

## **Rethinking the OECD's New Rural Demography**

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### **Summary**

This paper examines demographic changes affecting rural communities throughout the OECD. It focuses on three major dimensions of demographic structure and change: (a) internal migration and population redistribution, (b) changing rural age composition, and (c) immigration and rural labour supply. The paper contends that “demography is not necessarily destiny” for rural communities because demographic changes are mediated by local social structure, and because rural communities are embedded in larger macro social, economic and political contexts. That being acknowledged, demographic trends and changes can contribute to propelling people and communities on either upward or downward trajectories. Demographically-related changes will not become opportunities without informed public debate on their implications for communities, households and individuals. In addition, OECD policy recommendations regarding adaptation to rural population change will be difficult to produce since little comparable rural demographic analysis is conducted across OECD member states.

## **Introduction: Is Demography Destiny?**

August Comte is thought to have said that “demography is destiny.” While I do not dispute that local communities are importantly affected by population size, composition and change, population-related impacts are not direct, automatic nor mechanistic. My principal contention in this paper is that the impacts of population change are mediated by local social organization and by the larger structural and policy environments in which communities are embedded (Brown, 2008). In other words, similar population trends and changes might be experienced in distinctly different ways by similar communities depending on how these trends and changes are acted upon by local institutions.

Discussing a broad topic such as the OECD’s “new demography” is a daunting task. First, demography is a broad field that encompasses the determinants and consequences of changes in fertility, mortality, socio-demographic composition, and both internal and international migration. Second, OECD member states while having much in common, vary widely in economy, social and political institutions, language, culture and historical legacies. Moreover, individual member states tend to be characterized by significant internal differentiation. Hence, of necessity, my presentation will examine selective aspects of population dynamics, and I will endeavor to acknowledge both inter- and intra-state variability rather than masking these differences.

### **Three Rural Demographic Trends of Significance to OECD Member States**

As mentioned above, demography is a broad discipline, hence it is not possible to examine the full range of trends and changes relevant to rural areas at this time. Rather, I have chosen to discuss three aspects of population change that I believe are particularly important to the OECD’s rural people and communities. Internal migration and population redistribution are discussed first because of their generalized impact on rural economy and society. Next, I discuss changing age composition because it poses both challenges and opportunities for social and economic institutions and for economic development and social well being. Finally, I discuss changes in racial and ethnic diversity that are resulting from immigration (as well as from fertility differences between migrants and longer-term residents).

Before continuing, however, I would also like to note that while some rural demographic trends in OECD states are genuinely “new,” others have a long trace, and have been largely predictable for a considerable time. Population ageing, for example, results from long term trends of low fertility, chronic out-migration at younger ages, and increases in the length of life. Alternately, the volume and direction of both internal and international migration are much more changeable, and dependent on period-specific conditions that alter the relative economic attractiveness and political and social stability of origin and destination countries, regions and rural vs. urban areas. Hence, while ageing is a well established rural phenomenon, migration dynamics are constantly producing “new” rural populations in ways that are often unpredictable. Similarly, increasing racial/ethnic diversity is a “new” aspect of rural demography, but only in particular regions of selected OECD member states.

#### *Internal Migration and Population Redistribution*

In most OECD countries, internal migration accounts for much of the variability in population growth rates among rural places and between them and their urban counterparts. Moreover, because it is selective by particular age and socioeconomic groups, migration can also alter the percentage of persons in the working ages, with high educational credentials, creative skills, etc. Compared with other component of population change, natural increase (births minus deaths), migration is more variable from year to year and more difficult to project into the future. Hence, migration, both internal and international, is capable of producing “new rural demographics.”

#### *Counter-urbanization: a clean break with the past?*

In the 1970s, most OECD states experienced a period of counter-urbanization, e.g., a period during which rural areas grew more rapidly than urban areas and during which the rural growth advantage was largely due to net in-migration gains at the expense of urban areas (Champion, 1989; Vining and Kontuly, 1978). While the terminology used to describe these reversals varied, the most evocative and widespread phrase used during the time was “rural population turnaround” (Brown and Wardwell, 1980). During the 1980s, most OECD countries experienced a reversal of the rural turnaround. Urban areas generally recovered from a transitional period of industrial restructuring and urban-to-rural net migration either reversed direction or was much weaker (Champion, 1987). It is important to note, however, that while the direction reversed, it continued to be relatively consistent across OECD nations (Mitchell, 2004). Since 1990, however, this

apparent uniformity of population redistribution trends across OECD states has unraveled. The post-1990 situation is highly variable. Consider these examples:

