Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Wisconsin: The Plover Case Compared

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Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Wisconsin
Research Project Framework

- A strengths approach—studying communities that are gaining and maintaining young adults rather than those that are losing them

- A community approach—studying municipalities rather than counties

- An “effects first” approach—looking for places with strong young adult populations, and then looking for causes rather than doing programs and then looking for effects

- **Goal**—find positive forms of community development that attract and maintain higher numbers of young adults.
Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Wisconsin
Research Methods

• Started with all 1800+ Wisconsin municipalities and towns

• Assembled U.S. Census counts of “young adults” (20-39 yrs) at 1990, 2000, 2010; 5-year cohorts

• Excluded “group quarters” population

• Merged counts from cities and villages crossing county lines

• Calculated measures of *gainers* and *maintainers* in each place.
  • *Gainers* – absolute growth of young adult population
  • *Maintainers* – higher total percent of young adult population
Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Wisconsin

Where are Young Adults?

**All communities that are both gainers and maintainers**

**Gainers:** had an *increase* in the number of young adults from 1990-2010 (median is -22%)

**Maintainers:** had a proportion of young adults above the median of 24%

Note: communities in red are larger Wisconsin cities that are not gainers and maintainers, or are cities outside of Wisconsin.
Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Wisconsin
Where are Young Adults?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gainers/Maintainers</th>
<th>Non-Gainers/Maintainers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>1600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average distance (miles) to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>freeway</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average distance (miles) to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>city &gt;39,000</td>
<td>24.2</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent of communities within</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 miles of city &gt;39,000</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gainers/maintainers are closer to larger cities and closer to freeways.
Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Wisconsin
Case Study Selection Methods

- Used Wisconsin Workforce Development Board regional division strategy to highlight more cases across Wisconsin
- Ranked the “top 20” gainers & "top 20" maintainers within each WWDB region
- Selected overlappers--places that appeared in both “top 20” lists (top 30 in region 7) = 118 places
- Solicited input from Extension professionals on suitability of selection
- Included non-overlappers in northern portion of regions 5 & 6
- Resulted in 130 places under consideration
Gaining and Maintaining Young Adults in Wisconsin
Choosing case studies

Region 1: Delavan
Region 3: West Bend
Region 4: Omro
Region 5: De Pere
  Black Creek
Region 6: Plover
Region 7: Hayward
Region 8: Somerset
  New Richmond
Region 9: Onalaska
Region 10: Brooklyn
Region 11: Evansville

Case studies were selected for diversity, not because they were the “best” gainers/maintainers. Region 2--Milwaukee County--was excluded as too urban.
Moving from “where” questions to “why” questions

Conducting case studies of municipalities that show more success at gaining and maintaining young adults and potentially hold lessons for other communities.

- Chose one to two case studies per region
- Gather knowledge to understand the total picture of a community, not just the effect of a single intervention or program to attract young adults

Learning about the community by involving the community

- Engage “core group” of local community leaders to inform research
- Conduct “lay expert interviews” (goal of 12-25 per case)
  - Ask them about others, not just themselves
    - Look for repetitive themes
    - Accuracy even with “biased” samples
- Create stories that communities can tell about themselves
Why do young adults choose communities to live in?

- The “obvious” reasons:
  - Schools—for more than students
  - Housing—right size and right price
  - Amenities inside and out—public spaces
- The less obvious reasons:
  - Proximity to, and distance from, larger employment/shopping/entertainment centers
  - Appreciation for traditional community/family feel
  - Appreciation for new diversity
  - Universities may have a regional influence
- The unconfirmed reasons:
  - Young adult networking and support programs
  - Local jobs development
How do young adults perceive Plover?

- **Schools**
  - elementary school diversity—elementary schools important in small places
  - Concerns about quality of high school in Stevens Point

- **Housing**
  - For homeowners—large yard and small mortgage
  - For renters—concerns about cost

- **The urban connection**
  - Co-identity with Stevens Point, jobs and entertainment
  - Importance of UWSP—regional influence of universities

- **Outdoor amenities**
  - Schmeekele Reserve, Green Circle Trail
  - More silent sports—kayaking, biking, hiking—than motorized
  - Hunting and fishing
  - Outdoor team sports—ultimate freesbee, kickball, volleyball

- **Sense of Community**
  - density, sustainability
  - diversity, volunteerism

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**Plover data:**
15 in-depth interviews. Six current residents; one who grew up there; two who work there; four who lived in Stevens Point or nearby towns.
What challenges are facing these communities in general?

- “Old guard” tensions
- “Bedroom community” and volunteerism concerns
- “Tipping point” worries
- Absence of resources for youngest adults, especially singles
- Maintaining the minimum of desired amenities (coffee houses, restaurants, pools, outdoor spaces)

In Plover?

- Sprawl and sustainability
- Health of Stevens Point
- Health of UWSP
- Housing availability for youngest singles
- Maintenance and promotion of outdoor amenities
It might be as important to develop the regional urban center as the community itself.

Attempting to attract young singles may be difficult.

There may be a minimum set of local amenities needed: outdoor spaces, cafes and restaurants

Housing needs to be appropriately affordable and appropriately sized for the family age cohort the community is most likely to attract.

- Less expensive smaller housing for new families with new careers that pay less
- More expensive larger housing for growing families moving toward mid-career with higher salaries

Schools and teachers may need extra special care

- Residents want to feel like the teachers and administrators know them
- Residents want the school to feel like it is a community space

Too much emphasis on growth may be counterproductive
• You can find out about young adults in your community
  • You can adapt the guide at: http://comm-org.wisc.edu/youngadultreport
  • We can help
  • Finding our about your young adults can help build relationships in your community
  • Doing so can help you find out how much our findings apply in your community.
Gaining and Retaining Young People

For More Information

- See our report at http://comm-org.wisc.edu/youngadultreport

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