



## TURKISH RURAL LIFESTYLE MIGRANTS TO MUĞLA: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF VIDEO NARRATIVES

### *Muğla'daki Kırsal Yaşam Tarzı Göçmenleri: Video Anlatılarının Nitel Bir Analizi*

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### **Abstract**

This article focuses on migration from big cities to the countryside in Turkey, in the case of Muğla province with a lifestyle migration lens, based on content analysis of the stories of migrants posted on the YouTube platform that provides a basis to increase digital migration research. Research results showed that a group of people who were mainly earlier in their life cycle and worked in the private sector in the big cities quitted their jobs to start a new life in the countryside. Most of them escape from the disliked characteristics of big cities, negative emotions caused by urban life and intense work pressure. They are in search of natural and production-centred life in rural areas of the Turkish Aegean. The results indicated that Covid-19 also emerged as a recent motivator. Contrary to the city, favourable features of the countryside, especially the possibility of living in a detached house with a garden, strengthened the positive image of the rural areas. They are seen as safer and more comfortable locations because in the case of a curfew, outdoor activities and a mask-free daily life would be possible due to the private gardens. Migration from big cities to rural areas seems to become a more popular trend with the pandemic.

**Keywords:** Internal migration, rural lifestyle migration, Turkey, Muğla, video narratives

### **Öz**

Bu makalede, Türkiye'de büyük şehirlerden kırsala göç YouTube platformunda yayınlanan göç hikâyelerinin içerik analizine dayalı olarak, Muğla ili örneğinde, yaşam tarzı göçü yaklaşımıyla ele alınmıştır. Araştırma sonuçları, büyük şehirlerde ağırlıklı olarak özel sektörde çalışan ve çoğu otuzlu yaşlarda olan bir grup insanın yeni bir hayata başlamak için işlerini bırakıp, kırsala göç ettiğini göstermiştir. Söz konusu göçmenlerin çoğu büyük şehirlerin istenmeyen koşullarından, şehir hayatının getirdiği olumsuz duygulardan ve yoğun iş baskısından kaçmakta ve Ege kıyılarının kırsal kesimlerinde doğa ve üretim merkezli bir yaşam aramaktadır. Sonuçlar, Covid-19'un da yeni bir motivasyon kaynağı olarak ortaya çıktığını göstermiştir. Kentin aksine, kırsalın olumlu özellikleri, özellikle bahçeli müstakil bir evde yaşama imkânı, kırsal alanların var olan olumlu imajını daha da güçlendirmiştir. Kırsal alanlar, sokağa çıkma yasağı durumunda özel bahçeleri sayesinde açık hava etkinliklerini ve maskesiz bir günlük yaşamı mümkün kıldığı için daha güvenli ve konforlu yerler olarak görülmektedir. Dolayısıyla, büyük şehirlerden kırsal alanlara göçün, pandemi ile daha da popüler bir eğilim haline geldiği söylenebilir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İç göç, kırsal yaşam tarzı göçü, Türkiye, Muğla, video anlatıları

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the countryside has become a desirable and feasible residential environment for an increasing number of people who decide to translate their preferences into residential practices by moving from town to a village (Rivera-Escribano & Mormont, 2006). Several concepts were used to define these flows such as ‘counter-urbanization’ (Berry 1976; Buller & Hoggart, 1994), ‘back to the land’ (Halfacree, 2006, 2007), ‘rural gentrification’ (Stockdale, 2010), ‘neo-rurality’ (Rivera-Escribano & Mormont, 2006), ‘green migration’ (Jones *et al.*, 2003) or ‘rural lifestyle migration’ (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009; Torkington, 2012; Halfacree, 2014). In order to provide an analytical framework for understanding urban to rural migration phenomena, in this research, the umbrella concept, ‘lifestyle migration’ (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009) will be used. The lifestyle approach is an important conceptual framework in assisting scholars to understand migrations that are not driven by economic rationales (as in the oft-quoted phrase ‘economic migrants’) or political forces (refugees, exiles, etc.) (King *et al.*, 2021). The term has been used to refer to an increasing number of people who decide to migrate based on their belief that there is a more fulfilling way of life available to them elsewhere (Benson & O’Reilly, 2009) and centred on subjective motivations linked to a positively idealized view of the destination societies (Gaspar, 2015).

Although it was termed differently, migration from big cities to the countryside emerged in the United States during the 1980s, and spread to Europe in the 1990s. Today this trend has been experienced in many developed European countries on different scales; national, regional, and international. For example, the countryside of *Spain*, (Camarero & Oliva, 2002; Rivera-Escribano, 2007; Solona-Solona, 2010; Weidinger & Kordel, 2016), *France* (Buller & Hoggart, 1994; Stone & Stubbs, 2007; Benson, 2011), *Sweden* (Hedberg & Haandrikman, 2014; Carson & Carson, 2017; Eimermann, Lundmark & Muller, 2012; Eimermann, 2015), *United Kingdom* (Halfacree, 1994), *Australia* (Krivokapic-Skoko & Collins, 2016) and *The Netherlands* (Bijker & Haartsen, 2012) have become alternative destinations for urbanites. According to these studies, motivators of these movements are diverse: (1) the disliked features of the city (increasing crowd, uncontrolled urbanization, traffic and noise etc.), (2) the physical attractiveness of the countryside – higher quality of life (greenery, fresh air, and natural

landscape etc.) (Jones *et al.*, 2003; Rivera-Escribano & Mormont, 2006). Moreover, imagining the countryside as an escape place to relax, an alternative to the cities (Südaş, 2019), (3) ‘rural idyll’ (Buller & Hoggart 1994; O’Reilly, 2007; Benson & O’Reilly 2009) is most cited the trigger of these movements. This idyll is more likely to be imagined based on tourism experiences or representations that were produced through different means (media, real estate, narratives of migrants etc.), rather than on the reality of a truly rural existence (Torkington, 2012).

