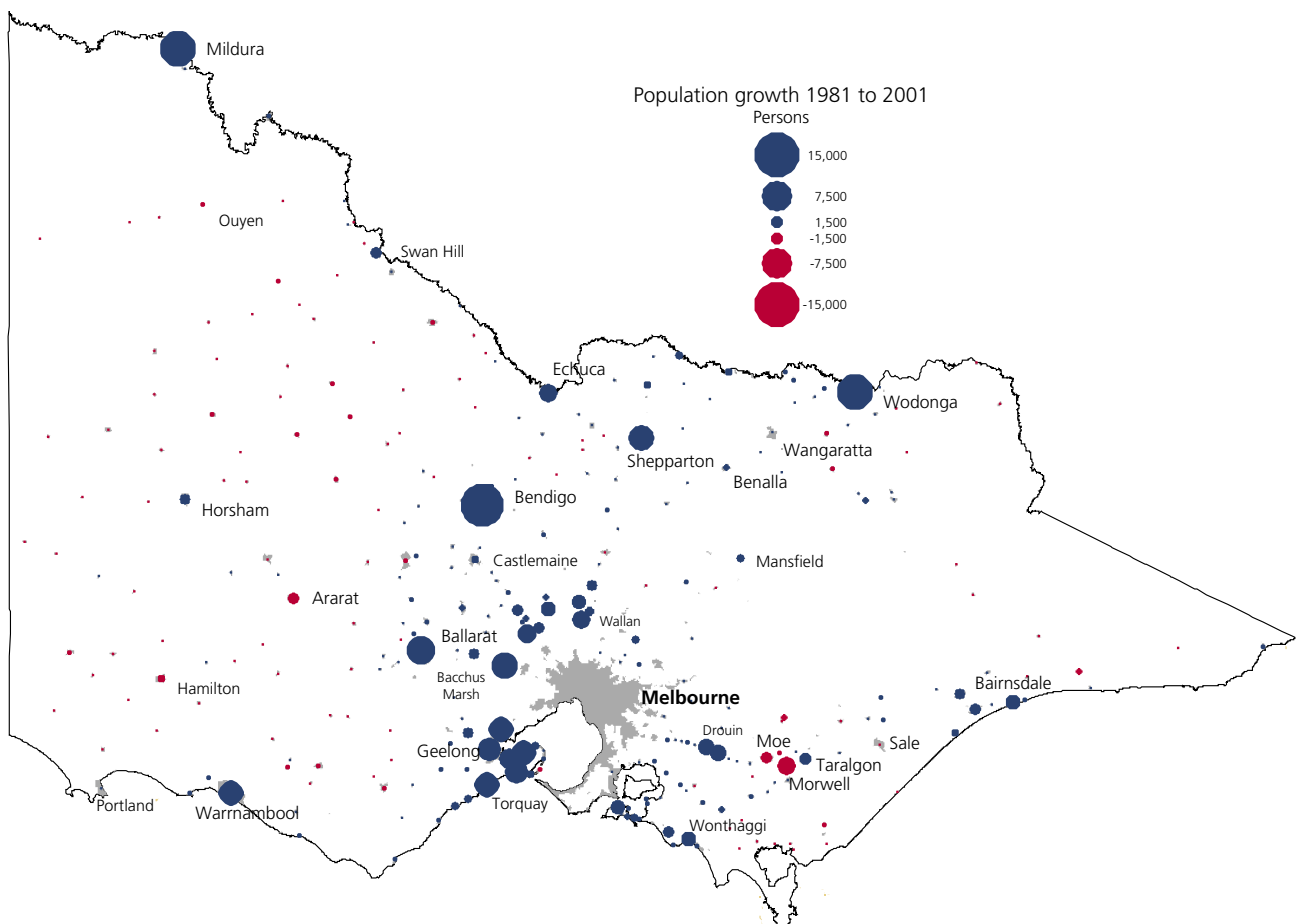


3 Regional centres

In the last intercensal period—between 1996 and 2001—almost all major regional cities returned to strong population growth. While these cities had been hit hard by the recession of the early 1990s, they reasserted themselves as the dominant centres of their regions, acting as focal points for jobs, education,

health care, retail and entertainment, and offering services not available in the smaller towns. In the 20-year period covered by *Towns in Time*, it is clear that most large regional cities in Victoria have experienced moderate to strong population growth.

Figure 3.1 Population growth in towns, 1981–2001



Source: Department of Sustainability and Environment, *Towns in Time* data.

