

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING MOBILE SKILLED WORKERS: BENEFITS FOR RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Abstract

Today's workforce is highly mobile. GPs, teachers and administrators no longer spend their working lives in one country town. A range of groups such as sea/tree changers, seasonal workers, executive staff suffering from high levels of stress and 'grey nomads' are downskilling and moving to or retire to rural areas, often only to move on again after a few years. Other factors, such as the resources boom, changing industrial laws and the economic crisis are forcing highly skilled workers from practicing in rural communities.

Work by Florida (2003) on the Creative Class suggests regions should try to target people such as professionals to come and live and work because of their ability to boost economic activity, but there is no research on capturing advantages from highly skilled people who transit through communities and regions. Many small rural communities with ageing populations and limited opportunities for young people are not attracting skilled workers, but have a flow of skilled people through the community. This raises the question of how could mobile skilled workers be encouraged to stay for extended periods to the benefit of the community?

The paper presents details of a research supported by the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation on the benefits to rural communities from mobile skilled workers. A case study approach has been adopted, with the current findings based on three sites in Australia, one each from Northern Queensland, Northern New South Wales and the third from Northern Tasmania.

The preliminary findings have identified sixteen unique benefits flowing from the presence of mobile skilled workers that cover social and economic factors. Two broad themes identified from the study will be presented: vision and implementation. The practical implications of these findings will be discussed as they apply to Northern Queensland, Northern Australia and beyond.

Biography

Dr Peter Vitartas is an academic at Southern Cross University, Lismore. He has published extensively and presented at national and international conferences (including SEGRA) on topics covering public policy, business education, marketing management, customer satisfaction, media and time use, services marketing, direct marketing and tourism. His articles have been published in the *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, *Journal of Economic and Social Policy*, *Contemporary Issues in Business and Government*, *Review of International Comparative Management*, *Australasian Journal of Business and Social Enquiry* and the *Journal of Management and Organization*. His research interests include marketing and public policy, community and economic development, social marketing and the mobile skilled workforce.

Mr Martin Homisan is an economic development practitioner, currently engaged as the Regional Investment Attraction Manager for the Mackay - Whitsunday Regional Economic Development Corporation. He has an empirical, contemporary knowledge of micro economic rural environment and has worked for a number of local government organisations in economic development positions. His work in Australia, New Zealand and Europe has involved developing close co-operation between local organisations, government and business and community. He is the co-author of *Drivers and Barriers for Sub-Regional Sustainable Economic Development*.