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Title: Spatial population and employment growth in rural Northern Ireland

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Abstract

It is evident that there are considerable spatial disparities in terms of employment and population changes within the rural economy in Northern Ireland in recent years. While some rural economies have waned, others have displayed strong economic growth, which presents challenges in terms of provision of adequate infrastructure such as roads, schools and other public services; loss of agricultural land; habitat fragmentation; degradation of the rural landscape; and increased traffic levels with associated air pollution and congestion. Understanding the causes of spatial disparities in economic growth is central to developing effective policies to promote rural development. This requires a systematic framework that accounts for the interdependencies between measures of economic growth and other drivers. Growth equilibrium models have been developed to analyse the interaction of economic phenomena occurring in spatial dimensions and account for interdependencies. This paper describes the application of a growth equilibrium model framework to analyse the linkages between population and employment patterns and other exogenous determinants of spatial growth within the rural economy in Northern Ireland. The model framework provides an insight into the extent to which 'people follow jobs' and/or 'jobs follow people' and whether rural areas benefit from urban growth. Preliminary results are presented using a range of specifications, which will form the basis of future model development.