

# Global Labour in Rural Societies (GLARUS) (Short version)

## 1. Relevance relative to the call for proposals

The project addresses the important but poorly explored question of how contemporary global flows of low-skilled and manual labour transform the social fabric of non-urban regions in Western society. It will theorize how immigration into rural sociocultural contexts differs from immigration into urban regions and generate an improved theoretical understanding of the spatial complexities of contemporary international migration and its implications for local rural communities. The study is innovative and highly ambitious: *theoretically* as it seeks to combine and move beyond the state-of-the-art concepts of three strands of literatures (immigration theory, labour market theories, and the rural studies tradition); *methodologically* as it employs a mixed-methods comparative and multisite approach; and in its *implementation* as it involves a creative blend of researchers, most in their early- or mid-careers, who are experts in their respective research fields. The project establishes a strong international research network on global rural labour by applying a comparative perspective and an extensive visiting scholar programme.

## 2. Aspects relating to the research project

**Background and status of knowledge:** Accelerating mobilities are described as a key characteristic of contemporary late modern societies (Urry 2007, Sheller and Urry 2006). The proposed project theorizes a phenomenon that is among the most distinct expressions of these radicalized mobilities: the global flows of labour for low-skilled manual labour tasks, which are presently making their mark on rural societies<sup>1</sup> on an unprecedented scale. The impacts of these flows span the rural/urban dimension; however, they are possibly more challenging for the rural societies that are conceived of as more traditional, less dynamic, and “sedentary” (Bell and Osti 2010). Yet scientific knowledge on how the global flows of labour challenge rural societies is surprisingly scarce as most studies on immigrant labour have taken place in the urban context.

The project’s main research objective is to develop novel theoretical approaches in the intersection between immigration, labour market, and rural studies perspectives, which will enable a better understanding of the rural labour immigration phenomenon:

- 1: What is the spatial structure of the rural immigration phenomenon, and what macro-level factors may explain immigrants’ distribution across rural regions?
- 2: In what ways does the rural societal context shape the immigration phenomenon?
- 3: How are rural labour immigration processes embedded in and shaped by properties of the rural economy?
- 4: How does large-scale labour immigration instigate social change in rural communities?
- 5: What are key implications of the labour migration phenomenon, for the labour immigrants and for local/hosting rural populations?

Empirically, the project’s point of departure is the last decade’s enhanced flows of work immigrants across the European continent. Following the EU enlargements in 2004 and 2007, a large number of Eastern Europeans travelled to the West for work opportunities. Contrary to historical patterns, in which the northern urban regions represented the dominant destinations, a larger part of today’s labour migrants settles in the Western European countryside (Bock *et al.* 2016, Dufty-Jones 2014, McAreavey 2012, Scott and Brindley 2012), where they find jobs in rural industries, mostly in low-skilled and manual positions.

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<sup>1</sup> Rural societies are here defined as sparsely populated and natural-resources-dependent localities located in the periphery of the political, administrative, and economical centres.

Thus in Norway, which represents the spatial focus of the research proposal, the rural regions' share of the immigrant population has increased tremendously over the last few years. Today many rural communities in Norway, which until recently had little experience with international immigration, host large multicultural populations, in absolute numbers and in the proportion of the population. While rural Norway (like rural regions in other Western countries) traditionally represented the "old fashioned", "original", and "authentic" image of the nation – the rural as a residual, the not-*yet*-modernized society (Newby 1980) – today's rural regions are fully integrated into the late modern globalized society, with heterogeneous populations and globalized economies, but in ways and with implications differing from those of urban regions. The result is a phenomenon that in several ways represents an unprecedented sociocultural challenge, both for the late modern societies at large, which need to find ways to accommodate their rural immigrant populations, and for the social sciences that strive to understand causes and consequences of the impacts on rural communities.

**Approaches, hypotheses, and choice of method:** The project will respond to these shortcomings in the existing literature by developing theories on the global flows of labour that are sensitive to the specifics of the rural context. The theorizing strategy is to cross-fertilize knowledge from three research fields, each offering important insights into the global labour phenomenon, which has been previously scarce and poorly integrated: 1) immigration theory, 2) labour market theories, and 3) the rural studies tradition.

