Therapeutic landscapes: Understanding migration to Australian regional and rural communities

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Australia has a controversial history of migration, spanning the original white settlement to the current Gillard government’s refugee policies. Surprisingly, there is a paucity of literature exploring specifically South East Asian migration to rural and regional Australia in the past 30 years. Seeking to understand the experiences of South East Asian migrants to the regional city of Bendigo, we were concerned with how migrants navigate new landscapes in order to create a sense of home and identity. The extant literature has been reviewed and reconceptualised to draw together how the concepts of therapeutic landscapes, and its links to social capital and well-being, can provide a schematic overview of South East Asian migration experiences to the regional city of Bendigo, Victoria.

This article, which draws upon a larger literature review, explores the connections between therapeutic landscapes, social capital and personal well-being for migrants to rural and regional communities. We suggest the theoretical literature and empirical research is under-explored with regard to migration to regional and rural Australia; the landscapes and communities that migrants encounter; and how the migrant experience can be linked to notions of therapeutic landscapes, social capital development and personal well-being. Linking these concepts extends the extant discourses about the economic impact of migration; the social ghettoisation of migrants, and the representation of their experiences in local, regional and national media. Instead, we shift the focus to the connections, processes and relationships that impact social and economic exclusion for South East Asian migrants.

**Research Method**

Research around topics such as migration, refugees, cultural diversity and such requires a theoretical, if not philosophical shift away from modernist notions of social and cultural capital, cultural diversity and harmony and the experiences of space and place in Australian regional and rural communities (Jupp & Nieuwenhuysen, 2007). Literature reported upon here has been conceptualised from multidisciplinary and mixed-method sources. It is not a systematic review that employed a pre-existing sampling or theoretical framework; this extant empirical literature was considered under-explored with regard to regional and rural Australia.

We have not been eclectic however; we have consciously reconceptualised the migration literature to connect therapeutic landscapes, space and place literature from cultural geography, with the sociological concepts of social capital, as well as the more psychosocial well-being. Taken together and used to understand the rural and regional experiences of migration, our intention...
was to expand the lens through which migration is more usually understood (Charters, Vitartas, & Waterman, 2011; Faggian, Olfert, & Partridge, 2011).

The research, from which this literature review formed a part, was funded by a Faculty of Health Sciences Research Grant from La Trobe University and was conducted during 2010 and 2011. Empirical data was collected and is reported upon elsewhere in a forthcoming article. The overall aim of the research project was to explore the experiences of migrants from South East Asia to the city of Bendigo, VIC. This was a mixed-methods design (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003) that incorporated a comprehensive literature review, mixed-method survey \( (N = 60) \) adult migrant participants and a case-study of one married couple's experiences.

The research project was categorised as a ‘pilot study/proof of concept’ study and collected base-line data about South East Asian migration to Bendigo, VIC. The survey collected demographic data as well as measuring experiences of education and employment, neighbourhoods, belonging, inclusion and social life during the first 2 years post-settlement. There were also open-ended survey questions exploring the migration journey. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS to provide descriptive statistics and the qualitative data was analysed utilising Nvivo and thematic analysis. Both the literature review and empirical data raised a range of issues for us as researchers; the first being that the motivations and experiences of migrants are diverse and complex. Also, that these motivations and experiences can be linked to issues such as: Rural versus urban landscapes and lifestyles; improving education and employment opportunities for self and one’s children and/or expanding the opportunities for whole families. Or simply escaping a society where conflict, war and totalitarian governments are the norm. This article reports on the literature review developed as part of a larger project conducted in 2010 and is the beginning of the researchers’ journey into linking complex experiences and concepts that might assist explain the migrant experience to Australia.

LITERATURE REVIEW
The migration milieu
Central Victoria’s history is steeped with Asian influence, with thousands of Chinese migrating during the gold rush era in the early 1850s. During the 1850s and 1860s Chinese migrants played an integral part in the formation of gold-field communities and comprised up to 10% of the Victorian population (Reeves, 2005). Immigration from South East Asia to Bendigo has waxed and waned during the last century and a half, which in part reflects the changing historical, political, social and economic climates.

