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## Research Article

# Not Just Any Village: Lifestyle Migration and the Search for Cultural Compatibility in Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula

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**Abstract:** This article examines the motivations and destination choices of urban residents relocating to rural areas in Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula, a "late-discovered" region that has recently attracted a growing number of lifestyle migrants. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork—including in-depth interviews and participant observation in seven villages—the study analyzes how migration decisions emerge through the interaction of urban disillusionment and rural attraction. Employing Lee's (1966) push-pull framework within the broader literature on lifestyle migration, it demonstrates that these relocations are not isolated acts of individual preference but socially embedded and morally charged projects of self-realization. The peninsula's appeal stems from its perceived authenticity as an "undiscovered" destination, largely untouched by the over-commercialization. This "quest for authenticity," however, operates through culturally specific moral geographies: migrants are not simply searching for rural authenticity but specifically seeking progressive rural spaces that can accommodate their secular, liberal lifestyles—what they describe as "open-minded" and "democratic" environments distinct from "conservative Anatolia." Their rejection of over-commercialized destinations while simultaneously avoiding "conservative" rural areas reveals a narrow corridor of acceptable rurality defined by both authenticity and cultural comfort. By highlighting how lifestyle migration in Turkey operates through an additional cultural-compatibility filter, this study extends existing debates on lifestyle migration and demonstrates that the notion of a "better life" is deeply contingent upon cultural and political contexts. Furthermore, the study carries early warning signs that the migrants' presence may trigger rural gentrification processes similar to those observed in other amenity-rich regions across Turkey.

**Keywords:** counter-urbanization, lifestyle migration, rural authenticity, rural gentrification, cultural compatibility, Gallipoli Peninsula

### Highlights:

- Cultural compatibility filter shapes rural relocation choices beyond amenities.
- Migrants seek "authentic yet progressive" rural spaces in Gallipoli Peninsula.
- Early signs show Gallipoli's "authentic" villages facing rural gentrification risks.

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## 1. Introduction

Ali—a retired doctor who had spent most of his career in Istanbul—reflected on how profoundly his perception of rural life had changed. He recalled passing by small villages years ago, looking out the car window and wondering how people could possibly live in such places. "I used to feel sorry for them," he said, "and I was certain that I could never live anywhere outside the city—especially not beyond Istanbul." Yet after decades of working in an increasingly commercialized and performance-oriented healthcare system, he found himself emotionally drained and searching for a different rhythm of life. He eventually settled in a village in Gallipoli. While tending to the house and garden, he discovered a sense of tranquility he had never expected to find. Still, as Ali himself emphasized, this sense of peace was not something he could have found just anywhere. As he put it bluntly: "You can't just settle in an Anatolian village like this—I mean, I couldn't live there. Nor could I live in an Anatolian town, you know, somewhere without even a restaurant serving alcohol. I just couldn't. I once stayed in Konya for 24 hours—God, my soul was suffocating in those Muslim cities." His words reveal not only a personal transformation but also the distinctive nature of migration to Gallipoli, where an open-minded social fabric and a secular-liberal atmosphere—unlike in many other rural regions of Turkey—enable urban migrants to sustain their values and lifestyles without cultural friction.

This story encapsulates a broader transformation that is quietly reshaping Turkey's social geography. What was once regarded as a space of deprivation and backwardness has come to symbolize freedom, authenticity, and moral coherence for a growing number of middle-class urbanites. In a country where rapid urbanization has already turned nearly 94 percent of the population into city dwellers, the voluntary movement of educated professionals from metropolitan centers to rural villages marks one of the most distinctive demographic and cultural reversals of recent decades. This new wave of urban-to-rural migration—driven as much by disillusionment with the pressures, moral fatigue, and ecological and

economic concerns of city life as by the search for authenticity, tranquility, community, and environmental quality in rural settings—has increasingly drawn the attention of scholars seeking to understand the changing meanings of rurality in contemporary Turkey.

Once predominantly associated with retirement or leisure, urban-to-rural migration has increasingly become a response to economic instability, environmental degradation, and deepening socio-cultural exhaustion in cities, reflecting the emergence of new imaginaries of the "good life" grounded in nature, community, and authenticity. This phenomenon gained sharp visibility with the COVID-19 pandemic, evolving from a marginal lifestyle preference among bohemian artists and early retirees into a broader mobility pattern encompassing young professionals, families with children, and middle-class urbanites seeking escape from urban disillusionment while pursuing spatial autonomy and meaningful social connections. While similar urban-to-rural flows are observed globally (Stockdale, 2016; Buckle & Osbaldiston, 2022), escalating political polarization, authoritarian governance pressures, and the persistent threat of a major earthquake in Istanbul create additional layers of urban disillusionment that distinguish Turkish cases from European or North American counterparts (Kayaalp, 2024; Şahin, 2025).

This is not simply an "escape from the city" phenomenon. Research on urban-to-rural migration has shown that destination selection involves complex negotiations between push and pull factors, where migrants actively seek specific cultural, environmental, and social configurations (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009; Mitchell, 2004; Halfacree, 2008). Despite growing visibility of this trend in Turkey, scholarly research remains geographically concentrated in well-established amenity destinations such as Urla, Alaçatı, Assos, and Datça—coastal towns that have undergone tourism-driven transformation and rural gentrification (Hurley & Ari, 2018; Kocabıyık & Loopmans, 2021; Arslan et al., 2024). These studies have illuminated important dynamics of rural commodification and socio-spatial restructuring, yet have inadvertently overlooked emerging destinations outside the mainstream tourism circuit.

The Gallipoli Peninsula, as a "late-discovered" rural frontier, represents one such case—increasingly attracting urban migrants despite its relative obscurity in both tourism markets and academic discourse. Gallipoli's appeal stems from a distinctive combination: protected agricultural landscapes resulting from its designation as a first-degree historical site, strategic geography balancing rural tranquility with urban accessibility, and—most importantly—a cultural atmosphere characterized by informants as "open-minded" and "tolerant" compared to more conservative rural areas of Anatolia. Drawing on qualitative fieldwork—including in-depth interviews and participant observation in seven villages—this research examines why urban residents migrate to rural Gallipoli and how they select this destination over alternatives. Employing Lee's (1966) push-pull framework within lifestyle migration debates, we demonstrate how migration decisions emerge through the interaction of urban disillusionment and rural attraction, emphasizing how social networks, cultural atmosphere, and perceived authenticity collectively shape destination selection.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews conceptual frameworks from counter-urbanization to lifestyle migration, while Section 3 surveys existing research on urban-to-rural migration in Turkey. Section 4 introduces the Gallipoli Peninsula as the research site, followed by Section 5, which outlines the qualitative methodology. Sections 6 and 7 present findings on urban push and rural pull factors, respectively. Finally, Section 8 concludes by synthesizing key findings and discussing how lifestyle migration in Turkey is mediated by culturally specific notions of compatibility, belonging, and moral coherence, while also reflecting on the temporal dynamics and transformative implications of Gallipoli's emergence as a "late-discovered" rural destination.

