

Counterurbanisation and the emergence of a post-productivist economy in South Africa's arid Karoo region, 1994-2010

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Abstract

This review article serves to broach the concept of the “post-productivist countryside” where the primacy of agricultural production is supplanted by tertiary industries such as tourism, recreational farming, and arts and crafts production. The essay maintains that advances in communications technology have facilitated the phenomenon of “counterurbanisation” whereby a new breed of well-qualified, highly mobile professionals (a “creative class”) opt for rural living, all the while continuing to derive urban-denominated incomes. In recent years South Africa's arid Karoo hinterland has enjoyed something of a renaissance occasioned by an influx of human capital from the cities. Although the onset of post-productivism inevitably entails costs it is argued that these are more than compensated for by the beneficial cultural and economic impacts of the new rural creative class in the Karoo.

Keywords: Post-productivism; Karoo; Rural development; Creative class; Post-apartheid; Counterurbanisation.

Introduction

The type of rural transformation described by Ilbery as a “post-productivist countryside” typically manifests itself as a shift from primary agriculture to the tertiary sector.¹ This sector is usually characterised by a burgeoning number of tourism facilities, game farms, recreational features, and arts and crafts enterprises. This is a form of rural re-orientation which has been the subject

¹ B Ilbery, “Dimensions of rural change”, B Ilbery (ed.), *The geography of rural change* (Harlow, Longman, 1998), pp. 1-10.

of academic scrutiny in Britain, Europe and the United States of America.²

The lion's share of South Africa's arid interior consists of the 400 000 square kilometres of the Karoo which is bordered by arid Namaqualand on the west coast, the Kalahari desert to the north-west, and the False or Grassy Karoo to the north. The Karoo is divided up among four provincial administrations and is therefore very rarely treated as a coherent regional entity in its own right by the central government. The region is very sparsely populated and consists of about 80 small towns with populations generally below 10 000. There are, however, a few larger regional centres which qualify as middle-order towns. The region has traditionally been given over to rangeland pastoralism, mainly sheep, and poverty is widespread.

This review article describes the onset of post-productivism in South Africa's arid Karoo region and draws out some of the implications of this. In particular, the article will explore the social dimensions of this transformation and the urban-to-rural migration of middle-class individuals (a phenomenon also known as "counterurbanisation" or "reverse migration").

The discussion includes a review of the international literature detailing the upsurge of interest in rural lifestyles, and the "Slow Movement", and compares and contrasts this with the South African experience. It draws attention to some of the costs associated with post-productivism before moving on to show how these are amply compensated for by the beneficial concomitants of post-productivism in the Karoo. A short history of the Karoo is also provided.

Hoogendoorn and Visser³ in commenting on the "emerging South African post-productivist countryside" contend that the phenomenon arose concurrently with the demise and ultimate collapse of apartheid, and they point to the role of second homes in rural areas as giving impetus to post-productivist developments. For the purposes of the arguments to be presented here it is instructive to note that the years of apartheid's decline also happened to coincide with South Africa's unprecedentedly rapid adoption of a range of communications technologies, namely mobile telephony, e-mail and the

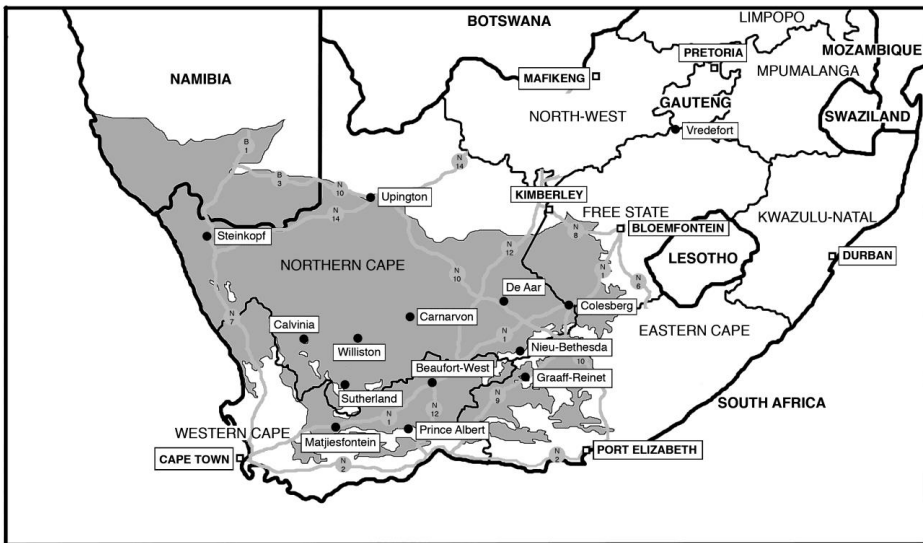
2 See for example CL Beale, "The changing nature of rural employment", DL Brown & JM Wardwell, (eds.), *New directions in urban-rural migration: The population turnaround in rural America* (New York, Academic Press, 1980), pp. 37-50; B Ilbery & I Bowler, "From agricultural productivism to post-productivism", B Ilbery, (ed.), *The geography of rural change* (Harlow, Longman, 1998), pp. 57-84; R Askwith, *The lost village: In search of a forgotten rural England* (London, Ebury Press, 2008).

