What Makes a Place
a Community?

by Dr Al Luloff

*I*t is a pleasure to be here tonight, and I am honored to have been invited to give the Fifth Sir John Quick Bendigo Lecture. I feel especially privileged to be asked to do so as a non-Australian. What I will discuss with you does not center on Australia, per se, but rather on a particularly thorny issue for nations everywhere - an issue I believe is central to each of the previous lectures. Unlike earlier talks, where Sir John Quick's contribution to Australian history was reviewed, and the origin, role, and experience of the Murray Darling Basin Initiative were explored, or the role of universities in exploring, capturing, and enhancing the human experience was elaborated, or the description of a proposed national industrial policy anchored by a balance of trade was presented, here I will focus on something that each of these lecturers mentioned in one way or another - namely, "community" and its place and role in modern society, both in Australia and elsewhere.

1

Before beginning, I would like to acknowledge the kind assistance of Les Kilmartin, Lisa Bourke, and Michael Osborne in facilitating this presentation.

Let us now turn to the broader framework in which this talk is couched.

In a world characterized by increasing urbanization and globalization, little attention is still given to the role and place of rural and small towns in developed nations - places - where significant numbers of people continue to live, work, and raise their families. The scarcity of research on such places impedes our understanding of and ability to respond to the forces of change affecting well-being and quality of life.

This occurs despite the fact that small towns in many developed nations are referred to as the bedrock of their societies. Such places serve as the stewards of their country's natural resources. At the same time, they contribute many of the human resources that facilitate the modernization, industrialization, and urbanization of their larger societies. We envision those who live in these communities as rugged individualists whose attempts to conquer the primeval wilderness have been glorified and celebrated (cf. Lawrence 1987; Sher and Sher 1994; Willits, Bealer, and Timbers 1992; Willits and Luloff 1994). At the same time, rural and small towns have been prototypically viewed as peaceful places to live, undisturbed by the problems that characterize urban areas.

You've been to such places. When you visit such communities in the United States, Australia, Europe, or elsewhere, on your approach to town you will find its square, usually dominated by a church with its steeple gleaming white, piercing the blue, mostly cloudless sky (especially in our recall). The storefront-squared streets invite you through their doors. When riding the blue highways to such communities, you can't help but notice the bucolic panorama framed by second-growth hardwoods and softwoods, and manicured farmlands with barns and silos.

So often as you drive these two-laners, you pass the local Dairy Queen, crowded with pickups and 4-by-4s, and lively conversations. And of course the crossroad taverns - the Dew Drop Inns and Rusty Nails and Handlebar Grilles - where at noon the regulars begin to arrive and, by five when the lot is full, the inside is smoked blue, the quiet laughter and jeer edges closely to the surface as knowing faces nod and stare.

So often these images are part of our definitions of place, and well they might be. They are based, more often than not, on a romanticized myth of small town life. Reality and perception are quite different. Contemporary studies in Australia and the United States have demonstrated economic instability and social disruption in such areas. Rural

populations tend to have higher rates of poverty, disability, and mental disorders than their urban counterparts, while having less access to health and human services (Cheers 1990; Lawrence and Williams 1990; Wagenfeld 1990; ACOSS 1993, 1994). Further, upheavals in the rural economic sectors of both Australia and the United States have focused attention on economic decline and levels of rural community distress by policy makers and the public (National Mental Health Association 1988; Cheers 1990; Castles 1994).

Rural and small town living also exposes residents to unique stressors. Such areas have higher incidences of malnutrition. In America, for example, one half of the nation's substandard housing and two-thirds of the houses with inadequate plumbing are in rural areas. In Australia and the United States, rural residents suffer higher underemployment and unemployment rates, and experience a greater incidence of poverty (Cheers 1990; Wilkinson 1991; Bourke and Cheers 1996). They also have a proportionally larger dependent population, with more children, elderly, ill, and poor (Coward and Jackson 1983; Wagenfeld et al. 1988; Cheers 1990). Similarly, rural people in poverty are more likely to be disabled than urbanites in poverty (Hoppe 1990). All of these factors contribute to increased stress levels among rural and small town populations.

Despite such problems, the myth of a romantic rural lifestyle remains alive and well. This myth may have been best exemplified by Grant Wood's "The American Gothic." This painting has been co-opted by numerous Fortune 500 conglomerates for the wholesome advertising of a wide array of products, in commercials designed by Madison Avenue for products such as Kellogg's Corn Flakes, Ford Motor Vehicles, Time Magazine, World Cup Soccer USA 94, and Sprint, and, more generically, by cartoonists and organizations. It is not surprising that Australia's heritage and images of its "outback" are being used for similar purposes (Nalson and Craig 1987).

Despite the irony, these images often trigger positive perceptions about the residents of these areas, people whose words are their bonds. These images dominate conceptions of small town culture and contribute to what is currently thought to be important for community life. And it is these images which anchor the oft repeated call for citizen and community involvement in decision-making efforts designed to level the playing field across all communities of a nation.

This may reflect the fact that the organized rural and/or small town village is the setting most often drawn upon when we ask folks about their "community." It is not a coincidence, then, that the most frequently heard opinions are rooted in nostalgia and little more.

You know, the small town mind-set, where everyone knows everyone else's business, and who and what you do is known broadly with little or no effort on your part to advertise. It is, in short, the place whose ties wrap and hold you, from cradle to grave.

And all those farms and woodlands that make up the periphery? Such lands were, even now sometimes are, the homesteads of stout souls who live by their knowledge and use of the natural resources of the area. As a result of their sweat equity, such folk are assumed to know the value of a dollar.

However, as Thomas noted so long ago, what we perceive as real is real in its consequences. Thus, the image of these places matters in the general belief that these areas are characterized by people whose words are their bonds. Thus, it is simply not surprising that the values of such people dominate our conceptions of small town culture and contribute to much of what we currently believe is important.

