

Going Bush: the Implications of Urban-Rural Migration

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Abstract

Traditionally, migration away from urban centres by those seeking lifestyle changes has been towards beach environments. More recently though, there have been small movements of people to rural environments seeking similar lifestyle changes. These movements to rural locales have been popularly referred to as treechange. Previous research on exurban migration has primarily focused on quantifying the migration process and attributes of the migrators. In contrast, this paper presents some preliminary findings on the impact of urban-rural migration on a small, semi-rural receiving area north of Melbourne. More specifically, it explores the impact that exurban migration has on local housing markets such as increases in house prices, decreases in affordability and declines in rental stock. The research also illustrates the divisions that appear in local communities between traditional residents and 'newcomers' over amenity issues and economic development.

KEY WORDS *exurban migration; housing markets; seachange; treechange; lifestyle; Melbourne*

Introduction

In his book *The Big Shift* (2001), Bernard Salt argued that at the end of the 20th century there was a new and emerging culture in Australia, the rise of a beach culture. He outlined that, historically, settlement in Australia had primarily been in cities (paradoxically found near the beach) and to a lesser extent in the bush. However, more recently he has suggested that Australians have been gravitating to beach locations in large numbers, to the point that they have now reached a critical mass. He put this change down to new emerging values in the Australian population and the desire for 'lifestyle', some of which has been facilitated by the increased financial capacities of the baby boomers. Salt coined the term seachange to refer to this new settlement pattern, population movement and preference for different types of living amongst Australians. In effect he was describing not

simply migration but suggesting that a new set of socio-spatial patterns was emerging in Australia.

Burnley and Murphy (2004) similarly argued that this changing migration pattern highlighted by Salt, from cities to less urban areas, has been traditionally labelled counter-urbanisation or population turnaround. In their book *Sea Change*, they chronicled the main trends in migration that have occurred across Australia since the 1970s. In this book, the authors contended that the movement of people away from metropolitan areas has not simply been contained to the beach but includes movement to rural and country areas. In the popular press this has been labelled 'treechange'. According to one report 'retirees were no longer looking for seachange and preferred a "treechange" back to the country where people were still friendly' (Duggan, 2005, 16). Likewise, Haxton (2005) suggested that the growing preference for rural areas, in preference

to seaside environments, is because some seachange places are bulging. The difference between the locational choices, bush versus beach, is that people are now seeking lifestyle and amenity that emanates from living in rural settings as opposed to beach environments.

This paper examines the immediate impact of treechange in one semi rural community, Castlemaine, located north-west of Melbourne (Figure 1). Much of the recent analysis on this type of migration has focused on quantifying migration patterns and predicting the next seachange location (where will people go when housing prices get too high), and less on the impact on communities and population change in receiving areas. Understanding the implications and effects of urban-rural migration has significant short- and long-term implications for policy and planning in these areas. As such, this paper focuses on the impact of changes to the local community of Castlemaine as a result of urban-rural migration. In particular the research analyses the divergent cultural values held by 'new' and 'old' residents and the ensuing community divisions that have become apparent. Little previous research has

been undertaken on the effects of urban-rural migration, the implications over time, and the day to day tensions that arise between long term residents and newcomers. This paper aims to fill part of this gap in geographical knowledge of contemporary migration patterns.

This paper uses both primary and secondary data sources. The secondary sources include Council (local government) reports, Australian Bureau of Statistics data about population changes, other demographic information about Castlemaine, and Valuer General data on house prices for the region. This information was used to provide a snapshot of trends in housing and population for Castlemaine since 1995. These data were not used to definitively state that urban migrators are the primary drivers causing, for example, rises to housing prices. This paper does argue that there are some significant changes occurring in Castlemaine's economic circumstances, population make-up and housing market, and anecdotally key stakeholders in the community have suggested that these changes have been caused by exurban migration. Secondary data were used to map these changed circumstances in Castlemaine and to augment the primary information collected.