3 G Hoogendoorn & G Visser, "Tourism, second homes and an emerging South African post-productivist countryside", *Tourism Review International*, 14, 2011, pp. 1-15.

internet. In the space of a very few years these technologies had become virtually ubiquitous in all but the remotest rural areas.

Since the mid-1990s, the Karoo has experienced a statistically unimportant, but economically significant, “counterurbanisation” of professionals from South Africa’s urban centres to its small towns.⁴ This migration has reinvigorated the economies of many of these towns and has also led to dormant entrepreneurial talent being reawakened as local residents have re-evaluated their farms’ or their localities’ assets and developed new livelihood options stimulated by the new perspectives brought by the erstwhile city-dwellers.

Image 1: South Africa showing the Nama and Succulent Karoo biomes merged



Source: MK Ingle, “Making the most of ‘nothing’: Astro-tourism, the sublime, and the Karoo as a ‘space destination’”, *Transformation*, 74, 2010, p. 94.

Voting with their feet

A major stimulus for the post-productivist movement internationally is the change of pace which many urban residents are seeking.⁵ This is of a piece

4 For difficulties associated with quantifying the precise extent of this phenomenon see MK Ingle, “A ‘creative class’ in South Africa’s arid Karoo region”, *Urban Forum*, 21, 2010, pp. 408-417.

5 R Askwith, *The lost village...*, pp. 43-45.

with the “deconcentration theory” described by Lewis⁶ which states that long-standing preferences for lower density locations are being less inhibited by institutional and technological barriers and that improved standards of living, and technical advances in transport, communication and production, are facilitating a convergence in the availability of amenities that were previously restricted to more densely populated locales. According to Honoré:⁷

Cities have always attracted energetic and dynamic people, but urban life itself acts as a giant particle accelerator. When people move to the city, they start to do everything faster.

The advent of mobile telecommunications has only served to make urban living in the developed world ever more frenetic (the “fast lane”). But advances in telecommunications simultaneously hold out the option of a bolthole from the urban frenzy. Mobile telecommunications can make urban living possible at one remove – that is to say, rural living with an urban income. This becomes a financially viable option for people not bound to a specific workplace.

In the late 1980s, the New York-based Trends Research Institute identified a phenomenon known as “downshifting”, which entails exchanging a pressurised “high-earning, high-tempo lifestyle for a more relaxed, less consumerist existence” – in other words being willing to sacrifice income in return for the quality-of-life attributes inherent in slowness and a surfeit of time.⁸ By the late 1980s, some big corporations were already running in-house prototypes of e-mail on networked personal computers, which enabled staff to work at home, and this facilitated a measure of downshifting in residential location.

Carlo Petrini, the Italian founder of the Slow Food Movement, rejects the notion that the Slow Movement’s ethos is anti-modern. He affirms the right of people to moderate the pace at which they choose to live:⁹

If you are always slow then you are stupid – and that is not at all what we are aiming for... being Slow means that you control the rhythms of your own life. You decide how fast you have to go in any given context. If today I want to go fast, I go fast; if tomorrow I want to go slow, I go slow. What we are fighting for is the right to determine our own tempos.

6 G Lewis, “Rural migration and demographic change”, B Ilbery, (ed.), *The geography of rural change* (Harlow, Longman, 1998), pp. 131-160.

