Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)
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Snapshot: Expressions of Urban – Peri-Urban – Rural Relationships

Counterurbanization via Multiple Residences

Helsinki, Finland

1. Brief Description

Since the late 20th century, many developed countries have experienced urban population deconcentration, labelled as counterurbanization. There has been an academic discussion on the meaning, validity and universality of this concept, drivers of counterurbanization and its impacts on rural areas. To date, research on counterurbanization mostly applies static and discrete definitions of residence, migration and population, which is an increasingly simplistic view in the contemporary reality of a growing multitude of mobility forms, often related to dual residence. Particularly large-scale quantitative studies on counterurbanization are limited by existing statistical practices.

This study attempts to overcome this obstacle and describe the transformation of the settlement system in Finland by acknowledging the role of second home mobility. To achieve this goal, it introduces two alternative measures of population (seasonal and average population) and analyses their spatial dynamics between the years 1990 and 2014 based on georeferenced grid statistical data. The study finds that although the registered population has been concentrating during the analysis period, seasonal population has been increasingly dispersing due to the growing number of second homes. The study shows how the population resides in their second homes during the year, and it is reported monthly during a year. It shows that the counterurbanization process, though not noticed by conventional statistics, does occur in Finland, manifested by seasonal, rather than permanent moves. The peak of second home occupation is during the holidays – especially July – but people do live in their well-equipped second homes also in the wintertime. Teleworking takes place, but there are no exact figures as to its generality. This study is not able to reveal the age distribution of second home residents, but it is known that retired people in particular can reside in their summer homes through the autumn, winter and spring.

The study concludes that various mobility forms should be taken into account when analysing the urban-rural population dynamics and transformations of settlement systems, as well as in rural development planning.

2. Questions and/or Challenges

This study explores the spatial patterns of population development in Finland between 1990 and 2010. We present a way to acknowledge the role of temporary mobility in the process of settlement system transformation, in response to the appeals to include diverse human mobilities into the population geography. Moreover, we aim to reveal the spatial patterns of population deconcentration hidden under the phenomenon of second homes. To achieve these goals, we introduce two alternative measures of population (seasonal and average population) and analyse their dynamics between 1990 and 2010 using grid statistical data, complemented with more in-depth survey data on the access and use of second homes in Finland. We use Finland as a case study for three reasons: the strong and ongoing urbanization process that the country is going through and related weakening development prospects of the rural areas; the large scale of second home mobility; and the availability of unique GIS and survey data that enabled us to perform a detailed quantitative study.

3. Main Insights

3.1. Indications of the application of the new concept of 'New Localities'

Official statistics indicate that the Finnish population has increasingly concentrated in and around major cities during the recent decades. This development has been paralleled by continuous population loss in peripheral rural regions. However, the urban-rural population dynamics appear more complex when taking into consideration temporary mobilities, as illustrated by the alternative population measurements proposed in the paper. Seasonal population assuming the highest attendance at second homes is much more spatially dispersed than registered population, and significantly outnumbers the registered population in many amenity-rich areas. Over time, contrary to registered population, seasonal population has increasingly dispersed as a result of the growth in number of second homes. Over half of the Finnish territory experienced an increase in seasonal population, compared with only 16% of territory where registered population increased. Regionally, the increase in seasonal population is the strongest in the amenity-rich areas of the sea coast, the Lakeland and the ski centres of northern Finland, while in other rural regions, particularly in western Finland, loss of registered population is not compensated by a seasonal population increase. Also, the average population figures calculated based on the average lengths of stays in second homes show that the spatial extent of rural depopulation has been in fact much smaller than registered population statistics suggest.

3.2. Insights related to the broad area of 'Smart Development'

We advocate taking temporary population into account when planning local development strategies as it can contribute to the development of rural areas equally to the “permanent” registered population. Although not being registered as residents, seasonal dwellers also use local resources, infrastructure and services, and they have considerable impact on rural land use patterns and ecosystems. Therefore, seasonal and average population measures

can be helpful in a number of planning and policy fields. In planning, scaling and managing infrastructure, such as transport and telecommunication networks, water and electricity supply, waste management and green infrastructure (and, consequently, financial needs of local authorities for infrastructure maintenance and development), the measure of seasonal population developed in this study can actually be a more appropriate tool than registered population. The measure of average population, in turn, may be useful to estimate and project the demand for local public and private services. For instance, increasing year-round use of second homes and aging of their owners imply an increasing latent burden for health care services in rural areas (Åkerlund et al. 2015). A dynamic approach which takes into account not only changes in the number of second homes, but also in the patterns of their use, allows to forecast future changes in demand for infrastructure and services.

3.3. Other insights that could be relevant for further work

This study highlights the importance of including various forms of mobility in analysing and explaining the population dynamics. The traditional notions of singular and static place of residence, migration as a shift between such static states, and the population of an area as their aggregation are increasingly ineffective in capturing the diversity of forms of mobility, including these related to multiple dwelling. Different research approaches should be applied to describe and understand the complexity of population mobility: exploratory qualitative research should be accompanied by quantitative studies using various sources of data (spatial, register, survey) to provide usable data and overcome the problem of inflexibility of traditional measurements. A better integration is also needed between different research fields addressing the urban-rural population dynamics, including population studies, rural studies, and tourism studies. Deeper understanding about the directions, drivers and transformations of the population flows of various spatial and temporal scales is crucial in explaining the current population processes, as well as for addressing effective development policies to rural and urban areas.

4. Data Sources and Indicators

In our analysis, we use the YKR database (Monitoring System of Spatial Structure and Urban Form), one of the most advanced georeferenced statistical databases in the world, enabling to perform nationwide analyses using GIS methods. The YKR database is created and maintained by the Finnish Environment Institute, and it comprises data about population, housing, workplaces and travels to work from the years 1980-2010 for each of about 6.3 million 250 m x 250 m square-shaped grid cells into which the territory of Finland is divided. We generalized the original data into lower spatial resolution of 5 km x 5 km cell size, as such resolution is sufficient for the purpose of the study and generalization facilitated computing and graphical presentation of the results.

Table 1 Data / Indicators for Example 1

Data / Indicator	Source
Monitoring System of Spatial Structure and Urban Form	http://www.ymparisto.fi/fi-FI/Elinymparisto_ja_kaavoitus/Yhdyskuntarakenne/Tietoa_yhdyskuntarakenteesta/Yhdyskuntarakenteen_seurannan_aineistot (in Finnish)

5. Critical Appraisal of Data Use

Data is under license; Luke can use it, but no access rights can be granted to other ROBUST partners.

6. References

Adamiak, C, Pitkänen K. & Lehtonen O. (2017). Seasonal residence and counterurbanization: the role of second homes in population redistribution in Finland. GeoJournal 82(5): 1035–1050.

Åkerlund, U, Sandberg, L (2015). Stories of lifestyle mobility: representing self and place in the search for the 'good life'. Social & Cultural Geography 16(3): 351–370. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2014.987806