

Chapter 19. Reclaiming livelihoods - initial steps to re-institute a viable socio-economic base for living in country settings

Anthony Hogan, Bruce Wilson, Douglas Baker, Lorelle Burton,

Laurie Buys, and Michael Cuthill,

Introduction

A key feature of this text has been the way in which it has unpacked the application of neo-liberal or free trade policies in agriculture and in turn, living in country Australia, over the past 40 years. An overview of these changes and initiatives can be found in Chapter 18. The introduction to this text promised that this book would not simply lay before the reader the many impacts and concerns arising as a result of this change process, but that it would open up a new way forward. This process was commenced in Chapter 18, where issues of a governmental approach to change were explored. This chapter will focus more specifically on responses that can be initiated from a community perspective. But before we move to outline the capacity for progress on these issues we must first bring forward, as succinctly as we can, the heart of the problem that is of concern to us. And that is our concern with what it is about the intensification of globalised free-trade and what this means for the continued viability of country living. At the heart of this concern is the extent to which the changing way in which globalising enterprises operate, leaves little room, at the local level, for everyday people to have livelihoods and to maintain their communities. Much of the angst underpinning change in country settings centres on the extent to which cultures and community can be maintained. For Chris Hedges (2010; noting the work of Polyani) – unfettered capitalism results in the death of society. And so it is this question of balancing the interface of economy and society that is at the heart of this project, revisiting as it does, the question of what is the purpose of economy, if it is not to support the peoples' livelihoods? This it seems is the issue on the table and one that we need to unpack somewhat before proceeding with the remainder of this closing chapter.

Free-trade policies were designed to optimise the capacity for industry to maximise their return on investment, based on the philosophy of buy low; sell high, within a context of increasing globalised markets (Carr and Kefalas). With the gradual removal of tariffs, producers who could conduct their businesses on a global scale, because they were able to shift productive processes to places where they could access the factors of production (land, labour and capital) cheaply, while being able to sell their products back into western markets at or near the usual price, were positioned to benefit. Patel's (2007) study of coffee sales is a case in point. Yet as Carr and Kefalas have made evident, these kinds of policies were always going to be socially problematic, particularly for small family producers. They set in play a whole new, agrarian revolution, on a global scale, resulting in the displacement of many family based producers and their families along with the impoverishment of many others. Central to the success of this change process has been the disembedding of localised labour relations from the economic base and the subsequent decoupling of established community from local, and in turn global, economy (Bligh 2006). A new form of social relations resulted - a set of relations that conflates community identity and wellbeing with the success of global markets.

Within this new form of social relations, the price mechanism has been installed as the primary policy instrument for the organisation of the economy with the consequence that it is serving to restructure the nature of relations between business, labour and the state (Bligh 2006) with the enterprise becoming the true subject of government (Foucault 2008). The crude installation of price as the organizing principle of the market to the benefit of the enterprising subject has also resulted in the social body and its governance being increasingly organized 'according to the rules of the economy' (Foucault 2008: 242). Taken together, the

emergence of free marketism, the privileging of the globally-oriented enterprising subject and the devolution of both the means for community livelihoods but also social protections, it is not only country communities and regions that find themselves in a vulnerable position – whole aspects of our economies are increasingly facing constraints in their capacity to progress their economic development (Markusen, 2007). The demise of manufacturing in westernised countries is a case in point. At the time of writing, Australia recently witnessed the loss of iconic producers of cars and white goods to so-called cheaper overseas countries, along with aircraft maintenance for our national carrier, but to name a few of our industries – all in the name of greater efficiency. Developments in transport, information and communications technologies further accelerate the process of change, creating as they go, radically different conceptions of the relationship between space and time, meaning that the link between locality, economy and community is further weakened.

