of daily travel, both local and inter-regional, while long-distance transnational travel is expanding (Frändberg and Vilhelmson, 2011).

SURVEY: DESIGN, POPULATION, AND DATA

To investigate the issues raised, a postal questionnaire was sent to a representative sample comprising 2,000 members of the Swedish population aged 20–29 years old in 2009. To facilitate information gathering on recent internal migration experiences, the target population was divided into two groups – one group of recent "movers" and one of longer-term "stayers" – from which stratified random samples were drawn. "Movers" were defined as people who had changed their municipality of residence in the 12 months before the study began. "Stayers" were defined as people who had lived in the same municipality for the previous five years. According to the Swedish Register of the Total Population (RTB), the target population consisted of 20% movers and 80% stayers. To include a sufficient number of movers, the stratified sample consisted of 1,000 movers and 1,000 stayers. A total of 756 people answered the questionnaire, for a response rate of 38%. A comparatively low response rate might threaten population validity. For example, recent migrants might be more inclined to participate in the survey than non-migrants. However, the response rate was the same for both movers and stayers, and was also consistent across other known total population characteristics such as age, marital status, living region and income.

Apart from facilitating analyses of people with actual migration experience, it was important to obtain information on people's future plans to move. The respondents were asked whether

or not they had any intentions of moving within next two years and the sample was classified into three groups accordingly: (i) people with active plans to move, (ii) people with vague plans, and (iii) people determined to stay where they were. Approximately one-third of the weighted sample population belonged to each group: 29% had active plans to move, 29% had vague plans and 33% were determined to stay (while 10% did not answer the question).

The groups of movers and stayers, as well as the three groups classified according to their expressed future plans to migrate, did not differ in terms of socioeconomic and geographic background factors, for example, marital status, place of birth (foreign/domestic), age, and income. The following were slightly more inclined to move in terms of both experience and plans: women were more inclined to move than men, students more than the employed, full-time more than part-time employed, highly more than poorly educated, high-skilled more than low-skilled people, urban more than small town/rural residents, and non-parents more than parents. Movers and stayers were planning to move to the same extent.

In addition to migration, Internet use was a central dimension of the survey. In this regard, questions were asked concerning the prevalence of Internet-based (communicative) practices with implications for migration decisions and the extent to which these practices were believed to have any influence on actual and planned moves. A first set of questions was retrospective and concerned Internet use in relation to a recent move. What was the perceived role and importance of the Internet for the move? Did it actually influence the decision and, if so, how? In what fields did respondents use the Internet to seek relevant information? Another set of questions was prospective and focused on Internet use among those planning to migrate in the near future. What were their current Internet-based practices? In what respects were the

respondents' motives and plans reported to be influenced by Internet-based information and contact? Was their desire to migrate strengthened by the Internet?

The descriptive part of the analysis of the survey results contains bivariate comparisons between groups with different migration histories and between groups with different plans for the future. Logistic regression is used to explore the relationship between Internet-based practices and the possibility that the Internet increases a person's interest in migrating elsewhere. The model controls for several background factors (i.e., gender, age, educational attainment, occupation, income, and type of living region) and for the spatial range of people's future migration plans.

RESULTS

Among the surveyed young adults, almost everyone (95 %) has access to the Internet at home and uses it daily. Half of the respondents spend more than one hour per day on the Internet (for private use), and a quarter more than two hours. This pattern of access and use is similar among movers and stayers, and among the three groups defined according to their plans to move within the next two years. An initial finding is that any differences in inclination to migrate (experienced or planned) seem not be linked to the general level of Internet use at the group level. However, some differences emerge when the purpose of Internet use is analysed in greater detail. Private Internet use usually concerns social communication, followed by entertainment and information seeking in general (Table 1). We find that both recent movers and people actively planning to move use the Internet more frequently for information

seeking. In addition, movers are slightly more socially communicative than are the other groups.