- The UK has experienced continuous counter-urbanization since the 1950s. (Champion, 2008; Kontuly and Geyer, 2003).
- In the US, similar to most other OECD countries, the rural turnaround of the 1970s reversed in the 1980s. Rural areas rebounded during the first half of the 1990s, but since then metropolitan areas have outpaced their nonmetropolitan counterparts. However, the current metropolitan population growth advantage is almost entirely due to international migration while the direction of net internal migration continues to favor nonmetropolitan areas. (Cromartie, 2007).
- A study of 310 cities in 36 European nations showed widespread population deconcentration between 1960-2000 (Turok and Mykhnenko, 2007). This research showed that the number of cities growing faster than their national rates declined during 1960-2000, and the number experiencing relative decline rose during the period. However, major differences in the patterns of population redistribution experienced by Western and Eastern Europe were also reported. Eastern Europe had strong city growth in the 1960s, somewhat slower growth in the 1970s and 80s, and absolute city decline since the mid 1990s. In contrast, Western European cities experienced less of a slowdown in city growth during the 1960s and 70s, and have had periods of recovery in both the 1980s and since 2000. Geyer's case studies of population redistribution in eight European nations found similar variability in trends (Geyer, 2002).

Accordingly, given this remarkable variability in national patterns of population redistribution, it is a mistake to conclude that the reversal of rural-urban redistribution trends, first recognized in the 1970's (Beale, 1975), is a *clean break* with past trends of long term urbanization (Vining and Straus, 1977). As Woods (2005:78) has observed, "the emphasis placed on counter-urbanization in the Anglo-American literature has understated the diversity of national trends." Woods emphasizes international diversity, but diversity between particular types of rural areas within particular nations is equally important. In fact, even in nations experiencing overall urbanization and relatively slow rural population growth, some types of rural areas may tend to attract migrants and have much higher rates of population growth than others. In contrast, areas with a high dependence on agriculture and other extractive pursuits appear to be experiencing

population loss regardless of whether their nation is gaining or losing rural population overall.

#### *Rural amenity migration*

Regardless of a nation's overall trend of rural-urban migration and population redistribution, most OECD member states are experiencing net in-migration to areas rich in natural amenities. In the US, for example, McGranahan (1999) demonstrated that climate, topography, and water area are highly related to nonmetropolitan population change over the past 25 years although the importance of particular amenities varied by region. In Australia, Gurran (2008) reported that rural coastal areas are attracting a broad range of migrants who are moving for lifestyle reasons rather than for jobs. In Europe, Perlik (2006) observed that seeking amenities has been a basis of Alpine development since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, he showed that permanent in-migration tended to focus on regions having both cultural and natural amenities and where switching between the two is easy depending on the season. In Japan, and elsewhere, mountains have deep spiritual significance and mountain communities attract in-migrants who seek spiritual engagement with nature (Locke, 2006).

#### *Rural retirement migration destinations*

The migration of older persons to rural communities is a well established trend throughout the OECD. Moreover, older migration is an aspect of internal population redistribution within various countries as well as a component of international movement. There are well established migration streams at older ages between various OECD countries. For example, Canadian retirees often spend 6 or more months per year in southern parts of the US, and northern European retirees have developed well established communities in Spain, Italy, Cyprus and a variety of other southern European destinations. Many of these destination communities are rural in character. For example, King and his colleagues (1998) examined the dynamics of migration of British retirees to Tuscany, Malta, Costa del Sol and the Algarve and explained that these migration streams are a result of globalization, improved transportation infrastructure, and greater international experience during retirees working lives. However, not all retirement migration in Europe is from North to South. For example, Illes (2005) reported that older in-migration to Hungary has been growing since 1990.

Retirement migration often involves internal redistribution rather than international movement. In the US, for example, about one in ten nonmetropolitan counties had in-migration rates of 15% or higher during 1990-2000, and have been identified as “rural retirement destinations” (Ross and Green, 1985). In the US, older in-migration is generally seen as an economic development option, and a number of states have instituted explicit strategies to attract older residents (Reeder, 1998). In the UK, Atterton (2006) has shown that coastal regions are beginning to attract older in-migrants. While typically considered a “pensions and care” issue, older persons’ potential contributions to rural society and economy are increasingly being recognized. In Japan, for example, rural retirement migration is likely to involve multi-habitation since retirees spend part of the year in rural locations and the remainder at their city homes. This pattern is being encouraged as a rural development strategy (Murakami et al., 2009).

