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Pierre Pistre

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# LIFE COURSE AND BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS OF RESIDENTIAL MIGRATIONS TO FRENCH RURAL AREAS

Pierre PISTRE,  
 Phd student of Human Geography  
 University of Paris 7 Denis-Diderot,  
 Géographie-cités (GC) - UMR8504: CNRS  
 13 rue du Four, 75006 Paris  
[pierre.pistre@parisgeo.cnrs.fr](mailto:pierre.pistre@parisgeo.cnrs.fr)

## Abstract :

Many rural areas in France have been repopulated since the 1970s. Through our current PhD research, we conduct a deeper understanding of its geographical and sociological features. As part of this paper, we examine population dynamics and migration flows to French rural areas, in a national perspective and a quantitative biographical approach. Because of census population data does partially interrogate the importance of life course processes, we mainly use data extracted from the *Histoire de Vie* national survey, to study hundreds of residential trajectories towards rural areas. First of all, we demonstrate the diversity of demographic profiles implicated, by means of classical criteria (age, income, socio-professional category, family structure) and biographical indicators (about birthplace, number of residential steps, some previous links with rural life). Then, we comment some charts and mappings to investigate residential histories. The aim is also to propose some pathways to develop different inputs of a biographical approach in population geography, between quantitative and qualitative methods.

**Keywords:** life course, residential history, geographical trajectory, rural migration, France.

This paper examines demographic dynamics and flows to French rural areas, focusing on a national perspective and a biographical approach. As in many European countries, rural areas in France have been repopulated since the 1970s and the 1980s (Laganier *and al.*, 2009). In the course of our current PhD project, we have undertaken a deeper understanding of its geographical and sociological features, studying the characteristics of rural revivals by looking at populations and territories implicated. Furthermore, statistical results have demonstrated that natural evolutions are much less relevant than migration balances to explain positive trends in most rural cases, including some that could be considered as fragile (figure 1). So, we have especially analysed the diversity of demographic flows towards rural areas, with mainly attention to regions and processes less dependent on urban attractiveness (such as rural gentrification, return and retirement migrations...).

**Figure 1. Demographic evolutions in metropolitan France (1962-2007):**

Intercensal periods	"Periurban areas"			"Fragile rural areas"			"Dynamic rural areas"			"Urban areas"		
	Natural increase*	Migration balance*	Total change*	Natural increase*	Migration balance*	Total change*	Natural increase*	Migration balance*	Total change*	Natural increase*	Migration balance*	Total change*
1962-1968	0,49	-0,15	<b>0,34</b>	0,43	-0,43	<b>0,00</b>	0,23	0,73	<b>0,96</b>	0,88	1,02	<b>1,90</b>
1968-1975	0,32	0,41	<b>0,73</b>	0,24	-0,39	<b>-0,15</b>	0,05	0,48	<b>0,53</b>	0,83	0,40	<b>1,23</b>
1975-1982	0,19	1,10	<b>1,28</b>	0,01	-0,13	<b>-0,13</b>	-0,14	0,98	<b>0,84</b>	0,63	-0,19	<b>0,44</b>
1982-1990	0,25	0,79	<b>1,04</b>	-0,01	-0,19	<b>-0,21</b>	-0,07	1,13	<b>1,06</b>	0,64	-0,07	<b>0,58</b>
1990-1999	0,23	0,52	<b>0,75</b>	-0,10	-0,07	<b>-0,17</b>	-0,10	0,91	<b>0,81</b>	0,58	-0,19	<b>0,39</b>
1999-2007	0,37	0,96	<b>1,33</b>	-0,08	0,25	<b>0,17</b>	-0,10	1,58	<b>1,47</b>	0,60	0,00	<b>0,61</b>

\* Average annual rate of change

Source : based on INSEE, French censuses data, from 1962 to 2007

The latest census population data - and previous ones – have been used to identify main flows in the direction of French rural areas (Pistre, 2011; e.g. appendix 1). They reveal a strong further of urban sprawl, around the large cities and the average ones. Several well known reasons both economic (e.g. lower prices for first-time buyers as young couples with kids) and cultural ones (e.g. people looking for a garden, green spaces and calm) can be provided to understand these peri-urban growths. Our analysis from census data also highlights the attractiveness of most of rural areas, particularly the touristic and residential places from south and west of France. Moreover, these demographic trends appear strongly related to life course processes, corresponding to specific migration patterns by age groups (such as intensities, destinations...) (e.g. appendix 2). In order to deepen this key point - and because of census data cannot really allows following residential trajectories, individual or collective ones, between intercensal periods -, we have based our paper analysis on data extracted from a national survey entitled *Histoire de Vie* (“Life story”). This survey has been conducted in 2003, among 8 400 people, to interrogate the construction of identities and social relationships in France (Clanché, 2006; Guérin-Pace *and al.*, 2008; Guérin-Pace *and al.*, 2009). One of its originalities has been to collect - with a “biographical grid” - geographical and sociological information on each residential step of the respondents. From these statistical data, we firstly propose a picture of newcomers’ profiles settled in French rural areas during the 1990s. Then, we expose some charts and mappings to represent and to investigate residential histories, and to propose some pathways to develop the geographical interests of a biographical approach, from quantitative to qualitative analysis.

