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Counterurbanisation and the Rural Idyll: A Case Study of Lifestyle Blocks in Dunedin

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Geography, University of Otago, Dunedin

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This study investigates a particular pattern of residential mobility in contemporary New Zealand, that is, the migration to live on lifestyle blocks. In particular it examines the context of, and motivations for, migrants’ decisions to move to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin in relation to the concept of the rural idyll.

A questionnaire survey sent to lifestyle block residents in the East Taieri and Pine Hill areas of Dunedin, and interviews with 15 residents, revealed that a variety of push and pull factors combined to contribute to residents’ decisions to migrate to lifestyle blocks. Overall, the desire for privacy and space and the perception of the rural as a safe place to live emerged as the most powerful motivations given by respondents. Only two of the 15 fundamental elements of the rural idyll identified in the literature were not present in the Dunedin case study. It was concluded that the rural idyll features strongly in the narratives of lifestyle block residents in Dunedin.

Interviews with key informants confirmed that the numbers of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand are growing. The increased development on the peri-urban fringe of many towns and cities, the introduction of the Resource Management Act (1991) and continual changes in regional district schemes have created many areas of contention for both lifestyle block residents and farmers alike.

The study concludes by considering prospects for future research and the need to understand the motivations and frameworks of meaning held by consumers of the increasingly commodified rural spaces in New Zealand.
I am especially grateful to Dr. Robin Law for her enthusiasm and the constant encouragement she has given me during the past three years. After supervising my honours dissertation, she was brave enough to take on supervision of my masters thesis. For her unfailing support and words of wisdom, I offer my sincere thanks.

I am indebted to the respondents who participated in this study, and to the interviewees who invited me into their homes. I am also very grateful to the surveyors, planners and real estate agents who offered me their valuable time and expertise, in particular, Mr John Lagan, who despite recovering from a serious accident, spent many long hours with me.

I would like to acknowledge the support and encouragement offered to me by the staff of the Otago Geography Department. The past three years as a postgraduate in this department have been memorable to say the least. The positive attitude they so willingly display and their good humour shown during various post-graduate ‘pranks’ (of which I had nothing to do with of course !!!) contributes to a wonderful department which I am proud to have been associated with.

Finally, I would like to thank the many friends I have made during my time at university. To the members of The Coven, keep up the cackling girls! ... and to fellow members of the Deadwood Society, keep up the good work, procrastinate regularly and enjoy life to the fullest!

Keep on cracking those jokes guys, and as Debs said… I’ll see you in Dublin!
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Introduction

It's a very basic animal instinct that man wants his own bit of land and his own home. In the city you're shepherded and pushed into little holes that give you no contentment.

(Anonymous, cited in Forsythe, 1982)

This thesis examines a particular pattern of residential mobility in contemporary New Zealand, that is the migration to live on lifestyle blocks. Lifestyle blocks are sections of land between one and 10 acres situated on the peri-urban fringe, and are also known as smallholdings, farmlets or hobby farms. This phenomenon is explored through a case study of settlements in the East Taieri and Pine Hill areas of Dunedin. In particular, it investigates the context of, and motivations for migrants' decisions to move to these lifestyle blocks in relation to the concept of the rural idyll. The research focuses on the central question: To what extent can the trend in New Zealand towards lifestyle blocks be understood as a form of consumption of the rural idyll? To address this question, the study investigates the motivations of people who select this form of housing and seeks to interpret their motivations in relation to a discourse of the rural.

Although New Zealand cities have historically had smallholdings on their urban fringe, the large-scale development and marketing of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand is a relatively recent phenomenon, related to larger demographic trends. Migration from urban areas to smaller towns and rural areas has increased since the late 1970s (Pool, 1985; Statistics New Zealand, 1996). The 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings substantiates this. Between 1991 and 1996 there was a significant outflow from 'urban' to 'rural' areas as over 36,000 more people moved into rural areas than left.
The long-established patterns of metropolitan growth and rural depopulation are now changing radically, as statistics show. From 1986 to 1991 rural areas in New Zealand increased by 1.58 per cent, but from 1991 to 1996, rural areas grew by 7.48 per cent (Statistics New Zealand, 1996). Although no national data is readily available on lifestyle block residential populations, these demographic shifts may indicate an increase in the popularity of lifestyle blocks. Data on the number of ‘improved lifestyle blocks’ (occupied rural properties generally over one hectare, often with a diversity of farming activities) in New Zealand indicate that the total has doubled between 1988 and 1997, from 34,680 to 69,993 (Grant and Grant, 1998: citing figures from Statistics New Zealand). However, this information is not wholly reliable, having been gathered sporadically and mostly using incomplete criteria (Grant and Grant, 1998:12).

Fairweather (1996) points out that lifestyle blocks are likely to be distinctive to New Zealand, but that smallholdings in general can be linked to the broader demographic patterns of urban and rural migration in most industrial countries. In the USA, for instance, since the early 1960s the population of non-metropolitan areas has increased more rapidly than that of metropolitan areas (Bunce, 1994). During the 1960s and 1970s many advanced western countries experienced what was described as “a major switch in the general pattern of population distribution” (Champion, 1998:19). This change typically involved the major cities and metropolitan areas showing a net loss by migration, while rural regions containing small and medium-sized towns showed signs of net-migration gains (Halliday and Coombes, 1995).

Many New Zealand urban-to-rural migrants, it is claimed, are moving to escape pollution, crowd-induced stress and other problems associated with a highly populated urban environment (Yerex, 1988). Some larger firms are moving their offices or plants out into country towns, utilising modern technology, overcoming problems previously associated with such moves, and benefiting from a more stable workforce. Associated with this progress is the growth of small service industries such as consultancy groups and craft industries. Improvements in technology and communication facilities have made where a person lives increasingly irrelevant to how they live. “Reduced friction of distance associated with transport and communication technology has allowed a further extension of urban communicating fields into widely dispersed networks”
The benefits of such improvements are especially important for those who choose to live on the urban fringe.

The term 'counterurbanisation' has been applied to this migration trend; however this term has been loosely defined and tends to direct attention towards urban-centred factors of change (Cloke, 1985). Interpreted broadly, counterurbanisation refers to a "redistribution of population from larger settlements and more densely populated areas to smaller centres and less densely settled areas" (Kontuly and Vogelsang, 1988:42).

The residential decision by some households to move from an urban site to a lifestyle block may thus be understood as one dimension of the counterurbanisation trend. The economic aspects of changing land use on the peri-urban fringe has been studied by urban geographers and theorists from Gottman (1961) on, but the economic dimensions of this pattern lie beyond the scope of this study. Instead, this study attempts to explain migration to lifestyle blocks with reference to the motivations of migrants and the context in which lifestyle blocks have emerged in New Zealand. In particular, the lifestyle block phenomenon will be examined as an arena where notions of the 'rural idyll' are expressed and potentially shape residential decisions.

The rural idyll is essentially an idealised version of the countryside (Short, 1991), that has been socially created. Woodward (1996:60) describes the rural idyll as "a set of ideas about rural areas as aesthetically pleasant and desirable places to live in" and stresses that the concept is historically specific. Attitudes to the countryside have been shaped by a response to the rural idyll. Crouch (1992:238) suggests that "people make their own sense of the rural, reinterpreting dominant images through their own cultural practice". Particular landscapes are given meaning through that practice. Landscape is experienced as an endorsement of the culture that it represents, and becomes part of the surrounding symbols of everyday culture. This raises questions as to the effect the rural idyll has on migration patterns, specifically, to lifestyle blocks. Is there a relationship between the notion of the 'rural idyll' and urban-to-rural migration patterns? How influential is the notion of the rural idyll in New Zealand society? Does the consumption of the New Zealand rural idyll have any parallels with the rural idyll in other industrial countries? Do New Zealanders create their own sense of an idealised rural space through the consumption of the rural idyll? How much influence does the
rural idyll have on migrants' decisions to move to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin? This study thus attempts to bring together two traditions of literature in geography: the work in population geography, migration and residential choice, and counterurbanisation; and the work in cultural and rural geography on concepts of the rural idyll.

Until relatively recently, contemporary migration research tended to focus on questions of methodology and technique, with less emphasis on content. British counterurbanisation and depopulation studies in the 1970s for instance, either concentrated solely on "enumerating the extent of population change rather than attempting to explain it, or else explanation was conducted solely in terms of contiguous observable events and processes" (Phillips, 1998:126). However, this situation is beginning to change, and an interest in the 'biographical experience' is emerging in contemporary migration research. This is one area of research where the two traditions are jointly contributing to the development of the field. Phillips (1998:146) contends that cultural studies and notions of post-modernism have rejected the restricted focus of studying the "tangible, observable and measurable materialities, to promote the importance of recognising a range of different experiences and conceptions of rural life". Research is focussing on the "real life experiences of rural dwellers" and more recently, on the "preoccupation with imagined geographies of the rural" (Cloke et. al, 1997:370). Valentine (1997) comments that rather than trying to define rural or rurality, geographers influenced by postmodern theory have begun instead to unpack the way that rurality is culturally constructed and deployed, emphasizing the production and contestation of meanings. A significant aspect of this work has been a recognition that there are 'multiple' cultural constructions of rurality and meanings assigned to living in the countryside (Philo, 1992). This study thus forms part of an emerging body of literature, which links population and cultural geographies. By focusing on the space where rural and urban meet, this study also links rural and urban geography.
There are three main research questions to be considered:

1. What is the context in which lifestyle blocks have emerged in
   (a) New Zealand
   (b) Dunedin
   as a residential choice?

2. What are the motivations for migrants' decisions to move to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin?

3. To what extent does the rural idyll feature in the narratives of lifestyle block residents?

To investigate these questions, the research design incorporated multiple methods. A questionnaire survey was sent to 160 lifestyle block residents in the study areas in order to elicit basic data regarding primary reasons for moving to lifestyle blocks, as well as general demographic and economic information. From the questionnaire responses, a group of 15 residents were selected and in-depth interviews carried out to establish secondary reasons for moving, as well as migrants' motivations. Interviews with a variety of key informants including real estate agents, planners and surveyors, were conducted, in order to investigate the context in which lifestyle blocks have emerged in New Zealand.

The body of the thesis is organised into two parts and is displayed in Figure 1.1. The first part, which includes Chapters Two, Three and Four, consists of an extended literature review with a particular focus on the notion of the rural idyll. Chapter Two provides a general overview of classic migration literature, and recent literature on a contemporary phenomenon relevant to lifestyle block settlement: the process of counterurbanisation. Chapter Three focuses on the development of the rural idyll in western societies, while Chapter Four discusses the creation of the rural idyll in New Zealand. The methodological approach used in this section draws on the humanities tradition in geography, which involves close reading and analysis of texts and representations to construct an argument in the form of an essay. The second part of
the thesis (Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight) draws more heavily on the tradition of geography as a social science. In this part of the thesis, a case study of lifestyle blocks in Dunedin is presented. The methodology used for this study is outlined in Chapter Five. Chapter Six discusses the context in which Lifestyle blocks have emerged in New Zealand and particularly, Dunedin. The motivations behind migrants' decisions to move to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin and the effect of the rural idyll phenomenon on this migration pattern are discussed in Chapters Seven and Eight. The thesis concludes with Chapter Nine.
STRUCTURE OF THESIS

Urban Geography

Population Geography

Cultural Geography

Rural Geography

Residential Mobility

Migration

Cultural Constructions of place

Construction of rurality

Biographical experience of migration

MIGRATION TO PERI-URBAN FRINGE
- Migration models
- Counterurbanisation

Chapter 2

RURAL IDYLL

Chapter 3

Counterurbanisation in New Zealand

Rural Idyll in New Zealand

Chapter 4

Case Study Topic
Migration to Lifestyle Blocks in Dunedin

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. Context of residential choice

Chapter 6

2. Motivation of Migrants

Chapter 7

3. Importance of rural idyll in migrants' motivations

Chapter 8

Figure 1.1 Diagrammatic Outline of Thesis Structure
Plate 1 Interviewee's property, Pine Hill, Dunedin
2

Lifestyle Blocks and Counterurbanisation

2.1 Introduction

Two themes will be discussed in this chapter. First, the classic literature on migration will be reviewed with reference to motivations by way of decision-making models, which make use of notions of push-pull factors. Second, this chapter includes an overview of the recent literature on a contemporary phenomenon relevant to lifestyle block settlement: the process of counterurbanisation. The chapter ends with a consideration of the phenomenon of migration to the peri-urban fringe, set in the context of these two themes in the literature of population geography.

2.2 Migration and Residential Mobility

We live in the world, among our data...we are concerned therefore to discover not only the kind of world in which we are living, but also to discover how we as geographers inhabit, reproduce and change that world, and how we understand and control the process of change.

(Kobayashi and Mackenzie, 1989:1)

Of the three major components of population change, migration is the most difficult to conceptualise and measure. The definition of birth and death, at least for statistical purposes, is clear-cut, but migration is “a physical and social transition, not just an unequivocal biological event” (Zelinsky, 1971:223). Ogden (1982) defines migration as “permanent or semi-permanent change of residence of an individual or group of people” (1982:290). It is important to note that there is no comprehensive theory of
migration, although attempts have been made to integrate migration into economic and social theory, spatial analysis and behavioral theory (Ogden, 1982:293).

Typical of this approach, Germani (1965) regards migration as the outcome of objective factors. These are the characteristics of potential places of origin and destination, and the nature of contact between them. "The normative context embraces the norms, beliefs and values of the society at origin, and the psychological attitudes and expectations of specific individuals" (cited in Jones, 1981:227). Likewise, Lee (1966) sees the migration process as involving sets of perceived factors relating to origin and destination, and a set of intervening obstacles (Figure 2.1). He argues that the sets of factors and obstacles will vary among individuals in relation to life-cycle, socio-economic and personality characteristics (cited in Jones, 1981:227).

![Diagram of the Migration Process](image)

**Figure 2.1** A Longitudinal Representation of the Migration Process

Source: (Jones, 1981:228)

Emphasis is given in Figure 2.1 to a developmental or biographical analysis of action to explain behaviour in terms of a sequence of stages along an extended time-line. In the migration context, such a longitudinal approach embraces a stayer-mover option at each major stage of development and considers the total migration situation of each migrant (Jones, 1981:227).
This general model of the migration process also underlies models of residential mobility, which specifically address migrants from one residential site to another within the urban setting.

Figure 2.2 is based on a conceptual model of household relocation and search process. This model recognises that the household will derive some degree of utility from its current dwelling: “a product of its own biography and of the qualities and attributes of the dwelling itself and the neighbourhood” (Knox, 1991:253). This may not necessarily be positive, however, and the combination of both push and pull factors that will be discussed later, may result in the decision by the dwellers to take some course of action. Following from point A in the diagram, the dweller has two choices, whereby they can either take measures to improve their environment or seek an alternative residence. The latter choice involves defining what the dweller wants in a new location; searching for that location; and comparing possible alternatives.
Figure 2.2 Knox’s Model of Household Relocation and Search Process
Source: Knox (1991:252)
2.3 Explanations of Migration in Terms of Push and Pull Factors

The notion of push and pull factors as explanatory variables for migration decision-making is prevalent in both migration and residential mobility literature. Push factors are those at the origins which are assumed to have a negative influence on the quality indicators of life, while pull factors are the positive factors drawing prospective migrants to the destination (Bogue, 1969, cited in Moon, 1995:507). Table 2.1 lists Bogue's principal push and pull factors.

Table 2.1 Bogue's push and pull factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Push Factors</strong></th>
<th><strong>Pull Factors</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Decline of regional income causing localised recession</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Loss of employment (from causes other than recession, e.g. mechanisation)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Political, religious, ethnic and/or other forms of oppression, or discrimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Little or no pathway to increased personal development in structure such as marriage, status or career, institutional facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Catastrophe. For example, floods, fire, earthquake, war, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Perceived superior career opportunities in another location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Greater income in another place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Personal growth opportunities such as better education, group association, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Preferable environment, such as climate, housing, schools and/or other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Desire to be with kin or other favourable people, in another place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lure of different social or physical activities in another place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


There appear to be a number of ‘push’ factors which contribute to urban dwellers’ moving from an urban environment. Perry, Dean and Brown (1986) suggests that these include “mounting pollution, congestion, crime, violence and tension” (Perry et al, 1986:14), while the countryside offers many ‘pull’ factors, for example, perceptions of the countryside as a haven of peace, tranquillity, and pure air. Rossie (1955) distinguished between involuntary and voluntary moves. Involuntary moves are caused by such events as evictions, property demolitions or natural disasters. Voluntary migration can be attributed to both push and pull factors. According to Knox (1994)
the most frequently cited voluntary push factor is the lack of sufficient space, or rather the feeling of insufficient space for household needs. Other frequently cited push factors include “the costs of maintenance and repair, aspects of structural or technological obsolescence in the dwelling, as well as aspects of the physical environment of the neighbourhood” (Knox, 1994:251). The most commonly cited pull factors included “the attractions of better schools and public services, the chance to switch housing sub-markets (for example, from renting to owning) and the attractions of particular settings in pursuing particular lifestyles” (Knox, 1994:251). In practice, households are ‘pushed’ and ‘pulled’ by a variety of factors at once.

Figure 2.3 shows Lee’s (1966) summary of the migration process involving sets of perceived factors relating to origin and destination, and a set of intervening obstacles. The sets of factors and obstacles will vary among individuals in relation to life-cycle, socio-economic and personality characteristics.

Origin and destination factors and intervening obstacles in migration.
Attracting factors are shown as + Repelling factors as - Neutral factors as 0

Figure 2.3 Origin and Destination Factors and Intervening Obstacles in Migration
(Source: Lee, 1960:48)
Chapter Two – Counterurbanisation and the Rural Idyll

The push-pull theory has been criticised by a number of researchers as an oversimplification of a highly complex process. For example, Thomas (1954) has argued that:

all sorts of promptings may lie behind the decision of an individual to leave one country in order to live in another...It is not by making a catalogue of such 'reasons' that one can hope to understand the phenomenon of migration any more than an attempt to describe the manifold motives leading people to want to buy a commodity would constitute an analysis of demand.


Indeed, for some households, the net effect of push and pull factors may not be enough to prompt the search for alternatives. Even if a household begins to search among potential alternatives, the search may not necessarily result in moving. Adjustments can be made to perceived needs and wants, to both the dwelling itself, and to the neighbourhood (Knox, 1994).

2.4 Critique of Migration Models and Alternative Explanations

At first glance, human migration appears to be very straightforward concept - it is the movement of a person from point A to point B, usually involving a change in one’s place of permanent residence so as to distinguish the idea from a simple movement (Halfacree and Boyle, 1998). However, migration must be considered from a number of perspectives in order to more comprehensively understand the processes involved. Migration has no psychological component; rather it is “a response by humans to a series of economic, social and political stimuli within the environment” (Lewis, 1982:99).

Lin-Yuan and Kosinski (1994) have noted that migration is generally viewed as goal directed behaviour. However, this approach is somewhat restrictive in that it “ignores social character” and reduces people’s behaviour to “episodes of theoretical reasoning” (Halfacree and Boyle, 1998). Moon (1995) suggests that current approaches in migration research constrain the opportunity for research based on migrants’
motivational perspective. He recommends an expansion into the field of social psychology in an attempt to broaden migration research’s understanding of human action.

Motivational psychologists have sought to understand both the implicit and explicit forces that invigorate direct human action: the realm of unconscious drives; the realm of discursive consciousness which represents that which is rationalised; and the realm of pragmatic and/or learnt responses to everyday activities.

(Moon, 1995:510).

In the realm of unconscious drives, need fulfillment is viewed as an important motivational issue. Discursive consciousness follows from the fact that people’s behaviour can result from an emotional construct, that is, people often react on ‘gut feelings’ or other non-rationalised methods. The third realm - the pragmatic and/or learnt responses to everyday activities - is concerned with how people are socialised to act and react within their surroundings (Moon, 1995:510).

Findlay and Graham (1991) have argued that one future direction population geography should take is to use humanistic methodologies to look at the individual as decision-maker. This would lead to an emphasis on the experience and context of migration and would link population geography with social psychology. Migration is a largely social experience for all those involved, and therefore the study of migration must consider every aspect of a person’s lifestyle. Not all migrants are motivated by the same factors and hence migration research must be carried out accordingly. Population geographers are now beginning to show a renewed interest in a more biographical approach, rather than focusing on quantitative analysis (for example, Findlay and Graham 1991).

Having examined the principal migration models, the chapter will now explore a particular population movement, the phenomenon known as counterurbanisation.
2.5 Counterurbanisation defined

The phenomenon of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand (migration to the peri-urban fringe) can be understood in the context of a broader demographic process, namely counterurbanisation. Counterurbanisation can be defined as the movement of population from large cities to smaller settlements on a scale that makes a significant difference to the distribution of the population between towns at different points in the urban hierarchy (Pooley and Turnbull, 1996:514). Essentially, counterurbanisation is 'a process of population deconcentration away from the large urban settlements' (Johnston, Gregory and Smith, 1995:99).

The terms 'counterurbanisation' and 'population turnaround' have been widely used to describe the net flow of migrants from major conurbations, primarily to their hinterlands, but also to remoter, peripheral and predominately rural regions (Jones, Ford, Caird and Berry, 1984:437). This movement is acknowledged as a relatively common occurrence in developed countries. However, Kontuly et al. (1988) point out that it is essential that counterurbanisation movements should not be confused with the process of suburbanisation that is occurring in many western metropolitan areas.

Dean, Shaw, Brown, Perry and Thorneycroft (1984) suggest that "counterurbanisation seems to enfold a number of trends, including deconcentration, decentralisation, de-industrialisation and ruralisation" (Dean et al. 1984:177).

![Diagram of Trends Associated with Counterurbanisation](image-url)

Figure 2.4 Trends Associated with Counterurbanisation (Adapted from Dean et al, 1984:177)
Berry (1976) as one of the first recognised counterurbanisation theorists, defines counterurbanisation simply as "... a process of population deconcentration; it implies a movement from a state of more concentration to a state of less concentration" (Berry, 1976:17, cited in Cloke, 1985:13). Berry's basic definition however, has been widely criticised in that it provides no guidance as to how concentration and deconcentration are to be recognised and according to Champion and Watkin (1991), can only be considered as a starting point.

Consequently, there exists a vast selection of definitions of the concept known as counterurbanisation. However, as Perry et al. (1986) states:

Models are constructs that only exist in the minds of theorists, and the notion of counterurbanisation is no exception to the rule. It is valuable as a focus for discussion of a mixture of demographic, social and economic trends rather than as a concept capable of a precise definition.


Pooley and Turnbull (1996:514) suggest that not only was suburbanisation a feature of nineteenth century British cities, but that "a significant amount of those leaving large cities were moving down the urban hierarchy to smaller free-standing settlements", therefore suggesting that the process of counterurbanisation is not new, but that "the late twentieth century has simply experienced an expansion of a much older trend". Nevertheless, most literature points to the 1970s as the recognised beginning of the counterurbanisation trend in Western countries. "It was then that it became apparent that the long-established pattern of population agglomeration in major metropolitan regions of developed countries was being reversed" (Jones et al. 1984:437). The last three decades have seen the counterurbanisation trend advance, and "the dominant net-migration movement is now away from the larger and older urban cores to the less densely populated peripheral regions"(Dean et al. 1984:177).

Beale (1975) is considered by many to be the first academic to draw attention to the revival of population growth in non-metropolitan America. His findings were followed by a series of further studies both in the United States and internationally (see Berry

Soon after World War Two, many Western cities experienced large increases in population, due in part to employment opportunities available in manufacturing and service industries. Combined with an international migrant labour system introduced in the late 1960s and early 1970s especially in Western Europe, this eventuated in rapid suburbanisation. This suburbanisation resulted in formerly dependent small towns and rural areas becoming incorporated into the growing western cities (Fielding, 1989: 144). Consequently, such rapid growth brought about overcrowding and associated pressures, re-establishing the ‘anti-urban myth’ and highlighting the socially constructed ‘attractiveness’ of the country. “Significant reversals in longstanding population distribution trends in many developed countries since the 1970s suggest that sustained metropolitan depopulation may accompany advanced post-industrialist development” (Frey, 1987:240). This, however, is only one of several theories on the development of the counterurbanisation concept, which will be examined later.

In most western cities, counterurbanisation was the dominant migration movement of the 1970s, but by the early 1980s there were signs that the movement was beginning to lose impetus. Rising unemployment and the oil crisis in the 1970s have been suggested as reasons for the initial decline, although these suggestions, just like the theories behind the emergence of counterurbanisation are the source of much debate.

The counterurbanisation phenomenon has appeared in a variety of forms in several countries including United States, Sweden, Japan, Denmark, Italy, Belgium, France, Canada, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands and New Zealand (Vining and Kontuly, 1978). Counterurbanisation appeared in France, Germany and the Netherlands as early as the 1960s, but only became evident in other countries in the early 1970s (Wardell, 1980). The question therefore arises as to why counterurbanisation emerged at such a similar time, in such a diverse and varied range of countries? Wardell (1980) points out that:
Changes in residential preferences in response to worsening urban conditions seems unlikely in view of the available documentation that negative externalities of cities such as density, congestion, substandard housing and financial instabilities have been decreasing, rather than increasing in recent decades (Wardell, 1980:85).

He adds that, furthermore “there is little evidence of an association between size of cities and the severity of these negative externalities” (Wardell, 1980:85). Therefore, it is important to reflect on several theories when considering the counterurbanisation phenomenon. The counterurbanisation concept has become both multifaceted and limited as a specific agent of understanding rural regeneration. Moreover, it “tends to view rural population from an urban perspective, highlighting push factors from urban areas rather than potential pull factors exerted by rural areas”(Cloke, 1985:14).

2.6 Explanations of Counterurbanisation

Diverse explanations for the counterurbanisation phenomenon appear in the literature. Many authors concentrate on the importance of changes in the spatial distribution of employment opportunities, implying that “counterurbanisation is an employment process” (Kontuly and Vogelsang, 1988:42). Others imply that counterurbanisation can be explained by examining government policy (Cloke, 1985); while another body of thought considers a regional restructuring perspective (Jarvie, 1981). Jarvie believes that the fundamental transformation of modern industrialised economies from manufacturing to services provides the reason for a decline in large metropolitan centres and the growth of rural and small urban areas. Several researchers connect counterurbanisation with job expansion in non-metropolitan areas, particularly Beale (1977). To date, little emphasis has been placed on socio-cultural factors contributing to the counterurbanisation phenomenon, although one of the counterurbanisation theory’s earliest researchers, Berry (1976), does argue specifically that counterurbanisation in the United States is a reflection of American location preferences for low-density, amenity-rich environments in newer areas (cited in Kontuly and Vogelsang, 1988:43).
Cloke (1985) suggests that while mortality and fertility rates in an indigenous population do affect net migration, such rates are generally not significant enough for a process such as counterurbanisation to develop. Instead, Cloke suggests that several localised factors are important to the development of counterurbanisation: the land market; the physical environment; the housing market; the employment market; social and community factors and accessibility (Cloke, 1985:21). Several significant explanations have been put forward by counterurbanisation scholars, which will now be discussed by drawing predominantly on the ideas of Perry et al. (1986), and Kontuly and Vogelsang (1998).