/Table 1 in about here/

Looking back: Migration experiences and the Internet

A main issue concerns whether people who recently migrated within Sweden considered the Internet to have had any influence on their migration decision. A comparatively large proportion of the movers thinks so; 51% of the movers actively (to a high or very high degree) say that they included the Internet in their migration planning and preparation in general, while 21% did not use it at all. The respondent's interpretation of "planning and preparation" – whether the Internet was used to support the overall decision to move, or was mainly used for practical (coordination) purposes when the main decision was made – however, is somewhat unclear. Therefore, a more precise and straightforward question of whether the Internet really facilitated the decision to move better specifies the perceived influence: 38% of movers think that the Internet facilitated their decision greatly (to a high or very high degree), while 46% did not get any support at all from the Internet.

Even more influential on the strategic decision to migrate is the question of whether and to what extent Internet-based information influenced people's actual choice of migration destination. Choice of destination is a complex issue involving many factors, and a clear majority of movers, 71%, say that the Internet did not affect this aspect of their decision at all. Despite this, 16% to a high or very high degree and 14% to a low degree believe that Internet use affected their choice of migration destination.

The importance of place, and its representation on the Internet, is emphasized by data on the type of information sought and used in the decision making process. Internet-based information on housing and residential environments was extensively used by 61% of movers (to a high or very high degree on a five-point Likert scale). Internet-based information on opportunities for education and study was widely used by one third , and on leisure activities, culture/entertainment, and labor markets by around one fourth of all movers. The ranking of these motives partly reflects the present life situations of the sample of young adults. Nonetheless, it is in these areas that the Internet might play an important role as an interactive (as well as passive) source of information that might affect people's future plans to move.

Looking forward: migration plans and the Internet

Concerning the role of the Internet in young adults' future plans and potential decisions to move, two tendencies are apparent. First, almost one third (30 %) have active plans to move to another place in Sweden in the near future and regularly use the Internet to obtain information about other places of residence that might be of interest. Almost two thirds (64%) of such active planners use the Internet in this way with high intensity, i.e., often or very often. This indicates that they have developed and maintain Internet-based practices that may also facilitate a decision to move. Second, a related tendency found at the group level is that the more active the planning, the more intensive the information seeking activities on the Internet. Whether such active planning to move causes more intense information seeking, or whether information seeking practices reinforce plans to move, is an open question difficult to firmly assess from our data. What we find is that Internet use and practice among many young adults include regularly obtaining information about places they consider important and may

potentially move to in coming years. An important spatial aspect concerns the range within which potential destinations are located. Internet-based practices were generally found to include searches on places both near the present place of residence (40%) and more distantly located, in other regions of Sweden (38 %) or abroad (18%), which suggests an interest in making longer moves as well.

This leads to the motives behind active plans to move to other places. Migration motives probably influence or are integrated into evolving Internet-based information seeking practices and the type of information considered important. The relative weighting of certain motives could be strengthened or weakened by information promptly and regularly received, for example, on vacant jobs and available housing opportunities in desired sectors and cities. Among those with active migration plans, the dominant motive for making a move is educational, as could be expected considering the age of the sample (Table 2). This motive is closely followed by perceived needs to change one's living environment, for new housing, and to find a (new) job. After those come social motives: to move in with or separate from a domestic partner, to move closer to family or friends, or to accompany one's partner who is moving elsewhere. These dominant motives – studies, environment, housing, and work – correspond well to areas in which information has been qualitatively improved via new Internet-based channels, giving some support to the hypothesis that the Internet might act as a facilitator in the migration context. Also the ranking of prospective motives among people actively planning to move differs from the ranking done retrospectively concerning their most recent move – local moves not included (Table 2). Primarily residential and housing motives are more common, together with work-related motives and the need to change living environment, among the plans to move. The observed divergence between retrospective and prospective motives for migrating relate to the actual life course of the respondents. Also

intensified and selective information online could contribute to this shift in priorities and preferences.

