

# **Rural migration in the North of the Netherlands: who moves to less popular areas and why?**

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## Abstract

Migration into rural areas is a much researched phenomenon. Also in the Netherlands a considerable demand for rural living has been found. The most rural part of the country is located in the North. When housing prices in this area are mapped substantial differences appear between different rural areas. This can be regarded as a sign that not all rural areas have the same popularity for living. Some of the less popular areas experience population decline or will experience this in the future. This makes it relevant to see which people do go to these areas and to investigate what their residential preferences are. The characteristics and motivations of people moving to rural areas in the Netherlands have been researched before. However, less attention has been given to the question whether these characteristics and motivations differ for people migrating to different types of rural areas. From international research there are indications that this very well could be the case, which makes it interesting to see whether this is also true for the Dutch situation.

This paper describes migration flows in rural areas in the North of the Netherlands. Where do migrants to rural areas come from? Do they move from urban or rural areas, from the region or from other parts of the country? Furthermore, characteristics and residential preferences of people who have recently moved to less popular areas and people who have recently moved to other rural areas in the North of the Netherlands are compared using data from Housing Research of the Netherlands.

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## Introduction

Migration into rural areas is a much researched phenomenon (e.g. Boyle & Halfacree, 1998, Dean et al., 1984; Escribano, 2006, Halfacree, 2008; Halliday & Coombes, 1995, Kalogirou, 2005; Lindgren, 2003; Stockdale, 2006; Walmsley et al., 1998). As Halfacree and Boyle state, the popular dream of “escaping to the countryside” is an element of most modern Western societies (1998). Moving to rural areas may have many different meanings and motives. Some migrants search for the rural in landscapes, housing or way of life, while others move to the countryside for pragmatic reasons, such as lower housing costs (Hjort & Malmberg, 2006). However, from the literature on rural migration it is known that rural areas differ in their popularity for living. Therefore rural migration is a geographically selective process (Woods, 2005). In the United States over three-quarters of the population growth in rural areas took place in western and southern states, stimulated by a combination of the environment, lifestyle

and employment opportunities. Throughout much of the prairie belt however, the population of rural areas decreased (Johnson & Beale, 1994). In Canada population growth concentrated in the rural districts closest to metropolitan centres, while remoter rural regions of central and northern Canada have suffered significant depopulation (Bollman & Biggs, 1992, as cited in Woods, 2005). In Australia population growth concentrates in rural areas in the coastal fringes of Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia (Hugo & Smailes, 1985).

In comparison with other European countries, the Netherlands is a densely populated and urbanised area, with few remaining rural areas. According to the OECD standard there are even no real rural areas in the Netherlands (Haartsen et al., 2003). In the Dutch context, however, a considerable part of the country is considered rural by the Dutch population (Haartsen, 2002). Considering rural migration, Heins (2002) investigated the demand for rural living among urban residents and their images of the countryside. Other studies were done into the migration flows into rural areas and the residential preferences of migrants moving into rural areas (Steenbekkers et al., 2006, 2008).

In these studies hardly any attention has been paid to a differentiation between different types of rural areas. Therefore it seems useful to see whether we can distinguish popular and less popular rural areas for living in the Netherlands, where these areas are located and how they can be characterised.

In this paper we will focus on the northern part of the country, consisting of the provinces of Friesland, Groningen and Drenthe (see figure 1). We chose this area first of all because the north can be considered to be the most rural part of the Netherlands, based on address density and the perception of Dutch people (Haartsen, 2002; Heins, 2002). Secondly, the north contains a large variety of rural areas, with regard to characteristics like for example the location relative to urban centres in the North and relative to the central part of the country, landscape, building style of houses, presence of natural areas and history.

We distinguish popular and less popular rural areas based on average housing prices. Housing prices reflect the value buyers attach to houses and their environments. Preferences of people are expressed in the demand for houses and therefore in the housing prices (Luttik, 2000; Visser & Van Dam, 2006). Because of that, we regard the average housing prices in an area as an indicator for the popularity of an area for living. We chose to use housing prices in stead of the often used immigration numbers to indicate popularity, because immigration numbers depend very much on the amount of available houses in an area. To prevent sprawl in the countryside, the Netherlands has quite strict regulations on building in rural areas, that is why there is no possibility of unrestricted population growth in popular areas. Especially in attractive areas the regulations are strict, to protect the landscape.

It seems reasonable to assume that characteristics of rural areas relate to the characteristics and motives of migrants. As Argent et al. (2007, p. 218) note in their article about amenities in rural areas: 'perceived rural amenity is clearly an anthropocentric concept, relating to the subjective interpretation of aspects of the physical and cultural environment in terms of their creation of a 'pleasant' setting. It is thus dependent on a wide variety of human factors and preferences, including age, fitness and socio-economic status'. Also Hjort and Malmberg (2006) relate the diversity of the countryside, 'a number of contrasting countrysides', to the many different meanings and motives moving to rural areas may entail. Therefore we think it is useful to look beneath the nationwide rural migration flow to see whether different rural areas attract different people with different motivations and preferences. Indeed some authors (Costello, 2007, Spencer, 1995) have noted that more research on the complexity of migration to rural areas is needed. They suggest that researchers should pay more attention to the uneven development of rural localities.

Studies in different countries show the diversity of rural migration in terms of socio-economic composition and motives (Halfacree, 1994; Hugo & Bell, 1998; Lindgren, 2003; Walmsley et

al., 1998). Less often are the characteristics and motives of people migrating to different kinds of rural areas directly compared. An exception on this is the research by Hjort & Malmberg (2006) in which the characteristics of migrants to periurban and remote countryside are compared.

In the Netherlands so far not so much attention has been given to the question whether the characteristics and motivations differ for people migrating to different types of rural areas. An exception is a study into the characteristics and residential choice of people migrating to areas close to protected natural areas (Elbersen, 2001). In comparison with other rural areas in the Netherlands these areas attracted more early-retirees, footloose and middle class households. Also indications of low-cost-of-living seekers were found. The areas close to protected areas received more migrants from urban areas than other Dutch rural areas.

