

1. Introduction

Many rural areas in the developed world are experiencing population loss and economic decline. Population decline in rural areas continues in the USA and in Canada, particularly in inland states such as Kansas, Nebraska, areas of the Rockies, and on the plains provinces of Canada (Otterstrom and Shumway 2003; Parton, Gutmann and Ojima, 2007; Wood 2008; Mayda, 2011; Crowley, 2012; Eimermann, 2013). In smaller and more densely populated European countries, similar but less substantial population declines have occurred and have often been continuous over several decades (Cawley 1994; Halkier, 2006; Hospers 2011; Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011). Throughout Australia many, but not all, rural areas have experienced population loss over the last 20 to 30 years. In contrast, larger cities and towns have generally increased in population (Pritchard and McManus, 2000; Connell and McManus 2011). This demographic change has generated various approaches to boosting rural and regional Australia, including the creation in 2004 of the Country Week Expo in Sydney to promote country and regional Australia and to encourage urban-rural migration.

In this article we employ the concept of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) to understand the overall Country Week approach, and examine how two particular councils in New South Wales (NSW) have worked to attract residents to their town. As demonstrated below, this approach is consistent with what Hospers (2010) calls “warm place marketing” and is an example of what Finne and Grönroos (2009) identify as relationship communication. We use these concepts in this article to answer three important questions;

- How does the 2 1/2 day event of Country Week fit within an Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) framework?
- How do selected councils market themselves at Country Week, following or outside Country Week (and how does this fit with an IMC approach)?

- Does an activity like Country Week, and the actions of councils, require adjustment of the framework to reflect what is happening in practice?

The article begins by providing a brief context for the emergence of the Country Week Expo. We then review the literature on place marketing, particularly drawing on the differences between marketing places and marketing conventional products. We use this distinction to highlight the importance of warm place marketing, which is achieved mainly through Integrated Marketing Communications, and its extension into relationship communications. The article then outlines the research methods used for the study, before presenting the findings of our research into Country Week, and the towns of Oberon and Glen Innes. In the analysis section we compare the marketing of the Expo and the two towns with the six criteria used by Keller (2001) to assess the collective impact of an IMC program and its extension into relationship communication. The article concludes with a commentary on the possibilities for improved destination marketing, and the prospects of this approach contributing to a rural revival in Australia and elsewhere.

2. Background to the Country Week Expo

Rural decline in various parts of the developed world has been hastened by many factors, including farm amalgamations, continued mechanisation and more capital-intensive production, plus a reduced interest in agricultural employment and difficulties in obtaining loans (Collits, 2000; Forth and Howell 2002; Nieldomysl and Amcoff 2011; Dufty-Jones, Argent, Rolley and Walmsley, 2014; Davies 2014). The costs of decline include the loss of

local schools, health services declining and disappearing, difficulties in recruiting teachers and skilled health workers and the loss of morale of those who must fill the gaps. In Australia declining production has meant the closure of both public facilities, such as post offices, police stations and schools, railway lines and stations, and of private sector activities, most evident in bank closures, but also in the widespread loss of chain stores, supermarkets and more specialist stores such as butchers (Collits and Gustin, 1997; Argent and Rolley 2000; Pritchard and McManus, 2000; McManus, Walmsley, Bourke, Argent, Baum, Martin, Pritchard and Sorensen, 2012). The burden of retaining other services falls on older, fewer or more distant, people.

Until recently the dominant approach to address concerns about rural decline has been state-sponsored regional development programs (Collits, 2000; Beer et al, 2003). In Europe, especially, population decline and the loss of services has occurred in countries where governments have tried a range of policies – centred on subsidised regional development strategies and incentives, salary supports and tax concessions, and infrastructure provision – to halt and reverse declines. Halkier (2006) highlights the use of many such approaches in Scotland, however Giles et al (2013, p4) note “the reform to policy-making structures, notably the abolition of Regional Development Agencies”. This places greater emphasis for promotion and economic development on the district and local levels, and the need for endogenous development emerging from within local areas (Margarian, 2013). These areas often have less experience, resources and the ability to coordinate at different scales and, as Margarian concluded, even when coordination exists it “cannot usually compensate for the lack of agglomeration advantages in rural areas” (Margarian, 2013, p21). Counterurbanisation (the movement of residents from urban to rural areas) has generally favoured areas of high environmental amenity and cultural heritage close to major cities,

and has often been the prerogative of the more wealthy sections of society (Stockdale, 2006; Costello, 2007, 2009; Argent and Rolley, 2008; Halfacree, 2008, 2012; Connell and McManus, 2011). This raises the question of how best to support and promote rural areas that may be declining and appear less attractive for in-migration.