Qualitative data were collected through interviews (26 in total) with a range of Castlemaine stakeholders. These included past and present Council officials, real estate agents, members of the local business association, and a number of residents. The participants were at times responding to questions in their 'official' capacity and at others as a resident of Castlemaine. In reporting information and opinions of the participants, names have been changed to ensure the anonymity of all individuals. Those interviewed for this research had resided in this area for differing periods of time, with some participants having lived in Castlemaine for their entire life and having generational links to the place, while others were recently arrived. In some instances interviewees were working and living in Melbourne but retained a house in Castlemaine. These particular participants all regarded Castlemaine as their 'home' and primary residence and were transitioning from Melbourne to a more permanent rural living arrangement. The in-depth interviews were conducted in mid 2004 and participants asked questions regarding individual perceptions of population change, economic circumstances, housing markets, and the implications of any perceived changes on Castlemaine.

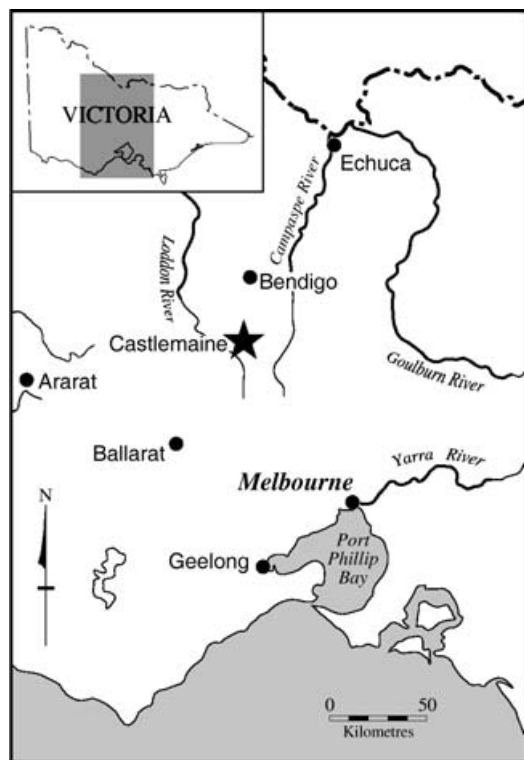


Figure 1 Location of Castlemaine, Victoria.

Urban-rural migration

The population movement described in this paper, from urban to rural, has been defined by many demographers, geographers and planners as counter-urbanisation. Studies in counter-urbanisation have traditionally quantified the movement of people from urban areas to rural localities, or as Spencer (1995, 154) stated, a simple concern with 'the redistribution of people'. Irrespective of the terminology, the process being described amounts to the movement of people from urban areas down the urban hierarchy to smaller rural places beyond the metropolitan boundary.

Much commonsense thinking about the relationship between rural areas and migration assumes that out-migration is the only significant population movement occurring in rural locales. This dominant understanding is reinforced in Australia by the traditional tendency for significant migration of younger adults from rural areas to urban places for the purpose of educational and employment opportunities. In addition, there has been a steady trend of rural depopulation (Tonts and Greive, 2002). However, Stockdale (2002, 345) has asserted that 'throughout the developed world, evidence has emerged to suggest that the historical trend of rural depopulation is being replaced by a repopulation of the countryside'. Such repopulation in rural areas is, in the Australian experience, quite complex. Vartiainen (1989) suggested that these movements are not indicative of wider national trends of population turnaround. Neither are they trends towards ruralisation, nor do they reflect a process of urban decentralisation and subsequent rural growth. There is not an across the board repopulation of the 'rural' occurring; rather, one contained to particular places that have scenic or Arcadian ambience (Selwood *et al.*, 1995).

