Received: 15 August 2019 | Accepted: 1 October 2019
DOI: 10.1111/nzg.12240

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

New Zealand's small town transition: The experience of demographic and economic change and place based responses

Etienne Nel[1,2] | Sean Connelly[1] | Teresa Stevenson[3]

[1]School of Geography, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
[2]College of Business and Economics, University of Johannesburg, South Africa
[3]Independent Researcher, Dunedin, New Zealand

Correspondence
Etienne Nel, School of Geography, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.
Email: eln@geography.otago.ac.nz

Funding information
National Science Challenge 11: Building Better Homes and Cities: Harnessing the Hinterland

Abstract
A significant percentage of the smaller urban centres around the world are losing people which raises questions regarding the appropriate responses to this challenge. Responses from the state have generally been muted, and as a result, concepts of new localism and new regionalism are useful for understanding the role played by place-based leadership and partnerships between local businesses, community groups and individuals. Key within this space is the role of endogenous responses anchored on local social capital and resilience. This paper overviews key themes in the literature before examining statistical evidence of small town growth, stabilisation or decline in New Zealand. This leads into an examination of how three small towns in the country are responding to demographic and economic change. The cases illustrate the importance of local-led responses to the debilitating effects of change and the degree to which place based development can be critical in the context of coping with change in small towns. The paper further argues that "right-sizing" to a new economic and demographic reality may be the appropriate focus of local attention.

KEYWORDS
entrepreneurs, localism, New Zealand, regionalism, shrinking town, small town

1 | INTRODUCTION

Rapid urbanisation has been a distinctive hallmark of the last 200 years globally, and while urbanisation is continuing unabated and often at an accelerating pace in parts of the Global South this is not true for the entire world (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). It has been estimated that some 10% of urban areas globally and 40% in the Global North have experienced some degree of population shrinkage in recent decades (Wolff & Wiechmann, 2018). Selective urban decline in terms of demographics and/or economics needs to be understood as an inevitable parallel to urban growth brought about by deep-seated structural shifts within economic and demographic systems. While the processes of economic change, deindustrialisation, amenity migration, post-industrial change, demographic transition and population ageing in rural and urban areas are broadly understood, responses to them, particularly in terms of urban planning, are often found to be wanting. While much of the attention globally has been on the challenges of urbanisation in large centres, comparatively little has been said about the challenges and futures of small towns. Yet these places play critical roles as service centres for larger rural districts, and provide important economic and employment opportunities, yet face many of the same challenges of managing growth and decline, but have far less capacity to respond (Atkinson, 2019). The stark reality is that while some smaller places are ill-prepared to cope with new-found growth driven often by tourism, retirement and new economic opportunities, others struggle to manage structural decline, job loss and out-migration. The nature of the latter challenge is all the more significant in a

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.
© 2019 The Authors New Zealand Geographer published by John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd on behalf of New Zealand Geographical Society

planning context which is built on the presumption of growth and which is ill-equipped to engage with, and respond to, the reality of managing decline or the absence of growth (Stryjakiewicz & Jaroszewska, 2016). In a world where Keynesian style interventions to correct regional imbalances are generally no longer practiced, and as the growing reality of "regions of recession" and "resurgence" (Chisholm, 1990) has become embedded and self-perpetuating, the reality of "uneven geographical development," as argued by Harvey (2015) as the spatial manifestation of the operation of capitalism is difficult to ignore at the level of the diverse experiences of different urban centres. That said, as Hummel (2015) points out population decline need not lead to a loss of quality of life and livability if places adopt appropriate "right-sizing" responses. These are issues which this paper will explore in the context of case studies of small New Zealand towns.

In the case of New Zealand's urban geography while the historic movement of the rural population to the cities has slowed in recent years, the cities are growing rapidly as a result of natural increase and migration. At the other end of the urban hierarchy, some small towns are booming—such as Cromwell and Queenstown, while others are struggling to hold their own as they face structural economic change, out-migration and ageing (Jackson, 2014). The inability to adequately cope with both rapid growth or decline or simply the lack of growth at the small town level is exacerbated by the low funding bases and narrow development mandates of local government (Nel, 2014; Nel, 2015). In addition, after four decades of neoliberalism there is minimal expectation or ability for the state to intervene in any significant manner to respond to growth or address change in smaller urban centres (Peet, 2012). As a result, while the boom towns struggle to cope with growth, struggling places often have to look inward to their endogenous capacity to respond to issues such as the loss of state services and the need to address challenges of rationalising service provision and addressing local quality of life and employment prospects. While the recently instituted Provincial Growth Fund (see Connelly, Nel, & Bergen, 2019; McNeil, 2019) may facilitate a range of small developments, it is unlikely to significantly alter the broad processes of decline or growth across the small town landscape of the country.

Despite this negative scenario, the reality is that New Zealand's rural and small town (i.e., places with less than 10,000 people—after Atkinson, 2019) heartland contains one fifth of the population, has 420,000 jobs, 140,000 businesses and it generates over 25% of the country's tradable GDP, albeit with a population which may be trending downwards in some places (Nana, 2014). This asset base provides the opportunity and endogenous skills set to potentially respond to the challenges, particularly of decline or the threat of decline—given that only a small number are in absolute decline, while many have stabilised to a new, often smaller, population norm, in the absence of significant external input. In this context, as demonstrated elsewhere in the world (Daniels, 1989), small towns often have to look inward to their internal skills sets, leadership capacity and resources and selectively engage with issues of external support and governance through processes broadly referred to as "new localism" or "new regionalism" (Clarke, 2013; Markey, 2011) if they wish to halt economic and demographic decline, potentially reverse or stabilise both and pursue new development opportunities.

This article considers the state of knowledge about small town change and development responses, first internationally and then in New Zealand, before moving on to explore the statistical realities of growing, stabilising and shrinking towns in that country. The nature of local responses to challenges forms the basis of the third section of the paper which places particular emphasis on the action of communities and place-based leaders as agents of change. The research on which this article is based was derived from desktop research, analysis of New Zealand census data (at the time of writing the results of the 2018 Census were not available and the population estimates for 2018 were used instead [Statistics New Zealand, 2019]) and field research undertaken in three case study towns, Lawrence, Tirau and Reefton (Figure 1) which involved key informant interviews and analysis of relevant published material.

2 | SMALL TOWN GEOGRAPHIES

As has been noted in the literature in many parts of the world, small towns are frequently the most neglected element in the urban hierarchy from a research perspective (Atkinson, 2019). Despite this, they continue to play a key role as service and economic centres for rural areas, and they are destinations for retirees and participants in counter-urbanisation. A dominant theme in much of European literature in recent years has been the stark reality of "shrinking towns," and this is the reality for often over 30% of towns in Eastern European countries (Wolff & Wiechmann, 2018). However, this trend has to be balanced against the reality that in most countries there are also growing towns that reflect broader shifts in global and national economies and social and lifestyle choices. New Zealand is no exception to this rule and small town decline parallels small town growth across the country. Understanding the diversity of needs, challenges and opportunities reflected across the diverse small town experience is a key difficulty in developing coherent policy and community responses.

