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# The New Demographic Growth of Cities: The Case of Reurbanisation in Switzerland

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**Abstract**

After having lost population for some decades, many cities are experiencing a new growth. This paper addresses this reurbanisation phenomenon in the case of Switzerland. It argues that the demographic evolution of cities is not adequately explained by the 'stages of urban development' model that tends to consider urban regions as closed systems. It should rather be analysed by unfolding the underlying mechanisms that include housing consumption as well as in- and out-migration flows. Swiss cities have gained inhabitants since 2000 thanks to international migrants, young adults, non-family households and some parts of the middle to upper class. From a demographic point of view, families' residential behaviour remains the driving force of suburbanisation so that the population growth is still higher in suburbs than in cities.

## Introduction

In 1996, the financial magazine *Cash* devoted an article to Zurich under the title "A giant with feet of clay" which addressed the decline of the economic capital of Switzerland (loss of population, overrepresentation of disadvantaged social groups, an immobile housing market, deindustrialisation). Ten years later, one of the main Swiss newspapers (*Das Magazin des Tages Anzeiger*) spoke of "Boomtown Zurich", of the new image of the city and of the regeneration of industrial wastelands. The contrast between these reports is a telltale sign of the renewed residential attractiveness not only of Zurich but of Swiss cities more generally. Many of them have experienced a period of growth—or reurbanisation—in the 2000s after having lost population for about three decades.

This demographic turnaround is not specific to Switzerland. If such a phenomenon was still rare in the 1980s (Lever, 1993), it is found now in a wide range of contexts (Cheshire, 2006; Champion, 2001). In the US, the most severe urban population loss took place in the 1970s,

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while in the 1990s many cities were characterised by gains or by attenuated loss (Simmons and Lang, 2001; Hughes and Seneca, 2004; Fishman, 2005). In France, a trend reversal is observed in the 1990s (Ogden and Hall, 2000, 2004) and most cities have not lost population any further, unlike in the 1970s and 1980s. Similar dynamics are identified in the UK where

> there has been a marked turnaround from the concerns about loss of population from the city centre which had dominated the last few decades of the 20th century (Bromley *et al*., 2007, p. 138).

Trend reversals have taken place in cities where important regeneration projects have been carried out on former industrial sites (Tallon and Bromley, 2004).

This new demographic growth of cities is often interpreted through the lenses of the 'stages of urban development' model (Klaassen and Scimeni, 1981; van den Berg *et al*., 1982), which can be regarded as the main attempt to conceptualise reurbanisation. However, the core argument of this paper is that we need to go beyond this model to understand reurbanisation. It is necessary to unpack the different mechanisms underlying the demographic evolution of cities such as the evolution of the settlement structure (number of households and housing space consumption) and the components of their demographic evolution (natural and migration balances). Migration balances are divided according to geographical and social characteristics in order to reveal the level of attractiveness of cities for different population groups.

This paper addresses the process of reurbanisation with Switzerland as a case study. In the conceptual section, the notion of reurbanisation and the 'stages of urban development' model are discussed. In the contextual and methodological sections, information is given regarding Swiss urban change as well as sources and indicators. The empirical section presents results on the demographic evolution of Swiss cities. The paper goes beyond the assessment of a new period of demographic growth of core cities and shows the changing migration behaviour of some population groups.

## Conceptual Discussion

### Definitions of Reurbanisation

The notion of reurbanisation is still undertheorised (Buzar *et al*., 2005) and the different definitions can be aggregated into four groups. The first one, which is used in this paper, designates a new period of demographic growth of cities after a period of decline (Nyström, 1992). This definition parallels terms like 'demographic turnaround', 'demographic inversion' and 'urban turnaround' (Kasarda *et al*., 1997; Simmons and Lang, 2001; Hughes and Seneca, 2004). Reurbanisation is considered as the demographic revival of cities and is defined with a single quantitative criterion, that of population evolution.

The second meaning of reurbanisation is that used in the cyclical urbanisation model or the 'stages of urban development' model (van den Berg and Klaassen, 1987). Reurbanisation is here not only based on the demographic evolution of a city but also of its suburbs. Reurbanisation therefore implies population decline of the suburbs and either reduced loss or a new population growth of the city. Such phenomena could for example imply a return from suburbia to the core city. As it is more thoroughly discussed in the next section, this definition poses several problems such as postulating the end of urban sprawl.

A third definition sees reurbanisation more as a qualitative than a quantitative phenomenon (Buzar, Ray and Ogden, 2007; Buzar, Ogden *et al.*, 2007; Haase *et al.*, 2010; Kabisch *et al.*, 2010). Reurbanisation is seen as a "process of populating and diversifying the inner city with a variety of residential strata" (Buzar, Ogden *et al.*, 2007, p. 652) and is said to imply "a variety of multidirectional flows and socioeconomic strata" (p. 673). While we can agree that reurbanisation involves (re)populating the city, the other aspects of this definition seem more debatable. First, it does not distinguish demographic turnaround from in-migration (i.e. the fact that, even when a city is losing population, diverse migration flows are directed to it). Secondly, the diversity of migration flows is difficult to measure (in comparison with the population of the neighbourhood, the city or the urban region) and does not appear necessary if the goal is to understand the new growth of cities. In other words, reurbanisation could be explained by a diversity of population groups and processes but also, as our empirical investigation will show, by the residential behaviour of some very specific groups.

Finally, reurbanisation is sometimes used as a synonym of renewal or regeneration. It designates projects related to the built environment at the scale of neighbourhoods and that do not necessarily imply demographic growth. This application is criticised by scholars studying gentrification who argue that neutral terms such as reurbanisation may conceal processes that have a strong social impact (Davidson and Lees, 2010; van Criekingen, 2010). The definition of reurbanisation suggested in this paper is more limited: reurbanisation is a quantitative phenomenon that may (partly) be explained by gentrification (in the case of a residential behaviour of the middle to upper class more favourable for the city).

