A Framework for the Study of Migration Destination Selection

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This article raises a number of issues that have generally not been addressed in previous studies of migration destination selection. Destination selection is seen as the result of two processes; (1) the sorting among a relatively large number of potential destinations over a lifetime, and (2) the selection among a relatively few (usually one or two) places at the time of the migration decision. Decision rules may differ in the two processes. The actual selection of a destination is based on place utilities derived from a combination of factors including: economic and noneconomic; micro (those attributes unique to one place); and macro (those applicable to larger geographic areas).

Among the many outcomes of the metropolitan-nonmetropolitan population "turnaround" of the 1970s, within the United States and other countries, has been a renewed interest among social scientists in a variety of issues that have a bearing upon individual migrant choices — including place preferences, motivations, and the overall decision-making process. Theoretical work applicable to explanation of individual migration decision making evolved during the 1960s (e.g., Brown & Moore, 1970; Sjaastad, 1962; Speare, Goldstein & Frey, 1974; Wolpert, 1965). Since then there has been an acceleration of empirical studies that use the individual (or household) as the unit of analysis as survey research techniques became more popular and as aggregate-level approaches alone were found to inadequately account for rapidly changing migration patterns.

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Completed by the early 1970s was a series of studies addressing regional preferences and size-of-place preferences (e.g., DeJong & Sell, 1975; Fuguitt & Zuiches, 1975). More recently attention has been placed on a broader variety of individual-level issues including the role of sets of place attributes in the migration decision (Gustavus & Brown, 1977), analysis of reasons for moving from the large annual housing surveys (Long & Hansen, 1979), the role of economic versus social factors in destination selection (Toney, 1978), and differences between reasons for moving and reasons for destination selection (Roseman & Williams, 1980; Williams & Sofranko 1979). On a parallel track has been a rapid evolution of studies of the determinants of local mobility (for a review see Quigley & Weinberg, 1977).

Despite the wide variety of approaches and research questions posed, there remain important questions relevant to the process of destination selection. The purpose of this article is to point out difficulties that have been encountered in destination selection studies and to propose a broad framework within which future research might be cast. Whereas the focus here is on metropolitan-to-nonmetropolitan migration, the framework is easily generalizable to other types of migration. The framework emphasizes: (1) the variety of ways in which several factors, including economic and noneconomic, may combine to influence destination selection; and (2) the role of past experiences with and ties to places in the destination selection decision.

In this article I first contrast the destination selection decision with the decision to move, then identify a set of issues that should be considered in theoretical and empirical research. Thirdly, I outline the proposed framework, and finally suggest theoretical and operational approaches for future research.

THE DECISION TO MOVE AND DESTINATION SELECTION

There are grounds for making a separation between the decision to move and the selection of a migration destination. The decision to move (or at least the decision to consider moving) tends to be related to life-cycle factors and/or career cycle factors, whereas the choice of a destination is a function of economic opportunities and local/regional amenities strongly qualified by limited information about alternative destinations. Many theoretical statements of migration decision making at the local scale make this separation either explicit or implicit (Brown &

Moore, 1970; Quigley & Weinberg, 1977; Roseman, 1971; Speare et al. 1974). Empirical use of the separation of the local scale is best exemplified by the work of Speare, Goldstein and Frey (1974).

For longer distance migrants, the separation is embraced by both aggregate-level studies and individual-level decision-making studies. At the aggregate level, the Lowry hypothesis suggests that, at least in the short run, inmigration to a place (the product of the decisions where to move) is a function of economic conditions at that place, whereas outmigration from a place (the product of decisions to move) tends to be related to the age composition of the population (Lowry, 1966). Although the hypothesis is still being debated, it is generally supported by the work of Morrison (1971. 1975). At the individual level, theoretical statements tend to center about the idea of place utility (Brown & Moore, 1970; Gustavus & Brown, 1977; Roseman, 1971; Wolpert, 1965). The place utility associated with premigration location is based on a direct experience upon which past, present, and future rewards at that place are evaluated (Wolpert, 1965). The decision to consider moving or to move, then, is a function of this direct place utility that is, in turn, conditioned by the position in the life/career cycle. Once the decision is made to consider moving (upon reaching a threshold level of dissatisfaction with the premigration residence). place utilities pertaining to other possible locations are drawn upon. Some of them may be part of a formal "search space" (Brown & Moore, 1970), and some of them are based on a less formal set of contacts through past experiences and preexisting ties.

