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Background

Regional and rural Australia

Definitions of rural, remote and regional vary. The terms can mean 'the bush' or 'the outback', areas outside major cities or all areas outside capital cities. The term regional is also used to refer to statistical or administrative areas of NSW.

Using a restricted definition, between 10 and 30 per cent of Australians live in rural or regional areas (Pritchard and McManus 2000). This means that a relatively small population is spread over a large geographic and a very large administrative area. Of these, around 13 per cent of Australians living in regional or rural Australia are engaged in farming activities (3.3 per cent of the Australian population). The remainder are employed in servicing, commercial, trade and professional activities in regional cities and small villages or employed part-time or unemployed.

Rural/regional crisis in Australia – an overview

The reconfiguration of rural and regional areas is a world-wide phenomenon marked everywhere by rapid urbanisation, especially in modes of administration, economic decline,

changing technologies of farming, generalised privatisation, micro-economic reform, shifts in the role of government, depopulation, intensified economic and cultural distress, cultural and political alienation and revolt (Pritchard and McManus 2000; Burch et al, 1999).

In keeping with the foregoing, rural and regional Australia has been hard hit by large scale economic restructuring and changes in public management dating from the 1950s, but crystallising over the last two decades. The changes that have had the greatest impact on rural communities have been the result of developments in the technologies and management of farming; global factors that include things such as trade liberalisation, the demise of protectionism, world commodity prices and increased market dependency on transnational corporations; neo-liberal ideologies of public management, especially the rolling back of the Keynesian welfare state; and the decline in the national and increasingly the local, economic centrality of the farming sector (Pritchard and McManus 2000).

The combined effects of globalisation and public sector rationalisation have produced a spatial redistribution of social inequities. Rural and regional Australia is disproportionately

disadvantaged relative to major urban centres (Pritchard and McManus 2000; McGregor 1999; Walmsley and Weinard 1997). In 1996, for example, 52 per cent of rural workers received the basic wage in comparison with 73 per cent of workers in major metropolitan or capital cities (Pritchard and McManus 2000). Unemployment rates, though difficult to assess, seem very high in some areas. According to Tony Vinson (1999), regional and rural Australia has 'higher than capital city' levels of disadvantage across a spectrum of social indicators, such as the provision of medical services, youth suicide rates, commercial and financial facilities, telecommunications, transport, education and employment opportunities. (See also Black et al 2000; Tonts 2000.)

Farming—itself extremely heterogeneous in terms of product, productivity and structure—has nonetheless undergone significant changes. Large farms are getting larger in response to global changes, but many small farms are economically unviable. There has been a 25 per cent decline in the total number of farms over the last 25 years and farms are increasingly organised like enterprises, though most are still family owned. Farms range from small or medium mixed crop, grazing or niche product farms to larger agricultural or pastoral properties. There are significant differences among these in relation to global factors and to economic viability (Lawrence and Gray 2000).

Many economically borderline farms supplement their income with off-farm earnings. Lawrence and Gray (2000) indicated that 63 per cent of income earned by people living on farms is off-farm (other work, investments, and social security). During the 1990s drought 45 per cent of farm families received social security (Lawrence and Gray 2000). In addition, many farms are also dependent on contracts with off-farm enterprises, especially transnational corporations, for distribution and marketing of their product. This means the farms are caught up in global financial circuits that in

turn define farm practices. With all this goes a loss in farming 'traditions' (successions, division of labour, technique, status, and pride).

Loss of a labour market for itinerant and farm labour has been one effect of the combination of restructuring and rural decline that has had an impact on rural villages and townships. Consequently there has been high unemployment in many areas with increasing out-migration and depopulation and a collapse of local cultures and networks in rural villages and towns (40 per cent in 1991–96) dependent on agricultural or pastoral industries (Tonts 2000; McKenzie 1994).

The decline in social and economic infrastructure has made things worse. The loss of government and community services (the result of changing philosophies of democratic government) has exacerbated the decline and worked against economic productivity and sustainability. Over the last two decades successive governments have shifted emphasis from redistribution with direct service provision to a combination of rationalisation (largely due to fiscal constraints) and regulation. In effect this meant a cutback in funding for direct delivery, an emphasis on results or outcomes (rather than process) and a shift in the delivery of services from an emphasis on equity to that of economic efficiency or viability.

