A longitudinal analysis of residential mobility from 1991-2017: Understanding generational patterns and inter-relationships

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This phase of the Life-Patterns program has continued the tradition of a strong participatory approach to research, through regular written and verbal feedback by participants, which shaped the progress and outcomes of the research program. We deeply appreciate the generosity, willing engagement and honesty of our participants.
THE LIFE PATTERNS RESEARCH PROGRAM

The Life Patterns research program is a longitudinal mixed-methods panel program that is designed to follow people’s lives over time to gain an understanding of the ways in which two generations of Australians are responding to our rapidly changing world (Tyler, Cuervo & Wyn, 2011). The program is based at the Youth Research Centre, in the University of Melbourne’s Graduate School of Education.

The generosity and ongoing support of the Life Patterns participants has meant that this study has built a unique picture of the reality of the lives of two generations.

Our focus here is on the generation that left secondary school in 1991, who are now 43-44 years old. However, the final section of the report also draws on data collected from the generation who left school in 2006 and are currently aged 29-30.

The Life Patterns program:

- follows two generations of Australians - one that left secondary school in 1991 (corresponding to the popular notion of ‘Gen X’, and here addressed as cohort 1); and another that left secondary school in 2006 (corresponding to the popular notion of ‘Gen Y’ or the ‘Millennials’, and here addressed as cohort 2). Multiple comparisons can be made between the two cohorts across different points in their lives. It is important to mention, however, that cohort 1 participants were recruited from Victorian secondary schools, while cohort 2 participants were recruited from secondary schools in Victoria, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania.

- explores the pathways through different areas of life taken by Australian young people including their experiences in education, the labour market, their family and personal relationships, attitudes to life, concerns, and health and wellbeing.

- allows for insights to be drawn that feed into policy advice and public debate and our work is often in the media disputing the simplistic claims about young people.

- was designed to follow patterns in young people’s lives over time to gain more than a static glimpse. We are interested in developing a more dynamic picture of young people’s lives rather than a single snapshot in time.

- surveyed cohort 1 every year from 1991-1999, every two years since the year 2000, and every three years in the 2010s. A subset of 30-50 participants are interviewed every two to three years. Cohort 2 are surveyed annually and a small subset of 30-50 participants are interviewed every second year.

The Life Patterns project is ongoing, thanks to the continued engagement of the participants, and the support of the University of Melbourne and the Australian Research Council through several discovery program grants (e.g. DP160101611, DP1094132).
INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the residential mobility patterns of participants in cohort 1 of the Life Patterns study over the period spanning 1991 to 2017. It focuses on those who remain in the study in 2017, using data collected over the preceding 26 years to trace their places of residence over this period. The term ‘residential mobility’ refers to changes or movements in individuals’ primary place of residence. It therefore captures a specific type of mobility; it is concerned with the experience of moving house or relocating to a new suburb or town, rather than with, for instance, temporary overseas travel or international migratory movements.

By focusing on residential mobility, the research underpinning this report aligns with the strong focus on mobility that has emerged in the social sciences in recent decades, conceptualised as a ‘mobilities turn’ (Urry, 2007). It also sits within the long-running tradition of neighbourhood studies which have focused on how belonging is formed and experienced in relation to specific places (Antonsich, 2010; Watt & Smets, 2014). However, research in these areas has focused predominantly on movement and relocation, paying less attention to individuals who are not mobile (for some notable exceptions see Clark & Lisowski, 2017 and Hjälm, 2014). The findings of this report address this under-researched area by considering Life Patterns participants who have remained in the same areas for much of their lives alongside those who have relocated. In so doing, this report compares those who have been mobile to those who have not with the aim of uncovering some of the factors that may correspond with various experiences and patterns of residential mobility. In sum, identifying the mobility, and non-mobility, patterns of this generation contributes to understanding processes of social change over the last quarter of a century.

Section 1 of the report begins by presenting an overall picture of the Life Patterns participants in cohort 1; their gender division, labour force participation, level of educational attainment and relationship types. This information is used to compare the Life Patterns participants to wider members of their age group living in Victoria. By showing how the Life Patterns participants match up, this section illustrates some of the ways in which the information presented in this report may be representing some specific experiences, while speaking less to others.

