



Putting pinot alongside merino in Cromwell District, Central Otago, New Zealand: Rural amenity and the making of the global countryside



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ABSTRACT

The paper draws on recent debates in the study of the space economy to explicate the development of a newly differentiated global countryside. Using a case study of the Cromwell District in the Central Otago region of New Zealand, we show how a place long valued for its natural and recreational amenity has been re-assembled in recent times by new configurations of actors, some well-established in the region, and others more recent amenity migrants from within New Zealand and overseas, engaging in regionally novel combinations of investment and economic practice. These actors have exploited Cromwell District's amenity repertoire in a process of creative enhancement by putting vineyards and wine-making in a spectacular high country landscape. Importantly, the result of the early stages of these developments has been further to enhance the region's amenity repertoire, attracting more migrants and investment. Our study shows therefore how places can and do 're-resource' in processes of globalisation and amenity migration, in this case by developing new networks associated with the international wine trade, regional and global flows of domestic and international tourists, real estate development and the growth of related service industries. As a consequence we have been able to engage constructively with very recent interpretations of amenity migration and rural economic, social and landscape change in the Antipodes.

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1. Introduction

In April 2014 a very significant event occurred in Central Otago's Cromwell District¹ in the South Island of New Zealand: for the first time a prominent vineyard and wine-making enterprise owned by a District resident was sold to a *global* luxury goods group (McKenzie-McLean, 2014). In announcing the sale, the owner of the vineyard said: "We view this ... as a boost for the region, expanding the reputation of Central Otago ... around the globe as a top quality Pinot Noir growing area" (McKenzie-McLean, 2014, n.p). The sale signalled an important next step in the globalisation of the world's

southernmost wine region, for up until this time there had been no global *corporate* presence among the owners' of the region's vineyards and wineries.

It is also important to note that the Central Otago wine region is the most recent example of a series of globalised production regimes that have been located in this part of New Zealand. Others include those associated with: minerals, particularly gold; export sheep and beef meat; merino wool; export cherries; and latterly, tourism, exploiting the region's high natural amenity and opportunities to participate in a range of recreational activities. Each regime has been associated with social, economic, environmental and landscape change in the region. Using vineyard development and wine production as an exemplar, our purpose in this paper is to present the recent dramatic social, economic and landscape changes in Cromwell District as a vehicle to contribute to debates about the development of the global countryside and particularly the role of rural amenity as a stimulus for in-migration and regional change.

We first outline the literature on the global countryside, amenity and rural amenity migration showing how amenity is today a

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¹ Cromwell is the name of a small township in Central Otago District, New Zealand. The local authority jurisdiction which includes the town, two much smaller settlements and the per-urban and rural district that surrounds them is known as the Cromwell Ward. During our fieldwork our respondents referred to the area encompassed by the Ward as the Cromwell District and it is this term we have used throughout this paper.

dominant force for social, economic, environmental and landscape change in particular rural regions. We then turn to a discussion of our methodology and methods emphasising recent developments in the study of the space economy and highlight the importance of taking an historical and contemporary approach to understanding rural change. We then present the historical background to our Cromwell District case study region, highlighting in particular the transition of the region from being mainly agricultural, with a focus on merino sheep production, to a new and much more multifunctional form. Next we focus on the role of amenity in the making of a wine region in Cromwell District, highlighting the centrally important roles of interacting established residents and amenity migrants from within and beyond New Zealand. After briefly commenting on the limited level of social and cultural conflict generated in these processes of change we conclude, emphasising that early entrants were attracted to the potential of viticulture and wine-making in an existing high amenity region and their efforts created new vineyard landscapes, high quality wine and opportunities to engage in wine-related hospitality. These additions to the amenity repertoire of the region attracted still more migrants. Our study thus shows that places can and do re-resource iteratively in processes of globalisation and amenity migration.

2. The globalising countryside, amenity and rural amenity migration

Over the last three decades, scholars have investigated processes of rural restructuring and the associated transformation of rural economy, society and space. As a consequence, many commentators, particularly political economists, have come to agree that since the 1980s, globalisation, commodification, neoliberal politics and allied exogenous regulatory processes and forces, have all played a role in the creation of a 'differentiated countryside' comprising new hybrid and dynamic production and consumption spaces (Marsden et al., 1993; Murdoch et al., 2003). While interest in the origins, nature and impacts of 1980s rural restructuring has diminished, there remains a strong scholarly focus on the continuing transformative effects of globalisation in rural regions, particularly those accorded high amenity value. Amenity-rich rural areas are particularly interesting because they attract new people from across the globe whose combined values, desires, networks, ideas, investments and activities influence how these places are re-resourced and therefore change (Perkins, 2006). These areas comprise a particular manifestation of what has become known as the global countryside (Woods, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2011).