In the above instances, being a rural retirement destination is closely related to the location of natural amenities. However, it is important to recognize that most amenity rich rural communities do not have high rates of in-migration at older ages. Research by Brown and colleagues (2009) shows that the transformation of high amenity rural areas into retirement destinations is contingent on commodifying amenities into tourism and recreation infrastructure sometime in the past. In these instances, vacationers and visitors develop durable social relationships with vacation communities and with each other (see Figure 1). In later life some long term visitors move to the previous vacation sites and recruit their friends and relatives to join them in what often become rural retirement destinations (Brown and Glasgow, 2008).

#### *Areas with high dependence on agriculture*

Throughout the OECD, agricultural areas have experienced consistent population losses for decades (OECD 1998). In many rural regions, agricultural restructuring has displaced farm operators and laborers, and reduced the demand for businesses that support farming. In the U.S. agricultural breadbasket, for example, farming dependent counties lost 28 pct. of their population between 1950-2000 while non-farm rural counties in the same region gained by 13 pct. (Johnson and Rathge, 2006).

### *Rural migration selectivity*

Migration into and out of rural areas is highly selective of particular age and socioeconomic groups. As indicated above, rural areas typically have positive net migration at older ages. In the U.S. this has been true regardless of the overall direction of metro-nonmetro migration. Hence, when the rural population turnaround of the 1970s reversed to urban in-migration, migration at ages 60+ continued to be strongly positive (Johnson & Cromartie 2006) (Figure 2). In the UK, the age pattern of rural migration is somewhat different than in the US. Older in-migration appears to commence in pre-retirement ages (Champion & Sheppard 2006). Research on urban-rural migration and commuting shows that many pre-retirees who move to rural areas in the UK continue to work at their urban-based jobs (Champion, Coombes and Brown, 2009f).

In contrast to the widespread pattern of positive migration at older ages, rural areas typically experience net out-migration at younger and young adult ages. Champion and Sheppard show this clearly with respect to England. This is important because it should be remembered that England has experienced overall counterurbanization since 1950. Similarly, in the U.S. net migration at young adult ages has been consistently negative regardless of the overall trend of rural-urban migration (Johnson & Cromartie 2006).

### *Is this brain drain?*

Many observers are alarmed at the net loss of young adults, and rightly so. The loss of young persons not only deprives communities of labor and human capital, but also reproductive potential. Accordingly, net out migration of young adults has immediate negative impacts and poses longer term problems because affected rural communities will not be able to replace workers who exit the labor force at retirement age. However, concerns about “brain drain” are often based on *net migration* data which do not reveal whether rural areas are experiencing excessive rates of out migration, *inadequate rates of in-migration or both*. Research in New York State indicates that the *failure to replace* young, well prepared, out-migrants is a bigger concern than out migration per se. Young adults are highly mobile regardless of whether they live in rural or urban areas. Hence, a high rate of out-migration among youth is to be expected. The problem in rural New York, and elsewhere, is a failure to attract young adults to replace those who left in search for better opportunities, for higher education and/or to establish a home with a partner living elsewhere (Dietz 2007).

### *Changing Rural Age Composition*

The OECD population is ageing. For example, Europe reported the highest share of older persons across any of the continents in 2005, and the largest increase across the continents in relation to old age dependency (Eurostat 2009). Similarly, Australia, Canada, Japan the US and other OECD member states are becoming older as a result of slow population growth or population decline. Moreover, in most instances, rural populations are ageing more rapidly than their urban counterparts (see Figure 3). In the US for example nonmetropolitan counties contain 22 pct. of the total population but 26 pct. of persons over age 65. Similarly, in Japan many rural municipalities are depopulating with resultant population aging (Coulmas 2007). In England, the average age of a rural resident is 42 while that of an urban resident is 36 (Lowe & Speakman 2006). Ageing is often portrayed as a social problem, but it can also present social and economic opportunities. Before examining these alternative outcomes, its first necessary to understand how populations age.