Many of these perceptions follow from the long history of interdependence between rural communities and their environment. This relationship is embedded in the rural social structure, economy, and cultural ideologies of rurality (cf. Willits, Bealer, and Timbers 1992). To date, however, few theories in the social sciences have addressed these relationships and their impacts on community. Given heightened development pressures and the increased presence of resource preservation/use conflicts found in such areas, research examining these relationships is essential.

Its absence is exacerbated by the fact that the majority of urban populations in modern nations continue to hold attitudes toward rural areas and people not based on facts (Willits and Luloff 1994). Rural places are marked by service deprivation and serious deficits in most measures of well-being when compared with urban populations (Cheers 1990). Policies developed on the basis of misperceptions about rural people and places are unlikely to achieve desired ends. This suggests that research attention needs to be paid to current conditions impacting rural and small towns.

In part, the absence of research efforts in this area reflects the impact of conditions captured by the community demise thesis (cf. Stein 1960; Nisbet 1969; Gusfield 1975; Castells 1977; Warren 1978). According to this perspective, one of the unavoidable consequences of urbanization has been that small and rural communities have lost autonomy in their decision-making structures and have been absorbed into "mass society." As a result, community studies have concentrated on the urban core (Luloff 1990). At the same time, there has been a general failure to recognize the heterogeneity of rural and small communities. Moreover, globalization theories have overlooked the lag in technological adoption in

 rural areas (cf. Wilkinson 1991; McMichael 1996)

This oversight has had negative consequences for both people and places in many nations (cf. Luloff 1987). The American and Australian farm crises, for example, focused awareness on increasing levels of rural area distress (cf. Lawrence 1987). Farmers impacted by the radical economic restructuring of the agricultural sector became the center of media attention. In America, dramatic events, including family farm foreclosures, congressional testimony by celebrities, movies, and Farm Aid benefit concerts, together with nationally reported suicides suggested to the public that rural areas were not immune to the stresses of modern life. Social science research has shown that stress is correlated with incidences of depression, poor health, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, and decreases in well-being among impacted rural residents (Belyea and Lobao 1990; Bush 1990 and Bourke and Cheers 1996).

But, not just farmers and farm communities were suffering from these problems. Other local communities also were experiencing major economic transformations (Claude and Luloff 1995). Earlier reliance on extractive (forestry, mining, fishing, and agriculture) and manufacturing industries gave way to employment in the service sector. Less jobs, lower wages, and fewer benefits, if any, heightened local stresses (Kassab, Luloff, and Schmidt 1995). Communities in search of new businesses and employment opportunities often engaged the process of "smokestack chasing" based on the use of a variety of incentives including tax holidays, highway access, subsidized sewer and water service, low-interest bonds, and the like, each of which further taxed local economies (Kassab and Luloff 1993).

Unfortunately, the vast majority of those places which captured such firms failed in their long-term efforts, since few firms lured to the "lucky winners" were encouraged to develop roots to the place, and fewer displayed elements of good corporate citizenship. Instead, when the honeymoon with the captured firm was over, such businesses continued to be footloose (Bluestone and Harrison 1982), chasing new sets of offerings, and beginning the cycle of luring, capturing, and losing such firms again (Kassab and Luloff 1993). As a result, many places remained stagnant with local economies offering limited opportunities.

Some have naively suggested that rural people and rural communities, because of their assumed integrated nature (Bush 1990), are better able to cope with and mediate stressful situations. However, others have argued that rural communities are less able to influence their situations because of increased linkages to extra-local corporations and governmental units, and increasing regulations (Luloff and Swanson 1990; Wilkinson 1991). These linkages, coupled with the presence of strong primary ties (Granovetter 1973), may act to significantly reduce residents' well-being and increase community disaffection (Luloff and Swanson 1995; see also Jacob, Bourke and Luloff 1997 and Jacob, Luloff and Bridger 1997).

More limited research has suggested that community integration and participation leads to improved well-being (cf. Keys and Frank 1987; Maton 1989). It suggests that while rural areas may be better off in this regard, some important costs are associated with rural community life. Many rural and small communities are dominated economically and politically by larger places. Further, spatial isolation from other communities creates additional problems. A lack of extensive social networks due to the limited number of potential contacts leaves residents of such places with fewer weak ties. Weak ties are secondary and tertiary acquaintances that are part of an individual's social support system which can be effective in mediating stress (Granovetter 1973). However, the prevalence of a large stress-vulnerable rural population has not been addressed in prior research.

These problems are not unique to the American experience. Despite their peaceful image, rural and small towns in many developed nations continue to suffer problems. In Australia, malindicators of community well-being, including rates of crime, divorce, poverty, poor health, inadequate housing, suicide, and lack of economic opportunities rival or surpass those of central cities (Bush 1990; Cheers 1990; Lawrence and Williams 1990; Thornthwaite et al. 1995; Bourke and Cheers 1996).

Growth patterns and the attendant problems associated with such changes also vary widely. Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, and Melbourne, all urban centers, are expanding in population. As these cities spread further into the surrounding hinterland, their metropolitan influence has positively affected the growth rates and local economies of the smaller towns within their range of influence. As in America, however, the experience of Australia's rural areas is not uniform. Many inland communities continue to decline, while others struggle to maintain a stable base. At the same time, rapid growth in coastal towns has caused stress and increased poverty among long-term residents. Further, many of these towns have grown dependent upon seasonal tourism which has the tendency to be environmentally harmful to fragile coastal ecosystems (cf. Davis and Harriott 1996). These changes are associated with increases in stress, poverty, and land use conflicts (Doyle and Kellow 1995). The absence of rural policy developed out of current research compounds these problems. Yet, our perceptions of rural and small town life belie such realities.

Images - correctly framed or not - do not define community. At best they are part of this story, albeit a large and central part. ***How we create narratives***, stories about places we live, or work, or know, or think we know - on the basis of experiences, real or contrived - says as much. And the basic data on places, including how many people, how different or similar they are, what they do for a living, how they live, what they volunteer for, what

they like and dislike also is important.