This paper aims at distinguishing popular and less popular rural areas for living and tries to characterise those areas. An overview of migration flows to the different types of rural areas is given. Also the characteristics and motivations of people migrating to these areas are compared. To do this we use population statistics of Statistics Netherlands and data from Housing Research of the Netherlands.

### **Selective migration into rural areas: popularity and amenities**

For 30 years now there has been an academic interest in the population development of non-metropolitan regions (e.g. Hugo & Smailes, 1985; Halfacree & Boyle, 1998; Beale, 1976; Williams & Sofranko, 1979). Many countries and regions in the developed world have experienced a change in their previously dominant migration trend: from rural-to urban to urban-to-rural (Kontuly, 1998). Much of this research has been done under the label of ‘counterurbanisation’, which has shown to be a ‘chaotic concept’ (Mitchell, 2004, p. 21). It is used to describe a migration movement, as well as a process of change of the settlement system, from a concentrated to a deconcentrated state (Mitchell, 2004). In this paper we focus on migration flows into rural areas, consisting of migrants coming from urban as well as rural areas. To acknowledge this diversity we prefer to use the term migration into rural areas instead of counterurbanisation in this paper.

This encapsulating of different kind of migration flows fits with Milbourne (2007) stating that ‘rural researchers have been preoccupied with longer distance movements and with migrations from urban to rural places. While such movements provide an important research subject, particularly if the objective is to identify differences, tensions and conflicts between new and established fractions of the rural population, they do run the risk of marginalising other types of movement (p. 385). He argues that researchers of rural population change need to think more critically about the broad range of movements and mobilities that are being played out in rural spaces. Also Stockdale et al. (2000) finds in her research that rural in-migration is comprised of groups other than the urban-rural migrant. There are migrants who have moved from even smaller places upward on the settlement hierarchy and lateral migrants who have moved between similar sized settlements.

In literature it is acknowledged that migration flows to rural areas are spread unevenly, rural areas do not all have the same popularity for living. As Selwood et al. (1995, as cited in Costello, 2007, p. 87) stated: “there is not an across the board repopulation of ‘the’ rural occurring; rather, one contained to particular places that have scenic or Arcadian ambience.” In Australia for example, the processes of migration are multifaceted. In particular, rural depopulation and its impacts are in general continuing, while some rural growth has been

evident in areas that conform to a mythical rural image. Additionally, exurban migration has been dominated by movements to the coastline (Costello, 2007).

From previous research in different countries some characteristics of popular versus less popular areas can be derived. An important factor seems to be the landscape. Research on landscape preferences has found that people mostly prefer park- or wooded savannah-like landscapes, with traversable foregrounds, open vistas, clumps of trees and a water source (Ulrich, 1986). These preferences appear to be largely independent of culture, with the exception of people that are dependent on other landscapes for livelihood such as farmers and foresters (Van den Berg et al., 1998; Yu, 1995). Preferences for semi-open landscapes can be explained by the so-called prospect-refuge theory. According to Appleton (1975), the ability to see (prospect) without being seen (refuge) increases perceived safety which increases the esthetic pleasure experienced in the environment.

McGranahan (2008) explores the relationships between natural landscape characteristics and migration. He uses five landscape ingredients: forest, cropland, water, topographic variation (relief) and population density. Landscape has a direct influence on migration, not attributable to employment change or the other county characteristics in the analysis. People have been most drawn to areas with a mix of forest and open land, water area, topographical variation, and relatively little cropland (McGranahan, 2008).

In Ireland the location, most importantly the travel distance to urban centres, seems important. Gkartzios & Scott (2008) state that in Ireland impressive rural repopulation can be seen (3 or more times than the national average) in accessible rural areas, along the road and rail transport. At the same time population decline has been recorded in less accessible rural areas, particularly in the west of the country.

In the US, Johnson & Beale (1994) find an association both with location and economic structure. Nonmetropolitan population gains were more likely in counties near urban centers. Also nonmetropolitan counties that were destinations for retirement-age migrants or centers of recreation were the fastest growing counties during the early 1990s. Counties dependent on farming and mining as well as those with low population density were the least likely to gain population.

Argent et al. (2007) developed an amenity index for Australian rural areas. Of the seven individual biophysical, climatic, historic, geographic and economic indicators they find a relationship with immigration rates for beach distance, employment in recreational and related services and irrigation water resources.

Further on in the paper we select a number of these characteristics which we consider relevant for the Dutch situation, to describe the less popular and popular rural areas in the North of the Netherlands.

## **Rural migration - different people, different motives?**

Moving to rural areas may have many different meanings and entail different motives. Some search for the rural in landscapes, housing or way of life, while others move to the countryside due to housing costs. But what is also important is the feeling, the idea of what rural is (Hjort & Malmberg, 2006). Research on rural population change has therefore also focused on the existence and its importance in rural immigration decisions of a 'rural idyll' (Halfacree, 1994; Walmsey et al., 1998; Van Dam et al., 2002), which refers to a very positive image of the countryside surrounding many aspects of rural lifestyle, community and landscape (Ilbery, 1998).

According to Stockdale (2006) counterurbanisation is widely reported to be associated with the movement of middle-class families from cities who are either retired or commute to

nearby urban centres for employment. Philips (1998) refers to the colonisation of rural areas by professional and managerial service classes. They are often motivated to relocate to rural areas in response to a desire for a rural lifestyle and residence. However, “the move to rural areas has predominantly been conceptualised as a retiree or, more recently, as middle class aspiration movement, but there are also people out of the metropolitan area searching for affordable housing and living options (Marshall et al., 2004, as cited in Costello, 2007: 88) People’s positive images of the rural and the attraction of the countryside may be related to a specific part of the country, for example places of one’s childhood or of one’s second home, places one once holidayed or may be related to a specific landscape described in art, film or literature (Hjort & Malmberg, 2006; Selwood et al., 1996).

