Westies, Bogans and Yobbos. What's in a name?

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Abstract
What's in a name? Quite a lot if you live in the fringe urban communities of Campbelltown, Camden or Picton in the Macarthur district on Sydney's rural-urban fringe. In the past these communities have been fiercely parochial country towns with clearly identifiable differences based on history, heritage, traditions, mythology, rituals, demographics, local government and a host of other factors. With the encroachment of Sydney's urban sprawl they have been wrapped up by the tentacles of the metropolitan octopus and faced challenges on a variety of fronts. The questions that this article raises concern Macarthur regionalism. Is it authentic? How representative is it of the former country towns that are now incorporated within it?

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Careful what you call south west Sydney

The issue boiled over in May 2013 when it raised the hackles of locals and outsiders alike in an opinion piece published by Fairfax Media. Campbelltown journalist and editor of the Campbelltown-Macarthur Advertiser, Jeff McGill, wrote an article for the Fairfax Media called ‘Careful what you call south west Sydney’. In the article he maintained that Campbelltown, Camden and Picton residents did not want to be identified as part of Sydney’s south-west or west by Sydney media. McGill stated:

“Residents of Campbelltown, Camden and the Picton-based Wollondilly Shire are fed up with being thrown into the same geographic area as Lakemba, Punchbowl and Campsie in a distant, unconnected part of Sydney.”

McGill’s article hit a raw nerve and highlighted the contested nature of community identity and a sense of place in three of Sydney’s fringe communities.
The contentious nature of regional identity

The contentious nature of regional identity was reflected in over 200 comments on the blog accompanying McGill’s article. Many bloggers expressed their anger and for CSKN, ‘if you don’t live on the North Shore or the Northern Beaches, then you’re all westies’, or Peter who staunchly maintained that ‘Campbelltown in not Sydney’. Jenny was struck by the snobbery of city-types because she was from Campbelltown.

McGill was surprised by the strength of the anger expressed in the numerous responses to his article. He said that ‘it got an unexpectedly large reaction. I’ve rarely ever been stopped, or contacted, by so many enthusiastic backers. A raw nerve was touched’. He maintained that local residents got ‘annoyed’ when they are lumped together with ‘Campsie or Punchbowl’, which are over 40 kilometres away. The Sydney media are happy to identify other smaller regional parts of Sydney including the ‘upper north shore’, the ‘lower north shore’, the ‘northern beaches’, yet they lump everyone from Pyrmont to Picton into one amorphous mass.

A crisis of identity

McGill’s article has highlighted a crisis of identity amongst locals around the ownership and usage of place-names and has created a level of sensitivity in the community. It offends their sensibilities when they are lumped together with other parts of Sydney’s west and south-west, which have their own challenges and stereotypes. Campbelltown resident’s have created an emotional investment in place through the ownership of their stories, traditions and celebrations including family births, marriages, deaths, christening, birthdays, first day at school, sporting events, first day child went to school and a host of other events that give meaning to their lives. These events contribute to a landscape of memories with multiple layers of meaning that build across the generations of human activity. McGill and others want to take possession of their identity and rest it away from the Sydney media and others who proclaim their ownership of the same identity.

A local storyteller

As a local storyteller McGill has worked hard to build a narrative of place that underpin people’s identity and attachment to Campbelltown. He is a local identity who grew up in the area, went to Campbelltown High then worked as a journalist at The Daily Telegraph and The Daily Mirror, and returned to the area as the senior journalist with The Macarthur Advertiser. He later became editor of The Penrith Star, then The Liverpool City Champion and finally progressed to be the editor of the Campbelltown-Macarthur Advertiser.

He has published a number of local histories and stated that ‘local history gives people pride and a place in our town’ and accords with SM Low’s typology of people’s cultural and symbolic linkages with place that are based on stories, family, loss, land ownership, mythology and spirituality.

‘If you mention to someone that you live at Campbelltown you see them slightly recoil, the expression of contempt passing fleetingly from their face. Because, after all, isn’t everyone from Campbelltown slow-witted, lazy, anti-social and committing crimes? Don’t we all have babies at 16, then abuse them while we are drinking and taking drugs?”