### 1) **How to characterize people who settled in French rural areas during the 1990s?**

Figures 2 and 3 allow analysing - through different demographic indicators (socio-demographic, socio-economic, biographical) - the profiles of people who came in a rural *commune* between 1990 and 2003, compared to those who chose an urban place, from the small towns to the largest cities. We can already point out that they represented approximately one quarter of people who have changed their residence during this time period, according to the sample of the *Histoire de vie* survey<sup>1</sup>.

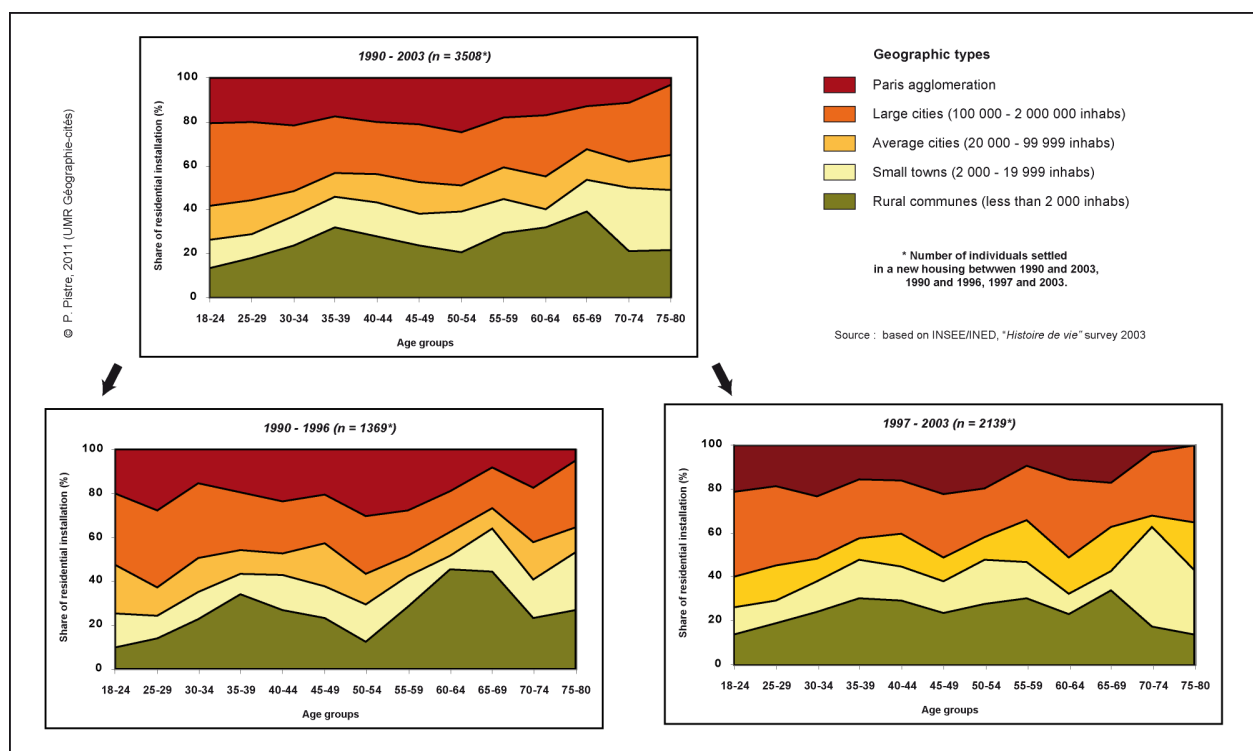
By analysing few classical indicators, rural *communes* have preferentially welcomed some married persons, some owners and some French by birth. Newcomers are rather from the middle class, with medium incomes (*cf.* socio-professional categories and annual household income). People of two age periods are also over-represented: the assets around 40 years old and the young retired people until 70 years old - mainly during the first part of the 1990s -, and this observation reinforce the interest to study by a life course approach the demographic flows towards rural areas. So, even if a variety of profiles has chosen to settle in a rural *commune*, strong sociological trends have emerged which are quite consistent with results got from the census data. Mostly, French rural areas attract people looking for a real estate investment - a property to renovate or a new-build house - because of the lower prices of houses and lands. But these economic factors also hide some needs and personal aspirations (about family, calm, green spaces, authenticity...) which seem stronger - and most of time becomes feasible - during two main life periods: the middle of professional activity and around the transition to retirement.

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<sup>1</sup> We would like highlight that the figures 2 and 3 percentages were calculated from a weighting variable which was determined by the statistical producers (i.e. members of the French National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies and the French National Institute for Demographic Studies) of the *Histoire de vie* national survey.

By introducing a biographical approach, some indicators about origins and trajectories of the respondents can allow to deepen our picture of rural newcomers. A large majority of them has always lived in France, and they have come from an urban place and/or they have made some back and forth between rural and urban areas. They have rather done more steps than the national average during their residential histories and a higher share has lived in more than 3 different administrative regions of France. Furthermore, most of them have had previous strong relationships with rural areas. Some were born in a rural *commune* or a nearby small town, and plenty of newcomers have already lived in a rural area, in the same one (about 15 %) or a different one. Finally, a large majority of them have resided for several years in rural areas, and undeniably these previous experiences and contacts with the rural life are key factors to explain their last settlement. Thus, these different biographical indicators let consider a strong attachment of rural newcomers to some previous “rural experiences” (such as during their childhood, holidays...) and reveal the wish of many of them to come back in a rural place which they already know or not. They also highlight longer residential trajectories of people finally settled in a rural commune, which may correspond to some mobile persons needing to “make a homecoming” and/or looking for an “authentic life” after a busy professional career.

