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Population change in England since 1981: Is an 'urban renaissance' really underway?

A.G. Champion

Emeritus Professor of Population Geography

University of Newcastle upon Tyne

## Population change in England since 1981: Is an 'urban renaissance' really underway?

### Abstract

It is almost 10 years since the UK government published *Towards an Urban Renaissance*. This paper assesses the extent to which a turnaround in the fortunes of English cities has occurred in recent years, using population estimates for 1981-2006. Population change rates are compared over time for 56 cities defined on the principle of built-up urban area and for a 10-fold classification of England based on settlement size and regional location. In aggregate, urban England is found to have achieved a steady acceleration in growth over the 25-year period, but since the early 1990s this has merely been tracking the national trend with no diminution in the growth-rate gap with the faster growing towns and rural areas. Also, a major contrast exists between London and the principal regional centres.

## **Introduction**

It is almost 10 years since the UK government published the Final Report of its Urban Task Force entitled *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (Rogers Report, 1999), which provided the basis of the policy proposals put forward in its Urban White Paper (DETR, 2000). Moreover, three decades have now elapsed since the major shift in national urban policy that involved the official recognition of the ‘inner city’ and urban decline as the central problems of spatial planning, along with the decision to wind down the New Towns programme (Cullingworth and Nadin, 1997; Robson, 1988). Moreover, quite widely across the more developed world, there has recently been much talk about ‘resurgent cities’ (see, for instance, Cheshire, 2006; Parkinson et al, 2006; Turok and Mykhnenko, 2007).

The purpose of this paper is to assess the extent to which there has been a turnaround in the fortunes of English cities in the last few years. This assessment is based on patterns of population change, reflecting the importance attached by both policy makers and academics to improving the attractiveness of cities as places to live in (Rogers Report, 1999; Florida, 2002). As such, it represents a revision and updating of one aspect of the results presented in the *State of the English Cities* report (Parkinson et al., 2006). Since the work for that report was done, the series of population estimates on which it was based have been revised. Moreover, it is now possible to track the patterns of population change up to 2006 compared to the end date of 2003 for the analyses in that report.

The remainder of the paper is in six parts. The next section briefly reviews the current debate about urban decline and resurgence. The following one justifies the choice of

population data to measure the changing fortunes of English cities and describes the methodology of the study, providing background to the data source used and the definition of cities covered. The study's results are described in three sections, first looking at the overall picture of population change and its demographic components for the five-year period 2001-2006, then setting this in the context of longer-term trends in order to identify the extent of any improvement in fortunes and, thirdly, examining contrasts between the inner and outer areas within cities. It ends with a discussion about the likely significance of the findings.

### **City decline and resurgence**

According to Storper and Manville (2006, p. 1269), 'For almost as long as we have had cities, we have predictions of their decline and, for almost as long ..., we have had prophecies of resurgence.' Recent years have seen the latter in the ascendancy, with cities being identified as sites of renewed economic dynamism and engines of national prosperity (OECD, 2001; Parkinson *et al.*, 2006). This view of cities has been endorsed at national and European policy levels to the point where it has been described as 'a new conventional wisdom' (Buck *et al.*, 2005). Yet, according to Cheshire (2006), there have tended to be more 'urban myths and policy hubris' in the debate than there is hard evidence. Reporting on a symposium held in 2004, he felt able to report as follows: 'Contributions showed that city resurgence was a hard concept to define precisely and the evidence suggested that, although happening in some urban contexts, it was ... far from universal, even uncommon' (p. 1231).

Since then, a major study by Turok and Mykhendo (2007) has greatly increased the evidence base by charting the population change trajectories of 310 European cities

with at least 200,000 inhabitants for the 45 years from 1960 to 2005. Taking the long term view, it appears that city fortunes have been waning. Nearly three times as many cities were growing in the 1960s compared to the late 1990s, by when there were more cities in decline than growing. In the shorter term, however, several indicators suggest something of a recovery between 1995-2000 and 2000-2005, especially in the western half of Europe. While it was felt to be too soon to say whether this recent uplift would be any more enduring than a short-lived one that they observed for the early 1990s, one potentially important development they identified in the latest period was that, on average, the larger cities were now performing somewhat more strongly than the smaller ones, reversing the negative relationship between size and growth that had pertained till the mid 1990s.

Previous evidence for the UK (Champion and Fisher, 2004; Champion, 2006) suggests a considerably more positive trend than for Europe as a whole, especially for England's larger cities, but this is mainly because of the depths to which their fortunes had plunged. Between 1971 and 1981 Greater London and England's six metropolitan counties had seen their combined population fall by 1.25 million, whereas the following 20 years saw an increase of 25,000 people. On the other hand, this overall stabilisation of population was found to mask significant differences between cities, especially between London and the principal regional cities. The population recovery of the former was truly remarkable, with its loss of around 750,000 people in 1971-1981 being followed by a gain of half a million in the 20 years to 2001. By contrast, by 2001 the six metropolitan counties together contained 478,000 fewer residents than in 1981, with the population of their central cities (Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool,

Manchester, Newcastle upon Tyne and Sheffield) sustaining an aggregate loss of 214,000 over the 20 years.