The demise of one means of production, yielding as it has to another, is not what is at issue here. It could be argued that such change is unavoidable or part of the natural progression for a society. What has to be considered here is the scale and social impact of this change process when one considers that not only agriculture, but also manufacturing, business services and banking and increasingly medical services, are all following the same path. While automatic telling and online access did not mean the end of employment in banking, it certainly changed the nature of banking and the size of banks. Mechanising farming has not resulted in the end food production, or consumption. However, changes in banking, education, healthcare and agriculture are all central to the demise of rural living, as they underpin the basics of localised economies (Hogan et al. 2013). The combined impact of such change manifests itself in the loss of jobs and subsequent loss of local spending, resulting in many inland settlements, in their current form, being no longer socio-economically viable. Unlike cities, the play of the economic hand is quite manifest in country centres – one's expenditure is literally the other person's income. In the country setting one can more readily see the broader social consequences of spending patterns, whereas in cities, they are masked in anonymity. In the city, a shop closes, another trader soon seems to take its place. In the country, a shop closes and it tends to stay empty. However, unlike in many urban settings, in country settings it is most likely that you know the people affected, personally.

At the same time communities have witnessed the concurrent devolution of the role of the state to dispersed individual actors. Notions of localism proliferate. Workers, who would have once turned to the state for support and the protection of their livelihoods, are dislocated from the market (Bligh 2006). In the era of localized self-sufficiency, the state is increasingly shifting the responsibility for wellbeing onto individuals (Hogan and Lockie 2013). Writers such as Hedges (2010) foresee the death of the middle classes, as though the benefits of several hundred years of enlightenment and the devolution of slavery, serfdom, classes and monarchical rule, are to be replaced by new forms of social dominance, but in this case, where the increasingly powerful but relatively small ruling classes have no responsibility for those who are unable to provide for themselves.

The last agrarian revolution was closely associated with significant social, environmental industrial and economic change. So too it seems that this process of agrarian change is associated with a significant period of change. The last such change process, however, was associated with significant transactional costs to those marginalised by the change processes. There are significant socio-economic transactional costs associated with this change process; the global phenomenon of farmer suicide being just one aspect of this change process (Hogan et al. 2012). One can question whether society is any better at managing processes of change

now than we were several hundred years ago. Namely, that the costs of change are allowed to lay where they fall (Titmuss 2006) and that the process of change is set up to benefit the few at the cost of the many. While the outcomes of these processes are not inevitably all doom and gloom, these questions are, nonetheless, on the table and these are the issues that need to be resolved.

What then might happen if the prophecies of doom are not to come to pass? There is a range of policy strategies at play that, in certain circumstances, may ensure the viability of country settlements. We are going to look at these settings and consider why it is that such strategies cannot be deployed simplistically, particularly when the issue of spatiality is taken into account. We need to do this because we constantly see advocates taking up specific policy agendas without thinking through the consequences agendas may have for the situation of interest. We will then move on from being grumbly sociologists to identifying other ways and means of progressing the socio-economic viability of country settlements.

Localism as a response to globalisation

Amongst some policy makers, rural decline is not necessarily a problem. The perspective is taken that those early forms of country living have served their purpose and that it is time to progress. Others may take the view that many inland parts of Australia should never have been populated. One could take the view that hindsight, informed by globalism and climate change, provides a certain clarity in perspective. For many, decline, consolidation and the restructuring of the rural sector are nothing more than the realisation of the inevitable, the maturation of the neo-liberalist strategy; there is no alternative. At the same time, locally based people have been looking for solutions to arrest decline and have embraced notions of localism as a potential solution to the challenges that they face. Localism has remerged across OCED countries as a policy strategy concerned with providing local people with the capacity to take decisions which impact on the viability of their livelihoods (for a recent review of localism see Evans 2013). Hogan et al. (2013) point out that the strength of localism as a policy is that it situates place, rather than sector, at the heart of the question of the sustainability for in-land communities in Australia; it identifies both a strategy and a national resource stream to fund development and change.

However, this text makes it evident that some significant negatives offset such benefits. Firstly, Collits (2013) observed that the social as well as economic issues impacting on the viability of in-land settlements may be beyond the control of local communities – examples being the historic highs which the Australian dollar recorded over recent years (dutch disease?), and product dumping of agricultural product from a variety of sources into the Australian market. Similarly, factors such as increasing climate variability, emergent climate change and globalisation, simply cannot be addressed at a local level. Second, the resources allocated to the process fell well short of the resources required by an order of some magnitude: Hogan et al. (2013) suggest that in order to address the adaptive needs of Australia's regional development bodies, a funding allocation of \$55 billion would be required. Even then, they argue, the sustainability of such communities could not be assured. While regional policy continues to focus on the question of the sustainability of rural communities, Hogan and Lockie (2013) point out that at its centre, Australia's form of localism is centred on a principle of economic Darwinism; that under the current global economic settings, only some communities have access to the diversity of economic, natural and social resources to make them viable and any other communities, at best, will survive as