It is recognized that the decision sequence can vary considerably. In some cases the decision to move may be triggered by stress factors, then a formal search is embarked upon, and, ultimately, a destination chosen. In other cases the decision to move is made simultaneously with the destination selection decision; when for example, upon the discovery of that ideal place to live, both decisions are made immediately, or in the numerous cases of persons moving as the result of job transfers. In still other cases, the decision where to move (e.g., a regular vacation place, a previous place of residence, or a particular retirement community) has been made, but the actual move must await a key career-cycle point, job offer, or a key life-cycle point (e.g., retirement) before the decision to move can be made.

In spite of these variations in sequence, however, it seems clear that research must at minimum uncover the two types of fac-

tors that have a bearing upon the ultimate decision: (1) the factors extant at the origin that pertain to the consideration of leaving, and (2) those attributes of the destination and surrounding circumstances that led to its ultimate choice.

In their large survey conducted in the early 1960s, Lansing and Mueller (1967) posed several questions pertaining to migration decisions including: "How did you happen to leave...(a place)...?" (asked for each place lived since 1950): "What made you decide to come here rather than some other place?" (asked for the present place of residence). Their detailed analyses of these, and related, questions reveal the variety of economic, family, and information factors that come together differentially in influencing the decision to move and the decision where to move. Yet more recent empirical studies of migration reasons tend not to consider both of these decisions. Most, in fact, ignore the migration decision-making process altogether, a topic that has now accumulated an important literature (Brown & Moore, 1970; DaVanzo, 1980; DeJong & Gardner, 1981; Sell & DeJong. 1978; Speare, et al., 1974; Wolpert, 1965; and others). Some contemporary empirical studies focus exclusively on the decision to leave the origin (or state the question in such a way as to strongly imply this) (Long & Hansen, 1979). Others examine reasons for choosing a destination (Green, Bender & Campbell, 1970; Gustavus & Brown, 1977; Thomas & Bachtel, 1978).

The one major survey that has made a distinction between reasons for choosing a destination did so with considerable success by clearly asking two separate questions: the reason for leaving the place of origin, and the reason for choosing "this" particular destination (Roseman & Williams, 1980; Williams & Sofranko, 1979). In doing so, a significant step forward was made in empirical approaches to uncovering reasons for migration. However, tests of theories of migration destination selection, except for the local mobility case, are rare. Before such theory is to be fully developed there are a number of issues pertaining to circumstances surrounding destination selection that must be considered. They are reviewed in the following section.

ISSUES IMPORTANT TO DESTINATION SELECTION

Most migration decisions are actually made among a very small set of alternatives. Lansing and Mueller (1967, p. 211), in their

survey in the early 1960s, found that a majority (64%) of migrants had only one feasible destination that was seriously considered (or at least seriously considered at the time of the migration decision). Therefore, the concept of a formal search space, as formulated for destination selection in intra-urban mobility, may be of limited usefulness for longer distance migration.

Limited alternatives, of course, have been quite characteristic of the long history of rural to urban migration — the destination being chosen on the basis of ties with a particular city established through friends and relatives (Goldscheider, 1971; Price & Sikes, 1975). Today, when migration in the opposite direction is more important numerically, destination selection may likewise depend to a great extent upon such ties. However, in this case the ties have a broader basis, including previous residential exposure and vacation/recreation experience, in addition to friends and relatives. Williams and Sofranko (1979) found that such ties were the single most important reason cited for destination selection among their sample of metropolitan-to-nonmetropolitan migrants in the late 1970s. This idea is nicely captured by the concept of location specific capital (DaVanzo, 1976, 1981; DaVanzo & Morrison, 1978). which is defined as the attachments of "ties" to particular places that are acquired through a variety of processes.