McGill and others want to take possession of their identity and rest it away from the Sydney media and others who proclaim their ownership of the same identity.
Sensitivities

One factor that underpins these sensitivities is a perception by many Sydneysiders that the fringe communities of Campbelltown, Camden and Picton, which is located in the Wollondilly LGA, have a distinctive uniformity that extends across parts of Sydney’s west and south-west. This is simply not true. While regionalism in Sydney’s west and south-west are a product of the post-war period when Sydney’s urban growth spread across the Cumberland Plain, regional labels are administrative conveniences used by politicians, planners, economists, technocrats and bureaucrats who fail to understand the diversity of these areas. Take two examples, the jurisdiction of the Ministry for Western Sydney in the New South Wales state government. It takes in the 10 Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils (WSROC) and has added Camden, Campbelltown, Wollondilly and The Hills. On the other hand the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) definition based on labour force regions includes the 12 LGAs: Auburn; Blacktown; Blue Mountains; Camden; Campbelltown; Fairfield; Hawkesbury; Holroyd; Liverpool; Parramatta; Penrith and Wollondilly, while excluding Bankstown and The Hills, which are included in the state governments definition. The one unifying demographic factor identified by the state government is the area’s diversity. The Fairfield LGA has over 70 different languages spoken while Auburn LGA is home to over people from 100 nations. Blacktown, Campbelltown, Liverpool and Penrith LGAs have largest urban communities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, while 37.3 per cent of the regional population is under 24 years of age, while the area has a projected population of 2.96 million by 2036. Diversity in itself is not a solid basis for the development of any coherent sense of place or a cohesive narrative that has any real meaning to the community. The lack of any identifiable uniformity across these LGAs for ethnicity, culture, history, tradition or other social or cultural factors means that there is no real basis for any true sense of unity. Bruce Baskerville notes that even the term Western Sydney is only quite recent and was first used by Prospect County Council in 1961 and it did not include the Macarthur LGAs of Campbelltown, Camden or Wollondilly. While the state government and ABS are happy to use these administrative regions they have made no serious attempt to develop a cohesive narrative that contributes to the development of any authentic regional identity.

Local resistance

Local resistance to the imposition of these administrative regions by government only complicates the picture. BM Taylor has discussed oppositional identities in regionalism where local interests come together around a regional identity for a particular purpose. The local resistance can be based on local opposition to an arbitrarily imposed regional identity by an administrative body, in this case the New South Wales state government or the ABS. He maintains that regionalism is strongest where other elements of place construction are acting to draw locals together based on a range of other factors including landform, economic factors, socio-cultural factors including common traditions, cultural background, histories, and other spatial considerations.

Smaller regional identities

In reality Sydney’s west and south-west has a host of different smaller regional identities including the communities of Campbelltown, Camden and Picton, a form of local tribalism. Bernard Salt maintains that Sydney is ‘a city of tribes and precincts’, a product of the city’s geography and the values of its residents. Kirsten Craze identified seven tribes of Sydney including ‘the Mighty West’ while Sacha Moltitormiz has identified eight youth tribes and sociologist Gabrielle Gwyther says Sydney’s west contains ‘multitudes’ of groupings. In 1996 a delegate at a local tourism forum stated that Sydney’s west ‘is too large an area to function with unity. What does Wollondilly have in common with Hawkesbury’. These sub-regional identities are reflected in the local editions of the two principle suburban...
newspaper publishers across Sydney’s west and south-west. Fairfax Community Newspapers publishes five weekly mastheads in Sydney’s south-west and a further 12 local editions across the remainder of western Sydney, while News Corp stable, publishes 12 mastheads in Sydney’s west and south-west as well as 3 local editions in the Macarthur region under NewsLocal, a division of Nationwide News. These weekly newspapers regularly carry a host of local stories, advertisements and notices that reflect local identity and branding. They are the voice of the local community and act as a noticeboard, which is not a characteristic of the national daily newspapers. Community stores, which are personal and small-scale, are the lifeblood of these newspapers. In many ways these newspapers are purveyors of the gossip that circulates through family and inter-personal networks, the essence of the local.

