



The relationship between place ties and moves to small regional retirement communities on the Canadian prairies

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ABSTRACT

The primary objective of this article is to further our understanding of the importance of place ties on the processes of migration to small regional retirement communities in a region with a cold climate (i.e., Manitoba's Interlake). A two-stage survey design includes (i) a interview survey of a non-probability sample of 34 recent older movers to the retirement communities and (ii) in-depth life-history interviews with nine of these movers. The analysis of data involves the use of both descriptive statistical techniques and qualitative methods. The findings disclose that place ties associated with the destination community play a major role in the senior's decision to move. While previous place experience and personal contacts represent important factors in the relocation process, they may also be used to promote population growth, community sustainability, and regional competitiveness.

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1. Introduction

It has been observed that: “very few countries in today's world are actively getting ‘younger’ in terms of their age profiles; the dominant world trend is towards an aging society in which elderly populations are not only growing in size but are also growing as a share of the total population” (Macey et al., 2003, 520). In Canada, the number of seniors aged 65 years and over surpassed the four million mark for the first time in 2006, with their proportion of the total population increasing from 13.0% in 2001 to 13.7% in 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2007) to 14.8% in 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012a). Moreover, the fastest growing age group between 2001 and 2006 was the 55–64 years cohort which included many individuals nearing retirement (Statistics Canada, 2007). Retirement often prompts a desire to change home, and in many cases the appeal of a simplified life in a smaller rural or semi-rural community may become the focus of future plans (Walters, 2000; Brown and Glasgow, 2008). The broad aim of this paper is to further our understanding of the importance of place ties on the processes of migration to small regional retirement communities on the Canadian prairies.¹

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¹ A regional retirement community is located in a rural or semi-rural area which (i) is rich in amenities and infrastructure, (ii) has high concentrations of seniors, and (iii) attracts a relatively high proportion of older people from places within the same region (Cuba and Longino, 1991; Dahms, 1996).

The work presented in this article is based on a wider investigation of the processes and outcomes of the migration of older people to small western lakeshore communities in the Interlake region of Manitoba. There are a couple of reasons why these communities offer an ideal study area for exploratory research on the migration of seniors to Canadian regional retirement communities. First, our study area clearly has a highly truncated population in terms of age distribution, with a large percentage in the older cohorts (Statistics Canada, 2012b,c,d). Further, the communities comprising our study area have developed as popular “retirement resorts” for both permanent and seasonal migrants. Thus, our research develops knowledge about this phenomenon on the Canadian prairies.

This paper commences by presenting the background literature and conceptual framework of the present study. A profile of the study area is next outlined followed by an explanation of the methodology and survey stages. The results of the analysis of the paper are then presented in detail, while the paper concludes with a discussion of the research findings and their implications.

2. Previous literature and conceptual framework

An important line of theoretical discourse of migration focuses on the decision to move and the decision where to move (Wolpert, 1965; Lee, 1966). For Wolpert (1965), one of the central concepts of migration behavior is the notion of “place utility”, which may be a positive or negative quantity expressing an individual's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with respect to a place. In addition, there is also a vast literature on retirees and retiree migration. Research

has addressed typologies of elderly migration types (Litwak and Longino, 1987; Walters, 2000), and the migration decision-making process (Brown and Moore, 1970; Wiseman and Roseman, 1979; Wiseman, 1980; Haas and Serow, 1993; Walters, 2000; Longino et al., 2002; Bradley et al., 2008). Research has also explored the characteristics of older movers (Lovegreen et al., 2010); motives for moving (Wiseman, 1980; Duncombe et al., 2003; Sunil et al., 2007; Longino et al., 2008); the dynamics between the elder and family members during the move decision process (Sergeant and Ekerdt, 2008) and return migration decisions (Jauhiainen, 2009; Hunter, 2011). The economic and social consequences of retiree concentrations in North America (Serow, 2003) has been examined, along with those factors that help rural communities successfully develop tourism and its entrepreneurship opportunities (Wilson et al., 2001), the types of images used to sell retirement communities (Lucas, 2004) and elderly in-migration and return migration as a trigger for local development (Rowles and Watkins, 1993; Jauhiainen, 2009).

Amenity migration is a distinctive form of mobility among retirees (Wiseman and Roseman, 1979; Wiseman, 1980; Meyer and Speare, 1985; Litwak and Longino, 1987; Speare and Meyer, 1988; Walters, 2000). Amenity areas are primarily located in non-metropolitan regions or small town settings (Rogers, 1992; Walters, 2000). Amenity migrants are strongly attracted by pleasant climates and favorable economic conditions, but tend to avoid large metropolitan areas (Dahms, 1996; Dahms and McComb, 1999; Walters, 2000). Dahms, (1996) has further disclosed that older migrants from metropolitan centers often move to amenity areas that were historically cottage and beach resorts.

