SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS: RADNORSHIRE

Introduction

Traditionally rural areas have been characterised by the out-migration of young people and a smaller in-migration of people in mid- or later-life. As a result rural populations have been ageing. This is set to become more pronounced during an era of national demographic ageing. This Economic and Social Research Council funded project (RES-062-23-1358) sought to more fully understand the mobility patterns, decision-making processes, characteristics of, and consequences associated with mid- and later-life migration into rural and, often, remote locations.

Research was carried out in three rural study areas (Figure 1): the Glens of Antrim (Northern Ireland), the Isle of Bute (Scotland) and Radnorshire (Wales). The study, which was split up into four separate stages, made use of various secondary data sets and collected new information using a household survey and interviews. The first stage, the selection of study areas, was informed by an analysis of the 2001 Census of Population. All three areas selected for further research had recorded a higher than national average in-migration rate by those aged 45 or over. Second, a ‘drop off and collect’ household survey was conducted in each area (winter 2009 - spring 2010), supplemented by a postal survey of individuals who had first registered with a local GP since 2000. In total 650 questionnaires were completed, representing an overall response rate of 64%. Response rates ranged from 70% in the Glens to 58% in Radnorshire. Third, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 33 households (summer - autumn 2010). All had indicated their willingness to be interviewed on their questionnaire returns, and included both non-mover and migrant households. The interviews also included those moving at different stages of their lives and who had different employment and household characteristics. Fourth, interviews were conducted with national and local public and voluntary service-providers (winter 2010).

Figure 1: Location of the three study areas

This summary presents the research findings from Radnorshire and focuses upon results identified from an analysis of the survey (226 households), supplemented by selected quotes from our interviews.
Household Mobility

Figure 2 displays household mobility in each of the study areas. Particularly notable is the high level of mobility in Bute and Radnorshire: in the latter just 5.7% of the households surveyed were non-movers (compared to 40% in the Glens of Antrim). In Radnorshire 28% had moved less than 15kms to their current address (local mover) with approximately two-thirds of all households surveyed moving over a distance of at least 15kms (non-local mover): many had moved a considerable distance. The highest number of non-local (or longer distance) moves was observed in Radnorshire.

Table 1 compares for the Radnorshire sample mobility patterns at different stages of the life course. Households which moved when the householder was aged under 50 were equally divided between those which had made a local and a non-local move. By contrast, the majority of households who moved when aged 50-64 or 65+ had made longer distance moves. Migration into Radnorshire is, therefore, associated with those aged 50 or above. That is, heads of households at the retirement transition or retirement stages of their life course. In this study it is these non-local moves into the study area that are of particular interest.

Table 1: Head of Household’s Age at Time of Move

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Non-local mover households are generally headed by an individual brought up in England (74%) and comprise of a couple with no children living at home. Most moved to owner-occupied accommodation (84%) with 80% owning their home outright (i.e. they do not have a mortgage).

Most non-local mover households lived in or close to the villages of Howey (41.2%) and Newbridge-on-Wye (37.6%). There are two mobile home parks – for those aged over 50 – within the study area: Sunnyhaven at Howey and Caerwnon near Builth Wells.

Immediately prior to moving into Radnorshire, 53.4% of non-local movers had lived in an urban location. The 46.6% who had moved from a rural setting was the highest in any of our study areas. Therefore, while urban to rural migration characterises incomers to the area, in Radnorshire this is accompanied by a sizeable rural to rural migration flow. 15% of non-local moves were from a settlement with a population of at least 75,000 (compared to a 26% average across the 3 study areas). 70% of households had moved from England (compared to 28% in Bute and 18% in the Glens of Antrim), with a further 28% relocating within Wales (the majority of whom moved from other parts of Powys). Of those of English origin 45% had moved from the West Midlands, 29% from the South-East, and 11% from the South-West.

Only 16.8% of all non-local mover households in Radnorshire contain at least one adult who has returned to their area of upbringing. This compares with 38% recorded in the Glens of Antrim. Roughly equal numbers returned to Radnorshire when aged under and over 50 years.

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The main motivations given to explain a non-local move into Radnorshire are displayed in Figure 3. The most frequently reported reasons were quality of life (19.7%), actual (19%) or impending (9.5%) retirement, employment (15.3%) and to be nearer adult children (9.5%). Retirement-related motivations are in line with non-local moves generally being undertaken by those aged 50 or over.

