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ABSTRACT
              With the advent of a Scottish Parliament and a Minister and
Parliamentary Committee for Rural Affairs, there is now a broad consensus
that policies are needed to generate "quality jobs" for young people in rural
Scotland. This agenda is politically appealing, since it addresses various
rural problems, including retention of young people in rural areas and the
viability of rural communities. However, proposed policies to promote
"quality jobs" have several difficulties. Such proposals conflate separate
issues into a single agenda, identifying young people's problems with those
of rural communities and ignoring the complexities and intractability of the
problems they claim to address. Young people may be better served by
provision of educational and employment opportunities in urban areas, while
policies to improve the economic and social life of rural areas might be
better directed at attracting newcomers than at trying to halt youth
outmigration. Proposals to promote quality jobs also disregard the diversity
of rural communities and rural youth, do not fully consider the costs of
redistributing resources and services to rural areas, and tend to misconceive
issues of whether rural youth have a "real choice" about staying or leaving
home. Different policy principles are explored that relate to the needs of
youth; rural-urban equity; or minimum standards for access to education,
employment, and services. Policymakers' attention should shift from migration
issues to provision of training and employment opportunities that enhance
minimum standards of living. (Contains 25 references.) (SV)

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Rural Youth: The Policy Agenda

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Abstract

There is now a broad consensus that policies are required to generate "quality jobs" for young people in rural areas. This is an appealing agenda, not least due to its political relevance in addressing a range of rural problems, including the retention of the viability of rural communities. However, this paper argues that there are several difficulties with proposed policies to promote "quality jobs." Such proposals conflate separate issues into a single agenda, tending to identify the problems of young people with those of rural communities. They take insufficient account of the diversity of rural communities and the young people in them. The significant costs involved in redistributing resources and services to rural areas are not fully considered, and issues of "choice" tend to be misconceived.

Rural Youth: The Policy Agenda

The advent of a Scottish Parliament has raised expectations that issues with a Scottish dimension will be recognised and addressed by distinctive Scottish policies. The development of policies that address appropriately the rural dimension of Scottish life will testify to the vitality and impact of the new Parliament. However, given the political salience of this rural dimension, the new Scottish Executive may pursue policies for their popular and political appeal: policies simple to grasp and sweeping in intention, but at odds with the complex and often intractable character of rural issues. If so, the new political vitality in Holyrood may prove a mixed blessing, adding vigour to policy developments, but along paths that ultimately lead to frustration and disillusion.

The ground has already been prepared for this prospect through policies already emerging on rural issues in Scotland. Research studies reveal the complexity of rural "problems"; yet their results are interpreted in ways that simplify and generalise these "problems," so permitting production of potential "solutions." This is particularly plain in the case of research on "rural youth," where a consensus has emerged around policies to generate "quality jobs" in rural areas. The appeal of these policies lies in their simplicity and generality, but also in their political relevance in addressing a range of rural problems. Policies addressing the limited opportunities of young people can also be presented as a means of retaining the viability and restoring the vitality of rural communities.

The appeal of this agenda also lies in the dearth of policies focusing on rural youth - despite increasing reference to "a rural dimension" in policies on social inclusion. The Consultation Paper on social exclusion in Scotland (Scottish Office, 1998) acknowledged the problems of exclusion in rural and island communities.

But policies proposed to promote inclusion (e.g. in education and housing) made no special reference to rural problems nor to young people in rural areas. The Scottish Office has expressed an intention to build "stronger communities" with a "sound" infrastructure, and "opportunities to find work, to learn, to shop or to have fun in the community" and also "good affordable links with other places where work and other opportunities can be found" (Scottish Office, 1999, pp. 7.1-7.3). This policy agenda may be relevant to rural communities but the link has only been made explicit in the context of transport, where funding is to be targeted at those living in rural areas if "viable alternatives to the car are frequently non-existent or inadequate" (Scottish Office, 1999 p. 7.13).

Following the introduction of a Minister and Parliamentary Committee for Rural Affairs, the rural dimension may feature more in policy making. (Fairley, 1999) There is already some evidence to this effect. Further cash injections for rural transport schemes across Scotland have been made to follow up a 1998 budget that allocated funding to subsidise public transport, to fund community transport projects and to help rural petrol stations to survive (Scottish Office, 1999; Scottish Executive Press Release 15/9/1999). The Rough Sleepers Initiative received funding to help rural local authorities develop a homelessness strategy, and Scottish Homes obtained £4m extra resources for rural areas (Scottish Executive Press Release, 24/9/1999). The "Remote and Rural Areas Resource Initiative" established in 1999, following the Chief Medical Officer's Acute Services Review, is receiving £2m a year and "will be responsible for sustaining and developing services to patients in rural and remote areas in Scotland." (Mauthner, 1999) The same year also saw the establishment of a new cross-cutting committee by the Minister for Rural Affairs in order to "mainstream" rural issues to give them priority in all aspects of Government policy (Scottish Office Press Release, 22/6/1999).