Table 1

RELEVANCE OF LOCATION SPECIFIC CAPITAL TO VARIOUS
RESEARCH TRADITIONS

"RETURN" MIGRATION
TRADITIONAL RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION
RECENT RESEARCH ON MIGRATION TO AMENITY AREAS
LOCATION OF SECOND HOMES
CUMULATIVE INERTIA

Location specific capital is an attractive concept because it integrates a set of factors that define or severely limit migrant search spaces — factors that tended to be treated separately in previous research (See Table 1). Not only does the concept have importance to contemporary destination selection, especially for nonmetropolitan-bound migrants, but it simultaneously helps to explain the decision not to move — the duration of stay or cumulative inertia process that reduces the probability of moving with time in a place due to the accumulation of ties to that place (DaVanzo, 1981; DaVanzo & Morrison, 1978). Any particular form of location specific capital (e.g., a family tie, property investment, or a previous residential tie) can be conceptualized as an information factor and/or a "reason" for moving. In the former case the tie establishes an information channel through which other place attributes are evaluated. In the latter case, the tie itself is an attribute important in the destination selection decision.

We know little about the way in which potential migrants acquire potential destinations over their lifespan. If we can assume that most migrants do, in fact, seriously consider only one or two possible destinations at the time of their migration decision, the more important question for a theory of destination selection may be: "How do migrants select among potential destinations over a lifetime, sorting among them and eventually arriving at one or a small number of places seriously considered?" rather than "How do migrants select among alternative destinations?" Although implied by the concept of location specific capital, this approach requires an explicitly dynamic approach, one which views the destination selection as a product of a long period of "searching" among alternative places.

We do not yet understand the complex interplay between the decision to move and the destination selection decision. Until recently this distinction simply has not been made in empirical work. One step in the direction of this understanding is an analysis by Roseman and Williams (1980) that focuses on the two decisions for 499 households who moved from metropolitan to rapidly-growing nonmetropolitan areas in the Midwest. The analysis cross-classified the most important stated reason for moving with the most important stated reason for destination selection, finding that only 40% of the sample gave the same response (including 32 households who had job transfers, a form of "forced" migration). This is initial evidence of the degree to which the two decisions are distinct in the minds of respondents.

Classifying migrants as "economic" or "noneconomic" in their migration behavior is an oversimplification leading to a misconception of factors important to migration. It is fashionable to discuss the role of economic versus noneconomic factors and to speculate on the possibility that economic factors are lessening in importance (Chalmers & Greenwood, 1977; Long & Hansen, 1979; McCarthy & Morrison, 1978; Zelinsky, 1977). While social scientists discuss this point, it is entirely possible that a majority of individual migration decisions are based on both types of factors. The problems of previous analyses and previous data collection procedures are illustrated by Long and Hansen (1979) in a recent study of questions pertaining to reasons for moving included as part of the Annual Housing Surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. In the survey the interviewers were instructed to classify the "main reason," of thirty possibilities, for the move. The problem is summarized by Long and Hansen:

a person who, when asked the reasons for having moved, answered, "When I retired from the Air Force, I moved to Arizona because the weather was warm" would be citing three of the 30 reasons: retirement, leaving the Armed Forces, and desire for a better climate. Or consider a person who said, "When I graduated from college, I moved back to my parents' home while looking for a job." Such a person could be considered as having given two of the 30 reasons: namely, moved to be closer to relatives and new job or looking for work. (p. 5)

Both of these examples, plus the large number of other possible combinations of employment, family, environmental, and other factors, illustrate the complex ways in which economic and noneconomic factors can combine. It is also noteworthy that factors related to the decision to move and destination selection are also mixed in these examples. Lansing and Mueller (1967) cite similar instances from their study showing the mixture of job and family factors in migration.

