

CALLS Hub

Plain Language Summary

Do people who move to large cities progress faster in their career?

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Key points:

- 'Escalator' regions are places people move to get ahead more quickly in their career.
- In England, London is the main escalator region, and there are fears that this leads to other large cities losing out on the most highly-skilled workers.
- This research used the ONS LS to compare working age people at the 1991 and 2001 Censuses who were living in London or one of the next 9 largest English cities.
- For people who stayed in the same city during the decade, those living in London were 30% more likely to have advanced in their career than those in the other cities. Manchester was the only other city to show a similar effect, though it did so at a much lesser level.
- People who moved during the decade experienced a similar 'escalator' effect regardless of whether they moved to London or one of the other cities, and were more likely to have been promoted than people who did not move.

The idea of an 'escalator' city or region refers to places where people move in order to get ahead in their career more quickly. These people then tend to leave the area (or "step off the escalator") towards retirement to move to places with a better quality of life and lower living costs.

In the UK the most obvious 'escalator region' is London, which dominates as an area with a very high concentration of highly-skilled jobs. There are fears, however, that other large cities in England - so called 'second-tier' cities - lose out because London is more attractive both for employers and for those seeking to advance their careers.

Because many second-tier cities were once heavily industrialised they face several problems in developing into an attractive place for skilled workers to be. This can be because they are not seen as attractive places to move to, as well as a culture amongst existing residents where it has become the norm for young people to move away in order to get ahead.

Since the late 1990s, several Government initiatives have been set up to try to improve this situation, and second-tier cities themselves have also lobbied to receive more investment in order to allow them to compete with London.

This piece of research aimed to find out whether England's second-tier cities are managing to act as 'escalators' for their residents ("non-migrants") and for people who move to live there ("migrants"), and to see how well they do this compared to London.

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Champion and his colleagues used the ONS Longitudinal Study of England and Wales (ONS LS) to follow the progress of a large group of working age people at 1991 then again at 2001. This used data from the UK Census. London was compared to the next 9 largest English city regions: Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, Bristol, Sheffield, Liverpool, Nottingham and Leicester. For this analysis people were marked as having advanced in their career if they made the move to becoming a manager/employer in a large company (or other professional worker) from any other non-manual occupation.

For people who were still living in the same city at the end of the 10 year period, those living in London were 30% more likely to have advanced in their career compared to people living in the other cities. Manchester was the only other city to show a notable escalator effect for its non-migrants, though it did so much more weakly than London.

A slightly different picture was revealed when looking at people who moved during the decade. There was evidence that moving to any one of the cities gave people a higher chance of progressing in their careers compared to people who stayed in the same place. Although there was still a higher chance of promotion for people who moved to London, when compared to non-migrants the relative advantage for migrants was almost identical for London and all of the cities. The results show that all of the cities, and not just London, acted as 'escalators' for people who moved there.

The researchers suggest several reasons why moving to a large city might be linked to promotion: it may be that 'migrants' are more "ambitious" or "able" to begin with; alternatively it may be that people tend only to move once they have found a good job; a third possible reason suggested was that relocation within organisations is often associated with a promotion.

Because the reason for the enhanced career prospects of people moving to London or other large cities is not clear, the authors urge further investigation into what makes people decide to move. Depending on what the main reasons are, it may be just as important to build policies focussed on developing employment growth in second-tier cities as it is to simply promote them as attractive places to live.

LINKS

Original Paper:

[Champion, T, Coombes, M & Gordon, I \(2014\) How far do England's second-order cities emulate London as human-capital 'escalators'? Population, Space and Place, 20\(5\), 421 - 433](#)

Further information about the ONS LS of England and Wales:

www.ucl.ac.uk/celsius

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www.calls.ac.uk

This summary written by Fiona Cox, CALLS Hub, 1 July 2015