Urban and Counterurban Migration: City and Countryside Push and Pull, the Internet, and Spouses

Sandra Charvat Burke and Mark A. Edelman
Community Vitality Center, 181 Heady Hall,
Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011
515-294-9307, scburke@iastate.edu, medelman@iastate.edu

This research reported in this paper directly compares and contrasts urban and counterurban migrants to assess economic, social, and amenity and lifestyle models of migration. The research focuses on the decision-making process of migrants moving to or from a group of nonmetropolitan counties that are not classic amenity locations with mountains or coastlines. It utilizes a unique study that not only located recent in-migrants but also located and surveyed out-migrants who had left the same areas thus allowing a direct comparison of two opposing migration streams in terms of demographic characteristics, attitudes, and economic and social motivations for moving. The goal is to assess the balance among traditional economic models of migration, the role of social ties, and a counterurban model of migration with a focus on amenities and lifestyle factors in migration to determine what differentiates a nonmetropolitan migrant from a metropolitan migrant. The continued viability of our country's less densely settled regions depends on maintaining and growing the population and remains a major concern for nonmetropolitan communities as well as population researchers.

The nonmetropolitan population “turnaround” and counterurbanization of the 1970s stimulated much worldwide discussion and research on the topic of what really comprises counterurban migration, whether the trend really happened, if it continued or changed, and what are the most recent trends and future prospects (Boyle and Halfacree, 1998; Brown, 2002; Brown and Wardwell, 1980; Dahms and McComb, 1999; Dominia, 2006; Halliday and Coombes, 1995; Johnson, 2003; Johnson, et al; 2005; Kandel and Brown, 2006; Mitchell, 2004). Migration patterns in nonmetropolitan counties have been quite variable across time and space. Some rural counties which experienced decades-long outmigration had an inmigration "turnaround" during the 1970s, only to fall back into outmigration in the 1980s. Another turnaround occurred during the 1990s for some nonmetropolitan areas but recent studies suggest continued variation in migration patterns across nonmetropolitan counties (Brown, 2002; Dominia, 2006; Johnson, 2003; Johnson, et al; 2005). Many regions, especially those dominated by agriculture and without scenic amenities may be continuing to lose population (White, 2008) and Dominia's (2006) findings are especially troubling, suggesting net outmigration coupled with net loss of those with higher levels of education.

Much previous migration research has been conducted at a macro level of analysis, analyzing structural factors in aggregate population flows between geographic areas. These studies are able to examine aggregate migration streams and assess if there is net gain or loss based on levels of employment, income, and other characteristics of origin and destination areas. In general, migration streams have been found to have net flows toward areas of higher income and employment and thus away from many nonmetropolitan areas.

A contrasting approach to migration research uses micro or individual level information. Motivations and choice processes are usually assessed by surveys of migrants and potential migrants (Brettell and Hollifield, 2000; De Jong, 1999; De Jong and Gardner, 1981; Hammar, Brochmann, Tamas, and Faist, 1997; Jobes, Stinner, and Wardwell, 1992; Lewis, 1982; Malmberg, 1997; Pandit and Withers, 1999). Neoclassical economic theory has had an especially significant influence on micro level research as many studies have started with an assumption that migrants were rational actors who moved based on principles of economic maximization (Brown, 2002; DaVanzo, 1981; Jobes, Stinner, and Wardwell, 1992). Indeed, work-related reasons are frequently cited as a key factor in migration, especially when longer distance moves are involved (Schachter, 2004). Previous studies have also found that family, social, quality of life, and amenities can be important factors that influence the decision to migrate. In recent decades, these noneconomic motives in migration have received increased attention and amenity factors have been found to be important in the rapid inmigration in some nonmetropolitan counties (Jobes, 1992; Johnson, 2003).