**THE CONSUMER-LED MODEL:**
The consumer-led model is the complete antithesis of conventional thought... “centrifugal rather than centripetal; operated by quality-of-life rather than producer-led, and involving small-scale rather than large-scale activities” (Perry et al., 1986:3). Therefore, the consumer-led model is a shift away from the traditional urban-value system, and towards a more “tranquil” and appropriately termed “post-industrial lifestyle” in remoter regions (Perry et al., 1986:3). Advances in technology and a more mobile society make it possible for more urban dwellers to shift to less densely populated areas. A reduced friction of distance associated with transportation and communications technology improvements allows for an extension of urban residences and employment into widely dispersed areas (Kontuly and Vogelsang, 1998). Perry et al. (1986) suggest that this kind of movement involves not only a geographical but also an ideological advancement, “a desire for an alternative way of life in which conventional dichotomies between ‘work’ and ‘non-work’ are discarded” (Perry et al., 1986:3).

Another important argument is the naturalistic explanation of counterurbanisation; namely that many people have an innate human need to live in a rural residential environment. Halfacree (1997:74) considers counterurbanisation as “a spatial act which individuals freely enter into, whether as single persons or as part of a household”. He suggests that people are “voting with their feet” in their migrations from urban to rural locations (Halfacree, 1997:74).
COUNTERURBANISATION AS A BY-PRODUCT OF AGGLOMERATION:
This model suggests that once the agglomeration threshold is reached whereby diseconomies of scale begin to take effect, workers are forced out towards the urban fringe. Push factors such as social (urban decay and large numbers of foreign migrants) and environmental (air and water pollution) problems are major contributors to the movement away from metropolitan areas (Kontuly and Vogelsang, 1998). The centre is still utilised for administrative purposes, while the lesser-skilled operations are forced out because of rising rent and labour costs. Low priced housing costs at the fringe also attracts workers, and commuting long distances becomes the norm.

TWO-WAY SELECTIVE MIGRATION OF HOUSEHOLDS AND FIRMS:
This model basically assumes that the urban culture will predominate, and that rural settlements will conform to a central value-system. Some rural dwellers will be attracted to the urban environment and likewise, some urban dwellers will be attracted to the rural environment. This model suggests that eventually, a homogenous landscape will result, with the urban value-system prevailing. This concept is also known as ‘rurbanisation’. Critics of this model argue that little attention is paid to social or cultural processes (Frey, 1987; Buursink, 1986), however, most observers do agree that the model predicts the outcome of urban to rural movement with some certainty (Perry et al., 1986).

OTHER EXPLANATIONS
There exist many other possible explanations for the counterurbanisation phenomenon, however many of these explanations are specific to particular places. Improvements in education, health and other social infrastructure in some rural and peripheral areas make such areas more attractive to migrants. Gottman (1986) and Berry (1976) contend that improvements in technology and transportation have eliminated localising effects of the past, allowing for greater flexibility in locational choice of both industries and residents, (Blaikie, 1996). Changing socio-demographic composition also may have some effect. In some countries, an aging population has meant a rapid increase in the numbers of economically inactive people and a growing pool of potential migrants (Kontuly, 1998). Those with the financial resources may perhaps realise their ‘dreams’ of a retirement in an attractive and less densely populated surrounding. Jones et al.
(1984) suggest that counterurbanisation is a result of a change in consumption choices, values and desires for a countryside lifestyle of the upper socio-economic sections of society. Environmental ‘pull’ factors may also be significant in an individual’s motivation to migrate, as may be housing availability and costs.

Wardell (1980:86) suggests three propositions for the explanations of the nonmetropolitan turnaround:

1. Changes in the infrastructure of smaller places encourage industries to expand into them or move to them at earlier points in their life cycles, thus hastening the process by which economic growth takes place in smaller places;

2. Economies of scale and agglomeration may be captured at lower levels in the city-size continuum, thus reducing the relative gains available in large cities and reducing the costs incurred through location in smaller cities;

3. Pre-existing nonpecuniary preferences of firms and households for relocation away from large cities are now being realised to a greater extent in actual moves.

These propositions express consequences of the extension of urban organisational forms into formerly rural space. Wardell suggests that the migration turnaround has taken place largely because of the convergent similarities between urban and rural areas (1980:86). Figure 2.5 shows Wardell’s paradigm of the non-metropolitan migration turnaround. The concept of locational flexibility allows industry and residents locational choice. “The combination of the removal of businesses to places of less concentration, allowing for employment and residential deconcentration has produced internal migration patterns” (Blaikie, 1996:25).
Figure 2.5 Paradigm of Non-Metropolitan Migration Turnaround
(Source: Wardell, 1980:85)
Champion (1989) summarised the principal explanations for counterurbanisation given in recent migration literature (Table 2.4). From this table it is clear that no single explanation for counterurbanisation exists. Halfacree (1994) suggests however, that counterurbanisation can be *summarised* into job-led and people-led explanations.

**Table 2.4 Explanations for Counterurbanisation Given in Current Migration Literature**

1. The expansion of commuting fields round employment centres.
2. The emergence of scale diseconomies and social problems in large cities.
3. The concentration of rural population into local urban centres.
4. The reduction in the stock of potential out-migrants living in rural areas.
5. The availability of government subsidies for rural activities.
6. The growth of employment in particular localised industries such as mining, defence and tourism.
7. The restructuring of manufacturing industry and the associated growth of branch plants.
8. Improvements in transport and communications technology.
9. The improvement of education, health and other infrastructure in rural areas.
10. The growth of employment in the public sector and personal services.
11. The success of explicitly spatial government policies.
12. The growth of state welfare payments, private pensions and other benefits.
13. The acceleration of retirement migration.
14. The change in residential preferences of working-age people and entrepreneurs.
15. Changes in age structure and household size and composition.
16. The effect of economic recession on rural-urban and return migration.
17. The first round in a new cyclic pattern of capital investment in property and business.


There also exist several criticisms of the explanations for counterurbanisation. Frey (1987) argues that there is a need for “more distinction among the various processes within counterurbanisation, aided by a more precise identification of the spatial levels and time periods to which generalisations apply” (Frey, 1987:241). Buursink (1986) even goes as far as to criticize the term ‘counterurbanisation’. He suggests that counterurbanisation is merely a “re-direction of the socio-economic process of urbanisation, not its reversal” (Buursink, 1986 cited in Frey, 1987:243). Other criticisms extend to the fields of counterurbanisation research, arguing that the national, regional and local scales of a study area need to be recognised, rather than just a chosen scale.
However, other scholars such as Dahms (1995) put forward a more positive suggestion to approaching the study of the counterurbanisation phenomenon:

Rather than speaking of the 'rural-urban turnaround', 'counterurbanisation' the 'urban field' or the 'rural renaissance' separately, we should recognise their complementarity and integrate the concepts they apply to rural areas where population turnaround has occurred.

(Dahms, 1995:31).

He continues by suggesting that attention should be directed to the unique local factors affecting individual growth. These will vary with location, size, community characteristics, the residents and government policy. Rejuvenation of rural settlements then, suggests that attention cannot be attributed to any one causal factor. Spencer (1995) suggests that “attention must be shifted to the local rural dimension in order to develop a firmer understanding of counterurbanisation” (Spencer, 1995:154).

It is clear from the review of the literature on counterurbanisation that a multitude of potential factors are involved, as well as a range of moves in geographic space. We now turn to one specific movement pattern, that is migration to the urban-rural fringe.

2.7 Migration to the urban-rural fringe

Migration to the urban-rural fringe is an important manifestation of urban deconcentration, bringing about a fundamental shift in employment and residential patterns in and around major cities in many ‘industrialised’ countries (Bogunovich and Morad, 1993:262). The urban-rural fringe (also known as the peri-urban fringe) can be defined as “a zone of transition between the continuously built up urban and suburban areas of the central and rural hinterland” (Johnston, et al. 1994:541). While counterurbanisation research in Europe and the United States is well developed, New Zealand literature on the subject is very limited. However, a number of local studies have dealt with associated issues, especially with regards to rural land use and population migration (for example, Bedford and Heenan 1987; Blaikie 1996; Seator 1978). The gap in the literature has prompted researchers to draw on material that is
more historic than geographic in character in order to “support the discussion of the temporal and spatial development of migration to the urban-rural fringe” (Bogunovich and Morad, 1993:262).

New Zealand is a sparsely populated but highly urbanised society, with more than 85% of New Zealanders living in urban areas (Statistics New Zealand, 1996). As in many ‘industrialized’ countries, the 1970s brought about deconcentration in the main urban centres of New Zealand. Counterurbanisation was occurring in Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin from the early 1970s, whilst Auckland’s population continued to grow. Lowe (1981) argues that population reversals in three of New Zealand’s four main centres could be explained to some extent as demographic, and also, as economic. These trends continued throughout the 1980s.

The 1990s has seen New Zealand’s economy stabilize and grow. Major cities in New Zealand have expanded with further suburbanisation on the edge of the built-up area, but the urban-rural fringe of these cities has also experienced significant growth (Blaikie, 1996:31). At the metropolitan level, New Zealand is now a country in which one half of the population lives in three major urban settlements, while at the regional level, almost three quarters of New Zealand’s population live in only six of the country’s 14 regions (Auckland, Canterbury, Wellington, Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Manuawatu) (Bogunovich and Morad, 1993:263).

While the process of urban concentration has been taking place at the macro (national) scale, an opposite inclination of deconcentration has been noticeable at the micro (regional) scale. Deconcentration pressures may have been brought about by “an array of diverse factors, including increased car ownership, the proliferation of personal means of telecommunication, growth of the retired population as well as new aesthetic and cultural preferences (lifestyle)” (Bogunovich and Morad, 1993:263). Through the 1980s and into the 1990s, around the periphery of towns and cities, parts of farms have been subdivided into smallholdings as more New Zealanders “escape the urban tensions and occupational stresses for more creative working and living alternatives” (Grant and Grant, 1998:11).
Yerex (1988) suggests that many New Zealand migrants are moving to the urban-rural fringe out of fear of violence, crowd-induced stress and related problems. Many larger firms are moving their offices or plants out into country towns, utilising modern technology, which overcomes problems previously associated with such moves, and benefiting from a more stable workforce. Associated with this move is the growth of small service industries such as consultancy groups and craft industries. In a study of land-use change in the urban periphery of Christchurch, Edwards (1992) found that hobby farms were developed as a result of the owner or operator's desire to enjoy the country lifestyle, but not to become a farmer. This finding is supported by Fairweather (1993) who found in his study of Canterbury smallholders that the attraction of an idealised socially-created image of rural life was a major contributing factor in the decision to purchase a smallholding. This desire to consume the 'rural' is prevalent in New Zealand society today. Advertising, art, literature and popular culture regularly advocate the New Zealand rural lifestyle, as discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

The ever-increasing improvements in technology and communication facilities have made where a person lives increasingly irrelevant to how they live. Reduced "friction of distance" associated with transport and communication technology has allowed a further extension of urban communicating fields into widely dispersed networks (Hugo, 1986:137). The benefits of such improvements are especially great for those who choose to live on the urban fringe. Courtney (1997:56) aptly describes the growing trend in New Zealand rural living today: “Today's lifestyler often works from a home office. Many spend more time on-line than on a tractor”.

There exist other possible explanations for the migration movement to rural areas. Hugo (1986) suggests that there has been a basic change in people's values and lifestyle preferences, and their ability to act on such preferences, in favour of residence in rural or small town environments. He also contends that the urban-rural migratory pattern is a result of "successful public regional development and decentralization policies, particularly those promoting deconcentration of the manufacturing industry from large cities" (Hugo, 1986:137).
The effects of an increasingly postmodern culture are also relevant to this discussion. Recent changes in the traditional urban blueprint in terms of residential location and the racial and demographic makeup of the city has contributed to new and varied social rationale in terms of preferences for residential location (Soja, 1989). Another explanation is that demographic changes are a contributing factor, however, this theory has little support in counterurbanisation literature.

2.8 Conclusion

Migration can be understood in terms of motivations, which contribute to decision-making models. The notions of push-pull factors were also useful in examining migration motivations. Although it has been criticised for being a somewhat vague concept, with no clearly defined parameters, counterurbanisation is a growing phenomenon. This chapter considered migration to the peri-urban fringe, in the context of these two main themes.

As more people continue to migrate from urban to rural areas, the pressures on cities increase. Peri-urban development is a dynamic and extensive process, which continues to reshape New Zealand's urban system and regional landscape (Bogunovich and Morad, 1993:265). Although the migration turnaround is surely not "a massive back-to-the-farm movement, salient negative attitudes towards cities are a likely part of value systems based on agrarianism" (Blackwood, 1978:33). The attraction of an idyllic country lifestyle, which is regularly promoted through various media and cultural practices, and the increasing affluence in western society contribute to the increased desire for property on the urban-rural fringe of the city. The next chapter explores the origins and dimensions of the cultural values which may play a part in stimulating migration from urban to rural and peri-urban areas.
The ‘Rural Idyll’ and the West

We must therefore use some illusion to render a Pastoral delight, and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd’s life, and concealing its miseries.

Alexander Pope (1717)

3.1 Introduction

An important theme in geography is the investigation of the relationships involved in the representations of places, spaces and landscapes (Barnes and Duncan, 1992; Short, 1992). Working within the tradition of humanistic geography, Relph (1976) suggests that places have meanings; that these are characterised by the beliefs of man and that understanding these beliefs is an important role for geographers. He cites Lukerman (1964) to complement his argument: “Geographers wish to understand not only why place is a factual event in human consciousness, but what beliefs people hold about place... It is this alone that underlies man’s acts which are in turn what give character to a place” (Lukerman, 1964:169, cited in Relph, 1976:58). Images and identities of places are constructed in a variety of manners. Mass identities of places are disseminated through the mass media and particularly through advertising. These, Relph claims, “are the most superficial identities of place, offering no scope for empathetic insideness and eroding existential insideness by destroying the bases for identity with places” (Relph, 1976:58).

Rural and urban myths and ideologies are represented in many forms: these include art, popular literature, advertising, nature trails, country houses, conservation movements as well as the built form. To understand the meaning of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand for the people who have chosen this way of life, it is necessary to examine the history of one of the most prevalent myths in western society, the rural idyll, and the
Chapter Three – The ‘Rural Idyll’ and the West

influence this myth has on people’s perceptions and identities of both the ‘rural’ and the ‘urban’. Critics have often dismissed these identities as simply a form of urban escapism, but as Bunce (1994) contends this myth is far more complex. “It is entrenched in the Western society value system, ideologically, psychologically and culturally” (Bunce, 1994:2). This chapter will focus on the emergence of the rural idyll in western society, but especially on the rural idyll in Britain.

3.2 The rural idyll defined

The rural idyll is a term used to describe an idealised picture of the countryside (Short, 1991). Throughout history, attitudes to the countryside have been shaped by a response to the ‘rural idyll’. The rural idyll provides a set of meanings for a given space, which “through its emphasis on timelessness and integration, denies the dispospositional logic of capital spatiality” (Halfacree, 1996:45). Much recent work on the rural idyll (Jones, 1995; Halfacree, 1995; Short. B, 1992 and Short. J, 1991) has tended to suggest:

mythological and romanticised constructions of pastoralism and Arcadia laden with implied and signified meanings of happy, healthy bucolic idyll amongst close-knit and problem-free communities and close to the natural environment of the countryside

(Cloke, Goodwin and Milbourne, 1998:136)

It is essential to understand that the concept of the rural idyll is not a recent phenomenon, but is deeply rooted in Western culture, particularly in the English-speaking world (Williams, 1973).

Images of ‘the countryside’ are deeply imbued with sentimentality. As Short (1991:34) observes, “It is the location of nostalgia, the setting for the simpler lives of our forebears, a people whose existence seems idyllic because they are unencumbered with the immense task of living in the present”. In one view, rural land is considered a priceless part of England’s heritage. It has traditionally been a cosy corner in which Anglocentric culture could “nestle down safe from harm” (Murdoch and Pratt,
The rural idyll maintains that problems such as crime and racism for example, are based in cities, and that rural life provides an alternatively safe environment. Essentially, the rural idyll provides an effective imagined geography of the rural. Bunce (1994) and Marx (1964) complement this argument. Bunce (1994:2) suggests that the rural idyll and the fondness for the countryside "reflects fundamental human values and psychological needs", which can be traced back to a basic human desire for harmony with nature and the land; a sense of community and place; and a simple lifestyle.

No single motive can account for these disparate phenomena, except that each expresses some desire for a simpler, more harmonious lifestyle, an existence that is 'closer to nature', that is at the psychic root of all pastoralism – genuine and spurious.

(Marb, 1964:6).

The counterurbanisation phenomenon, where the dominant migration movement is away from urban areas, is the behavioral expression of this sentimental idyll. A desire for a more peaceful, natural environment, away from the crowds and the impersonal nature of the city can be connected with recreational activities in Western society. "It manifests itself in our leisure time activities, in the piety toward the outdoors expressed in the wilderness cult and in our devotion to camping, hinting, fishing, picnicking and so on" (Marx, 1964:5).

The rural idyll is disseminated particularly through various forms of the media. Much literature, as has been previously discussed, concentrates on accentuating the enjoyable qualities of the rural landscape, whilst ignoring the drawbacks. This is the case also, with advertising:

Perhaps the most convincing testimony to the continuing appeal of the bucolic is supplied by advertising copy-writers; a favourite strategy, validated by marketing research, assumes that Americans are most likely to buy cigarettes, beer and automobiles they can associate with a rural setting.

(Marb, 1964:6).
The concept of the rural idyll is still very strong in Western society today. It continues to be produced and disseminated within various cultural structures such as art, literature and all forms of the media. While the influences of art, history, literature and the media are important, it is significant to realise that there is simply not a straightforward superimposition of dominant popular discourse onto lay discourses. As Crouch (1992:229) states “...people make their own sense of the rural, reinterpreting dominant images through their own cultural practices”.

A review of the literature on the rural idyll suggests that several fundamental elements can be identified. I suggest that the rural idyll includes the following components as shown in Table 3.1. Although it is likely that this classical vision of the rural idyll has been influential in other western European cultures, this is beyond the scope of this thesis. Instead, the discussion will be limited to the development of the idea in Britain, especially with regard to England.

Table 3.1 Fundamental Elements of the Rural Idyll Found in the Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDIVIDUAL</th>
<th>WAY OF LIFE</th>
<th>COMMUNITY</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- As pure and uncorrupted</td>
<td>- As wholesome and healthy</td>
<td>- As close-knit (gemeinschaft)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- As carefree and contended</td>
<td>- As spiritually nourishing and non-materialistic</td>
<td>- As safe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- As natural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- As ordered, harmonious and peaceful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- As timeless (nostalgia for the past)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 **History of the ‘rural idyll’**

The origins of the rural idyll can be traced back to the writings of Theocritus and Virgil. It is widely considered that these works contain the beginnings of the pastoral vision (Bunce, 1994; Short, 1991; Marx, 1964). It is because of Theocritus’ influence in the literary world through his work *The Idylls*, that the term ‘idyll’ has come to be used to refer to an archetypal image of a country scene.

> May the old inhabitants repossess their cities  
> Build on ruins and restore what has been spoiled.  
> May the fields be worked and bring forth crops once more,  
> While bleating flocks, too many to count, grow fat on the grassy plains.  
> May the passer-by at nightfall  
> Quicken his step as the cattle are driven home.

*(Theocritus, *The Idylls*)

Lowe (1989, cited in Mingay, 1989:113) suggests that industrialisation is chiefly responsible for the emergence of such socially constructed symbolism:

> Industrialisation has provoked popular reactions which have been partly nostalgic for the disappearing, pre-industrial world; partly apocalyptic, fearing the outcome of the Faustian bargain of technological society; and partly utopian in seeking to re-create community and human solidarity out of the dislocation and fragmentation wrought by industrialism


While the city reflected the speed of change in industry and society, the countryside continued to be portrayed as a static, unchanging community embodying the way things used to be (Short, 1992). In Britain especially, the symbolic importance of the countryside grew despite the decline of its agricultural industry. The industrial revolution had provided the means for cheap food to be transported by railroad and steamship from overseas. Despite such a significant economic downfall, the countryside continued to be idealised, particularly in literature, as an area for traditional and harmonious relations (Lowe, 1989 cited in Mingay, 1989:114). It is argued that “whenever social tensions increase, fear of the future heightens,
urbanisation intensifies and large-scale social changes loom large, then countryside as myth becomes more prevalent” (Short, 1991:31). The rise of the urban-industrial society magnified the desire for and importance of a simple lifestyle and a sense of community and place.

The industrial revolution was based on a highly developed agrarian capitalism, overtaking the conventional peasantry (Williams, 1973). Despite such a transformation, it is important to note that in Britain and particularly in England\(^1\), attitudes to the country, and to rural life in general,

...persisted with extraordinary power so that even after the society was predominantly urban, its literature for a generation was still predominately rural; and even in the twentieth century, in an urban and industrial land, forms of older ideas and experiences still remarkably exist.

(Williams, 1973:2).

Haggard sums up the anti-urban view prevalent in England in the nineteenth century:

> The city breeds one stamp of human being and the country breeds another... Take the people away from their natural breed and growing grounds, thereby sapping their health and strength in cities such as nature intended to be the permanent homes of men, and the decay of this country becomes only a matter of time


The anti-urban bias has strong Victorian roots as towns during this particular time period were viewed as being unhealthy, due particularly to housing shortages and subsequent overcrowding. Public discontent and political disorder was commonplace whilst the countryside was idealised and romanticised as a place of freedom and prosperity. “Large cities seemed socially chaotic and morally degenerate; the slum was seen as a canker at the heart of the Empire” (Rose, 1995:107). The desire for harmony and an environment free of conflict meant that people turned to the countryside. Davidoff, L’Esperance and Newby (1996) comment that the rural idyll provided a “cognitive and moral map of the universe, as a response to the need for imposing order in an increasingly troublesome, impersonal and alleviating real world” (1996:265).\(^1\)

\(^1\) Although many of the cultural themes described here were probably evident throughout the British Isles, the focus in most of the writing on this topic is on England.
During the nineteenth century it was widely considered that "real communities" could only be found in rural areas, (Davidoff, et al. 1996). "It was in rural England that the sense of community reigned and where the apparently automatic acceptance of the 'natural order' of things ensured that the norms of deference and paternalism remained at their strongest" (Davidoff et al. 1996:266).

Obviously this was a very partial perception of the countryside which ignored certain regions and disregarded processes of rural change and discord. Nevertheless, this landscape became accepted as the quintessential Arcadia, encompassing only the positive aspects, while ignoring the negative. The harsh urban environment of a newly industrialised society was not the most aesthetically pleasing image for a nation and was therefore ignored in favour of "the soft hills, small villages around green, winding lanes and church steeples of the English southern counties", which came to represent England and all the qualities the culturally dominant classes desired (Rose, 1995:107). Therefore, with the rise of the urban-industrial society, the countryside in western societies was redefined as "the symbolic antithesis of the city" (Bunce, 1994:18).

3.4 Art and Literature

Literature from the middle of the eighteenth century onwards, shows much use of the antithetical device of comparing the rural lifestyle with that of the city. Comparing rural and urban life and hence promoting the rural way, became such a literary convention that it is now one of England's most ingrained cultural characteristics (Davidoff, et al. 1996). Such value-loaded dualisms are still prominent in today's society. As Davidoff et al. (1996:267) state:

It is a tribute to the endurance of this convention that, even today to many of us, simplicity, rest, grass-roots democracy, peacefulness, Gemeinschaft. 'Urban' spells the opposite: ugliness, disorder, confusion, fatigue, compulsion, strife, Gesellschaft.
Crabbe sums up these ideas in his work *The Village*:

> God made the country and man made the town,
> What wonder then, that health and virtue...
> ...should most abound,
> And least be threatened in the fields and groves?

As well as contrasts with the urban setting, the sense of ‘belonging’ to England’s countryside was heightened in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by comparisons with other countries. The redefined rural idyll represented by the English countryside was made all the more eloquent by contrasts with the landscape of the ‘Other’ (Rose, 1995). “The barbarity of the exotic Orient (and Africa)” was one Other landscape (Rose, 1995:108).

Rose suggests the dominant sense of England, then can be interpreted in terms of a certain landscape representation which contains only one particular version of English place and social relations, in which there is not even an illusion of social conflict. This aversion to any discord is illustrated effectively in the artwork of the period. A consummate example is the portrait entitled ‘Mr and Mrs Andrews’ by Thomas Gainsborough, 1748. (See Plate 3). Gainsborough has brought together several images of an idyllic countryside, whilst seemingly ignoring the realities. The absence of people working the fields is noticeable, for example. The well-kept landscape, the groomed fields and plentiful harvest appeals to the audience’s imagination and mental constructions of how the countryside should be – idyllic, peaceful and perfect.

Several other artists of the period enhanced the idyllic representation of the English landscape, and most notably, John Constable (1776 – 1837). Socially acknowledged as England’s most popular painter, Constable’s works are frequently reproduced on greeting cards, calendars, and chocolate boxes. Constable’s paintings are used as publicity images, combining nature with national pride, to advertise a variety of products. Critics have described his work as ‘emphatically’, ‘peculiarly’, ‘essentially’ English.
Plate 3 Thomas Gainsborough’s *Mr and Mrs Andrews* c. 1749
“This is often couched in terms of the naturalism of his style, as ‘fresh’, ‘green’, ‘clear’ and ‘healthy’” (Daniels, 1993:201). “The myth that rural life in England is a ‘supreme form of community’ has remained pivotal to representations of rural England in the media and in literature” (Watkins, 1997:384).

The rural idyll is not just limited to England. As Marx, (1964) notes, the pastoral ideal has been used to define America ever since the age of discovery and it has not yet lost its hold on the native imagination. As in Britain, the notion of the rural idyll and its associated concepts in America was also disseminated through various forms of art and literature. “There can be little doubt that it [the rural idyll] affects the nation’s [America] taste for serious literature reinforcing the legitimate respect enjoyed by such writers as Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway and Robert Frost” (Marx, 1964:6).

Notions of the rural idyll can be seen in this excerpt from Irving:

I mention this peaceful spot with all possible land; for it is in such little retired...
valleys... that population, manners and customs, remain fixed; while the great torrent of migration and improvement which is making such incessant change in other parts of this restless country, sweeps by them unobserved. They are little nooks of still water, which border a rapid stream.

