



Being Involved in the Bush: Productive ageing in different types of rural communities

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I am female- I will be 90 in July this year of 2009. I keep reasonable good health apart from high blood pressure which is monitored by prescribed medication. I consider the services provided here <medium size town> are second to none. I am an avid reader and the local library visits my home when requested. I have 1 hour a week home help but cook my meals. My son does my weekly shopping. I get the local newspaper each week. A volunteer comes each Sunday to say Mass & give communion. Until a few years ago, I had been active swimming, tennis, walking and gardening. I have all my faculties; financially I am comfortable and help with my grandchildrens school fees whenever possible. The only volunteer work I do is knit small jumpers for the small African babies with AIDS which is very satisfying & can do at home.

Research question & objectives

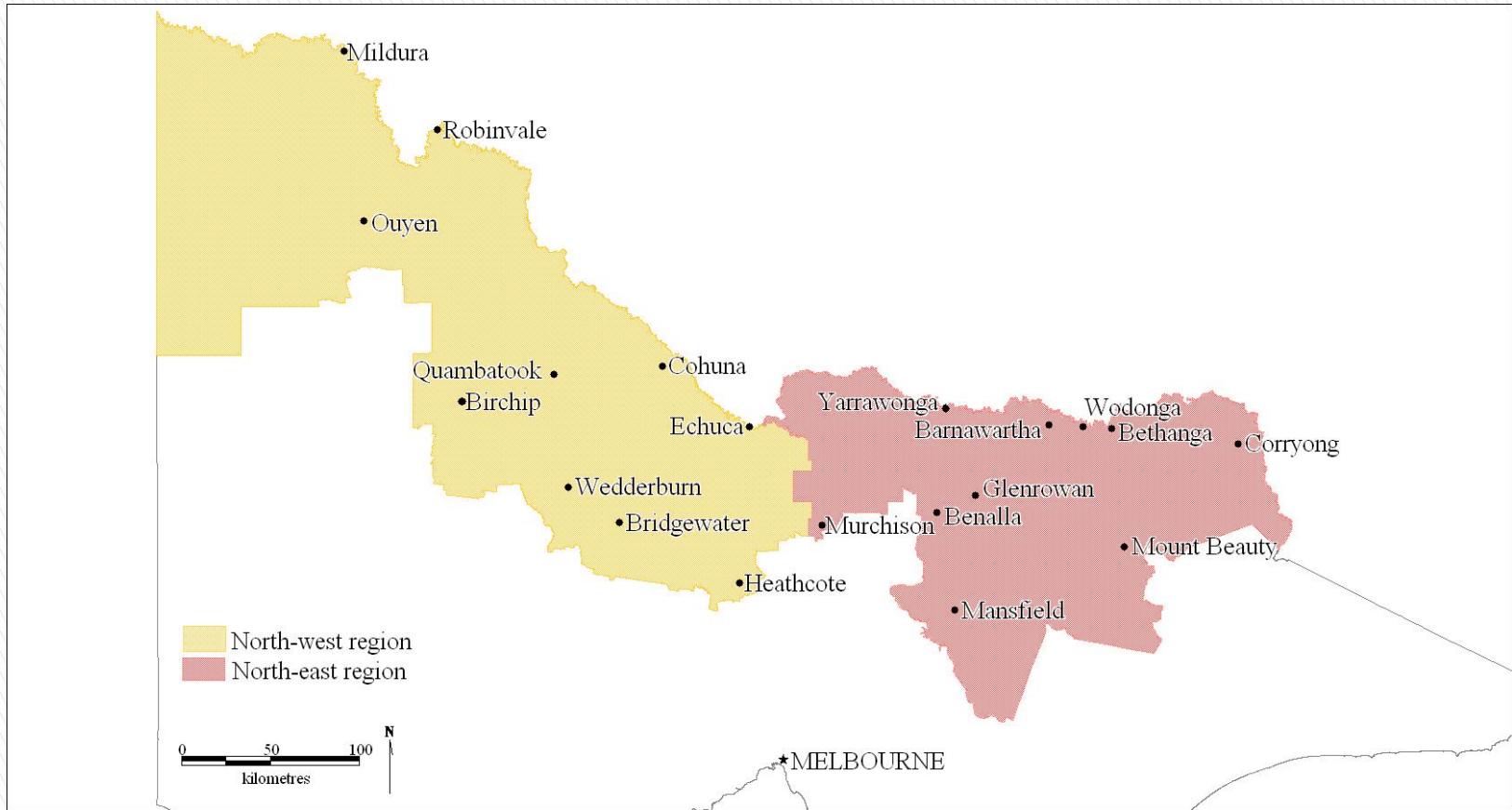
Does social and civic engagement differ across declining, stable & growing rural communities?

- ▶ investigate social anchorage (years of residence in and familiarity with, community/involvement in community);
- ▶ determine the value placed on social and civic engagement; and
- ▶ explore social and civic engagement in relation to community sustainability.

