THE IMPORTANCE OF AMENITIES AND ATTITUDES: A WASHINGTON EXAMPLE*

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ABSTRACT

Most models of why people move or stay have assumed that economic reasons were the primary driving force. More recently noneconomic or amenity reasons have been recognized as other major factors in the decision to move or stay. We report on the results of a random survey of 398 people in San Juan County, Washington. Amenities were found to be important both for migrants and residents, although there were differences between the two groups. Migrants and residents also differed on issues such as raising taxes to improve local services. We also found differences by age category. Discriminant analysis was successful in classifying both on resident/migrant and under and over age sixty-five categories.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional explanation of why people move has been a simple economic one. Economic theory and models assumed that people would move from areas of lower wages and higher unemployment to areas with higher wages and better employment prospects. Unfortunately such models are not very good at explaining migration trends [1] and today the simple income maximization model is no longer accepted as adequate in explaining migration trends in the United States. For example, Haurin and Haurin argue that predicting relocation as a function of differences in wages is not fully grounded in theory [2]. Krumm found that while

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migrant households experience higher wage growth after migration than before, there was no systematic movement from or to areas with high or low wages [3].

Economic factors, while clearly important in explaining why people move or stay where they do, have led to myopic theorizing. Wages are trade-offs for a particular lifestyle, stress level, or happiness that people perceive can be found in particular locations. One reason why economic models do not adequately explain migration trends is that migration should be considered within the substances or context in which individuals want to live their lives [4]. The quality of life at a particular place becomes an important consideration for many people.

Noneconomic factors, especially amenities, have become recognized as important reasons for why people move. Ullman was among the first to cite amenities as a major factor in the regional growth process [5]. Since then, a number of studies have shown amenities to be important determinants of the migration process [6-11].

Survey-based research indicates that about 50 percent of migrants to non-metropolitan counties had a decline in income after migration [12-15]. The importance of amenities may explain why income may not be as important as expected, since people may accept lower wages and incomes if they are compensated by a potentially wide range of amenities.

The relative importance of economic or noneconomic factors will vary by place. People move, and places increase or decrease in population because of a complex combination of factors. Nonetheless, Evans asserts that a major question is whether amenities or jobs are the most important determinants of migration [16].

MIGRATION TO SAN JUAN COUNTY, WASHINGTON

The relative importance of economic or noneconomic factors will vary from place to place. Not all places have the same amenities or conditions for a high quality of life. An undesirable physical environment, for example, is difficult to change. An attractive location should have a higher set of physical amenities and demonstrate their relatively greater importance. At the same time this importance may vary by how long people have lived in a place. Do recent migrants to an area place a higher value on amenities than people who have lived there for a long time? Retired people should be more interested in amenities and the quality of life than migrants still in the labor force. We tested the validity of these and other questions for San Juan County, Washington.

San Juan County is located in northwest Washington State and consists of four main islands (San Juan, Orcas, Lopez, and Shaw), with up to 786 islands in total depending on the level of the tide. The county has a mild dry climate, and tourism is the major industry [17].

During the 1970s the county had a population increase of 103 percent. Between 1980 and 1990 its population grew 28 percent (compared to a 4% average increase for nonmetropolitan counties nationally). The 1990 population was 10,035 [18].

SAN JUAN COUNTY SURVEY

A survey was mailed to 850 randomly chosen residents of San Juan County. The survey followed a modified Total Design Method with one mailing and a postcard follow-up [19]. This is the most widely used method for conducting mail surveys. Three hundred and ninety-eight surveys (51%) were returned. People were classified as migrants if they had moved to the county within the last ten years, and as residents if they had lived there longer than ten years. Of the respondents 66 percent (262) were migrants, and 34 percent (135) residents. The largest group of migrants (44%) moved to the San Juan Islands from other counties within Washington State; 27 percent moved from California.

Migrants to the county were more likely to be employed in the professional, technical or managerial fields (58%) than the residents (39%). Migrants had higher incomes, with 40 percent earning more than $35,000 compared to 28 percent of the residents. Of the migrants 29 percent had completed graduate work while only 18 percent of the residents had done so.

