The Ghosts of planning: Vanishing and unseen towns

A paper for presentation at the Planning Institute Australia Queensland State Conference 2017, 'The Spirit of Planning'

1 Introduction

Littered with dying towns, Queensland is yet to take serious notice of rural settlements that have the potential to vanish in the next twenty years. After the mining boom in a post-industrial Australia, larger settlements have succeeded in attracting media and government attention but not so for their smaller cousins. Queensland centres such as Townsville, Gladstone or even Emerald have gained effective media coverage about their economic plight, while many other much smaller towns linger in a policy and media void.

Managing depopulation of small towns is an aspect of Queensland’s settlement and planning policy that seems to escape adequate attention. The challenges of small rural Queensland towns are almost universally to do with stopping the leakage of services to larger centres, retaining employment opportunities, stemming the ‘brain-drain’ of the young, and arresting population decline. For many places, their townsfolk feel the very existence of their towns is under threat. The towns are vanishing towns.

There are also many unseen ‘towns’, places that were either once thriving or that a hopeful entrepreneur thought deserved to be a centre of activity. These places have no physical evidence of any form of settlement. The Titles Office has the lots registered, but there are no constructed roads or services, no buildings or fences and often not even a survey peg. We refer to these places to as historic lots, historical subdivisions, paper subdivisions or such similar terms. The unseen towns may be a premonition for the future of others.

Moreover, it is not merely the stagnant economy or a degenerating built environment that needs addressing—but welfare dependency, substance abuse, and domestic violence also often strongly coincide with small towns under stress. The young, well-resourced, and mobile move to where there are better opportunities. Those who cannot move or change remain—leaving the most disadvantaged behind. Typically, these are the elderly who end up residing in poorly-maintained dwellings until they pass away. Funerals are frequent—newcomers are not!
Settlements come and go for a variety of reasons—the discovery and exhaustion of a mineral resource, changing transport patterns, or long-term drought are some. Vanishing towns may yet be an unavoidable fact of life. Is it a wise use of the taxpayer dollar to sustain a town that will inevitably disappear or would it be more appropriate to leave its future to economic geography and the market?

Some suggest the planning profession needs to develop a different planning model for managing areas experiencing shrinkage.

_The planning discipline itself has developed a strong anchor to transitional economic models of urban growth and therefore the new situation of demographic change and shrinkage is outside the “international planning box”. Addressing the issue of sustainable development models that move away from the growth paradigm requires different instruments and strategies strongly anchored to the local situation and the manifestations of shrinkage._ (Cristina Martinez-Fernandez, Naoka Kobo, Antonella Noya and Tamara Weyman, 2012)

After examining some of the “vanishing and unseen” from the Wide Bay Burnett Region, this paper discusses possible policy responses, including those that are not within the mainstream of land use planning.

2 Method

This paper seeks to examine a sample of small towns and villages in the Wide Bay Burnett Region¹ and one in the neighbouring Banana Shire. It explores the notion that, despite considerable diversity, there is a common theme of resilience matching adversity. Small settlements lack inherent buoyancy due to their inability to have a diverse economic base. A smaller population simply cannot sustain a broad range of enterprises and is therefore exposed to risks associated with the downturn in one industry. Larger towns and cities can cope with a decline in the prosperity of one sector.

¹ Bundaberg Regional Council and North Burnett Regional Council
The method used to examine the resilience and adversity of small towns is to—

- select several small settlements and historic subdivisions in a transect in a generally south-westerly direction from Bundaberg
- compare the history and development of each town, observing where possible periods of growth or decline
- make conclusions about trends—if this is indeed possible
- review relevant literature
- provide conclusions about possible policy responses.

3 Selected small settlements

This paper examines a few towns and villages in the Wide Bay Burnett Region.

There is a plethora of small settlements from which to choose to study. There are, of course, no typical small towns and indeed all are unique. The study however deliberately examines a diverse range of towns, from villages with just a few houses to a district centre such as Eidsvold. The objective is to sample the variety in a way that can give a qualitative portrayal of settlements in this part of Queensland.

Transect approach

This study uses a transect of rural settlements to the west of Bundaberg for approximately 200 km. See Appendix A—Study transect area.