Nowadays, urban-rural migration has emerged in Turkey, especially in the form of settling in a village, mostly located along the Aegean coastal zone; lifestyle-based factors drive a wave of urbanities onto the rural routes of the Aegean region. For instance, the countryside of provinces of *Izmir* (Budun, 2015; Südaş, 2019), *Muğla* (Özadık, 2016; Mirza-Baş 2019), *Çanakkale* (Başaran-Uysal & Sakarya, 2018) and *Balıkesir* (Özkan, 2019) have pulled the urbanites from the metropolitan cities of Turkey, especially from İstanbul and Ankara. Not only retirees but new graduates, and middle-aged urban professionals pursue an alternative lifestyle in such destinations. ‘Covid-19 outbreak’ has unexpectedly increased the demand for rural areas due to their isolated character too. In the early period of this pandemic, there was intense mobility from the city centres (especially from İstanbul, İzmir and Ankara) to the second homes. Many summer resorts and rural areas have faced intense population flows such as Bodrum, Marmaris, Çeşme, Kaş, Bozcaada, Gökçeada, Ayvalık and Datça (Zoğal & Emekli, 2020) which also seems to have an impact in the Turkish real estate market as it has been reported on a popular real estate web page, on February April 9, 2020:

“Real estate preferences are changing after the coronavirus epidemic. With most cases seen in İstanbul, many people started to search houses in the Aegean villages. Many citizens, including celebrities, are looking for a traditional stone house with a garden”<sup>1</sup>.

It must be underlined that though there was already news, web blogs, and YouTube videos about the urban to rural migration before Covid-19, the visibility of this population movement has increased with the pandemic in media. Especially, YouTube has been one of the platforms that make this phenomenon more visible. Accounts that produce videos about urban-rural migration stories have grown by the day on YouTube, especially with the pandemic. As it is

<sup>1</sup> Emlak Kulisi. 2020. “Koronavirüs sonrası şehirden köye kaçış başladı!” <https://emlakkulisi.com/koronavirus-sonrasi-sehirden-koye-kacis-basladi/635152> (Last accessed: September, 4<sup>th</sup> 2020)

known, growth in information and communication technology affects migration dynamics; particularly smartphones, social media platforms, and apps have been used by migrants as new channels of access to information, resources and news in many ways, including communication, emotion management, intercultural relations, identity acquisition (Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018).

Image of a destination is socially and collectively developed, through narratives expressed by locals, visitors and migrants, and at popular lifestyle mobility destinations they are often constructed and mediated by them (Åkerlund & Sandberg, 2015). How a place is perceived, represented and interpreted play a crucial role in the decision of all kinds of mobility (Åkerlund & Sandberg 2015). The desirability of a specific place as a migration destination depends on subjective evaluations and perceptions such as good or bad, cheap or expensive, dangerous or safe, clean or dirty etc. Just like the question of how migration emerges, the role of place in this process is a dimension that needs to be understood in migration studies (Simonsen 2008). The image or representation of a place is an essential factor both for the migration decision and the process of reconstructing the identities of the post-migration process of migrants (Benson 2011a; Åkerlund 2013). Sets of representation of place can be produced via films, promotions and other forms of media or by personal experiences like visits. As long as the relationship of immigrants with place continues, it is reproduced and constantly reshapes the migration process.

Based on the analysis of video narratives, this article focuses on rural lifestyle migration in Turkey, in the case of Muğla province. It analyses the ways how “urban” and “rural” are represented by migrants involved and the ways how this representation influences the migration process including motivations and post-migration life.

### 1.1. Urban-rural movements in Turkey

Internal migration in Turkey has traditionally taken place mainly from rural areas to urban centres and also between cities as a form of gradual migration due to economic motivations (Tümertekin & Özgüç, 2019). However, as a result of modernization and urbanization, a wealthy urban part of the Turkish population has been the actor of a unique form of internal migration in Turkey. As a result of experiencing an urban life with its difficulties and problems, urban Turks started to head to south-western Turkey, a region which is characterized by a recreational function, relatively low urbanization, and a mild climate. Mostly highly-educated, professional,

urban Turkish population has settled in villages in this region. They either have never experienced a rural lifestyle or their awareness of this region is based on their previous tourism activities. This recent and distinct population movement has been in the academic limelight in a short time. For instance, Başaran-Uysal & Sakarya (2012) indicated that Adatepe and Yeşilyurt villages of Çanakkale province seasonally received well-educated urbanities who are mostly white-collar workers, academics and artists from Istanbul. Budan (2015) investigated urban to rural migrants in Şirince, a previous Greek village in the province of Izmir. Şirince has been attractive for those to escape from the materiality of urban life and fill the void of spirituality. Urban migrants’ re-enchanting with the world by migrating to Şirince and their romantic imagination of the village life created an ambivalent situation when they faced the ‘reality’. Özadak (2016) termed urban to rural movement as *neo-rurality*. The actors of this movement had not experienced a life in the countryside before and are looking for “a new home” for themselves. In another study, the case of Selimiye village in the province of Muğla, Yörür, Uysal and Altınörs-Çirak (2018) found that ‘new villagers’ caused changes in the rural settlement pattern through building second houses, tourism accommodation facilities and day-to-day tourism businesses. Impacts of newcomers on rural areas were researched within the concept of *rural gentrification*, in the case of Çanakkale villages (Başaran-Uysal, 2017). Rural gentrification was initiated by a small group of artists and academics from Istanbul who discovered the region and bought abandoned Greek houses.