Section 2 provides an overview of the Life Patterns participants’ residential mobility patterns. The participants are divided into nine groups in order to represent their movements between three different regions of Victoria: urban, regional, and rural. The participants’ residential mobility between 1991 and 2017 is compared to the region in which they expected to live by 2001 when they were asked in 1996.

Section 3 addresses the residential mobility experiences of those in regional and rural areas (including those who lived in regional and rural areas in 1991, and those who moved to these areas by 2017). The participants who have lived in a rural or regional area are compared based on their mobility experiences in relation to demographic attributes such as gender and level of educational attainment. While acknowledging the way in which factors such as education and employment function as ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors, this section also focuses on motives for staying in and leaving rural and regional places related to experiences of belonging and identification with place.

Section 4 considers the participants who lived in urban areas when they completed secondary school in 1991 and remained there in 2017. It is found that many of these participants (32%) were living in the same suburb in 1991 and 2017. Based on this finding, the participants who remained in their 1991 suburb are compared to those who relocated to neighbouring suburbs, as well as those who moved further afield with the aim of identifying some correlates or determinates of these mobility experiences.

Section 5 of the report considers whether the residential mobility patterns experienced by cohort 1 have begun to be replicated by the participants in cohort 2, who were aged 28-29 in 2017. Focusing on those who lived in Melbourne in 2005 when they entered the study in their second-last year of secondary school and remained there in 2017, it is found that, compared to the cohort 1 participants at age 28-29 in 2002, the younger group are less likely to have remained in the same suburb, and are less likely to have entered into the housing market. While the cohort 2 participants appear to have similar desires and priorities when compared to the participants in cohort 1, they are nevertheless constrained in their ability to meet them, and are ultimately not ‘on track’ to replicate the residential mobility experiences of the older cohort.
The participants in cohort 1 of the Life Patterns study completed secondary school in 1991 and were aged 42-43 in 2017. Although the original sample recruited into the study in 1991 were selected with the intention of representing their wider age cohort with respect to demographic considerations such as gender, location and socioeconomic status (SES), the participants who remained in the study in 2017 no longer reflected the wider population. Attrition – the way in which participants drop out of research projects over time – is one of the key challenges associated with longitudinal research (Tyler, Cuervo & Wyn, 2011). However, while our Life Patterns cohort might not express or reflect a perfectly symmetrical picture to that of the overall population, their stories certainly resonate with those of many members of Generation X in Victoria, Australia and beyond.

This section of the report shows how the participants in cohort 1 of the Life Patterns study compare to their more general age cohort within Victoria with the aim of indicating the types of experiences that may be over or under represented in this report. Using census data collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in 2016, the Life Patterns participants, aged 42-43 in 2017, are compared to the general population of Victoria at age 42 in 2016.

Although gender division was relatively even when the participants were recruited into the study in 1991, by 2017 more than two thirds of the participants were women due to higher rates of attrition among the male participants. By comparison, in 2016, 51% of 42-year-olds living in Victoria were female, and 49% were male.

The Life Patterns participants were also, on average, more educated than the general population of Victoria. They were significantly more likely to have a tertiary degree, and more than four times more likely than the wider population to have a postgraduate degree. The Life Patterns participants were, however, significantly less likely than their wider age cohort to have a trade qualification. However, while the Life Patterns cohort might seem over-educated compared to national counterparts, their active post-secondary school educational experiences contribute to analysis of the concerning weakening nexus between education and work (Brown, Lauder & Ashton, 2010; Cuervo & Wyn, 2011).

The Life Patterns participants were not significantly more likely than members of their wider age cohort to be working full time. They were, however, more likely to be working part time, and less likely to not be in the labour force (meaning that they were not employed and were not looking for work, usually due to caring commitments). These differences can be explained by the relatively high proportion of the Life Patterns participants who were combining part time work with caring responsibilities.

Figure 1. Highest level of education attainment for Life Patterns participants and Victorians aged 42 in 2016 (in %) Source: ABS (2016).
Figure 2. Labour force participation for Life Patterns participants and Victorians aged 42 in 2016 (in %) Source: ABS (2016).

There was very little difference in the relationship statuses of the Life Patterns participants when compared to their wider age cohort. Each were equally likely to be married, living in a de facto relationship, or not married (which included those who were single and those who were in a relationship but not cohabiting).

Figure 3. Relationship and marital status for Life Patterns participants and Victorians, aged 42, in 2016 (in %) Source: ABS (2016).