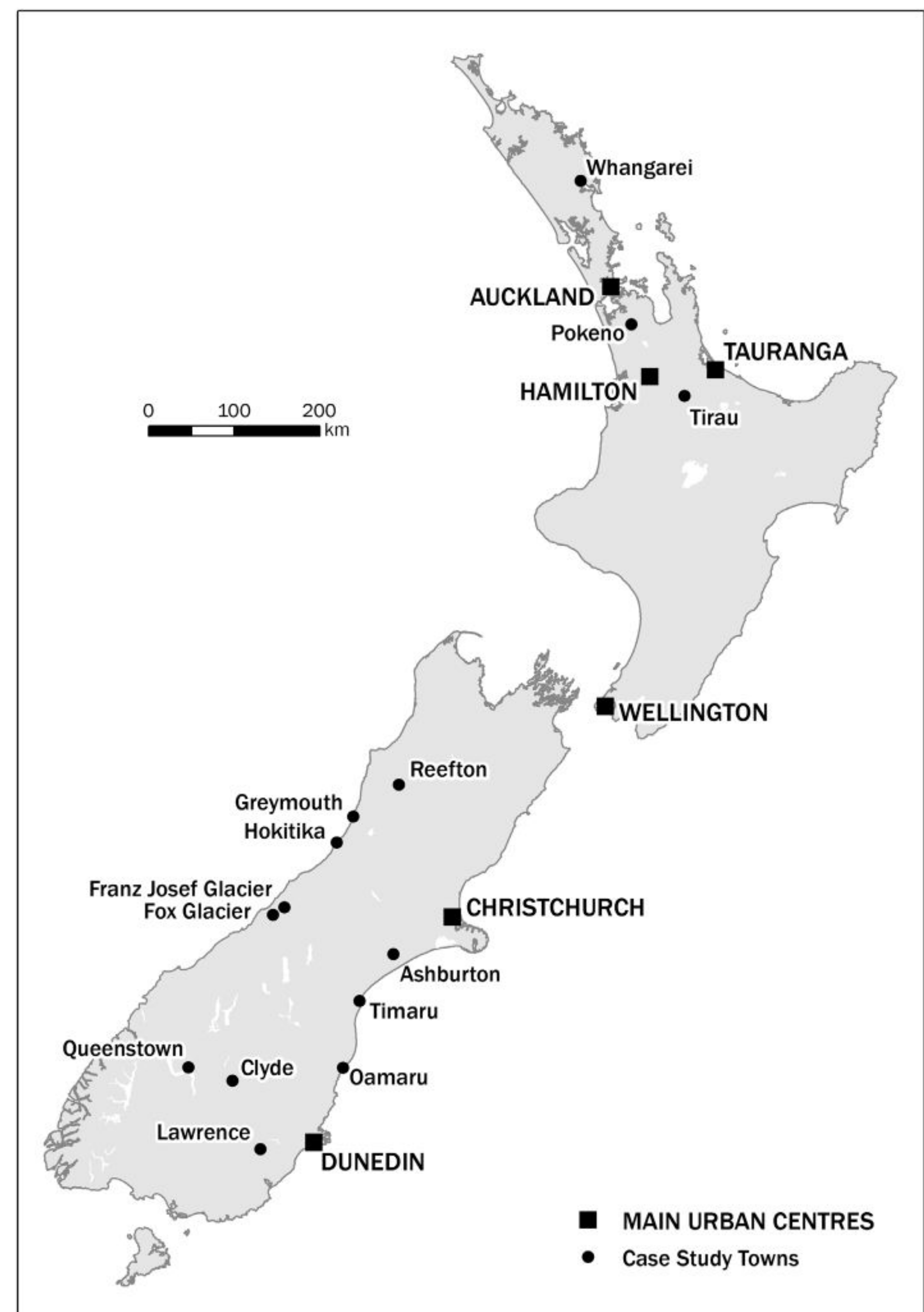

FIGURE 1 New Zealand: main centres and key small towns. Drawn by Chris Garden, School of Geography, University of Otago

2.1 | Small town growth and shrinkage

The growing small towns tend to be larger and more central places which benefit from the opportunities offered by globalisation, technology, leisure and new economic opportunities, disposable wealth and proximity to large urban centres. The towns which tend to grow often lie within each reach of a metropolitan area and/or have a favourable natural environment attractive for counter-urbanisation, retirement and tourism opportunities. Heritage, high amenity value and/or new rural economies anchored on niche production can also serve as catalysts for growth (de Noronha Vaz, van Leeuwen, & Nijkamp, 2013; Mayer & Knox, 2010). Changes in rural environments and associated production systems, and their implications on broader development processes are documented in a wide literature of rural areas (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2018; Woods, 2004, 2010, 2011).

As noted above, it has been estimated that some 10% of urban areas globally and 40% in the Global North have experienced some degree of population shrinkage in recent decades (Wolff & Wiechmann, 2018). Shrinkage is caused by the loss of population occasioned by a range of catalytic factors, individually or collectively, the most common being: structural economic change and loss of employment, exhaustion of natural resources, out-migration of the young and job

seekers, falling birth rates and population ageing. Urban shrinkage however needs not be a permanent feature, for as Stryjakiewicz and Jaroszewska (2016) argue, shrinkage can be short-term, long-term or episodic and can even reverse.

In response to the situation of shrinkage various urban places have embarked on strategies of "right-sizing" or "smart decline" anchored in the search for new foci centred on a declining population base. Strategies include: urban greening, removal of redundant buildings, improving the efficiency of service provision, encouraging new economic activities for example, the retirement sector and neighbourhood and community action (Hollander, 2018; Hummel, 2015). In rare cases, such as Kiruna in Sweden, significant government support helped to refocus the activity of the former mining town on a new trajectory—but this seems to be more the exception than the rule in policy terms (Lansbury & Breakspear, 1995). Several countries, particularly in Eastern Europe, have developed national strategies to encourage urban regeneration (Martinez-Fernandez, Audirac, Fol, & Cunningham-Sabot, 2012; Martinez-Fernandez, Kubo, Noya, & Weyman, 2012). In a few limited cases passive "regrowth," without any direct external intervention has been noted, but these often tend to be in places close to metropolitan areas which have successfully managed to restructure their local economies and where there is a reasonably high quality of life appealing to potential in-migrants (Haase, Wolff, & Rink, 2018; Wolff, Haase, Haase, & Kabisch, 2017). In general terms, in countries of the North, outside of Europe, small towns cannot expect state support and need to respond to local challenges through local actions.

The stark reality for many towns not fortunate enough to have the resources and assets to capitalise on a new wave of economic activity is that in the context of neo-liberal reforms and the reduced role of state, the pursuit of locally driven new economic activity in the form of "self-reliance and self-organization" (de Noronha Vaz et al., 2013, p. 3) may be critical. In these instances, grassroots movements anchored on local partnerships can be important in efforts to address crises and decline (Mayer & Knox, 2010). Such initiatives often focus on the development of alternative economic spaces, local business promotion and community economic development, drawing on cultural and environmental assets as appropriate. Clearly there is no uniform response of how small towns respond to the development challenges and opportunities which they face. Rather, "each case highlights the importance local actors place on new sensibilities that have emerged" (Mayer & Knox, 2010, p. 1563). However, the emphasis on local actors raises the potential for increased uneven development, as small towns are increasingly dependent on local capacity, expertise and resources to fund infrastructure development, service provision, heritage and culture, tourism development and social services, all of which are critical for the development of new rural economies dependent on high-quality services and amenities (Reimer, 2006). Atkinson (2019, p. 15) argues that while many towns will be locked into a negative cycle of path dependence which they cannot break out, "such places cannot simply be abandoned … these places will still require support to ensure that daily life can continue."

In the absence of defined and realistic state responses and uncertainty regarding how to respond to decline, small towns rather have to look inward to their own endogenous potential and resilience.