/Table 2 in about here/

An important question is how regularly people seek Internet-based information in relation to the motives discussed. We find that topics related to housing and residential environments are sought most often. Almost half of the group (47%) with active plans to move intensively seeks updated information concerning these aspects, i.e., “very often” using a five-point Likert scale. Next comes updated information about work and education, sought intensively by one third of the group (30%), followed by information on culture/entertainment (14%) and leisure activities (13%); information from official sources, such as local authorities, is not sought as often (5%). As expected, online information seeking is more intense among those actively planning to move than among those less actively planning (Chi sq.: p=0.000).

The most basic question considered is whether Internet-based information and practice also fuel a person’s tendency to move elsewhere. The explicit survey question on this matter produces somewhat divergent answers. Overall, almost one third (30%) of the total survey population, regardless of migration plans, agrees that the Internet indeed stimulates (to a high or very high degree) their interest in moving. Another third (38%) considers the impact more moderate (to a low degree), while another third (33%) expects no influence at all. There is a weak, yet statistically significant, tendency for those with active migration plans to assign greater importance to information from the Internet. Any causal relationships between online information seeking and migration plans are difficult to assess based on our exploratory survey data; a process of mutual reinforcement is likely going on. This notion of

reinforcement is partly supported if one considers the correlation between the intensity of seeking information about specific places and the belief that the Internet strengthens respondents' personal interest in migrating (r_s=0.253; p=0.000). Such a tendency is evident at the group level, as a high proportion (61%) of those intensely seeking information on the Internet also considers this information as stimulating their interest in moving.

Finally, in an attempt to address the issue of causality, logistic regression is used to model the likelihood of respondents perceiving the Internet as promoting interest in migration to another place (Table 3). Two variables, the intensity in seeking online information about potential destinations (places) and online personal contact intensity, are used to indicate Internet-based practices. Migration plans are taken into account and indicated by the intention to make local, interregional and international moves. Also several demographic, socioeconomic, and geographic variables are controlled for. As hypothesized, results confirm a positive relationship between the intensity of Internet-based information seeking and the likelihood of a respondent stating that the Internet promotes the tendency to migrate to another place. It is further indicated that intensive (i.e., daily) personal contacts via social media – another important dimension of Internet-based practice – have a significant positive association with perceived migration interest. Results also corroborate that having active plans for long-distance (i.e., interregional and transnational) migration is important, while most background factors considered here do not affect the likelihood. Neither sex, ethnicity, education, occupation nor income seem to influence the perceptions. One exception is living in a large city, which has a positive association. Overall, as total variance explained by the model is relatively high (Nagelkerke R^2=0.290), results show that young urban adults' interest in and active plans to make a long-distance move are stimulated by extensive Internet-based habits and communication practices. A plausible interpretation is that we are observing the

development of an integrated Internet-based communication and migration practice where the most ICT conversant informants in general are more geared to the Internet, thus use it more and find it to have greater impacts on migration intentions compared to people who are more conservative in relation to their use of and belief in new communication technologies.

/Table 3 in about here/

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In migration research, debate is ongoing concerning plausible shifts in migration drivers and motives (see e.g., Cooke, 2011). Arguably, these shifts are accentuated by the spread of modern ICTs, not least the central role of the Internet in accessing abundant, often personalized and interactive information about distant places and place-based utilities. This study attempts to understand how evolving Internet-based communicative practices might influence decisions and plans concerning interregional moves within Sweden. Our approach concentrates on recent movers (and stayers) own perceptions of the role of the Internet: perceptions that also might come to affect their future migration behavior. Our conclusions concern two main issues. One is the occurrence of Internet-based practices as regards migration intentions and decisions. The other relates to a latent research hypothesis that the Internet and associated practices stimulate people's propensity to move. If so, we would have another example of how the emergence of Internet-based communication, or virtual mobility, interacts with and conditions people's corporeal mobility and location behavior, though at a different spatial and temporal scale than hitherto asserted.