**Figure 2. Geographical destination choices by age groups between 1990 and 2003:**



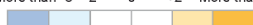
## 2) Residential histories of newcomers in French rural areas, between 1990 and 2003

In this second part, we present and comment several visual figures (charts and maps), resulting of exploratory statistic treatments made from biographical data series. Our aim is both to provide additional understanding elements of migrations to rural areas by looking for spatial recurrences and to consider few geographical pathways to analyse individual's residential histories. Methodologically, the following treatments are partly inspired by recent researches developed in sociology and demography on sequence analysis and time series (Stovel *and al.*, 2004 ; Elzing *and al.*, 2006). Moreover, these studies will constitute some interesting researches to develop our analysis in a real quantitative way.

**Figure 3. Profile indicators of people who changed their residence in metropolitan France, between 1990 and 2003:**

		INSTALLATION BETWEEN 1990 AND 2003 IN A COMMUNE BELONGING TO A URBAN UNIT OF THE FOLLOWING GEOGRAPHIC TYPES:						
		Rural communes (less than 2 000 inhabs)	Small towns (2 000 - 19 999 inhabs)	Average cities (20 000 - 99 999 inhabs)	Large cities (100 000 - 2 000 000 inhabs)	Paris agglomeration	National total, then National mean	
DEFINED SAMPLE	Net volume	799	563	531	1159	456	3508	
	Volume-weighted	4 964 500	2 973 500	2 835 500	6 335 500	4 168 500	21 277 500	
	Weighted proportion	23,3	14	13,3	29,8	19,6	100	
CLASSICAL INDICATORS*	SEX	Men	50	53,6	54,5	46,6	49,5	50
		Women	50	46,4	45,5	53,4	50,5	50
	SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL CATEGORIES**	Farmers	4	0,6	0,8	0,2	0	1,18
		Artisans and co.	7,2	9,1	6	3,8	3,2	5,5
		Managers and co.	9,2	12,4	12,2	15,6	24,8	15
		Intermediate occupations	20,4	21,6	21,1	23,3	17,8	21
		Employees	28,9	26	24,6	23,9	24,8	25,6
		Unskilled/skilled manual workers	25	24	24,5	16,4	16,3	20,5
	Retirees**	12,1	12,5	8,7	7,6	4,7	8,9	
	ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME	Less than 15 550 euros	13,6	16,2	20,8	20,2	14	16,9
		15 550 - 23 782 euros	20,1	19,2	23	21,7	18,6	20,5
		23 783 - 39 332 euros	38,5	36,2	33,4	31,8	25,7	33,2
		More than 39 332 euros	20,5	20,9	13,1	20,2	32,7	21,8
	MARITAL STATUS	Single	29	41,8	43,2	48,8	45,7	41,9
		Married	61	44,9	43,1	38,8	43,2	46,3
		Widower	2,5	4,5	3,5	3,2	1,9	3
		Divorced	7,4	8,8	10,2	9,2	9,2	8,8
	NATIONALITY	Dual nationality	0,7	3	2,5	1,6	4,1	2,2
		French by birth	96,2	91,5	86,9	88,9	72,8	87,6
		French by acquisition	1,2	2,7	1,7	3,8	7,9	3,6
		Foreign nationality	2	2,8	8,9	5,7	15,2	6,7
	HOUSING	Owners	58,7	41,2	30,8	31	31,1	38,9
		Tenants	29,6	46,8	58	60	58,1	50,2
Others cases		11,7	12,1	11,2	9,7	10,8	10,9	
BIOGRAPHICAL INDICATORS*	LAST PLACE OF RESIDENCE = A PREVIOUS ONE	Yes	15,1	15,4	16,3	16,8	13,4	15,5
		No	84,9	84,6	83,7	83,2	86,6	84,5
	TYPES OF BIRTH PLACE	Rural commune	5,8	2,9	3,6	1,9	1,1	3,1
		Small town	38,7	43	39,5	27,7	25,7	33,7
		Average city	35,9	32,3	39,9	34,4	43,1	36,6
		Large city	14,7	16,9	12	32,6	9,3	19,4
		Paris	5	4,9	5	3,4	20,8	7,1
	RESIDENTIAL HISTORY BETWEEN FRANCE AND FOREIGN COUNTRIES	Always in France	82,5	78,2	71,6	75,6	57,4	73,5
		Abroad then in France	4,9	5,2	13,2	10	25,1	11,5
		Back and forth	12,6	16,6	15,2	14,4	17,5	15
	RESIDENTIAL HISTORY BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN	Always in rural	8	0,9	0	0	0	2
		Always in urban	3,8	41,8	43,3	67	73,4	47,1
		Rural then urban	0	14,2	14,9	10,7	9,5	9,6
		Urban then rural	35,3	4,5	0	0	0	9,4
	Back and forth	50	38,7	38,9	21,5	17,1	32	
	NUMBER OF SUCCESSIVE STEPS	1 to 3	27,1	27,4	30	34,8	25,5	29,5
		4 to 6	45,1	48,5	47,5	42,1	49,8	45,9
		7 to 9	20,6	14,4	16	16,8	18,2	17,5
		10 and more	7,2	9,7	6,6	6,3	6,5	7,1
	NUMBER OF DIFFERENT ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS	0 to 2	74,8	75,7	79,5	77,1	83,8	78
		3 to 4	21,8	19,6	17,8	18,4	14,4	18,5
		5 and more	3,4	4,6	2,7	4,5	1,8	3,5
	PREVIOUSLY LIVED IN A RURAL PLACE	Yes	96,5	60,45	57,9	34,6	27,7	54,9
No		3,5	39,5	42,2	65,4	72,3	45,1	
NUMBER OF YEARS LIVED IN RURAL	0	12,7	47,7	48,2	69,5	74,9	51,4	
	1 to 5	15,1	11,5	10,7	8,4	8,7	10,8	
	6 to 20	34,6	25,4	26	15,3	11	21,8	
	20 and more	37,6	15,5	15	6,9	5,4	16	

More than -5 -2 0 +2 More than +5



Distance index to the mean (pts)

\* Each indicator data are weighted proportions.