The following section addresses the stages of urban development model. As previously mentioned, the definition of reurbanisation in this model links the demographic evolution of cities and their suburbs. It is important to discuss this theory because it is commonly referred to in discussions of demographic turnaround in cities (Bromley *et al.*, 2007; Schnell and Graicer, 1993, 1994) and because it stresses the cyclical aspect of urbanisation. I criticise this presupposition and argue that, in order to unfold the mechanisms behind reurbanisation, it is more fruitful to consider the demographic evolution of cities as the outcome of housing consumption and migration flows.[1]

## The 'Stages of Urban Development' Model

According to the stages of urban development model, urban regions undergo a four-stage process (Klaassen and Scimeni, 1981; van den Berg *et al.*, 1982; van den Berg and Klaassen, 1987). Stages are defined on the basis of the population evolution of a core city and its suburbs (or ring) that make up a functional urban region (FUR). Changes are absolute (when the evolutions diverge) or relative (when the evolutions go in the same direction but with different intensity). Four stages are identified, each of which is divided into two steps (Figure 1)

— *Urbanisation*: the core city population is increasing while the suburbs are losing inhabitants (absolute concentration; 1). The latter soon start to gain inhabitants but at a slower pace (relative concentration; 2).
— *Suburbanisation*: the suburbs are experiencing a population growth larger than

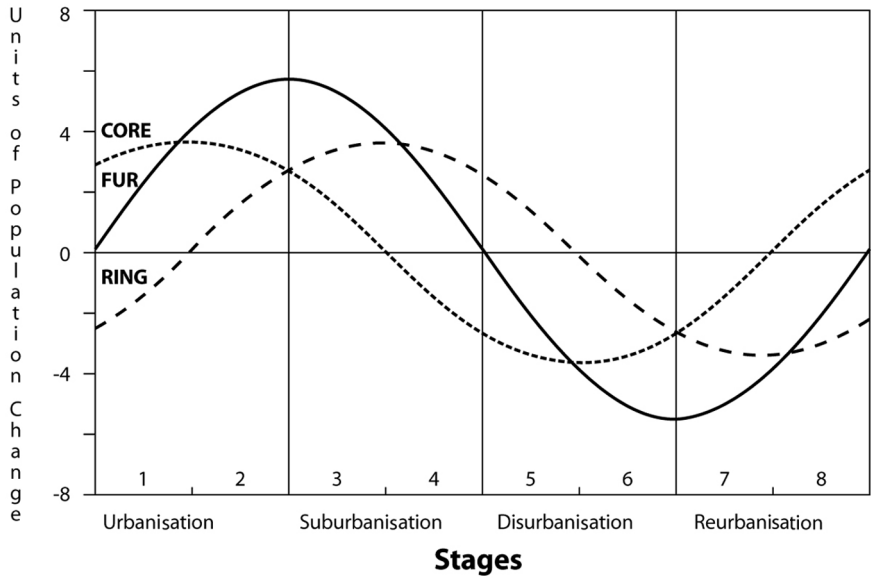


**Figure 1.** Population evolution of the core city, ring and functional urban region (FUR) in the stages of urban development.
*Source*: adapted from van den Berg *et al.* (1982).

that of the city (relative suburbanisation; 3). Then, the core city starts to lose population (absolute suburbanisation; 4).

— *Disurbanisation (or counter-urbanisation)*: the whole urban region begins to decline. The loss of the core city exceeds the gain of the suburbs (relative disurbanisation; 5). The population of the latter starts to decrease as well (absolute disurbanisation; 6).

— *Reurbanisation*: the core city loses population at a lower rate than the suburbs (relative reurbanisation; 7) and then gains inhabitants again (absolute reurbanisation; 8). The urban region as a whole is, however, characterised by a decline during this stage.

This model is interesting in that it suggests another hypothetical stage of urban development: the demographic loss of cities could be reversed so that they start a new period of growth which may lead to a new cycle (Klaassen and Scimeni, 1981, p. 16). This model has, however, been criticised on several grounds.

The first relates to scale: the model defines an urban area as a functional region consisting of a city and its suburbs. Such zoning presents several flaws, such as the problem of defining the suburbs as homogeneous whereas they are often very heterogeneous (density, type of housing, population structure, etc.). Moreover, urban growth can touch municipalities not yet included in the FUR (outer suburbs), so that some authors argue that the assessment of disurbanisation or counter-urbanisation results from a too limited perimeter of observation and that a broader view would show a continuation of suburbanisation (Bretagnolle *et al.*, 2002).

The second relates to mechanisms: the model emphasises negative externalities (congestion, housing price, transport costs, etc.) in the core city and then in the suburbs. However, it is not clear how the same

externalities can explain the decline of the centre and the growth of the suburbs and vice versa over a relatively short time (da Cunha, 1993, p. 510).

Thirdly, relating to the cyclical nature of urbanisation, according to the model, the new growth of cities takes place to the detriment of the suburbs, as if the FUR was a closed system. In other words, this stage would lead to the end of urban sprawl. However, there have been very few signs of a decline of the suburbs (Champion, 2001; Storper and Manville, 2006; Fishman, 2005).

Finally, with regard to indicators, the number of inhabitants represents the core indicator of the model, which does not take into account the number of households and their housing consumption. Moreover, it does not distinguish between population groups that have very different migration behaviours regarding the city (Ford and Champion, 2000).