Initial candidate settlements

The study initially identified the following settlements, in general order of travel to the west of Bundaberg, as candidates for further study—

- South Kolan
- Bullyard
- Wallaville
- Gin Gin
- Tirroan
- Mount Perry
The intention was to examine each before selecting a few for more detailed comparison. It would have been possible to describe each settlement in much more detail using a broad range of attributes. This was not necessary for creating an initial list of candidates, however.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement</th>
<th>Town area (ha)</th>
<th>Pop’n 2016 (SSC)*</th>
<th>Index of econ. resources (Decile)</th>
<th>Number of Res lots</th>
<th>Education facilities</th>
<th>Business activity</th>
<th>Public sector services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South Kolan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1061</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>State school</td>
<td>Hotel, motel</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullyard</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>State school</td>
<td>Shop (ceased operating)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wallaville</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>410</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>State school, K’garten</td>
<td>Hotel, shop</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gin Gin</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>1053</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>400 (approx)</td>
<td>State school, High school</td>
<td>Highway strip centre</td>
<td>Council depot and offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirroan</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Perry</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>538</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>500 (approx)</td>
<td>State school</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>Council depot and offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abercorn</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>State school</td>
<td>Shops closed</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eidsvold</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>250 (approx)</td>
<td>State school</td>
<td>Small strip</td>
<td>Council depot and offices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawbelle</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28 (originally approx 140)</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cracow</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Likely to be overstated due to the SSC being larger than the town or village area

Figure 1—Initial transect selection of settlements

### 4 How towns vanish

**Planning paradigm of growth**

Our land use planning and development assessment systems orient towards and assume some form of urban growth and expansion—this is the nature of change that the planning profession typically anticipates and regulates. Even though land use planning and regulation acknowledges decline, the system regulates growth and development. It is much less
capable of managing depopulation and economic decline. Our political and macroeconomic systems drive a ‘paradigm of growth’. McMillan summarises this well as—

*Governments and planners have yet to learn how to manage population decline as it does not occur in a uniform manner at the local level and institutional arrangements and the legal framework are geared for a growth paradigm. (McMillan, 2015)*

**Triggers for decline or growth**

The cause of demographic change is often external, a complex interaction between international, national, regional and local factors (Cristina Martinez-Fernandez, Naoka Kobo, Antonella Noya and Tamara Weyman, 2012), including—

- internationally—global dynamics such as ageing of the baby-boomer generation; low fertility rates; technology; commodity prices;
- nationally—metropolitan suburbanisation, de-industrialisation, natural disasters, climate change; the shift from rail to road transportation;
- regionally—administrative change such as local government reform; improved road access; greater access to port facilities;
- locally—natural resources (exploitation or exhaustion); local government finance; community leadership; entrepreneurship; character and appeal of the built or natural environment.

**Cycle of population decline**

Depopulation is multidimensional. It influences government and private sector confidence and investment, which tends to have the effect of withdrawing services, which ultimately encourages the population to find alternative places to work and live. It is potentially a self-sustaining loop (McMillan, 2015) (Haartsen & Venhorst, 1998).
5 Trends and influences in the selected settlements

This section examines selected towns and concludes with observations about the key influences on their growth or decline. It was necessary to consider whether to conduct a quantitative examination of smaller towns. The conclusion was that the geographical extent of the ABS SA1 areas meant that smaller towns and settlements, especially those with only a handful of dwellings, would not be meaningful or reliable\(^2\), at least not without considerable effort.

Brief town histories, trends and influences

**GIN GIN** is a small rural highway town approximately 50 km by road south-west of Bundaberg. European settlement in the district commenced in 1848 with the Tirroan pastoral run. The colonial government gave the

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\(^2\) The ABS warns that Collection Districts (CD) in previous censuses and the 2016 SA1s were designed using very different criteria, resulting in considerable differences between the two. In general, it is not possible to make a comparison between CDs and SA1s.
name ‘Gin Gin’ to its telegraph office on the railway line between Bundaberg and Gladstone in 1874.