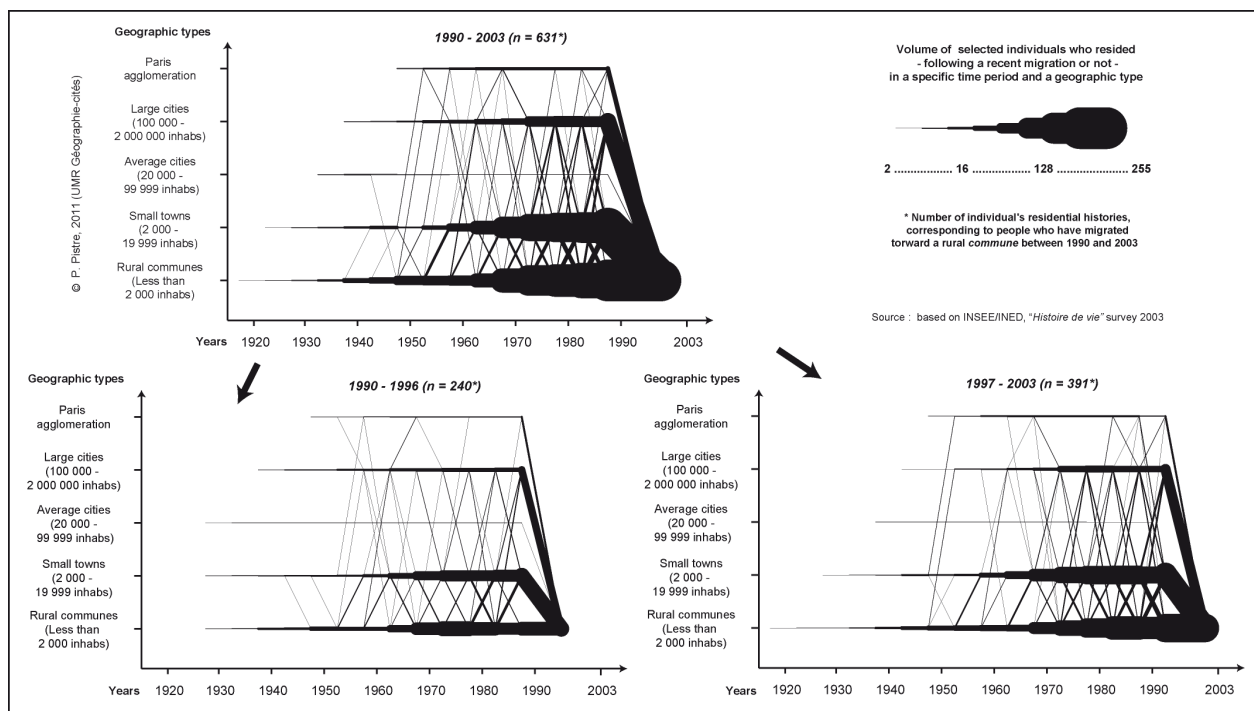
\*\* Firstly, people who became retired are classified according to their former socioprofessional categories. Then, we propose an independent accounting of all retired people in the same group.

Source : based on INSEE/INED, "Histoire de vie" survey 2003

On the first hand, the figures 4 and 5 are graphical attempts to represent residential histories, from individual ones to collective ones, by aggregating - according to determined space types and time periods of 5 years - the successive residence places of a defined sample<sup>2</sup>. They indicate as well as residential shifts than pauses over the years and each residential history. Moreover, they gradually integrate new persons based on their dates of birth, and as the increase of the time variable. The following figure already confirms strong and previous residential steps in rural areas from people finally settled in a rural *commune* during the 1990s, and so tends to confirm cultural reasons already indicated. Then, life periods spent in a rural residence appear closely linked to demographic flows with the small towns. We can assume that it indicates the significance of “nearby migrations” made internally to a small area. The figure 4 also highlights a common residential history of some people who left a rural *commune* for a large city – including the Paris agglomeration - during the 1970s and the 1980s, and who came back in a rural area one or two decades later. Finally - according to our sample from the *Histoire de vie* survey -, rural *communes* welcomed more newcomers during the period from 1997 to 2003 than the previous one. This observation may highlight a growing attractiveness of rural areas for people from urban areas, but also an increase of intern migrations into rural areas.