WHY PEOPLE MOVED TO SAN JUAN COUNTY

Migrants were asked on a five point scale the importance of a number of factors in their decision to move to San Juan County. The responses as shown in Table 1 were collapsed into Important or Not Important. The two columns do not sum to 100 because a middle neutral category was excluded. Noneconomic factors such as landscape/scenery (83%), environmental quality (81%), pace of life (77%) and

Table 1. Importance of Different Attributes in Decision to Move
to San Juan County (Migrants Only Percentages)

Attribute	Important	Not Important
Employment opportunity	16.8	75.2
Cost of living	5.2	76.3
School quality	6.1	80.1
Climate	56.0	16.6
Health and social services	4.0	75.8
Access to family and friends	16.1	68.9
Outdoor recreation	55.3	21.2
Crime rate	43.0	34.2
Landscape/scenery	82.8	5.9
Pace of life	77.2	6.7
Environmental quality	81.2	6.3
Place to raise children	28.9	59.9

climate (56%) were mentioned by a majority of the migrants. Only 17 percent of the migrants cited employment opportunities as an important reason for moving to the county.

More than 70 percent of the migrants were under sixty-five years of age. Employment opportunities was the most cited (but still by only 21%) category among twenty-one- to thirty-five-year-old migrants; pace of life and a place to raise children were both cited by 18 percent. Landscape/scenery was cited by 20 percent of the thirty-five- to fifty-year-old migrants, followed by employment opportunities (17%), pace of life (14%), and a place to raise children (14%). As expected, in the fifty-one to sixty-five and over age sixty-five category employment opportunities were not cited. Pace of life, climate, landscape and scenery are the top three categories for these two age groups (Table 2).

Another indicator of the importance of amenity variables was that over 44 percent of the migrants experienced a decrease in their annual incomes by more than $5,000, consistent across all age groups. Yet the vast majority (from 73% to 86%) said they were happier, healthier, less stressed, and enjoying life more. This is particularly notable given that San Juan, with a median housing value of $166,400 in 1990, has among the highest living costs of any county in Washington [18].

Table 2. Top Three Pull Factors by Age of Migrant
(Percent Listing as Most Important)

Age			
21-35	36-50	51-65	Over 65
Employment opportunities 21.21	Landscape/ scenery 19.74	Pace of life 22.41	Climate 27.42
Pace of life 18.18	Employment opportunities 17.11	Climate 17.24	Landscape/ scenery 24.19
Place to raise children 18.18	Place to raise children 14.47	Landscape/ scenery 13.79	Pace of life 19.35
	Pace of life 14.47		

ATTITUDES OF MIGRANTS AND RESIDENTS

Migrants and residents generally were very satisfied with life in San Juan County (Table 3). Employment opportunities, local taxes, quality of public schools and county services, medical services, and shopping facilities were sources of some discontent for both groups. Migrants were less satisfied than residents with local taxes, schools, medical services, and shopping facilities, and more satisfied than residents with the level of county services (64% vs. 35%). One attraction of an island county connected by ferries to the mainland is the physical setting itself, as well as access to public lands and wilderness areas. Majorities of both migrants and residents used nearby public lands (89% and 74%) and wilderness areas (76% and 65%) more than once a year.

Table 3. Level of Satisfaction of Life in San Juan County
(Migrant vs. Resident Percentages)

Percent respondents who were:	Residents (N = 135)		Migrants (N = 262)	
	Very Satisfied	Not Satisfied	Very Satisfied	Not Satisfied
Your dwelling	89.34	2.46	79.14	3.94
Surrounding scenery	95.16	—	97.24	0.40
Climate	86.40	0.80	84.98	1.58
Outdoor recreation	80.00	4.80	84.19	1.98
Air quality	98.40	—	98.81	—
Traffic	72.14	7.38	81.49	3.54
Shopping facilities	33.06	14.51	27.17	23.23
Medical services	44.71	13.82	31.50	24.41
Schools	39.09	16.36	22.93	28.90
County services	34.96	20.33	64.13	15.22
Your job and income	64.13	15.22	51.75	15.42
Housing costs	80.25	2.47	65.71	12.39
Friendliness of neighborhood	86.29	4.04	85.31	1.98
Pace of daily life	89.60	3.20	87.90	3.23
Crime rate	89.60	0.80	93.65	0.40
Law enforcement	78.23	4.04	75.10	5.53
As place to raise children	77.97	2.54	70.75	10.38
Employment opportunities	15.45	42.73	22.48	54.07
Local taxes	29.03	25.00	18.87	29.72
Facilities for seniors	52.47	8.91	50.26	16.92

Table 4. "Should Local Taxes be Increased to . . ."
(Migrant vs. Resident Percentages)