Washington Irving, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow, 1820

The notion of the idyllic rural countryside in American thought however reached its peak with the rise of transcendentalist philosophy (Bunce, 1994). Central to this strain of thought was the belief that true freedom could only be achieved through self-sufficiency, simplicity and living close to nature, and as Bunce points out, these ideas were attractive to a newly industrialized and rapidly changing society. However, for less-educated Americans, “much of the popular attraction to nature stemmed from its aesthetic appeal, rather than from its ideological associations” (Bunce, 1994:9).
3.5 Value-loaded Dualisms - The 'Rural' and the 'Urban'

Socially created ideas about the rural are to some extent the creation of oppositions to the urban. The closely related urban counterpart to the rural idyll is the 'anti-urban myth', where the unnatural city is compared unfavourably with the countryside and the wilderness. This dualism between rural and urban is related to a wider tendency in western thought to operate with binary opposed categories, where one element of the pair is defined as lacking, (‘A’ – ‘not-A’). Other common binary pairs are mind-body, nature-culture, and masculine-feminine. The rural and the urban present an intriguing value-loaded dualism. James (1991, cited in Jones, 1995:45) puts forward the idea that the rural 'myth' gains its potency from its relationship with and juxtaposition to the urban myth. There appears to exist a number of 'push' factors, which contribute to urban dwellers' motivations for moving from an urban environment. As discussed in the previous chapter, Perry et al. suggest that the major factors might be “mounting pollution, congestion, crime, violence, and tension” (1986:14), while the country offers many 'pull' factors, for example - perceptions of the countryside as a haven of peace, tranquility and pure air. These images of rural life dominate art and literature of the nineteenth century.

The anonymity of the city is contrasted with the warm community found in villages and small towns (Short, 1992). Short cites Baldwin's (1962) description of New York as an example of the city represented as a negative space:

> The most despairingly private of cities. One was continually being jostled, yet longed, at the same time for the sense of others, for a human touch; and if one was never – it was the general complaint – left alone in New York, one had still, to fight very hard not to perish of loneliness.


There also exists another rural-urban value-loaded dualism. Davidoff et. al, (1996:268) have argued that the ‘rural’ tends to be equated with meanings of awkwardness, and being ‘backward’, while the ‘urban’ is regarded as synonymous with ‘progress’ and ‘advancement’. However, the more popular dualism contends that the term ‘rural’ is more often associated with fresh air and order, while the term ‘urban’ is synonymous
with violence and disorder. These popular associations are highlighted by Williams (1973):

> Clearly the ideas of the country and the city have specific contents and histories, but just as clearly at times, they are forms of isolation and identification of more general processes. People have often said ‘the city’ when they meant capitalism or bureaucracy or centralised power... we need to put these ideas into the historical realities: at times confirmed, at times denied

(Williams, 1973:350)

This idea is supported by Game (1991) who argues that we should “think of the city-country opposition in the now: the country is only defined as such within the context of modernity” (cited in Jones 1995:45).

### 3.6 Twentieth Century Idyll

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, one of the many contradictions of what is fashionably described as post-modern society, is the continued, even growing nostalgia for the countryside and an abiding ambivalence towards the city

(Bunce, 1994:1)

The rural idyll in the twentieth century is still persistent, particularly in Western culture. The twentieth century brought with it many expressions of a renewed desire from city dwellers for an unspoiled countryside. Towns and cities were “noisy and dirty...” and “morally bankrupt, the home of greed and vulgarity...” (Forster, 1910, cited in Tinniswood, 1995:176). Tinniswood (1995) uses the traditional ‘country cottage’ as an excellent example of the strength of the twentieth century idyll. “The country cottage has become an icon for the 1990s, signifying a better, safer, quieter life away from the city, a potent focus for the anti-urbanism that is so at large in modern thought” (Tinniswood, 1995:10).

Short (1992) argues that a belief in social progress, combined with criticism of the modernist enterprise, lead to a lack of confidence in the efficacy of the urban environment. “When you lose confidence in society, you tend to lose faith in the city” (Short, 1992:415). Pearson (1975) comments that criticisms of the city as a place
lacking in community values and ties is in many ways a broader attack on the emergence of an industrial capitalist system. "The city, is a convenient peg on which to hang these assertions" (Pearson, 1975:178). The city also offers a place for marginalised groups to have a voice. Short (1992) cites the saying "Taking to the streets" as being indicative of the urban bias of popular unrest (1992:416), indicating a perception that the city is a possible threat to the existing order.

Tinniswood (1995) suggests that the idyllic images of country life are a construct of an educated middle class, and a consequence of an Industrial Revolution that drew most of the population away from the countryside and into towns and cities where they could happily mythologise their rural roots. It is essential to remember, however that, "as with all things, we remake the past, and in remaking it we leave out an awful lot" (Tinniswood, 1995:14). The rural landscape was good because it was not new, because however falsely, "it appeared to embody all the precious values that modern urban society had lost – stability and innocence, continuity and clam, a deep-rooted connection with the forces of nature" (Tinniswood, 1995:16).

Over the last fifty years, the strain of anti-urbanism in western society has grown to such an extent that 'rural life', with all that the term represents has acquired an almost mythical status (Tinniswood, 1995). Part of the appeal can be attributed to a greatly increasing urban population, which continues to idealise rural life. Rural images are regularly disseminated through art, literature and other forms of the media, and the tourist industry has begun to focus on promoting the 'clean green' image associated with the countryside in an attempt to move away from mass tourism, (Howard, 1997). From a more practical perspective, the rise in car ownership and improved public transportation services has enabled urban dwellers greater access to rural areas.

3.7 The Commodification of the Rural

In today's society, rural environments are being exploited in order to match the demands of contemporary consumption. The commodification of the countryside can be linked to deregulation of the agricultural sector, and the new post-productivist
countryside, (Halfacree, 1997). The character of rural living is changing at an accelerated rate and this is partially the result of commodification.

Marx (1978) considered commodification to represent an inversion of exchange value over use value. “An object therefore, becomes a commodity when it assumes an exchange value over and above its use value” (cited in Cloke, 1993b:53).

Once object exchange has been extracted from sensuous needs and qualities, from any social referent... once it extends beyond the factories to penetrate all cultural and interpersonal relations, it has a profound corruptive and distorting effect. The inversion that occurs in the economy, and which affects the whole of social life, is then directly transferred to the cultural and personal realm where commodity fantasy begins


Therefore, in order to meet the demands of the consumer, the countryside is being turned into a commodity. One aspect of the commodification of the rural is the development of a niche housing market, known as lifestyle blocks. This is made possible by a reorganisation of labour requirements, using improvements in technology and communication in order to maintain work contacts in the city while maintaining “the backdrop of a manicured rural landscape which is the necessary context for those commodities” (Cloke, et al. 1998:329).

By thinking of the rural as a commodity, we can situate it within the emerging literature on consumption. Geographical research on consumption has extended dramatically, particularly in the last ten years. Traditionally, writing on consumption has been restricted to modes of production, the distribution of goods and services and inequalities of gender, race and class. However, Jackson and Thrift (1995) argue that such traditional approaches tended to ignore many areas of everyday consumption like shopping, advertising and the media. Today, an understanding of the process of consumption is central to debates about the relationship between society and space (Jackson and Thrift, 1995:205).
But how does the literature on consumption help us to link the rural idyll and contemporary practices such as the move to lifestyle blocks? I argue that the rural idyll is central to the definition and meaning of the commodity that is being purchased and consumed when migrants move to lifestyle blocks. When people move to a lifestyle block, they are acquiring a commodity (a way of life) which is imbued with a particular cultural meaning, and the pleasures and benefits they derive from living there can be understood in terms of consumption of the rural idyll (Figure 3.2). This notion of consumption includes attention to the concrete form and the cultural meaning of the commodity, is developed in some recent work in cultural studies and sociology. For example, Cloke (1993) suggests that people are led to consume a world which is constructed by others and which consists of a series of ‘spectacles’. Best (1989) describes this notion as “the spectacular society” and states that “the spectacular society spreads its narcotics through the cultural mechanisms of leisure and consumption, services and entertainment, within a culture that has grown (relatively) autonomous from social totality” (Best, 1989:29, cited in Cloke, 1993b:56).
Chapter Three – The ‘Rural Idyll’ and the West

RURAL IDYLL

COMMODIFICATION OF THE RURAL
- as a setting for consumption, leisure and recreation activities rather than as a site of production
- as a source of cultural symbols attached to consumer goods (including 'country style décor, food etc)

Lifestyle blocks as a commodity imbued with cultural meaning

Migration to lifestyle blocks as a form of CONSUMPTION OF THE RURAL IDYLL

Figure 3.2 Lifestyle Blocks as a Consumption of the Rural Idyll
Urry (1988:41) suggests that consumers of rural spaces are motivated by certain attributes of taste such as:

- A reverence for the pastoral idyll
- An acceptance of certain cultural symbols such as old houses, antiques, and health foods
- An enjoyment of outdoor pursuits such as jogging, cycling, fly-fishing, windsurfing and mountaineering


These new consumption motivations are somewhat confusing, because they appear to mirror traditional themes. However, these motivations are unique because they reflect traditional rural society, but they also “provide identity-giving spectacle or interpretation without a reinforcement of cultural norms’ and instill custom ‘without being shackled by the legacy of tradition” (Cloke, 1993:60).

The countryside is being commodified in such a way that goes well beyond the attractions a particular rural area has to offer the consumer. Instead, socially constructed ideals dominate the consumer mentality, and as Best (1989:27) suggests, “the commodity fantasy begins”.

### 3.8 Conclusion

The rural idyll, it has been established, is both a social ideal and a cultural construct that has been intensified by the historical processes of an urban-dominated society, (Bunce, 1994). Three centuries of changes have generally increased the levels of affluence, mobility and education in Western society, which has consequently contributed to a broadening of lifestyle choices and an increasing influence over the quality of the human environment. Therefore, “the attraction of the countryside cannot be explained solely in terms of elemental human needs. It is also a mix of ideology and
values, myth and stereotype, image and perception and lived experience” (Bunce, 1994:211).

Having identified the main elements of the rural idyll, the following chapter will discuss the key components of the New Zealand rural idyll.
The ‘Rural Idyll’ in New Zealand

And despite (or perhaps because of) an increasing urbanisation, many of us continue to feel strongly the pull of the land - an attachment to an idyll of rolling farmland dotted with sheep, a red-roofed farmhouse set about with hydrangeas and daffodils in the spring, hand-fed lambs in the house paddock, a couple of border collies and a Fordson or Massey Ferguson at the ready.

(Barnett and Wolfe, 1989:149)

4.1 Introduction

New Zealand culture is imbued with rural symbols and images. Many people value things that are rural and this status, value and popularity of rural images sustains interest in actually experiencing the rural life.

(Fairweather, 1993:4)

The malleable persistence of rural imagery indicates the ability of some members of society to adapt them ‘to suit the particular need of that time’

(Cloke and Little, 1997:19)

The concept of the rural idyll is produced and disseminated within various cultural structures. In art, literature and all forms of the media, in country homes and weekend houses, in rural community promotions and tourist attractions, the countryside appears to maintain the traditional perceptions of a happy, healthy bucolic landscape. “No longer are rural idylls the reserve of an elitist landscape movement, but rather they inform popular thought” (Coombes, 1997:80).
Bunce (1994) suggests that the attraction of the countryside is “a cultural construct and social ideal forged by the historical processes of a metropolitan-dominated society”. The countryside ideal, he maintains, is a “combination of ideology and values, myth and stereotype, image and perception, as well as lived experience” (1994:2). This idea is supported by Cloke and Milbourne (1992:359), who state “there can be no one typology of rural representations, and that the representations operate at different scales”. They add that while international and national scales are important, so too are regional sets of images.

This chapter argues that the New Zealand rural idyll can be understood as the product or outcome of a set of processes, sketched out in diagrammatic form in Figure 4.1. The foundations of the idyll are based around the British rural idyll (as discussed in Chapter Three) and the specific features of New Zealand’s role as a British colony or ‘farm’ (discussed in section 4.2). These foundations generated a distinct New Zealand rural idyll and this chapter suggests that the idyll has three key components: the rural as masculine (discussed in section 4.3), the nature myth of a clean, green and health-giving environment (section 4.4), and the romanticisation of agricultural work, and especially pastoralism (section 4.5). These foundations are all filtered through to contemporary representations and practices such as tourism, branding and advertising, and art and popular culture. This is then reinforced and reworked to recreate the rural idyll in New Zealand. Consequently, from this idyll comes the notion of the good life in the country and eventually the creation of lifestyle blocks. Figure 4.1 displays these components.
The persistence of the rural idyll in Britain throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant that this sentiment would inevitably travel with British settlers and re-emerge in the new colonies. Bell (1993) suggests that British rural culture influenced New Zealand principally through its application in the creation of myths about New Zealand during settlement. However, as Gibbs (1997) points out,
By the time of Edward Gibbon Wakefield's writing about, and projects for, the colonisation of New Zealand in the 1830s and 40s, the strands of dreaming and observing, and of satire and wish-fulfillment, have become so entwined we can hardly separate them

(Gibbs, 1997:7)

The first settlers arrived in New Zealand on 22 January 1840, and vigorous promotion of the new settlement followed. In the first decades after 1840, British promoters of settlement in New Zealand emphasised a purely rural vision. Advertisements for organised immigration schemes regularly depicted the country as "the land of milk and honey, a labourer’s paradise" (Ferguson, 1994:26).

These descriptions rested on the idea of a country of natural abundance, fertile soils and magnificent forests of a garden overflowing with goodness. Town life had no place in this vision of rural settlement and plenty.

(Ferguson, 1994:26)

What Charles Darwin saw at the mission station at Waimate in the Bay Islands in late 1835 was what Wakefield wanted his settlers to see: "a fusion of nostalgic yeoman’s merry England and progressive future" (Gibbs, 1997:7).

New Zealand was promoted as a country free of the distress of the ‘Old World’. British industrial society was one of increasing hardship and poverty for many, and the notion of a new and better life away from the social hierarchies of industrial England was an attractive one for many potential settlers to New Zealand. Industrialisation in Britain had brought about rapid population growth in urban areas. The inevitable result of an often filthy and overcrowded environment was the threat of disease such as cholera and typhoid. This explosion of uncontrolled urban growth profoundly influenced the way people saw towns and cities. It also affected the language used to describe this new urban phenomenon (Ferguson, 1994). Therefore British settlers to New Zealand brought with them the memories and perceptions of city life and the contrasting nostalgic images of life in the country as simple, healthy and not overcrowded.
New Zealand as a country derived from the expansion of British cities; “geographically, it may have been in the Pacific, but structurally, it was part of Britain’s rural hinterland” (Perry, 1994:46). Perry brashly suggests that “New Zealand was not so much discovered as fabricated by pre-existing cultural categories” (1994:46). Indeed, despite harsh and trying conditions, early settlers attempted to maintain the image portrayed by colonial advertisements in Britain of New Zealand as a place of rural contentment. Graham (1992) cites one settler’s letter to a correspondent in South Australia as an example of this admiration for the rural and the affiliation to Britain’s countryside:

This is lovely country... the finest agricultural country you can imagine, with the nicest, quietest, most simple, rural population you can imagine out of dear old England...

(Cited in Graham, 1992:119-120)

Graham (1992) also cites an early settler to New Zealand, William Morgan, who noted that:

A country life was free from the sights of drunkenness and vice, there was more time to read, one’s evenings were not absorbed in going hither and thither but one was almost invariably at home, enjoying the peace and company of wife and children

(Graham, 1992: 135)

From the early 1840s, England readers of the Illustrated London News were able to read about the colonisation of New Zealand. Named and unnamed correspondents entertained readers with fascinating descriptions of majestic scenery accompanied by sketches from staff reporters based in London. These sketches depicted idyllic scenes created by artists, interpreting a combination of both the descriptions of New Zealand correspondents and the promotional emigration material. Such was the influence of promotional material in England that many migrants to New Zealand had formulated their own opinions of the country well before they arrived. William Goulder wrote the following piece while on board the ship travelling to New Zealand:
Oh happy plan! - ingenuously devised! -
To colonise New Zealand's lovely isle;
Bid Britons welcome - let their scheme be priz'd
And let your valleys with fresh beauties smile;
No longer need your rich luxuriant soil
Bring forth to waste, without owner's care,
While nature amply recompenses toil
With good abundance, so make commerce share;
Prove to the world no country can compare.

(William Goulder, 1852)

The image of the hard working pioneer has carried through to the 20th century, as has the sentimentality for Britain. Tourist guides and promotional material describing New Zealand often mention the New Zealand connection with Britain. "New Zealanders are still willing to think of themselves as more British than the British", commented Hall in a 1955 book entitled *Portrait of New Zealand* (1955:39). He continued to add "By culture and disposition, we were even more firmly wedded than by blood to the British traditions our forefathers brought with them on the long voyage out" (Hall, 1955:39). Indeed this theme of New Zealand as an enhanced Britain was prevalent throughout the nineteenth and early to mid twentieth centuries. Sinclair cites an anonymous contributor to the *New Zealand Herald* in 1911, as an example of this theme:

'Home' means that we have transplanted to these alien lands and seas the national ideals of the North, the racial vigour and aspirations of our sires. It means that we have tried and are trying to be true to type, to keep our blood clean and pure, to preserve our past traditions, to be worthy of our great history, to progress undeviatingly or steadily along the lines instinctively taken by the heroes and leaders of our ancestral people. In a word, we seek to make of New Zealand a better Britain.

(Cited in Sinclair, 1986:7)

While the realities of life in colonial New Zealand were far from those presented to perspective migrants and readers of English newspapers, early settlers strived to
maintain the idyllic imagery that was so rigorously promoted. With images of industrial Britain still fresh in the minds of many migrants, the promise or at least the notion of a better life in New Zealand was of the utmost importance and continued to be so for many decades to come.

4.3 The Rural as Masculine

The contrast between rural and urban life in New Zealand became more apparent as the century progressed. Phillips (1987) suggest that out of their New Zealand experience, people began to formulate generalisations about the pioneer stereotype, and especially the colonial male. "In the transition from actuality to stereotype, from participation to perception, a mythic and exaggerated dimension entered into judgments" (1987:38). Because it was the most particular aspect of Pakeha society, "the frontier experience was universalised and the urban world was ignored" (Phillips, 1987:38-39). Phillips adds that from the 1890s onwards, the combination of nostalgia and the search for a national identity promoted the early settler to legendary status. Images of the hard working, rugged pioneer farmer became the exemplar from which a rural ideal was created. Establishing the beginnings of a new colony often involved hard physical labour, and this was especially so in rural areas. Long after towns and urban facilities were developed, strenuous labour remained characteristic in rural areas, and with it, the pioneer male culture.

Phillips (1987) suggest that the male stereotype of experienced farmer and 'outdoors' man continues to be the most distinctive element of New Zealand manhood, despite the fact that the majority of New Zealand males in the 20th century live and work in urban areas.

Although they attempted to maintain their outdoor identity through suburban gardening or deer-hunting trips at the weekend, few really were giants of the backblocks and even fewer used pioneering skills in daily tasks

(Phillips, 1987:180)
The male-dominated image of the rugged pioneer has disseminated today’s culture. Advertisements and other media forms in New Zealand frequently draw on the pioneer male imagery. Berg (1994) suggests that a ‘frontier discourse’ is apparent in present-day constructions of the New Zealand Pakeha male, which implies “the true New Zealander is a male pakeha farmer who is practical, independent and resourceful”. He continues to add that the “real New Zealander” is a “kiwi battler – the white man who tames the frontier and contributes to capitalist production through ingenuity and hard work” (Berg, 1994:252). Fitzharris and Kearsley (1987:201) state that the “myth of the rugged honest countryman pervades the iconography of modern Western society in antithesis to the shallow and sophisticated, almost effete, urbanite”. They point to the New Zealand version of this stereotype in the contrast between the high country musterer and the Queen Street dandy. Thus, while the dominant construction of masculinity in New Zealand is heavily imbued with rural elements, the reverse is also true: the rural in New Zealand is typically coded as masculine (Berg and Kearns, 1996; Longhurst and Wilson, forthcoming; Campbell and Phillips, 1995).

4.4 Nature Myth of a Clean, Green and Healthy Environment

Despite the extensive modification of New Zealand’s landscape for eco-commodity production, and its poor record in respect of energy sustainability, the country has an image as ‘clean and green’. In fact, this is one of its most powerful contemporary myths

(Pawson, 1996:273)

The myth of the rural environment as clean, green and more healthy than the urban environment is closely connected with the nineteenth century dogma of the healthiness and vigour of life in colonial New Zealand. The nature myth continues to be pervasive in New Zealand society in the 1990’s. Pawson (1996) argues that New Zealanders “both expect and wish to believe that living in New Zealand is a guarantee of a healthy environment” (Pawson, 1996:273). He cites “the effectiveness of the environmental movement in extending the conservation estate; the increasing emphasis placed on ‘the environment’ as an item of consumption, and the role of New Zealand’s anti-nuclear
stand as the main contributing elements to the prominence of the myth in today’s society” (Pawson, 1996:274). It is this clean, green image that attracts so many overseas tourists to New Zealand (1.4 million in 1996), (Opperman, 1996). A senior planner for the New Zealand Tourist and Publication Department stated “We know from our market research that our major attraction for international visitors is undoubtedly our clean, green healthy, very scenic and wide-ranging environment” (cited in Cloke and Perkins, 1998:192).

Many New Zealanders consider the rural to be healthier than an urban environment. This perception can be connected to the post-productivist countryside and the increasing use of rural areas as sites of leisure. Outdoor activities such as tramping, mountain-biking and bush-walking all take place in sparsely populated and often idyllic rural settings. The rural is being ‘consumed’ by a wide variety of people. Cloke (1993) contends that the novelty of contemporary consumption lies in different motives for consumption rather than in the manifestation of new products.

Thus the conventional concerns with pastoral traditions and outdoor pursuits are still evident, but such experiences increasingly seem to be served up and received so as to provide identity - giving spectacle and interpretation without a reinforcement of cultural norms; infusing the attraction with ‘tradition’, without appearing to be shackled by the legacy of tradition

(Cloke, 1993:60)

A Northland real estate company recently took advantage of the ‘healthy’ rural image with a newspaper advertisement headed “Don’t Let a Heart Attack Decide Your Lifestyle”. It continued: “If you hate the pollution, the traffic, the aggressiveness of city living, then consider a move” (cited in Bramwell, 1998:97). The nature myth of the rural environment as wholesome, pure and healthy continues to gain in strength as New Zealand’s urban areas continue to expand.
4.5 Romantic View of Agricultural Work

A key component of the rural idyll in New Zealand is agriculture. The central and privileged status of agriculture in New Zealand thought can be identified in three popular discourses:

- Imagination, i.e. New Zealand as an imagined country;
- Economy, i.e. New Zealand as a system of economic activities; and
- Labour, i.e. New Zealand as a site of work.

Despite vast changes within the country’s economy over the past few decades, New Zealand is still thought of primarily in terms of agriculture, and especially pastoral agriculture.

New Zealand is imagined to be chiefly rural and chiefly pastoral, and this imagination is accentuated through various media forms. As Marx (1964:5) states, “nowhere is the feeling for nature more influential than in the realm of imaginative expression”. New Zealand postcards frequently feature images of grazing sheep in idyllic rural settings. Plate 4.1 shows one such example. The blurb on the back of the postcard reads “Rural New Zealand. The meat and wool industries have played an important part in New Zealand’s economic development - making sheep a common and familiar sight in the country’s rural districts”. These images are also frequently seen in tourism brochures and information on New Zealand.

Agriculture is also prized by New Zealanders as an economic activity and is considered to be a valuable and dignified occupation. From the origins of commercial agriculture in settler society, agriculture has always been valued for its economic contribution to New Zealand society and because of this, New Zealand farmers hold a great degree of status.

Most New Zealanders also see themselves as linked to farming via only one or two generations. A significant number of people have either worked on a farm or know people who do. The idea of farm labour appeals to many New Zealanders, and this in part can be related to the representation of agriculture in the media.
Plate 4.1 Postcard 'Rural New Zealand'
The apparently strong role of agriculture in New Zealand’s economy means that New Zealanders tend to interpret rural images differently from societies whose economy is not so reliant upon agriculture and whose built environments display a more complete colonisation of the natural world. Under such conditions, “the claim that rural New Zealand ‘somehow’ stands for a national culture is therefore not wholly without plausibility” (Perry, 1994:49).

People can therefore easily imagine inserting themselves into the rural landscape through the medium of farm labour, once again reinforcing the New Zealand rural idyll. This is somewhat different from the British rural idyll where individuals may be likely to visualise themselves as land-owners removed from direct labour processes.

4.6 Branding and Advertising

A selective version of rural way of life becomes a consumable, to be enjoyed for as long as the fashion lasts, and representing vague visions of that way of life as it might (ought to be)

(Bell, 1993:215)

Rural images are also frequently seen in New Zealand advertising. Television viewers can watch the Speight’s ‘Southern Man’ advertisements in which high country sheep musters reflect on their relatively unconstrained lives - with product in hand.

The ads show a timeless place. Among the images of ‘unspoiled’ nature, stripped-down male bodies, companion dogs and horses, there are no disturbing modern gadgets such as farm bikes, two-way radios or binoculars, not even a plastic bag. Although the ads are not explicitly set in the past, the depiction evokes nostalgia for simpler times, and a poignant recognition that this way of life is threatened.

(Law, 1997:25)

D.B. Draught beer uses Clydesdale horses and the story of a small rural community to sell its product. In an attempt to connect the product with New Zealand’s colonial heritage, D.B.Draught focuses on “the pioneer attributes of the brand to capture the
core qualities of determination, strength, honesty, pride and endurance that drinkers associate with their image of D.B.Draught” (D.B. Group, 1993:26, cited in Pawson, 1997:18). Mainland cheese has a series of advertisements connecting the production of cheese with the seasons of the year. The catch phrase ‘Good things take time’ is used as an idyllic country field is shown, changing throughout the seasons using still photography.

A walk through any supermarket reveals products appealing to consumers’ rural fondness. ‘Country Soft’ and ‘Country Blend’ margarines are offered; ‘Farmbake Cookies - the golden taste of home’; and ‘Country Fresh’ bread all perch on supermarket shelves. Implicit messages are that the products are “healthy, wholesome, made only from natural ingredients via natural processes by clean, healthy, hard-working morally good country folk” (Bell, 1993:215).

Clothing outlets such as ‘The Great Outdoors’; ‘Wild South’ and ‘Country Road’ appeal to consumers’ colonial heritage. The Country Road advertisements, for example, “depict yuppie human models in Country Road fashions amongst derelict hay barns, antique rakes and old cartwheels” (Bell, 1993:213). The manufactured ‘rural’ has become a flourishing product for consumers. Pawson (1997:20) suggests that such branding “frequently employs languages of place, which can rapidly become invested with not only commercial but also cultural meanings, such that place/product associations can reimagine places (such as the New Zealand high country)”. Branding therefore, enables traditions to be “invented” or “repositories for nostalgia created or re-made” (Pawson, 1997:20).

Glossy magazines such as New Zealand House and Garden, invariably feature rural locations or parallel urban-rural differences. Plate 4.2 introduces an inner city apartment with the passage “A peaceful, country spot in the heart of the city sounds too good to be true” (House and Garden, August 1998:32). Articles frequently employ picturesque imagery when describing a featured house: “The house exudes a special country charm that is a direct result of its owners’ devotion” (July, 1998:58). “A scattering of ducks ripples across [the lake], like the best poetry, this idyllic beauty appears simple, but its simplicity is built on an assured and deliberate framework”
Sacred Territory

A peaceful, country spot in the heart of the city sounds too good to be true.
Sue Moody looks around an inner-city sanctuary in Ponsonby.

