



university of
 groningen

faculty of spatial sciences

Exploring the Social Impact of Urban-Rural Migration: Perceptions from the Rural Population of Westerwolde

Human Geography and Planning Bachelor's Project
Leon van der Sluis (S4124367)

June 2024

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between urban-rural migration and the social dynamics within the newly formed rural population of Westerwolde, the Netherlands. This is done by attempting to answer the main research question: How are the social dynamics within the newly formed rural population in the municipality of Westerwolde related to the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration? The aim of this research is to get a better understanding of the different aspects of social dynamics that are perceived to change due to urban-rural migration, and the potential conflicts between urban migrants and rural inhabitants that may arise from unsuccessful integration. Furthermore, the study aims to provide knowledge to mitigate these conflicts between rural inhabitants and urban migrants by providing insights into encouraging positive integration within rural communities. In order to get a comprehensive insight into the perceived impact and social dynamics through collecting quantitative primary data, a survey was conducted and answered by 50 original rural inhabitants of Westerwolde. The results showed statistically significant negative correlations between the perceived impact of urban-rural migration and key aspects of social dynamics such as wellbeing and social network strength. Except these correlations, no other significant correlations could be found between any of the perceived social impacts of migration and aspects of social dynamics. These findings underscore the complexity of migration's influence on rural societies, highlighting the need for nuanced approaches to rural development and integration. This research suggests directions for future research into the underlying factors shaping social dynamics within rural communities, thereby encouraging policy-makers to formulate effective strategies for rural community development.

Contents

Introduction	3
Theoretical Framework	8
Hypotheses	12
Methodology	14
Results	17
Discussion	22
Conclusion	23
References	25
Appendix	28

Introduction

Background

To many people, the vast countryside of Westerwolde may look a little less vibrant when compared to larger towns and cities. However, in this municipality in the Netherlands there are a couple of interesting ongoing processes within the broader context of migration. The main process that is addressed in this study is urban-rural migration, or counterurbanisation.

Counterurbanisation is defined by the migration into rural areas in Western countries, which is often explained by the attraction of the rural idyll for urban residents (Bijker & Haartsen, 2012). According to Ilbery (1998, as cited in Bijker & Haartsen, 2012), the rural idyll refers to a very positive image of the countryside comprising many aspects of rural lifestyle, community, and landscape. Although urban areas attract more people than rural areas in the Western world, people are on average not happier there and are often less happy in large cities compared to medium-sized and small cities and villages (Hoogerbrugge & Burger, 2022). Hence, it is interesting to investigate whether newcomers who also seek to live a peaceful rural life may have an influence on the strong social ties that rural life generally has to offer. From previous studies it becomes clear that there are more motives behind counterurbanization than just the pull of the quiet, peaceful countryside. Some migrants are motivated by a desire for a rural lifestyle and residence, whereas others move to the countryside for pragmatic reasons, such as lower housing costs or work opportunities (Bijker & Haartsen, 2012). These different motives together result in a group of people from the cities with different characteristics, standards, values and habits moving out to the countryside. In order to get the best understanding of interregional migration and its effects upon the composition of communities, migrant inflows and outflows need to be considered separately (Lewis, 2000). Where those who move in possess different socio-economic characteristics than those who they replace, then social re-composition takes place (Lewis, 2000). This ongoing process results in that the community in rural areas is constantly changing and adapting, and leaves the question of what the effects are on the newly formed rural community. This paper aims to investigate the relationship between various aspects of social dynamics within

the newly formed rural population of Westerwolde, and the influences of urban-rural migration on various aspects of social dynamics, as perceived by the original rural population. The newly formed rural population is defined as the original rural population plus the urban-rural migrants. The original rural population is defined by the group of people that are above the age of 21 and have lived more than half of their lives in the municipality of Westerwolde. This particular age has been selected because 50 percent of 21 years is considered to be sufficient to have an idea about urban-rural migrants and changes in the social dynamics in the countryside. As shown in Figure 1, the research area that is the municipality of Westerwolde is marked in blue.

Figure 1

The municipal boundaries of Westerwolde



Note. The exact location of the municipality of Westerwolde within a map of The Netherlands. From *De gratis online kadasterkaart*, by KadastraleKaart.com, n.d.