2.2 | Local action: new localism and new regionalism

Over recent decades the devolution of power, functions and resources from central to local levels has promoted what Evans, Marsh, and Stoker (2013) regard as "new localism" anchored on notions of local management, representation and the community. In turn this is related to the argument by Jones and Woods (2013) that we need a "new localities" focus grounded in processes taking place in local space which can be regarded as both absolute and relative space. The approach argues that local resources, labour, political cultures and decision-making help define the role and place of the "local" in a competitive global economy, in a sense reifying local decision-making and drawing on local resilience and social capital (Besser, 2013) while simultaneously further embedding both uneven geographical development and path dependency (Clarke, 2013; Harvey, 2015). Clarke (2013, p. 492) sees localism as intimately involved with "struggles to produce locally scaled action, including projects of local autonomy and self-sufficiency." However, local governance restructuring has often been antithetical to rural development and been argued to offer little value (Douglas, 2005). While these restructuring processes serve a political and public administration purpose, their actual impact has reframed the way that social cohesion and local resilience are put into practice. As a result, variable internal capacity and restricted sources of funding for community amenities are further reliant on competitive grant funding for community development projects (Stern & Hall, 2015). In New Zealand the withdrawal of the central state from direct engagement in the economy and regions from the 1980s has helped embed and encourage the need for local places to look inward. At another level a locally driven focus has close links with the recent embedding of the concept of place-based development in regional development practice in the EU consequent on the release of the Barca Report with it focus on social inclusion, place specificities and efficiency (Barca, 2009; Barca, McCann, & Rodgriguez-Pose, 2012).

Within the context of locally driven development, themes of needing high levels of social capital to support and encourage locally driven development are well recognised (Trigilia, 2001) as is the need to recognise the role which resilience plays in facilitating and responding to changing developmental contexts (Martin, Sunley, & Tyler, 2015). This re-found interest in locally driven development parallels and overlaps a reinvigoration of interest in the concept of "new regionalism." In its earlier iteration before 2000, with its focus on regional development as a counter-point to national development it was criticised for its narrow focus on local institutions, industries and businesses, and for its inward looking nature (Bristow, 2018). The concept has since attracted new interest, particularly from Canadian researchers (Markey, 2011; Zirul, Halseth, Markey, & Ryser, 2015), this time focusing on a conceptualisation of regions as fluid and not static, recognising that places and regions have extended levels of non-local contacts, often at different scales. There is a need to rethink what regions and their development opportunities are in terms of themes such as multi-level governance, social capital, socially embedded processes, smart growth, sustainability, relational assets, integration and learning (Vodden, Douglas, Markey, Minnes, & Reimer, 2019; Zirul et al., 2015). In this regard, "new regionalism highlights approaches for creating more regionally resilient futures supported by informed development policy that is, among other things flexible, adaptive and context-appropriate" (Vodden et al., 2019, p. 3). The new approaches recognise the fluidity of borders and that the region "represents a contingent 'coming togetherness' or assemblage of proximate and distant social, economic and political relationships" (Jonas, 2012, p. 263).

2.3 | Place based leadership

As demonstrated in New Zealand and elsewhere, local leadership and local entrepreneurs often become key change agents with the "hollowing out of the state" in an era of central state withdrawal and neo-liberalism (Nel & Stevenson, 2014, 2019). Concepts of new localism and new regionalism are thus useful in highlighting the importance of social capital and resilience in defining the future of small towns. In this regard the role of "place leadership" in regional development is increasingly recognised (Beer et al., 2019; Horlings, Rope, & Wellbrock, 2018) with Beer and Clower (2014) arguing that the role of leadership in ensuring the success of places is more critical than ever before. While this might relate to the leadership role played by local institutions, it also relates to the role played by individuals or local partnerships which "play a key role in guiding and facilitating transformation by stimulating imagination … and the development of new agendas" (Horlings et al., 2018, p. 250). This is of particular value in economically challenged areas where relying on endogenous strengths and social capital and capitalising on internal and external links, which are often personal in character becomes critical in achieving local innovation and development. Mobilising private and public actors on the basis of collective values and trust can help embed sustainable development in rural areas (Holrings & Padt, 2013). As Collinge et al. (2010, p. 367) argue "effective leadership is one of the critical factors that explains how and why some localities are able to adapt and exploit opportunities."

Yet the focus and reliance on local leadership does raise concerns about the degree to which powerful and prominent voices are able to dominate agendas, set priorities and displace competing voices and opportunities in response to the planning for the future of small towns. While leadership may spring from a range of public or private institutions or individuals, as previous work in New Zealand has shown, scaling back on the role of the local and national state in rural communities and small towns has often passed the local development mandate to local communities and businesses (Nel & Stevenson, 2014). In the case of the latter, considerations of the ill-defined concept of "social entrepreneurship" are important to acknowledge (Peredo & McLean, 2006). The creation of "social value" through the pursuit of development opportunities and innovation by local business leaders can achieve the dual purpose of both enhancing social value, assisting the less privileged and promoting place base development, while also achieving parallel business goals (Abu-Saifan, 2012; Sastre-Castillo, Peris-Ortiz, & Danvila-Del Valle, 2015). A smaller and more recent line of argument has identified that certain business people, known as "benevolent entrepreneurs" are supporting community and small town development outcomes for altruistic and not material outcomes (Nel & Stevenson, 2014; Nieva, 2015; Wilson, 2011). These actions are built on the earlier manifestation of the charitable paternalism 2007 (Shephard, 2018). They are regarded as "risk-orientated, benevolent, community-serving entrepreneurs who are" socially progressive, and have "grounded morality and neoliberal beliefs" and who show an unwavering commitment "to improving their community as they strive to sustain their businesses" (Wilson, 2011, p. 703). Their actions generally reflect personal levels of place attachment to their community and the desire to be an agent of social agent, often without taking credit for their actions. Besser (2013) points out that in situations where small towns face economic restructuring, high levels of community-based social capital, as well as high degrees of local business ownership can help strengthen resilience to respond to crises, as this promotes economic stability and helps to maintain socio-economic well-being. In this context "the business sector is a major contributor to community welfare, beyond their role of providing jobs and tax revenue… local capitalists will be more committed to the general

welfare of their community than will absentee owners" as is shown in membership of local agencies and charities and support for local betterment processes (Besser, 2013, p. 122). However, this inevitably raises issues about the potential to narrowly define social welfare along business and community development lines and naturally does also require local residents to accept the leadership role assumed by local entrepreneurs.

3 | RECENT TRENDS IN RURAL AND SMALL TOWN NEW ZEALAND

The future of rural areas and small towns and their on-going marginalisation, given the national urban-centric focus in New Zealand has raised real concern among rural and farming communities (Newshub, 2018). It has promoted comments that "Heartland NZ is hurting" as a result of government service cuts and points to "the challenge many rural areas face to remain economically competitive and to retain jobs" (Curran, 2012). The debate about the future of rural and small town New Zealand reached a peak in 2014 when a leading national economist, Shamubeel Eaqub, argued that many small towns in the country resembled places in the Third World, with the loss of small town functions and populations creating "zombie towns that need to close" (NBR, 2014). In the same year, it was argued that stark economic and social differences between Auckland and rural New Zealand had created a "tale of two New Zealands," with "rural and provincial areas … struggling with declining or flat populations and economies. The people who do live there are likely to be elderly, and there won't even be the workers or infrastructure to support them" (The Wireless, 2014).

Responses to this predicament have varied from one commentator who has argued "it's time to stop propping up small town New Zealand" because of the loss of young people, the ageing of the remaining population and the cost of maintaining services for a diminishing population (Newshub, 2017b). This argument is reflected in the findings of a private sector think-tank, the Maxim Institute, which predicted that 44 of the 67 territorial authorities in the country would stop growing or decline in 30 years time (Wood, 2017). Predictably, local mayors in towns and regions experiencing decline have reacted angrily to these reports and the overall negativity surrounding the future of rural and small town New Zealand with arguments that; "the report is an unnecessary, inaccurate load of clutter," "we have the ability to get population growth," and "you can come here, you can have the lifestyle, housing's affordable, the jobs are there" (Newshub, 2017a).