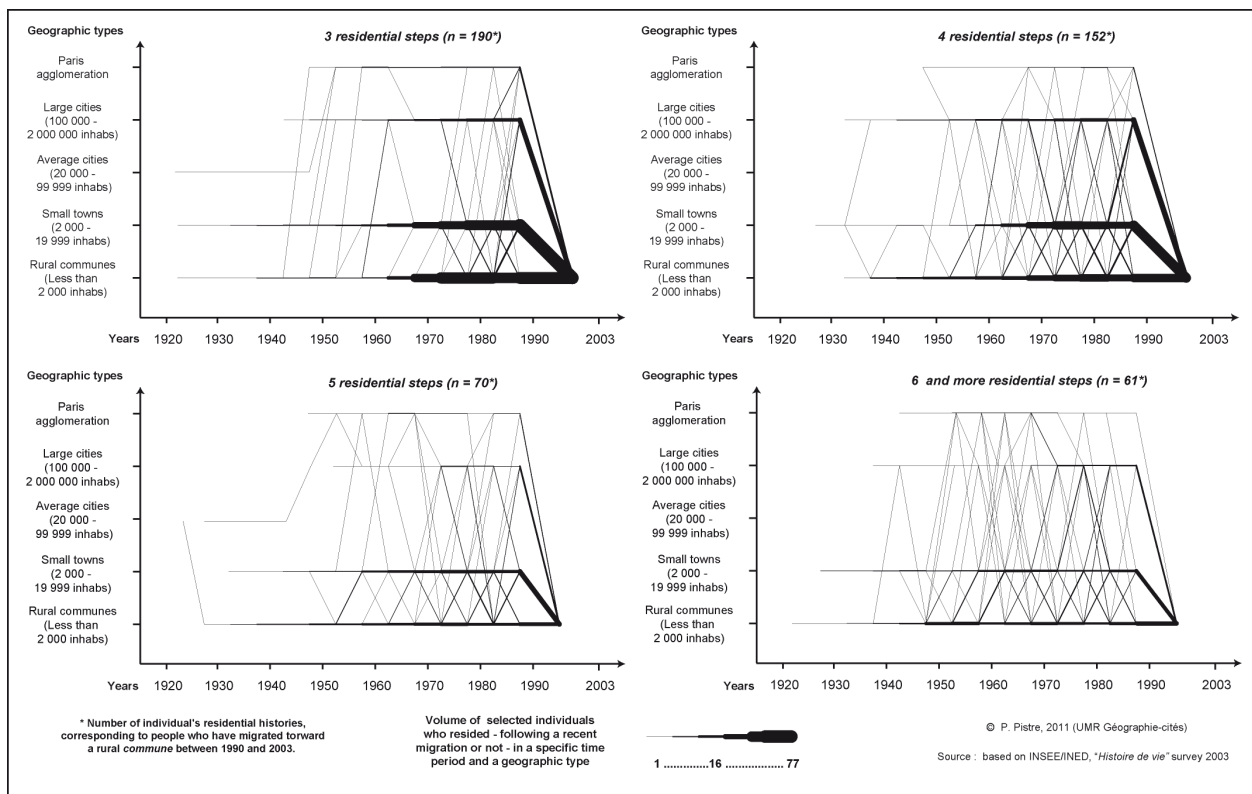
The aim of the figure 5 is to study - by the same graphic process - the residential histories of people sampled, according to the number of steps they made. A logical first observation of each chart volumes indicates that the higher the share of people is, the lower the number of steps can be. Then, it seems that the higher the number of steps is, the more recurrent and old to have lived once or several times in a large city is. Nevertheless, each chart data doesn't bring out a significant rate of last shifts from urban areas to rural ones for the longer residential histories. This may correspond to some return migrations towards a rural place before the last shift and so followed by some “residential adjustment” into the rural areas.

**Figure 4. Residential histories of people finally settled in a rural *commune* since 1990:**



<sup>2</sup> Only people who made a final shift towards a rural *commune* were kept and those for which we had the whole residential trajectories. It finally corresponds to 631 individuals between 1990 and 2003.

**Figure 5. Residential histories of people finally settled in a rural *commune* since 1990, according to the number of residential steps realized:**



On the second hand, from figure 6 to figure 8 we propose mapping representations of our residential histories' sample, keeping people who have at least lived in two administrative French *départements*. The following treatments don't have to be considered representative of the spatial trajectories of people who settled in a rural area between 1990 and 2003, but rather as multiple examples which present an interesting diversity of residential histories.

**Figure 6. Looking for spatial recurrences in the residential histories of people who settled in a rural *commune* between 1990 and 2003:**