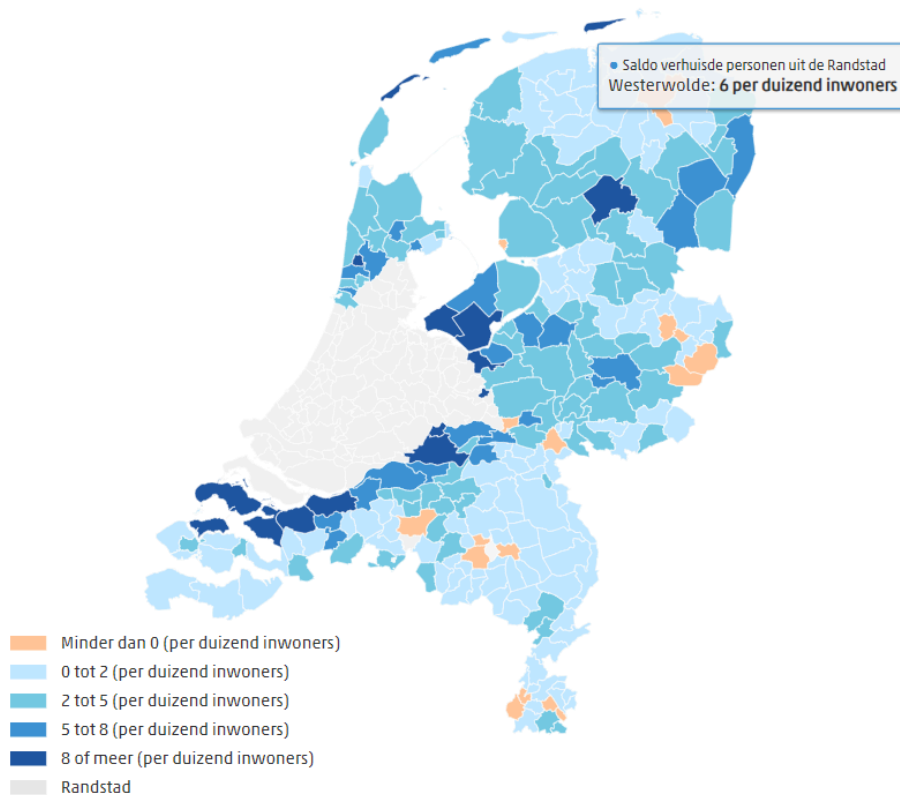
<https://kadastralekaart.com/gemeenten/westerwolde-GM1950>

What makes this research topic academically relevant is that according to CBS (2022), in the province of Groningen, Westerwolde is the municipality where most people move to from the

Randstad, namely 6 per thousand inhabitants (Figure 2). Hence, the rural communities in Westerwolde are very likely to experience significant social change, due to a large number of movers (Lewis, 2000).

Figure 2

Balance of people moved from the Randstad to Westerwolde



Note. Saldo verhuisde personen uit de Randstad. From *Trek uit de Randstad blijft toenemen*, by Centraal Bureau Van De Statistiek, 2022.

(<https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2022/32/trek-uit-de-randstad-blijft-toenemen#:~:text=Het%20aantal%20mensen%20dat%20naar,uit%20de%20Randstad%20dan%20erheen>).

Rural areas tend to be quickly overshadowed by the large availability of jobs and amenities in the cities. This is probably also the reason why the main subject of most of the larger studies in the context of migration are urban areas. Although the concept of counterurbanisation has been used

to explain the phenomenon of the reversal of depopulation trends in remote rural areas, the concept tends to direct attention towards urban-centred factors of change (Cloke, 1985). Unlike the majority of previous research, this paper attempts to view the effects of counterurbanisation on the social dynamics from a rural perspective. The concept of counterurbanisation itself is frequently studied, and also its impacts have been researched a notable amount of times. For example, (Ma et al., 2018) researched urban-rural migration in South-Korea, (Kok, 1999) studied Hungary and Poland, (Spencer, 1995) looked into the South Oxfordshire District in England and (Bijker & Haartsen, 2012) researched the northern Netherlands, but used different methods. Rural areas in Groningen have not been studied thoroughly in the context of urban-rural migration, and a research gap specifically exists within this field when talking about the municipality of Westerwolde. Because of many more people gathering in the cities, and way more social phenomena going on there, the social dynamics of the countryside tend to be easily overlooked and forgotten about. Nevertheless, the research topic is relevant because even with such a high rate of urban population concentration, people still move in and out of rural areas, and the selectivities of these migration streams can change the composition of rural populations (Rebhun & Brown, 2015). Despite the focus being mainly on urban areas, a fair share of the population lives in the countryside and society is likely to benefit when the merging of urban and rural people is guided in the right direction through effective policies. This in its turn relates to the societal relevance of this research. The results that come forward from this research paper may eventually lead to recommendations for policy-makers and provide valuable knowledge in general on how the original rural population perceives the social changes that come forward from urban-rural migration. Rural immigration also raises sociological questions about changing social capital, community solidarity and dense and interlocking social networks in rural areas (Lichter & Brown, 2011). The knowledge arising from this study by attempting to answer such questions may eventually be used by policy-makers and future researchers to attempt to decrease the conflicts between rural inhabitants and urban migrants. The cultural differences and differences in norms and values that exist between urban and rural people come from the different backgrounds they possess. These large cultural differences may exacerbate the likelihood of clashes with native rural residents (Lichter & Brown, 2011).

In addition, it is also important to get a better understanding of what is happening in rural areas socially, as the social dynamics may need to be reinforced in order to make rural society flourish, more progressive and most important, keep it attractive and peaceful. For planners and policy-makers there are important planning considerations at the local as well as the macro-scale because of conflicting requirements of different groups of in-migrants with and potential out-migrants from the existing population (Cloke, 1985).