On the basis of these critiques, I argue that the new growth of cities depends on socio-demographic phenomena as well as in- and out-migration flows and that it can be independent from the fate of the suburbs.

## Migration Flows to and from the City

A review of the literature enables us to identify the groups for which cities may have a positive migration balance—international migrants, the 'new' middle class, young adults, elderly people and non-family households—or a negative balance—families. It has to be stressed that these behaviours are not the sole outcome of aspirations, but are choices made under a variety of constraints (income, housing and job markets, etc.). These factors are no doubt important but are beyond the scope of this paper. The rest of this section discusses these six groups—that may overlap (for example, young adults and non-family households)—and their role in the demographic evolution of cities.

**International migrants.** The links between international migrations and urbanisation were identified by the Chicago School in the 1920s. Burgess (1968) represented the city as a succession of rings and considered that urban growth was provoked by international migration flows. The role of the gateway played by cities for international migration and the spatial repartition of migrants within the destination country have rarely been studied since then (Clark, 1996; Myers, 1999). Most researches have focused either on urban segregation or on flows between states. However, several authors have pointed out the importance of international migrants for the demographic dynamics of centres (Champion, 2001; Buzar, Ogden *et al.*, 2007) given several factors such as economic structure, employment opportunities, social and ethnic networks and structure of the housing market (Gorter *et al.*, 1998).

**The 'new' middle class or gentrifiers.** Gentrification designates the physical and social transformation of inner-city neighbourhoods. Besides economic restructuring (development of highly qualified services), the growing importance of some segments of the middle to upper class in cities has been explained by the diversification of their lifestyles and their rejection of suburbia, the role of women in the labour force and the rise of dual-career couples or the increase of non-family households (Lees *et al.*, 2008, pp. 89–128). Gentrification stresses the class aspects of urban changes, but does not necessarily imply a demographic growth. Given the scope of this paper, gentrification is defined as the

renewed residential attractiveness of cities for the middle to upper class.

The three following categories are defined by their position in the life course: young adults, elderly people and non-family households. They could share an in-migration propensity and take part in a reurbanisation process. Their importance moreover has grown since the 1960s with the second demographic transition (van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe and Neels, 2002) characterised by an ageing population and the destabilisation of the traditional nuclear family (two married heterosexual adults with children). The latter phenomenon is explained by a declining fertility rate (under the replacement threshold), the postponement of marriage, a rise in the average childbearing age, a growing divorce rate and an increase in household arrangements outside marriage (Buzar, Ogden *et al.*, 2007).

**Young adults.** This refers not to an increasing number of young adults (the number is actually declining in an ageing society), but to the number of young adults living outside family households. Research on the sociology of youth has shown that migrations away from the parental home no longer imply several other events such as completing education, starting working, getting married and having a first child (Cavalli and Galland, 1993; Smith, 2002; van Criekingen, 2010). A new stage in the life course has appeared, given the lengthening of the transition to adulthood and the desynchronisation of the conventional stages already mentioned, and cities could become attractive over a longer period of life. A related phenomenon is the increasing importance of higher education which creates a new demand for centrality (Smith and Holt, 2007).

**Elderly people.** Due to rising life expectancy, the number of elderly people is growing. Even though the majority of elderly people stay in their dwelling, the propensity to move increases at the national scale at retirement (motivated by residential amenities) and in old age (motivated by a loss of autonomy) (Rogers, 1992). In Switzerland, it is often said—although not demonstrated—that this age-group is likely to leave the suburbs and to settle in cities in order to benefit from the proximity of infrastructure and to avoid car dependence. The movement of suburban empty-nesters has, however, not been recognised as significant in other contexts (Kasarda *et al.*, 1997).

**Non-family or non-traditional households.** The general effect of the second demographic transition on households has been to reduce their average size and to increase their number. This is especially the case with non-traditional households due to the longer transition to adulthood, the higher life expectancy and a sharp rise in divorce and separation. This implies a disparity between the pace of population evolution and the much stronger rate of increase in terms of households (Ogden and Hall, 2000, 2004; Bunting, 2004). Non-traditional households are small (with the possible exception of flat-shares) and adult-centred (in contrast with families that are child-centred). The boom in such households is likely to reinforce the demand for a residential location in cities (Frey and Kobrin, 1982; Fishman, 1999).

**Families.** Over the past decades, urban sprawl has been the dominant territorial trend. Fishman (1987) argues that the bourgeois utopias of suburbia historically coincide with a new ideal of family and domestic life: the rise of the nuclear family. Child-centred households do indeed have different migration patterns within an

urban region from adult-centred households (Bunting, 2004), so that the attractiveness of the suburbs is greatly influenced by the life course. The fact that families predominantly settle in suburbs can be explained by a combination of aspirations (environment favourable to raise children, quietness, proximity to nature, etc.) and constraints related to the housing market in the centre (level of rents or prices, availability, etc.).

The residential behaviours of these six population groups in Switzerland are examined in the empirical section of the paper. First, however, the next section introduces some background details about Switzerland. It then presents the sources and indicators used to measure the evolution of the residential attractiveness of Swiss cities.

## Background and Methodology

According to the Federal Statistical Office, 73 per cent of the population in Switzerland were living in urban areas in 2000. The urban system is polycentric and reflects the decentralised political organisation of the country. In the official definition, the urban system is composed of 55 core cities of various size and their respective functional areas.

