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URBAN RURAL MIGRATION IN THE DUBLIN CITY- REGION

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore in-migration trends to the rural hinterland of the Dublin city-region\(^2\). Recent trends have been characterised by population increases in Dublin's surrounding rural areas, resulting in urban sprawl and an increasingly dispersed city-region, which in turn fuels greater car dependency and longer commuting distances. This trend is not unique in Ireland, as similar spatial phenomena have been observed in most western societies and, in part, reflects changing demands for rural space (in an increasingly post-agricultural society) and consumer preferences towards rural areas and environmental amenities. However, in the case of Dublin, housing growth in the rural hinterland of the city not only includes the growth of rural towns and villages, but also of dispersed single dwellings in the open countryside – a distinctive feature of Irish settlement patterns. This paper begins with a discussion of the counterurbanisation concept, followed by a brief overview of counterurbanisation in a European context. The national and regional policy framework for managing settlement is then reviewed. Drawing on recent census data, the paper examines recent spatial trends in residential development in the Dublin city-region to consider the extent that residential growth has been occurring in the rural hinterland of Dublin City. This involves four components: demographic changes; house-building activity; house prices; and travel-to-work commuting patterns. Finally conclusions are developed, in particular highlighting the need for further research.

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\(^2\) For the purposes of this paper, the Dublin city-region is defined as the Province of Leinster, comprised of the following counties: Carlow, Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny, Laois, Longford, Louth, Meath; Offaly, Westmeath, Wexford, Wicklow. This definition extends beyond the Greater Dublin Authority administrative boundary, reflecting the increasing influence of the capital city.
The counterurbanisation phenomenon

In recent decades, traditional patterns of urban growth and rural decline have changed dramatically in most advanced capitalist societies. In this transformation, the key factor has not been any important shift in the natural balance between births and deaths in either urban or rural areas, but rather it is the reversal from net loss to gain in the transfer of people from town to countryside that has been the crucial factor. The dominant net movement in advanced countries, Perry et al. (1986) argue, is now generally away from the older and larger towns and towards their rural fringes and the less densely populated outer regions, a migration trend that has been also termed counterurbanisation.

The term counterurbanisation was first coined in North America, nearly thirty years ago to describe the spatial out-migration of people from cities to rural areas. For the American geographer Berry, counterurbanisation represented the direct antithesis of urbanisation. Counterurbanisation was defined as “a process of population deconcentration; it implies a movement from a state of more concentration to a state of less concentration” (Berry, 1976 p. 17). In contrast to the defining elements of 19th and early 20th century industrial urbanisation (increasing size, density and heterogeneity), the process of counterurbanisation has as its essence decreasing size, decreasing density, and a decreasing heterogeneity (Berry, 1976). The conceptualisation of the new term helped to draw attention to a new and important tendency, which constituted a turning point in the American urban experience.

The model of urban/rural movement was initially seen as a clean break from the past – a decisive break with traditional urban value-systems. It constituted the complete antithesis of conventional thought of urbanisation: centrifugal rather than centripetal, operated by quality of life instead of pecuniary forces and consumer rather than producer-led. The theory suggests that with higher incomes, greater increased mobility and a vastly improved rural infrastructure, large numbers of town-dwellers can move towards their ideal of a rural lifestyle. Advanced capitalist societies have entered a high-mobility era where masses of people can live and work where they choose. Thus, this kind of movement involves not merely a geographical but also an ideological leap, and a desire for an alternative way of life (Perry et al., 1986). Generally these changes fitted very closely with notions of a shift from an industrial to some form of ‘post-industrial’ society, as they appeared to provide a physical and readily measurable manifestation of more complex and deep-seated changes believed to be taking place in economic and social structures (Champion, 1998). The spillover school of thought represented the first and least restrictive step in narrowing down the definition of counterurbanisation from the very wide interpretation Berry gave. The central argument is that population growth taking place within the commuting fields of existing metropolitan centres cannot be considered as a break from past trends, but merely a continuation of the local metropolitan decentralisation involving shifts of people and jobs from core to ring in each
urban region (Champion, 1989). According to the urban-sprawl model higher-paid and prestigious ‘head-office’ functions continue to concentrate in the centre while lesser-skilled operations are forced out because of rising rent and labour costs. Workers also move to the rural periphery, taking advantage of the cheaper housing costs and the advances of telecommunication, which allow ‘net-workers’ to communicate rather than to commute to work over long distances (Perry et al., 1986).