Research problem

This paper aims to explore the relationship between the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration and the social dynamics within the newly formed rural population of Westerwolde through correlation analysis. Additionally, this study seeks to understand how the original rural population perceives social change resulting from urban-rural migration, aiming to mitigate potential conflicts between rural inhabitants and urban migrants. This paper aims specifically on the migration of people from cities in the Netherlands to the municipality of Westerwolde, in the province of Groningen. Through an analysis of various social, cultural and demographic factors, this research aims to provide a broader understanding of the perceived changes that occur within the rural community as a consequence of urban-rural migration. Furthermore, this paper contributes insights to the discourse on counterurbanisation and its implications for rural societies in the municipality of Westerwolde. Altogether, this leads to the following central research question: How are the social dynamics within the newly formed rural population in the municipality of Westerwolde related to the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration?

Next to this central research question, a couple of secondary questions have been formulated in order to give a more comprehensive answer to the central research question. These questions are as follows:

How is the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration related to the overall wellbeing of the newly formed rural population?

How is the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration related to the social network of the newly formed rural population?

How is the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration related to the community cohesion between inhabitants in the newly formed rural population?

How is the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration related to the cultural identity of the newly formed rural population?

Theoretical framework

Urban-rural migration

In this research paper a couple of important theories and concepts are central. First, the concept of urban-rural migration, which is defined as the process of people moving from the cities to the countryside. Often it is also referred to as counterurbanization, as it is the opposite movement of people moving from the countryside to the city. In his paper, Martin Philips (2010) argued that the concept of counterurbanisation may be viewed as a chaotic and complex concept. Thus, he explored the concept from different perspectives. In this study, the focus is mainly on the social and cultural perspective, which introduces the definition: Counterurbanisation is described as a social and cultural phenomenon where individuals seek lifestyle changes. This includes a preference for rural living, often associated with ideals of tranquillity, community, and connection to nature, as opposed to the perceived drawbacks of urban life such as congestion and pollution (Philips, 2010).

In other cases, the movement of people from urban to more remote, less-populated places has also been explained as geographic theories of exurban migration (Costello, 2007). In most cases, such movement has typically been conceptualised as being for the purpose of lifestyle gains, with retiree migrants being the largest cohort (Costello, 2007). This concept and group of people is relevant in this study as they amount to a significant share of the newcomers that may change social life in the countryside.

Social dynamics

The second main concept in this study is social dynamics. Social dynamics is explained by the changing social processes within the rural societies in the municipality of Westerwolde, as a result of changing spatial forms, in this case counterurbanization (Vartiainen, 1989). Social processes within rural communities are going through a change because people with different characteristics are blending with the original population. In this study, the concept of social dynamics is split up into four separate concepts: wellbeing, social network, community cohesion and cultural identity. This is done in order to get a more comprehensive understanding of the concept and to fit better within the chosen method of the study, which will be elaborated later on in the methodology chapter.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing can be understood as hinging upon some measurable notions of welfare together with some self-ascribed understandings of contentment (Berg, 2020). While the concept of wellbeing has been studied and researched many times before, this is not the case for rural and migration studies, especially in analyses of post-migration everyday lives (Berg, 2020). Wellbeing is strongly related with the other concepts in this research within the broader concept of migration. As Fuller et al., (2016) argue, wellbeing, however defined, can have no form, expression or enhancement without consideration of place. Therefore, place attachment can be an important factor in the overall wellbeing of an individual. The term place attachment can help to get a better understanding of why urban-rural migrants choose to stay or leave their rural place of residence (Berg, 2020). Place attachment may also be referred to as place identity or place belongingness. The terms 'belonging' and 'attachment' are often used interchangeably. However, in this paper attachment is regarded as a broader concept whereas belonging is an affective and strongly embodied experience (Berg, 2020). Nevertheless, in this study belonging is included with place attachment, as the lived experience is an important aspect of the research and is intertwined with the concept of wellbeing. What makes place attachment an important and interesting phenomenon here, is that it works differently both ways. It has an increasingly strong effect on the decision to stay or leave of newcomers, and a decreasingly strong effect on the

decision of rural youth to stay in or leave their place of birth. In summary, place attachment is not a main concept in this study. However, the aspects of well-being and place attachment overlap and place attachment can be seen as an important sub-dimension of urban-rural migrants' wellbeing (Berg, 2020).

Social network

According to Moore and Westley (2011, as cited in Rockenbauch & Sakdapolrak, 2017), social networks have been shown to foster the capacity to buffer, adapt to and shape change by providing resources needed to cope with external stresses and disturbances (Adger, 2003 in Rockenbauch & Sakdapolrak, 2017), and fostering humans' ability to initiate social innovations and act collectively (Moore and Westley, 2011 in Rockenbauch & Sakdapolrak, 2017). In this study, social network is referred to as the amount of people an individual from Westerwolde has social interaction with regularly. As such, the social interactions can be used to cope with stresses and foster the ability to act collectively and therefore are important aspects of the social dynamics that are researched in this paper. The literature connects well with the narrative of this study, as within the context of this study, adapting to change (Adger, 2003, in Rockenbauch & Sakdapolrak, 2017) can be referred to as adapting to the social re-composition due to people with different socio-economic characteristics moving into rural areas (Lewis, 2000).