dormitory townships in relation to these, or that they will wither on the vine (Hogan and Young 2013b). Such an outcome stands in stark contrast to the policy rhetoric put forward by many of the nation's political leaders. It seems unlikely that under the existing policy settings that Australia's deserts will bloom again, if they ever did (Gross 2013). And yet at the same time, policy makers enthusiastically look to develop agriculture in areas such as Northern Australia (which is sparsely populated, few available workers or accommodation; has a variety of climate patterns and challenging growing conditions, rangelands, poor soils and is isolated from markets) utilising a model that is not based upon family farming but on one of large, increasingly, globalised agri-business. If agriculture is deemed to be uneconomic in places such as Tasmania (great soils, good rainfall, available workforce, good climate prospects but also geographically isolated) and parts of the Murray Darling Basin (currently producing large proportions of Australian agricultural product), why would the Northern Australia suddenly offer a viable alternative – unless of course there was a way to step around Australia's labour, wages and health and safety laws. But we digress. The question remains as to the extent to which rationalised economic policy adequately enables a vision for a populated, vibrant, and equitable rural and regional Australia (Smith and Pritchard 2013), as it once was promised, to be realised? This question takes on particular salience as we consider the fact that change will continue to impact on country Australia.

Ongoing change

In country Australia in the 1930s, children would commonly walk or ride a horse to school. When Max Hogan (the first author's father) was a boy living in the Central West of New South Wales, he rode a horse to school a distance of eight kilometres and it took 30 minutes to get there. On Sundays his family drove the sulky to Church. It was a distance of 12 kilometres and it took 45 minutes to get there. Both the school and the church are now closed. For those who remain in the area the majority of school education and Church services are accessed in the regional centre, now a distance of 59 kilometres away, involving a motorised travel time of approximately 30 minutes. Country people now commonly drive up to an hour to utilise the facilities available in regional shopping centres. Such journeys are often justified on the basis that regional centres offer cheaper prices (such as being able to purchase a \$5 imported tee-shirt) without regard to the longer-term consequences of globally driven cannibalising market strategies designed to eliminate local competition.

Just as transport has been increasingly mechanised and streamlined, agriculture is increasingly being mechanised while other labour intensive tasks are being designed out of existence through the use of genetic modification (such as cotton). Producers can now single-handedly run large properties, using machinery (which can weed, cull and harvest a crop) that is operated remotely (ref). Mines are now staffed by fly in, fly out workers who are housed in dongas on the edge of townships; dongas which draw little if any of their needs from the local economy. Similarly, mining machinery and irrigation systems are being operated remotely. It is difficult to imagine that people would be prepared to give up the motorcar for the horse and sulky. It is readily imaginable that increased efforts will be made to improve links between farming regions and their markets so that products can be transported faster and more cheaply. And as a consequence of such developments, the time distance between centres is further reduced, opening up residents in some smaller towns and villages to a greater choice of jobs and shopping experiences. It is also readily imaginable that with the roll out of better broadband systems, that many services currently provided in country towns can be accessed on line (see Hogan and Young 2013b) to the extent that further downward pressure is placed on the viability of existing country services.

It is difficult to imagine that effective steps will be taken in the coming decade to prevent substantive global warming and thus climate change, while it is quite imaginable that country communities will witness greater climate variability as well as shifts in weather and rainfall patterns. Similarly, globalised agri-interests are unlikely to pull back from the efficiencies they have made by mechanising their productive processes, while it remains quite imaginable that continued downward pressures would be on wages and conditions in westernised markets.

Recognising the issue of spatiality

The spatial and historical development of regions defines the cultural and economic base that underlies most of Australia's country areas, yet there is little research that develops spatial theories unique to Australia. While country decline is evident across most OECD (2006) communities, there are only a few member countries (e.g. the United States, Canada, Mexico and Spain as well as Australia) where issues of rural place and space interface with policy in a profound and consequential manner. In many European countries, for example, there would be few rural settlements that would be more than two hours' drive from a major regional centre or city. In any event, the European Union Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has existed for many years to support farming families and sectors to adapt steadily to increasing global competition, and their incorporation into the European Single Market. Not so in countries such as Australia, particularly the outback, where the size of cattle stations can readily exceed 1 million acres and where the drive to a major metropolitan centre can be counted in days rather than hours. Where government support for transition has been available, it has been segmented and limited with an eye to individual interests rather than to the collective needs of country communities and towns.