Overall the most significant differences between the Life Patterns participants and their Victorian peers in the year 2016, at the age of 42, were in relation to their gender division and level of educational attainment. While it is important to keep these factors in mind while reading this report, it is also necessary to be mindful of the aims of the report. This report is seeking to consider some of the reasons why individuals may stay in or leave their local area and through this to explain the potential relationship between specific factors (for instance, family composition) and residential mobility. As such, it is not of primary importance that it draws upon data collected from a sample which is directly representative of the wider population (Gobo, 2004). Rather, it aims to present factors that can possibly explain why individuals stay in or move out of their neighbourhoods, cities and towns.
2. RESIDENT MOBILITY PATTERNS

This section addresses the Life Patterns participants’ residential movements between 1991 and 2017. It begins by dividing the participants into three main regions: urban, regional and rural. The participants selected the region that aligned with their 2017 place of residence in the survey that they completed that year. Their selections were verified by the researchers for the sake of consistency, and broadly aligned with the following categorisations: ‘urban’ referred to metropolitan Melbourne, ‘regional’ referred to regional centres with a population between 10,000-99,000, and ‘rural’ referred to the remaining areas which had populations of less than 10,000. In 1991 almost two thirds of the participants lived in Melbourne, while the remaining third were divided between rural and regional areas. However, by 2017 the proportion of the Life Patterns participants living in rural areas had almost halved, while slightly more were living in regional areas. Exactly the same proportion were living in Melbourne, and a small percentage had moved either interstate or overseas, creating a new mobility category.

Although the number of Life Patterns participants living in urban, regional and rural areas in 1991 and 2017 were relatively similar, this did not mean that most of the participants in each of these locations simply did not move over this period. A total of 68% of the participants remained in their 1991 region in 2017 while the remaining 32% relocated to a different region over this period. That is, 26 years later, at least two-thirds of participants were living in the same place in which they grew up. The proportion that stayed in and moved between each region is represented below (see Figure 5).
People choose to move to new areas for many reasons, such as education, employment and lifestyle opportunities. Some of these reasons can be anticipated, allowing moves to be planned far in advance, while others may be unexpected or may be the product of quick decisions. In a survey administered in 1996, when the participants were aged 22, they were asked ‘where do you expect to be living five years from now?’ They were provided with the following response categories: Melbourne, another capital city, a regional area, overseas, a mixture, and other. Interestingly, the participants’ anticipated 2001 locations provided a relatively accurate prediction of their 2017 residential locations.

Overall the greatest degree of predictive accuracy was apparent among those who expected to be living in Melbourne by 2001. Eighty-three per cent of those who lived in Melbourne in 1991 and remained there in 2017 predicted that this would be the case. Although it can be questioned whether those who anticipated remaining in Melbourne appeared to predict their residential mobility more accurately than those who were living in rural and regional areas due to the popular valorisation of urban areas (Farrugia, 2016) this did not appear to be the case. Sixty-seven per cent of those who stayed in rural areas and 37% of those who stayed in regional areas anticipated that they would live in a regional part of Victoria in 2001. While the highest degree of predictive accuracy is reflected among the participants who lived in urban areas in 1991 and remained in these areas in 2017, we can see that almost seven out of ten of those who lived in rural areas in both 1991 and 2017 predicted staying in them when asked in 1996 despite the education, work and lifestyle opportunities offered by the metropolis. This reveals a strong desire to remain rural, and connected to people and places that matter to them, contrasting with policy and media discourses that stigmatise rural youth who do not leave their home-communities as ‘failures’ (see Geldens, 2007).
3. PARTICIPANTS LIVING IN RURAL AND REGIONAL AREAS

Life Patterns cohort 1 participants were the first generation of Australians for whom the expectation to continue with further and higher education after school became a norm (Cuervo & Wyn, 2011). This normative expectation, combined with the lack of regional further education institutions, often meant that migration to a metropolitan centre was the only option for regional and rural young people who wished to continue with more formal studies after schooling (Cuervo & Wyn, 2012). This was the case for many of the participants reflected in Figure 6, who migrated to Melbourne from rural and regional towns. As noted previously, the rural population of Life Patterns participants halved over the period 1991-2017 with many of them moving after school searching for education and employment opportunities.