Stereotypes and bogans

Sydney’s west and south-west have also been stereotyped as regions that are dangerous foreign places, a form of Otherness. According to Diane Powell Sydney’s west is ‘so much deeper that the bogan stereotype portrayed on TV’. The Campbelltown Chamber of Commerce president Anne Parnham has stated that she is ‘sick of people saying ‘You had another shooting over your way’. When they were in Bankstown’. Campbelltown’s state MP, Brian Doyle, said that ‘he was often… frustrated by media headlines that portray the area as a type of war zone. Some examples include: ‘Man stabbed in Sydney’s west’ (Location: Parramatta); ‘Man shot dead in Sydney’s west’ (location: Chester Hill); ‘Four men wounded in western Sydney shooting’ (location Smithfield); ‘A house and cars have been damaged in another shooting in Sydney’s southwest’ (location Lakemba); and ‘South-west Sydney a recruitment for Islamic fundamentalists’ (location Auburn).[18]

Some sort of ‘cultural wasteland’

Macarthur residents state that they are not part of Sydney’s west or south-west, which they perceive as some sort of ‘cultural wasteland’. Yet the remainder of Sydney, in the eyes of McGill’s bloggers at least, do see Macarthur residents as part of that so-called wasteland. McGill maintains that the Campbelltown, Camden and Picton area ‘is so much deeper that the bogan stereotype portrayed on TV’. The Campbelltown Chamber of Commerce president Anne Parnham has stated that she is ‘sick of people saying ‘You had another shooting over your way’. When they were in Bankstown’. Campbelltown’s state MP, Brian Doyle, said that ‘he was often… frustrated by media headlines that portray the area as a type of war zone. Some examples include: ‘Man stabbed in Sydney’s west’ (Location: Parramatta); ‘Man shot dead in Sydney’s west’ (location: Chester Hill); ‘Four men wounded in western Sydney shooting’ (location Smithfield); ‘A house and cars have been damaged in another shooting in Sydney’s southwest’ (location Lakemba); and ‘South-west Sydney a recruitment for Islamic fundamentalists’ (location Auburn).[18]

Macarthur branding

McGill wants Campbelltown, Camden and Picton to be known as the Macarthur region so as to differentiate them from the rest of western and south-western Sydney. While at the same time admitting that the regional name Macarthur, which he staunchly defends, has ‘nothing to do with Campbelltown’ and yet has become the generic regional identity of the area.[20] So what is the justification for using the place-name Macarthur for the Campbelltown, Camden and Wollondilly LGAs? Is it authentic?

The first official use of the term Macarthur

The first official use of the term Macarthur as a regional place-name was the proclamation of the new Federal seat of Macarthur in 1949 after the 1948 re-distribution and the Federal House of Representatives was increased from 75 to 122 members. The new seat of Macarthur was named after the colonial wool pioneers John and Elizabeth Macarthur of Camden Park, which according to a recent heritage report from TKD Architects ‘is the most important surviving early colonial estate in Australia and ranks amongst the most historic houses in Australia’. [21] The original land grant to John Macarthur in 1805 took place on the Nepean River floodplain and eventually the family’s colonial estate of Camden Park covered parts of what is now the Campbelltown, Camden and Wollondilly LGAs. The current Camden Park Heritage Precinct listed on the New South Wales State Heritage Register is primarily located in Wollondilly Shire, with a small northwestern section in the Camden LGA, while the northeastern boundary borders the Campbelltown LGA. 

[12] Bruce Moore has stated that the term westie originated in the 1970s as a pejorative for someone living Sydney’s western suburbs and perceived to be socially disadvantaged and that the term bogan became common in the 1980s. These perceptions are not helped by media headlines that portray the area as a type of war zone. Some examples include: ‘Man stabbed in Sydney’s west’ (Location: Parramatta); ‘Man shot dead in Sydney’s west’ (location: Chester Hill); ‘Four men wounded in western Sydney shooting’ (location Smithfield); ‘A house and cars have been damaged in another shooting in Sydney’s southwest’ (location Lakemba); and ‘South-west Sydney a recruitment for Islamic fundamentalists’ (location Auburn).[18]

[13] One outburst by media commentator Eddie McGuire typified the attitude of many when he dismissed the western suburbs of Sydney as the ‘land of the felafel’. [14] Sydney’s western suburbs, according to philosopher Michael Symonds, are seen by many as ‘an ugly, barren wasteland’, to lack ‘beauty and a history of enchantment’ and the ‘troubling prettiness of the leafy suburban home’ that can be found in the eastern suburbs, north shore or Sutherland Shire. The west is ‘a cultural wasteland’ which was ‘ugly and dangerous’, the home of ‘the yobbo’, and the ‘westie’, who are part of the ‘otherness’ created by city folk. [15] Bruce Moore has stated that the term westie originated in the 1970s as a pejorative for someone living Sydney’s western suburbs and perceived to be socially disadvantaged and that the term bogan became common in the 1980s. These perceptions are not helped by media headlines that portray the area as a type of war zone. Some examples include: ‘Man stabbed in Sydney’s west’ (Location: Parramatta); ‘Man shot dead in Sydney’s west’ (location: Chester Hill); ‘Four men wounded in western Sydney shooting’ (location Smithfield); ‘A house and cars have been damaged in another shooting in Sydney’s southwest’ (location Lakemba); and ‘South-west Sydney a recruitment for Islamic fundamentalists’ (location Auburn).[18]