More recently, migrants from European and Asian continents have been the two key migrant groups residing within the Bendigo region (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2006). South East Asians are the second largest group \((N = 436 \text{ in } 2009, 466 \text{ in } 2011)\); with the fourth largest group from Southern and Central Asia \((N = 234)\). More specifically, time series data sourced in relation to country of birth per person reveals that there has been a steady increase in migration rates from most of the South East Asian countries (ABS, 2006). In particular, there was almost a doubling of migrants from China across the 1996, 2001 and 2006 census years. These demographics reflect national trends (ABS, 2009) whereby migration, both skilled and humanitarian, has increased from South East Asia from the late 1970s until the last decade when changes in people movement arose from the Middle East and Africa. However the interim 2011 census data is revealing a decline in yearly numbers of migrants from South East Asia to the Bendigo region, from a high of 146 migrants in 2009 to 75 in 2010 and 36 in 2001 (ABS, 2012).

Therapeutic landscapes
Gesler (1992) first introduced the concept of therapeutic landscapes to denote that places provide meanings and attachments for people, and that a sense of place could be related to wellbeing and good health (Andrews, 2004). Existing research demonstrates strong links between health and landscape (Frumkin, 2001; Gesler, 1992; Pretty, 2004). Pretty (2004) extended Frumkin’s concepts, asserting that features of the natural and
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built environments affect behaviour, interpersonal relationships and cognitive and emotional states.

As well as physical and emotional health benefits, research indicated that therapeutic landscapes have relational, symbolic, spiritual and healing benefits (Conradson, 2005; Malinski, 2004). However, it is not only the physical environment that constitutes therapeutic landscapes. There is a complex interaction between ‘space’ and ‘place’. Space can be understood as the physical natural and built environments. However, the sense of place is embedded with emotions, preconceptions, narratives and values associated with that space. It is these anticipations, and their subsequent effects, that influence how place is subjectively experienced.

The literature points to the importance of space and place as indicators of well-being; but less is understood about the migration experience, as they negotiate new spaces such as regions, communities and neighbourhoods and the narrative places which accompany these. Seminal work by Sampson and Gifford (2010) posit that existing communities’ capacity to incorporate diverse cultures into everyday economic and social activities supports the notion that place does matter and therefore impacts on social capital development and well-being. They found that if the process of ‘settling’ into a place and being able to successfully use and inhabit a new space does not occur, migrants are at increased risk of social exclusion.

Exploration of everyday activities for producing meaning and experiences of space, place, health and home for migrant women in British Columbia, Canada (Dyck & Dossa, 2007) further illustrates the importance therapeutic landscapes. Participants from Punjab, India in the research highlighted the importance of transnational connections and situates the women as transnational subjects with a complex relationship to place (Dyck & Dossa, 2007, p. 692). Therapeutic landscapes recognise that spaces and places can create well-being; however it was highlighted that different cultural groups may experience these landscapes differently (Dyck & Dossa, 2007). The themes identified related to the importance of being able to incorporate both their past culture and knowledge into present experiences, in food preparation, illness and healing practices; and in spirituality and religious traditions. Home remained both a place and space that was healthy for the groups studied. Furthermore, it was discovered that the communities they resided in played an important role in creating healthy places and spaces (Dyck & Dossa, 2007).

These seminal studies highlight the significance of migrants being able to create ‘therapeutic landscapes’ that promote social capital and well-being within the context of resettlement. Existing research points to strong links between well-being and physical spaces such as natural and built landscape, and places, where meanings and attachments are made (Frumkin, 2001; Pretty, 2004). Space and place can combine then to form therapeutic landscapes (Gesler, 1992). This is a holistic concept exploring ways in which space and place shape identity through social and emotional connection (Pascal, 2010).

Therapeutic landscapes and the impact of space and place on migration well-being can be linked both theoretically and empirically. Literature indicates that space and place are central to the resettlement experience. However, what is less understood is the particular narratives of South East Asian migrants to regional Victoria. As the limited literature points out, space and place are experienced subjectively and contextually, in terms of history, culture and identity of migrant groups.

This gap in the literature requires further empirical exploration, meanwhile, we have synthesised the existing literature to shift the discourse to relationships, space, place and identity. What follows is an exploration of space and place specifically in regional contexts, and the implication these concepts have for migration to rural and regional communities.

Regional space and place

We posit that regional Victoria is not merely a geographic location, even when encompassing regional cities and small rural towns and villages. Instead, these communities are also where new beginnings, expectations and cultural representations are realised; that is, these are physical spaces that facilitate reconstructed representations.
of place, including social capital and well-being experiences.