We found a strong gender differentiation among those who remained living in rural communities in terms of their occupations. Male participants found work in rural areas in traditionally ‘male’ occupations, such as farming, agricultural business, engineering and trades. Some of the female participants made a living in the incipient service sector that expanded through some rural areas (e.g. retail sales, hospitality and tourism) and in some traditional occupations for women in rural places such as nursing, childcare and teaching. A small portion of the female participants found other professional jobs (e.g. senior scientist, psychologist), pointing to the expansion of rural Victoria from a landscape of production (e.g. farming) to one of amenities (e.g. service sector) and protection (e.g. environment) (see Holmes, 2006).

However, despite the range of occupations pursued by the female participants living in rural areas in 2017, it appears that the perception that rural areas offer a limited range of occupational choices for women was a factor in the decisions of some of the participants who lived in rural areas in 1991 to not only relocate to urban areas for further education, but to remain in these areas when their education was complete. For instance, in a 2012 interview one participant who moved from a rural to an urban place in the early 1990s reflected:

*If I had studied something like teaching or nursing, I could have worked easily in the country, I wouldn’t have been looking to move, but those careers didn’t appeal to me.*

![Figure 6. Residential mobility between 1991 and 2017 by gender (in %)](image)
Our general sample, and even the rural part of it, were more educated than their wider age cohort. However, the rural participants nevertheless achieved less educational credentials than their urban peers. This spatial difference reflects the lack of tertiary educational institutions on offer to the non-metropolitan members of Generation X living in Victorian in the early to mid-1990s. A national study conducted in 1999 to identify the reasons why rural youth did not continue with further and higher education mentioned financial reasons as the main obstacle (James et al., 1999).

In 2012 we interviewed 19 participants who lived in rural areas in 1991 and remained living in them at that time. The aim was to ask the participants to reflect upon their decisions over the 20 years after leaving school in 1991. The decision to relocate to continue with further and higher education, or even find employment, is never taken easily by rural young people (Cuervo, 2014; Kenway, Kraack & Hickey-Moody, 2006). It requires not only financial resources but emotional support as rural young people have to re-create their communities and social networks in places foreign to them.

Some participants were able to continue with further and higher education, which in many instances meant relocating to another town or city. Some participants stayed with relatives or friends of their families in the new metropolitan places. Other rural participants in cohort 1 mentioned how during their metropolitan university years they tried to remain close to “country-minded people” forming a “surrogate community” that enabled them to remain connected to their roots.

Other participants, however, were not able to make this transition. One female participant who has stayed in the same rural town all her life, reflected in 2012:

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I mean I was good at school and got good marks, I could have gone on to primary school teaching but finance was always a problem with my family and they couldn’t afford to send me anywhere.

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Other participants stated that they wish they had the same amount of tertiary educational institutions in the early and mid-1990s as the current generation of regional youth enjoy now: “Nowadays there are more TAFEs around, back in the 90s, you had to move to Bendigo or Ballarat or Melbourne for that”. Nonetheless, an important message coming out of the 2012 interviews was that rural participants who stayed
rural, valued their connections to people, places and landscapes (Cuervo & Wyn, 2012). Some participants moved to Melbourne or Adelaide to continue tertiary studies but chose to pursue careers that would allow them to return and find work in rural places (e.g. nursing, teaching, agricultural studies). Other participants mentioned that they did not want to leave their families, or their partner at that time, or that they did not have a strong enough social network outside of their local community to consider the possibility of relocating to a metropolitan centre.

We were impressed with the participants’ attachment to landscapes (e.g. the beach, trees, a certain type of flora) and how these attachments helped to imbue in them a sense of belonging. For instance, one participant placed landscape and family at the core of his conceptualisation of belonging:

The familiarity of the landscape and the surroundings, and having family and old friends nearby.

Many of the comments that the participants made in the 2012 interviews have continued to be reflected in the survey data over the intervening years. For instance, in the 2017 survey the following participant offered an interesting reflection on their reasons for staying in a rural town:

Interesting, I often wonder what life would have been like for me living in a city. I feel like country life has held me back over the years. I think academically I would have prospered so many more options and socially too. However, family commitments were always my priority and my ever so strong relationship with my grandparents was my reason to stay put. So, I don’t regret that and now my mother seems to need me so I guess that is a reason to stay. Plus, I do enjoy my job and can’t really picture working anywhere else.