In Switzerland, the term city means the municipality (a political entity) at the core of an urban region and is therefore larger than the city centre. Suburbs are defined according to functional and structural criteria such as the percentage of commuters (Schuler *et al.*, 2005). In this paper, in order to encompass their diversity in size, economic structure and linguistic region, 25 cities, with a combined population of over 1.5 million people in 2000, have been selected (see Table 2). They constitute the main centres of the country and correspond to the densest areas.[2]

Data pertaining to residential mobility are provided every 10 years by the population census on the basis of a question on the place of residence five years before. Information about the residential behaviour of specific population groups at the scale of cities was not directly available. For the research from which this paper is taken, the Federal Statistical Office gave access to the anonymised data of the most recent censuses for each inhabitant in Switzerland (with information about both former and present places of residence available at the scale of municipalities). This very valuable information allows the measurement of the residential attractiveness of cities for population groups, thanks to the aggregation of individual data.[3]

Two indicators have been calculated. The first, the migration balance, corresponds to the difference between the number of people belonging to a certain category having settled or having left one of the 25 cities between 1995 and 2000, divided by the total number of people of this category who lived in one of the 25 cities in 1995.

The number of arrivals for every 100 departures defines the second indicator: the migration ratio. A ratio lower than 100 means a migration loss, whereas a ratio higher than 100 shows that arrivals are more common than departures. The evolution of this indicator measures changes in cities' attractiveness between the periods covered by the 1980 and 2000 censuses (1975–80 and 1995–2000). It has to be noted that the term 'attractiveness' refers to the capacity of a spatial entity to attract some population groups whatever their residential motivations or the degree of freedom in their choice.

Six cases (Table 1) are defined according to the migration ratio during the most recent period (net in- or out-migration) and its evolution (increased, reduced or

**Table 1.** Classification of residential attractiveness

| *Cases* | *Types of evolution* |
|---|---|
| The migration balance has become more positive | Increased net in-migration |
| The migration balance has become less positive | Reduced net in-migration |
| The migration balance was negative, but has become positive | Recent net in-migration |
| The migration balance has become more negative | Increased net out-migration |
| The migration balance has become less negative | Reduced net out-migration |
| The migration balance was positive, but has become negative | Recent net out-migration |

recent). This indicator has the advantage of being independent from the structural evolution of society (such as the global rise in education level, labour force professionalisation or ageing population). It also avoids the problem of replacement of certain populations by others (in the case of gentrification; see Hamnett, 2003).

Population censuses provide exhaustive information on the residential behaviour of city inhabitants. The 2000 census is the most recent and there is no subsequent comparable data on these issues. Trends observed between 1975–80 and 1995–2000 can, however, be extrapolated to the years after 2000. They are very likely to have continued as they are based on more general societal trends such as the second demographic transition (that includes an increase in non-traditional households notably formed by young adults), a growing new middle class due to the professionalisation of the employment structure and an ageing population.

The Annual Population Statistics (ESPOP) provide additional information. Since 1981, they have provided data on the resident population as well as on the natural balance (births minus deaths) and migration balance (in-migrants minus out-migrants with the rest of the country or abroad). The population in ESPOP is slightly different from that in the census in that it is based on legal residence (where a person pays taxes) whereas the census concerns the economic domicile (where a person lives most of the time). Both domiciles usually coincide, but the legal population is slightly lower in cities than the economic population. This difference (less than 4 per cent for the 25 cities in 2000) is essentially explained by students and young active people who officially keep their residency permit in the municipality of their parents but who spend most of their time in a city.

## The Demographic Evolution of Swiss Cities

### Population Evolution

Cities were characterised by a strong growth until 1970 (Figure 2), when a trend reversal was observed. The cities' population collectively decreased from 1 825 996 inhabitants in 1970 to 1 634 820 in 2000 (–191 176; –10.5 per cent). Particularly noticeable in the 1970s, the demographic decrease lasted until 2000, although by then it had considerably diminished. At the same time, suburbs gained population and increased from 2 112 136 people to 2 876 692 ( +764 556; +36.2 per cent).

More recent trends regarding population are provided by ESPOP. It should be noted that the actual number of inhabitants is higher (many students are not counted in ESPOP). However, this underestimation

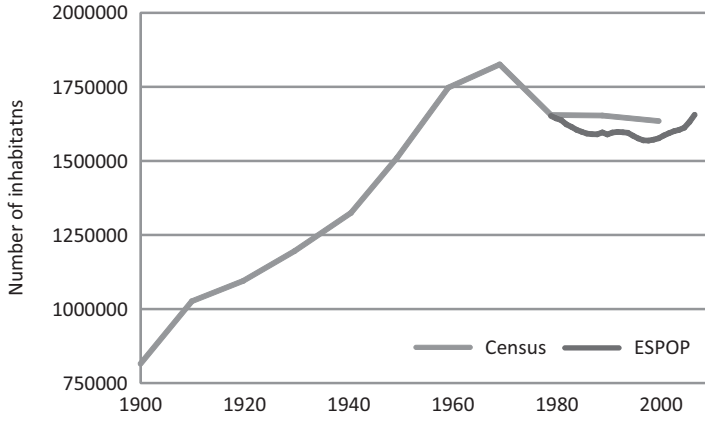


**Figure 2.** Population evolution in the 25 core cities, 1900–2008.
*Source*: Census, ESPOP and City of Lugano.

can be regarded as constant. After a minimum in 1999 (1 568 673), cities have gained population. Thanks to a process of reurbanisation (nine years of consecutive growth), the 25 cities reached 1 655 996 inhabitants in 2008, which is the highest value over the period covered by ESPOP.