Relative proximity to a major metropolitan centre can mean that people living in a given place can continue to live within a rural setting and commute to employment elsewhere, if or when the economic base underpinning their livelihoods undergoes a significant shift. However when one lives in a place that is more than two hours' drive from a major metropolitan or regional centre, one's capacity to adapt readily is limited. Even in the case where the nearest regional centre is within a commutable drive from one's existing town or village, there would be few regional centres across in-land Australia where the population of such centres exceeds 30,000 to 40,000 people. The problem is that settlements of this size have limited employment opportunities and tend to remain static, in population terms, over the longer term. The population of the city of Goulburn (in-land New South Wales) has grown by barely 10% in the past 40 years, with an increasing proportion of that population migrating out of the city to work in places such as Canberra.

Australia does have some notably large regional centres in its physically largest states (e.g. Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia); however such regional centres tend to be situated on the coastal fringe. Other than Canberra, Albury-Wodonga, Wagga or Toowoomba, there are very few large in-land centres in these states. This in turn means that when the traditional economic base that underpins the foundation of such settlements declines (the 19th century gold rush and pastoralism centred on farming families, for example), there are few ready alternatives for local employment and thus reduced opportunities to support livelihoods and population. The state of Victoria is interesting in that it has a number of large regional centres, most of which are also in two to three hour commuting distance of the city

of Melbourne. In some ways, however, this has exacerbated the same trend in the decline of small towns; while some regional centres might be strengthening, it is still at the expense of communities that are 50-100 kilometres distant.

Finally, the issue of the staples thesis links together this section on spatiality with the previous section on change. We recall that within the Canadian context, Innis' work on the staples thesis (1930s and 1940s) that provided a geographical analysis of the development of Canada's resource economy. Innis focused on how staples were extracted and the social relations established in the process of extraction. He provided an in-depth analysis of the history of extractive resources such as fur, cod, and mining that were critical to the development of the Canadian frontier. Key to the staples theory is that geographic location determines the shape and form of the region that provides the resources, and that transportation of the staples out of the region is a critical link to the economy (Bunker, 1989). Space and time (to remove the resource) are significant elements in the development of a region, coupled with strong transport infrastructure. Bunker further argues that in such regions, "the greater direct dependency on natural or environmental factors on the one hand and on external markets on the other constrain extractive economies in ways quite alien to analysts whose frame of reference is derived from industrial experiences..." (p. 592). Thus, the difference between industrial production economies in urban centres and the external regional economy that remains extractive - produces an "unbalanced relationship" (p. 608) that is spatially, culturally and economically defined. Within this context the regional economies are tied to the export of the staple and the evolving economies are unable to diversify (see also Heartland-Hinterland theory; see McCann and Gunn, 1998; Filion, 2010). There are definite similarities between the Australian and Canadian experiences. The staples thesis underscores many of the issues facing country Australia and presently at the forefront on debates concerning the viability of industries in the state of Tasmania (and one which will confront the Northern Australia experiment as it seeks to expand its primary productive capacity while competing with access to export opportunities in the face of mineral and ore extraction). More broadly speaking, the growth and decline of many country settlements has been determined by what has been extracted from the region of interest. As the nature of markets and productive processes change, it follows that the capacity for a given area of industry to support human life, will also change.

Recent planning developments, such as those occurring in regional Queensland, serve to underscore regional dependency on staples. After a decade of agonizing over the role of regional planning in Queensland, and several iterations of regional plans, the most recent approach launched in 2013, reduces regional planning to support economic development in agriculture, mining and extractive resources, development and construction, and tourism (State Planning Policy Draft for Consultation). Planning, it seems, privileges exports over any existing environmental or social concerns (Matthews, 2013).