My talk today is about my perceptions of what makes a place a community. This is an important issue since so much of the political rhetoric invokes the term "community" without providing a definition or anchor for the term. In the absence of either, it is no wonder that confusion attends its usage.

Not everything I say will fit a narrative of your town but some pieces will and it is to these that I direct your attention. Where we find common ground is where we find community - both in the general case - that is, across communities, and, more specifically, in the local place. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's start with some definitions.

Most definitions of community have three components: (1) a geographic or territorial dimension, which I refer to as locality (this simply refers to where people live and meet their daily needs together); (2) a human life dimension - a place also is characterized by the fact that people live there, in a local society (local society usually is marked by a relatively complete social organization through which members satisfy their basic needs); and (3) finally, the process of locality-oriented social actions - that is, we focus on local processes through which community residents express their common interests in the local society.

But even when these three elements are present, community, as I like to think of it, might not exist. That is because we use this term with abandon, most often to conjure up images drawn from the nation's rural, agricultural, and/or small town heritage. In regarding villages - many with town commons, covered bridges, stone walls, and managed fields and forests worked by those captured by Grant Wood - it should be remembered that the term also has been applied to prisons, asylums, and institutions. The State College, Pennsylvania, area I call home, for example, often recognizes and pays homage to its two largest communities: Penn State and the State Pen (actually, the location where death penalties are carried out).

But there is no impunity in such usage. All it does is rip the essential meanings from the term "community." In what sense, for example, do pretty pictures speak to people interacting at high levels for the general good? Or when were the residents of prisons, asylums, and institutions granted the same freedoms as those in the places we really mean when we invoke the term?

Community is a variable, not a given.

Community emerges only when the conditions are right, and it lasts as long as the people in an area continue to care about each other and the place and express this caring in the

actions they take to enhance general well-being. Admittedly, my definition is exclusive. In America, and I suspect in other developed nations throughout the world, particularly during the last three decades, selfless behavior has become an exception. Not only are individuals more interested in personal advancement and their own well-being, but their places of residence have become increasingly reflective of them.

As a result, places, that is local societies, have become increasingly abundant. Community, on the other hand, is a far rarer breed.

I do not come to this belief because I am overly pessimistic, nor do I long for community from some sense of nostalgia or romanticism. Rather, I reach this conclusion from my reading of the wide and discordant literature on community and more than twenty-five years of research on this subject.

The biggest influence on my thinking has been the fact that almost all definitions of "community" stress the importance of local social relationships. These interactions often reflect common experiences and/or occurrences within the community, and such events shape discourse and action.

It is for this reason that I believe community only emerges when local citizens exhibit behavior patterns that express purposive collectivistic orientations. That is, community arises when people come together to address local issues of concern.

This does not suggest that the structural characteristics of a place are not critical. Of course they are. I include among these more visible characteristics of place such things as (1) the local labor force structure; (2) its demographic profile (its population size, density, and heterogeneity); (3) its economic infrastructure (including its transportation facilities, industrial base, and mix of retail and service establishments); (4) its physical location (including whether or not it is near or at the rural-urban interface and its proximity to centers of economic expansion); and of course (5) its natural resource endowments. Each of these traits serves as an important input for assessing community vitality and chances for development and progress. They serve as the arena for local action. But together they say little about the ability of locals to influence the directions a place might take.

The mobilization of locality-based, collective human resources is a significant and generally ignored feature of community. Indeed, I think it is the signal characteristic of place, and the vital ingredient in explaining what makes a place a community.

There is an important temporal dimension to collective identity - a common identity,

whether rooted to a place or ethnic group, presupposes connections to one's forebears. Bridger has argued (1996, 1998) that narratives are used to make these connections. They give people unity through time and tend to mute contemporary differences. By telling the story of a people and a community, a "We" is created and maintained. Without this kind of symbolic connection between the present and past, collective action is extremely difficult to sustain for any length of time. Of course, the kind of social action which I suggest is so vital to the community presupposes a sense of collective identity, and this identity is place-based. It depends, in large part, on narrative that links people to place over time.

My framework, which is traced to Wilkinson (1991) and Kaufman (1959) and their associates, takes social interaction as the central element of community - that is, community emerges from social interaction. Community, from this perspective, occurs in places and is place-oriented, but the place itself, strictly speaking, is not the community. Instead, community is conceptualized as a process of place-oriented social interactions that express shared interests among residents of the local society, and that are expressed in prevailing local narratives. Use of the interactional approach in rural and small town settings directs attention to forces that block or retard the emergence of the interactional community in particular settlements (Wilkinson 1986; Luloff and Swanson 1995).

Unfortunately, a people vs. place distinction has emerged in practice and theory. Most of the theoretical and policy focus has been on one or the other dimension - people or place. Development policies, for example, have focused either on the human capital needs of residents or on improving the local labor market. Rarely have people and place been considered together, as a package that cannot be usefully disentangled. As John Agnew (1984) argues, a distinction between people and place " ... can only be made if one adopts an economic ideology that commodifies people and places." By following such an ideology, it is arguable that both people and places are made worse off because we don't see that they mutually constitute one another. Such concerns have meant the people-place relationship has not been addressed well.

Instead, much of the extant research and policy work has tended to focus on the more visible characteristics of place. Given this, it is not difficult to explain how so many places in search of new businesses and employment opportunities engage in "smokestack chasing" based almost entirely on the use of macro-structural incentives such as tax holidays, highway access, sewer and water service, low-interest bonds, and the like.

Clearly, such an approach to community development is short-sighted. It fundamentally ignores the capacity of people to manage, utilize, and enhance those resources available to them. I call this ability to act ***community agency*** and define it simply as the capacity for

9

collective action. It is one of the most important dimensions of a community's social infrastructure. Using it focuses attention on the key natural resource a place has - namely, its people. When we use the term community agency, we are focusing our attention on the coming together of people in a local society to address local needs. These folks may have intense conflicts or be of like mind - it really does not matter - but the will to act collectively comes from their recognition of shared needs.

