



Social Change and New Ruralities

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“while the pace of change seems to be increasing, it is not taking place in a vacuum. History delivers structures and modes of behaviour. The forces for change that we have identified coalesce with, and arise out of, stable forms of social life. Change does not chaotically ravage the rural landscape. It occurs along structured pathways and provides us with the means to assess how the past acts as a context for the present.”

Marsden, Murdoch, Lowe, Munton & Flynn (1993),
Constructing the Countryside, p 185.

- How does rural change occur?
- Why do processes of change lead to different outcomes in different settings?
- What do we mean by 'new ruralities'?

Outline

- Conceptualizing rural change
- An Assemblage Theory approach to rural change
- Social change and new ruralities
 - Transnational social mobilities
 - Global challenges and rural space
- Conclusions

Conceptualizing Rural Change

1) Change as disruption

“It seems often to be assumed that the English village lies on the side of tradition against modernity, with those two terms in opposition.”

David Matless (1994) in *Writing the Rural*, p 79

- Myth of a settled, essential rurality
- Change is exogenous
- Change as urbanization

Conceptualizing Rural Change

2) Change as modernization

“what was stalling the progress of rural America was its failure to modernize, to take advantage of the efficiencies promised by new technologies, to realize its potential through scientific management and reformed institutions.”

Lapping et al. (1989) *Rural Planning and Development in the United States*, p 26

- Planned change for social and economic progress
- Exogenous transformation of endogenous resources
- Objective of producing ‘new ruralities’

Conceptualizing Rural Change

3) Change as restructuring

“History delivers structures and modes of behaviour ... Change does not chaotically ravage the rural landscape. It occurs along structured pathways and provides us with the means to assess how the past acts as a context for the present.”

Marsden et al (1993) *Constructing the Countryside*, p 86

- Rural change as part of the restructuring of the wider political economy
- Exogenous dynamics but endogenous mediation
- Produces differentiated outcomes as rural localities are ascribed new roles within the capitalist economy

Conceptualizing Rural Change

4) Change as reconfiguration

“no special emphasis should be placed on the social domain of action because the stimulus for change may equally come from non-human entities. Therefore, any analysis of rural change must adopt an ‘agnostic’ attitude towards different types of actors and entities and must keep an open mind about which are likely to prevail in any given circumstance..”

Jonathan Murdoch (2003) in *Country Visions*, p 265

- Rural change as the recalibration, mutation, multiplication, capture and dissolution of the relations that constitute rural space and place
- Change may be affected by human or non-human entities

Conceptualizing Rural Change

4) Change as reconfiguration

- Change is endogenous, but may be responsive to exogenous events
- Change involves the reconfiguration of relations and of human and non-human entities to produce new hybrid forms of rurality

“Through these entanglements, intersections and entrapments, the experience of globalization changes rural places, but it never eradicates the local. Rather, the networks, flows and actors introduced by globalization processes fuse and combine with extant local entities to produce new hybrid formations. In this way, places in the emergent global countryside retain their local distinctiveness, but they are also different to *how they were before*.”

Woods (2007) in *Progress in Human Geography*

- Why do changes occur to the entities and relations that constitute rural places?
- How do small-scale changes to specific entities or relations produce larger-scale effects? Why are some changes more transformational than others?
- How are micro-changes to specific entities or relations connected to global processes of social and economic restructuring?
- How does the material recomposition of rural places relate to the discursive re-imagining of rurality?

Assemblage Theory

- Way of thinking about society derived from social theory of Deleuze and Guattari
- Society as comprised by assemblages

“The term is often used to emphasise emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy, and connects to a wider redefinition of the socio-spatial in terms of the composition of diverse elements into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation”

Anderson and McFarlane (2011) in *Area*, p 124

- Formulation by Manuel de Landa in *A New Philosophy of Society* (2006).