Figure 3—Gin Gin Station building (Michael Johnston - August 2003) (Dave Phillips and Mike Lee, 2017)

Several factors influenced the growth of the early settlement—

- the choice by the Kolan local government division in 1879 to make the town its administrative centre;
- copper mining commencing at New Moonta, approximately 30 km by road to the West in the early 1880s;
- construction of a rail line between Mount Perry and Bundaberg passing through Gin Gin.

The population of the town more than tripled between 1901 and 1911 enabling the diverse economy to support a state school, courthouse, police quarters, churches, stores, library, two hotels and daily rail communication with Brisbane.

The 2011 main street upgrade project revitalised the town centre, encouraging tourists and travellers to make the town a convenient rest stop. Retail expansion, including the Supa IGA, now provides a greater range and convenience of facilities in the town.
Table 5.1—Population trends - Gin Gin 1881 to 2016 (Source: Queensland Places and ABS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENSUS DATE</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>738</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>903</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>892</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1053</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gin Gin’s most significant influences—administrative centre, copper mining in Mount Perry, rail connection to Bundaberg, improved town centre image

**Mount Perry** is a former copper mining and smelting town approximately 100 km by road south-west of Bundaberg.

In 1851 Robert Wilkins became the first proprietor of the Mount Perry pastoral run. The discovery of rich copper ore in the district in the late 1860s however triggered a rush of prospectors. Several enterprising holders of mineral selections took advantage of the pressure for housing and subdivided their holdings for building sites. By 1871 there were reportedly five hotels, several stores and a blacksmith. School enrolment reached 150 students by 1874. The original 1872 survey plans show nearly 400 lots, typically each a quarter acre.<sup>3</sup> The 1876 Australian handbook reported that there were about 3000 town residents, although this would seem to conflict with the 1891 census population figure.

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<sup>3</sup> approximately 1011 square metres
Figure 4—The original 1872 survey plan of Mount Perry (then called Town of Fife-Barnett)

The prosperity of Mount Perry has ebbed and flowed over the years due to the fluctuation in world copper prices. For example, the copper smelters closed in 1877 yet reopened in 1884. By this time there was a railway connection to Bundaberg, and for a while, Mount Perry prospered. Smelters closed yet again in 1915, and the rail connection to Bundaberg closed in 1960. Gold mining at the nearby Mount Rawdon triggered renewed prosperity when gold production commenced in 2001. Again, however, this is subject to the world gold price, and at one-time much of the town was for sale—hotel, post office, general store, motel, service station. There were rumours at the time about the mine closing.
More recently the prosperity of the town benefited from the nearby Mount Rawdon gold mine—some of the workforce reside in town. Even though the town straddles a state-controlled road, Route 12 is not a major thoroughfare and is merely a connection between the Bruce Highway north of Gin Gin and the Burnett Highway halfway between Monto and Eidsvold. Traffic volumes are consequently very light and passing trade minimal.

Mount Perry headquartered the Perry Shire Council until local government reform and the March 2008 elections. The town retains some council services.

Table 5.2—Population trends - Mount Perry 1891 to 2016 (Source: Queensland Places and ABS)
Mount Perry's major influences—copper mining and smelting, enterprising locals, gold mining; commodity prices

EIDSVOLD is a small rural town approximately 180 km by road south-west of Bundaberg. The Archer family took up a pastoral run in 1848, establishing the Eidsvold Homestead in 1850 on the west side of the Burnett River, approximately 6 km from the Eidsvold post office, on the Eidsvold Theodore Road.

Even though the first discoveries of gold occurred in the 1850s, significant mining only started with a gold rush in 1886, such that there was a population of more than 1000 (plus 800 miners) within a couple of years.

Figure 6—Eidsvold Courthouse (Source: State Library of Queensland)
By one account (Marks, 1891), there were many more..."Early in 1888 fully 4000 people were on the spot, whilst work could not be found for 100 men." There were eight hotels, stores, churches and sawmills. Mining was not sustainable however, and the population approximately halved in ten years—between 1891 and 1901. Pastoral interests became dominant and by about 1926 regional cattle sales was a sizeable industry. The saleyard was quite successful and reportedly had record throughput—for example, 7482 animals in one day in 1932 (Centre for the Government of Queensland - University of Queensland, 2017). The extension of the rail line from Mundubbera to Eidsvold in 1924, and its connection through to Rockhampton in 1928, was apparently a significant influence on the prosperity of the town for cattle sales.