The reality of long-term population decline, ageing and the loss of youth from rural and small town New Zealand has been present for decades. While all the demographic indicators suggest that this is likely to continue and perhaps get worse in certain districts (Brabyn & Jackson, 2019; Jackson & Brabyn, 2017), there is a need to de-couple the survival of small-town and rural New Zealand from the sole criteria of population growth or decline. As the extensive experience of Eastern Europe has shown, population loss is sometimes inevitable and the challenge is not to try and prevent what will happen but rather to "right-size" urban areas to their new norm in terms of servicing the needs of smaller populations (Hummel, 2015). In addition, boosting the resilience of those who remain is both ideal from a social point of view and is a realistic response to changes in nationally and globally driven structural economic demand and productivity. A more balanced perspective has emerged in more recent thinking in the country with two recent books (Brown, Kaye-Blake, & Payne, 2019; Spoonley, 2016) drawing attention to the very real challenges which prevail but also the very real local capacity which exists in many places to respond positively and creatively to change, drawing on local resilience, leadership and capacity. As Spoonley (2016, p. 241) argues, it is possible to "reboot" regions, and "we need to adopt a new realism in understanding and responding to these dynamics (of demographic and economic change), it also invites new policy and political options." As will be demonstrated in the following section not all towns are in the same bracket, some are declining economically and demographically, while others are growing, often rapidly, particularly those in metropolitan commuting belts for example, Pōkeno (Ryks, Kilgour, Whitehead, Whetu, & Whetu, 2019) and Selwyn District or in places attractive to retirees and tourists for example, Queenstown and Te Anau. Simultaneously change has catalysed pro-active local responses in a range of centres, focused on drawing in investment and improving the local quality of life (Nel & Stevenson, 2012, 2014, 2019), causing what has been called "a renaissance (as some) … Small town communities … are looking for opportunities to reinvent themselves" (McCahon, 2012) to match new realities. This may well involve seeking to "right-size" a place to meet the wellbeing and quality of life in place with an altered population size regardless of whether the population has fallen on not (Hummel, 2015).

3.1 | New Zealand small town geographies

Only a relatively small academic literature exists which details trends in small towns in New Zealand. While there have been general studies looking at growth trends and functions, such as the work of Pownall (1943) and Hamner (1995), from the 1990s a clear focus centred on the effects of neo-liberal restructuring and the withdrawal of state services on rural and small town New Zealand emerged

(Le Heron & Pawson, 1996; Mansvelt, 2002). This includes the study by Wilson (1995) on the negative effects agricultural restructuring had on towns in Southland, Johansen's (1999) study of farming changes in South Canterbury and the detailed studies of dramatic regional and urban change in the West Coast region (Conradson & Pawson, 1997; Pawson & Scott, 1992). Subsequent to this analysis of change, a small literature has emerged which has variously examined recovery efforts centred around community based activity (Scott & Pawson, 1999), and emerging efforts from 1990 to institutionalise Local Economic Development within municipal practice (Mansvelt, 2002). More recent literature has focused on new economic opportunities opening up to small towns through post-industrial activity, such as tourism, festivals and niche retail activity (Bell, 2002; Higham & Richie, 2001; Kaino, 2014; McGregor & Thompson-Fawcett, 2011; Nel, 2015; Panelli, Stolte, & Bedford, 2003). Important in this regard has been the recognition of culturally based and niche economic "efforts to rework the cultural dimensions of marginality" (Conradson & Pawson, 2009, p. 77) and the increasing impact which globalisation is having on key tourism and amenity destinations such as Queenstown (Woods, 2011). The notion of the "global countryside" has come to reflect the degree to which boutique agriculture and associated amenity based activities can transform selected rural areas and small towns such, such as Cromwell (Perkins, Mackay, & Espiner, 2015). A parallel focus has been on the role played by local communities, local government and business groupings in ensuring small town survival (Nel & Stevenson, 2012, 2014, 2019; Spoonley, 2016), and the importance of having strong local resilience (Brown et al., 2019). As a result, it is apparent that "not all 'lagging towns' are passively accepting their fate. Rather '… reduced state support and the urgent need to address local economic challenges has, in many cases, encouraged local pro-active action by individuals and agencies to either attempt to restore economic vitality or to take advantage of new niche opportunities" (Nel & Stevenson, 2014, p. 499). More recent writing has focused on the long term challenges which many small towns currently, and increasingly in the future, will face as populations age and the number of job market entrants falls (Brabyn, 2017).

4 | URBAN GROWTH AND DECLINE IN NEW ZEALAND

Having examined the academic and political-economic context in which small town change is taking place and is understood in New Zealand, attention in this section focusses on the evidence of change in demographic terms, paying particular emphasis to the very real changes which small towns have experienced. While acknowledging that demography is only one dimension of the picture of urban change, it does, none the less, provide an important window into current trends. At the time of writing the results of the 2018 national census had not been released, so the population estimates for all urban centres in the country produced by Statistics New Zealand (2019) have been used to inform the discussion which follows. The latter classifies urban places into a series of settlement classes with a minimum population of 1,000 being needed to classify as place as urban, while places smaller than that are regarded as rural settlements. Earlier concerns expressed by (Brabyn, 2017; Jackson, 2014) regarding the implications of the scale of demographic change in terms of population loss in the three smallest categories of urban places, are reflected in Table 1. This table is based on the 1981 Census and the Population Estimates for 1996–2018. As statistical boundaries shifted in this time period to compensate for pre-1996 changes, not all centres could be factored into the calculations and the figures from 1996 to 2018 are estimates. Therefore, what follows needs to be seen as a reflection of general trends, not a 100% accurate depiction of reality. In all cases, the percentage decline in each category of settlement is for the specific time period noted.

Table 1 reveals the degree to which, with the exception of the largest centres, all other categories of settlement have a not insignificant proportion of centres experiencing some degree of demographic loss in the period under review. While the table implies that most places have actually grown, clearly this trend has not been uniform. The most striking falls were in the periods before 2006 which accords with previously noted effects of state restructuring and the loss of employment that resulted from the neo-liberal reforms in the smaller centres in particular (Nel & Stevenson, 2014; Peet, 2012). Throughout the period structural changes such as population ageing, the falling fertility rate and work force entry rates and youth out-migration have had a key bearing on observed trends (Jackson, 2014). While a large percentage of all the smaller classes of settlements were experiencing decline in the period of economic restructuring (pre-2006), over a longer time period (1981–2018), the percentage rates are lower reflecting the degree to which a new norm has been established of both widespread growth but also of slow structural decline in many places.

Table 2 examines in greater detail the specific case of the smaller urban centres that is, the 146 places with between 1,000–10,000 people for the period 1996–2018 using the criteria of: Decline: >0.1% loss p.a. and Growth: >0.5% growth p.a. (which is loosely based on indices used by Wolff & Wiechmann, 2018 as discussed earlier in their comprehensive analysis of urban shrinkage in Eastern Europe). The table indicates that while some 33% of the centres

TABLE 1 Urban decline across New Zealand's settlement hierarchy: 1981–2018: percentage of centres per category declining based on average % p.a. changes (derived from Stats NZ population estimates, 2019)

Settlement type	1981–1996	1996–2006	2006–2013	2013–2018	1996–2018	1981–2018
Major urban centres +100,000 (7 centres in 2018)	0	0	14%	0	0	0
Large urban centres 40,000–100,000 (13 centres)	33%	23%	8%	0	8%	25%
Medium centres 10,000–40,000 (22 centres)	57%	23%	14%	0	5%	36%
Small centres 1,000–10,000 (136 centres)	25%	52%	27%	4%	29%	25%
Rural settlements >1,000 (401 centres)	–	46%	37%	36%	36%	44% (1981–2013)

Source: Department of Statistics (1981) and Stats NZ (2019).

