

The effects of geographic amenity migration: Occupational status among residents of high population growth, high amenity, recreational areas

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Abstract

Population growth in rural areas characterized by high levels of natural amenities has recently received increased attention. Concerns have been raised about the effect that in-migration has on long-term residents. This paper empirically models the growth of long-term rural residents' occupational prestige using the Panel Study of Income Dynamics. The results suggest that long-term residents of high amenity regions have higher occupational status, but are not advantaged when it comes to status growth.

In recent years, natural amenity rural areas have experienced population growth at much higher rates than non-amenity regions. Migrants are increasingly drawn to areas characterized by favorable climates, attractive scenery, and recreational opportunities. While these growth trends in high amenity regions are well documented, the impacts of this growth remain unexplained. Current research does not provide conclusive evidence about whether this growth is beneficial or detrimental to the socioeconomic status (SES) of residents. Furthermore, research does not address how these demographic trends differentially affect the SES of long-term, rural residents living in various geographic and demographic contexts. This research addresses this gap in the literature and focuses on how rural demographic change impacts the SES of long-term, rural residents in a given environmental context. Specifically, we are interested in the effects of natural amenities on occupational prestige. We first review recent work describing rural population redistribution, with a focus on natural amenities, and demographic change. Second, we review literature on the importance and relevance of occupational prestige as a measure of SES. Following, we provide a description of the rural SES within our sample, and provide research that examines the longitudinal trends of occupational prestige in high amenity growth areas. Finally, we discuss the conclusions, limitations, and areas for future research. The 1990's have brought with them a "rural rebound", with many rural areas experiencing the fastest growth in 20 years (Johnson 1999). This growth, preceded by stagnation in the 1980's has been a result of net migration, rather than the traditional "natural increase" associated with nonmetropolitan rural areas. This net migration has led to an influx of migrants whom were not traditionally located in rural areas, bringing with them differential incomes, additional levels of education, and experience in non-traditional, rural occupations. Coinciding with this rebound in rural areas, there has been an increased in- migration to areas ranked high in natural and recreational amenities. Whereas, natural or geographic amenities include amiable geographic characteristics including climate, temperature, and/or topography, recreational or retirement areas often include many of these same characteristics with the addition of infrastructures that promote recreation within these geographic amenities.

For example, recreation areas may include amenities such as access to water and water recreation, a gateway to national park land, or mountainous terrain conducive to skiing and other mountain recreation. Indeed, 90% of rural recreation areas experienced growth between

1990 and 1998, and high amenity counties experienced 120% growth from 1970-1996. This increase of migration brings with it both positive and negative consequences. According to Kenneth Johnson (1999), the influx of in-migrants into rural amenity regions potentially creates additional jobs. For example, opportunities may open for construction, and there may be an increased demand for employees in retail and commercial services that serve this growing population. Also, this increase in jobs may result in an abatement of young out-migrants seeking work, preventing the much-discussed "brain drain" 1 While natural amenities are conducive to recreation areas, 20% of U.S. recreation areas fall in the bottom half of natural amenities, partially due to seasonal attractiveness.