Community cohesion

For the concept of community cohesion, different definitions from previous literature can be used to effectively address relevant aspects within this study and thus within the discourse of social dynamics. Based on shared values and a sense of belonging, community cohesion is the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, shared challenges and equal opportunities based on a sense of hope, trust and reciprocity (Spicker, 2014). Rural community has been, and continues to be, imbued with positive sets of meaning, providing attachment to place and social cohesion (Berg, 2020). From the perspective of the rural inhabitant, it is interesting to see whether he or she thinks that urban-rural migrants have contributed in developing a community of shared values, or that the values of these two groups of people is what causes them to stay two separate groups of people. Based on the ability to live and work together, community cohesion is

a state of affairs in which a group of people (represented by a geographical region) demonstrate an aptitude for collaboration that produces a climate for change (Spicker, 2014). This definition can be translated into this research by viewing a climate for change as the newly formed rural community after urban-rural migrants joined the community. In other words, additional urban-rural migrants are more likely to integrate well and improve the community cohesion into a community that has already undergone successful integration of previous urban-rural migrants, as it improves the overall climate for change. Referring to change as the social re-composition due to people with different socio-economic characteristics moving into rural areas (Lewis, 2000) returns within this concept as well as in the social network concept. Finally, Beck, van der Maesen and Walker describe community cohesion as the extent to which social relations, based on identities, values and norms are shared (2012). This definition can be placed in the same context as the previous ones, but it contains one important deviation. The link of cohesion with shared identity and culture may be an indication not of social quality, but of cultural exclusivity (Spicker, 2014), which may influence social dynamics in a different way.

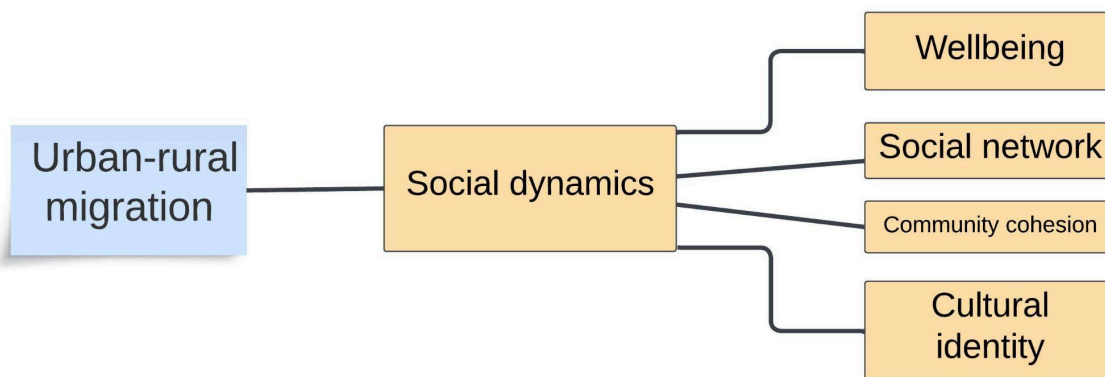
Cultural identity

Humans tend to categorise individuals and place them into in and out groups, relative to their own identity, and use these group classifications to draw inferences about the people in (and out) of them (Lyons & Utych, 2023). In addition, it is described as a complex cluster of factors, including self-labelling, a sense of belonging, preference for the group and involvement in activities associated with the group (Milne, 2017). Cultural identity can with regard to this research be defined as a group within a population in which individuals place themselves and identify themselves with - in this case rural inhabitants -, while they may place people with different values - urban-rural migrants - out of the group. Cultural identities such as place of birth and norms and values can on one hand contribute to a strong social cohesion and social network. On the other hand, when people are being excluded, it can lead to strong feelings of disdain between members of different identities (Lyons & Utych, 2023). This study focuses on whether the urban-rural migrants are able to properly integrate into rural society and reinforce the cultural identity of the countryside, through the perspective of the original rural population.

Overall, the concepts used in this research paper may seem familiar, and are not unknown to present day academic research. However, in the broader context of urban-rural migration, and especially in the municipality of Westerwolde, a comprehensive understanding of the social consequences of urban-rural migration remains absent. The conceptual model below shows how the concepts are used and related within this research (Figure 3).

Figure 3

Conceptual Model



Note. Visualisation of how the main concepts are related. Own work.

Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical framework of this paper, several hypotheses are formulated to investigate the relationship between social dynamics and the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration within the municipality of Westerwolde. These hypotheses address the key concepts of wellbeing, social networks, community cohesion and cultural identity.

Firstly, it is expected that there will be a relationship between the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration and the overall wellbeing of the newly formed rural population. The theory suggests that urban-rural migrants might enhance the rural idyll, potentially improving wellbeing

(Bijker & Haartsen, 2012). However, previous research by Hoogerbrugge & Burger (2022) indicates that people are often happier in smaller towns and villages compared to large cities, suggesting that the influx of urban residents might have varied effects on rural wellbeing.

Second, the role of social networks in buffering, adapting to, and shaping change within rural communities is emphasised in the theory. It is expected that there will be a relationship between the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration and the social network of the newly formed rural population.. Adger (2003, in Rockenbauch & Sakdapolrak, 2017) emphasises that social networks help communities adapt to change, which is particularly relevant as rural areas undergo social re-composition due to migration (Lewis, 2000). Social network theory indicates that new arrivals can either enrich social networks by adding diversity and resources (Rockenbauch & Sakdapolrak, 2017) or disrupt existing networks, leading to potential negative outcomes.