TABLE 2 Trends in small urban areas: 1996–2018

Trend	No. of places	% of all places
Absolute decline	14	9.6%
Decline then plateau	42	28.8%
Grow	48	32.9%
Decline then reverse/grow	22	15%
Plateau/stable	8	5.5%
Other trends	12	8.2%
Total	146	100%

Source: Stats NZ (2019).

(48) have experienced unabated growth, only 14 places have experienced unabated decline, while a combined total of 50 remained stable or stabilised after an initial decline, probably as a direct result of responding to the post 1980 neoliberal changes. Interestingly 22 declined and then reversed these trends. It is these majority in-between towns that are interesting, as this raises the question of whether they have "right sized"?

Unabated decline has occurred, more often than not in more isolated resource-based and former industrial centres such as Murupara, Patea, Waiora and Westport. Unabated growth has taken place in tourism/retirement and commuter centres such as Wanaka, Te Anau, Rolleston and Lincoln.

From an economic perspective, predictably, the slowest growing and the declining towns and districts, in population terms, have had the lowest GDP growth rates. Based on government estimates for the period 2000–2018, the average GDP growth rates for all territorial authorities over this period was 161%. For the lowest performing quartile, figures range from −7.5 to 117% and reflect the lower economic performance of districts which all contain many of the countries smaller and declining towns, such as—Wairoa, Kawerau, South Taranaki and South Waikato (based on Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2019).

5 | RESPONSES OF DECLINING TOWNS

From the above tables it is apparent that both processes of decline and growth characterise the small town landscape of New Zealand. While many rapidly growing towns such as Pōkeno (see Ryks et al., 2019) and towns such as Cromwell are struggling to cope with growth and cater for the growing service and infrastructure challenges, probably more interesting are the questions facing the 64 towns which have either experienced decline or the absence of growth. Have some of the latter "right-sized" (after Hummel, 2015), if so how did they do this and further, does decline actually mean loss of well-being? These are places which have seen the gradual loss of former mining based economies (Westport and Reefton) (Connelly & Nel, 2017), closed or scaled down industrial activity (Kawerau and Patea), general loss of state services—hospitals and schools, and so forth (Kurow and Lawrence) and static or declining populations in rural service centres (Marton and Bulls). While not all places can, realistically address and reverse the challenges of decline, and the economic rationale to continue a town's life from an economic point of view may be weak; there is a quality of life and well-being argument, which requires a response. As evidence from elsewhere has shown, such a response may need to be community-led in an era of central state withdrawal and the weakened position of local government to act (Nel and Connelly, 2019). In the following section evidence of selected responses in demographically declining or static centres are presented. It should be noted that what follows are cameos which represent a redefinition of success and the revitalisation of small towns in the New Zealand context and are not necessarily examples of restored population growth. Rather they may at best have stabilised their situation and provided new opportunities to maintain employment and the local quality of life in a scenario which Hummel (2015) refers to as "right-sizing." It should also be noted that not all small struggling towns have the benefits of strong local leadership, social capital and resilience discussed below and

may, sadly have to contend with continued erosion of economic and social well-being and population loss. The cameos which follow also reflect emerging evidence of "new localism" and "new regionalism" in terms of the nature of local action and response.

6 | SMALL TOWN TRANSFORMATION IN NEW ZEALAND

6.1 | Reefton—entrepreneurial driven restructuring

The small West Coast town of Reefton (Figure 1) owes its existence to mining operations from the second half of the nineteenth century—primarily gold and coal mining. It is one of the "small centres" noted on Table 1 and between 1996 and 2018 it experience a slow decline in its population size from 1,100 to 1,010 (Stats NZ, 2019). It could be argued that the town provides evidence of "right-sizing" in that while the town's population has slowly declined, people have gone and others have come and there have been clear efforts, as detailed below, to maintain the town's economy and well-being. As with the other two centres discussed below what has happened is not a story of "success" in the sense of a profound economic restructuring and restored economic and population growth; rather the town and its community have maintained the town and its services at a new level, jobs have been lost and gained and the economic focus has slowly transformed from one dependent on mining to a more diversified reality.

In the late twentieth century the town was severely impacted by a down-turn in the mining industry and from the 1980s by severe cuts in state support and state employment (Conradson & Pawson, 1997). The net result was out-migration and rationalisation of state services, despite this the town did not "die" and while a limited amount of mining persists, the town has gradually started to re-orientate its economy to take advantage of its heritage, natural amenity and new niche opportunities as part of a new economy which is starting to characterise this once mining-focussed mono-economy region (Conradson & Pawson, 2009). In recent years, this change has, in no small measure been facilitated by the presence of social or benevolent entrepreneurs who, in addition to running their own businesses have provided significant support to the community through their time, leadership and often direct financial commitment. The first individual, a resident in the town for over 25 years and a former state employee, co-manages a local business and, recognising the hardship the town was enduring championed initiatives to rebrand the town as a tourism and heritage destination. Through his leadership and with the support of the community a tourism and marketing agency was established, a heritage trail instituted, the main-street was upgraded and events held, which contributed to a gradual revival in the economic fortunes of the town (O'Connor, 2015; KI 1, 2010, 2019; KI 2, 2019). The subsequent arrival of a new benevolent entrepreneur, a retired millionaire who has chosen to make Reefton his home, has significantly boosted local support. This individual has bought and renovated 12 buildings, and through his maintenance team has assisted other businesses, often at no cost, to restore their buildings. In addition, he directly supported the establishment of at least three main-street businesses and helped with the establishment of a new local business association "Reefton Inc." to support and market Reefton (Ward, 2019). Anecdotally this has helped lead to the near complete purchase of the town's vacant housing stock and the in-migration of retirees and a small artistic community (Carroll, 2018). According to the media, "the renaissance of Reefton and its quest to be a tourist honey-pot has been immeasurably powered by the new in-migrant" (Yardley, 2019). He is described on the town's web page as: "a notable entrepreneur, photographer, author and an avid philanthropist … (who) has been instrumental in breathing new life into this old gold mining town" (Reefton.co.nz, n.d.). The Reefton case while showing the impact which resourceful and well-healed entrepreneurs, with benevolent foci (see Nel & Stevenson, 2014; Wilson, 2011) have had on a small town, needs to be moderated by the reality that the town is in a scenically attractive area with touristic potential and has relative high levels of social capital which when combined helped create community organisations to support change and to seek a natural economic alternative. It stands as an example of new localism (Besser, 2013) and what Clarke (2013, p. 492) sees as "locally scaled action, including projects of local autonomy." It should however be noted that the actions of individuals have not been trouble-free and local conflict has emerged (KI 3, 2019; KI 4, 2019). It is evident that the town's economic focus and urban amenities have transformed over time, suggesting at the reality of a process of "right-sizing."