Table 5.3—Population trends - Eidsvold 1891 to 2016 (Source: Queensland Places and ABS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENSUS DATE</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>1258</td>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>635</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eidsvold’s most significant influences—gold mining, cattle, rail
CRACOW is now a near-deserted gold mining town nearly 300 km by road south-west of Bundaberg.

A gold rush occurred in 1931 after the Queensland government encouraged gold prospecting as an antidote to the depression. Cracow was subdivided into township lots, which were auctioned in 1932. By the end of the year there were, by some accounts, approximately 2000 people in the town—although the 1933 Census records a population of only 858. Records show that there were bakers, butchers, fruiterers, drapers, cordial makers, billiard rooms, two pictures theatres, five garages, three sawmills and a brickworks (Centre for the Government of Queensland - University of Queensland, 2017). Most buildings were basic, and businesses often operated from tents and other temporary or makeshift structures.

Interestingly, by 1940, Cracow was the largest town in the Banana Shire, accommodating a hospital, courthouse, school, and ambulance service, and various public buildings. As with other mining settlements, the cessation of operations caused a significant downturn in the prosperity of the town. Services and facilities progressively withdrew—the hospital and state school closed in the 1990s, for example.

As typical of mining towns that depend upon the world price of mineral commodities, the town became reinvigorated when Newcrest Mining Ltd reopened the goldmine in 2003 and established sizeable mining camps in the town.

Despite the presence of gold mining, Cracow remains almost a ghost town. The single hotel is practically the only visible commercial enterprise other than the mine. The town retains many of the disused retail premises and has become a small-time tourist attraction as a ghost town. According to tourist promotional material, the pub is ‘legendary, and has a ‘resident ghost that haunts the hallways and on occasions has been spotted among memorabilia that lines the pub walls’.

Table 5.4—Population trends - Cracow 1933 to 2016 (Source: Queensland Places and ABS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CENSUS DATE</th>
<th>POPULATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>302</td>
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<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This study examined the changes in Cracow’s built environment by comparing aerial and satellite imagery between 1952 and 2016. Aerial images for 1952 [see Figure 16—Aerial photograph Cracow 1952 (Source: Qimagery - The State of Queensland, Department of Natural Resources and Mines)] and 1972 [(Figure 17—Aerial photograph Cracow 1973 (Source: Qimagery - The State of Queensland, Department of Natural Resources and Mines)] and the satellite image for 2016 have been examined. By identifying new building work, either new buildings, extensions or demolitions, it is possible to map where change has occurred in the 43-year period. The aerial imagery does not reveal where there have been material changes of use within buildings or which buildings are vacant, so it is not a proxy measure for town prosperity. Even so it is surprising how few buildings have been demolished and how much new building work has been carried out in the study period.

Figure 19—Development activity between 1973 and 2016 shows the resulting changes in the 43-year study period.

Despite the evidence of considerable decline over a period of eighty years—depopulation, the large number of derelict buildings, vacant lots, even marketing as a ghost-town—there has still been considerable growth in the built environment over the 43 years.

*Cracow's most significant influences—gold mining, tourism and 'ghost-town' status*

Some of the smallest settlements are unlikely ever to recover. Abercorn, a former railway town is probably one such place. It was a major rail trucking centre—one of Central Queensland's largest (The Eidsvold and District Historical Society Inc., 2012) but is now little more than a collection of houses. There are only about 14 buildings used as dwellings, complemented by—

- one school;
- two streets;
- three churches⁴; and
- four tennis courts.

Cattle were brought in from cattle stations such as Camboon, Rawbelle, Woolton, Wingfield, Taroom and further afield.

⁴ Presbyterian, Catholic and Anglican—they appear to be either vacant or used very infrequently.
There was, many years ago, a considerable range of services and facilities available (The Eidsvold and District Historical Society Inc., 2012), including—

- butcher;
- cream and mail carriers
- post office;
- shop;
- Mobil fuel depot;
- bakery/store/cordial factory
- hall.