Expected Relationships

Based on traditional economic models of migration, migrants bound for metropolitan destinations would be more likely to be motivated by jobs and work than migrants going in the opposite direction. Indeed, these are the classic pull factors of metropolitan destinations which are found in both macro and micro types of migration research. In addition, metropolitan migrants would be expected to be younger, have higher levels of education, and higher levels of income than those bound for nonmetropolitan areas. Possibly related to work factors, some research has found that men may have a higher likelihood than women of moving to metro areas.

Nonmetropolitan areas have their own set of pull factors that center around lifestyle such as a fresher, cleaner, and healthier environment, scenic landscapes, less crowding, and pace of life. As a counterpart to these rural pull factors, cities also have the push factors of crime, traffic congestion, crowding, and high costs of housing. These kinds of factors taken together comprise the classic counterurbanization model and would be more likely to be found as motivations for nonmetro bound migrants than those going to metropolitan areas.

Cities do have pull factors beyond the availability of work. Entertainment, cultural activities, shopping, and the arts are generally more available in metropolitan locations. Such urban amenities would likely be more important to those going to metro locations than to those bound for nonmetro areas.

Social ties are factors for many migrants and people move in order to be closer to family and friends. These motivations might be common among both nonmetro and metro bound migrants. However, since smaller communities are perceived as more personal, interest in moving to be with family and friends might be more important for those going to nonmetro locations. The kind of area in which a person grew up may impact later migration preferences as well. It is likely that persons who grew up in metro locations may prefer those as adults while those who were raised in smaller communities may have a preference for nonmetro areas as adults.

The Study

Although many people and households move annually, it is not necessarily easy to directly study migrants because national surveys of the general population generally do not contain many respondents who have actually moved. Finding those with nonmetropolitan origins or destinations in order to study counterurban movement is perhaps even more difficult. The research reported here utilizes a recent survey of nonmetropolitan migrants in Iowa who were located through a marketing company's "new movers" database. By utilizing current and previous zipcodes and addresses, those who had moved either into or out of the selected counties could be located through the database, even if they had moved to other counties or to other states.

People who had moved either into or out of 18 selected nonmetropolitan, nonmicropolitan counties in Iowa (Adams, Appanoose, Cherokee, Davis, Decatur, Floyd, Hamilton, Hardin, Henry, Howard, Jefferson, Page, Ringgold, Sioux, Taylor, Union, Van Buren, Wayne) were eligible for the study. The criteria to be included were that both their new and past zip codes had to be known, at least one of the zip codes had to be from the selected 18 counties, and the zip codes had to be different, indicating a community move rather than just a move across the street or down the block. A cursory estimate of the expected number of movers was made based on county-to-county migration data from Census 2000. The actual number of movers generated from the database compared well with the estimated number. No further sampling of the movers was done and all names and addresses generated from the database were initially included in the study.

Surveys were designed that asked questions about the respondent's current location as well as their previous location, reasons for moving, satisfaction with multiple factors in their communities, as well as their demographic, social, and economic information. The surveys, along with several follow-ups as needed, were mailed to the addresses generated from the marketing database in the fall and winter of 2005 and 737 respondents who met the study criteria replied for an estimated response rate of 35%.

Each respondent's previous and current community, county, and state are known and each county of origin and county of destination was coded as being metropolitan, micropolitan, or neither (nonmetro and nonmicro). This research reported here utilizes a subset of the original respondents who either migrated from a metropolitan area to one of the study's 18 nonmetro, nonmicro counties (149 respondents) or who left one of the 18 counties and moved to a metropolitan location (136 respondents). Using only these respondents in this analysis gives a set of movers who most clearly made a move between nonmetro and metro locations.

The reasons for moving were assessed by a number of questions in the survey. The respondents were asked to fill in an open-ended question which asked for the first and most important reason for leaving their previous location as well as their second and third most important reasons, if applicable. The responses were analyzed for content and categorized into four main categories: work (including job, income, education, and retirement), family (including relationships and health), community (including services, amenities, weather, and lifestyle), and housing (including ownership, and affordability). A fifth category of "other" is reported for the

few items that did not fit into the four main categories. Because the questions were open-ended and fill-in, some respondents included more than one meaningful reason in each of the items. Each of the reasons was counted, thus, the number of reasons was larger than the number of respondents.