The main report of the *State of the English Cities* study (Parkinson *et al.*, 2006) drew similar conclusions. Drawing on a range of population, employment, social and attitudinal data, it found ‘a lot of good news’ (vol. 2, p. 115). Many English cities had been found to have picked up in terms of their demographic, economic and social performance in recent years. This was seen as consistent with the international evidence in support of a ‘sea change in how cities are regarded’, with cities increasingly being seen as the dynamos of national and regional economies rather than as liabilities (vol. 1, p. 9). On the other hand, the process of resurgence was recognised as uneven, with London and other cities in the south and east of England performing better than cities in the north and west that were still being disadvantaged by their industrial legacies. While many of the latter were found to be picking up in terms of absolute numbers, in relative terms they were generally falling further behind their southern counterparts and were still facing considerable challenges in achieving sustainable growth.

### **Aim and approach of the study**

This paper builds on the work carried out for the *State of the English Cities* report, reviewed above. Its aim is to provide both a more focused and a more up-to-date assessment of the recent performance of England’s cities, by concentrating on the evidence of population change and by using the latest versions of the official population estimates that run through to 2006. This section justifies the choice of population data for measuring the changing fortunes of English cities and goes on to

describe the methodology of the study, including the data source used and the definition of the 56 cities.

Population change is commonly viewed as a key indicator of urban performance. Though obviously it does not provide a full picture of urban change, it is important for two reasons, as spelt out by Turok and Mykhnenko (2007). First, it is an important consequence of urban conditions, most notably as migration decisions are influenced by differences between places in such aspects as employment and quality of life. Second, population change is also an important influence on urban conditions, as demographic trends impact on the size and composition of the residential population, with knock-on effects on local purchasing power, on size and quality of the labour force and on confidence in the future of business investment and house prices. More pragmatically, as also acknowledged by this and other previous studies of urban change (see, for instance, Cheshire and Hay, 1989), population is used partly for reasons of data availability, as it is usually much easier to compile data sets consistently over time for this than for economic statistics.

The population data used for this study of English cities comprises the official population estimates. The latter have two great advantages over data from the population census. First, they provide an annual series and are thus not limited to the once-every-ten-years snapshot of the census. Second, the estimates made allowance for differences between censuses in such crucial considerations as census coverage and population definition. For instance, the published data from the 1991 census suffered so much from underenumeration, as reflected in the debates about the ‘missing million’ at that time, that the data published from the 2001 census were

actually estimates that attempted to allow for coverage problems in what was called the One Number Census approach (Diamond *et al.*, 2003). The biggest change in population definition in the 2001 census compared to previous ones was the decision to treat students as being usually resident at their term-time address rather than at their vacation, normally parental, address (Smith *et al.*, 2003).

The main disadvantage of the official estimates is that they do not provide the great geographical detail of the census, but instead are traditionally produced only for the rather crude geography of local and health authority areas. Even in this respect, however, there is the bonus that the annual estimates are available for a consistent set of geographical areas going back as far as 1981. This is because, although the local administrative geography has altered over time, the estimates for the earlier years have been updated to the latest set of area boundaries.

As regards the selection of cities, this study follows the approach used in the *State of the English Cities* report, which was agreed through lengthy discussions with the central government department which commissioned that work. The definition of a city is based on the principle of physically built-up urban areas, or ‘agglomeration’ approach, as recommended by the United Nations (1998). The only modification is that, where two or more relatively separate labour markets are joined together in a single urban area by just a narrow corridor of urban development, these are split into their ‘primary’ units. A size cut-off was also imposed on the urban-area database, such that any Primary Urban Area (PUA) should contain at least 125,000 residents in 2001. On this basis, England contains 56 PUAs which were then classified into three groups on the basis of urban status and size, as follows: Metropolitan comprising

London and the six main cities of the former metropolitan counties (referred to below as ‘London and the Mets’), 17 Large Cities comprising other PUAs with a 2001 population of 275,000 and over, and the remaining 32 Small Cities. It should be noted that, although these cities were originally defined in terms of small census-based building blocks, in this study (as was also the case for the *State of the English Cities* report) they are represented by the best fit of local authorities in order to permit the use of the population estimates data.

This city grouping also forms the basis of a 10-fold typology of the whole of England. The part of the country not included in one of the 56 cities is split into two categories on the basis of whether or not a local authority contains a large town, differentiating Large Towns from a Small Towns and Rural type. Along with the three city types, the resultant five-way division of England was further disaggregated by reference to broad regional location. This distinguishes cities in the North and West of England from those in the South and East, with the dividing line being the official regional boundaries such that the latter half of the country comprises London, the South East, the South West, the East of England and the East Midlands. This framework is used in the present study to give an overview of population trends across the nation’s two main spatial divides (see below).