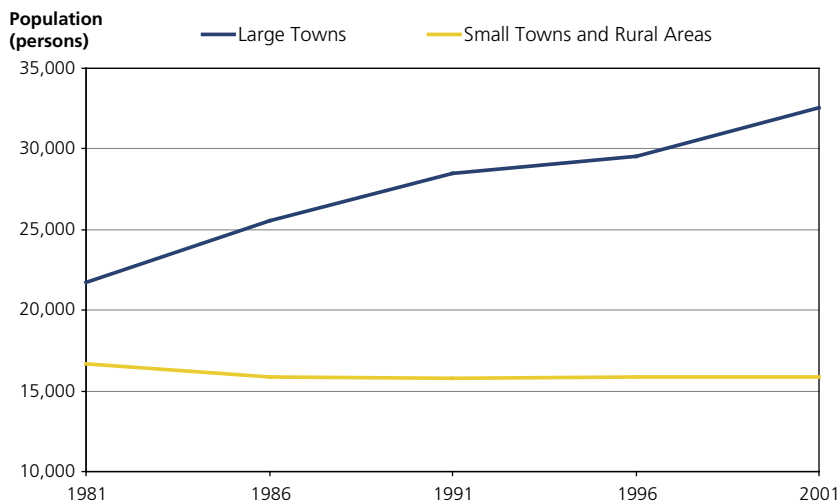


Regional centres are growing more quickly than average

The growth of the regional centres is more apparent when compared with growth in the smaller towns around them. While the following chart shows that there is some flow-on effect of the growth in regional centres in terms of growth in their hinterlands, the smaller towns beyond this influence generally have not grown nearly as strongly. The exceptions are some small towns in high amenity areas such as those on the coast or close to other natural attractions.

The main exception to this pattern has been the population losses from towns such as Moe and Morwell in the Latrobe Valley. Towns that experienced population losses during this period generally experienced them because of economic restructuring. In the Latrobe Valley, for example, major changes to the electricity generation industry and ongoing reductions in the timber industry have led to steady population losses.

Figure 3.2 Population growth, large towns, small towns and rural areas, 1981–2001



Source: Department of Sustainability and Environment, Towns in Time data.



Regional centres are attractive to a range of age groups

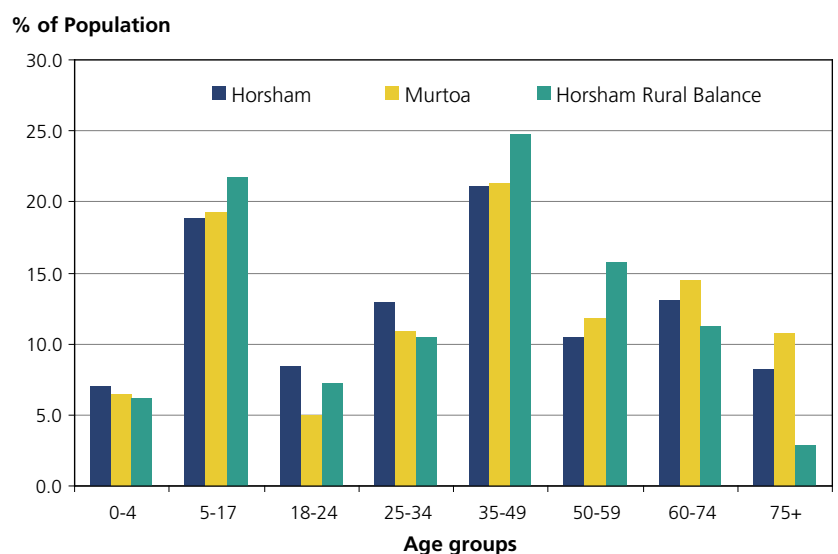
The major regional centres tend to show a more balanced age–sex profile when compared with the smaller towns and rural areas of Victoria. Because regional centres offer a greater range of services and opportunities, including employment and education, they tend to attract people across a wider range of age groups.

The normal pattern of regional areas losing a lot of population in the 18–25 age range is largely associated with young people moving away after completing secondary school or tertiary study to seek further education or job opportunities. The regional centres are, however, often able to offer some tertiary education opportunities and therefore retain their younger population better than the more remote areas and smaller towns. Figure 3.3 clearly illustrates this pattern.

Regional centres tend to have higher proportions of 18–34 year olds and lower proportions of 35–60 year olds than smaller towns, and rural areas in particular. This pattern changes in the later years, however, as many retired persons seek to live closer to family or medical facilities.