In these circumstances, it is hardly surprising that there has been a loss of confidence in the capacity of the state to service the interests of country people. On the one hand, it was as a result of government policy that the populating of rural Australia came in the first instance (see for example Henderson 2013 and Gross 2013). Policymakers wanted productive agricultural and mining industries and they wanted people to live in rural settings and work in such industries. Settler policies were put in place, as we saw, which allocated farming blocks to returning soldiers and other settlers, even if at times such blocks were not suitable for sustained farming (Alston 2013). Some towns, such as Coleambally, in inland New South Wales, were specifically established as part of policy initiatives in irrigated agriculture. Now,

with the changes to the economic base, coupled with a changing environment, the wisdom of these earlier policy decisions is being called into question (see for example Murray Darling Basin Authority 2010).

The state has established, on the one hand, a set of expectations and interests which have taken root, literally, over several generations, and then on the other, adopted policy which undermines those expectations fundamentally, in support of a new set of interests. And herein lies the problem. Two distinct shifts in governance have occurred. The role of governance is now increasingly concerned with managing the interests of the financially vested on the one hand while seeking to disqualify itself from social action on the other (Foucault 2008). Industry seeks government support for the infra-structure it requires or requests bail outs to support its ailing enterprises, but similarly essential to their success, is the disablement of the governance processes which put such infrastructure in place; mechanisms which were also put in place to protect the interests of people, interests which are manifested in and around the equitable distribution of income, social wages, public goods and regulatory processes which ensure a form of economic growth centred on the livelihoods of the people (Foucault 2008). This is a case of not being able to have the cake and eat it too! Just as we have raised the question then as to what is the purpose of economy in relation to society, we must in turn raise the question of what is the role of formal government in relations to its people? If the price mechanism is rejected as the principle upon which social and governance relations are organized, the question arises as to what 'should be the organizing principle of governmental practice' (Foucault 2008: 29)? What are the options open to such communities? Whose welfare, in a democratic society, is a government supposed to protect and progress? If the answer to this question, at least in part, is the welfare of its people and their capacity to provide for their own livelihoods, then the first thing that must happen is that price can no longer be the sole criteria or value that informs policy. Price and the market system have to be tempered by other values and until such values are brought forward and validated, it is difficult to see how the interests of country people can be more broadly progressed. As Aarons (2009: 205) observes: 'effective policies have to be created through the power of ideas in contest: governments adequate for tackling present challenges can only come about by complex political and other processes which involve building a majority opinion for effective concrete policies expressing a wide social philosophy'. Central to this task is the recognition that the issues impacting on country people, in western societies, are not that different from those impacting on urban dwellers.

Embracing the need for a value other than price as a principle for organising society

The 40-year sequence of institutional change has manifested itself on specific westernised country communities in the disruption of well-institutionalised country practices that were centred on productive family-based enterprises. This sequence of change put in train a process of rural transition. The focus on price as the organizing principle and the subsequent focus on scale-able profit margins further set in train a transition towards the optimal mechanisation and technological innovation around production, which subsequently made the capacity for scale and the elimination of labour critical factors in underpinning the organization of markets. In short, neo-liberalism put in place a set of economic relations, which could only benefit large players over smaller ones (Carr and Kefalas 2009) and as such, issued a death warrant for small, localised producers. While this is a text concerned with country-based forms of production, a similarly story can be told in manufacturing and is beginning to be told across an array of other industries such as accounting, banking,

information technology, health, education and food services. In short, any process wherein the inputs of labour can be eliminated, reduced or out-sourced are up for grabs. Such a strategy has efficiency, not peoples' livelihoods as its central agenda and has resulted in a situation which Bligh (2006:9) refers to as 'Knightian uncertainty' wherein agents became 'unsure as to what their interests actually are. Let alone how to realize them'. How likely would it be, for example, that by further embracing market principles country people would be able to realise their social or economic interests? If they could, how would they do so in the context of processes which dis-embed local labour and subsequently contribute to the decoupling of their economy from their community?

Or, is it time, as de Sousa Santos (2008) suggests, that communities must consider alternate ways of organizing production such that they provide for livelihoods at a local level? Communities could pursue the development of a 'market economy on the non-capitalist principles of cooperation and mutuality', and develop an economic practice based on the values of 'autonomy, participatory democracy, equality, equity and solidarity (Birchall 1997 cited in de Sousa Santos and Rodrigues-Garavito 2008: xxvii). Increasingly, country communities have to recognise that the globalising impacts of neo-liberalism have in fact left them in a developmental status, economically, such that the re-envisioning of economy and society must be undertaken through a new lens.