## 2. From Counter-Urbanization to Lifestyle Migration: Conceptual Frameworks and Determinants of Urban-to-Rural Relocation

Urban-to-rural migration was initially conceptualized as counter-urbanization—a term coined by Berry (1976) to describe the reversal of traditional urbanization trends, characterized by the relocation of residents from larger metropolitan areas to smaller communities and rural lands. Early research interpreted this population deconcentration primarily as a demographic response to the challenges of rapid urban growth, including deteriorating living conditions, unplanned development, and overcrowding in cities (Berry, 1976; Fielding, 1982; Champion, 1989). Over time, the concept has evolved from its demographic origins, with subsequent research revealing a more diverse array of motivations driving urban-to-rural relocations, encompassing cultural aspirations, lifestyle preferences, and symbolic attachments to rural environments (Boyle & Halfacree, 1998; Mitchell, 2004). Empirical works from Europe, Australia, and beyond indicate that counter-urbanization today is not merely about escaping congestion or seeking cheaper housing, but about negotiating the cultural meanings of authenticity, community, and well-being (Löffler & Steinicke, 2006; Eimermann, 2015; Rivera-Escribano, 2007; Buckle, 2022). Jończy et al. (2021) demonstrate that environmental quality and landscape aesthetics have become major determinants of urban-to-rural migration, while recent studies show that pandemic-induced counter-urbanization has been driven by health concerns, risk perceptions, and lifestyle aspirations for safer, slower, and more meaningful living (Zhang et al., 2024; Nelson & Frost, 2023; Öncü et al., 2023; Klien, 2025).

These accounts collectively mark a conceptual shift from counter-urbanization as a demographic trend toward a more culturally infused and reflexive phenomenon. Increasingly, counter-urban migration is seen to blend into lifestyle-driven relocations that reflect broader quests for meaning and well-being beyond the city (Buckle & Osbaldiston, 2022). It is within this evolving framework that the notion of "lifestyle migration" has gained particular relevance. Originally introduced by Benson and O'Reilly (2009), lifestyle migration refers to the voluntary relocation of individuals with relatively high socioeconomic status seeking a "better way of life" through new spatial and social arrangements. It is defined as a process—rather than a single event—in which consumption, mobility, and identity formation are intertwined (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009, 2016; Hoey, 2005; Benson, 2011, 2013; Hayes, 2015). Lifestyle migration studies have revealed how migrants frame their rural choices as moral projects of self-realization and distinction, often performed through everyday practices of authenticity, simplicity, and creative labor (Benson, 2013; Hoey, 2005; Osbaldiston, 2016). Expanding on this moral and affective dimension, Buckle (2022) establishes a direct link between counter-urban migration and the pursuit of 'home', arguing that moves away from cities are often motivated by emotional and moral aspirations for stability, belonging, and the realization of normative ideals of home. Buckle and Osbaldiston (2022) further argue that these counter-urban trajectories are best understood as "reflexive projects of the self," where migration becomes a means to reconfigure one's relationship with modernity, nature, and community.

Lifestyle migration scholarship has coalesced around three core themes that structure migrants' decision-making and place-making practices: the symbolic power of rural idyll imaginaries, the pursuit of authenticity in rural settings, and the search for community and simpler ways of living (Benson & O'Reilly, 2009, 2016; Osbaldiston, 2016; Halfacree, 2007). The symbolic meanings attributed to rural spaces also play a critical role in shaping migration decisions of lifestyle migrants. One such influential concept is the rural idyll—an idealized vision of the countryside as a space of beauty, simplicity, stability, and social harmony (Bunce, 1994; Hoggart & Buller, 1995). This pastoral ideal is often shaped by representations in literature, media, and popular culture, which portray rural life as pure, harmonious, and free from the alienation of urban existence (Bell, 2007; Cloke, 2006). Migrants may draw upon these symbolic narratives to rationalize their decisions or to construct alternative imaginaries of

what a 'better life' might look like in rural settings (Bunce, 1994). Central to these imagined futures is the search for authenticity. Rural areas that have not yet been "spoiled" or "commercialized" by tourism hold special appeal for lifestyle migrants (Osbaldiston, 2016; Hoey, 2005). This leads to popular destinations gradually losing their attractiveness and drives the search for new "undiscovered" areas. A large portion of migrants prefer regions that have not yet been touched by mass tourism in order to realize their dream of tranquility, sense of community, and living in harmony with nature (Cloke, 2006; Little & Austin, 1996). Intertwined with these searches for idyll and authenticity is the desire for community and simpler ways of living. Lifestyle migrants often articulate their relocations as moral projects, seeking escape from what they perceive as the superficiality and instrumental relationships of urban life (Hoey, 2005; Osbaldiston, 2016). The countryside represents an imagined space where meaningful social connections and slower rhythms become possible, with migration serving as a means of aligning one's lifestyle with deeper values of well-being and self-realization (Halfacree, 2007; Benson, 2011).

More recently, scholarship has foregrounded cultural atmosphere and value-compatibility in lifestyle migration. In China, Friedman (2023) shows that domestic lifestyle migrants gravitate toward destinations where shared lifestyle orientations enable community formation. Extending the lens beyond affluent groups, Jolivet (2025) demonstrates that moral value alignment and perceived welfare also shape relocation decisions among disadvantaged movers. In Turkey, Şahin (2025) traces how secular middle-class urbanites seek rural settings where everyday freedoms and civic norms can be sustained, while Türkkan (2025a) finds that new settlers in the Aegean frame migration as a moral-cultural project aimed at living among tolerant, like-minded communities. Similar dynamics are observed elsewhere: Ní Laoire (2007) highlights how counter-urban migrants "re-story" rural places through selective engagements with local culture, while Stockdale and Haartsen (2018) show that lifestyle movers often seek communities that support their social identities and value orientations. In Southern Europe, such interactions between newcomers and locals reshape local moral geographies and everyday practices, fostering new hybrid ruralities (Verinis, 2011). Taken together, these studies indicate that migrants appraise not only amenities and landscapes but also socio-cultural fit—a point further elaborated by our findings.

The factors that influence urban individuals' decisions to settle in rural areas and the processes behind their location choices have been widely explained through the balance of perceived negative attributes of the city and the attractive qualities of the countryside (Bijker et al., 2012; Eimermann, 2015; Jończy et al., 2021; Erkan-Öcek & İslam, 2025). This line of reasoning builds upon Lee's (1966) push-pull theory, one of the most enduring frameworks in migration research. According to this model, migration decisions emerge as the outcome of interactions between push factors in the place of origin and pull factors in the destination. In the context of urban-to-rural migration, urban push factors such as the stress of city life, environmental pollution, high living costs, and social isolation are generally universal, whereas rural pull factors differ according to destinations. Migration decisions are further shaped by intervening obstacles (distance, costs, regulations, and family responsibilities) and personal factors (age, gender, education, socioeconomic status, and life course) (Lee, 1966).

