

Envisioning a global future for rural Australia: local government visions and local youths' educational aspirations

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Introduction

Rural education has traditionally been able to satisfy the local workforce requirements of employers, local industry, trade, and business groups. However, with the global challenges facing rural families today, it seems that rural educational institutions are unable to provide the specialised education and vocational training necessary for individuals to compete in the international market. In addition, decreasing opportunities for school leavers to find local employment have made it necessary for young people to look beyond their local communities. For the purposes of this paper, the concept of transnationalism will be limited to occupations and activities that require regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders for their implementation. Within the definition of transnationalism, it is possible to accommodate a number of diverse activities. Activities across national borders of members of a rural community also contribute to strengthening the transnational field.

Rural industry is one example of the new demands facing rural families and of the need for local youth to pursue higher education and specialised training. These challenges can only be understood in the context of globalisation. Globalisation in the context of this paper refers to the economic, political and cultural aspects of the international market where technology, transport and communication are creating a 'global village'. No longer can Australian farmers consider themselves from a purely regional or national context. The World Bank's official definition of globalisation is: 'Freedom and ability of individuals and firms to initiate voluntary economic transactions with residents of other countries' (Milanovic, 2002, p. 6). Globalisation refers to greater mobility of production such as capital and labour, and enhanced world integration through increased trade and exchange of ideas. The present movement of globalisation is predated by a similar trend at the end of the last century ending by 1914 (Milanovic, 2002). Australian rural families find themselves defined as 'individual' players in an international market. Gone are the days of government protections and subsidies. One consequence of this new won 'freedom' is that rural farmers must maximise their ability to work the land. In other words, they must use all available knowledge to maximise production. Moreover, it has become increasingly necessary to pursue higher education in order to work on the land. Techniques such as maximising agricultural produce, land management strategies and the need to conserve water resources require specialised knowledge, taught at tertiary institutions. Competition in the international market has brought about increased scientific management of rural industries. It is no longer possible for farming families to survive by relying on traditional agricultural knowledge. Rural families must keep up with latest knowledge about farming, and with the aid of advanced technology such as computer programs, the internet, and specialised accounting packages, farmers can monitor and assess livestock and produce, in order to successfully compete in global markets.



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This trend to apply specialised knowledge to farming is borne out by an article in the Sydney Morning Herald (22/02/2006) describing the “e-sheep” project being trialled by the NSW Department of Primary Industries. It involves attaching electronic ear tags to sheep and using equipment such as scanners to provide information to farmers about an animal’s weight, age, and sex or wool thickness. In a drought, it will enable farmers to know which sheep is losing condition, and at shearing time, it will provide information that will enable farmers to group the animals based on wool quality. According to this article such technology will enable farmers to save money by reducing the amount of work they do and will enable them to cater to every animal individually without even venturing into a paddock. It is argued that specialised information will allow farmers to make better decisions about how to spend their money such that it will not be lost on inferior livestock. A farmer from Bourke who has been trialling this technology explained that “we are looking at completely changing the way we manage stock- going from subjective to objective management”¹

In the rural communities we studied, it was often seen as a necessity to send one’s children to high schools more than 600 km away to the cities where they could receive the necessary education to compete in the modern world. Their own towns could not offer the necessary curricular support for the diversity and specialisation of education that were needed to be competitive in the global market. Councillors who were interviewed in this study recognised the need for tertiary education and were attempting to establish higher education facilities in their Shires.

At the same time, councillors recognised that traditional work areas such as mining and agriculture were providing less opportunities for local youth and limited job opportunities for graduates in the Shires. They recognised the need for young people to move away to urban areas to fulfil their professional aspirations. They identified the loss of their young people as a real problem for their communities and discussed strategies which would halt the drift to the cities. For example, councillors talked about the need for their Shires to create ‘knowledge based industries’ such as innovative IT businesses, tourism, hospitality and service industries that could create job opportunities for their young residents.

This paper will situate young people’s aspirations for education and employment in the broader context of Australian rural communities and show how globalisation is affecting these communities. The notion of social capital will be used as a conceptual tool for understanding the kinds of cultural resources which exist in rural communities and which are being developed to enhance opportunities for rural young people. In the Shires, young people, particularly women, displayed constructive aspirations towards higher education. This paper will explore the gender differences in attitudes to work and higher education within these communities. In our study, we found that community members such as councillors and parents active in local voluntary organisations provided important leadership role models and helped to promote many informal learning experiences within the communities. Informal learning processes help to build strong networks of social capital within communities and in our study, these positive experiences seem to account for the positive aspirations displayed by many young people in the Shires (Falk, 2001a; Falk and Harrison, 1998).

