



## Once an outsider, always an outsider? The accessibility of the Dutch rural housing market among locals and non-locals

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### A B S T R A C T

#### Keywords:

Rural location preferences  
Actual location choice  
Local housing market pressure  
Longitudinal research

One of the most pressing questions in the rural gentrification literature is whether rural residents face difficulties in finding a home within their locality due to the influx of more wealthy newcomers. In this paper, we investigate the extent to which intended local movers and intended non-local movers have realised their rural residential preferences in their preferred municipality. We perform multilevel multinomial logistic regression analysis on data from two housing surveys for the Netherlands that are enriched with register data from the longitudinal Social Statistical Database (SSD). Our results show that, despite of their lower income, intended local movers are more likely to find homes within their preferred rural location than are intended non-local movers. Intended non-local movers move more often to a location other than that initially preferred, with urbanites facing a higher likelihood to move to an urban area. The findings suggest that ties to the residential environment are more important in successfully finding housing in one's preferred rural location than are financial resources.

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### 1. Introduction

In recent decades, many Western European and North American rural geographical studies have addressed the popularity of living in rural areas (Jones et al., 2003 for the United States; McGrath, 2001 for Ireland; Stockdale, 2010 for Scotland). Also in the Netherlands, which is one of the most urbanised countries in the world, many urbanites have a preference for rural living (Van Dam et al., 2002). The combined popularity and scarcity of rural housing in parts of Western European countries (Heins, 2003 for the Netherlands; Shucksmith, 1991 for the UK), is reflected by high housing prices. In the Netherlands, rural areas within the urban sphere of influence particularly face a highly pressured housing market (Heins, 2003).

As several rural geographers have observed, it has frequently been claimed that rural residents have problems securing rural housing when the local housing market is under pressure (e.g., Hoggart, 1997; Stockdale et al., 2000). Through their higher income,

non-locals have the opportunity to outbid rural residents (for example, see Cloke and Little, 1990; Smith and Phillips, 2001; Stockdale et al., 2000), which may lead to the displacement or out-migration of less affluent rural residents (Cloke and Little, 1990; Hoggart, 1997; McGrath, 2001; Shucksmith, 1991; Smith, 2002). Because of the selectivity of rural migration flows with members of a middle class group replacing less affluent rural residents, rural areas become “colonised” by the middle class (Cloke et al., 1995a; Day et al., 1989; Phillips, 1993). This process is often referred to as rural gentrification (Phillips, 1993, 2004).

Nonetheless, irrespective of whether they are using qualitative or aggregated data on actual moves, studies analysing the mobility processes in rural areas, do not provide conclusive evidence for the general validity of the claim that rural residents have difficulty finding homes within their locality and are forced to move elsewhere (cf. Millbourne, 2007). This lack of evidence may be related to the fact that many studies on rural gentrification are area-specific and thus context-specific (see also Hoggart, 1997; Stockdale et al., 2000). This may make it tricky to generalise findings. As Lewis (1998) argues, by adopting a micro-behavioural perspective and paying attention to mobility intentions and actual mobility behaviour, rural geographical studies would gain a better understanding of why people move into and out of the countryside. Thus far, this type of study has rarely been performed (Lewis, 1998). Investigating rural mobility decisions from a micro-behavioural

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perspective essentially requires longitudinal data. As Smith (2002) remarks, the use of longitudinal data may improve our understanding of the migration dynamics of gentrification.

In this paper, we investigate whether rural residents indeed face relocation difficulties within their locality by analysing individual rural mobility decisions from a micro-behavioural perspective. Do intended local movers realise their rural location preference (i.e., their preference to move to a rural area within their current municipality) less often than intended non-local movers? Do income and the local housing market pressure matter regarding the extent to which intended local and non-local movers move to locations different from those they initially preferred? We will also pay attention to the question of whether rural residents are more inclined to express a preference to leave their municipality if the local housing market pressure is high.

We use data from two cross-sectional housing surveys for the Netherlands, the Housing Demand Survey (HDS) 2002 and the Housing Research Netherlands (HRN) survey 2006, that are enriched with individual register data from the longitudinal Social Statistical Database (SSD). By following individuals longitudinally, we try to make visible what remains invisible in studies that rely solely on data regarding actual moves. This study employs multi-level multinomial logistic regression of the realisation of rural location preferences.

