

Belgian graduates on the move: Does the location of the educational institution matters for internal migration patterns?

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Framework

Per capita income in Belgian metropolitan cities increases at a lower pace than the national average. In the Brussels-Capital Region for example, per capita income in 2010 was 19% lower than the national average (vs. 10% lower in 2000 and only 2% lower in 1993)¹. This impoverishment of the city is partly the result of residential mobility. Affluent households are generally moving out of the city to settle in the suburbs (e.g. Massey, 1996). On the contrary, many people who are attracted to cities are low-income migrants (singles, young adults at the beginning of their professional career, immigrants from outside Europe, divorced people, single-parent households) (e.g. Feijten & van Ham, 2007).

Because municipalities in Belgium are largely funded by income taxes, it is important for cities to attract higher-income individuals or households and retain them as long as possible. In this respect, higher education graduates are an important group: tertiary education students are familiar with an urban environment and with city life (especially those who lived in student accommodation) because most higher education institutions in Belgium are located in metropolitan or regional cities. Moreover, young adults in general are attracted to the city because of the presence of cheap rental housing, job opportunities and the many possible leisure activities. From an economical point of view, cities are much better off if they are able to keep these higher educated persons as they progress during their life course. This is especially true if cities can attract and retain higher educated couples where both partners earn above-average incomes.

Much research on highly skilled migration has focused on international migration and on the effect of brain drain (e.g. Docquier et al., 2009; Dumont et al., 2007; Özden & Schiff, 2006). Internal migration of higher educated graduates has gained less attention. Moreover, these studies often investigate the impact of internal migration on the regional labour markets and thus have a more economical point of view (e.g. Faggian et al., 2006; Faggian et al., 2007; Busch & Weigert, 2010; Hoare & Corver, 2010; Venhorst et al., 2011).

¹ Statistics Belgium, income statistics.

Since education is a frequently applied indicator for human capital, this study mainly considers the mobility of human capital. Institutions of higher education are related to the acquisition of human capital. However, the way in which these universities or university colleges and their location play a mediating role in the redistribution process of human capital remains unclear. It is doubtful that all locally acquired knowledge through higher education is to be kept in the same geographical unit. A significant share of the students may obtain a job in another region than where they studied for a degree (Faggian & McCann, 2009a). Since most higher education institutions in Belgium are located in metropolitan cities, the local availability of jobs may coincide with the location of the university. As such, the preference of higher educated persons to live in or nearby metropolitan cities is related to (better) job opportunities and higher wages (Borjas et al., 1992; Becker, 1962; Sjaastad, 1962). The attraction of learned people towards an urban locality results in a regional concentration of human capital (Faggian & McCann, 2009b).

The aim of this paper is to explore the location decisions of higher education students in the 4 to 8 years after their graduation. We are especially interested in the characteristics of graduates who decide to move to the city where they followed higher education. Also, we want to know which cities are successful in attracting and/or retaining recent graduates. The focus is on geographical and demographical aspects, rather than on economical explanations of work-related long-distance moves.

Data and measures

This study uses data from the Belgian 2001 Census (1/10/2001), individually and anonymously linked to the National Population Register by Statistics Belgium. The register data contain information on residential mobility between 1991 and 2010, and information about the composition of the private household (situation on 1/1/2006) for every person in the 2001 Census. Using the information on residential mobility, the municipality of residence can be calculated for every possible date between 1/3/1991 and 1/1/2010. The place of residence is the legal address (domicile) of the person. Belgian municipalities (589 in total) correspond to the LAU-2 (Local Administrative Unit) level.

The study population are higher education students younger than 30 who are at least one year in full-time education at the moment of the 2001 Census. Doctoral students are not included

in the analyses. This selection comprises a total of 141,678 persons with a known and valid² school location in Belgium. 94% is domiciled with their parents. The vast majority (88%) are 19 to 23 years old, 6% are 17 or 18 years old, and another 6% are older than 23. Multivariate analyses will be restricted to graduates from 19- to 23-year old who left the parental home after 2001 (N=98,614). After exclusion of the deaths and international emigrants, our research population covers 94,815 graduates.