7 C Honoré, *In praise of slow: How a worldwide movement is challenging the cult of speed* (London, Orion, 2004), p. 21.

8 C Honoré, *In praise of slow...*, p. 41.

9 Quoted in C Honoré, *In praise of slow...*, p. 14.

It is this “right to determine one’s own tempo”, and a willingness to make the requisite trade-offs,¹⁰ that has contributed to the migration of urban sophisticates to small towns. The new emphasis on “quality of life” considerations, as typified by the Slow Food Movement and its offshoots, is associated with this type of migration (sometimes also called “semigration”).¹¹

Going up country

Carr¹² reveals why increasing numbers of people might wish to opt for rurality when he points out that studies in attention restoration therapy over the past twenty years have indicated that, after exposure to a tranquil rural setting, close to nature, people “exhibit greater attentiveness, stronger memory, and generally improved cognition”.¹³ Creative professions typically put a premium on such experiences, and this acts as an environmental inducement for people to relocate where their circumstances make such a move feasible. Additionally, in South African cities, as is the case worldwide, “traffic and gridlock have become a deadweight time cost”,¹⁴ and consequently the case for rural living has become all the more compelling.

Ilbery,¹⁵ in his analysis of the changing relationship between society and space in the countryside, has found that in rural areas:

...the increasing mobility of people, goods and information has helped to erode local communities and open up the countryside to new uses [leading to new]... “actor networks” which are likely to be dominated by external rather than internal linkages.

These new actor networks tend to be populated by “quality of life migrants” who exert major positive impacts on small rural economies, as their influx

10 See for example E Brende, *Better off: Flipping the switch on technology* (New York, HarperCollins, 2004).

11 P Boyle, K Halfacree & V Robinson, *Exploring contemporary migration* (Harlow, Prentice Hall, 1998).

12 N Carr, *The shallows: How the internet is changing the way we think, read and remember* (London, Atlantic Books, 2010), p. 219.

13 See also SR Kellert, *Kinship to mastery: Biophilia in human evolution and development* (Washington DC., Island Press, 1997).

14 R Florida, *The great reset: How new ways of living and working drive post-crash prosperity* (New York, HarperCollins, 2010), p. 8.

15 B Ilbery, “Dimensions of rural change”, B Ilbery (ed.), *The geography of rural change*, p. 5.

introduces new sources of capital, skills and entrepreneurship.¹⁶ According to Seabrook:¹⁷

Contemporary communications systems, global cultural convergence, information conglomerates and transnational providers of entertainment have made deep inroads into worlds that remained for centuries bounded, enclosed and self-reliant. These were characterised by networks of kin, work and neighbourhood, networks which have been torn apart and scarcely exist now in that particular form. They have not disappeared however, but have been reconstituted in global networks of far wider scope and reach. Relationships constituted through the new networks are based upon instant access to a whole world; careers articulated to the global economy, elective relationships, often at a distance, that give their participants the freedom to remain where they please, for they are never out of touch. If the provinces exist now, they are social rather than geographic, a class rather than a place.

Ilbery¹⁸ describes how agriculture in the developed world has been restructured in line with an accelerating rate of socio-economic, environmental and political change to the point that “rural areas are no longer dominated in employment terms by farmers and landowners”. The countryside in Britain has moved from a predominantly agricultural productivist mode (primary agricultural production) towards tertiary sectors.¹⁹ Askwith²⁰ noted that by 2007:

... the proportion of the UK workforce employed in agriculture had fallen to 1.7 per cent, compared with 5 per cent in 1951. A quarter of farms had... an income of ‘less than zero’; half had an income of less than £10 000... Meanwhile, the new countryside-dwellers continued to pour in with their money. In 2007, the average rural house cost £30 000 more than the average urban house.

While South Africa’s countryside has not seen anything like this scale of “rural colonisation”, there has been a significant reappraisal of the value of rural properties in the country - no doubt stimulated by the demand for

16 See for example WB Beyers & PB Nelson, “Contemporary development forces in the non-metropolitan West: New insights from rapidly growing communities”, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 16, 2000, pp. 459-474; K Halfacree, “Back-to-the-land in the twenty-first century – making connections with rurality”, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 98(1), 2007, pp. 3-8; K Halfacree, “Trial by space for a ‘radical rural’: Introducing alternative localities, representations and lives”, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 23, 2007, pp. 125-141.