In the Netherlands, Steenbekkers et al. (2008) studied revealed residential preferences of movers to rural areas. The largest group (20 %) mentioned the specific dwelling or dwelling type that was offered. Quietness, space and a green environment were also an often mentioned consideration. To a lesser extent work and living close to family and friends were important. Heins (2002) investigated the role of images of the countryside in rural living preferences in the Netherlands. Her findings suggest that images of the countryside play a considerable role in rural living preferences and suggest the existence of significant rural idyll in the Netherlands. Rural residential environments are very popular among urban residents according to her research. 70 % of the urban residents considering a move would like to move to such a residential environment. Having children, age and income did not influence preferences for rural living. However, having lived in the countryside before and frequent visiting of the countryside increase the probability of rural housing preferences. Residential motives were most mentioned as motive behind an urban-rural move (Heins, 2002).

In an international context some research has been done into different characteristics and motivations of people migrating to different rural areas. Stockdale (2006) examines migration from and to depopulating areas of rural Scotland. Immigration largely consisted of cohorts of economic activity age. Most moved over short distances often from elsewhere in the study region. In-migration to these peripheral rural areas was characterised by some who moved down the urban hierarchy, some who moved up the urban hierarchy and some who moved between similar sized rural settlements. Contrary to much of the literature on a repopulation of rural areas (Boyle & Halfacree, 1998, Stockdale et al., 2000) quality-of-life considerations were under-represented, accounting for no more than 10 per cent of the moves. Based on this Stockdale concludes that it seems that the motivations for immigration to depopulating and repopulating areas are notably different. In these depopulating areas personal reasons (relating to for example marriage and divorce) are the most important, followed by employment considerations. 50 % of all immigrants possessed tertiary level or vocational qualifications. Only a small number was self-employed.

Shumway and Otterstrom (2001) compare migration flows to rural areas with service-based economies and high levels of natural amenities (‘the New West’) to areas with ‘old’ economic structures, like for example farming or mining. Population growth appears to be concentrated in the ‘New West’ counties. They find that immigrants to New West counties have the highest incomes when compared to migrants to the other areas.

Amcoff (2000, as cited in Hjort & Malmberg, 2006) shows that the search for rural living is equally important to migrants from different socio-economic backgrounds. However, he also observes that people with a university education tend to choose the very specific rural locations most associated with the rural idyll.

In their study into characteristics of rural migrants in Sweden Hjort & Malmberg (2006) investigate to what extent rural areas located farther away from urban centres attract different migrants than areas located close to these centres. They find that population trends in the

Swedish countryside are highly dependent on migration to and from the cities, the exchange between the periurban and remote countryside was very limited.

When comparing migration to periurban areas with that to more remote rural areas, they found that people aged 19-40 had a lower probability to end up in the remote countryside, while people older than 61 had a higher probability to end up in the remote countryside. Having children and being self-employed showed mixed results for both research years, in 1993 they did not significantly differ for migrants to the different areas. High-income earners, people with a university education and singles are more likely to move to the periurban countryside.

## **Facts and figures rural migration the North of the Netherlands**

Before we start our analysis of popular and less popular rural areas and the similarities and differences in in-migrants and their motives, we give an overview of the population and migration figures in the North of the Netherlands in general, and in the rural parts of the northern Netherlands more specifically (see table 1). Also the internal migration in the northern part of the Netherlands is depicted. In total, around 1,700,000 people live in the North of the Netherlands. That is about 10% of the total Dutch population. The northern Netherlands consists of three provinces and 68 municipalities. Based on the national standard for urbanity of Statistics Netherlands, the so-called address density, 58 of these municipalities can be considered rural. These are municipalities with an average of less than 1,000 addresses per square kilometer 65% of the population of the North of the Netherlands lives in these rural municipalities.

As table 1 shows, the net migration in the North of the Netherlands is slightly negative. In the period 2003-2007, a five-year average of 22,326 people leave the north towards the rest of the Netherlands, while 21,913 people come to the north. Of these in-migrants, 54% find a place to live in the countryside. Around one third of the in-migrants to rural municipalities originate from rural areas in the rest of the Netherlands. 68% (7,967 people) can be considered counterurbanists, moving from an urban municipality to a rural municipality. This is more than the overall Dutch average; according to Steenbekkers et al. (2008), in 2006 57% of the people that moved into rural areas in the Netherlands came from an urban area.

Table 1: Population and migration figures for the North of the Netherlands

	2003-2007
<b>Total population North Netherlands</b> (5 years average, absolute and % of total population Netherlands)	1,700,493
<b>Total population municipalities rural North Netherlands</b> (5 years average, absolute and % of total population North Netherlands)	1,097,332 (65%)
<b>Net migration North Netherlands</b>	-413
- Out-migration to the rest of the Netherlands (5 year average, absolute)	22,326
- In-migration from the rest of the Netherlands (5 year average, absolute)	21,913
<b>In-migration into rural municipalities of North Netherlands</b> (5 years average, absolute and % of total in-migration into North Netherlands)	11,785 (54%)
- from rural municipalities rest of Netherlands	3,809 (32%)
- from urban municipalities rest of Netherlands	7,976 (68%)
<b>Internal migration in North Netherlands between municipalities</b> (5 year average, absolute)	51,831
- rural to rural migration	19,236
- urban to rural migration	12,138
- rural to urban migration	15,049
- urban to urban migration	5,408

Source: Statistics Netherlands

Migration flows into the Northern Netherlands' countryside also consist of internal migration. Table 1 shows that the five year average of migration between northern Netherlands municipalities is 51,831. 61% of these migrants move into a rural municipality, of which more almost two third (19,236) originate from another rural municipality and around one third suburbanizes or counterurbanizes from urban areas in the north. On the other hand, a significant proportion (29%; 15,049) of the migrants moves from the countryside to urban municipalities.