Although the push-pull framework has faced sustained criticism for overemphasizing individual rationality and downplaying structural constraints (de Haas, 2010; Hunter & Simon, 2023), it continues to provide a valuable analytical lens for understanding the perceived motivations behind voluntary population mobility (Jończy et al., 2021; Buckle & Osbaldiston 2022; Eimermann 2015). Its enduring applicability lies in its capacity to integrate both objective conditions and subjective perceptions, making it particularly suited to understanding lifestyle-driven migrations where personal values, aesthetic preferences, and perceptions of well-being play a central role. In this sense, the push-pull model aligns well with the emerging literature on lifestyle migration, particularly when it is employed not as a deterministic mechanism but as a relational lens for exploring how urban dissatisfaction (push) and rural attraction (pull) shape decisions among lifestyle-oriented migrants, where the decision to relocate is framed not merely as a response to material conditions but as a reflexive engagement with the symbolic and emotional meanings attached to place.

### 3. Factors Driving Urban-to-Rural Migration in Turkey

Urban-to-rural migration research in Turkey has so far concentrated mainly on the country's coastal and amenity-rich rural regions, where empirical studies have examined diverse processes such as foreign retiree migration, rural gentrification, and the socio-cultural effects of urban newcomers on local communities (Südaş & Mutluer, 2008, 2010; Bahar et al., 2009; Hurley & Arı, 2011, 2018; Sağır, 2011; Özerim, 2012; Kocabıyık & Loopmans, 2021; Arslan et al., 2024; Arslan-Avar et al., 2024). While this body of work has shed light on the cultural and economic transformations occurring in rural destinations, relatively few studies have addressed the settlement experiences and motivations of migrants themselves (Kılıç & Buzlukçu, 2021; Kaba, 2022; Özlü-Diniz & Arslan, 2022; Şahin, 2025).

In studies on Turkish cases, urban-to-rural migration is generally explained within the classical push-pull framework, emphasizing how deteriorating urban conditions drive relocation decisions. The push dynamics mainly manifest across economic, environmental, and psychological dimensions. Economic pressures—unemployment, rising living costs, housing shortages, and escalating rents—emerge as the most consistent push factors (Tezcan, 1989; Güreşçi, 2010; Unguren et al., 2021), particularly in metropolitan cities such as Istanbul where their impact intensified following the 2008 global economic crisis (İslamoğlu et al., 2014). Environmental factors that complicate urban life, such as air pollution, noise, and traffic problems, also play a determining role in migration decisions (Tezcan, 1989; Güreşçi, 2010; Yılmaz, 2021; Kılıç & Buzlukçu, 2021; Şahin, 2025). In addition to these material and environmental drivers, psychological and social pressures—such as stress, alienation, and the loss of cultural identity—have been widely identified as significant motivational elements prompting urban residents to seek rural alternatives (Yürüdü, 2008; Özerim, 2012; Gümüş et al., 2013; Ertuğrul, 2016; Bulut & Dinçmen, 2021; Kılıç & Buzlukçu, 2021; Şahin, 2025).

Beyond individual perceptions and lifestyle-oriented motivations, there are structural forces that have intensified push dynamics in Turkish metropolitan contexts, particularly in Istanbul. Most notably, widespread housing insecurity and the persistent anticipation of a major earthquake have created a profound sense of uncertainty and material vulnerability for Istanbulites, resulting in what Kayaalp (2024) describes as a structural "deadlock" particularly affecting low- and middle-income groups<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, escalating social and ideological polarization, coupled with authoritarian tendencies during the long-standing AKP regime, has deepened urban alienation and discontent among secular middle-class urbanites (Ertit,

<sup>1</sup> Despite the overall expansion of housing supply since the 2000s, home ownership has become unattainable for middle- and lower-income groups, while rental housing has also lost its affordability for these segments (Istanbul Planlama Ajansı [İPA], 2023). Empirical data from the Istanbul Policy Agency show that between 2020 and 2022, rental prices in the city increased by 5.2 times—the sharpest rise worldwide compared to the global average of 1.6—rendering both home ownership and rental accommodation inaccessible for large parts of the middle class (ibid.). The persistent threat of a major earthquake further compounds this housing crisis, as scientific projections suggest that up to 200,000 structures could become uninhabitable following a major seismic event (Kayaalp, 2024).

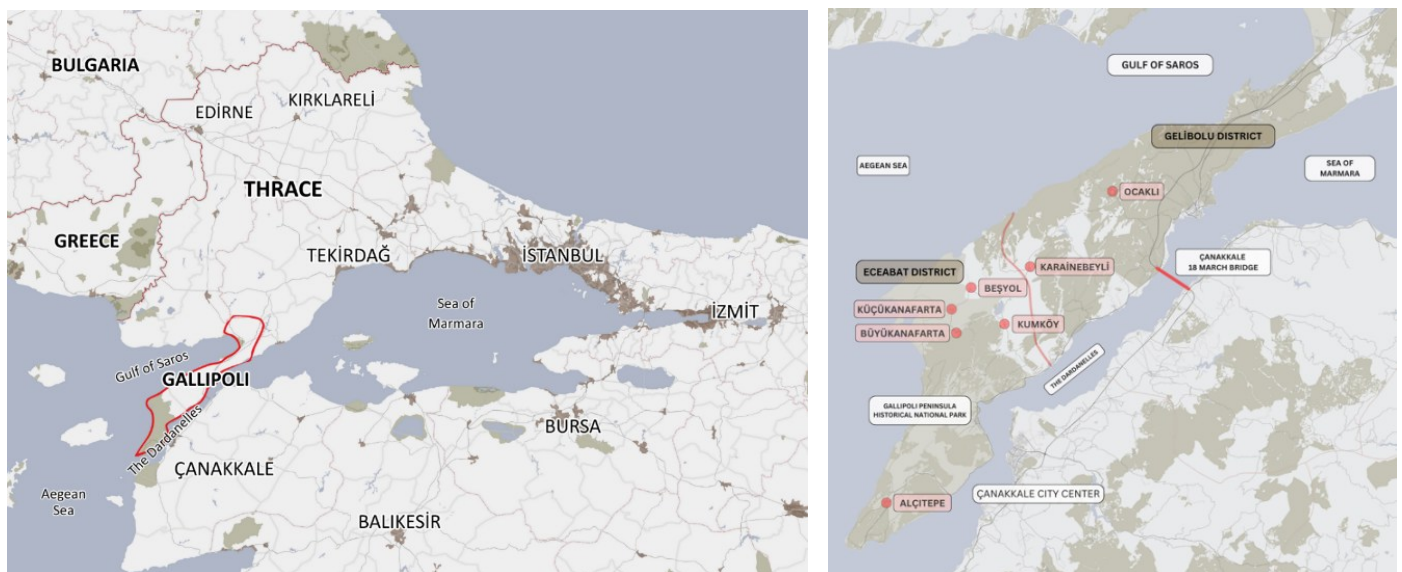
2024; Şahin, 2025). This growing sense of being "trapped" within an increasingly restrictive social and political environment has produced emotional fatigue and moral discomfort, becoming an additional push factor encouraging migration from metropolitan to rural contexts (Şahin, 2025).

