



A community-based view of a rural social revolution: spatial aspects of rural change in South East Australia, 1981-2001.

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This paper is based on a database constructed to approximate the social catchment areas of 414 significant country towns in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales, excluding metropolitan and major urban areas. It deals with aspects of change in these socially defined communities between 1981 and 2001, and assesses the impact of the rural crisis years of 1984-1994 approximately. Compared with the depression of the 1930s, it suggests that the effects of this crisis have had a greater and more irreversible effect on Australian rural and regional communities. The paper briefly examines the way place-based communities are built up from several layers of social identification, and seeks to justify the 414 social catchments as building blocks or 'units of survival' for rural planning. It examines change over the two decades both in the 414 communities as units, and then differentiates the trends as between the central town, other minor clustered settlements, and the dispersed rural element within each community. Starting with an overview of change in population, households and occupied dwellings, it goes on to deal with change in the occupational and industrial structure of the communities, concentrating on primary production, amenity-oriented occupations, and rising industrial diversity. Major differences of these features are demonstrated within the settled areas. The paper then deals with demographic response to economic change, including fertility, ageing, and residential mobility, differentiating between the urban, minor centre and rural population elements. In conclusion, the paper comments on the likely future shape of rural communities, and aims to shed light on some commonly held views such as the "uncoupling", "Sponge City", and "small town viability" debates in the literature