An Overview of Rural Accessibility and Social Exclusion

Professor Mark Shucksmith
In 1970s ‘rural deprivation’ emerged as a defence against shift of resources towards inner cities: “arithmetic of woe”.

Moseley’s book on rural accessibility was highly influential. It postulated:
- Spatial accessibility v Social accessibility
- Access deprivation v Opportunity deprivation.

By 2000 Moseley proposed a ‘trilemma’ of how to provide rural services with good coverage, high quality and low cost.

But the concept of rural deprivation, with accessibility at its core, was criticised...
Social Exclusion in Rural Areas:

Power relations? or Remoteness?

“Daddy, What’s a Neighbour?”
• Rural deprivation -> Disadvantage -> Social Exclusion.
• “Exclusion is an idea which poses the right kind of questions.” (Donnison 1998). Investigates the causes, rather than symptoms.
• Whereas poverty concerns *distributional* outcomes, SE focuses on *relational* understandings of dynamic, multi-dimensional processes in local contexts. Systemic.
• What are the processes by which people gain resources (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) and so are integrated into or excluded from society?
  ▪ Market; state; voluntary sector; family and friends.
• SE remains a highly contested concept…
BHPS: Incomes and Poverty

• Rural areas in the UK are mostly prosperous but there is hidden and dispersed poverty amongst affluence.
• 1 in 3 of rural people poor sometime during 1991-96. No significant difference between rural and urban Britain.
• Typically short spells for young people, and longer spells for older people, lone parents, and unqualified workers.
• Rural low pay. Poverty amongst rural self-employed.
• Elderly, children and women most susceptible.
• Young People: class and gender differences in age of taking driving test and gaining access to a car.
• Older People: lifetime earnings and savings.
Pre-School Education

I will refer to a study we undertook a few years ago.

- **UK New Labour Government promised pre-school places for all aged 4 (by 1998) and aged 3 (by 2002).**
- **Scottish Office asked us to examine how this could be achieved in rural Scotland. We explored:**
  - Whether there were enough places in rural areas.
  - Models of provision as distance increases from urban centres.
  - Parents’ and providers’ perspectives on these issues.
  - Issues of social inclusion, of quality and flexibility, and of choice in relation to rurality.

Access, time and cost

Access to services was seen as an *entitlement*. However…

- Many in sparse areas accept they have to bear some of the cost (e.g. transport to distant services) or that services may be inferior (e.g. emergency services). Others claim equal entitlement.
- Should sparse areas receive minimum standard or equal entitlement?
- External perspective that people who ‘choose’ to live in sparsely populated regions must expect poorer services: why should taxpayers (elsewhere?) meet the cost of this ‘lifestyle’ choice?

Difficulties of access, time and cost may prevent some people from accessing services, or lead to real hardship.

- Some 3 and 4 year olds could not benefit from pre-school education, due to lack of two cars, cost of travel or other barriers.
- Ironically, for their children to access pre-school education, some mothers have to leave the labour market (so falling into poverty).
Access, time and cost

• Transport crucial: for most people this means car dependency.
  ▪ For pre-school children, long distance on school bus without parents was problematic. Is this acceptable? What alternatives?
  ▪ 2007 survey of cancer patients in SW Scotland travelling an average of 124 miles for routine tests and treatment, such as radiotherapy and chemotherapy, some up to 14 hours a day.
  ▪ For vulnerable groups, difficulties in accessing services can be an important element of their social exclusion.

• How much of travel costs should rural residents bear?
• Should services be funded by local taxpayers (low tax base)? Taxpayers elsewhere (social solidarity)?
• Alternatively, how might services be brought closer to people in sparsely-populated regions?
Young People in Rural Areas

JRF Action in Rural Areas programme 1996-2000 found

• Context of extended and fractured youth transitions.
• Young people from rural areas become integrated through educational attainment into one of two quite separate labour markets:
  ▪ national: well-paid, distant, career opportunities.
  ▪ local: poorly paid, insecure, fewer prospects.

For the latter, FE and training are much less available, with accessibility a real barrier to negotiating non-linear or fractured youth transitions.