17 F Seabrook, “The end of the provinces: We are all metropolitans now”, *Granta*, 90, 2005, p. 241.

18 B Ilbery, “Dimensions of rural change”, B Ilbery, (ed.), *The geography of rural change*, p. 4.

19 See for example B Ilbery & I Bowler, “From agricultural productivism...”, B Ilbery (ed.), *The geography of rural change*; C Taylor, *Return to Akenfield: Portrait of an English village in the 21st century* (London, Granta Books, 2006).

20 R Askwith, *The lost village...*, p. 274.

second homes.²¹

The transition from agricultural to post-productivist rural areas has occurred in parallel with the consolidation of farmland and the “massification” or industrialisation of large-scale agricultural production fuelled by biotechnology and genetically modified crops. This in turn has caused a backlash in favour of organic, locally-grown produce often retailed via “farmers” markets.²² This shift has also been identified as involving “the relocalisation of the agrofood system” whereby high-quality products “with real authenticity of geographical origin”, are locally produced.²³

The post-productivist shift also entails the generation of hitherto unexploited sources of income from non-agricultural activities such as tourism. The advent of “niche tourism” has seen a move away from traditional “mass tourism” towards a predilection for remote, “authentic” rural regions and their small towns.²⁴ Factors such as improved transport and communications have facilitated rapid movement between rural and urban areas, and have stimulated preferences for rural lifestyles, even while those enjoying this option maintain constant access to cities. Brand²⁵ observes that “nothing saves a village like a good road to town and a good cellphone connection” and goes on to quote from a 2006 UN-HABITAT report to the effect that “cities are engines of rural development” and that “improved infrastructure between rural areas and cities increases rural productivity”. Greater disposable incomes for urban people have not kept pace with the astronomical increases in South African coastal property prices occasioned by foreign purchasing power, and a combination of these factors has been associated with the acquisition of second homes in rural areas. This in its turn stimulates demand for typically outdoor leisure pursuits in rural areas where 4x4 trails, hiking, birding, fishing, and arts and crafts “meanders” have all been turned to commercial account.

21 G Hoogendoorn & G Visser, “The role of second homes in local economic development in five small South African towns”, *Development Southern Africa*, 27(4), 2010, pp. 547-562.

22 See for example B Kingsolver, *Animal, vegetable, miracle: Our year of seasonal eating* (New York, Faber & Faber, 2008); S Brand, *Whole earth discipline: An ecopragmatist manifesto* (New York, Penguin, 2009).

23 B Ilbery, “Dimensions of rural change”, B Ilbery, (ed.), *The geography of rural change*, p. 4.

24 See for example J Butcher, *The moralisation of tourism: Sun, sand... and saving the world?* (London, Routledge, 2003); MK Ingle, “Tarring the road to Mecca: Dilemmas of infrastructural development in a small Karoo town”, R Donaldson & L Marais, (eds), *Small town geographies in Africa* (New York, Nova Publishers, 2012), pp. 209-222.

25 S Brand, *Whole earth discipline...*, p. 35.

The phenomenon of agri-tourism typifies a post-productivist blend of agriculture, tourism and lifestyle. Urry²⁶ in his discussion of social identity and the countryside concludes that:

... what takes place in the countryside cannot be separated off from much wider changes in economic, social and cultural life, particularly those changes which occur within what might appear to be distant towns and cities.

This contention applies no less to South Africa than it does to Britain, and it resonates strongly with the notion of a rural 'creative class' to be advanced in this discussion.²⁷

Post-productivism also involves "the manipulation of consumer demand" in the direction of well-branded, select and boutique products.²⁸ As Askwith observes: "The art of growing apples hasn't changed much over the centuries, but the art of selling them has".²⁹ This has not affected all rural areas equally. Those that are favoured with a good climate, attractive landscapes and well-preserved heritage architecture tend to attract the attentions of urbanites. As Ilbery points out, "uneven development and increasing differentiation are now characteristic features of rural space."³⁰

In describing the sea-change in international attitudes towards the rural, Atkinson reveals that:³¹

Rural policies are now much more than agricultural policies, or even agrarian policies. They are truly inter-sectoral, interdisciplinary, and based on a fluid conception of regions and territories. The management skills required draw from a wide range of disciplines: agriculture, tourism, water management, soil management, development planning, heritage management, ecology, and transport. In fact, even the concept of "rural policy" is increasingly becoming a misnomer, as we realize the manifold connections between farms, villages, towns and cities – with a sophisticated rural clientele moving effortlessly between global, city and rural pursuits.