### **The overall picture of population change in 2001-2006**

The first question that this paper addresses is about how strongly England’s cities have been performing compared to the rest of the country in terms of recent population change. We leave to the following section the question of how this compares with their previous experience.

Table 1 shows the distribution of England's total population between cities and the rest of the country as it stood in 2001, as well as how national population growth of the following 5 years was spread. In 2001 the 56 Cities identified for this study (see previous section) contained a combined population of 28.8 million, accounting for 58% of England's 49.5 million total. Between 2001 and 2006 their population grew by just over 600,000, which represented just under 46% of England's total growth of 1,313,200 people. Therefore, at this time the Cities were not pulling their full weight in terms of population growth. The remainder of the country – Towns & Rural – was responsible for 54% of England's population growth, though making up barely two-fifths of its population in 2001. its annual average rate of growth of 0.69% was more than half as much again as the 0.42% of the Cities.

Table 1 about here

Table 1 also breaks down this information by the 5-fold grouping by urban status and size. This allows the examination of whether the largest cities are performing more or less strongly than the smaller cities. First, it is found that none of the three Cities groups had been pulling their full weight between 2001 and 2006, all of them making a contribution to national population growth that was below their share of total population in 2001. As regards the relative growth rates of the three Cities groups, however, the picture is a mixed one. London and the 6 Mets in aggregate saw their populations grow faster than did the Large Cities over this period, but the Small Cities recorded the highest growth rate of the three groups. On the other hand, when this differential performance of the Cities is set within the context of the full 5-fold

grouping, then it is London & Mets that appears anomalous. Generally, the rate of growth is inversely related to settlement size, rising progressively from the 0.37% for Large Cities to 0.46% for Small Cities, then to 0.60% for Large Towns and reaching 0.75% for the Small Towns & Rural category. This 'counterurbanisation' relationship, however, does not hold for the London & Mets category, which on this basis is performing considerably more strongly than would be expected from that pattern.

Figure 1 takes the analysis a step further by incorporating the broad regional division that produces the full 10-fold typology. Perhaps the most impressive feature here is the poor performance of the North and West. None of the 5 types for this part of the country exceeds the growth rate of its counterpart in the South and East and, indeed, none manages to match the national growth rate. On the other hand, there is a strong similarity between the two parts of the country in the patterning of population growth across the 5 types. Paralleling the England-wide picture shown in Table 1, a clear counterurbanisation relationship exists across most of the range, but it is broken by the stronger than expected growth of the highest urban status groups of London in the South and East and the Mets in the North and West.

Figure 1 about here

Some insight into the dynamics behind these patterns can be obtained by examining the separate roles of the main components of change. The data available for this period allows a breakdown into three primary components of change, namely natural increase (the surplus of births over deaths), international migration (defined here as the net gain of people through movement into and out of the UK) and net within-UK

migration (including population exchanges with Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). The average annual rates of population change generated by each of these three components are plotted for the 10-fold typology in Figure 2.

Figure 2 about here

Figure 2 reveals that over this period it was international migration that the main generator of population growth for the three Cities types in both broad regions. All these six types of Cities also achieved a surplus of births over deaths, but in each case the contribution of natural increase was smaller than that of net immigration. It can also be seen that in each part of England the growth rates for all three Cities types were higher than for both the Large Towns and Small Towns & Rural types. Clearly, it is in relation to their migration exchanges with the rest of the UK that the Cities are disadvantaged in growth terms. Over this period a net within-UK migration loss was registered by all three Cities types in the South and East, especially by the London urban area, and by all but the Small Cities type in the North and West. By contrast, it was this component that was primarily responsible for the population gains of the non-city types. Indeed, the Small Towns & Rural type in the North and West lost population through both natural decrease and net international emigration, and that in the South and East also experienced natural decrease.

Figure 2 also helps to explain the relationship between overall population growth rate and urban size that we have observed in Table 1 and Figure 1. This can now be seen to have been driven entirely by within-UK migration. This is particularly marked in the South and East, where almost 2 percentage points separate the high rate of internal

migratory loss of London from the substantial gain rate of the Small Towns & Rural type and where the rate rises progressively with reducing urban size. A similar, though less steep, gradient of net within-UK migration rates is also found in the North and West. By contrast, for the international migration component, there is a strong positive relationship with urban size in both parts of the country, while there is a similar, though somewhat less regular, pattern for natural increase.

The direct reasons for London and the Mets having higher rates of overall population growth than expected from the general counterurbanisation relationship can also be seen from Figure 2. Comparing the performance for London with that of the South and East's Large Cities reveals that the former's higher rates of both international migration gain and natural increase more than offset the effect of Large Cities having much the lower rate of net migratory loss to the rest of the UK. In the North and West, it is entirely the international migration component that accounts for the Mets having a somewhat higher overall population growth rate than the Large Cities despite the latter having the lower rate of within-UK net loss, as their two natural increase rates are identical.

