

Typology of Euro-commuters – Lifestyles, Careers, Livelihoods

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Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity

- 2006-2013 – 213,000 net emigration
- 2005 – 13,000; 2013 – 51,000
- But beyond headline figures?

Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity

- Socio-economic, occupations, gender backgrounds
- Regional impacts of emigration
- Startling findings: 47 per cent of departees in full-time employment at time of leaving

Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity

- Regional level: rural areas emigration most keenly felt
- 27 percent of households had one family member emigrate since 2006
- Less evident in affluent urban, ex-urban areas, as well as in deprived urban areas – 15-17 percent of households experienced emigration

Outlier

- New suburban towns, villages, with young families (20-44), young children, around the cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway
- Here – emigration least keenly felt, at 11 percent of households

Caveat

- Households here, when surveyed, may have in mind “conventional emigration” – that is, leaving, permanently, full-time
- Does not taken into account unconventional emigration – circular, seasonal, temporary, secondments, overseas company transfer

Why below national-levels of conventional emigration in certain areas?

- *Irish Emigration* authors state:

“It is likely, however, that these are the kinds of areas from which ‘commuter migrants’ are likeliest to be found, that is, where one household member is working outside the country and returning home on a more or less regular basis. . . . One might have expected people from classic commuter areas to be leaving, given the negative equity many face. Due to the burden of mortgage service costs, however, and because the Irish system does not allow a householder to give back the keys and walk away from the debt, emigration becomes complicated, especially if mortgage holders have young children.”

Euro-commuting, ISS21

- I look at one instance of “emigration becoming complicated”
– Euro-commuting
- Examine experiences of people who commute between ROI (primary residence) and EU city (work destination) – London, Paris, Brussels, Munich, Frankfurt, Amsterdam
- Some press coverage: “Semigrants”; “Mortgage Refugees”; “Monday Morning Mob”

Social Demographics in 2016

- Crazy futurologists?
- New breed of worker in post-Schengen EU
- Euro-commuters “mega trend” – free labour markets, cheap air travel, high-speed rail
- Leading to . . .

“New Commuter Belt”



ROI “suburb” of “New Commuter Belt”?

- Hardly
- Irish Emigration in and Age of Austerity report would not support this – but would support claim of in certain areas, among certain demographics, it is in greater evidence
- My research asks – who are these people? Why Euro-commuter? And what are they hoping to gain from it?

Euro-commuter profile

- Professional-managerial occupations (finance, banking, accountancy, media, academia, engineering, law, medicine)
- Relatively well-remunerated
- Housing, travel, consumption, lifestyle, education – all middle class
- Almost all male (29 of 35)

Euro-commuter Profile

- Commuting routine – weekly, bi-weekly
- Similar family circumstances – married or co-habiting, school-age children, mortgaged homeowners
- Advantages – new job skills, wider professional networks, new friends, greater autonomy
- Drawbacks – loneliness, fatigue, miscommunication, private worries

Euro-commuters – distinct migrant group?

- Socio-economic, occupational and gender background largely similar
- But in terms of *motivations*, coherent portrait fragments
- Mortgage-debt issues and children certain a major factor . . .
- But – range of other, less visible motives factors too . . .

Type 1: Commuting-as-lifestyle

- Michael. Commuting 12 years now, between Dalkey and London. Financial services
- “Loves the life” – personal autonomy, career aspirations, socializing, Dublin too small professionally
- “This is a lifestyle choice rather than a forced situation”

Type 2: Commuting-as-career

- Eoin. Dublin to Paris. Inter-company transfer, two years ago
- Job not under threat – but if he wanted not lateral career moves but promotion, then he needed mobility (“spiralist”)
- “I am very career focussed at the moment. So is my girlfriend. So we discussed it. She has a very good job here in Dublin, so leaving that was a non-starter. And if I was ever to move up the ladder here, then I had to move with the crowd I’m with [to Paris].”

