

Research matters

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Ten years of Research Matters: Retrospect and Prospect

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This 41st edition of *Research Matters* marks 10 years of the publication of quarterly news bulletins from Spatial Analysis and Research (and its former incarnations). When the first issue of *Research Matters* was published, the 1996 census results were eagerly anticipated, just as the 2006 census results are now. Victoria and most of its parts were recovering from the recession of the early 1990s but the census, being such an important benchmark, would measure the extent and characteristics of that recovery. The 1996 census would confirm many expectations but would also produce its share of surprises.

In 1997 Victoria was recovering. Overseas migration was rising but still low as it usually is when the economy is struggling and employment opportunities are modest. Victoria was losing people interstate as the recession had hit the southern states harder than the rest. Contrast this with 2007. Net overseas migration to Australia last year was a rising 134,000 and Victoria's share was growing. The economy has adapted to the loss of manufacturing jobs. Thirty year low unemployment rates, widespread skills shortages and the prospect of a retirement boom are now leading to calls for large increases in overseas migration programs. Victoria no longer loses large numbers interstate and Melbourne has become a sought after destination for young migrants. Victoria already had a major planning and development task but new trends will require revisions to the assumptions behind our population projections, resulting in higher levels of projected growth.

The change over the last ten years has been particularly apparent in regional Victoria. According to ABS figures, the population growth of regional Victoria between 1991 and 1996 was 12,000 compared with 74,000 over the last five years. The latest ABS population estimates have regional Victoria growing at its fastest rate

for twenty years and outpacing Melbourne's rate of growth. Treechangers, seachangers and the growing band of second home owners are placing pressure on coasts, rural hinterlands to cities and the Murray Valley. Regional centres are booming. But the drought is a stark reminder of the fragility of that balance between human settlement growth and the physical environment.

One surprise from the 1996 census was that for the first time in over a hundred years inner Melbourne's population was increasing. Casual observation showed that the redevelopment of Southbank had been successful in bringing a new life to the heart of the city. But inner city populations in other Australian and overseas cities were also increasing so this was not just a trend affecting Melbourne. We concluded that underlying structural changes in the economy and society were resulting in a new form of urban development and in 1998 we published, what was at the time, a controversial discussion paper, *From Doughnut City to Café Society*, about this. The inner city of Melbourne had weathered the recession better than anywhere else in Victoria and that recovery has continued apace. The modest population increase of 3,400 in the City of Melbourne between 1991 and 1996 has been followed by a 30,000 increase since. What were lean office and hotel sectors are now vibrant and expanding. As in many other places, inner cities have become magnets for the young, for professional and creative workforces, for students and for overseas and domestic tourists. The popularity of the inner city, the churn of people and business and the spaces, infrastructure and services that they demand, present a new scale of challenges and opportunities.

Over the last 10 years this the need for good information and analysis has strengthened. The readers of *Research Matters* have become more sophisticated and questioning users of our work and are making greater demands. Our challenge over the next ten years is to keep ahead of the game: being open, precise, innovative, informative and influential.

Past issues of *Research Matters* are available online at www.dse.vic.gov.au/research



Understanding mobile populations: A study of non-resident ratepayers in Mansfield Shire

In September 2006 Spatial Analysis and Research visited Mansfield Shire Council to provide a presentation on the Regional Atlas and demographic change in the region. One feature which emerged from the discussion following the presentation was that a very large proportion of Mansfield's ratepayers (c. 50%) had their main residence outside the Shire. These kinds of population groups are mobile and therefore hard to count, yet they are significant in terms of their potential use of services and expectations regarding the place in which they have bought a second property or home.

The survey

Mansfield Shire Council is keen to know more about their non-residents, in particular whether they are planning to move permanently to Mansfield at some stage and their likely use of and demand for local services. SAR developed the study of non-resident ratepayers in partnership with the Council. A questionnaire was developed and mailed out by Council to non-residents in November 2006. The questions were organised around themes of:

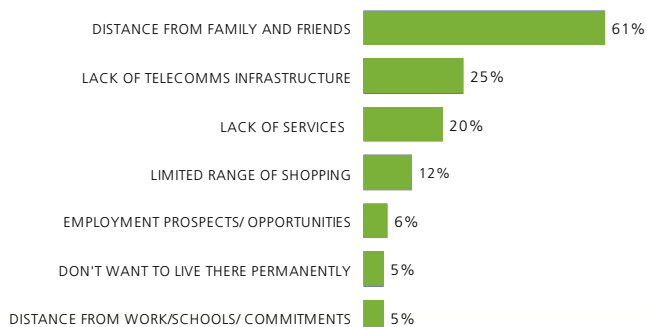
- Property (characteristics; frequency and duration of visits; future intentions);
- Connections with resident community; and,
- Local services (usage; expectations; satisfaction levels).