Social capital and social cohesion

Social capital is the attitude, spirit and willingness of people to engage in collective, civic activities and the degree to which a community or society collaborates and cooperates through networks, shared trust, norms and values to achieve mutual benefits (Putnam, 2000). Social capital can be described as the link between individual behaviour and the social community

¹ ‘Mustering sheep with the click of a mouse’, The Sydney Morning Herald, February 22, 2006.



environment. The social capital construct has been used within academic disciplines and in policy construction to describe non-economic, often difficult to define connotations of social structures, factors that underpin economic growth and sustainability (Bryden and Hart, 2004). Trust and social interaction among people, people who take pride in their local community and care for their community, being active participants in local issues create a healthier atmosphere and is more likely to cultivate effective social network systems to the benefit of the residents and the community as a whole (UK Department of Health, 1999, paragraph 4.34). A community is built on personal social networks that provide support, identity and belonging to the residents and glue the community together (Wellman, 2001, p. 228). The two research communities are defined by their geographical boundaries even if social cohesion and social network systems do not necessarily follow these boundaries. Moreover, in rural areas, geographical distances are vast which makes it difficult to sustain intensive social networks between communities without the help of telephone and internet communication.

The concept of social capital is complicated to define and differs from economic factors where a figure value can be attached and explained. Social factors do not have this clarity: their ambiguous nature can create difficulties in definitions, measurements and interpretations (Morrow, 2001, p. 39). Key fundamentals of social capital are sociability which is based upon an individual's skills and the desire to sustain social network systems (Bourdieu, 1993). Individual relationships require durability and are indispensable for community members (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249; Paxton, 2002, p. 256).

Recent social research has demonstrated the importance of social capital building for rural communities.² In order for a community to sustain itself and flourish community members must participate in exchanging experiences, skills, services, commodities, and social support. In other words, a reciprocal approach is essential for sustainability, and even more so in isolated communities which may be lacking in resources or essential services. Mutual respect among community members is a crucial foundation for social networks and social cohesion. Reciprocal network systems create support and interest in community members' welfare, a consideration and trust that will be returned (Putnam, 1993, p. 35; 1995, p. 665). Social capital structures such as networks and organisations provide opportunities for members to have shared learning experiences. These experiences contribute to the development of strong social structures and culture within the community and are factors which will help to sustain and enhance the community.

Social capital cannot be thought of as a property of closed and bounded rural communities, which merely perpetuates the myths of rurality as a preserve of old traditions. And yet, on the other hand, it is very much linked to ideas of place and identity. Where social capital brings positive benefits, it is likely to be associated with a plurality of cultural identities, a plethora of diverse networks of social relationships, a mixing and interweaving of spatial scales ..., and strong links to the multiple historical themes that characterise European rural areas (Lee, Árnason, Nightingale, and Shucksmith, 2005, p. 281).

Although Lee et al. (2005) refers to a European context, the assumption is applicable to other societies and to the Australian situation where rural communities need to preserve their uniqueness and identity but at the same time look for new ideas and structures to promote their sustainability. Recent research has recognized the importance of social capital as a

² See studies from the Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia, in particular discussion papers and reports by Ian Falk, Sue Kilpatrick, John Field, L. Harrison and J. Guenther on social capital, support networks, trust and learning communities.



means of rebuilding communities (see Falk, 2001b, pp. 1-2). Different forms of social capital exist in communities. In our study of two rural Queensland communities social capital existed in many forms. It was evident through the existence of youth councils and youth centres which undertook activities for the benefit of young residents and which encouraged youths to take shared responsibility for activities such as running a skateboard park in one of the Shires. The development of social capital was evident in community organisations such as Landcare where volunteers ran classes on computer literacy and art and through community projects such as the Art Gallery and activities to beautify the towns (“tidy towns”). Social capital existed in the form of a plethora of sporting organisations run by dedicated parent volunteers.

