
NEWSLETTER

Autumn 2006

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1. CALENDAR OF FORTHCOMING RURAL CONFERENCES & EVENTS

Date	Event	Contact
17-21 April, 2007	AAG, 2006, San Francisco	http://www.aag.org/annualmeetings/SF2007/index.cfm
15-20 July	The Sixth Quadrennial Conference of British, Canadian, and American Rural Geographers, Spokane, Washington, US.	Henry.Buller@exeter.ac.uk
28 -31	Royal Geographical Society With	http://www.rgs.org

2. RGRG DISSERTATION PRIZES

Undergraduate Prize, 2005

First prize: Sophie Wynne-Jones (Aberystwyth) "An exploration into how nature is constructed through the Join Muir Trust Summer programme"

Second prize: Laura Tan (Oxford) "Black people in white spaces: the experience of African migrants in rural Ireland"

Third prize: Alexa Smith (Exeter) "The London and Brighton Pro-Hunt Demonstrations of September 2004"

Entries for the 2006 competition are current being reviewed by the panel

Undergraduate Dissertation Prize, 2007

The prize is available to students who have completed an undergraduate degree and produced a dissertation in a subject area related to rural geography. The relevant examination board for the degree may nominate one candidate each year and should arrange for one copy of the dissertation to be sent to the dissertation prizes officer of the Rural Geography Research Group by the 31st July 2007 (address below), together with full contact details of the nominee and the nominating institution. Submitted dissertations will be considered by a panel of assessors comprising members of the RGRG Committee. The winner of the prize and the institution will be notified by the end of December 2007 when submitted dissertations will be returned.

Three prizes are available. first prize: £25; second prize: £20; and third prize: £15.

Masters Dissertation Prize, 2007

The deadline for the submission of dissertations for the RGRG Masters Dissertation Prize is 31st January 2008. The prize is available to students who have completed a taught Masters degree and produced a dissertation in a subject area related to rural geography in the year 2007. The relevant examination board for the degree may nominate one candidate each year and should arrange for one copy of the dissertation to be sent to the dissertation prizes officer of the Rural Geography Research Group (as below), together with full contact details of the nominee and the nominating institution. Submitted dissertations will be considered by a panel of assessors comprising members of the RGRG committee. The winner of the prize and the institution will be notified by the end of the academic year 2007-8, when submitted dissertations will be returned. The award is £50.

Please submit dissertations to: Dr Lewis Holloway, Department of Geography, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull, HU6 7RX.

3. RECENT CONFERENCE REPORTS

3.1 SESSIONS AT THE RGS-IBG, 2006

Competing Knowledges and Uncertain Agricultural Futures

The 2006 RGS/IBG had two sessions dedicated to 'agricultural geographies'. Their overall premise was that agro-food studies are currently characterised by two key themes: uncertainty regarding the future direction of agriculture; and a competing range of interests / knowledges about how agriculture and rural use might change and develop. The sessions were organised to tackle these themes.

The first session comprised four papers on uncertain agricultural futures. Fiona Williams (Scottish Agricultural College, Aberdeen) kicked-off proceedings by outlining the main barriers facing new entrants to farming in Scotland. The paper identified three main 'entry routes' to farming (the family farm business, as a new entrant from another sector or via the 'agricultural ladder'). It went on to argue that, with increased market liberalisation and related industry pressures, aspiring farmers face two major hurdles: a lack of affordable land and a lack of access to capital. The second paper, by Damian Maye (Coventry University), David Watts (Scottish Agricultural College, Aberdeen), Lewis Holloway (University of Hull) and Brian Ilbery (University of Gloucestershire), examined tenant farming, the Single Farm Payment (SFP) and farm diversification in England. The paper began by arguing that tenant farming as a specific agricultural sector has been somewhat neglected, especially in recent geographical accounts. Results from a postal survey showed high rates of diversification on tenant farms (70%). However, interviews with tenants and landlords/agents revealed that most are currently more concerned about levels of SFP and issues surrounding entitlement rather than future farm diversification. The third paper, by Tanja Bastia and Mara Miele (Cardiff University), examined the role played by women in developing new dynamic forms of agricultural entrepreneurship in Italy. Their key argument was that changing structural factors (e.g. land ownership, access to credit and an ageing population) and the development of a new discourse on the role of women in farming have enabled female entrepreneurs to increase participation in some of the most dynamic types of farming enterprise, such as organic farming and agri-tourism. The final paper, by Bill Slee and James Kirwan (University of Gloucestershire), challenged some of the rhetoric employed to promote the 'new' European model of farming which is used to justify policies that promote change in farming practices. The paper explored the extent to which the literatures associated with 'habitus' and 'styles of farming' yield clues about the capacity for change within the farming sector. This sparked a lively audience debate, especially around the potential merits of 'farming styles' as a framework to further unpack European multifunctionality.

