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Belgians on the move

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Belgians on the move

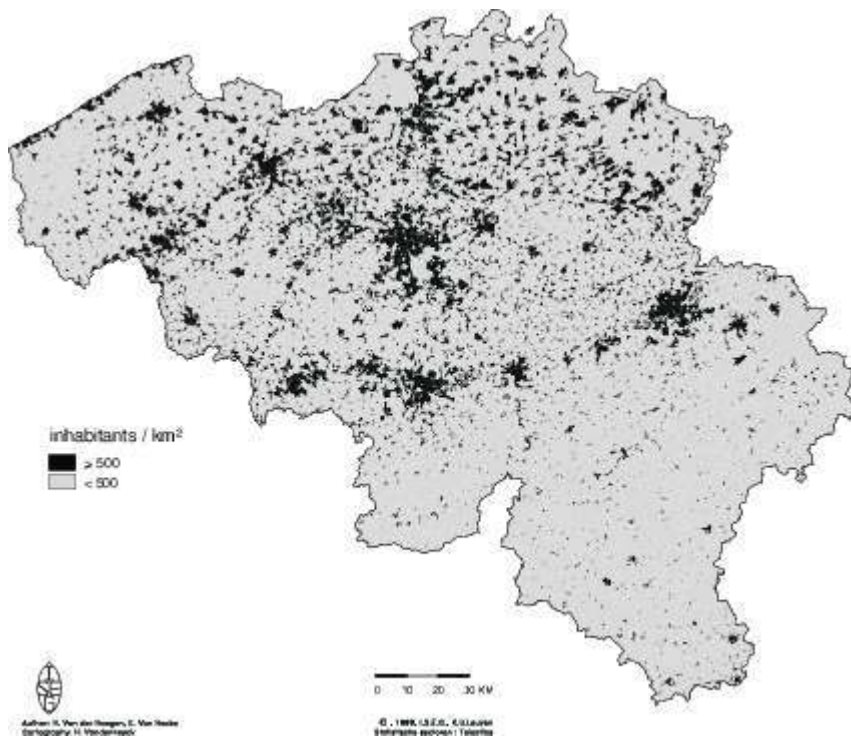
Population distribution from a historical and modern perspective

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The basic pattern of distribution

- 1 The most recent and also the most detailed map (Van der Haegen, 1999) shows the geographical distribution of the population in all its rich variety per neighbourhood. Since there are approximately 19,000 neighbourhoods compared with the 589 municipalities (maximum number reached in 1928: 2,675 municipalities), previously the smallest unit, the density of the population is shown with a never before reached precision. Figure 1 therefore shows those neighbourhoods, which have more than 500 inhabitants per km². It clearly indicates the morphological urbanisation of our country.

Figure 1. Density of population.



- 2 This distribution is mainly, as elsewhere in Western Europe, historically determined. The physical environment and the agricultural systems were important factors, but also the industrial and urban development were essential elements to explain the geographical distribution of the population. The great contrast between the north and the south, particularly the low population density to the south of the Sambre and the Meuse compared with the density in the north of the country, can essentially be attributed to the environment. The soil and climatic conditions offer far fewer opportunities for agricultural development in the Ardennes than in Flanders. This has resulted in small islands of cultivation in a natural landscape of the Ardennes (heathland and later particularly woodland).
- 3 The contrasts to this pattern can be seen in the centre and north of the country. There the population distribution can particularly be attributed to the agricultural systems of the past. For example, in the early cultivated, fertile Hesbaye, the three-field system was able to be fully developed and was used for a long time in fully grown villages because of its efficiency, so that the pattern of small villages in an open, empty landscape still prevails in many places and is clearly visible on the map. In Binnen-Vlaanderen, the poorer soil as well as impulses from the large network of towns resulted from the Middle Ages onwards in the general cultivation of less fertile ground and strong demographic growth. A scattered population prevailed, with very early individual business management soon leading to more intensive forms of agriculture as well as homeworking in the textile sector. The textile tradition, together with the existing population potential, would form the basis for a very varied and widely dispersed manufacturing industry in the 19th and 20th centuries, which experienced a particularly dynamic growth in the south of Flanders. The harbours of Zeebrugge and Ghent gave new incentives to the industrialisation and stimulated the change to new activities in these urban areas.

