



How people move to rural areas: Insights in the residential search process from a diary approach



Rixt A. Bijker*, Tialda Haartsen, Dirk Strijker

Faculty of Spatial Sciences, University of Groningen, PO Box 800, 9700 AV, Groningen, The Netherlands

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 24 April 2014

Received in revised form

19 December 2014

Accepted 6 January 2015

Available online 2 March 2015

Keywords:

Residential mobility

Housing search

In-depth interviews

Representations

Internet

The Netherlands

ABSTRACT

Given the ascribed importance of in-migration for the development of rural areas, it is remarkable that little attention is paid to *how* people end up in a specific rural place. This paper closely addresses the way in which the decision-making process of rural in-migrants takes place *during* their residential search. To do so, we experiment with the diary approach; a novel method in studying the residential search processes. Our findings indicate that the search process of home seekers in rural areas in the northern Netherlands is not always linear, and that based on their search process, different groups of searchers can be distinguished. The search areas of local, regional and distant searchers not only seem to differ in scale, but also in the extent to which they change over the course of the process. Whereas local movers began searching in their own or in neighbouring villages, and continued to do so throughout the search process, most regional and distant searchers started their search in one region but ended up somewhere completely different. Previous contact with an area, resulting in positive perceptions, appears to be essential for including an area in the search space. Our findings also suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the role of perceived social characteristics of rural areas in residential choice. Following searchers over time with a partly qualitative diary approach shows the non-linearity of the process, the role of representations, the more emotional aspects of residential decision-making and the influence of coincidence on the process.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

In the context of the transition of the rural from a production to a consumption space, in-migration is often seen as an important opportunity for the development of rural areas (e.g. Andersen, 2011; Stockdale, 2006). In-migration provides economic benefits such as extra jobs in the rural economy (Stockdale et al., 2000; Findlay et al., 2000) as well as an increase of expenditures (Findlay et al., 2001). In-migrants may also contribute to the social fabric of rural areas. Stockdale and MacLeod (2013) show for instance for pre-retirement age migrants, a high incidence of participation, volunteering and the holding of responsible positions in local community groups. Newcomers are also known to play crucial roles in the regional development of rural areas by bringing in human capital, entrepreneurship, relevant social networks, and renewed impetus to the area overall in the forms of ideas and fresh enthusiasm (Stockdale, 2006; Derounian, 1998).

Against this background of the importance of in-migration for rural areas, it is remarkable to notice how little attention is given to the decision-making processes of rural in-migrants. This oversight was justly pointed out recently in this journal by Stockdale (2014). People do not move to 'the rural', they choose a specific property in a specific rural region. Nevertheless, ample studies on rural in-migration or counter-urbanisation mainly examine the characteristics and motivations of people moving into rural areas in general. In so doing, they tend to focus either on people considering a move, i.e. stated preferences (Van Dam et al., 2002) or on people who have already made a move into the rural, i.e. revealed preferences (Bijker and Haartsen, 2012; Bijker et al., 2012, 2013; Gkartzios and Scott, 2009; Grimsrud, 2011). But little attention is paid to *how* people end up in a specific rural place. We take the view that this facet can be explored by closely examining the way decision-making takes place *during* the residential search process. Also in the housing literature generally, the search process has remained under-researched, partly due to the predominance of quantitative research on housing mobility (McPeake, 1998; Posthumus and Kleinhans, 2014). As Clampt-Lundquist (2004) remarks: 'we tend

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: r.a.bijker@rug.nl (R.A. Bijker).

to know quite a bit about outcomes and precious little about process' (p. 422).

The lack of attention for the decision-making processes of rural in-migrants is even more notable given the knowledge already available on the uneven distribution of rural in-migration. Some rural areas are considered as more attractive places in which to live than other areas (Bijker and Haartsen, 2012; Bijker et al., 2012); but also within less popular or depopulating rural areas one can observe so-called 'hotspots': characterised by rising house prices and in-migration of highly educated and high income households (Andersson, 2013; Magnusson Turner, 2013). Woods (2005) refers to this as 'the regionally uneven nature and uneven local geography of rural migration', which means that not all rural areas are able to benefit to the same extent from the opportunities that in-migration offers. More insight in the decision making processes of migrants in the rural context might help to better understand these differences between areas.

In addition to our knowledge on who migrates to the countryside and why, we think it is important to examine the 'how' of counter-urbanisation. Therefore, the first aim of this paper is to study the residential search process in rural areas. Greater insights into the process between stated intentions to move and actual moving behaviour in a rural context may provide policymakers in rural areas with opportunities to influence the number of in-migrants to their areas. That this is relevant is illustrated by the finding that non-local movers with a rural location preference more often move to a location other than that initially preferred, with urbanites facing a higher likelihood of moving eventually to an urban area (De Groot et al., 2012). The same study shows that, despite lower incomes, local movers are more likely to find homes within their preferred rural location than intended non-local movers. De Groot et al. (2012) note that it remains as yet unclear to what extent this can be explained by differences in the constraints people face in realising their preferences, in the strength of the rural location preference, or to factors such as emotional place attachment and local ties of intended local movers. Further investigation into the search process of these movers could increasingly uncover the role played by these factors.