Most studies seeking to explain counterurbanisation focus on the motivations of people moving into rural areas (Champion, 1989; Halliday and Coombes, 1995; van Dam et al., 2002). However, there has been little precise agreement as to the significance of the term itself. Counterurbanisation has been interpreted either as a migration movement, a relocation of urban residents from large (often metropolitan) to small (often non-metropolitan) places or a process of settlement change. The focus, therefore, shifts from a migratory movement to one of a process of settlement system change, resulting in the creation of a deconcentrated settlement pattern (Mitchell, 2004). In an effort to promote a more consistent usage of the word, Mitchell construed counterurbanisation as a migration movement, rather than a pattern or a process. Such a movement cannot be considered homogenous but may vary in terms of both the destination of migrant households and the motivations driving relocation – therefore its categorisation in sub-forms is necessary. The three forms Mitchell proposed are as follows:

- The term ex-urbanisation can be used to describe the movement of well-to-do urban dwellers to the bucolic countryside surrounding urban centres. Although motivated to reside outside the metropolitan core, these ex-urban residents are highly connected to the city with daily commute to work patterns;

- The term displaced-urbanisation can describe household moves that are motivated by the need for new employment, lower costs of living and/or available housing. Unlike ex-urbanisation, moves taken by such urban dwellers are to whatever geographic location provides for these needs;

- The term anti-urbanisation can describe movement of people whose driving force is experiencing life in a non-metropolitan setting. Anti-urban motivations move residents (beyond the suburbs) to escape crime, taxes, congestion and pollution. Therefore, in this case urban dwellers not only long to live in a rural environment (as a result of push and pull factors) but, for those in the labour force there is also the desire to work in a less concentrating setting.

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3 The term counterurban was proposed to describe a pattern of population distribution that is deconcentrated (small number of people being distributed in many settlements), and the term counterurbanising to describe the process whereby a settlement system is transformed from a concentrated to deconcentrated state (Mitchell, 2004).
Counterurbanisation in Europe

According to Kontuly (1998), spatial trends in European countries between the 1960s and the 1990s showed no clear-cut patterns but rather trends towards urbanisation as well as counterurbanisation. In Finland for instance, urban concentration is a dominant feature of the migration system; migration flows are heavily directed towards the few largest urban centres located mainly in the southern parts of the country. However, against the common belief that migrants head only to urban areas, both urban and rural regions are experiencing in and out-migration, and there is also a constant inflow of migrants to peripheral and more distant regions. In-migration to rural areas in Finland is selective, but partly in an atypical way as rural in-migrants tend to be older and have less human capital than those moving to other areas. Therefore, rural areas are constantly loosing the most competent (young, educated) segment of their population to urban regions and instead they receive retirees. Despite the current trend of migration, opinion polls show that two out of three Finns place a premium on rural residential environment against the urban. In particular it is the residential preferences that are drawing people into rural areas: a good living environment, cheaper housing and quality of life are the strongest pull factors of rural areas (Nivalainen, 2003).

Similarly in the Netherlands the demand for rural residential environments appears to be large. Urban-rural migration is also a selective process in the Netherlands, and it involves higher income households, the elderly, and younger and middle-aged families with children. In addition, urban-rural migration is tightly constrained by factors such as the availability of dwellings, house prices and development control and regulation at a local level. In areas that are commonly perceived as attractive, rural housing is a scarce commodity and this scarcity is maintained by state planning and intervention. Most people who consider a move to rural areas, consciously and deliberately choose a rural environment on the basis of the ‘rural’ characteristics of the area. However, new possibilities for rural housing are currently restricted and consequently, Dutch spatial policy is facing the dilemma whether this demand for rural residential environments should be facilitated and how (van Dam et al., 2002).

