THE SOCIAL EFFECT OF POPULATION GROWTH IN THE PERIURBAN REGION: THE CASE OF ADELAIDE

Tania Ford,† Heriot-Watt University

The forces driving periurban population growth and change vary, resulting in different scales of periurban development, and local differences will undoubtedly modify the social effect of population growth in the periurban zone. The aim of this paper is to assess the effect of recent population growth on the social structure of periurban communities. Drawing on results from surveys of migration to three study areas in the periurban region of Adelaide (South Australia), the paper examines the perceptions of recent migrants as distinct from the established residents, focusing on three key aspects associated with population growth: social integration, satisfaction and identification with the local area and local commitment.

Since the early 1970s, an extensive literature has developed documenting the extent and spatial patterning of non-metropolitan population growth in developed countries. Although more pervasive than in the 1980s, non-metropolitan growth in the 1990s is neither as strong nor as extensive as in the 1970s (Nucci and Long 1995). Nevertheless, the 1990s have seen a renewed spread of population growth beyond metropolitan boundaries in many developed countries (Champion 1989; Errington 1994; Burnley and Murphy 1995; Dahms 1995; Murphy and Burnley 1996). Although the intensity and scale have varied, increasingly non-metropolitan population growth has become concentrated in the periurban regions surrounding major urban centres. In the United States, it is estimated that nearly 60 million people resided in periurban areas in the early 1990s (Davis, Nelson and Deuker 1994:45). In Australia, population growth in the periurban region has been rapid since the 1970s, with net inmigration being the principal component.

The heterogeneous nature of the periurban region has long been acknowledged. As Griffin (1965:133) recognized more than three decades ago, 'the periurban region is essentially a zone of discord between two contrasting types of land-use ... characterised by local variety [rather] than regional unity'. The periurban region may be conceptualized as a ring-shaped zone in which growth processes generate net immigration from both the inner and outer sides and population increase within the region itself (Ford 1999). Although the forces are essentially the same, local differences will modify the spatial pattern of population growth, contributing to the inherent heterogeneity of the periurban region (Ford forthcoming). It follows that the social effects of population growth on the periurban host community will also vary widely across the region.

† Address for correspondence: School of Planning and Housing, Edinburgh College of Art/Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh EH1 2HJ, United Kingdom. E-mail: T.Ford@eca.ac.uk.
Most research into the implications of population growth in the periurban region has focused on macro-scale effects, with two dominant central themes: planning and policy implications (Robinson 1990; Foyle and Houston 1992) and physical and environmental implications (Heimlich 1989; Bowie 1993). Although these issues are certainly important, as Hooimeijer and van der Knaap (1994:178) argue, the effects of migration ‘... go well beyond the simple mechanisms of change in population numbers and composition ... at least as significant is the impact upon the wider economic, social and political life’. Specifically, the literature mostly lacks local-level analysis of the potential conflicts and problems arising from the intermixture of urban and rural attitudes and lifestyles in the periurban region. As Joseph and Smit (1981:211) suggest, population growth in the periurban region creates a mixture of community problems, which differ from those which have previously confronted most of the region. Some have suggested that more research is needed on the likely implications of population growth, not only at the aggregate level, but on the individual characteristics and unique sets of problems and issues at the local level (Bryant and Coppack 1991; Errington 1994). This paper aims to contribute to this literature by focusing on the periurban region of Adelaide in South Australia.

The central objective of this paper is to assess the effect of recent population growth on the social structure of periurban communities. It is argued that in order to assess the likely effects of population growth due to net inmigration on the host community, examination of individual perceptions at the local level is required. According to Beesley (1991:53), ‘how people think and feel about their life ... in a specific place or community are of central concern’ to a comprehensive understanding of the effects on the social structures in the host community. The analysis focuses on three principal aspects associated with such population growth: social integration, satisfaction and identification with the local area, and local commitment. Based on a review of the literature dealing with these issues, a series of hypotheses is established and tested using survey data collected in three study areas. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings and research issues arising from the analysis.

Effects of population growth on the host community: the literature

Social integration

Part of the literature dealing with the effects of periurban population growth has focused on issues surrounding social relations, particularly as migrants and established residents attempt to accommodate to one another and deal with a variety of issues (Forsythe 1980; Price and Clay 1980; Johansen and Fuguitt 1984; Thomas 1990). Various studies have found that inmigration appears to disrupt the stability of the host community (Newby 1979; Schwarzweller 1979; Hudson 1989; Jackson and O’Connor 1993). The values, behaviour and attitudes of migrants are often urban ones, sometimes found to be incompatible with the pre-existing rural social system. As urban influences penetrate the largely rural settlements, social structures in these communities change from being locally oriented to more extensive networks of social interactions (Lewis and Maund 1976:21). Price and Clay (1980) argue that the needs, values and expectations of migrants differ from those of the established community, potentially creating conflict between the two groups.