This shift has been marked by cutbacks in funding to direct delivery, because of fiscal conservatism, a shift of the burden of aspects of service delivery to local government (environment, safety, economic development), a recentralisation of public and private sector services with decentralised program management, the privatisation and/or tendering of services (including community based services) and a complex pattern of micro and macro-economic reforms/aims that mirror private sector practices and philosophies. According to the Australian National Audit Office, the accompanying reduction in the public sector has also resulted in the loss of specialist skills and of institutional memory to the detriment of public welfare (Gerritsen 2000).

The net effect for small rural towns has been to put in a mutually destructive relation between economic and cultural depression (HREOC 1996, 1999). The flight of public and private sector services (banks, telecommunication, transport, medical services, unemployment services, police, courts, education) has (a) had a negative impact on the viability of small local business (b) further decreased local employment opportunities and (c) reduced local savings and spending.

One major deleterious effect has been depopulation largely as a result of out-migration to major service and employment centres. Out-migration is most marked among 15–35 year olds who leave for educational and employment opportunities (Tonts 2000). The loss of this age group puts at risk the long-term economic and cultural sustainability of the local rural village or township. An additional problem is seasonal migration of family members or temporary moves to other towns or centres for work. As a consequence, many small rural villages and towns have either an aging population or an unstable nomadic population.

Rural Aboriginal populations are the exception to this demographic pattern. Overall there are proportionately more young rural Aboriginal people and the aging component of the Aboriginal population is proportionately lower, largely due to premature death, the consequence of the effects of dispossession (high morbidity rates due to poor health, poor medical care, suicide, accident and substance abuse).

The sudden disappearance of ‘taken for granted’ community support services has gutted the morale of local communities, producing a decline in local community involvement, in local cultural well being and in people’s quality of life. Problems have been compounded by jurisdictional (local, state, federal) and border issues. The closest regional centre and, therefore, community and educational services of small border towns may be across the border in an adjoining state. Towns in this situation tend to fall—in terms of infra-

structure and services—into a border zone between jurisdictions. This problem has been exacerbated for villages remote from the municipal centre, especially border villages and towns, by council amalgamations and the merging of services at the local government level. Towns with a shaky economic base, poor local leadership or cultures of cronyism are unlikely to survive under these circumstances. The loss in cultural morale has then impacted negatively on the success of local economic initiatives and vice versa (Furuzeth 1998; Black et al 2000; Gerritsen 2000; Murray and Dunn 1996).

Qualifications

Rural and regional communities are very heterogeneous. They vary by state and by their environment, economic base, size, wealth and position. Sixty per cent of rural and regional Australia is surviving and there is some very uneven regional revival. New growth industries, such as tourism and service industries, especially in scenic and regional coastal areas, are providing employment and income. In fact, HREOC believes globalisation offers some opportunities for innovative revitalisation. Improved transport and telecommunications makes capital more mobile, so that relocation is rapid. Many local councils and industries are now operating on a transnational border and new information technologies have the potential to link remote areas with national and transnational activities and markets. In some declining areas there has also been a significant in-migration of ‘life-style’ rural settlers who are either retirees or professionals who bring additional money and create employment through service needs.

At the political level, local government knows its constituency and local control over service delivery—a form of self-help and local control over issues—does have benefits for recipients. There have also been state and federal initiatives addressing the decline in cultural morale and service provision in regional and remote areas,

some of which have been implemented with varying success. A few examples would be assistance to hospitals, multi-purpose services, main street and place management programs, subsidies for industries, transport subsidies for disadvantaged people, IT assistance (such as *Networking the Nation*), LandCare and assistance in the promotion of tourism—plus a range of regional programs through various state and federal regional bodies and via a whole of government approach that ensures regional programs. At the NSW State Government level examples include the Department for Women's regional projects, a range of Aboriginal regional programs and projects from Health, Housing and Community Services. In addition, there are projects and programs initiated from and documented by the NSW Department of State and Regional Development (Regional First). There have also been important successes initiated by the community sector and by Aboriginal communities. Examples include the Cobar IT Community Centre and the Kempsey Art Co-op.

Overall, however, the most positive impact of these factors has been on regional coastal areas, scenic areas and semi-urban areas that are often satellites or dormitory towns for major regional centres. Between 1991–96 the coastal towns had an average growth rate of 16 per cent compared with 5.7 per cent for all rural centres (NSW Premier's Department 2000). One example is the recent infrastructural capacity debate that has arisen as a consequence of a major population drift to rural coastal NSW (Woodford 2000). The lowest growth rate occurred in towns with a population of 5000 to 10,000. Additionally, some environmentally attractive outlying towns of inland regional centres have benefited from life-style shifts of a working population, although only marginally at this point. Other towns and villages, especially those in remote inland areas, continue to decline.