### *How rural populations age?*

It is widely recognized that low population growth or population decline results in population ageing, however, this overall relationship is not particularly illuminating about the demographic dynamics producing older populations. Population aging results from four separate but interdependent processes: (a) increased longevity and aging-in-place, (b) long term net-out migration of young adults and children, (c) chronic low fertility, and (d) older in-migration. In some instances, certain of these components are most influential, while other components play a bigger role in other situations. In rural populations, chronic net out-migration of younger persons is an especially powerful component of ageing.

Long term net out-migration of younger persons has a direct ageing impact by reducing the percentage of younger persons in a population. In addition, it has the indirect effect of diminishing the share of the population in childbearing ages, and hence reducing future fertility. Obviously, fewer babies in a population will increase its average age. It should be noticed, however, that potential parents in rural areas do not necessarily have low *fertility rates*, rather it is simply that there are relatively few of them who are exposed to the risk of having children.



Geographic mobility among older persons also affects rural population ageing in at least two distinct ways. First, low out-migration at pre-retirement and retirement ages in combination with increased longevity, means that late middle age persons will survive into older age. This phenomenon is called "aging-in-place." Second, as discussed in the previous section on migration, many rural areas are experiencing net in-migration of pre-retirement and retirement age persons. This has the potential of raising average age, but in some instances older in-migration induces the demand for younger service providers who tend to counterbalance the ageing effect of the in-movement of retirees. Where two or more of these processes occur simultaneously, population ageing can be extreme. For example, in the US, about half of rural retirement destinations also have natural decrease as a result of chronic out-migration of young persons (Brown and Glasgow 2008). Research by Bucher (2001) highlights a similar situation in Germany by comparing ageing in the western and eastern parts of the country. In the context of overall low fertility, the East is ageing more rapidly as a result of long term out-migration at younger ages. What this discussion shows is that ageing is both a determinant and a consequence of slow population growth or decline.

Increasing survival to older age is also a powerful component of population aging, especially in countries that had significant baby booms after World War II. Most OECD member states had baby booms, and persons born during this period are now either entering older age, or moving toward the oldest old age groups (Notestein, et al. 1944). The extent and timing of this process depends on the length of a nation's baby boom, from about 5 years in most Scandinavian countries, to about 20 years in Germany, the US, Canada and Australia, to almost 30 years in France and the UK, how high the fertility rate rose during this time, and increases in longevity. Aging-in-place affects rural and urban areas similarly, hence in comparison with net out-migration of youth which largely affects rural areas, it is not an exclusively rural issue.<sup>1</sup>

*Is population ageing a social and economic problem?*

Population ageing is typically framed as a social and economic problem, but this is not necessarily the case. As with most aspects of population change, ageing presents both challenges and opportunities. Clearly, population ageing raises pension and care issues that can stretch community resources. However, the extent to which this is a "rural issue"

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<sup>1</sup> Note: Central cities of many larger urban areas, are experiencing net losses of young adults, but the urban sector as a whole is not losing population at young adult ages.

depends on how a nation's social welfare system is organized. In the U.S., where the funding of Medicare is a joint responsibility of the national, state and local governments (via cost sharing with the state), increased ageing-related health care demands translate directly into budget pressure at the local community level. In many other OECD nations where health care is a national program, localities are not as likely to feel the pinch of increased ageing-related health care expenditures.

Regardless of whether population ageing exacerbates a rural community's fiscal capacity, an ageing population can stretch the community's ability to provide skilled care, transportation, appropriate housing and social activities, services and opportunities that are often in short supply in rural areas regardless of their age composition.

In contrast, population ageing can provide a wide range of social and economic opportunities for rural communities. As Glasgow and Brown (2008) observed, some communities consider older persons, especially older in-migrants, to be "grey gold." Most obviously, older residents are consumers who support local businesses (Baker and Speakman 2006), and home owners who pay property taxes. This is clearly beneficial in the context of stagnant or declining overall population. In addition, older persons, especially in-migrants, have a positive impact on the real estate market and construction, provide financial and technical assistance to a wide array of civic endeavors, and they invigorate the arts and cultural scene. In particular, research shows that older persons contribute to a wide range of community organizations. As Le Mesurier (2006: 143) observed, "Groups run by and for older people are an important part of rural infrastructure, offering activities and social support, as well as part of the fabric of rural life...." Similarly, Brown and Glasgow (2008) found that older in-migrants to rural retirement destinations volunteered widely, often taking leadership positions in a diverse range of community organizations.