The movement of people from urban areas to more scenic places has also been explained by geographic theories of exurban migration. In Australia, such movement has typically been conceptualised as being for the purpose of lifestyle gains, with retiree migration the traditional and largest cohort. Retiree migration was typified by the downsizing of housing and a gain in a low-stress lifestyle. Such migration in Australia has long been focused towards coastal regions, especially to warmer, northern coastlines (Murphy and Burnley, 1996). In Victoria, these areas include the Mornington Peninsula south of Melbourne, an area still, however, found within

the metropolitan boundary; and, more recently, the Bellarine Peninsula, which includes the regional centre of Geelong. The choice of sites for retirement migration was often thought to be initiated by people's history with places. For example, they once holidayed in these areas, returned to birthplaces or had purchased second homes there (Selwood *et al.*, 1996; Burnley and Murphy, 2004).

While the movement to the coastline has a well-developed literature, there is much less research on the complexity of migration to rural areas. Indeed, according to Spencer (1995), much of the work on urban-rural migration has been too focused on macro-scale population movements. He suggested that researchers need to pay more attention to the 'uneven development of rural localities' (Spencer, 1995, 153). Along with others (such as Cloke, 1985), Spencer contends that a focus on rural receiving areas is necessary. In particular, there is a need to rethink how we conceptualise spatial systems, and according to Vartiainen (1989) take into account the socio-cultural factors of individual areas. Likewise, Ford (1999) theorised that the processes of counter-urbanisation are distinct and the desire for a lifestyle change becomes a crucial driver or indicator. Given these traditional foci of rural population change, this research focuses less on quantifying the movements and more on why people move to rural locations and what are some of the impacts, perceived or real, of new residents.

The populist conceptions of 'seachange' and 'treechange', plus the academic versions, are closely aligned to traditional migration flows of people from metropolitan spaces to rural or less urban places. The difference between the historical trends and the more contemporary movement found in Australia is the importance placed on lifestyle gains provided by this migration. As Burnley and Murphy (2004, 157) argued:

The category of 'better environment' is a broad one and include[s] the desire for peace and quiet, security needs, and less crime, as well as the aesthetics of the natural environment itself.

Mitchell *et al.* (2004) considered that this desire for rurality is based on an idealised construction of a mythical rural lifestyle. They suggested that there are both tangible and intangible aspects to which people aspire or assume they will receive in rural living. Nonetheless, the authors believe these aspects, like those described by Burnley

and Murphy above, are important in understanding recent moves to rural areas.

In the United States and the United Kingdom (UK) recent research has considered the process of urban-rural migration as contributing to rural gentrification, indicated by the influx of seemingly affluent urbanites. In the UK, researchers have argued that there have been significant changes to the English countryside as a result of this new in-migration (Phillips, 2002; Smith, 2002; Darling, 2005). These changes are not simply economic changes but, as Ghose (2004, 529) explained,

conflicts arise between newcomers and the locals over the changing identity of the community, conspicuous consumption of the countryside, increasing privatization of resources, housing affordability, and issues of environmental conservation.

Walmsley *et al.* (1998, 116) suggested that such conflict can also arise when ‘newcomers’ start to resent the activities of more short-term visitors.

In Australia, Selwood *et al.* (1996, 222) also suggested there are many similarities between urban and rural gentrifiers:

One growing and increasingly powerful group ... is composed of middle class former city dwellers ... In terms of education, income and political ability in terms of knowledge of the system, the power to organise and thus ability to manipulate, the members of this group can be compared with the gentrifiers who have, over a similar period, moved into older inner suburban areas of large Australian cities and transformed them socially and physically.

Tonts and Grieve (2002, 61) explained that urban-rural migration can result in the commodification of rural landscapes, in some instances overdevelopment, and create a process of ‘creative destruction’. This process occurs when there is a disparity between the expectations of newcomers and those of existing residents regarding development. The newcomers want to retain the landscape to best reflect their imagined ideal of rurality, while traditional residents see financial benefit accruing from landuse changes and subdivisions.