## 2. Theory and background

Whether it applies to a rural or an urban context, the individual mobility decision-making process includes the formation of a positive attitude towards moving (e.g., a desire, intention, or expectation), the search and evaluation of housing alternatives, and, finally, the decision to move or to stay. There are important conceptual differences between the various positive attitudes. Desires are often seen as unconstrained attitudes representing longings; that is, people may have a desire without considering the possibility to fulfil this desire (Crowder, 2001; Desbarats, 1983; Lu, 1998). Conversely, intentions and expectations, whereby expectations also indicate whether individuals think that the behaviour is likely to happen in the future (Sheeran, 2002), are thought to be constrained in the sense that they incorporate an individual's perception of the possibilities to change residence (e.g., Lu, 1998). Accordingly, intentions and expectations are considered to be more rational (cf. Davis, 1984) and better predictors of actual behaviour than desires in the sense of longings (Crowder, 2001; Lu, 1998).

This paper focuses on the realisation of rural location preferences among rural residents and urbanites intending to move. In line with De Jong (1999), this intention to move indicates that one is willing to change residence. This willingness is likely constrained. Related research, for example, has shown that lower income groups are less likely to be willing to move than higher income groups (De Groot et al., 2008). Although our measurement of a positive attitude towards moving is rather simple (see Section 3.1), it comes closest to the concept of an intention.

### 2.1. Preferences to move to or within rural areas

Preferences for rural living are often ascribed to the characteristics of rural areas such as peacefulness, space, greenness, and a slower pace of life (Bunce, 1994 for the United States; Halfacree and Boyle, 1998 for the United Kingdom). The positive and idealised image surrounding many aspects of the rural lifestyle, community, and scenery (e.g., Cloke and Little, 1997; Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen, 2010), is certainly not a new phenomenon; the "rural idyll" already emerged in the eighteenth century, when industrial barons bought up county estates and grand mansions in

the Victorian countryside (Bunce, 1994). The rural idyll in particular, offers an explanation for rural preferences among urbanites (Bunce, 1994; Halfacree, 1994; Jones et al., 2003; Van Dam et al., 2002). However, rural residents' preferences can also be related to the rural idyll: rural experience generates attachment to the characteristics of rural areas (Feijten et al., 2008) and thus may affect residential preferences.

In line with the assumption that people take hampering and facilitating factors into account in the formation of intentions to move (for example, see Desbarats, 1983; Gardner et al., 1985), intended movers' location preferences are most likely accounted for perceived local housing market opportunities (compare Feijten et al., 2008). If people believe that it is difficult to realise their latent (rural) residential preferences in a certain municipality due to a high local housing market pressure, then they may not express a preference to move to this municipality (see also Section 2.2.2). Rural residents living in areas with a highly pressured housing market are, therefore, expected to express a preference for moving elsewhere more often than those living in rural areas with a less pressured housing market. However, such factors as emotional attachment to the locality (Fischer and Malmberg, 2001) and location-specific capital, which indicate the degree to which people are embedded (socially and economically) into their locality (DaVanzo, 1981), may make rural residents less willing to leave their municipality. In such cases, an initial favourable attitude towards moving may not crystallise into an intention to move at all (Gardner et al., 1985).

### 2.2. Realisation of rural location preferences

If intended movers are unable to realise their rural location preference, two adjustment mechanisms can be expected. First, intended movers may choose to stay in their current homes. Second, intended movers may decide to move to a rural area in a different municipality than initially preferred or they may move to an urban area. The latter is often referred to as substitution: the acceptance of a new home that may fit some, but not all, of one's initial preferences (Goetgeluk, 1997). Which of the two alternatives will be chosen is highly dependent on personal circumstances. Personal circumstances not only determine whether it is possible to postpone the intended move but also the willingness to move to a location that does not comply with one's initial location preferences. Goetgeluk (1997) showed that most people are not willing to move to a location different from that initially preferred because location preferences are often strong. In line with this finding, McHugh (1984) showed for the United States that just 16 percent of those with a specific destination in mind relocated to a destination different from that initially preferred.

#### 2.2.1. Intended local movers versus intended non-local movers

Studies on rural gentrification frequently claim that rural residents, so-called "locals", face difficulties realising a preference to move within their rural locality because they are outbid by more affluent non-locals (chosen as the all-embracing term for such descriptions such as "incomers", "newcomers", "non-residents", "returnees", and "outsiders" found in studies on rural gentrification, e.g., Cloke and Little, 1990; Shucksmith, 1991; Smith, 2002).

Although this assumption is, to say the least, quite persistent, there is no conclusive empirical evidence for its general validity. Based on in-depth interviews, the studies of McGrath (2001 for North West Connemara in Ireland) and Stockdale (2010 for Scotland) indeed suggest that rural residents have difficulties in finding homes within their locality and are forced to move elsewhere. Stockdale and colleagues (2000 for rural Scotland) and Guimond and Simard (2010 for Québec) find some qualitative evidence that

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