STYLING: JULIE FIELDING  PHOTOGRAPHS: RICHARD SEIFERT

The focus on rural imagery and nostalgia can be found in another New Zealand magazine, *The Smallfarmer*. One section within this magazine is entitled ‘Farm Kitchen’ and presents traditional New Zealand recipes and cooking advice. The April 1998 issue features an article entitled “Grandma’s remedies still work” and discusses “home remedies of grandma’s day”, while another section features “Do it yourself” hints for smallfarm maintenance (April, 1998:13). This also reflects the gendered nature of the New Zealand rural environment, as discussed in section 4.3.

### 4.7 New Zealand Tourism

The first impression you get of New Zealand is the vibrant green of the countryside (McDermott, 1976:3)

New Zealand tourism promotion focuses largely on a clean, green, rural image. Postcards overflow with rural images of green pastures, flowing rivers and snow-covered mountains. New Zealand promotional material presents a country unspoiled, fresh, honest, uncomplicated, new – “all wrapped up in blue skies and primal bush” (Cloke and Perkins, 1998:190). Adventure tourism, farm tourism, and live farm shows, nature tourism as well as rural community promotion all contribute in multiple forms to the enigmatic production of the rural idyll in New Zealand. A recent study undertaken by the Centre for Research, Evaluation and Social Assessment (CRESA) has shown that there is a diverse rural tourism sector operating in New Zealand. The scope of businesses includes: accommodation, various activities that take advantage of the natural environment and landscape, a thriving retail sector dominated by crafts, garden tours, food outlets, wineries and cultural and historical events and tours (Warren, 1997:4). Through the imagery and mystification of the ‘rural’, tourism (particularly rural tourism) represents an opportunity for visits to partake in the consumption of idealised rural space (Howard, 1997).
Farm tourism, for example, offers visitors the opportunity to experience everyday farming activities, although the majority of visitors are interested more in the general consumption of rural imagery. Carson (1988:20) comments on the actual attraction of farm tourism:

There is clear evidence through the many studies that only a small percentage of visitors staying on farms are interested in the farming activity. The primary attraction is the countryside - pleasant scenery, peace, quiet and fresh air...

Live farm shows such as *The Agridome* and *Dairyland* (near Wanganui, New Zealand) offer tourists a sanitised view of New Zealand farm life. Tourists can view animals being milked or hand-fed, for example, but more arduous tasks such as drenching and shearing are ignored. Dairyland displays both old and new methods of farming and in doing so, fashions nostalgia. (Plate 4.3).

Accommodation guides frequently use nostalgic rural imagery to attract tourists (Plate 4.4). Phrases such as ‘Old world charm and elegance’; and ‘Stylish traditional accommodation in a tranquil country setting’ (New Zealand House and Garden, August 1998:112) are used in advertisements.

While writing about the experiences of an American travelling around New Zealand, McDermott (1976:29) formulated his personal opinion of New Zealander: ‘The average New Zealander, with an agricultural heritage, is straightforward, friendly, honest’. This comment can be directly related to the concept of the simple agrarian life, to which the rural idyll is associated. The representation of a peaceful, uncomplicated lifestyle and a refuge from modernity demonstrates the similarities between the image of New Zealand tourists identify with and the traditional mythologies of the rural idyll.
Plate 4.3 Dairyland Display, Wanganui
Plate 4.4 Nostalgic Rural Imagery in Accommodation Guides
New Zealand House and Garden Magazine, August 1998
Chapter Four - The ‘Rural Idyll’ in New Zealand

4.8 Art and Popular Culture

What should seem anomalous is that the critically important media of mass communication routinely have recourse to rural imagery, when their audiences are overwhelmingly urban. In all of these areas, however, cultural producers have no difficulty in finding and exploiting images of rural New Zealand which these audiences can recognise and treasure.

(Carter and Perry, 1987:61)

New Zealand’s population is one of the most highly urbanised societies in the world. The 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings revealed that 85 per cent of New Zealanders live in urban areas. Despite this high rate of urbanisation, a great deal of New Zealand media including television programmes, advertisements, film, novels, poetry and cartoons feature images of country life.

Television programmes such as Heartland, A Dog’s Show, Inside New Zealand, Ansett New Zealand Time of Your Life and Country Calendar regularly celebrate rural life in New Zealand, often emphasising the positive aspects, while ignoring the negative. Country Calendar, for example, one of New Zealand’s longest running television programmes, specifically provides information and images of rural life. Country Calendar, Carter and Perry (1987) note “depends upon a construction of the rural which is a collage of British antecedents, media-specific conventions, local inflections, particular social interests and material constraints” (1987:4).

Heartland is another example of a television programme that celebrates rural New Zealand. “The title of the programme is a rhetorical device used to imply that the ‘real’ heart of New Zealand is within rural and provincial spaces” (Wilson, 1996:57). The light-hearted documentary series frequently employs lingering panoramic camera shots of uninterrupted landscapes, with no commentary. “These images are slow-moving and not at all hurried, like the slower pace of the rural environment” (Wilson, 1996:65).

Mortimer’s Patch, a popular television police series in the early 1980s, was centred on a (semi-) rural New Zealand police station. “It seems a particularly telling cultural
indicator that so resolutely urban a genre as a ‘cop show’ should be placed in such a setting, and that urban audiences should valorise it” (Perry, 1994:50). The rural idyll ‘audience’ has remained strongly urban from its beginnings. Even from its origin in classical Greece, the pastoral was a view of the countryside, which emanated from the town (Short, 1991:28).

1990’s prime-time television features documentaries such as ‘Rural Dreaming’, which focuses on several New Zealand families and their experiences of life in rural areas. Overblown narration emphasises the rural New Zealand idyll, with phrases such as “It’s their little touch of rural paradise”; “They’re in no hurry to trade it [living in a rural area] in for the cocktail circuit and parking meters down town”; and “There are no high-rises interrupting the red sky sunsets” (TVNZ, 1998). At the conclusion of the documentary, having observed several families in idyllic situations, the narrator announces “The families we met tonight are typical of rural life these days”. Once again, this comment reinforces the sylvan rural idyll that is so prevalent in New Zealand society today.

The huge following that the cartoon ‘Footrot Flats’ has in New Zealand is another illustration of the rural imagery being consumed by the mainly urban New Zealand audience. Created by cartoonist Murray Ball, Footrot Flats depicts the experiences of life on a New Zealand farm using the main characters of a farmer, his farmhand and a farm dog. Farm-work is presented to the reader laced with humour, once again reaffirming idyllic images of the New Zealand countryside. As Williams (1973:62) states, the fantasy of the harmonious countryside “is not a rural but a suburban or dormitory dream, but it is also a dream for those who live in rurality”. Barnett and Wolfe (1989:5) has described the success of Ball’s cartoon as being due to the appeal of “cowpat patriotism”.

Wedde and Burke (1990) comments on the idyll-like presentation of art in New Zealand. The notable lack of realistic imagery in New Zealand art is closely connected with historical representations of Arcadia.
The English post-Baroque landscape gardens of neo-classicists like ‘Capability’ Brown in the later eighteenth century, pushed artificially towards the picturesque - towards a ‘view’ of Arcadia for people who never had to shear dags off their fleecy pets, let alone tra-la out into the snow and go a-lambing - this landscape is getting close to the one we are familiar with, but there’s no ‘unspoiled’ (how tourist brochures love the word) landscape convention at work here; not as we understand it in its post-Romantic sense.

(Wedde et al., 1990:13)

While there appears to be a lack of ‘true’ landscape paintings, the New Zealand landscape continues to be a predominant theme in New Zealand artwork of the twentieth century nevertheless. Pound (1987) cites Wilson’s (1976) argument for why this should be so:

The landscape is, in the first place, an unavoidable presence in this country. New Zealand’s population was, and still is, sparsely spread over a land of constant variety and presence. It is there, and dominates our lives; even our city dwellers whose lifeblood is in the city are nurtured by the land and its products. As long as New Zealand remains pastoral, until it becomes predominantly urban in character and our principal livelihood becomes non-rural, then landscape painting will remain an intrinsic element in the country’s art.


Gibbs (1997:11) comments that “we are still close to the base, to the land, to a brooding spiritual presence. Our best art, including abstract art, reflects that”.

The feature of the New Zealand rural landscape in much contemporary art continues a tradition encountered in colonial artwork. Ellen Valpy’s well-known watercolour ‘Dunedin’ (c.1850) for example, combines ‘documentary truth with a charming personal vision. “The peaceful, natural settings, with their harmonious rows of recently harvested grain and orderly paths, embody both the settlers’ optimism and the belief that hard work and fortitude would mould the ‘new country” (Te Papa, 1997:6). Eugene von Guerard’s ‘Milford Sound’ (1877-79) has been described as “Arcadian and sublime” and “emphasising the power of nature and the insignificance of humans” (Te Papa, 1997:7). The combination of optimism and patriotism early settlers’ to New
Zealand experienced has filtered through to much of this country’s twentieth century artwork.

In addition to artwork, New Zealand literature has also abounded with rural imagery throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Descriptions of the rural are often used as a method of escapism. Denis Glover’s poem ‘Letter to Country Friends’ highlights the strong parallels between rural and urban imagery, common to much New Zealand poetry.
Letter to Country Friends

We live in the city as best we can,
Fettered by fears of by-laws and police,
Our short perspective magnifies alarms;
We feel uneasy when the gas-man calls;
And hope decline, though tabulated years,
To quarter-acre sections neatly fenced.

Daily across the photographic page
Waddle the imbecile guns; the stock exchange
Is jumpy; over the rented house falls the new shadow of a block of flats
Discarded nightly by a tram, and by the gate
Taking the paper from the garden path,
We, in the angle of a clock's hands,
Envy your country lives.
Therefore, beyond the city, we are glad to find
Your country, where the flat roads run
Like helter-skelter hares across the land,
With its frontier the capricious ford
And your fields that lie towards one another,
Mountains being near.

Your ways are ordered too - though not
By the compelling hours, nor is your dawn
Awakened by the milkman's changing gears.
Your lives are more deliberate: you note
Symptoms in sheep, and gauge the winter feed,
Combat encroaching blight; and all the time
You wage indifferent your war with the weather.

Fronting your formidable hills, hedges are toys
An toy-like those scattered buildings;
Nevertheless home to you,
And your wide gates stand open.

Denis Glover
Alan Duff’s novel ‘Once Were Warriors’ is an example of 1990’s urban-rural parallel. Set in an impoverished Auckland suburb, Duff’s novel follows the life of a Maori family and their experiences of urban New Zealand life.

And she feels like whatshername, Cinderella, in her taxi, waiting for it to turn into a pumpkin at the sight of her residential reality, and the rotten little kids everywhere and the mean-faced teenagers and the gang members sauntering around like they owned the place. No gardens here. Not trees, nor plant arrangements, not nothing.

(Duff, 1990:13)

These themes are also prevalent in New Zealand theatre. An advertisements for a 1998 play ‘Wairora’ uses the following blurb:

In 1936, 9 per cent of Maori lived in urban areas. By 1961, 33 per cent of Maori had moved to the cities. Wairora reaches into the heart of one Maori family’s sense of isolation and dislocation following their shift to urban life.

King (1992:184) emphasises this sense of isolation many Maori associate with urban areas:

There’s no doubt about it. Young people find it very difficult to move to areas where the dominant culture is practiced in so many ways to which they are unaccustomed. They don’t feel welcome; they feel it’s a cold-as-steel world and one which they are not geared to live in because they have come from a community where everybody knows what everybody else is doing, where there’s warmth...

He speaks of “the absolute loneliness” people will find in a crowd, and contends that urban society is dominated by pressure for work and economic security (King, 1992:185).
Figure 4.2 summarises the elements of the rural idyll in New Zealand. The New Zealand rural idyll has three distinctive aspects: the rural as masculine; the nature myth of a clean, green and healthy environment; and the romantic view of agricultural work. This thesis seeks to investigate to what extent can these elements be observed in the narration of lifestyle block residents? This will be discussed further in Chapters Seven and Eight.

### FUNDAMENTAL THEMES OF THE RURAL IDYLL

| INDIVIDUAL       | as pure and uncorrupted  
|                  | as carefree and contented |
| WAY OF LIFE      | as wholesome and healthy  
|                  | as spiritually nourishing and non-materialistic  
|                  | as natural  
|                  | as ordered, harmonious and non-materialistic  
| COMMUNITY        | as close-knit (gemeinschaft)  
|                  | as safe  

### CONTEMPORARY THEMES RELATING TO THE CONSUMPTION OF RURAL AS A COMMODITY

- As a setting for consumption, leisure and recreation activities rather than as a site of production
- As a source of cultural symbols attached to consumer goods (including ‘country style’ décor, food, etc.)

### DISTINCTIVE NEW ZEALAND THEMES

- Rural as masculine
- Nature myth of clean, green, healthy environment
- Romantic view of agricultural work

Figure 4.2 Summary of Elements of the Rural Idyll in New Zealand
The three key aspects of the rural idyll in New Zealand are disseminated through nostalgia to shape contemporary representations and practices such as tourism; art and popular culture; and branding and advertising, which are then continuously reinforced and reworked to recreate the rural idyll in New Zealand. It is essential to understand that while the New Zealand rural idyll is rooted in a combination of links with the British rural idyll and New Zealand’s mythical pioneering male, the rural idyll in contemporary society is constantly changing. Pivotal to the myths and images surrounding rural life in New Zealand is nostalgia for the past and the notion of an escape from modernity. “The notion that culturally, if not statistically, it is the rural which is the ‘real’ New Zealand, has proved to be remarkably resilient” (Perry, 1994:58).

We turn now to the second substantial section of this thesis: the case study of lifestyle blocks in Dunedin.
5

Methodology for Case Study

5.1 Choice of Methods

This chapter outlines the methods used to investigate to what extent the trend in New Zealand towards lifestyle blocks can be understood as a form of consumption of the rural idyll. Deciding the structure that this research should take and in particular, the methods to be used for the purposes of investigation, was primarily influenced by the study goals. This study seeks to investigate the motivations of people who select this particular form of housing and attempts to interpret their motivations in relation to a discourse of the rural. A quantitative methodology would consider how many people live on lifestyle blocks, and could even classify residents into particular trait groups. However, as Sarantakos (1993:42) points out:

Quantitative research perceives reality as a sum of measured or measurable attributes; and its primary purpose is the quantification and measurement of this reality... The whole research process is geared towards quantifying and measuring: measurement is taken for granted, is used to classify events, and introduces a peculiar and biased perception of the world.

The aim of this thesis however, is to analyse people’s motivations for moving to lifestyle blocks and to understand why people moved, as opposed to when and how they moved. In these circumstances, it therefore seems more pertinent to use predominantly qualitative methods to “achieve a deeper understanding of the respondent’s world” (Sarantakos, 1993:52). Qualitative research is not predetermined or pre-structured by hypotheses and procedures that might limit the topic’s focus or operation. “In qualitative research every symbol or meaning is considered to be a reflection of the context in which they were developed” (Sarantakos, 1993:50) (Figure 5.1).
While there appears to be a lack of literature available on the phenomenon of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand, the majority of previous literature both in New Zealand and overseas, has focused predominantly on those migrants who choose to farm their land, while largely ignoring those who make the move to a lifestyle block as a consumption choice. A notable omission from the available literature is consideration of migrants' perceptions of 'the rural', and the effects, if any, such perceptions have on migrants' decisions to move. This warrants the need for more extensive use of qualitative methods in research on urban-rural migration, in order to investigate such considerations.

Quantitative methods were also used to complement the research objectives, as they have a number of advantages. They are simple and objective; the enquiry is value-free and the researcher remains separate from the subject, assuming a somewhat 'passive' role (Sarantakos, 1993).
Four data collection methods were used in this research. A questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews with lifestyle block residents, and key informants were the chosen qualitative methods used, (see Figure 5.3). These methods were supplemented by data collected from local documents. These methods, and the reasons for choosing them will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter. Following this, data analysis is discussed as well as a reflection on the methods chosen.
5.2 The Study Area

The study is based in the East Taieri and Pine Hill areas of Dunedin (Figure 5.4). These areas were traditionally used for farmland, and have slowly been subdivided and sold off over the past twenty years. Factors contributing to this subdivision are discussed in Chapter 6.

5.3 Interviews with Key Informants

Key informants were selected by recommendations from initial data sources using a ‘snowball’ method. Local planners, surveyors and land agents as well as lifestyle block residents already known to the researcher recommended numerous contacts and interviews were set up using the information given. The format of the interviews was semi-structured, and the order of the questions varied according to each individual situation. The only form of input from the researcher aside from the questions asked, was through the use of neutral probing.

Six key informants were interviewed. The interviews generally lasted between 30 and 40 minutes and most were conducted in the informants’ workplaces, which were considered to be the most conducive environments for quiet and relaxed discussion. To avoid disruptions and to ensure an accurate record of each interview was obtained, a dictaphone was used to tape record each interview. The recorded interviews enabled accurate recollections upon writing up the research results. A list of key informants is included in the Appendix (A).
Figure 5.4 Study area: East Taieri and Pine Hill, Dunedin
Chapter Five - Methodology for Case Study

5.4 Questionnaire Survey

Questionnaires are a convenient method of data collection. They can produce quick results for the researcher and can be completed at the convenience of the respondents, whilst ensuring anonymity.

A questionnaire survey was distributed to 160 lifestyle block residents. Addresses were obtained after several days of intensive searching through cadastral maps held in the Department of Survey and Land Information. Questionnaires were sent to every property identified between one and ten acres in size in the East Taieri and Pine Hill areas. This was to avoid any possible bias and to ensure a wide variety of responses were obtained. A 51 per cent response rate was achieved.

The questionnaire used a distinctive design in an attempt to gain a large response rate. It was produced in a booklet format, on coloured paper to create a less formal appearance. A cover letter was sent with the questionnaire, explaining the purpose of the study and providing contact addresses in case any clarification was needed.

Both open and closed-ended questions were used. Several open-ended questions were also asked as a closed-ended question to ensure consistency and clarification of responses. A copy of the questionnaire is included in the Appendix (B).

Finally, a follow-up postcard was sent, after three weeks, to all households to encourage any that had not sent back the questionnaire in an effort to further boost the response rate. This increased the return rate to 56 per cent.
Chapter Five - Methodology for Case Study

5.5 In-depth Interviews

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. The issue is not whether observational data is more desirable, valid, or meaningful than self-report data. The fact of the matter is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts and intentions. We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organised the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective.

(Patton, 1990:278)

In-depth interviews were decided on as the principal source of data collection in order to elicit more specific information on migrants’ decisions to move to lifestyle blocks. Recipients of the initial questionnaires were invited to participate in an interview and 15 of the 89 respondents indicated they were willing to cooperate; all 15 were consequently interviewed.

Before the interviews began, interviewees were given a consent form assuring them that their anonymity would be maintained at all times (see Appendix D). This was read thoroughly by participants and signed by both parties. The semi-structured interviews consisted of both structured and open questions. While the semi-structured interviews were focused around the three main research questions, no attempt was made to impose an order on the schedule of topics within the interview. Initial conversations with an interviewee helped guide the direction the interview would take, asking questions that the respondent felt comfortable with at the beginning of the interview, and moving forward from there. Ensuring the comfort of the respondent made for a more agreeable experience for both the respondent and the interviewer as well. In several interviews, additional questions not covered by the basic interview schedule were also asked, in order to meet the needs of the study.

The interviews with lifestyle block residents were undertaken in the residents’ homes and lasted from between 20 and 50 minutes each. After gaining respondents’
permission, the majority of interviews were taped recorded to ensure accuracy. Two interviewees expressed discomfort at being taped, and therefore during these interviews comments were recorded by note taking.

### 5.5.1 A ‘Biographical’ Approach

An interpretive technique which Halfacree (1995:4) terms a “social representations perspective” was used for interviews with the 15 respondents. This allowed the study to “build up a definition of the rural from individual respondents, instead of attempting to fit empirical material to our presuppositions of what rural is” (Halfacree, 1995:4). As discussed previously, there have been numerous calls for a biographical approach to population geography. Werlen (1993:488) suggests that a biographical approach based in a theoretical framework that combines “identity’ and ‘narrativity” is one possible new methodological avenue for studies of migration in particular. The concept of ‘identity’ refers to “the expression of people’s sense of being at any one point in time” (Werlen, 1993:482). Therefore, migration becomes a social event, without decentering the subject (Werlen, 1993) or falling into the “determinism trap” (Halfacree, 1995; Moon, 1997). The use of the notion of the ‘narrative’ traditionally affiliated with the humanities, is supported by Somers and Gibson’s (1994) argument that:

social life is itself storied, that people make sense of what has happened to them by attempting to assemble or integrate these ‘happenings’ within one or more narratives; and that people act in certain ways and not others on the basis of these various story lines.

(Somers and Gibson, 1994, cited in Werlen, 1993: 482)

This study attempts to interpret counterurbanisation to lifestyle blocks as expressions of the respondents’ sense of being. Respondents’ were asked about their backgrounds and their lifestyles before and after their decisions to shift to a lifestyle block, in an attempt to create a biographical account of each individual. By understanding both their identity and narrativity, as suggested by Werlen, the study attempted to interpret respondents’ sense of being in relation to their own comprehension of the rural idyll.
5.5.2 Disadvantages of Interviewing

One of the disadvantages of interviewing is that there exist a number of possibilities for potential bias. Attention was paid to the way questions were worded and spoken during interviews, in an effort not to emphasise any particular key words, which might have affected the way respondents answered questions. Another consideration when wording a particular question is the possibility that a question may be phrased in a way that the researcher thinks is 'neutral' but is in fact, from the respondent's perspective, 'biased'. This was considered during the construction of the basic interview outline, and it was a constant concern during the interviews. The interview recordings were checked upon completion by a person not involved in the research, for any questions which may have been phrased in a leading manner.

As well as the potential for interviewer bias, there are a number of other disadvantages of interviewing. Interviewing offers less anonymity for the respondent than other qualitative methods, since the interviewer knows the identity, residence, type of housing, family conditions and other personal details of the respondents (Sarantakos, 1993: 199). Another important consideration is that some more sensitive questions asked by the researcher may not be answered as adequately as they might be if the respondent were to write the answer down. Many people prefer to answer more sensitive questions by writing them down, rather than answering orally (Sarantakos, 1993).

5.6 Data Analysis

Interpreting the data and drawing relevant conclusions that will satisfactorily answer the research questions is one of the most significant steps in the research process (Sarantakos, 1993: 308). Sarantakos also adds that "there are no distinct guidelines for data analysis in qualitative methodology, and therefore it is the task of each researcher to interpret their data in the best possible way" (1993:308). The following two sections discuss the data analysis used in relation to the data collection methods used.
5.6.1 Questionnaire Survey

After receiving the returned 89 questionnaires, responses to open-ended questions were grouped into themes and trends according to similarities in comments. A base group of more general responses was constructed and the respondents' answers were grouped accordingly. Coding was also used as a method of categorizing responses. “Pattern codes help to reduce and analyse data and direct [the researcher] towards trends, themes, patterns and causal process” (Sarantakos, 1993:304). This statistical data was also grouped and counted, although this was a more straightforward task as the respondents were given groups to choose from in the questionnaire. From these similar groupings and themes, conclusions could be drawn and directly linked to the research questions.

5.6.2 Processing Interview Information

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed so that respondents' speech hesitations and changes in tone could be noted. Although time-consuming, the transcripts ensured the interview analysis was both detailed and comprehensive. The transcripts were then individually evaluated to find general similarities and differences. Codes were assigned and themes identified from this.

5.7 Reflections on Method

Although all methods of data collection have some degree of potential bias, this was considered throughout the study, and great care was taken to avoid such partiality. There were several instances where the position of the researcher - being young, female, middle-class academic - possibly had an effect on the interviewees' responses. In some situations, phrases or questions the researcher used were not understood by the interviewees. In these situations, rephrasing the questions for the benefit of the interviewees meant that there was the potential for bias, as the rephrased questions were unprepared.
The respondents to the questionnaire may not have been a true representation of the study area. Of the 160 questionnaires sent out, 89 were returned. Forty-two questionnaires were completed by males, and 47 by females. The majority of the questionnaires returned were from the 34-44 year age group (47%). As little research has been undertaken on lifestyle blocks in New Zealand, there is no data to compare these statistics to; hence it is not clear whether or not the sample was representative of the demographic mix.

Overall, the choice of methods used was successful. The relatively high response rate of the questionnaire (for a postal survey) was encouraging. Using coloured paper and including a photo of the researcher in an attempt to make the questionnaire both more interesting and personal may have been a contributing factor to this high rate of return. The high socio-economic group that the majority of these households belonged to, could also have assisted. I would recommend this choice of methods for future qualitative research.

One particular section of the questionnaire appeared to confuse many respondents however, resulting in a low response rate for this segment. Each respondent was asked what they considered to be the advantages and disadvantages of living in both rural and urban environments. These questions were each asked separately, however many respondents misread these questions and interpreted them as the same questions being asked twice. It would have been particularly useful to be present when respondents were filling out their questionnaires to assist with any confusion, such as this example. However, time and monetary considerations did not allow for this to take place.

One interviewee was particularly concerned with the consent form shown to her, and became increasingly suspicious as I attempted to explain the reason for the form to her. At one stage, the interviewee accused me of being in a local motorcycle gang, and she then began to raise concerns about her house being burgled in the future because she had let me in. After a lengthy discussion with both the interviewee and her husband, and despite assurances from myself that the interview could be called off if she wished, the interview finally took place, albeit under rather strained conditions. However, the
majority of the interviews proceeded without any major problems, and the interviewees were comfortable allowing me in their homes.

Overall the data collection techniques used were successful, and allowed for effective analysis of both qualitative and quantitative results.
6

The Context of Migration to Lifestyle Blocks in New Zealand

6.1 Introduction

The essence of a small farm is that it allows each person or family a little space which they can call their own and a decent arm’s length between neighbours (Yerex, 1988:4)

People in New Zealand who have made the move from suburbs to a semi-rural setting are generally referred to as ‘lifestylers’, ‘smallfarmers’ or ‘hobby farmers’ who live on ‘lifestyle blocks’ or ‘farmlets’ or ‘10-acre blocks’. It is commonly assumed that a major reason for choosing this lifestyle is that it allows residents to “enjoy the pleasures of living in the country without necessarily giving up a career or social contacts in the city, and without rejecting all the paraphernalia of so-called sophisticated living” (Yerex, 1988:4). Yerex suggests that part of the attraction of living in a New Zealand rural setting is that there exists a greater amount of individualism, and freedom from time constraints that dominate city life.

Most main centres in New Zealand have lifestyle blocks on their outskirts as “people seek to experience the rural lifestyle on recently subdivided farmland while keeping within commuting distance of their employment” (Fairweather, 1996:76). This social process has generated a number of questions including, How do planners manage the urban sprawl for the public good? and What are the reasons behind the establishment and growth of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand? This chapter is especially concerned with the context in which lifestyle blocks have emerged in New Zealand, and particularly, Dunedin.
Chapter 6 – The Context of Migration to Lifestyle Blocks in New Zealand

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines the origins of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand, from the foundations of smallfarming in colonial New Zealand, to the availability of former farming land after the agricultural restructuring in 1984. Planning issues associated with the changes in agricultural land use will also be discussed here. The chapter then moves on to discuss lifestyle blocks in New Zealand in the 1990s. A brief discussion of New Zealand literature on lifestyle blocks and smallfarming is incorporated, and issues for future consideration are also discussed.