This overview of the migration flows to as well as within the North of the Netherlands supports the view of Milbourne (2007) that rural population dynamics consist of a broad range of movements and mobilities. Next to urban-rural migration there exists a considerable migration flow between rural areas, within the North of the Netherlands this flow is even more dominant than urban-rural migration.

## Defining popular and less popular rural areas in the North of the Netherlands

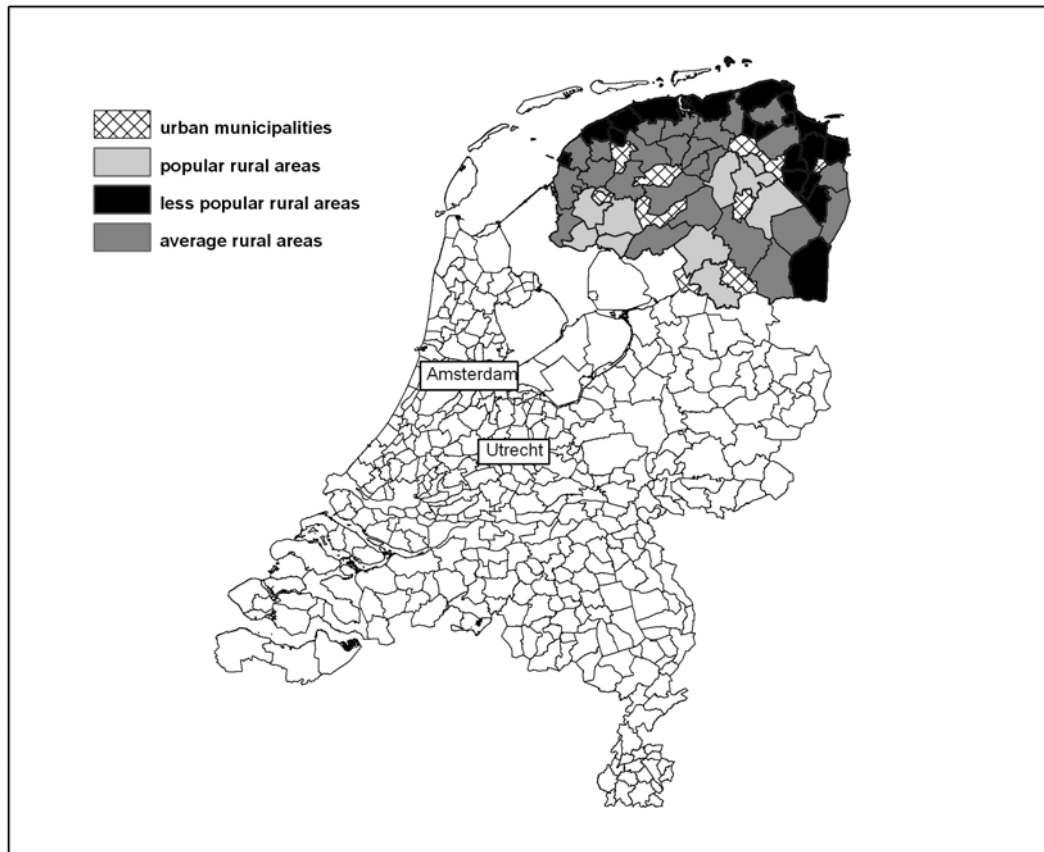
As stated in the introduction, we use the prices of houses as measure for popularity of rural areas for living. In 2008, the average housing prices per municipality in the north of the Netherlands varied from 142,600 euros to 340,000. For our analyses, we did a cluster analysis on the average prices of houses of the northern Netherlands' rural municipalities. The outcome consisted of four clusters, of which one cluster only contained one case (with the highest average price). We combined this one-case cluster with the cluster that has the second highest average of prices. This results in the following three clusters of rural municipalities:

1. **less popular rural areas** (n = 18), lowest prices of houses (cluster average prices 174,828 euros)
2. **average rural areas** (n = 26), average prices of houses (cluster average prices 212,731 euros)
3. **popular rural areas** (n = 10), highest prices of houses (cluster average 273,170 euros)



Figure 1 shows that the less popular areas are located across the northern and eastern borders of the North of the Netherlands. More than half of the less popular rural municipalities border the Waddensea, an intertidal zone with mud flats and wetlands. The coastline exists of a typical Dutch dike that separates the mud flats from the agricultural land. This might explain why the northern Netherlands' coastline is not as popular as the Australian coast with sandy beaches and cliffs (Costello, 2007).

*Figure 1: Popular, average and less popular areas in the North of The Netherlands*



In order to characterise and describe similarities and differences between the three types of rural areas, we calculated the mean scores of these areas for several types of characteristics, being landscape characteristics, socio-cultural characteristics, socio-economic characteristics and measures of peripherality. The results are presented in table 2.

We have used three types of variables to describe the role of landscape characteristics in the popularity of rural areas. As table 2 shows, the popular rural areas have a significantly large share of the land use categories nature and recreation land. This corresponds with the results of Elbersen (2001), that the vicinity of natural areas attracts people.

The variables ‘dominant type of soil’ and ‘type of agriculture’ are measures for the type of landscape of the specific rural areas. In the North of the Netherlands, two dominant landscape types can be distinguished. The first is the open, young marine clay and former peat landscape, where arable farming and large scale dairy farming prevails. The second is the semi-open sand landscape, where small-scale mixed and dairy farming is concentrated. Less popular areas are characterised by a large share of marine clay soils and a large share of arable farming. Popular rural areas are dominated by sand landscapes and grazing livestock farming. This is consistent with the findings of Ulrich (1986) and McGranahan (2008), that people prefer areas with a mix of forest and open land and relatively little cropland.