In the UK evidence of previous censuses highlights a continuing decline in population in large urban areas and an increase in population in rural areas. These changes in population have been accompanied by shifts in employment and retailing but evidence suggests that the dispersal is associated with longer travel distances and increased reliance on private transport. The quality of the rural environment is one of the most important factors in the appeal of rural areas as places to live and many city dwellers aspire to live in more rural areas (Stead, 2002).

From this brief assessment of European experiences, it is apparent that counterurbanisation cannot be evaluated without considering the concept and perception of rurality. As van Dam
et al. (2002) argue urban-rural migration, images and representations of the rural and preferences for living in rural residential environments are strongly linked. The manner in how people conceive rurality – a rural idyll as many commentators argue (see for example, Halfacree and Boyle, 1998; Gorton et al., 1998; Boyle et al., 1998) – can influence individual migration behaviour. Thus, images of the countryside play a considerable role in rural living preferences and can make rural residential environments very popular amongst urban residents. However, images and representations of the rural are not static and have changed considerably as rural economies and societies continue to restructure. In fact, fundamental transformations have taken place in Europe’s rural economy and society, and new patterns of diversity and differentiation are emerging within the contemporary countryside. These may be summarised as (drawing on Marsden, 1999):

- The decline in agricultural employment, and in the relative economic importance of food production, accompanied by structural changes in the farming industry and food chain;
- The emergence of environmentalism as a powerful ethic and political force;
- The related emergence of new uses for rural space, and new societal demands in relation to land and landscape and the treatment of animals and nature;
- Increased personal mobility, including commuting, migration, tourism and recreation;
- The emergence of new winners and losers from change processes, and especially recognition of ‘excluded groups’ suffering from poverty and economic and social vulnerability.

Given the depth and prolonged character of crisis in the agricultural sector, some commentators have suggested that rural areas are experiencing a shift from a ‘productivist’ (agricultural) to a ‘post-productivist’ era in the countryside (Halfacree, 1997; Hadjimichalis, 2003). In this post-productivist phase, rural localities are now places that people from outside come into to consume the diversity of things that now make and constitute rural space (Gray, 2000). Traditional rural images based on agricultural features, and negative associations with agricultural issues (overproduction, environmental pollution, intensive farming, livestock diseases, etc.) and the presumed conservative rural life, whether correct or not, seem to have been replaced by broadly shared positive images connected with rural amenities such as greenness, nature, peace and quite and space (van Dam et al., 2002).

In line with the European experience, Ireland’s rural communities are also undergoing rapid and fundamental changes: the agricultural sector continues to restructure; the economic base of rural areas is diversifying; new consumer demands and practices have emerged; there is a growing concern for the environment and increased pressure to include the environmental dimension in decision-making; and some rural communities are under intense pressure from urbanisation, while other areas continue to experience population decline. Within this context,
a survey of 1,500 respondents on public attitudes to the environment and quality of life issues (UII, 2001), revealed a particular image of the Irish countryside. The principal benefits of rural living included the peace of rural areas (18 per cent of all respondents), followed by clean air (13 per cent) and then space. Other perceived benefits of rural life included less drugs, pleasant walks, integrated schools and good sporting facilities. On the other side the main limitations of rural life in Ireland, according to the same survey were the lack of public transport (29 per cent of all respondents), followed by isolation (15 per cent) and distance from facilities (9 per cent). Interestingly, some 9 per cent also felt the there were no limitations to rural living at all. Finally over half of respondents expressed a preference for rural life, whereas the corresponding figure for urban/suburban life was just over one third (see figure 1). The research also highlighted respondents’ aspirations to shift from urban/suburban living in both the short to medium term to a more rural based lifestyle in the long term (see table 1). Following this survey it appears that there is a preference in Ireland towards rural living. That preference could translate into an Irish rural idyll – an image of the Irish countryside appealing to the majority of people as a desirable residential environment, which represents both a desire among rural dwellers to remain in rural communities, and for urban dwellers to migrate to rural areas.