6.2 | Tirau: social entrepreneurship

The story of Tirau (Figure 1) shares similarities with the experience of Reefton in terms of it being a case of "right-sizing." It is one of the "rural settlements" noted on Table 1 and between 1996 and 2018 the population remained effectively static, declining in size from 790 to 780 (Stats NZ, 2019). In this case a key entrepreneur was instrumental in supporting and encouraging local economic revival. The Tirau experience is detailed in the study by Panelli et al. (2003) which examined how by the 1980s Tirau was in decline. The town was hard hit by the loss of main-street

businesses and agro-industrial firms, and national economic restructuring, while administrative reform saw the loss of the town's independent local government as a result of central government led amalgamation of smaller local authorities, further marginalising the community. By 2000 however the town experienced something of a change of fortunes, through its location on a main road and growing interest and support for post-industrial activity. This stemmed from the development of an antique-shop based retail sector and associated art galleries, and eateries. In no small part this was this due to a local social entrepreneur encouraging external investment and supporting deliberate efforts to rebrand and market the town, using giant corrugated iron-buildings—one shaped like a sheep and the other as a sheep-dog to give the town a distinctive identity and brand (KI 5, 2010; KI 6, 2010; Rardon, 2010; Rodgers, n.d.). According to the local promotion agency "he has been a leading force in attracting many other businesses to Tirau. As a result of his vision, Tirau became home to a range of antique and craft shops, and became a popular pit-stop and shopping destination" (Tirau Info, n.d.). Similar to the case of Reefton the role of a local entrepreneur, working with the community, was critical in the town's revival. While pursuing his own business interests, he led local stakeholders in efforts to market and refocus the town's economic activities, while also relying on externally sourced market opportunities. As such, as argued elsewhere by Abu-Saifan (2012) and Sastre-Castillo et al. (2015), he achieved the dual purposes of enhancing social value and promoting the community while also achieving parallel business goals. While not meeting all the criteria of what the concept of "new regionalism" (Jonas, 2012) espouses, the reliance of Tirau on passing traffic and weekend shoppers from larger centres suggests the degree to which local economic responses depended on recognising and drawing on the opportunities provided by the wider region's economic opportunities. At a broader level, the reorientation of the town's economy in the absence of population growth and in the face of a slight decline hints at a potential process of "right-sizing" which has occurred.

6.3 | Lawrence: community-led service provision

Lawrence (Figure 1) is regarded as the site where New Zealand's industrial revolution started as a direct result of the discovery of gold in the 1860s. The resource however was soon exhausted and the town languished as a forestry and farming centre for decades. By the 1970s, the population stood at some 800 people, but after that it started falling as state services were gradually rationalised and the town lost its independent local government status. This was as a result of the rationalisation of state services following the neo-liberal reforms of the 1980s and, in the case of Lawrence, this was exacerbated by the declining productivity on the farms and of the forestry sector in the rural hinterland (KI 7, 2017). Since then the agricultural sector has experienced new growth enabling the farming community to champion local development in the town. Like Tirau it is classified as a "rural settlement" and its population fell from 550 to 440 between 1996 and 2018 (Stats NZ, 2019).

While communities often struggle to respond to the slow erosion of their town's services and economy, it was the threat of the closure of the state hospital which propelled the community to action. Broad based community concern drove a local response which moved from protest to the recognition that if the service was to be maintained the community itself would have to take ownership of it to ensure the continued provision of health care and thus prevent further loss of people (KI 8, 2012). As a first step, the community set up a Community Health Trust, the first in the country, as a vehicle which could take over health care provision from the state (Bidwell, 2001; Eyre & Gauld, 2003). Initial funding to set up the Trust was provided from proceeds raised by the local golf club (KI 9, 2017). The Trust then established a subscription based membership base to fund running costs and ensure members with access to local care. By 2003 the Trust had 230 members (Eyre & Gauld, 2003). In 1992 a Health Trust was established to run the hospital and the adjacent rest home, receiving support from 31 local groups, clubs and societies. When the local pharmacy closed and no pharmacist showed interest in taking over the business, the Trust bought the business which it now leases to an out of town pharmacist who provides occasional personal services, but otherwise issues electronic scripts for local collection (KI 10, 2017).

The success of the Health Trust and the continued operation of the hospital served as a key boost to local resolve and resilience and the various community groups in the town and its district have embarked in a significant range of local projects to improve the local quality of life. These include: an indoor sport facility and club, a swimming pool/gymnasium complex and a new gymkhana club (KI 11, 12, 2018). In these activities they did receive a degree of support from the local government. In addition, the community founded a "Community Company" to promote the town and activities within it and there are active community groups promoting a range of annual events.

What has been undertaken is testimony to the strength of local community social capital and resilience. The focus of local action has not been on economic activity but rather the desire to retain and improve local services and enhance the local quality of life (Nel & Connelly, 2018). Even though the population has fallen the community have retained and improved local services and by implication the local quality

of life, suggesting that this is a clear case of successful "right-sizing." In this regard, as has been noted elsewhere, the key agents of change are often the local farming community (Besser, 2013) who have given of their time and money to ensure that the town continues to provide services to meet their health and well-being needs. Such pro-active local action aligns well with notions of "new localism" geared to address local development challenges through inward focused actions (Clarke, 2013).

7 | CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Urban areas around the world are clearly experiencing divergent experiences in terms of either growth or decline. Understandably, the rapidly growing mega-cities of the world and the South in particular are the focus of attention of key international agencies such as UN-Habitat (2019) and the Cities Alliance (2019). However, at the same time, a not insignificant number of small towns globally are actually shrinking or alternatively adjusting to a new norm of stability and very slight growth or decline. In the case of the latter, as shown by the case-studies above, one should not over-focus on population issues alone, since local communities and leaders can negotiate a middle ground based on "right-sizing," such that their town's economy reflects a new focus for example, Tirau or the community maintains and perhaps even extends services which the state has withdrawn from, for example, Lawrence, thus addressing local well-being needs. Ironically, as argued above, planners and governments are focused on principles of planning for growth and not managing stabilisation or decline and processes of planning for shrinkage or smart decline are ill-formed (Wolff & Wiechmann, 2018). As such we need to rather look to endogenous and local development response theories to help explain how shrinking and stabilising towns and their communities can respond to change. As shown above, a significant number of New Zealand's small urban centres are either declining or static in demographic terms and in the context of post-1980s state rationalisation and neo-liberalism, intervention from the state is unlikely and rather communities need to look inward and draw on their own resilience, social capital and leadership to try and arrest and perhaps reverse decline and, more often than not, to improve the local quality of life.

As the preceding discussion suggests, small towns are experiencing diverse processes of economic and demographic change. Structural changes at the national and global levels, changing demographic patterns, post-political, neo-liberal and post-production changes collectively impact on small town development prospects. In this context small town communities can either passively accept change or look inward to their own resources, skills, social capital, resilience and leadership, to improve community well-being and potentially respond to issues of demographic and economic change. What the overview also shows is that socially responsible and potentially even benevolent entrepreneurs can be key agents of local change reinforcing arguments about the key role played by place based leadership in supporting their communities and catalysing change (Beer & Clower, 2014; Wilson, 2011). At a broader level such endogenous development endorses arguments regarding new localism and where higher level engagement is sought, of new regionalism too (Markey, 2011; Vodden et al., 2019).

ORCID

Etienne Nel https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8401-3698
Sean Connelly https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6576-3856

REFERENCES

Abu-Saifan, S. (2012). Social entrepreneurship: Definition and boundaries, *Technology Innovation Management Review*. Retrieved from https://timreview.ca/article/523

Atkinson, R. (2019). The small towns conundrum: What do we do about them? *Regional Statistics*, *9*(2), 1–17.

Barca, F. (2009). *An agenda for a reformed cohesion policy: A place-based approach to meeting European union challenges and expectations. Report for the European Commissioner for Regional Policy*. Brussels: European Commission.

Barca, F., McCann, P., & Rodgriguez-Pose, A. (2012). The case for regional development intervention: Place-based versus place-neutral approaches. *Journal of Regional Science*, *52*(1), 135–152.

Beer, A., Ayres, S., Clower, T., Faller, F., Sancino, A., & Sotarauta, M. (2019). Place leadership and regional economic development. *Regional Studies*, *53*(2), 171–182.

Beer, A., & Clower, T. (2014). Mobilizing leadership in cities and regions. *Regional Science*, *1*(1), 5–20.

Bell, C. (2002). A town called JenniferAnn.com. *Space and Culture*, *5* (3), 278–286.

Besser, T. (2013). Resilient small rural towns and community shocks. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, *8*(1), 117–134.