A large proportion of migrants arrive in regional and rural communities ‘unlinked’; that is, without any prior connections in, or to, Australia. To exacerbate this experience of disconnection, rural and remote communities in Australia remain mostly homogeneous, with regard to white Anglo-Saxon, or European, ethnicity, relative to metropolitan and capital cities (Stone & Hughes, 2002). When rural and remote residents are active in groups, these social groups are likely to be constituted of members ‘like themselves’ that is stereotypically white-Australian. Furthermore, there is evidence that suggests rural and remote Australia is characterised by bonding rather than cross-cutting ties. (Stone & Hughes, 2002, p. 16). As such, communities remain closed and inward looking, providing little opportunity for culturally diverse groups to become active participants. Bonding rather than bridging social capital is the consequence of such activity, potentially exacerbating migrants’ social isolation. The experiences of social inclusion or exclusion of recently arrived migrants in regional communities is reported to influence an array of social capital and well-being indicators, in particular as sense of belonging (Pascal, 2010).

It was noted in research undertaken by the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DTRS, 2005) that migrants who feel socially included in their new community can create, contribute and expand the labour market. Additionally, their added presence provided expansion of small businesses. Migrants allow for new cultural meanings to emerge within the community by organising cultural and community events that provide benefits for social well-being to all of the community. In addition, the creation of culturally diverse businesses, which offer new goods and services, provided migrants with ready access to a range of necessities and cuisines specific to their cultures. These economic and social activities subsequently widen cultural understandings and experiences for existing communities.

In comparison, the DTRS (2005) research indicated that homogenous communities that tended to socially exclude migrants subsequently lost entrepreneurial opportunities. This lack of employment in turn created barriers to migrants completing formal vocational training and adult education furthering reducing social capital and well-being for these groups (Townsend, 2008). An overall lack of available culturally appropriate community activities created environments that increased the isolation of migrants groups, which was noted to be associated with poorer mental and physical health (DTRS, 2005).

Carrington and Marshall (2008) noted that homogenous regional and rural communities, which have had little exposure to migrants, become dependent on media representations rather than personal experiences when formulating views on migration. Penetrating the intrinsic norms and values of a close knit community would be difficult enough for any new resident to a rural or regional community, but being a newly arrived migrant would affect a form of double exclusion. People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds do experience being outside the ‘mainstream’ of Australian society and are represented as other than. This can be compounded when the exclusion faced originates from ‘bonded’ community groups, networks, associations and local media within regional community contexts, effectively barring migrants from the social and economic life of a community (Townsend, 2008).

From a policy perspective, this is captured in the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) promotion of newly arrived migrants, especially skilled migrants, to settle in regional and rural areas in Australia (Department of Immigration and Citizenship [DIAC], 2010). Such policies were noted to have ‘directed a small but steady stream of migrants’ to particular rural and regional areas since the mid 1990s (Carrington & Marshall, 2008, p. 117). Underpinning this was the aim of preventing a ‘cultural chasm’ from developing between regional and metropolitan areas. Furthermore, it was hoped that a flow-on effect would eventuate, promoting chain migration to the same geographic locations, thus creating a sense of community and networks. Finally, it was believed that newly arrived migrants could replenish the stock of social and human capital needed in regional and rural areas by
locating employment and meeting the demand for unskilled labour, ameliorating localised critical skills shortages. Chain migration in itself is noted to play an important role in explaining significant migrant concentrations in particular regional areas across Australia (Carrington & Marshall, 2008; Carrington, McIntosh, & Walmsley, 2007).

However, it has been found that a large proportion of migrants arrive in Australian regional and rural areas ‘unlinked’; arriving without prior links to Australia (Australian Psychological Society, 2011). In these instances, individuals and small kinship groups have to create new links and networks and hence develop social capital independently from existing networks (Stone & Hughes, 2002). As such, these factors may work to exclude migrants from both physical spaces, and the accompanying cultural places. The delicate balance of therapeutic landscapes is altered when migrants are socially and economically excluded from participation in their new communities.

Social capital and well-being
Social capital is viewed as the processes and relationships that impact on individuals and specific population groups within a community and society (ABS, 2004; Putnam, 2000; Stone, Gray, & Hughes, 2003; Szreter & Woolcock, 2004). The ABS (2002) cites social capital as a relational concept, which can be produced by societal investments of time and effort. When considering South East Asian migrants, the salutary benefits of gaining greater social capital, as broadly defined in such work as Putnam (2000) and others (Nieuwenhuysen, 2007; Stanwick, Ong, & Karmel, 2006; Townsend, 2008; Vasey & Manderson, 2012) are often times limited to Anglo-centric homogeneous groups (Hero, 2007). This does little to foster social inclusion or to support cultural diversity. Thereby, a vast body of literature exploring social capital, and its paradox of inclusion and/or diversity has not been accounted for. We reiterate that bonding social capital is required to welcome those from diverse cultures, but bridging capital is required for community sustainability and social inclusion and cohesion (Giorgas, 2007; Townsend, 2008).

