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# Demographic Development of Rural Areas

## An overview

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### Abstract

The paper is an attempt to depict rural urban differences in demographic development within the last two hundred years. Urban and rural transitions are a part of the industrial, vital and mobility revolution. The historical evidence from now developed countries suggests several stages in that interplay.

Contemporary data from some European countries demonstrate no clear differences in age structure and vital rates between rural and urban space. That means that rural residents equalized their fertility behavior with urban counterpart. Despite of it outmigration from rural space is still high.

Modern farm technology destroys traditional rural life by removing need for concentration of people in agriculture, and allows only small number of educated, well equipped with machinery and able-bodied farmers to benefit from it.

Such development inevitably leads toward a non-rural world.

Urban and rural transitions are a part of the industrial, vital and mobility revolution. The historical evidence from now developed countries suggests several stages in that interplay.

Preindustrial cities have been locuses for administrative, religious, military, and commercial activities (Preston, 1979). Their growth rate has been associated with the rate of national population growth rates, although until 1750 cities in Europe had surplus of deaths over births (London is a good example).

Industrial revolution transformed the demographic development of both urban and rural areas by increasing their economic performances. Industrializing cities were short in labor supply providing "pull" factors. On the other hand the new industrial techniques had increased agricultural productivity and due to excess labor supply "push" factors appeared. As a consequence the large - scale migration from rural areas to cities occurred, which is the beginning of rapid urbanization (the rate of change in the percentage living in urban areas). Rural - urban migration disturbed initial equilibrium between urban and rural demographic growth. Urban rate of increase was higher than rural one despite some evidence that suggests that urban rate of natural increase was lower than the rural one. Increased concentration of people and lack of sanitation and cheap medical measures created conditions in which urban population was susceptible to various epidemic diseases and mortality rate was high.

Spread of medical innovations (milk sanitation, vaccination) and improvement in living conditions (water supply) occurred in urban areas first and eliminated many traditional causes of death markedly. This is the time of urban booming growth in numbers. Cities grew by the access of natural increase and by immigration.

Living in nuclear families and being more educated city dwellers started to control their fertility and limit their family size. Fertility was reduced and natural rate of increase dropped below the rural one again.

The long continued immigration approached their peak and formed a substantially younger urban population. That is why in modern

societies rate of natural increase is often higher in urban areas than in the rural one.

As one can see all collected and generalized evidence apply on urban population. Looking from the country side early urbanization had not jeopardized population growth in rural areas and between 1875 and 1900 rural populations in now-developed countries grew by 18 percent (Preston, 1979). The main reason is that fertility was high enough to compensate rural population loss from deaths and internal migration.

The basic process, which caused urban rural differences in growth rate, was migration. Its long duration exhausted demographic capacities of rural part of population and made urban part stronger. According to the process described we are about to accept a definition that urbanization is a social diffusion process where "messages" are transmitted from urban to rural residents (United Nations, 1980), and where rural residents respond

by adopting the innovations. Basically what rural residents adopted was urban residence (rural-urban migration), but remaining part imported some elements of urbanization like means for family control, which caused fertility decline of countryside population.

Somewhat surprisingly, even in our days net outmigration rates from rural areas are still high in both developing and developed parts of the world. But the basis for contemporary outmigration is very small which limits city growth (there are small changes in numbers) although at the same time this process leads to further deterioration of demographic conditions in the country-side. On the contrary, proportion urban is still increasing even in developed part of the world, this time at the cost of decreasing in numbers of population living in rural areas (table 1).