Third, It is expected that there will be a relationship between the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration and community cohesion among the newly formed rural population. The presence of newcomers may influence the sense of community and shared identity, potentially fostering greater cohesion and cooperation. Migrants can contribute to community cohesion by bringing new perspectives and enhancing collective capacity for change (Spicker, 2014).

However, differences in values and norms between newcomers and long-term residents may also challenge existing cohesion and lead to tensions within the community.

Finally, It is expected that there will be a relationship between the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration and the cultural identity of the newly formed rural population. Urban-rural migrants might influence the cultural landscape of rural areas, either reinforcing or challenging existing cultural norms and values (Lyons & Utych, 2023). In addition, Milne (2017) describes cultural identity as a complex cluster of factors, including self-labelling and a sense of belonging, which can be significantly affected by migration.

Methodology

Data collection method

As mentioned earlier, the central research question in this paper is as follows: How are the social dynamics within the newly formed rural population in the municipality of Westerwolde related to the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration?

In order to give the most accurate answer to this research question, the research method was chosen to be a quantitative method. The quantitative method used here will be a survey, consisting of questions that give a better insight into the relationship between perceived social impact of urban-rural migration and the social dynamics within rural communities in the municipality of Westerwolde. The data collected for this part of the research will therefore be primary data. In the survey different concepts that could possibly have an impact on social dynamics will be used in formulating the survey questions.

In this research, a survey was selected as a method of data collection for several reasons. Firstly, it provides a relatively quick method of data collection, especially when distributed online. Secondly, the surveys were easy to distribute across the entire municipality of Westerwolde. This approach ensured that every town and village within the municipality was represented by at least two participants.

Survey questions

The first questions of the survey consists of age, gender, postal code and years lived in the countryside. The variables age and gender are used for establishing demographic characteristics of the participants, whereas postal code is used to make sure that each village in the municipality of Westerwolde is represented by at least two participants. In addition, the variable years lived in the countryside is used as a method to include only people that have lived the majority of their lives in the countryside in the survey. The variable age is also used as a selection method, as only participants above the age of 21 are included in the survey.

The next section consists of Likert-scale questions addressing the quality of social dynamics within the rural community. As outlined in the sub-questions of this research, the term "social dynamics" is divided into four concepts: wellbeing, social network, community cohesion, and cultural identity. One survey question was formulated in a way to assess the various aspects of social dynamics, such as: I am satisfied with the overall wellbeing of the rural community. Participants answered using a Likert scale, where 1 indicates "totally disagree," 2 indicates "disagree," 3 indicates "neutral," 4 indicates "agree," and 5 indicates "totally agree." This approach allows for the collection of ordinal data, enabling the application of specific statistical tests, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Additionally, participants were asked another set of four Likert-scale questions, addressing the influence of urban-rural migration on the different aspects of social dynamics. It is important to note that each survey question was formulated with regard to whether there is much influence, reflecting statements such as 'Urban-rural migrants have much influence on social network strength.' Respondents provided their answers using the same Likert scale as before, ranging from 'totally disagree' to 'totally agree.' The complete list of survey questions can be found in the appendix section (Appendix A).

Ethical considerations

It is important to note that respondents were required to provide consent before participating in the survey. The first page of the survey informed participants that all data would remain completely anonymous and confidential. It also clarified that no names would be used, ensuring the anonymity of the respondents. Furthermore, it stated that all data would be destroyed upon the completion of the research. By proceeding to the survey questions, respondents provided the researcher with consent to use their data, as explicitly stated in the informed consent form. The complete informed consent form can be found in the appendix section (Appendix B).

Participant selection

The survey ended up being filled in by 50 individuals who have lived most of their lives in Westerwolde and were over the age of 21. These criteria were important because such individuals

are most likely to be familiar with the changes in social dynamics within the community due to urban-rural migration. Some respondents were reached through acquaintances and through people passing on the survey, while others filled in the survey online. This strategy ensured that the survey was easily distributed and every town and village in Westerwolde was represented in the survey data.

Data analysis

Following the completion of the survey and the collection of all data, statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS. Initially, descriptive statistics were computed to provide an overview of demographic characteristics of the participants.

For the correlation analysis, Spearman's rank correlation emerged as the most appropriate test. It is in line with the ordinal nature of the data and with the aim to assess the direction and strength of relationships between multiple ordinal variables. The correlation coefficient will be computed between how the original rural population perceives the social effects of urban-rural migration and the different aspects of social dynamics within the newly formed rural population. Based on the results, it will be determined whether or not the correlation coefficient is statistically significant at a predetermined level of significance ($p < 0.05$).

Data quality

Efforts to ensure high data quality included careful survey design and operationalisation of the concepts, which refined questions for clarity and relevance. The concepts wellbeing, social network, community cohesion and cultural identity were translated into non-expert language, so that the participants would be able to understand the survey questions properly. A detailed version of how the concepts were operationalised exactly can be found in Appendix A. In addition, a balanced sampling strategy, ensuring representation from all villages in Westerwolde, minimised bias. Furthermore, ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, encouraged honest responses, which enhanced the reliability of the data.