Furthermore, well-being research has expanded rapidly over the last two decades (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) with its concomitant focus on ‘happiness’ (Conceicao & Bandura, 2008; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, the links between the social capital and therapeutic landscape literature have not been drawn explicitly. Nonetheless, there is an emergence of a more holistic representation of well-being that encompasses an array of factors. Beyond mere description, recent literature seeks to understand the underlying processes that inspire happiness and well-being in individuals (Conceicao & Bandura, 2008; Easterlin, 2003; Morgan & Farsides, 2009) beyond any demographic characteristic that ‘makes people happy’.

The literature indicates, ‘well-being is probably best conceived as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes aspects of both the hedonic and eudaimonic conceptions of well-being’ (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 148). Current research is less focused on happiness, and more towards interdependencies, timing and casual pathways (Helliwell, 2001). The specific life issues, or indicators, explored in relation to well-being have included the impact of emotional, physical and/or health status, economic and fiscal stability, resilience, freedom and choice, spirituality, personality, interpersonal relationships and/or attitudes towards these, which were framed across an array of places, cultures, time and life events (Burns & Evans, 2011; Conceicao & Bandura, 2008; Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008; Drakopoulos, 2008; Martin, 2008; Morgan & Farsides, 2009). It is suggested here that the literature indicates a connection between individual moods and encompasses life satisfaction, including familial and social relationships, employment and community life.

An exploration of the cultural understandings and interpretations associated with well-being add further complexity to this contested topic. There are vast differences seen in how individualistic nations, such as first world Western countries, view happiness and well-being, when compared with collectivist nations, such as third world and/or Asian countries. Individualistic
nations value self-esteem, independence, a positive self-view and the expression of emotions. In contrast, collectivist nations place importance on the needs of others; an acceptance of one’s fate, interdependence within a group, and collections of cultural norms as more important than that of personal pleasure (Davey, Chen, & Lau, 2009; Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto, & Ahadi, 2002).

Interestingly, migrants are more likely to achieve parity with the Australian born population in economic participation and well-being, before they achieved parity in social participation (Khoo & McDonald, 2001). Indicative in part, that economic participation may enhance well-being, by creating and increasing avenues that promote social participation for migrant groups. Nonetheless, poverty does remain a key barrier for many migrants as their economic participation via work is often unrelated to their qualifications, skills and aspirations (Vasey & Manderson, 2012). It is perhaps easier to locate correlations between social capital and social well-being than specific causes of such with common themes identified across the literature about migration and settlement services including; employment, language proficiency, education and housing (DIAC, 2010; Jupp & Nieuwenhuysen, 2007; McDonald-Wilmsen, Gifford, Webster, Wiseman, & Case, 2009).

As implied in the work of Hero (2007), there is a distinct relationship between migrants, their new community, and how these landscapes combine to facilitate social capital and well-being. This relationship is complex and, given that Australia is becoming increasing culturally diverse it is one that requires further exploration (Townsend, 2008; Vasey & Manderson, 2012). The impact of migration is not a simple one, shared patterns of cultural meaning are important to all societies and these patterns reflect the development of norms, values, skills, understandings, attributes and characteristics that become resources for individual, communal and social action. That is, cultural meaning has impacts for personal and social identities (Burns & Willis, 2011; Charters et al., 2011; Faggian et al., 2011).

**DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS**

Migration is a mosaic of experiences both positive and negative. Less evident is how these migration experiences impact on social capital and well-being. Concepts of both social capital and social well-being can be linked to such factors as housing, employment and recreation, but what remains unclear is whether social capital formation promotes a greater sense of well-being, particularly for migrants relocating to rural or regional Australia. The relationships between education and employment contribute to social capital formation in that, places of work and learning can be supportive environments that allow diverse groups to interact with one another, which in turn supports network development and social well-being (Stanwick et al., 2006; Townsend, 2008).

Australian regional areas in particular have a long history of migrant experiences. Nonetheless, in the 21st century there is a relative lack of empirical understanding about successful migration experiences and how social capital development and social well-being can be created and represented to enhance the reformation of rural and regional communities. What is required is more sophisticated, longitudinal quantitative and qualitative research that acknowledges the complexities of migration experiences. This research needs to explore the complex, holistic notions of ‘settling’ that encompass the intertwining of places and spaces, social capital development, economic growth and personal well-being. That is, how can these factors combine to facilitate a therapeutic landscape of social inclusion for migrants to rural and regional Australia? Clearly, there is more work to be done.

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