Table 2: Mean score on different characteristics, per type of rural area (bold figures  $p < 0.05$ )

‘Amenity’		Less popular rural areas (n=18)	Average rural areas (n=26)	Popular rural areas (n=10)	Total
<i>Landscape characteristics</i>					
Share in land use (2003)	Agriculture	82%	85%	78%	82%
	Nature	<b>6%</b>	<b>6%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>7%</b>
	Recreation	<b>1%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>1%</b>
	Water	0.21%	0.68%	0.14%	0.13%
	Urban area	7%	5%	5%	5%
Dominant type of soil (% of municipalities in cluster)	Marine clay	<b>67%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>44%</b>
	Former peat	22%	31%	30%	28%
	Sand	<b>11%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>28%</b>
Type of agriculture (% of total agricultural area) 2005	<b>Arable farming</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>27%</b>
	Horticulture	1%	0%	0%	0%
	<b>Grazing livestock</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>64%</b>
	Non-grazing livestock	0%	0%	0%	0%
	<b>Combinations</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>6%</b>
<i>Socio-cultural characteristics</i>					
<i>Dimensions of Dutch regional culture 1997-2003 (after Brons, 2005;2006)</i>	Post-materialism	<b>0.094</b>	<b>-0.365</b>	<b>-0.281</b>	<b>-0.210</b>
	Protestant conservatism	0.099	0.085	-0.110	0.0538
	Classic individualism	<b>0.170</b>	<b>0.449</b>	<b>0.707</b>	<b>0.411</b>
	Egalitarian anti-conservatism	1.435	1.165	1.244	1.270
	Dissatisfaction	-0,512	-0.914	-0.998	-0.795
<i>Socio-economic characteristic</i>					
Average income per household per municipality (2006)		<b>19,206</b>	<b>20,150</b>	<b>22,040</b>	<b>20,185</b>
<i>Measures of peripherality</i>					
Expected population development		-9.321	-4.957	-4.336	-6.297
Expected household development		<b>-4.142</b>	<b>4.782</b>	<b>6.682</b>	<b>2.159</b>
Travel distance to nearest urban centre in North Netherlands		22	24	24	24
Travel distance to nearest urban centre in West Netherlands		<b>109</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>97</b>

Although it is hard to operationalize social features of rural areas (Argent et al., 2007), we tried to find out whether our three types of rural areas differ for five specific dimensions of regional culture. These dimensions were defined by Brons (2005; 2006), who developed a dataset based on quantitative measurements of culture at the spatial scale of Dutch municipalities. The dimensions of regional culture were developed from various indicators using factor analysis. Two of these dimensions show significant differences in our three clusters of rural areas. The first, the degree of ‘post-materialism’, is related to anti-conservatism, feminist values and self-expressive individualism. It consists, for example, of the number of single-person households, votes for progressive parties and the number of children born outside marriage. Less popular rural areas appear to have a regional culture that contains more post-materialism. The second dimension that differs significantly is labeled called ‘classic individualism’. It stands for personal freedom, materialism and egoism. Its indicators are the percentage of votes for liberal parties, and the postponement of marriage and having children. Classical individualism is a dimension of regional culture that prevails in popular rural areas.

The three clusters of rural areas do not differ significantly for the other three dimensions of regional culture. These are ‘Protestant conservatism’, ‘egalitarian anti-conservatism’ and ‘dissatisfaction’. ‘Protestant conservatism’ is strongly related to religion, conservatism, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity. Examples of indicators are the number of marriages

and childbearing at young ages. 'Egalitarian anti-conservatism', is to some extent a weaker version of post-materialism. It includes variables such as the number of public schools and votes for the social democratic party. The final dimension, 'dissatisfaction', relates to both social dissatisfaction (support for political reform movements and low turnout) and individual dissatisfaction (number of divorces).

The socio-economic characteristics of the areas are measured by the average income per household per municipality in 2006. In less popular rural areas, households have a significantly lower average income than in average and popular rural areas. Popular areas are inhabited by households with the highest average income.

The final group of characteristics that we think are relevant for characterizing the differences in popularity of rural areas in the Netherlands are so-called measures of peripherality. Two of the measures are related to population developments; figures on the expected growth of both the population and the number of households in 2025 (compared to 2007). In the Netherlands, from 2030 onwards the total population is expected to start declining. Because of migration patterns towards the more central areas in the Netherlands, population decline has already started in the most peripheral areas of the country. For the housing market, also the expected growth of the number of households is relevant, since the Netherlands has been experiencing a trend of decreasing household size, which implies that even when there is a situation of population decline the number of households can increase.

As table 2 shows, the expected population decline does not significantly differ for the different types of rural areas, although less popular areas do have a higher expected population decline than average and popular rural areas. However, less popular areas are expected to experience a decline in the number of households, while the number of households is expected to increase in average and popular areas. So, considering population and household developments, less popular areas can be considered areas of decline. At the moment, much discussion is going on in the Netherlands on how to solve the problems that areas of decline experience with declining numbers of facilities and services, aging, and keeping up the quality of the houses in a housing market with a residue on houses. Also the question whether such areas of decline will attract certain types of migrants is open for debate.

The other two measures for peripherality are related to the relative location of the rural areas to the nearest provincial capital city in the northern Netherlands (including Zwolle, the province of the neighbouring province Overijssel), and to the nearest city in the central part of the Netherlands (Amsterdam or Utrecht, see figure 1). The relative location is measured in travel time in minutes by car from the town hall of the specific rural municipality to the city hall in the nearest provincial capital city or the nearest of the two cities in the centre of the country, as predicted by a website on travel routes ([www.routenet.nl](http://www.routenet.nl)). The mean travel distances to the nearest city in the centre of the country do vary significantly for the three types of rural areas. The more popular rural areas are closer to the central part of the country. The travel distance to the closest city in the North is almost the same for the various rural areas.