The railway has been disused for some period, and recently contractors removed the rail and sleepers. There are no retail or other businesses in the village. The state primary school continues to operate.
Abercorn's most significant influences—changing transportation, especially rail

Conclusion
The above examples show the ebb and flow of small towns because of external factors over which they typically have no control. It is almost inevitable that some places will, in time, cease to exist—despite the sometimes-incredible resolve and resilience of locals.

6 Historic subdivisions—the invisible towns

The Bundaberg, North Burnett, and South Burnett regions, perhaps like many others in Queensland, contain many historic subdivisions\(^5\)—where land-owners created lots in the late 1800s but were either not developed or have since been abandoned.

RAWBELLE, a town named after the nearby original station was surveyed in 1872. The history of the settlement is unclear, although what exists today

\(^5\) sometimes referred to as "paper subdivisions"
is negligible. There are no constructed roads, services or buildings and it is unlikely that there are even any remaining survey marks for the lots remaining. Those lots exist, but the ‘town’ is invisible. Apart from a small cemetery containing seven graves approximately 800 metres to the south-east, the cadastre is the only remnant—see Figure 10—Rawbelle 2014 Satellite image with cadastre (Source: Queensland Globe). Even the 1961 aerial imagery shows no evidence of any settlement, so it is likely that any buildings had been removed at least several decades earlier. There may never have been any buildings in the town.

![Figure 10—Rawbelle 2014 Satellite image with cadastre (Source: Queensland Globe)](image)

Historic subdivisions can create problems for a local government. They are like having a subdivision approval in place with no conditions or requirements, no limitations about a currency period and no indication about when further development such as housing would occur. The Rawbelle example is one of many in the region and further afield.

Importantly, historic subdivisions represent a failed community—either one that once prosperous and thriving or a ‘stillborn town’ that never had the opportunity to grow.

**Mount Perry** includes many ‘historical lots’, mostly those created in 1872 in the Fife-Barnett subdivision, but which remain vacant and not

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6 included on the North Burnett Regional Council Local Heritage Register
connected to any town services. Many have no constructed road access. Enterprising business people have acquired and developed some of these, triggering infrastructure issues for the local government. In approximately 2012, 11 historic lots on the edge of Mount Perry were acquired and developed with houses. Housing construction and the subsequent occupation by residents triggered demands for municipal services, and because the land was steep and soils erodible, Council was under pressure to remediate the erosion and sedimentation. See Appendix B—Additional photographs. Figure 11—Eleven newly-constructed houses on an historic subdivision, Mount Perry is an aerial photo showing houses constructed in Mount Perry. Figure 12—Newly-constructed houses on historic lots, Hunter Street, Mount Perry shows erosion and sedimentation problems. Ultimately, Council decided to amend its planning scheme to regulate dwellings on historic lots throughout the North Burnett Region. There are many other historic lots not included in the amendment.

Other Councils have experienced similar development challenges and needed to incorporate provisions in their local planning instruments. South Burnett, for example, proposed an Historic subdivisions overlay in its publicly notified draft planning in late 2016 as a direct result of protracted problems with housing built on an historical subdivision at Memerambi, a small town about 10 km north of Kingaroy. Bundaberg Regional Council includes historic subdivisions, such as those at Miara (in areas of remnant vegetation about 40 km drive north of Bundaberg) and Avondale (in the middle of a farm about 30 km drive north of Bundaberg), in the Limited development (constrained land) zone.

7 Towards a policy response—engaging the Ghost-town busters

Recognising that small towns face significant challenges is much easier than identifying appropriate responses. This section introduces some solutions.

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7 more than a hundred lots in 14 locations
View rural areas and rural towns differently

We firstly need to acknowledge that the challenges in rural areas require an entirely different response to the regulatory 'growth management' approach used in metropolitan areas and regional cities.

When the word planning is used in relation to places in Australia it is usually connected with urban areas, or with the economy as a whole. Rarely is it connected with rural areas. Somehow, the rural areas are thought of as stable, simple areas of low population densities and low population numbers that cannot possibly have the sorts of problems that beset the urban areas which are volatile, complex and have high population densities and large numbers of people. (Williams, 1976)

Planning schemes are rarely the answer. They are regulatory tools that may do more harm than good. They are good for stopping, delaying or moving projects to another location but have negligible value in attracting investment. Instruments that are capable of 'creating' would be better in dying towns. An action tool for 'driving' public and private investment would be far more appropriate. Strategies, plans, and action that identifies, promotes, and targets projects or activities would be preferable than regulation.