Urban-to-rural flows in Turkey were also examined in the case of Izmir province, the third biggest city of Turkey with a population of 4.3 million (TÜİK, 2021). Rural lifestyle migration within the province of Izmir was motivated by stressful urban life, the desire of living in detached houses with a garden and the pursuit of a natural environment. The urban migrants are highly educated, in their early 50s, and partly retired. There is a geographical difference in the aspect of permanency of the migration in relation to the proximity of the destinations to the city centre (Südaş, 2019). Mirza-Baş (2019), on the other hand, focused the migration from the city of Istanbul to rural areas in the case of Köyceğiz, Muğla – one of the coastal destinations along the Turkish Riviera. Diverse aspects of the metropolitan way of life motivate individuals to migrate. For instance, life in the city is generally perceived as meaningless and also high level of individualisation in the urban society, feeling of being overwhelmed, and the stimuli of the city are among the push factors for migration. Most of

the studies centred on the motivation of spatial relocation but migrants' post-migration lives in rural areas have been underexplored. In this study, this recent migration movement will be examined in terms of both aspects in the case of Muğla province through a lifestyle migration perspective.

Muğla (Figure 1) is located in southwest Turkey and is surrounded by the Aegean Sea from the west and the Mediterranean Sea from the south. The province has Mediterranean climatic conditions and the longest coastline with 1124 km (Bahar 2008). This province is famous for its international coastal tourism destinations such as Dalaman, Köyceğiz, Fethiye, Marmaris, Milas, Datça and Bodrum.



Figure 1- Location map of Muğla

## 2. METHODOLOGY

There is increasing content about urban to rural flows in the news, columns, and social media platforms, mainly on Instagram and YouTube. As the growth in migration and information and communication technology has affected each other increasingly (Leurs & Prabhakar 2018), this research is based on content analysis of the stories of migrants posted on the YouTube platform that provides a basis to increase digital migration research. In this respect, a "Netnography"- virtual ethnography method was used in the study (Kozinets 2006; Kozinets, Pierre-Yann and Amanda 2014). This approach enables researchers to access the community members' knowledge online which, in turn, helps to provide in-depth insights into the consumers (Kozinets 2015, 2) and it involves gathering data from various online sources such as social networking sites, chat forums and weblogs (Zhang & Hitchcock, 2017).

The research data was collected between December 2020 and August 2021. In the process of data collection, the YouTube search engine was used by searching the expression "migration from city to

rural" [kentten kıra göç] and a total of 85 video content was reached. These videos were examined by fast watching, and through purposive sampling, a total of 26 videos about the migration stories in Muğla province were selected. Videos were transcribed into text (19.242 words). The text was read and re-read several times to notice initial ideas and subjected to content analysis which involved the processes of familiarization, coding and categorizing the data (Braun & Clarke 2006; Krippendorff 2018).

Most migrants originated from big cities; eighteen were from İstanbul, and six were from Ankara. One was from Tekirdağ, and the other was from Kocaeli. They all preferred various districts of Muğla such as Ortaca, Köyceğiz, Fethiye, Dalaman, Marmaris, Dalyan etc. Almost all of them decided to migrate at an earlier stage in their life (between their thirty and forty), worked in the private-corporate sector, and quitted their jobs in the big cities to embark on a new life in the countryside. Many of them migrated as couples however, there are single individuals too. Most of them moved to Muğla during the last five years (Table 1).

**Table 1-** Sociodemographic Characteristics of Migrants

Videos	Sex	Age	Marital Status	Number of Children	Previous Job	Current Work	Migration Year
Video 1	couple	35-37	married	1	corporate sector	ecologic farming	2019
Video 2	couple	31-35	married	0	corporate sector	ecologic farming	2019
Video 3	couple	33	married	0	corporate sector	handicraft making and selling	2018
Video 4	male	36	married	2	corporate sector	resuming old job	2019
Video 5	female	35	single	0	education sector	ecologic farming	-
Video 6	couple	54	married	2	private sector	-	-
Video 7	couple	36	married	0	private sector	jam making and selling	2020
Video 8	couple	21	cohabitation	0	-	-	-
Video 9	male	38	married	1	corporate sector	ecologic farming	2016
Video 10	female	38	single	0	corporate sector	ecologic farming	2015
Video 11	male	42	single	0	private sector	workshop (studio)	2018
Video 12	couple	-	married	-	private sector	retired	-
Video 13	female	30	married	0	private sector	ecologic farming	2017
Video 14	couple	38	married	2	corporate sector	ecologic farming	2019
Video 15	couple	36-35	married	2	corporate sector	ecologic farming	2016
Video 16	couple	-	married	1	corporate sector	wooden toy workshop	2014
Video 17	female	35-37	married	2	private sector	home office	2020
Video 18	male	45	married	1	private sector	ecologic farming	2019
Video 19	couple	-	married	0	private sector	-	2021
Video 20	couple	52-50	married	-	private sector	-	2019
Video 21	female	50-52	single	1	private sector	retired	2019
Video 22	female	-	single	0	corporate sector	-	2018
Video 23	female	-	married	0	corporate sector	home office	2016
Video 24	couple	38-40	married	1	private sector	-	2020
Video 25	couple	-	married	3	corporate sector	ecologic farming	2017
Video 26	couple	31-38	married	0	corporate sector	ecologic farming	2019