In sum, looking at the post-2001 period of population change on its own for this urban-size-based classification of England, there is only very limited evidence of city resurgence. It comes primarily in the form of London and the Mets both achieving a higher overall growth rate than the Large Cities in their respective parts of the country. This has been found to be due primarily to the greater attractiveness of England's largest cities for net immigration from outside the UK, plus stronger natural increase in the case of London. Otherwise, there remains a clear and regular

counterurbanisation pattern in the differences in overall population growth across both parts of England, and it is one that is driven entirely by within-UK migration. This suggests that, whatever progress has been made by the cities up till 2006, all but the latest arrivals are still voting with their feet in favour of smaller cities, towns and especially more rural districts in choosing where they wish to live.

### **Longer-term population trends**

Set in a longer-term perspective, the results described above already indicate that a major degree of city resurgence has occurred. The fact that the latest estimates indicate the achievement of overall population growth for both London and the Mets – indeed their gaining almost a third of a million residents in 5 years – stands in stark contrast to the experience of the 1970s when, as noted earlier, London and the 6 former metropolitan counties saw their combined populations drop by almost one and a quarter million. The question addressed in this section concerns the trajectories of change since that very challenging earlier period and, in particular, whether there has been a sustained and perhaps accelerating recovery since the beginning of the 1980s.

For this purpose, we take advantage of the annual series of population estimates being available on a consistent basis of geography and population definition going back to 1981. Unfortunately, this source does not provide a breakdown by components of change for that far back in time. However, by also allowing for fluctuations over time in the national rate of population change, it is possible to monitor change in the relative performance of the different urban-size groups. The overall picture is shown in Table 2, which compares the annual average change rates for 5-year periods since 1981 including the most recent one already discussed in the previous section. .

Table 2 about here

Focusing first on all 56 cities as a single category (shown in the second data row of Table 2), there is found to be a progressive rise in their overall rate of population change across 5 periods. The change from loss to gain actually took place during the 1980s, but the rate of growth has moved upwards between each subsequent period and indeed has accelerated progressively. It stepped up by 0.04 percentage points between 1986-1991 and 1991-1996, then by 0.11 points and most recently by 0.15 points to its 0.42% level in 2001-2006. By contrast, population growth for the remainder of England, as constituted by the Towns & Rural category, rose only marginally during the 1980s and actually fell back significantly in the early 1990s before accelerating again in the last two periods.

On the other hand, it is also apparent from Table 2 (top data row) that the population growth rate for England as a whole has risen fairly regularly across the 5 periods, more than tripling by 2001-2006 compared to its average of 0.16% in 1981-86. If one allows for this national trend by representing the change rates in terms of percentage point deviation from the national rates (as in the lower panel of Table 2), the relative performance of the 56 cities comes across in a considerably different light. Now it would appear that the relative improvement of the cities had been completed by the early 1990s. By then, they had clawed their way back to an annual average growth rate that was only 0.10 percentage point below the national rate, having been 0.23 points below it in 1981-86. Since 1991-1996 there has been no further narrowing of the gap between the cities and the national rate, at least on the basis of these 5-year

averages. In other words, the acceleration in England's city growth since then has been entirely due to the national uplift in population growth rate.

The same stability in relative performance since the early 1990s is also found for the Towns & Rural category. Initially, this part of England was outpacing the national growth rate by 0.34 percentage points, but the differential had fallen back to 0.15 points by 1991-1996 and has remained at close to this level through to 2006. In recent years, therefore, this category, too, has been tracking the national trend, thus maintaining its considerably stronger position compared with the cities. Whereas the growth rate difference between Cities and Towns & Rural dropped from 0.57 percentage points in 1981-1986 to 0.25 points in 1991-1996, it has fallen no further since then, indeed widening marginally to 0.27 points.

Table 2 also provides the equivalent data for the 5 size groups. Comparing the growth rate of the 5 groups for each period, it is found that the departure from the perfect counterurbanisation relationship by London and the Mets in 2001-2006 (as observed in the previous section) is a relatively new development. In 1981-1986 there had been a regular increase in growth rate with falling size across all 5 groups and this can be seen to have remained in place through to the first half of the 1990s, though the range between the two ends of the spectrum had narrowed markedly by this time. It was in 1996-2001 that London and the Mets overtook not only the Large Cities but also the Small Cities, though the latter's rate again exceeded that of London and the Mets in 2001-2006.

Comparing the performance of each size group against the national rate (by looking along the rows in the bottom panel of Table 2), London and the Mets improved so much since the beginning of the 1980s that they had almost closed the gap on the national rate by 1996-2001, but then slipped back towards their relative position of the early 1990s. By contrast, the Large Cities have merged as the weakest of the three Cities groups, with a particularly marked deterioration in their relative position between the first and second halves of the 1990s. Meanwhile, the Small Cities, after slipping back in relative performance in 1991-1996, have seen their growth rate stabilise at a little below the national one. The two Towns groups are the only ones to have maintained consistently higher growth than the national rate over the 5 periods, though since 1991 the gap has been much smaller than it had been previously.