Research design and methodology

The research project was designed to elucidate young people’s everyday life on three community levels: the local government, community- organisational and individual. Two Queensland rural Shires with comparable demographic and socio-economic profiles and a substantial high school -aged population, the Years 10-12, were researched. The councillors were personally interviewed while the students completed a self-administered 25 minute survey during school time. All councillors elected to local government in the Shires were invited to participate in the research project and to talk about their role as councillors and as residents in the Shires. Fourteen councillors, a further eleven people representing the local government, sports and recreational, youth counsellor and social support organisations in the Shires were interviewed. The student sample includes 751 young people between the ages 14 and 21 years. The sample represents 98 per cent of all young people attending the schools the day that the research was conducted and 84 per cent of all students enrolled in the participating schools. The first research phase was undertaken with local government councillors in October 2002 and the second phase, the youth survey, was undertaken in March 2003. The youth survey data was analysed with SPSS, V11 (2002)³.

The survey questions related to young people’s sport and recreational pursuits, involvement in local clubs and organisations, future educational and professional aspirations, family and friends social networks, feeling safe in the community and trust of people, and experiences of gambling.

Female students were slightly over-represented in the sample, 55.9 per cent of the sample (N = 420) and the males 44.1 per cent (N = 331). The 15 and the 16 year old students were the largest group, making up two thirds of the sample, while the youngest and oldest age groups together covered one third of the sample. Nearly two fifths of the students had lived in the local community their whole life and another one fifth had resided there ten years or longer. Only seven per cent of the respondents had been living in the community less than one year, thus creating adequate time for most residents to be familiar with life in the community (White and Wynn, 2004). The majority of the population can be described as Anglo-Australian with only seven per cent of the respondents identifying themselves as Indigenous Australians. Ninety-six per cent of the young people were living with their parents, relatives or in a comparable family situation.

Results

The results from the question of future education and vocational preferences show a clear indication of what the majority of the students aspired to in the future, (6.8 per cent did not

³ The research is presented in detail in Fabiansson, C and Healey L., 2004, *Young People’s Community Affiliation*. Final Report, Sydney: University of Western Sydney.



respond to the question and 13.2 per cent were not sure). In total 601 students (80.1 per cent) of the students had clearly thought about their future after leaving high school⁴).

TABLE 1. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDENTS' FUTURE PROFESSIONAL PREFERENCES IN RELATION TO GENDER AND PER CENT

Educational pathway – professional area	Females	Males	Total per cent/N
Medical, science and social	33.5	9.6***	23.1/139
Technical	2.4	35.6	16.8/101
Education	20.0	3.4	12.8/77
Trade	8.5	16.0	11.8/71
Defense and security	5.9	14.9	9.8/59
Creative and artistic	9.4	3.8	7.0/42
Hospitality	8.5	3.4	6.3/38
Service sector	5.6	3.8	4.8/29
Design and construction	4.7	4.2	4.5/26
Sports area	1.5	5.3	3.2/19
Total per cent/N	100.0/340	100.0/261	100.0/601
Pearson Chi-Square; level of significance; >.001***-- strong; .001-.009**-- moderate; .01-.05*--weak			

The results show that the females were more inclined to seek an academic pathway outside the community while a higher percentage of the male students chose areas that could be satisfied in traditional male jobs within the local community. The females' choices reflect the limited opportunities that exist in the communities for young females aspiring for a professional career. The females' aspirations reflect the reality of the limited employment market and the realisation that the local opportunities are fewer and likely to stay that way for the foreseeable future. Even unqualified service and hospitality positions would be in short supply. The males' situation is less acute where local opportunities are still seen as a viable option, even if technical skills training would be required which to some degree could be undertaken locally.

Rural communities

The Shires are situated in Central Queensland: the less remote Shire is 120 kilometres west of Gladstone and 144 kilometres south west of Rockhampton; the most remote Shire is situated along Capricorn Highway, 271 kilometres west of Rockhampton and 415 kilometres east of Longreach. The most remote Shire has a railway link and both of them have airports with