Economic revival does not necessarily benefit the whole community. There are still major

discrepancies in wealth within communities and tourism only provides seasonal work, even in wealthy tourist areas. So, for example, the in-migration of people and industries will inevitably bring new ideas and counter old prejudices—to the benefit of many rural towns and villages—alter political landscapes and cement links with major urban centres.

In-migration will also bring additional skills and knowledge to rural and remote villages, especially if it includes, as is increasingly the case, highly skilled and professional workers (e.g. IT personnel, scientists and vets) as staff on rural properties. However, at the same time, the revival of many townships and villages through in-migration and industry changes could also work against the old rural community. These communities might lack the skills to participate in the new local economy, be displaced or become an underclass in a new local culture with a new local elite. Conflict and the sense of loss may actually increase.

Effects of decline on women in rural and regional Australia

In comparison with metropolitan women, rural women have lower employment to population ratios, lower labour force participation rates, higher part-time employment rates and lower average personal incomes (HREOC 2000). In Sydney the greatest numbers of women's jobs were in property and business, education, health and community services. Outside of Sydney the greatest number of women's jobs were in accommodation and food outlets, health, community services and retailing (HREOC 2000).

Regional decline has exacerbated this situation. Rural women have borne much of the burden of regional decline, but broad statistics are deceptive and do not reflect the very different patterns at the local level. In particular, they do not reflect the differential effects of decline on town women compared with farm women and on non-indigenous women compared with Aboriginal women.

The overall pattern is that local economic decline in rural areas has had a strong impact on employment opportunities for rural women, access to education and training (especially among Aboriginal women), the extent of their home responsibilities and their levels of community involvement (HREOC 2000). According to a 1999 study for the Sex Discrimination Commission (HREOC 2000), women have been disproportionately disadvantaged in the labour market by rural decline as employment is now likely to require commuting over long distances, especially as traditional local sectors (health, retail, community sector, banks) close down.

Additionally, the employment situation of women has been exacerbated by the rapid decline in jobs for male farm labourers and for itinerant workers. One consequence is that women may be the only source of local family income, or that males may have to seek work elsewhere. Out-migration is greater among men than women (Haslam McKenzie 2000). Consequently, rural women are left to care for their families with the result that they are either unable to participate in the labour market or they remain locked in menial, poorly paid, part-time jobs, struggling to make ends meet.

Work opportunities for rural women have been further diminished by the flight from small villages and towns, or declining centres, of public and private sector infrastructures. Rural women and their families now have to either pick up the burden of health care, educational support and child care themselves or spend long periods commuting to service centres. Haslam McKenzie (2000) tells of women travelling 100 kilometres for medical assistance for sick babies and reports the additional family stresses experienced through the removal of local mental health.

Aboriginal women are particularly disadvantaged by both the prevalence of racism and racial violence and by a spectrum of the social and economic legacies of colonial dispossession and post-colonial discrimination. Unemployment rates

are high and education and training out of reach for many Aboriginal women—in part due to poor educational levels, culturally inappropriate or diminished teaching and the distances required to travel and times required to attend courses and training programs. Another reason is the increasingly important support role of Aboriginal women in their families and in their communities, especially as infrastructural supports are whittled away and domestic and community financial crisis increases. In addition, many Aboriginal women are the mainstays in communities in grief—a grief born of dispossession and its consequences as they are manifest in intra-communal relations. In some cases it takes the form of escalating levels of domestic abuse, violence and despair, for Aboriginal women themselves as well as their children (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force 2000).

Anecdotal evidence from community centres and local family services and support groups suggests that escalating levels of domestic violence are a feature of all rural communities, especially amongst those segments of the population whose incomes have either diminished or been lost. In some areas the shift of local family crisis services to main service centres with once weekly visits to small villages, plus the closure of refuges and youth crisis centres, means that women are locked into increasingly dysfunctional family situations. Women have no support either for themselves or for other family members, especially children. The loss of services also means that families in crisis will either not seek help, or seek help from remaining local community services (such as a medical centre or a community centre) that are often not qualified or do not have the time to adequately deal with family crisis.

The lives of young women in small rural towns are of particular concern. Most are disadvantaged compared with their city based peers, especially in terms of educational, training and job opportunities. Out-migration of young women from rural areas is high, and those that stay most

often marry young. There is a higher than average proportion of young single mothers in many rural villages (Shoalhaven Community Plan, 1999a; Shoalhaven interviews Community Sector, 2000) and reports of depression among young women are widespread. The employment situation of young women in regional NSW is particularly disadvantageous relative to their Sydney counterparts and their situation worsens the more remote their town (as does the employment situation of Aboriginal women). Young country women have higher unemployment rates. They are restricted in their choice of jobs, working mainly in retail and food industries, and have no professional role models other than teachers or nurses (HREOC 2000).