This does not suggest or assume that these people share a full range of interests or even a common understanding of a problem. Of course, community agency might reflect these common grounds, but it is much more likely to occur as a result of the uninspiring local actions of organizing committee meetings to address local sewer and water needs, or to establish a business incubator, or to organize a celebration and/or parade.

Nor should community agency conjure romantic notions of strong local solidarity. The collective capacity of volition and choice, however narrowed by structural conditions, makes community agency a central element in local well-being, and in understanding what makes a place a community. That is, communities make choices and act on them. Knowing how these choices are made, what and how perceptions of local issues are constructed, and the ability of members of such communities to access and process information are essential to utilizing economic, social, and natural resource endowments.

To attempt to provide some meat to the "skeletal structure" being fashioned here, I turn to some recently collected and analyzed data which offers a comparative look at concepts associated with community agency. My data are rooted in studies I have been conducting in Pennsylvania over the past ten years, but the lessons reach farther than that, see for example (Luloff, Bourke, Jacob and Seshan 1995; Luloff 1996; Bourke and Luloff 1996; Bourke, Jacob and Luloff 1996) I hope.

It is extremely difficult to make generalizations about the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The state is marked by the presence of two faces: one of growth, the other of decline. It boasts old industry and new; viable agriculture, forestry and mining enterprises; and contains more than 2,600 municipal governments, with big cities and small rural towns at its core. Because of these variations, the only things that can be said with some assurance are broad statements with many provisos.

Here, we use data purposively collected by a team of social scientists interested in understanding the impacts of the ongoing changes in Pennsylvania's places. These data are drawn from a study funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture which focused on land-use issues at the rural-urban interface. In order to be included in the study, a place

had to have at least 60% of its land base in agriculture, at least 5% of its population residing on farms, or 5% or more of the workforce in farm occupations. Of the 2,611 municipalities in Pennsylvania, 1,494 or 58% had no agricultural presence and were excluded from study. However, that still left a sizeable number of places to examine. To reduce this load we created a typology of agricultural places at the rural-urban interface.

Using such a typology helped us to identify, simplify, and order data so that it could be described in comparable terms. Thus, in our study, which had lots of secondary data, we used a procedure which helped us characterize and classify a limited number of places. Seven key indicators were used to identify four types of agricultural communities: (1) % land in agriculture in 1975; (2) % employed in agricultural occupations in 1990; (3) % urban population in 1990; (4) population size 1990; (5) the migration rate between 1980 and 1990; (6) the population growth rate between 1980 and 1990; and (7) % housing change between 1980 and 1990.

The four identified types included the following places: (1) those without urban presence or pressure (relatively isolated agricultural communities which have experienced few changes in land uses and levels of urbanization); (2) those with limited urban presence and no urban pressure (places where agricultural activities coexist with urban residences and amenities); (3) those with urban presence but no urban pressure (places marked by the co-existence of agricultural and urban land uses as indicated by the presence of urban amenities and productive farm land); and (4) those with both urban presence and pressure (agricultural areas not only adjacent to an urban presence but where this presence is associated with increased pressure for converting farm land to urban uses).

Once these types were identified, we conducted windshield reconnaissance of such places in various areas of the state, and selected four areas for in-depth study (Beavertown area of Snyder County; Bedford area of Bedford County; Meadville area of Crawford County; and Leacock area of Lancaster County). Representing type 1 - no urban presence or pressure - was the Beavertown area of Snyder County, which included five municipalities. This isolated agricultural valley has a stable economy, with manufacturing, mining, and agriculture. Its population base has remained stable as well.

Representing type 2 - limited urban presence and no urban pressure - was the Bedford area of Bedford County, which included 14 municipalities. Bedford is a mountainous region with active forestry, mining, and farming interests, and emerging light manufacturing and tourism businesses which have experienced retirement-related growth over the past ten years.

Representing type 3 - urban presence but no pressure - was the Meadville area of Crawford County, which included eight municipalities. This area has suffered population decline since 1975, yet many urban amenities are present along with a viable agricultural industry.

Finally, representing type 4 - both urban presence and pressure - was an area centered around Leacock in Lancaster County, which included eight municipalities. Here, commercial and residential development from the expansion of Lancaster city and the demand for rural residences from the larger metro areas to the east have led to a decline in available farm

Map of the four study sites
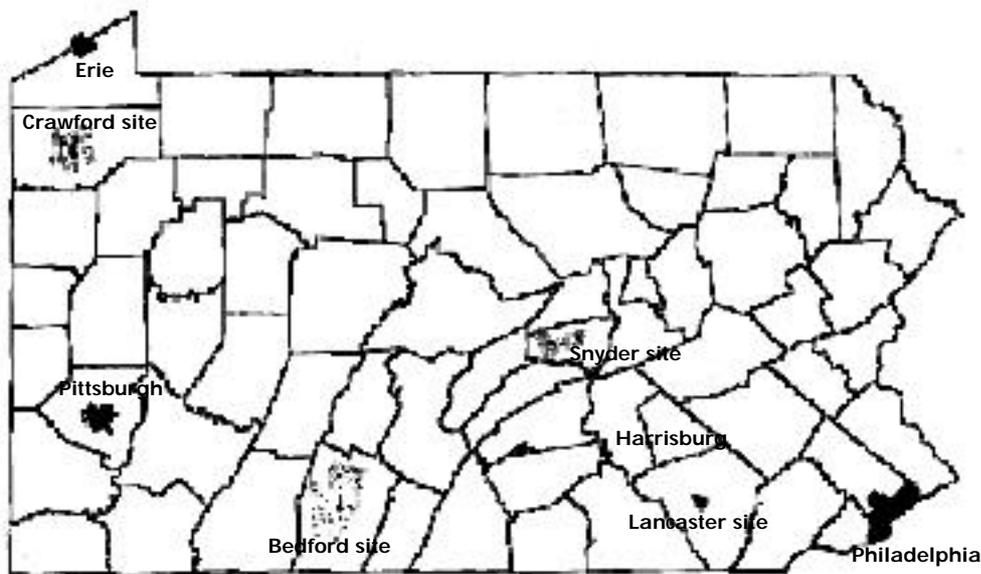
land.