Assemblage Theory

- An assemblage comprises *material* and *expressive* components

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- An assemblage is stabilized and destabilized through processes of *territorialization* and *deterritorialization*
- “assemblages always ‘claim’ a territory as heterogeneous parts are gathered together and hold together”
(Anderson and McFarlane, 2011, p 126)

Assemblage Theory

- An assemblage comprises *material* and *expressive* components
- An assemblage is stabilized and destabilized through processes of *territorialization* and *deterritorialization*
- An assemblage is given an identity through *coding* and *decoding*

Assemblage Theory

- Assemblages are characterised by 'relations of exteriority'

Assemblage Theory

- Assemblages are characterised by ‘relations of exteriority’
- “[The capacities of an assemblage] do depend on a component’s properties but cannot be reduced to them since they involve reference to the properties of other interacting entities” (De Landa, ANPS, p 11)
- “a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different” (De Landa, ANPS, p 10)

Assemblage Theory

- Assemblages are characterised by 'relations of exteriority'
- Assemblages are dynamic and constantly changing

Assemblage Theory

- Assemblages are characterised by ‘relations of exteriority’
- Assemblages are dynamic and constantly changing
- “this can only ever be a provisional process: relations may change, new elements may enter, alliances may be broken, new conjunctions may be fostered” (Anderson and McFarlane, 2011, p 126)

Assemblage Theory and Place

- Assemblage theory has gained popularity in human geography and sociology
- Emphasis on ‘translocal assemblages’: processes and networks operating across space
- Applications in rural geography/sociology:
 - Global land-grabbing assemblage (Murray Li 2013)
 - Global biofuel assemblage (Hollander 2010)
 - Forest management (Murray Li 2007)
 - Rural microfinance (Rankin 2008)
- Little examination of *places* as assemblages

Places as Assemblages

- Chapter of *ANPS* on 'cities and nations' as assemblages:
 - Buildings as material components
 - Iconic skylines as expressive components
 - Territorialization through residential practices
 - Deterritorialization through gentrification
 - Interactions between town and countryside as relations of exteriority

Rural Places as Assemblages

- **Material components:** Landscape, buildings, crops, livestock, wildlife, economic commodities
- **Expressive components:** Aesthetic qualities of landscape, 'rural idyll', folk culture, emotional attachments, sense of identity
- **Territorialization:** Working the land, family inheritance, administrative boundaries
- **Deterritorialization:** Migration, loss of rural services, amalgamation of municipalities
- **Coding:** Description as 'rural', eligibility for rural development programmes
- **Decoding:** Changing meaning of rurality

Rural Places as Assemblages

- Relations of exteriority:
 - Interactions with local towns and the region
 - Migration flows
 - Economic transactions
 - Power relations
 - Intersections with 'translocal assemblages'

Rural Change & Assemblage Theory

- Change is natural and ongoing as a reflection of the dynamic and unstable character of assemblages
- Change is defined by the exterior relations of rural assemblages
 - Engagement with global economy
 - Flows of migrants, tourists and commuters
 - Communication and transport links
 - Political policies and campaigns
 - Representation in external media
 - Corporate networks
 - Environmental impacts

Rural Change & Assemblage Theory

Change occurs through the alteration of an assemblage's *material* components

- Introduction of new components: technologies, crops, buildings, consumer goods, capital, migrants, tourists, invasive species, pathogens....
- Loss or removal of components: traditional crops and rare breeds; closure of schools, post offices and village services; de-industrialization...
- Mutation and hybridization of components: land use changes; genetically modified seed; commodification of artefacts as consumer goods ...
- Capture of components by other assemblages: e.g. industrial re-location;

Rural Change & Assemblage Theory

Change occurs through the alteration of an assemblage's *expressive* components

- Weakening of symbolic or emotional significance of landscape features as population changes
- Loss of folk traditions, customs, dialect, rituals etc.
- New symbolic associations from new economic activities or from fictional representations in film, TV, literature etc.
- New cultural practices and fashions introduced through migration, tourism or from global media.