Strategies for rural revival have hitherto been primarily centred on providing the context for regional development or promoting development from within regions that are already declining and are strapped for resources. An alternative migration-oriented approach is documented by Niedomysl (2007), who studied fourteen rural municipalities in Sweden that were conducting a marketing campaign in 2002 to encourage in-migration, but found no conclusive evidence for the success of marketing. A more detailed case study of one municipality, Bräcke, concluded that there was some evidence for the positive effect of marketing, but overall a marketing campaign was most successful in raising internal morale in depressed regions as a tangible sign that something was being done to address population decline (Niedomysl, 2007). Eimermann (2013) studied Swedish municipalities marketing themselves at the Emigration Expo near Utrecht, The Netherlands, designed to encourage Dutch residents to migrate to Sweden and elsewhere, and concurred with Niedomysl (2007, p708) that there was “no general evidence of success from the marketing campaigns”. Despite this outcome, in total some 164 of 290 Swedish municipalities have engaged in place-marketing efforts in the Netherlands in the 21st Century, with the number of municipalities involved at a single point in time rising from 76 in 2008 to 131 in 2011 (Eimermann, 2013).

A similar approach in eastern Australia, called Country Week when it began in 2004, is a market based approach employed to attract urban residents to a two and a half day Expo in the city. This Expo is attended by many non-metropolitan local governments and other

organisations in the two eastern states of New South Wales and Queensland, to attract people to their town or organisation, including government departments (and the occasional business organisation). This paper seeks to examine the significance of this particular strategy for rural and regional development, in the unusual context where strategies are directly targeted at individuals and households and where the place-promotion is undertaken by smaller rural towns (rather than large cities) and is oriented towards both permanent migration and tourism, the latter being seen as one stage in the migration process.

3. Place Branding, Integrated Marketing and Relationship Communications

According to Anholt (2008, p1) “there appears to be no evidence to suggest that marketing communications to influence international public perceptions of an entire city, region or country is anything other than a vain and foolish waste of taxpayers’ money”. We seek to examine this notion in this article. Rather than branding a place, Anholt (2008, p2) suggests that “places *have brand images*” (emphasis in original) and that there are five new ideas within place branding or competitive identity (Anholt, 2008, p3). These may be summarised as the need for clear and coordinated communications to influence public opinion, recognition of the importance of brand image even though a brand is not under the direct control of an “owner”, the importance of brand equity being a hugely valuable asset that needs to be managed, recognition that brand purpose is critical and that brand management is an internal project, and finally, sustained and coherent innovation is more important than recalling past glories (Anholt, 2008). Place branding, Anholt (2009) argues, is

different from product branding in that product branding is reductionist in character, whereas place branding (at the scale of the country, region or city) should encompass the richness and complexity of places. This enables various endeavours, such as tourism promotion, in-migration and economic development, to take place within a brand image that is conducive to all of these activities.

The complexity of even small human settlements, however, makes place branding a very challenging exercise. As noted by Anholt (2010, p5), "the tiniest village is infinitely more complex, more diverse and less unified than the largest corporation, because of the different reasons why people are there. Places have no single unifying purpose...". While the homogeneity of corporations, in both purpose and form, can be debated, the key point is the complexity, and futility, of trying to control the branding of places. Govers (2011, p229) believes that to think "just a destination branding programme (implying a tourism campaign) can change place image is rather ambitious ...", not just because of the complexity of places but also because people's perceptions are influenced by many factors. It is therefore important to distinguish between place branding (which concentrates on the image and the reputation of a place) and destination marketing which is aimed at attracting tourists, visitors and potential new residents. The latter is likely to emphasize advertising (albeit not in isolation) whereas place branding potentially covers all communications of a place's identity.

Ideas of place branding tend to be applied at the national, regional or city scale, but in this paper we consider the use of place branding, integrated marketing communications and relationship communications both at the scale of an Australian state (New South Wales), as performed by a not-for-profit organisation, and at the scale of local councils of varying sizes and capacities.

Marketing has extended from the marketing of products to the marketing of places, services, experiences and politicians (Luck, Taylor and Moffatt, 2010). This is not a recent phenomenon, but its application is more widespread than in the past. Hospers (2010, 280) noted that “since the mid-1980s, however, public authorities started to use place marketing as part of their economic development policies”. Following Anholt (2008), Hospers (2010, p281) observed that “owing to the nature of places, place-marketing is more complex than product marketing”. In a later article, Hospers (2011, pp371-372) expanded on this point by writing that “places evoke feelings among individuals as a result of the memories, experiences or routines associated with these locations”. This has implications for both places and people. For places, it is difficult to re-brand a place when there are strong feelings about it. A positive place-identity, particularly among potential migrants, is crucial in the migration process. People do not move to locations where the place-identity invokes a negative response, unless they are severely choice-constrained. For people, as they do become part of the community of a place, inertia develops and the movement from one location to another often requires a significant effort or catalyst. Consequently it “is doubtful as to how useful cold place marketing really is” (Hospers, 2010, p284). By cold place marketing, Hospers (2010) meant the attempt to attract people from outside an area by offering incentives to move to a new location.