\*Couple (female and male)

### 3. FINDINGS

#### 3.1 Representations of urban and rural in the narratives of migrants

The representations of the origin city are generally negative. Almost all migrants described the big cities as places lacking quality of life (19 times). “Crowded”, “heavy traffic” and “chaos” were the common words that refer to the low quality of life in the city. There were frequent references to the rapid and busy life (14 times) in the city such as the stressful work pace, the rush, and lack of time. In addition to these representations, consumption-based life (11 times), negative emotions (9 times), and weak social relations (5 times) were other categories that emerged from the narratives of migrants:

“When I walked in Istanbul during summers and winters, I would be out of breath. I could not breathe. After I got settled in here, I discovered that I could take a breath while walking outside in August. Time passes slowly here; you can fit a lot into a day. We are not in a hurry to get anywhere, so we can enjoy everything we experience here. I remember we used to go to the Bosphorus to have breakfast in Istanbul, I would get already tired on the way, and when

breakfast would come, I could not enjoy it because I had already been exhausted. I got very tired of the time flowing so fast there [in Istanbul], and I was not being able to fit into it (Video 23, female, from Marmaris).”

Contrary to the city life, the representations of rural life are generally positive. As mentioned by Torkington (2011) positive representation of rural life generally builds in contrast with the negative evaluative representation of the city left behind. For instance:

“First of all, it is a very well, safe environment for children. The vehicles are scarce. Children can still play in a reliable environment. I could not leave my child on the street in Istanbul, but here I do. (Video 1, couple, from Ortaca).”

As it is the case in the narrative of Video 1, almost all migrants referred to the rural as a place that offers high quality of life (22 times); quiet, peaceful and safe. Furthermore, the countryside was imagined as a place which has a natural (17 times), minimal and slow lifestyle (15 times) and strong social relations (7 times). So, it can be said that the representation of rural mainly depends on rural idyll (Benson and O'Reilly 2009; Benson 2011a). Table 2 shows the

representations of the rural that ran throughout the data.

**Table 2-** Representation of city that was left behind and the relocated rural

URBAN	RURAL
LOW QUALITY OF LIFE (19 times) crowded, traffic, chaos, unsafe environment, noise, insufficient space, buildings, air pollution etc.	HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE (22 times) quiet, peace, safety, having time for yourself, luxury of managing time, clean air, safe environment, few people, few vehicles
BUSY PACE OF LIFE (14 times) stressful work pace, rush, lack of time, fast living	NATURE AND NATURAL LIFE (17 times) tree, garden, crop, organic food
CONSUMPTION-BASED LIFE (11 times) consumption, artificiality	MINIMAL AND SLOW LIFESTYLE (15 times) stability, slow flow of time
NEGATIVE EMOTIONS (9 times) stress, monotony, being stuck, unhappiness, emptiness etc.	STRONG SOCIAL RELATIONS (7 times) friendship, neighbours
WEAK SOCIAL RELATIONS (5 times) miscommunication, declining neighbourly relations, forced relations	

### 3.2. Motivations for migrating to the countryside in the narratives of migrants

An important part of this research was to understand the migration motivations. For the majority of migrants, **disliked characteristics of the city** (such as insecurity, crowdedness, traffic etc.,) were the main reason to run away from the city. Jones and others (2003) indicated that in the American example, ageing baby boomers were seeking refuge in rural areas from urban problems. Similarly, Ermiş (2022) pointed out that the ageing population is searching for an alternative life in Datça (Muğla) because of the cosmopolitan atmosphere in the big cities of Turkey. In this research context, it seems that not only older migrants but also young escape from urban life as seen in the narratives of a young couple from Istanbul:

“We were weary of life in Istanbul. The crowd of people, traffic, the lack of social relations, and the rashness became so tiring that even when people came to ask for the time, we took a step back, we became so alienated from each other – am I going to be seized? You start to see people differently; it is very sad. All these became tiring for me (Video 3, couple, from Köyceğiz).

As was noted by Osbaldiston, Picken and Denny (2020), precursors to migration include emotions and not simply cognitive or rational decision-making processes. Similarly, unfavourable conditions that reduce the quality of life in the cities cause the feeling of tiredness, monotony, stuckness, stress and unhappiness for some of the migrants. Hence **negative emotions** triggered migration:

“Our life had become so monotonous that we thought it was time to change this, and we took the first step to make a radical decision and migrated to the village (Video 15, couple, from Köyceğiz).”

“There was a situation of being trapped. We got bored of the chaos of Istanbul (Video 7, couple, from Fethiye).”

Lifestyle migration offers people a way to take control of their lives and live in a way that is truer to themselves (Korpela, 2019). For many, the first step to rural life is quitting business life. This action can also be read as a contradiction to the capitalist system intertwined with intense work pressure. A **busy working schedule** that, actually is a norm of living in a big city was another reason to escape. For instance, many migrants emphasized that they were overwhelmed by corporate business life:

“My husband was a lawyer for a company. I was a financial manager. We worked hard and made decent careers, but there came a time when we realized that this system (corporate life) made us unhappy. I was always telling myself that another life should be possible because I couldn’t make it no more. I shared these ideas with my husband. He was under stress at work. We talked for days; when we were still young, we said that we should leave Istanbul when we had the opportunity to start over. (Video 13, female, from Marmaris).”