	Migrant		Resident	
Issue	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Improve schools	59.60	21.60	59.01	26.22
Build parks/playgrounds	44.36	35.88	47.06	34.45
Better medical facilities	61.20	23.20	59.01	25.41
Improve security and police protection	25.81	41.53	42.63	26.23
Provide better senior citizen services and facilities	41.04	27.89	46.28	28.10
Improve roads	47.20	33.60	62.30	23.77
No tax increase	35.63	33.20	52.89	28.93

In view of the county's rapid population growth in the 1970s and 1980s, we asked about the acceptability of raising local taxes to improve infrastructure and county services (Table 4). A majority of migrants and residents said taxes should be increased to improve schools and provide better medical facilities; a plurality of both groups (the "no opinion" category is not shown in Table 4) said they would support higher taxes to build parks and playgrounds, and provide better senior citizen services and facilities.

DISCRIMINANT ANALYSIS

A stepwise discriminant analysis was used to classify migrants and residents according to demographic and attitudinal differences [20]. A second discriminant analysis was run for respondents under age sixty-five and those sixty-five or older (39% of respondents were over age 65). Standardized discriminant function coefficients are shown in Table 5.

Migrants tend to be younger, more highly educated, and more satisfied with medical services in the county than residents. They also were more likely to have lived in a large city or suburb. The difference in background and socio-demographic characteristics of the migrants and residents would in part explain attitudinal differences. The ten variables selected for inclusion in the standardized discriminant function correctly classified 73 percent of cases either in the migrant or resident group.

The second equation in Table 5 discriminates between persons under and over age sixty-five. The variables which best discriminated between the two age categories were satisfaction with the friendliness and pleasantness of the

Table 5. Standardized Discriminant Functions Statement

Variable	Migrant Group	Age Group
Age	−0.42	
Education	0.52	
Quality of medical services	0.55	−0.17
Increase tax for police	0.32	0.58
Additional wilderness	−0.19	
Preferred town size	−0.25	
Local taxes	0.17	
Increase taxes for roads	0.18	
Friendliness of neighbors	0.16	
Population size where raised	0.33	
Climate		0.43
Crime rate		−0.13
Income lost		−0.66
Friendliness of county		−0.76
Pleasantness of county		0.69
No tax increase		0.23
Mineral/energy development		0.42
Canonical Correlation	0.52	0.64
Wilk's Lambda	0.73	0.59
Significance level	0.00	0.00
Correctly classified	73%	86%
No. of cases	329	179

county, and the degree of income loss. Persons over age sixty-five, as might be expected, had larger income losses. Variables with moderate discriminatory power were attitudes towards increasing taxes for police protection and whether or not mineral or energy development should be allowed on public lands. Persons over age sixty-five were more concerned with police protection and more willing to allow development on public lands. Variables with little discriminatory power included no tax increase, and levels of satisfaction with the quality of medical services and the crime rate. The discriminant function correctly classified 86 percent of the 179 cases into either the under or over age sixty-five years category.

CONCLUSION

We have found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that amenities are an important reason why people move to an island county such as San Juan, even in the face of lower

incomes. The high quality of life derived from a clean environment, spectacular scenery and access to public lands (among other attributes of the area) leads to a high level of satisfaction with life in the county. More than 75 percent of the 210 people who provided additional comments at the end of the survey expressed such sentiments explicitly, migrants and long-term residents alike. The importance of maintaining environmental quality at a high level, and the perception that a lifestyle based on a low population was currently being threatened by continuing population growth was cited as a cause for alarm by a number of current residents.

We were able to differentiate between migrants and residents and between young and old persons primarily on the basis of their attitudes. As noted, many migration studies have emphasized economic and demographic variables largely because they have been either theoretically grounded in economic theories or the costs attached to gathering attitudinal data. Our results suggest that continuing to pay more attention to people's attitudes will increase the predictive and explanatory power of future migration models.

Our findings suggest that places with desirable physical environments would be well advised to preserve their surroundings, in part to underpin the economic viability of the area. Moreover, for places such as San Juan County with a very desirable physical environment and relatively low population base, the problem of the future may be to retain that advantage. By far the largest segment of the local economy is driven by the services and tourist related sector which has 58 percent of all the employees while manufacturing, agriculture, forestry, and fishing combined have only 12 percent [21]. The ongoing high population growth may both reduce the quality of life and the rationale for moving and living there.

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