However, the sample size of 50 participants, despite being representative, may not fully capture the diversity within Westerwolde. The recruitment method, involving personal contacts and

passing on the survey to acquaintances, might introduce selection bias, which could possibly skew the results. Despite operationalising the concepts, some questions might still be interpreted differently by different participants, which could affect the consistency of the data.

Results

Demographic characteristics

The survey included 50 participants who met the criteria of having lived more than half of their lives in Westerwolde and being over the age of 21. The demographic section of the survey collected data on age, gender and years lived in the countryside.

As shown in Table 1, the participants' age ranged from 21 to 69 years, with a mean age of 47.94 years. This range ensures a broad representation of different age groups within the community. Participants reported having lived in the countryside for an average of 41.28 years, indicating a long-term residency and familiarity with local social dynamics.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.
Age	50	21	69	47.94	12.188
Years lived in countryside	50	20	69	41.28	11.874

Note. Data collected by author on the 10th of April 2024.

As shown in Table 2, the sample consisted of 24 male (48%) and 26 female (52%) participants, providing a balanced gender distribution.

Table 2

Gender frequency table

	Frequency	Percent
Male	24	48
Female	26	52
Total	50	100

Note. Data collected by author on the 10th of April 2024.

Correlation analysis

The spearman's rank correlation test tells something about the strength of the relationship and whether there is a negative or positive relationship between the ordinal variables, derived from the survey that was conducted for this research.

First, the probability value is of utter importance here. For this test, a significance level of 0.05 was chosen. The results show that there is evidence of a statistically significant bivariate correlation between the following five pairs of ordinal variables, which are shown in Table 3.

Table 3*Statistically significant correlations*

		Influence migrants on social network	Influence migrants on wellbeing	Influence migrants on social network
Wellbeing countryside	Spearman's ρ	-0.389		
	Sig.	0.005		
Social network countryside	Spearman's ρ		-0.446	
	Sig.		0.001	
Social network countryside	Spearman's ρ			-0.421
	Sig.			0.002

Note. Data collected by author on the 10th of April 2024.

As the null-hypothesis of this test is as follows: there is no relationship between the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration and the various aspects of social dynamics within the newly formed rural population in Westerwolde, we can reject this null-hypothesis for the statistically significant pairs of variables that are shown in Table 3. For all the other pairs of variables, we can not reject the null-hypothesis and thus we have to accept that there is no relationship between those variables.

Next, it is important to dive deeper into the strength of the correlations between the pairs of variables that can be assumed to be statistically significant, and whether they are positive or negative. The strength of the correlations will be determined according to Figure 4.

Wellbeing and perceived influence on social network

Table 3 shows a weak negative correlation between the wellbeing of rural inhabitants and the perceived influence of urban-rural migration on the social network (Spearman's $\rho = -0.389$, $p < 0.05$). A negative correlation indicates that as the perceived impact of urban-rural migration on the social network increases, the overall wellbeing of the original rural population tends to decrease, or vice versa. Urban-rural migration can disrupt the established social networks that are integral to the wellbeing of long-term rural residents. This disruption can negatively affect their sense of community and place attachment, which are critical components of overall wellbeing (Berg, 2020).

Additionally, the work of Adger (2003, in Rockenbauch & Sakdapolrak, 2017) indicates that social networks play a vital role in fostering the capacity to buffer, adapt to, and shape change. When these networks are disrupted by new migrants, the resources needed to cope with external stresses and disturbances may reduce, leading to a decline in overall wellbeing.

Social network and perceived influence on wellbeing

Second, there is a moderate negative correlation between the social network of the rural community and the perceived influence of migrants on the wellbeing of the rural community (Spearman's $\rho = -0.446$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that as the perceived influence of urban-rural migration on wellbeing increases, the strength of the existing social network among the original rural population decreases, or vice versa. According to Moore and Westley (2011, as cited in Rockenbauch & Sakdapolrak, 2017), social networks foster humans' ability to initiate social innovations and act collectively. However, the introduction of new residents can weaken these networks by changing the social structure and norms. As a result of this social re-composition (Lewis, 2000) the overall wellbeing is likely to decline.

Social network and perceived influence on social network

Finally, a moderate negative correlation exists between the social network of the rural community and the perceived influence of migration on the social network of the rural community (Spearman's $\rho = -0.421$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that as the perceived impact of

migration on the social network increases, the actual social network strength among the rural inhabitants decreases. Lewis (2000) notes that social recomposition due to migration can lead to significant changes in community structure and social dynamics. The integration of new migrants might create different social structures that do not fully align with the existing ones, thereby weakening social ties and networks.

Figure 4

Grading table of Spearman correlation coefficient

Grading Standards	Correlation Degree
$\rho = 0$	no correlation
$0 < \rho \leq 0.19$	very weak
$0.20 \leq \rho \leq 0.39$	weak
$0.40 \leq \rho \leq 0.59$	moderate
$0.60 \leq \rho \leq 0.79$	strong
$0.80 \leq \rho \leq 1.00$	very strong
1.00	monotonic correlation

Note. Table used to interpret correlation strengths. From *Grading table of Spearman correlation coefficient* (ρ), by ResearchGate, n.d.