[14] The Deputy Mayor of the Wollondilly Shire, Councillor Benn Banasik said that he ‘didn’t find a real community between people from Fairfield and people for Wollondilly’. One newcomer to the suburb of Harrington Park, who moved from Sutherland, told Gabrielle Gwyther that Harrington Park was not the western suburbs. ‘It’s more rural. I wouldn’t live in the western suburbs’. When asked ‘why not?’, the newcomer replied ‘well, they’re a different type of person’. [19]
historical importance of the Macarthur legacy is closely aligned with the story of the Cowpastures which is located in today’s Wollondilly and Camden LGAs. On a broader level the Macarthur story is just one part of the history of the network of gentry estates that extended across the western Cumberland Plain, when the Macarthur family established Camden as an estate village on the family’s pastoral property. The Campbelltown story is linked to the smallholders who took up the early land grants and the market town that served them, while Picton’s history is a mix of influences linked to the Antill’s estate village and the development of the government town. Daily life in these country towns was ruled by intimacy, class, inter-personal and familial networks, rugged independence, patriarchy, sectarianism, rural poverty and a host of other factors. Each community had an authentic and natural distinctiveness that has contributed to their identity and sense of place. Locals residents had an emotional attachment and a patriotic loyalty to their locality, expressed as parochialism and localism. Today the close geographic proximity of Campbelltown, Camden and Picton means that they are a natural fit for the type of regionalism of Sydney’s rural-urban fringe that is represented by the place-name of Macarthur.

Syd Richardson

The use of the Macarthur place-name got a leg up in 1958 when local media baron Sydney Richardson felt that local regionalism provided a great business opportunity. There were enough unifying characteristics across the three country towns, he thought, that justified launching a new regional newspaper using the Macarthur masthead. He re-named the Camden Advertiser, a free Camden weekly newspaper he took over from Ken Gibson in 1955, as the Macarthur Advertiser. Richardson had two competing newspapers – the Camden News and the Camden Advertiser – in the same Camden market place. He had previously purchased both the Camden News and Campbelltown News from the Sidman brothers in 1952. Richardson promoted the Macarthur Advertiser as a free regional newspaper and expanded its circulation to included Campbelltown and Picton. The newspaper had a broad regional compilation of news and advertisements from the three towns and he ‘fused and popularized a new regional name for Campbelltown, Camden and Wollondilly’. Richardson, like McGill, was a local patriot and understood the significance of parochialism to the success of his local newspaper empire. Richardson was also president of the Country Press Association of NSW 1960-1962, the Picton RSL, the Camden RSL, the Camden Chamber of Commerce, an alderman on Camden Council and a member Camden Rotary Club. In 1982 Richardson merged the Macarthur Advertiser with other local newspapers – Campbelltown-Ingleburn News, Camden News and Picton Post – which he had previously sold to Suburban Publications, a joint venture between John Fairfax and Sons and Australian Consolidated Press, in 1969. Richardson’s new regional newspaper prospered and was a builder of community and identity by being a regional voice and notice board for the first time, and in the process strengthened people’s attachment to the concept of a regional identity.

Macarthur Development Board

Town planners and administrators strengthened the official support for the use of the Macarthur place-name in 1975 with the establishment of the Macarthur Development Board, with its head office in Campbelltown’s heritage precinct. Peter Kacirek, the chairman of the Sydney SW Sector Planning and Development Board, renamed it as the Macarthur Development Board, against much local opposition which local residents felt affronted the legacy of Governor Lachlan Macquarie, who proclaimed the town in 1820. Campbelltown parochialism was piqued as many felt that the place-name of Macarthur was more the province of Camden and the Cowpastures, an argument that was more pointed given the decades of rivalry between Campbelltown and Camden. The purpose of the board was to implement the 1973 New Cities Plan for Campbelltown, Camden and Appin as part of the 1968 Sydney Regional Outline Plan. The New Cities Plan called for the development of the Macarthur growth centre, located away from the Campbelltown central business district in Queen Street. The aim of the Macarthur Development Board was to ‘plan, co-ordinated implement’ the New Cities
Plan with power to compulsory acquisition of land. Town planner James Deane, from the Urban Development Institute of Australia, felt that the name Campbelltown should be completely abolished and replaced with the City of Macarthur. [23] The New Cities Plan incorporated the colonial story of the Macarthur family and Camden Park and felt that the Macarthur legacy was essential to the identity of the new growth centre. The board stated in 1976 that ‘the area of Macarthur is steeped in rich tradition and much of the early history of New South Wales was recorded here. The aim of the Board is to link the historic past with an exciting and vigorous future and to plan for the enjoyment and benefit of all members of the community’. [24] Unfortunately the Macarthur family felt otherwise and sold most of the pastoral property to housing developers in 1973 against a national outcry. [25]

