Spatial Context in Ageing for Regional Community in Australia

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Introduction

The 2003 *State of the Regions Report* presented a demographic profile for so-called retirement-oriented 'life-style' regions as typically being in the lower end of socio-economic performance in terms of employment and income growth, with significant rates of population growth in older ages, rapidly rising housing prices, and heavy demand for infrastructure and community services[1]. It means that increasing numbers of retirees could have an adverse impact on the finances of local government. These residents may be entitled to concessions on rates and other charges. They may also consume, need or demand increasing services. Consequently there are a number of direct policy and practice drivers for the regional policy and its implementations strategies. They include:

- ・How to support regional communities impacted by high increases in the numbers of senior aged Australians in their populations. There is a need to explore approaches to balancing infrastructure and service provision with opportunities to expand the required revenue streams.
- ・How to enhance the health and well-being outcomes of seniors in ways that recognize their knowledge and expertise in practical and meaningful ways and to build a stronger sense of personal gain through community involvement.

- ・How to evaluate the potential benefits of technologies in providing support for older people. This potential includes managing activities of daily living, supporting families as carers and advocates through technology such as remote monitoring, improving access to service delivery information, enabling clinicians to share care plans and better coordinate care. There is potential through technology to support ageing in place and delaying or avoiding moves to institutional care. Savings are anticipated from applying technology to foster prevention and early detection of the onset of disease or disability, when treatment is often cheaper and more effective.

The focus of this paper is on the Wide Bay/ Burnett region of Queensland which has one of the fastest growing populations of retirees and is one of the poorest regions in the state[2]. This research has also arisen as a result of a growing collaboration and a strengthening partnership between researchers in ageing at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) and the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC). USQ hosts CAAIR, the Collaboration for Ageing and Aged-care Informatics Research. The expertise contained in that centre is complimented by research expertise in regional development issues that USC has in its Institute for Sustainability, Health and Regional Engagement (iSHaRE). The first steps

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of the research have been undertaken in the form of extensive consultations with local government authorities and other entities considered to be stakeholders.

The aims of the research are to assist regional communities in addressing increases in the percentage of older people in their populations, moves towards enhancing the independence of older people and expectations of more care to be delivered in the home and in the community. The general principles include considering approaches for engaging the enterprising capacity of an active ageing population to achieve a range of individual, institutional, regional objectives through processes of learning and innovation, and exploring the development and application of innovations and technologies which will be essential as enabling infrastructure for these changes.

Contexts

Demographic context

The Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay regions are characterised by:

- rapid population growth, part fuelled by in-migration of 'life-style seeking' seniors. The Sunshine Coast and the Wide Bay regions both have 28 percent of their population in the 55 years and older category compared to a National figure of 21 percent;
- a relatively low socio-economic performance (unemployment, employment growth, income levels) that reflects the ageing end of the demographic structure as well as industry restructuring. The *State of the Regions* report ranks indicators of these measures for the two case study regions at between 40 and 50 out of the total of 64 metropolitan and non-metropolitan regions Australia-wide[1]. This situation is similar in other 'lifestyle' regions;

- a relatively high level of 'creative skills', as measured by the creativity index in the *State of the Regions* report, 2002. The 2002 State of the Regions report for example gives a creativity index ranking for the Sunshine Coast region of 15, just in front of another 'lifestyle region' in the Richmond Tweed region of NSW, and only just behind regions in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide.
- a high level of latent social capital of an enterprising kind that is inherent in the educational and professional attainments and experience of the seniors in the population.

These characteristics are becoming increasingly common to many other 'life-style' regions throughout Australia where the current realised productive contribution of active seniors falls short of their impact on community services and infrastructure.

Policy Context

The solution offered in the *State of the Regions* report is one that relates to adjusting the Financial Assistance Grants formula to take into account the impact of an ageing population at the local government level[1]. An alternative strategy is that is being explored to build underlying economic capacity on the back of the expertise of seniors within a framework of innovation, learning, enterprising and engagement. In other words we suggest these retirees have a potential economic worth of an enterprising kind separate to their declining economic worth as consumers and investors.

Recognizing the significance for local government capacity of an ageing population in some regional areas, the ALGA issued a population ageing action plan that specified principles and objectives to help local councils plan for an ageing population[3]. The action plan followed an earlier ALGA discussion paper *An*

Older Australia: Identifying Areas for Local Government Action [4].

The ALGA action plan specified four priority areas, and a number of strategies, including building awareness of the ageing population issue in local government, encouraging local government planning action, fostering partnerships to support a collaborative approach to population ageing, and improved access to regional information on population change. We believe this research project provides a strategy to achieve this action plan.