- 4 The existence of rich mineral reserves, primarily pit coal, was the main reason for busy and varied industrial activities in the Walloon axis. This Walloon axis stretches from the Borinage to Liège and is one of the most densely populated areas of Belgium. The growth in industry and population took place at a fast rate particularly from the 19th century onwards, with many new urban centres such as Charleroi emerging alongside existing towns such as Liège, which were given a new impulse. Growth was only possible as a result of the settlement of workers from the whole of the Walloon region and Flanders. After the Second World War in particular, the settlement of migrants from the Mediterranean region was very important in maintaining the traditional activities and the population level.
- 5 The highest concentration of population is found in the centre of the country. As a result of its administrative function, Brussels has since the 19th century developed from being the capital of a centralised country to becoming the principal commercial and service centre as well as an important transport and industrial centre. The morphologically strongly expanding growth was only possible as a result of massive settlement from the whole of the country, which was very soon supplemented by considerable levels of commuting. After the Second World War, its development into the European capital would lead to new streams of migrants, firstly from Walloon reconversion areas and later from the whole of Europe, with both guest workers from the Mediterranean region as well as more specialised workers from the service sector in Northern and Western Europe settling in the towns in large numbers and compensating for the urban exodus of Belgians.
- 6 The second largest urban agglomeration, Antwerp, grew particularly as a result of its harbour, which achieved international importance in the 15th century and again from the 19th century onwards. The harbour provided the impulse for the development of important industrial and tertiary activities. Immigrants from the immediate hinterland provided the majority of the workforce, although there has also been a significant settlement of Mediterranean workers during the last decades.
- 7 Finally, the Campine has seen particularly strong population growth during the 20th century, primarily as a result of the coal mines (all closed) and limited industrialisation, which has undergone considerable expansion since the closure of the mines. The population growth was mainly the result of a very significant natural growth, which persisted for a long time for cultural reasons (birth rate of 30‰ until the sixties). Mediterranean guest workers in relation to the mines and Dutch settlers from over the border contributed to the population growth.
- 8 Overall, the population growth led to urbanisation, which is discussed in the census study 11A Urbanisation (Mérenne-Schoumaker, Van der Haegen & Van Hecke, 1998). Of considerable importance are the city regions (Van der Haegen & Van Hecke, 1996), which are regional urban complexes. They dominate the national migration patterns. A recent review of the general urbanisation is published in the 'Fiches Geografie' (Van Hecke, 1999).

Current population growth

- 9 As a result of social and medical developments, regional differences with regard to birth control and health care are not completely eliminated, but are quantitatively very

limited. The existing limited differences in number of births and deaths can essentially be attributed to the age distribution of the population. As can be seen from the following, this is very much influenced by the migration behaviour of the population and the possibility for commuting.

- 10 Both the distribution and the composition of the population together with the components which determine it, are given and analysed clearly per municipality in the census studies (Bartiaux & Wattelar, to be published; Schoenmaeckers, Lodewijckx & Gadeyne, 1999) and the census atlas 'La Belgique, diversité territoriale' (Mérenne, Van der Haegen & Van Hecke, 1997). They confirm the important role of migration and show the urban regions as both centres of settlement and centres of departure.
- 11 Within the context of migration it is important to focus on specifying and understanding the regions of departure and settlement areas as well as the age-related differential migration patterns which occur in connection with these. Depending on age, the cities appear to attract as well as reject people. In summary, we can state that the expanding town with the well-known mechanisms of urbanisation, suburbanisation and ruralisation covers the whole country. Rural exodus is at present only noticeable in some municipalities in the poorly developed outlying regions such as the Westhoek, the northern part of the Campine and the Ardennes.
- 12 The migration balance can serve as a guide to distinguish regions of attraction and regions of departure within the Belgian area. Analysis of the migration balance according to the functional level of the municipalities and the age of the migrants provides a broad outline of the geographical pattern of migration and shows that urban structure to a large extent determines migration flows, whether as a place of attraction or a place of departure. The migration balance according to the age of the migrants and the functional level provides a clear picture of what applies in each area (Table 1). The total balance shows that the cities are regions of departure. The population leaves the central city where the strongly negative migration balance is lessened by the immigration of people from abroad. The most important regions of attraction are firstly the urban fringe and to a lesser extent the residential area for commuting migrants (commuter area) and those municipalities which do not form part of the urban field. The agglomerations in which the municipalities are directly connected to the central city are only the fourth area of settlement.

Table 1. Migration by functional level and total mobility by age, 1988-1996.

