

Royal Geographical Society
29 November 2007

Rural Evidence Research Centre

What Is Rural England For?

9.00 Coffee and Registration

10.00 -10.05 Welcome, Rita Gardner

10,05 -10.15 Keynote, Alun Michael MP

Chair, Tim Allen, Local Government Association

10.15 - 10.30 John Shepherd : What has RERC Done for Us?

10.30 - 11.15 Peter Bibby : Networks, Place and Productivity, Approaches to Understanding the Rural Domain

11.15 - 11.45 COFFEE

11.45 - 12.30 Tony Champion : Context and Correlates of Small Town Growth

12.30 - 13.00 Panel Discussion, Robin Mortimer (Director, Rural Affairs,Defra), Ken Roy (Director Research,CRC), Peter Bibby, Tony Champion

13.00 -14.00 LUNCH,

Chair, Tim Allen

14.00 - 14.45 Anne Green: Employment, Skills and Gender Differentials in Rural England

14.45 - 15.30 Ray Pahl What is Rural England For?

15.30 - 16.00 Panel Discussion, Ivan Annibal (Director of Economic DevelopmentLincs CC), Prof Malcolm Moseley, Dr Anne Green, Prof. Ray Pahl

16.00 John Shepherd: Closing Statement

Mr Peter Bibby
University of Sheffield

Networks, Place and Productivity, Approaches to Understanding the Rural Domain

This paper considers aspects of rural differentiation emerging from participation in different economic networks. Rather than starting from the notion of a rural economy, it assumes simply that there is a rural *domain*; distinguishable by settlement structure, within which there are also important variations in economic mass, (which underlie official recognition of 'sparsity'). Economic distinctions between the urban and rural domains being limited, it becomes pertinent to consider the separate contributions of households and businesses based in the rural domain to the broader economy which contribute to the broader economy, without the conceit of self-containment. An 'official' productivity proxy and related indicators (grounded more clearly in arguments that the wage represents the marginal revenue product of labour (MRP)) are found to have only weak relations to GVA per head.

Introducing consideration of the geographic configuration of capital stock reveals a dualism between a rural domain from which substantial business is largely absent (in response to lack of economic mass), but which disproportionately provides homes for those who control such business. More generally, the paper distinguishes rural settlements typified by high levels of skills, participation in professional occupations and complex and attenuated work travel patterns and which on the MRP interpretation of income might be seen as making a disproportionate contribution to the national economy. In contrast, other rural settlements at equivalent (or greater) disadvantage in terms of economic mass are typified by participation in far less attenuated economic networks more nearly approximating the local low wage equilibria discussed by some commentators. These differences embodied in a rather broader typology of settlement types are found to affect property utilization, residential property prices, and market service provision. It is held that understanding of such differentiation is significant both in informing local responses and more generally in shaping understanding of the role of the rural domain.

Professor Tony Champion
University of Newcastle Upon Tyne

Context and Correlates of Small Town Growth

This paper presents the initial results of a study that aims to identify the settlements to which various government documents accord the title 'market towns' and to examine their role in the social and economic structure of England. As we no longer know *a priori* what defines a market town, the starting point is an analysis of all 1,628 'urban areas' with between 1,500 and 40,000 residents at the 2001 Census, termed here 'small towns'. Together, these were home to nearly 11 million people in 2001, or just over one - fifth of England's population. Yet they accounted for almost three-fifths of national population growth 1991-2001, reflecting their pivotal position in the national settlement system between larger towns

and cities on the one hand and the wider rural community on the other. The main part of the paper shows how growth since 1991 has been distributed across this section of the settlement system, comparing the performance of these towns by size group, regional location and socio-demographic type. The paper concludes by discussing the policy implications of the great diversity of places and trends revealed, within the context of official projections suggesting further rapid population growth in rural England.

Dr Anne Green
University of Warwick

Employment, Skills and Gender Differentials in Rural England

This presentation provides a selective overview of some of the labour market and economic development challenges in rural areas. It aims to showcase a range of different data sources (including English Longitudinal Study of Ageing [ELSA] and the National Employers Skills Survey [NESS], as well as the more familiar Census, Annual Business Inquiry and Labour Force Survey/ Annual Population Survey), which have been used to provide insights into key economic and labour market policy issues in rural areas. It highlights the key features of work in rural areas, including the changing sectoral, occupational and gender profile of employment in rural areas over recent years and future trends. A particular focus is on the quality, as well as the quantity, of jobs in rural areas. The discussion focuses on a number of challenges of particular pertinence to discussions of labour market issues in rural areas, including: the labour market transitions of residents in the older working age groups; the supply of and demand for skills and associated recruitment and retention problems faced by employers; and the role of international labour migrants in rural areas and the implications of this for the job prospects of local people.

Professor Ray Pahl
University of Essex

What Is Rural England For?

The term 'rural' is culture laden and lack of precision over the way we use it lies at the heart of confusion and contradictions in government policies for 'rural' areas. This paper exemplifies this contention with reference to the various initiatives that go under the heading 'enhancing rural productivity'. Regarding economic success, a crucial question is whether it is possible to combine dynamic wealth creation with social justice in areas of dispersed populations living in small places. Answering this question requires an understanding of the relationships between *economic analysis*, focussing on the buzzwords of regeneration, economic well-being, wealth creation etc. and *sociological analysis* focussing on social capital, social cohesion, community and social justice. Much current government policy relies on contrived geographical units for its delivery – regions, city regions, local authorities etc. However, people live in real places and it is essential that we understand better what makes places tick – not simply as analytical units but as lived in places with people of varied ages, social backgrounds, interests, skills and capacities. The recent work of the economists Bowles and Gintis is germane to policy. The authors do not subscribe to some vague 'feel-good' notion of community but refer to groups of people "who interact directly, frequently and in multi-faceted ways". And this is precisely what the small towns and villages of rural England are about.