The normal pattern of migration for regional Victoria is that it gains children and adults aged over 30 years, but loses young adults, particularly those aged 18 to 25 years. While the major regional centres are more likely to retain their school leavers, there are still losses once people complete their tertiary studies.

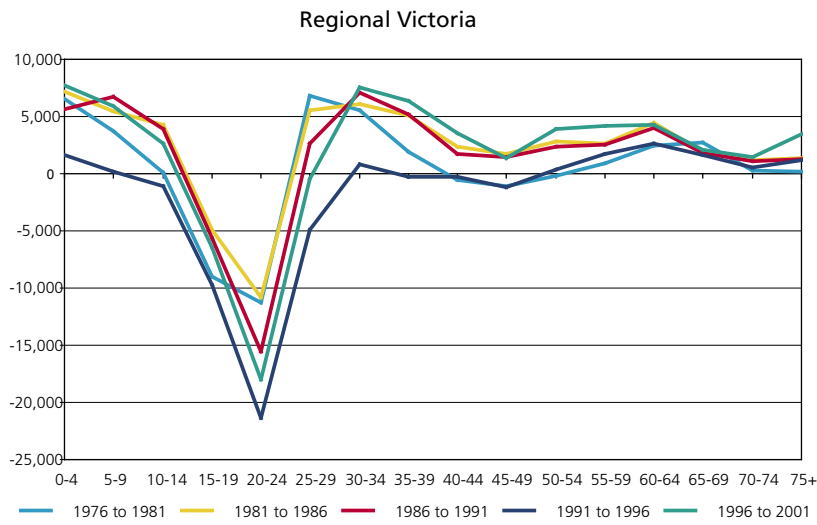
Figure 3.3 Selected age groups in Horsham, Murtoa and Horsham Rural Balance Local Government Areas, 2001



Source: Department of Sustainability and Environment, Towns in Time data.

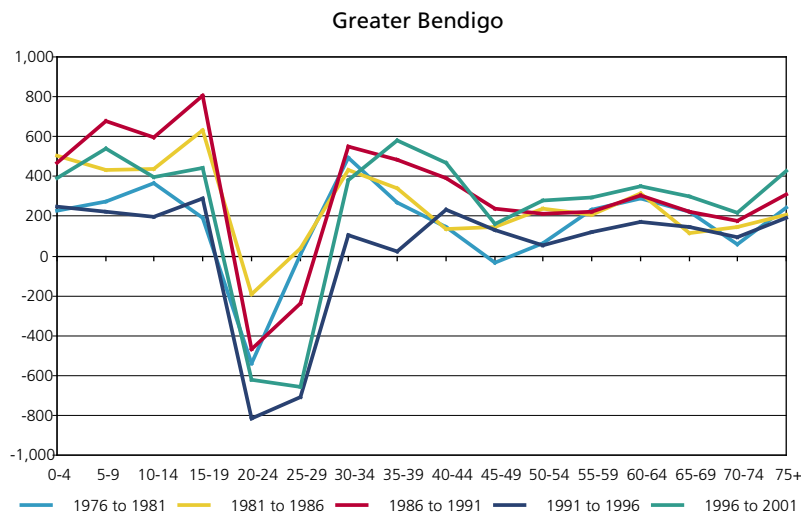


Figure 3.4 Implied net migration by age, regional Victoria, 1976–81 to 1996–2001



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 1976 to 2001; Department of Sustainability and Environment, unpublished data.

Figure 3.5 Implied net migration into the Greater Bendigo Local Government Area, 1976–81 to 1996–2001



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 1976 to 2001; Department of Sustainability and Environment, unpublished data.



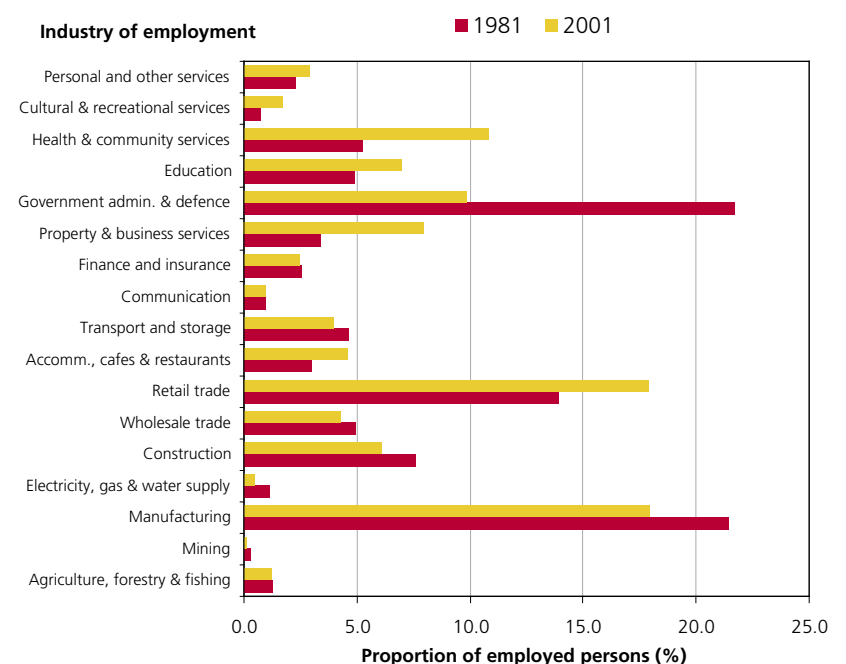
The large regional centres are becoming more diverse in their employment opportunities compared with the rest of regional Victoria