	Central city	Agglomeration	Urban fringe	Commuter area	Other municipalities	Total	Mobility
0-4	-16.1	15.8	<u>22.8</u>	13.5	8.6	3.9	133.6
5-9	-6.8	7.6	<u>9.1</u>	5.2	4.3	2.0	93.3
10-17	-1.3	3.6	<u>3.7</u>	2.6	2.6	1.6	67.4
18-24	<u>24.0</u>	-8.9	-8.4	-1.9	-1.9	5.4	184.5
25-29	-1.1	-1.8	<u>13.1</u>	9.3	0.7	3.0	229.5
30-34	-13.1	8.2	<u>17.4</u>	9.3	4.3	1.6	144.8
35-39	-7.9	4.9	<u>7.9</u>	4.5	2.9	0.6	96.6
40-44	-4.0	1.4	<u>4.0</u>	2.3	2.2	0.4	72.0
45-49	-3.2	-0.3	2.5	2.3	<u>2.7</u>	0.3	57.4
50-54	-3.7	-1.0	2.1	2.9	<u>3.6</u>	0.3	45.3
55-59	-4.2	-1.2	2.0	3.3	<u>3.8</u>	0.2	36.9
60-64	-4.6	-1.1	1.5	3.0	<u>3.3</u>	-0.2	31.7
65-69	-3.2	-0.8	0.8	<u>1.9</u>	1.6	-0.4	26.7
70-74	-1.8	-0.1	1.3	<u>1.4</u>	0.8	-0.1	24.9
75+	-7.3	5.7	<u>10.1</u>	3.8	2.0	-0.1	44.9
total	-2.8	2.0	6.0	4.2	2.6	1.5	94.8
migration balance	-10,819	2,302	9,343	9,111	6,623	16,559	1,072,165
immigration	213,234	65,183	80,221	90,412	95,313	544,362	
emigration	224,053	62,881	70,878	81,301	88,690	527,803	

PER 1,000 INHABITANTS AND TOTAL NUMBER (ANNUAL AVERAGE) FOR THE MIGRATION BALANCE, IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION.

- 13 Depending on age, Table 1 indicates well-known phenomena, namely the significant migration of young people of 18-24 years of age to the centre of the towns followed by the changed family status which brings new residential desires and explains the clearly positive balances in the urban fringe among the 25-39 age group. This is consistent with a clearly negative balance for the same age group in the central city. The availability and price of building sites or dwellings explain why the urban fringe has become more important than the agglomeration as an area of settlement. The still expensive properties in the urban fringe push young, less wealthy households further away from the town, which explains the positive balance of young adults in the commuter area. All moves during this phase of life take place within the context of suburbanisation. Children follow their parents, there are parallel curves for the age groups of 0 to 17 years and thirty-year-olds. Age groups with a lower level of mobility follow the very high peak of mobility that corresponds to the phenomenon of suburbanisation. The central cities continue to depopulate, but the small negative balance associates with low positive balances at all functional levels. After the age of 45, the positive balances are higher outside the urban fringe and this can clearly be seen in the 50-64 age group: the population seeks attractive living environments or seeks the closeness of family. Migration often takes place over greater distances as the relationship to the town as a workplace no longer applies.
- 14 The phenomenon of gentrification is present but is not strong enough to be seen in the figures (Van Criekingen, 1996). Within the cities the destination of the migrants between 20 and 30 years of age is bound to specific places. They are called 'migrations d'émancipation' by J.P. Grimmeau *et al.* They settle in areas with rental apartments, shops and places of entertainment, preferably in the vicinity of institutions of higher education. Originally those neighbourhoods were inhabited by the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy, later on by the working class (Grimmeau *et al.*, 1998).
- 15 As can be seen from the table, the migration patterns, determined by movements to and from the urban centres, have an effect on the whole of the Belgian area with regard to a

particular age group in each functional category. These centrifugal suburbanisation movements give rise to daily commuting movements which take place over increasing distances: the average commuting distance between the residence and the workplace increased significantly between 1970 and 1991. The intensity of suburbanisation is responsible for the daily saturation of the road network at rush hours.

- 16 Table 2 examines the geographical relationships in greater detail and shows the result of the flows between the different levels. It can be stated that all areas are having an out migration surplus to areas which are further away from the centre and an immigration surplus from areas which are more central. All moves are centrifugal. The belts of growth around the towns, which are the result of the immigration surplus are moving further and further away from the city centre. For all areas of the urban fields and the regional towns, the migration balance is the most positive from the central city. The agglomeration and the urban fringe are seeing the same high level of settlement due to immigration. The difference between the total increase which is three times higher in the urban fringe than in the agglomeration stems from the fact that many people in the agglomeration come from the central city, while many people again leave for the urban fringe, commuter area and more distant municipalities for commuting migrations. The urban fringe receives people from the central city as well as from the agglomeration but the size of the increase in the influx from the central city is much greater than that of the settlement of people coming from the agglomeration. The municipalities in the urban fringe see some of their inhabitants move to the commuter area or municipalities outside the urban field, but the overall result of the migration movements is strongly positive. In spite of the increasing distance, the commuter area receives a large proportion of its settlers from the central city and a lesser number from the urban fringe and the agglomeration. Not one of the functional levels determines the immigration pattern in the commuter area but, as a result of the accumulation of three positive figures together with a surplus from abroad, the commuter area is seeing an overall immigration surplus which is not to be underestimated. Belgian municipalities that do not form part of the urban field are seeing a surplus influx from all other areas, including foreign countries.