⁴ The categories used in the survey included: (i) Medical, science and social professions (medical doctor, different specialities of scientist, veterinary surgeons, nurses, nutritionists and physiotherapists (Table 1). (ii). Technological professions (engineer related occupations, mechanical work, computer programming, information technology related occupations and computer analysts) (iii) Educational professions (primary and secondary teachers, early childhood teachers; childcare related occupations included nanny positions, social workers, child counsellors and occupational therapist occupations) (iv) The defence and security group (occupations within the air force such as pilots and army, navy, or air force positions; police officers, detectives, prison guards, intelligence officer and lawyers within the legal field) (v) Design and construction (architects, interior designers, graphic designers and fashion designers) (vi) Creative and artistic professions (actors, musicians, museum curators, journalists and fashion editors); (vii) trade professions (plumbers, electricians, hairdressers, fire personnel; real estate agents and people working within agriculture); (viii) Service sector (administrative positions, accountants and managers); (ix) Hospitality sector (occupations related to hospitality, tourism and entertainment such as chefs and cooks, resort managers; and in the entertainment industry, events managers and travel agents) (x) Professional sport (athletes, professional trainers of people or animals).



daily flights to Brisbane. The populations of the Shires range from approximately 13,600 to 14,300 people in 2001 (Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, 2001).

The main industries in the Shires are coal mining, power generation, aquaculture, horticulture, and agriculture such as beef production, both dry land cropping and irrigation cropping growing lucernes, cotton, wheat, sorghum, soybeans, sunflowers, citrus fruits and grapes in addition to flowers such as the kangaroo paw, rice flower, protea, eucalyptus, red claw, herbs and spices. The Shires are also the dormitory centres for adjacent mines.

The Shires provide the mainstream services needed for the residents. However some specialist health services such as specialist medical procedures need to be sought outside the Shires. Education facilities outside compulsory schooling (Year 1 - 10) including Year 11 – 12, are in the least remote Shire limited to a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) college, while in the most remote Shire there is access to tertiary education through the University of Central Queensland and an Agricultural College Campus. These education faculties are highly treasured and protected by the residents. Education is valued in the communities and approximately seven per cent of the adult residents in the Shires have a Bachelor Degree (ABS Census, 2001, B23). However, there is a shortage of employment opportunities for those with professional education. In addition, affordable housing is another limitation facing young people who would like to settle in the Shires.

The rural communities are made up of strong mining communities. The mines have traditionally provided many jobs for males in these Shires. By contrast, there are less work opportunities for females. This imbalance makes it necessary for females to seek employment and higher qualifications outside the Shires as few options are available outside the traditional path as a stay at home parent.

The research findings indicated that females were more inclined than males to choose teaching as a desired profession (20.0 per cent and 3.4 per cent, respectively, Table 1). It was quite likely that graduate teachers would find themselves working outside of their local community. It was recognised in the interviews the importance of quality education and the fact that their local communities offered limited opportunities to the young. The less remote Shire had only one school catering for students sitting their Higher School Certificate, while the more remote Shire had two schools catering for Year 12, one public and one private catholic. The schools were only able to offer the main stream choices of subjects so that students with other interests needed to attend schools as boarders in the larger cities, 600 to 900 km away, or alternatively they could do distance education externally, with the help of their schools.

Community members responded to this dilemma in two ways. On the one hand, they saw the necessity of sending their children away to seek education ‘outside’ the community, demonstrating openness to new ideas, and the ability to look beyond their own communities. On the other hand, community members valued the continuity of their communities and desired to make them stronger. They expressed disappointment that many young people who left the Shires to seek further education, did not return. Their response to the urban drift was to look critically at their own communities to find ways of improving local educational facilities and work opportunities. Local residents desired to make their communities places where the young enjoyed living, in the hope that when they left they would one day wish to return. In other words, residents’ desire to nurture a kind of civic pride in their young residents through projects such as skate parks, and activities initiated by young people themselves working through the youth councils. Councillors were proud of the extensive sporting facilities sponsored through the efforts of Council members and the plethora of sporting organisations available to the town’s young people, which were organised largely through the voluntary efforts of dedicated parents. At the same time, they recognised that



these activities favoured male participation or sports minded people and that a broader collection of cultural activities was lacking.

One councillor explained that he was not fearful of young people leaving their community because leaving was beneficial both for the individual and for the community if the person returned and shared their new learning experiences. However, he was concerned that young people often did not return, and so in his view it was important to build a community that people would want to return to. Thus, he emphasised the importance of encouraging research, which would build local industries such as solar energy. He recognised that in 20 years the mining industry would not be a viable option for graduates wanting to return to the Shires.