**Figure 3: Motivations for Non-Local Moves**

The number of employment-motivated non-local moves in Radnorshire was the highest in the three study areas, where it is associated with those securing largely public sector employment in nearby Llandrindod Wells.

These motivations were elaborated upon during our household interviews. The following quotes illustrate typical themes to emerge among those who had moved when aged over 50 years:

a) Childhood holiday/ day trips –
   ‘For me, as with a lot of people, when I was little we came here for holidays in Wales and you think ‘oh, I’d like to live here’ and that was what I wanted to do.’

b) Convenient location –
   ‘… it was within shooting distance of the Midlands [where] my family still live.’

c) Escape the ‘rat race’ –
   ‘…It was definitely a conscious decision to get out of the rat race. I think we’d both had enough … When I go back now it’s an absolute nightmare: too many people, too many cars, the pace is wrong. I just hate it.’

d) Affordable property –
   ‘Cornwall, Devon was very expensive …. We looked in Norfolk as well. … In this area we could afford to buy this sort of size of house.’

e) Retirement –
   ‘The children had effectively flown the nest. … We found ourselves in a position [like others] who take early retirement, in that money was tied up in the house. I said ‘look, I think we could put ourselves in a much better [financial] position, perhaps see another part of the country … - let’s downsize.’

Overall, 50% of all non-local moves into Radnorshire were undertaken by households that had no prior connection to the area. This compares to approximately 30% in Bute and 12% in the Glens of Antrim. In addition to the small number who are returnees, a further 24.1% had relatives living in the area, 16.2% had themselves previously lived in the area, 15.3% had visited on holiday, and 3% owned a holiday or second home in the area. The latter is the lowest in any of our study areas.

15.4% of all households surveyed recorded the out-migration of at least one adult child since 2000. This was the lowest among the three study areas. Common reasons for young adults leaving included: employment, personal and for further/ higher study.

22 (17%) non-local mover households intend to move again in the near future. Half plan a return to England to be nearer family members. This was associated with those who had moved into Radnorshire when aged over 50 years, suggesting that ageing in place is less likely among English in-migrants and those with no family in the area. As explained in one interview:

‘[I plan to move] to be nearer my kids. When my husband died and when I was poorly it was too far for them to keep dropping in to see me and I really did feel lonely…’
Economic attributes

Similar proportions of adults were retired (45%) and in work (41%). The proportion of working adults in Radnorshire was the lowest of the three study areas but the proportion retired was the highest. Most adults in work were employees although a sizeable minority were self-employed (Table 2). Most working adults (80%) worked full-time.

Table 2: Economic status (all adults)

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<th>Economic Status</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>199 (45.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>21 (4.8%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Looking after family</td>
<td>12 (2.7%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long term sick or disabled</td>
<td>19 (4.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>9 (2.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>110 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>70 (15.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>440</td>
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Four-fifths of all non-local mover households contained a retired adult.

UK average individual salaries in 2008/09 were just over £23,000. Non-local mover households were the most likely to have an annual income of less than £10,000 reflecting their greater reliance on a state pension and other benefits. By comparison, a greater share of local movers had an annual income of more than £30,000 reflecting the greater likelihood of their household members to be in work.

Working adults were most likely to be employed in agriculture (18.5%), building and construction (13.3%), public administration and defence (13.3%), community, social and personal service activities (12.6%), wholesale and retail trade (10.4%) and education (10.4%). Almost all worked in Powys. Home working was common: 30.1% did so all of the time and 6.3% did so at least once a week. Working from home was associated, unsurprisingly, with the agriculture and hospitality sectors and was also common amongst those who worked in the real estate, renting and business sector.

38% of all economically active households contained at least one person who was self-employed. In total 16% of all working adults were self-employed and they worked in agriculture (38%), the hospitality sector (15.5%), real estate, renting and business activities (12.1%), and other community, social and personal services (12.1%). Self-employment was most common among the 50-64 age group and, unlike the other study areas, with non-local mover households. Regardless of migrant status, the self-employed were most likely to work in the same sectors. In total 54 businesses were owned or part-owned by members of surveyed Radnorshire households. Similar proportions of non-local and non- and local movers owned an agricultural business (unlike Bute and the Glens where this type of business was almost exclusively owned by non- movers or local movers). Businesses in accommodation and food services were more likely to be owned by non-local movers whilst building and construction businesses were more likely to be owned by non- and local movers. Very few businesses employed non-family members.