Nevertheless, initiatives as yet are typically of an isolated nature with an uncertain future - such as a pilot scheme taken forward by DfEE officials to meet educational transport costs of young people aged 16 –18 in rural areas (Cabinet Office, 2000). To date, few policies in Scotland (or the UK) directly aim to improve the living standards or prospects of young people in rural areas. Though the Scottish Youth Parliament has been formed to give youth have a policy input, the Parliament and the more local youth assemblies have an urban base, and are less accessible to youth living in remoter rural areas.

Most policies targeted at young people still neglect the fact that those in rural areas encounter specific problems. The Government's flagship programme, the New Deal, provides subsidised employment and training while promoting attainment of regular (unsubsidised) employment. Although in principle extended to the whole of Scotland, in practice the New Deal is limited in rural areas by lack of training and employment opportunities, regular or subsidised. Employment opportunities tend to be limited to low paid insecure jobs, and rural firms tend to be small, with a notable lack of training opportunities. Recent research (Cartmel & Furlong, 2000) found that rural employers were not well informed about the New Deal despite the heavy publicity through which it had been promoted. Many of the better informed were reluctant to participate due either to lack of in-house training or the inaccessibility of formal training courses. Opportunities are often limited by shortage of accessible housing and by transport problems. Moreover, the initial target population for the New Deal - the young long-term unemployed - is concentrated in the Scottish cities, with about one third of this population located in Glasgow alone (Fairley, 1998). Not surprisingly, Fairley (1998) found critics questioning the relevance to rural areas of a programme so plainly "urban in concept and design."

Proposals to enhance the prospects of rural youth through the promotion of employment and educational opportunities may fill this political vacuum. One aim is to extend opportunities for rural youngsters to acquire training and educational qualifications while staying within their communities. Another is to provide "quality jobs" to allow young people who left in search of better opportunities to return to their communities of origin. Proposals under this umbrella (Henderson & Rothe, 1997) include, for example:

- Promotion of subsidised training with rural employers
- Promotion of distance learning
- Financial support for travel and subsistence for rural youngsters attending training courses
- Decentralisation of public services
- Promotion of increased job training and career progression in rural employment
- Improved transport links to rural areas
- Promotion of self-employment in rural areas
- Improved access to housing for young people in rural areas
- Development of mentoring programmes to assist new company formation

Unlike the New Deal, with its focus on promoting employment opportunities without much regard to the quality of work on offer, such proposals directly address the issue of employment "quality" (Henderson & Rothe, 1997, p. 8) in rural areas. This agenda is informed by a landmark study stressing "the very real issues of lack of employment opportunities and affordable housing in rural Scotland in the 1990s" (Shucksmith et al., 1996, p. 480). The study highlighted the problem of "educating out," whereby rural parents seek educational

opportunities for their youngsters outwith the immediate area, knowing that this will encourage them to leave their families and communities. Unless "educated out" young people in rural areas may have to reconcile themselves to a life of limited opportunities, circumscribed by the low level of available training and employment and exacerbated in many cases by lack of transport or access to housing. On the other hand, youth migration is perceived as a threat to rural communities, both undermining social support (exacerbating the social problems of an ageing community) and reducing social cohesion (threatening continuity of shared values and beliefs). Thus "respondents in all areas were anxious to develop mechanisms to retain young people in rural communities" (Shucksmith et al., 1996, p. 465).

Improving the supply of "quality jobs" in rural areas may help resolve the dilemmas facing rural families while simultaneously helping rural communities to retain their young people. Earlier research (based on the Scottish Young People's Survey) suggested that migration of young people from rural areas is associated mainly "with the lack of opportunity in the home area, particularly in terms of employment and education" (Jones, 1992, p. 37). Arguing that more young people would choose to remain in (or return to) their home area if given the choice, this study associated youth migration from rural areas with "constraint or at best of limited choice" (Jones, 1992, p. 37) or, more emphatically, with "lack of opportunity, reflecting constraint rather than choice" (Jones, 1992, p. 38). It was also argued that rural communities need to retain their youngsters:

> The migration of young people from rural areas is a particular problem because they leave communities which consist increasingly of elderly people, who contribute only marginally to the local economy, but require a higher level of service provision. For communities to thrive, populations should be relatively stable and covering a range of age and economic activity (Jones, 1992, p. 37)

It was suggested that young migrants often transferred their problems to an urban setting rather than resolving them, since many youngsters went on to experience problems in town. Though acknowledging the inclination of youngsters to seek a better life in the cities (whose streets are still imagined to be "paved with gold") this inclination was questioned, for "life in rural communities may seem dead-end to many, but is there any guarantee that town life is going to be better?" (Jones, 1992, p. 37).