While a discussion of the global countryside may imply that exogenous structural forces are the dominant influence shaping contemporary rural spaces, 'the local' still remains of vital significance. This is because globalisation works itself out differently across time and space as it interacts with emplaced regulatory arrangements, production and consumption practices and the values, aspirations and actions of rural communities, individuals and firms. Consequently, globalising economic and cultural processes produce differentiated rural areas by linking local and global agency and creating new urban–rural relations and networks. Within nation states, this process affects competition for investment between regions and sub-regions and creates and sharpens divisions within communities. Woods (2006, 2007, 2009, 2011) interprets this contemporary change process as the 'globalising rural' which he sees as involving and the outcome of the (inter)actions of an ever-expanding network of regional, national and global actors (see also McCarthy, 2007; Murdoch, 2003).

Woods (2006, 2007, 2009, 2011) developed his global countryside thesis by studying change in the Queenstown-Lakes District of the South Island of New Zealand. There, in-migration, associated

population growth, and touristic and domestic rural residential and commercial property development is transforming the region. Woods argued that these modes of development are occurring because of the area's high and internationally recognised natural amenity and a corresponding demand for rural living in what has become a "premier destination" (Moss, 2006b, p.15). As a result of the increasing interest and investment, the Queenstown-Lakes District is being (re)shaped by an expanding network of actors including international tourists and non-resident investors (such as prominent North American celebrities and business people, one of whom has purchased three high country sheep stations 32,000 ha in extent), and also those regionally based such as boosteristic politicians and developers and savvy and often well-resourced entrepreneurs. Woods also found that Queenstown's growth is being contested, and that this is most evident in debates and encounters concerning land use planning. He stressed that while at first glance it might appear that the locality is dominated by global actors and globalisation processes, it is more astute to view the region as a hybrid construction involving local and global actors who – whether in agreement, partnership or pitted against one another – are all engaged in Queenstown's transformation.

As we noted at the outset, and as is evident in Woods' Queenstown and later studies, the notion of rural amenity and its ability to attract new residents, domestic and international tourists, private capital, and renewed attention and investment from the central state, has been a key focus in theorising about the global countryside (e.g., Albrecht, 2007; McCarthy, 2007). Albrecht (2007) suggests that while rural populations have historically grown in areas where extractable natural minerals and the necessary resources for primary production have been plentiful, in the global era it is also an area's amenity repertoire – the "combinations of factors that comprise an aesthetically pleasing environment" (Albrecht, 2007, p.6) – that drives economic development and rural social change in processes of 'creative enhancement' (Mitchell, 2013). Of course, amenity is a key feature of rural change in only some places (Argent et al., 2007; Holmes, 2006; Woods, 2006, 2009). It is able to be harnessed in only those "areas meeting the requisite aesthetic, legal, linguistic and other preconditions" which means that "most rural areas [are] unlikely to receive ... [amenity related] investment". If attempts are being made to re-resource other rural regions this must be done using natural and cultural resources other than amenity; but of course one place-promotion strategy in those regions might be to attempt to re-present amenity in new ways (McCarthy, 2007, p.131 cited in Woods, 2009).

This raises the question of what constitutes amenity in a rural context. For Argent et al. (2007, 2014), writing from an Australian perspective, rural amenity represents a range of regionally situated *environmental* attributes including coastal vistas and access to good surfing and swimming beaches. From a North American viewpoint, McGranahan (1999) highlighted the importance of climate and access to water resources such as lakes and rivers. Buckley et al. (2006) included wine regions and national parks, and mountains (see also Glorioso and Moss, 2007; Hall, 2006; Loeffler and Steinicke, 2007; Moss, 2006a, 2006b). Widening the lens, Moss (2006b, pp.8–9) also draws attention to the *socio-cultural* amenities of rural areas which are the:

... tangible and intangible manifestations of human groups considered culturally valuable by either their originators or others. Tangible manifestations are artefacts, including the built or significantly altered natural environment. At the more visually perceivable end of an intangibility continuum are the performing arts, spectacles and rites, and towards the other end are audible language, gestures and other shared constructs, such as aesthetic and organisational paradigms.

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