Finally, Figure 3 examines the regional dimension to these trends in relative performance for the 5 size groups. The broad distinction between a stronger South and East and a weaker North and West – which originated in the first half of the last century – clearly remains a very important one. In the latter, Figure 3 reveals only three instances of faster growth than the national rate, these being for the three smallest size groups in 1986-1991. By contrast, in the South and East, there are no cases of the rate for the three smallest size groups growing at below the national rate, though the picture is more mixed for London and Large Cities there.

Figure 3 about here

The most remarkable feature of the trends across the 5 periods is London's population recovery from below-average growth in 1981-1986 to becoming the fastest growing

of all 10 region/size types in 1996-2001. Possibly almost as remarkable, however, is the subsequent collapse of its growth relative to the national rate, especially as this took place at a time when the Mets registered a substantial uplift in rate. The latter followed two periods of only modest improvement relative to the national rate up to 1991-1996 and then the substantial setback of 1996-2001. As regards the Large Cities, those in the North and West saw the same degree of setback as the Mets in 1996-2001, while those in the South and East have been tracking the national rate pretty closely since the mid 1980s. The three smallest size groups in the South and East were also at their strongest relative to the national rate in 1981-1986 and, since then, have seen their rates adopt a more pronounced counterurbanisation gradient, most notably as the Small Cities' growth has fallen back towards the national rate.

### **Performances of the individual cities**

Thus far, the paper has not examined the case of any individual cities apart from London. The separate treatment of the latter can, of course, be justified by reason of its huge size, with the 8.5 million population of its urban area being more than the number of residents living in the urban areas of the 6 Mets combined and making it considerably larger than any of the other four Cities categories. This section therefore looks at the experience of the 56 cities individually. As there is not space to deal with all of these in any detail, the main focus is on the Mets, where the aim is to see how varied the performances of these regional cities have been and whether any of them has managed to match London's resurgence. The other 47 cities are examined more briefly.

The population growth rates for London and the individual Mets are shown in Table 3 on the same basis as used for the size groups in Table 2. Perhaps the most impressive feature of these results is the fact that in 2006 the number of residents was higher than in 2001 for all but one of the Mets, the exception being the Liverpool urban area. This represents a major departure from the picture of almost universal and continuous decline that dates back to 1981 according to the data here and that was even more entrenched in the 1970s according to other sources (Champion and Fisher, 2004; Gordon, 1986). Before 2001, only Leeds had given any clear indication of the possibility of a turnaround in fortunes along the lines of London's resurgence in the later 1980s.

Table 3 about here

When the recent resurgence is matched against the national trend, the position reached by the Mets in 2001-2006 does not appear so positive. On this basis (lower panel of Table 3), only Leeds saw its population growing faster than the England rate then. Nevertheless, even after allowing for the uplift in England's rate, there was a substantial relative improvement for all 6 cities between the last two periods. It was greatest for Leeds, which switched from a rate that was 0.39 percentage points below the national rate in 1996-2001 to one that was 0.44 points above it in 2001-2006, an upward shift of 0.83 points. The upward shift was over 0.50 points for Newcastle and Sheffield, over 0.40 points for Birmingham and Manchester, and 0.27 points for Liverpool.

Figure 4 shows how these changes have played out on an annual basis since 1991, using the actual population growth rates rather than the deviations from the national rate. It is impressive how similarly the rates for the 6 Mets have moved over this 15-year period, especially by comparison with London. Though there is some fluctuation from year to year, the Mets' rates appear to have passed their nadir around 1998 and moved smartly upwards for a couple of years at the same time as London's rate plummeted. Subsequently, the 7 cities appear to have followed the same broad path, mirroring the national trend of accelerated growth to 2004-2005 followed by a slowdown in the final year that affected all these cities apart from Manchester.

Figure 4 about here

Finally, Table 4 summarises the patterns for the 6 Cities groups in terms of whether the populations of their member cities grew or shrank in each of the 5 periods. For the Large Cities, the two groups emphasise the big difference between the two broad regions, with the majority of those in the South and West gaining population in all periods but with a significantly weaker performance by those in the North and West. The same is broadly the case for the Small Cities, though 1996-2001 was a less successful phase for those in the South and East according to this evidence while those in the North and West have performed much more strongly since 2001 apart from a temporary resurgence in 1986-1991. Regional economic cycles, as well as the national population trends, will have played their part in these patterns, as will be discussed on the final section.

Table 4 about here

## **Concluding discussion**

This paper has examined whether an urban renaissance is underway in England, using official estimates of population change which are on a consistent basis from 1981.

