

Rural and Urban Dynamics in the Eastern Cape Karoo

A preliminary investigation over 100 years

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The Karoo

The Karoo is semi-arid area of some 400 000 km² situated in the central and western interior of South Africa. It can be considered as a single eco-system, sub-divided into the winter rainfall Succulent Karoo and the summer rainfall Nama Karoo (Rutherford and Westfall, 1986; Archer, 2004). It is characterised by a low population density and an economy dominated by extensive rangeland agriculture. Urban settlements are widely dispersed and generally developed to service the farming, religious and administrative needs of the scattered farming communities. It is a region with an obvious west-east environmental gradient and has been subject to significant fluctuations in its economic fortunes, which have impacted on the area's demography and its towns.



Context:

The Karoo is often perceived as being an area:

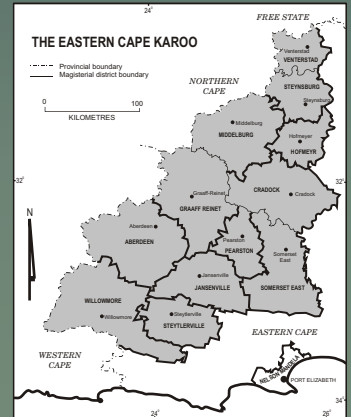
- in economic and demographic decline,
- marginalized through its division into four provinces,
- an area with limited economic potential, which may affect its future funding status in terms of the South African government's National Spatial Development Framework,
- in agricultural decline,
- with a denuded landscape and,
- with assumed small town decline.

The challenges are to identify:

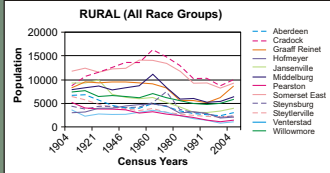
- relevant data sources to test these assertions over time, relative to spatial variation, bearing in mind limitations with census data.
- key indicators to track change over time which reflect demographic and economic trends.
- causal factors.

The Case Study: Why the Eastern Cape Karoo ?

- comparable data-sets over an extended time period
- it is an interface zone between different bio-physical biomes
- there is an apparent west-east economic, demographic and environmental gradient
- it contains towns of varying population size and function
- it is commonly recognised as being the 'Karoo Heartland'

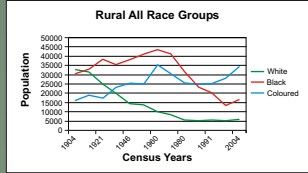


1. Is the rural population in decline ?



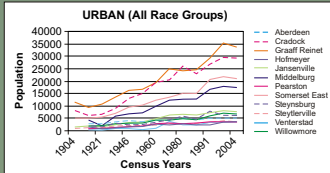
Yes, there has been a 30% decline in the rural population since 1904, however all districts remained relatively constant till the 1960s, where-after they experienced a marked decline (36% to 2004).

3. Are there differing racial trends ?

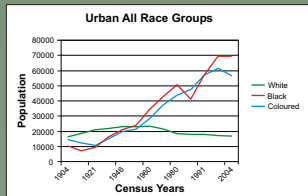


There has been a declining white rural population since 1904 (83% decline over 100 years). Rising and then (since 1960) declining black rural populations (62% decline over the last 44 years). A variable trend in the case of the coloured rural population, which has recently become the dominant rural group (with a 109% increase since 1904).

2. Is the urban population in decline ?

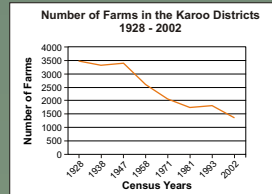


No, the urban population in the district rose by 240% from 1904 to 2004 there has been a marked (between 100-160%) growth since 1970. However in 'larger' district towns i.e. those with more than 15 000 people in 2004 (Graaff Reinet, Middelburg, Somerset East and Cradock) growth is more evident due to: their larger initial population size, more diverse economy and the role they play as district centres. For example a 45% population growth has been experienced in Graaff Reinet since 1970.