As we have stated elsewhere (Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Cuervo & Wyn, 2017), in our interviews, we found that rural participants have always gone to great lengths to explain their residential choices. In some ways, in our increasingly urban world, with urban lives taken as the norm, it might not be surprising that rural people feel the need to explain their life-choices against the urban normative. Overall, we found over the years that those participants that chose to remain regional and rural have expressed a great satisfaction with their lives and a deep sense of belonging to people and places that underpin their sense of purpose in life. Their satisfaction defies “deficit” views of rural life, always as disadvantaged or backwards places compared to progressive and modern urban spaces.

In comparing their attachment to family and landscape or familiar surroundings we do not find important differences between the rural participants and their urban counterparts (see section 4). Members of this generation, be that those living in urban, regional or rural places, have strived to belong to people and places that matter to them as a priority in their lives growing up in times of rapid social change. The difference lies in the continuous policy and media messages that position urban places as plentiful of opportunities while rural ones are perceived as declining. The economic rationalist policies of the Victorian government of the 1990s (Cuervo & Wyn, 2012), with its closure of public services such as schools, hospitals and postal services, followed by the closure of private services (e.g. banks, supermarkets) did not help young people to make a living.

Nonetheless, our participants use tertiary education to find employment opportunities to remain rural, and seek both family support and the presence of familiar landscapes to experience a sense of belonging to places that make life meaningful for them.
4. PARTICIPANTS LIVING IN URBAN AREAS

The bulk of the participants were living in metropolitan Melbourne when they completed secondary school in 1991 and remained there in 2017. Specifically, of the 256 participants remaining in the study in 2017, 139 lived in Melbourne in 1991 and remained there by 2017. However, out of those who remained, a large proportion lived not just in the same city in which they resided at the end of secondary school, but in the same suburb. Out of the 139 participants who lived in Melbourne in both 1991 and 2017, 45 remained in the same suburb, 60 lived between 1-10km away, and 34 lived 11-50km away. This means that, after 26 years, 75% of participants have remained living within less than 10kms of their place of residence in 1991. This reveals a very low level of residential mobility for our urban participants.

While comparing the participants who fit into each of these residential mobility categories it became evident that there were few differences between them. The participants in each category (same suburb, between 1-10km, and between 11-50km) had similar levels of educational attainment, similar rates of employment, employment contract type and average hours worked per week, and a similar proportion in each category were parents.

The most notable difference between each group emerged while comparing who they were living with. Eighteen per cent of the 45 participants living in the same suburb in which they resided in 1991 were living with their child or children as a single parent compared to one per cent of those living between 1-10km away from the suburb in which they grew up, and none of those living between 11-50km away.

These findings indicate that proximity to sources of intergenerational support is likely to be a consideration in individuals’ decisions about where to live, and that this was especially the case for single parent households. This interpretation is, indeed, supported by several comments that the participants made in open response sections of our last survey wave in 2017. The importance of family support in allowing one to balance various commitments alongside parenting was identified by several participants. For instance, a mother of two...
who worked part time and whose husband worked full time stated:

*Family support plays a pivotal role in allowing me to balance my work and home duties.*

Similarly, a mother of three who worked full time, and whose husband also worked full time, stated:

*With the support of extended family, we have been able to return to our careers and achieve a great balance in our lives.*

Conversely, a mother of three who worked part time, and whose husband worked full time hours on several contracts identified a lack of support from extended family as a challenge, especially when her children were younger:

*All our extended family live interstate. I found being so far from family support very difficult when my children were younger.*

However, while intergenerational support was extremely important to many of the participants, especially those who were in parenting roles, it was not unidirectional. Many of the participants identified that they provided various levels of support to older relatives. For instance, when asked to comment on any issues affecting their lives at the end of the survey one woman who worked full time and lived with a de facto partner stated:

*One of the major pressures at the moment is looking after an elderly parent. Looking after an elderly parent impacts all aspect of your life you need to have flexible work arrangements to go to doctors/specialists and to go to shopping and other outings. It also affects social/leisure activities. The responsibility of looking after elderly parents is the same/similar to caring/parenting children and is a broader issue affecting my life.*

This statement indicates that while the proximity of sources of intergenerational support appears to be a significant factor impacting upon individuals’ choices of where to live, especially among single parents, it is also likely that the choice of where to live is impacted by the desire to be close to elderly relatives who require additional support. Against analysis that portray conflict as the main issue characterising relationships between generations, over the years we have found a strong sense of intergenerational solidarity between our cohort 1 participants and their parents, revolving around the ideals of mutuality, caring and belonging (Cook & Cuervo, 2018; Cuervo & Wyn, 2012; Woodman & Wyn, 2015).