The headline findings are positive, in that the nation's largest cities are now performing much more strongly than in the 1970s and, in aggregate, the 56 cities studied here have registered a steady acceleration in growth between 1981-1986 and 2001-2006. The latter, on the other hand, is found to be merely tracking the national trajectory, with the pace of urban-to-rural population shift altering little since the early 1990s. At the same time, the plummeting of London's growth rate around the turn of the century after two decades of remarkable recovery calls into question the longer-term sustainability of the general upturn in city fortunes, including how long the recent resurgence of the largest northern cities is likely to continue.

One key factor would appear to be the scale and nature of international migration. According to the evidence of Figure 2, this component has played an extremely important role in the recent growth of all the city types. It also has a knock-on effect on natural increase, given that immigrants are primarily of young working age and from countries with higher fertility than the England norm. On this basis, it would seem that the urban resurgence would be vulnerable to any reduction in net immigration. On the other hand, in that eventuality it might be that the exodus from cities to towns and rural areas would then diminish, given the inverse relationship found between the levels of international migration and within-UK migration across the 10 region/size types. Certainly, the *State of the English Cities* report (Parkinson *et al.*, 2006) provides ample evidence on the rising degree of confidence in cities among

business and residents alike, as does research on the repopulation of the more central parts of cities (Bromley *et al.*, 2007; Nathan and Urwin, 2005).

Another important consideration is the economic situation. The past 15 years has seen one of the longest economic booms ever recorded in the UK, but there are now signs that this is coming to an end. In particular, the recent slowing of London's growth in parallel with the rising fortunes of the provincial cities is in keeping with the experience of previous regional economic cycles, again being associated with the regular 'house price ripple' that starts in London and then works its way out across the nation. Having benefited in the last few years from both this cyclical effect and England's higher international migration, the cities of the North and West of England may well be facing a more challenging future. Certainly, research – albeit being rather dated because of being based on the 2001 census – suggests that many of these cities are still losing their better qualified young people to the London region, as well as seeing a continued loss of wealthier residents to the smaller towns and rural areas in their regions (Champion *et al.*, 2006).

It will be interesting to see how the prospects for city and countryside develop in England over the next few years and beyond. Nevertheless, the results reported here raise research issues that can be followed up more immediately. One important step would be to build up a longer-term picture of the dynamics of population change, starting by trying to plug the current gap in official statistics and separate out the natural change, international migration and within-UK migration components back to 1981. Secondly, while population data are seen as both a key reflection and a principal driver of the economic performance of places, analyses using employment

data can provide additional insights into the underlying changes in regional and urban space economies. There is also scope for more in-depth work that compares the 56 cities individually and relates their varying fortunes to differences between them in other characteristics besides size and regional location, not least their industrial and occupational structures and trajectories.

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Table 1. Population, 2001, and population change, 2001-2006: England and size groups

Size groups	Population 2001		Population change 2001-2006		
	000s	% England	000s	% England	%/year
England	49449.7	100.0	1313.2	100.0	0.53
Cities	28807.9	58.3	601.7	45.8	0.42
Towns & Rural	20641.9	41.7	711.5	54.2	0.69
London & Mets	15603.2	31.6	327.8	25.0	0.42
Large Cities	6771.8	13.7	125.5	9.6	0.37
Small Cities	6432.9	13.0	148.4	11.3	0.46
Large Towns	7787.2	15.7	232.9	17.7	0.60
Small Towns & Rural	12854.6	26.0	478.7	36.4	0.75

Source: calculated from data supplied by the Office for National Statistics. Crown copyright data.

Table 2. Population change, 1981-1986 to 2001-2006: England and size groups

	1981-1986	1986-1991	1991-1996	1996-2001	2001-2006
<b>%/year</b>					
England	0.16	0.29	0.27	0.38	0.53
Cities	-0.07	0.12	0.16	0.27	0.42
Towns & Rural	0.50	0.54	0.42	0.54	0.69
London & Mets	-0.26	-0.01	0.15	0.36	0.42
Large Cities	0.06	0.13	0.17	0.03	0.37
Small Cities	0.27	0.45	0.20	0.31	0.46
Large Towns	0.37	0.44	0.34	0.40	0.60
Small Towns & Rural	0.57	0.60	0.46	0.63	0.75
<b>% point difference from England</b>					
England	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Cities	-0.23	-0.17	-0.10	-0.11	-0.11
Towns & Rural	0.34	0.25	0.15	0.16	0.16
London & Mets	-0.42	-0.30	-0.12	-0.02	-0.11
Large Cities	-0.10	-0.16	-0.09	-0.36	-0.16
Small Cities	0.12	0.16	-0.07	-0.08	-0.07
Large Towns	0.22	0.14	0.07	0.02	0.07
Small Towns & Rural	0.41	0.31	0.20	0.25	0.21

Source: calculated from data supplied by the Office for National Statistics. Crown copyright data.