(https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Grading-table-of-Spearman-correlation-coefficient-r_tbl2_33109626)

Overall, it is notable that all of the statistically significant correlations are negative. The strongest correlation ($\rho = -0.446$) suggests that while the relationships are not very strong, they do indicate meaningful trends. These findings highlight the complex relationship between perceived influence of urban-rural migration on the social dynamics of rural communities. While the influx of new residents can bring diversity and new opportunities, it also poses challenges to the existing rural settlement, as evidenced by the observed negative correlations in this study.

Discussion

This study examined the relationship between urban-rural migration and the social dynamics within Westerwolde's rural population. Survey analysis showed that there were significant correlations between the perceived impact of migration and various aspects of social dynamics, such as well-being, strength of social networks, community cohesion and cultural identity.

Urban-rural migration was found to have a notably negative correlation with aspects such as wellbeing and social network strength. This suggests that the inflow of urban migrants may disrupt existing social order and norms within rural communities, potentially leading to an overall decline in wellbeing and social network strength. These findings indicate that migration is a complicated process which requires differentiated approaches to rural development as well as integration.

These results have considerable implications. Policymakers must be aware about the societal outcomes of migration so that they are used in addressing challenges through rural development agendas ensuring inclusive growth and community resilience. In addition, policy makers and researchers could build on this study in order to reduce conflicts between rural inhabitants and urban migrants, due to different social characteristics. To achieve this, however, rural communities would need to welcome newcomers into their environment while preserving the cultural identity and cohesion which already exists among original inhabitants. It is important for migrants themselves to participate actively with new communities if they ought to successfully integrate and benefit mutually from rural life.

However, it is important to note that this study has its limitations. The small sample size may not be representative of the whole population and could have been biased towards a certain group of people, thereby affecting these findings' generalizability. This is also a cross-sectional study which limits any definitive conclusion on causality and hence necessitates more longitudinal studies to fully explore long-term social impacts of migration on rural areas.

Moving onward, future research should take into account such gaps and contemplate over the findings of this study. Moreover, this research should expand upon the present report. Furthermore, larger samples, longitudinal design and qualitative methods could provide richer insights on social aspects perceived by both urban-rural migrants and long term rural inhabitants. Comparative studies in different rural areas as well as intervention studies exploring strategies aimed at fostering positive integration within such communities are also recommended.

Conclusion

This study attempted to construct an answer to the central research question: How are the social dynamics within the newly formed rural population in the municipality of Westerwolde related to the perceived social impact of urban-rural migration? This research, therefore, aimed at shedding light on the relationship between urban-rural migration and rural community life through examining comprehensive sub-concepts of social dynamics. The theoretical framework provided a strong basis for understanding the concepts of urban-rural migration, social dynamics, and their relations. Based on previous literature, research questions were formed which explored the expected relationships between diverse dimensions of social dynamics and perceived social impacts of migration.

Furthermore, in this study quantitative primary data was collected from original rural inhabitants residing in Westerwolde, using a survey as its methodological approach. The findings from the data analysis revealed significant negative correlations between the perceived impact of urban-rural migration and two aspects of social dynamics.

First, a weak negative relationship between the wellbeing of rural inhabitants and the perceived influence of urban-rural migration on the social network was found. This suggests that as the perceived impact of urban-rural migration on the social network increases, the overall wellbeing of the original rural population tends to decrease, or vice versa.

Second, a moderate negative relationship between the social network of the rural community and the perceived influence of migrants on the wellbeing and the social network of the rural community was found. This finding indicates that as the perceived influence of urban-rural migration on wellbeing and the social network increases, the strength of the existing social network among the original rural population decreases, or vice versa.

Other than these statistically significant correlations, the null-hypothesis of there being no relationship could not be rejected for any of the other combinations of variables. Therefore, the alternative hypothesis of there being a relationship between the remaining variables could not be accepted. As both perceived social impact of urban-rural migration and aspects of social dynamics within the rural community were divided into four variables, only two sub-questions (wellbeing and social network) could partially be answered throughout this study.

The findings suggest that while urban-rural migration may bring about changes in rural societies, its direct correlation with perceived social dynamics is not statistically significant. This underscores the complexity of migration decisions and highlights the need for further research to explore the underlying factors shaping social dynamics within rural communities.

In conclusion, this study contributes to our understanding of the social consequences of urban-rural migration in the municipality of Westerwolde. While urban-rural migration is a growing trend driven by lifestyle preferences, its impact on social dynamics within rural communities is complex and multifaceted.