The larger Victorian regional centres generally offer more diverse employment opportunities than in the past. The following chart uses Wodonga as an example, it illustrates that there was a strong dominance of manufacturing, retail and government jobs in the highest level industry groupings in 1981. In the 20 years to 2001, employment growth was strongest in industry groupings such as education, health and community services, and property and business services. Growth in these sectors reflects

their growth across the State and in Melbourne. The chart shows that the service economy, which is growing strongly, is also witnessing growth in the retail and accommodation sectors in Wodonga.

While better employment opportunities in regional centres attract young people, especially secondary or tertiary school leavers, they are also attractive to families wanting greater job opportunities.

Figure 3.6 Change in employment by industry, Wodonga Local Government Area, 1981–2001



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census 1981 and 2001



Larger regional centres continue to attract population and services from their surrounding areas and smaller towns

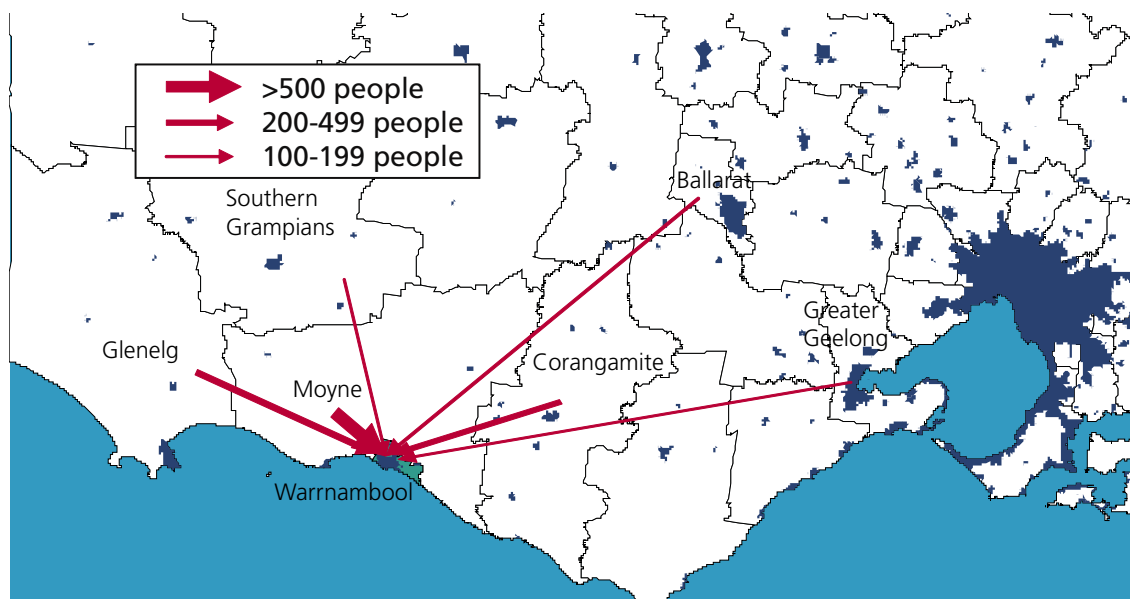
Regional centres continue to attract people from the areas around them. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the drivers behind some of this movement relates to losses of services from the smaller towns, and their consolidation into the larger regional centres. The concentration of employment opportunities in the larger regional centres means that they continue to grow, often at the expense of the smaller surrounding towns.

Looking at the five-year migration pattern for some of Victoria's largest regional areas, it is clear that most people who have moved into a large regional centre have come from the surrounding local government areas.