In contrast to cold place marketing, Hospers (2010) advocated the use of “warm place marketing”, which involves “addressing people who have emotional or socio-economic ties with the municipality – the spatial equivalent, so to say, of what marketers call ‘relationship marketing’” (Hospers, 2010, p284). Both warm place marketing and relationship communications start “from the premise that keeping existing customers is more profitable than acquiring new ones” (Hospers, 2011, p373). Sometimes simply keeping existing

“customers” is insufficient, and the attraction of new “customers” is required. In areas of rural decline, warm marketing addresses people who have previously lived in the area or have experiences of living in similar rural areas as being particularly suitable to target for a destination marketing campaign.

In addition to the extension of marketing from product to place, the forms of marketing have also changed, particularly driven by the diverse and often fragmented possibilities created by technological change (Keller, 2001). Perhaps the most important change has been in the mindset of marketing people, who have moved from individual marketing exercises and brand creation to a more holistic approach to marketing communications, as seen in the rise of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). An IMC program has been defined as;

The development, implementation and evaluation of marketing communication programs using multiple communication options where the design and execution of any communication option reflects the nature and content of other communication options that also make up the communications program. (Keller, 2001, p825).

According to Keller (2001, p831) “the overriding goal is to create the most effective and efficient communication program possible”. To this end, Keller (2001) and Giles et al (2013) see six relevant criteria: coverage, contribution, commonality, complementarity, robustness and cost. Giles et al (2013) apply this concept as the foundation for detailed analysis of local perceptions of the marketing of rural regions in Cornwall and Northumberland.

Given their significance, it is worth summarising these six criteria (based on Keller, 2001; Giles, Bosworth and Willett, 2013). Coverage means the proportion of an audience who are reached by the marketing communications (which includes market segmentation and the

alignment of messages between different market segments). Contribution essentially means targeting the desired group of people and the degree to which one gets an intended response. Commonality is about different elements of the communication mix reinforcing each other. Complementarity refers to the integration of different associations and linkages, perhaps using alternative communications media to reinforce a message. Robustness means the extent to which a communication “works” for people, including both those who have seen the message previously and those who are exposed to it for the first time. Finally, the above criteria must be measured against the cost of what is achieved in each of these above areas; in other words, is it cost-effective given the benefits that ensue?

Finne and Grönroos (2009, 188) move beyond what they call “traditional IMC” to explore possibilities for a Relationship Communication Model (RCM) that is a “dynamic multi-dimensional communication, multi-dimensional meaning that both time and situational factors contribute to meaning creation”. Our argument in this paper is that given the various stages of urban-rural migration decision-making identified elsewhere (Connell and McManus, 2011), destination marketing must include both integration of messages and a two-way communication that is multi-dimensional and occurs over time, and includes places such as the current residence, the past residence and the potential future residences of likely migrants. This approach, which includes the warm place marketing techniques of targeting those most likely to be receptive to the messages, and using the residents of a place to communicate these messages, is the basis for an innovative marketing based approach to rural revival in parts of eastern Australia.

4. Research Methods

In order to examine the above questions, we conducted a questionnaire survey, formal in-depth interviews and general observations and discussions at the 2006, 2007 and 2008 Country Week Expos in Sydney and the 2007 and 2008 Country Week Expos in Brisbane. The exact number of visitors to these Expos is hard to determine because no reliable counting mechanism exists, but the estimate is of several thousand at each Expo. The questionnaire in Sydney received 576 responses. It was slightly modified for each Country Week Expo as the researchers learned from experience, and as new issues rose to prominence. It was administered as an exit survey, so that the responses reflect what attendees had just experienced, rather than what they might hope to experience. Completing the questionnaire was voluntary. Boxes were provided for the completed questionnaires to ensure confidentiality. That was later combined with studies undertaken in the two NSW towns of Oberon and Glen Innes, where in total 71 and 56 interviews were conducted respectively (see Connell and McManus, 2011). In this article, any interviewees are referred to by a pseudonym, while people quoted in publicly available documents are referred to by their real names.

Formal interviews, usually at least 45 minutes in duration, were also conducted with local government representatives between 2006 and 2010. In some cases the interviews were follow-up interviews to track changes in attitudes and experiences by particular local authorities over the three year time period of the research. The questionnaire and interviews were supplemented by an analysis of local newspapers (following McManus, 2000; Montoya, McManus and Albrecht, 2012) that were distributed at the Country Week Expo, which enabled the researchers to observe what was being presented both to potential migrants and Country Week and to existing residents of a town or region. This last point is crucial, given Govers (2011, p230) observation that “the destination” only exists in the

minds of potential travelers/migrants, but ignores how a place is presented to the local residents. This may “result in antagonism from certain local interest groups” and may lead to “brand failure considering the negative ‘internal branding’” (Govers, 2011, p230). This multifaceted research approach over a five year period enabled us to develop a very good understanding of the Country Week Expo, the participating councils, the visitors to the Expo and the new migrants into two selected rural towns in New South Wales.

