


Rural Health
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Incomers and Locals: Length of Residence and ageing in rural communities


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The Studies

- Three studies involving older people in rural communities:
 - *Maintaining social roles in ageing*
 - 34 Interviews across three communities
 - *Healthy Eating, Healthy Ageing: Perspectives from a rural community'*
 - 40 interviews/focus group participants in one community
 - *ARC Linkage Grant Project: Community Engagement for Productive Ageing*
 - 69 Interviews across six communities


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An 'Unlooked for' Finding

- Most of these communities contain a highly visible group of older individuals who have moved into the community from urban environments – 'sea or tree changers'.
- Many of these individuals are highly visible and civically active within their communities
- Clear differences between such individuals and longer terms locals are likely to have major implications, and raise important questions, for the future planning of ageing support and services.


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Counter-urbanisation

- Accurate figures hard to pin down (e.g. Ragusa 2007 : ~2% sea/tree-change; Hamilton et al. (2003): 23% 'downshifted' over 10 years) but significant numbers moving from away from metropolitan living, predominantly to peri-urban.
- Highly uneven across regions and demographic categories
- Over-hyped in mass media as a national and international demographic trend – urbanisation remains the dominant trend
- Much more significant impact in arrival destinations – especially on small rural/regional communities (Baum 2008, Curry 2010)


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Counter-urbanisation Categories

- **Commuter**
 - Peri-urban – mainly coastal but increasing inland
 - Amenity driven free movers – lifestyle landscape, heritage
 - Highly educated, mobile, elite consumption patterns
 - Remain tied into urban economy
- **Ruralisation (sea/tree-change)** – major focus for ageing
 - Amenity driven – high cultural values
 - Beyond comfortable commuting – link into diversified local economies
 - Lower SES - Pensions or local employment
 - Mixture older, retired/semi-retired and alternate life-stylers
- **Displaced Urban (urban spill)**
 - Economically forced re-location – high proportion unemployed and single families, lower education
 - Likely to return to urban if circumstances improve

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Local Impact: Denmark (WA) a case study*

- 1970s collapse of small dairying -> depressed land prices
- Influx of ex-urban amenity migrants – retirees, alternate life-stylers
- Incomer-driven amenity improvement:
 - Culturally rich social and physical environment
 - Land regulation changes – flexibility, environmental preservation
 - Diversified local economy – niche production
- Commodification of rurality:
 - Amenity becomes marketable
 - Attract investment including speculative investment
 - Increased land values – increasing unaffordable for locals
 - Corporatised niche production
 - Increasing elite and urban consumption patterns

*Curry, G. N., G. Kozuberski, et al. (2001). "Cashing Out, Cashing In: Rural change on the south coast of Western Australia." *Australian Geographer* 32(1): 109-124.

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A Qualification

The following are incidental and indicative findings which raise important questions and point to the need for more rigorous evidence gathering and testing.



The Rural Ageing Experience: incomer and long-term local differentials

- Attitudes, approaches and expectations
- Relationship to community
- Options and resources:
 - Networks
 - Economic, educational and cultural resources
 - Mobility
 - Flexibility and change



Attitudes, approaches and aspirations/expectations

- Long-term Locals:
 - Stoicism – 'just got to get on with it'
 - Self-sufficiency/self-reliance: highly valued, carefully guarded
 - Limited expectation and modest aspiration – never had much and never expected much
 - See limited role for government
- Incomers
 - Higher aspirations demonstrated by move
 - Higher expectation – urban experience, more 'voice'
 - Change actors and drivers
 - See greater role for government



Relationship to Community

- Perceptions of 'Community'
 - Incomers (strategic): work to fashion community into an idealistic (rural idyll) image:
 - Strategic action to enrich socialisation/build community : community markets and gardens, activity groups.
 - Heritage/history, environmental, and arts and culture focus to activities
 - Interested in what they are interested in
 - Long-term locals (evolved): 'community' structure and organisation evolved out of what was needed in the day-to-day struggle to survive – many traditional organisations now struggling.
- Attachment to Place:
 - Incomers: aesthetic, environmental, philosophical, aspirational. Grounded in positive affect
 - Long-term locals: deeply and complexly rooted in history – attachment strength made up of a mix of positive and negative affective elements



Options and resources: Networks

- Long Term Locals:
 - Deeply historically rooted – support obligation flows as much from connection (historical) as from affect – being a local, being 'of' place.
 - Macro social and economic change mean that these ties are diminishing; although most still have at least one physically and emotionally close kin/confidant
 - Ties spatially bounded and multiply overlapping - fewer bridging ties
- Incomers:
 - Deep affective and kinship ties often left behind
 - Local ties: shorter history, dependent on positive affect and active involvement – highly vulnerable to conflict or disengagement
 - Strong and wide-reaching bridging and resource gathering ties



Economic, educational and cultural resources

- Incomers generally:
 - Higher educational attainment
 - Greater disposable income/liquid assets
 - Greater facility with technology and bureaucratic process
 - Different and wider mix of cultural interests
- This provides:
 - Greater mobility and more connectivity options
 - Greater capacity to source and draw in external resources
 - Additional flexibility options – especially residential
- BUT
 - With increasing disability and immobility, emotional and support ties become more important than those for information gathering and influence spreading (socio-emotional selectivity theory*).

*Carstensen, L. L. (1992). "Social and emotional patterns in adulthood: support for socioemotional selectivity theory." *Psychol Aging* 7(3): 331-338.



• Mobility and Services

- Incomers better placed to move **to** services:
 - Demonstrated preparedness to undertake a strategic move
 - Financially often better resourced – although not if kinship and support networks are in a high priced urban setting.
- Incomers often better resourced to **fight for** local services
- Long-term locals' stoicism, self-reliance and more modest expectations better equip for coping with poorer local services.
- Flexibility: two forms:
 - 'Rolling with the punches ' and 'making do' – long-term locals
 - 'Doing what you need to do to make it happen' - incomers

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The Future

Ageing service and supports providers will need to plan for very different, and diverse range of, rural communities in the future.

One major factor in what these communities will look like will be the extent to which incomers either:

- Stay and fight to maintain the dream in the face of increasing disability; or,
- Move on when the going gets tough.

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D.. (husband) had roots down in this community. Well I find that my roots are not down in this community, as much as you strive through that. D.. knows that if I was in any way not able to be here, I would very much like to be back in my own Melbourne-based family. Because there would be no-one to visit A.. (herself) here. I mean I know friends do, but friends don't regularly do. And I do miss my children and grandchildren very much. Because the (Bass) Strait is not easy to get across. I can be there in an hour but it is a lot of money and we live on the pension. (HF1)

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