Against this backdrop of mounting urban pressures, urban-to-rural migration literature on Turkish cases points to a complementary set of pull factors that make rural areas increasingly attractive destinations. The pursuit of a better quality of life stands out as one of the fundamental motivations behind the orientation toward rural areas in the Turkish context. A peaceful and tranquil living environment, proximity to nature, healthy conditions, and access to basic services such as healthcare are frequently cited as key attractions (Südaş & Mutluer, 2010; Özerim, 2012; Yılmaz, 2021; Şahin, 2025). Geographical and climatic advantages—including temperate weather, landscape quality, and ecological diversity—also shape destination preferences in accordance with the lifestyle aspirations of migrants (Yürüdü, 2008). Studies on Turkish cases further identify a range of economic opportunities that influence rural preferences, ranging from traditional incentives such as supplementary income from farming and land or tax advantages (Tezcan, 1989; Unguren et al., 2021) to newer entrepreneurial ventures including organic farming, agroecology-oriented livelihoods, and boutique rural tourism (Turkkan, 2025a, 2025b; Kepenek & Uğuzman, 2018). The literature also points to additional pull factors such as property and inheritance rights (Güreşçi, 2010), pre-existing social networks and kinship connections (Yürüdü, 2008; Sağır, 2011; Gümüş et al., 2013; Beyaz, 2020), as well as the appeal of local cultural heritage (Sağır, 2011; Gümüş et al., 2013).

Recent studies have also conceptualized these dynamics through the lens of rural gentrification, emphasizing class-based transformations and spatial restructuring in Turkey's rural and coastal settlements. Empirical works in the North and South Aegean (Başaran-Uysal & Sakarya, 2018; Göçer et al., 2021; Kocabiyyık & Loopmans, 2021) reveal that the influx of middle-class urbanites, driven by lifestyle aspirations and heritage-based tourism, has reshaped rural environments, altered traditional land uses, and triggered socio-spatial transformations that often lead to displacement.

#### 4. Gallipoli as a Late-Discovered Rural Destination

The Gallipoli Peninsula, situated in the southern part of Eastern Thrace within Çanakkale province, lies between the Gulf of Saros on the Aegean coast and the Dardanelles Strait, encompassing 38 villages across the districts of Eceabat and Gelibolu (Figure 1). Renowned for its strategic location, the peninsula has played a pivotal role throughout history, most notably during the Gallipoli Campaign of World War I, which shaped national memory and established Gallipoli as a symbolic landscape of resistance and commemoration (Erbey, 2018). Today, its historical depth and protected archaeological and cultural zones provide the basis for heritage and battlefield tourism (Boz, 2016).

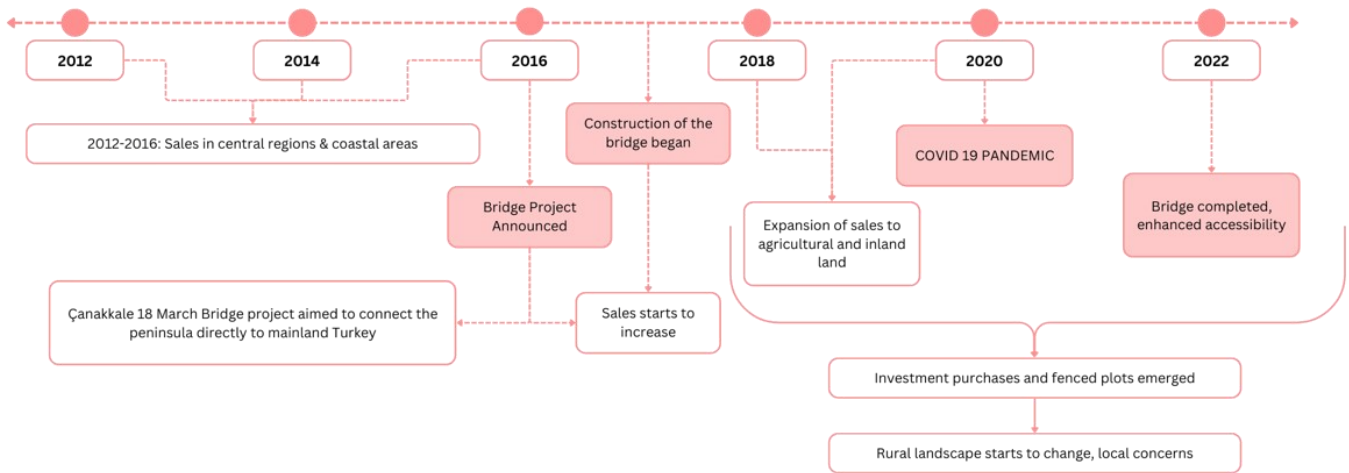


**Figure 1.** Gallipoli within the Thrace Region of Turkey and the Villages of the Study

Beyond its historical significance, Gallipoli has increasingly attracted attention as a rural migration destination due to its unique cultural and environmental character. Unlike many coastal towns of the Aegean and Mediterranean, such as Ayvalık, Asos, Datça, or Urla—where tourism-driven development and rural gentrification have accelerated transformations (Hurley & Arı, 2018; Kocabiyyık & Loopmans, 2021)—Gallipoli has remained relatively “late-discovered.” The peninsula has so far been less exposed to mass tourism and large-scale real-estate speculation, largely due to its status as a first-degree protected historical site. The historical trajectory and recent infrastructural milestones are summarized in Figure 2.

The 2016 announcement of the Çanakkale 18 March Bridge and its completion in 2022 marked a turning point in the peninsula's accessibility, directly connecting Gallipoli with Istanbul, Ankara, and other metropolitan centers. Land transaction data between 2012 and 2022 show how demand shifted from central zones toward coastal and agricultural areas after the bridge project, with purchases extending to inland villages (Figure 3). While this expansion alleviated pressure on already saturated central areas, it also intensified the commodification of agricultural lands. Tourism and agriculture, traditionally intertwined pillars of the local economy, are now being reshaped by these dynamics. As heritage and battlefield tourism expands—with the Gallipoli Historical Area functioning as an “open-air museum” that attracts both domestic and international visitors (Boz, 2016; Erbey, 2018)—second-home and tourism-oriented development has intensified, particularly along the northwestern coasts around Güneyli Village. Land-use studies reveal that these combined pressures have reduced agricultural and forest areas by nearly 10% over the past

three decades, resulting in the fencing of parcels and the gradual withdrawal of fields from cultivation (Akbulak, Erginal, & Öztürk, 2016; Çanakkale İl Tarım ve Orman Müdürlüğü, 2023).