The case regarding the need for "quality employment" in rural areas has been reinforced by research sponsored by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation "Action in Rural Areas" programme. Two recent studies emphasised the restricted opportunities for "quality jobs" available to young people in rural areas. They suggested that finding employment per se was not a particular problem, since long-term unemployment was rarer in rural labour markets and young people found themselves out of work no more often

than their urban counterparts, while returning to employment more rapidly (Cartmel & Furlong, 2000). This faster flow out of unemployment reflected the vital role of local contacts in facilitating job search in rural areas. However, the jobs found were typically low paid, undemanding in terms of skill, and lacking in promotion prospects or career structures (Pavis et al., 2000). This can mainly be attributed to the prevalence of small employers, offering few "quality jobs" and little in the way of formal training opportunities, beyond the minimum required for health and safety. Moreover, where young people were employed they often filled the most insecure positions (Cartmel & Furlong, 2000).

The lack of "quality jobs" in rural labour markets is perceived as a major problem, both for those remaining long-term (with no prospects of improvement) and for those wishing to return to their home communities after migrating to acquire better qualifications. Although research found that many students returned home for a period after graduation, this was mainly short-term, while they paid off debts and sought jobs in national labour markets. Meanwhile, those remaining in rural areas tended to experience problems in establishing independent homes, often remaining in the parental home for extended periods or relying on poor quality private rented sector accommodation in remoter areas. As rural employers also tended to be widely scattered, transport could be a serious problem in finding work. Even if available (and many parents helped with the costs of buying or running a car) employers could be reluctant to take on employees obliged to make long and complex journeys to work. If work was found, its low paid and insecure character often prevented young people from overcoming their problems with transport and housing (Cartmel & Furlong, 2000; Pavis et al., 2000).

Such findings have reinforced the case for promoting improvements in the quality of employment in rural areas. This focus on "quality jobs" at least provides a refreshing antidote to the Government's inclination to promote work as a path to welfare, regardless of quality. However, despite its merits in this respect, the case for promoting "quality" work in rural areas is less convincing than it appears, once due account is taken of the complexities and intractability of the problems that it claims to address.

Retaining young people in rural areas

One difficulty arises from the conflation of separate issues into a single agenda. The problems of young people tend to be identified with those of rural communities:
Lack of youth employment choice and options was perceived to be the most serious problem facing rural communities" (Henderson & Jones, 1997, p. 5).

Respondents in rural areas focus on the need to retain young people within them, and the provision of greater opportunities is conceived with this purpose in mind.

Hence the concern to ally training opportunities with better chances of employment, lest young people use acquired skills and qualifications to seek jobs in national rather than local markets:

> A danger with promoting training opportunities is that, unless employment opportunities exist in rural areas, they may merely have the effect of increasing youth migration from rural areas. It is important that training and employment creation is a joint strategy" (Henderson & Rothe, 1997, p. 17).

However, the interests of young people may conflict with those of rural communities. Young people may be better served by provision of opportunities outwith rural areas. This may be on efficiency grounds - more educational opportunities can be created by expanding existing (urban) institutions than by creating new (rural) ones. It may be easier to reduce the problems young people encounter when migrating to urban areas - for example, through transport subsidies, housing allowances and the like - than to try to bring educational opportunities and jobs to rural areas.

It is doubtful that the problems of rural decline can be tackled through trying to retain young people who would otherwise migrate. One reason this seems attractive to rural communities lies in a concern with local tradition:

> Migration and retention were raised as major issues by respondents in the context of social change because for many respondents the strengths of any rural community lay in the people who lived and worked in the communities, and who adhered to a set of shared values and beliefs" (Shucksmith et al., 1996, p. 465)

This concern with change (and continuity) is evident in responses to the arrival of new migrants into rural areas. These migrants are often seen as a threat to rural traditions, with respondents "deeply concerned about the effect of the sheer volume of counterstream migrants on small rural communities" (Shucksmith et al., 1996, p. 465). The significance of inward migration in terms of economic activity (e.g. on spending capacity) or political vitality (e.g., through challenging deference) tends to be obscured by cultural perceptions of migrants as "incomers" disinterested in traditional rural life and work. By comparison, the retention of young people offers the prospect of preserving conventional rural values and leaving the slow pace of rural life undisturbed. Nevertheless, policies to improve the economic and social life of rural areas might be better directed at attracting inward migration of "incomers" than at trying to halt the outward migration of the young. If it is indeed the "socially limiting environment" of rural areas that young people find "daunting" then
"Policies designed to preserve local communities, through the protection of traditional industry and festivals, may simply increase dissatisfaction among the young" (Jones & Jamieson, 1997).