Re-envisioning the basis for the socio-economic viability of living in country settings

While country disruption and the need for change might stem from economic restructuring, Bligh suggests that communities can create new sequences and social processes which result in new institutional arrangements. In the context of Knightian uncertainty, it is evident that there is not simply one strategy that will fix all ills (Bligh 2006). The adage must be applied, that if you have seen one country town, you have seen one country town. While globalised and generic performance indicators might serve to paint an homogenous picture of country people, any inquiry into the dynamics of a given area draw specific attention to the fact that the drivers, barriers and challenges to socio-economic viability vary from place to place. This means that all options are on the table and that the socio-economic viability of a given community may result from a variety of contributing factors. Inherently communities might seek to attract a new, big producer to town (what Brown and Schaffe refer to as elephant hunting). For the shorter term, such strategies, if successful, can buy the community some time. However, communities with which we have worked, find themselves experiencing future shock (Toffler) as they battle with the impacts of winning and losing a series of such industries over time.

Progress requires that such communities engage in a change process which commences with an acceptance of the fact that they are in a state of Knightian uncertainty – that it is hard to know what in fact is in their best interests for the future. As Latour (2004) has observed, it is necessary to recognise that one has been affected, in this case, by the structural factors that are at play, and this realisation itself has to result from a sensitisation process (Hogan et al. 2012). This process of sensitisation involves methods that enable communities to understand the process of change which they have been through and to gain insight into the kinds of options available to them and from which they might reimagine their futures (Taylor). These insights are carefully and sensitively gained through methods such as those of the Sustainable Communities project (Hogan and Phillips 2013).

Central to the success of such processes is the organisation and development of localised governance structures, which enable a community to have sufficient control over its infrastructure development and economic processes such that they can make changes that will meet their desired ends. This requires a revaluation of values, a reconsideration as to the extent to which organic social bonds exist and can be redeveloped centred on the notion of place and shared living experiences. in country settings. It is a new form of gemeinschaften (Tonnies), less the limitations of more traditional forms of patriarchal, kin-based community relations. While communities may not return to a family-based value system, they may rediscover the extent to which a shared social and economic structuring of their livelihoods is central to their survival and wellbeing.

At the same time, it may also be important to revisit the fact that country communities operate differently, in a social sense, to urbanised communities. Yet again, urban conceptions of the social should not be imposed on the country. In these contexts, public infra-structure funding is directed to provide resources for generating sustainable local economic flows which support local livelihoods. Community banks, competitive within the finance sector, can generate profits which support the development of critical local initiatives that can in turn reinvest in projects that generate livelihoods. If localism is to be realised, it is central that local people own the means of production and that the proceeds of such endeavours stay in the local communities. It involves the development and utilisation of the wealth of expertise of retiring baby boomers, many of who wish to contribute something meaningful and significant to local communities, on a voluntary basis. It involves the development of a genuinely civil economy – an economy whose primary purpose is to support the livelihoods of local people. It involves the development of new, locally organised governance processes that can work with the community to develop its local vision, from a sound evidence base (Hogan and Phillips 2013) and in turn create the institutional processes that are necessary for the creation of new forms of locally oriented productive activity. At the same time, a dose of realism has to be applied to the situation. A given geographic area may be limited in the extent to which it can provide livelihoods for a given community. To sustain itself, such a community may have to understand its socio-economic base in relation to a broader regional centre, should one exist.

Houghton (2013) has identified up to 15 critical economic enabling factors that country communities can draw upon to sustain their livelihoods. These include a matrix of opportunities which may be realised from production to service industries with the mix of economy being distinct to the local area and its asset base. The European Union's emphasis on 'smart specialisation strategies', as an integral component of their Regional Policy for 2014-2020, takes this approach a stage further, through its emphasis on regional stakeholders developing detailed analyses of their local assets, human and natural, and exploring new opportunities to build economic value from these assets in global value chains (see European Union 2013).