The comparison of the demographic evolution of each city between the 1990s and 2000s shows this trend reversal in detail (Table 2). While a decline is observed in 14 cities in the 1990s, only one of them, Basel, is still losing population in the 2000s. This exception, however, has to be put in perspective: the evolution is much less negative during the second period and has even become positive in 2007 and 2008. The 11 cities that already gained population are all characterised by a stronger growth in the last decade.[4] The difference between the two periods is particularly high in relative terms in Zurich and Fribourg. In absolute values, Zurich has gained more than 27 000 inhabitants. Winterthur, which is part of the Zurich metropolitan area, is also characterised by a strong growth. According to other data published by the City of Winterthur and based on the economic population, the symbolic threshold of 100 000 inhabitants was crossed in 2008 for the first time in its history.

While cities are experiencing an increased dynamism, suburbs continue to have a positive demographic evolution (Figure 3). After a relative fall between 2004 and 2006, the growth rate of the suburbs reaches its maximum in 2008 ( +1.6 per cent). Thus, reurbanisation does not mean the end of suburbanisation which remains the dominant spatial dynamic ( +8.2 per cent and +233 319 between 2001 and 2008, without Lugano). Both trends do not exclude each other, as postulated by the stages of urban development model, but co-exist in the case of Switzerland. As cities do not necessarily grow at the expense of their suburbs but can grow autonomously, it is necessary to examine other aspects to understand reurbanisation.

## Components of Demographic Evolution

A first step in unfolding the mechanisms behind demographic decline or growth is to determine the evolution of households, their housing consumption as well as the natural and migration balances.

**Table 2.** Population evolution in each of the 25 core cities, January 1993 to December 2000 and January 2001 to December 2008 (ranked according the 2001–08 evolution)

| | *Evolution 1993–2000* | | *Evolution 2001–08* | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Cities* | *Number* | *Percentages* | *Number* | *Percentages* | *Population (2008)* |
| Zug | 1 042 | 4.8 | 3 068 | 13.5 | 25 778 |
| Vevey/Montreux | 656 | 1.8 | 4 807 | 12.9 | 42 196 |
| Lugano | 742 | 3.0 | 3 128 | 12.1 | 29 000 |
| Winterthur | 2 203 | 2.5 | 9 471 | 10.7 | 98 238 |
| Baden | 717 | 4.7 | 1 501 | 9.4 | 17 446 |
| Wil | 9 | 0.1 | 1 480 | 9.1 | 17 678 |
| Zurich | −7 335 | −2.1 | 27 232 | 8.1 | 365 132 |
| Sion | 1 791 | 7.1 | 2 159 | 8.0 | 29 304 |
| Fribourg | −1 012 | −3.1 | 2 393 | 7.6 | 34 084 |
| Lausanne | −2 682 | −2.3 | 7 395 | 6.4 | 122 284 |
| Thun | 1 500 | 3.9 | 2 148 | 5.4 | 42 129 |
| Chur | 711 | 2.3 | 1 647 | 5.3 | 32 957 |
| Geneva | 4 810 | 2.8 | 8 288 | 4.7 | 183 287 |
| Locarno | 366 | 2.6 | 658 | 4.6 | 15 123 |
| Luzern | −2 553 | −4.3 | 2 218 | 3.9 | 59 241 |
| Solothurn | −518 | −3.3 | 549 | 3.6 | 15 623 |
| Bellinzona | −402 | −2.3 | 529 | 3.2 | 17 286 |
| St. Gallen | −2 187 | −3.0 | 2 204 | 3.2 | 72 040 |
| Aarau | −621 | −3.9 | 471 | 3.1 | 15 753 |
| Neuchatel | −45 | −0.1 | 953 | 3.0 | 32 592 |
| Olten | −987 | −5.7 | 440 | 2.7 | 16 874 |
| Schaffhausen | −662 | −2.0 | 802 | 2.4 | 34 076 |
| Biel/Bienne | −2 479 | −4.8 | 1 173 | 2.4 | 50 013 |
| Bern | −7 585 | −5.8 | 441 | 0.7 | 122 925 |
| Basel | −9 501 | −5.4 | −1 072 | −0.7 | 164 937 |
| Total | −24 022 | −1.5 | 84 083 | 5.4 | 1 655 996 |

*Source*: ESPOP, Federal Statistical Office (2008).

The demographic decline of cities during the last quarter of the 20th century is sometimes regarded as the consequence of a lack of attractiveness relative to suburbia. However, the evolution of the number of households (which is equivalent to the number of dwellings according to the Swiss definition) considerably nuances this interpretation: it increased by 15 per cent between 1970 and 2000 (while the 25 biggest cities lost one-tenth of their population). The apparent contradiction between population loss and a housing market both in shortage and expansion is explained by a growing consumption of housing space (i.e. a decreasing density in the occupation of dwellings), which results from two phenomena. On the one hand, the average size of households (or the number of persons per dwelling) decreased in Swiss cities from 2.5 to 1.9 between 1970 and 2000. This phenomenon, which is characteristic of the second demographic transition, is due to the increase in small households (the number of persons living alone has doubled) and the decline in households of three persons or more (see Bunting, 2004, and Ogden and Hall, 2000, 2004, for

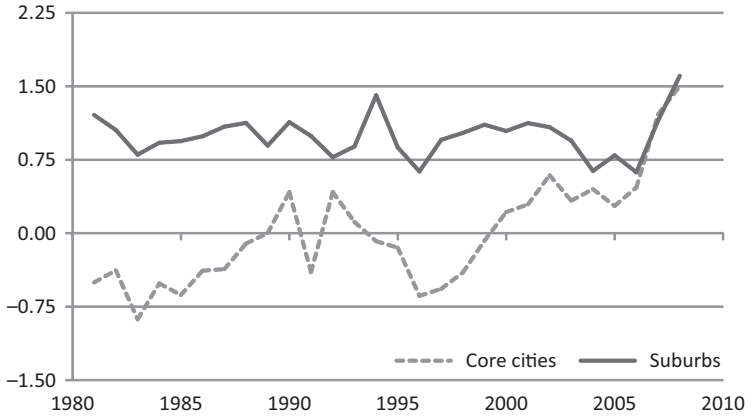


**Figure 3.** Population growth rate in 24 core cities (without Lugano) and their suburbs, 1980–2008.
*Source*: ESPOP, Federal Statistical Office, 2008.

similar observations). On the other hand, similar-sized households occupy larger dwellings than 30 years ago due to their higher purchasing power. For example in the 25 cities, 28.7 per cent of two-person households in 2000 occupied a four-room flat (three bedrooms and a lounge) against 15.7 per cent in 1970: a near doubling.