In each of these areas, we conducted interviews with key leaders and active citizens to identify the major local issues related to land use, agriculture, development, and the environment. Then, to investigate the responses of local citizens to these issues, a questionnaire was developed which not only contained specific questions on these topics, but also sought information on a variety of social issues including community attachment, community ties, and community participation. Through an analysis of the latter data, I hope to demonstrate the central role played by purposive collectivistic actions in helping to make the transition from place to community.

To begin, we should say something briefly about who these people are. Those from Lancaster were slightly younger, had shorter lengths of residence, and tended to have lower educational levels. More women responded in Crawford, where people had the highest education levels, were the least likely to be married, attended church less often, and were the least likely to report being Republican. Bedford had the highest response from men; its residents were the oldest and they had lived in the community the longest. Snyder residents were most likely to report being Republican. All 4 places were similar in that four in five reported having children, all were characterized by long lengths of residence by local citizens (more than 30 years), and all but Lancaster residents reported incomes slightly less than $30,000.

Now, let's compare measures of community attachment, ties, and activeness among these sites. First, to what degree did community residents feel at home? The overwhelming majority of residents, regardless of place, feel very much at home. However, respondents from Bedford felt most at home, more so than those in Crawford and Snyder.

Turning to levels of interest in their community, no statistically significant differences were found among places.

In the third measure of attachment, respondents were asked how sorry or pleased they would be to leave their community. Responses to this question indicated significant differences among places, with Crawford residents differing significantly from those in Bedford and Lancaster, and Snyder residents differed from those from Bedford.

Next, let's look at ties to a community. First, respondents were asked to indicate the proportion of adults in the community they knew. Bedford residents reported knowing the most adults, followed by those from Snyder; residents in Crawford and Lancaster were most likely to indicate knowing less than half the adults. Respondents from Bedford and Snyder were statistically different from those from Crawford and Lancaster.

When asked to indicate the frequency with which they see or meet with family, the most common response was more than once a week. Those from Crawford were found to be statistically different from Snyder residents.

Also, we asked how often they met with kin. Crawford residents, who meet most often with kin - monthly or few times a year basis - differed significantly from both Snyder (where respondents meet most regularly - more than once a week) and Lancaster residents differed from Snyder folks.

Next, we asked how often they meet with close friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and neighbors. No significant differences by place were uncovered for any of these relationships.

Snyder

How do these respondents feel about their neighbors? Crawford residents felt the most distant. This was reflected in the fact that these residents differed significantly from those in Bedford, Lancaster, and Snyder.

We also sought information on respondents' activeness or participation in community-related activities. First, respondents were asked to describe their levels of involvement in community or local area activities, events, or organizations, and then to report the number of hours spent per month in organized community activities. In neither case were significant differences uncovered.

Next, respondents were asked whether they'd ever been involved in a controversial local issue. Bedford residents were least likely to be so involved, differing significantly from those in Snyder who were most likely to be involved.

Finally, we asked if the respondents or any members of their household participated in a community improvement activity during the past year. Nearly 40% indicated some involvement and there were no significant differences among places.

All of the above relationships were measured at the bivariate level - that is, only two variables at a time were explored. But, as we all know, things really don't happen like that. To investigate further, we developed ordinary least square regression models using the variables discussed. The first model (see Table 1) explored the relationship between participation in community improvement activities and levels of activeness, community ties, and socio-demographics.

What is most clear is that there are significant differences among the four places and no predictor is uniformly important. In Crawford, the more active you described your level of involvement, the more often you had regular meeting with colleagues, larger household size, higher education, and lower household incomes all contributed to participation in community improvement activities. This model accounted for one-quarter of the variance.

In Snyder, participation in nonrequired activities, lower education, and less frequent meetings with friends also contributed to participation in community improvement activities. This model accounted for 28% of the variation.

In Lancaster, smaller household size, more frequent meetings with neighbors, participation in nonrequired activities, and more active involvement all contributed to participation in community improvement activities. This was the best model, accounting

Table 1. Regression of Participation in Community Improvement Activity by Levels of Activeness, Community Ties, and Sociodemographics

	Crawford	Snyder	Lancaster	Bedford
On average, about how many hours do you ordinarily spend in a normal month attending or taking part in any kind of organized group activity or event that involves other members of this community?				.32
In general, how would you describe your level of involvement in community or local area activity, events, or organizations?	.34		.32	
Do you participate in any non-required activities, not associated with any formal positions you hold?		.31	.25	
How often do you meet with colleagues?	.17			
How often do you meet with friends?		-.18		
How often do you meet with neighbors?			.24	
How many close, personal relationships do you think is best?				.25
Household income	-.24			
Household size	.15		-.20	
Education	.15	-.26		
Adj. R^2	.25	.28	.37	.18

for slightly more than one-third of the variance.

Finally, in Bedford County, the number of hours spent in organized group activity and the greater number of close personal relationships contributed to participation in community improvement activities. This model had the poorest fit as indicated by the fact that less

Table 2. Regression of Hours Spent per Month in Organized Community Activities by Levels of Activeness, Community Ties, and Sociodemographics

	Crawford	Snyder	Lancaster	Bedford
To what degree do you feel "at home" here?			-.26	
How sorry or pleased would you be to leave this community?			.15	
About what proportion of adults in the community would you say you know?			.14	.22
Of all the relationships you have in this community, how many are close, personal relationships?			-.20	
Of all the relationships you have in this community, how many are not especially close but still involve people you know?				-.21
How many relationships, which are not especially close, do you think is best?		-.19		
How would you describe your level of involvement in local activities, events, or orgs.?	.59	.70	.52	.67
In the past year have you or any HH member participated in a community improvement activity?				.17
Do you participate in any non-required activities?	.14	.17		
Household size	-.14		.17	
Highest level of education			-.22	
Adj. R^2	.44	.63	.61	.57

than one-fifth of the variation was explained.