5. Country Week

Country Week was established in 2004 by a businessman, Peter Bailey, from the northern New South Wales (NSW) town of Armidale. In 2009 Country Week changed its name to become the Foundation for Regional Development Ltd (FRD). Country Week long advertised itself as promoting the ‘Sea and Tree Change Expo’ but its focus was primarily on inland areas, where population declines were greatest. Whereas “sea change” – counterurbanisation to coastal areas – has been considerable, inland “tree change” has been limited. Country Week’s budget has come partly from the NSW and Queensland state governments, either directly or through the ongoing support of government departments attending as participants (almost all from inland regions) and from the various council participants, who rented space at the Expos. Both in being a private sector organisation (albeit with significant public funding) and being oriented to ordinary households rather than to broad notions of regional development or the transfer of firms and government departments, Country Week is distinctive. Likewise the activities of Country Week directly contrast with more diffuse forms of place branding that focus on passive advertising,

oriented primarily at economic development and tourism (Mayes, 2008). Central to Country Week's campaign was the concept of local councils and other state bodies paying to promote particular rural and regional areas in the two state capitals of Sydney and Brisbane, to address what they perceived as misconceptions about the country and to promote the specific advantages of their own local areas.

The foci of Country Week are the annual Expos in Sydney and in Brisbane. At both Expos local government councils, government departments and businesses were the principle exhibitors, paying to secure an exhibition space. Consequently, as its 2008 website observed, for potential residents of regional Australia

Country Week, the Tree and Sea Change Expo, is your opportunity to find out about the virtues of living and working in country and regional Queensland or New South Wales...Country Week is an easy, direct way to find out what is on offer.

Councils took up stalls of variable sizes according to their willingness and ability to commit resources to the Expo. Some small places combined resources and attended as a region. Visitor admission was free. Visitors were registered, and their names and jobs recorded, so that stallholders had an idea of what kind of employment or retirement strategies to focus on in discussions. For six hours a day, council officials handed out literature and talked to visitors.

A range of other organisations also attended the Expos. Most were state government departments, who sought to attract new workers. A small number of private sector companies also attended the Expos; these included representatives of housing estate development companies, some of whom were constructing residential development

facilities and sought to sell these and retirement properties. There were generally in excess of sixty stalls at Country Week, hence the need to differentiate different country towns from each other was paramount. Even so, councils increasingly came to recognise that while differentiation was important, it was only the first step to getting potential migrants to look at the common factors that were influencing migration decisions, particularly housing, employment, education and medical facilities.

Job boards at Country Week, with their focus on trades, and the housing advertisements (that emphasize affordability) are somewhat different from the glamour of councils bringing their wines and gourmet foods to the Expos. This highlights one of the tensions in Country Week – trying to appeal to urban residents to relocate to rural areas by using the up-market sophistication of magazines such as *Country Style* (see Connell and McManus, 2011), while simultaneously recognizing that the residents who indulge in such lifestyles are unlikely to relocate from the city. Consequently the catalysts for relocation (which the organizers pushed as being traffic congestion, safety issues, cost of living in the city, and so on) are more likely to appeal to urban residents who are less affluent, and who are seeking affordable housing, employment in trade industries, and schools and medical facilities.

6. Place Marketing in New South Wales

The need to distinguish places is crucial. Hospers (2011, p372), commenting about the marketing of European cities, observed that “many places fail to think about their uniqueness vis-à-vis other areas. In the end, it is not so much about what a place has to offer as such, but what it has to offer that is really different”. This need is acute at a venue

such as Country Week Expo, which brings more than 25 broadly similar places together in one location. There is both collaboration to promote rural and regional migration and competition in the same venue. Participants need each other to create a critical mass capable of attracting visitors to the Expo, but they are in competition with each other for the attention of these visitors, and therefore differentiation is essential for success. Collective marketing helped create the success of the event, but also generated confusion among some urban visitors to the Expo as they struggled to distinguish one rural location from another.

Councils (and other organisations) were both competing for visitor interest and competing against each other. They needed to distinguish themselves, by strengthening their own image and attributes. Some councils relied on cultural heritage. Idyllic locations often set the scene. Council representatives argued that 'people are firstly drawn by our photos of green and lush rainforests, and then we give them our information'. Every council saw branding as a learning process: 'We've learned with Country Week the notion of branding and other things about our area. You'll see it with the colour of our shirts, the logo'. Some branding was initially based on lifestyle attractions, or resembled tourism promotions, but most councils quickly recognized that dubious notions of lifestyle were not the key motivation for visitors contemplating moving, although it might represent a starting point. Branding became more closely linked to employment opportunities, to the price and availability of housing, education and health facilities, but alongside particular local features. Over time the majority of councils recognised that the most important stimuli to attract new residents were employment and housing, while services were crucial, whether for older people or families with children. Aesthetic considerations were important, and linked into widespread but diffuse notions of lifestyle, but were gradually recognised as secondary,

despite the necessity for lifestyle to be a selling point. Eimermann (2013, p15) similarly found that Swedish municipalities marketing their locality in The Netherlands also moved from a rather “touristic focus on the aesthetic” to promoting employment and housing. These lessons were not lost on two regular council participants at Country Week– Glen Innes and Oberon.