Type 3: Commuting-as-livelihood

- Commuting-as-career, commuting-as-lifestyle minority voices
- More prominent narrative – commuting-as-livelihood-strategy . . .
- Advent of economic downturn key here (13.8 percent unemployment; €90 billion “troika” bailout; tax hikes, job precarity, paycuts)
- All “push” factors . . .

Commuting-as-livelihood-strategy

- “This is work, not life”; “Having a job, having an income – that’s why I do this”; “It’s about survival, isn’t it?”
- Oliver. Software engineer, works in Vienna, JP Morgan Chase, Monday-Friday
- Property market crash – needs sufficient income to meet mortgage repayments, plus other living costs – private health insurance, children’s education, private pension, two cars, annual holidays etc . . .

Commuting-as-livelihood-strategy

- “If it wasn’t for this house, things could be a lot different [ie. family emigration], I mean, we love the house, we have invested a lot of money and energy in the place. But if we had a, what do you call them . . . a jingle mortgage like they do in the States, then the keys might well be in the postbox . . .”
- Jingle mortgage – borrower can strategically default – not such mechanism available in ROI

Economic rationale/class rationale

- Commuting, then, a livelihood strategy – “to stay afloat”, as one put it
- But is the bottom line everything?
- Alongside economic rationale other, class-based rationale . . .
- Commuting, as such, safeguards against threat of downward social mobility than accompanies remaining in ROI . . .

Celtic Tiger Redux

- Peter. Architect. Wife civil servant. Both had work, but suffered paycuts, reduction in disposable income
- He now commutes between Dublin and company office in Berlin, biweekly
- Restored semblance of life pre-crisis – afford again the mortgage repayments, the second car is back on road, annual holidays

- “Look, I’m a Catholic, but I guess I turned my children into Protestants. One of them does piano, one horse riding, the other plays hockey. All these are very pricey, and if they were to keep doing these, then daddy had to go, didn’t he?”
- Religion as metaphor here – if they are to remain middle class, need a labour market position commensurate with this – hence, Euro-commute

- Andrew: “A lot of it, if I’m being honest, is Keeping-Up-With-The-Joneses. I mean, Marie’s income has been shredded, mine too. So it was either try and sell this place and move to a cheaper area and stay in the job here in Dublin. And of course, cut out some of the extras. That wasn’t really an option – the kids like their school, we are well liked in the neighbourhood. So if we wanted to stay, somehow I needed to be earning the big bucks”
- Intersection of livelihood strategies with middle-class social norms and values around residential location, leisure activities, lifestyle, consumption, education . . .
- The alternative – remaining in Ireland – would threaten class-based identities – mobility would be southward, downsizing direction (“skidding”)

A “mancession”?

- Gendered identities as breadwinner figures under siege?
- Joe, for example. Instead of “sitting round on my arse” – like some men he knows – he has commuted since mid-2009
- Others echo this: “That’s it basically. No work in Dublin, fine. Then London, strap me in”; “You follow the work”
- Joe continues: “I am the author of my own destiny again” – proud of his assertiveness, his initiative in face of challenging situation
- Peter: “The lads on that flight, we’re doing this for our families. If you ask me, we’re the unsung heroes of Ireland”

- Male-provider identity jeopardized by rapidly contracting economic conditions in ROI
- By Euro-commuting, display resilience, shore up not just class- but also gender-based identities as middle class, male breadwinners
- As such, upheaval to make-breadwinner identity stabilized

Conclusions

- Portraits illuminate one stream of under-studied intra-European migration
- Casualties of economic crisis, how it intersects with mobility – “crisis migration”
- Importantly, though – crisis remains a relatively privileged one

Conclusions

- Peculiar 21-st century form of mobility motivated by class and gender considerations
- Class – economic downturn threatens middle-class lifestyles and consumption practices
- Gender – economic downturn imperils male-breadwinner figures

Conclusions

- Viewed mobility decision as the correct one, as a success
- However, any commuters find it a failure?
- No, as they consider it a form of temporary migration, not permanent
- If economic buoyancy not returned to ROI, their view on “success” of Euro-commuting could alter significantly