Figure 1: Preferences for rural or suburban lifestyle in Ireland

Table 1: Choice of areas in short, medium and long term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Periods of time</th>
<th>Choice of area (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>next 5 years</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10 years</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 10 years</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Public Attitudes to the Environment and other Issues (UII, 2001)

4 The survey was based on interviews with a probability based random sample of Irish adults (aged 18+) population (UII, 2001).
Policy Framework in Ireland

Following European trends, the urban policy discourse in Ireland increasingly favours a compact city approach with increasing residential densities as a means to prevent urban sprawl and to reduce the spatial separation of daily activities, particularly travel-to-work patterns. Both the recently published National Spatial Strategy (NSS) (DOELG, 2002) and the Regional Planning Guidelines for the Greater Dublin Area (RPGs) (Dublin Regional Authority and Mid-East Regional Authority, 2004) endorse this approach to urban development. In relation to the Greater Dublin Area, the RPGs’ settlement strategy proposes two separate Development Policy Areas – the Metropolitan Area and the Hinterland Area (see figure 2). The settlement strategy proposes that development within the Hinterland Area will be balanced by the concentration of development into identified towns characterised by an increase in residential densities and high levels of employment activity, high order shopping, a full range of social facilities and separated from each other by strategic green belt land. The longer-term objective is to create self-sufficient towns, with only limited commuting to the Metropolitan Area. Five classifications of urban centres are detailed in the RPGs based on size and function as follows (p. 131) (Figure 2):

1. Metropolitan Consolidation Towns. They will be the main growth areas within the Metropolitan Area;
2. Large Growth Towns (Primary Development Centres). Such towns occur both in the Metropolitan and Hinterland Areas;
3. Moderate Growth Towns (County Towns and Towns with over 5,000 population). Such towns occur both in the Metropolitan and Hinterland Areas;
4. Small Growth Towns (Towns 1,500-5,000 Population). Such towns occur in the Hinterland Area;
5. Villages (Villages 1,000 Population): (a) Commuter Villages and (b) Key Villages. Such villages occur in the Hinterland Area.
However, despite this policy agenda, a distinctive feature of both remote and accessible rural areas in Ireland over the past thirty years has been the growth in dispersed housing in the countryside, and recent years have witnessed increasing difficulties in addressing this issue. The proliferation of dispersed single dwellings in the countryside has been an issue for many years, but the scale and pace of recent years appears to be intensifying. For example, analysis undertaken during the preparation of the National Spatial Strategy suggested that between 1996-1999 over one in three new houses built in the Republic of Ireland have been one-off housing in the open countryside, and highlighted that the issue of single applications for housing in rural areas has become a major concern for most local planning authorities (Spatial Planning Unit, 2001). Commentators such as Aalen (1997) and McGrath (1998) have argued that the planning system is unable to respond effectively to rural settlement growth. In a critique of rural planning, both commentators suggested policy has been driven by the priorities of a few individuals, an intense localism, and the predominance of incremental decision-making. Similarly, Gallent et al. (2003) classified rural planning in Ireland as a laissez-faire regime, suggesting that: “the tradition of a more relaxed approach to regulation, and what many see as the underperformance in planning is merely an expression of Irish attitudes towards government intervention” (p. 90).

Although dispersed housing in the countryside is often portrayed as a singular issue among many commentators and in the national media, clearly differences exist between different types of rural areas, including the drivers of settlement change and rural community context.
A positive development in the National Spatial Strategy was the adoption of a differentiated rural policy, and this was reflected in its approach for housing in the countryside. Encouragingly, the Strategy called for different responses to managing dispersed rural settlement between rural areas under strong urban influences and rural areas that are either characterised by a strong agricultural base, structurally weak rural areas and areas with distinctive settlement patterns, reflecting the contrasting development pressures that exist in the countryside. This was further developed in the NSS with a distinction made between urban and rural generated housing in rural areas, defined as (p. 106):

- Urban-generated rural housing: development driven by urban centres, with housing sought in rural areas by people living and working in urban areas, including second homes;
- Rural-generated housing: housing needed in rural areas within the established rural community by people working in rural areas or in nearby urban areas who are an intrinsic part of the rural community by way of background or employment.