Table 2. Migration (per 1,000 inhabitants) by functional level, 1988-1996.

		T O				
		Central city	Agglomeration	Urban fringe	Commuter area	Other municipalities
F	Central city	0	<u>5.8</u>	<u>5.5</u>	<u>2.3</u>	0.4
	Agglomeration	-1.7	0	1.8	0.8	0.3
R	Urban fringe	-2.2	-2.4	0	1.1	0.3
	Commuter area	-1.3	-1.5	-1.5	0	0.4
O	Other municipalities	-0.3	-0.7	-0.5	-0.5	0
Total intern		-5.5	1.2	5.2	3.7	1.5
M	Non-domestic	<u>2.7</u>	0.8	0.8	0.5	<u>1.1</u>
Total		-2.8	2.0	6.0	4.2	2.6

Moves to and from Brussels

- 17 Migration from Brussels to and from its close, as well as its more distant (but still national) surroundings can serve as a prototype for moves to and from an urban

residential area. Since the Capital Region Brussels contains most of the Brussels residential area, the migration patterns are well documented and can be examined for a period covering more than a decade (1984-1996). They show a constant and typical pattern of migration, which is linked to the life cycle (Figures 2 and 3): the immigration surplus in the town of young adults together with departures among other age groups with four clearly visible peaks corresponding to young families and their children where the peaks are very pronounced but with a less clearer pattern in the case of pensioners and older people who are no longer able to support themselves.

Figure 2. Brussels Region migration balance (1988-96) by age.

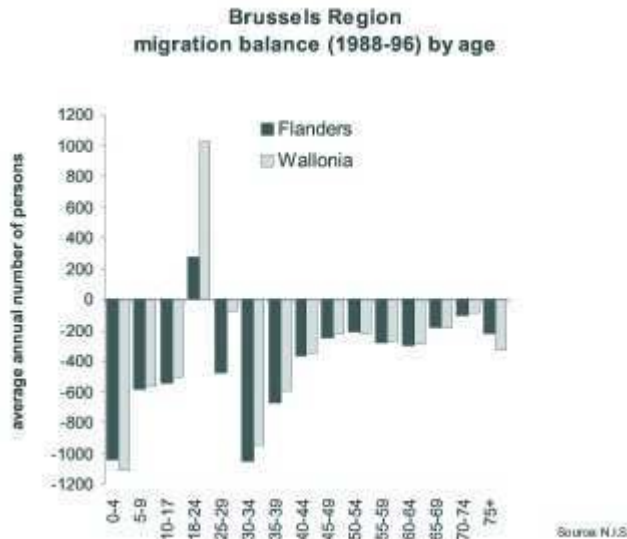
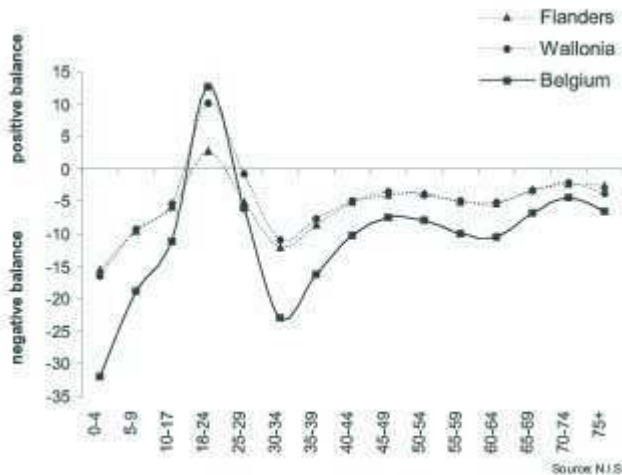


Figure 3. Brussels Region migration balance (1988-96) by age (per 1000 inhabitants).