In the second model we explored the relationship between hours spent per month in organized community activities and levels of activeness, community ties, and socio-demographics. As shown in Table 2, each place had a different set of predictors, although in each place, the most significant contributor to explaining hours spent was level of

16

involvement in local activities. In Crawford, those from larger households were less likely to spend time on organized community activities, but their participation in nonrequired activities added to the number of hours they spent per month. With the strong influence of their involvement in local activities, this model accounted for nearly half the variance as indicated by the adjusted R^2.

In Snyder, participation in nonrequired activities also added to the number of hours spent per month, but responses to a question about the number of non-close relationships reduced the number of hours spent. When their involvement in local activities also is considered, this model accounts for nearly two-thirds of the variance.

Lancaster folks provided a very different perspective - there, not feeling at home, having less education, and having fewer close personal relationships contributed to more hours spent in organized activities; in addition, those with larger household sizes, who would feelsorry about leaving the place, who knew many adults, and who were involved in local activities also contributed more hours in organized activities. This model accounted for 61% of the variation. Finally, in Bedford, those involved in local activities, who knew more adults, who had participated in a community improvement activity, and who had fewer non-especially close relationships with people contributed more hours in organized activities. This model accounted for 57% of the variation.

Conclusion, Discussion, and Implications

This study clearly shows that despite identifying a set of very different parameters for grouping places in Pennsylvania with an agricultural presence, there are few differences in macro or social structural conditions. Yet, when we simultaneously examined socio-demographics, community attachment, ties and activeness measures, and levels of activeness or participation in community-related activities, we uncovered numerous significant differences among these four places.

Such differences, from my perspective, reflect levels of local agency. People do get involved in various activities and commit their time and resources to the resolution of local social problems. The kinds of problems clearly influence the amount of activity and the people involved. For example, in places experiencing decline, general levels of participation are often low compared to those places where growth and change dominate, while in areas facing rapid expansion of residential, commercial, and/or industrial properties on former agricultural land, it is common to find many individuals actively involved.

Further, in both regression models - participation in community improvement activities

and hours spent per month in organized community activities - different variables were found to play significant roles. This reveals the fact that community is indeed a variable. Such differences are both quantitative and qualitative in nature. More importantly, these differences indicate purposive collectivistic responses to broad issues facing a community.

In my opinion, it is naive to simply examine structural or macro parameters of a place and attempt to conclude something about its level of communityness. The only way to get at such a measure is to examine whether people participate, for what reasons/issues, and at what level. Unfortunately, we spend far too little time documenting the latter.

Moreover, determining the average level of participation in a place provides a clear target for local leaders. For example, in each place we studied, we found that about 4 in 10 respondents, or members of their household, had participated in a community improvement activity during the previous year. Combined, this effort represented thousands of hours of work, per month, directed at improving the local quality of life.

Such numbers also told us that 60% did not participate during the previous year. If even one-quarter of these people could be recruited to volunteer, significant numbers of voluntary hours would be realized, broader networks of locally active citizens would emerge, and even greater levels of local activeness and improvements to local quality of life would occur. In other related research we discovered that one of the major impediments to getting these people involved was the fact that no one asked for their help. Whether we should have to ask for assistance for community-related activities is not the issue. If all it takes is to ask, then why aren't we asking for help and participation more often?

A place becomes a community when its residents assume a purposive collectivistic orientation - when they come together of their own minds to address issues related to general well-being. Such contributions of time and effort are selfless; they result in an overall contribution to community well-being. Personal rewards, if necessary, are realized in improvements for all.

So, I guess my message is to remember that the most important natural resource an area has is its people and that for anything near sustainability to be reached, efforts must be made to cultivate a sense of selflessness - that is, of caring for each other and the place.

Where such concern is expressed, not only in words, but more importantly by actions, community emerges. There, people are energized, problems are seen as opportunities, and human volition is alive and well. We all want to live in and belong to such places. Getting there requires our active involvement. We can no longer allow or encourage free riders. Having community requires work at it. This means we must be inclusive, open, and willing to deal with change. I remain convinced that these things are possible and increasingly

necessary as we move towards the new millennium. Indeed, if we do not do these things, the future we all want will not likely occur.

Bibliography

ACOSS. (1993). *Poverty Is a Health Hazard*. Sydney, Australia: Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS).

ACOSS. (1994). *Down But Not Out: Helping People Most Deeply Disadvantaged in the Labour Market.* Sydney, Australia: Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS).

Agnew, J.A. (1984). "Devaluing Place: 'People Prosperity vs. Place Prosperity' and Regional Planning." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 1:35-45.

Belyea, M.J. and L.M. Lobao. (1990). "Psychosocial consequences of agricultural transformation: the farm crisis and depression." *Rural Sociology* 55(1):58-75.

Bluestone, B. and B. Harrison. (1982). *The Deindustrialization of America: Plant Closings, Community Abandonment, and the Dismantling of Basic Industry.* New York, NY: Basic Books.

Bourke, L. and B. Cheers. (1996). "Towards a rural policy agenda." Paper presented at The Regional Australia Conference. September, Bunbury, Western Australia.

Bourke, L. and A.E. Luloff. (1996). "Rural Tourism Development: Are Communities in Southwest Rural Pennsylvania Ready to Participate?" Pps. 277-295 in L.C. Harrison and W. Husbands (eds.), *Practicing Responsible Tourism: International Case Studies in Tourism Planning, Development, and Marketing.* New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.