Summarizing, less popular rural areas can be characterized by having a relatively open, marine clay landscape with a large share of large scale arable farming and relatively less natural and recreational areas. The people that inhabit these areas have a lower average income than those in the average and popular rural areas, and the regional culture is more

dominated by ‘post-materialism’. Less popular areas can be considered relatively peripheral, considering both expected population and household decline and travel time towards central parts of the Netherlands.

Popular rural areas can be characterized by having a more semi-open landscape with predominantly grazing livestock farming and a relatively large share of natural areas. The inhabitants of these areas have a relatively high average income. Classical individualism is a dimension of regional culture that prevails in these areas. Popular rural areas have an expected household growth and the least peripheral location with regard to the central parts of the Netherlands.

Average rural areas score in between the other rural areas on most characteristics.

## Differences in migration patterns to popular and less-popular rural areas

After defining and characterising less popular, average and popular rural areas in the North of the Netherlands we will focus now on the migration flows to and from these areas.

*Table 3: Mean net migration rate and in-migrants, per type of rural area (bold figures  $p < 0.05$ )*

	Less popular rural areas (n=18)	Average rural areas (n=26)	Popular rural areas (n=10)	Total
Five year average net migration rate 2003-2007	-3.7	-2.3	-1.5	-2.6
Five year average in-migrants per 1,000 inhabitants 2003-2007	40	41	42	41

As table 3 shows, the clusters do not differ significantly for the migration variables ‘five year average net migration rate 2003-2007’ and ‘five year average in-migrants per 1,000 inhabitants 2003-2007’. All clusters show a negative net migration, which means that also in popular rural areas more people leave the area than move to the area. Popular rural areas do not attract significantly more migrants than less popular rural areas either. Thus, the three types of rural areas show no differences in overall migration figures. However, it could well be that the different types of rural areas do attract migrants from different areas. We analysed this for internal migration in North Netherlands and for in-migrants from elsewhere in the Netherlands. Table 4 and 5 show the results of this analysis.

*Table 4: Internal migration within the North of the Netherlands*

	To				
From	Urban municipalities	Less popular rural areas	Average rural areas	Popular rural areas	
Urban municipalities	31%	18%	32%	19%	100%
Less popular rural areas	39%	26%	29%	6%	100%
Average rural areas	43%	21%	28%	9%	100%
Popular rural areas	55%	9%	20%	16%	100%
Total	40%	19%	28%	13%	100%

	To				
From	Urban municipalities	Less popular rural areas	Average rural areas	Popular rural areas	Total
Urban municipalities	27%	32%	39%	51%	34%
Less popular rural areas	21%	28%	21%	10%	21%
Average rural areas	34%	34%	31%	21%	31%
Popular rural areas	19%	6%	10%	17%	14%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 4 shows a mix of migration flows: from urban to rural and vice versa and between the different types of rural areas. The first part of table 4 shows that 40% of the migrants within North Netherlands migrate to urban areas. It also shows that of the rural destination areas, the average rural areas are the most popular for migrants, also specifically for migrants from urban areas. However, this can be caused by the fact that average rural areas comprise the largest part of the rural municipalities in the North. Striking is that more than half of the migrants from popular rural areas migrate to urban areas.

The second part of table 4 shows that popular rural areas receive the highest share of urban immigrants, more than 50 % of the migrants to these rural areas come from an urban municipality. Less popular rural areas receive the lowest share of urban immigrants. It seems as though the migration flow between less popular and popular rural areas is very limited. Popular areas receive the smallest share of migrants from less popular areas, while these areas receive the smallest share of migrants from popular areas.

*Table 5: In-migration from elsewhere in the Netherlands towards the different types of rural areas in the North of the Netherlands*

	To				
From	Urban municipalities	Less popular rural areas	Average rural areas	Popular rural areas	
Rural elsewhere	47%	14%	25%	14%	100%
Urban elsewhere	47%	17%	24%	12%	100%
Total	47%	16%	24%	13%	100%

	To				
From	Urban municipalities	Less popular rural areas	Average rural areas	Popular rural areas	Total
Rural elsewhere	33%	28%	33%	35%	32%
Urban elsewhere	67%	72%	67%	65%	68%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

People migrating from urban and rural municipalities elsewhere in the Netherlands show the same pattern of destination choice. Most people migrating from elsewhere in the Netherlands to rural areas in the North move to average rural areas, but as mentioned before this can be caused by the size of average rural areas in comparison to the other rural areas. Part two of the

table shows that less popular rural areas receive a slightly larger share of migrants from urban areas elsewhere in the Netherlands.

Summarizing, less popular, average and popular rural areas do not differ in net migration and immigration numbers. With regard to migration within the North of the Netherlands can be said that popular rural areas receive the largest share of people migrating from urban municipalities. Migration flows between less popular and popular rural areas are limited. With regard to migration from elsewhere in the Netherlands the different types of rural areas show almost the same immigration pattern. Less popular rural areas receive a slightly larger share of migrants from urban areas elsewhere in the Netherlands.

### **Characteristics of in-migrants: less popular and other rural areas compared**

Based on the data of Statistics Netherlands we can say something about migration numbers and the origin of migrants. However, based on these migration numbers we can not say anything about the characteristics and motivations of migrants to different rural areas. That is why we want to complement the analysis described above with an analysis using data from Housing Research of the Netherlands (WoON2006). This project investigates every three years housing preferences and housing circumstances in the Netherlands. The total sample consists of 40.000 respondents.

For our analysis a selection has been made from the national sample. We selected respondents living in rural municipalities in the North of the Netherlands. Rural municipalities are just like in the previous analysis defined by an address density less than 1.000 addresses per square kilometer. Because of their special position the Wadden islands were again removed from the selection. Migrants are in this analysis defined as people who have moved in the last two years to their current address from another municipality. Based on the clustering of municipalities based on housing price described above, we distinguish people who have moved in the last two years to less popular, to average and to popular rural areas. We decided to combine the average and popular areas, in that way two groups of migrants can be distinguished; people who have migrated to less popular and people who have migrated to average and popular rural areas. We decided to separate the less popular areas, because it seems interesting to see who goes to areas which are generally perceived as less attractive for living and which residential preferences these people have. This is even more relevant in the light of expected population and household decline predominantly in these less popular rural areas.