Involvement in local activities

Different levels of participation in local activities - such as social events, sporting and civic activities - were reported ranging from non- through to frequent participation (Figure 4). The most common participation (by almost 60% of all households) was in social and/or fundraising activities.

Frequent participation by household members was associated with Church attendance (22%), social and fundraising (21%), sport and fitness (16%) and special interest (15%) activities. The least involvement was in business and civic organisations.
Expected differences were noted between age groups: those aged under 50 were more likely to participate in sport/fitness while those aged over 65 were more likely to attend Church. Compared to local movers, non-local movers were more likely to participate in special interest groups.

A quarter of households surveyed contained at least one person who participated in a charitable or voluntary group: participation was not associated with migrant status or age group. This figure is similar to that obtained for the Glens but lower than that for Bute (34%). Volunteers freely gave their time, often holding unpaid positions of responsibility (Figure 5). Many of these groups have a direct benefit to the local community.

Holding a position of responsibility was most common in an educational (e.g. a playgroup or parent-teacher association) or special interest (e.g. the Women’s Institute or gardening) group. Volunteering was most common for medical and health-related charities (e.g. the Bracken Trust, the Red Cross) and Church groups. Typically up to 4 hours per week was devoted to voluntary activities, however, a sizeable minority set aside at least 10 hours per week.

Life in Radnorshire

A unique feature of the Radnorshire survey was the high proportion giving a ‘no opinion’ response about some aspects of life in the area. For example, approximately 40% had no opinion about the local availability of affordable housing or homes to rent. This is likely to reflect the fact that many respondents have not lived in Radnorshire long enough to form a definite opinion. Nevertheless, definite views were expressed on various other aspects of Radnorshire life.

Respondents rated as ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ primary care services (64%). One interviewee told us:

‘When I got my hearing aid, [a friend in Birmingham] said “you’ll have waited two years in Brum for that”. And I waited sixteen days here.’

There was general contentment (rated ‘good’ or ‘fair’) with local shopping facilities (62.1%), the range of public transport (56.2%) and support services for the elderly (53.4%). One interviewee noted that:

‘Llandrindod is very poor for clothes. It’s OK for groceries, especially now with the new Tescos, but there’s not a lot of choice. Most people will go to Hereford or Newtown to do any other shopping.’
The over 65s were the most likely to rate local shopping facilities positively.

In common with our other two study areas, Radnorshire respondents had a ‘poor’ opinion about the availability of local job opportunities (55.9%).

The overall quality of life in Radnorshire was rated very highly (78% rated it ‘good’ or ‘excellent’). The proportion in the Glens was similar, but the Bute proportion was higher (87%). Radnorshire was considered to be a good place to grow old in (64%) and as a good place to bring up children (66%). Almost three quarters reported that they ‘belong’ in the area and 90% that they like living in the area. There were no differences in the views of local and non-local movers or people of different ages.

A majority of respondents were of the opinion that newcomers and long-term residents mix (Figure 6). Nevertheless, during our interviews some spoke of two communities:

‘There is the Welsh community with sporadic people ... that have moved in or you’ll get the collections of Birminghams in the caravan parks.’

Others emphasised a neighbourliness and sense of community:

‘I tell you what was lovely; we didn’t know anybody [when we moved here] but we had people coming to introduce themselves and they are not even our neighbours.’

Newcomers were considered to be active participants in local activities and to make a positive contribution to the area. However, they were also viewed as having raised local house prices and failing to create local jobs.

The dominant perception of newcomers to the area is that they are not from Wales, that they do not have family connections with the area and that they are retired. Such impressions are broadly in line with our findings.

Migration, population change and policy implications

This research has provided a snap-shot of the migration processes affecting our three study areas. Our findings suggest a broadly positive situation in terms of population change and life in Radnorshire today. Youth out-migration and in-migration at mid- or later-life have been identified. Irrespective of age or length of residence in the area the majority of respondents identified a good community spirit and made positive evaluations of their personal wellbeing. Nevertheless, we identify a number of issues that the local community, service providers and policy makers may wish to reflect on to enhance community wellbeing.