More broadly in relation to the ageing population, both the Federal Government and the Queensland State Government have issued policy and strategic planning statements that focus on the health and well-being aspects of seniors, including the 'active' seniors group which are the target group for this project. The Commonwealth Government's *National Strategy for an Ageing Australia: An older Australia challenges and opportunities for all* talks about opportunities for Australians to make a lifelong contribution to society and the economy, including through training and professional development and lifelong learning for mature age workers and learners [5].

At a state level, the Queensland Department of Community Services issued a 1999 policy document (*Our Shared Future: Queensland Framework for Ageing 2000 - 2004*) that specifies five principles and strategies that seek to improve a coordinated approach to the design and provision of aged services [6]. Importantly for this project, the policy paper recognizes the contribution seniors can make, through knowledge and learning, to society, culture and the economy of their communities. This was also recognized in the Queensland Department of Families report *Ageing: Myth and Reality* [7].

Spatial context

However none of these policy documents spell out a spatial policy perspective, even though there are quite clear spatial differences in impact as the State of the Regions report [1] and Salt have demonstrated [8]. Nor do these policy and strategy documents identify how the health and well-being of this active demographic, and the communities in which they reside, can be enhanced through meaningful enterprising initiatives that draw on the accumulated knowledge and expertise of these people and the learning and research frameworks of education institutions.

The second area of literature important for this research project concerns the growth and competitiveness of Australian regions, and in particular those regions that are at the forefront of 'lifestyle-seeking' senior in-migration population growth. While competitiveness and equity are the two principles that are meant to underpin policies relating to regions, the strategies and programs put forward to address them are generally vague in the way these objectives will be met. They tend to rely on a range of 'off-the-shelf' popular approaches (such as social capital, learning regions, aggregate demand, 'institutional thickness', industry clustering, etc) that are unsubstantiated in their evidence.

Research suggests there has been an increasing concentration and divergence in growth between metropolitan and non metropolitan regions in Australia over the last two decades that indicate many of the supposed drivers for regional growth, explicit in the institutional embeddedness approach to regional development theory, policy and practice, are either ineffective or have negative impacts [9,10]. And other research analysis suggests an approach to regional growth and competitiveness that focuses on the growth transmission process, and in particular on the degree to which it can engage with the enterprising aspects of a region's human capital [10], is the best way forward. The regional analysis, covering 94 Australian regions, includes five sub-regions targeted for the case study analysis for the

Sunshine Coast and Wide Bay regions for this project. They include Caloundra, Maroochydoor, Gympie, Hervey Bay and Maryborough.

Approach and Results

The first step of this research project was undertaking GIS (geographic information system) research to better understand demographics of ageing in the Wide Bay/Burnett region in comparison with other LGAs of Queensland. The GIS research focused on the baby boomers in Queensland as these are the most numerically-significant age cohort that will have impacts for ageing and aged care. Of particular interest will be the first of the boomers, that is, those born in 1946. These are the oldest of the boomers, likely to be the first to retire and to make life-style choices that may indicate patterns that the rest of the boomers may follow.

Using GIS technology, the spatial location of 1946-1964 born baby boomers in Queensland and their migration over time were mapped and analysed based on the census data of 1991 and 2001[11]. Results show that using 2001 data, baby boomers were well represented in the southeast region of Queensland, including Brisbane, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Logan, and Redland Local Government Areas (LGAs); boomers were also well-represented along the eastern coast of Cairns, Mackay, Townsville and Thuringowa LGAs. The comparative research of the two census data also shows areas of baby boomer gain and loss, which clearly demonstrates the spatial migration of baby boomers over the decade.
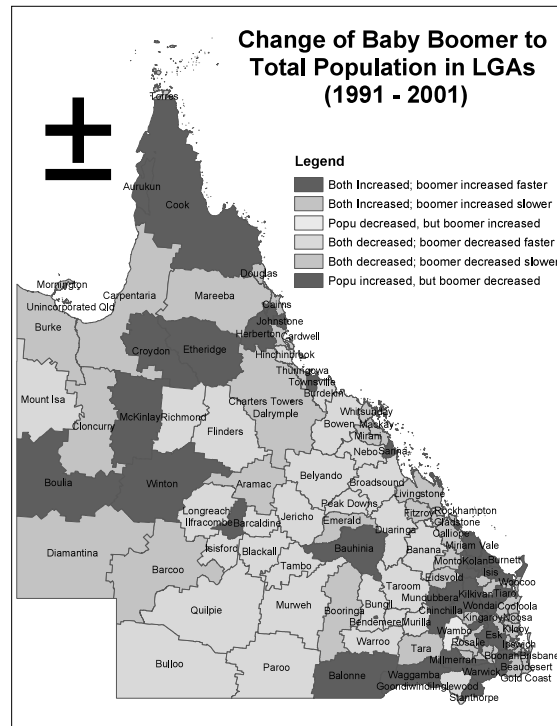
Figure 1: A comparison of the change of baby boomers to total population change between 1991 and 2001 in Queensland
(Data Source: CDATA 2001 and CDATA 1991)

Figure 1 shows for LGAs in Queensland:

1. those LGAs where the general population increased but boomers (born between 1946-1964) increased faster than the general population; these were exclusively on coastal and South Eastern areas of Queensland.