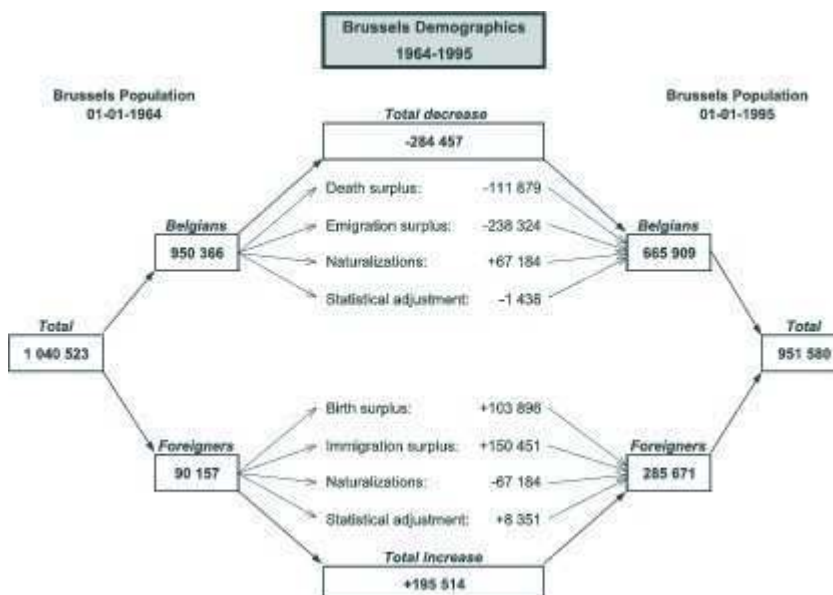
- 18 Logical settlement patterns are also to be seen geographically. In the case of young families, the time that it takes to travel to work as well as a geographical division of the living environment on the basis of social resources and cultural area, determine the place of residence. In the case of pensioners, location in peaceful and attractive areas (the Ardennes, but particularly the coast) is noticeable as well as a return to their old village.

- 19 Very specific to the Belgian situation is the division between the Flemish Region and Walloon Region. Rather more migrations to and from Flanders (which completely surrounds Brussels) seem to occur than to and from the Walloon provinces. However, if we examine the intensity of the movements (with regard to the Flemish or Walloon population), it can be seen that 2.4 times more moves are made to and from the Walloon provinces than is the case in Flanders. This reflects the fact that Brussels is by far and away the most important town as far as the Walloon provinces are concerned, while Brussels has to share the position with Antwerp and Ghent in the case of Flanders. It is also a result of the difference in the economic situation between Flanders, with its various successful large and medium-sized cities, and the less favourable economic situation to be found in the Walloon provinces. The difference in the balance of settlement between the regions of 18- to 24-year-olds, those that predominantly seek to live in the town, is an indication of this. In the period from 1988-1996, Brussels saw an increase in settlement of 8,177 people from the Walloon provinces and 2,213 people from Flanders. Although Flanders has almost twice as many inhabitants as the Walloon provinces, the Flemish settlement surplus in Brussels only amounts to 27% of the Walloon settlement surplus.

Impact of foreign migration

- 20 Brussels is also a good example of the significant impact which foreign migration, essentially sustained by foreigners, has on the population. Brussels can serve as a prototype for many other European cities. Figure 4, showing population growth over a thirty-year period according to nationality and components, provides an excellent illustration of this. Without foreigners, whose children are increasingly born as Belgians (see below), the 'Belgian' population would have halved. Only the excess of births of foreigners compensates for the excess of deaths of Belgians in Brussels.

Figure 4. Brussels Demographics 1964-1995.



- 21 From the analysis per age group (Figures 5 and 6) of foreign migration for the same recent period as national migration, it not only appears that the surplus of settlement

from abroad (49,251) completely compensates for the surplus of domestic departures (36,640), but that a settlement surplus occurs in the case of every age group except those over the age of 55.

Figure 5. Brussels Region migration balance (1988-96) by age.