Wiseman (1980) noted that prior travel experience plays an important part in migration decisions through the development of ties to specific places. The accumulation of place ties throughout the life-course impacts both the attachments that elderly migrants have with different locations and their migration patterns. Several studies have found that elderly migrants tend to move, or anticipate moving, to places they know through various ties, including friends and family, previous residence, and repeated vacations or visits (Williams and Sofranko, 1979; Gober and Zonn, 1983; McHugh, 1984; Oldakowski and Roseman, 1986; Longino et al., 2008). Previous contact with the migration destination may play an important role in the migration process in general and amenity migration in particular (Cuba, 1991; Cuba and Longino, 1991).

Variations in previous place experience may also have very important effects on the destination search. Cuba (1991) revealed that the greater the intensity of prior contact that older migrants had with Cape Cod, the less likely they were to consider alternate destinations. Longino et al. (2002), in an attempt to identify issues that underlie the decision process of retirement moves, found place ties to be very important. Stoller and Longino (2001) concluded that the probability of return migration among retirees is dependent upon ties to the home community, consistent with Litwak and Longino's second stage.

Our broader conceptual framework incorporates relocation processes and outcomes in the specific context of the migration of older people to regional retirement communities. Fig. 1 presents that part of this framework which explicitly focuses on components relevant to our research objectives concerning the importance of place ties on the processes of migration to small prairie retirement communities on the Canadian prairies. The basis of this conceptual framework is the *older migrant*. The characteristics of the older migrant that are particularly relevant include his/her: (a) *social, demographic, and economic background*, and (b) *migration and travel histories*. Past work (Wiseman and Roseman, 1979; Wiseman, 1980; Meyer and Speare, 1985; Litwak and Longino, 1987; Serow, 1987; Speare and Meyer, 1988; Walters, 2000) has consistently found the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of older people to be important indicators of both the decision to move and

the type of move. However, we recognize that joint decision-making plays a role on the move. Accordingly, the *social, demographic, and economic backgrounds* of older migrants are based on a wide variety of profile characteristics including age, level of education, and health status. Further, it is anticipated that older migrants comprise a diverse group with varied *migration and travel histories*. Each of these histories is unique, and experience with a particular place may occur for different reasons. In particular, the past vacation patterns of older migrants may reveal a preference for locations with particular place attributes, with one vacation location subsequently becoming the migration destination of choice in old age. In more general terms, an older person's exposure to a place may lead to an affinity for living there, with a permanent move to the same place ensuing.

The profile characteristics of the older migrant may be viewed as inputs to his/her *migration decision-making process*. We wish to address the two major aspects in this process: *the decision to move to regional retirement communities*, and *the relocation process concerning regional retirement communities* (Brown and Moore, 1970; Wiseman, 1980; Cuba, 1991). The decision to move encompasses push factors motivating migrants to move away from their pre-migration residence, and pull factors which attract people to new locations. Some of these push and pull factors may be influenced by a senior's socio-economic characteristics and migration/travel history, together with individuals who were involved in the decision to move to a regional retirement community (Wiseman, 1980; Longino et al., 2008). Thus, all of these factors may ultimately impact on the selection of the migration destination.

The relocation decision-making process is influenced by the older migrant's information sources that are important in gathering information about potential destinations (Longino et al., 2008). Further, the older migrant's attachments and relationships with places evolve over time. In this regard, the role of previous place experience, including previous contact with the migration destination (i.e. repeated vacations or visits), assumes particular importance (Cuba, 1991). Many older people who engage in migration decision-making may ultimately make the decision not to move and age in place. However, for those seniors who decide to relocate, a *migration move* results. When a migration move is completed, a host of new decisions must be made by the migrant that represent the immediate outcomes of the move. These decisions essentially relate to the selection of the new residence which may be assessed in terms of dwelling type, tenure status, and living arrangements.

3. Profile of the study area

Fig. 2 indicates that Manitoba's Southern Interlake region is located north of Winnipeg and bounded in the east by Lake Winnipeg (the eleventh largest freshwater lake in the world), and by Lake Manitoba in the west. Natural attractions in the region include wilderness and a variety of wildlife, with extensive beaches along the shores of Lake Winnipeg and Lake Manitoba. In the vacation communities around the south basin of Lake Winnipeg, permanent residents are augmented each summer by both cottagers² and vacationers (Selwood, 1996). The beaches of Lake Winnipeg are within weekend or day-trip distance from Winnipeg (45 min to 1-h driving time) and have developed as second home (cottage) destinations (Gill, 1996).

There are a number of popular resort communities located on the west shore of Lake Winnipeg (Fig. 2). Approximately one-half of the populations of the towns of Gimli (1916 population), Winni-

² In North America, most buildings known as cottages are used for weekend or summer getaways by city dwellers. What Eastern Canadians refer to as "cottages" are generally referred to as "cabins" in most of North America. In much of Northern Ontario, New England, and upstate New York, the term "camp" is used.

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