#### *Changing age composition and dependency*

The above discussion of the determinants of population ageing shows that ageing is an indicator of a more complex situation. In fact, *ageing per se is not the main issue*, the main issue concerns the relative balance between older persons and young adults who tend to be more active in the labour force, the so called age dependency ratio (Figure 4). Since ageing at the rural level typically involves long term out-migration of young adults, it raises the question of whether rural communities can retain an adequate labour

supply which is necessary for maintaining their economic bases and providing essential services such as education, public safety and health care. In other words, rather than focusing on ageing per se, attention should center on changes in a community's overall age composition.

According to the latest *Eurostat Yearbook* (OECD 2009), Europe's old age dependency ratio is currently the highest of any continent, 4 percentage points higher than its closest rival North America. OECD members outside of Europe and North America also share this high dependency burden. Furthermore, Europe's working age population is predicted to shrink from its current share of total population, 67.2 pct., to about 57 pct. in 2050. In other words, while the working base already supports a relatively large older population, old age dependency will increase dramatically in the future. This, of course, raises serious questions about whether Europe's OECD members, and OECD members outside of Europe, will have sufficient labour to maintain their current levels of economic activity, let alone grow. Given the higher than average rate of population aging in rural areas, and the importance of long term out-migration of working age persons in altering rural age structures, rural areas share in this dilemma. Immigration has been identified as a way to substitute for declining domestic labour supply. I examine this issue in the next section.

#### *Immigration and Rural Labour Supply*

Viewing all 30 member states as a whole, the OECD's net in-flow of international migrants increased from 1.6 million in 1998 to 3.3 million in 2005 (see Figure 5). While the majority of OECD nations experienced positive net in-migration, some lost more migrants than they gained. For example, even as the 27 EU nations gained 1.9 million more migrants than they lost during 2006-07, 5 EU members had negative immigration. Similarly, the OECD's Oceanic and North American members had positive immigration during this time, but neither Japan nor South Korea gained more migrants than they lost (Population Reference Bureau 2008). In addition, migration to the OECD is heavily concentrated in the earlier working ages, (OECD 2009), which indicates the draw of superior economic opportunity to OECD member states.

Many scholars and policy makers consider labour force age migration to be a substitute for an inadequate supply of domestic workers. As Rosenberg (2007) has shown, natural demographic change has already become negative in eight European OECD countries plus Japan. Similarly, large stretches of the U.S. Midwest have experienced natural

population decrease for decades (Johnson & Rathge 2006). In Germany, and in some Eastern European countries, chronically low fertility has so distorted age structure, thereby diminishing future reproductive potential, that population is declining with or without migration. As reported by Eurostat (2008), immigration now comprises the largest component of developed country population growth except in a few countries such as France. David Coleman's recent article in *Population and Development Review* (2009: 451) reflects this dramatic situation. As he observed

*"Germany's population decline is powerfully underwritten by negative demographic momentum despite relatively high immigration. Higher levels of immigration relative to population size maintain the population of Italy roughly in balance, while huge inflows to Spain have reversed its demographic trends and prospects from substantial projected decline to substantial growth."*

Migration is motivated by a wide range of social, political and economic considerations, hence not all migrants move in response to the availability of superior economic opportunities in host nations. As indicated above, some areas are attracting international migrants for amenity and/or retirement reasons, and while asylum applications to OECD nations have declined from previous highs they still number over 200,000 per year (OECD 2009). That being said, relative economic advantage is a powerful "pull" factor with respect to migration to the OECD. And, as observed in the 2009 *Eurostat Yearbook*, it is not simply a shortage of workers in general, but of particular types of workers, that is shaping migration policies. Hence, overall labour deficit as well as specific occupational needs fuel a large part of the increased migration to OECD member states.

*Are rural areas sharing in this migration?*

Labour migration has long been regarded as a primarily urban phenomenon. The majority of all migrants to OECD nations still settle in urban areas, but there is growing evidence that rural areas are increasing as migrant destinations. Systematic international comparative research on this issue does not exist, but an increasing number of national-level case studies has focused on migration to so-called "new destinations," some of which are rural.