Although the desire to be close to members of their extended family appeared to impact upon many of the participants’ residential mobility decisions, it is also important to consider other factors that have been identified as key determinants of individuals’ decisions to move to or stay in specific areas, such as the appearance of the area and the proximity to amenities. For instance, when interviewed in 2012 one of the participants who grew up in Melbourne and relocated to a new suburb in early adulthood expressed the desire to return to the suburb in which she grew up as she did not like the appearance of her new area:

*I really miss the greenery, I guess. I do live on a main road in [new suburb] so I think that colours my view a bit. There’s not many nice, big, tall trees in this area and it just changes the whole feel of the suburb.*

Another participant, who had two young children identified the following reason for living in her local area:

*The primary reason for this property is it’s zoned for a good school.*

However, in addition to considerations of aesthetics and amenities, numerous studies have found that
individuals’ level of comfort in an area is also directly related to the degree to which they feel that they belong (Antonsich, 2010). While belonging can be related to the physical appearance of an area and the proximity of amenities, as well as family and friends, it is also shaped by additional factors such as the amount of time that one has spent in an area, and the resulting familiarity that they have with it.

Many of the participants identified belonging to place as important to them, even from a relatively early age. In 1998, at the age of 25, they were asked to rate the level of importance staying in their local area had to them, using the response categories ‘very high’, ‘high’, ‘medium’, and ‘low’. The urban participants in each of the three groups (those that remained in the same suburb in 1991 and 2017, those that moved 1-10km away, and those that moved 11-50km away) were more likely to rate the importance of staying in their local area as either very high or high than they were to rate it as low (see Figure 8). Indeed, a combined total of almost 40% of the participants who lived in Melbourne in both 1991 and 2017 rated the importance of staying in their local area as very high. Interesting, when the participants were considered based on their mobility patterns between 1991 and 2017, it was found that those who moved 11-50km away from their 1991 suburb were more than twice as likely to rate the importance of staying in their local area as very high when compared with those who stayed in the same suburb, and those who moved 1-10km away. By 1998 many of the participants who were in the 11-50km category had already moved away from their 1991 suburb. While these results initially appear to be somewhat contradictory, suggesting that those who relocated were least willing to do so, they can also be interpreted as suggesting that the relevance and significance of specific places becomes most evident only after one leaves them. In other words, the data suggest that the participants who had moved a significant distance (at least in the context of metropolitan Melbourne) from the suburb in which they lived at the conclusion of their secondary education were more likely to reflect on the significance of their local area than those who remained either in the same suburb or relatively nearby.

![Figure 8. Urban participants: importance of staying in local area (asked in 1998) (in %)](image)

Ultimately, the residential mobility experiences of the participants living in Melbourne in both 1991 and 2017 were shaped by a confluence of factors. The finding that multiple factors work in a complex way to shape decisions about whether to remain in or leave one’s local area is certainly not new. Indeed, much research has evidenced the way in which changes in residential mobility often occur in tandem with other life-course transitions such as completion of education, relationship formation and childbearing (Mulder & Hooimeijer, 1999). However, the significance of the data presented here lies in the fact that it highlights some of the less visible and less often acknowledged reasons why individuals might stay in their local area, such as intergenerational solidarity, the aesthetics of the area and feelings of belonging. Evidently the factors that influenced the urban participants’ desires and decisions to remain close to their local areas directly reflected those experienced by the participants living in rural and regional areas.
While section one of this report sought to contextualise the Life Patterns participants in relation to wider members of their age group living in Victoria, it is also important to consider the ways in which their experiences are positioned by the social, political and economic context in which they have lived. In order to consider the degree to which the participants’ residential mobility experiences and patterns are a product of their times, this final section of the report compares their experiences to those of members of cohort 2 of the Life Patterns study, who were aged 28-29 in 2017 and were originally (in 2005) living in Melbourne. Specifically, this section compares the experiences of cohort 1 when they were aged 28-29 in 2002 to the experiences of cohort 2 in 2017 to examine whether cohort 2 are ‘on track’ to follow the mobility patterns established by the cohort 1 participants living in Melbourne. Thus, this comparison not only sheds light on the generational ‘times’ of cohort 2 but on the social, political and economic context that cohort 1 lived in at the early years of this century.