Learning over time, by their own experience or scoping the experience of other councils, was an important part of place marketing strategies. Thus attending the Expo once was likely to be a waste of money – an example of cold place marketing – whereas repeated visits by local councils enabled lessons from the previous year to be included in an iterative learning process. Moreover visitors who were doing repeat visits became familiar with particular councils and their representatives. This proved an excellent example of relationship communications, when it eventually paid off as visitors decided that they would relocate to a particular area. A survey of attendees at the 2012 Expo revealed that ten per cent of visitors had come more than three times, while almost forty per cent of visitors had previously attended the Expo (Country and Regional Living Expo, 2013).

An example of learning over time was the recognition by many rural councils of the limited familiarity of many metropolitan residents with rural and regional Australia, and the extent of a ‘sandstone curtain’ that separates inland councils from the coast. Smaller councils had to work hard to become “a place on the map”, that is on the mental maps of urban residents. Likewise the Expo organisers, and many councils, had to dispel urban myths such as “dead sheep in the dam” and “abattoirs on the main street”. Two councils that did not have to work quite so hard on these issues because of their more favourable geographical locations were Oberon and Glen Innes.

7. Marketing Oberon and Glen Innes

Oberon and Glen Innes are relatively small, reasonably typical towns in rural NSW (see Figure One). Oberon is 200 kilometres west of Sydney and Glen Innes is about 800 kilometres north of it, and closer to Brisbane. Both are in upland areas, more than 1000 metres above sea level, with distinctly cold winters, thus both claim to have the pleasure of four seasons – whereas spring and autumn barely register in coastal areas. Oberon has a population of about 2700, at the centre of a local government area (LGA) with 5000 people, while Glen Innes has about 5700 people at the centre of a large region of 8900 people. Both have what are effectively one street ‘central business districts’, low density detached housing surrounding it and a scatter of more dispersed properties on small acreage blocks beyond that.

INSERT FIGURE ONE ABOUT HERE

Since the 1930s Oberon’s economy has been dominated by a timber mill and population changes have partly reflected its fluctuating fortunes. By contrast Glen Innes is a more typical regional service centre with a range of small businesses linked to surrounding agricultural activities, but both towns have significant public sector employment. The urban populations have increased very slowly since the 1980s. Glen Innes particularly has a population that is significantly older than the state as whole, especially in the age groups

over 55, largely the outcome of limited immigration and significant outmigration. Both towns have relative deficits in the age group 15-44.

Oberon and Glen Innes have appeared at every Country Week Expo, but have used slightly different strategies. Oberon's stall has emphasised property prices – a function of its relative closeness to Sydney - whereas in recent years Glen Innes has emphasised cultural distinctiveness and the potential for residential satisfaction and business development. Both have attracted new migrants, with Oberon especially being significant for migration from Sydney. In Glen Innes new residents are from more diverse origins, but in both towns there has been a steady inflow.

Oberon had also attended every Expo and for many years marketed itself as a 'family destination' with its key message for potential residents being 'relocate without losing touch'. It thus focused even more directly on Sydney than did more distant Glen Innes. Scenery was promoted as a particular feature of Oberon, under the title 'Oberon – Simply Spectacular':

Moving to Oberon means you can enjoy all the country lifestyle has to offer – clean air, little traffic, a crisp alpine climate, a short drive or walk to work (which means less time commuting), friendly people, a real sense of community, a safer environment, and some of the most spectacular scenery in NSW.

As with many other towns, Oberon was positioned in the 'heart' of a region or route, rather than being a remote settlement, here as 'The Heart of the Tablelands Way', connecting Canberra to Muswellbrook. Through the use of concentric circles, Oberon was portrayed as being two hours from Mudgee to the north, Goulburn to the south and Sydney to the east. As a small upland town - 'heaven on a hill' – its Mayor reluctantly noted: 'Of

course we don't have everything – no McDonald's or KFC etc' (*Oberon Review*, 5 August 2010).

Oberon was marketed particularly to young families. As an example, the story of Scott Dawson and Jodie Barton, and their daughter Eliza, was prominent in the special 2006 Country Week issue of the *Oberon Review*, under the heading 'No pollution, no traffic, plenty of reasons to stay'. The family had attended the 2005 Expo, and moved from the western Sydney suburb of Blacktown to Oberon, with Jodie 'still working a few days a week back in Sydney'. Many promotions used similar local success stories modelled on those of Country Week itself, emphasising amenity and accessibility. By 2008 the brand message was 'a great place to visit ... a better place to live'. As in similarly high-altitude Glen Innes, the 'distinctive climate' was marketed as a year-round advantage. In winter there were 'glorious layers of snow' (rare in Australia) and in summer 'mild summers are a real treat in Oberon, unlike the sweltering summers in the city'.