In this regard, the NSS shifted the importance of rural housing developments from the development itself to the motives behind such developments. These two different types can involve houses located in the same area, within the same price class or even look identical. It is the peoples’ motives in their decision to build/buy a house in a rural location and their lifestyles that will characterise a rural housing development as rural-generated or urban-generated. In general, the National Spatial Strategy outlined that development driven by urban areas (including urban-generated rural housing) should take place within built up areas or land identified in the development plan process and that rural-generated housing needs should be accommodated in the areas where they arise. These themes have been further addressed in the recent Draft Planning Guidelines for Sustainable Rural Housing (DOEHLG, 2004). However, these guidelines appear to suggest a more relaxed approach to managing rural housing, including in those areas accessible to urban centres. In summary, the guidelines outline that (p. 1):

- People who are part of and contribute to the rural community will get planning permission in all rural areas, including those under strong urban-based pressures, subject to the normal rules in relation to good planning (related to site layout and design);
- Anyone wishing to build a house in rural areas suffering persistent and substantial population decline will be accommodated, subject to good planning practice in sitting and design.

In relation to managing rural housing in the Dublin city-region, this emerging policy framework perhaps presents ‘mixed-signals’. On the one hand, national and regional spatial strategies propose that residential development in the rural hinterland of Dublin should be concentrated in identified towns and service villages. However, on the other hand, the rural housing
guidelines suggest a more permissive approach to dispersed housing in the countryside, including areas in close proximity to urban centres.

**Residential trends in the Dublin city-region**

This section will examine recent residential spatial trends in the Dublin city-region to consider the extent that residential growth has been occurring in the rural hinterland of Dublin City (see figure 3 for study area). This will involve four components: firstly, this section will outline recent demographic changes in the city-region and in individual local authority areas. Secondly, house building activity will be considered, focusing on private detached houses. Thirdly, house prices will be briefly discussed, and finally travel-to-work commuting patterns will be highlighted.

**Figure 3: The proposed Dublin city-region**

![Map of Dublin city-region: Leinster](Image)

Demographic changes

According to the last 5 censuses (after the late 1970s), it appears that the population has been growing constantly in all counties within the city-region until 1986. Whereas Kildare, Kilkenny, Meath, Wicklow and Dublin increased their population during 1986-1991, the remainder of counties experienced population decline during this period. Nevertheless after
1991 they all started growing – except the relatively remote Co. Longford. In particular counties Meath, Kildare and Wicklow started growing significantly faster than Co. Dublin and the national rate of growth after 1991. The trend continued after 1996 with Co. Dublin (including Fingal, South Dublin, Dublin City and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown) growing more slowly (6 per cent) than the nation as a whole (8 per cent) and less rapidly than nearby counties within commuting distance to Dublin (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Percentage change in population of each county in Leinster as constituted at each census since 1979.

For a comprehensive spatial analysis of the recent demographic changes in the city-region, population levels from the 2002 Census were analysed and read into Geographical Information System (GIS) maps. The smallest administrative area for which population levels were calculated and mapped was the Electoral Division (ED). In Figure 5 percentage classes are applied to describe population changes from 1996 to 2002 in the Dublin city-region. Multiples of 8 have been used for easier comparisons of the growth of an area with the

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5 The term Electoral Division was changed on 24 June 1996 (Section 23 of the Local Government Act, 1994) from District Electoral Division. There are 3,440 Electoral Divisions in the State.
national average percentage growth (8 per cent). The most dramatic increases of population (3 times or more than the national rate of growth) have taken place in the mid eastern counties of the city-region – Counties Meath, Kildare, Offaly, Westmeath and Laois – and along the eastern coastline – Counties Louth, Wicklow and Wexford. Outside these counties, most areas in the city-region grew less than the national average or even decreased their population. The redistribution of population in the city-region suggests a residential preference for rural areas accessible by major road links and rail transport and a widening of the Dublin commuter belt well beyond the Greater Dublin Area, from Dundalk to Gorey and as far as inland as Athlone.