The local economy

In order to understand the educational and professional aspirations of young people in the Shires, it is instructive to look in some detail at the local economy and the opportunities available to local youths. Agriculture and mining are the mainstays of these communities within the Shires. Agriculture and coal mining form the main industries in the most remote Shire while the less remote Shire is largely dependent upon coal mining, beef production, lucernes and cotton cropping. The main township in the Shire is the dormitory town for three Callide power stations and the Callide Coal Mine. The town meatworks is the third largest in Queensland and processes meat for export throughout Australasia. Fairburn Dam and Lake Maraboon in the remote Shire have given the Shire a reliable water supply and the ability to develop a variety of irrigated crops including horticulture, cotton, wheat, sorghum, sunflowers, and citrus fruits as well as being a major beef supplier. In addition to the main town in the Shire, the Shire provides dormitory facilities for the BHP's Coal Gregory mine, the Gordonstone mine, since 1992 and for the Crinum and Enshum mines since 1994. The prosperity and growth of the town is highly dependent on the future of the mines.

The Mayor in the less remote Shire described the severe drought facing their region due to the lack of water infrastructure. The only available water source for industry was water that came from underground from the Callide Dam in Gladstone. Consequently, the town was facing severe water restrictions. One of the most important future projects would be to secure access to water and present residing major companies indicated they would expand if they could get 'water', the single most significant factor in attracting people and businesses to the Shire.

Shire Mayors and councillors indicated an awareness of their communities' changing economic situation: the drift of youth from their towns to metropolitan areas, the loss of essential services, the squeeze on Shire resources due to drought and global economic circumstances. They spoke of the need to bring their communities into the 21st century and demonstrated this desire through their proactive management of community issues. For example, one of the Shire councils had commissioned a Strategic Document to research the various ways the council could promote development within its region. The document was being used as a blueprint to initiate and develop new projects, for example it mentioned issues such as the need for another dam (Nathan Dam) to create an alternative water supply, the importance of new railway link in the area, and the need to promote the town in terms of international tourism and through the hospitality industry. Councillors recognised the need to broaden the types of industry within the Shire, to extend agricultural products to new areas such as herbs, not just water dependent cotton, and to attract new commercial industries which are not agriculturally based. For example, they recognised the importance of their communities becoming globally connected through IT and the use of the internet. Shire councillors spoke about the new Local Government Act which would expand the role of local councils. Rural and regional councils would take over many areas formerly provided by



the State Government, which according to many of the councillors interviewed, would be an improvement. They emphasised that local councils have special knowledge of their local communities and so are in a better position to develop programs suited to their communities.

Social and economic infrastructure within the Shires

One of the most obvious facts about living in rural areas is the lack of higher education facilities and high schools. It was a common fact that most families in the area would send their children away to boarding school in urban areas such as Rockhampton or Brisbane for the last few years of high school, if they could afford to do so, in order to take advantage of the broader curricula offered by these schools. The move could be long term or even permanent if these teenagers decided to take up tertiary education and then work in these centres. From our surveys, it appears that a high percentage of young people had these aspirations, thus the loss of population that Falk (2001a) describes is clearly exacerbated by the lack of local educational facilities. The lack of local resources forces rural families apart at an early age, and necessitates this drift to the urban centres. Councillors in both Shires recognised the serious problem of young people drifting away from their communities and developed strategies to try to stem this tide. Even when there were limited higher education facilities available, such as the local TAFE in the less remote Shire, which provides IT and engineering, the location of this institution near the power station 15 km out of town, with no mobile phone coverage, and with no bus service to the area, made this a limited option for most young people in the community. The Mayor spoke of plans to relocate the TAFE closer to the town. The Council was also in the process of talking to University of Southern Queensland at Rockhampton, to establish a Level 1 University in the Shire.

The surveys conducted with young people in the Shires represent the population of young people who have stayed in the communities, and have not experienced boarding schools. Their experiences have been firmly rooted within their local rural communities. It is interesting therefore to account for the kind of positive aspirations displayed by many of the high school students surveyed in their choice of further education (Table 1). There was a clear aspiration towards further tertiary education especially for the females.

