

Anna Hjälml Ph.D.
Ageing and Living Conditions Programme/
Centre for Population Studies
Umeå Universitet, Sweden
E-mail: anna.hjalm@geography.umu.se

Extended abstract

The “stayers”. Life-long sedentary behaviour, family and ageing in Sweden

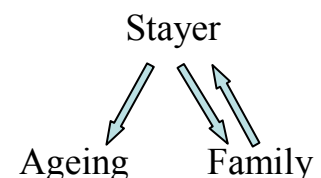
Although staying – even more than moving - is a more common feature of mans life the nature of staying is heavily under researched. Numerous studies have given us extensive knowledge about migration – who the migrants are, what they do - their origins and destinations as well as their rational behind moving is hence well explored. Much less is known about the non-migrants and their characteristics and decision processes. Some might however argue that migrants and non-migrants are two sides of the same coin, that the non-movers are the opposite of the movers (hence generally older, less educated, married, with young children etc.). This understanding that the residual is just the opposite of the studied is not only statistically objectionable but hampers further understanding of the specific nature of staying. This study, a work in progress, focuses on the extreme end of the migratory scale – the life long “stayers”.

There are nevertheless studies focusing on the “stayers” – most of them utilizing either large population register (Fisher et al 2000) or surveys (Mellander et al 2011). Focus is often set either on the economical effects and reasons for staying, while a smaller number of studies address the role of the community in the decision to stay. Previous research has also shown that in the Nordic countries a majority of the people that move state that their move is voluntary and connected to their life plans and values (Lundholm et al 2004), while this kinds of parameters has been little researched among the non-movers.

From a family and relation point of view, it is possible that the “stayers”, as the they may have many “long” relationships – to the house, the place, the view, the friends, the family, have a broader social network, something that might contribute to health and well-being – OR – does the “staying” behaviour render those staying put a lot of “broken” links in the network when others move away. In an ageing society, where working social networks has been shown to be of importance for old age well-being, this notion of long relationships or broken links needs to be addressed.

Hence it seems advisable to discuss stayers not as the opposite side of the coin from movers, but rather as a phenomenon of its own. The study reported here addresses this gap in the literature by focusing on the ageing life long “stayers”. Further, while most migration research focuses on migrants and the factors attracting them to new locations, it should be equally important to analyse the decision process of non-migrants and their reasons to stay. Not least from a policy perspective retaining the current population can be as vital as attracting new migrants.

The aim of this study is hence to address the questions: Who are the life long “stayers” and why do they stay? How does life long sedentary behaviour influence and get influenced by family



relations? And further, to explore the influence of life long sedentary behaviour on the experience of ageing.

Staying put – long relationships or broken links? Attachment to place and social capital

A recent paper by Mellander, Florida and colleagues (2011) indicates that place attractiveness – such as beauty and physical setting, satisfaction with the community service and places to meet people – is very important for a persons intention and decision to stay. Drawing on previous studies on migratory behaviour among the older segments of the population we know that places with greater amenities attracts migrants, while for example suburban areas seems to be less attractive for ageing return migrant (Lundholm 2010). Other studies have rather highlighted that the individual resources and characteristics are important for explaining migratory and sedentary behaviour (Fischer and Malmberg 2001).

We know that when comes to sedentary behaviour non-migration is cumulative, meaning that the longer you stayed in a place the less likely you are to migrate, and Fischer et a. 2000 identifies, concerning labour markets, “immobility as a strong and persistent behavioural strategy for the large majority of people.”(p. 32). This “unwillingness” to move is often explained in terms of insider advantages, where place specific abilities and assets are accumulated over time and would be, at least partly, lost in case of migration. An ageing person that lived his or her whole life in the same place can therefore be expected to have accumulated considerable insider capital that might be drawn on in times of for example challenges connected to ageing. For persons of old age, location integrated with one’s personal history has further been shown to be of importance for well-being and independence (Peace, Holland & Kellaheer 2006).

Concerning the elderly not only the place but also a working social networks, including kin, has been shown to be important for wellbeing, and further protective against cognitive decline (Silverstein and Marengo 2001, Frataglionni et al. 2000). Previous studies has shown that event though Sweden has, in a European comparison, longer distances between elderly parents and adult children, and that intergenerational contacts are less frequent (Hank 2007) still 10% of the elderly parents has at least one adult child within 100 meters and about 30% has a child within 1 km (Malmberg and Pettersson 2007). As we know that the majority of migrations made are short distance migrations we might expect that a fair amount of this 10% are generations that never separated geographically. It is however possible that the sedentary behaviour of the aged have led to “broken links” where friends and relatives migrated, a phenomenon previously described in an international setting by for example Vullnetari and King (2008).

Study design and data collection – an outline

Drawing on previous knowledge about place characteristics and migratory and sedentary behaviour this study will be carried out in two separate areas with somewhat different characteristics. Further, interviews will be carried out in both urban and non-urban settings to, seeking to allow more themes to arise.

The first site is the municipality of Boden in northern Sweden, a municipality with approximately 19000 inhabitants. Boden, a former garrison town, has for the from the 1990ies had a slightly declining population and an ageing population with 20,5% aged 65 and older. The second site, the municipality of Umeå (115 000 inhabitants), also in the northern Sweden, has a somewhat younger age structure, with 14% 65 years and older, and a stable population growth.

Sampling in qualitative research is a difficult and often debated issue. In this study, the aspiration is to find a number of persons who in their older years share the experience of having lived on the same place for their entire life, rather than seeking a statistically representative or most deviant experience sample. The sampling will therefore be done through “opportunistic sampling” (Burgess 1984), a method found suitable when finding informants that meets the criteria can be expected to be a challenge. This kind of sampling, naturally, does not lend itself to either internal statistical analysis or external generalisations and the outcome will be influenced by the particular participants recruited. It however allows a wide range of potentially relevant issues and themes to emerge. The interviews will follow directed content analysis method, as explained by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), with open-ended questions concerning specific themes derived from previous studies and theory.

In a subsequent study, addressing the same topic, the Linnaeus Database at the Umeå University will be used. The Linnaeus data, micro-level population data covering the full Swedish population, contains apart from rich socio-economic and links between generations also detailed geographical information (Malmberg et al. 2010). The database allow for quantitative studies of the extent and patterns of staying.

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