Three other immediate options are evident. First, various forms of economic gardening (Barrios and Barrios, 2004) offer communities a way in which to develop a more sustainable local economy, developed from within. Economic gardening is based on the idea that rather than trying to secure one key enterprise for an area, that a series of smaller projects are developed. Each in themselves is not necessarily sufficient to support a whole community but coupled together, several key initiatives will underpin success. One part of such a strategy requires an increasing willingness, certainly in Australia, for governments to decentralise their activities to regional centres. The presence of goals, government agencies and

institutions in a specific centre can, in itself, be sufficient to create a flow on effect. It is in cases such as these that the delivery of the service at a reasonable rather than optimal cost must be considered. This again is where a revaluation of values is required. The health and social benefits of socialising the cost of running a system that is somewhat less efficient than optimal, but which also addresses broader social goals needs to be considered. Price, as we noted, can no longer be the sole determinate of structuring of our society.

The second possibility arises from problems that have occurred in many of the communities that we have studied, where unemployment has resulted because a business entity, often with a multi-national focus, decided that better margins could be made elsewhere. It did not necessarily mean that the enterprise itself was not viable, particularly when the focus was on providing livelihoods from a basis of a positive rather than ever-increasing or optimal return. A 'good-enough' return may well be sufficient to cover the costs of financing and regeneration while at the same time generating important localised economic flows.

Third, there is a ground-swell of interest around the idea of consumptive-based economies. Markusen (2007), for example, using cases of small towns in Minnesota, argues that a consumption-base theory of development provides a strong antithesis to export-based theories. Investment in consumption-based activities such as health care facilities, retirement communities, and cultural centres helps recycle income back into the community and support local jobs and business. Little research has focused on consumption base strategies as an alternative to industry-focused economic development. However, it is evident that many country communities are positioning themselves, for example, as country retirement hubs, where baby boomers can move from cities to a more affordable lifestyle in the country (e.g. lower accommodation and transport costs therein leaving greater disposable income) while being able to access the services that they need. This may create a domino effect to the extent that in turn younger families move to such towns as providers of services and a virtuous cycle ensues with regards demand for health, education and other services, pushing a town towards a critical and sustainable mass of population over time. Hub and spoke options are again possible within such scenarios. The city of Orange, in country New South Wales provides a case in point. It is surrounded by a number of smaller villages, which in themselves, are not able to provide a wide range of livelihoods but which can grow and prosper as people move to the area to take up work, not simply in agriculture or mining, but in a far wider range of occupations, while enjoying the health and social benefits of country living.

Fourth, the hub and spoke model can be extended to other models of regional development. In country Australia at present, there is a lot of enthusiasm for developing tourism as an option for economic sustainability. On the one hand, there is only so much capacity for tourism in an area or in a region. There is however, capacity for towns within the same region to team up to create a coherent overall tourism experience rather than one that seeks to cannibalise the other. The development of wine trails and regional tourist experiences (e.g. program of out-door holiday experiences across a region) would be a case in point. Similarly, if resources are used strategically, with a view to an equity of outcomes, it does not have to be a given that one town has to grow at the expense of others. In situations where a set of towns exist within close proximity (in New South Wales one would think of Harden, Young and Boorowa, for example), community cannibalism can be avoided if an agreement is struck that each progresses with a unique part of the regional infra-structure, such that the region grows as a whole. Those who have lived in small country areas know that the viability, and particularly a diversity of business and services, can only occur, if the community as a whole chooses to spread their business around. Else, a given business goes under.

Fifth, the application of the Internet as a job generating tool has far from having been readily deployed in countries such as Australia. On the whole, Australian country towns have not as yet systematically embraced the networked economy, despite the fact that the rolling-out of the nation's new broadband internet system was prioritised to country towns. As an enterprise development tool, we are seeing isolated examples of specific entrepreneurs using the Internet to establish global businesses from country towns (e.g. florist; clothing manufacturer; spare parts businesses, editors), the fuller capacity of new and emerging businesses to secure niche positions within local and international markets which (as an example), built upon a working Internet system, provides just one example of how a community, which is seemingly isolated from global opportunities, can create sustainable opportunities for local livelihoods. Similarly, there are numerous examples of individuals using the Internet as a basis for working from country and sea-side locations, even on a part-time basis. To the extent that such individuals have distinct skills and business networks that enable them to pursue such work, their presence in country towns contributes to local economic flows.