References

- Beck, W., van der Maesen, L. J.G., & Alan Walker. (2012). Theoretical Foundations. In *Social Quality: From Theory to Indicators* (pp. 44-69). Palgrave Macmillan.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-36109-6_3
- Berg, N. G. (2020, August). Geographies of wellbeing and place attachment: Revisiting urban-rural migrants. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 78, 438-446.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.06.041>
- Bijker, R. A., & Haartsen, T. (2012). More than Counterurbanisation: Migration to Popular and Less-popular Rural Areas in the Netherlands. *Population, Space and Place*, 18(5), 643-657. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.687>
- Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek. (2022, August 11). Trek uit de Randstad blijft toenemen. Centraal Bureau Voor De Statistiek.
<https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2022/32/trek-uit-de-randstad-blijft-toenemen#:~:text=Het%20aantal%20mensen%20dat%20naar,uit%20de%20Randstad%20dan%20erheen>
- Cloke, P. (1985, January). Counterurbanisation: A Rural Perspective. *Geography*, 70(1), 13-23.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40571490>
- Costello, L. (2007, March). Going bush: the Implications of Urban-Rural Migrationx. *Geographical Research*, 45(1), 85-94. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-5871.2007.00430.x>
- Fuller, S., Atkinson, S., & Painter, J. (2016). *Wellbeing and Place*. Taylor & Francis Group.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315547534>

-
- Hoogerbrugge, M., & Burger, M. (2022, August). Selective migration and urban–rural differences in subjective well-being: Evidence from the United Kingdom. *Urban Studies*, 59(10), 2092-2109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980211023052>
- KadastraleKaart.com - De gratis online kadasterkaart. (n.d.).
<https://kadastralekaart.com/gemeenten/westerwolde-GM1950>
- Kok, H. (1999). Migration from the city to the countryside in Hungary and Poland. *GeoJournal*, 49(1), 53-62. <https://doi.org/10.1023/a:1007092228633>
- Lewis, G. (2000, April). Changing Places in a Rural World: The Population Turnaround in Perspective. *Geography*, 85(2), 157-165.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282061096_Changing_Places_in_a_Rural_World_The_Population_Turnaround_in_Perspective
- Lichter, D. T., & Brown, D. L. (2011). Rural America in an Urban Society: Changing Spatial and Social Boundaries. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37, 565-592.
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150208>
- Lyons, J., & Utych, S. M. (2023). You're Not From Here!: The Consequences of Urban and Rural Identities. *Political Behaviour*, 45, 75-101. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09680-3>
- Ma, S., An, S., & Park, D. (2018, June). Urban-rural Migration and Migrants' Successful Settlement in Korea. *Development and Society*, 47(2), 285-312.
<https://doi.org/10.31894/jrs.2019.10.29.2.7>
- Milne, A. (2017). Chapter 3: Cultural Identity. *Counterpoints*, 513, 47-67.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/i40220242>

-
- Philips, M. (2010, November). Counterurbanisation and rural gentrification: an exploration of the terms. *Population, Space and Place*, 16(6), 539-558. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.570>
- Rebhun, U., & Brown, D. L. (2015, July 14). Patterns and selectivities of urban/rural migration in Israel. *Demographic Research*, 33(5), 113-144. <https://doi.org/10.4054/demres.2015.33.5>
- Rockenbauch, T., & Sakdapolrak, P. (2017, March). Social networks and the resilience of rural communities in the Global South: a critical review and conceptual reflections. *Ecology and Society*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.5751/es-09009-220110>
- Spencer, D. (1995). Counterurbanisation: the Local Dimension. *Geoforum*, 26(2), 153-173. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185\(95\)00017-f](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185(95)00017-f)
- Spicker, P. (2014). Cohesion, Exclusion and Social Quality. *The International Journal of Social Quality*, 4(1), 95-107. <https://doi.org/10.3167/ijsq.2014.040107>
- Table 2 . Grading table of Spearman correlation coefficient (ρ). (n.d.). ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Grading-table-of-Spearman-correlation-coefficient-r_tbl2_331096265
- Vartiainen, P. (1989). Counterurbanisation: a challenge for socio-theoretical geography. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 5(3), 217-225. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0743-0167\(89\)90001-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/0743-0167(89)90001-6)

Appendix

Appendix A

Complete list of survey questions

Demographic information

What is your gender?

What is your age?

How many years have you lived in the municipality of Westerwolde?

What is your postal code?

Social dynamics (Likert-scale: 1- totally disagree to 5- totally agree)

I am pleased with the general happiness and health of our rural community (wellbeing).

I am satisfied with the friends and connections I have within the rural community (social network).

I believe that people in our rural community work well together and support each other (community cohesion)

I feel I play a role in shaping the unique character and traditions of our countryside (cultural identity).

Perceived influence of urban-rural migration (Likert-scale: 1- totally disagree to 5- totally agree)

I believe that the newcomers from the city have had much influence on the happiness and health of our rural community (wellbeing).

I feel like the number of friends and connections I have changed due to people moving from the city to the country (social network).

Cooperation and support among people in the rural community has been influenced by migration of people from urban to rural areas (community cohesion).

People moving from the city to the countryside have an impact on the character and traditions of the countryside (cultural identity).

Appendix B

Complete informed consent form

This is a survey that contains questions about social life in the rural community of Westerwolde, and the social consequences of migration from the city to the countryside. The information you provide will remain completely confidential. You will not need to share your name, and thus it will not be linked to the information provided. After processing the data collected from this survey, all the provided information will be deleted. By continuing to the survey, answering the questions and submitting your answers you agree to the terms and conditions and you give your consent.