Importantly, the participants in cohort 2 share many similarities with those in cohort 1 (Crofts et al., 2016). They are, for instance, comprised of around two thirds women, and they are significantly more educated than the wider population. While it is not possible to control for all factors when comparing two groups of individuals born at different times, the similar demographic profile of each group suggests the possibility that a comparison between them will identify similarities or differences that are reflective of the wider social context in which they each transitioned to adulthood. As stated above, in the interests of drawing an appropriate comparison this discussion is only considering the cohort 2 participants who lived in Melbourne in 2005, in their second last year of secondary school, and remained in Melbourne in 2017 at age 28-29.

When cohort 1’s residential mobility in 2002, at the age of 28-29, is compared to that of cohort 2 at the same age it is evident that the members of cohort 1 were much more likely to remain in their local area. Eighty per cent of cohort 1 participants remained in their 1991 suburb in 2002, compared to 52% of cohort 2 participants at the same age (see Figure 9).

![Comparison of cohort 1 and cohort 2 distance from address at which they lived at the end of secondary school](image)

Figure 9. Comparison of cohort 1 and cohort 2’s residential mobility: urban participants in 2002 and 2017 respectively, at the age of 28-29 (in %)
However, perhaps the most notable point of difference between the cohort 1 and cohort 2 participants living in Melbourne at the age of 28-29 was revealed by questioning whether they had entered the housing market. Although the cohort 1 participants were not asked if they were living in a house that they owned outright or were repaying a mortgage on in 2002 at the age of 28-29, meaning that a direct comparison with cohort 2 at the same point in time is not possible, they were asked if they had obtained a housing loan in 2000, when they were aged 26-27. When the cohort 2 participants’ rates of home ownership at the age of 28-29 were compared to those of cohort 1 at the age of 26-27 it was apparent that despite the two extra years, the participants in cohort 2 were far less likely to have entered the housing market. Specifically, at the age of 26-27, 40% of the cohort 1 participants living in Melbourne had obtained a housing loan, compared to 24% of the cohort 2 participants living in Melbourne at the age of 28-29.

Although it may be questioned whether the lower rates of home ownership among the cohort 2 participants reflect shifting priorities and perhaps a decline in the desire for home ownership, this did not appear to be the case for our participants. When they were asked to nominate the three most important issues facing their generation in Australia today in the 2017 survey the cohort 2 participants nominated housing affordability as one of the top three issues. Additionally, when they were asked to provide their opinions on broader issues affecting their lives the topic of housing affordability and barriers to home ownership came up frequently. The sentiment that many of these responses carried was exemplified by the following comment from a young woman living in Melbourne:

\[\text{I am largely concerned with the cost of housing as I am just renting (a small apartment). I worry that I won’t be able to afford to buy a house to live in permanently.}\]

The similarities between cohort 1 and cohort 2 were apparent not just in relation to their goal of home ownership; much like the cohort 1 participants, many of the cohort 2 participants appeared to value places that were familiar to them, and that were proximal to their families and friends. In other words, the cohort 2 participants were not just concerned about home ownership; they were concerned about their ability to own their own home in their chosen areas. For instance, in the 2017 survey when asked to write about any issues affecting their life one of the cohort 2 participants stated:

\[\text{It is sobering to know that I won’t probably have the ability to own my own home or be in the environment that I grew up with. This is a huge disadvantage for children of baby boomers. Parents don’t understand that we can’t just buy a house and live like they did. It is rather sad to know that I might not be able to have the luxury of a backyard like I did when I was growing up.}\]

This sentiment was echoed in a recent round of interviews that were conducted with a sub-set of the cohort 2 participants with the aim of adding detail and nuance to the insights gathered via the annual survey. When he was interviewed in 2017, one young man was living with his girlfriend in a property that was owned by her brother in a suburb in the northwest of Melbourne. Although both he and his girlfriend paid board to her brother, this amounted to significantly less than the cost of renting a comparable or slightly smaller property in the area. This young man and his girlfriend were both originally from a suburb in the
southeast of Melbourne, and he expressed the desire to purchase a property in this area before starting a family. While he acknowledged some benefits to his new suburb, such as access to a greater variety of lifestyles, he planned to stay in this area temporarily while saving money for a deposit for a house, and was considering purchasing a first property in this area to gain equity before purchasing a family home in his preferred suburb. When asked about his strong preference for his local area he stated:

It's where my connections are… It's where my family is. It's where [girlfriend's] family is. It's where those connections are.