The natural features of Oberon were augmented by cultural activities, including activities that accentuated the natural attributes of the area, such as the Oberon Daffodil Festival of Spring Gardens which allowed residents and visitors to see the private gardens of Oberon residents. These were also highlighted in Oberon's promotion of outlying townships, the 'Oberon circle of villages', a rare example of a town promoting other places in its hinterland. As in Glen Innes, festivals were both a means of indicating that towns had potentially lively activities and offered tourism opportunities, while also celebrating distinctiveness and heritage.

Glen Innes quickly became conscious of the need to differentiate itself from other regional towns. The Deputy Mayor noted that at Country Week 'people are bombarded with information ... they need some sort of branding to separate Glen Innes from other towns.

Our Celtic heritage is unbelievable for providing awareness of and a positive attitude towards Glen Innes' (Davidson, 2008, p3). The use of that assumed Celtic heritage included tartan decorations of the stall, dressing some of the workers in Celtic attire (including kilts), distributing flyers to promote the annual Australian Celtic Festival and even including tea bags with tartan tassels in their 'showbag' (the collection of promotional material given to potential new residents). While branding Glen Innes as 'Celtic Country' has a tenuous link to local history it has been a deliberate and effective branding exercise that has also stimulated tourism (Connell and Rugendyke, 2010).

Underpinning Celtic Country, and other festivals such as Minerama (a large gem, mineral and craft festival held in March each year) and The Land of the Beardies (a festival held over two weekends in November of each year), was a concerted effort to promote basic themes that visitors were usually looking for in a town. These were access to medical facilities, aged care facilities, education (including electronic access to the facilities of the University of New England, with its main campus in nearby Armidale), locational advantages for businesses and affordable housing. Alongside what were largely generic themes Glen Innes also stressed the environment, described in their 2009 newspaper promotion under the heading 'A great place to live, work and play', as including a 'high average annual rainfall and the beauty of four distinct seasons'.

Glen Innes was also constructed as 'a district on the move', with population growth being cited as evidence of progress, alongside an image of a newly constructed McDonalds Restaurant on the front page of the special edition of the 2008 *Glen Innes Examiner*. That perhaps debatable image of progress connected city and country - a form of suburbanization, and emphasised the presence of otherwise often absent urban amenity. There was no apparent conflict or disjuncture between images of the ubiquitous and

modern McDonalds and a Celtic heritage. Glen Innes could be perceived, branded and marketed in various ways.

While natural features and distinctive attributes were highlighted to differentiate Oberon and Glen Innes from the other towns competing for the attention of visitors to the Expo, basic services were nonetheless recognized by both councils as critical in the migration process. Table 1 highlights the promotion of basic services by five selected local newspapers in NSW, where the local authority was attending the Expo, and distributing free copies of the newspaper as part of its promotion. Oberon and Glen Innes were typical of many other local councils in their newspaper marketing of basic services, but notably with the absence of specific employment opportunities that were available mainly in larger towns or towns experiencing a resources boom. While these services are similar between various towns, the initial work on differentiating the towns from other locations in NSW meant that visitors to the Expo were more likely to be looking at Oberon or Glen Innes to see if employment, affordable housing, health, and education existed in those particular towns.

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8. Integration, Relationships and Marketing Rural Revival

The outcome of the Country Week Expos and related activities cannot easily be assessed. In addressing the three research questions posed earlier in this article, Country Week is part of an IMC approach in that it is improbable that individuals, let alone households, will be so convinced by a brief visit to an Expo to move to a distant town soon afterwards. Expo

visitors were conscious that they needed to visit towns to see what they were like, and the follow-up work of local councils generally involved attracting visitors from the Expo to an event in the town within a month or two of the Expo (see below). Tracking mobility, and attributing it – even partially - to the marketing of an event such as Country Week, however, is extremely difficult. This makes it particularly challenging for local councils to commit a significant proportion of their promotion finances to a single event in the absence of quantifiable returns on this investment, hence the importance of personal relationships in perpetuating involvement in the Expo.

Subsequent studies in Oberon and Glen Innes have shown that migration into both towns, firstly, was often from elsewhere in rural and regional NSW rather than from metropolitan centres, secondly, resulted from a combination of reasons that were centred on employment transitions, family relations and necessity, and, thirdly, was unlikely to have been caused by Country Week activities (Connell and McManus, 2011). That does not mean however that Country Week was unsuccessful, but simply that it was more effective and relevant for people moving from metropolitan centres to larger ‘sponge’ towns – micropolitan centres, such as Armidale and Orange – that had a fuller range of services, housing and employment opportunities, rather than smaller towns.

Few things can be more attractive than the notion of dissatisfied urban residents making a successful transition to rural life and, in the face of an alienating urban world, finding a new place in a smaller world of human proportions, dominated by a sense of community, seemingly absent in large cities. Relocation is rarely a hurried decision, especially for those who are relatively well-off or contemplating retirement, but may extend over decades, until the right alignment of circumstances. The Expo, through enabling repeated visits, supports

the ability of people to develop their awareness of regions over time to a point in the household life cycle when migration is possible.