6.2 Origins of Lifestyle Blocks in New Zealand

Grant and Grant (1998) contend that smallfarming has been a major feature of New Zealand agriculture since the beginnings of the colonial settlements. European settlers’ first coastal ‘footholds’ were in the North Island bush as it was cleared and in dairying areas like Waikato and Taranaki. Moreover, almost all of New Zealand’s early farms were small. While large stations and runs were numerically at least, the exception, the Wairarapa, Masterton, Greytown and surrounding areas were specifically designed as small farm settlements (Ian Grant, pers comm.). During the early years of colonisation, each New Zealand province competed to attract smallfarming settlers with visions of an appealing new lifestyle. The 1875 edition of the Official Handbook of New Zealand provides one such example:

Of all the Provinces, Taranaki offers the greatest advantages to the petty capitalist or smallfarmer immigrant. Land inferior in quality to none in the Colony and superior to most, is obtainable at a reasonable rate and within reasonable distance of town… True, most of it is covered with forest, but this is rather an advantage than a drawback to the industrious smallfarmer settling down on his 50-acre section with the determination to make a home in the bush


Gradually, however, with the establishment of farming patterns and an export trade in meat, wool and butter, combined with the concentration of a larger proportion of the population in towns and cities, there was a consolidation and consequent increase in the size of most pastoral farms (Grant and Grant, 1998:9).
By the middle of the 1870s, Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington and Auckland emerged as the four major urban centres, and have continued to retain this status today (Bogunovich and Morad, 1993). The 'drift' to rural areas continued throughout the early part of the twentieth century, and rural depopulation became prevalent toward the late 1970s. As Grant and Grant (1998:10) describe, many farmers had responded to the Government's supplementary minimum price scheme (SMPs), and over-mortgaged their properties to finance greatly increased production. However, they found that after the oil shocks and European Economic Community (EEC) decisions resulted in a shrinking marketplace, they received too low a return. Grant and Grant add that at the same time as New Zealand farmers were in a financial crisis, studies showed that the value of production per acre on smallholdings generally equalled or bettered that on larger properties. As a result, the newly formed *New Zealand Association of Smallfarmers* began a spirited campaign to challenge district schemes throughout New Zealand, which had previously made it difficult for prospective smallfarmers to purchase land, particularly in established farming areas.

While the process of urban concentration in New Zealand has been taking place at the macro (national) scale, an opposite tendency of deconcentration is occurring at the micro (regional) scale (Bogunovich and Morad, 1993:263). Preliminary observations based on a variety of data sources by Bogunovich and Morad (1993) indicate that in the Auckland, Waikato, Wellington, Bay of Plenty, Manawatu, Hawkes Bay, Taranaki, Canterbury and Otago regions, there already exists a consistent pattern of low-density development, generally around existing urban cores and along some transport corridors.
The powerful agricultural organisation Federated Farmers argue that the trend towards subdivision reflects, in part, poor farm returns. 'It is a sign of the lack of profitability in farms. If there was greater profitability, fewer farms would be sold. Farmers would be in a better position to compete for the land' (Christchurch Press, 8.4.95, page 35).

It is necessary to review the process of New Zealand's agricultural restructuring that began in 1984 in order to understand this lack of profitability.

Shortly before the election of the Labour government in 1984, New Zealand had reached the ridiculous situation where a large proportion of the net farm income of sheep and beef farmers was provided by subsidies. Clearly for a variety of reasons something had to change

(Willis, 1992:2)

The problems in the New Zealand farm sector were not new. In order to sustain the standard of living that New Zealanders had become accustomed to during the 1950s and early 1960s, the government had begun a programme of borrowing on international markets. According to Walker and Bell (1994), this borrowing was used largely to sustain consumption rather than for the investment to generate further growth of the economy. By 1984 New Zealand's manufacturing base was very inefficient. "The exporting sector, based on agriculture, was heavily subsidised to maintain output, and to compensate for the high cost structure brought about by local protection" (Walker and Bell, 1994:4). The government found itself in a situation where it was supplying many of the goods and services that could not be supplied by the private sector. This resulted in the government taking on a role as 'protector' against any adverse situation that might arise. The outcome of this was a rapid decline in private sector initiatives, innovation and entrepreneurial spirit, as businesses were concerned more with taking advantage of the government's schemes rather than initiating fresh business development and planning.

The highly regulated economy resulted in seriously low economic growth. While agriculture was still the key export sector, it was heavily subsidised. Walker and Bell (1994) state that the increased output was in some cases more than the cost of
production and processing. “For example, about 40% of the sheep farmers’ income was paid by the government. While lamb production increased, the cost of producing the lambs was more than 65% above the international market price” (Walker and Bell, 1994:5). Eventually, the cost of policies was so great that New Zealand could no longer borrow from overseas sources. It was clear that a change in policy was necessary.

The goal of the new Labour government in 1984 was to maximise sustainable growth.

The presentation of the '84 budget marked a watershed in the history of New Zealand farming and land-use policy: in this budget the new Labour government signalled its clear intention to make the marketplace the chief regulator of land use and farm production decisions.

(Willis, 1992:2)

It sought to achieve such a goal by removing all regulations and controls that had previously prevented competition. This goal also applied to the agricultural sector, which was exposed to international prices. The government removed assistance swiftly, beginning with the agricultural sector. The majority of agricultural subsidies were stopped immediately and farmers found they were required to pay for services, which were previously free, such as inspection and consultancy. Policy changes in other parts of the economy also had major impacts on agriculture.

Prior to 1984, New Zealand government policies insulated New Zealand agriculture from overseas prices and thus reduced the international competitiveness of New Zealand agriculture. “The government assisted farmers in three main ways; these were price supports, subsidies on inputs, and assistance to produce more output” (Walker and Bell, 1994:21). The effects of such subsidies were great. Because there was more support for sheep farming, an oversupply was produced resulting in severe wastage. The servicing sector became less efficient and hill country areas were neglected, some to the point where erosion is now occurring.
However, it is important to note that the New Zealand experience is not unique. According to Walker and Bell (1994), more than half the income received by a European farmer in 1993 was from government support. Cloke (1988) suggests that the restructuring of the agricultural sector in particular was not just an outcome of the national policies of deregulation. Contemporary conditions in agriculture are accrued "from complex international conditions, in relation to which national policy is part response, part counter-responses" (Cloke, 1988:39). It is widely acknowledged that the most potent force for change was external to New Zealand. "The Treasury's 1984 review of land-use issues discussed government attitudes to the restrictions imposed by export markets" (Cloke, 1988:40).

The effects of the 1984 deregulation on the agricultural sector were severe. Farm profit was halved and operating costs rose as incomes fell. Many rural businesses failed as farmers cut back on spending, resulting in the migration of many rural residents to urban areas in an attempt to seek new employment. Ironically, rural depopulation and the urban drift has been suggested by many (Halfacree 1996; Short 1996; Yerex 1988; Perry 1986) as a key contributing factor to the anti-urban myth and the socially constructed images of the countryside.

Some writers argue however, that the Labour government restructuring did not affect farmers as much as has been reported by many (Walker and Bell, 1994; Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, 1994). While the government did help in farm debt restructuring and encouraged private sector lenders to write off loans, many farmers were in such a stable financial position prior to 1984 that they did not have substantial loans to clear. Chamberlin (1996) argues that management of most farms was of a particularly high standard and therefore restructuring of the economy simply meant a cutback on farm spending, which was well within the means of many farmers. Furthermore, restructuring resulted in huge improvements in the efficiency of the whole farm service sector. Willis (1992) partially agrees with these suggestions, but offers that:
New Zealand farmers had an almost schizoid reaction to the removal of subsidies. On the one hand, most individual farmers and indeed Federated Farmers agreed that the level of government support for agriculture was too high. Yet what really hit the rural community was the understandable and emotional reaction to the fall in land values.

(Willis, 1992:3)

It is misleading to attribute all the changes in New Zealand agriculture since 1984 solely to deregulation. Wilson (1994) suggests that there exist many contemporary issues in agriculture including diversification, indebtedness and off-farm employment, although most of these issues can somehow be traced back to the changes in 1984. One such issue is the decrease in overall farm productivity, which Federated Farmers suggest contributes to the loss of farmland for subdivision into lifestyle blocks. With greater profitability, fewer farms would be sold to developers and accordingly, farmers would be able to competitively compete for prime farming land.

For the rural sector in New Zealand, the consequences of agricultural restructuring were great. The removal of direct assistance to agriculture combined with floating the New Zealand dollar from exchange rate control resulted in a dramatic fall in farm prices as servicing debts rose and real farm income decreased (Bell, 1993). As individual farmers' debts increased, rural communities and rural service providers were also affected. Towards the end of the 1980s, several freezing works and many rural banks closed, creating high levels of unemployment in small New Zealand towns and rural areas. In an attempt to reduce debts, farmers looked for alternative land use options, one of which was the selling off of some agricultural land to developers for the purposes of subdivision. The consequences of this decision will be discussed later in this chapter.

6.4 Subdivision of Rural Land

In order for the land on which lifestyle blocks are situated to become available, many farms have been carved into smaller properties. This is the source of some contention between farmers and in-migrants. Prices for lifestyle properties continue to rise.
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rapidly, as subdivisions are restricted in an attempt to salvage some prime agricultural land. In 1995, blocks of bare land from 0.7 hectares to 1.4 hectares on the outskirts of Christchurch could fetch between $85,000 and $140,000, while established homes on lifestyle blocks with a proven income from the land could bring prices around $500,000 (Christchurch Press, 8.4.95, page 35).

Opinion on the growth of lifestyle blocks is clearly divided. Clearly, the development of lifestyle blocks meets a growing demand for a rural lifestyle and a daily retreat from the pressures of city life (Christchurch Press, 8.4.95). Many rural areas are also experiencing an economic 'boom' period, and are beginning to recover from the downturn of the mid-1980s. However, some farmers are less than pleased with the current trends. Many see the growth in rural population as the cause of rising land prices, and the loss of much productive farming land. Peter Roberts, President of the North Canterbury division of the Federated Farmers agrees that “it’s changing times”. He is concerned about the amount of quality farming land that is being wasted on “hobby farmers”. “As long as the land gets used for some sort of production. If it is just used as a dormitory for people who work in town, it’s a waste” (Christchurch Press, 8.4.95, page 35). Some farmers have chosen to sell their farms and move further out into backcountry areas, taking advantage of the high prices paid by people wanting the rural lifestyle. However, there is uncertainty as to how many lifestylers actually make productive use of their land.

Much of the concern over subdivision relates to smallholders filling rural spaces with housing, so that peri-urban areas become “de-facto suburbs” (Pomeroy, 1996:9). A Waimakariri District Council study conducted in 1995 showed that lifestyle block residents did not want to live in subdivisions with other houses around them. They wanted instead to be surrounded by farmland and open spaces. A key problem with this idea is the associated loss of agricultural land. Intending lifestyle block residents often purchase more land than necessary in an attempt to be surrounded by agricultural land, away from other housing. As a result, the additional land purchased is often unused, and over time, becomes ineffective for any future agricultural production.
People seeking small blocks of rural land do not all have the same objective. Some seek merely a residential site in a rural setting, while others seek a residential site with sufficient pasture to keep a few animals for recreational purposes. Another group of people seek rural land in order to be ‘hobby farmers’ on a part-time basis, while yet another group seek good quality land for intensive farming for their primary income.

Traditionally there has been a conflict between the various possible uses for rural land versus urban expansion. Expansion outward of urban areas by those wishing to live in a rural environment raises questions as to how such land should be used. The encroachment on to such land - which is often resource-rich or prime agricultural land, is an important planning issue. Much of the conflict that arises as a result of rural land use decisions often comes down to the basic premise of ‘economics’ versus ‘lifestyle’ choices. In a 1979 New Zealand conference on ‘Peri-Urban Land Use’, several goals were established to guide peri-urban development. These goals were essentially that the “maintenance and enhancement of the rural environment should foremostly be considered in terms of maintaining the land so that it has a wide range of land uses, a varied and harmonious landscape and a sense of tranquility and spaciousness”, (Lawn, 1983:460, cited in Upton, 1995:6).

Many of New Zealand’s urban settlements were originally established on, or near to, areas where there were existing developed and farmed soils. As these settlements expanded, increasing pressure was placed on the subdivision of adjoining, often highly productive, agricultural land for residential and industrial use. Consequently, “the expansion of urban areas into their rural hinterland has resulted in significant losses of high quality soils available for agricultural use” (Grundy, 1995:8). According to the Proposed District Plan of Dunedin for 1996, the establishment of land use activities not functionally dependent on these resources can compromise the potential of the natural and physical resources of a rural area. Such land use activities, it is suggested, may represent an inefficient use of resources. It is considered that “the present and future well being of people in rural areas is reliant on a variety of primary production activities, therefore the retention of the productive potential of the soil is an important resource management issue” (Dunedin City Council, 1996:34).
In 1995, the Ministry for the Environment commissioned research into the environmental effects of rural subdivision. A number of effects were found including:

- poor water quality caused by increased loading of sewage;
- changes to the landscape through boundary plantings and greater density of housing;
- loss of heritage values;
- a wide range of nuisances such as dust, noise and possible air emissions;
- pressure on particular ecological values;
- loss of amenity values.

Lifestyle blocks can also be a drain on public resources. Smallholders demand urban services, such as utilities and roading, which are especially expensive when the residential area is scattered across a wide area.

The use of the soil resource for residential activities involving such operations as topsoil removal and sites being covered by buildings and other hard-standing surfaces, adversely affects the productive potential of soil. Consequently land-use planning in recent years has sought to prevent the subdivision of rural land into small blocks except where it is believed that the small blocks will be farmed intensively. This has resulted in heavy competition for existing blocks. “The pressure for rural land, particularly adjacent to urban areas which generate the bulk of our jobs not to mention conveniences and amenities like supermarkets and movie theatres - is unrelenting” (Upton, 1995:2). Studies have shown that on the urban-rural fringe, “the combined pressures of decreased building costs associated with flat land, proximity to existing services, and speculative property market imperatives almost inevitably result in the conversion of often highly productive agricultural land to residential uses” (Grundy, 1995:8). It is no wonder therefore, that the subdivision of rural land, especially for lifestyle blocks, is a source of much conflict in the planning arena.

However, it must be recognised that not every aspect of rural residential use is negative. It is acknowledged that lifestyle block owners rarely place the pressures on land that livestock farmers do, for example. Animal effluent, fertilisers and sprays all...
have effects on the environment, but such impacts in the past have not been part of rural local body awareness (Upton, 1995). Rural subdivision will involve environmental changes, but these changes may not all be negative.

We have, in New Zealand, traditionally focused on urban sprawl as being necessarily bad. We should also consider the effects of urban containment in the same way. Often, the effects we are trying to avoid in rural areas result in increasing population density in urban areas and damaging urban amenity values (Upton, 1995:15).

Recent research has in fact indicated that lifestyle blocks do contribute to sustainable development, and often in ways that are not obvious (Hunt, 1995). According to Grant and Grant (1998) owners of smallholdings are, for instance, planting trees and hedgerows in greater numbers than farmers ever did. Lifestyle blocks residents are also bringing with them a wide variety of new and innovative ideas. In doing so, and by using local resources in non-traditional ways, newcomers are often responsible for introducing new business to rural areas. The subdivision of rural land has in many instances, brought with it “diversity, intensification and innovation” (Bennetts, 1995, cited in Pomeroy, 1996:3).

### 6.5 Planning Legislation

Traditionally, the Town and Country Planning Act (1977) meant that planners were expected to make choices for people by deciding whether subdivision would “most effectively promote and safeguard the health, safety, convenience and economic, cultural and general well-being of the people”. The introduction of the Resource Management Act (1991) assumed that people are able to make their own decisions regarding the use of resources instead. Councils oversee such choices in order to make sure that the effects of those choices are consistent with sustainable management (Upton, 1995).

Prior to the introduction of the Resource Management Act, the Town and Country Planning Act used two main tools for controlling rural subdivision: minimum size lots
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and economic units. “The classic minimum size lot was the old ten-acre block. Its legacy still lingers in many rural areas” (Upton, 1995:6). Such a crude mechanism resulted in the misuse of much rural land, as many people were forced to purchase ten acre units when they needed or desired only two or three acres. The enforcement of economic units was also not a particularly successful mechanism, as many ineffectual schemes were proposed simply in order to obtain permission from local authorities to build on rural land, which resulted in millions of misspent money. The introduction of the Resource Management Act has meant that subdivisions are now controlled for the purpose of sustainable management, but such measures are well established in the rationale of many people.

Before the introduction of the Resource Management Act, the regulation of rural land was done through the provisions of a district scheme, usually by the use of prescriptive zoning and associated subdivision controls. “Most district schemes divided land into land use zones based on the separation of what were seen as conflicting activities” (Grundy, 1995:8). Residential, industrial and commercial types of rural zones were normally distinguished. The Resource Management Act continued to support the protection of high quality agricultural land from unnecessary and inappropriate development. However, there exist a number of difficulties in enforcing subdivision controls, such as ‘minimum size’ allotments and ‘economic units’, which, although no longer enforced, are still prominent concepts.

The Ministry for the Environment considers that there has been, and continues to be a loss of rural farmland that is situated close to urban areas. This generally results from the desire of urban dwellers to live in a rural setting. However, the Ministry emphasises that such land is sold by choice. Therefore problems arise not because of the urban migrants, but rather because the rural farmland is severely undervalued in relation to urban developed land. Once a lifestyle block is established, the price of the land soars. Such prices are considered well beyond the economic means of most farmers. Although many farmers who do not sell to in-migrants are experiencing a rise in value of their properties due to demand for such land, many conclude that such a rise accounts for little if farmers have no intention of selling. It is rather, the income from farming the property that is important (Christchurch Press, 8.4.95, page 35).
There exist a wide variety of opinions on whether or not subdividing farms into smallholdings makes the best use of the land. The Auckland Regional Council and the Rodney District Council are an example of two authorities with very different opinions as to the effects of subdivision on farming land. The Auckland Regional Council maintains that subdividing can cause decline in agricultural productivity and eventually the loss of agricultural potential altogether, as lifestyle blocks become further divided into residential lots. Meanwhile the Rodney District Council “makes provision for continuing rural lifestyle settlement, in reasonable proximity to main roads, and where services can be efficiently provided” (Hunt, 1995:16). In achieving this, however, “the council makes no specific mention of how it would address conflicts in land-use, where, for example, good agricultural land is zoned for development” (Hunt, 1995:16). Hunt (1995) recommends that lifestyle blocks should be allowed but only on poorer quality land, which can then benefit from soil conservation measures that smallholders undertake and only in areas that rely on independent water and sewerage systems. Figure 6.1 summarises the contributing factors leading to increased development on the peri-urban fringe.
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Internal and External Pressures on New Zealand Economy

Restructuring (1984 Labour Government)

Deregulated Economy
Affects Farming sector... loss of subsidies to agriculture
increase in interest rates
decrease in land values, incomes
resulted in producing a negative equity

Subdivision Controls varied from council to council at this time

Subdivision of large farms into smaller farmlets for exurban development

Farming subdivided to produce an income, to increase equity in their properties – or to finance farm diversification etc.

Change of regulations via creation of RMA 1991

Economy - lower interest rates, increased economic growth

Farmers
Opportunities for farmers to make considerable capital gains through subdivision, some farmers now becoming developers

Councils
More consistent integrated approach to development and planning under RMA 1991

Population
An increasing trend towards counterurbanisation, due to a better financial situation and perceived better rural lifestyle creates significant demand for rural lifestyle blocks

Figure 6.1 Summary of Factors Leading to Increased Peri-Urban Development
(Source: Blaikie (1996) adapted from Wilshire, 1995)
6.6 Current Literature

Little literature exists on the phenomenon of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand. The available literature does not examine migrants' perceptions of the rural in any depth. Planning aspects and the need for services is covered in some detail. Lawn, Burridge, Berging and Keating (no date) studied smallholdings in the late 1970s, where smallholders emphasised the importance of utilising the land for agricultural and horticultural purposes (cited in Fairweather, 1993:3). Jowett (1976) surveyed smallholdings in New Zealand to find that there were about 27,000 rural holdings between one and ten hectares. Slightly less than 50% of those surveyed used their land as a source of income.

Seator (1978) in a study of small rural farmlets in Hawkes Bay, found that only 20 per cent of people living on smallholdings earned their living working their farmlets full-time. He also established that smaller-size properties were located nearer to the urban areas than their larger counterparts and that the majority of farmlets enjoyed the same services and facilities of their urban counterparts, while also enjoying the benefits associated with living in a rural environment. Gardner (1978) examined the levels of satisfaction lifestyle block owners perceived, comparing these with their perceptions of their previous residential location. The study found that a large proportion of respondents (76%) were more satisfied with their present location. Two thirds of respondents also indicated that they would almost certainly be living on their current property in five years time.

The motivations of migrants decisions to move to lifestyle blocks were considered briefly by Moran et al (1980), citing family reasons as a major motivation. The rural environment was seen by many respondents as a more appropriate environment in which to bring up children than an urban environment.

The process of rural resettlement by urban residents wishing to experience a rural lifestyle has other dimensions as well, according to Bedford and Heenan (1987). Areas close to major cities have experienced a growth in second homes. A similar development has taken place in small towns and settlements close to major recreation
attractions in inland areas, such as skifields, hydroelectricity developments and national parks (Bedford and Heenan, 1987:159).

Investigating the role of hobby farming and landuse change in the urban periphery of Christchurch, Carey (1992) found that hobby farms were developed as a result of the owner/operators desire to enjoy the country lifestyle. Hobby farmers had no intention of making their household and farm income dependent on profit derived from the land unit (Carey, 1992:114).

Fairweather (1993, 1996) discovered that the expectations of intending smallholders on the urban periphery of Christchurch and those already living on a smallholding tended to be different. An important objective for intending smallholders was to use their smallholdings to generate additional income. Current smallholders were less interested in earning an income, and placed more importance instead on the tangible lifestyle. Fairweather argued that preferences for a rural lifestyle among Christchurch smallholders was not linked to anti-urban perceptions, but rather was based on notions of an idealised rural space.

Blakie (1996) examined the development, conflict and compatibility of land uses found within the northern rural-urban fringe of Christchurch. He found that “there has been a movement away from traditional landuse activities towards a larger range, including further exurban residencies, industrial and commercial activities and public open space” (Blakie, 1996:134). In addition to establishing land-use change in Christchurch’s northern rural-urban fringe, the study recognised that with the establishment of non-agricultural activities in the countryside, conflict has emerged between the traditional users and more recent migrant users.

In a study of the motivations and economics of part-time farming in Alexandra, Whitelock (1997) found that smallholders in Alexandra were motivated to take up residence in a rural area to pursue their preference for the ‘rural lifestyle’, rather than by a desire to undertake any type of farming. She also discovered that “a significant proportion of smallholders were hiring temporary wage labour to help maintain the
productivity of their land, despite the small scale of the production process and its
general inability to contribute to household income” (Whitelock, 1997:44).

Most recently, Grant and Grant (1998) have produced a book entitled *The Smallfarming Revolution – New Beginnings in Rural New Zealand*. They argue that the major motivation behind the decision to become a smallfarmer is rooted in “a desire to move ‘back’ to the countryside, to lead a simpler, more natural life, and to re-establish fast-disappearing family and community values” (Grant and Grant, 1998:14). The book details 21 smallfarming partnerships in New Zealand and discusses the unique experiences these smallfarmers have had.

The New Zealand literature provides some detailed information on lifestyle blocks and particularly on planning aspects and the demand of lifestyle blocks residents for urban services. While (1992), Whitelock (1997) and Grant and Grant (1998) all discussed residents’ motivations for moving to lifestyle blocks, these investigations were somewhat superficial and in all three studies were secondary to the main research objectives. A detailed account of lifestyle block residents’ perceptions of the rural lifestyle in New Zealand is lacking, with the exception of Fairweather (1996).

6.7 Lifestyle Blocks in New Zealand

The correct terminology used to describe these sections of land has been the source of many debates. A variety of terms including ‘lifestyle blocks’, ‘hobby farms’, ‘smallfarms’ and more recently ‘smallholdings’ have been used to describe small land holdings in New Zealand. Fairweather (1996:76) terms smallholding as “country living sustained by urban employment”. The expression ‘lifestyle blocks’ was originally coined by Dunedin real estate agent John Lagan in the 1970s, who, when in court at a land hearing described the small piece of land in question as a ‘lifestyle block’. This phrase was duly noted by the presiding judge and continues to be used today. It is especially prevalent in real estate marketing, as land agents attempt to emphasise the idyllic lifestyle obtainable by purchasing a property in a rural setting.
Ian Grant, however, regrets the term ‘lifestyle block’ because “it is meaningless”. He argues that every way of living provides a lifestyle and also because:

...it suggests a large house on a small acreage with a decorative pony grazing in the front paddock. While there are obviously a number of such properties, this sort of mental picture has not helped the image of smallfarming which, in our experience, involves people farming seriously and adding to the value of their land in a number of ways

(Ian Grant, pers comm.)

Pomeroy (1996) points out that these terms merely denote a diversification of income sources, and tend to reflect the agricentricity of the users of those terms, rather than portraying an accurate reflection of what landowners actually do. While there appears to be no agreement on the correct terminology used to describe households on the peri-urban fringe, for the purposes of this study, these properties are referred to as lifestyle blocks.

Rather than debate the most appropriate terminology, it is perhaps more pertinent to define exactly what a smallfarm or lifestyle block is considered to be. Traditionally, in keeping with district plans throughout the country, land for subdivision was divided up into 10 acre blocks, regardless of the size desired by intending residents. Therefore, a lifestyle block is generally considered to be a property of 10 acres in size. Department of Statistics endeavours to determine the number of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand included blocks of land ranging in size from 10 – 49 acres to 1 –19 hectares (Grant and Grant, 1998:16). According to their records, from 1988 to 1997 the number of lifestyle blocks rose from 34,680 to 69,993. A brief survey of real estate agents in Dunedin, determined that the exact size of a lifestyle block varies from region to region in New Zealand. Most Dunedin agents consider a lifestyle block to be a section of land ranging in size from between 1 to 10 acres, where some agricultural production may take place, for the purposes of profit or pleasure. This definition has been used for the purposes of the current study.
Currently the Otago property market is experiencing an economic decline, and real estate agent John Lagan suggests that in times of economic downturn, the sale of lifestyle blocks is first to be affected. “When there’s high inflation, there’s low demand. When there’s a slump, suddenly you’ve got high supply”. He adds however, that while lifestyle block sales are affected during a regional economic recession, there always exists a market, albeit small, for more exclusive properties. One such example is Surrey Heights, near Waihola, Dunedin, where a good elevated section can be sold for $350,000. Plate 6 shows recently relocated homes to ‘Surrey Bay’, a new peri-urban development also near Waihola, Dunedin. Sections on this particular development can be purchased for a minimum of $85,000. John Lagan comments that these properties appeal to a wide range of clientele; he has recently sold lifestyle blocks to a former diary farmer, a builder, a travel agent and a sales manager. He describes sales as “Pretty much to people who are earning in excess of $80,000 a year”. These comments are confirmed by real estate agent Nicki Read, who adds, “It’s definitely the higher income bracket who keep it [the lifestyle blocks property market] going during the lean times. We still sell less expensive properties in slow times, but they take longer to sell”.

