During times of community change, familiar sources of information feel more trustworthy

August 7 2013

Increases in population size may lead to a breakdown in social trust, according to Jordan Smith from North Carolina State University in the US. As local populations grow, local elected officials and national news media become less trusted, compared with friends and family, local churches and civic institutions. This 'trust deficit' has implications for long-term environmental and community planning. Smith's study is published online in Springer's journal *Human Ecology*.

Smith studied three southern Appalachian mining communities during a period of change, amid growing controversy over the expansion of amenity-based industries (such as tourism and recreation areas), as well as its impact on both the environment and local communities. The expansion of these industries inevitably leads to rapid increases in population.

Smith was particularly interested in the levels of social trust within these communities where conflict is likely to exist between long-term residents who tend to be more concerned about 'their' community, and incoming residents who are more transitory and less vested in community affairs.

All three communities have transitioned from a natural resource-based economy to a service economy, demonstrated by a steady decline in natural resource-related jobs and a dramatic increase in the types of employment associated with amenity-based communities. This steep rise in population has inevitably changed how residents interact and communicate with one another.

By and large, residents in each of the three communities tended to trust the information they received from immediate family members, churches, close friends, and local newspapers more than information coming from other sources. The least trusted information comes from elected officials, national television news, online news sources and co-workers.

The analyses also suggest that population density itself is not related to the structure of information networks or the level of trust or distrust within them.

Smith concludes: "As resource-dependent communities continue to grow, residents will increasingly look for familiar faces when trying to get information. This in effect reaffirms already held attitudes and beliefs. Conflicts associated with amenity transition are more likely to arise because of conflicting values and ideologies, rather than social structural changes in the community. The road ahead for environmental and community planners is likely to be difficult as they attempt to accommodate greater and greater numbers of amenity migrants."

More information: Smith JW (2013). Information Networks in Amenity Transition Communities: A comparative Case Study. *Human Ecology*; DOI: 10.1007/s10745-013-9595-7

Provided by Springer

Citation: During times of community change, familiar sources of information feel more trustworthy (2013, August 7) retrieved 2 May 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2013-08-familiar-sources-trustworthy.html

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.