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Local amenities and life-cycle migration: Do people move for jobs or fun?

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Abstract

Do households move for jobs or fun, and where do they go when they move? We address these questions using the 1970–2000 US Census. Based on a panel of quality of life and business environment measures, households prefer MSAs in warm coastal areas and non-metropolitan locations, while firms prefer large, growing cities. In addition, cities with improving business environments acquire increasing shares of workers, especially workers with high levels of human capital; cities with improving consumer amenities become relatively more populated by retirees.

Further analysis of individual level migration decisions indicates that regardless of marital status, young, highly educated households tend to move towards places with higher quality business environments. This tendency is especially pronounced among highly educated couples who are more subject to job market co-location problems. In contrast, regardless of education, couples near retirement tend to move away from places with

regardless of education, couples near retirement tend to move away from places with favorable business environments and towards places with highly valued consumer amenities. These patterns help explain why areas unattractive to both households and business have struggled, as with upstate New York, while the sun-belt and other regions are thriving.



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