Table 6.1 shows the number of sales of lifestyle blocks in Otago from 1995 to 1998, compared with other South Island regions and overall New Zealand sales. It is interesting to note that lifestyle blocks sales in Otago over the past four years represent on average only 3 per cent of the total New Zealand sales. Otago median list and sale prices are also significantly lower than Canterbury and Nelson/Marlborough regions.
Plate 6 Subdivision Development, Surrey Bay, Waihola, Dunedin
Table 6.1 New Zealand Real Estate Residential Statistics – Lifestyle Blocks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of Sales</th>
<th>Value of Sales</th>
<th>Median List Price</th>
<th>Median Sale Price</th>
<th>Median Sell Days</th>
<th>Median Government Valuation</th>
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<td>1995</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>Canterbury</td>
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<td>152,000</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>215,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson/</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3,106,110</td>
<td>238,500</td>
<td>228,000</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>228,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlborough</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otago</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1,760,000</td>
<td>205,000</td>
<td>174,000</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>92,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>10,442,741</td>
<td>168,250</td>
<td>163,750</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>188,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson/</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2,041,000</td>
<td>169,000</td>
<td>160,000</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>205,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlborough</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>71,699,623</td>
<td>179,500</td>
<td>165,000</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>162,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October 1996</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otago</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3,305,500</td>
<td>132,000</td>
<td>107,750</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>205,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>11,271,650</td>
<td>210,000</td>
<td>179,500</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>210,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson/</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3,977,000</td>
<td>215,000</td>
<td>206,750</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>197,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>108,549,996</td>
<td>220,000</td>
<td>209,000</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>200,000</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 1997</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otago</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2,090,000</td>
<td>137,000</td>
<td>135,000</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>190,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>10,258,550</td>
<td>129,000</td>
<td>129,000</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson/</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2,935,083</td>
<td>220,000</td>
<td>190,000</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>196,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlborough</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>85,452,614</td>
<td>180,000</td>
<td>170,000</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>189,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October 1997</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otago</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>860,525</td>
<td>77,500</td>
<td>67,750</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>169,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canterbury</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3,715,500</td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td>140,000</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>202,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nelson/</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3,975,000</td>
<td>184,000</td>
<td>177,000</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>198,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marlborough</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>76,962,860</td>
<td>195,000</td>
<td>187,000</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>185,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Real Estate New Zealand, Monthly Statistics)
Dunedin City Council Planner Kirsten Klitcher acknowledges that there is a demand for lifestyle blocks in Dunedin, but suggests that perhaps some lifestyle block residents would be better suited to a large urban section, rather than a lifestyle block with several acres of unused land. The lack of services on lifestyle blocks is a source of discontent for some lifestyle blocks residents, and she proposes instead that purchasing a large urban section complete with urban services would be a more appropriate solution for certain residents (pers comm.).

### 6.9 Expectation versus Reality

The shift from urban dwellings to rural smallholdings is reflected worldwide. However, currently in New Zealand, attempts are being made to avoid some of the problems experienced by overseas countries. One notable problem experienced is the clash of ideals between the in-migrants and the rural farmers in terms of what is expected in a rural environment. Having moved to a rural area, the urban migrant often wants to impose urban standards on rural land users. Often termed 'nuisance-type work', farming activities such as early morning machinery use and crop spraying, for example, is an essential part of farm production, but nevertheless impinge on residential satisfaction of the area. Federated Framers have recently been involved in examining district schemes, in an attempt to create new legislation giving farms the right to continue with regular farm activities regardless:

> Given trends overseas, there will be pressure brought for example for tractors not to be used before seven a.m., harvesters to be stopped at certain times of the day and work which has to be done at night to be stopped. From a farmer’s perspective, that’s not an ideal situation.

(Graham Robertson, cited in Sunday Star Times, 9.4.95, page A5)

For example, in West Auckland, a piggery gradually became surrounded by urban sprawl and pressure mounted for it to be relocated. This occurred even though migrants who had purchased homes nearby knew of what to expect before they moved (Sunday Star Times, 9.4.95, page A5). This type of problem can be linked to idyllic representations of New Zealand’s rural areas in popular culture, and the notion of expectation versus reality, associated with living on a lifestyle block. It is essential
therefore, that council planners balance the needs of farmers to carry out particular agricultural practices against the trouble these practices may cause others.

6.8 Conclusion

"The dynamic and extensive process of peri-urban development continues to reshape New Zealand’s urban system and regional and landscape" (Bogunovich and Morad, 1993:265). Agricultural restructuring in New Zealand has brought about the freeing up of agricultural land for the purposes of subdivision. The increasing urban population in many of New Zealand's main centres has also contributed to the rise in the numbers of lifestyle blocks as people seek a quieter and more private lifestyle. While the growth of lifestyle blocks has brought about some changes to traditional agricultural production increasingly, rural economies are being driven by the consumption of rurality (Grieve and Tonts, 1996).

Farmstay holidays, rural landscapes, tourism, recreational activities, rural festivals, and new lifestyle options have, together with the associated changes in local and national modes of social regulation, emerged as important modes of social regulation, emerged as important aspects in a shift towards a more differentiated and 'flexible' countryside (Grieve and Tonts, 1996:20).

The 'rural' as a place to farm is now being superseded by the rural as a place to live (Grieve and Tonts, 1996:20).

The introduction of the Resource Management Act, and the continual changes within regional district schemes have created many areas of contention for both lifestyle block residents and farmers alike. Bogunovich and Morad (1993) contend that it is of the highest priority to establish what the implementation of environmental legislation – primarily the Resource Management Act 1991 – will mean for the process of peri-urban growth. As the numbers of lifestyle blocks continue to increase, it appears inevitable that conflict between different land users will also intensify. Blaikie (1996:136) suggests that “the only possible solution to the conflict between traditional
users and more recent migrants to the countryside, is for both the planning authorities and developers to take a more realistic approach to land use, and not allow development to occur in areas that are vital in terms of agricultural productivity". Information gathered on lifestyle blocks in New Zealand thus far suggests that lifestyle block residents do not want to see rural subdivision spoiling the rural character of the landscape anymore than do large farmers. Equally, as Pomeroy (1993:9) points out, it should be noted that it is the property of the large farmers which is being subdivided with their permission in the first place.
Motivations of Migrants to Lifestyle Blocks in Dunedin

7.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the second research question, namely, What are the motivations behind migrants' decisions to move to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin? The information presented here was obtained from 89 returned mail questionnaires and interviews with 15 selected questionnaire respondents. These interviews explored in more detail some of the questionnaire responses, as well asking further questions about the respondents' motivations for moving to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines the 'biography of respondents' and looks at the lifestyle block residents' age, gender and employment patterns in the context of 1996 Census data for the suburbs of East Taieri and Pine Hill (suburbs include both lifestyle blocks and urban). Land-use and property alterations on respondents' lifestyle blocks are also discussed here. The second section deals with the motivations of lifestyle blocks residents in terms of migration models discussed in Chapter Two. The notion of push and pull factors associated with the housing relocation and search process is examined and related specifically to the comments made by questionnaire respondents and interviewees.
7.2 Biography of Respondents - Who Lives on Lifestyle Blocks?

Of the 89 questionnaires returned, 42 were completed by males and 47 by females. The majority of respondents were in the 34-44 year age group (47%); with 21 per cent aged between 25-34; 13 per cent in the 55-64 category; 10 per cent aged 45-54 and one respondent aged between 18-24 years. (Figure 7.1).

![Age of Questionnaire Respondents Compared to Pine Hill and East Taieri Population, 1996 Census](image)

Figure 7.1 Age of Questionnaire Respondents

Clearly there is a significant cluster of questionnaire respondents in the 35-44 year age group. This is considerably higher than both the East Taieri and Pine Hill suburbs. Real estate agent John Lagan acknowledges that the majority of lifestyle block purchasers are “young middle to upper class families with a couple of kids. They’ve got a bit of money and the kids are young enough to enjoy the place” (John Lagan pers. comm). All other age groups in the questionnaire, however, correlate well with East Taieri and Pine Hill census data.

The ratio of male to female questionnaire respondents in each age group was very similar with the exception of 13 females compared to 6 males in the 25-34 age group.
7.2.1 Respondents’ Occupations

Employment patterns, varied notably between the two genders. Thirty-four per cent of lifestyle block residents described themselves as self-employed, with 24 per cent of these respondents being male and 10 per cent, female. Thirty-three percent of respondents were in full-time paid employment at the time of the questionnaire, which consists of 15 per cent males and 18 per cent females. Part-time employment accounted for 13 per cent of respondents, while all six per cent of respondents who identified as being homemakers were female. 6.5 per cent of males and 6.5 per cent of females were retired, and finally, one male respondent was a student. These results can be seen in Table 7.1, which shows the divisions of both age and occupation, by gender.

Table 7.1 Age and Occupation of Questionnaire Respondents, by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>25-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-maker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interesting variable here is that the numbers of self-employed respondents is much higher than the New Zealand average. While 24 per cent of male respondents identified themselves as being self-employed, according to the 1996 Census of Population and Dwellings, only 4.6 per cent of male New Zealanders are self-employed. Similarly, ten per cent of female lifestyle block residents were self employed, compared to the national total of 2.1 per cent. When balanced with the suburbs of East Taieri and Pine Hill, it can be seen that the numbers of questionnaire respondents who are self-employed or unpaid family workers is significantly higher. (Figure 7.2) Furthermore, both East Taieri and Pine Hill have higher rates of full-time
paid work than do the sample of questionnaire respondents. While only a small number of interviewees discussed setting up a small business on their properties, none of the 15 residents interviewed were earning their income solely from their properties.

Two interviewees were intending to begin their businesses within the next two years. One interviewee had spent the previous four years planning and setting up her business, however she was not yet generating an income. Another interviewee had just begun setting up her business, and was intending to begin production in 18 months time. Both women identified themselves as being self-employed, and both had partners commuting daily to careers in Dunedin city. Another three interviewees commented that they earned some income off their properties. These businesses included a boarding kennels, and an arts and craft boutique. However, all three interviewees were also employed elsewhere. One interviewee commented that he was both self-employed and in full-time paid employment, and thus the high number of self-employed respondents may perhaps be explained in part, through confusion with the phrasing of this particular question in the questionnaire.

![Employment Status of Respondents compared to East Taieri & Pine Hill suburbs](image)

Figure 7.2 Employment Status of Questionnaire Respondents
7.2.2 Property ownership and household composition

A large percentage of respondents (95%) owned their own properties, and another five per cent rented their property. This supports the argument that consumption of lifestyle blocks is a characteristic of mid to higher socio-economic groups. Labour and material investment needed in order to maintain land, as well as the travel costs incurred with commuting to work and services in urban areas, implies that additional spending is necessary.

The majority of respondents lived on properties of six acres or less (55%). Three per cent of respondents' lifestyle blocks were between seven and nine acres in size, while another 42 per cent lived on 10 acre properties. Forty-three per cent of respondents lived in a four person household, while another 25 per cent lived in a three person household. A further 28 per cent of respondents lived with just one other person on their lifestyle block, seven per cent lived in five person households, and five per cent lived in a six person household.
7.2.3 Land Use

Figure 7.3 shows the land use of questionnaire respondents' properties.

![Land Use of Lifestyle Blocks](image)

Figure 7.3 Land Use of Lifestyle Blocks

Two interesting points emerge from these results. The large percentage of people who used land for recreational purposes is significant. There were frequent comments from both the questionnaire respondents and the interviewees regarding the pleasures of the countryside and the activities residents take part in on their properties were notable.

There's plenty of space for the children - they can climb trees, make a dam, play with the lambs, all the things kids should be doing

(Questionnaire respondent)

We love to go on bushwalks. There's a big swimming hole down the back and the kids' dive in on a hot day. It's great

Anne

Also noteworthy is the high percentage of respondents who used land for raising livestock. This is surprising, considering the number of respondents who commented that they had moved to their lifestyle blocks solely for lifestyle reasons. However, without the respondents specifying further, it is difficult to ascertain the respondents'

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1 This graph shows the percentages of responses of land use indicated from the questionnaires. In many instances, multiple land uses were cited. These were included as additional counts in each land use class
purposes for raising livestock, whether for enjoyment or profit. This would be an interesting consideration for future studies.

7.2.4 Property Alterations

The idyllic rural setting that many respondents ardently describe requires a great deal of maintenance. Contrary to popular belief, a country residence and green pastures demands constant upkeep. Questionnaire respondents therefore were asked whether they had made any alterations to their properties, in an attempt to extract a more candid depiction of respondents’ experiences on their lifestyle blocks.

Figure 7.4 Alterations Made to Lifestyle Block Respondents Properties, as given in Questionnaire.

Thirty respondents mentioned that they had to improve water supply and sewerage systems, as well as connecting electricity to out buildings such as sheds and garages. Another 14 respondents made improvements to the quality of the soil, for both recreational gardening and business purposes. Thirteen respondents purchased their land with no facilities on site, and therefore had to build homes as well as develop the section. “We started from a bare paddock - had to do everything - but quite a
challenge” (Questionnaire respondent). Eight respondents mentioned that they had made extensive alterations to their house, and another 5 had made improvements to their property for the purposes of setting up a business. Only 10 respondents had not had to make any alterations to their properties.\(^2\)

Several interviewees mentioned that they had not expected to carry out so many alterations to the property, and several also stated that they had not planned on spending such a great amount of money on these alterations and general maintenance of the property as they had.

\[\text{If I had to do it again, I would work it out again financially beforehand because, although that’s hard because you still want it so you can’t put it off, and I’d probably plan things better} \]

Kris

\[\text{There’s always room for improvements if you’ve got the money} \]

James

Such a large number of respondents specifying that they had to make alterations to their properties indicate the significance of their desire to purchase their respective properties. Especially for those respondents who had to provide all their utilities, the desire to live in a rural setting must have been particularly strong. This aspiration will be discussed further in the following chapter.

### 7.3 Migration and Residential Mobility

As discussed in Chapter Two, Germani (1965) views migration as the outcome of objective factors. These factors are the characteristics of potential places of origin and destination. Both migrants’ places of origin and destination and their perceptions of these places will be examined here in an attempt to understand their motivations to move to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin. Knox (1991) formulated a conceptual model of

\(^2\) Some respondents answered more than one category.
household relocation and search process. The dweller, Knox suggests, has two choices when no longer satisfied with their present environment. He asserts that dwellers can either take measures to improve their environment, or seek alternative residence. The latter choice involves defining what the dweller wants in a new location, and comparing possible alternatives. Clearly, lifestyle block residents decided against improving their environments and instead sought alternative residences. The extent to which residents’ previous environments were unsatisfactory for respondents needs will also be examined here.

### 7.3.1 Push and Pull Factors

The notion of push and pull factors as explanatory variables for migration decision-making is also strong in migration and residential mobility literature. Push factors are those at the origins which are assumed to have a negative influence on the quality indicators of life, while pull factors are the positive factors drawing prospective migrants to a destination. Table 7.2 lists Perry’s (1986) most frequently cited push and pull factors in comparison with those given by questionnaire respondents.
Table 7.2 Push and Pull Factors cited by Perry (1986), Compared to Push and Pull Factors cited by Questionnaire Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Mounting pollution</td>
<td>• Haven of peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Congestion</td>
<td>• Tranquility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Crime</td>
<td>• Fresh air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tension</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifestyle Block Residents’ PUSH Factors</th>
<th>Lifestyle Block Residents PULL Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Neighbours</td>
<td>• Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To get away from urban environment</td>
<td>• Always wanted to live in the country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Noise</td>
<td>• Wanted to try farming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Congestion</td>
<td>• Rural lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Crime</td>
<td>• Place to raise/care for animals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pollution</td>
<td>• Peace and quiet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Traffic</td>
<td>• View</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stress</td>
<td>• Work on the land</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Questionnaire responses to “I decided to settle on this property because…” and Perry (1986)

Several motivations were given by respondents as to why they decided to move to a lifestyle block. Both push and pull factors were mentioned by 43 per cent of respondents. Thirty-three per cent of respondents mentioned only pull factors, while another 24 per cent spoke only in terms of push factors. This supports Moon’s (1995) argument that a number of push factors, rather than just one, contribute to urban dwellers’ decision to move from an urban environment. Knox (1994) also contends that households are ‘pushed’ and ‘pulled’ by a variety of factors at once. However, it is just as important to realise that for some households, the net effect of push and pull
factors may not be sufficient to prompt the search for alternative residences. Adjustments can be made to both the dwelling itself and to the neighbourhood (Knox, 1994). Therefore, with regards to the 89 questionnaire respondents, it can be assumed that the desire to live on a lifestyle block was more important than the desire to improve their previous living arrangements.

The push and pull factors given by respondents can be broken down further into both physical and social factors. Table 7.3 lists these factors, as given by respondents.
Table 7.3 Physical and Social Push and Pull Factors, given by questionnaire respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical PUSH Factors</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcrowding</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congestion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours close by</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get away from city life</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More space</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to raise animals</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural view</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to work with the land</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked the house</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large garden</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liked the area</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always wanted to live in the country</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good environment for raising children</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace and quiet</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to try farming</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to try something different</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthier lifestyle</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in pace</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepping stone to full-time farming</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 7.5 summarises this table. The most significant point here is that 37 per cent of lifestyle block residents were motivated to move to their property by physical pull factors. The desire for more space, and the opportunity to raise animals in this space were the most frequently cited physical pull factors. A more private environment, and a 'rural' view, were also regular comments. Social pull factors were also cited by respondents as major motivations for moving to lifestyle blocks. The most commonly mentioned being that they had 'always wanted to live in the country'. Of the motivating push factors given by respondents, the noise associated with living in an urban environment was the most commented physical factor, whilst the close proximity of neighbours was cited by 8 per cent of respondents. It is interesting to note here that during discussions with the 15 interviewees regarding their motivations for moving to lifestyle blocks, 73 per cent spoke of urban push factors before mentioning rural pull factors.

The opportunity to just get away from the intensity of life in town, you know, escape and relax in the country. Our previous house was in a nice street, but we were all boxed in, you had to put up with everyone else, whether you liked it or not.

Michael
To be able to get out, to leave all that stress behind, and go somewhere peaceful and forget. Yeah, I don’t think you can honestly do that in town, you know, I mean even when you go home you’re still in town. Do you know what I mean? It can get you down I think

Heidi

While the lure of a peaceful rural environment is strong, so too is the desire to get away from the urban environment. Overcrowding, pollution and congestion are all cited by questionnaire respondents as major motivating push factors. However, the relatively small scale of urban problems in Dunedin City tends to contradict many of these comments made by respondents. For example, Dunedin residents do not face significant industrial air pollution or lengthy congested peak-hour commuting trips. The question arises as to whether these references to urban problems are accurate reflections of the conditions of urban residence in Dunedin, or are rooted in wider cultural themes. This apparent contradiction suggests that the anti-urban, pro-rural idyll, may be a major contributing factor to migrants’ motivations for moving to lifestyle blocks. This possibility will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

Using a more direct approach, questionnaire respondents were asked ‘Why did you choose to live on a lifestyle block’? (Table 7.4) Once again, the desire for privacy was most frequently cited. Also repeatedly mentioned was the idea that respondents ‘wanted to try farming’. This can be linked to comments made by interviewees regarding the desire, especially by male residents to pursue farming as a hobby. The notion of the rural as masculine and the associated connections with lifestyle block residents will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

A surprising finding was the lack of comments made by respondents’ concerning environmental issues. Only one respondent cited environmental concerns as a major motivating factor in her decision to move to a lifestyle block. It was thought, especially considering New Zealand’s wholesome ‘clean, green’ image, that more respondents may have considered environmental issues. In later questions, however, several respondents did discuss an appreciation of nature. This will also be examined further in Chapter Eight.
Table 7.4 “Why did you choose to live on a lifestyle block?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>&quot;To be able to look outside your window and see green. No chimneys and next-door neighbours&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Wanted to try farming</td>
<td>&quot;Wanted to try our hands at farm life – without the commitment of having to make an income off the land&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>To raise and care for animals</td>
<td>&quot;To be able to raise farm animals, and enjoy the children watching them grow&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Views</td>
<td>&quot;We wanted to build a house with space around it – views and a rural aspect&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Rural lifestyle</td>
<td>&quot;We wanted the lifestyle of being in the country&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Raising children</td>
<td>&quot;To raise our kids in a better, healthier environment&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Goal attainment</td>
<td>&quot;We always wanted to live in the country and have only just now been able to afford it&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Space</td>
<td>&quot;For some space away from everyone else&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Raised on a farm</td>
<td>&quot;Originally I came from a farm and appreciated the lifestyle this provides&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Close to town</td>
<td>&quot;To give our children a chance to live a rural life, but still get a good education in town&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>&quot;To establish a business and enjoy privacy and a peaceful setting&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>&quot;For a change of pace, and a better lifestyle&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>House</td>
<td>&quot;Fell in love with the house and the views&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Retirement</td>
<td>&quot;We wanted to be active in our retirement&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>&quot;An investment for our children&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>&quot;To establish a large garden – for enjoyment and fitness in our old age&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Stepping stone to full-time farming</td>
<td>&quot;We wanted to farm, but didn’t have the skills, so this was the next best thing -we felt we could do this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>&quot;To protect the land and its soil, air, and water, views, native flora and fauna, while developing a healthy, humane, sustainable way of life for self and others&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers denote the number of respondents who mentioned each category.

Some respondents mentioned more than one category.
In an attempt to further understand migrants' motivations, questionnaire respondents were asked to rate a variety of categories from *highly important* to *not important*, in terms of major motivations for shifting to their lifestyle blocks. The results can be seen in Figures 7.6 and 7.7. The most highly rated motivations were the desire for space and privacy (45%), and the desire to live in a safe environment (45%) followed by the wish to raise animals (38%). Raising children in a 'good' environment was highly important for 31 per cent of respondents, and a rural view was an important motivation for 20 per cent of respondents. Of interest, is the relatively low rating of the desire to live a 'farm lifestyle' (20%). The desire for a close-knit community was the most cited *not important* motivation (28%), followed by retirement (26%). This reflects the relatively young age group of respondents.

When categories are merged into *highly and fairly important*, and *only and little and not important*, the major motivations vary slightly. They most significant finding was that the desire for space and privacy was considered to be a motivating factor by all 89 respondents. The perception of the rural as a safe environment was noted by 95 per cent of respondents. This reflects previous negative urban-based comments given by respondents, particularly regarding neighbours and overcrowding in urban areas. Raising animals is also mentioned as a key motivation by 95 per cent of respondents. When combining two categories, living a farm lifestyle is a major motivation for 78 per cent of respondents.

The perception of the rural and safe and idyllic can clearly be seen in these results. The desire for more privacy, a safer environment and a more appropriate place to raise children, all refer to what the rural environment is perceived to offer and what the urban environment cannot.
Figure 7.6 Major Motivations for Moving to a Lifestyle Block

Motivations given by questionnaire respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safety</th>
<th>Privacy</th>
<th>Animals</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>View</th>
<th>Hobbies</th>
<th>Affordable</th>
<th>Wildlife</th>
<th>Farm Lifestyle</th>
<th>Investment</th>
<th>Build Own Home</th>
<th>Retirement</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Not Chosen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Legend:
- □ highly impt
- ■ fairly
- □ little
- □ not
Figure 7.7 Motivations for moving to a Lifestyle Block - Combined Categories

Motivations given by questionnaire respondents
It can be seen therefore, that a variety of push and pull factors contributed to residents' decisions to migrate to lifestyle blocks. While urban push factors were mentioned by 35 per cent of respondents, 65 per cent were concerned chiefly with rural pull factors. While the majority of respondents were concerned with rural pull factors, 73 per cent of interviewees mentioned urban push factors before discussing rural pull factors as motivations for moving to lifestyle blocks. This contradiction supports Knox's (1994) theory that several push and pull factors will combine to contribute to the decision to change housing location. Despite the relatively small size of urban Dunedin, the perceptions of the urban environment as overcrowded and polluted were evident in several comments made by respondents. The desire for privacy and space emerged as the most powerful motivation. The notion of the rural as wholesome and healthier than the urban environment was especially strong in comments made by respondents, and will be discussed at length in the following chapter.
The Rural Idyll in the Narratives of Lifestyle Block Residents

8.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the third research question: To what extent does the rural idyll feature in the narratives of lifestyle block residents? While much attention has been directed towards the academic interpretation of the rural idyll phenomenon, representations by rural and urban residents have been neglected. In-migrants to lifestyle blocks, for example, are certain to have their own individual understanding and interpretation of the rural idyll. While the rural idyll may be understood in a certain way from the perspective of urban residents, the view may differ somewhat according to lifestyle block residents. This chapter examines the rural idyll as it is expressed in the narratives of lifestyle blocks residents. Migration to lifestyle blocks may be in part, an attempt by people living in an urban context to draw on notions of the rural. It is the purpose of this chapter to discuss to what extent this is true for the Dunedin case study.

I will argue in this chapter that some elements of the rural idyll (as it has been defined in earlier chapters) are drawn on by lifestyle block residents. The rural idyll appears to offer a rich array of cultural themes and meanings, which lifestyle block residents selectively incorporate into their narratives about the lifestyle block experience. However, the analysis of the questionnaires and interview transcripts also revealed the pervasive presence of other themes, notably a rather different cultural ideal which may be labelled the ‘retreat from society’. The characteristics of this ideal will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
The chapter is organised as follows. First, lifestyle block residents’ references to the rural idyll are discussed in the context of the three ‘imagined locations’. Second, an overview is presented of all key themes that were identified in the interview transcripts, whether or not they were linked to the rural idyll. In the third section, the findings from this case study are directly compared to the expectations derived from the literature on the rural idyll. The results are combined from the questionnaire survey (n = 89) and in-depth interviews (n = 15). The term ‘respondents’ will be used to refer to the questionnaire respondents, while the term ‘interviewees’ will be used when reporting results from the interviews.

8.2 Imagined Locations

In the stories people tell about life as a lifestyle block resident (narratives), it is important to understand how they locate themselves. Three related locations can be identified here; both from people’s own narrations in the interviews, but also those explicitly elicited by the questionnaire. These are the location in Time, Space and Society. All three were drawn on in the design of the questionnaire, and most of the respondents also referred to more than one in the interviews.

The first position, lifestyle block residence located in Time, can be seen as the outcome of an individual’s biography or as the endpoint in a personal history. This perspective considers an individual’s background and their expectations. Narratives that locate the individual in time typically describe the purchase of their lifestyle block as the fulfillment of a longstanding goal.