Approach to gathering information

- ▶ anonymous self-complete postal questionnaire for residents 50 yrs + living in northern Victorian communities;
- ▶ 20,000 surveys distributed using Australia Post Unaddressed Select Service;
- ▶ Local advertising prior to / 3 weeks following;
- ▶ 20 towns selected by two main characteristics – population size & distance from Melbourne;
- ▶ 4003 surveys returned / 3925 used in analysis;

Rural towns surveyed



Community connectedness

Stronger in declining communities

Lifelong residents – higher %

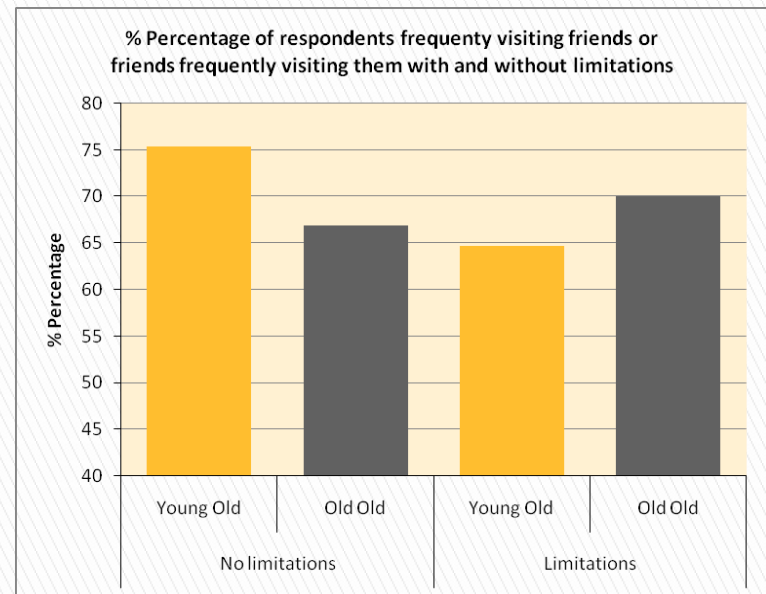
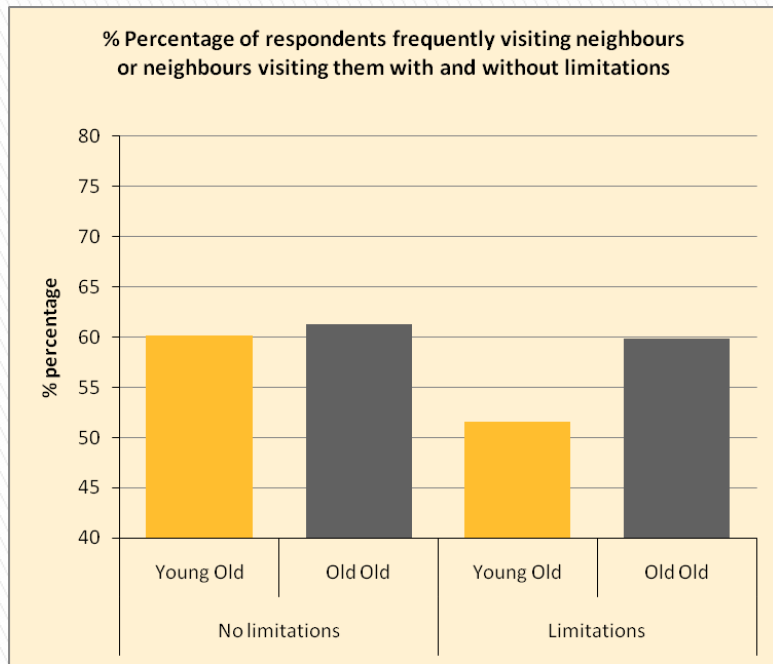
“incomers” – higher average length of residence

Significantly higher percentages indicating:

- community felt like home
- felt a sense of safety
- a sense of being part of the community
- regular opportunities to share
- trust
- felt people willing to help if needed

Levels of Participation (social, civic, community)

- ▶ Informal social participation attracted highest % across all types of communities
- ▶ Low levels of civic involvement
- ▶ Higher social involvement in public spaces in growing communities
- ▶ Higher levels of group civic and community involvement in declining communities
- ▶ Group membership was higher in declining communities



“Being able to drive is a great privilege I love to share with non-driving friends. We enjoy an activity at least once a week eating, crafting, visiting places of interest. I have been a widow for 6 years but I have a good time with friends in a similar position but great fun with younger friends and their families.”

“I have had the experience that when an (environmental) issue or event (bushfire) threatens you or your community, the opportunity for “natural” leaders in the community come to the fore, arises. It often isn’t the same people.

Our leaders are often called on because of their expertise, ability to represent and to organise themselves and others when required. I have confidence that small communities can organise themselves and make a profound difference when the need arises.”