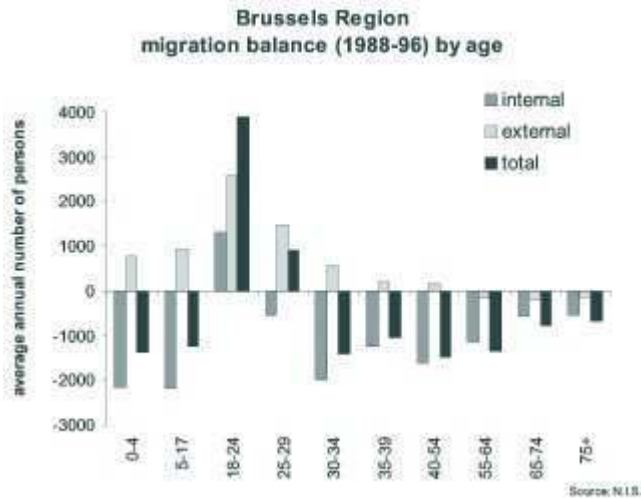
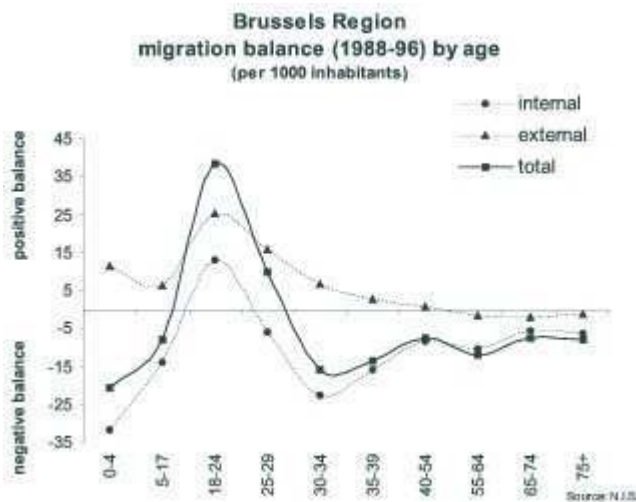


Figure 6. Brussels Region migration balance (1988-96) by age (per 1,000 inhabitants).

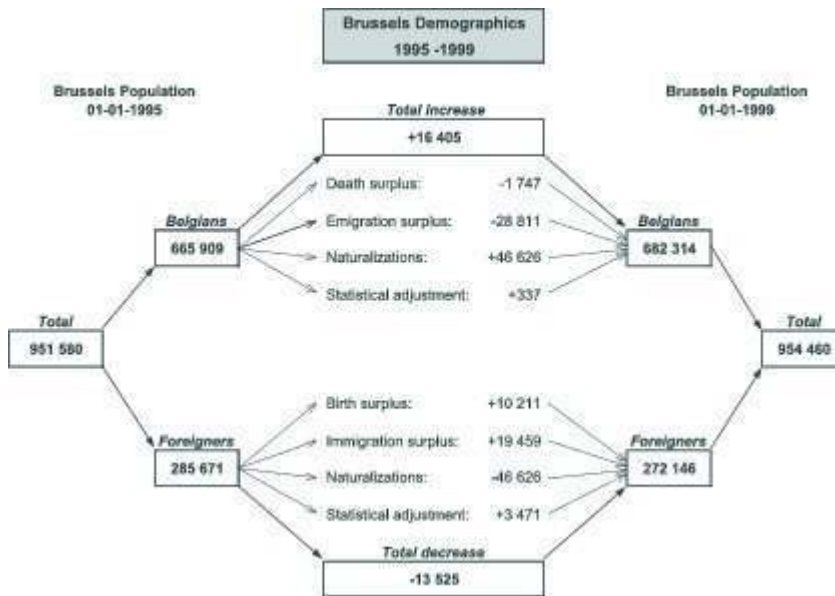


- 22 This reverse migration behaviour with regard to migration with other countries can be explained by the type of foreigners who are responsible for this surplus in settlement. The foreigners principally consist of two groups. On the one hand, there are the families of guest workers who join their compatriots within the context of family reunions and choice of partner. They are concentrated in the old worker neighbourhoods in the poorer parts of the city. On the other hand, there are foreigners who form part of highly-qualified, mainly young workforces from the Western world, who are attracted by the international jobs which are to be found in Brussels and who settle as unmarried people or newlyweds in neighbourhoods in the better parts of the residential centre of Brussels.
- 23 The concepts of 'Belgian' and 'foreigner' have become very relative when it comes to illustrating the significance of the foreign population with regard to demographic growth. They have become descriptions that are used purely for administrative and

statistical purposes. As a result of a series of recent changes (since 1984) (Van der Haegen, 1990) in the laws which make the acquisition of Belgian nationality easier, if not automatic in the event of birth, this distinction has become defective for the purposes of measuring the significant impact of foreign population groups on the demographic evolution.

- 24 Two examples illustrate this. Population growth in terms of nationality and components (Figure 7) during the period from 1995-99 compared with the period from 1964-95 (Figure 4) presents a different picture. As a result of the greater acquisition of Belgian nationality and consequently the lower natural growth among foreigners and a limited surplus in deaths among 'Belgians', Brussels recently shows a reduction in the number of foreigners and an increase in the number of 'Belgians'.

Figure 7. Brussels Demographics 1995-99.