1) **MIGRATION THEORY:** The recent boost in the immigrant population in Norway is distinct from previous developments, requiring the project to utilize different elements of the immigration literature. First, the people are labour immigrants. For Norway, as for other Western European countries, the EU enlargements<sup>2</sup> in 2004 and 2007 allowed citizens from less-developed economies in Eastern Europe to work in the West. Relative to its population, Norway has been among the countries receiving the most immigrants (Dølvik *et al.* 2006). Second, the immigrants are employed in low-skilled manual occupations. This migration is in contrast to the sparse pre-2004 labour migration to Norway, which was largely restricted to high-skilled personnel (Brochman 2006). Today's dominance of low-skilled manual immigrant labour is even more pronounced in the rural regions, where it is largely the primary industries that attract immigrants. Third, historically, culturally, and ethnically, the labour migrants represent less distinct/visible ethnicities (Eastern Europeans) than those of previous immigrant groups. Fourth, the geographical proximity between sending and hosting locations invites practices that include both spaces and may/often result in the formation of transnational spaces. Fifth, and as noted above as the very point of departure of the project, the stronger presences of global labour outside the urban centres represent a novel spatial distribution of the immigrant population in the hosting society. These conceptually intertwined features of the immigrant labour will serve as key analytical entrance points for the project.

Interestingly, the last year's rise in refugees/asylum seekers from outside of the EU/Schengen has also affected many rural regions. These immigrants differ from the Eastern European labour immigrants in all regards discussed above and represent a different phenomenon from the one addressed in this project. However, we expect results to have a strong value of transferability to these and other rural immigrants, in particular in terms of participation in rural labour markets.

2) **LABOUR MARKET THEORY:** Labour immigration is demand-driven, and the logic of global flows of labour follows the workings of the labour markets. The project draws on the tradition of segmented (/dual/secondary) labour market theory, originally conceptualized by Doeringer and Piore (1971), which has proven fruitful in contemporary analyses of how immigrant workforces fill positions in the labour market with the least attractive employment conditions, in terms of both wages and work arrangements. The result is often ethnification of certain jobs (Martin 1993), whereby work conditions become too poor to attract local workers who find more attractive work

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<sup>2</sup> In effect, the enlargements applied to the European Economic Agreement (EEA) in which the EU member states, plus three Western European non-EU member states (Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein), take part. Thus Norway is part of the common European labour market.

alternatives, or live on welfare provision. The workings of these processes have been documented in several research projects conducted in urban contexts; they are also suggested to take place within the Norwegian rural context, but with important modifications. For example, the better visibility of global labour in rural communities may enhance employers' and local communities' sense of social responsibility. These theories have been refined and elaborated, most fruitfully by theories on "flexibilization" (Atkinson 1984) and "precarious work" (Kalleberg 2009) and the "precariate" (Standing 1999, 2011)

Presumably, different rural industries invite different configurations of labour relations. For example, industries differ in their formal/informal wage and work arrangements, particularly in the character of employment (full/seasonal, direct/subcontracting) and in unionization and union strength. While some works have explored conditions for Eastern European labour migrants in agriculture (Rye 2014, Scott 2013, Findlay and McCollum 2013, Kasimis *et al.* 2010, Rye and Andrzejewska 2010), we know less about other industries. The project will explore these industry-specific differences.

3) **THEORIES OF RURAL CHANGE:** While there is a large literature on various forms of rural migration and their implications for rural change (Milbourne 2007), fewer studies have focused on immigrant labour with an explicit focus on rural societies (Bock *et al.* 2016, Dufty-Jones 2014), though with important exceptions (e.g., Pedreno *et al.* 2015, Rye 2016). The presences of larger populations of immigrant labour (distinct in their ethnicity and sociocultural background, poorly integrated in the local communities, and constituting an underclass in the rural social structure) represent major challenges for the future of rural communities. This situation demands analyses of the processes of social inclusion/exclusion, which may vary from those in urban communities. Most important, the rural housing structure has less distinct structures, often implying that the immigrants live in the same neighbourhoods as the locals and not in counterparts to the "urban ghetto". On the other hand, regardless of the social proximity of the rural actors, the presence of a rural underclass challenges the traditional harmonious perspective on rural society, that of the classless "rural idyll", characterized by social cohesion, even though a patriarchal one (Cloke & Thrift 1995). In addition, the immigrant workers, coming from other countries, may represent different lifestyles, extending those attributable to class (Rye 2014). Further, the immigrant population represents a spatial heterogenization of rural communities in terms of their biographies, present-day practices and future plans, hopes, and dreams. They do not have the same "roots" in or share the rural locality's place history; they are "newcomers", even "strangers", for years (Rye 2016, Søholt *et al.* 2014). They often engage in transnational practices, communicating both physically and virtually with geographically distant locations; they are not just "here", in the rural locality, but also "there", in the homeland (Andrzejewska and Rye, 2012), which is often an urban location. They often see themselves as temporary visitors, as "birds of passage" (Piore, 1979), with less interest in the local rural place and its development.