Since access to employment in rural communities tends to depend strongly on the integration into "the network," those "not fitting in," perhaps because their parents are "incomers" or because their behaviour is disapproved of, can face significant barriers to economic and social integration (Furlong & Cartmel, 2000). Trying to retain traditional communities may do little to reduce the unequal opportunities they offer, notably to young women seeking employment. Hence "Policies designed for young people would not focus on retaining them in rural communities but would increase their scope for choice, and allow migrate-or-stay decisions to be based on viable alternatives" (Jones & Jamieson 1997).

This may conflict with the interests of rural communities in the retention of a young population. But it seems preferable to recognise such conflicts than to presume that policies can serve all interests at once.

Diversity

Another issue stems from the marked diversity of rural communities and their residents. As a recent report by the Cabinet Office (2000) acknowledged, "rural areas do not all share the same characteristics: some are prosperous, others are not; and some have better access to services, facilities and higher levels of employment than others" (p. 4). Though emphasising common "structural barriers," (Pavis et al., 2000) also note significant differences in employment levels, transport problems and housing problems, according to whether "rural areas" were isolated or close to urban centres, had high levels of seasonal employment or suffered from long-term industrial decline. Clearly there are marked differences in rural areas, depending on such factors as their remoteness from cities, their access to various forms of non-agricultural employment, their dependence on tourism, their proximity to educational and training establishments, and so on. These factors can have a significant impact on "rural" circumstances. For example, North Ayrshire, with its proximity to training and educational establishments and employment in Glasgow, retains a much larger proportion of young people than remoter parts of Scotland (Henderson & Rothe, 1997).

Variation is also marked amongst the target population of young people in rural areas. Pavis and others (2000) emphasised the importance of education and qualifications in differentiating between the young people in their study - with graduates orientated to national labour markets and those with low qualifications orientated to local employment. Although graduates may be obliged to look beyond local labour markets, it seems unlikely that this is entirely a function of the limited employment opportunities available there. Mobility for those with even modest career aspirations is also a common requirement for urban youth. Moreover, although Jones and Jamieson (1997) observed that migration does provide higher rewards for those with comparable education qualifications, they also found social factors influenced migration decisions, with

"stayers" usually belonging to local families and migrants more likely to come from families with a history of migration. They also found that stayers or migrants varied in their degree of attachment to their home communities, with some migrants longing to return but some stayers also longing to leave. Thus enhanced provision of higher-level educational and employment opportunities in rural areas may be relevant mainly for well-qualified migrants who remain "attached" to their local communities. Provision for "detached" stayers might be more usefully focused on helping them to escape from their local communities.

Costs

If the problems of "educating out" are most severe in the remoter localities, so too are the problems of locating in them the requisite educational and employment infrastructure to prevent it.

Choices involve costs as well as benefits - requiring a trade-off between options, not all of which can be maximised at once (or we would not have to choose in the first place). Enhancement of the provision of "quality jobs" in rural areas is not a "no-cost" option, but one which may have negative consequences - for example, for the availability of opportunities outwith rural areas. What if educational and employment opportunities can only be improved through redistribution from urban areas – for example through the decentralisation of civil service jobs or educational institutions? Even policies to promote training and quality employment within rural communities have a price, in terms of resources that could be allocated in other ways. Should we be more concerned with facilitating the choices of those who wish to remain in rural communities, even at the expense of those who wish to migrate?

Even if such policies are desirable, this does not mean that they are feasible. If the limitations of rural employment are deep-rooted then the migration of young people is likely to prove an intractable problem. There are powerful factors that motivate industry to locate quality jobs in urban areas, including the availability of an established and substantial pool of skilled labour. Other considerations relate to transport and communications costs of locating in remoter areas. Some of these considerations may be removed by the advent of more sophisticated communications systems, including the Internet. This has already led to relocation of information processing work to rural areas - as, for example, the location of work processing of reports for New York professionals in Rothesey. However, while such examples hold out some hope for the redistribution of "quality" work from urban to rural settings, they also underline the force of the market in dictating location outcomes. In an era of increasing "globalisation" the power of public authorities to influence market movements is increasingly limited, not least because they also have to compete against each other.