**Table 1. Components of annual population growth rates for urban and rural populations: 1960 (per 1,000 population)**

Components	World total	More developed	Less developed
<b>Urban</b>			
Birth	27.7	20.1	37.9
Death	11.6	8.9	15.4
Natural increase	16.1	11.2	22.5
Net migration	16.9	12.3	23.0
Total growth	33.0	23.5	45.5
<b>Rural</b>			
Birth	39.8	23.3	44.1
Death	19.1	9.3	21.7
Natural increase	20.7	14.0	22.4
Net migration	-8.2	-16.6	-5.9
Total growth	12.5	-2.6	16.5

Source: Lowry, 1990, 154-155

Contemporary causes of rural outmigration are not traditional pull and push factors but some personal factors associated with the nature of agriculture. Young farmers can adopt same or even better economic standard than some urban categories, but what they can never afford is to live in areas with high concentration of people and activities. Although farm mechanization and irrigation enable substitution between land and nonland inputs in agriculture, the potential for such substitution is severely limited by technology (Mohan, 1985). It means that husbandry as a profession and labor force in it will remain spatially separated and reside in small countryside settlements with no easy access to other activities.

Because of age selectivity of migrants who are presumed to be younger, more able-bodied and traditional high fertility in the countryside, rural population is expected to have surplus of very

young and old inhabitants and shortage within a reproductive age span. But contemporary data from some European countries do not support such a conclusion. Judging from presented diagrams migration schedules vary from country to country. All selected countries (except Poland in 1983) have in common old age structure due to decline of fertility. It is visible that Bulgaria (in 1982), Finland (in 1983), France (in 1982), and Hungary (in 1983) had lower rural than urban crude birth rate. Austria (in 1981) and the Netherlands (in 1984) had a lower proportion of old people and as a consequence in this two countries crude death rate is lower in rural areas than in the urban one. These differences might be attributed to the differences in rural-urban age structure. In order to show the effect of the age structure we have standardized rural population on the total population of their own countries (table 2).

**Table 2. Crude Birth (CBR), Death (CDR) and Natural Increase Rates (NI) by Urban/Rural Residence for Selected European Countries**

Country	Urban			Rural			Rural standardized		
	CBR	CDR	NI	CBR	CDR	NI	CBR	CDR	NI
Austria (1981)	10.8	13.4	-2.6	14.4	10.9	3.5	14.3	12.6	1.7
Bulgaria (1982)	14.7	7.9	6.8	13.1	15.6	-2.5	18.2	11.7	6.5
Finland (1983)	13.7	8.6	5.1	12.5	10.2	2.3	13.8	9.6	4.2
France (1982)	15.5	9.3	6.2	12.9	12.5	0.4	13.8	10.9	2.8
Hungary (1983)	13.1	12.5	0.6	12.9	15.7	-2.8	12.9	15.2	-2.3
Netherlands (1984)	12.0	9.0	3.0	14.1	7.1	7.0	14.2	8.2	5.9
Poland (1983)	17.8	8.5	9.3	20.5	10.1	10.4	22.1	9.5	12.6

Source: Demographic Yearbook, 1984

Standardized on the age distribution of the entire population rural birth rates would be larger in all countries except in Austria. Having in mind that total fertility rates are larger in all countries with no exceptions one may presume that Austria has considerably higher proportion of rural population within reproductive years. On the contrary death rates would be lower (exceptions are Austria and the Netherlands). As a result if there were no rural-urban migration natural increase would benefit in all countries but not in Austria and the Netherlands. The main reason for such a state in majority of developed countries is that developed countries almost equalized rural-urban conditions regarding the spread of curative medicine (which lowers death rates) and the spread of means for fertility control (which lowers birth rates). Although fertility in countryside declined with a time lag it is only a bit higher and not high enough to maintain stationarity, and any outmigration loss reinforce further decline. Exceptions are Bulgaria and Poland, which had total fertility rates 3.4 and 3.1, respectively. Regardless of high rural fertility Bulgaria had a negative rate of natural increase of rural population because of enormous loss from outmigration (the

limit for such total fertility rate level is 40 per cent "survivors" per cohort).

It can be inferred that only Poland had satisfactory conditions for demographic development of its countryside population. If Poland succeeds not to lose (by death and outmigration) more than 34 per cent of its rural population per cohort by the mean age of the fertility schedule (which is near 30 years) it will be able to maintain stationary rural population (any cohort will produce the same number of births) and consequently to postpone demographic decline of not only rural but its entire population.