Next, a series of 15 work-related reasons were presented and for each item the respondent was asked to circle "yes" or "no" if the factor was involved in the decision to move. Finally, another series of 26 family, community, and quality-of-life reasons were listed and the respondent was asked to indicate which, if any, were part of the moving decision. For these two series of 41 questions, the respondents could respond “yes” to any which were applicable. Respondents were also asked about their age, gender, level of education, household income, and type of area in which they grew up.

Findings

The responses for the question on the most important reasons for moving, the series of 41 questions on specific motivations for moving, along with the demographic and social characteristics of the respondents were analyzed by the nonmetro and metro direction of migration. Because these are all categorical measures, the association of each item with the direction of migration was initially tested with chi-square (Tables 1 – 4).

The respondents, both metro and nonmetro bound, cited work-related issues most frequently as the most important reason for their move, however those who moved to metro locations were significantly more likely (63.2%) to name work reasons as most important than were the nonmetro movers (40.9%). Family-related reasons as well as community and housing motivations played a role for both sets of migrants, but the nonmetro group was significantly more likely than the metro movers to list a family reason as most important. The difference between the groups in housing reasons nearly reached the .05 level of significance as well. Overall, the nonmetro movers gave a set of reasons that was more balanced among the four main categories of reasons while the metro bound group was more focused on work as most important (Table 1).

It was with the reasons that were given as second and third most important that community issues were cited more often than any other type for both groups. Work reasons were cited much less often (21%) than with the most important reason. None of the differences between the two groups emerged as significant at the standard .05 level, but family and housing were again more common for the nonmetro bound group.

When all the reasons given as important were merged together, the nonmetro and metro groups were significantly different on three of the four types of reasons. The metro bound migrants more often said work was important than did the nonmetro group, while the nonmetro bound migrants more often named family and housing as important (Table 1).

A more detailed picture of work-related factors is presented in Table 2 with the findings from the series of questions asking about specific work factors. The results from these questions give additional support to economic models of migration. The respondents most frequently said yes

to the factors of moving to be closer to a work location, having a new job with a new employer, moving to look for work, and moving because of retirement (the absence of work). The differences between the groups reached statistical significance on moving to be closer to work and the retirement question and were nearly significant on taking a new job and moving to look for work. Two other variables emerged as significantly different between the groups, the nonmetro bound group was more likely to say they moved to start farming while the metro group significantly more often cited starting education. The results of both of these are a function of the location of farms and colleges. It is also worthy to note the lack of importance of the military at a time when the country had major conflicts in two countries.

Multiple aspects of family and relationships can impact a moving decision. In general, proportions of the respondents as high as for the previously noted work factors said that moving to be nearer parents, children, siblings, or friends was part of their moving decision (Table 3). Consistent with the findings in Table 1, the nonmetro group was significantly more likely than the metro movers to note moving to be nearer parents or siblings and other relatives. It was the metro bound group, however, who was significantly more likely to say they moved to be in a place where it would be easier to find a spouse or partner. The nonmetro movers cited poor health of someone in the household more than the metro movers. Both groups, however, cited moving to be closer to various relatives much more than said they moved to be farther from relatives. Moving for childcare was not cited often, and although respondents noted local schools and opportunities for children more than they mentioned childcare, none of these factors was significantly different between the two groups.

The lifestyle, quality-of-life, and community issues were very significant motivations for moving both in terms of the large number of respondents who cited these as factors as well as for the differences in these factors that emerged between the metro and nonmetro movers. More than 60 percent of the nonmetro bound respondents said they wanted to find a less congested place to live, a simpler pace of life, or to lower the cost of housing. More than half of the nonmetro group also said they wanted a safer place to live or to have lower taxes. The contrast on these lifestyle factors with the metro movers is distinct and significant. Depending on the question, just four to fifteen percent of the metro bound migrants cited any of these five factors (Table 3). In addition, none of the work or the family factors elicited such a large response as was generated by these lifestyle items. Taken together, these responses lend support to the counterurban model of nonmetropolitan migration.