Policies to improve "quality jobs" in rural areas therefore raise the question of costs, an issue significant when the level of services and provisions in rural areas is

considered. In the area of health, for example, it is clear that "the direct costs of providing health care in rural areas are higher than in urban areas due to, amongst other factors, the lack of economies of scale, additional travel costs, high level of unproductive time, extra costs of providing mobile and outreach services and the extra costs of providing training and other support" (Roderick, 1999, p. 45).

Whilst resource allocation on a per capita base would obviously disadvantage rural areas, a sparsity weighting method is applied in the allocation of resources in Scotland and Wales (Roderick, 1999). Whether or not we agree on the method or its results, it is clear that arguments for giving "choice" to rural youth through enhancing "quality jobs" (and other services and provisions) have to consider potentially significant implications for resource distribution.

Choice

The case for enhancing "quality jobs" is often made in terms of giving young people "real" choices whether to remain or to migrate (or to return). Youngsters are perceived as "forced" to leave home, "often earlier than they would wish" (Highland Council, 1993, p. 3) in order to realise their educational ambitions and job aspirations. Those who migrate are denied a "real" choice to remain (or return). The young people staying in their home communities also suffer from restricted opportunities, in that they usually cannot choose "quality jobs." Hence the claim that "ideally, young people Should be able to choose whether or not to migrate away from their home communities, rather than to be forced to leave or stay. In order for young people to have such a choice, *structures for local employment and post-school education and training, as well as housing opportunities*, need to be in place" (Jones, 1997, pp. 7-8; emphasis added).

Offering "real" choice to young people through the creation of viable alternatives (and not simply aiming to retain them in rural communities) has become the central plank of research on young people in rural areas (Jones, 1999a; Jones, 1999b; Hendry et al., 1998; Jones & Jamieson, 1997; Shucksmith et al., 1996), also figuring in policy documents such as the Rural Audit of the Rural Group of Labour MPs (Murphy and Shucksmith, 1999). Since training in the absence of "quality jobs" might promote further migration, it has been argued that "an integrated approach to the retention of young people is required from policymakers if those who wish to remain are allowed that choice." (Shucksmith et al., 1996, p. 512). Moreover, young people are thought to require: "*support and guidance* in order to make "real" choices when confronted with the obvious tensions and dilemmas associated with the stay-or-migrate decision that all young people living in rural areas must recognise and face." (Hendry et al., 1998, p. 5.1.2; own emphasis).

Thus public policy is exhorted not only to create choice, but also to provide professional advice (e.g., through careers guidance) to help young people to exercise it.

The concept of "real choice" is appealing. Who would want to deny young people the choice of whether to remain in or leave their home community - urban or rural? We are generally inclined to regard choice as positive and restriction of choice as unreasonable. But on closer scrutiny the concept of "real choice" (whether to remain or migrate) is problematic.

There is the difficulty of how such "choices" could be exercised, for they are complicated by the problem of ignorance – of balancing the "benefits and burdens of the life and opportunities already known" against the (unknown) "benefits and burdens of a life and opportunities to be explored." The exercise of "choice" is also complicated by influence, since young people are not immune to the influence of powerful others with a vested interest in whether they stay or go.

Although "real choice" has been presented as the ideal, its conceptualisation has remained vague and inconsistent. At least three components have been evoked, with different emphases. First, it has been conceptualised in negative terms, as not being "forced" to leave or to stay (Jones, 1997, p. 7). Second, a positive conceptualisation has been "the ability to choose whether or not to migrate away from the home community" (Shucksmith et al.,1996; Jones, 1997). Third, "real choice" has been interpreted simply as "increasing access to opportunities" (Jones, 1999; Jones & Jamieson, 1997; Rural Audit, 1999) including local education and training; wider labour markets; transport; child care and information.

But the idea that young people are "forced" to migrate or stay is problematic. Who or what is "forcing" whom? Is this force intended or unintended? The term "force" is ambiguous, since it can refer to social constraints but also has connotations of deliberate action and even violence. Residents of rural areas are sometimes inclined to "blame" the problems of young people (for example in finding affordable housing) on "incomers" who (by raising the price of local accommodation) can "force" young people out of the housing market. However, we need to be wary of this kind of over-simplification. Since we are always subject to social constraints, we also need to consider whether, when and why these ought to be challenged. It is never obvious - in the age of globalisation - which constraints we should challenge, and which we should accept as a framework for our actions. The existence of constraints does not in itself establish a case for trying to reduce or remove them.