The second position, lifestyle block residence located in Space, can be understood as a point in a rural-urban continuum or dichotomy. Here, people act as agents looking to an abstract urban/rural space, and then actively making the decision to place themselves in a rural setting and live a rural life. This perspective is closely related to the geography of consumption. Narratives that locate the individual in space typically describe the act of consumer choice among alternative options.
Lifestyle block residence located in *Society* is the third position identified. By utilising their hard-won wisdom regarding the actual realities of life on a lifestyle block, residents may adopt the role of experienced informant for others considering moving to a lifestyle block on the future. Narratives that emphasise this theme typically stress the residents’ choice as a social act that can serve as a model (or caution) for other members of society.

Figure 8.1 Imagined Location of Lifestyle Block Residents

### 8.3 Time

Throughout both the questionnaires and interviews, there were many comments relating to the purchase of a lifestyle block as the satisfaction of a long-term goal. Several respondents spoke of how they had “always wanted to live on a farm” and that the purchase of a lifestyle block, or a rural section had been a long-term goal. Here, the rural idyll may be seen to be operating as an inspiration and dream that shapes people’s progress through life. The following section considers the backgrounds and personal biography of each interviewee in an attempt to understand how they came to the decisions to live on a lifestyle block.
Chapter 8 - The Rural Idyll in Narratives of Lifestyle Block Residents

8.3.1 Respondents' Backgrounds

One of the ways in which the biography of a lifestyle block resident may be narrated is in terms of a story, which links an urban or rural upbringing or background with their present situation. Sixty per cent of respondents identified themselves as being from a mainly urban background, seventeen per cent from a mainly rural background and twenty-three per cent from a combination of both rural and urban.

Respondents were then asked what effect, if any, their backgrounds had on their decision to move to their current location, that is, their lifestyle block. The most striking finding was that the majority of respondents (66%) believed that their background had had a great effect on their decision, ranging from 41 per cent of those with an urban background to 11 per cent of those with a rural background, and 14 per cent with a combination (Table 8.1).

Table 8.1 Respondents’ backgrounds and effect of backgrounds on decisions to move to a lifestyle block.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>URBAN</th>
<th>RURAL</th>
<th>COMBINATION</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Effect</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Effect</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Effect</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td>59</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(One respondent did not answer this question)

The interviews provide more insight into how the effect of background is perceived by lifestyle block residents. One female interviewee who considered herself to have come from a combination of both rural and urban backgrounds expressed her discomfort with urban living, and stressed that she always felt like an outsider in an urban environment.
Both the interviewees and questionnaire respondents frequently expressed common themes of the urban environment as unfriendly and cold, perhaps reflecting the influence of the notion of the rural idyll that permeates New Zealand culture.

I think you really get a sense of the good things in life when you leave the farm for town life. I mean, everyone's so busy and so caught up in themselves in town, but down on the farm there's courtesy and a bit of respect. I suppose that has a bit to do with who you choose to surround yourself with, but I don't know, it just never seemed nice for us in town, you know?

Betty

Eight interviewees (five females and three males) were from urban backgrounds and several of these interviewees expressed distaste for overcrowding, insensitive neighbours and noise they considered prevalent in urban environments. When asked whether her urban upbringing was influential in her decision to move to her current lifestyle block, one respondent replied:

Yeah, definitely. I mean, when I was a kid I grew up in a horrible area, with noisy neighbours yelling and screaming and looking in our windows, glaring at us, and I mean I know not all suburbs are like that and I have lived in some nicer areas, but there's always neighbours and I decided, that when I had the choice, like when I could actually afford to do it, I would shift to a place without neighbours nearby.

Elizabeth

Lack of privacy in an urban environment was also a major concern for many interviewees.

I just don't like neighbours watching me all the time.

James
I don’t like the close proximity to other people, I don’t like looking into someone’s backyard or that type of thing and I don’t like people looking into mine.

Betty

Of interest were the comments made by three interviewees who came from mainly rural backgrounds. Their perceptions of urban life were just as disapproving as those who had experienced living in an urban environment. Furthermore, these three respondents’ opinions of rural life were extremely positive.

It's just a simpler, far less complicated life. Good honest work, good people, yeah.

Liam

Well, I think that rural people are more genuine and down to earth than some of that lot in town. There’s more time to do what you’ve got to do and really, it’s just a nicer place to live.

Anne

Attachment to place for these interviewees was especially strong, with the rural environment representing familiarity and security.

8.3.2 Expectations before moving

It was thought that respondents’ expectations before and after moving to their respective lifestyle blocks would differ and that where the expectation meets the reality could be problematic. Fairweather found in a 1993 study of smallholders around Christchurch, that intending smallholders valued privacy, clean air freedom, quietness and an appropriate place to raise children, while existing smallholders emphasised country living.
The expectations of interviewees in this study as they prepared to move to their lifestyle blocks were varied. The most frequently cited expectation was that shifting to their lifestyle block would enable respondents' to experience a more enjoyable lifestyle.

That this property would be a haven for us, a place to escape the stresses of urban life - that sounds a bit dramatic doesn't it? But just a place to calm down; that we would both enjoy living here; that we would both be able to pursue our hobbies; that we would both have a better life here.

Ingrid

Another common remark was that living on a lifestyle block had been a long-term goal, and that their expectations had been simply to achieve that goal. Also cited was the enjoyment of privacy; being away from neighbours and noise pollution, and escapism. To be able to enjoy the outdoors and the climate were also mentioned by respondents' as expectations. All 15 interviewees agreed that their expectations had been met upon taking up residence on their lifestyle blocks. While many did acknowledge that the everyday maintenance and responsibility associated with a lifestyle block was greater than they had anticipated, none of the interviewees spoke negatively about their lifestyle block.

To expand on the migrants' major motivations for moving to a lifestyle block as discussed in the previous chapter, interviewees were asked: What attracted you to this location? Once again, several respondents mentioned negative urban-based problems:

The fact that there were no neighbours was a big attraction. I mean no neighbours staring at you and knowing your business. I guess the feeling that you could just get lost out here you know, forget where you are, what you do and just relax, yeah.

Paul
Well a quiet setting was essential to us, having had some bad experiences with neighbours before. My husband called them the neighbours from hell! don’t you darling? So yeah, a quiet setting with no one to bother us. When the agent showed us this place and we couldn’t see the neighbour’s house, well that was it really.

Diana

For others, the image of a country house was an important:

That’s what we told the agent, we wanted a country house so yes. We weren’t really that specific, but when we saw this place we just knew.

Gemma

We liked the idea of a place in the country you know, away from it all. So when we found this place, even though it didn’t look much at the time, we knew it had potential and that we could make it into our place in the country if we wanted to. So that’s what we did.

Heidi

8.4 Space

As the previous section has discussed, the decision to choose to live on a lifestyle block encompasses a number of different variables. Generally, lifestyle blocks are situated on the fringe of the city, in space which is neither distinctively urban, nor rural. The decision to move to a lifestyle block can be understood as the choice of a housing which combines elements of both rural space and urban space. Here, the rural idyll may be understood as a part of the social process of defining ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ as distinct alternative spaces. More specifically, the rural idyll may be drawn on to provide some elements for a social for a social definition of peri-urban space. In other words, the rural idyll is mined as a source of ideas to attach to a particular space or spatially-located way of life. This is in contrast to the previous ‘imagined location’, where the rural idyll was used to define a period in the life-course.
Chapter 8 - The Rural Idyll in Narratives of Lifestyle Block Residents

8.4.1 Advantages and Disadvantages

In the first part of the questionnaire, questions regarding residents’ feelings about the rural environment were alluded to, but not asked directly. Therefore, in order to gain a more detailed understanding of resident’s attitudes and impressions of both lifestyle blocks and the urban environment in general, respondents were asked to list what they considered to be the advantages and disadvantages of both. The results of these questions can be seen in Table 8.2.

It is interesting to note that comments regarding the advantages of an urban environment relate solely to urban services, while the lifestyle block advantages cited are more emotionally focused. Emotionally descriptive language is predominantly used when describing the disadvantages of living in an urban setting, while the disadvantages of living on lifestyle blocks primarily focused on the labour-intensive nature of the lifestyle. Several lifestylers commented that an ideal lifestyle for them would be to live on their current property, but still receive all the urban services that are provided in town. The phrase ‘The Best of Both Worlds’ coined by Yerex (1988) fits aptly with these respondents’ comments.

Table 8.2 Most Frequently Mentioned Advantages and Disadvantages of Lifestyle Blocks and the Urban Environment, Given by Questionnaire Respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVANTAGES</th>
<th>DISADVANTAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
<td><strong>Urban</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to services</td>
<td>Noise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wide variety of services available</td>
<td>Traffic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubbish collection</td>
<td>Close to neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public transport</td>
<td>Lack of privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment facilities</td>
<td>Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lifestyle Block</strong></td>
<td><strong>Lifestyle Block</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace and quiet</td>
<td>Water/sewerage problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Labour intensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>Greater distance to services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No neighbours</td>
<td>More maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for relaxation</td>
<td>Time-consuming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tables 8.3 and 8.4 display the comments made by questionnaire respondents regarding the advantages and disadvantages of living in an urban environment.

### Table 8.3 Advantages of Living in an Urban Environment, as given by Questionnaire Respondents

**Question 13:** In comparison, what do you consider are the advantages of living in an urban environment?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>12</th>
<th>Close to services</th>
<th>&quot;Closer to amenities - mainly social in nature&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rubbish collection</td>
<td>(no comment offered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Availability of services</td>
<td>&quot;Better level of civic services&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Availability of entertainment facilities</td>
<td>&quot;You may be closer to entertainment facilities&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Public transport</td>
<td>&quot;The city bus service&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Water on tap</td>
<td>(no comment offered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Closer to emergency services</td>
<td>&quot;Closer to services such as the doctor&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Less distances to travel</td>
<td>&quot;Closer to everything&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Better roading</td>
<td>&quot;Better roads - no gravel&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Close to schools</td>
<td>&quot;Close proximity to schools, shops etc...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Less committed to property</td>
<td>&quot;Easier to go away for a 'weekend' &quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>More spare time</td>
<td>(no comment offered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>More control of traffic</td>
<td>&quot;Much more control of traffic&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sewerage</td>
<td>&quot;Water and sewerage provided&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No animal excrement</td>
<td>&quot;No cow dung!&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers denote the number of respondents who mentioned each category.
Table 8.4 Disadvantages of Living in an Urban Environment, as given by Questionnaire Respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excessive noise</td>
<td>“Noise pollution”; “Loud stereos and tooting horns”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too close to neighbours</td>
<td>“Neighbours are too close to each other which inevitably causes problems”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>“Much more pollution in town - air and noise pollution that is”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of privacy</td>
<td>“Having neighbours look in your bathroom window”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traffic</td>
<td>“Just too much traffic”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cramped lifestyle</td>
<td>“The feeling of being ‘caged in’ that you can’t get away - ‘cause there’s nowhere to go”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>“Crime is rampant in town”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overcrowding</td>
<td>“Too many people in too small a place”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsiderate people</td>
<td>“You rely on other people so much to be considerate, and often they’re not, which leads to stress”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller properties</td>
<td>“Small sections, close neighbours, noise”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of space</td>
<td>“Lack of space and privacy”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>“The stress levels of everyday living”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor water quality</td>
<td>“The water is nasty”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything</td>
<td>“Everything you can think of”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitors arriving unannounced</td>
<td>“People dropping in”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No green spaces</td>
<td>“There is hardly any green spaces in town - nowhere to go and just relax and be yourself”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s safety at risk</td>
<td>“Children’s safety is jeopardised”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less control of immediate surroundings</td>
<td>“Air, water and soil pollution; lack of privacy; noise; and generally less control of immediate surroundings including water quality”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moody people</td>
<td>“Everyone is so grumpy in the city”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers denote the number of respondents who mentioned each category.

So how important was it for respondents' to live in an environment that was experienced as ‘rural'? I have argued that the notion of the rural idyll pervades New Zealand society, but does this strong ideal actually influence people’s decisions to migrate to rural environments, and especially lifestyle properties? Both the questionnaire respondents and the interviewees were asked whether living in a rural setting was important to them.

The responses were overwhelmingly consistent. Forty-eight per cent strongly agreed that living in a rural environment was important to them. A further forty-five per cent agreed with this statement. Only one respondent disagreed whilst another six per cent...
were undecided. Most of the interviewees strongly agreed, and many cited family reasons for this response:

Yeah well it's important to us. I mean our kids have got acres and acres of wide-open space, native bush to explore, clean air, room to be kids. I mean we just think the kids couldn't ask for a better place to grow up. So yeah, it's very important for our family.

Anne

8.5 Society

After several years experience with day-to-day living on a lifestyle block, both respondents and interviewees had much advice to offer prospective lifestyle block residents. The questionnaire asked them to adopt the role of experienced informant, but in addition this role was readily embraced in the interviews. In this imagined location, the rural idyll is used to define the individual and households' relationship to other members of society. In other words, it serves as a source of valued wisdom and also contributes to status.

8.5.1 Residents' Satisfaction

Almost 80 per cent agreed that their current lifestyle block was better than their previous address. Fifteen per cent considered their level of satisfaction to be the same as it was with their previous living arrangement, while another four per cent were more satisfied with living arrangements at their previous address. Two respondents' offered no answer to this question. (Figure 8.2)
Figure 8.2 Respondents' Level of Satisfaction with Lifestyle Block

The interviewees expanded on these responses, when asked whether they thought this location was better or worse than an urban environment. Several respondents' once again commented on urban-based problems:

Betty: This would be better [than previous address in town]. I could cope moving back there, but I don’t think he [husband] could.

James: Yeah, I don’t like neighbours. No I don’t like close proximity to other people.

Oh yes it’s definitely better. It’s things like...I don’t have to worry about the kids turning their stereos up and I don’t have to worry about intruding on other people really.

Diana
I think when you live in town, you just spend so much time running around dealing with problems and meeting people and everything, that you don’t have time to appreciate life. Not that there aren’t problems with the country life too, but I think you deal with things a lot better when you’ve got room to breathe.

Gemma

Table 8.5 shows the problems associated with living on a lifestyle block, as given by questionnaire respondents.

Table 8.5 Problems with Living on A Lifestyle Block, As Given By Questionnaire Respondents

| Question 12. What are the unexpected problems of choosing to live on a lifestyle block? |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9 Water and sewerage problems     | “Water - we’re on tank water and we run our during the dry season and sewerage - problems with septic tanks” |
| 7 Labour intensive                | “Hard work - sometimes back-breaking”                                                               |
| 5 Greater distance to services    | “Distance you have to travel to get anywhere”                                                     |
| 4 More maintenance                | “Hard work just maintaining property”                                                              |
| 4 Time-consuming                  | “Travelling, gardening, - everything takes longer”                                                   |
| 3 Pests destroying plants         | “Possums wreaking havoc in your garden”                                                            |
| 3 Unsealed roads                  | “Gravel road and wind (dust)”                                                                     |
| 3 Lack of urban services          | “No D.C.C. [Dunedin City Council] services”                                                        |
| 3 Cost                            | “Cost of land and home upkeep”                                                                    |
| 2 Lack of children’s activities   | “You have to travel long distances to children’s activities”                                      |
| 2 Committed to the land           | “Having to get someone to housesit when you go on holiday”                                        |
| 2 Urban visitors abuse area       | “People who use the countryside to dump rubbish/ take plants/ take rocks etc...”                   |
| 2 No public transport             | “The total disappearance of public transport on our road”                                          |
| 2 Obtaining resource consent      | “Need a resource consent when wanting to do anything”                                               |
| 2 Insufficient farming knowledge  | “Insufficient farming knowledge - needed to keep ringing our friends”                             |
| 2 Other                           |                                                                                                   |

Numbers denote the number of respondents who mentioned each category.

The interesting finding here is that problems cited by lifestyle block residents are all practical, and concrete issues, and are not at all related to emotional issues such as loneliness or dissatisfaction.
Table 8.6 Benefits of Living on A Lifestyle Block, As Given By Questionnaire Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
<th>Benefit Category</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Peace and quiet</td>
<td>&quot;An oasis in an otherwise hectic world. Our space and privacy are highly regarded&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Space</td>
<td>&quot;Space for the children to grow and enjoy the consequences&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>&quot;Your own way of life, space and privacy&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>No neighbours</td>
<td>&quot;I can do what I like and the neighbours won't complain - we don't have any!&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>&quot;It's just a more relaxing lifestyle than I think you could ever achieve in the city&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Raising children</td>
<td>&quot;Good environment to raise our children in&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>&quot;We just feel generally healthier than we ever did in the city&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>&quot;The opportunity to develop a large garden&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Raise and care for animals</td>
<td>&quot;We also have had lots of fun bringing up animals (all named and well fed)&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Helpful neighbours</td>
<td>&quot;Great neighbours with lots of advice for us townies&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>&quot;Country life is quiet and safe - you really feel like you are a world away from the troubles of the city&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Farming lifestyle</td>
<td>&quot;The farming lifestyle without the financial pressures&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Close to nature</td>
<td>&quot;Native bush at your fingertips&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>View</td>
<td>&quot;A beautiful feeling to be able to wake up and look out your bedroom window and see green&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Less noise</td>
<td>&quot;No neighbours and much less noise - I can put up with mooing cows much better than screaming neighbours&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>&quot;Peace, tranquility, space and investment&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Work with land</td>
<td>&quot;You're able to get your hands dirty and produce food - gives your life some real meaning&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Community spirit</td>
<td>&quot;We have no close neighbours yet we are still part of a close community&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Close to services</td>
<td>&quot;Peace and quiet but close to town when we need it&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Country life</td>
<td>&quot;We can live the farming life - (On a much smaller scale of course)&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Away from city</td>
<td>&quot;Away from the hustle and bustle of city life&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fresh air</td>
<td>&quot;Fresh air, space and privacy&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>&quot;Freedom to work on the property&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Clean and green</td>
<td>&quot;Clean and green surroundings&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Numbers denote the number of respondents who mentioned each category.

Many respondents answered more than one category.
8.5.2 Advice for Future Residents

In another attempt at a retrospective, questionnaire respondents were asked what advice they would give someone who was considering purchasing a lifestyle block. Altogether the comments were generally positive. Table 8.7 summarises these remarks.

Twenty-one respondents offered their encouragement to prospective lifestyle block residents, with many commenting that purchasing a lifestyle block would be one of the best decisions they would ever make.

The most often cited piece of advice was related to money. Many commented that they had not been fully aware of the amount of money they would have to spend undertaking general maintenance around their properties. James commented that it was just as expensive to maintain a five acre block of land as it would be to look after a 50 acre block. Continuing with this theme, several respondents also advised potential owners to have some form of financial security. Two interviewees who had intended to earn an income from their lifestyle blocks were no longer actively involved in this pastime, while two other interviewees had remarked that their businesses had taken longer to set up than they had intended, and as yet neither were making a profit from the land.
Table 8.7 Advice for Future Lifestyle Block Residents, as given by Questionnaire Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 18: What advice would you give someone who was considering purchasing a lifestyle block?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21 Good wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Make sure you have enough money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Understand the reality of life on a lifestyle block</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Think about what you really want</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Have some farming knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Understand time demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Be prepared to work hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Understand D.C.C. and legal policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Be prepared to travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Must be physically fit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Know where to go in an emergency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Know what services are provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Find out about potential neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Explain to children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Conservationist approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Take time to adjust - be patient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Have a back-up income for security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Have a good car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Adopt a rural attitude</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another recurrent comment was that potential lifestyle block owners should give careful consideration to exactly what they wanted to gain from living on a lifestyle block. As Kris noted:

You know, we were in such a hurry to get away from everyone else and move as far away as possible, that we didn’t really think carefully about everything. I mean, we’ve got three kids who we have to cart everywhere, and it takes ages to get there; we’ve spent so much more money than we thought we would, and the ironic thing is that we still have neighbours who annoy us - even out here. So we really should have given it a bit more thought.

He continued to say, however, that he still enjoyed living on his lifestyle block and had no intention of moving back to an urban area any time in the near future, “We still love it though”.

A few respondents mentioned that they had experienced difficulties with gaining planning consent, and had not fully understood the implications of planning restrictions on their properties before they purchased them. Another frequent comment was that everyday activities on a lifestyle block involved a certain amount of physical exertion, and therefore potential residents should be prepared to work hard and be physically fit. Almost all of the 15 interviewees accepted that they would probably not be able to maintain their properties upon retirement, and would therefore have to move at this time. Anne wanted to stay on her property “as long as we’re active”. Carolyn thought that “older people need to be near services, but we would still if we were able like to be able to have a larger garden, because that’s very important to us”.

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Chapter 8 - The Rural Idyll in Narratives of Lifestyle Block Residents

8.6 Key Themes Emerging

The following sections discuss the major themes emerging from the fifteen interviews with lifestyle block residents, supplemented by some evidence from questionnaire responses. (See Figure 8.3)

These themes were identified from repeated reading of the interview transcripts. The reason for this form of analysis was to 'open up' the interpretation of the data beyond a potentially rigid focus on the rural idyll. In other words, this involved an attempt to 'hear' what the lifestyle block residents were saying about their experiences.
8.6.1 Attachment to Place

Short (1996:488) contends that ‘Place captures space by registering our times, embodying our identities and reflecting our lives’. Lifestyle block residents’ attachment to place is inherently related to each individual resident’s identity. For example, when asked to describe their properties, several residents used emotive language such as:

...it’s my own beautiful haven

Carolyn

I feel an instant sense of relief when I come home. Like I’m free to let go of the stress of the day.

Fay

Interviewees’ comments were largely pro-rural with regards to both the social and physical environment in which they lived. The notion of territoriality was also pervasive in interviewees’ comments reflecting the strong attachment to place that many residents felt. A strong sense of ‘home’ also permeated through many interviews.

At the end of the day when I get home from worked I am so chuffed to be here. This is it for me. I don’t want to be anywhere else.

Michael

8.6.2 Appreciation of Nature

Many residents spoke of gaining a greater appreciation of nature, both as an expectation that they had before they moved, and as an important aspect of their current lifestyle.

We have the opportunity to go on nature rambles and bush walks with the kids.

We’ve bought a book on bird watching and the kids are learning to identify different species we see.

Elizabeth
Respondents’ wrote of “Native bush at your fingertips”, and “Clean and green everywhere you look”. Michael had this to say when discussing what he considered to be the most important qualities and aspects of his lifestyle:

I think it’s a rhythm of the seasons, it’s like you know, there’s some lambing, and shearing and tailing and stuff... it hooks you up on a really basic sort of a human drive I think to be in some way in touch with the calendar of life.

Michael

8.6.3 Social Status and Appearance

The idea of the rural as a consumable good has gathered momentum in both consumption and cultural geography literature in recent years. As has been previously discussed, the countryside is being commodified in such a way that goes well beyond the attractions a particular rural area has to offer the consumer. For the purposes of this study, this notion of the commodification of the rural was investigated by asking interviewees about a variety of subjects including their friends, their decorating tastes, and even their choice of reading material in an attempt to gain a more comprehensive understanding of residents’ consumption preferences.

When asked whether their friends also lived on lifestyle blocks and what their friends thought of the interviewees’ lifestyle, a predominant motif of improved social status was evident. Many interviewees spoke of friends’ envy of their lifestyle. Only two residents knew friends who also owned a lifestyle block, the other interviewees commenting that many of their friends would like to own their own block, but for a variety of reasons, could not.

My mother thinks we’re mad. But most of our friends are really supportive - we love having people around to show off our place. We love it out here... I think some are a bit jealous? I don’t know - I’m biased because I love the place and the lifestyle, but yeah, I think some of our friends really wish they could do this.

Ingrid
Two respondents mentioned that to have a house in the country was something that they had strived to gain for many years. They spoke of their property in terms of an asset or a prize. Lifestyle blocks were considered by some respondents to also be “a good investment”.

Some respondents had preconceived ideas about what their lifestyle block and particularly their house should look like. When asked about their choice of decorating styles some spoke of decorating using a “country theme”, while others described their decorating style as “simplistic” and “back to basics”. Kris and his wife wanted to use “a country rustic theme” throughout both their house and their property. Carolyn gave this detailed description when asked about her decorating style:

This was researched at great length and to complement the property one of four styles of country decorating was chosen. It certainly complements the property even to the extent of using natural colours... for example the bedroom is now in shades of natural green, deep greens which complement the large trees which are seen from the bedroom window so that the impression continues as you look out the window... a lot of careful planning... probably because it's an interest, an artistic hobby and something that we will continue to do.

While not all the interviewees houses were deliberately decorated according to a particular style, several interviewees did speak specifically about wanting to achieve a country style. Coffee tables in three of the houses visited had magazines with country themes such as ‘Country Living’ and ‘Country Life’. This provided an interesting discussion point. Elizabeth borrowed her magazine from a neighbour and said that while she enjoyed browsing through the magazine, she would not purchase it regularly. Both Gemma and Carolyn, however read these types of magazines frequently and both women commented that the magazines provided them with decorating ideas.

It gives me innovative ideas... it helps me in keeping and maintaining the country style and presentation that we worked so hard to create.

Carolyn
Drawing heavily on both English cottage and Amish styles, these magazines provide readers with decorating ideas and do-it-yourself advice. Betty mentioned that she occasionally read a magazine entitled ‘This England’, which by its own description is “Britain’s loveliest magazine”. This particular magazine features idyllic images of rural England, paired with excerpts from the works of acclaimed English poets. It also features articles and traditional recipes, as well as a feature entitled, ‘This Earth, A column for countryfolk’, which provides a pro-rural societal commentary. Betty refers to the recipes encountered in the magazine as “like you’d find in Grandma’s kitchen”.

An interesting contradiction appears to emerge here. Several respondents went to great lengths to embellish their homes and properties in a particular often preconceived image. Many commented that they liked to show their lifestyle blocks off and enjoyed having friends visit. However, there were also a few comments made regarding how living on a lifestyle block removed from neighbours meant that the pressure to conform or “keeping up with the Jones’s” as Oliver described it, is not as great.

You don’t have to worry about your house being tidy all the time - well it is a farmhouse after all, and you don’t need to have an immaculate garden and worry about what the people up the road think.

Oliver

To summarize, for certain respondents, living on a lifestyle block meant assuming the appearance of an affluent country home, but also maintaining one’s individuality. While some interviewees enjoyed impressing their peers with their ‘acquisition’, the privacy and relative isolation of a lifestyle block enabled them to live a more relaxed and non-conformist lifestyle.
Chapter 8 - The Rural Idyll in Narratives of Lifestyle Block Residents

8.6.4 Raising a Family

A persistent theme throughout the questionnaires in particular, was that of the rural environment as an ideal location for raising a family. “A safe environment to bring up our children in”; “So that our children could have a happier healthier lifestyle than they could in an urban environment” (Questionnaire respondents).

Yeah, I mean the kids can go off and have a run around, get into mischief and not bother anyone. You’ve got the creek down there - well they can go fishing or looking for bugs, there’s plenty of space for them to just be boys.