International migration represents another factor influencing the demographic evolution of cities. During the 1970s, immigrants were the first to feel the effects of the economic crisis (Piguet, 2009). After losing their jobs, many were not allowed to renew their work permit and had to return to their country of origin. According to censuses, the number of foreigners in the 25 cities increased between 1960 and 1970 (+56.7 per cent; +131 561) but decreased by 43 312 (–11.9 per cent) during the following period. International migration thus represented more than a third of the demographic decline of the 1970s. A more favourable economic situation and the spread of the right of family reunification linked to a stabilisation of the non-nationals led to increases in the 1980s (+97 664; +30.4 per cent) and 1990s (+59 677; +14.2 per cent).

This last result is confirmed by the international migration balance calculated each year with ESPOP. Cities act as gateways for international migrations (Figure 4). With the exception of 1996, due to the economic crisis, there is a net gain, especially in the 2000s thanks to the agreement on the free movement of people between Switzerland and the European Union. International migration thus appears to be the main driving force of reurbanisation in Switzerland.

Natural balance represents another component of the recent demographic growth. Between 1981 and 2003 it was constantly—but less and less—negative. Births start to outnumber deaths in 2004 so that five years of positive trend have followed 23 years of negative balance. Several explanations can be given: population ageing has slowed down in cities, the number of births is increasing and young adults tend to stay longer in cities until the early childhood of their offspring (see the next section).

In contrast, internal migration balance is clearly negative. In the years after 2000, cities lost about 7500 people a year relative to the rest of the country. However, the trend is slightly more favourable now than

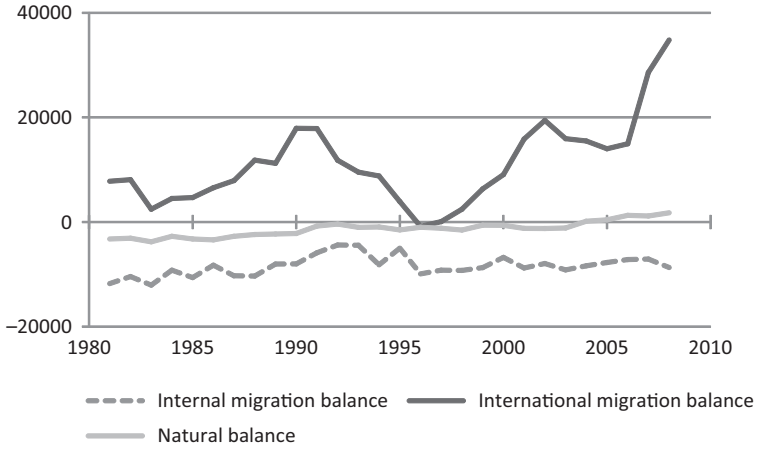


**Figure 4.** Components of the demographic evolution in 24 core cities, 1981–2008.
*Source*: ESPOP, Federal Statistical Office, 2008.

in the 1980s (about –10 000). Behind this general trend are hidden very different residential behaviours according to life course position and socioeconomic status. The following section specifically analyses internal migrations of the six population groups mentioned in the theoretical part.

## Residential Attractiveness According to Population Groups

The 25 cities lost population in respect to the other parts of the country between 1995 and 2000 (migration balance of –1.0 per cent). This deficit is smaller than in the 1970s: the migration ratio has increased by 18.9 per cent, the number of arrivals per 100 departures amounting to 79 in 1975–80 and to 94 in 1995–2000.

### Internal Migration Balance According to Life Course Position

Cities show positive internal migration balances for young adults—15 to 29 years old—between 1995 and 2000 (Table 3). The largest negative figures apply to families (people in their 30s and their children). All the other age-groups also show negative figures including elderly people.

The attractiveness of cities for young adults has reinforced between 1975/1980 and 1995/2000. The evolution of the migration ratio effectively indicates a process of increased net in-migration for 15–24-year-olds; this is more recent for 25–29-year-olds. As mentioned in the conceptual section, this change is explained by the desynchronisation of the major stages of the transition to adulthood and their spreading out over an increasingly long period to create a new life stage ('youth') during which urban living is more sought after (van Criekingen, 2010; Cavalli and Galland, 1993; Tallon and Bromley, 2004).

Only three categories show increasingly unfavourable migration balances for cities: the 5–9, 10–14 and, to a very slight extent, the 40–44-year-olds. In other words, families left the cities more in the 1990s than in the 1970s, despite the construction of new dwellings. The positive evolution of the 45–60-year-olds is probably due to some empty-nesters who moved to the centres. However, this phenomenon is minor as their migration balance remains negative.[5]

**Table 3.** Migration behaviour according to age in the 25 core cities, 1975/1980–1995/2000 (percentages)

| *Age* | *Migration balance (1995–2000)* | *Evolution of the migration ratio (1975/1980–1995/2000)* | *Age* | *Migration balance (1995–2000)* | *Evolution of the migration ratio (1975/1980–1995/2000)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5–9 | −9.9 | −10.7 | 50–54 | −2.5 | 18.3 |
| 10–14 | −5.0 | −2.5 | 55–59 | −2.8 | 20.0 |
| 15–19 | 5.0 | 3.4 | 60–64 | −3.6 | 5.7 |
| 20–24 | 38.1 | 92.3 | 65–69 | −3.2 | 3.7 |
| 25–29 | 13.0 | 84.1 | 70–74 | −1.4 | 8.1 |
| 30–34 | −7.4 | 26.5 | 75–79 | −1.1 | 9.8 |
| 35–39 | −9.5 | 2.4 | 80–84 | −1.4 | 24.9 |
| 40–44 | −6.0 | −0.5 | 85 and more | −3.7 | 14.7 |
| 45–49 | −3.5 | 11.5 | | | |

*Source*: Census, Federal Statistical Office (2000).