Bourke, L., S. Jacob, and A.E. Luloff. (1996). "Response to Pennsylvania's Agricultural Preservation Programs." *Rural Sociology* 61(4):606-629.

Bridger, J.C. (1996). "Community Imagery and the Built Environment." *The Sociological Quarterly* 37:353-374.

Bridger, J.C. and D.R. Maines. (1998). "Narrative Structures and Catholic Church Closings in Detroit." *Qualitative Sociology* 21(3):319-340.

Bush, R. (1990). "Rural youth suicide." *Rural Welfare Research Bulletin* 6 (December): 25-27.

Castells, M. (1977). *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Castles, I. (1994). *1994 Yearbook (Australia).* Canberra, Australia: Australian Bureau of

Statistics.

Cheers, B. (1990). "Rural disadvantage in Australia." *Australian Social Work* 43(1):5-13.

Claude, L. and A.E. Luloff. (1995). *Comparative Case Studies: Coudersport, Austin, Liberty, Emporium.* A.E. & R.S. Research Report 252. University Park, PA: College of Agricultural Sciences, the Pennsylvania State University.

Coward, R.T. and R.W. Jackson. (1983). "Environmental stress: The rural family." In H.I. McCubbin and C.R. Figley (eds.), *Stress and the Family: Volume One*. New York, NY: Brunner/Mazel.

Davis, D. and V.J. Harriott. (1996). "Sustainable Tourism Development or a Case of Loving a Special Place to Death? Scuba Diving in the Julian Rocks Aquatic Reserve, Eastern Australia." Pps. 422-444 in L.C. Harrison and W. Husbands (eds.), *Practicing Responsible Tourism: International Case Studies in Tourism Planning, Development, and Marketing.* New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.

Doyle, T. and A. Kellow. (1995). *Environmental Politics and Policy Making in Australia.* Melbourne, Australia: MacMillan.

Granovetter, M.S. (1973). "The strength of weak ties." *American Sociological Review* 78 May):1360-1380.

Gusfield, J. (1975). *Community: A Critical Response.* New York, NY: Harper and Row.

Hoppe, R.A. (1990). "Defining and measuring poverty in the nonmetropolitan United States using the survey of income and program participation." *Social Indicator Research* 28(3):17- 27.

Jacob, S., L. Bourke, and A.E. Luloff. (1997). "Rural community stress, distress, and well-being: A Pennsylvania assessment." *Journal of Rural Studies* 13(3):275-288.

Jacob, S., A.E. Luloff, and J.C. Bridger. (1997). "Pennsylvania rural communities and individual mental health." Paper presented at the Annual Meetings of the Community Development Society. July, Athens, GA.

Kassab, C. and A.E. Luloff. (1993). "The new buffalo hunt: Chasing the service sector." *Journal of the Community Development Society* 24(2):175-195.

Kassab, C., A.E. Luloff, and F. Schmidt. (1995). "The changing impact of industry, household structure, and residence on household well-being." *Rural Sociology* 60(1):67-90.

Kaufman, H. (1959). "Towards and Interactional Conception of Community" *Social Forces* 38(1):8-17

Keys, C.B. and S. Frank. (1987). "Community psychology and the study of organizations: A reciprocal approach." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 15(3):239-251.

Lawrence, G. (1987). *Capitalism and the Countryside*. Sydney, Australia: Pluto Press.

Lawrence, G. and C. Williams. (1990). "The dynamics of decline: Implications for social welfare delivery in rural Australia." In Cullen, T., P. Dunn, and G. Lawrence (eds.), *Rural Health and Welfare in Australia.* Wagga Wagga, Australia: Charles Sturt University.

Luloff, A.E. (1987). *Rural People and Places: A Symposium on Typologies.* Publication No. 47. University Park, PA: The Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development.

Luloff, A.E. (1990). "Community and social change: How do small communities act?" Pps. 214-227 in Luloff, A.E. and L.E. Swanson. (1990). *American Rural Communities.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Luloff, A.E. (1996). "The doing of rural development research." Pp. 25-30 in H.E. Echelberger (editor), *Rural America: A Living Tapestry. Proceedings of "The Research Fit" Module, 3rd Annual U.S. Forest Service Rural Communities Assistance Conference.* Knoxville, TN; 1996. Radnor, PA: USDA Forest Service.

Luloff, A.E., L. Bourke, S. Jacob, and S. Seshan. (1995). *Farm and Non-farm Inter-dependencies at the Rural-Urban Interface.* Final Research Report to The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. University Park, PA: College of Agricultural Sciences.

Luloff, A.E. and L.E. Swanson. (1990). *American Rural Communities.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Luloff, A.E. and L.E. Swanson. (1995). "Community agency and disaffection: Enhancing collective resources." Pp. 351-372 in Lionel J. Beaulieu and David Mulkey (eds.), *Investing in People: The Human Capital Needs of Rural America.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Maton, K.I. (1989). "Community settings as buffers of life stress? Highly supportive churches, mutual help groups, and senior centers." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 17(2):203-232.

McMichael, P. (1996). Globalization: Myths and realities." *Rural Sociology* 61(1):25-55.

Nalson, J.A. and R.A. Craig. (1987). "Rural Australia." Pps. 311-342 in Ensel, S. and M.

National Mental Health Association (1988) Report of the National Action Commission on the Mental Health of Rural Americans. Washington, D.C.: National Mental Health Association.

Nisbet, R. (1969). *The Quest for Community.* London, UK: Oxford Press.

Sher, J. and K.R. Sher. (1994). "Beyond conventional wisdom: Rural development as if Australia's rural people really mattered." Pps. 9-32 in McSwan, D. and M. McShane (eds.), *Issues Affecting Rural Communities.* Townsville, Australia: The Rural Education Research and Development Centre at James Cook University.