**THREE KEY CONCEPTUALIZATIONS:** These strands of literature will be combined and cross-fertilized. Three key conceptualizations will guide the gathering and analyses of the materials.

a) *Rural transnationalism:* Transnationalism has emerged as a key concept in immigration theory (Portes *et al.* 1999, Vertovec 2007, Faist *et al.* 2013). However, how are transnational spaces created, practised, and experienced differently in rural and urban areas? What are the specifics of the rural version of transnationalism, and with what implications for the actors?

b) *New social inequalities in rural societies:* How are the interactions of class and ethnic inequalities expressed in the case of global labour in rural societies? Are there specific properties of the rural logic of social distinctions and class structures? Do labour immigrants experience their position as precarious workers differently in rural and urban communities?

c) *Multispatial rural practices, identities, and belongings:* The presence of global labour in rural societies reflects multispatiality in two ways: i) rural places are inherently constructed by and interwoven into complex webs of relations with extra-local places, e.g., as demonstrated by the

reliance of local rural economies on global labour markets, they are “assemblages” (DeLanda 2006, Woods 2016), creating a “translocal ruralism” (Hedberg and do Carmo 2012), and ii). In reflection, the actors’ everyday lives are spatially distributed (cf. rural transnationalism) with major impacts for questions of rural identities and belonging, these becoming hetero-/multilocal (Halfacree 2012).

Inherently, these theoretical perspectives invite for gender sensitive analyses, both to understand how transnational practices and identities vary across gender and how gender is transnationally “done” in a rural societal context (cf. West and Zimmerman’s 1987 “doing gender” approach).

**THE COMPARATIVE APPROACH:** The rural labour immigration phenomenon varies across social space at local, regional, national, and global levels. Different sociocultural properties invite different configurations of global labour. Thus, exploring spatial variations is important, and the project has an explicit comparative design:

First, as noted above, the scale and content of labour-motivated migration to Norway’s rural regions differ between communities. Some rural communities see large-scale immigration; other communities receive only a handful of immigrants. Experiences of the immigrants – and of the members of the hosting communities – also vary considerably, as hypothesized in this proposal, due to variations in the local economic bases. These differences will be studied by applying a comparative approach covering labour immigration to three study cases in rural Norway, all hosting large labour-immigrant populations despite different economic bases. (See WP3 for details.)

Second, the Norwegian phenomenon of rural labour migration both aligns and contrasts with its counterparts in other late modern societies. The flows of global labour seem universal, but with different manifestations across space (Bock *et al.* 2016), due to historical trajectories, immigration regimes, economic structures and labour market regulations, and other sociocultural, contextual aspects, e.g., welfare regimes and expressions of rurality. The project will focus on two international study cases chosen due to their value as both contrasting and corresponding cases. a) The UK study case (in Cornwall County) is interesting as it shares some main features with the Norwegian agricultural study case, in particular its roots in the EU 2004-enlargement and the subsequent influx of immigrants. b) The US study case (in San Joaquin Valley) is interesting as it contrasts the European case due to the experience of its illegal, poor, and disempowered labour immigrants.

While the project acknowledges the importance of national-level politics, the inherent global character of the labour immigration phenomenon, in combination with the regional and cross-national comparative design, facilitate for avoiding the pitfalls of methodological nationalism (Andersson 2007). None of the cases *per se* is “representative” of the respective nations, but all offer opportunities in theoretical generalization drawing on their particular contexts (Flyvbjerg 2006). Figure 1 summarizes the comparative design of the study.