**Figure 2.** Timeline of Key Events Shaping the Transformation of the Gallipoli Peninsula

The peninsula thus represents a space where multiple temporal and spatial dynamics converge. Its layered past, agricultural traditions, and emerging mobility patterns bring together structural forces such as heritage governance, housing markets, and infrastructural projects with place-based assets like productive landscapes, local authenticity, and collective memory. In this sense, Gallipoli offers a distinctive case for understanding how urban-to-rural migration unfolds in a territory that is simultaneously protected, increasingly invested in, and gradually exposed to new forms of tourism and rural transformation.

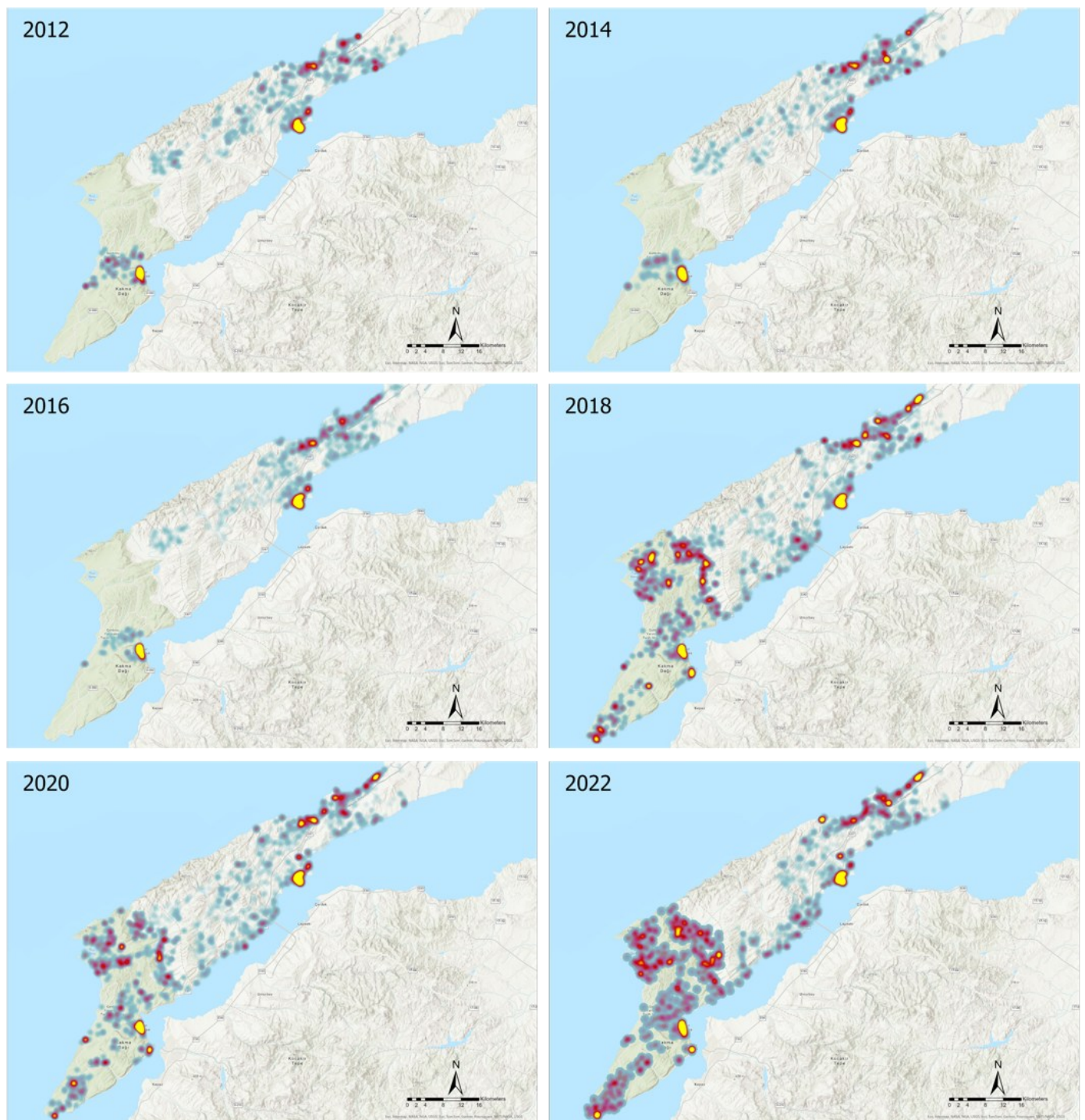
## 5. Method

This study employed qualitative methods to investigate the motivations behind urban-to-rural migration and the decision-making processes of individuals who have relocated to rural areas of the Gallipoli Peninsula. Fieldwork was conducted during two separate periods: in the winter (22–26 January) and summer (15–28 August) of 2023. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and participant observation across seven villages: Küçükanafarta, Kumköy, Karainebeyli, Alçitepe, Ocaklı, Büyükanafarta, and Beşyol<sup>2</sup>. Participants were accessed via snowball sampling, resulting in a group of 16 urban migrants with diverse backgrounds. While most interviews were conducted individually at participants’ homes or agricultural plots, several encounters evolved into informal group discussions due to the presence of other migrants. Rather than being a limitation, this setting enriched the data by facilitating open conversation and reflexive exchanges among interviewees. Additionally, the first author resided in two migrant households during fieldwork, allowing for participant observation and more intimate insights into everyday routines and spatial practices.

Most participants had relocated from Istanbul, while others came from cities such as İzmir, Bursa, İzmit, Çanakkale, and in one case, Germany. The sample was gender-balanced and composed of individuals ranging in age from their 30s to over 60, with a majority being over 60 years old. While most participants were university graduates, five had no higher education qualifications. Their former professions included a wide range of white-collar occupations such as pharmacist, lawyer, banker, doctor, and writer, as well as skilled trades like auto mechanic and woodcarver. A few were formerly housewives or held assistant-level positions. Following migration, nearly all participants engaged in some form of rural livelihood, primarily farming, gardening, or beekeeping, mostly for self-sufficiency. Eleven participants had permanently settled in village houses, while five maintained a dual urban-rural lifestyle<sup>3</sup>. On average, participants lived in the villages for approximately seven years, though this ranged from just a few months to nearly two decades. For confidentiality purposes, all participant names used in the study have been anonymized.

<sup>2</sup> According to the 2023 address-based population registration system (Turkish Statistical Institute [TÜİK], 2024), corresponding to the fieldwork period, the populations of the studied seven villages were as follows: Alçitepe (445), Beşyol (181), Büyükanafarta (177), Küçükanafarta (207), Kumköy (275), Karainebeyli (293), and Ocaklı (142).