Similarly, when asked how long he could imagine staying in his current suburb he replied:

[If the] housing market crashes tomorrow, I'll buy and move out. If the housing market takes a while longer, I'll probably rent and move out [of the suburb].

This young man’s experiences reflected those of many of the cohort 2 participants living in Melbourne who found themselves pushed out to ‘growth areas’ or suburbs that were cheaper than their local area when they chose to purchase a property, whether they planned to buy a property in that area in order to gain equity before relocating, or intended to remain in that area indefinitely. Reflecting on the finding that cohort 1’s residential mobility patterns were often shaped by the desire to remain in areas in which they felt that they belonged in a secure and long-term way, it is significant that such aims appear to lie increasingly outside the reach of the cohort 2 participants living in Melbourne.

Ultimately, although the cohort 2 participants appeared to desire to replicate both the residential mobility and the residential tenure patterns experienced by the cohort 1 participants, they were constrained in their ability to do so. As such, it appears that they are not ‘on track’ to replicate the patterns experienced by the participants in cohort 1. It remains to be seen what form their residential mobility experiences will take over the next 15 years.
CONCLUSION

A variety of factors come into play when thinking about residential mobility, ranging from material to emotional. The cohort 1 participants in rural, regional and urban areas were united by their dual focus on these considerations. Specifically, while financial factors related to employment, education, property prices and the availability of economic support shaped the life chances and, as a result, the residential mobility experiences of these participants, they were not the only significant factor. The residential mobility preferences and choices of the participants living in each region were also shaped by less ‘concrete’ considerations related not only to the presence of intergenerational support, but also to experiences of belonging and identification with place. However, while the significance of these considerations was evident across the regions, they took on a slightly different character in each of these places. For instance, the rural and regional participants often spoke about landscapes, while the urban participants were more likely to speak about aesthetics (i.e. ‘green’ versus ‘grey’ areas) and amenities.

Although this report highlights some of the key reasons why individuals may relocate, its findings predominantly shed light on the reasons why they may stay in or close to their local areas. While addressing the cohort 1 participants living in Melbourne we found that in 1999, at the age of 25-26, 40% of them rated the importance of staying in their local area as ‘very high’. Although the proportion of cohort 1 participants who remained in their 1991 suburb dropped from 80% in 2002 to 32% in 2017, their comments in both the survey and interview data suggest that a sense of familiarity and identification with specific places, as well as the presence of family and friends, remained centrally important to them. Ultimately, while their residential mobility experiences were shaped by a range of factors, such as considerations of school zones and responsibilities caring for elderly parents, their reflections on the importance of specific places did not appear to change greatly over time.

In the final section of the report we compared the residential mobility experiences of the cohort 1 and cohort 2 participants who were each living in Melbourne at the age of 28-29 in 2002 and 2017 respectively in order to consider whether the cohort 2 participants were ‘on track’ to replicate the residential mobility patterns experienced by cohort 1. We found that at the age of 28-29 the cohort 1 participants were more likely to be living in the same suburb in which they resided in their final year of secondary school than their cohort 2 counterparts. We also found that, at the age of 28-29, the cohort 2 participants were less likely to live in a house which they owned or were repaying a mortgage on than the cohort 1 participants were at the age of 26-27, despite the additional two years.

Notably, while the residential mobility patterns of the cohort 2 participants living in Melbourne differed from those experienced by the members of cohort 1 at the same age, this was not due to a change in their desires or priorities. Not only did the cohort 2 participants aspire to home ownership in much the same way as their cohort 1 counterparts, many of them also expressed a similar desire to remain in or near their local areas. Ultimately while the residential mobility experiences of the cohort 1 and cohort 2 participants living in Melbourne reflected several differences, they did not extend to their priorities and desires in this area, which were strikingly similar. Ultimately, we found that despite their desires for home ownership, and in many cases to remain either in or near their local area, the cohort 2 participants were not ‘on track’ to replicate the residential mobility experiences of cohort 1.
REFERENCES


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