26 J Urry, *Consuming places* (New York, Routledge, 1995), p. 228.

27 R Florida, *The rise of the creative class* (New York, Basic Books, 2002); PH Ray & SR Anderson, *The cultural creative* (New York, Harmony Books, 2000); Anon, "Growing the creative-rural economy in Prince Edward County", Report prepared by the Queen's University Geography Department for the P.E.L.A. Institute for Rural Development, 2008 (available at: http://www.pecounty.on.ca/government/corporate_services/economic_development/creative_economy/index.php, as accessed on 18 April 2011).

28 B Ilbery, "Dimensions of rural change", B Ilbery (ed.), *The geography of rural change*, p. 4.

29 R Askwith, *The lost village...*, p. 251.

30 B Ilbery, "Dimensions of rural change", B Ilbery (ed.), *The geography of rural change*, p. 5.

31 D Atkinson, "Crossing boundaries: The role of universities in unlocking regional development" (Inaugural lecture, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein), 13 April 2011.

The costs of post-productivism

England's Lake District, as described by the poet William Wordsworth, was one of close-knit local relationships.³² Two centuries later, and rural England looks very different.³³ In place of Wordsworth's old "true communities" there are retirees, aspirant entrepreneurs, and "high-earning incomers" from other parts of the country³⁴ and "the family names in the local graveyard are no longer the surnames of the people living in the houses."³⁵ Some people now live in "the middle of a village but seem to take no part in it. They're living urban lives in the countryside."³⁶

Other authors have also commented on the loss of traditional society:³⁷

Globalization... has begun to spawn its opposite... The dominant cultural force of the century ahead won't just be global and virtual but a powerful interweaving of opposites – globalization *and* localization, virtual *and* real, with an advance guard constantly undermining what is packaged and drawing much of society behind them.

Clearly, post-productivism, especially when it takes place to the extent that it has in the UK, can come with costs attached. According to Dyer³⁸ to travel through most of England "is now a journey through the almost unrelieved ugliness of post-industrial homogenisation" because every town looks the same. Similarly, Seabrook contends that:³⁹

In a global economy, with instantaneous worldwide communications networks, there are no longer any outlying areas, distant settlements, remote places, since everything is brought into contact with the ubiquitous metropolis. If provincial life still exists, it does so only residually and is doomed to eventual extinction.

Little wonder that the journal *Granta*, when it devoted an issue to the theme "Country Life" in 2005, qualified its title with "Dispatches from what's left of it".⁴⁰

32 A Sisman, *Wordsworth and Coleridge: The friendship* (London, HarperCollins, 2006), p. 289.

33 C Taylor, "Return to Akenfield: England's classic village forty years on", *Granta*, 90, 2005, pp. 11-55.

34 R Askwith, *The lost village...*, p. 49.

35 C Taylor, "Return to Akenfield...", *Granta*, 90, 2005, p. xv.

36 C Taylor, "Return to Akenfield...", *Granta*, 90, 2005, p. 54.

37 D Boyle, *Authenticity* (London, Harper Perennial, 2003), p. 5.

38 G Dyer, *Working the room: Essays and reviews – 1999-2010* (Edinburgh, Canongate Books, 2010), p. 136.

39 F Seabrook, "The end of the provinces...", *Granta*, 90, 2005, p. 227.

40 *Granta*, 90, 2005, cover.

Karoo background

Karoo towns have, over the last century, experienced a marked decline in their economic fortunes,⁴¹ but this decline has been arrested, if not altogether reversed, in the last two decades by the arrival of a post-productivist cohort of migrants from the cities.⁴²

A rash of Karoo-denominated studies published in the 1970s analysed the decline of Karoo towns. Economic development in the Karoo had been boosted by the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley in 1867 and gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886. Most routes to the new mining fields passed through the Karoo towns. But by the 1920s, the social structure of Karoo communities began to change. The most important direct consequence was an out-migration of whites from rural towns. By the 1930s, the depopulation of the Karoo was well advanced. The smaller Karoo towns were severely affected by the exodus.⁴³

