Reading Demographic Tea Leaves: Population Change and Urban Futures

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Anyone who believes exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist.

– Kenneth Boulding
And probably not a demographer...

• For many reasons, population decline or stasis, even within a broader context of growth, is possible and, in fact, already occurring in many places

• Looking towards the (demographic) future of cities, at least two points are important:
  1. The demography of growth/decline may matter
  2. The geographical context of the demography matters too
This is one geographical manifestation of 10 percent growth
## Urban population change in the U.S. context (2000-2009)

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<th>Non-Metro/Micro (1,357 Counties)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Percent Change</td>
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<td>Share of Population in 2009</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>6.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Change Across All Areas</td>
<td>3.3</td>
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Demographically, how do places change?

• **Components of change:**
  
  – Natural increase

  – Domestic migration

  – International migration
Demographically, how do places change?

- Components of change:
  - Natural increase ➔ **Births and Deaths**
  - Domestic migration ➔ **Ins versus Outs**
  - International migration ➔ **Ins versus Outs**
The question is: Is it predominantly one of these factors that shifts the scale from growth to decline?

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<td>Births</td>
<td>38,358,804</td>
<td>32,580,213</td>
<td>3,598,809</td>
<td>2,179,782</td>
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<td>Deaths</td>
<td>22,483,225</td>
<td>17,771,469</td>
<td>2,742,056</td>
<td>1,969,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Natural Increase/Decrease</td>
<td>15,875,579</td>
<td>14,808,744</td>
<td>856,753</td>
<td>210,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Domestic Migration</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>50,872</td>
<td>196,743</td>
<td>-247,615</td>
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<tr>
<td>Net Immigration</td>
<td>8,944,170</td>
<td>8,456,601</td>
<td>348,559</td>
<td>139,010</td>
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• Natural increase is the rule, not the exception, even in declining metropolitan areas

• Highest growth rates come from areas firing on all three demographic cylinders, and definitely positive migration
  — Growth can occur within a context of natural decrease, but these are retirement destinations

• Domestic migration is usually the key

• Positive net immigration is almost a given
Geographical context matters

Localized decline, characterized by spillover growth in neighboring areas

Clustered decline that defies characterization as only local

Decline embedded within larger region of decline
Why does this matter?

• Decline/growth from net migration might be different from decline/growth from natural change
  – Retirement destinations for example will rely forever on favorable migration conditions
  – It’s the demographic “surprises” or turnarounds that are the most difficult
    • e.g. Young white families deciding to stay in the District of Columbia

• Understanding combination of geography and demographic change is invaluable for planning and policy-making
Some final thoughts

- Let’s not forget compositional change
- International migration as the canary in the coal mine
- Natural increase for sustainability
- Decline ≠ Unhealthy
- Importance of demographic turnarounds