“We resigned. We would no longer belong to the capitalist system. I could not tolerate the system, the work anymore. I thought that it was not me. That was not how I wanted to be. I wanted a less stressed life. We said that we would do our work if needed. So, we would not serve the system. We decided this way. (Video 15, couple, from Köyceğiz).”

As mentioned by Benson and O’Reilly (2009), the place chosen by lifestyle migrants tells us a lot about the lives they aspire to lead, and what it represents is an important driver of lifestyle migration (Benson and O’Reilly 2016). For many, **the desire to live in nature** was a crucial reason to relocate to the countryside.

“A: Why did you migrate? B: We always had expectations about being in touch with nature, living a quiet life, realizing that we are living, and being able to do what we want. While we lived in Ankara, we tried to escape to nature whenever we could (Video 6, couple, from Ortaca).”

“One of the reasons for moving here is that I love being in nature (Video 11, male, from Fethiye).”

The desire to live in nature sometimes appears in the form of living in a detached house with a garden. Many migrants stated they have a garden surrounding their home, and they grow vegetables, fruits, and flowers that dreaming of in their previous city life. But for some migrants, it was beyond a hobby, and the **desire for agricultural production** was the essential source of motivation.

The biggest reason that pushed us here is we wanted to produce something. We were trying to grow peppers in a flowerpot on our balcony. We saw it and said why not, so we wanted to migrate to a place with a garden, quiet, peaceful, away from the crowd (Video 2, couple, from Köyceğiz).

Some migrants also stated that they search for **tranquillity**:

“Together with our two children, we wanted to move into a quieter life so that our children could spend a more tranquil life too (Video 7, couple, from Fethiye).”

Like Benson’s (2011a) British lifestyle migrants in Lot and King *et al.*’s (2020) British, Dutch and German lifestyle migrants in Marche, Turkish lifestyle migrants aspired to live a more “natural” way of life, also marked by the consumption of local produce sourced from their land and local markets. So, for many migrants, a more **natural/organic diet** and **food security** were important reasons for relocation:

“Food security was another reason. Everything we bought from the markets and brought to our home was [in fact] chemical products (Video 4, male, from Ortaca).”

“We already had a desire to migrate to the countryside both in terms of reaching organic food and being able to crop. We already desired to live in an environment where we could commune with nature. When we learned that we were going to have a baby, we said if she will be born in Istanbul, it would be more difficult for us to get out of there (Video 16, couple, from Köyceğiz).”

Related literature remarks on the effect of lifecycle events on migration decisions and proves the importance of ageing, retirement, marriage or divorce, and giving birth (e.g., Benson, 2011a; Mirza-Baş, 2019; Ermiş, 2022). As seen in the narrative of Video 16, especially, **giving birth/having a baby** is a breaking point for many of them. For families with

children, rural area was considered to offer a safer life for their children (Halfacree, 1994; Benson, 2011a). For instance:

“Before we decided to move here, we had two children of school age. I’m a bit of a picky mom. For example, I want to know who the children have friends with, who they will meet after school, and who is around them. That’s why we wanted them to be in a place where the children would be more under our control, in a quieter place where we could get to know people better (Video 25, couple, from Dalyan).”

Jobs (2000) mentioned that the dream of moving to a small town in a beautiful rural area is a common reason to relocate to rural for many Americans. Similarly, the narratives showed that the dream of rural life was also a motivator. Mainly, the imagination of rural life corresponds to the desire to live specifically in an Aegean village. In most narratives, migrants stated that when they thought of moving to the countryside, they started to look for a place in the Aegean region of Turkey. It seems that the Aegean region attracted them with social-cultural values besides its material characteristics like the climate and nature, just as previously also found by Ermiş (2022) in the case of the elderly moving to Datça. And it is understood the dream of living in an Aegean village mostly depends on repeated holidays in this region. For example, Video 9 express his settling reason for the current location by referring to Aegean:

“We dreamed of migrating to a village for years but always postponed it. We decided on this overnight and came to Muğla (Köyceğiz) after picking up our stuff (Video 24, couple, from Köyceğiz).”

“A: Why Dalaman? B: Dalaman was not a choice directly. We thought about a pleasant Aegean town when we took the road (Video 9, male, from Ortaca).”

“I see Aegean people from a different perspective. I am pretty sure that most of the Anatolian peasants are also good people, but the people of the Aegean villages are considerably more helpful, warm, and hospitable (Video 17, female, from Dalaman).”

“We lean towards the Aegean villages because we have always visited here. We have had holidays here since 2016. So, we have known this region, its climate, and its people since 2016, and we wanted to move here (Video 7, couple, from Fethiye).”

As it was mentioned by earlier researchers (Torkington, 2012; Åkerlund, 2013) lifestyle migrants’ imaginaries about a destination are informed by their repeated tourism experiences. Similarly, in my research, most of the narratives showed that decision to move was based on first-hand experience of the destination. Before the movement, most migrants had

repeated holidays in Muğla that is to say, the place was already an integrated part of their migration trajectories (Torkington, 2012). Some of them made short car trips along the Aegean coastal settlements before they considered moving to a village. On the other hand, few migrants did not have first-hand experience of the new migration destination. As we know, the representation of a place, refracted through a range of media, matters more to migrants than the actual characteristics that can be described objectively (Halliday & Coombes, 1995). So, we can say that YouTube videos or movies that were shot in Aegean villages strengthened the image of a life in an Aegean village. It can be seen in Videos 2 and 17, **YouTube videos** created by earlier migrants to these destinations, impressed and encouraged some of the newcomers:

“We were always watching migration stories from city to village on YouTube. We started to watch Mustafa there. He was telling so well, and he gave us courage. We said that “let’s do this” (Video 2, couple, from Köyceğiz).