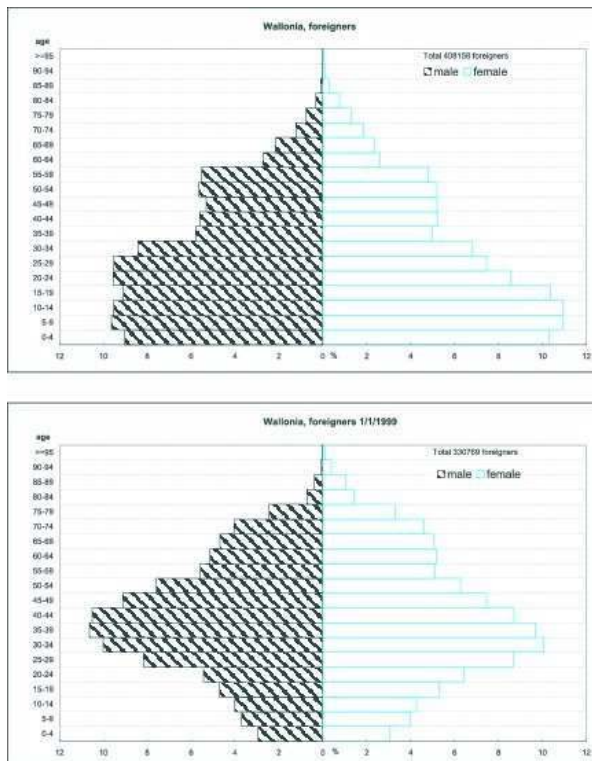
- 25 As can be seen from the following table 3 that compares the number of births in 1983 (before the change) and 1998 (the most recent figure), the changes in the laws relating to the acquisition of Belgian nationality have led to a reversal in the relative birth rate, while a general reduction in births is occurring as is the case elsewhere in Western Europe. Ethnic composition and time of settlement explain the still different pattern in Flanders, where fewer foreigners are as yet being considered for naturalisation and the ethnic groups have a slighter higher birth rate.

Table 3. Birth rate (%).

	1983			1998		
	Belgians	Foreigners	Total	Belgians	Foreigners	Total
Belgium	11.2	19.4	11.9	11.4	9.6	11.2
Wallonia	11.0	16.7	11.7	12.2	5.7	11.5
Brussels	9.0	19.4	11.6	14.3	11.7	13.5
Flanders	11.6	23.9	12.1	10.0	12.2	10.7

- 26 The current laws thus grant Belgian nationality to many foreigners. Consequently, statistical data relating to nationality only partially reflect the significance of foreigners with regard to Belgian demographic growth. Because of less strict legislation and in spite of a constant settlement surplus of foreigners, the population structure of foreigners has become a statistical fiction and no longer reflects the demographic structure of the foreign population. The comparison of the population pyramid of 'foreigners' in the Walloon provinces in 1981 and 1999 provides a good illustration of this fact (Figure 8). Nevertheless, the population with foreign nationality in 1998 still accounts for 36% of the total natural growth in the Belgian population. In Brussels, the figure is even as high as 92%. This is as a result of the considerably higher death rate of Belgians (Belgium 1998: Belgians 10.7‰, foreigners 5.5‰; Brussels: Belgians 12.5‰, foreigners 3.4‰).

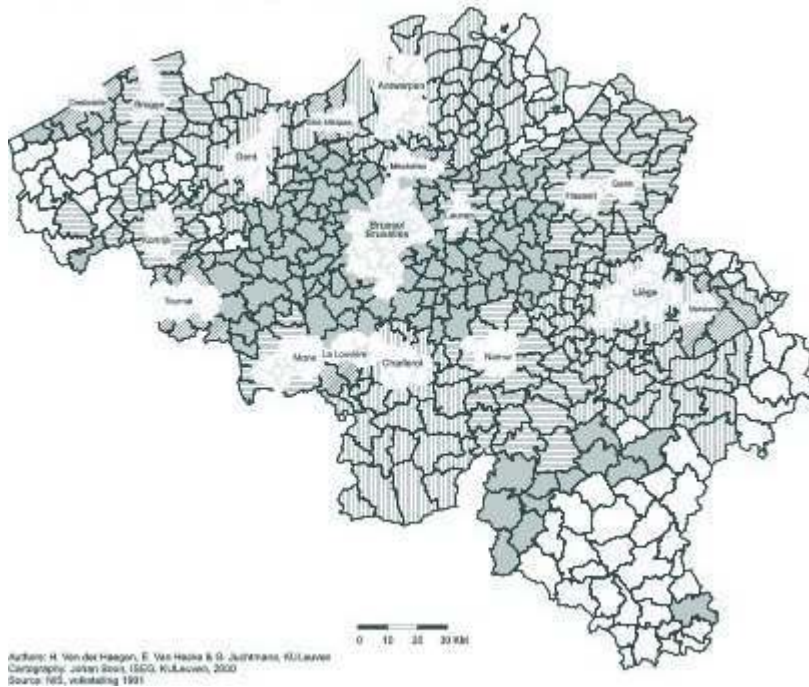
Figure 8. a. Wallonia, foreigners 1/3/1981; b. Wallonia, foreigners 1/1/1999.