These studies portray differing situations as well as similarities across the various national study sites. Virtually every study indicates that migrants are working in relatively low wage, low skill jobs, but there is some international variability in the specific occupational

sectors of employment. In the US, rural migrants are highly concentrated in agriculture, meat processing and construction (Kandel and Parrado, 2005). However, as Pfeffer and Parra (2005) showed in their study of rural New York, if farmworkers leave agriculture they tend to be employed in a wide range of lower wage production, construction and service occupations. Agriculture and construction are also well represented among migrant workers in rural Greece and throughout southern Europe (Kasimis, 2005). In Scotland, agriculture and construction are important sources of migrant employment, but so are tourism and care services (de Lima 2009). In addition, many migrants in rural Scotland have significant education, but are employed in low end jobs regardless of their qualifications. In Finland, Partenen (2009) reported that while rural in-migrants work in agriculture and construction, they also find jobs in the better paid ICT and health care sectors.

Studies show that rural migrants differ with respect to country of origin. In general, the largest share of in-migrants come from neighboring states, but this is not necessarily the case. Accordingly, the variability of origins among migrants to rural parts of Europe is worth noting. Case studies in Finland, Scotland and Greece show that distinct migration streams have developed linking various origin and destination countries. In Greece, over half of international migrants come from Albania with Bulgaria a distant second (Kasimis 2005). In Finland, most migrants come from Russia, Estonia and Sweden with smaller numbers coming from the former Yugoslavia and Iraq (Partanen, 2009). In contrast to these two cases where most migrants come from the "near abroad," migration to rural Scotland tends to originate in Poland and the Baltics (de Lima & Wright, 2009). In the U.S., most rural in-migration originates in Mexico as well as in various parts of Asia. The American rural migration dynamic is somewhat ironic. Rather than off-shoring jobs to low wage countries as is typically done with respect to non-durable manufacturing, meat packers and food processors have tended to bring low wage workers to low wage jobs the U.S. This practice has dramatically shifted the regional location of U.S. rural Hispanics from almost total concentration in five southwestern states to a much wider representation throughout the Midwest and Southeast (Massey 2008; Kandel and Parrado, 2006).

While migrants fill important occupational niches in rural economies and substitute for domestic labor where it is in short supply, most rural communities are ambivalent at best about having "new faces" in their midst. In Pfeffer and Parra's (2005) study of Mexican

migrants in rural New York, migrants and non-migrants inhabited almost wholly separate social spaces. Outside of work and school, there was almost no social interaction between the two groups. In Scotland, de Lima & Wright (2009) reported that migrants often have trouble accessing services and housing. However the authors stress that lack of access is not necessarily explained by social exclusion. Migrants bring different cultural norms and experiences with the state's public policy apparatus which affects their utilization of services and their interaction with the public sector in Scotland. de Lima and Wright also reported that social interaction between migrants and non-migrants is relatively infrequent in rural areas of Grampian Scotland. Cultural differences or norms were often cited as deterring socializing. In other words, simply working in a community does not necessarily guarantee that new comers are actually "living" there in the sociological sense. Social integration of new comers is a clear challenge for rural communities experiencing in-migration.

## **Conclusions**

The demographic trends and changes portrayed in this paper identify opportunities as well as challenges for rural people and communities throughout the OECD. Demographic transformations induce changes in other aspects of society and economy, but *demography is not destiny!* Rather, the impacts of demographic changes are mediated by local social structure, and by the larger national and international environments in which rural areas are embedded (see Figure 6). As I have observed elsewhere (Brown 2008: 242), "To assume that a unit change in population size or composition automatically and mechanistically results in a similar magnitude of change in economic activity, poverty reduction, farm land conversion, or public service utilization is to deny the agency of actors and the instrumentality of community institutions." The translation of demographic changes into enhanced or diminished rural well being is contingent on how rural communities position themselves with respect to external forces and whether national and supra-national governance is able and willing to develop strategies and policies that facilitate meaningful social and economic life in the OECD's rural peripheries.

Although national and global forces have the potential to undermine localities, rural communities with strong institutions are better able to mobilize their resources and negotiate mutually beneficial agreements with global and national-level actors. While

community development scholars disagree on the exact nature of local social structure that contributes most to community sustainability, they agree that strong and responsive social organization is required for rural communities to avoid being overwhelmed in today's global world (Flora and Flora, 2003; Luloff and Bridger, 2003; Lyson and Tolbert, 2003).

The demographic trends and changes described in this paper could contribute to propelling people and communities on either an upward or a downward trajectory, depending on the future rural development choices made by OECD member states at the national, regional and local levels. Challenges will not become opportunities without informed public debate, and well articulated strategies that map out clear options for public and private actions and investments. Social science research has a key role to play by informing these policy choices. My overall conclusion is that the OECD underutilizes its regional data base for rural-oriented research. I was unable to locate even one document that systematically compared a wide range of social and demographic trends and processes across the OECD. In other words, what exactly is the "new rural demography?" how does it vary across the OECD?; what factors account for these differences, and how do demographic trends and changes affect social and economic well being in differing contexts?