Figure 5: Percentage change in the population of Electoral Divisions in Leinster, 1996 – 2002
For a more detailed assessment, the maps below illustrate spatial changes for some of the counties that have experienced significant levels of population changes outside Co. Dublin (Louth, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow). Co. Louth (Figure 6) increased its population by 10.5 per cent from 1996 to 2002 with higher increases in the southern parts of the county, outside Drogheda. The spatial distribution of growth demonstrates that the rural environs of Dundalk and Drogheda experienced higher increases of population than their urban areas. For example Dundalk town increased its population by 4.5 per cent whereas the adjacent rural areas increased two times more than the town itself. Similarly the urban area of Drogheda increased its population by 3.8 per cent, while some of the rural areas around Drogheda increased their population by almost 50 per cent.

Figure 6: County Louth population changes 1996-2002
Co. Meath (Figure 7) increased its population more than any other county in the GDA, almost 3 times more than the national average (22.1 per cent). Major population increases took place close to the boundary with the Fingal local authority area (Co. Dublin) and around towns like Drogheda, Navan, Kells and Trim. In all cases the population of these urban areas increased at a lower rate than their surroundings, except in the case of Trim where the town itself showed a significant decrease of population (-16.8 per cent), while its rural surroundings increased their population by 39.7 per cent. Despite the high levels of population increases in the county as a whole, 21 EDs (22.8 per cent of 92 EDs) decreased their population or remained stable, exhibiting a considerably unequal redistribution of population in Co. Meath away from small towns and villages and towards the rural environs of larger towns.

Figure 7: Co. Meath population changes 1996-2002

Similarly in Co. Kildare (Figure 8) the rural environs of Naas experienced higher increases of population than the town itself. Athy is the only urban area in the study area that increased its urban population rather than experiencing increases in its rural environs. The redistribution of population in Co. Kildare appears to be more even than in Co. Meath (only 7 EDs decreased their population). EDs that decreased their population appear to be the least well-served areas along the road and rail transport corridors. In Co. Wicklow (Figure 9), population increases occurred near and around urban areas like Wicklow, Arklow and Bray.
increased its population less than the other counties adjacent to Co. Dublin, possibly as a result of stricter planning policy related to its outstanding landscape quality.

Outside the GDA, major population increases follow the same pattern of residential development, along the rail and road transport links and near larger towns. For instance, in Co. Westmeath the rural environs of Mullingar and Athlone experienced much higher increases of population than their urban areas. Dramatic changes have taken place also in the periphery of Portlaoise (Co. Laois), which increased its population by 41.3 per cent, while the town itself recorded a marginal population decrease (-1.4 per cent).

Figure 8: Co. Kildare population changes 1996-2002
Figure 9: Co. Wicklow population changes, 1996-02
**House-building activity**

Apart from population levels, it is also useful to assess housing activity in the study area. Figure 10 shows private house completions in the city-region (excluding Local Authority and voluntary/non profit houses). Private house completions tended to increase throughout the city-region. Co. Dublin, as expected, has had the highest housing completions followed by the adjacent counties and then the outer counties. Outside of Co. Dublin, Co. Meath was the strongest residential target in the GDA in 2003, followed by Co. Kildare (with 3,519 and 2,824 completions respectively). Significantly, Co. Meath increased its private house completions by 163% in only 5 years (1999-2003).

Figure 10: Private house completions by area in Leinster, 1996-2003
Figure 11: New detached houses (including bungalows) completed as a percentage of yearly house completions, 1998-2003