While lifestyle persists as an explanation for migration, and lifestyles certainly change after migration, the evidence from regional Australia indicates that lifestyle is subsidiary to employment and housing, and thus to financial issues, even in very small towns (Connell and McManus 2011). In Sweden only environmental factors rivalled employment and housing (Lundholm, Garvill, Malmberg and Westin, 2004, Hjort and Malmberg, 2006), with a shift in promotion from tourism-oriented images to address issues of employment and housing (Eimermann, 2013), while in Scotland employment and housing were pre-eminent (Stockdale 2010). While migrants often preferred to emphasise lifestyle, amenity or personal connections, all factors in decisions to move, lifestyle played a limited role in the actual choice of location.

How then did migration decisions relate to the marketing framework of IMC (Keller, 2001)? Clearly Country Week is an example of both IMC and the Relationship Communication Model (RCM). In terms of relationships the founder and CEO, Peter Bailey, developed strong ongoing relationships with local councils, particularly those in northern NSW. Councils attended the event largely through his persuasive powers, given that it is very challenging to know if the marketing and communication strategy that began as Country Week and is now the Country and Regional Living Expo actually “works” in the idea of robustness posited by Keller (2001) that was discussed earlier in this paper. Firstly, it works because it offers councils a receptive audience (not “tyrekickers” but people who are genuinely thinking about relocating) and secondly, no individual council could access this audience without the contribution of Country Week or a similar collective arrangement. Relationships also work at the level of the visitors, who sometimes return time and again to

the Expo and rekindle conversations with the same participating councils and people staffing that booth. This is part of the staged process of urban-rural migration. The relationships extend to family networks, and to the past life experiences of visitors. Thirdly, it has succeeded because councils have moved from delivering an “unclear message from an unknown source” to being closer to “a pleasing message from the foremost provider in the business, enhanced by a long, strong, on-going relationship” (Finne and Grönroos, 2009, p187), Country Week, now called the Country and Regional Living Expo, is clearly the foremost provider of urban-rural migration marketing, while individual councils have often developed relationships with visitors who sometimes return year after year before finally deciding to relocate.

Country Week, and both Oberon and Glen Innes, have embraced the concept of ICM to some extent, even if implicitly. Country Week involves integrated messages, whether through its venue in western Sydney (a lower socio-economic status region of the city), advertising in particular newspapers (tabloids) and on radio stations that are likely to appeal to a demographic group that is more inclined to move, and through the coordination of messages between organizers and participants at Expos, and in lead-up and follow-up events. For example, templates for marketing are provided by the organizers to all councils. This achieves integration but, ironically, as noted earlier, means that councils may have to work harder to achieve differentiation in a crowded market. Lead-up events include working with the local newspapers, real estate agents and employers to promote the concept to the existing residents of the town, and to provide detailed information about housing and jobs when marketing the town at the Expo. Follow-up events include attracting people who may be interested in moving, and whose details have been recorded at Country Week, to visit the town at a festival (usually a month or two after the Expo, but before the

summer heat arrives), take a local guided tour, and talk with residents, real estate agents, and potential employers. Tourism is perceived as a step in the counterurbanisation migration process, as urban residents become more familiar with a specific location *in situ*, rather than through a mediated engagement in a large hall where numerous locations are vying for attention.

Oberon and Glen Innes both learned to attract people initially through their distinctive physical attributes (varying seasonal conditions and pleasant landscapes) and cultural attractions (such as the Celtic ancestry theme), and have recognised the importance of engaging with prospective new residents through the themes of employment, housing and services. Consistent with the concept of relationship communication, they are also usually friendly, warm and engaging on the stalls. In terms of ICM the messages are consistent – the tourist and lifestyle attractions grab the Expo visitors' attention and differentiate the towns from numerous other country towns, but they quickly segue into employment, housing and services. In terms of the ICM approach, the Expo is cost effective as long as the marketing done by the local council meets the other criteria of contribution, commonality, complementarity and robustness. In the case of regular participants such as Oberon and Glen Innes, it meets these criteria. Country Week delivers small local councils the coverage that collectively can be generated, but individually cannot. Whether this is cost effective depends on how much they are charged for the stall, whether there are alternative options (to date there have been few) and whether the individual council does its marketing communications well. There is a symbiotic relationship here with the Country Week organizers, who want individual councils to succeed so that they enhance the whole event and, importantly, so that they return in following years.

Given this analysis of Country Week (Regional and Country Living Expo), does this activity and the actions of councils, require adjustment of the ICM framework to reflect what is happening in practice? The ICM framework pays inadequate attention to the two-way ongoing relationships that are involved in successful place marketing. This is apparent when one considers how local councils have changed their team composition over the years, from council employees to a mixture of elected councillors, employees, real estate agents and local residents who, like the people visiting the Expo, were themselves a few years earlier fronting up to a stall and asking for information – and now they ‘love living’ in Oberon or Glen Innes. They are enthusiastic, credible and can relate to Expo visitors. If they are eloquent and appear trustworthy, then they are also cost-effective as ambassadors for their new town.