My review of the literature also indicates that there are wide gaps in knowledge on the three aspects of rural demographic change I focused on in this paper: internal migration and population redistribution, changing age composition, and international migration. International comparative research on migration and population redistribution is needed to make sense of the different patterns being experienced across the OECD. While impressive comparative international studies of internal migration and population redistribution were once conducted (Vining and Kontuly, 1978), few have been reported in recent decades. As a result, it is virtually impossible to make a definitive statement about the direction of urbanization or counter-urbanization in the OECD aside from the situation in a few countries such as the US, Canada and the UK.

More research is being conducted on changes in age structure, yet relatively few studies focus on the aspects of population ageing that are of particular concern to rural people and communities – (a) the direct and indirect affects of chronic out-migration of young adults and (b) retirement migration in rural settings. Moreover, research on ageing tends to be negatively biased as a "pensions and care" issue. More research is needed to

examine the social and economic opportunities presented by population ageing in general, and retirement in-migration in particular.

Finally, research on international migration to rural communities is woefully lacking. High quality case studies have been conducted in a number of countries, but we lack the ability to make systematic statements about the determinants and consequences rural in-migration across the OECD. This is the biggest gap in the literature, and the area where research is least able to inform critical policy decisions.

Research on migration is especially timely during the current economic recession that is adversely affecting most OECD member states. Word of mouth reports indicate that some migration streams into the OECD have been reversed, for example the stream linking Poland and the UK and Ireland. In the US, piecemeal evidence suggests that the recession has slowed migration from Mexico as a direct response to the abrupt slowdown in construction and housing-related activities. These migration reversals directly affect rural economies given the critical importance of migrant workers in agriculture, tourism, care giving for dependent populations, and other rural pursuits. The OECD needs authoritative information on the rural impacts of changes in migration so that timely policies can be crafted to chart effective and sustainable paths of recovery.

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Figure 1: Becoming a Rural Retirement Destination