Social researchers such as Ian Falk (2001a) have described the flow of social and economic infrastructure out of rural communities and the outward perception of rural communities as caught in a 'downward spiral' or some kind of inevitable decline⁵. Yet the positive aspirations of these young people indicates a high degree of social capital, a high degree of confidence in themselves and their future, and in many instances, the desire for further education, in the form of apprenticeships or tertiary education. According to town councillors and other community representatives, there were plenty of job opportunities in the Shires, but the young people often aspired to broader directions. These aspirations can be understood by looking at the community spirit which existed within the Shire, and in particular, the way local townspeople maximized the use of their resources and facilities through the existence of voluntary associations and through special projects and community events organised by parents, families, schools, churches, councillors and various other networks.

The presence of constructive youth aspirations indicates a vibrant rural community able to nurture constructive and positive views in their young residents. They are able to do this despite the challenges and difficulties facing rural families. Talking to town councillors provided glimpses into the hopes nurtured by the townspeople for their communities and their young residents. The desire to start a local university was just one example. Other examples

⁵ See various reports by Ian Falk, Centre for Research and Learning in Regional Australia.



included individual councillors and community involvement in establishing a youth centre in one of the smaller towns, the use of the local Post Office as a study place for students with access to a computer and the internet and where the Post Office staff took on the responsibility of supervision.

Rural communities, globalisation and the role of local leaders.

The *issue of rural communities, globalisation and the role of local leaders* was raised in the interviews with community representatives. The experience of globalisation is a problem common to many Australian rural communities. The effects of globalisation and the decline in population of Australian rural communities have been well documented⁶. For example, Falk (2001b, Chapter 1, p. 1) talks about the ‘crisis’ affecting rural communities: the downward spiral affecting regional communities due to the globalisation of agricultural markets and the consequential competitiveness that results from this; the ensuing loss of population from these areas, the outflow of economic and social infrastructure in the form of governments withdrawing services, businesses relocating elsewhere and young people moving away to urban areas (Falk, 2001b; 1999). A recent inquiry by the Productivity Commission (1999, pp. 28-30) into the plight of rural Australia identifies ‘drivers’ of change in rural Australia and refers to the increased scale and pace of globalisation. The report refers to technological advances such as improved transport and telecommunications, increased mechanisation of farming, agronomic developments and the adoption of new mining techniques. Another facet of globalisation has been the downward trend in world prices for agricultural commodities, which has resulted in a decline in producers’ terms of trade. At the same time rural Australia has experienced government policy changes such as the lowering of trade barriers, deregulation of the financial system and increased regulation to protect the environment. According to Pritchard (2001, p.1), Australia has championed agricultural trade liberalisation since the 1980s. From the late 1970s, neo-liberal economics contested the idea that government should have priority over market processes. These changes have brought about changes in Australia’s economic activity, and while it is still true to say that agriculture and mining has continued to grow, the reality is that these activities have diminished as a proportion of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). A large share of GDP has been taken over by service activities. Pritchard (2002, p. 5) describes the ‘profound sense of vulnerability’ in much of rural Australia due to a variety of circumstances. These include problems of environmental degradation forcing changes in agricultural practices, long term declines in terms of rural trade are squeezing farm incomes; trends in agricultural production increasing dependence on large-scale capital investment with implications for debt and farm size; and service industry restructuring is leading to small businesses leaving small towns.

The role of local councils in the community

In the communities studied, it was clear that local councils played an important role in community development. Councillors provided important structures of leadership within the communities and were responsible for directing and mobilising local resources, for the benefit of the community. At the same time as being councillors, many of these towns’ people were dedicated parents, and business owners. They were able to integrate their experience as parents, business owners/workers, and their knowledge of the community and apply it to the challenges facing local council. The study of these local councillors is a good example of how

⁶ See recent works such as Gray and Lawrence, *A Future for Regional Australia: Escaping Global Misfortune* 2001; Lockie and Bourke, *Rurality Bites: The Social and Environmental Transformation of Rural Australia* 2001; Pritchard and McManus, *Land of Discontent* 2000



local residents applied their local knowledge and mobilised community resources in order to tackle problems such as the lack of educational facilities, housing issues, and various social issues facing the communities.

As one interviewee explained, the councils had gone beyond being about rates and limited services. Their new vision was about building infrastructure and developing programs which would enhance the whole fabric of their communities. Many councillors explained that their interest in being on council was related to social issues which affected their community such as improving local housing, making the community a place which young people were proud of and developing industries in the area. One Mayor explained that local government councils have more responsibilities than 10 years ago. The responsibilities have expanded to environmental health and economic development such as bringing workers to the area and this brings with it social issues and affordable housing concerns. In other words, the Council was now responsible for encouraging development. An example of this is that one council had funded a major study of Gladstone hinterland in order to define the major issues of economic development for the region.