Commuting

- 27 Commuting is perhaps an even more important element in understanding the distribution of the Belgian population (Mérenne-Schoumaker, Van der Haegen & Van Hecke, 1999). Very early, namely in the second half of the 19th century, commuting to urban areas reached such proportions that it slowed down the rural exodus to a greater extent than in surrounding countries and most villages experienced further growth. The extremely cheap railway tickets for commuters in a country with by far the densest railway network (normal and narrow gauge railway) in Europe played an important role. It meant that all rural municipalities were connected to the cities and industrial areas. This made it possible to develop for many decades a farmer-worker lifestyle in an extended geographical area. Shorter working hours and the introduction of the bicycle that increased the area covered by public transport gave commuting a fresh impulse in the period between the two world wars.
- 28 After the Second World War, the existing commuting infrastructure and the general use of the car on the one hand supported both suburbanisation and rurbanisation and promoted on the other hand further commuting. A positive mutual influence was felt. Together with typical Belgian conditions such as general home ownership and a strong bond with the local environment and the phenomenal growth of the road system, this led to a further expansion of commuting.
- 29 Commuting consequently assumed substantial proportions and practically every family was involved.
- 30 The Census of 1991 states that no less than 1,908,000 people or 56% of the Belgian working population work outside their municipality. The widespread distribution of the population and employment as well as the number of two-income households is leading to considerable intersection of commuter flows.
- 31 It is clear that the central parts of the city regions attract the highest number of commuters and have developed their own work hinterlands (Figure 9), with the influence of Brussels extending still further, although as a second work centre. The capital essentially recruits its workers from the whole of the country.
- 32 The majority (93%) of commuters travel daily (at least four times a week) between their residence and workplace, with the car having become by far and away (70%) the most important means of transport and public transport accounting for approx. 13% of journeys and the bicycle for a further 9%. Of course, there are clear regional patterns.

Figure 9. Commuting areas of the Belgian City Regions.



- 33 There are great differences in the distance travelled, which is determined both by the closeness of the work centres and the economic development of the residential area. The weighted average journey is 18 km, with no less than 18% of commuters travelling more than 30 km. The detailed commuting statistics even make it possible to calculate the average speed of travel (38 km/hour) and duration (30 minutes, one way).
- 34 The average limited distance, but particularly the limited time of travel, explain the large belt of suburbanisation around the cities, while the widespread and fast transport facilities make it possible to understand suburbanisation, which now stretches over the whole of north and central Belgium. The ever more widespread distribution of the population is made possible by the intensification of commuting. This is supported by both the deep-rooted desire to live in one's own home with a garden in a peaceful environment – this can be seen politically in terms of a very liberal attitude towards the geographical location of dwellings and residential districts in green areas – and a population with one of the highest living standards in the world.

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ABSTRACTS

In this article, the principal factors that explain the basic pattern of population distribution will first be outlined from a historical perspective. The current mobility of the population will then be examined, since it is the main factor that now determines population distribution. Historically, but particularly now, the town plays a decisive role, although the extensive immigration of foreigners is also important. Brussels is an example, which illustrates all aspects of this. It also sheds some light on the relative nature of the concept of 'foreigner' in the

statistics. The vast amount of commuting provides the final key to an understanding of the distribution of the population.

In deze bijdrage worden eerst de voornaamste factoren die het basisspreidingspatroon van de bevolking verklaren bondig geschetst in historisch perspectief. Vervolgens wordt de huidige mobiliteit van de bevolking behandeld daar zij de voornaamste factor is die de spreiding van de bevolking nu bepaalt. Historisch, maar vooral nu, speelt de stad hierbij een determinerende rol, maar ook de omvangrijke immigratie van vreemdelingen is van betekenis. Het voorbeeld van Brussel illustreert dit in al zijn aspecten. Het laat tevens toe om de relativiteit van het begrip 'vreemdeling' in de statistieken te belichten. De enorme pendel vormt het sluitstuk bij het verklaren van de bevolkingsspreiding.

INDEX

Keywords: population distribution, migration, Belgium

Trefwoorden bevolkingsspreiding, migratie, België

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