<sup>3</sup> Although these dual residents differed considerably in their personal circumstances—ranging from retirees who periodically returned to the city for family or medical reasons to younger professionals sustaining hybrid work routines—they shared similar motivations with permanent settlers in their pursuit of a rural way



**Figure 3.** Land Transaction Density Change in Gallipoli Peninsula, 2012–2022 (visualized by the first author based on General Directorate of Land Registry and Cadastre [TKGM], 2024 data)

Interviews covered demographic background, urban experiences, motivations for migration, selection criteria for relocation, and rural everyday life. All interviews were conducted in Turkish and subsequently transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA software. A single analytical strategy was followed, focusing on identifying the motivations behind migration through a coding framework derived from Lee’s (1966) push-pull theory. The main categories—economic, environmental, psychological, socio-cultural, and personal—were used to organize the data. Within each category, sub-codes were developed inductively to capture nuanced motivations and reclassified to reflect patterns that emerged from the narratives in a way that aligns with the thematic focus of this article.

of life. In fact, many dual residents expressed a desire to settle permanently in the village once their personal or professional circumstances allow, indicating that their continued urban attachment often reflects practical constraints rather than preference.

## 6. Why They Left: Urban Push Factors Behind Migration to the Gallipoli Peninsula

In the narratives of urban immigrants, the decision to leave typically emerges from discontent with urban life that gradually accumulates over an extended period. These dissatisfactions manifest across five main dimensions: economic pressures stemming from rising living costs and workplace exploitation; environmental degradation including traffic congestion, noise pollution, and air contamination; psychological burdens of burnout, existential emptiness, and the mechanical routines of urban life; socio-cultural alienation and the erosion of community bonds; and personal crises involving health problems, life transitions, and individual turning points.

The contrast between economic stress and the promise of financial relief in rural life has become a decisive factor in migration decisions. As their income became insufficient to maintain a reasonable standard of living in metropolitan settings, rural alternatives began to appear increasingly attractive from an economic perspective. Retired participants, in particular, emphasized the importance of retirement in their decision-making process to migrate to rural areas, highlighting the inadequacy of their fixed retirement income to cope with constantly rising urban costs:

*"The day I realized I could make ends meet with my pension, I bolted—just like that. I mean, I don't know a thing about farming or anything."* (Ali, M, early 60s)

The cumulative effects of traffic congestion, noise pollution, air contamination, and overconstruction have contributed to an urban environment that many described as increasingly unbearable. Migrants from Istanbul, in particular, emphasized the stress created by traffic and the time lost on the road:

*"I remember 6:30 (AM) very clearly. I'd catch the Topkapı minibüs... It took about an hour and a half, maybe an hour forty-five minutes. First to Topkapı, then I'd transfer to a Florya minibüs from there and continue. I swear I'm not exaggerating. In the evening I'd get home around 20:40 or 21:00... That's how two, three years passed for me and my wife... We barely saw each other."* (Mehmet, M, 42)

*"I once left Bahçeşehir for a concert on the Maslak side... It took me six hours to get there. By the time I arrived, it was already over. Like a joke. I sat in a café, had a coffee, and came back. Not being able to go where you want is a restriction of your freedom. I could honestly say I decided to move on that very day."* (Gülşen, F, 58)

Air pollution and noise emerged as significant sources of discomfort that drove my informants away from urban living. Several participants described the environmental degradation of city life as fundamentally incompatible with their well-being, using visceral imagery to convey their experiences of urban environmental stress. Drawing attention to the visible signs of pollution, Ayşe (F, early 60s) noted: *"The traffic starts there... The top of the city is covered with this yellow layer even in summer... there's this brown-yellow layer."* Another participant, Sema (F, 63), living near a hospital, explained how constant noise affected her: *"Living between four walls with constant horn sounds... ambulance sirens suddenly going wee-wah wee-wah. I felt that these sounds were exhausting me very much."* Kemal (M, 54) articulated the health implications most directly:

*"The breath you take is very important... we talk about the disease of our age... inflammation. Even the breath you take in Istanbul causes inflammation, but the breath you take here changes that."*

Another factor emphasized in migrants' narratives is the psychological burden brought by urban life. The fast pace imposed by modern city living, constant competition, and performance pressure often leads to a sense of disconnection from oneself and one's surroundings. As Hakan (M, 42) put it: *"But I don't belong here... I can't breathe at all... I definitely don't feel like I'm living."* His words reflect a deeper alienation that many urban residents experience—feeling emotionally out of place within the very environments they inhabit.

Burnout and mobbing in work life have become serious problems threatening both the physical and mental health of many migrants. The exploitative nature of contemporary workplace dynamics, combined with power imbalances and systematic harassment, creates an environment where employees feel their very essence is being drained. Reyhan (F, 51) described her experience leading up to early retirement:

*"The day I became eligible for retirement two years ago, I went straight in and filed for it. Because for the past six years, the company had gone completely off the rails... That's when I truly understood what it means to 'suck the marrow out of you.' I was going to work almost in tears every single day. And honestly, I couldn't endure the workload even for one more day."*

The mechanical routines imposed by urban life gradually lead individuals to question the meaning of their lives. When trapped within a monotonous and standardized daily cycle, many experience an existential emptiness that deepens as the fundamental question of "why" remains unanswered. Osman (M, early 60s) reflected on his urban experience: *"We had no social life there. Always work, home. You're like a robot. Like a robot, go home, come to work... You're struggling for something... I don't even know what we worked so hard for."* Another participant, Sema (F, 63), contrasted this with rural life: *"Here you feel like you're a part of nature. Istanbul isn't like that—it's a mechanized life, a metallic life."* Similarly, Reyhan (F, 51) described how she tried to compensate for this emptiness: *"My life was passing by there, and I was cramming the things I loved into whatever remaining time I had left."*

The social isolation experienced in urban environments stands out as one of the most paradoxical aspects of modern city life—a theme that emerged consistently across our interviews with urban-to-rural migrants. Despite living among millions, many participants described a profound sense of disconnection and anonymity. These accounts often pointed to the erosion of community bonds as a central factor motivating their decision to leave the city. Hakan (M, 42), expressed this sentiment particularly poignantly, reflecting on this experience of Istanbul's transformation:

*"Suddenly we became like a virus, like Istanbulites are a virus. Istanbul and Istanbulites are like the center where a cancer virus spreads"*

This visceral metaphor reveals not only personal alienation but also a broader critique of how rapid urbanization may have eroded Istanbul's cultural fabric. This sense of disconnection manifests in concrete ways in daily urban life. Gülşen's (F, 58) experience illustrates how physical proximity paradoxically coexists with social distance—she described living in high-rise buildings where she didn't even know her next-door neighbors. Such anonymity, our informants suggest, creates a culture of indifference that fundamentally alters social behavior. Kemal's (M, 54) reflections further reinforce this theme by drawing a direct comparison between urban and rural social relations:

*"In the village, everyone knows each other, so in a small place nobody steps on anyone's toes. But Istanbul is not like that. In Istanbul, since nobody sees each other again, they can violate others' rights much more easily."*

This perception of urban moral decay echoed through the reflections of other participants who voiced a deep sense of disillusionment with city life. Osman (M, early 60s), for instance, dismissed the idea of longing for the city with pointed sarcasm: *"What would I miss about the city? Should I miss the noise? Should I miss people's, excuse me, treachery?"* This sense of betrayal—of trust broken in environments where accountability seems absent—runs even deeper in İbrahim's (M, early 70s) reflections:

*"If you asked me what I learned by age 70, I learned nothing but betrayal. I both witnessed betrayal... I mean, it would be right to say I don't miss anything about Istanbul."*

Personal life circumstances and individual crises also served as important push factors in our informants' decisions to leave urban areas. Health problems created particularly powerful moments of reflection—Hakan's (M, 42) experience following a severe traffic accident requiring two years of rehabilitation, and Mehmet's (M, 42) stress-related complications fundamentally altered their relationships with urban living. Major life transitions proved equally catalytic: retirement freed some from urban employment obligations, while others found themselves navigating the challenges of single parenthood in environments that felt unsupportive.

These personal crises can be seen as critical junctures that exposed the fragility of urban life arrangements for our informants. When individual vulnerabilities intersected with broader urban dissatisfactions—the noise, anonymity, and moral compromises described earlier—they created a form of comprehensive disillusionment that made the rural lifestyle vision offered by the Gallipoli Peninsula seem not just attractive, but necessary for personal renewal and authentic living.

## 7. Why Gallipoli: Rural Pull Factors in Destination Selection

The attraction to Gallipoli typically emerges as a result of perceived solutions that gradually address accumulated urban dissatisfactions. For nearly all participants, this destination choice stems from deepening recognition of Gallipoli's capacity to resolve urban discomforts. Rural pull factors manifest across four critical dimensions: social and family networks that provide both discovery mechanisms and ongoing support systems; cultural compatibility that enables secular urban lifestyles to coexist with rural living; authentic rural experiences that have remained immune to commercialization; and strategic geographical positioning that balances rural tranquility with urban accessibility.

A significant portion of migrants discover their target regions through existing social connections and draw strength from these networks in their settlement decisions. Many migrants discovered the region through acquaintances, former friends, or work colleagues. Personal relationships serve as both discovery mechanisms and ongoing support systems that extend far beyond initial settlement. However, not all social connections are predetermined; many migrants discovered Gallipoli through coincidental encounters that redirected their initial plans. Ali and Ayşe's experience demonstrates how chance encounters can redirect initial destination preferences and transform migration journeys:

- *"A friend of ours bought a place in Assos. We looked at the Assos area initially, but Assos didn't feel like the village life I really wanted." (Ayşe, F, early 60s) ...*  
 - *"then a coincidence happened... a patient came to me here, a woman doing organic farming in Ocaklı village with her husband... she invited us. We went for a stay a week later... Then I sold the caravan. We started settling here more permanently." (Ali, M, early 60s)*

The ongoing importance of these social connections becomes evident in migrants' concerns about community continuity and their dependence on social networks for long-term migration decisions. Mustafa's (M, 62) reliance on existing relationships is an example that shows how social bonds are effective not only in initial settlement but also in long-term residence decisions and community stability:

*"Having a close friend you can trust, someone you can entrust everything to, becomes a huge motivation in decision-making... But if Ali and his family leave, I might not stay here alone."*

Family connections also facilitate the discovery of the region and provide continuous social support networks. For instance, Sema's (F, 63) settlement was directly influenced by her brother's previous presence in Gallipoli, while Fatma (F, 65) was drawn to settle near her in-laws. As seen in all these examples, social networks are not merely sources of information but also anchor points that ensure the emotional and practical sustainability of the decision. Rather than seeking just any location, migrants tend to gravitate toward communities where they can find familiar faces and meaningful connections.

Beyond the initial phase of moving, many migrants also take an active role in expanding their social circles into their new rural environment. Several interviewees mentioned encouraging friends or relatives from urban areas to consider relocating. Some acquaintances have already purchased land, summer houses, or small plots with future relocation in mind. While some have moved permanently, others are waiting for more favorable conditions—such as retirement, improved financial circumstances, or a more suitable stage in their lives—before making a long-term commitment.

Family ties and the desire to return to one's roots emerged as one of the decisive factors in urban-to-rural migration processes, particularly for return migrants. The decision to return is part of return migrants' search for identity and belonging. Beyond emotional benefits, these family connections provide practical advantages that can significantly ease adaptation to rural life, including recognition and acceptance by local

populations. Ahmet (M, 60) explains how his parents living in the region and the presence of an extensive kinship network made him familiar to the village inhabitants, smoothing his settlement process. Similarly, Esra (F, late 30s) emphasizes her deep-rooted connection with the village by defining herself as "ancestral native," referring to her family lineage that extends generations back.

Cultural compatibility and socio-cultural atmosphere emerge as significant determinants in migrants' destination choices. While migrants seek to disconnect from urban life, they simultaneously desire to maintain their social environment, remain among like-minded individuals, and preserve the freedoms that city life affords. Gallipoli's distinctive socio-cultural structure largely meets these demands. Interviewees consistently describe the open-minded, tolerant, and democratic nature of Thracian people as a fundamental characteristic distinguishing their chosen destination from other potential rural areas. Ayşe (F, early 60s) articulates this regional preference clearly: "*We wanted Thrace specifically... We wanted Thracian people, who are more open-minded in terms of perspective.*" Several other participants emphasized how the region's unique cultural structure distinguishes it from more conservative areas of Turkey. Ali (M, early 60s) captures this cultural divide most explicitly, explaining why Thrace's social atmosphere makes it uniquely suitable compared to more conservative areas of Anatolia:

*"You can't settle in an Anatolian village like this, I mean, I can't settle and live there... I can't live in an Anatolian city, places without alcohol-serving restaurants and such. I can't live there. I stayed in Konya [a city well known for its conservatism] for 24 hours. My God, my soul was suffocating in these Muslim cities."*

Kemal (M, 54) further illustrates the region's level of social tolerance through concrete examples from daily life, particularly regarding women's freedom:

*"Not every village is like this, for example, you can go and buy rakı [a traditional Turkish alcoholic drink] here at 11 PM... Then I saw the village people are very democratic, even a girl alone in shorts can walk around here without any problems. We're used to very bigoted villages, we know Turkey. Even if a woman walks alone at midnight, she won't have problems [here]."*