The illustration above shows that the largest in-migration into Warrnambool between 1996 and 2001 was from the three nearest LGAs of Moyne, Corangamite and Glenelg. Warrnambool

is also a good example of a major regional centre that both attracts population from and loses population to other major centres; Greater Geelong and Ballarat are significant sources of migrants to Warrnambool.

Figure 3.7 Migration into Warrnambool by Local Government Area, 1996–2001



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census data.



The hinterlands, or reach, of regional centres is extending

The exurban areas around metropolitan Melbourne are highly connected with the metropolitan area. The same connections exist between the major regional cities and their surrounding hinterlands.

While these connections have certain resource implications, particularly near the Victorian border where regional cities (such as Mildura, Swan Hill, Echuca and Wodonga) may be providing services for residents of New South Wales, federal funding to the States is provided on a per capita basis and uses place of residence, not place where services are accessed, to determine funding levels. Similarly, municipalities are funded at the State level using a model that includes a component of resident population. Official Australian Bureau of Statistics data is used. These current funding models may, therefore, mean that larger regional centres are providing services for residents of other municipalities because their catchment spans the borders of their own LGA.

These models can also benefit a particular municipality and increase the net economic and social benefit to the local community because of increased patronage of services and social interactions. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the implications of providing higher order services in terms of the potential catchment that some will have.



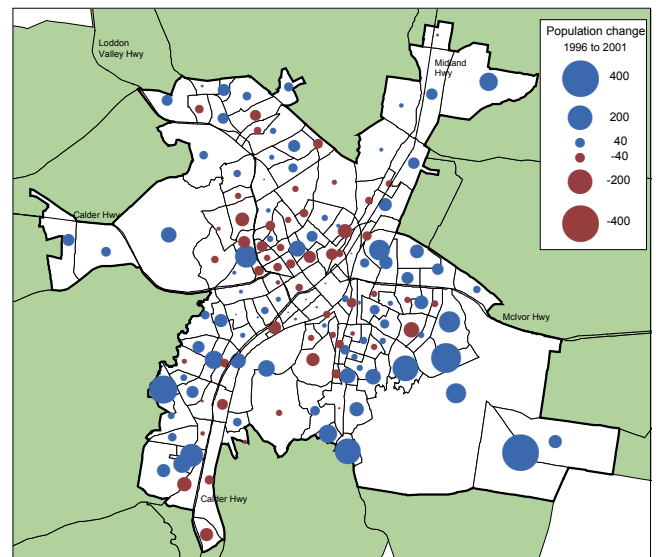


Regional centres grow in a similar pattern to larger urban areas

The larger regional centres experience diverse patterns of internal population growth and loss, just like in larger urban areas such as Melbourne and Sydney. Patterns of higher population growth are found on the fringes of these regional cities, and a mix of growth and decline is evident in established centres.

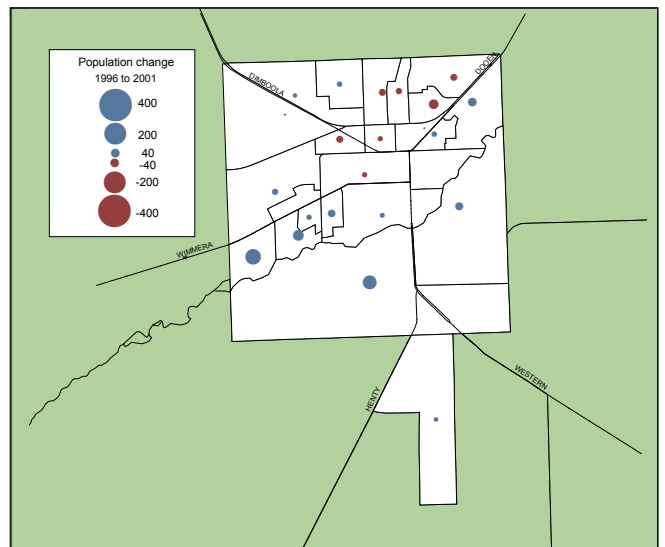
Figures 3.8 and 3.9 show that while Bendigo and Horsham are very different in terms of physical size and population, they both contain areas of population growth and population loss. This growth tends to follow normal patterns; land for new housing is available on the outskirts of towns and cities, and the established areas tend to lose population as young adults leave the family home to form their own households. In a large city such as Bendigo, an opportunity occurs for some inner city regeneration to take place, as is evidenced by some of the growing census collection districts.

Figure 3.8 Population growth in Bendigo, by census collection district, 1996–2001



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001 Census data.

Figure 3.9 Population growth in Horsham by census collection district, 1996–2001



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1996 and 2001 Census data.