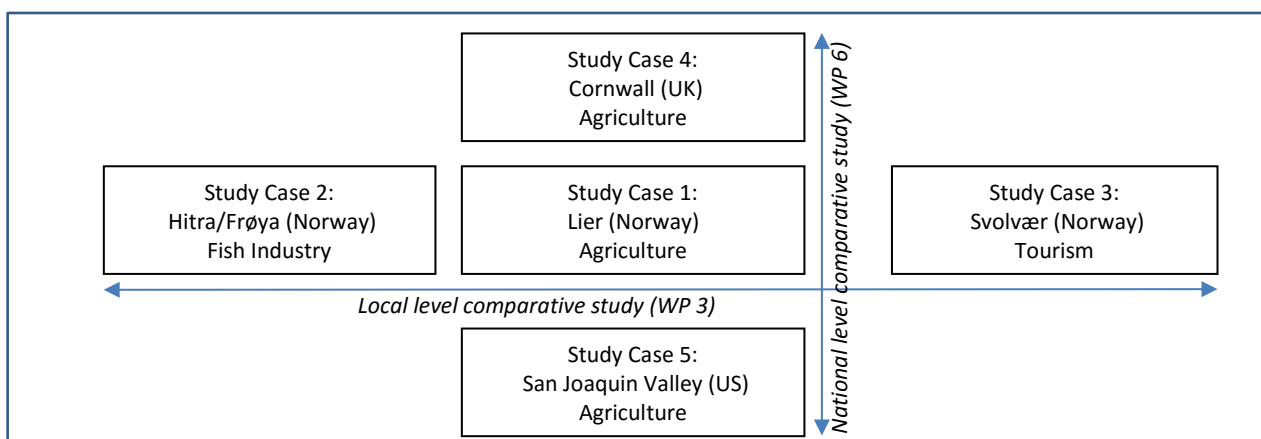


FIGURE 1: THE COMPARATIVE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

AN EXTENSIVE MIXED-METHODS DESIGN: The project builds on a mixed-methods design to obtain different types of data that allow for solid, fine-grained, and nuanced investigations of the phenomenon. Consequently, a wide range of methods is employed: use of national statistics materials, surveys, media content analysis, photo elicitation, qualitative interviews, and ethnographic fieldwork. (See WP descriptions for details.)

MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM: The project team is a multidisciplinary team (sociology, geography and public policy, and planning) in which members will combine their knowledges on immigration, labour market theory, and rural studies and methodological competences.

### 3. The project plan, project management, organization, and cooperation

The project is organized into seven work packages:

WP1 is a desktop study reviewing existing bodies of literature (Norwegian and international) and providing a foundation for further work;

WP2-5 studies rural labour immigration in Norway *quantitatively* (analysis of secondary statistics, macro-level analysis, WP2), *comparatively* (comparison of three study cases, mesolevel analysis, WP3), in-depth from the *actor perspective* (ethnographic study of one study case, micro-level analysis, WP4), and in-depth from the *place perspective*, micro-/meso-level analysis, WP5);

WP 6 is an international comparative study exploring how the global labour phenomenon varies in three national contexts (Norway, the UK, and the US); and

WP 7 draws together and synthesizes previous WPs.

#### *WP1: REVIEWING INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE ON RURAL LABOUR IMMIGRATION*

WP1 establishes an overview of the phenomenon of international labour migration into rural regions in Norway, England/the EU, and the US. Three thematic strands of literatures will be covered: rural studies, labour market theory, and immigration theory, with a focus on studies that may inform the intersections between these strands. WP1 objectives are to: a) map the wider phenomena of labour migration in terms of quantitative indicators on the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels; b) identify key similarities and dissimilarities between the three national contexts and relate these to regional- and national-level social, cultural, economic, and political structures; c) generate and refine research hypotheses to be explored and tested in subsequent work packages.

#### *WP2: THE NORWEGIAN RURAL LABOUR IMMIGRATION PHENOMENON (MACRO)*

WP2 explores the Norwegian case in-depth through the use of NTNU's "Municipalities in Norway" (MIN) database. The MIN contains a large number of statistical indicators on the municipality level (demographics, immigration, local economic structure, indicators of rurality), including data from Statistics Norway and other sources. The data are used to explore and explain regional differences in the labour migration phenomenon: What is the spatial structure of labour-motivated migration in rural Norway? What factors impact rural municipalities' ability to attract labour migrants? What are the relationships between immigration and labour markets?

#### *WP3: THE RURAL ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND ITS IMPACTS ON IMMIGRATION (MESO)*

WP3 explores key characteristics of the rural labour immigration phenomenon based on extensive study cases of three different localities in Norway, each representing different rural economic bases (agriculture, fisheries, tourism). The WP aims to describe labour migration at the general level – the commonalities of rural immigration (similarities between study cases) – and at the specific level –

the variations of rural immigration (differences between study cases). To address these issues, we will gather data that provide a detailed account of the presences of global immigrant labour in the study cases, from the angles of the immigrant workers, the employers, and the local community. Study cases are: a) Agricultural study case, Lier, Southeastern Norway; b) Fish processing study case, Frøya, coastal Mid-Norway; and c) Tourism study case, Vågan, Lofoten, coastal and arctic Norway.