According to Haslam McKenzie (2000) young women moving into small rural communities, most often through marriage, also suffer loneliness and isolation if local communities are unfriendly to 'outsiders' or if local female community support networks have broken down.

The most extensive material available on rural women concerns farm women. First of all, poverty is widespread, especially among small farmers, and is often hidden because of shame. Economic downturn also means that farm women are working more as unpaid labour on farms, especially as new technologies take over heavy work. They are also working as partners in 'farm tourism' (farming as a service and 'as a performance' to quote Lawrence and Gray 2000), run farms themselves or are the source of off-farm income.

The situation of farm women is complex. Resentment among women about unpaid labour on family farms is widespread (Haslam McKenzie 2000). Overall, farm women are better qualified than their husbands are. Many have managerial and professional skills that they suppress. They 'maintain a sort of silence' (Lawrence and Gray 2000) so that their occupational status, which is high relative to their husband's occupational status, does not show. Farm life without

professional practice also means a loss of professional skills for women with a resulting loss in self-confidence and loss in self-esteem.

At the same time 'satellite' families are increasing among farm families. A combination of educational needs and the need for the wife to earn a decent off-farm income means that women and children may move to major centres for considerable periods of time. It should be noted that the mobility of farming family members in times of economic decline will further diminish the pool of people involved in the local community and further diminish that community's strength.

Finally there are difficult questions about female youth. Female youth in townships everywhere are, much more than their elders, part of global youth cultures. As a result, they will have differences with their elders about what counts as tradition, how they define the community and what they think about the future. There will also be differing views about balancing personal ambitions, youthful cultural affiliations (often virtual) and desires, and their rights in and obligations to their community of origin, as well as the priority they accord to it. The issue is important in terms of sustainability in regard to the questions of succession, change, what is sustained and so forth. It should be added that youth services in all areas are dominated by male youth. There is a need for an extension of safe, innovative youth services for women.

Women's organisations and community

Rural women—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—play very important roles in their communities and women and women's organisations are often the mainstay of cultural strength and community morale. Rural women have a great knowledge of and are skilled in local cultural practices. They provide continuity of memories and practices, for which they often serve as the archivists and the transmitters. Consequently, rural women are vital to the enrichment and revitalisation of local rural cultural life, and their role as key agents of change in rural and remote communities is well

established (Country Web – New Beginnings Autumn 2000).

Current trends in rural demographics, especially the greater out-migration of men, suggest that in rural or regional villages and towns women will play an even greater role in community revitalisation and in community leadership. But they will also need support for this through education and training, especially leadership training and through a better or more innovative provision of infrastructural supports.

Rural/regional Australia has a tradition of women's organisations. Traditional rural women's associations, such as the Country Women's Association (CWA), have a long history of working with women in rural areas, largely to alleviate the isolation and routine of their lives and to prevent the loss of women to urban areas. However, the CWA has not been able to stop the loss of women from rural areas and its role in the contemporary rural situation is uncertain, while other rural and regional women's organisations are growing (Teather 1997). For example, the Women in Agriculture Movement has been innovative by bringing social issues and environmental issues onto the rural policy agenda. Another example is the Rural Women's Network, which links rural women through print and electronic media.

Globalisation: Sydney city and suburbs

Sydney is a global city and like other global cities is shaped by international financial and emerging information industries. It is a key locus for the coordination and production of specialised service for diverse industries and markets and of innovation, especially for financial industries (Soja 1989; Harvey 1984; Sassen 1996; Zukin 1995).

Like all global cities, Sydney's urban form has undergone massive restructuring since the 1970s. The most marked changes have been the shift of the population westwards; the decentralisation

of industry away from the CBD; the growth of industrial parks in suburban and fringe-urban areas; the gentrification of the inner city; accelerated fragmentation of labour markets, labour processes and sites of production; nomadic labour and capital; the rapid urbanisation of the suburbs; and the relative industrial decline of the CBD and its shift to a symbolic economy where 'culture' (tourism, finance, IT, redevelopment, public relations, consumerism) is now its major business (Gibson and Watson 1994; Zukin 1995).