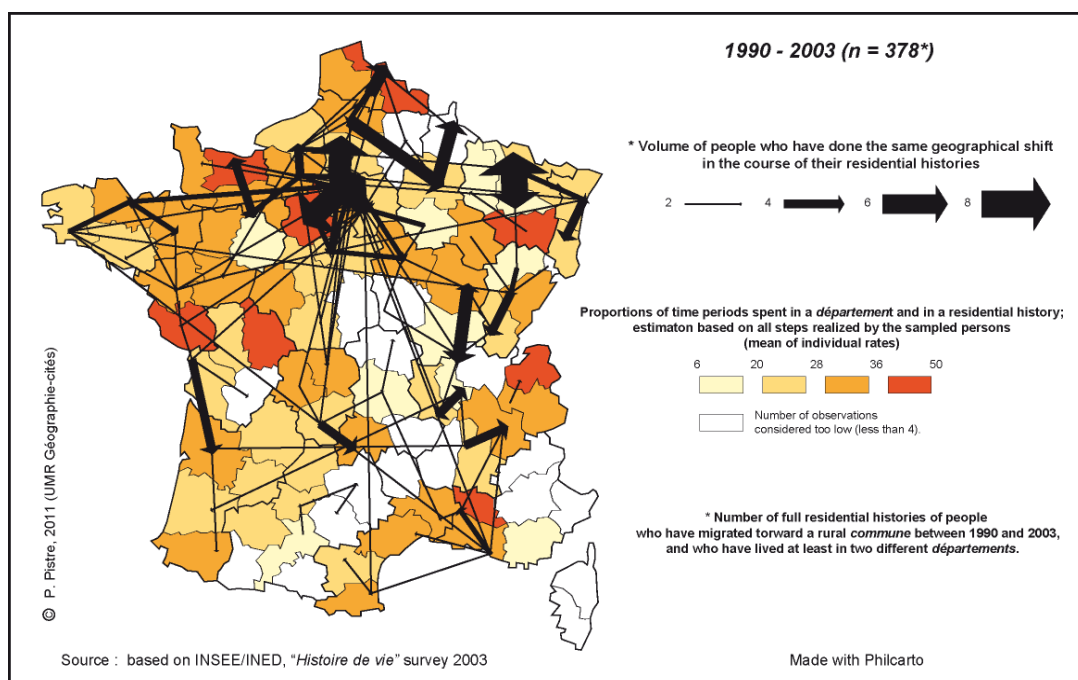
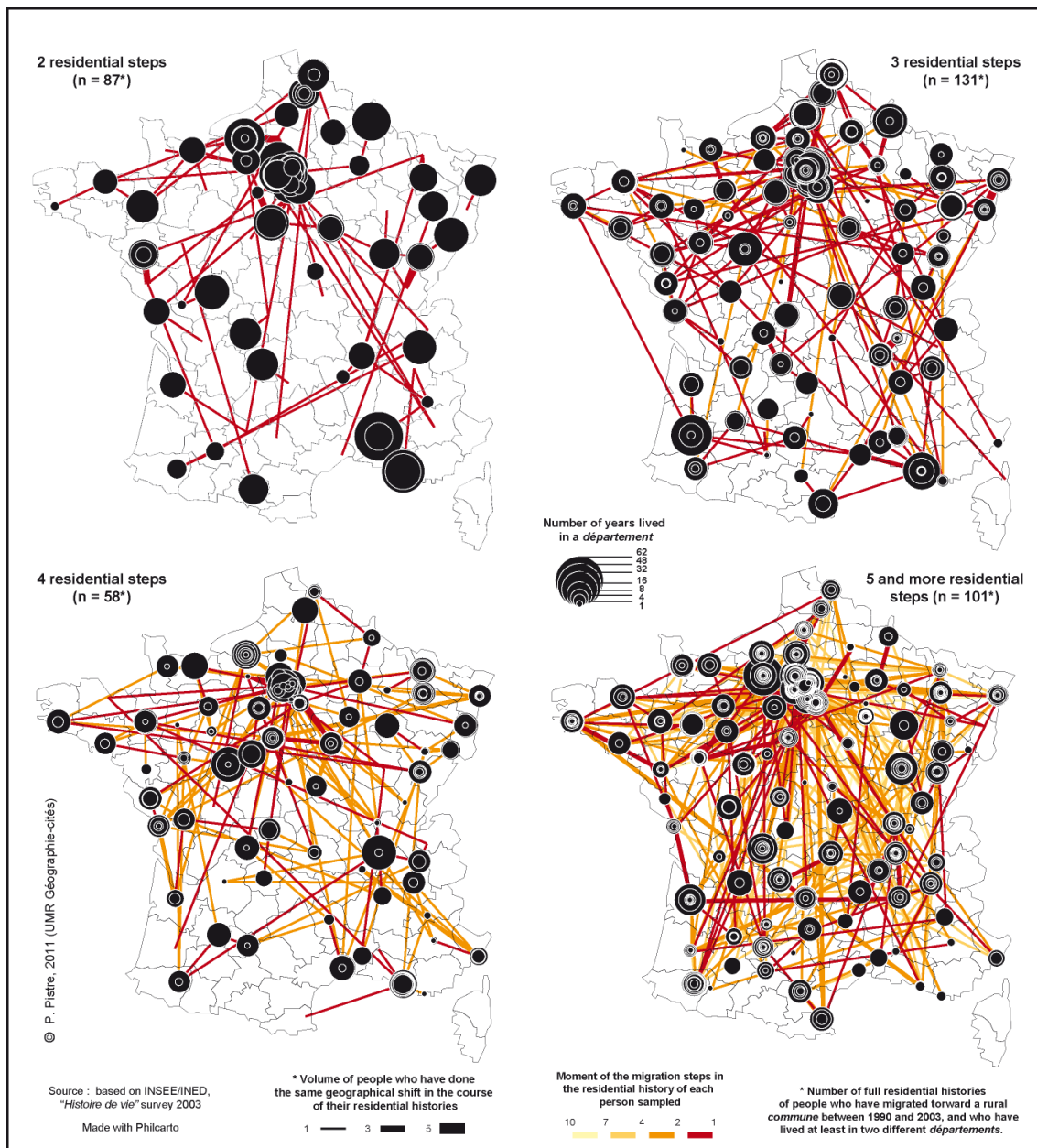


Figure 6 attempts to resume most of information from the defined sample in a mapping way, using two main indicators. Firstly, proportional arrows correspond to people who made a same path during their residential histories. Logically, *départements* of the major urban centres (e.g. Lille, Bordeaux, Rennes, Marseille, Lyon) - and foremost the Paris area – appear as the most common places. This point tends to confirm that people who relatively made geographically longer residential trajectory are those who conducted some back and forth between urban and rural areas. Then, the residential movements between bordering *départements* are really frequent, and kinds of residential “loops” and consecutive “trips” seem to appear in north of France which might highlight the importance of “nearby migrations” at a medium scale. Secondly, we have tried to estimate an average of time spent in a same area, in order to identify places characterized by longer periods of life than in other ones. Even if the results seem generally inconclusive - because of a sample data too low -, areas with most of the biggest urban centres often match to places where people have spent lower time of their residential history.