Figure 11 illustrates new detached house completions as a percentage of total new house completions from 1998 to 2003 in the city-region. A much higher proportion of new detached housing development can be found outside of Co. Dublin, reflecting higher densities and increased apartment-living within the urban core. However, the availability of larger dwelling units with individual front and back gardens may indeed be a major factor in migratory trends. It is unclear at present how much of this development outside Co. Dublin is comprised of dispersed single dwellings in the countryside, which requires further research. It appears that new detached house completions as a percentage of total completions peaked in most counties in 2000 or the year before. Significant differences from other types of houses are obvious for counties like Laois, Longford and Kilkenny. After 2000, the percentage of detached new houses started decreasing considerably in most counties and this trend continued until 2003.
Despite the percentage decreases in the numbers of new detached house completions, the actual numbers of detached houses as a whole, according to the latest census results, are very high. In most counties in the city-region, detached houses account for more than 50 per cent of all private households and accommodate more than 50 per cent of the people living in each county (Figure 12). In addition, most people in the study area own the house they are living in (Figure 13). In fact Ireland has one of the highest levels of home ownership in Europe and a house for many people represents their greatest financial asset and the mortgage on the property very often represents their largest financial liability. It can be assumed that this residential reality shapes a particular image in the Irish house market: a detached owner occupied private house in a rural area could be the Irish rural idyll.
Figure 13: Percentage of owner occupied private dwellings (with or without loan or mortgage) in each county in Leinster, 2002
House prices

Undoubtedly housing activity is closely related to house prices and *vice versa*. Housing supply is probably the most important issue facing Dublin, with average house prices well beyond the reach of most workers, leading to increased pay demands and a threatening inflationary spiral (Ellis and Kim, 2001). The trends in house prices in recent years in Dublin and the whole State according to the governmental quarterly housing statistics bulletins are illustrated in figures below.

Figure 14: Average new house prices (excluding apartments) in Dublin and whole country

![Graph of average new house prices](image)

Source: Housing Statistics Bulletin, DOEHLG

Figure 15: Average existing house prices (excluding apartments), Dublin and whole country

![Graph of average existing house prices](image)

Source: Housing Statistics Bulletin, DOEHLG
Figures 14 and 15 show average new and existing house prices (excluding apartments) in Dublin and the rest of the country. It is obvious that prices of new houses follow a constant increase and that they are much higher in Dublin than the country as a whole. Despite the slowdown in the rate of increase after 1998, the level of prices illustrate a rising trend and as the third Bacon report\(^6\) (Bacon and Associates, 2000) concludes this is an indication of continuing instability. Second hand houses appear to be more expensive than new houses and their prices have continued to grow in both Dublin and the rest of the country. In relation to the rate of increase in house prices according to type of dwelling, the IAVI\(^7\) Annual Property Survey provides systematic data on recent and past price movements, including distinctions between geographical areas and between urban and rural houses. Table 2 is based on these surveys and shows the annual increases in new and existing rural houses from 2001-2003 in Dublin and the rest of the city-region.

### Table 2: Percentage changes of rural house prices in Dublin and rest of Leinster according to types of houses, 2001-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural Homes</th>
<th>Dublin</th>
<th>Rest of Leinster</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Homes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-bed detached Bungalow</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-bed detached Bungalow</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-bed detached House</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-bed detached House</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing Homes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-bed detached Bungalow</td>
<td>-4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-bed detached Bungalow</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-bed detached House</td>
<td>-1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-bed detached House</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional cottages</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Period houses on good grounds</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: IAVI Annual Property Surveys (2001-03)

This table suggests that the rate of increase for rural homes in both Dublin and the rest of the Province of Leinster peaked in 2003, continuing a significant rising trend in the last three years, after decreases in prices in 2001. In accordance with government data, it appears that the increases in Dublin are more acute (except traditional cottages and period houses in the rest of the city-region). House prices in Dublin reflect the major housing pressure in the metropolitan area, which could be a significant push factor for movements towards the rural

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\(^6\) The Bacon Reports (three so far) were commissioned by the Government (Department of Environment and Local Government) for in-depth research on the national housing market.

\(^7\) The Irish Auctioneers & Valuers Institute (IAVI) represents over 1,550 real estate agents and auctioneers in Ireland.
fringes of the city and the subsequent sprawl. As the Bacon Report (Bacon and Associates, 2000) acknowledged, how the demand for housing will split between Dublin City and County and the adjacent counties will depend, *inter alia* on relative house price developments and access times between these areas in public and other transport terms and relative endowments of social and recreational infrastructures and facilities. Personal preferences for living in city and suburban or outer suburban locations, will also play an important part.