Concerning the first issue, our study clearly demonstrates that most young adults in Sweden have adopted communicative practices that integrate the Internet into their migration decision making processes – from the formation of vague plans and thoughts, to more active plans and actual moves. Half of all recent movers retrospectively estimate that the Internet had an important impact on, and facilitated their recent decision to move. The Internet served not only as an extended, and qualitatively different, information channel as one third of all movers also claimed that the Internet affected destination choice and outcome. Information seeking was most intense in relation to geographical issues concerning, for example, housing, residential areas, and local environments.

Further, results also show that Internet-based practices are integrated into young people's prospective migration intentions and plans. There are indications of a positive, reinforcing relationship between how much information a group seeks on the Internet, and how active their plans to move are – beyond the trivial observation that people who plan to move also seek move-related information. Whether active migration plans intensify information seeking, or the reverse, is difficult to disentangle, and is an important issue for further investigation. Our findings also indicated that young adults with active plans to move are insensitive to geographical distance in their information seeking. The Internet might therefore trigger more distant interregional moves as the spatial horizons and mental maps of people become virtually widened, at least from a Swedish perspective.

An essential second issue concerns whether and to what extent the Internet enhances people's actual tendency to move elsewhere. This is difficult to assess prospectively using cross-sectional survey data regarding respondent's subjective opinion of the relationship between ICT and migration practices. However, our results show that a comparatively large group –

one third of the Swedish young adults studied – estimates that the Internet really enhances their interest in migrating, while one third thinks that the Internet has only a minor effect and another third claims it has no impact at all. This divide in opinion is of no surprise, as research (e.g., Valentine and Holloway, 2002; Kesselring, 2006; Schwanen and Kwan, 2008) has repeatedly demonstrated that ICTs (like most other technologies) seldom have a single homogenizing effect on either people's attitudes, plans or behavior. However, this differentiation is another important issue for continued research in the field.

Our results further indicate a reinforcement tendency: people intensively using the Internet to obtain information about places to which they wish or plan to move also report that this Internet use intensifies their intention to move. At a more general level, it seems appropriate to view the Internet as an enabler or catalyst rather than an out-and-out causal factor of change in a wider process of migration stimulation. Migration is primarily driven by deeply rooted needs and motives related to essential spheres of an individual's life and wellbeing, rather than by sheer information about possibilities. At the same time, it is important to see the Internet potentially as more than simply supportive; it may perhaps also affect how people structure and relatively weight various migration motives. For example, the dominant motives expressed by those who have active plans to move relate to areas covered by drastically improved (i.e., prompt, interactive, and personalized) information from the Internet, namely, educational purposes, residential environments, housing, and work. Among recent movers already planning to make a new move, more weight is now put on housing, work, and environmental motives than before. Although this observation is due to life-cycle related changes, it also goes along with the hypothesis that the Internet not only encourages interest in migration, but also contributes to a process of changing the spatial preferences and migration motives of individuals. This would be in line with the thoughts regarding the

reconfiguration of access proposed by Dutton (2009), as well as Stevenson's (2009) observation that the Internet intensifies job search activity beyond the local labour market area. This calls for future studies based on approaches and data (for example, longitudinal) better suited for the purpose of explanation.

Finally, our study calls for further investigation of the role of the Internet in migration at various scales – local, interregional, and international. This approach is needed in order to better understand how the preconditions for physical mobility change in a society undergoing rapid virtualization and how virtualization affects the geography of the real world. Two lines of research are of specific importance in this regard. The first concerns more detailed investigation of the role of virtual practices when decisions are made, i.e., how the Internet is used in detail and in what part of the decision making process. The second concerns the role of Internet-based social communication and how social media, such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace, Skype, and LinkedIn, affect people's spatial horizons, flexibility and priorities concerning decisions whether and where to move.