In Sydney, outlying suburbs, or suburban conglomerates, are now major national employment nodes and command centres linked directly to global financial industrial and labour markets. The consequence is that the global becomes localised and the local becomes globalised, so that the whole imaginary geography of major cities and their imaginary histories have changed. (Soja 1989; Appadurai 1990). Taking transnational migration as their trope, some writers argue that remote corners of the world are now a part of the spaces and of the histories of all major cities. They say that every major city has suburbs in far flung corners of the world—Sydney, for example, in Turkey, Greece, Vietnam, Hong Kong, the Philippines, Italy and Wales, and in diasporic settlements in North America, the UK, Germany and so forth (Alexakis and Janiszewski 1995).

Small cities have grown on the edge of the old metropolis and they have been accompanied by the growth of local shopping and leisure nuclei (the 'post-suburban') and the demise of the CBD as the core leisure/shopping nucleus for once suburban populations (Soja 1989). Global culture intrudes through consumerism and electronic mediation. But there is some evidence that cultural homogenisation is not the result and that local cultural forms mould the global product or its reception. Oddly the local (the old suburban) is now both more global and more intensely local. People live their lives in their local areas. The 'city' is purely a symbol. But attachments to the local—identities, the sense of belonging and the sense

of place—are nomadic and scattered rather than settled and place bound.

The pattern now is even more complex. While urban consolidation continues, there is also a gentrification of outlying areas, especially on the fringes of urban development in Sydney's west. Some examples are Parramatta, Liverpool, Campbelltown and Penrith. The spatial distribution of inequity is more marked, the first and third world existing within a single conglomerate of suburbs, but spatially segregated and fragmented, and this patterning extends outward to rural areas.

All this has been shaped in turn by a complex redistribution of jobs, itself a product of post-Fordism—flexible production/accumulation, subcontracting of factory jobs, internationalisation of the production process, shrinking of the factory system, growth of service sector, shift to finance and speculation, replacement of stable workers by nomadic workforces, privatisation of the public sphere and the universalisation of entrepreneurialism (Harvey 1984).

These changes have affected jobs. Large scale restructuring has meant a downgrading and a loss of jobs in manufacturing industries in global cities, with widespread unemployment among skilled and unskilled workers. This has been matched by a proliferation of low paid and part-time jobs in service and retail/hospitality industries, a generalised casualisation of work (matched in the Australian case by deregulation), changes in industrial relations between capital and labour, deunionisation and the loss of power by trade unions (Harvey 1984; Gibson and Watson 1994).

The rolling back and privatisation of the welfare state has exacerbated the situation. Service delivery is now shaped by new managerial imperatives so that economic efficiency and fund-raising are at the core of their business. Tendering and privatisation has disadvantaged the locally controlled community sector that cannot compete with larger financial organisations (charities). One possible effect of the implementation of the

Hilmer Report is the displacement of locally controlled services most directly related to the welfare of low income groups (Heikonen Laing and Makris 1997).

Concepts of western Sydney

Western Sydney is a concept that is mobilised in different contexts and debates in very different ways. It is not a fixed or value free term. It has a very different meaning depending on who is speaking. Parramatta, 23 kilometres from the Sydney CBD, is now the geographic centre of Sydney. Yet the term 'western Sydney' is often used to encompass all of the suburbs west, or south-west of, for example, Strathfield, which is 12 kilometres from the CBD. The term 'the Greater West' is now used by local and state governments and researchers—and increasingly by the public—to represent a huge area of Sydney covering local government areas from Auburn and Bankstown, west to the Blue Mountains, north-west to Hawkesbury and south-west to Wollondilly. Moreover, almost half of Sydney's population lives there. At July 2000, 45 per cent of Sydneysiders lived in the area now called 'the Greater West' (Development and Information Management Planning Services 2000).

Media discourses are the most pervasive disseminators of ideas and images about western Sydney. Since the early 1980s the media has steadily perpetuated the concept that western Sydney is a by-product of poor planning. The term 'urban sprawl' is repeatedly used to argue that Sydney is geographically 'out of control', the implication being that it is socially 'out of control' as a result (Powell 1993; Johnson in Grace et al 1997). In these accounts western Sydney is represented by social isolation, dislocation and a lack of social order. These representations of western Sydney have two major effects. They ignore any sense of community or social cohesion in the western suburbs and they ignore the difference and diversity that characterises this vast area (Collins et al 2001).

These discourses construct the residents of western Sydney as passive and disinterested in the well being of their communities. They lay the blame for any social problems with the people who live in the area. People are represented as *being* disadvantaged and as *having* problems, rarely as individuals and communities struggling to do something about these problems (Powell 1993; Johnson in Grace et al 1997). In regard to media representations of Green Valley, Christopher Keating argues that media induced panics over an 'underclass' of welfare dependent people in the area panders directly to middle class fears about a lack of social cohesion and the spread of anti-social behaviour and crime (Keating 1996). In addition, western Sydney is also positioned as culturally, geographically, socially and economically homogenous in comparison to a vibrant and diverse Sydney proper (Sydney's CBD and its inner, eastern and northern suburbs). Difference and diversity is subsumed in an overarching narrative of poverty and despair.