All of these observations underscore how migrants perceive Gallipoli as an exceptional space within Turkey's broader conservative rural landscape, where secular urban lifestyles can coexist with rural living. For many migrants like Zeynep (F, 39), Gallipoli even offers a more comfortable social environment than major metropolises like Istanbul:

*"We stayed in Gallipoli [district center]. They recommended a tavern there. We went there. We looked around. Women were dancing at their tables and so on. Brother. How relaxed it was. In Istanbul, there are no longer such relaxed rakı gatherings."*

Another reason behind Gallipoli's appeal as a destination for urban migrants is the "real rural life" experience it represents. Participants frequently emphasize that coastal towns like Kaş, Assos, and Datça have become overly commercialized and "Istanbulized" over time, while Gallipoli villages still maintain a preserved simplicity and authenticity. Zeynep (F, 39) explained her perspective on what constitutes genuine rural living:

*"... should I live in Kaş? Should I live in Assos? whatever. That's not real rural life. Because those places have become very touristic now. Assos, for example, there was a tavern at the edge of the village. You know, there are 'beach clubs' there and so on. It has moved beyond that rurality... Those areas have become too trendy"*

Similarly, Ayşe (F, early 60s) described her disappointment with the transformation she witnessed:

*"We also looked at the Assos area initially, but Assos didn't really feel like the village life I wanted. Because everything there was somewhat Istanbulized."*

This emphasis on authenticity is further reinforced by Reyhan's (F, 51) reflection on what drew her to the region:

*"And the nature of this place, of course... I mean its tranquility. The fact that it's untouched and hopefully will remain so, these kinds of things directed us more toward here."*

The migrants' understanding of rurality reflects not merely a spatial relocation, but a lifestyle choice that centers authenticity, simplicity, and rural character. In this context, Gallipoli stands out as a late-discovered destination that, unlike many popular coastal towns, has remained outside large-scale commercialization and development.

The geographical location, climatic characteristics, and natural resources of the Gallipoli Peninsula also emerge as determining factors in migrants' settlement preferences. Among these geographical factors, proximity to major urban centers stands out as a particularly influential element in decision-making. More than a few participants emphasized how strategic positioning factored into their calculated decision-making process. Hakan (M, 42) articulated this through his systematic approach to location selection:

*"We always had this in mind: we should arrive within three hours maximum after leaving work. If you leave work at six, we'll be there by nine. ... I started working on it. As I said, we're looking for a three-hour distance. Istanbul Bahçeşehir as the starting point, draw a circle. ... Where can I go in 3 hours?"*

Similarly, Reyhan (F, 51) and her husband emphasized how Gallipoli provides an ideal balance —close enough to urban services like Çanakkale while remaining distant from the overwhelming density of major cities:

*"Being close to Çanakkale but not being an overly crowded city, these actually greatly influenced our choice of this place."*

Reyhan further articulated her desire to slow down life while preserving modern comforts:

*"I was actually thinking about Bodrum 4-5 years ago, but then that place became no different from the city, maybe even worse. That's why I had this dream of living in the countryside, but like this: Everything will be at hand, not a shabby life. Technologically, everything will still be at hand, but I will experience that tranquility there."*

In addition to location and access, climatic factors constitute another equally significant dimension in migrants' decision-making calculations. The temperate climate of the North Aegean, in particular, appeals to migrants who do not favor extreme heat. Several participants emphasized how weather considerations shaped their geographic calculations. Ayşe (F, early 60s) articulated this preference clearly:

*"We always love the North Aegean. For holidays, we don't like too much heat anyway. Our choice of this place is partly because of that. Because we can't stand the heat of the Bodrum areas in summer."*

## 8. Conclusions

This study examines the motivations behind location choice and the decision-making processes of individuals migrating from urban areas to rural Gallipoli. Our findings reveal that migration decisions are not merely individual choices, but rather socially embedded processes shaped by the convergence of urban disillusionment and rural attraction, further mediated through networks, cultural compatibility, authenticity seeking, geographical considerations, and familial connections.

Our findings generally align with research on urban-to-rural migration, highlighting how economic pressures, environmental degradation, and psychological stress drive people to leave cities. Migrants' narratives consistently highlight a growing dissatisfaction with city life. These push factors work cumulatively over time, creating conditions that participants describe as increasingly unbearable. In response to growing dissatisfaction with city living, Gallipoli provides an appealing alternative with various attractive features.

Beyond these general patterns, our findings uncover some distinctive aspects of this migration pattern, most notably the critical role of socio-cultural compatibility in location selection. Gallipoli's perceived open-minded, tolerant, and democratic socio-cultural atmosphere emerges as a key determinant in migrants' decisions. Migrants actively seek to maintain their preferred social environment and freedoms, which distinguishes Gallipoli from more conservative areas in Turkey and even major metropolises like Istanbul.

Our findings also highlight the dynamic nature of authenticity-seeking. As popular destinations become "spoiled" by over-commercialization, migrants turn to "undiscovered" areas. The majority of migrants explicitly seek a "real" rural life, differentiating their aspirations from better-known destinations such as Kaş, Assos, or Datça, which are perceived as "Istanbulized."

Infrastructure developments, such as the Çanakkale 1915 Bridge, further accelerate migration dynamics by enhancing accessibility. The strategic proximity to Istanbul remains a vital factor, particularly for working migrants who seek a balance between rural tranquility and access to urban services within a reasonable commuting distance.

Equally important are the social networks that underpin these decisions. A substantial number of migrants discover Gallipoli through existing social ties and rely on these networks not only for information, but also for emotional and practical support. These relationships play a critical role in both initial settlement and long-term continuity. In turn, many urban migrants also bring others from their networks to the region—inviting them, encouraging them, or simply serving as examples to follow, with some of these acquaintances later purchasing property and considering relocation themselves.

It is important to acknowledge the scope and limitations of this study. Our research offers a temporal snapshot based on data collected during the winter and summer of 2023, focusing specifically on the experiences of urban migrants who were already somewhat connected to each other or to local villagers, and who were, to some extent, socially accepted and integrated into the village community. The experiences of other actors, including long-term local villagers, isolated migrants with limited community connection, or those who ultimately returned to urban life after a brief rural stay, fall outside the scope of this analysis. As such, this study does not aim to provide a comprehensive account of rural transformation in Gallipoli but rather contributes to a more nuanced understanding of selective migration and socio-spatial preferences among a particular subset of urban-to-rural migrants in contemporary Turkey.

Finally, our findings reflect a temporal moment in which the physical landscape had not yet been significantly reshaped by urban migrants, and the social balance still favored the local population. What remains uncertain is whether this balance will shift in the coming years. Will the area resist the pressures of rural gentrification, or will it follow trajectories observed in other amenity-rich villages across Turkey, where urban migrants have gradually reshaped both the social and spatial fabric? Long-term research is needed to explore how migrants' motivations interact with these evolving dynamics and whether initial intentions to live "authentically" rural persist or transform over time.

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