The processes of migration in Australia continue to be multifaceted. In particular, rural depopulation and its impacts are in general continuing, while some rural growth has been evident in areas that conform to a mythical rural

image. Additionally, exurban migration has been dominated by movements to the coastline. However, the recent occurrence of ‘treechange’ has complicated these understandings of people movements. The move to rural (and some coastal) areas has predominantly been conceptualised as a retiree or, more recently, a middle class aspiration movement, but there are also people out of the metropolitan area searching for affordable housing and living options (Marshall *et al.*, 2004). These groups are moving to rural areas because housing is cheaper than in metropolitan areas. One of the features of seachange and treechange includes an increasing importance placed on the types of migrators and the impacts of affluent and knowledgeable urban refugees on receiving areas.

Castlemaine

The town of Castlemaine is located in central Victoria, approximately 120 kilometres northwest of metropolitan Melbourne (Figure 1). It is the main urban area of the Shire of Mt Alexander, with the townships of Maldon, Chewton and Newstead nearby. This semi-rural place was historically important during the early 1850s as the primary location of Victoria’s goldmining infrastructure (Hocking, 1994). Over time gold became a less defining feature of Castlemaine’s primary economic activity. The heritage of the gold rush era, however, has led to Castlemaine being included in a recent Cultural Heritage project (Lennon, 1997). Today the remnants of the gold rush era remain amongst the more important tourist drivers for Castlemaine and surrounding areas such as Bendigo and Ballarat.

While there was early farming in the 1880s, primarily by English settlers and Chinese market gardeners, Castlemaine has not relied significantly on agricultural production for economic success. Since the 1900s Castlemaine’s economic base could have been easily considered industrial, with a steel foundry (Thompsons) becoming a successful business through the last century. More recently, a large number of manufacturing companies has been located in Castlemaine, including the Castlemaine Bacon Factory (renamed KR Castlemaine Foods since 1993) and the Victoria Carpets mill. Some of these industries are still operating today and provide a major source of employment for local residents.

The Castlemaine township has a population of approximately 8000. According to the 2001 Census, only 51% of this population lived at the same address five years previously. It is an area

that has a large proportion of its residents aged over 60 years (approximately 26%). This has resulted in concerns by the local council of the long-term effects of an aging population on infrastructure and the town's future economic viability. The table below (Table 1) illustrates the age distribution of Castlemaine residents in 1996–2001.

The data in Table 1 below show a very distinctive age profile for Castlemaine. There are very few infants, suggesting that this area may not be attracting those people who are in the family formation stage of the life cycle. Notwithstanding the relatively old average age at which women have their first child in Australia (30.2 years in 2002), there are small proportions of individuals aged 18–34. The data also indicate that 22% of people are aged 35–49, and in the long term this cohort will add to an already aging population. Between 1996 and 2001 there were small increases in some sections of the age profile. While the number in younger years decreased in absolute terms, those aged over 35 years increased for each cohort specified. Further analysis of smaller cohorts might reveal a more nuanced reading of these changes, but for

the purpose of this paper this data reveal three main points:

- 1 this is an aging population;
- 2 there is a movement of younger people out, and
- 3 a movement of people aged over 35 into the area.

In addition to the age structure, in 2002 the town of Castlemaine had a large proportion of 1–2 person households (68%); a small number of government housing (4%); and a high rate of unemployment (10.2%). Of those employed, 23% are found in manufacturing jobs, while a further 16% and 15% are employed in retail and health and community services respectively. These show the local area's reliance on a few manufacturing industries mentioned above, as well as the local hospital, allied health provision and retail services. Given high unemployment and a reliance on a few sectors for jobs, household data illustrate that this is a low income area. In 2001, 40% of households were in the lowest income quartile and only 10% in the highest.

The tenure of all households shows that 50% of all occupied private dwellings are fully owned and 24% are being purchased. As Table 2 demonstrates, the proportion of dwellings fully owned is above State and national averages, a paradox given the income data presented above.