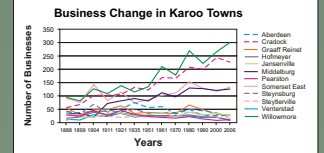
The white urban population has increased (by 45% from 1904 to 1960) to a maximum in 1960 and subsequently has declined (by 30%) to the present. Urban blacks have increased 545% over a 100 year time span. Urban coloureds have increased 281% over a 100 year time span.

4. What is happening in the agricultural hinterland of Karoo towns ?



There has been an obvious decline in the total number of farms (by 60% since 1928), however the area under agricultural production has remained constant, showing only a 2.5% decline from 1938 to 1993, with land under agricultural production being 5.24 million hectares.

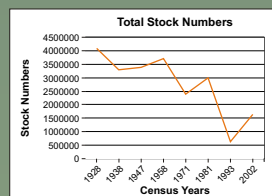
5. Are urban centres experiencing business loss ?



The four larger centres (Graaff Reinet, Cradock, Middelburg and Somerset East) have experienced a significant, and generally uninterrupted, increase in the number of businesses since 1888 (192% increase on average). The most dramatic growth has been in Cradock which experienced a 312% increase.

The eight smaller centres, while showing some variation, tend to have fewer businesses in 2006 than they had in 1888.

Most small towns experienced business growth till the 1920s and 1930s, where-after decline set in (a 55% decline from 1921-2006).



Total stock numbers have declined since 1928 by 60% (and 87% in the case of Venterstad), as well as there being a 43% decline in the number of livestock units (LSUs) per hectare. The low 1993 figures reflect the severe drought of that year.

Market price fluctuations, increased game farming and changed farming practises also account for declining stock numbers.



General Findings:

The larger towns (+ 15 000 in 2004) are experiencing significant population and business growth. Smaller centres (-15 000 in 2004) are experiencing business loss, and limited population growth. The white population is in absolute decline, especially in rural districts, while the coloured and black urban population is increasing, the only population group increasing in rural areas is that of the coloureds.

In terms of agriculture, the absolute number of farms are in decline, whilst the area under production has remained constant, inferring that average farm sizes are increasing (which has implications in terms of the decreasing number of farmers and labourers).

Overall stock numbers and the LSUs/ha have declined.

Future Potential Research:

To extend the analysis throughout the Karoo eco-system.

To compare perceived landscape denudation to shifts in agricultural production.

To ascertain the impact of changes in agriculture on town economies.

The impact of provincial policies and national economic and political change on the Karoo.

What are the current population migration trends (i.e. rural to small town, rural to out of district, town to town etc.).

Are towns experiencing functional change from being agricultural service centres to other activities and if so, what are they ?

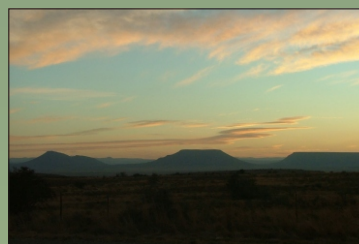
Are there new rural functions emerging e.g. is there a shift to specialist crops or to new activities such as tourism and game farming and if so, what is their impact ?

To provide a socio-economic framework to parallel the well established bio-physical arid areas research programme in South Africa.

To compare trends in the Karoo with other semi-arid areas in the world.

References

- Archer. E.R.M., 2004: Beyond the 'climate versus grazing impasse', *Journal of Arid Environments*, 57, 381-408.
- Rutherford, M.C., and Westfall, R.H., 1986: Biomes of Southern Africa - an objectives categorization, *Memoirs of the Botanical Survey of South Africa*, 54, 1-98.



Data Sources

- Commercial Directories: 1888-2006
 Global Insight southern Africa, 2004: Regional Economic Explorer. Ricon (Pty) Ltd: Johannesburg
 Republic of South Africa: Population Census: 1904-1981
 Union of South Africa and Republic of South Africa: Agricultural Census: 1928-2002

NOTES

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