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to predict the type of rural destination area on the basis of personal and household characteristics and residential preferences. The dependent variable in this model contained the categories having moved to less popular rural areas and having moved to average or popular rural areas (other rural areas).

We based the selection of background characteristics on previous research. In Sweden having children, being part of a couple, age, income and education showed to distinguish migrants to the periurban and remote countryside (Hjort & Malmberg, 2006). Probably these characteristics also predict moving to less popular or other rural areas. The analysis of migration patterns showed that migrants to rural areas in the North of the Netherlands have mixed origins. They come from urban as well as other rural areas and they come from other areas in the North as well as other parts of the Netherlands. We want to see whether moving from an urban municipality or moving from a municipality in the North of the Netherlands predicts the type of rural area people move to, also when other variables are controlled for.

In WoON a lot of residential preferences and motivations for moving are included. When working with a small sample size in logistic regression the number of independent variables is limited. To decide which variables to include in the logistic model we made cross tabs of the preferences and motivations for the move with the dependent variable to see which variables varied considerably for the two groups.

The respondents were asked about their reasons for moving to this address. The questionnaire is routed in such a way that when people have moved to their current address for personal reasons (marriage, living together, divorce, leaving the parental home) they are not asked whether they have other motivations (for example work) as well. To be able to use this variable in the analysis we had to follow this reasoning, therefore people who have moved for personal reasons are assumed to have said no on the other questions about motives for moving to this address.

Most of the motivations for the move did not differ for people migrating to the different areas. Around one third of both groups moved for personal reasons, work related reasons were important for around almost 20 % in both groups and also motives like health reasons and dissatisfaction with the previous dwelling had the same importance for both groups. However, the motive 'residential environment previous dwelling' was more often mentioned by the migrants moving to average and popular areas, while the motive 'living closer to family and friends' was more often mentioned by the people migrating to less popular areas.

The respondents was also asked which importance they attached to different characteristics of the house and the residential environment. Both groups attached the same importance to characteristics of the house like size, lay out and characteristics of the neighbourhood like having contact with neighbours, population composition, traffic safety, presence of shops near the house, feeling at home in the neighbourhood. Preferences that are distributed significantly different for the two groups and are relevant for rural areas are included in the analysis. These are size of the garden, much unity in the neighbourhood, availability of public transport and the presence of a primary school near the dwelling.

Table 6: Logistic regression analysis of having moved to less popular or other rural areas

	B	S.E.
Couple	,263	,551
Having children	,482	,471
Age	,000	,013
Income	-,029	,021
Higher education	-,679	,560
Moved from urban area	-,976**	,458
Moved from North of the Netherlands	-,379	,474
Moved because of previous residential environment	-,895	,751
Moved to live closer to family and friends	1,527*	,832
Size of garden	-,826	,545
Unity in the neighbourhood	-1,641**	,608
Public transport	1,026*	,583
Primary school	1,376**	,502
Constant	,781	1,130
N	155	
-2 log likelihood	154,938	
$\chi^2$	38,477***	
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	,308	

p < 0,10; \*\* p < 0,05; \*\*\* p < 0,01

Source: WoON 2006

0 = having moved to average or popular rural area

1 = having moved to less popular area

The results of the analysis (see table 6) show that it seems to be the residential preferences and motives for moving that are important in predicting a move to a less popular or to an average or popular rural area. Except for 'moving from an urban area' background characteristics of a migrant do not influence the probability to end up in a less popular or in other rural areas, while especially income could be expected to be a determining factor regarding the fact that the areas are defined based on housing prices. Migrants moving from an urban area have a higher propensity to move to average or popular rural areas. People who have moved to their current address with the motive to live closer to family and friends have a higher probability to move to less popular areas. The same holds for people who find the nearness of public transport and a primary school important. Migrants who consider the unity of the neighbourhood to be an important factor have a higher probability to move to average or popular rural areas. People moving from the city are more inclined to move to average or popular rural areas, probably motivated by the idea of the rural idyll. The importance of unity in the neighbourhood fits with the idea of a close social community being part of the concept of the rural idyll. It seems as though for movers to less popular areas practical considerations are most important, like the presence of certain facilities and the nearness of family and friends. This seems to correspond with the findings of Stockdale (2006) in depopulating areas. For migrating to these areas she found that personal reasons were most important, quality-of-life considerations were far less important, while previous research (Boyle & Halfacree, 1998) shows these considerations to be important in repopulating areas. Our results differ from the findings of Hjort and Malmberg (2006), who found that personal and household characteristics distinguished movers to periurban and remote rural areas. In our analysis these characteristics do not predict the type of rural area people move to. A possible



explanation could be the short distances in the Netherlands in comparison to Sweden and many other countries. Daily commuting to urban centres is possible from practically all the rural areas in our analysis. Dependence on the urban labour market, which could for example be the case for high income earners and higher educated people, does therefore not hinder migration to certain types of rural areas.

## Conclusion

From literature on rural migration it is known that rural areas differ in their popularity for living. In Australia the coast attracts people, in Ireland the travel distance to urban centres seems important and in the United States also landscape seems to be an important factor (Gkartzios & Scott, 2008; Hugo & Smailes, 1985; McGranahan, 2008). In this paper we have tried to investigate whether we can distinguish popular and less popular rural areas for living in the North of the Netherlands, where these areas are located and how they can be characterised. International research shows that characteristics and motives of migrants to different types of rural areas can differ (Hjort & Malmberg, 2006; Stockdale, 2006). Therefore we examined whether different rural areas in the North of the Netherlands attract different people with different motivations and preferences. Until now, research into rural migration in the Netherlands has hardly paid any attention to a differentiation between different types of rural areas and the migrants to those areas (Steenbekkers et al., 2006, 2008, Heins, 2002).

