

Cities luring young residents back from inner-ring suburbs

February 26 2015, by Meredith Gunter

City centers across the country are attracting younger, wealthier and more educated residents, according to a new study published by the Demographics Research Group of the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service.

Based on analysis of 66 major cities across the country, researchers identified rising poverty rates and falling incomes in a zone of "inner-ring" suburbs surrounding city centers, while suburbanization continued in newer and larger "outer-ring suburbs" that are responsible for most [population growth](#).

While the "donut" model of the city proposed in the report is not new, an empirical, systematic study is. The characteristics of residents and neighborhoods, including age, income, education, race, population density and housing characteristics, are graphed by distance from the center of the city, providing a clear visualization of patterns of metropolitan change between 1990 and 2012.

"The patterns of change are remarkably consistent," noted Luke Juday, research analyst in the Demographics Research Group and author of the report, "and not unique to just a few cities with active plans for urban revitalization. The 'new donut' is seen across the country in the changing nature of the city center and suburbs, and in the concentration and spread of various populations – all worthy of attention from urban planners and managers."

The following is a summary of findings from the report:

- Since 1990, downtowns and central neighborhoods in cities across the country have attracted significantly more highly educated and higher-income residents.
- Young adults (22 to 34 years old) have increased as a proportion of residents in the center of nearly every city in the country, while falling as a proportion across all other areas.
- Older residents (ages 60 and up) form a smaller proportion of the inner-city population than they did in 1990.
- A decrease in income and education levels several miles outside the core is evident in most cities.
- Households below the federal poverty line are increasingly migrating outward from the center of cities.
- Racial groups are less concentrated in particular rings than they once were.
- Most growth in housing units and population continues to come at the outer edges of cities. Residents of the outer ring tend to be more educated and have higher incomes. They are much less likely to be younger adults, however.

In addition to the report, the project generated a large reservoir of graphs that can be accessed online [here](#). Using these graphs, viewers can compare 1990 to 2012 for each [city](#) in the study or compare different cities on the same graph.

"This comprehensive mapping of demographic characteristics in metropolitan areas in America contributes to ongoing discussion of the future of cities and the policies and programs appropriate to meeting the needs of their residents," said Qian Cai, director of the Demographics Research Group. "These findings reflect broader demographic changes in our society as well as changing preferences and possibilities for segments of the population."

More information: The full report is available online:
[www.coopercenter.org/sites/def ... Center_March2015.pdf](http://www.coopercenter.org/sites/default/files/Center_March2015.pdf)

Provided by University of Virginia

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