Town planner Peter Kacirek

Town planner Peter Kacirek, an amiable well meaning person, was chairman of the Macarthur Development Board between 1975 and 1984. He had worked for the UK Ministry of town and country planning and was a major figure in British new town movement. He established the School of Town Planning at the University of Queensland and was at the New South Wales State Planning Authority from 1967 where he was deputy chief planner then chief planner. He was integral to the formulation of Sydney Region Outline Plan and growth centres at Bathurst-Orange and Albury-Wodonga. In 1976 Kacirek was awarded Sidney Luker Memorial Medal awarded by Planning Institute of Australia for the person who has made a notable contribution to urban and regional planning. His part in the development of the Sydney Regional Outline Plan and new Macarthur growth centre were seen as international best practice at the time for urban planning development. [26]

Town planner’s pipe-dream

To the disappointment of many the Macarthur growth centre was a short lived town planner’s pipe-dream. The new regional centre was planned to have high-rise office blocks, conference facilities, sports stadiums, transport interchange and become a city within a city and to be located on Campbelltown Golf Course (1971), which was acquired against significant local opposition. There was some progress within the growth centre precinct with the construction of Macarthur Square (1979), Macarthur Railway Station (1985), the Macarthur Institute of Higher Education (1983) and the launch of a new Macarthur community radio station 2CT (1978) yet the new TAFE college (1981) and hospital (1977) both carried the place-name Campbelltown, not Macarthur. The Federal Whitlam government promised funding of $25 million in 1975, which was slashed in 1976 to $2 million dollars by the incoming Fraser Government but by 1978 all funding had dried up. Open hostilities broke out between Campbelltown City Council and Macarthur Development Board over the ‘regional centre’ in 1979 when the Wran state government approved the construction of Macarthur Square funded by State Super. The Macarthur Development Board continued to foster the regional centre over Campbelltown’s Queen Street precinct as the retail and community hub in 1980, and by 1984 the Board was $200 million in debt. Peter Kacirek was sacked and Ian Henry, former Campbelltown council planner, was appointed by the state government. In 1985 the regional centre was slashed by Wran Labor state government and the Board was stripped of planning power and restructured to Macarthur Development Corporation, which was a small promotion unit. Ian Henry stated that the Macarthur Development Board was ‘an over-expanded planner’s dream turned nightmare’ and in 1989 the MDC restructured and renamed Business Land Group, which was little more that a sales unit. [27]
The Macarthur growth centre road crash had been driven up onto the rocks of divisiveness by the state government’s push of large scale public housing into the Campbelltown area, the development of the ‘ugly Campbelltown’ stereotype and the moral panic that ensued. Problems originated in 1969 when Campbelltown Council was forced to sell large tracts of land at Macquarie Fields to the state government for welfare housing. Fortuitously McGill notes in his history of Campbelltown that critics of the sale were concerned at the time that it would result in ‘slums for the future’, claims that were dismissed by the New South Wales Housing Commission. In 1975 there was a recession and private developers were forced out of housing market and the New South Wales Housing Commission took up the slack. In 1975 the Sydney media portrayed an image of Campbelltown as an ‘ugly houso wasteland’ and in 1976 The Sunday Telegraph stated that ‘Campbelltonians were so embarrassed by their address that they would not admit it’. In 1978 Catholic Bishop Dr William Murray visited Minto and criticized the high density public housing and by 1978 one third of all Campbelltown residents were ‘public housing tenants’. In 1980 the Sydney media generated moral panic around public housing ‘ghettos’ and there was continued criticism of public housing enclaves at Macquarie Fields, Airds, Minto, Claymore and Ambervale. Public housing was accused of generating a ‘demoralised’ way of life and public meetings of tenants labeled criticism at ‘cheap, shoddy journalism’. By 1984 the New South Wales Housing Commission had changed its priorities and abandoned a new public housing estate at Bow Bowing.