**Figure 7. Looking for spatial recurrences in the residential histories of people finally settled in a rural *commune*, by the number of steps realized:**





As for the previous charts, figure 7 - and the following one - seeks to decompose the defined sample, depending on the number of steps made during each residential history. According to the proportional circles which represent years spent by each person sampled in a *département*, a first logical comment can be made: the longer the residential histories are, the shorter the steps are. On the other hand, few recurrences can always be observed between the volume of years spent in a *department* and its characteristic rather urban or rural. A clear confirmation can also be made: the longer the residential histories are, the more recurrent having lived in a *département* with a large city – foremost Paris – is (*cf.* the visual overlay of circles). Then, a new graphic variable have been integrated from this figure, to indicate the moment of each shift in the individual residential histories, rather at the beginning or at the end. In looking at the longest histories and the latest shifts (*cf.* dark red), *départements* of the major urban centres are often origins of the migrations, and mainly from Paris where they join some rural areas of west of France.

### 3) **Conclusions and research perspectives:**

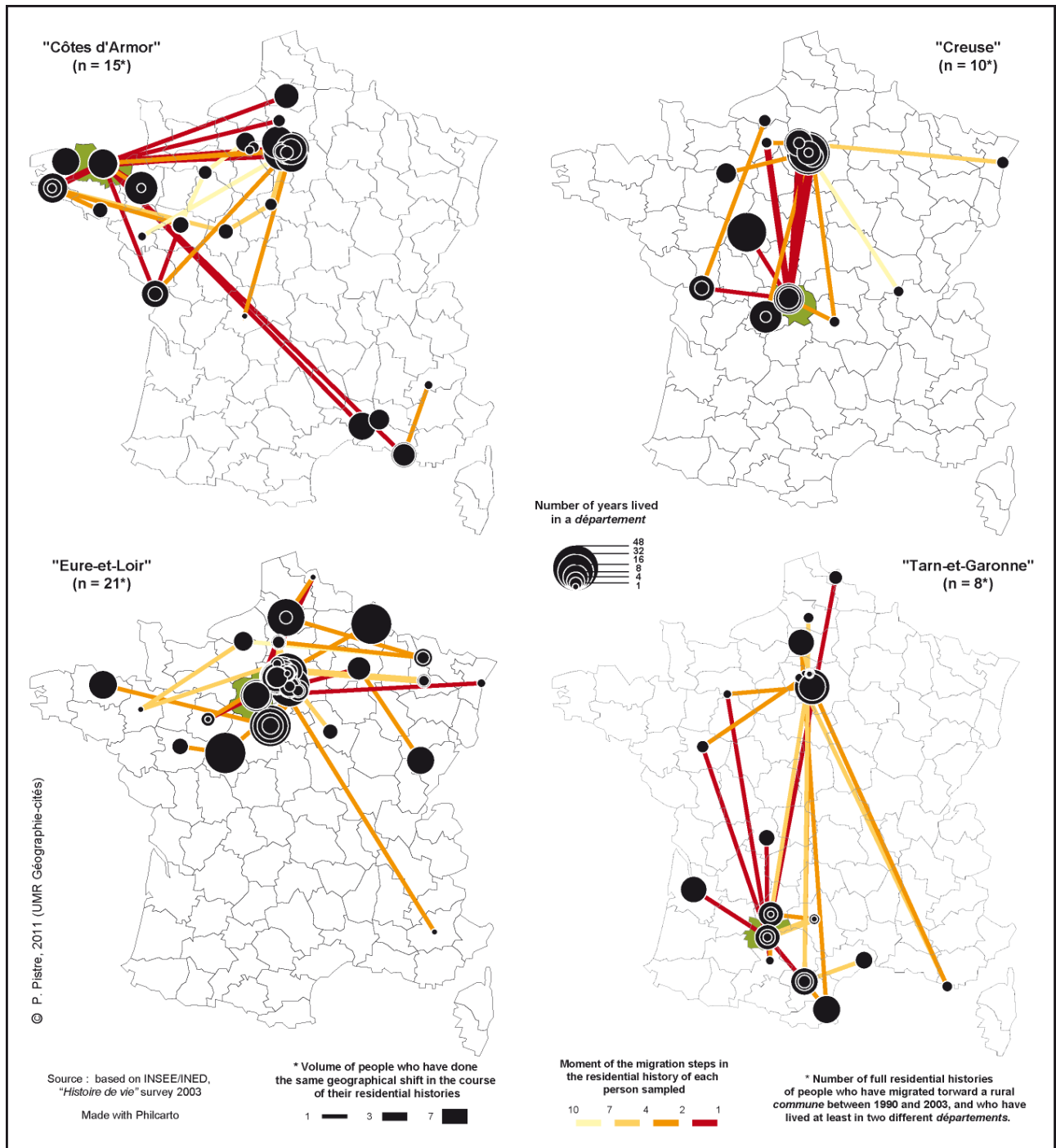
The main purpose of this paper has been testing the potentials of a life course approach from biographical data series in studying residential migrations towards French rural areas. Our aim was to complete some previous researches that we realized from census data and tourism/presence data.