• The interplay between transport, employment and affordable housing is crucial. Loss of EMA is a crucial issue now.
Young People in Rural Areas

• Important class and gender dimensions in access to transport: age at which young people gained access to a vehicle, and gained a driving licence.

• Young people under adult surveillance (bus shelter?) and rarely allowed a voice: thus, young people are ‘very visible, yet find their needs invisible and unmet’.
  - Denied space for social interaction, not just because of distance but as a result of power-laden interactions.

• Nevertheless, young people do actively negotiate their transitions in a variety of ways.
Older People

• Elderly people living alone are particularly likely to experience poverty and social isolation.
  ▪ In remoter areas 29% live on low incomes, especially after 75.
  ▪ But social isolation is worst in accessible rural areas.
• Half rely solely on state pension and uptake of welfare entitlements is systematically lower in rural areas.
• Service availability is an issue for older people, along with the related loss of independence.
• Distinguish between different ‘groupings’, by age, by type of rural area, and by length of residence. Key factors are labour market history and pension savings.
Use of car by income group, age group and rurality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>&lt;55</th>
<th>55-64</th>
<th>65-74</th>
<th>Over 75</th>
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<td><strong>Remote rural</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;50% median income</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>31%</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;150% median income</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>81%</td>
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<td><strong>Accessible rural</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;50% median income</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;150% median income</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>85%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non-rural</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>&lt;50% median income</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>&gt;150% median income</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bus Services and the Cuts

- The Transport Select Committee has just issued a report on ‘Bus Services after the Spending Review”. 3 impacts are highlighted:
  - 28% reduction in LA revenue expenditure, with implications for funding of bus services;
  - Changes in the formula for concessionary travel reimbursement
  - 20% reduction in the Bus Services’ Operators Grant (BSOG) from 2012-13.

They conclude these have already led to reduced services in some areas, and expect further reductions especially in rural areas.
Car Dependency, Sustainable Communities and Exclusion?
The idea of ‘sustainability’ has been used to prevent housing development in rural areas:

- **Sustainability viewed not in terms of equity but of environmental goals**: reducing CO₂ emissions & car use.
- **Sustainable Communities** defined by CLG as presence of services and access to public transport.
- **Dualism of sustainable/unsustainable communities**, distinguished by crude sustainability checklists - which offer a static view of sustainability and deny agency to rural people.
- **Every Region** sought to reduce rural house building in the name of sustainability and urban regeneration.
Murdoch and Lowe (2003) studied the role of CPRE in the emergence of this dominant discourse, from the 1940s discursive construction of a rural/urban divide and through their subsequent lobbying and campaigning. They found:

- CPRE switched from a preservationist discourse to ‘ecologise’ the rural/urban division and so capture the dominant discourse of sustainable development.

  “Sustainable development requires that valued national assets in rural areas should be protected, while cities are encouraged to ‘tread more effectively on the environment.’” (Interview with CPRE officer, p.330)

- Key arenas for CPRE have been the Urban Task Force (Rogers Report), Sustainable Communities white paper, the writing of PPG3, Regional Spatial Strategies…. and now the NPPF.

  “We invented all the key planks in PPG3. PPG3 is basically CPRE policy.” (Interview with CPRE officer, p.327)
Symbolic Power and Exclusion

• Since 1940s the planning apparatus has offered an arena to middle-classes to ensure that only they can afford to live in rural areas, boosting their property values, securing their amenities, and making the countryside more exclusive.

• Power is exercised in covert and insidious ways in the form of discursive power which shapes people’s perceptions and understanding of the world – eg. that rural communities are ‘unsustainable’ if they lack services/ generate car journeys.

• Such symbolic violence furthers the interests of a dominant class while also masking the power relations implicit in the process and making it appear legitimate to those adversely affected. This is why the rural housing question persists... See NPPF debates!
Conclusions

- Processes of social injustice operate in rural areas, as in urban, but may be less visible.
- Injustice in markets, state, associative and reciprocal allocative systems is still structured by class, gender, age and ethnicity. Differential rural accessibility is an aspect of such power relations.
- Control may be exercised as much though ideas (symbolic violence) as though material factors.
- Researchers have a vital role in revealing the processes through which injustice arises.