9. Conclusion: Marketing Rural Revival?

In recent decades almost any form of ‘rural revival’ would have been welcome in the more remote areas of most developed countries, as regional populations have aged and declined and rural economies been hollowed out or, more occasionally, where resource booms required labour. Yet efforts to directly stimulate revival by encouraging urban-rural migration have been virtually non-existent. Only in Australia, and somewhat differently in Sweden, has direct marketing seemingly been attempted. Elsewhere place branding has centred on tourism promotion, business development and infrastructure provision. In this paper we have analysed the marketing of Country Week/Regional and Country Living Expo

and of two local councils in relation to the concepts of Integrated Communication Marketing (ICM) and the Relationship Communication Model (RCM).

The concept of an annual city-based Expo, as an institutional strategy involving centralised and localised place-marketing approaches that are both collaborative and competitive, is unique. Moreover the Expos are not directed exclusively at any particular group of potential migrants, usually assumed to be sea and tree changers who are thought to be lifestyle oriented migrants (see Connell and McManus, 2011), but at workers and households of all kinds. Nonetheless councils prefer households with parents of working age, particularly in skilled occupations, rather than retirees. Various messages are specifically targeted at people who may find living in large cities challenging, particularly in relation to the cost of housing and the strains of commuting, though the Expo is certainly not aimed at welfare migration. These messages were generally integrated, and conform to the criteria for marketing success identified by Keller (2001).

The Expos are innovative engagements between urban residents and rural communities that cross many perceptual divides between city and country, and encourage direct contact between people rather than engagement mediated by brochures, newspapers, radio and television. They are two-way, multi-dimensional communications, as outlined in the RCM approach. The substantial numbers attending the Expos provide clear evidence of continued interest in moving to rural areas: neither tree change nor sea change are losing momentum, but Country Week offers a new strand in counterurbanisation. That new strand is the deliberate search for migrants, hopefully with families, who might be lured by lower house prices and employment opportunities rather than the somewhat intangible lifestyle that is held to characterise sea change. Our research emphasises that programs encouraging urban-rural migration should recognise that, while lifestyle is an attraction, the

integration of messages about the affordability of living in the country, the existence of jobs and the availability of services, is crucial. As we have demonstrated, these messages were carefully orchestrated by both the Expo organizers and by individual councils, guided by the organizers.

Marketing place is difficult and cannot be achieved instantaneously. The drop-out rate of mainly small, remote councils for whom it is relatively costly, and the returns limited (Connell and McManus, 2011), suggests that sometimes it cannot be achieved at all. Migration takes time and careful consideration, unless prompted by job transfers or facilitated by family connections. Many Expo visitors became frequent attendees, annually revising and updating their knowledge and impressions. Even more importantly, migration is often underpinned by structural issues that provide economic security, and Country Week is not likely to significantly contribute to that given the relative importance of commodity prices, government planning, corporate investment decisions, wage bargaining and so on. Place marketing can be effective but, as in Sweden, usually only if people were already contemplating a move (Niedomysl 2007) and needed a catalyst, a jolt or at least a degree of encouragement.

Our research adds to the knowledge of urban-rural migration by investigating the under-explored role of place marketing in promoting rural revival. While the Expos cannot, and could not be expected to, create a rural revival that would redress population imbalances in Australia, they provided information and offered potential migrants a choice about regional living through an instant virtual tour of numerous places. The Expos enabled country towns to connect directly with urban residents, and encouraged local governments, the media and small businesses to 'work together', so initiating and smoothing the process

of migration for those potential migrants who might otherwise have not got beyond the 'thinking about it' stage.

And, as even the two small towns of Glen Innes and Oberon demonstrate, counterurbanisation is still diverse in people, influences and outcomes, all of which preclude easy characterisation. Despite the success stories of urban-rural migration trumpeted each year at the Expos, the population of inland Australia continues to decline relative to capital cities and coastal locations, and in several towns and regions of inland Australia it is declining in absolute terms. Marketing these rural destinations to urban residents in a way that is integrated and builds ongoing communication relationships is an approach that is fraught with challenges, but one that offers possibilities to rejuvenate some country towns. In many cases, these are the places where migration would happen anyway, particularly coastal locations but for some inland centres warm place marketing, such as through the Expo, has attracted new residents who might otherwise not have migrated. While this partly confirms Niedomysl's view (2004, 2007) that campaigns have limited success, the success that is achieved is often through warm place marketing, an integrated approach and the gradual development of relationship communications that recognises the challenges of urban-rural migration, the priority needs of potential residents in the form of employment, housing, education and medical services, and the necessity to work for a prolonged period of time to achieve desirable outcomes.

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