Working on individuals' residential histories and trajectories can allow expanding the profiles' knowledge of people implicated, as we have shown in the first part. Some synthetic index based on biographical data could still be developed, and next integrated in some statistical modelling – in combination with socio-demographic and socio-economic indicators – in order to summarize the main explicative factors of demographic flows towards rural areas. Moreover, some statistical tests should be developed to test the significance of our results which have got with data from the sample of the *Histoire de vie* survey.

Then, we have proposed some visual representations – with charts and maps -, from individual histories and looking for collective recurrences. They have revealed interesting and general trends, but methods used are still in progress and have to be improved. Moreover, two approaches will be soon undertaken to try enhancing the readability of our biographical visualizations. Firstly, the use of network techniques seems among the most appropriate. They should allow clarifying the graphic results and - inspired by a genealogical approach - including spatial and sociological information about relatives (such as birth place of spouse, of parents ...).

Like we propose with the last figure 8, a strong thematic issue is also to conduct analysis on parts – even small ones - of our defined sample, to refine and to exemplify our comments. The following figure represents some cases studies of residential histories towards the rural areas of a same *département*. They clearly highlight specific attitudes and geographical trajectories according to the final rural area where people decided to settle. For example, a same process could be then implemented in analysing residential histories of people who lived their childhood in a same rural place. Finally, these kinds of empirical approach should be used to study trajectories of demographic groups, according to age, profession or income indicators, and in a qualitative way. We will mainly focus on the retired people who currently represent a key group in the demographic evolutions of French rural areas. Furthermore, they most of time present very rich residential histories which have to be studied in order to well understand their last rural settlement.

**Figure 8. Examples of residential histories concluding in the rural areas of a same *département*:**



## Acknowledgements

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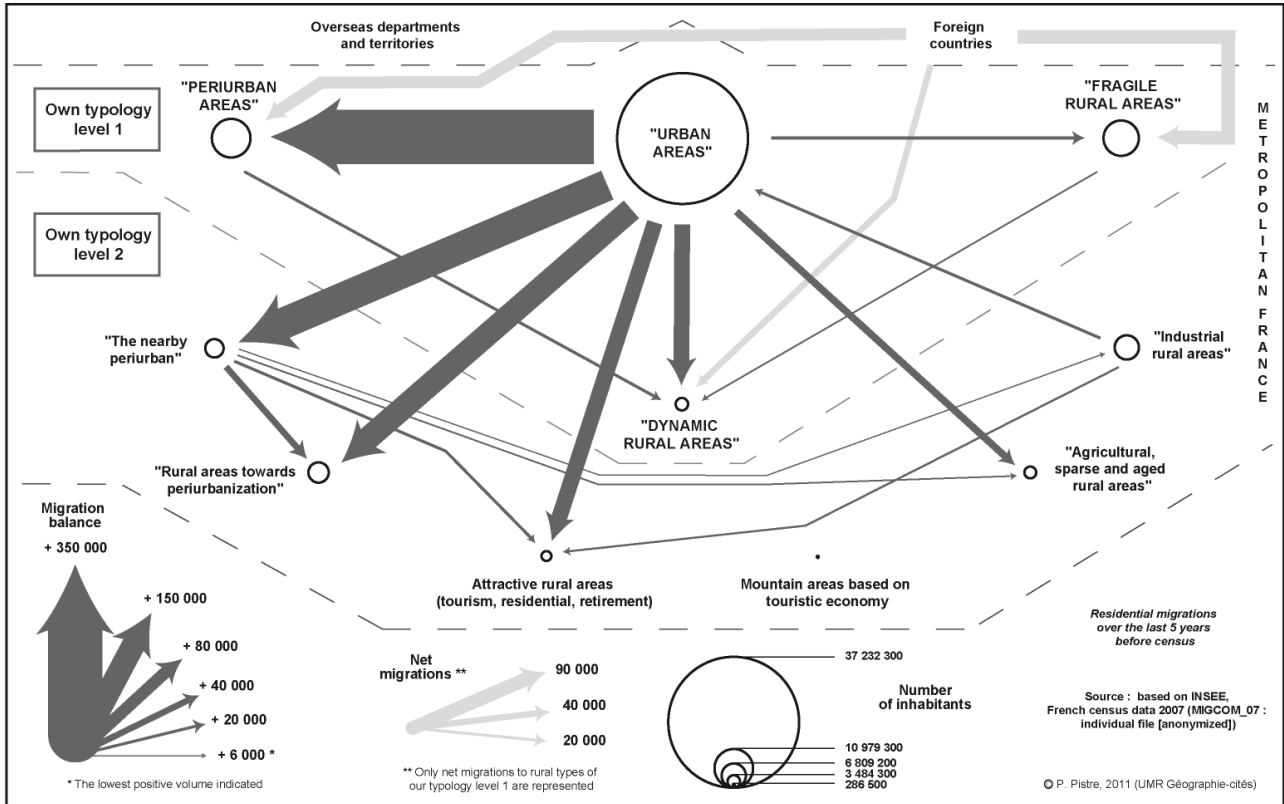
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## Appendix 1. Residential migrations toward and between French rural areas (2007):



## Appendix 2. Residential migrations by age groups toward French rural areas (2007):