The importance of geographic scale has not been recognized in previous analyses of migration decision making. A set of factors that are influential to migrant decision makers in their choice of a destination can be divided into two subsets: micro and macro. A micro factor describes an attribute of one place; thus, one and only one destination can be chosen if the major reason for moving is a micro factor. Examples would include moving to live in the same community as a particular relative, moving to accept a par-

ticular job offer, moving to the community of birth, and so forth. Macro factors are those attributes of places that are found in numerous communities and manifest themselves over broad regions (or in many locales), including climate, "rural amenities," cost of living, high wages, and so forth.

It is likely that both types of factors play an important role in migration decisions, but it is not known how the two types are interrelated. Are most recent migrants to the Sun Belt in the United States responding to the macro factors that manifest themselves over large sectors of the region, or responding largely to unique opportunities and/or ties in specific places? Such a question has implications for regional development policies as well as for theory that attempts to hypothesize the ways in which various factors enter into the migration decision calculus.

The concept of micro and macro factors also relates to the concept of location-specific capital in the following way: Location-specific ties, for some migrants, represent the micro factors (e.g., moving "back home" to be with relatives); but for others, location-specific ties define the specific community chosen, even though the major reasons are macro (e.g., moving to a place known about through previous regular vacations because it has a "pleasant climate," low cost of living, or a bucolic setting). Hence, research designs aimed at understanding reasons for choosing a destination should incorporate: (a) more than one reason (when the respondent is cognizant of more than one), (b) whether they are macro or micro in nature, and (c) the role of location-specific capital in allowing these factors to be utilized in the decision.

The macro/micro distinction may also provided insights into the sequential processes by which alternative destinations are selected. The suggestion has been made that, for intraurban mobility, a general search space area is first delimited by the potential mover on the basis of his/her general images of the city and his/her ongoing activity space (Adams, 1969). Within that area, perhaps near the center, is chosen a final destination based on housing and neighborhood attributes (Brown & Holmes, 1971). Also, most migrants clearly make a two-step decision in terms of geographic scale: a choice of the community followed by the choice of a specific dwelling within (Roseman, 1971). The separation of macro from micro factors suggests the possibility that some migrants first choose a region (on the basis of macro factors), then narrow their choice to a community (utilizing micro factors), and finally to a dwelling location. This hypothesis seems most

plausible when the process is viewed as a long-term "sorting" among potential destinations, but is yet to be tested.

Other contextual factors need to be considered in destination selection theories. At least two additional types of factors set the context for migration location decisions. First, important constraints are placed on choices; large numbers of the poor, military personnel, job transferees, and students, for instance, have rather limited choices of alternative destinations, if any at all. Thus, not only does location-specific capital limit feasible choices, but so do external constraints for many migrants. Secondly, household factors have a bearing on who makes the migration decision (and who makes the decision for whom). It may no longer be appropriate to consider the household as the most relevant decision-making unit given the increasing variety of household types (Norton & Glick, 1979), and given the fact that an increasing number of migration acts represent change in household composition.

A FRAMEWORK FOR VIEWING THE DESTINATION SELECTION PROCESS

In contrast to the usual conceptualization of the household as the migration decision-making unit, the proposed framework views every individual as a potential migration decisionmaker, as advocated above. Among other advantages, this perspective avoids the empirical difficulty of identifying a "head" who makes the decisions, and reduces sex and other biases often inherent in migration research. Household decisions are considered to be the result of either a single decision maker or shared decision making.