The dynamics in the farming sector also changed, with a considerable loss of agricultural jobs. The people who left the farms either moved to nearby towns, or left the region altogether. According to Blumenfeld:⁴⁴

As various factors, such as changing cultural and social attitudes and values, the high risk factor inherent in farming enterprise, improved agricultural techniques, low income elasticity of demand (as well as unstable demand) for agricultural products, and the unceasing battle against the elements, have combined to create, and drive out, a surplus rural population, the region's inability to re-absorb this displaced population in other occupations and sectors – but particularly in manufacturing industry – has resulted in the loss of this population to other areas. Similarly, in times of agricultural hardships, the region has lacked a non-agricultural 'base' of sufficient depth and diversity to enable it to cushion the impact.

This then was the economic scenario before the stirrings of revitalization in the Karoo which is the subject of this article. Although the period since 1994 has seen the Karoo's social structure undergoing profound change, these

41 E Nel & T Hill, "Marginalisation and demographic change in the semi-arid Karoo, South Africa", *Journal of Arid Environments*, 72, 2008, pp. 2264-2274.

42 MK Ingle, "A 'creative class'...", *Urban Forum*, 21, 2010.

43 WJH Vrey, *Demografiese sosiologiese studie van die blanke bevolking in die sentraal-Karoo* (Instituut vir Sosiale en Ekonomiese Navorsing, Universiteit van die Vrystaat, Bloemfontein, 1974); G Cook, *Towns of the Cape Midlands and Eastern Karoo* (Institute for Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1971).

44 J Blumenfeld, *Survey of the Cape Midlands and Karoo regions, Vol. 4, The economic structure of the Cape Midlands and Karoo Region: A sectoral and spatial survey* (Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1971), p. 107.

dynamics are not well understood, and the area is still treated by government as being of marginal economic importance.⁴⁵

Significantly, the epithet Karoo has seen an extraordinary resurgence in prominence and is even being appropriated as a brandname by enterprises outside the Karoo and as far afield as the USA and the UK.⁴⁶ In other words, the asset value of this arid space may be at odds with the government's characterization of it as a region that is lacking in potential.⁴⁷ But this asset value remains largely unarticulated and unexplored.

The Karoo as a site of post-productivism

In many respects, the British situation is dissimilar from South Africa's equivalent of the post-productivist countryside – although there are a number of Karoo “boutique towns”, such as De Rust, Prince Albert and Nieu-Bethesda, operating as weekend boltholes, within reach of South Africa's cities. Askwith's⁴⁸ valedictory implies that there just is not enough space left in Britain for a countryside to exist much longer and that it is being crowded out above all else by vehicle traffic. In England, the countryside is depicted as being essentially absorbed by the urban; in contrast, in South Africa, the distinctive “apartness” of rural areas is constantly valorised and accentuated in the lifestyle media. In spite of its growing number of ties with the urban, rural South Africa still retains its physical integrity in the “social imaginary”.

Given the ever growing media coverage of the Karoo in recent years, it can be argued that, far from the South African countryside vanishing, it is a countryside parts of which are increasingly coming into being. Information technology and media have been and still are hugely instrumental in (re)creating the South African countryside. In Britain, this technology has often been accompanied by hard infrastructure (roads, rail and housing development) but this has not happened to the same extent in South Africa where rural infrastructure is by and large still fairly antiquated. It could be argued that the countryside as a

45 See for example D Atkinson & L Marais, *Provincial development policies and plans - The Arid Areas Programme, Vol. 2* (Centre for Development Support, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 2007).

46 MK Ingle, *Economic potential in South Africa's arid areas: A selection of niche products and services* (Centre for Development Support, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 2008).

47 Republic of South Africa, *National spatial development perspective* (The Presidency, Pretoria, 2006).

48 R Askwith, *The lost village...*, p. 59.

socially constructed reality⁴⁹ is still an “emergent” phenomenon in the South African context. And although, as intimated above, key elements of post-productivism are taking shape in the Karoo these are thus far not such as to detract from its quintessential “rurality”.

Economic and cultural impacts of counterurbanisers

A number of recent studies reveal new dimensions of capital formation in the Karoo⁵⁰ and attempt to describe some of the socio-economic impacts of post-1994 counterurbanisation and “white displacement” in South Africa.⁵¹ Creative small enterprises in South Africa’s desert Karoo region are growing in number and variety.⁵² The Karoo has also come to acquire considerable “cachet” in recent years, and is being rebranded as a desirable tourist destination.