Metropolitan areas do have amenity pull factors, however. Fifty-two percent of the metro bound respondents said they wanted to find more arts, entertainment, or cultural activities; forty-five percent cited wanting a more exciting lifestyle. These responses from the metro movers contrasted distinctly with the nonmetro group as ten percent or fewer of the nonmetro movers cited these factors (Table 3).

Several other factors elicited significantly different responses between the metro and nonmetro groups. The metro respondents were more likely to cite wanting better internet, tv or phone service or more ethnic diversity than the nonmetro group. The nonmetro movers were somewhat more likely to say they wanted less ethnic diversity (Table 3). A desirable natural environment was noted more often by the nonmetro group as well. Natural environment factors are a

component of the counterurban migration model, but because this study took place in Iowa, not known for scenic mountains or coastlines, it was interesting to find that Iowa's rural, agrarian environment can be perceived as attractive and desirable.

Finally, there were some differences between the two migration groups on the demographic and social variables used in the analysis (Table 4). As expected, the nonmetro group was somewhat older, of somewhat lower income, and more likely to be female than the metro bound movers but the difference was significant only for the age variable. More difference was expected on education than what was shown between the groups. The metro movers had higher proportions with bachelor degrees but the nonmetro group had higher levels of advanced degrees. The metro bound group had more respondents with a rural or farm background than did the nonmetro movers, but neither the education nor background differences were significant.

From the separate bivariate analyses reported in Tables 1 – 4, there is evidence for an economic model of migration, support for the influence of social ties, and significant support for a counterurban model of migration as well. In order to assess the balance and importance of these factors together and to differentiate nonmetropolitan from metropolitan migrants, they must be entered together into a multivariate analysis. Although discriminant analysis is commonly used to differentiate groups and predict group membership, the categorical nature of the variables in this survey infringes on the assumptions of discriminate analysis. Instead, logistic regression is used to predict the likelihood of nonmetropolitan migration based on the factors included in this survey.

A preliminary series of logistic regressions (not reported here; available from author) was undertaken with separate sets of the independent variables (demographic and social characteristics, most important reasons for moving, work factors, social tie and family factors, lifestyle and community factors). In order to pare down the large number of independent variables into an efficient, manageable, and appropriate number, variables that remained significant after these preliminary regressions were retained and entered with those from the other sets. The final model contains six independent variables that retain significance and, when taken together, provide an appropriate model fit and a good prediction of cases (Table 5).

The variables in the model show that nonmetropolitan migration is highly influenced by wanting to find a less congested place to live. Indeed, the odds ratio suggests that those wanting a less congested place to live were 49 times more likely to be in the nonmetro group than those who did not cite wanting a less congested location as a factor in their decision. Wanting to lower the cost of housing also positively distinguished nonmetro movers from the metro bound group. Several other variables also distinguished nonmetro movers by highlighting those who were *less* likely to be in the nonmetro group. Males were less likely than females to be in the nonmetro group along with those who said they wanted to find arts, entertainment, and cultural activities. Two other factors resulted in especially low odds ratios with regard to nonmetro migration. Respondents who said they wanted to be in a place where it would be easier to find a prospective spouse or partner and those who indicated that wanting better internet, tv, or phone access were especially unlikely to be in the nonmetro bound group. These six variables together correctly predicted 83.9% of the nonmetro cases and 82.9% of the metro cases. The Cox & Snell r-squared was 0.516 and the Nagelkerke r-squared was 0.688.

Conclusions

The bivariate and multivariate analyses provided here from movers in opposing migration streams suggests that the city and the countryside each have push and pull factors that influence migration decisions. The counterurban model is supported for nonmetro bound movers as they seek less congestion and the related aspects of a simpler pace of life, less crime, and a pleasant environment. Housing costs also are a factor promoting nonmetropolitan migration.