These representations have come to have authority because people who live in western Sydney are seldom given the opportunity to speak about their experiences and their communities in the public arena. That is, they are generally the objects of media reports but rarely the speaking subjects (Powell 1993). It is important to reiterate that Powell's focus is on media texts dating from the early 1980s to early 1990s. Since then, as Johnson (in Grace et al 1997) has argued, numerous groups in the vast area of western Sydney have attempted to counter these negative images. However, the dominant and most powerful images of western Sydney are, arguably, still centred around a supposed loss of social order. Recent media reports that have focused on a crisis of law and order in the Cabramatta area in south-western Sydney are a case in point.

This dominant discourse has a powerful effect on other ways of thinking about western Sydney. During the 1990s, for example, another prevalent media discourse focused on the diversity of the

west. In many ways this was mobilised to counter the negative, homogenising discourses reported on by Powell. However, this discourse—centred predominantly around multiculturalism, and particularly around food and cultural pastimes—is in many ways as homogenising as the early ones. A focus on food and other symbolic markers of a particular culture ignores the interaction between various cultures in western Sydney—Anglo, indigenous and ethnic. Moreover, as with the earlier discourses on western Sydney, these are written from the standpoint of a dominant, middle-class, Anglo culture. Hage writes that these representations of diversity in western Sydney are part of a broader discourse that *hinges on 'multiculturalism without migrants'*—a multicultural reality made of institutions that seem to exist without any migrant subjects to sustain it (in Grace et al 1997).

This newer discourse is much like the idea of western Sydney without people and communities that characterised the earlier media representations. Concepts of community and diversity must be viewed in terms of the ways they are played out in the suburbs that comprise western Sydney—that is, where almost half the people in Sydney live.

As Powell emphasises, western and south-western Sydney exceeds the negative images and imaginary constructions imposed on it. Its communities are not simply cosy neighbourhoods united in celebration or mourning. Its cultural diversity is not simply an exotic mask. Both community and diversity are deeply experienced and dynamic forces, full of complex and contradictory relationships, which are often difficult to negotiate (Powell 1993).

Sustainability

The term sustainability is used in two ways in the literature on the topic:

- It is referred to as an activity that either does not diminish the overall stock of resources in an area, or that has the capacity to replace or replenish the resources it uses or that may already be

depleted. This is the common use of the term in environmental and economic literature and most often refers to replenishable resources.

- It is also defined as the long-term viability of an activity in its own right. As a rule 'long term viability' means the capacity of an activity to achieve self-sufficiency—that is, to sustain and reproduce itself. Most often this means economic self-sufficiency.

While both definitions are linked by the notion of replacing or augmenting existing resources they are not the same. An activity could be sustainable in the second sense and unsustainable in the first or *visa versa*.

The foregoing definitions of sustainability are especially difficult to apply to cultural or social community activities. For example, a community based activity may be sustainable in terms of both the first and second definitions, but it may be *undesirable*. In this case sustainability is qualified by reference to other sets of values, i.e. democratic, egalitarian, justice or rights based. Likewise, an activity might meet a community *need*, but be unsustainable in the second sense or in both senses. Or an activity may be unsustainable in one or both senses, but it may have unintended effects or long term consequences that contribute to the sustainability of cultural life.

Attempts to include cultural or social sustainability have most often generalised economic or environmental notions to social and cultural relations—in other words, to include the maintenance of community life and its infrastructural supports (CCE 2000; Hart 2000). However, since (a) a community can fit all sustainability criteria yet still be undesirable and (b) wealth is the most accurate predictor of a viable community through time, they add to their definition notions of empowerment, participation, equity, justice, tolerance of difference and so forth, generalised to future generations.

In some cases the result is that sustainability gets close to being a redundant term or,

otherwise, a term that functions as a euphemism for a particular political philosophy or a philosophy of development. In others it differs from the foregoing only in its 'ecological' tone—one that interweaves environmental sustainability to the economic and cultural. In some of the literature terms such as 'resilient community' (CCE 2000), 'community capacity' (ASPEN Institute 1996), 'healthy communities' and 'community strength' are often used in place of or to extend the definition of sustainability.