**Table 4.** Migration behaviour according to the kind of households in the 25 core cities, 1975/1980–1995/2000 (percentages)

| *Kind of households* | *Migration balance (1995–2000)* | *Evolution of the migration ratio (1975/1980–1995/2000)* |
|---|---|---|
| Flat-shares | 39.7 | 114.8 |
| Persons living alone | 7.4 | 15.2 |
| One-parent households | 1.7 | 5.0 |
| Childless unmarried couples | −1.5 | 15.8 |
| Childless married couples | −4.7 | 9.6 |
| Married couples with children | −8.4 | −5.7 |
| Unmarried couples with children | −13.4 | −11.1 |

*Source*: Census, Federal Statistical Office (2000).

The change is more positive for very old people but for small numbers.

The influence of the life course position is also highlighted by the type of households.[6] Three categories have a positive balance: flat-shares, persons living alone and single-parent families (Table 4). These are non-traditional households because they do not correspond to a couple or a nuclear family. Couples show negative balances and are the driving force of urban sprawl. The presence of children influences the residential choice: married or not, couples with children are more likely to move away from the city.

Changes in migration ratio also show an increased level of departure of families (couples married or not with children). Married couples without children move away from city but less so than 20 years ago. One also notices a phenomenon of increased net in-migration for flat-shares,[7] persons living alone and, to a lesser extent, single-parent families.

## Internal Migration Balance According to Socioeconomic Status

The socio-professional category is less important than the life course position in

**Table 5.** Migration behaviour according to the socio-professional category in the 25 core cities, 1975/1980–1995/2000 (percentages)

| *Socio-professional category* | *Migration balance (1995–2000)* | *Evoluton of the migration ratio (1975/1980–1995/2000)* |
|---|---|---|
| Employees | 0.0 | 15.9 |
| Workers | −1.4 | 2.1 |
| SPC+ | −2.9 | 32.3 |
| Other self-employed | −3.8 | 38.4 |

*Source*: Census, Federal Statistical Office (2000).

the decision to leave or to move into a city as their migration balances are closer to the equilibrium. Only employees show a balanced figure, with the others moving out of city (Table 5). This is more specifically the case for the higher socio-professional categories or SCP+[8] and the 'other self-employed'.[9] In other words, households with high economic resources tend to leave the cities more than others. However, an attenuated net out-migration characterises these categories. With a growth of more than 30 per cent of the migration ratio, the other self-employed and the SPC+ have, after young adults and flat-sharers, the highest positive evolutions. The case of the SPC+ is of particular interest, because they represent an indicator of gentrification. While one counts 68 arrivals for every 100 departures between 1975 and 1980, the situation is much more balanced at the end of the 1990s (90 arrivals for every 100 departures).

In focusing the analysis on separate cities, one observes that the beginning of a process of gentrification affects some more than others. In five cities, the migration figures indicate a recent net in-migration (Zug, Thun, Zurich, Winterthur and Chur). In Zug, the number of arrivals for every 100 departures has increased from 78 to 134 and in Zurich from 97 to 112. Among the other positive changes are nine cases of attenuated net out-migration. In Lugano, Lucerne, Neuchatel, Geneva and Vevey/Montreux, the migration balances are nearing equilibrium with more than nine arrivals for every ten departures.

Other research has shown that the activity of the housing market in Swiss cities has increased in the years since 2000 (Rérat *et al.*, 2010). New residential buildings have expanded the available housing space and made possible a demographic growth. They have also strengthened the residential attractiveness of cities for the SPC+ since the great majority of them have been designed for the middle to upper class.

## Conclusion

This paper has assessed reurbanisation in the case of Switzerland and has unfolded the underlying mechanisms of a phenomenon now found in a growing number of contexts (Cheshire, 2006; Champion, 2001). It has argued that the stages of urban development model (van den Berg and Klaassen, 1987) has become outdated to analyse reurbanisation and it has been shown that the demographic evolution of cities should rather be considered as the outcome of the evolution of household structure, consumption of housing space, natural balance and migration balance. The latter has furthermore been divided according to spatial (internal versus international) and social aspects (life course position, socioeconomic status).

The demographic loss of Swiss cities from 1970 and 2000 is due to three factors. The first one is specific to Switzerland (the other two are the expression of more global trends observed in many Western cities): many foreign workers lost their job during the economic crisis of the 1970s and had to leave the country due to the migration policy of the time. Secondly, there was a steep increase in housing space consumption which is explained on the one hand by a rise in small households (persons living alone, childless couples) and on the other hand by a growing purchasing power that enables households to live in larger dwellings. The growing housing space consumption explains the seeming contradiction between demographic decline, development of the housing stock and shortage in the housing market (see Bunting, 2004, and Ogden and Hall, 2000, 2004, for similar issues in Canada and France). Thirdly, families—and to a lesser extent elderly people—are characterised by net out-migration and represent the driving force of suburbanisation in Switzerland as in other contexts (Fishman, 1987).