During the decade to 2003 house prices across Victoria have generally risen, with variations across the State according to local determinants. Castlemaine has been one Victorian location that has experienced significant increases in house prices above those found in the Shire as a whole and rural Victoria. As Figure 2 shows, Castlemaine experienced increased median house prices during the 1994–2003 period. The most significant and sustained increase began in 2000.

Overall, Castlemaine's median house prices were marginally higher (with differences averaging approximately A\$7000 per year) than the Shire and rural Victoria more generally.

This demographic snapshot of Castlemaine contextualises the population and housing issues

Table 1 Age distribution in Castlemaine 1996–2001.

Age Cohort	1996		2001	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
0–4	540	7	453	6
5–17	1428	18	1461	18
18–24	609	8	527	7
25–34	966	12	913	11
35–49	1679	21	1810	22
50–59	731	9	985	12
60–64	1168	15	1218	15
75+	794	10	921	11
Total	7915	100	8288	102*

* Total percentage does not equal 100 due to rounding.

Source: www.doi.vic.gov.au/DOI/knowyourarea.nsf – accessed 19/05/2004.

Table 2 Percentage tenure of occupied private dwellings, 2001.

	Castlemaine	Rural Victoria	Victoria	Australia
Fully Owned	50	45	43	40
Being Purchased	24	27	28	26

Source: www.dse.vic.gov.au/DOI/knowyourarea.nsf – accessed 15/09/2005.

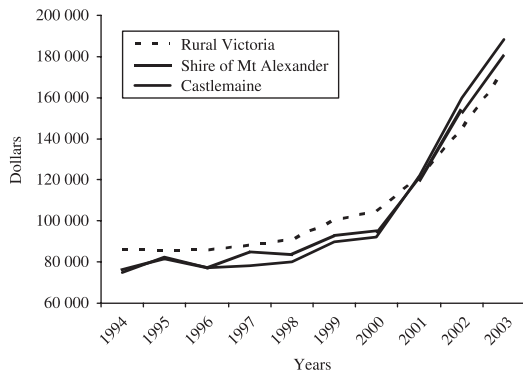


Figure 2 Median house prices, 1994–2003 (Source: Valuer General Victoria, 2003).

that have and continue to emerge in this semi-rural community. The small influx of people into this place and the simultaneous house price increases feed the ‘treechange’ narrative in this area. The aim of this paper is not to prove or quantify the extent of the population movement, but to analyse how residents understand or perceive recent changes to Castlemaine.

In Castlemaine there is little doubt that many residents and key stakeholders believe that treechange is occurring. According to the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research, those moving to Castlemaine include people ‘seeking lifestyle attributes’ (Shire of Mt Alexander, 2004b, ii). Joy, a recent resident to Castlemaine stated: ‘... what I was looking for was a romanticised element about lifestyle, there’s no doubt’. Likewise Ben, a real estate agent, when asked if people moving into Castlemaine are predominantly from Melbourne, confirmed that:

Predominantly ... we assess it every quarter – and 80 per cent are out of town purchases. And that’s predominantly Melbourne, but it’s interstate, the odd international purchaser as well. But they either have an alliance to Castlemaine or they’ve heard about it as a lifestyle choice.

Along with this lifestyle narrative is the assumption by many in the local community that there is a very particular ‘look’ to these newcomers. Valerie, who has worked with the local Council suggested:

People who come up here with a disposable income, they’re retired quite often. The theory is that they sell a house in Melbourne

for a great deal of money, buy one here for half the price and contribute the extra money to their superannuation or whatever it is and it allows them to live comfortably.

Given the assumption that treechange has been occurring in Castlemaine, a range of issues has arisen in the local community. In this paper two such issues are discussed: first, the perceived impact new residents are having on house prices of the area; and second, the resulting tensions arising over residential amenity and the ‘look’ of Castlemaine.