“When we were living in Istanbul and dreamed of migrating to a village, I followed many accounts and watched videos on Instagram and YouTube, and I enjoyed watching the experiences of many people (Video 17, female, from Dalaman).”

“The movie *Mandıra Filozofu (The Dairy Shop Philosopher)*<sup>2</sup> was one of the reasons that influenced my migration decision. After watching that movie, I had friends like me who set their sights on this migration (Video 4, male, from Ortaca).”

As previously cited, urban-rural flows have come out during the last few years in Turkey. However, especially after Covid-19, these flows have drawn more attention in academia and media. Similarly, the analyse of narratives indicated that the **Covid-19 pandemic** was a motivator for some migrants. Mainly, the idea of an ending life-an existential idea that occurred under the conditions of the pandemic (Deniz & Şahin, 2022) awoke the instinct to lead a better life. Besides, home office and remote-working possibility facilitate urban-rural flows and ensure this movement's continuity. For example, this was expressed by narratives in Video 19 (couple, from Ortaca):

“Beginning in February 2020, people we loved lost their lives. My brother passed away in the early stages of Covid-19. Later, our mother passed away.

Two months ago, my uncle died too. After all, especially when we heard the news of my brother who first died due to Covid-19, we started to ask ourselves what are we doing here, in Ankara? The probability of a different life came to my mind and we moved here. Especially, with the pandemic, everyone has started migrating to places like this thanks to the possibility of working remotely.”

Although Covid-19 is not just an urban phenomenon, the high density of social contacts, crowdedness, and cramped urban centres lead to the spread of it quicker. And so, these unlikeable characteristics of city life strengthen its image as an unsafe place during the pandemic. On the contrary, the countryside enables people to live in a detached house with a garden, low population density, open scape, and fresh air. Such features support the positive image of countryside as a safer place and increasingly attracts urbanites during the Covid 19 days. For example, for some migrants, the countryside is seen as a place to escape from the pandemic, especially during curfews and quarantine periods:

“You feel safe in here, also in terms of the corona. For example, thanks to houses being very distant from each other here, we are so lucky in terms of isolation” (Video 17, female, from Dalaman).

“It was an advantage to be here, especially during the pandemic period. Thanks God, we had the chance to have our meals in the garden. We got all our foodstuffs from our garden. We were able to breathe outside. Since the physical distance is long enough here, we did not have any problems, such as whether I had the risk of too close contact with someone else. These were huge advantages [*of life in the village*] (Video 25, couple, from Dalyan).”

As asserted by Lee (1966), every migration movement is characterized by a place of origin and destination, and factors related to these places, individuals, and intervening obstacles could affect the migration decision. Both push factors such as the disliked characteristics of big cities, negative emotions, and too busy working schedules, and pull factors like the desire to live in a natural environment, desire for own agricultural production, the need of tranquillity, organic diet, and food security, etc., influenced migration decision of lifestyle migrants. Previously-watched exemplary online videos and the Covid-19 pandemic also encouraged migration decision (Table 3).

Table 3- Motivations of moving from urban to the countryside

<sup>2</sup> *Mandıra Filozofu* (2013) is a Turkish comedy film directed by Müfit Can Saçintı. The main character, Mustafaali, is a person who left the modern life behind and started to live in the village of Çökertme; he spends his days by reading. Mustafaali, a person

who is against working, satisfies all his vital needs from the blessing of nature (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3655374/>, Last accessed: September, 7<sup>th</sup> 2022).



Number of videos	Motivations										
	disliked characteristics of big cities	negative emotions	busy working schedule	desire to live in nature	desire for own agricultural production	need for tranquility	organic diet and food security	giving birth/having a baby	dream of rural life	online videos	Covid-19 pandemic
1		X	X	X	X		X	X			
2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
3	X	X	X	X			X		X		
4	X					X	X	X			
5		X		X	X						
6		X		X		X		X			
7	X	X	X			X				X	X
8		X				X					
9	X		X	X				X			
10	X			X	X						
11	X	X		X							
12	X										
13	X	X	X					X			
14	X			X	X		X		X		
15	X	X	X							X	
16			X	X	X		X	X	X		
17					X			X	X	X	X
18	X							X		X	
19	X		X			X					X
20	X					X					X
21	X										
22	X	X	X	X							
23	X	X	X								
24				X	X				X		
25			X			X	X	X			
26	X	X	X		X	X	X				X
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>

### 3.3. Representations of post-migration life in the narratives of migrants

As expressed by Halfacree and Rivera (2012:92) while pro-rural migration is usually initially a contemplated 'representational' action, the significance to the migrant of the resulting relocation does not end here, requiring attention to be paid to everyday entanglements with the (rural) place. Thus, the ways how migrants' post-migration life was a crucial inquiry in this article. Most migrants described their post-migration life positively. Living in countryside provides them a more peaceful and relaxed living environment that is stress-free and safe:

“We are very peaceful, happy, our door is not locked, we are safe, and we are not trying to be protected. I did not regret moving here even for a second, I wake up seeing roses, birds enter my room, I wake up

happily. I say how happy I am. I wake up content each day. I used to go to work in anger; Oh, again? Working? How will it end today? With being stuck? [in the big city]. I get up at my own time, the time I desire to wake up in the morning, I don't wake up with an alarm clock, I adjust my work according to my own pace, this is a great luxury [in the countryside] (Video 5, female, Fethiye).”