To adapt a well-worn aphorism, one person's constraint is another person's opportunity. Even if migration is "associated" (Jones, 1992, p. 37) with a lack of educational and employment options in rural areas, this "constraint" may be perceived in positive rather than negative terms. Thus the research evidence suggests that

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residents in rural communities tend to perceive migration as "forced" while young people themselves are often very positive about their experiences of migration, and find attractions in an urban lifestyle (Shucksmith et al., 1996; Henderson & Jones, 1997).

The argument that young people are "forced" to migrate is also suspect on empirical grounds. The Scottish Young People's Survey carried out in the late "80s revealed that

> young people who were living in rural areas were more than twice as likely to have left home as those living in the major towns. [ ] By the age of 19 years, 54% of people who had been living in remote areas at age 17 had left home (though some had returned again). This figure compares with 32% of 19-year-olds living in other rural areas, and 25% of those living in towns." (Jones, 1992, p. 37).

While leaving home was notably more common amongst young people in remoter rural areas than in major towns, it was only marginally so amongst those in other rural districts. More young people in rural areas left home to continue their education (55% compared to 44% in the major towns) but this hardly justifies any strong conclusion regarding the "force" of restricted opportunities in rural areas.

Thus the question of whether young people are "forced" to leave (or stay) is more complex and ambiguous than the "real choice" agenda allows.

What of "real choice" in terms of choosing whether to stay or leave? This implies that choice involves a rational assessment of what opportunities are like at home, compared to those elsewhere. However, there are always pressures that encourage people to act one way rather than another. For example, Henderson and Jones observe that "more is done (through education and social pressures) to encourage young people to leave rural areas, than was done to encourage them to stay" (1997, p. 3). And apart from economic reasons for migration, there are other important considerations, including degree of attachment to the local community, family history, parental influence, and the location of the extended family (Jones, 1992; Jones, 1999b; Jones & Jamieson, 1997; Shucksmith et al., 1996).

Extending choice is therefore likely to be a more complex and difficult exercise than any simple equation of greater "real choice" with increased opportunities implies. But if "real choice" is equated with opportunities, why invoke the concept of choice in the first place?

Values

The "real choice" argument tends to rely upon an unacknowledged and questionable value assumption - that young people should choose to remain in their home communities. This has been defended (Jones, 1992) on the grounds that the interests of young people themselves may be best served by remaining at home (given the risks associated with migration).

However, a case can be made to encourage young people to leave and explore new possibilities beyond their own community. Leaving home, at least for a period, may mark an important step in the transition from youth to adulthood, aiding the process of emancipation from parental authority. Not to embark on such a venture may mean a missed opportunity at an age when "experimenting" should be part of the experience. This view seems prevalent amongst young people themselves, since younger respondents "generally viewed their time in urban areas as extremely beneficial" (Shucksmith et al., 1996, p. 467) offering opportunities to experiment with youth and urban lifestyles.

It has also been pointed out that local employers value the experience young people have gained outside their local communities, which can increase their chances for employment on their return (Henderson & Jones, 1997). Evidence also suggests that those returning to rural communities after a period away are more likely to be balanced and tolerant in their attitudes (Shucksmith et al., 1996). A case can therefore be made for giving priority to migration over staying at home.

Policy principles

The "real choice" argument does not offer explicit principles on which to base claims for increasing resources for rural areas in general, and rural youth in particular.

If the concept of choice is difficult to interpret, we may call upon other principles to inform policy. But it is not clear what these principles should be. Is the underlying concern about meeting young people's needs? About greater equity between rural and urban youth? Is "real choice" a rights-based notion? Is it related to concepts of social justice? Such principles are conventionally invoked when the distribution of resources is discussed (Taylor-Gooby, 1998; Manning, 1998) and might be relevant to arguments about "real choice" for rural youth - but no explicit links have been made.

Suppose we invoke the principle of meeting needs. One problem here is that the needs of young people are not confined to rural settings. For example, mobility may be vital for any young people with modest ambitions, not just for those in rural areas. Many urban young people live in areas where unemployment is very high, and where there are few social provisions. The latest research suggests that geographical location is less significant in shaping the experience of young people than other factors, such as gender or education (Pavis et al., 2000). Policies designed to address the "needs" of young people in general, or to focus on the needs of young people suffering particular forms of disadvantage (such as lack of qualifications) may therefore be more appropriate

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than trying to address the needs of young people in rural areas.