Issues

Housing – prices and heritage

One of the perceived impacts of the move to the country has been on local house prices. In addition to the data provided previously, interviewees clearly perceive house price rises to be an outcome of people moving from Melbourne and pushing prices up, and out of reach of a range of groups.

You’ve got the seachange people ... They’re coming up, selling their place in Melbourne. Probably get a nicer place at their time of life, probably half the price. So they’re cashed up. So younger people have to cope with those prices. (Russell, interviewee.)

What is being suggested here is that exurban migrants enter the Castlemaine housing market pushing prices up with the effect of pushing younger potential homeowners out of the market. The flow-ons of this are numerous. First, it decreases the amount of affordable housing available in the town. Second, it has the potential to push low income earners further out of the rural centre to poorly serviced areas. Third, it creates a demand for housing and possibly decreasing rental supply.

A former Council officer believed that the ‘enormous increase in housing prices has been a huge problem’ (Katherine, interviewee). She went on to explain that the housing ‘affected’ has primarily been that in the centre of the town:

But the houses in that core of Castlemaine have basically been sold off by what I would call the old working class citizens and taken up by middle to upper-middle class Melburnians (Katherine, interviewee).

The impact of the housing ‘boom’ in Castlemaine has resulted in a decline in affordable

housing and 'the absence of rental accommodation' (Valerie, interviewee), and low-income households are now 'having to move to other areas to acquire affordable housing' (Adam, interviewee). Those affordable housing areas include the surrounding towns and some, like Ben and Frank, both local real estate agents, suggested that Bendigo has more affordable housing than Castlemaine. Ghose (2004) has suggested that locals being marginalised in the housing market is a common impact of exurban migration. Likewise, Smailes (1997) argued that exurban migration can typically result in housing price increases.

While there is a distinct perception that exurban migration and treechangers have driven the rises in the housing market, an analysis of national housing markets reveals that the growth experienced in Castlemaine, while slightly higher than other areas, does not seem significantly different than rates of change experienced across rural Victoria (or the State more generally). However, since median values measure middle values of ranked data, there is a clear push upwards of the value of houses sold in this time period. While this may be a similar trend found across Victoria, it still remains a clear indicator of a house price increases. The impact of such house price changes can cause a decrease in housing affordability and result in, according to Yates and Wulff (2000), housing polarisation.

These pressures being currently faced in the housing market of Castlemaine are likely to intensify in the future. According to Victorian State Government projections the population of Castlemaine is expected to grow to 11 500 by 2021 (Shire of Mt Alexander, 2004b). Again, this pressure for housing and appropriate development will mean land-use conflicts will occur. Currently, these land-use disputes will not simply be confined to the urbanised section of Castlemaine but also extend into the surrounding rural pockets (Shire of Mt Alexander, 2003).

Within the township of Castlemaine the housing pressures currently being felt have led to community tensions over development projects. On the one hand the proposed Mt Alexander Urban Living Strategy (Shire of Mt Alexander, 2004a) suggests that the growing demand for housing in Castlemaine needs to take into account the heritage of buildings and associated streetscapes. The issue for the local council is that Castlemaine's image is, in part, built around the existence of architecturally and culturally important buildings, structures and other historic

landmarks. This set of circumstances has resulted in a polarisation within the community which surrounds the housing and commercial development.

For example, Carol, a resident of 15 years, and Clive, who has lived in Castlemaine all his life, remarked on what draws people to the area and then the subsequent conflict over what the place looks like:

Clive: They like the appeal, the charm and the character of the older homes, what they've been used to and what they've had previously.

Carol: They're mostly from the people coming here being heritage aware and choosing this place because of the heritage and the old worldly country feel of it, and then resisting developments that are being proposed by the more traditional [long established] Castlemaine town folk. Resisting it because they don't want to see the type of thing they moved here for changing. Which is kind of weird. You'd expect the people who had lived here all their lives to resist change more.