Economic factors were important in the bivariate analyses and, as expected, were cited more frequently as most important by the metro bound migrants. This supports economic models of migration, however, none of the work factors remained significant in the logistic regression to differentiate metro and nonmetro movers. Our set of respondents had migrants moving in both directions in order to take new jobs. This suggests that aggregate analysis of net flows of migrants do not do justice to the complexity of migrant flows going in either direction. These findings show that young adults do move to nonmetro areas and that people with college educations also move in the nonmetro direction. It is not just a one-way street out of nonmetro America.

Metro areas were shown to have additional pull factors, however. In addition to the recognized pull factors of employment and income, this analysis shows that social relationships, entertainment amenities, and technological capabilities have important roles to play in migration decisions into metropolitan areas. These were additional factors that differentiated metro bound migrants from those going in the nonmetro direction and may become even more important in the future as technological innovations increase.

There clearly are economic, family, community, and amenity factors at work as people decide whether to stay where they are or to move somewhere else. This research shows support for economic models and factors in migration decisions and social ties also were reasons our respondents gave for moving. Our research found, however, that the most significant factors differentiating nonmetro movers from those who were metropolitan bound was in the areas of amenities and lifestyle. Nonmetropolitan migrants were seeking a counterurban lifestyle and metropolitan migrants were attracted by city amenities and activities.

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Table 1: Percent giving work, family, community, or housing reason as important for leaving previous location by direction of migration.[1]

	Direction of Migration		
Type of Reason	Metro to Nonmetro N =149	Nonmetro to Metro N = 136	
First and most important reason	%[1]	%[1]	
Work, income, retirement, education	40.9	63.2	***
Family, friends, health	34.2	23.5	*
Community, services, amenities	25.5	21.3	
Housing	9.4	3.7	+
Other	1.3	2.9	
Second and third most important reason	%[1]	%[1]	
Work, income, retirement, education	21.5	21.3	
Family, friends, health	30.9	21.3	+
Community, services, amenities	46.3	52.9	
Housing	16.8	10.3	
Other	5.4	8.8	
Total important reasons given	%[1]	%[1]	
Work, income, retirement, education	53.7	72.8	***
Family, friends, health	55.7	38.2	**
Community, services, amenities	53.0	60.3	
Housing	21.5	11.8	*
Other	6.7	11.0	

[1]Percents do not add to 100 because some respondents gave more than one reason.
chi-square p + <.10 * <.05 ** <.01 *** < .001

Table 2: Percent responding "Yes"[1] to work-related factor as part of decision to move by direction of migration.

	Direction of Migration		
Type of Reason	Metro to Nonmetro N = 149 % yes[1]	Nonmetro to Metro N = 136 % yes[1]	
Closer to work location	25.5	46.2	***
Moved but same employer	10.3	7.1	
Job transfer by employer	9.0	10.1	
Laid off from previous job	3.4	7.8	
New job, new employer	23.6	33.1	+
Moved to look for new job	17.4	27.1	+
Moved to start farming	6.9	0.0	**
Moved when stopped farming	1.4	2.3	
Moved to start business	4.8	4.7	
Moved to lower business costs	2.7	0.8	
Moved when stopped business	0.7	0.0	
Military entry, transfer, exit	0.7	1.6	
Moved to start education, training	3.4	16.3	***
Moved when finished education	8.3	7.7	
Retired from previous employment	21.2	10.1	*

[1]Respondents could respond “Yes” to more than one question.
chi-square p + <.10 * <.05 ** <.01 *** < .001

Table 3: Percent responding "Yes"[1] to family, community, or quality-of-life factors as part of decision to move by direction of migration.