Several towns in the Karoo region, such as Graaff-Reinet, Sutherland and Carnarvon to name but a few, are undergoing a profound transformation with the influx of “creatives” from the urban areas.⁵³ Typically, these relatively affluent migrants from the city exhibit a propensity for creative activities, exemplified by art, crafts, boutique agriculture and niche tourism along with country lifestyle and biodiversity pursuits. Many also derive their livelihood from the so-called “knowledge economy” as freelance journalists, consultants, authors or academics. These in-migrants to Karoo towns have leveraged their “weak tie” networks⁵⁴ to transform local economies.

Some idea of the diversity and extent of the post-productivist inroads being made in the Karoo is provided by Ingle⁵⁵ in a report produced for the University of the Free State’s Arid Areas Programme. Significantly, where it was possible to discern whether the owners of the businesses captured by the

49 J Foster, *Washed with sun: Landscape and the making of white South Africa* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).

50 See for example R Donaldson & L Marais, (eds.), *Small town geographies in Africa* (New York, Nova Publishers, 2012).

51 G Visser, “Unvoiced and invisible: On the transparency of white South Africans in post-apartheid geographical discourse”, *Acta Academica Supplementum*, 2003(1), 2003, pp. 220-244.

52 MK Ingle, “Economic potential...” (Centre for Development Support, University of the Free State Centre, Bloemfontein, 2008).

53 See for example D Atkinson & MK Ingle, “A multi-dimensional analysis of local economic development in Graaff-Reinet, Eastern Cape”, *Journal for New Generation Sciences*, 8(1), 2010, pp. 11-28.

54 R Florida, *Cities and the Creative Class* (New York, Routledge, 2005); R Florida, *Who’s your city?: How the creative economy is making where to live the most important decision of your life* (New York, Basic Books, 2008), p. 131.

55 MK Ingle, *Economic potential...* (Centre for Development Support, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, 2008).

survey were newcomers to the Karoo or not, it was found that two-thirds were in-migrants. This suggests a fairly robust degree of new enterprise creation in the fields of arts, crafts, tourism, and other lifestyle-related fields. Ingle extrapolates from these findings to show how the Karoo's defining quality of "nothingness" has been capitalised on to create a burgeoning "astro-tourism" market segment.⁵⁶ This is a classic instance of rural assets being leveraged for post-productivist purposes and it is not surprising to find that the notion of "creative tourism" has been introduced into academic tourism discourse.⁵⁷

The growing popularity of "Karoo lamb" (and its recent establishment as a formally registered brand) also typifies this trend, and the Karoo is constantly presented in the lifestyle media as a site of "authentic" cuisine, landscapes, and cultures. Here again the "creative class" has harnessed the lifestyle media to reinvigorate and repackage the Karoo's assets.

An important element of human capital is its role in constituting other forms of capital, by means of human creativity. One need only consider the difference it makes when phenomena such as "emptiness" and "nothingness" come to be leveraged as an asset. It requires creativity to reverse popular perceptions of barrenness and then to market a desert as a positive asset; to toy with the concept of "space" and turn it into a saleable entity.

Secondly, there are numerous examples of overt philanthropy where the creative class has drawn on its urban expertise and been instrumental in initiating a wide variety of projects aimed at benefitting previously disadvantaged communities. The Karoo Development Foundation (KDF), the Middelburg Foundation, the Richmond Foundation and the Nama Karoo Foundation are just some examples of this.

Thirdly, the creative class in the Karoo has had indirect impacts on municipalities and on their Local Economic Development (LED) mandates. This engagement is sometimes regrettably sporadic, subject to the vagaries of political processes, and it can in any event only happen where municipalities are reasonably functional. In a study of the impact of the FIFA 2010 World

56 MK Ingle, "Making the most of 'nothing': Astro-tourism, the sublime, and the Karoo as a 'space destination'", *Transformation*, 74, 2010, pp. 87-111.

57 G Richards, "Creativity and tourism: The state of the art", *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(4), 2011, pp. 1225-1253.

Cup on a range of small Karoo towns, Atkinson⁵⁸ cites several instances of constructive engagement between municipalities and a new cohort of city residents who have moved to the Karoo, to promote tourism effectively.