Another principle, based on considerations of equity, implies that opportunities for young people in rural areas should be comparable to those in urban areas. But this would hardly be feasible without eroding entirely the social and economic differences between rural and urban areas. The issue of equity is also complicated by the problem of isolating particular factors, though quality of life is experienced as a whole and not in terms of particular circumstances. Rural residents themselves subscribe to this more holistic conception of the balance of advantage and disadvantage of rural living:
"...respondents very much saw the disadvantages and advantages as being an issue of balance, and they were prepared to accept some disadvantages as long as the balance was in favour of the advantages" (Chapman & Shucksmith, 1996, p. 73).

Thus rural residents tended to discount the lack of opportunities in terms of employment and income generation, and offset problems of transport and work, against other virtues of living in a rural setting:

> by (these) objective standards the respondents in the study could be seen as being disadvantaged because to a large extent they were unable to share in the lifestyles of the majority of the population. And yet what was found was that for the most part respondents considered themselves to be advantaged by rural life rather than disadvantaged, because of the higher quality of life available to them, in terms of the social and moral environment, a lack of crime, neighbourliness, and so on (Chapman & Shucksmith, 1996, p. 74).

To focus selectively on particular factors such as income or employment may distort the overall balance of advantage and disadvantage associated with rural or urban styles of life.

Arguments for increased opportunities for young people in rural areas could also appeal to minimum standards. This raises two questions. First, what level of social provisions (such as education, health, housing, employment, and leisure) should people enjoy in a given society? To make a case for rural provision we would have to establish a baseline and show that rural communities fall below it. Second, what provisions above that baseline should be available in all areas of a given society, and what criteria should determine the location of provisions, such as hospitals and institutions of higher education? We also have to consider the extent to which public intervention should try to alter the geographical distribution of resources (such as employment) established through the operation of the market.

It may be possible to construct a more coherent case for enhancing the opportunities for youth in rural areas by considering the provisions they lack, such as access to local employment, post-school education, training, housing and leisure. All these fulfil basic needs, and not being able to meet these can be said to indicate deprivation of some kind. Issues of lack of employment, education and housing led to the establishment of the Commission on Social Justice in December 1992, set up by John Smith, then leader of the Labour Party. The Report of the Commission stressed "the need to spread opportunities and life chances as widely as possible" at a time when "old evils of homelessness and pauperism have returned" (Commission of Social Justice, 1994, pp. 1-2). However, as a recent workshop on Rural Deprivation reinforced (at The Sixth Circumpolar Universities Co-operation Conference, Aberdeen, 24 - 27 June 1999), concepts such as "deprivation" and "poverty" are relative, and what they mean in practice is controversial. Often, residents in local areas consider themselves reasonably well off (at least compared to others even less well off), and it is professionals who label these people as living "in poverty" (Shucksmith, et al., 1996).

However, poverty does not have to be understood as a purely relative concept. Re-visiting the poverty debate can be instructive in showing us a possible "absolute" aspect of poverty. The concept of "achieving minimum capabilities" has been used by Sen to argue that "the poor, relatively speaking, are in some sense absolutely deprived" (Sen, 1983, p. 168) and

> Poverty is not just a matter of being relatively poorer than others in the society, but of not having some basic opportunities of material well-being - the failure to have certain minimum "capabilities." The criteria of minimum capabilities are "absolute" not in the sense that they must not vary from society to society over time, but people's deprivations are judged absolutely, and not simply in comparison with the deprivation of others in that society (Sen, 1985, pp. 669-70).

If people are seen as deprived because they are homeless, whether or not other people are homeless cannot alter this judgement.

Sen goes on to distinguish between "commodities" and "capabilities." Take the example of a bicycle as a commodity. It has several characteristics, one of which is transportation. A bike provides a person with the capability of moving in a certain way. Sen (1983) argues that it is "the capability to function which comes closest to the notion of standard of living" (p.160). Commodity ownership tells us nothing about what a person can do, or cannot do (Sen, 1983). Persons with a disability may not be able to use a bike, and for them to be mobile, other forms of transport must be available if we want to ensure that they enjoy similar capabilities, and therefore a similar living standard, as those without a disability. Thus "having a bike may provide the basis for the contribution to the standard of living, but it is not in itself a constituent part of that standard" (Sen, 1983, p. 160). It follows that poverty is an absolute notion in the

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space of capabilities, but is relative "in the space of commodities, resources and incomes in dealing with some important capabilities, such as avoiding shame from failure to meet social conventions, participating in social activities, and retaining self-respect" (Sen, 1983, p. 168).