Each individual has the potential to make migration decisions at various points in his/her life cycle, and most realize that potential at one time or another. The individual's decision-making role is dormant during times when others are making the decisions for him/her (e.g., during childhood or during a very old elderly stage), although the presence of the individual in a household context may have an indirect influence upon the migration decision (e.g., parents considering the welfare of children in the destination choice). At other times the migration decision is shared with a partner or spouse, and still other times the individual makes his/her own migration decisions applicable to that person only (e.g., a one-person household) or to a larger set of persons in a household (e.g., a single parent with children).

In the framework each individual is viewed as having, at any point in time, a "stock" of potential destinations defined on the basis of direct exposure (previous residential experience, vacation places, etc.), by kinship and friendship ties, and by job offers or perceived job opportunities. Both location-specific capital and other, more instantaneous ties to places define the "stock" of feasible alternatives. Over a lifetime, whether or not an individual is considering moving, places are occasionally added to or deleted from this stock. The stock may be expanded or depleted very rapidly as in the case of a job search that yields several real opportunities, or may be built up over very long periods of time as in the case of many forms of location-specific capital.

At any point in time, however, the number of feasible places that comprise the stock is likely to be small — most typically one or two. At a given point in the life cycle, then, serious consideration may be given to moving, and this limited stock may be drawn upon without modification (e.g., upon retiring and choosing to move to a regular vacation place). In such cases the destination selection decision has been made in an implicit fashion, prior to the decision to move. Another possibility is the case of a person receiving one job offer in a previously unknown place, in which case the stock is still limited in number but one place has appeared without prior ties to the place. At the other end of the continuum of possibilities, the stock may rapidly increase as an individual sorts among a large array of job opportunities.

This view is a simple extension of the location-specific capital concept and can be thought of as a long-term place utility framework that emphasizes the role of location-specific capital in defining place utilities. Place images and place utilities are continually being modified but may only come into play at times when a decision to move is being contemplated, or when they reach a threshold value and thereby stimulate the consideration of moving.

Implementation of the framework would require measurement of a "migration-relevant life history," a life history focusing on a wide variety of ties with and exposures to places with key points in the life cycle. In this sense, the framework merges with the activity system and activity space approaches to analysis of human behavior advocated by Hägerstrand (1979) and Chapin (1968) and the time-space framework tradition in geography (Carlstein, Parkes & Thrift, 1979). It recognizes that any single spatial behavior decision is only a small part of the total time-space path taken by an individual or household and is partly the product of continued spatial

adjustments which are made as needs and preferences change through the life cycle.

For present day metropolitan-to-nonmetropolitan migration, and perhaps for a wide variety of other types, the defining and redefining of the feasible stock of destinations is likely to be based to considerable degree upon noneconomic location-specific capital (e.g., ties to vacation places or the birth place). Therefore, even if the ultimate decision is made on the basis of economic factors, and even if the migrant's stated reason is an economic factor, the destination selection has actually been made partly on the basis of noneconomic factors by virtue of the long-term sorting among alternative places. This is consistent with the notion that, for much rural to urban migration, the decision to move is based on economic factors (e.g., differential wages between the rural South and urban North in the United States in the 1920s) but the destination is essentially predetermined by ties with friends and relatives (Price & Sikes, 1975, p. 14).

This situation may realistically describe the majority of recent moves from metropolitan to nonmetropolitan areas, except that the stock of potential destination is determined by a broader range of types of noneconomic location-specific capital. It may also apply to many metropolitan to metropolitan moves. In their comprehensive survey of migrants in the United States in the early 1960s, Lansing and Mueller (1967, p. 132) found that (excluding job transfers) 69% of their sample of movers had friends and/or relatives in the area of destination. It is likely that the role of friends and relatives in the contemporary migration decision has either been underestimated or not clearly understood.

