

Case study: Hallett, South Australia

Hallett is small community in South Australia, 200km north of the state capital, Adelaide and is situated in pastoral country dominated by grain production and known as one of Australia's prime sheep stud areas. There are just over 200 residents in the Hallett district, and while Hallett has never been a substantial urban centre, its population has declined over the past six decades as farming properties have grown larger and retailing and other services have contracted to larger towns.

Beginning in the 2000s Hallett began to attract significant numbers of professionals living and working in Adelaide who bought homes as a weekend retreat or for 'tree change' lifestyles. These new arrivals took up homes that might otherwise have lain empty, but the partial occupancy of those with weekend retreats has created challenges for a town that has experienced considerable industry and community change, as well as falling demand for the goods and services it offered. Weekenders are not well connected to the community and therefore do not contribute their knowledge and skills, as well as spending their money on consumables elsewhere.

However, the majority of new arrivals into Hallett either commute or telecommute and have brought with them new perspectives and skill sets. They have represented an injection of human capital, with the capacity to mobilise resources in new, and innovative ways (see Beer and Clower 2014; Sotarotua and Beer 2017).

In the 2000s, newly-arrived residents joined with long-term citizens of Hallett to revitalise the Community Management Committee set up years before by the Regional Council. With the goal of ensuring the future and vibrancy of the town, this diverse group came together to map out a new future, one not dependent on the historical legacy of wool and grain production and associated industries.

The Community Management Committee monitors homes and businesses for sale and actively promotes new resident and business attraction via its website, social media and networks. When faced with closure of its main businesses (general store and hotel), it investigated the option of running these as social enterprise or community-owned ventures until they could attract new owners. This ensured the survival of an essential local resource, one of the primary drivers for the town's on-going existence.

The Community Management Committee also recognised Hallett had a future as part of the 'experience economy' and as of September 2019 it has secured nearly \$1m in government grants to:

- Make Hallett a Recreation Vehicle-friendly town, with facilities – water supply, sewerage, free sites - for 'grey nomads' and others travelling Australia;
- Engage with the National Landscapes program to feature Hallett as part of a Flinders Ranges tourism experience;
- Upgrade the Hallett Recreation Ground to make it a more attractive destination for individuals and groups choosing to explore the local environment;
- Promote Hallett as a point of departure for those walking or riding the mid-section of the 1,200km long Heysen trail or the 300km Mawson trail;
- Engage with the Aboriginal heritage of the area through the development of physical assets that reflect the story of the Ngadjuri

- Provide a picnic area in the centre of town to encourage travellers to stop and visit town businesses;
- Promote horse riding in and around the region;
- Develop the Bowling Club into a multi-use sport and recreation facility that incorporates bowls, tennis, playgroup and regular Family Night events and,
- In keeping with Chapter 7 of *Globalization, Planning and Local Economic Development*, establish a website (<https://www.hallettmidnorth.com/>) that continues to promote Hallett as a short and long term destination, and provides a portal for communicating with its people. As one of the area's residents and key agents for change explains: 'The website has been a key point of difference for potential new residents deciding to choose Hallett above other towns. Many ring me before committing to buy in Hallett (my number is provided on the site), and all say that the website was an important part of their decision as it provided behind the scenes information and showed that we were a contemporary community and hence less of a culture shock moving from a city to a small town. Consequently we are attracting active, engaged and skilled people.'



Horse riding: a passion for some, and a potential industry base for small towns