There are two further issues. One concerns the notions of community and community development. Debates about sustainability have inevitably folded into debates about the status or nature of contemporary communities and about the level of cultural life at which a sustainable community is best located. These are addressed below. The other concerns the ideals of harmony and balance that are the foundational value terms of much of the literature on sustainability (and on community), or more generally, of eco-system approaches to cultural life. A report such as this cannot review the extensive philosophical and political literature on notions of harmony and balance, except to note that they are rarely seen as *definitionally* benign values in either their utopian or pragmatic forms.

However, the notion of cultural sustainability (which is the most problematic notion) is integral to the terms of this report and we use it extensively. But we use it with caution and as a provisional term, which we define loosely and negatively as follows.

A culturally sustainable activity is any activity that does not damage collective life *to the point where there is no collective alternative*. Cultural sustainability, though, should not reproduce or replace cultural resources (privilege, prejudice, gross economic inequality, bigotry and so forth) that offend disadvantaged collectivities in a community, or that reproduce a community that is oppressively normative. Justice and equity frame our notion of sustainability, as does a

politics of difference or of normativities. Therefore, we leave space for irresolvable community conflict, for mediation—including symbolic, economic, subjective, historical, and emotional mediation—and for the culturally creative and life affirming place of imbalance and disharmony.

Community: debates and definitions

Community is a highly debated notion. For some writers community refers to locality and stresses the intimacy of face to face relations, immediacy, assimilation, transparency, wholeness and local autonomy. Such theories either stress shared understandings and shared subjectivities (commonness) or they stress relations of mutuality and reciprocity that involve the capacity to take the 'standpoint of the other' (Benhabib 1986). As a rule the model is the small rural town, but the term is also extended to include neighbourhoods, street cultures and so forth (Jacobs 1961). The political frame is clear in most writing of a utopian turn. Community as per the above is a strong democratic alternative (Barber 1984) to the social problems and forms of personal misery and atomisation that are seen as the product of the individualism of liberalism. The politics privileges collective self-sufficiency and decentralisation as the alternative to individualism and 'big government' dependency and/or control. The locality model is also attractive to environmentalists, partly for the foregoing reason, but also because small scale manageable environments facilitate a participatory environmentalism (Ife 1995).

For other writers, community refers to cross locality links based on interest—communities of interest. These writers argue that shared identities and significant community affiliations arise from shared interests that do not necessarily coincide with locality. All argue that the identifications and the meaningful social relations of contemporary life occur through webs of interest based social relations that are multiple and fragmented and

only coincide with locality on an occasional dimension, such as place of residence.

There is also a debate about community and culture. Many writers have pointed out that community and culture are synonymous in much of the literature, and that collapsing community and culture has a different impact on different populations in a society. The first model discussed above makes community, culture and locality (and belonging, identity and place) synonymous. But for some populations the terminology is inverted. Peters-Little (2000), for example, takes the notion of Aboriginal community to show how community means imputed cultural commonness or unity across localities. She goes on to discuss the use of community by government to categorise Aboriginal Australians on the basis of the imputed 'wholeness' of traditional cultural identities, regardless of spatial distribution. Against this Peters-Little argues for a *locality* based definition of Aboriginal communities, by which she means a grassroots focus for action and identification, as opposed to bureaucratically (or interest) imposed communities based on some notion of a traditional, unitary culture and rights.

Finally, there is the argument that the notion of community is a purely utopian term based on a romantic vision of a rural town (or, in a more sophisticated form, Jeffersonian democracy). The core of this position is that anti-urban notions of community are both culturally and intellectually 'thin' and (administrative convenience aside) have uncertain political or democratic or economic potential. Iris Young (1995), for example, argues that the privileging of face to face relations in the locality model cannot deal with mediation, which it 'wrongly identifies with alienation', because it assumes unmediated 'copresence' (a 'metaphysical illusion'). She further argues that the model fails to address how small communities relate to each other, and that, in addition, the privileging of 'commonness' and 'unity' fails to adequately address their undesirable political consequences,

such as exclusiveness and intolerance of difference (Young 1995; Sennett 1996).

Young's concern, like that of the community theorists, is to think about modes of democratic organisation—interventions—that will enhance the quality of life of people, and most importantly, ensure social justice. Consistent with her anxieties about community theories, her central concern is to develop a conception of rich social relations that encompass as a foundational value a politics of difference.

To this end, and in a similar vein to Richard Sennett (1990, 1996), Young rejects the anti-urbanism of the first model and the lop-sided emphasis on interest in the second. For Young the urban *structures* the lives of all people in a modern society because of the mediation of unseen persons and processes through broader networks—administrative, political, economic, cultural—where encountering strangers is as much a part of the cultural experience as the reverse. Young puts the coming together of strangers (not familiars) at the centre of her theory of justice, arguing that the capacity to deal with difference is the capacity to deal with strangers in a democratic environment of (unassimilated) difference.