By extending the development of community driven brokerage models, such as the *make-it-work* brokerage system in Narrabri (New South Wales), local communities have an additional model for sustained country employment. In Narrabri, community entrepreneurs recognised that there were a variety of employment opportunities existing in the cotton industry, mining industry and local council roads works. Individually, there was not enough work in any individual opportunity to justify maintaining a permanent workforce in each industry. But collectively, there was in fact ongoing, year round employment opportunities for a number of workers, provided that they could have access to some form of job security. The local council undertook to employ the workers and brokered them out to the respective industries, while ensuring the workers had continuity of employment and hence economic security, which meant that they could continue to live in the area. Local governments have the capacity to develop a similar service base to support the networked economy where the initial start-up risks can be socialised. Participating in the networked economy is concerned with providing Internet based services to overseas countries such that while they are sleeping, we are working. It means that the data that they need analysed quickly can be processed over night and reported back to the business of concern by the time they return to work the next day. By developing a capacity for working in the networked economy, country towns develop the capacity to attract professional staff to their areas with the flow on effects to social capital and service utilisation

Sixth, the issue of mobile workforces, in this sense drive out, drive home, is also emerging as a basis upon which workers can live in country settings and be away at work for intensive periods. Embracing such models of employment requires a rethinking not just of what it means to go to work, but also in terms of what it means to be a part of a community and a family. It is readily viable as a short term strategy, but it is far from apparent that it is a viable employment options for the bulk of a community.

While these suggestions just begin the kinds of innovative thinking that can be applied to sustaining country communities, there is one problem that has to be addressed as part of this process. . Readiness, however, on the part of local residents, to make room for change and for new people, will be an issue that such towns need to embrace. Across many of the towns in which we have worked, specific individuals have often worked to thwart change. Central to the Sustainable Communities methodology is garnering the extent to which the community as a whole supports specific changes. By taking a community-wide approach, the extent to

which nay-sayers are representative of community views can be determined in a confidential manner.

There is a smorgasbord of options exists for developing localised economic options. However, achieving sustained outcomes requires some reworking of how a community operates. Compromises may be required and public resources may be used to back specific entrepreneurs. One question though may be central to securing a viable livelihood in settings where higher incomes are harder to come by, is the question of how much is enough? That is pursuing a non-urban lifestyle, particularly, may mean letting go of some of the excesses of a consumer society.

Conclusion

Clearly, specific challenges confront country communities seeking to explore and advance viable and sustainable socio-economic alternatives at the localised level. Nonetheless, there is a wellspring of community, industry and government support for sustaining country communities, many of which face an unavoidable transition. Decision-makers at all levels are looking for ideas, skills and tools that will enable them to work through this process of socio-economic change towards a more prosperous future. This book has detailed how we have arrived at the point of where we are and the causes of current troubles, But it has also sought to open up thinking and a discussion as to how a preferred future may be secured. Working towards the sustainability of localised communities requires an openness and commitment to the re-discovery of community, of collective interest and of long-term collective action. The crisis which neo-liberalism constitutes for country living is such that a re-evaluation of values, priorities and ways of making a living is necessary in order for many communities to move forward. It is a question, as the adage goes, of having the capacity to both win the hearts and minds of the community as well as being able to coalesce such commitment into sustained and unified action. If anyone can do this, it is certainly country people! What we hope that this book has made evident, is that the decline of the rural is not as a result of the poor choices of individuals, but that it has occurred as a result of broader societal and economic decisions. And similarly, new decisions can be made to put in place new directions and outcomes.

Country people value country living. The country is not simply a basis for generating livelihoods, country living is about connectivity, manifested within a strong social and cultural life, often situated within a beautiful environment. Country spaces are much more than just places where agricultural production has occurred, or where untapped opportunities exist for future economic gain. Place is about the lived experience; of home, family, identity, country, culture and wellbeing (Tuan 1977). Similarly, country decline involves a far greater range of issues than simply the changing face of productive processes. It centres on the loss of country identity and culture. Thus in considering the importance of socio-economic change, it is important to distinguish carefully between the baby and the bathwater. What is the point, people may well ask, of giving up the country life style to pursue the inter-generational accumulation of wealth through the development of ever greater efficient processes, if the end point of such wealth is only to try and find a different, quiet place in the country or by the sea to find a quality of life no longer possible in country economy.¹

¹ With apologies to the Buddhist story this analogy is drawn from.

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