We can consider opportunities for rural (and urban) youth through the principle of "achieving minimum capabilities." Here the question arises whether the ability to locate in a geographical area of one's choice is indeed a "minimum capability" that ought to be ensured by society. We might well regard any interference with choice of location through legal restriction or force (such as the kind notoriously used in the Highland clearances) as an intolerable infringement of freedom. Few would disagree that people should be "free" in this sense to choose where to live. But this does not establish an obligation on others to make such choices "free" from costs or constraints. To do so, we would have to establish the importance of realising this capability, just as we might argue that communications skills are essential for participation in society. It is not at clear, however, that ability to locate in a particular place (one's community of origin) can be advocated on these grounds, particularly when that home community is itself located within a highly mobile and integrated society. Indeed, there seems something rather odd about any suggestions that one should be able to stay at home but still enjoy all the wider benefits and opportunities associated with not doing so.

There are other more serious contenders as minimum capabilities - mobility, communication, creativity, self-respect - that may be restricted if commodities such as transport, education or employment are unavailable or inaccessible. In these cases, we may more readily accept an obligation not merely to establish (negative) freedom from interference but also positively to provide resources to allow people to realise their capabilities. It seems more compelling to meet needs for education or jobs because without them such capabilities as communication cannot be realised, than to base these claims on the capability of choosing geographical location.

Conclusion

The case for extending "real choice" to young people in rural areas through encouraging the creation of "quality jobs" is undoubtedly an appealing one, but it takes insufficient account of complexities and potential costs. It is not enough to identify the "needs" of rural youth and then assume that these should be met.

In any case, the "needs" identified by research are less clear-cut than at first appears. The problems of rural communities and of young people in those communities can easily be confused. It is important to distinguish the case for retaining young people in rural areas from that of extending their options to remain or migrate. The case for retention is pressed most by rural residents, but

primarily on grounds of cultural continuity. We should recognise that the interests of residents may conflict with those of young people. We should also recognise that policies to bring "quality jobs" to rural areas may prove expensive and ineffective given the force of countervailing social and economic factors. The diversity of rural areas has to be taken into account, since those remote areas most disadvantaged by isolation are also those where these obstacles are most severe. The diversity of young people in rural areas is also a factor, since it is mainly those who have acquired good qualifications through migration and desire to return to their "home communities" who stand to gain from policies to relocate "quality jobs." Whether meeting this desire should be accepted as a policy priority is a moot point.

The complexities we have discussed relate not only to the diversity of rural contexts and populations, but also to the problems of disentangling issues and establishing clearer policy agendas. The argument for "real choice" has become an important policy premise but one which lacks clarity and consistency. The interpretations of "real choice," in terms of not "forcing" young people to migrate, or giving them a "choice" to stay or go, are of questionable merit. The underlying value position - that young people should choose to remain in rural areas - seems plausible but is nonetheless contestable. We explored different policy principles to which one might appeal ⸂ needs, equity and minimum capabilities - and in each case found reasons to question the case for extending the choice of location made by rural youth.

To close this paper on a more positive note, we suggest that attention should shift from choice of location to concern with realising minimum capabilities (mobility, shelter, communication) and the related case for meeting the educational and other needs of young people generally. This does not exclude a rural dimension, since capabilities can only be realised through variations in the commodities requisite for their attainment. However, the provision of training and employment opportunities to young people based on these criteria would be orientated to enhancing minimum capabilities rather than extending choice with respect to migration. This would involve a sharper focus on those young people who lose out most in the struggle to realise their potential - notably those young people remaining in rural areas with transport problems, without educational qualifications, lacking access to adequate housing, and trapped in insecure employment. The aim would be to reduce or remove these barriers to realising their capabilities rather than changing their options regarding migration.

Separating the problems of rural youth from those of rural communities allows a more positive agenda to emerge regarding the latter, as a more broadly-based approach can be pursued. This could involve a much more positive perspective on inward migration of "incomers" and their capacity to sustain rural economies and services. This might be less ambitious but more attainable than the ambition to retain rural youth, since

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inward migrants are often prepared to trade educational and employment opportunities for other qualities associated with rural life. It might also be more ambitious, in that inward migration is likely to challenge the slow pace and comfortable conventions characteristic of many (but not all) rural communities.

Finally, we would like to rescue the issue of "quality jobs" from its entanglement with that of migration. The emphasis on the quality of opportunities is surely a marked improvement on current inclination on the part of New Labour to regard work of any sort as a panacea. Steps to improve the income and security that can be derived from work are much needed, though this need applies to urban as to rural employment, and can surely be tackled best through measures to enforce minimum standards (such as a more vigorously pursued minimum wage policy) rather than by chasing a chimera in the form of reduced migration.

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