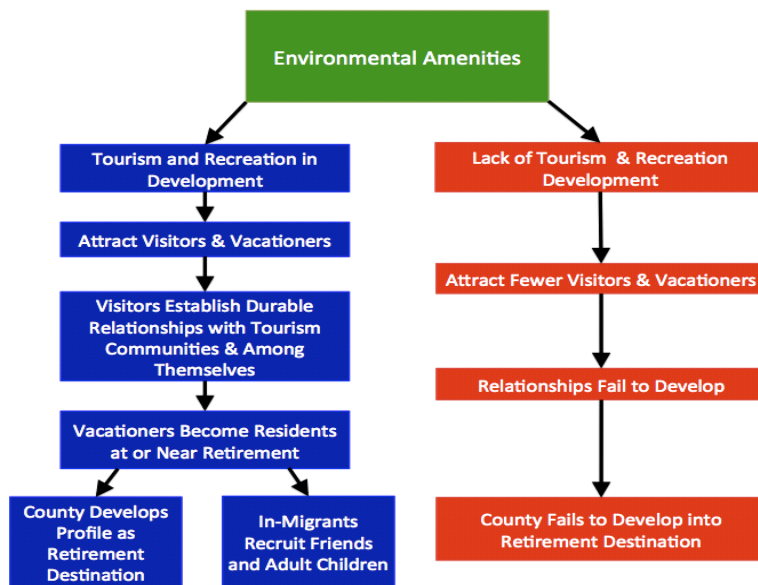


Figure 2

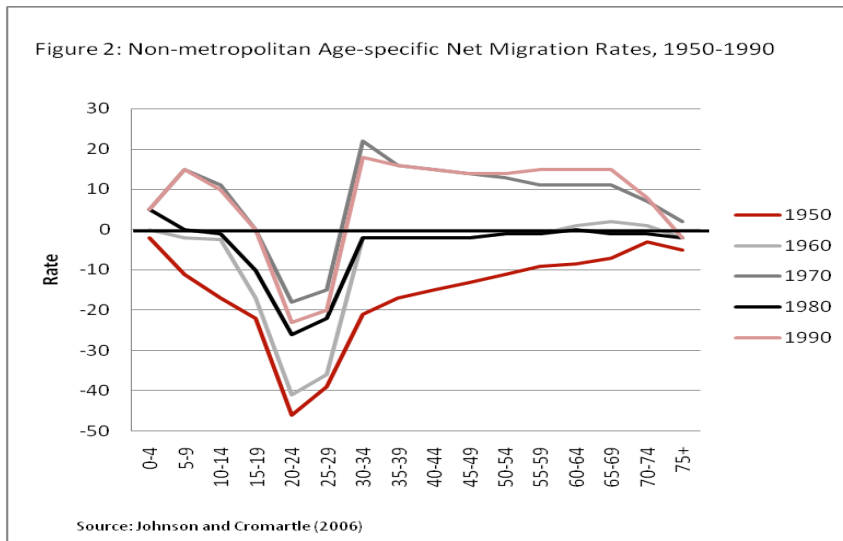


Figure 3

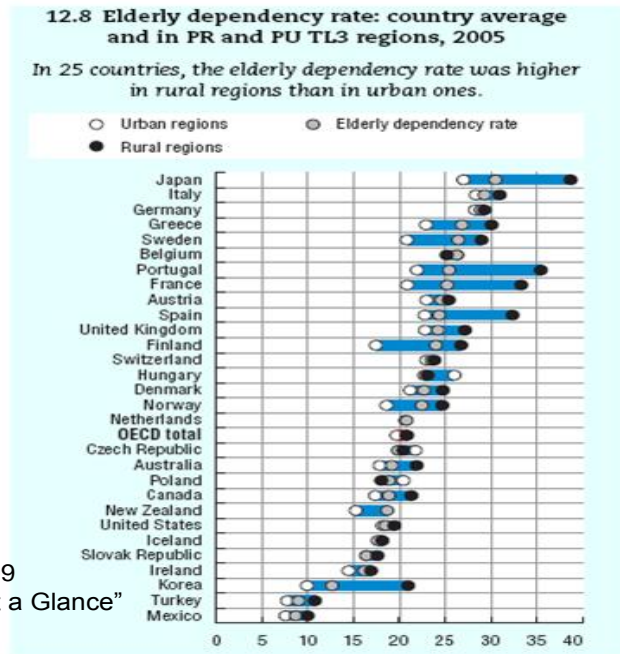




Figure 4

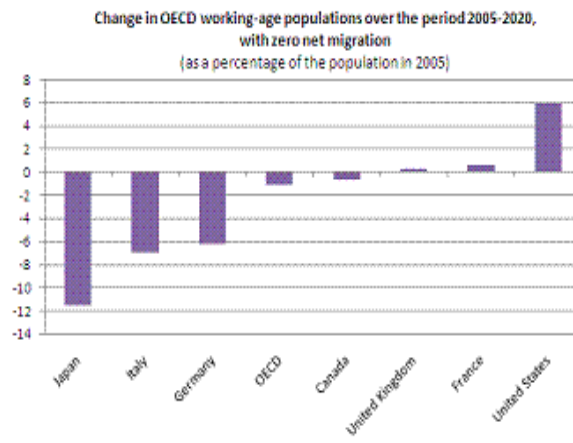
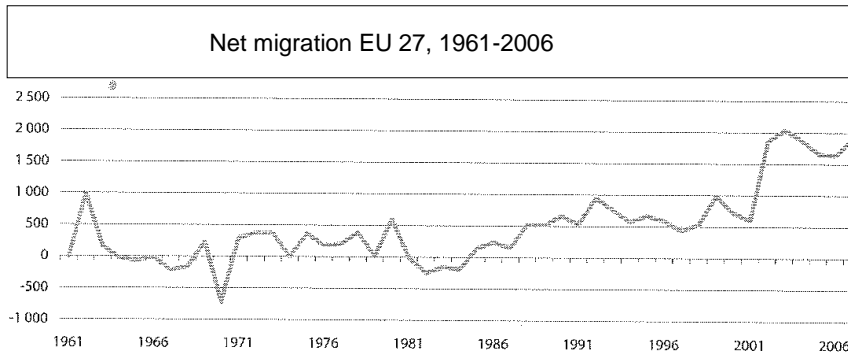


Figure 5



(1) Break in series: up to and including 1997 France includes metropolitan regions only; 2007 data are provisional.  
Source: Eurostat (tsdde230)

Figure 6