Bidwell, S. (2001). *Successful models of rural health service delivery and community involvement in rural health: International literature review*. Christchurch: Centre for Rural Health.

Brabyn, L. (2017). Declining towns and rapidly growing cities in New Zealand. *Policy Quarterly*, *13*, 37–46.

Brabyn, L., & Jackson, N. O. (2019) A new look at population change and regional development in Aotearoa New Zealand. *New Zealand Geographer*, *75*(3), 116–129.

Bristow, G. (2018). New regionalism. In A. Passi & J. Harrison (Eds.), *Handbook on the geographies of regions and territories* (pp. 67–78). Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Brown, M., Kaye-Blake, W., & Payne, P. (2019). *Heartland strong: How rural New Zealand can change and thrive*. Auckland: Massey University Press.

Carroll, J. (2018, October 20). *New people, tourists and businesses are flocking to Reefton*. Retrieved from https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/107924526/new-people-tourists-and-businesses-are-flocking-to-reefton

Chisholm, M. (1990). *Regions in recession and resurgence*. London, England: Routledge.

Cities Alliance. (2019). About Cities Alliance. Retrieved from https://www.citiesalliance.org/about-cities-alliance

Clarke, N. (2013). Locality and localism. *Policy Studies*, *34*(5–6), 492–507.

Collinge, C., Gibney, J., & Mabey, C. (2010). Leadership and place. *Policy Studies*, *31*(4), 367–378.

Connelly, S., & Nel, E. (2017). Employment and labour in New Zealand: Recent trends and reflections on developments in the West Coast and Southland regions. In G. Halseth (Ed.), *Transformation of resource towns and peripheries: Political economy perspectives* (pp. 221–241). Oxford, England and New York: Routledge.

Connelly, S., Nel, E., & Bergen, S. (2019). Evolution of new regional development interventions in New Zealand: An analysis of the first year of the provincial growth fund. *New Zealand Geographer*, *75*(3), 177–193.

Conradson, D., & Pawson, E. (1997). Reworking the geography of the long boom: The small town experience of restructuring in Reefton, New Zealand. *Environment and Planning A*, *29*, 1381–1397.

Conradson, D., & Pawson, E. (2009). New cultural economies of marginality; revisiting the West Coast, South Island New Zealand. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *25*, 77–86.

Curran, C.. (2012, September 3). *Heartland NZ is hurting, opinion piece, constituency email*.

Daniels, T. L. (1989). Small town economic development: Growth or survival? *Journal of Planning Literature*, *4*(4), 413–429.

de Noronha Vaz, T., van Leeuwen, E., & Nijkamp, P. (2013). *Towns in a rural world*. Farnham, England: Ashgate.

Department of Statistics. (1981). *New Zealand census of population and dwellings, 1981*. Department of Statistics: Wellington.

Douglas, D. J. (2005). The restructuring of local government in rural regions: A rural development perspective. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *21*(2), 231–246.

Evans, M., Marsh, D., & Stoker, G. (2013). Understanding localism. *Policy Studies*, *34*(4), 401–407.

Eyre, R., & Gauld, R. (2003). Community participation in a rural community health trust: The case of Lawrence, New Zealand. *Health Promotion International*, *18*(3), 189–197.

Haase, A., Wolff, M., & Rink, D. (2018). From shrinkage to regrowth: The nexus between urban dynamics, land use change and ecosystem service provision. In S. Kabisch (Ed.), *Urban transformations* (pp. 197–219). Cham: Springer.

Hamner, D. (1995). The making of urban New Zealand. *Journal of Urban History*, *22*(1), 6–39.

Harvey, D. (2015). *Seventeen contradictions and the end of capitalism*. London: Profile.

Higham, J. E. S., & Richie, B. (2001). The evolution of festivals and other events in rural southern New Zealand. *Event Management*, *7*, 39–49.

Hollander, J. (2018). *A research agenda for shrinking cities*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Holrings, I., & Padt, F. (2013). Leadership or sustainable regional development in rural areas. *Sustainable Development*, *21*, 413–424.

Horlings, L. G., Rope, D., & Wellbrock, W. (2018). The role of leadership in place development and building institutional arrangements. *Local Economy*, *33*(3), 245–268.

Hummel, D. (2015). Right-sizing cities: A look at five cities. *Public Budgeting & Finance*, *35*(2), 1–18.

Jackson, N. (2014). Sub-national depopulation in search of a theory – Towards a diagnostic tool. *New Zealand Population Review*, *40*, 3–39.

Jackson, N., & Brabyn, L. (2017). The mechanisms of subnational population growth and decline in New Zealand: 1976–2013. *Policy Quarterly*, *13*, 22–36.

Johnsen, S. (1999) Agricultural restructuring and responses: interrelationships between farm adjustment strategies in Waihemo, 1984-1997. *New Zealand Geographer*, *55* (1), 25–34.

Jonas, A. (2012). Region and place: Regionalism in question. *Progress in Human Geography*, *36*(2), 263–272.

Jones, M., & Woods, M. (2013). New localities. *Regional Studies*, *47* (1), 29–42.

Kaino, L. (2014). 'There's something special about this little town': Cultural identity and the legacy of Hundertwasser in Kawakawa, New Zealand. *Continuum*, *28*(1), 65–76.

Lansbury, R. D., & Breakspear, C. (1995). Closing down the mine: A tale of two communities and their responses to mining closures in Australia and Sweden. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, *16*(2), 275–289.

Le Heron, R., & Pawson, E. (1996). *Changing places: New Zealand in the nineties*. Longman Paul: Auckland.

Mansvelt, J. (2002). Revitalising local economic development – New Zealand policy and practice. *New Zealand Geographer*, *58*(2), 45–55.

Markey, S. (2011). *A primer on new regionalism*. Canadian Regional Development: Ottawa.

Martin, R., Sunley, P., & Tyler, P. (2015). Local growth evolutions: Recession, resilience and recovery. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society*, *8*, 141–148.

Martinez-Fernandez, C., Audirac, I., Fol, S., & Cunningham-Sabot, E. (2012). Shrinking cities: Urban challenges of globalization. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *36* (2), 213–225.

Martinez-Fernandez, C., Kubo, N., Noya, A., & Weyman, T. (2012). *Demographic change and local development: Shrinkage, regeneration and social dynamics*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Mayer, H., & Knox, P. (2010). Small-town sustainability: Prospects in the second modernity. *European Planning Studies*, *18*(10), 1545–1565.

McCahon, S. (2012). *Small town New Zealand – Take heart*. Retrieved from www.urbannz.co.nz/Home

McGregor, S., & Thompson-Fawcett, M. (2011). Tourism in a small town: impacts on community solidarity. *International Journal of Sustainable Society*, *3*(2), 174–189.

McNeill, J. (2019). Benefiting from the regional problem: The politics of 60 years of regional development. *New Zealand Geographer*, *75*(3), 130–139.

Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. (2019). *Modelled Territorial GDP: 2019 Release*. Retrieved from https://www.mbie.

govt.nz/business-and-employment/economic-development/regional-economic-development/modelled-territorial-authority-gross-domestic-product/2019-release/

Nana, G. (2014). Yes, from wool to Weta: But no to zombie towns. *Economic Insights: Regions*. Retrieved from www.berl.cp.nz/economic-insights/economic-development/regions.

NBR, The Administrator. (2014, July 12). *NZ has zombie towns that need to close*. Retrieved from https://www.nbr.co.nz/article/nz-has-zombie-towns-need-close-%E2%80%94-economist-ns-159124

Nel, E. (2014). Responding changing fortunes: The experience of small town New Zealand. In M. Roche, J. Mansevlet, R. Price, & A. Gallagher (Eds.), *Engaging geographies: landscapes, lifecourses and mobilities* (pp. 63–86). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

Nel, E., & Connelly, S. (2018). Rural health service delivery challenges in an era of neo-liberalism in New Zealand. In G. Halseth, S. Markey, & L. R. Markey (Eds.), *Service provision and rural sustainability: Infrastructure and innovation* (pp. 65–79). London, England: Routledge.