The second aim of the paper is to explore the utility of a new method for studying the residential search process: a diary approach which applies both qualitative and quantitative elements. Until now, the search process has mainly been studied using retrospective survey methods, computer experiments, retrospective interviews, and simulation models (Donaldson, 1973; Hooijmeijer and Oskamp, 1996; Phipps, 1983; McPeake, 1998; Harper, 1991). There is only scant longitudinal research into the search process (Huff, 1986; Cronin, 1982; Goetgeluk, 1997). A diary approach however has several advantages as opposed to these existing methods. Firstly, it reduces the problem of the inaccuracy of memory, which is an issue that has been closely associated with the use of retrospective methods; Stockdale (2014) acknowledges this potential problem in her study using retrospective interviews (see also Benson and O'Reilly, 2009). A second issue arising from the use of retrospective methods is that often only people who did make a move to a (specific) rural area are included. Following people during their search process offers the opportunity to take note of changes that take place during the search process, whether their search leads them to new search areas, or if even if they quit their search. Furthermore, a diary approach in which people are repeatedly approached during their search has the potential to offer insights into what happens between the longer intervals of a longitudinal approach. Finally, by including qualitative elements in the approach, the opportunity arises to glean further insights into the often overlooked, more emotional, non-economic, less tangible aspects of human decision-making (Levy et al., 2008).

Our respondents were all searching for houses in rural areas in the northern Netherlands and were recruited through real estate agents in the area. Although in comparison with other European countries the Netherlands is a densely populated and urbanised area, a considerable part of the country is defined as rural by official bodies such as Statistics Netherlands and also according to the Dutch population (Haartsen et al., 2003a). In our definition of rural we follow Statistics Netherlands' national standard for the degree of urbanisation, the so-called address density, defined as an average of fewer than 1.000 addresses per square kilometre. We chose to locate our study in the northern Netherlands as it is the most rural part of the country according to both address density and the perceptions of the Dutch people (Haartsen et al., 2003a). Moreover, the North contains a wide variety of rural areas in terms of characteristics such as house price, landscape, accessibility, building style, and history (Bijker and Haartsen, 2012), which makes the region highly suitable for the study of search behaviour. As with other rural areas in Europe, population decline has begun in the Netherlands, specifically in peripheral parts of the country, including the northern Netherlands (Haartsen and Venhorst, 2010). Nevertheless, over 20.000 people from elsewhere in the Netherlands move to the North of the Netherlands each year and of these in-migrants 54% find a place to live in a rural area. In addition to migration flows from other parts of the country there is internal migration as well. On an annual basis approximately 30.000 people coming from one rural or urban municipality in the North, move to a rural municipality in the northern Netherlands (Bijker and Haartsen, 2012).

We start our paper with a discussion of the literature on residential search in general and within rural areas specifically. Thereafter we provide detail on the concept of representations. The diary approach is explained in the methodology section, followed by the results and conclusion.

2. Theory and previous research

2.1. The residential search process

The individual decision-making process with respect to residential mobility includes the formation of a positive attitude towards moving, the search for and evaluation of housing alternatives and ultimately the decision to move or to stay (De Groot et al., 2012). If intended movers are unable to realise their preferences, they may choose to stay in their current homes (Brown and Moore, 1970) or resort to substitution: the acceptance of a new home that may satisfy some but not all of their initial preferences (Goetgeluk, 1997). The realisation of intentions to move depends on the interaction between the triggers or motives for moving, housing preferences, individual resources and restrictions on the one hand, and the opportunities and constraints in the housing market on the other (De Groot et al., 2011a; Hooimeijer and Oskamp, 1996). Often, the motive for moving develops from one of the careers that together form the life course: the residential, the household, education or employment career (Mulder, 1993). Anticipated changes in these careers can also affect the probability that the intention to move is realised because some triggers for moving are more urgent than others. While intended moves triggered by changes in the household, employment or educational careers are usually associated with a high degree of necessity, moves triggered by residential motives are often less urgent (Goetgeluk, 1997). On the other hand, unanticipated household and employment changes can lead to the postponement or cancellation of the intended move or result in an unexpected move within a short period (De Groot et al., 2011b; Speare, 1974).

The residential choice process occurs within the context of the housing market. By searching, the potential migrant interacts with

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/92461>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/92461>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)