Local politician Elizabeth Kernohan,

From the 1970s one of the biggest champions of the Macarthur legacy was local politician Elizabeth Kernohan, whose political activity indirectly supported the Macarthur place-name. Kernohan, an agricultural scientist, was originally politicized by the 1973 release of the New Cities Plan, which she felt would destroy the area’s rurality. She was subsequently elected to Camden Council and in 1991 state parliament. Her political mantra centred on the powerful combination of the Macarthur mythology at Camden Park, along with Camden’s rurality, Englishness, rural heritage and conservatism. She used this an effective weapon to batter the supporters of both Sydney’s urban sprawl and the Macarthur growth centre at a local and state government level. Her political activities were enlivened by the public outcry at a local, state and national level in 1973 by the sale of most of Camden Park by the Macarthur family to land speculators. She vigorously defended the history and heritage of the Macarthur legacy in a bitter 1995 election campaign in defence of her Camden seat where Kernohan raised the folk devil of public housing and ‘the ugly Campbelltown’ stereotype against a residential development at Cawdor. She successfully elevated the iconic symbolism associated with presence of the Macarthur brand across the region while staunchly defending the areas rurality assisted by her immense popularity. One of her legacies is the location of the Elizabeth Macarthur Agricultural Institute on the former pastoral property of Camden Park, with the institute’s website boasting that it continues the traditions of John and Elizabeth Macarthur.
Ongoing connectedness

The communities of Campbelltown, Camden and Picton have an ongoing connectedness to their rural heritage and in the face of Sydney's urban sprawl the region's rurality takes a number of forms. There is the annual country show in each community and other community festivals that honour their colonial past. There is also a common nostalgia about the loss of their own town status and the countryside that went with it with its rural landscape of fences, paddocks, haysheds, farmhouses, and other features. At Campbelltown the rural landscape and vistas have been protected along the ridge line between Denham Court and Mount Annan under scenic protection zonings as the 'Scenic Hills' in 1972, which restricted development of an area that is still today characterized by its rural acreages and large homes. Even in the late 1960s, as McGill notes is his Campbelltown's history, as new suburbs started to appear at Bradbury, Ruse and Leumeah Heights newcomers were complaining in letters to editor in local newspapers that 'they had escaped the rat race and wanted Campbelltown to remain as the same uncomplicated, semi-rural haven they had first found'.[11] Even under the 1951 County of Cumberland Scheme where Campbelltown was identified as a satellite town there were green belts of open space, which effectively aimed to protect the area's rurality. The scheme acknowledged both the natural and historic landscapes and County of Cumberland Scheme undertook a historic survey of historic buildings in Campbelltown in 1963 and purchased Campbelltown's Queen Street Georgian buildings. This was the first time that the New South Wales Government had acquired privately owned buildings and was seen as a landmark in the state's conservation movement.[12]

Macarthur regionalism and peri-urbanism

Today the most important unifying theme between Campbelltown, Camden and Picton is their peri-urban location, on the city's rural-urban fringe which acts to foster Macarthur regionalism. Their community identity and sense of place has been re-shaped by the forces of urbanization as the Sydney juggernaut moved as it passed across the Cumberland Plain. The urban fringe has attracted newcomers and Sydney's ex-urbanites looking for an imagined rural arcadia promoted by land developers and other rent-seekers in master-planned estates. The rurality of these edge communities is contested as a range of actors seek to commodify it on a stage of competing interests around stereotypes and perceptions. The combination of these factors has meant the arrival of Sydney's urban sprawl has seen some in the community retreat to an idealized version of these country towns, a form of 'country town idyll' that is based on the use of local history and heritage.[13] Wollondilly Shire promotes its rurality through its policy 'Living Together in Rural Wollondilly' which states that the council provides 'an opportunity for residents to live amidst a rural setting of productive farming enterprises'.[14]