In this study we use housing prices as a measure for popularity of rural areas for living. Within the North of the Netherlands average housing prices per municipality vary considerably. Based on a cluster analysis we distinguish three types of rural areas in the North of the Netherlands: less popular rural areas, average rural areas and popular rural areas. The less popular areas are located along the northern and eastern borders of the North of the Netherlands. They can be characterized by having a relatively open landscape with a large share of large scale arable farming and relatively less natural and recreational areas. Less popular areas can be considered relatively peripheral, considering both expected population and household decline and travel time towards central parts of the Netherlands. Popular rural areas can be characterized by having a more semi-open landscape with predominantly grazing livestock farming and a relatively large share of natural areas. They have an expected positive household growth and the least peripheral location with regard to the central parts of the Netherlands. Average rural areas score in between the other rural areas on most characteristics.

The finding that landscape seems to be an important factor and that the popular areas predominantly have a semi-open landscape fits with the results of McGranahan (2008) in the United States. Travel distance to urban centres in the central part of the country seems to be important as well, which corresponds with findings in Ireland, Canada and the United States (Bollman & Biggs, 1992; Gkartzios & Scott, 2008; Johnson & Beale, 1994). The travel distance to urban centres within the North of the Netherlands does not differ for the different areas. This can be explained by the fact that all rural areas in the North could be called 'accessible' rural areas.

Less popular, average and popular rural areas do not significantly differ in net migration and immigration numbers. With regard to migration within the North of the Netherlands can be said that popular rural areas receive the largest share of people migrating from urban municipalities. With regard to migration from elsewhere in the Netherlands the different types of rural areas show almost the same immigration pattern.

The migration numbers show that there is a considerable migration flow to the less popular areas, while based on housing prices it can be concluded that these areas are in general perceived as less attractive for living. This shows that amenities do not have the same meaning to all migrants (Argent et al., 2007), also less popular areas offer something that attracts people. It is interesting to see who does go to these areas and why. This is even more relevant because of the expected household decline in less popular areas.

That is why we did a logistic regression analysis using data of WoON 2006 to examine which characteristics and residential preferences predict a move to less popular areas versus average or popular areas. It seems to be the residential preferences and motives for moving that are important in predicting the type of destination area. Except for 'moving from an urban area' background characteristics of a migrant do not influence the probability to end up in a less popular or in other rural areas, while especially income could be expected to be a determining factor regarding the fact that the areas are defined based on housing prices.

People who have moved to their current address with the motive to live closer to family and friends have a higher probability to move to less popular areas. The same holds for people who find the nearness of public transport and a primary school important. Migrants who consider the unity of the neighbourhood to be an important factor have a higher probability to move to average or popular rural areas.

People moving from the city are more inclined to move to average or popular rural areas, probably motivated by the idea of the rural idyll. The semi-open landscape of the popular areas corresponds with this idea, as Halfacree and Boyle (1998) describe the rural idyll as 'consisting of small villages joined by narrow lanes and nestling amongst a patchwork of small fields' (p. 10). The importance of unity in the neighbourhood fits with the idea of a close social community which is also part of the concept of the rural idyll. It seems as though for movers to less popular areas practical considerations are most important, like the presence of certain facilities and the nearness of family and friends.

This corresponds with the findings of Stockdale (2006) in depopulating areas. For migrating to these areas she found that personal reasons were most important, quality-of-life considerations were far less important, while previous research (Boyle & Halfacree, 1998) shows these considerations to be important in repopulating areas.

Our results differ from the findings of Hjort and Malmberg (2006), who found that personal and household characteristics distinguished movers to periurban and remote rural areas. In our analysis these characteristics do not predict the type of rural area people move to. A possible explanation could be the short distances in the Netherlands in comparison to Sweden and many other countries. Daily commuting to urban centres is possible from practically all the rural areas in our analysis. Dependence on the urban labour market, which could for example be the case for high income earners and higher educated people, does therefore not hinder migration to certain types of rural areas.

This explorative study offers some first insights into less popular and popular rural areas for living in the North of the Netherlands and the people who move to these areas. However, due to limitations of the available data the paper does not cover all relevant aspects and questions, which offers possibilities for further research. Firstly, we used data on the level of municipalities which do not allow us to differentiate between areas on a lower level of scale. But more importantly, we do not know enough about the migrants yet. In marketing research it is seen as important to add values and life style to the 'traditional' demographic variables to be able to predict consumer behaviour (Vyncke, 2002). Also in housing research the concept of values is increasingly used (Coolen, 2008). Maybe different rural areas attract people with

different values, a first indication of that could be the differences in regional culture that we found between the areas.

We also do not know enough about the motives of the migrants yet. In the questionnaire used in WoON 2006 motives for moving are mixed with motives for location choice, while these two aspects of the choice process should be separated to make a clear analysis possible. More specific rural preferences could be used in the questionnaire and it would be interesting as well to know more about the choice process itself: how do people end up in a certain type of rural area?

In this context it is also important to know more about the representations people have of different rural areas. It is assumed that people act on their interpretation and representation of reality (Van Dam et al., 2002; Halfacree, 1994). It could for example very well be that while less popular areas are not far away from urban centres in the North of the Netherlands, they are perceived to be further away than other rural areas. Argent et al. (2007) also acknowledge the importance of representations when stating: 'The future development of rural areas is not only dependent on their specific amenities of the local physical, social en economic environments itself, but also on the way these rural regions are capable of communicating or conveying these amenities to potential and established residents' (p. 217). It will be interesting to see which different appearances the rural idyll has in different types of rural areas in the North of the Netherlands and for different groups of migrants.

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