Almost in all narratives, migrants stated they have never regretted migrating and they were contented. Their happiness narratives are generally associated with the positive representation of the countryside, compared to negative ones of the urban. Especially, the image of the countryside is that of a glorious place where children can grow up safely (Matthews *et al.*, 2000) match up with reality, as is seen narrative of Video 18:

I can't explain how happy I am to be here; I am unbelievably content and peaceful. When I take my daughter to the garden, I never think if a vehicle would suddenly appear and harm my child or if someone would do harm to my child. While I am working, my child sits in the garden with the cat, chases the lamb, plays with the chicks, or goes and selects something from the greenhouse and eats what she has picked. I don't worry about anything. I sometimes watch her happiness, and I become happy too. So, I am delighted, and she is pleased too (Video 18, male, from Ortaca)."

On the other hand, the transition into rural life for a few migrants has not been an easy process. As cited by Halfacree and Rivera (2012), even a significant mismatch between representation and reality and thus the failure of the pro-rural migration and its outcomes may be very hard psychologically to admit, even to the actors themselves. In the example of Video 12 (couple, from Ortaca), migrants explain this situation using a metaphor that village life resembles a full-length film while images of before migration reminds of a trailer:

"Village life is very well in a trailer, but when you get into the movie itself, circumstance change. Nobody should come with beliefs that had by the trailer. You should come, see, and rent a house for a month, if necessary, you should live and decide after it. We had difficulty when we came here, and our wives said let's turn back. We went out to the balcony with my brother, we looked to each other and said that we did it, we said that we will also achieve this, we will overcome it."

Beyond the common dream of seeking a better way of life in a pleasant place, lifestyle migrants' narratives encapsulate self-realization ideals and personal projects (Gaspar, 2015). As seen in the example of Videos 12 and 26, for some migrants, settling and living in rural is a challenge that feeds their self-realization:

"I realized my power here, you know, I didn't know I was that powerful (Video 26, female, from Seydikemer)."

Besides, many migrants reported that they had achieved self-centred elements of the good life (those were imagined when in the city) in the rural, and they realized themselves. Such as being productive, creative and active, living naturally and sustainably, organic nutrition, experiencing and learning new things, and having time for self, family and relaxation:

"At the moment, as my wife said we are happy. We have a quiet, minimal life. We minimized our lives and started to spend more time with each other and our children. We began to have breakfast together. Here, we realize what we already missed in the city. We learn more about this place as we experience the

life here. Here we went beyond what we dreamed in there (the city) (Video 1, couple, from Ortaca)."

Especially, production-centred life was one of the priorities for almost all migrants. This mentality reflects both in their economic activities and daily life practices. For example:

"A: How do you earn your living? B: I produce worm manure, and I do ecological agriculture with them. I have organic vegetables and olive trees. With worm manure, I process the vegetables that I produce. I make vinegar, pickle, pomegranate syrup, and sell them (Video 10, female, from Ortaca)."

"I have neither any regular livelihood nor a regular salary job. I sell out my lemons. I sell the lemons that I produce over the internet with an "organic" product label. Rather than having an income, I have minimized the expenses. I already generate the food partly by myself. I collect waste oil and turn it into diesel; I produce electricity through solar panels, etc, (Video 9, male, from Ortaca)."

"A: What are your daily routines? B: Feeding our animals. We feed them then we have a coffee routine. We don't have a greenhouse but a small garden, which we keep with it. We are constantly producing, and we make vegetable beds. We dedicate ourselves to work (Video 3, couple, from Köyceğiz)."

As seen in the narratives of migrants, many have no regular jobs as they did in the city. Most of them perform ecologic farming, and some produce wooden toys and organic products. They also generate YouTube videos about their new life and share experiences in the countryside. These online platforms also give them a way to meet, socialize and act with solidarity:

"A: How do you socialize? B: We established a club of migrants here, and it developed automatically. We did not intend to do such a thing. Some like-minded friends watched our videos and migrated here. There are almost fourteen, or fifteen of us, and we have reached a crowd that can make a football match, and it is just for socializing. We set up a WhatsApp group, a voluntary group where those who want to migrate ask the questions in their minds, "Can I find friends there, can we find people who can help us when we are in trouble, will we be accepted or excluded when we go there?". We have such a group, and when one of us has trouble, everyone comes to help, and it is something done voluntarily (Video 1, couple, from Ortaca)."

Lifestyle must not be seen as overly fixed but as inherently mobile, mutating and evolving as the event of lifestyle migration plays itself out (Halfacree, 2014:111). Due to the dynamic nature of better life search, the concept of migration turns into a "process" rather than a one-time "action" which is completed with the arrival at the destination. Although almost all

migrants are happy about their new rural life, there is already a dream to settle in a different place. Especially for young couples, quieter and isolated rural areas stand out as a new option:

“We can't get out of the system right now, but in the future, we are thinking of a place in the heights where we can live in a more isolated and barter manner. A place in which we can live with gifts of nature (Video 3, couple, from Köyceğiz).”