The study cases will be explored by using a wide range of methods to cover the different aspects of the phenomenon. First, in each study case, we will obtain information from the three categories of informants by use of qualitative in-depth interviews, five informants representing the employees, employers, and the local community (cf. above), generating a total of 45 (3\*5\*3) in-depth interviews. Second, we will study the local public discourses on the immigrant labour as it is expressed in the local newspapers (the *Hardingen*, the *Hitra/Frøya*, and the *Lofotposten*). Third, we will gather and make use of available official statistical materials.

#### *WP4: PERSPECTIVES ON CHANGING RURAL COMMUNITIES (MICRO)*

WP4 studies social change from explicit actor and micro-level perspectives: How are the global trends of labour immigration actually shaping the everyday lives of the immigrants, the employers, and other members of the local rural community? How are work arrangements negotiated in terms of wages and working conditions? By which processes are immigrants included and excluded from the local rural communities' different social arenas? In what ways are the immigrant workers combining practices, identities, and belongings from different locations (cf. transnationalism). And – as a general perspective guiding the research – how are these aspects influenced by the rural sociocultural context?

The methodological approach to answer these questions is an ethnographic study in the Lier study case. The objective is to get beyond the political-administrative and various lay public discursive representations of the immigrant workers in the community and, further, to better grasp the subjective interpretations of the phenomenon of global labour and its implications at the actor level. Among other methods, we will employ participant-/researcher-driven photo elicitation (Van Auken *et al.* 2010, Vassenden and Andersson 2010) to tap into immigrants' perspectives. The approach will allow for an understanding of migrant strategies of resistance and/or compliance with the larger structural forces of the global labour phenomenon.

#### *WP5: CONTESTING PLACE IDENTITIES AND SENSE OF BELONGING (MICRO/MESO)*

WP5 studies the global labour phenomenon from the perspective of place theory: How are rural places transformed as a result of the presence of large immigrant populations? Further, what are the various actors' evaluations of the transformations taking place and what are their responses, individually and collectively? As the conceptual framework for the analysis, Halfacree's threefold model of space (2006), inspired by Lefevre's work (1991), is used. This framework allows us to investigate three different dimensions of rural space – lived rural lives (subjective), the rural locality (material), and formal representations (discursive) – and to see how these are mutually supportive or in an incongruent state. The outcome of the negotiations of rural space is dependent on the distribution of power in the rural locality (Frisvoll 2012), which again actualizes the immigrant workers' precarious work and marginalized class position in the rural society (Rye and Andrzejewska 2010). The study will primarily rely on the materials collected in WP3, tailored to accommodate the data requirements for analysis in WP5 as well.

## WP6: SPATIAL VARIATIONS – THE INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE APPROACH

WP6 is a comparative study of study cases in Norway, the UK, and the US. The objectives are to identify both similarities and differences between the localities' immigrant labour practices and to theorize how these relate to national-level policies and regulation of immigration, labour markets and welfare provisions, and more generally, the countries' versions of "rurality".

The Norwegian study case is Lier (described above, WP3). The US case study is located in the San Joaquin Valley, California, and the UK study case is in Cornwall, southwestern England. The specific US and UK study cases will be identified at the first project meeting to ensure that they are suitable for comparisons. The methodological design similar to that in Norwegian cases (see WP3).

## WP7: SYNTHESIZING RESULTS

The final WP brings together all participating researchers and their works in previous WPs. The objective is to synthesize the different parts of the project, establishing theoretical bridges between findings on micro/meso/macro levels and between realist/subjectivist and structuralist/individualist approaches. The synthesis will have four thematic foci:

*Theoretical:* How far are contemporary dominant theories on global labour, transnationalism, and immigration transferable/applicable to the rural social context? *Comparative:* How does the rural labour immigration phenomenon unfold differently in rural communities? To what extent are differences related to the economic base of the communities? To what extent is the rural immigration phenomenon dependent on national policies/regulation regimes of immigration, the labour markets, and welfare provisions? *Empirical:* What characterizes present-day conditions for rural labour migrants? Are conditions for rural unskilled immigrant labour different than in urban regions, and in what ways? *Future research challenges:* What are the key research challenges in the intersection between immigration theory, labour market theory, and the rural studies tradition?

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