These different expectations and values set up a dichotomy between the notion of what constitutes a 'local' and a 'newcomer'. This difference becomes most easily defined in relation to a recently-proposed housing subdivision on the town boundary. A large number of those interviewed pointed to this housing project as a source of community conflict. It was argued that newcomers are anti-development while locals are positioned as pro-development. As Jean, a long-term resident and small business owner suggested:

You do have a real conflict between people who've been here for a long time and who perhaps are in business and are very pleased to see the activity, and those who are actually escaping from Melbourne and say: 'oh no, we don't want any more people here. We want this beautiful country town to stay exactly as it is. We don't want any more industry; and we don't want any more development'.

Much of the development in the town centre fits closely to what Ghose (2004) described as rural gentrification. In this process façade restoration of housing and modern duplications of Victorian and Edwardian buildings occur, along with the reconstruction of 'heritage' streetscapes. The 'new' gentrified streetscape may represent a

return to the past, but also symbolically reflects the order and values of a bygone era. Jager (1986, 80) argued that in particular, 'it is through facadal restoration work that urban conservation expresses its approximation to a former bourgeois consumption model in which prestige is based'. Allen (1984) believed that heritage style renewal reflects the values of middle-class living. Even though the locational preferences of this class are different (rural), their vision for a harmonious and homogeneous community is the same. The adoption of heritage style maintains social differences as it expresses 'social identity, of representing values, of affirming arrival, of symbolizing possession and of demonstrating presence' (Jager, 1986, 90).

Philo and Kearns (1993) believed that such place-making may be a subtle process of manipulation where marginal groups, who are potentially most at risk of displacement, are convinced by local authorities that changes to the urban landscape are in their best interests. They are lured by discourses that target middle-class aspirations. Therefore, place-making can be viewed as a 'selling of places' and the manipulation of culture to entice economic initiatives and community harmony. While the place-making in Castlemaine could ultimately enhance economic enterprise, there is little need to 'sell' rural locations. In fact it seems that urban-rural migrators are already enchanted by the ideal of rurality. Given that rural living has already been effectively 'sold' and that we traditionally consider place-making to be the domain of cities, in rural areas this push to beautify rural towns is just as significant. Those economically and socially marginalised in Castlemaine may well be subtly persuaded that streetscape renewal programs enhanced the long-term potential and economic success of places.

Changing spaces

Apart from the divisions over housing price rises and development in Castlemaine, there is much anxiety about how the character of this place is changing as a result of 'newcomers' lifestyle expectations. What is clear here is that some long-term residents are in favour of development, but when these developments are conceptualised as driven by 'newcomers' tensions emerge. What this means is that when changes stereotypically fit within the 'lifestyle' narrative, then 'locals' are less than supportive of change. What seem to be at the crux of these tensions are the changes that are emerging in the local

area, in particular to the streetscapes, increased traffic and duplication of Melbourne-like amenity, or, as indicated above, urban middle-class values. What this alludes to is that there is a qualitative difference between the aspects of lifestyle that people desire from living in rural settings, and the consumption patterns that are associated with new residents. As such the tensions that are arising are focused on consumption patterns of treechangers and their apparent desire to have the place stay rural.

Adam, a former senior Council employee suggested that the economic development has been a plus for the township.

... the central business area, Mostyn Street East, I'd particularly name, was an area where you could walk through and drop a grenade, so to speak, and you would do no damage. It was literally dead – I don't think that's an exaggeration in any sense of the word ... now it's probably one of the liveliest ends of town. (Adam, interviewee.)

However these positive sentiments regarding the repopulation and revival of the civic centre are not shared by all. Russell, a resident of approximately 15 years, lamented that the centre of Castlemaine '... could be just a suburb of Melbourne as far as the café latte set and everything else that goes with that'. Carla, who has lived here most of her life, worried about the impact of such changes on her experience of rural living.