Whether right or wrong in her conclusions, Young's account of modern society does—on three counts—challenge taken for granted ideas and practices that privilege community. Firstly, the emphasis on urbanity is well placed. The rapid urbanisation of suburbs, towns and villages after World War II is indisputable. Secondly, it is also indisputable that most people belong to communities that are trans-local and that these are not just interest based. Thirdly, Young's work is policy focused and her concern is that the theoretical foundations of much work on community dooms practical action to failure. To this end her work draws attention to problems inherent in trying to link the democratic ideals of modernity to unexamined (or administrative) notions of community.

In other words, one might say that Young's work aims to create 'thick' democratic cultures—working side by side with cultural meanings, cultural practices, cultural histories, aesthetics and heterogeneities, and then 'thickening' these with open ended democratic ideals. Communities then are just handy shorthand terms for specific constellations of meanings, practices and identifications as they coalesce for particular cultural, economic or political activities. What Young's work does not deal with, perhaps because of its North American context, is the tension between government, or elite-determined, community based policies on the one hand and the community itself (meaning 'the grassroots') on the other. This tension is a feature of Australian politics.

Community development

Community development is an omnibus term covering quite different activities ranging from grassroots political mobilisation and conscious raising through to structured interventions by governments, or private or global organisations (World Health Organisation, human rights organisations, Worldbank and other foundations). Consequently, the strategic location of the practices may be very different. For example, because of NGO funding by global organisations, contemporary social movements (workers, women, environmental, indigenous) fall under the rubric of community development, though their purpose at a local community level may be very different to say a government or religious intervention.

At the core, community development refers to a set of practices whose constituency is disadvantaged populations. Most community development practices are based on a range of political, community, development and rights theories. They emphasise empowerment, participation, democratic structures, sustainability, egalitarian processes, openness, self-help, self-sufficiency and quality of life.

The overall aim of these practices is to enable disadvantaged people to take control of their lives, either by becoming a strong political force and/or by collaborative endeavours with other groups. Depending on the particular community development practice, local groups may be linked horizontally with similar groups outside the community (political alliances, economic and cultural activities). Or they may be linked vertically to businesses, professionals and various levels of government at the local and the trans-local level. The activities, encouraged by community development practices, range from economic activities (such as local cooperatives among women) through cultural activities and mutual support activities (such as festivals, theatre, child care and health cooperatives) to political activities (such as the Green Bans Movement and the People's Science Movement).

Contemporary community development theory is focused much more on the local community in a strictly geographical sense. The reasons are fivefold:

- In response to globalisation, social movements have privileged in their activities work at the level of the local community, especially rural communities.
- The accelerating spatial distribution of inequality means that many local areas, especially in global cities, are more demographically homogenous than previously.
- The paring away of the welfare state has decimated civil society at the level of the local community with consequent discontent, fear, social malaise and misery.
- Government intervention, now regulatory rather than redistributive, in conjunction with the decentralisation of service delivery, makes the local administrative community the focus of community strategies.
- Intentionally or not, notions of self-help and self-sufficiency at the level of the local community, some refracted through local government, sit well with shrinking public and private sector expenditure on social need.

There have been three further developments. The first, noted earlier, is a shift away from a needs based or a deficit model to an assets based model of community development (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). The logic of this shift is that working from the strengths of a community and mobilising these will better enhance community capacity and benefit its members. While an assets based model is a positive move away from a victim model, some argue that the question of needs, both local and universal, must still be addressed, as assets can only be maximised if needs are met (Ife 1995; United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948).

The second development, in part a response to the generalisation to the public and NGO sector of new management philosophies, is an increased emphasis on the technologies of community development—audits, indicators, accountability and outcomes—including an emphasis on the economic self-sufficiency of community organisations through self-funding, partnerships and collaborations.

There is now a wealth of literature providing community checklists for sustainability, healthy communities, strong communities, resilient communities, community capacity, community assets, human capital, social capital, economic capital, environmental capital and so on (Ife 1995; SCDC 2000; Kretzmann and McKnight 1993; Aspen Institute 1996; CCE 2000; Kenny 1994; WHO 1990). Most of these include equity and justice indicators, and rules for democratic meetings and participation.

The third development, again a product of new managerial ideologies, is an emphasis on community leadership and leadership training as a central aspect of capacity building.

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