In 2001, there were 73 municipalities with a higher education institution in Belgium. Most students are enrolled in higher education in the metropolitan cities of Brussels, Antwerp, Ghent and Liège (55% of the study population). Another 31% are enrolled in the 16 regional cities and in the metropolitan city of Charleroi. Especially Leuven (Louvain) counts many higher education students. The remainder goes to school in the university town of Louvain-la-Neuve (5%) or in other smaller cities (9%).

Preliminary results

The comparison of residential movements of high- and low-educated persons illustrates the pronounced attraction towards city regions of those who completed tertiary education; this attraction is absent among the lower educated (Figure 1). Since higher education institutions are mainly located in central cities, in-depth multivariate analyses aim to probe into the role of the educational institution for the observed internal migrations, controlled for selected socioeconomic and demographic characteristics.

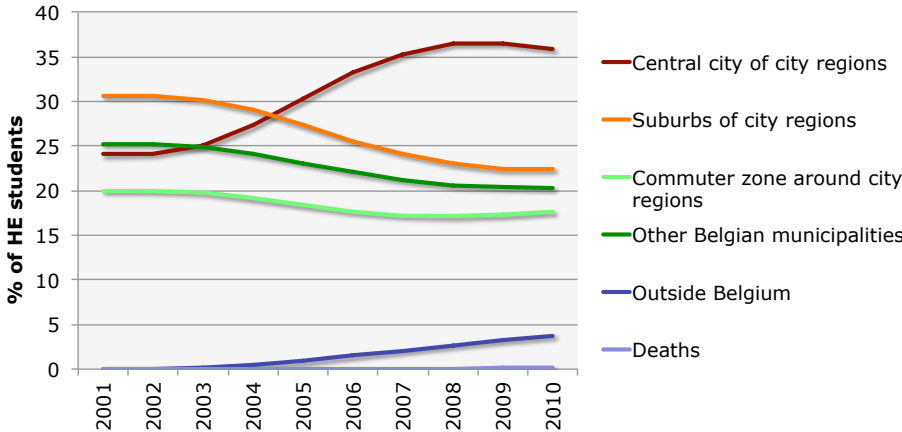
Restricting the population of interest only to students who do not live in the city of higher education in 2001, we investigate the likelihood of being attracted towards the city of tertiary education after getting a degree. Our results point out that the location of the educational institution is in fact of considerable importance for the likelihood of moving within national boundaries, even after controlling for socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Accounting for the destination of a potential relocation, multinomial logistic regression indicates that the Brussels-Capital Region, closely followed by Ghent and Antwerp, is a strikingly more attractive city for graduates in comparison to smaller urban areas in Belgium. These preliminary results however, do not account for the duration of residence in the city of higher education. A subsequent move to the suburbs (i.e. *suburbanisation*) is observed for a

² Higher education students who report they go to school in a city without a higher education institution are ignored.

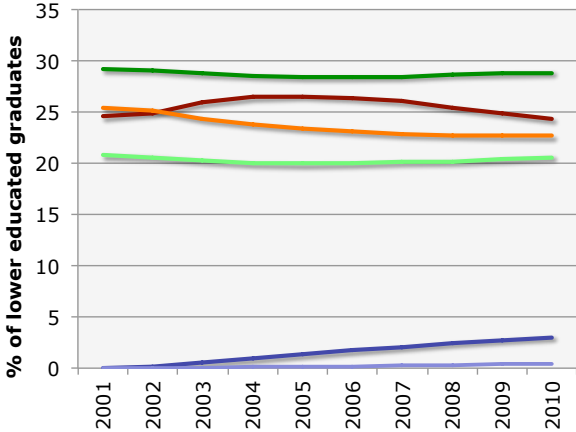
significant share of the study population. Since the year of first migration after graduation is unequally distributed between 2002 and 2009, the extent to which a higher education city is able to attract and retain its graduates remains rather unclear. This will be further looked into through survival analysis.

Figure 1. Place of residence 2001-2010 (urban typology) of higher educated (A) and lower educated (B) graduates

A: Higher education graduates



B: Graduates with a degree of secondary education or lower



Source: Census 2001 and National Register (Statistics Belgium)

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