Table 3. Population change, 1981-1986 to 2001-2006: England, London and the Mets

	1981-1986	1986-1991	1991-1996	1996-2001	2001-2006
<b>%/year</b>					
England	0.16	0.29	0.27	0.38	0.53
London	-0.08	0.14	0.41	0.93	0.50
Birmingham	-0.23	-0.10	-0.13	-0.30	0.25
Leeds	-0.32	0.01	0.26	-0.01	0.97
Liverpool	-1.03	-0.60	-0.47	-0.55	-0.13
Manchester	-0.51	-0.09	-0.21	-0.19	0.37
Newcastle	-0.48	-0.23	-0.07	-0.55	0.12
Sheffield	-0.42	-0.25	-0.12	-0.20	0.46
<b>% point difference from England</b>					
England	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
London	-0.24	-0.15	0.14	0.55	-0.03
Birmingham	-0.39	-0.39	-0.40	-0.68	-0.28
Leeds	-0.47	-0.29	-0.01	-0.39	0.44
Liverpool	-1.19	-0.89	-0.74	-0.93	-0.66
Manchester	-0.67	-0.39	-0.48	-0.58	-0.16
Newcastle	-0.63	-0.52	-0.34	-0.93	-0.41
Sheffield	-0.58	-0.54	-0.39	-0.58	-0.07

Source: calculated from data supplied by the Office for National Statistics. Crown copyright data.

Table 4. Number of cities experiencing population growth, 1981-1986 to 2001-2006, by region/size group

Region/size group (total number of cities)	1981-1986	1986-1991	1991-1996	1996-2001	2001-2006
<b>South and East</b>					
London (1)	0	1	1	1	1
Large Cities (8)	7	8	8	6	7
Small Cities (19)	18	17	13	17	18
<b>North and West</b>					
Mets (6)	0	1	1	0	5
Large Cities (9)	1	5	4	2	7
Small Cities (13)	5	12	8	8	12

Source: calculated from data supplied by the Office for National Statistics. Crown copyright data.

Figure 1. Average annual rate of overall population change, 2001-2006: England and 10 region/size groups

Source: calculated from data supplied by the Office for National Statistics. Crown copyright data.

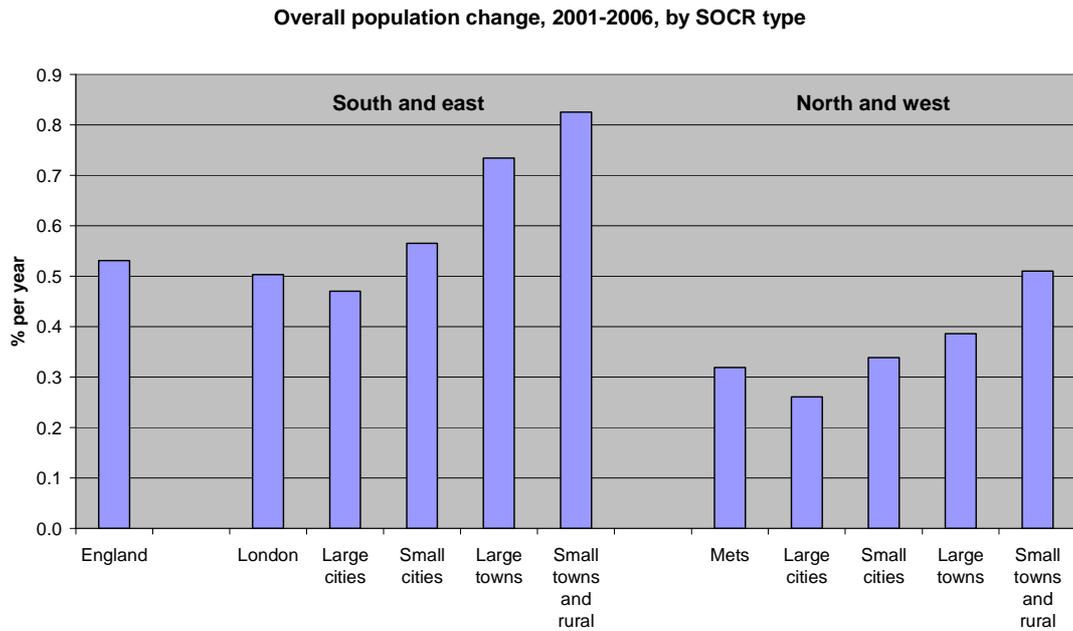


Figure 2. Annual average rate of population change due to natural change, international migration and within-UK migration, 2001-2006: 10 region/size groups  
 Source: calculated from data supplied by the Office for National Statistics. Crown copyright data.