	Direction of Migration		
Type of Reason	Metro to Nonmetro N = 149 % yes[1]	Nonmetro to Metro N = 136 % yes[1]	
To be nearer parents	30.8	19.1	*
To be nearer children	23.8	19.4	
To live with spouse or partner	12.5	15.2	
To be nearer siblings, other relatives	41.1	27.8	*
To be nearer friends	33.8	27.7	
Change in marital status	12.4	11.4	
Place where easier to find spouse, partner	4.1	18.3	***
Poor health of someone in household	17.7	7.6	*
Take care of aging parents	8.2	4.5	
To be farther from family, relatives	8.2	6.1	
To find available, affordable childcare	3.4	2.3	
For better quality schools	18.5	12.9	
Greater opportunities for children	18.5	24.2	
To find less congested place to live	63.0	3.8	***
To find safer place to live	57.5	10.6	***
To lower cost of housing	64.9	9.1	***
To have lower taxes	52.4	14.5	***
To have better internet, TV, phone	2.1	16.0	***
To live in desirable natural environment	49.3	22.7	***
To find more outdoor recreation	27.4	31.1	
To find arts, entertainment activities	9.6	52.3	***
To find simpler pace of life	65.8	15.2	***
To find a more exciting lifestyle	10.3	45.0	***
To have more ethnic diversity	5.5	25.8	***
To have less ethnic diversity	9.7	1.5	**
To live new place, have fresh start	40.0	44.6	

[1]Respondents could respond “Yes” to more than one question.
chi-square p + <.10 * <.05 ** <.01 *** < .001

Table 4: Characteristics of respondents by direction of migration.

	Direction of Migration	
	Metro to Nonmetro N = 149	Nonmetro to Metro N = 136
Age in Years*	%	%
18 -24	4.1	13.4
25 -34	20.3	26.9
35 -44	12.8	24.9
45 - 59	30.4	23.9
60 -69	18.2	11.2
70 or older	14.2	9.7
Gender	%	%
Male	54.4	59.7
Female	45.6	40.3
Education completed	%	%
Less than 9^{th} grade	0.7	0.0
9^{th} to 12^{th} grade, no diploma	2.7	3.0
High school graduate or equivalent	10.8	17.2
Some college or vocational training	31.1	20.1
Associate degree	10.1	14.2
Bachelor degree	25.7	31.3
Advanced degree	18.9	14.2
Area in which grew up	%	%
Rural area on a farm	20.9	26.4
Rural area but not on a farm	13.4	7.0
Small town under 2,500	12.7	14.7
Medium town 2,500 – 24,999	21.6	20.2
Large town 10,000 – 49,999	3.7	5.4
Small city 25,000 – 49,999	6.0	6.2
Small metro area 50,000 – 249,999	11.2	9.3
Large metro area over 250,000	10.4	10.9
Household income in 2004	%	%
Less than $20,000	20.0	15.9
$20,000 - $34,999	19.3	16.7
$35,000 - $49,999	18.6	18.2
$50,000 - $69,999	18.6	18.2
$70,000 - $99,999	11.0	14.4
$100,000 - $149,999	10.3	11.4
$150,000 or more	2.1	5.3

chi-square p + <.10 * <.05 ** <.01 *** < .001

Table 5: Logistic regression coefficients, standard errors, significance, and odds ratios predicting nonmetropolitan bound migration vs metropolitan bound migration.

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	Wald	Signif level	Odds ratio
To find less congested place to live	3.906	0.869	20.182	***	49.704
To lower cost of housing	1.734	0.562	9.503	**	5.661
To find arts, entertainment activities	-2.113	0.536	15.541	***	0.121
Place where easier to find spouse, partner	-2.975	1.146	6.743	**	0.051
To have better internet, TV, phone	-3.152	1.171	7.248	**	0.043
Gender = male	-1.081	0.383	7.970	**	0.339
Constant	.287	0.309	0.860		1.332

p * <.05 ** <.01 *** < .001

Omnibus test of model coefficients chi-square 197.229 df 6 signif 0.000
N = 272 -2 Log likelihood = 179.122 Cox & Snell R-Square = 0.516 Nagelkerke R-Square = 0.688
Hosmer and Lemeshow chi-square 4.455 df 7 signif 0.726
Cases correctly predicted Total = 83.5% Nonmetro bound = 83.9% Metro bound = 82.9%