Who are the non-residents?

A review of respondent characteristics revealed:

- 80% are based in Melbourne while 14% are based in country Victoria
- 34% recorded their industry of employment as manufacturing, construction or wholesaling (Victorian average = 27.5%) while a further 17% were employed in finance, insurance property or business services (Victorian average = 15%)
- The majority of respondents were older than 40 years (55% aged 40-54 and 33% aged 60-plus)
- Nearly a third had children under the age of 18

FACTORS PREVENTING A PERMANENT MOVE TO MANSFIELD



The most significant factor limiting the likelihood of a permanent move to Mansfield was distance from family and friends. This is a common 'anchor' reported in many migration-related studies.

When and why did they buy their property?

Almost all respondents had visited Mansfield during the previous year. Visits to Mansfield by non-residents are quite frequent on average while the length of stay is short. This suggests a great deal of travel is occurring to and from the Shire. Those most likely to visit frequently included: owners of working farms; people with large land holdings and people with multiple properties. This suggests that an important component of Mansfield's non-resident community are farmers. The main reason for purchasing a property in the Shire was to use it as a holiday home, or a weekender. Other reasons included: like the area; future retirement; lifestyle or recreation.

The survey showed that retail businesses are the main beneficiaries from non-residents with those most commonly used by non-residents including those selling groceries, hardware and clothing/ homewares. In terms of service use, nearly half the respondents had used the hospital and a third had used property maintenance services and a similar proportion had used tourism businesses. Use of Council services and facilities such as swimming pool and library was lower while membership of community clubs or organisations was below 25% overall.



Having good relations with neighbours can help non-residents maintain their property. Fifty-nine percent of non-residents ask their neighbours to keep an eye on their property when they are not there, while 18% rely on them for assistance in maintenance issues such as putting out the bin.

Findings from the Mansfield survey are being used by both Mansfield Shire Council and by DSE to inform research and planning. Already interest is strong from other Councils who have large numbers of non-residents or visiting populations. Spatial Analysis and Research will be undertaking further investigation of mobile populations in both metropolitan and non metropolitan (especially coastal) locations.

For further information contact Fiona McKenzie:
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Researchers lend a hand at the Victorian Bushfires

Not many Victorians could have escaped hearing about the incredible bushfires that raged in our Alpine region for 69 straight days before being declared contained. You may not, however, be aware that many of the Spatial Analysis and Research team played roles in the fire fighting effort.

Many of the SAR team also helped out with a range of tasks including organising 24-hour, 7-day staffing rosters; updating the website with the latest public information; moving aircraft and resources around Victoria from the State Air Desk; and driving injured fire fighters back from the front line.

Julian Smith from the Sustainability Analysis team trained as a fire fighter and undertook two deployments in December. He was working on the Alpine Complex South and was stationed at Heyfield and Briagolong. Julian said "It was a lot of hard work and long hours, but I wouldn't swap the camaraderie you develop with your crew for anything."

Chris Wight from the Housing Research team spent a week up at Corryong in the far north east of Victoria, lending some muscle to the logistics team at the Mt Hermit fire. He said "I learned so much about fire management by being there on the ground. I was just glad to be able to contribute in a small way."



Stephanie Walton and Daniel Catrice from Fire & Emergency Management and Julian take a break from blacking-out operations



Dale Stokes from the Urban Development Program in a late afternoon back burning operation

Summer of Research

While many university students were heading off to the beach for summer, a dedicated group of first year planning students from RMIT embarked on placements in SAR to learn more about urban and regional research, and gain experience in working in government.

Students Jess Noonan and Felicity Rose assisted Simone Alexander with the Towns in Time and Suburbs in Time projects. They quickly had to become familiar with ABS geography, specifically how Collection Districts change between Censuses, and how this affects the boundaries of towns and suburbs. A highlight of their internship was a field trip to North Melbourne. Kudos to both girls for becoming familiar enough with Census data to question how establishments such as brothels and homeless shelters are included in the count!