Rural Change & Assemblage Theory

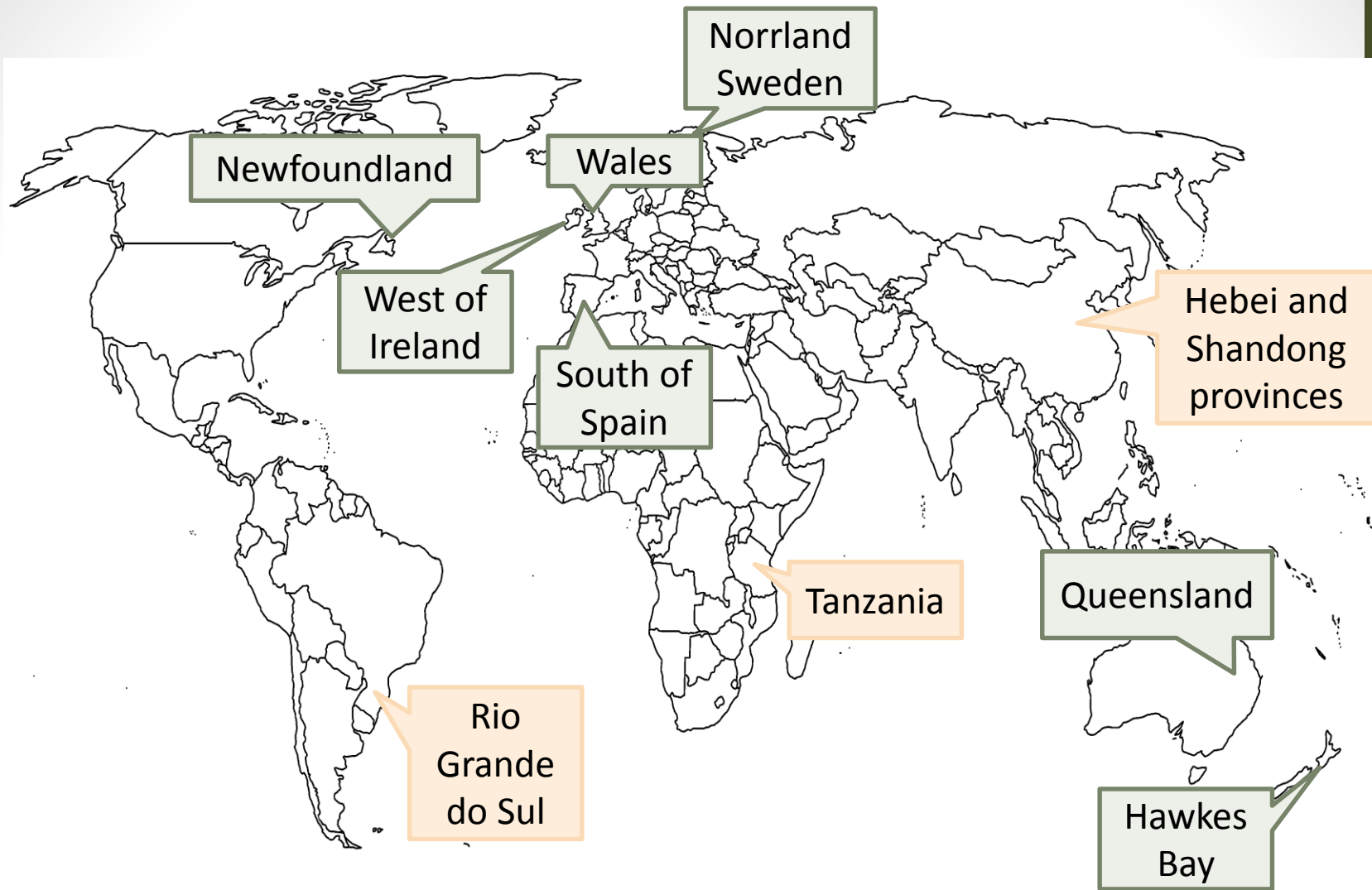
Change involves the re-territorialization of rural assemblages:

- *How it holds together*: fragmentation of rural community life; weakening ties between agriculture and the local community; new institutions of governance.
- *Spatial territorialization*: physical expansion of rural communities; delocalization of daily life (travel for shops, schools, leisure, workplaces etc); commuting; part-time residents and ephemeral residents (tourists, migrant workers); remote participation in rural life via internet and social media; economic footprint.

Rural Change & Assemblage Theory

Change involves the re-coding of rural assemblages:

- Re-branding of rural places and environments for tourism or marketing of local products.
- Representation of rural places in regional development, land use planning and conservation policies.
- Meanings attached to components within rural assemblages
 - > Lagerqvist (2014) in *Journal of Rural Studies* on changing media representations of Swedish *torp*
- Critical representations of campaigners and NGOs (e.g. animal welfare, environmental protection)
- What it means to be 'rural'
 - Dilution of rurality through social change?
 - New ruralities?