Another important feature of this framework is its suggestion that destination selection is on ongoing process, one which cannot be modelled with instantaneously measured determinants. Sevveral conceptualizations of the decision to move attempt to explicitly consider the process leading to that decision over time (e.g., Sell & DeJong, 1978, 1979; Van Arsdol, Sabagh, & Butler, 1968). Not only will such a temporal approach to destination selection advance our understanding of the determinants of migration, but it may enhance our ability to predict regional migration patterns. Measurements of the extent and nature of previous experiences, in particular nonmetropolitan places, could be important inputs to models of subsequent migration flows to those places. For example, aggregate models might usefully incorporate measures of vacation activity in nonmetropolitan places. Such activity has often

culminated in the ownership of a seasonal home that later may be utilized on a more permanent residential basis. The number of "second" homes was, in fact, found to be a critical variable in the statistical explanation of net migration among nonmetropolitan counties during the early 1970s (Briggs, 1980). This variable exceeded all other "amenity" variables in importance and was among the three most important variables overall.

THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE FRAMEWORK

Given the proposed framework, two separate issues need to be addressed by migration theory which seeks to explain destination selection:

- (1) Appropriate theories must be tested pertaining to selection among the typically small set of alternatives near the time of the migration decision. The human capital and place utility approaches are compensatory models of migration destination selection. That is, individuals evaluate, integrate, and trade off salient attributes of considered alternatives in arriving at a destination selection. Thus, they may be quite appropriate given man's limited information processing abilities. Another possible decision rule, elimination by aspects, posits a sequential process in which the decision maker begins by judging alternatives on the basis of the most important attribute. All alternatives that do not meet a threshold value with respect to that attribute are eliminated; then the process is repeated until all but one alternative is eliminated (Tversky, 1972).
- (2) Theories of selection must be applied to the mechanism by which the stock of places is created over the life span of an individual. Existing intergration theories may be inappropriate, however, because of the inability of decisionmakers to integrate all factors for all places at one point in time. Instead, a long-term modification of elimination by aspects may be appropriate as follows: Places are "discovered" through friends/relatives, travel, and other fortuitous circumstances, then eliminated one at a time according to attributes that are important to the individual at a given stage in the life cycle. Thus, key attributes (and therefore the places in the stock that survive) may be determined by needs and preferences associated with particular life cycle stages. The places surviving when a decision to move is being contemplated are the ones that enter the ultimate selection process. A variety of additional psychological decision theories may be appropriate; but, in

any case, the possibility that different decision rules are most applicable to different stages of the process is very real.

In addition to tests of the theories discussed above and/or other possible decision rules, three procedures for future surveys of metropolitan-to-nonmetropolitan migration are suggested. First, careful identification of the individual decision maker(s) and, if more than one, the role played by each. Identification of the role would include both the relative quantity and quality of input into the actual decision, plus the degree to which the preferences, needs, and location-specific capital of each individual entered into the final decision. There is little point in first screening for the household head, a vague concept at best these days, assuming that the head was the principal decision maker when a variety of other possibilities exist.

Secondly, a variety of structuring of "factors" needs to be built into both the instruments used and the analyses of survey data. In general, several factors should be elicited, or rated, rather than forcing the "most important" only. The range of factors should address the situation surounding and the factors behind both the decision to move and the destination selection decision. Destination factors should be stratified by economic/noneconomic and micro/macro for two reasons: to assess the relative importance of each, and to assess in a multiple factor framework the interplay of each with one another.

Third, a migration-relevant life history would be a valuable addition to surveys of either potential or recent nonmetropolitanbound migrants. A life history documentation methodology proposed by Balan, Browning, Jelin and Litzler (1969) would allow rather complete temporal/spatial accounting of the stock of potential destinations an individual has collected. In this method, the researcher in an interview mode attempts to fill out the entire matrix, in which rows are time periods and columns are migrationrelevant experiences such as previous residential locations, vacation experiences, location of property owned, locations of friends and relatives, and so forth. For cells that the respondent finds difficult to fill, references are made back and forth between columns to utilize the respondent's ability to associate events with one another in time. Subsequent analysis of this matrix would, among other things, be directed toward understanding why some places were in the stock of realistic destinations but later disappeared, whereas others persisted and were seriously considered at some point in time.

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