2. LGAs where both the general population and boomers increased but the rate of boomer increase was lower than the general population; this was an interesting mixture of remote and SE locations, no doubt requiring further analysis and research.

3. LGAs where the population decreased but boomers increased. There were only two

Table 1 Baby Boomer Change Patterns

	Number of LGAs	%
1. Both increased; boomer increased faster	23	18.25
2. Both increased; boomer increased slower	41	32.54
3. Population decreased, but boomer increased	2	1.59
4. Both decreased; boomer decreased faster	30	23.81
5. Both decreased; boomer decreased slower	5	3.97
6. Population increased, but boomer decreased	25	19.84
Total	**126**	**100.00**

LGAs in this category, both in the inland regions not too distant from major cities (Brisbane and Rockhampton)

4. Population and boomers both decreased but boomers decreased faster; large areas of central Queensland experienced a decrease in population over this period with boomers leaving these regions at a faster rate than the general population decline.

5. Both decreased; boomer decreased slower. Two of the four LGAs in this category are located in central Queensland while the other two lie alongside the Wide Bay/Burnett region which saw rapid population growth.

6. Population increased, but boomer decreased; some of these LGAs are in far west and far north regions where small populations can make data analysis challenging and locations such as mining camps can distort data.

Overall the populations of large parts of Queensland are declining and that is a matter for further research. For the purposes of this paper this data analysis supports popularly-held perceptions that boomers are reducing in numbers in far west, far north and central Queensland and increasing in numbers in coastal and hinterland regions.

Discussions

Regional growth and competitiveness

Analysis of regional growth and competitiveness over the period 1984 to 2002 for 94 Australian regions identifies the circumstances for the five sub-regions in the study area for this project[9,10]. The sub-regions in this research project study area have some of the lowest rankings for economic growth. The presence of the key human capital driver is very poor, while the access to high technology driver is also relatively poor. Industry specialisation is relatively good for the Sunshine Coast and for Hervey Bay, while the regions rank at around the middle for the degree of institutional intervention, with the Sunshine Coast and Hervey Bay doing better against this driver. This points to a situation where a failure to engage the region's human capital shows up in poor economic growth. Any strategy for regional development in these places therefore should focus on the way human capital is engaged in the growth transmission process[10].

Regional development transmission

Two regional development transmission

concepts stand out from the research work on regional growth and competitiveness [9,12]. These concepts are:

(a) enterprising human capital; and

(b) regional engagement.

'Enterprising' people in the regional development context we define as those that take an idea and turn it into an outcome using the regional attributes at their disposal. They are people that understand the way markets operate, can access finance, can see an opportunity, understand risk management, without necessarily being risk takers, and can mobilise resources, particularly teams, to good effect. They are ostensibly outcome-oriented people, and they are an undeveloped resource that exists across demographic groups in most communities. Developing an enterprising culture in the regional context is seen as something that needs to be taken on by the education system - not the training system - as it is about behavioral processes of thinking and acting that have long run implications.

Regional engagement in this context we refer to as the mutual and creative connectivity that can be formed by the region's human capital, to achieve accumulated outcomes that otherwise might not be possible when attributes are taken in isolation or are constrained by business or institutional structures. It is, in a sense, a framework of mutual cooperation that surrounds the enterprising human capital in the region. It is a concept of regional *involvement*, where participants are accepted on equal terms to exchange knowledge as learners.

Senior participation

An issue to be explored is whether seniors themselves will support and adopt the concepts of regional growth and competitiveness. The research commenced with wide consultation with stakeholder groups, policy makers and

implementers of programs at all levels of government. The consultations included seniors' bodies such as U3A (University of the Third Age), Pensioners and Superannuates League and the RSL. Feedback gathered to date from consultation indicates that seniors want to participate productively and actively in the education and labour markets.

Conclusion

This research project offers an approach to engaging active seniors as a key human resource in the growth prospects of those regions currently attracting increasing numbers of so-called 'lifestyle'-seeking retirees. It is an approach based on realizing the enterprising capabilities of this demographic within a framework of learning and innovation using the university as a facilitating agent.

In this regard it goes beyond many current strategies that see active seniors as employees or as unpaid and charitable to be needed help in the community and provides an important implications to assist in local, State and Federal government strategies to address a number of economic, social and cultural issues associated with an ageing Australia. And this research also shows an additional strategy to boost regional development outcomes, rather than simply view older age population growth as an additional cost that needs to be compensated for. Finally, it suggests a strategy for university viability in such locations could be adaptable to not only to Australia but also other countries facing same aging problems, such as Japan.

Acknowledgements

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