

**Australian Population Association Eleventh Biennial Conference
University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2 to 4 October 2002**

Title:

Is the grass always greener at the city's edge?; a comparison of community well-being in a sunbelt area of the metropolitan periphery with a growing community on the fringe of a global city

Author:

Bob Birrell – Centre for Population Urban Research, Monash University
Alison Taylor – Planning Information and Forecasting Unit, Queensland Department of Local Government and Planning

Abstract:

Most of Australia's population growth is occurring in suburban locations on the periphery of the major metropolises, often at considerable distances from the new economy jobs and amenities offered at the heart of these cities. Some of Australia's fastest growing areas are found in Queensland's sunbelt region while Melbourne's outer suburban communities accounted for more than 80% of the city's growth between 1991 and 1996. However, population growth does not necessarily translate into healthy and sustainable communities, particularly given the clustering of those not well positioned to meet the demands of a global economy.

This paper uses case studies to explore the well-being of two growing communities located on the metropolitan fringe. One, the Sunshine Coast, is located in the outwardly prosperous, sunbelt with its population growth-led reliance on construction and retirement. The other, the City of Casey, is found on Melbourne's fringe and accounted for nearly one-third of Outer Melbourne's growth during the early 1990s.

Are these metropolitan fringe communities, as some claim, composed of people who do not possess the financial resources or job skills needed to locate near or work in the metropolitan centre? Is there in fact a paradox in the seeming affluence of the sunbelt when confronted with the evidence of the disadvantage affecting such communities, particularly that disadvantage associated with access to a limited range of employment options? Are communities on the outer edge of global cities excluded from their benefits? To the extent that this is the case, are these communities further disadvantaged through limited access to educational opportunities?

The study concentrates on three segments of the population; young people, families and older people, each of which makes a significant contribution to community well-being. Equipping young people, through quality education and training, to participate in the global economy is of vital importance to the longer term future of our communities. The integral role of the family unit is well acknowledged but non-traditional family types are increasingly accounting for larger proportions of the population. Similarly, older people are projected to be the largest growing sector of the population as the baby boomers move into retirement. Older people have the potential to be either a huge drain on resources or alternatively, to be able to make a significant contribution to community well-being.

These issues are explored through a series of indicators of well-being, including income levels, labour market status, educational attainment (on the part of young people) and welfare dependency. Well-being in a sunbelt community on the metropolitan periphery is compared to that in a community located on the periphery of a developing global city. Similarities and differences between the two areas are noted, pressing social needs identified and opportunities for the future outlined. In this way, the well-being of both current and future communities, at least in terms of social outcomes, may be addressed by contemporary, strategic policy decisions.