Whereas international migration flows temporarily deepened the population loss of cities in the 1970s, they then became positive due to a more favourable economic situation. In Switzerland, cities have acted as gateways for international migrations which represent the main explanation of their recent demographic growth. If cities lose population relative to the rest of the country (internal migration), population groups have very different residential behaviours. The decision to settle in cities is first influenced by the life course position: small households are more attracted by cities than bigger households. This is especially the case of young adults who tend to migrate to cities (Schnell and Graicer, 1994). Moreover, the period during which cities are attractive as places of residence is becoming longer. This phenomenon is the spatial consequence of the longer transition to adulthood and the emergence of a new life stage ('youth') that are observed in Europe (Cavalli and Galand, 1993; van Criekingen, 2010). The fact that the natural balance has recently become positive may show that in Switzerland the period during which cities are attractive has widened to encompass the early childhood of their offspring. In other words, whereas some decades ago many childless couples would have left the city to found a family in the suburbs, they now stay slightly longer in cities and postpone their departure. Higher socio-professional categories left cities more than workers or employees in 1990s. However, the migration balance is much less pronounced in the 1990s than in the 1970s and the increased activity of the housing market in the 2000s benefited the middle to high classes. This tallies with studies showing that urban living is sought after by a growing part of these classes (Bromley *et al.*, 2007; Tallon and Bromley, 2004, Hamnett, 2003).

On the whole, the recent growth of Swiss cities appears to be determined by several demographic, residential and migration phenomena. In turn, these can be explained by broader factors such as the migration policy of the federal government and a period of economic growth (that explain their attractiveness for international migrants but also investors in the housing market) and also the demographic changes that make up the second demographic transition. The main aspects of the second demographic transition (van de Kaa, 1987; Lesthaeghe and Neels, 2002) are the diversification of households, the increase of their number and the reduction of their size as well as the longer transition to adulthood, all of which have spatial impacts since they influence the

demographic evolution and residential attractiveness of cities (Buzar, Ogden *et al.*, 2007; Buzar, Ray and Ogden, 2007). Another phenomenon is the growing segment of the middle to upper class deciding to live in cities, particularly in new developments (on the various forms of gentrification, see Lees *et al.*, 2008).

Reurbanisation has sometimes been interpreted through the stages of urban development model that links together the demographic evolution of cities and their suburbs. This Swiss case, however, confirms that the new demographic dynamism of cities does not take place to the detriment of their suburbs. In other words the demographic evolution of the urban region is not cyclical. On the contrary, urban sprawl and reurbanisation, in- and out-migration flows, gentrification and the suburban ideal can co-exist at the macro scale (urban region) and sometimes also at the micro scale (households whose residential behaviour changes over the life course).

What is the future of this reurbanisation trend? On the one hand, some categories are growing and chose to live in the city (young adults, non-family households and an increasing part of the middle to upper class). On the other hand, the number of inhabitants is in many Swiss cities lower than in the 1970s despite the development of their housing stock. The decrease in the size of households and the increase in the consumption of housing space represent a restrictive factor to the growth of cities.

This paper has focused on the demand side of urban dynamics. However, continuation of reurbanisation will also greatly depend on the production of the built environment. The strategies of two actors are of prime importance. First, local and regional authorities have large powers in the field of planning in Switzerland in comparison with the federal state. They have started to implement programmes to attract new inhabitants and to promote the model of the compact city. Local and regional authorities rarely invest directly in housing in Switzerland. This shows the importance of a second range of actors—the investors and developers—and the attractiveness of the housing market in cities in comparison with other locations or with other products (such as shares or bonds). This convergence of factors—latent demand, public policies promoting densification and private actors investing in the housing market—explains reurbanisation in the 2000s and seems necessary for the continuation of the demographic growth of cities.

## Notes

1. The supply side of the housing market (developers and planners) is important but its analysis is beyond the scope of this paper that aims at explaining the demographic evolution of central areas by determining which population groups settle in cities or leave them. It could also be argued that the migration behaviour of population groups partly reflects the housing market (level of rents, size of dwellings, etc.).
2. Among this list, Vevey and Montreux are aggregated as they are the centres of the same urban region. Moreover, Lugano merged with several municipalities in 2004 (the only boundary change during the period under scrutiny). Data regarding the number of inhabitants are available according to the former boundaries (as well as information taken from the censuses). This is not the case, however, for the migration and natural balances since 2004, which is why Lugano is not taken into account when these components are analysed.
3. Only internal migrations, whatever the migrants' nationality may be, have been taken into account, since information about the profile of those leaving Switzerland is impossible to obtain.
4. Eight of these 11 cities nevertheless lost population in the 1970s and/or 1980s and were

already characterised by a reurbanisation process in the 1990s. Only three cities have not experienced a demographic loss in the second half of the 20th century (Sion, Thun and Chur).

5. This evolution is not due to a generational effect (baby-boomers reaching retirement age) since the migration ratio is independent of the structure evolution of society (see the discussion about methodology).
6. Migration balances are related to individuals according to the kind of household they live in and not to the number of households. In other words, members of flat-shares (or couples) are distinguished individually according to their residential behaviour.
7. Flat-shares are indeed increasingly common among students (whose number is rising) and also in bigger cities among young active people (due to the shortage on the housing market). Moreover, they remain an urban phenomenon and are rare in suburban or rural spaces.
8. SCP+ correspond to liberal, intellectual and executive professions as well as managers.
9. The other self-employed category designates the self-employed (craftsmen, retailers, etc.) not included in SCP+ (the latter includes self-employed individuals with a university degree such as lawyers, doctors, etc.).

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