

RURAL REVIVAL? PLACE MARKETING, TREE CHANGE AND REGIONAL MIGRATION IN AUSTRALIA, by John Connell and Phil McManus. Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2011.

Dealing with Australia's case, this book asks a question important for most developed economies, namely can their rural areas be repopulated? Quoting from the preface "... [The book] links issues of rurality, counter-urbanization, rural gentrification and lifestyle migration, rural place marketing and place branding ... ". Specifically, it focuses on how a private sector-run organization, Country week, has successfully developed new place marketing strategies, to encourage population turnaround in Eastern Australia (New South Wales and Queensland). The strategies focus on households, rather than on building infrastructures or attracting businesses.

The book includes nine chapters. The first, "Rural Revival?", briefly outlines Australia's rural history – the years of agricultural prosperity through pastoralism and farming and in the early twentieth century, the onset of rural urban migration, somewhat slowed by government sponsored soldier settlements after World War One, as well as freight subsidies and improved roads and communications. During the Great Depression, severe urban unemployment, helped prevent further rural depopulation. Agricultural prosperity returned after World War II through increased productivity, mechanization and later on agricultural diversification, but increasing numbers of young people kept leaving the countryside for state capitals, in search of "education, employment and excitement", while the countryside experienced increasing difficulty in attracting skilled workers, such as doctors and nurses. Government steps (subsidized regional development, infrastructure provision, salary support and tax discounts) failed to stop the process. To illustrate these processes, the authors focus on one typical small town, Oberon in New South Wales, on the leavers over more than twenty years, while as well as on the stayers: closure of public and private facilities (schools, post offices, police stations, banks, supermarkets, care for the aged), and loss of jobs.

The second chapter "Leaving the City" deals with counter-urbanization and decentralization. It shows that efforts to repopulate inland Australia have been unsuccessful. Rural gentrification has mostly involved sea change (moving to coastal towns) rather than tree change (moving to inland Australia). Given that real estate in coastal towns is expensive, rural gentrification has been limited to the middle class. The chapter ends with the question "how can regional Australia be marketed so that tree change ensues?"

The third chapter deals with an attempted answer—Country Week—an organization established in 2004 in New South Wales, by a businessman connected to one of Australia's main political parties. It started with a state sponsored Expo, showing the advantages of living in rural NSW. In following years additional annual Expos

were held in Eastern Australia often funded by private businesses (hotel chains, banks, meat producers).

Country Week is distinctive in two ways: it is oriented to individual households and markets places (not tourism or local business) advertising the quality of life within the jurisdictions of rural and regional councils; it mostly operates through annual Expos. In addition to New South Wales, the states of Victoria and Queensland have also attempted to encourage rural urban migration by "changing negative perceptions about regional and rural locations". Queensland has started a "Country Week" of its own in 2006, within the framework of its' wider "Blueprint for the Bush" program. CWs are colorful social events, opened with local politician speeches, and serving as meeting places for would-be-immigrants and people from various places in the region. Local councils often participate in funding and organizing CW's, hoping that their promotional activity would bring them needed immigrants. It is increasingly understood that for the latter, lifestyle might contribute to the attraction of country living, but the main issues remain employment and housing. Country Week relies on an anti-urban bias, i.e. that the large cities are expensive, dangerous, unhealthy and inappropriate for a balanced family life. Conversely, it promises to counter-urbanisers cheaper housing, a healthier life and sometimes appropriate employment. A major demographic target of Country Week is young families, whom the countryside had lost through urbanization. CW promises them cheaper and larger homes. Other targets are trades people, and also retirees, a traditional target of rural gentrification. Place marketing through CW includes multiple approaches to advertising, according to what local councils have to offer. Thus, each council tends to focus on its relative advantages (colorful cultural heritage, scenic landscape, special facilities, specific economic branches, such as mining, requiring manpower, etc.), striving to appear as blending urban and rural advantages rather than project bucolic imagery. Evaluating the success of Country Week is impossible, as the authors acknowledge. Of course some people do move to places advertised by CW. But is it because of CW? Local councils do not expect too much, "a couple of families is a lot": and to the extent that families move in, it could be due to extremely careful branding of councils and focusing on matching the needs of families and the potential of the places. Moreover, people seem to prefer rural places which are close to large towns, like in other developed countries.

Additional chapters stress the diversity of the population which ends up being attracted by tree change, and also the diversity of the success with which they are absorbed into the countryside. Other chapters stress that country-mindedness in the present era does not pursue former ideas but rather acknowledges the fact that Australia has become an urban society and the blurring of the urban-rural differences, while distance to large cities remains an essential element of success for small towns. Moreover sometimes small towns are able to answer the needs of their dwellers, new or veteran at some points of their life cycles while they may be unable to

do so at other stages of that cycle, as the case of the town of Oberon clearly demonstrates.

In sum, the book provides a well-rounded and well-documented analysis of urbanization vs. rural gentrification in Australia, clearly distinguishing between the earlier middle class move to coastal towns (sea change) and the present move to inland Western Australia (tree change). More importantly it provides a well written "thick description", about the ways in which tree change is being encouraged through the place marketing which occurs within the framework of Country Week. My only reservation is that the reference to rural gentrification in other developed countries is somewhat unsystematic, though the book does make it clear that the Australian case is quite different from the British one. Even with this incomplete comparative background, the book provides much to learn about rural gentrification, in terms of analysis as well as in terms of the novel ways in which Country Week has encouraged counter-urbanization, and which may well be worth imitating in other countries. Scholars and advanced students will enjoy the book and learn from it.

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