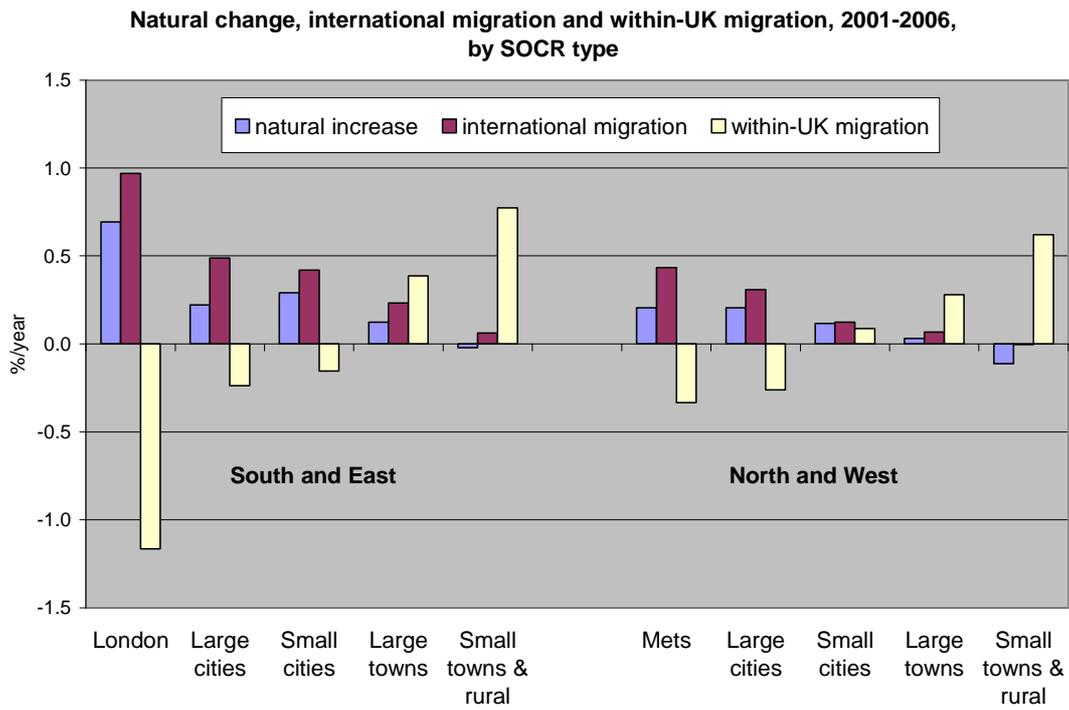


Figure 3. Population change, 1981-1986 to 2001-2006, expressed as percentage point difference from the England rate: 10 region/size groups

Source: calculated from data supplied by the Office for National Statistics. Crown copyright data.

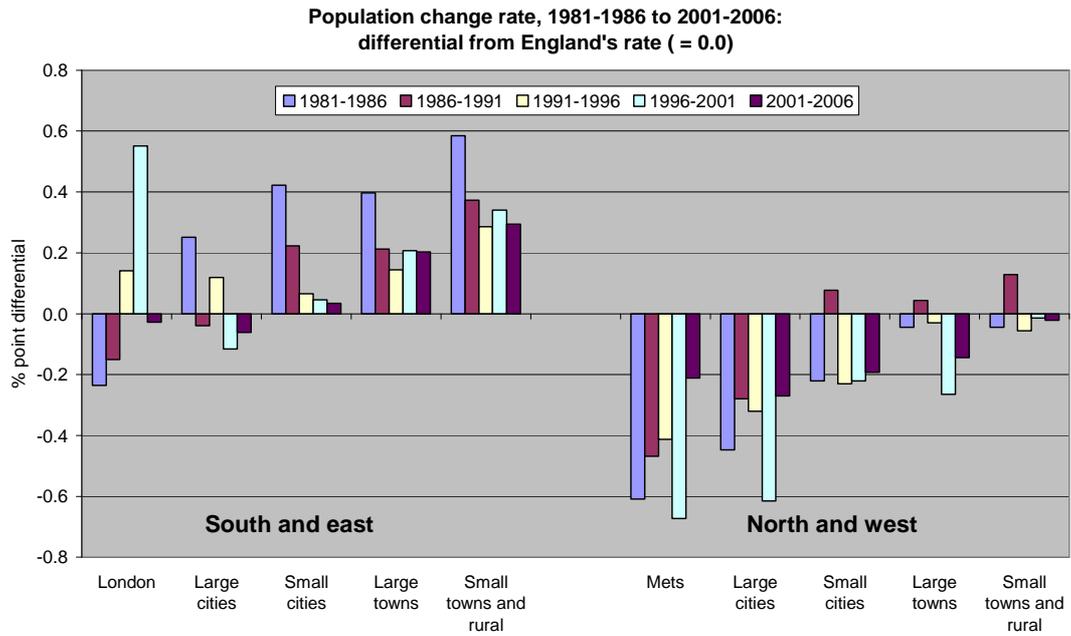


Figure 4. Annual average rate of population change, 1981-2006: London and the Mets  
 Source: calculated from data supplied by the Office for National Statistics. Crown copyright data.