Kris

He continues by remarking that when they lived in town, both he and his wife were constantly worried about their children bothering neighbours, but that this was no longer the case, living on their lifestyle block. Also mentioned by residents was the belief that the rural environment was healthier for their children than an urban environment. Comments such as “Fresh air and no pollution”, and more general remarks, “The city is not an ideal environment for children and the country affords us the peaceful harmonious lifestyle we wanted”; and “I was raised on a farm and I wanted my children to have the same experiences I did” were repeated throughout the questionnaire responses. These respondents were referring to their young children, however Diana and Michael, who lived with their two teenaged daughters admitted that as their children got older, their lifestyle blocks was not such an appropriate residence. Lack of public transportation and increased activities undertaken by high-school children, brings about an increased pressure on parents’ and caregivers’ time.

Diana: The kids can turn their stereos up and it doesn’t offend me and the neighbours can’t hear which is great.

Michael: Yeah, but we’ve got two teenaged daughters so its just got to the stage that... you spend all weekend travelling in and out.

Michael stated that despite being only a 20 minute drive from services, living closer to town would be advantageous to his family’s situation. He pointed out however, that this would not be financially viable, if he and his family wanted to continue living on a lifestyle block:
You see that reflected in the price of lifestyle blocks, there's a direct relationship between the distance from the centre and the value of a property.

Michael

Some respondents commented that it was easier to shift back to an urban area during their children’s teenage years. Thirteen per cent of respondents had lived on a lifestyle block previously and nine percent had returned, after their children had become independent. This can be seen in the large number of respondents aged 44 years and under.

Similar themes were expressed by parents in Valentine’s (1994) study of households in the English village of Whedale. “They [parents] perceive their children to have to enjoy an ‘innocent’ childhood away from the social stresses and spatial constraints of the city” (Valentine, 1997:146). Much literature, especially children’s literature such as *The Tales of Beatrix Potter* and *Anne of Green Gables*, present the countryside as both peaceful and safe, where an idyllic childhood can be achieved. Ward (1990) suggests that English literature and especially autobiographical novels promote a picture of a purified identity of rural childhood, uncontaminated by urban influences which are muddy and confuse the image (Ward, 1990:18, in Valentine, 1997:38).

Halfacree (1995) found that the respondents in his study attached much more importance to rurality’s effects on children than to its effects on themselves. However, this was not the case for Dunedin lifestyle block residents. While many respondents felt that the rural environment was a better location to raise their children; as was found in the previous chapter the majority of respondents moved to lifestyle blocks chiefly for their own enjoyment. Comments relating to relaxation, improved health and less stress were common. Paul moved to his lifestyle block after suffering a heart attack some six months earlier. He considered the combination of cutting down his hours worked, and the shift to a rural setting to be advantageous to his health.
I know my health is much better since we got here, but I also know that that has to do with me slowing down. My wife is much more relaxed out here too, which helps us both I think.

Paul

8.6.5 Environmental Influences on Behaviour

Another key theme emerging from lifestyle block residents' comments can be linked to one of the doctrines of environmentalism, that is, of humanity (society) in harmony with nature. The rural-urban opposites described by residents were never stronger than when discussing environmental influences on behaviour. According to many respondents, the urban environment is "... a cold and unwelcoming place". There is "pollution, overcrowding, snotty people", "Crime is rampant in town", and "Everyone is so grumpy in the city". One respondent commented that "stress levels of everyday living" in an urban environment lead to "conflict and general discontent". These comments are in contrast to some descriptions of the rural environment given by respondents. "We just feel generally healthier than we ever did living in the city". "We're happier"; "You feel like you are at peace - calmer, closer to nature". Throughout her interview, Betty often spoke agreeably about the honesty and integrity of rural residents.

8.6.6 Masculinity - The New Zealand Farming Man

Best you have a bit of the pioneering spirit and interest in rural life...

Questionnaire respondent

The image of the rugged, hard-working pioneer male has pervaded today's culture, and various media forms frequently draw on this image. Indeed, a number of male respondents spoke of the lure of farm work, and the attraction of producing visible results from hard, physical labour. "You're able to get your hands dirty and produce food - gives your life some real meaning"; "I think it's always been in my blood, deep
down. I always wanted to have a go at farming, to get my hands dirty.” (Questionnaire respondents)

I always wanted to work with the land - I'm fortunate enough to have a wife that supported my dream and made it a reality - even though I think she would be happier in town - but she hasn’t said as much though.

Questionnaire respondent

Several respondents revealed that they had always wanted the opportunity to experience the farming life, but until now, their financial situations had prevented it. “We always wanted to live on a farm, but could never afford it”. (Questionnaire respondent. A number of respondents also commented that by purchasing a lifestyle block they could try farming without taking a major financial risk. “We wanted to run some stock and still keep the financial security of our jobs in town.” (Questionnaire respondent).

We wanted to try our hands at farming on a small scale, but we didn’t want to let go of our careers - this seemed like the perfect compromise.

Questionnaire Respondent

Anne also mentions this:

Allan likes to muck around outside, he's done all the fencing, he looks after the hens and the sheep. He likes that side of thing - he can work like a farmer, but not have that real responsibility. We don't rely on this place for an income, so it's just a hobby, really.

It is not only males, however who support the desire to emulate the male farmer image. Indeed, a number of female respondents described how living on a lifestyle block has given their partners and husbands an opportunity to take on the role of farmer. In several instances, female respondents took on traditional female roles and supported their husbands’ personification as provider or head of the household.
It's been marvelous... I think my husband looks 10 years younger. We both have fun - he gets to potter around and act like a farmer and I get to bake home goodies and hang my needlework everywhere, just like in the pictures, yeah, this is super.

Gemma

Albeit relatively small, a pattern has nevertheless merged of a traditional domestic order, and can once again be connected to colonial New Zealand and the pioneer male imagery. While the majority of respondents, both male and female were actively employed, these traditional domestic roles were still played out, even if self-consciously in some cases.

8.7 The rural idyll revisited

After considering the main themes emerging from discussions with interviewees, it is necessary to re-examine one of the key components of the New Zealand rural idyll as discussed in Chapter Four. It can be seen that the New Zealand rural idyll is made up of a number of components. The foundations are based around the British rural idyll, which is both class and gender specific, and New Zealand’s role as a British colony. The clean, green, healthy image of the countryside, the emphasis on the agricultural industry in New Zealand as especially on the pastoral, and the image of rural New Zealand as masculine are all filtered through to contemporary representations and practices such as tourism, branding and advertising, and art and popular culture. This is then reinforced and reworked to recreate the rural idyll in New Zealand. Consequently, from this idyll comes the notion of the good life in the country and eventually the creation of lifestyle blocks.

Drawing on comments made by the interviewees, we can interpret the components of the ‘good lifestyle’ of a lifestyle block. (Table 8.8) Satisfying activities, good health, the benefits of nature, attachment to place, traditional social values and preferred relationship to other people are all considered by interviewees to contribute to the ‘good life’ of a lifestyle block. For many interviewees, in order to maintain the ‘good life’, employment away from their lifestyle blocks was undertaken, and considered a necessity.
Table 8.8 Components of the ‘Good Lifestyle’ of a Lifestyle Block

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOOD HEALTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Less stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Physical - no pollution; less stress</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ATTACHMENT TO PLACE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sense of belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong sense of ‘home’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PREFERRED RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PEOPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Privacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• No neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Envy of others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BENEFITS OF NATURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Appreciation of nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Home – attachment to place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Effect of environment on behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conservation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRADITIONAL SOCIAL VALUES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Community spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Children and family life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Traditional gender roles (hobbies)</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SATISFYING ACTIVITIES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Farming – self sufficiency; male farmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Country crafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Children’s activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 8 - The Rural Idyll in Narratives of Lifestyle Block Residents

8.8 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the third research question: To what extent does the rural idyll feature in the narratives of lifestyle block residents? The rural idyll as it is expressed in the narratives of lifestyle blocks residents has been examined. It was found that nearly 70 per cent of respondents felt that their backgrounds had had a great effect on their decision to move to a lifestyle block. Expectations of respondents before moving to a lifestyle block included achieving a more enjoyable lifestyle, fulfilling a long-term goal, enjoying privacy and no neighbours, as well as being able to ‘escape’ everyday urban life. It is interesting to note that negative urban-based problems features strongly in comments from respondents describing what attracted them to their current property. Interestingly, remarks made by respondents regarding the disadvantages of lifestyle blocks were chiefly about the practical every-day running of lifestyle blocks, emphasising the labour-intensive and time-consuming side of the lifestyle. Throughout both the questionnaires and interviews, the topic of neighbours was prominent. Numerous comments were made relating to problems with neighbours in the urban environment, and the possibility of having no neighbours, or neighbours relatively removed from respondents’ sections, was a very attractive option for many. Nearly 80 per cent of respondents stated that their lifestyle block was better than their previous address.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, migration to lifestyle blocks is an attempt by people living in an urban context to draw on notions of the rural. They are still on the fringe of the city, but mentally and spiritually, they are living a rural life. Living in a rural environment was an important factor for nearly 50 per cent of respondents. A few respondents made comments regarding the importance of living in a ‘country house’. Respondents also spoke of undertaking traditional gender roles for recreation on their properties, and even decorating their houses to a country theme. Country magazines were read by some female respondents, and one respondent Carolyn, described in great detail the efforts she had gone to on order to create a traditional rural theme throughout the interior of her house. Nostalgia plays an important role here, as references to the rural and to ‘how things used to be’ were frequently mentioned.
Several key themes emanated from both the questionnaires and interviews. Many respondents commented on their new-found strong attachment to place, and appreciation of nature they had achieved since moving to their lifestyle blocks. Comments about feeling healthier, happier, and calmer in an urban environment were frequent. The perception that the rural environment was a safer and therefore better location to raise children was also strong, especially from female respondents.

Perhaps the most interesting theme to emerge from the questionnaires and discussions with interviewees was that many lifestyle block residents were drawn to their properties by their perceptions of the rural as superior to an urban environment. Negative urban-based comments pervade both the questionnaires and the interviews. Pollution, for example, both environmental and noise pollution, is perceived by many to only occur in urban environments. Respondents’ comments regarding the advantages of living in an urban environment were largely practical, such as access to public services and less distances to travel, rather than personal or emotive comments. These findings are in contrast to Fairweather (1993:81) who found that while there was some dissatisfaction with urban life, this was not strong and not a principal factor in motivation for smallholding.

Table 8.9 examines the major elements of the rural idyll as discussed in the literature, and identifies the presence or absence of each element in the Dunedin case study. The most predominant features of the rural idyll found in the Dunedin case study included the individual as carefree and contented; the way of life as timeless; the rural community as safe; and the rural as a setting for consumption, rather than production activities. Of the three distinctive aspects of the New Zealand rural idyll, both the nature myth of a clean, green, healthy environment and the romantic view of agriculture were predominant in the case study. The rural as masculine was also present in the narratives of lifestyle block residents albeit to a lesser extent. A surprising finding was the negligible presence of a close-knit community in the study areas.
## Table 8.9 Main Elements of the Rural Idyll Given in the Literature, and Their Presence In the Dunedin Case Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHIEF ELEMENTS OF THE RURAL IDYLL IDENTIFIED IN THE LITERATURE</th>
<th>PRESENCE IN DUNEDIN CASE STUDY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INDIVIDUAL - as pure and uncorrupted</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- as carefree and contented</td>
<td>Predominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAY OF LIFE - as wholesome and healthy</td>
<td>Predominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- as spiritually nourishing</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- as non-materialistic</td>
<td>Negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- as natural</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- as ordered, harmonious and peaceful</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- as timeless (nostalgia for the past)</td>
<td>Predominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY - as close-knit (gemeinshalt)</td>
<td>Negligible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- as safe</td>
<td>Predominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. COMMODIFICATION OF THE RURAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- as a setting for consumption, leisure and recreation activities, rather than as a site of production</td>
<td>Predominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- as a source of cultural symbols attached to consumer goods, (including 'country style' décor, food, etc)</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. DISTINCTIVE ASPECTS OF NEW ZEALAND RURAL IDYLL</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- rural as masculine</td>
<td>Present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- nature myth of a clean, green, healthy environment</td>
<td>Predominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- romantic view of agriculture</td>
<td>Predominant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHERS NOT FOUND IN LITERATURE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Retreat from society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Self sufficiency</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Good environment for raising children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Attachment to place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Also negligible was the 'rural' way of life as non-materialistic, as lifestyle block residents frequently spoke of the purchase of their properties as an economic attainment of a long-term goal, and of the social status associated with this purchase. Several aspects of the rural idyll were evident in the Dunedin case study that were not found in the literature. A predominant comment by respondents was the notion that living on a lifestyle block provided a 'retreat from society'. Attachment to place and the rural environment as an ideal location to raise children, were also prevalent, as well as the notion of attaining some degree of self-sufficiency through growing vegetables or raising animals, for example.

Crouch argues that “people individually create their own symbols of their lives, according to the meaning that materials, events and landscapes have for them, and thereby create their own history” (Crouch, 1992:233). He adds that this may involve some appropriation of dominant images and myths but not be replaced by them. This chapter has attempted to understand lifestyle block residents’ biographies and interpret the meanings that these residents attach to both rural and urban environments.

It can be seen therefore, that the rural idyll features strongly in the narratives of lifestyle block residents. Although respondents did not specifically mention the rural idyll, they did have clear ideas about the attractions of the rural in society. While they may only be 20 minutes from the centre of town in some instances, emotionally and spiritually, they are living a rural lifestyle.
Conclusion

This thesis has examined the context of, and motivations for migrants’ decisions to move to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin, in relation to the concept of the rural idyll. A biographical approach was undertaken for this study, combining identity and narrativity. In other words, the study attempted to interpret counterurbanisation to lifestyle blocks as expressions of respondents’ sense of being in relation to their own comprehension of the rural idyll. This study thus forms part of an emerging body of literature, which links population and cultural geographies. By focussing on the space where rural and urban meet, the study also links rural and urban geography.

While some literature exists on the phenomenon of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand, an in-depth examination of migrants’ perceptions of the rural and more especially, on motivations for moving to lifestyle blocks is missing. Acknowledging this gap in the New Zealand literature was a key consideration during the creation of the research questions.

The study considered three main research questions:

1. What is the context in which lifestyle blocks have emerged in
   (a) New Zealand
   (b) Dunedin
   as a residential land use settlement pattern?

2. What are the motivations behind migrants’ decisions to move to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin?

3. To what extent does the rural idyll feature in the narratives of lifestyle block residents?
The context of migration to lifestyle blocks in New Zealand was discussed in Chapter Six. It was established that the freeing up of agricultural land for the purposes of subdivision in New Zealand has been brought about chiefly by the processes involved with agricultural restructuring. The increasing urban population in many of New Zealand’s main centres has also contributed to the rise in numbers of lifestyle blocks as people seek a quiet and more private lifestyle. The increased development on the peri-urban fringe of many town and cities, the introduction of the Resource Management Act (1991) and continual changes in regional district schemes have created many areas of contention for both lifestyle block residents and farmers alike.

The motivations behind migrants’ decisions to move to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin were addressed in Chapter Seven. It was found that a variety of push and pull factors combined to contribute to residents’ decisions to migrate to lifestyle blocks. Rural pull factors were most frequently cited as motivations for moving, while one third of respondents cited urban push factors. In conversations with interviewees, the majority spoke of urban push factors before discussing rural pull factors as motivations for moving. Overall, the desire for privacy and space emerged as the most powerful motivation given by respondents.

Most of the elements of the rural idyll that were identified from the literature were also mentioned in the narratives of the lifestyle block residents, as described in Chapter Eight. However, one unexpected element also emerged very strongly: a cultural ideal which was labelled ‘retreat from society’. Numerous comments were made relating to problems with neighbours at respondents previous urban addresses, and many commented that the desire to live away from other people was a key contributing factor to the decision to migrate to a lifestyle block. Comments made by respondents regarding the advantages of living in an urban environment were mostly practical, while the majority of comments made concerning the benefits of the rural environment were emotive. Only two of the 15 fundamental elements of the rural idyll identified in the literature were not present in the Dunedin case study. It can therefore be concluded that the rural idyll features strongly in the narratives of lifestyle block residents in Dunedin.
The lack of literature available on the phenomenon of lifestyle blocks in New Zealand was discussed in Chapter Five. The majority of previous literature, both in New Zealand and overseas, has focused on those residents who choose to farm their land, while largely ignoring those who make the move to a lifestyle block as a consumption choice. While this study sought to investigate the motivations for migrants' decisions to move to lifestyle blocks in Dunedin, it would be useful to investigate these research questions in other areas of New Zealand to uncover regional variations. This thesis has also considered the rural idyll in New Zealand from a pakeha perspective, and therefore an analysis of Maori perceptions of the rural would also be valuable.

Further work could be done to explore possible solutions to some practical dilemmas now facing planners. There is a significant need for a firm definition of lifestyle blocks, in order to allow effective analysis of this phenomenon in New Zealand. This would be particularly useful for local planning authorities to assess the impact of subdivision for lifestyle block development on both rural and urban areas. Planning authorities must carefully consider how peri-urban spaces can best be utilised in order to balance the needs of all actors. In order to satisfy the needs of developers and lifestyle block residents, as well as the needs of farmers, it has been suggested that planning authorities adopt a more realistic approach to land use and not allow development to occur in areas that are vital in terms of agricultural productivity.

The rural idyll has become an institutionalised part of the way that New Zealanders respond to the landscape. The rural as a setting for consumption, leisure and recreation activities, as well as a source of cultural symbols, continues to gain popularity with a largely urban-based New Zealand audience, and as a consequence, the demand for rural land will continue to grow. This study has demonstrated that as rural spaces become increasingly commodified, it is vital to understand the motivations and frameworks of meaning held by the consumers of these commodified spaces. It is not sufficient to study just the structural factors lending to new land
settlement patterns in New Zealand; we must also study the system of ideas which inspire, justify and make sense of the actions of the people involved.


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LIST OF KEY INFORMANTS

Mr John Baldwin  
Department of Surveying, University of Otago

Ms Jean Foster  
Otago Real Estate Institute

Mr Ian Grant  
Author, The Smallfarming Revolution

Ms Kirsten Klitcher  
Dunedin City Council Planner

Mr John Lagan  
Real Estate Agent, Reid Farmers Real Estate, Dunedin

Ms Nicki Read  
Dunedin Real Estate Agent
18 March 1997

Dear

Re: Study of Lifestyle Blocks in Dunedin.

Why do people in New Zealand choose to live on lifestyle blocks? Is this a trend that is growing or declining?
I am a sixth year geography student at the University of Otago currently undertaking my MA thesis. My study investigates the trends and motivations of lifestyle block residents in Dunedin. For this research I am working under the guidance of Dr. Robin Law, lecturer in the Department of Geography.

I am writing to request your help with my research by filling in the enclosed questionnaire. Your participation in this study is very important as the results will help planners and policy makers to better understand the needs and concerns of lifestyle block residents.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to establish general demographic trends of families who choose to move to lifestyle blocks. During this study, confidentiality is assured and anonymity will be maintained at all times. Your name and address was randomly selected from the electoral roll. I would be grateful if you would complete this questionnaire. To reply, please return the questionnaire in the enclosed self-addressed envelope.

I am also interested in learning more about the views of lifestyle block residents by conducting personal interviews with residents - again, confidentiality will be assured. The interview will take 30 to 45 minutes and will cover general topics. If you are interested in participating in an interview, please fill in the box at the end of the questionnaire, and I will be in contact with you to arrange a suitable time.

If you would like any further information about my research, or have any other questions, please do not hesitate to contact either myself or Dr. Robin Law.

Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Yours sincerely

Emma Hamilton
Department of Geography

Dr. Robin Law
Department of Geography
Telephone (03) 479 8775
Lifestyle Blocks Residents Survey

Please fill out this questionnaire if

*You are an adult (aged 18 or over) and:

*You were actively involved in the decision to shift to your current residential location

Thank you

ABOUT YOUR CHOICE:

1. How long have you lived at your current address?

2. Why did you choose to live on a lifestyle block?

3. What is the size of your property? (in acres)
4. What is your land used for?

[ ] Raising livestock

[ ] Growing fruit/vegetables for profit

[ ] Growing plants for profit

[ ] Recreational purposes (please specify)

[ ] Other uses (please specify)

5. Do you plan to be living on this property in 5 years time?

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

[ ] Not sure

6. What is your overall level of satisfaction with your present living arrangements compared to your previous living arrangements?

[ ] better than previous

[ ] same

[ ] worse than previous
7. What were your major motivations for shifting to this property? (Please tick appropriate categories)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Highly Important</th>
<th>Fairly Important</th>
<th>Only a Little</th>
<th>Not Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farm lifestyle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildlife / native bush / birds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety / peace &amp; quiet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close-knit community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good investment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space and privacy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to keep animals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affordable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity to pursue hobbies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted to build home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanted activities for retirement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not specifically chosen (e.g. inherited property)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good environment to bring up children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The view</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other (please specify) ____________

8. Over the course of your life, do you consider yourself to have come from a:

- [ ] mainly urban background?
- [ ] mainly rural background?
- [ ] a combination of both rural and urban?

9. What effect has your background had on your decision to move to your current location?

- [ ] great effect
- [ ] little effect
- [ ] no effect

10. Living in a rural environment is very important to me:

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Undecided
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree
11. Looking back now, what are the benefits of choosing to live on a lifestyle block?

12. What are the unexpected problems of choosing to live on a lifestyle block?

13. In comparison, what do you consider are the advantages of living in an urban environment?

14. What are the disadvantages of living in an urban environment?

15. Did you experience any difficulties in settling on this property? (ie. resource consent, etc...)

16. What alterations (if any) have you had to make to the property? (ie. sewerage, soil, electricity...)
17. I decided to settle on this property because... (please complete this sentence)

18. What advice would you give someone who was thinking about purchasing a lifestyle block?

19. Are you:

   [ ] Male
   [ ] Female

20. How old are you?

   [ ] 18-24  [ ] 25-34  [ ] 35-44  [ ] 45-54
   [ ] 55-64  [ ] 65+

21. How many people (including you) live in your household?

22. Please tick what best describes your housing situation:

   [ ] I own my own residence or share ownership
   [ ] I rent my home
   [ ] other (please specify)
23. Please tick what best describes your PREVIOUS address:
[ ] house/flat in town
[ ] lifestyle block
[ ] farm
[ ] other (please specify)

24. Please tick what best describes your occupation:
[ ] self employed
[ ] full-time paid work
[ ] part-time work
[ ] student
[ ] currently unemployed
[ ] retired
[ ] full-time home-maker
[ ] other

25. If you are in paid work, how do you usually travel to work?
[ ] Drive alone  [ ] Bus  [ ] Walk
[ ] Cycle  [ ] Carpool  [ ] Work at home

26. How long does it take you to travel to work?
(Approximately, in minutes)

__________________________________________
CONSENT FORM FOR INFORMANTS  
-- LIFESTYLE BLOCK RESIDENTS --

I have read the letter explaining this study, and have had an opportunity to discuss it with the student researcher and/or research supervisor. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. Information gained from the interviews will be used only for the purposes of research.
2. My participation in the interviews is entirely voluntary.
3. In the dissertation, I will not be identified by my name.
4. Interviews will involve an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked will depend on the way in which the interview develops.
5. If I begin to feel uncomfortable during the interview I may decline to continue.
6. I may end the interview at any time and/or withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.
7. The results of the project may be published, but my anonymity will be preserved.

I agree to take part in this project.

Signature of participant

Interviewer: Emma Hamilton
Supervisor: Dr Robin Law

Date

..................................................

..................................................
tel: 03 479-8775
CONSENT FORM FOR PHOTOGRAPHS
-- LIFESTYLE BLOCK STUDY --

I have read the letter explaining this study, and have had an opportunity to discuss it with the student researcher and/or research supervisor. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:

1. The photographs will be used only for the purposes of research. They may be included in the final (public) version of the dissertation.

2. Some people who read the dissertation (research report) may recognise me from the photographs.

3. My participation in the photography session is entirely voluntary.

4. If I begin to feel uncomfortable during the photography I may decline to continue.

5. I may end the session at any time and/or withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.

6. I will be not be identified by name in the caption to the photographs.

I agree to be photographed for this project.

Signature of participant

Date

Interviewer: Emma Hamilton

Supervisor: Dr Robin Law
tel: 03 479-8775
Appendix F

BIOGRAPHY OF INTERVIEWEES

Anne
Anne is a 35 year old Administration Assistant who lives on a five acre block with her husband and two young children. She was raised in Southland on a sheep and beef farm, and considers her background to be rural. She has lived on her current lifestyle lock for two years.

Betty
Betty is a 62 year old homemaker. She was raised on a dairy farm in Southland, but had lived most of her adult life in suburban Dunedin. She moved to her lifestyle block seven years ago with her husband James.

Carolyn
Carolyn is a 49-year-old part-time teacher. Until moving to her lifestyle block three and a half years ago, she had lived in suburban Dunedin all her life. She lives with her husband, who is self-employed, and their three dogs. Her two adult children live away from home.

Diana
Diana manages a home for intellectually disabled people. She is 45 and lives with her husband and 2 teenaged children on their five and a half acre section. She describes her lifestyle block as “an absolute necessity when you live with two loud teenagers, you need plenty of space”.

Elizabeth
Elizabeth is in her late thirties and works part-time at a nursing home. She is married with two young children. She has lived on her 10 acre lifestyle block for just over two years, and soon hopes to begin production with a small business she has set up on her property. She was raised in an urban environment.

Fay
Fay is a 28 year old part-time bank officer and has two pre-school twin daughters. She and her husband purchased their 10 acre block six and a half years ago, and built on the section four years ago. A keen horsewoman, Fay keeps her two horses in a paddock next to her house.

Gemma
Gemma was born and raised in Timaru, but has lived in suburban Dunedin for over 20 years. She works 30 hours a week as a nurse, while her husband, also a nurse, works full-time. She moved to her 3 and a half acre lifestyle block two years ago and describes the property as “a self devotion centre – a place to unwind and relax”.

Heidi
Heidi is a 32-year-old new mother. She has lived on her lifestyle block for nearly five years. Her husband works full-time in town, and Heidi has been working to establish a small business on her property for the past four years.
Ingrid
Ingrid is 36 and lives with her partner on a five acre section. She works from home while her partner has a full-time job in town. She has lived on lifestyle blocks previously.

James
James is a retired shopkeeper who, until moving to his current five acre lifestyle block had lived in suburban Dunedin all his life. He is married to Betty.

Kris
Kris is 30 years old and is self-employed. He has lived on his lifestyle block with his wife and three children for two and a half years. He describes his background as a combination of both rural and urban.

Liam
Liam is a 52-year-old labourer. He shifted to his lifestyle block with his wife 15 years ago “before they became trendy”. He spent his childhood living in rural South Otago, before moving to Dunedin when he married.

Michael
Michael is also 52. He is a bank manager who describes his background as “shamefully suburban”. He is married to Diana.

Oliver
Oliver is a self-employed electrician. He purchased his 10 acre lifestyle block a year ago with redundancy pay from his previous employment. He is unmarried and comes from a combination of both rural and urban backgrounds.

Paul
Paul is a lawyer in his late fifties. He and his wife purchased their three and a half acre lifestyle block six months ago, after Paul suffered a heart attack. Paul now practices law three days a week, and spends his free time with his wife establishing an extensive garden.