In our days almost all-European countries want to increase their birth rates. Various negative and positive measures are used in that effort, like restrictions relating to induced abortions, reduction in the availability of contraceptives, liberal increase in monthly wages or interest-free loans for couples having three or more children. Briefly, these measures are costly but there are no clear signs of success. Demographic development planned well in advance may postpone this problems by taking into account the fact that rural human resources are exhaustible and have clear limits.

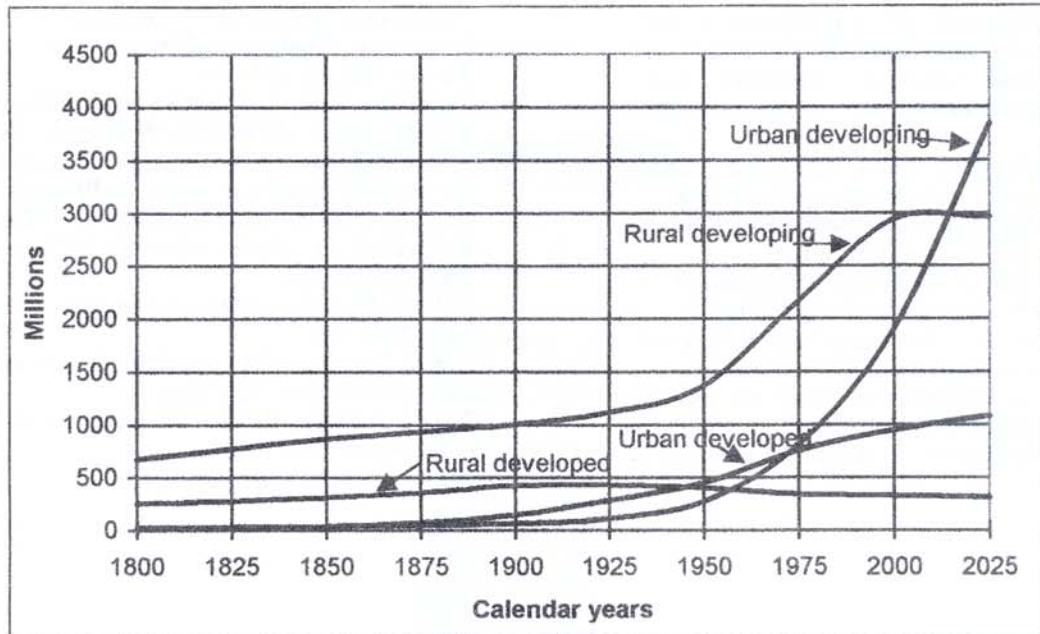


Figure 1. Urban and rural population, 1800-2025.

Source: United Nations, 1980 and 1987

Population projections made by United Nations (1987) predict that rural share will be less than 50% before the year 2010. Rural population number will continue to grow but with declining rate until the year 2025 when it will reach 3.3 billion or 40% of the Earth population. In Latin America the share will be only 15% while Europe will have only 18% of rural population. Only East Asia will have majority of rural population (51%). After the year 2025 rural population is expected to decline in numbers (figure 1).

### Conclusion

Experience from developed countries suggests that outmigration from rural areas is the basic process which caused urban rural differences in growth rates. Its prolonged duration exhausted demographic capacities of rural population and made urban counterpart stronger. Although outmigration

from rural space is still high the contemporary basis for it is severely limited. This process limits urban growth and further deteriorates demographic conditions of the countryside.

Because of age selectivity of migrants who are presumed to be younger, more able-bodied and traditionally high fertility in the countryside, rural population is expected to have surplus of very young and old inhabitants and shortage within the reproductive age span.

However, contemporary data from some European countries do not support such a conclusion. If standardized on the age distribution of the entire population rural birth rates would be larger in all countries except Austria while death rates would be lower (exceptions are Austria and the Netherlands). Only Poland had satisfactory conditions for demographic development of its countryside population.

United Nations predict that we are moving toward a nonrural world, or at least, towards new

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forms of rurality. That questions traditional self-sustainable demographic development of rural areas.

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