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TABLES

Table 1. Internet use by purpose among surveyed young adults classified by recent migration (experienced in the last 12 months) and stated plans to move (in the next two years). Percentages (weighted). *n* = 756

	Migration experience		*Migration plan*		
	Movers (*n* = 386)	Stayers (*n* = 370)	Active plans (*n* = 212)	Vague plans (*n* = 222)	Plan to stay (*n* = 249)
Information seeking					
Almost every day	38.1	27.6	39.3	24.3	29.8
Several times per week	40.7	36.8	34.1	47.4	33.3
More seldom/never	21.0	35.7	18.1	20.5	22.7
	100	100	100	100	100
	Chi sq.: *p* = 0.000		Chi sq.: *p* = 0.051		
Social communicatiom					
Almost every day	69.9	61.6	63.4	67.8	63.6
Several times per week	21.8	23.2	24.9	19.9	23.0
More seldom/never	8.1	14.9	6.5	4.9	4.8
	100	100	100	100	100
	Chi sq.: *p* = 0.007		Chi sq.: *p* = 0.733		
Entertainment/leisure					
Almost every day	56.0	55.7	62.7	56.2	51.0
Several times per week	25.9	26.5	27.1	29.6	25.5
More seldom/never	17.3	17.6	8.0	7.6	9.4
	100	100	100	100	100
	Chi sq.: *p* = 0.984		Chi sq.: *p* = 0.014		

Table 2. Stated migration motives. Planned move (in the next two years) compared with recent move (experienced in the last 12 months). Note: up to three choices are possible. Percentages (weighted). *n* = 386

Motive	Planned move	Recent move	Difference Planned move – Recent move (% points)
Education	37.2	41.7	–4.5
Environment change	32.2	26.9	+5.3^
Housing	32.1	7.0	+25.1*
Work	29.8	17.1	+12.7*
Move in with/separate from domestic partner	20.7	23.8	–3.1
Move closer to family/friends	8.7	14.5	–5.8*
Accompany domestic partner	4.5	6.7	–2.2
Other	9.0	13.0	–4.0

Statistically significant difference: *p = 0.05; ^ p = 0.10

Table 3. Likelihood that the Internet increases interest in migrating to another place: logistic regression analysis of answer to "In your judgement, does information from the Internet about other places increase your interest in moving?" (0= not at all/to a low degree; 1= to a high/very high degree)[1]

		B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Internet-based practices	Information seeking about potential destinations/places:			
	Infrequently/never(reference)			
	Several times per month	0.688*	0.285	1.99
	Several times per week	1.82***	0.269	6.173
	Daily	2.508***	0.32	12.276
	Personal contacts via the Internet:			
	Infrequently/never (reference)			
	Several times per month	0.271	0.714	1.312
	Several times per week	0.867	0.567	2.379
	Daily	1.096*	0.542	2.991
Migration plans	Local move (versus no plan)	–0.381	0.215	0.683
	Interregional move (versus no plan)	0.509**	0.196	1.664
	International move (versus no plan)	0.413**	0.248	1.512
Background factors	Women (versus men)	–0.308	0.192	0.735
	Age 25–29 yrs (versus 20–24 yrs)	–0.266	0.239	0.766
	Born in Sweden (versus foreign born)	–0.389	0.328	0.678
	Mover, recent year (versus stayer)	-0.149	0.194	0.861
	Education: Elementary school (reference)			
	Education: High school	–0.408	0.429	0.665
	Education: University level <3 years	–0.293	0.493	0.746
	Education: University level ≥3 years	–0.346	0.466	0.708
	Occupation: Work (reference)			
	Occupation: Studies	0.07	0.226	1.073
	Occupation: Job seeking	0.498	0.336	1.646
	Occupation: Other	–0.136	0.348	0.873
	Income	–0.001	0.001	0.999
	Living region: Rural area (reference)			
	Living region: Town – small/medium	0.411	0.27	1.508
	Living region: City	0.572*	0.282	1.772
	Constant	–2.481	0.748	0.084

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p \leq 0.05$

$n = 724$

Nagelkerke R-square = 0.290

Note 1: Swedish original wording: "Bedömer du att information på nätet om andra platser ökar ditt intresse att flytta?"

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