*Travel-to-work commuting patterns*

Figure 16: Percentage of people who travel to work, school or college by various means of transport in Leinster.

A further issue of urban-rural migration is the relationship between commuting patterns and urban sprawl. For people living in the rural fringe of towns and working in urban areas, commuting is probably the most important trip of the day. Car ownership in the Republic of Ireland has grown rapidly in line with the country’s economic performance, placing Ireland amongst the most car-dependent societies in Europe. There were almost 1.2 million private cars in the country in 1998 and car ownership exceeded 50 cars per 100 persons for the first time in the same year (Goodbody Economic Consultants, 2000). The rising level of car ownership has led to an increasing reliance on the private motor vehicle as the preferred
mode of transport (Clinch et al., 2002). Indeed, according to the 2002 census, the private car appears to be the most popular mode of transport in the city-region. More than 50 per cent of people are commuting to work, school or college either by driving or as passengers in a car. The use of public modes of transport (bus and train) account for less than 40 per cent of the people living in the city-region whereas cycling and walking seem to be the least popular ways of commuting, restricted as expected to larger towns and cities (Figure 16).

Figure 17: Percentage of people who travel at least 15 miles from home to work, school or college in Leinster.

Figure 17 reveals the percentage of people who travel more than 15 miles (around 24 km) from home to work, school or college. It appears that long-distance commuting has became particularly characteristic in the GDA. Longer travelling distances also appear around urban
areas like Waterford and Wexford. These are areas that significantly increased their population during the 1996-2002 period. According to Clinch et al. (2002), long distance commuting has led to further congestion, increased travel time to work, rising frustrations and stress, and increased fuel and associated pollution.

**Conclusion**

In summary, recent migration flows in the Dublin city-region have generally occurred outside urban areas and towards the rural fringe. Urban-rural migration appears to follow the pattern of road and rail transport, which suggests a rural living preference but with the benefits of proximity to urban areas. In particular, the mid-eastern counties of the Greater Dublin Area have become significant residential targets with increasing private house completions (Co. Meath increased its housing completions by 163 per cent in only 5 years whereas at the same time Co. Dublin increased its housing completions by 37 per cent). These trends are consistent with notions of counterurbanisation and metropolitan dispersal. In particular, the housing pressure in Dublin suggests a displaced-urbanisation (following Mitchell’s classification) whereby people migrate to the countryside simply because it is cheaper to buy or build a house there. On the other hand, preferences for rural living in Ireland suggest the existence of an Irish rural idyll. An isolated house in the open countryside with the benefits of proximity to the capital or other urban areas appears to be a strong choice for city dwellers, facilitated by a relaxed planning regime. These urban dwellers’ intentions or actions fit closely with ex-urbanisation and/or anti-urbanisation movements.

Lindgren (2002) observed that although a major focus of research has been to identify periods of population concentration or dispersal, primarily in advanced capitalist societies, scant attention has been paid to studying the individuals and households who decide whether or not to make a counterurban move. The NSS vaguely acknowledged that “some persons from urban areas seek a rural lifestyle with the option of working in and travelling to and from, nearby larger cities and towns” (p. 106). However, much less clear is the types of people this includes; the driving forces (push and pull) behind such relocations; and the extent that urban households in Dublin have preferences for a rural residential environment. Since urban-rural migration is not only a socio-economic but also a geographically selective process (van Dam et al., 2002), further baseline information is essential to provide an evidence-based approach to policy-making – for example, where do these migrants go and how much are they willing to trade the amenities of a rural residential environment with longer daily journeys to work and to nearby urban centres for services? What are the impacts of urban-generated rural housing in relation to local services, population levels and community cohesion? Through understanding consumer and lifestyle factors, in particular how these may vary through an individual’s life cycle, consumer decision-making could be influenced more effectively by policy-makers to achieve desired policy outcomes. Moreover, although policy prescription currently advocates
a compact city approach for the urban core and concentrated development in key settlements in the hinterland, evidence suggests that deconcentrated and decentralised spatial patterns are emerging. In this context, further research is also required to evaluate the effectiveness of existing and potential alternative policies and policy instruments.

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