MACROC

With the failure of the Macarthur growth centre another official attempt at developing Macarthur regionalism occurred in 1986. The Hawke Federal Government played a role in development of Regional Organisations of Councils (ROCs) through the Federal Government's Office of Local Government and its Local Government Development Program. It came out of the Hawke government's conviction that local authorities could make a positive contribution to the Commonwealth's national economic reform strategy.[15] The Camden, Campbelltown and Wollondilly LGAs came together in 1986 as MACROC, the Macarthur Regional Organisation of Councils with its headquarters in Campbelltown. MACROC's charter states that its aim is to 'promote a regional approach to issues' and to develop 'regional facilitation, planning and coordination', to promote 'a regional economic growth strategy' and 'provide a voice for regional issues'.[16] MACROC has had mixed success, and while some accuse it of being a talkfest, its presence has supported Macarthur regionalism. MACROC spokesperson Christine Winning defends its role as in regional advocacy and states that has a achieved a number of outcomes of regional importance in the areas of job creation, economic growth, education, small business, local government, environment and tourism since its foundation.[17]

Macarthur Country Tourist Association

The voluntary sector has had a role to play in promoting Macarthur regionalism through the establishment of the Macarthur Country Tourist Association in 1978. The association had the supported of Campbelltown, Camden, Wollondilly and Liverpool councils, although it collapsed in 1994 after Wollondilly Shire withdrew support.[18] In 1996 after the collapse of the association, Camden Council set up the Camden Interim Tourist Committee and continued to operate independently from Oxley Cottage in Narellan.[19] In 2008 Camden and Campbelltown LGAs started a joint tourism project as part of the Macarthur Tourism Action Plan which was marketed as Destination Macarthur, and was influenced by Tourism New South Wales's Destination Development Program and the 2007 Griffith Local Government and Shires Association Tourism Conference which used the theme Tourism – An Investment. Wollondilly General Manager Les McMahon has stated that the council was not involved in the 2008 venture because of cost considerations and not any lack of support for local regionalism. In recent months, according to McMahon, the council has re-examined the potential benefits of being involved with a regional approach to tourism. The Wollondilly region conducts an independent tourism strategy through the Wollondilly Tourism Association Inc which is supported by Destination Macarthur, MACROC and Wollondilly Shire. While the website promotes shire attractions, it omits Camden Park, which is located in Wollondilly Shire.[20] McMahon agrees that Macarthur regionalism needs a clear identity based on the place-name of Macarthur,[21] which has been partially accomplished in Destination Macarthur's Official Visitors Guide 2013/2014. The Guide gives an account of the Macarthur legacy around Camden Park, although not recognizing its unique national status, while attempting to build a Macarthur tourism brand based on 'adventure, dining, outdoors, golf, farm visiting and accommodation'. Within the Guide the Macarthur legacy is relegated to a short section on 'living history' and states 'the region of Macarthur is named after renowned pioneers, John and Elizabeth Macarthur'. It does add that 'Macarthur's heritage is evident at every turn and adds to the region's charm' and 'a simple walk down the towns' main streets will reveal a rich array of colonial architecture'.[22]

Macarthur regionalism and local business

Over the years Macarthur regionalism has had mixed support by the local business and community voluntary organizations. A survey of telephone listings of local businesses in 2011 indicated that only 156 business listings used the term Macarthur in their business name, for example, Macarthur Tavern, Macarthur Camera House and of these 61 businesses were located in Campbelltown, while the

remainder were located in other local suburbs. On the other hand the traditional names of the country towns of Camden, Campbelltown and Picton were the preferred option for business names with 134 had Camden in their business name, while 140 used Campbelltown in their business name, for example, Camden Towing Services and Campbelltown Car Detailing. A search of the 2014 Wollondilly Business Directory reveals that 24 businesses have used the Picton place-name, while at a district level even the Telstra telephone listings were located in the 2013 Campbelltown Telephone Directory which included Camden and Picton.

In Macarthur lifestyle magazine

Amongst local businesses there are some prominent and enthusiastic supporters of Macarthur regionalism as a coherent market place and branding that has a distinctive identity. Most notably In Macarthur lifestyle magazine publisher David Everett who has stated that his support for Macarthur regionalism for his business ‘seemed obvious and wasn’t really a decision’. Everett’s quarterly magazine started in 1999, has a print run of 20,000, is published in Campbelltown and is distributed throughout the three LGAs at points in Macarthur Square, Campbelltown, Camden, Narellan, Mt Annan, and Picton. Everett feels that Macarthur is a different geographic region to Sydney’s south west, ‘is culturally quite different’ and has ‘a sense of community’, which he maintains is ‘quite rare in the rest of Sydney’. He states that there is ‘a distinct region [which] feels like a region’ and the ‘name describes quite an organic community’ across all three LGAs. Amongst other local businesses that use the regional branding is the Macarthur Credit Union, which adopted the Macarthur name in 1978. The credit union wanted to extend its brand and grow its customer base and changed it name in 1978 from the Clutha Employees Credit Union, which was established in 1971, to the Macarthur Mutual Credit Union and extended membership to the local community. It then progressively established branches across the region starting with Picton in 1979, Camden 1979, Narellan 1990, Tahmoor 1994. It changed its name in 1994 to Macarthur Credit Union and started a mobile service at Oran Park.