During an era of national demographic ageing when a quarter of Wales’ and 36% of Powys’ populations are projected to be aged 65 or over by 2033², the mobility flows and motivations associated with older people will become increasingly important. As has been shown in our study the over 50 year-olds dominate non-local moves into Radnorshire and mid- and later-life moves are likely to dominate rural in-migration trends for the foreseeable future.

For some this mid- or later-life move involves leaving adult children, and therefore potential family support systems, behind in their former place of residence. Only one in four households that moved into Radnorshire had family or relatives living in the area. What will happen if they are widowed or develop debilitating health problems? Might a move at the generally healthy mid-life stage be regretted
in later life? Will those moving into Radnorshire (and other rural areas) at or around the retirement stage of their life age in place or are they likely to move again as they advance into old age?

‘We will have problems growing old here. [Our children say] 'what happens when you get older, who is going to look after you, who is going to do this, who is going to do that?' … us coming to Wales; we’ve left our children back in England.

Despite the fact that many older people live healthy, active and independent lives, the changing population profile of rural areas and an increasing number of older people will place demands upon, for example, health and social care services, services that are already challenging to deliver to remote, rural communities.

Some organisations have yet to fully appreciate the implications of such processes for rural areas and those who do have expressed concern about how they will respond in the current economic climate when public sector funding is being retrenched. As public and voluntary sector providers explained:

‘… I just wonder how much they [statutory bodies] are talking to the voluntary sector and are aware of what we could do for a lot less money than it will probably cost them if they don’t get it right.’

Will the voluntary sector play an enhanced role in service provision and, if so, where will the larger number of volunteers required to deliver enhanced services come from? A local voluntary sector body told us:

‘the majority [of volunteers] are older people themselves. I would say fairly newly retired people that have wanted to use either what they’ve used in their professional life and want to carry that on or want to do something different. I would say that most are in that fifty to seventy-ish bracket.’

Self-employment figures suggest that mid-and later-life in-migration is bringing entrepreneurial activity into the area. How might these small businesses be supported to facilitate their expansion and the creation of jobs for non-family members?

In summary, those over the age of 50 are an important resource for rural areas. Older people are, in general, fitter, more active and more financially secure than ever before. They may bring business and professional expertise into the community, helping to support entrepreneurial activity. They may boost the potential reserve of local volunteers and thus help to support a range of service providers through the voluntary sector. However, the patterns, processes and implications of ageing vary considerably in different places and are experienced differently. We were told by a service provider:

‘Powys is a wonderful place, if you are fit, if you are healthy and if you’ve got a reasonable income. You don’t need a fantastic income but you’ve got a reasonable income. It’s quite a different story if you are living on the side of a hillside, you’ve possibly lost your partner, your health is failing or your mental health is failing, you don’t have any transport and it’s been described as a “beautiful prison”.

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About the Research Project

This two-year project was interested in people moving into, out of, and choosing to remain in, rural areas. Rural communities are changing. They are home to people originating from urban and rural areas. Some are experiencing demographic ageing at a higher rate than the UK’s population as a whole. In some places this is due to in-migration of middle-aged and older people. Individuals are living longer than before and many remain healthy and active well into old age. A key question for the study was - What might these population trends mean for the future of rural areas?

The collaborative research project sought to investigate the possible effects of population change in rural communities in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. The findings will inform policy-makers and relevant agencies about the future of rural communities.

Specific questions addressed in the project include:

At what age do people move into rural areas?
Why do people move into or away from rural areas?
What are the experiences of people in different age groups living in rural areas?
Will people currently living in rural areas continue to do so as they grow old?
What are the consequences (good and bad) of population change for rural areas?

Summary findings from each of the three study areas will be available –

25th February 2011 - Summary of Research Findings: Glens of Antrim
31st March 2011 - Summary of Research Findings: Radnorshire
29th April 2011 - Summary of Research Findings: Isle of Bute

For further information about the project and its authors, and to download any of these findings papers please visit our website: http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/RuralMigration/

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