Nel, E. & Connelly, S. (2019) Regional economic transformation: Changing land and resource access on the West Coast of New Zealand's South Island, *Land Use Policy*. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2019.04.008

Nel, E., & Stevenson, T. (2012). Small town New Zealand: Reflections on local responses to geographical marginalization. In W. Leimgruber, W. Zsilincsar, & E. Nel (Eds.), *Mountain regions in transformation* (pp. 85–99). Acahen: Shaker.

Nel, E., & Stevenson, T. (2014). The catalysts of small town economic development in a free market economy: A case study of New Zealand. *Local Economy*, *29*(4–5), 486–502.

Nel, E., & Stevenson, T. (2019). Demographic and economic change in small towns in New Zealand and the responses to marginalization. In L. Leimgruber & C. D. Chang (Eds.), *Rural areas between regional needs and global challenges* (pp. 177–189). Berlin: Springer.

Nel, E. L. (2015). Evolving regional and local economic development in New Zealand. *Local Economy*, *30*(1), 67–77.

Newshub (2017a, February 28). *Are NZ's small towns doomed?* Retrieved from https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2017/02/are-nz-s-small-towns-doomed.html

Newshub (2017b, March 5). *Ryan Bridge: It's time to stop propping up small-town NZ*. Retrieved from https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2017/03/ryan-bridge-it-s-time-to-stop-propping-up-small-town-nz.html

Newshub (2018, November 29). Opinion: *What's the future for rural New Zealand*. Retrieved from https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/rural/2018/11/opinion-what-s-the-future-for-rural-new-zealand.html

Nieva, F. O. (2015). Social women entrepreneurship in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research*, *5*(1), 1–33.

O'Connor, J. (2015, August 2). *Reefton braces for loss of local goldmine*. Retrieved from https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/industries/70382411/

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2018). *Rural 3.0: A framework for rural development*. Pari: OECD.

Panelli, R., Stolte, O., & Bedford, R. (2003). The reinvention of Tirau: Landscape as a Record of Changing Economy and Culture. *Sociologia Ruralis*, *43*(4), 379–400.

Pawson, E., & Scott, G. (1992). The regional consequences of economic restructuring: The West Coast, New Zealand (1984–1991). *Journal of Rural Studies*, *8*(4), 373–386.

Peet, R. (2012). Comparative policy analysis: Neoliberalising New Zealand. *New Zealand Geographer*, *68*(3), 151–167.

Peredo, A. M., & McLean, M. (2006). Social entrepreneurship: A critical review of the concept. *Journal of World Business*, *41*, 56–65.

Perkins, H. C., Mackay, M., & Espiner, S. (2015). Putting pinot alongside merino in Cromwell District, Central Otago, New Zealand: Rural amenity and the making of the global countryside. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *39*, 85–98.

Pownall, L. L. (1943). The functions of New Zealand towns. *Geographical Review*, *33*(1), 86–99.

Rardon, C. (2010, July 12). *Tirau, a small town success story*. Retrieved from https://www.candaceroserardon.com/2010/07/tirau-a-small-town-success-story-day-four-on-the-north-island/

Reefton.co.nz. (n.d.). *Dressmart co-founder wants the world to follow him to Reefton*. Retrieved from https://www.reefton.co.nz/discover/blog/dressmart-founder-wants-the-world-to-follow-him-to-reefton

Reimer, B. (2006). The rural context of community development in Canada. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, *1*(2), 155–175.

Rodgers, K. (n.d.). *Tirau's tin sheep turns ten*. Retrieved from https://www.nzgeo.com/stories/tiraus-tin-sheep-turns-ten/

Ryks, J., Kilgour, J., Whitehead, J., Whetu, A., & Whetu, J. (2019). Jenniferann.com, regional development, and realising the aspirations of mana whenua in Pōkeno. *New Zealand Geographer*, *75*(3), 152–162.

Sastre-Castillo, M. A., Peris-Ortiz, M., & Danvila-Del Valle, I. (2015). What is different about the profile of the social entrepreneurs. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *25*(4), 349–369.

Scott, G., & Pawson, E. (1999). Local development initiatives and unemployment in New Zealand. *TESG*, *90*(2), 184–195.

Shephard, R. J. (2018). *A history of health & fitness: Implications for policy today*. Cham: Springer.

Spoonley, P. (2016). *Rebooting the regions: Why low or zero growth needn't mean the end to prosperity*. Auckland: Massey University Press.

Statistics New Zealand. 2019. *Population estimates: 1996–2018*. Retrieved from https://www.stats.govt.nz/topics/population-estimates-and-projections

Stern, P., & Hall, P. (2015). *The proposal economy: neoliberal citizenship in "Ontario's most historic town"*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Stryjakiewicz, T., & Jaroszewska, E. (2016). The process of shrinkage as a challenge to urban governance. *Quaestiones Geographicae*, *35*(2), 27–37.

The Wireless. (2014, November 5). *A tale of two New Zealands*. Retrieved from https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/the-wireless/372305/a-tale-of-two-new-zealands

Tirau Info. (n.d.). *Transformation into a vibrant town*. Retrieved from https://tirauinfo.co.nz/about-tirau/tiraus-transformation/

Trigilia, C. (2001). Social capital and local development. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *4*(4), 427–442.

UN-Habitat. (2019). *UN-Habitat at a glance*. Retrieved from https://unhabitat.org/un-habitat-at-a-glance/

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2019). *World population prospects*. New York: United Nations.

Vodden, K., Douglas, D., Markey, S., Minnes, S., & Reimer, B. (2019). *The theory, practice and potential of regional development*. London, England: Routledge.

Ward, V. (2019, March 8). *Big Reefton crows against storing waste plan*. Retrieved from https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/industries/70382411/

Wilson, D. (2011). Performative neoliberal parasitic economies: The Chicago case. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *35*(4), 691–711.

Wilson, O. J. (1995). Rural restructuring and agriculture-rural economy linkages. *Journal of Rural Studies*, *11*(4), 417–431.

Wolff, M., Haase, A., Haase, D., & Kabisch, N. (2017). The impact of urban regrowth on the built environment. *Urban Studies*, *54*(12), 2683–2700.

Wolff, M., & Wiechmann, T. (2018). Urban growth and decline: Europe's shrinking cities in a comparative perspective: 1990–2010. *European Urban and Regional Studies*, *25*(2), 122–139.

Wood, J. (2017). *Going beyond growth: Rethinking the goals of regional development in New Zealand*. Maxim Institute: Auckland.

Woods, M. (2004). *Rural geography: Processes, responses and experiences in rural restructuring*. New York: Sage.

Woods, M. (2010). *Rural*. London, England: Routledge.

Woods, M. (2011). The local politics of the global countryside: Boosterism, aspirational ruralism and the contested reconstitution of Queenstown, New Zealand. *GeoJournal*, *76*(4), 365–381.

Yardley, M. (2019, March 11). *Mining its own rich history*. Accessed from https://www.odt.co.nz/lifestyle/travel/mining-its-own-rich-history

Zirul, C., Halseth, G., Markey, S., & Ryser, L. (2015). Struggling with new regionalism. *Journal of Rural and Community Development*, *10*(2), 136–165.

How to cite this article: Nel E, Connelly S, Stevenson T. New Zealand's small town transition: The experience of demographic and economic change and place based responses. *N Z Geog*. 2019;75: 163–176. https://doi.org/10.1111/nzg.12240