They like the lifestyle. They like to live in a country town. I mean it's very nice to be able to stroll down the street, get your groceries, say hello to half a dozen friends you meet on the street and drive home again. And usually, to be able to get a parking spot without any trouble at all, although it's getting worse.

The concerns over the changes to Castlemaine are constant. Carol suggested: 'There are now too many places you can buy a coffee, I think, in Castlemaine. It's become more visitor focused'. The tourist focus of the town is an issue reiterated by Kenneth:

But the numbers of businesses that are opening for the weekend tourist trade have certainly increased. And the numbers of cafes and cafe-restaurants that have established would have tripled in the time that I've been here – the eight and a half years that I've been here.

The perceived impact of these changes creates a range of divisions within the community. First, there is an assumption that a new class or affluence is emerging in Castlemaine and that local services are being directed towards newcomers to the area. Gary, Amanda and Jason each made such suggestions:

Gary: They bring a desire for new foods and good coffees, and certainly you would have to say that Castlemaine is a fairly affluent place now, where it wasn't affluent in the mid 1990s.

Amanda: It's sort of becoming the 'Paris end' of Mostyn Street – up towards the Restorer's Barn. There's a few good little shops up there. I suppose it is a little more up-market. There's subtle little changes that are happening.

Jason: Coming out of the café society of Melbourne they expect exactly the same and the quality that they get there ...

The exact nature and extent of these changes identified above are not quantifiable by residents. In fact these are the perceptions of local Castlemaine residents. However, the construction and reiteration of these ways of thinking create a sense of unease within the community and have the potential to reinforce an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. It also brings into view the unconscious belief that a homogeneous community existed previously and the advent of new populations creates another form of polarisation in Castlemaine.

Indeed Norman, a local councillor, took this polarisation a step further by suggesting that:

... you have people who at one of the scale are the real rednecks, and people at the other end of the scale, well I call them the gumtree nazis.

This divisive talk does fit into traditional narratives that construct rural dwellers as 'rednecks' and a more contemporary stereotype of exurbanites as 'gumtree nazis'. While this is an extreme set of sentiments, Norman is reproducing a set of social and cultural divisions within the local community. As such, I am arguing that these are not benign words, nor do the words have agency (Fairclough, 1995), but set up specific ways of talking about the Castlemaine community.

Conclusion

Traditional migration research focuses on quantifying the movement of people in and out of

specific locales. While this remains an important process in understanding population change, this paper has concentrated on the impact of urban-rural migration on receiving areas. What became evident is that the impacts of this treechange migration are diverse. At one level, exurban migration has impacted on the Castlemaine housing market, in real and perceived ways. There have been increases in house prices, but it would be foolhardy to suggest these were directly caused by treechange. Even though many local residents and other key stakeholders provide evidence suggesting these new migrants have 'upped' the local housing market, the direct link is unclear. There is, however, a process of housing polarisation underway, pushing out low income earners from the Castlemaine housing market. Also becoming evident is the suburbanisation of housing taking place on the periphery of the town borders.

Apart from the impact of the housing market, another effect of exurban migration has been the changes to the local economy and streetscapes. These changes have caused tension between existing residents and newcomers, over development projects and the 'look and feel' of this rural space. The perception is that a new rural class is emerging and changing the local landscape – making existing residents feel out of place.

These impacts examined in this research can provide a starting point in understanding the complex interactions that occur in local areas as a result of an influx of new residents. In the long term, State and local governments will need to attend to the issue of housing polarisation in Castlemaine and the effects of an ageing population on the local economy and infrastructure. Any continued population growth, as is expected in Castlemaine, may ultimately result in further changes to the rural lifestyle people are seeking.

At present, population turnaround has been influenced by a divergence in housing markets between metropolitan centres and receiving areas. However, Burnley and Murphy (2004) suggested that the convergence in housing prices may see treechange or seachange areas becoming less affordable than in the past. Therefore the financial capacity for people to move will lessen.

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