Stein, M. (1960). *The Eclipse of Community: An Interpretation in American Studies.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Thornthwaite, T., C. Kingston, and P. Walsh. (1995). *Drawing the Line on Poverty.* Brisbane, Australia: Queensland Council of Social Services.

Wagenfeld, M.O. (1990). "Mental health and rural America: A decade review." *The Journal of Rural Health* 6(4):507-522.

Wagenfeld, M.O., H.F. Goldsmith, D. Stiles, and R.W. Manderscheid. (1988). "Inpatient mental health services in metropolitan and nonmetropolitan counties." *Journal of Community Psychology* 9(2):13-28.

Warren, R.L. (1978). *The Community in America.* Third Edition. Chicago, IL: Rand McNally.

Wilkinson, K.P. (1986). "In search of the community in the changing countryside." Rural Sociology 51(1):1-17.

Wilkinson, K.P. (1991). *The Community in Rural America.* New York, NY: Greenwood Press.

Willits, Fern K., R.C. Bealer, and V.L. Timbers. (1992). *The Rural Mystique: Some Suggestions for Rural Development.* Experiment Station Bulletin 870. University Park, PA.: The Pennsylvania State University.

Willits, F.K. and A.E. Luloff. (1994). "Urban Pennsylvanian's misperceptions of rural conditions." *Rural Development Perspectives* 10(1): 10-27.

Biosketch

Dr. A.E. Luloff is Professor of Rural Sociology in the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology. He received his under-graduate degree from Cornell University, his Masters degree from North Carolina State University, and his doctoral degree from the Pennsylvania State University. Upon graduation from Penn State, he joined the faculty at the University of New Hampshire. In 1990 he returned to Penn State where he currently advises several Ph.D. and MS. students. He teaches, conducts research, and writes on the role and importance of community with funding from multiple agencies. His work primarily elaborates on the impacts of rapid social change, as a result of demographic shifts, on the human and natural resource bases of the community. Changes in land cover and use, particularly in areas at the rural-urban fringe, and the impact of rural development policy on small and rural communities have been the central features of his work. He currently serves as the Secretary-Treasurer of the Inter-national Rural Sociology Association, edits *The Journal of the Community Development Society of America*, and is an elected member of the Council of the Rural Sociological Society. In August 1997 he was named the recipient of the Rural Sociological Society's "Excellence in Research Award."

Previous Positions: Associate Professor of Rural Sociology, Penn State, 1990-1993; Assistant to Associate Professor of Rural Sociology and Community Development, University of New Hampshire, 1977-1990; Community Development Program Coordinator, University of New Hampshire, 1979-1988.

RSS and Related Activities: Membership Committee, 1979-1980, Chair, 1981-1982; Co-chair Local Arrangements Committee, Annual Meetings, Burlington, Vermont, 1979; Member of Council, 1981-1982, 1984-1985; 1998-1999; Awards Committee, 1998, Chair, 1999; Associate Editor *Rural Sociology*, 1982-1985; Program Chair, Annual Meetings, Blacksburg, Virginia, 1985; Co-Chair, Rural Policy Interest Group, 1989-1990; 1996-1997; Liaison, Local Arrangements Committee, RSS Annual Meetings, Penn State, 1992; Nominations Committee, 1995-1996; Secretary-Treasurer, International Rural Sociology Association, 1993-present.

Honors and Awards: Sigma Xi; Alpha Kappa Delta; Fellowship, Japan Science and Technology Agency, February-March, 1996; RSS Research Award, 1997; Book Review Editor, *Journal of Rural Health,* 1992-1994; Editor, *The Journal of the Community Development Society,* 1997- present.

Publications and Other Contributions: Over 100 publications including co-editor of *Community: A Biography in Honor of the Life and Work of Ken Wilkinson,* 1998, University Park, PA: Northeast Regional Rural Development Center (with S. Nelson

and E. Zuber), *American Rural Communities,* 1990, Boulder, CO: Westview Press (with L. Swanson), and *The Structure and Impact of Population Redistribution in New England,* 1986, University Park, PA: Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (with T. Steahr); author or coauthor of articles in such journals as *Rural Sociology, Journal of the Community Development Society, Journal of Rural Studies, American Sociological Review, Sociology and Social Research,* and *Social Science Quarterly*. His research has been supported by federal agencies (e.g., USDA/CSREES/ NRICGP, USDA/Water Quality), state agencies (e.g., Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Center for Rural Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania Game Commission, Pennsylvania Department of Forestry), and others (e.g., World Wildlife Fund).

Selected Recent Publications: "Exploring the Meaning of Rural Through Cognitive Maps." Rural Sociology 60(2): 260-273; 1995; (with S. Jacob). "Achieving Better Forest Management Through a Forest Land Preservation Program: A Pennsylvania Perspective." *Ecosystem Health* 2(1): 69-80; 1996; (with S. Jacob, L. Bourke, and J.C. Finley). "Farm Structure and Attitudes to Environmental Problems of Hokkaido Dairy Farms." *Japanese Journal of Farm Management* 34(3): 87-90; 1996; (with H. Ukawa and S. Yokoyama). "Response to Pennsylvania's Agricultural Preservation Programs." *Rural Sociology* 61(4): 606-629; 1996; (with L. Bourke and S. Jacob). "Women and Leadership in Rural Areas." *Women and Politics* 17(4):1-23; 1997; (with L. Bourke). "Rural Community Stress, Distress, and Well-Being in Pennsylvania." *Journal of Rural Studies* 13(3):275-288; 1997; (with S. Jacob and L. Bourke). "The Association of Forest Recreation with Environmentalism." *Environment and Behavior* 30(2):235-246; 1998; (with M. Nord and J.C. Bridger). "NIMBY and the Hazardous and Toxic Waste Siting Dilemma: The Need for Concept Clarification." *Society and Natural Resources* 11(1):81-89; 1998; (with S.L. Albrecht and L. Bourke).