Fourth, the creative class typically functions as a champion for the protection of ecosystems and cultural heritage both of which are vital for tourism's sustainability. Because it is so articulate (and vocal), it serves to keep the importance of "seldom acknowledged" ecosystem services⁵⁹ firmly in the public eye via the national media, the lifestyle media, a variety of scholarly outlets, and the internet.⁶⁰ In this way, it can be inferred that the advocacy function which is such a mark of the social capital of the "creative class" has beneficial collateral impacts for less articulate constituencies.

The poor usually bear a disproportionately heavy burden of the negative externalities caused by environmental mismanagement.⁶¹ It follows from this that the preservation of the environment can confer important benefits on the poor. Shackleton et al. demonstrate the often underestimated importance of ecosystem factors such as soil fertility, water resources, eco-tourism, biodiversity, and a range of "cultural services" for the spiritual and material wellbeing of the poor.⁶²

The creative class is also involved in a never-ending tussle with telecommunications providers to provide better connectivity and greater bandwidth, and this is of course a public good which can benefit the economy and all sectors of the community.

58 D Atkinson, "Getting the chemistry right: The impact of the FIFA 2010 World Cup on Karoo towns", R Donaldson & L Marais, (eds.), *Small town geographies in Africa* (New York, Nova Publishers, 2012), pp. 233-250.

59 CM Shackleton, SE Shackleton, J Gambiza, E Nel, K Rowntree, P Urquhart, C Fabricius & A Ainslie, *Livelihoods and vulnerability in the arid and semi-arid lands of southern Africa* (New York, Nova Publishers, 2010), p. 124.

60 See for example J du Toit & H Dugmore, "The battle for the Karoo", *Country Life*, May 2011, pp. 30-35; SJ Milton & WRJ Dean, "The basis for sustainable business in the Karoo: Bringing ecological and economic issues together", *Journal for Development Support*, 2, 2010, pp. 58-66; D Atkinson, "Fracking' fiasco exposes SA's fractured planning system", 2011 (available at: <http://www.businessday.co.za/articles/Content.aspx?id=133655>, as accessed on 8 February 2012); Karoo Space, 2013 (available at <http://karoospace.co.za>, as accessed on 18 February 2013); Treasure Karoo Action Group, 2013, (available at: <http://www.treasurethekaroo.co.za>, as accessed on 18 February 2013).

61 ES van Eeden, "Theorizing the way forward regarding transdisciplinary research on environmental crises in small towns"; R Donaldson & L Marais (eds.), *Small town geographies in Africa* (New York, Nova Publishers, 2012), p. 84.

62 CM Shackleton, SE Shackleton, J Gambiza, E Nel, K Rowntree, P Urquhart, C Fabricius & A Ainslie, *Livelihoods and vulnerability ...*, p. 124.

Conclusion

The compression of time and space, entailed by the accelerated pace of innovation in the telecommunications arena, has had a profound effect on the agricultural sector in the developed world. Changing employment and outsourcing practices have also meant that the traditionally rigid distinction between the workplace and the home has become blurred with increasing numbers of freelance individuals able to generate an income from wherever they might be located just as long as there is telecommunications connectivity.

The space/time compression has also had the effect of speeding up life in the urban “fast lane” where growing personal affluence has also resulted in an exponential surge in the number of vehicles on the streets with all the associated stress that traffic gridlock entails. This inexorable acceleration in the pace of living has stimulated backlashes such as the Slow Food Movement and an increased interest in countryside lifestyles especially where these can be enjoyed without forfeiting “fast lane” incomes.

These factors have led to a form of reverse-migration (“counterurbanisation”) from the urban to the rural especially where space/time compression has facilitated the ease with which mobile professionals can oscillate between the two spheres. This in turn has stimulated what has been theorised as the onset of the “post-productivist countryside”.

In post-apartheid South Africa there has been a noticeable degree of counterurbanisation to the vast, desert Karoo region after several decades of neglect. These “semigrants”, who answer to the description of a rural “creative class”, embody elevated levels of human capital and professionalism. They also come accompanied by their social capital networks and connections – and this combination has led to the socio-economic revitalisation of a number of small towns which until fairly recently were economically moribund and in danger of imploding altogether. This development is in line with international trends and has been analysed here as the emergence of a post-productivist economy in South Africa’s rural Karoo region.