Many councillors expressed the view that local government was more important than state government and there existed duplication of efforts and as a result a waste of resources. They believed that as local people, their knowledge of the issues was superior to the State government and the latter tended to represent an interference. Some councillors believed it would be better to get rid of state government altogether. They described what they saw as a more constructive form of governing in the structure of committees responsible for regional areas relating to specific issues. Local government was the structure through which these regional committees could be formed.

Councillors were involved in a wide range of activities and committees which reflected their commitment to community development: some examples included committees for road works, Landcare and the environment, housing, youth issues, and agricultural development. It was clear that councillors took pride in their communities and saw their role on the Council as an important means of bringing about positive change. One Mayor was proud of introducing a Youth Council to their local area; another Mayor was proactive in managing the local Police Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC) and made it a passion of his to gain diplomas in a myriad of youth activities so that he could pass these skills onto other potential teachers. His idea was that even though their town may lack resources, he could use his own skills and energies to provide leadership and pass on knowledge to others. One councillor explained the plight facing local young people due to the lack of affordable housing and how young people are spending most of their disposable income on rent. One of her interests in being on Council was to focus on housing in the Council planning scheme, so that more council land could be used to deal with this problem. Councillors shared their concerns about the lack of social services in their communities and the need to attract specialists such as doctors and nurses to the area. Once again, affordable housing was an important issue if the communities were going to be able to attract professionals to their communities. One council was in the process of trying to set up a private medical practice with specialists. Another councillor described his special interests in the portfolios of Art and Culture, Environment and Tourism: he was involved in Friends of the Gallery and the Country Music Festival, Australia Day celebrations, Landcare. He showed a concern about making the town interesting for young people, and was concerned when a Channel V (television youth program) bus came to town and the young residents described their town as boring. Another councillor mentioned the need for change in the training and employment area of young people: his concept was that of acquiring more 'learning communities' which concentrated on higher learning rather than just relying on resource based activities such as mining and agriculture (coal, cattle and farming).



Conclusion

Young rural females' aspirations towards tertiary education, their preparedness to leave their communities (not an easy route due to expensive HECS [Higher Education Contribution Scheme] fees and the uncertainty related to gaining work) indicated positive social capital within these rural Queensland communities. This can be partly explained by the fact that females had fewer alternatives than males in their communities. Nevertheless the choice is still their own and rather than stay in town doing whatever work was available or relying on welfare, they have aspired towards higher, if uncertain goals. This in itself speaks positive things for the communities in that they are able to nurture such aspirations. These aspirations are reflected in the kind of projects the communities provide and help us to understand the context in which such aspirations have developed.

In these communities there may not be a lot of specific youth activities (apart from sports which are extensive), although there are some and, increasing attempts by locals to provide more activities such as skate parks, art galleries with the existence of an active adult community involved in voluntary work, which provide constructive role models for young people. A member of Landcare in one of the smaller towns explained that if you get into trouble in the community there is a network there to help you. For example, people organised a working bee to help a wife whose wheelchair bound husband had difficulty venturing outside the home and into the community, through building wheelchair friendly pavements. Our research indicates that in rural communities local young residents may be more exposed to these kinds of networking activities where the community maximises their limited resources by utilising human capital as a resource. Young people see their elders actually getting down to practice real action and making things happen.

These role models are priceless and go much further than being able to just buy things for your children, or always being able to give them any activity they desire. Sometimes getting things too easily and having too many choices as exists in the cities breeds a lack of value of things, and a lack of value of what human efforts are involved in actually achieving change.

Even though young rural people may complain about their communities being boring and lacking activities for youth, they are at the same time exposed to an active community life. This criticism of local communities may come from the fact that rural children are exposed to the excitement of urban life as presented through television and the internet and so by comparison their communities seem lacking. At the same time, the nature of community life in rural areas reflects situations where families involved in many activities together, although perhaps more adult-centred create the basis for developing social capital and social cohesion.

Transnational movements and globalisation operate in and emerge out of local contexts in a relationship that is in flux. This challenges us not only to think of the local/global dualisms but also of the implications for transnational curriculum development.

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