GLOBAL-RURAL project

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Transnational Mobility

- Domestic mobility, including migration, a key feature of rural change in late 20th century
- Increasing transnational mobility from, to and through rural areas in 21st century
 - Tourism
 - Amenity or lifestyle migration (part- and full-time)
 - Labour migration (short- and long-term)
- International migration into relatively culturally homogeneous rural communities with little recent history of immigration
- Recipe for community fragmentation and conflict?
- Or, possibility for new cosmopolitan ruralities?

Transnational Mobility

When the World Goes Rural Project

Stockholm University

<http://www.humangeo.su.se/english/research/research-areas/population-geography-migration-and-gis/projects/when-the-world-goes-rural-wtwgr-1.81180>

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Transnational Mobility

Gort, Ireland

- Population of 2,734 in 2006
- Including 1,000 Brazilians (40% of population)
- Brazilian workers recruited for town's meat processing plant during 2000s
- Followed by family members and other migrants



Transnational Mobility

Change defined by exterior relations:

- Growing employment opportunities in Irish rural economy
- Economics of the global meat industry
- Role of an Irish ex-pat in Brazil as a recruiting agent



Transnational Mobility

Changes in material components:

- Migrant workers and their families
- Food, Portuguese language media etc
- Brazilian shops, hairdressers, restaurants, churches etc
- Internet café and money transfer office



Transnational Mobility

Changes in expressive components:

- Portuguese language
- Evangelical religion
- Football
- Cultural traditions such as Quadrilha festival



Transnational Mobility

Changes in territoriality:

- Networks of connection to Brazil (including remittances)
- Parallel social spaces: churches, shops, bars etc
- New spaces of integration: schools, supermarkets, football leagues, festival



Transnational Mobility

Changes in coding :

(Following Sheringham 2009)

- Coding as a safe and tolerant place for Brazilian migrants
 - Liberal attitude towards immigration controls
 - Safe rural environment
- Re-coding of local identity, 'Rio on Shannon'

Global Challenges & Rural Space

- Growing global consciousness and changing social attitudes towards 'global challenges' including
 - Climate change
 - Food security
 - Energy security
 - Water resources
 - Biodiversity
- Development of technocratic responses that frequently involve use of rural resources or changes to rural land uses
- Promoted as new ruralities ('new rural economy'; 'new rural-urban compact')

Global Challenges & Rural Space

Re-coding of rural assemblages

- Re-coding of rural land as a valuable resource in tackling global challenges, as suitable sites for windfarms, solar energy farms, reservoirs, fracking operations etc.
- Re-coding of natural processes as ecosystem services and the assignment of economic values to previously non-monetised resources
- Re-coding of certain rural activities (types of farming; reliance on motor transport etc.) in terms of their future sustainability

Global Challenges & Rural Space

Changes to material components

- Introduction of new components such as wind turbines, solar panels, biofuel crops, GM crops, industrial farming units, fracking fluids, electricity pylons, wetland restoration, etc.
- Possible removal of components including sheep and cattle, oil-based transport and machinery, even farms and fields



Global Challenges & Rural Space

Failure to appreciate expressive roles of components

- Symbolic and spiritual meanings attributed to landscapes
- Senses of tranquillity and solitude
- Memory and landscape
- Cultural tradition of activities such as hill-farming

Expressive components become drivers of resistance to change



Conclusions

- New ruralities emerge from the ongoing dynamism of rural assemblages
- Change is both material and discursive
- To understand how rural places change, we need to examine of micro-processes and micro-politics of changes in the components of place
- These mean that the outcomes of societal-scale processes of restructuring will be different in different places
- Also create spaces for dissonance, resistance and conflict that mean that rural change will be contested

Conclusions

“Although strongly shaped by regional and national economic and demographic factors, rural areas are not simply ‘*tabulae rasae*’ upon which the influence of various social trends are etched, but sites of active contestation, in which particular groups are engaging politically to achieve desired outcomes. The socio-cultural (as well as physical) features of areas can work to preserve a particular type of rural society or can be marshalled in order to bring about particular forms of development. It is the complex interplay of these two dimensions – exogenous and endogenous – over time that produces the socio-economic geography of rural [areas]. The effects, in other words, are spatially differentiated.”

Philip Lowe and Neil Ward (2009) England’s Rural Futures,
in *Regional Studies*, p 1322