A planning team that jointly works with investors to identify needs, find funding, select land, create ideas and make projects reality ought to have priority ahead of a development assessment team.

Three broad policy responses

Broadly speaking, there are only three possible policy responses to reversing decline—

- **take deliberate counteraction**—intentionally attempt to stimulate population growth through one or more policy actions with the expectation of reversing the decline;
- **do nothing**—either deny that decline is occurring or fail to act in any meaningful way; the response might include an intentional policy of not intervening;
- **accept the inevitable**—acknowledge the depopulation scenario and work to manage its effects, either by slowing the decline or having an ‘exit strategy’ for selected settlements.
Deliberate counteraction

Governments use a range of strategies to counteract population decline. Counter-urbanisation sometimes occurs in areas previously experiencing depopulation. It is likely that counter-urbanisation is not an outcome of a single policy but the result of many interventions economic geography (Joyce Halliday and Mike Coombes, 1995).

Some strategies include—

- *Have committed leaders*—small towns need leadership (Fagence, 1978) and is the key to having a healthy community attitude to its challenges (Peter Kenyon et al, 2001).
- *Engage with the community*—involving a broad range of stakeholders is essential for successful outcomes.
- *Be relevant to the context*—the local context and using the characteristics of the affected communities is important.
- *Secure expertise, funding and external support*—actively securing funding from other sources, including public investment at all levels of government, improves the prospect of success.

There are several common factors to small towns successfully turning population decline around through improving ‘quality of life’—

- accessible location—
- good buildings
- pleasant environment
- rural ambience
- entrepreneurial initiative.

Net positive migration to a town or district is a key measure of success. Attracting and retaining people is often achieved by—

- *towns as appealing places*—creating places, especially town centres, that are attractive to live and work in—
  - conservation of heritage places
  - nature conservation or restoration
  - landscape enhancement
  - community infrastructure such as libraries and swimming pools;
- *promotion*—marketing the region or town as providing economic opportunities or as an appealing place—
visitation and tourism
business opportunities and skill shortages
business incubators.

Segregation or consolidation of functions
In metropolitan and larger regional centres, it is the commonly-accepted practice to segregate residential areas from industrial and business areas—this is land use planning 101. In a small or declining town, this practice may be problematic. For example, achieving the usual separation distances between industry and housing in a village is not practical. There would be considerable inefficiencies associated with providing even limited infrastructure services to a small number of dwellings and to an industry that was perhaps 100 metres away.

8 Conclusions

- The study transect contains a surprising number of struggling towns. The future of some is doubtful. Those relying on mining are very susceptible.
- There are no cure-alls or generic solutions for transforming vanishing and unseen towns.
- The planning profession should re-evaluate its paradigms for managing population decline in small settlements.
- Good town planning, at least in the way it is currently practised will not, at least by itself, revive a ghost town. Actions are more important than regulation and facilitation instead of development control.

The ghosts of planning left here long ago.
Appendix A—Study transect area
Appendix B—Additional photographs

Figure 11—Eleven newly-constructed houses on an historic subdivision, Mount Perry

Figure 12—Newly-constructed houses on historic lots, Hunter Street, Mount Perry
Figure 13—Cracow—Oblique aerial image with approximate cadastre (Source: Author’s aerial photo, 2017; cadastre from State of Queensland)

Figure 14—Cracow’s derelict commercial centre, Third Avenue (Source: Author, 2010)
Figure 15 — Abercorn—Oblique aerial image (Source: Author’s aerial photo 2017)
Appendix C—Comparison of aerial and satellite imagery for Cracow—1952, 1973 and 2016
Figure 16—Aerial photograph Cracow 1952 (Source: Qimagery - The State of Queensland, Department of Natural Resources and Mines)
Figure 17—Aerial photograph Cracow 1973 (Source: Qimagery - The State of Queensland, Department of Natural Resources and Mines)
Figure 18—Satellite image Cracow 2016 (Source: Google Earth and The State of Queensland, Department of Natural Resources and Mines)
Figure 19—Development activity between 1973 and 2016
Bibliography


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