As previous studies have pointed out, urban-rural migration causes social-spatial and economic changes in the new places of residence (Jones *et al.*, 2003; Stockdale, 2010; Solana-Solana, 2010; Leebrick, 2015). Narratives showed that some migrants are aware of how this migration has transformed the villages they have settled in. For instance, as the number of new and potential migrants rises, they are afraid that the rural in which they live naturally will disrupt. Even though they are newcomers, they differentiate themselves by claiming that they have adapted to the rural life here, but the newcomers will not be able to “adapt” and will cause changes in the rural. Thus, we can say that a majority of them came to rural areas because of its natural environment, and protecting these values remains a high priority for them just as was found in research conducted by Jones *et al.*, (2003):

“I think if we want to migrate to village life, truly move for it, become aware of ourselves. We became villagers here. But people come here like that; I came here and brought the city with me, as well. I call out to newcomers, do not bring the city life with you because here there is a different dynamic. You move here to live this dynamic, so take it easy, absorb and live”. (Video 3, couple, Köyceğiz).”

“I don't want too many people to move here. I'm undesirous of the people who will turn these natural lands into concrete constructions or just retired and coming for vacation life. If they are going to touch the soil and an animal, they can come” (Video 18, Man, Ortaca).

Post-migration life in the narratives of migrants indicated that they are generally satisfied with their new life in the countryside. In other words, migrants' imaginary rural life generally matches up with reality.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The article focused on migration from big cities to the countryside in Turkey, in the case of Muğla province with a lifestyle migration lens. The study showed that a group of people who were mainly earlier in their life cycle and worked in the private sector in the big cities quitted their jobs to start a new life in the countryside. Most of them escape from the disliked characteristics of big cities, negative emotions caused

by urban life and intense work pressure, parallel to present studies (Budan, 2015; Mirza-Baş, 2019; Südaş, 2019; Korpela 2019).

While the desire to escape from the general urban life practices pushes the migrants to search, the belief that there is a better lifestyle (Benson and O'Reilly, 2009) in the countryside maintains the movement. For some, the imagination of an alternative lifestyle corresponds to living mainly in a village of the Aegean region. As it is known, the Aegean embodies stereotypes woven into the perfect climate (warm, sunny), its ancient history and long-standing traditional ways of life, and hospitable, friendly people inviting visitors to an easy way of life (Terkenli, 2001). In a similar vein, research finding indicated that the Aegean region has a social and cultural significance for the Turkish lifestyle migrants beyond its material features, and the regional scale became prominent rather than a village. No other rural region of Turkey has been as dramatically favourite for urbanites over the last few decades as the Aegean coastal zone. The Aegean landscape's distinctiveness stems from its insularity, which has produced a unique maritime history and land-sea connections that have played a significant role in shaping local histories and geographies as well as human psychology and behaviour, both at a personal and at a collective level (Terkenli, 2001:203).

Migrants' imaginaries of the rural (especially the dream of living in the Aegean village) and migration decisions mainly depended on repeated tourism visits and short car trips along the Aegean coastal settlements before moving. YouTube videos created by earlier migrants to the destination also influenced the decision-making process of the migrants. Such videos led up to the discursive construction of Aegean villages, just like Torkington (2012) mentioned in the case of British residents in the Golden Triangle area of the Algarve. As it is known, discursive practices such as place branding reinforce collective socio-cognitive representations of a place among particular (specifically targeted) groups of people (Torkington, 2012:80) and make this place more popular.

In Jobs's (2000) words, while the dream of moving to a small town in a beautiful rural area is common among many, that dream often turns into a nightmare for those who decide to follow it. Although, in most cases, imaginary and reality do not overlap (e.g., Budan, 2015; Krivokapic-Skoko & Collins, 2016), for the Turkish lifestyle migrants, post-migration life is generally pleasing; their imaginary rural life matches up with reality. The 'lifestyle' is context-specific, fractured across social groups and nationalities that may well have different conceptions

of the 'lifestyle' that feed into a desire to migrate; in other words, the specifics of lifestyle can be quite different (Benson & Osbaldiston, 2016). For Turkish lifestyle migrants, a new/alternative life overlaps the desire to live in nature and production-centered life. In particular, a detached house with a garden, the possibility of agricultural production, and the availability of organic/natural food are vital parts of their life. When preference reasons for the countryside taken into account, it can be concluded that they are searching for an ecologic-oriented lifestyle in rural areas of Muğla province and this seeking somewhat evokes the back-to-the-land movement as a counter-cultural practice that stood as social critique, with elements of normal-daily life rejected in favour of alternative living arrangements (Halfacree, 2006).

Lastly, different from existing literature, the research findings showed that Covid-19 also emerged as a recent motivator for rural lifestyle migration. Contrary to the city, favourable features of the countryside, especially the possibility of living in a detached house with a garden, strengthened the positive image of the rural areas. Rural areas are seen

as safer and more comfortable locations because in the case of a curfew, outdoor activities and a mask-free daily life would be possible due to the private gardens. The covid-19 process affected the temporal dimensions of this movement too; those who temporally live in the villages become permanent residents with pandemics. Hence, Migration from big cities to rural areas seems to become a popular trend with the pandemic. Elimination of the necessity of working in an office and the possibility of remote work promotes this trend and ensures its continuity. It exposes us to a question for the next research: Is lifestyle migration, a privileged form of migration, now turning into a more widespread movement? If the answer is yes, how the future of rural areas will be affected by this?

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