Conrad Mazurkiewicz worked for the Industry and Employment Research team. He was involved in piloting 3D modelling using Footscray and Dandenong shopping centres as examples. This involved drawing buildings from aerial photography using a geospatial information system (GIS) and then visiting the sites to determine the height and use of the buildings on the ground to produce the 3D models. Conrad's work proved that the method is workable and provides the basis for further investigation of this technology.

The Sustainability Analysis team hosted two students, Gareth Hately and Nicole Ford. They were set the task of creating profiles from a sustainability perspective for four towns in the southwest of Victoria. These towns were Colac, Forrest, Apollo Bay and Skenes Creek. Their main research was reliant on secondary data sources exploring concepts and ideas around urban systems and metabolism. Also, they explored information which can be used to tell stories about four types of capital associated with the resource base of a settlement: natural; human and social; physical or built; and economic. Their work was contextualised with a visit to the towns for a series of meetings with key stakeholders and to observe the situation 'on the ground'. To finalise their work with us they prepared a project report and presentation. This included the key themes and issues facing the settlements and mini "know-your-area" style profiles.



RMIT student Jess Noonan undertaking field work as part of her summer placement with SAR

Preview of DSE 2006 Census Products

With 2006 Census results released in July and November 2007, Spatial Analysis and Research have prepared an information sheet presenting a schedule for the release of DSE Census products.

For further information and regular updates contact:

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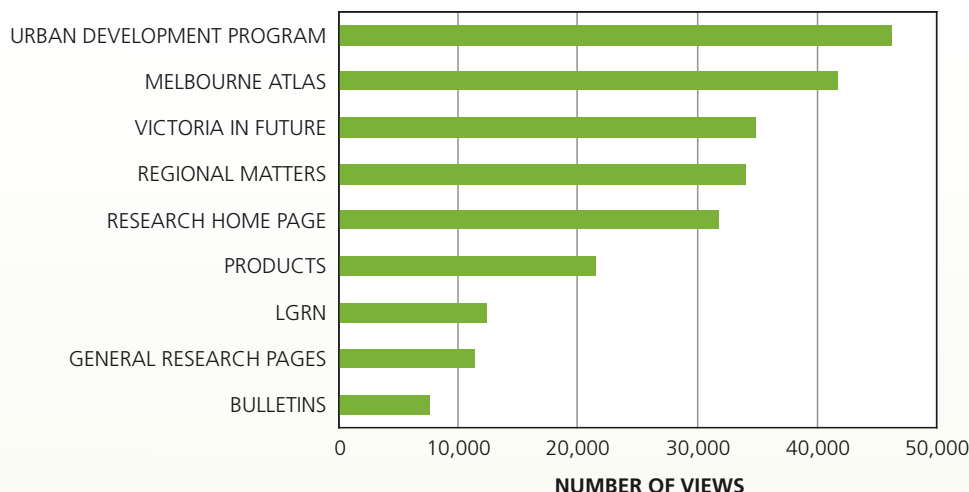
For all Spatial Analysis and Research online products:

www.dse.vic.gov.au/research/urbanandregional



Urban and Regional Research Online

The internet continues to be a powerful tool for communicating the work of Spatial Analysis and Research. The number of pages viewed on the Urban and Regional Research online increased by 67% last year; from 156,000 page views in 2005 to 260,000 in 2006. The two most popular search phrases by our users were "Suburbs in Time" and "Towns in Time". The graph below highlights the principal sections of the research website and the number of page views each section received.



Know Your Area (KYA) is an online database that provides information about the people of an area and how they live. KYA can still be accessed via www.doi.vic.gov.au/knowyourarea or by visiting the link at www.dse.vic.gov.au/research.

Recent quarterly data updates include:

- Residential land development data for Metropolitan councils.
- Unemployment data from Department of Employment and Workplace Relations for Victorian Statistical Local Areas.

Water Consumption data for Metropolitan councils have not been updated over the last two quarters due to changes in internal databases. We anticipate this to be completed in the near future. For further information please email christina.inbakaran@dse.vic.gov.au

Ten years of *Research Matters*

Some of the more memorable titles for articles over the last ten years include:

- 'The Bunfight over Doughnuts'
- 'Retail in Detail'
- 'English supermodel (er) visits Melbourne'
- 'Lies, damned lies and fertility statistics'
- 'In Search of Bigfoot: Industrial Building Footprint Database'
- 'Regional Victoria – On the Move or the Place to Be?'
- 'Are children a dying breed?'
- 'Country Football: an indicator of social change'

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