Community radio station 2MCR,

Local media outlets are prominent supporters of Macarthur regionalism including Community radio station 2MCR, which started operations on the 1989 and promotes itself as "Heart of Macarthur". It was the first radio station aimed at broadcasting to the Macarthur region, are staffed and operated entirely by volunteers and broadcasts 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The local commercial radio station C91.3, which has been on air since 2001, uses a call sign 2MAC and the slogan 'Macarthur First'. It has a limited broadcast area of the major centres of Campbelltown and Camden under Federal Government broadcast regulations and is owned by WIN Corporation. The local print media have been supporters of Macarthur regionalism for decades, although in recent years have responded to the resurgence of localism under the influence of globalization by re-establishing local editions of Macarthur regional newspaper titles (mentioned earlier).

Camden Community Directory

Similarly the community voluntary sector has a mixed response for its support of Macarthur regionalism. An examination of the 2005 Camden Community Directory only has 53 voluntary organizations that used Macarthur in their title, out a total listing of 380 entries. One current regional organization is the Macarthur Community Forum, which is an inter-agency organization which was incorporated in 2000 and changed its name to Sector Connect in 2008. It covers the four local government areas of Campbelltown, Camden, Wollondilly and Wingecarribee and acts a peak organization for the not-for-profit sector across the LGAs. The organization operates Volunteering Macarthur and acts as an agency for other government related services including Macarthur Youth Services Network and MacUnity.

Other regional voluntary organizations range from the Macarthur Rural Fire Service to regional sporting organizations including Macarthur District Soccer Football Association and Macarthur Basketball Association, while 2013 saw the birth of Quota International of Macarthur after the demise of the Camden Quota Club.

Conclusions for Macarthur Regionalism

In conclusion, a name does matter and Macarthur regionalism is a touchy issue in the communities of Campbelltown, Camden and Picton where identity, place, stereotypes and perceptions are realities for some but not for all. The authentic use of the regional term Macarthur has been contested from its origins and still generates more heat than light. While acknowledging that the Macarthur story and Macarthur legacy does have links to all these communities they all developed identities as small closed rural communities. Government, business and the voluntary sector have a mixed response to Macarthur regionalism. Government has a mixed history on the issue while some local businesses see an identifiable separate market place.
Macarthur regionalism has been caught up in the broader issues of regional stereotypes applied to Sydney’s west and south west. McGill and others are seeking to re-take ownership of their identity using the Macarthur place name. It is a hot-button issue given people’s emotional investment in the characteristics that make up the identity of local residents. While Macarthur regionalism has some traction there is still parochial loyalty to the place-name of Campbelltown. Camden and Picton. This creates layers of meaning and memory for many based on hope and loss and a host of other elements that are all part people’s daily lives and their identity.

For Macarthur regionalism to gain wider community acceptance its supporters need to develop a much clearer identity and branding. While it has the support of government, business and voluntary organizations there needs to be a stronger narrative around a common message. The cultural landscape of Macarthur regionalism has three common elements that need to be part of the message: the colonial narrative of the Macarthur legacy at Camden Park; the regions rurality; and other aspects of the region’s cultural heritage. A reasonable start would be to develop a coherent story based on the heritage of the Macarthur family and the national status of Camden Park homestead precinct, followed by support for the region’s rurality that is used by local government, land developers, newcomers, politicians and a host of others. A strong narrative around these themes will have the additional benefit of strengthening community connections and social cohesion, which will in turn increase the meaning, purpose and satisfaction in people’s lives. Regionalism will build community resilience and break down social exclusion particularly in the newly emerging communities where Sydney’s ex-urbanites are seeking a new beginning in a new community. Hope and loss are constant themes that emerge for newcomers as they attempt to build their new identity and sense of place.

Notes


Christine Winning, Executive Officer, MACROC, email, 4 April 2014.


Camden Interim Tourist Committee, Minutes, 26 June 1996.


Les McMahon, Wollondilly LGA General Manager, Telephone Interview, 2 April 2014.


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