The five papers in the second session explored competing agricultural knowledges and practices. Selyf Morgan (Cardiff University) examined knowledge deficits and learning in organic agriculture, specifically asking how organic farmers form 'communities of practice' (as a model of social learning) in a sector where practices are usually spatially dispersed. The paper explored the means by which farmers go about the task of generating and gathering knowledge of organic farming. The second paper, by Owain Jones, Henry Buller (both from Exeter University), Carol Morris (Nottingham University) and James Kirwan (University of Gloucestershire), asked whether farming knowledges are being reconfigured through alternative agri-food networks. They identified four challenges to hegemonic agricultural knowledges: 'retro-innovation', post-farming practices, imported non-farm knowledges, and antagonistic / symbiotic knowledge practices. However, the paper cautioned that practices such as retro-innovation are complex and hybridised, often melding 'traditional' agricultural practices with modern animal husbandry and marketing techniques. Katy Bennett (Newcastle University) then presented a paper on the contested nature of knowledge claims tied up with heather moorland management on the North Yorkshire Moors. Interested in how, and by whom, knowledge claims related to moorland management are made, her work involved observation and in-depth small group work. This revealed the juxtaposition of local and scientific knowledges, the role of 'circuits of power' in the knowledge creation process, and the way knowledge claims interact in small group contexts. Following this theme, Rhys Evans (Integrate Consulting, Perth) and Alex Franklin (Cardiff University) identified the important and changing place of the horse in rural culture and economy, focusing on the role of equine knowledges in creating new rural spaces and the ways that embodied practices of equestrianism foster new 'regimes of movement and visibility' in the countryside. The final paper, by Susanne Seymour (Nottingham University), considered the role of farmers in the protection of historic parkland. After plotting the history of parkland and its conservation using case studies, the paper argued that there is a lack of research on farmers who farm within parklands and the potential knowledge conflicts that may arise from their activities.

The chair (David Watts) thanked the speakers for addressing so directly the session themes. He concluded that the papers collectively identified important changes in the rural economy and drew attention to groups often considered to have 'uncertain' relations with mainstream agriculture (such as women, new entrants, organic farmers and tenants), and that both are beginning to force a re-conceptualisation of agriculture and its place in the European countryside.

Damian Maye (Coventry University), David Watts (Scottish Agricultural College, Aberdeen) and Lewis Holloway (University of Hull)

Postgraduate Research in Rural Geography

The session brought together a varied set of interesting papers and a forum for lively discussion and positive feedback. Rebecca Sims (Lancaster

University) presented on 'The Tourist G(r)aze': Understanding the role of food and holidays in identity formation'. The paper examined the connections between food and travel, looking specifically at the role that food plays in tourism. Using examples from qualitative research undertaken with tourists in Cumbria and Exmoor, it was argued that food and tourism practices can reveal much about the way in which we make sense of space, place and identity in a globalising world. Julie Urquhart (University of Gloucestershire) presented a paper entitled 'Public benefits from private forests and woodlands: managing the opportunities for public good enhancement' which addressed the scope for enhancing the public benefits derived from private woodland and forest ownership. The paper outlined the methodological approaches taken to create a typology of woodland owners with respect to their willingness to deliver public benefits from their forests and woodlands; and suggested possible policy interventions that will enhance the capacity for public benefit provision from non-public forests and woodland.

Lisa Hill's (University of Bristol) paper 'Access in the 1960s: Forestry Commission policies and waymarking in the Dean Forest & Wye Valley National Forest Park' explored the Forestry Commission's early joint initiative with the Gloucestershire District Ramblers' Association to waymark trails in three areas of the Forest of Dean. Through this case study the paper explored the changing policies of both the Forestry Commission and the Ramblers' Association towards the provision of leisure infrastructure for walkers and other users of the forest landscape. Bruce Scholten (Durham) talked to the title of 'Polytunnel perversity: UK/US limits to alternative agro-food networks'. Bruce's paper drew on research in Seattle and Newcastle involving ethnographic fieldwork, surveys, and focus groups to discuss a range of economic and social aspects of alternative agro-food networks.

Margaret Currie (University of Aberdeen) presented to the title 'The rural bus challenge: comparing bus policy support to needs and wants in rural Scotland'. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach - APAT (Accessibility Policy Appraisal Tool) –the paper presented provisional findings from interviews with policy makers, local authority providers, bus operators and community transport groups in rural Scotland alongside the needs of rural people identified through questionnaires and focus groups. Katherine Taylor (Kingston University) presented a paper entitled 'Reconstructing the agricultural environment of part of East Sussex between 1935 and 1959'. The paper reported on a study undertaken with a GIS, using aerial photographs and data from the National Farm Survey (NFS). Focussing on the parish of Barcombe, as a pilot area, the paper demonstrated the potential of GIS as a tool for the manipulation of historic data and adding value to the basic NFS data and aerial photographs.

Kate Mahoney (Coventry University)

Emotional Geographies of Rurality

The emotional and related affective 'turns' within human geography continue to develop. See for example the recent conference on affect at Durham and various emotionally targeted sessions at the 2007 RGS-IBG annual conference. The emotional geographies of rurality sessions were conceived, in part, in response to the particularly urban inflection of some treatments of affect notably that of Thrift. In our call for papers we made the point that emotions are obviously just as active in rural contexts. We also suggested that rurality itself might be differently relationally configured and also that 'while many of the issues studied within rural geography are strongly underpinned by emotions (work, for example on ways of interpreting the landscape, experiences of community and relationships with nature) there has been little explicit attempt to foreground emotions within such work, particularly in a theoretical context'.

These assumptions we feel were borne out by the number, range and quality of the 12 papers which were given in three sessions. Indeed we had to seek extra sessions such was the response. Clearly, a range of issues which are relevant to rural are worked through the emotional register in ways which (should) make it a central rather than peripheral conceptualisation.

Three of the four papers in the first sessions focused on what could be called (rather simplistically) the negative emotions – fear and anger. Anger in the countryside protests which grew up in the UK around the Hunting with Dogs Act (Woods et al); fear within the idea of belonging – or not belonging – to a community (Panelli and Welch); fear of crime and the other in Belgian rural life (Schermans and Meert). The last paper in session one discussed the rural housing debate in Ireland, thus covering one of the central grounds of emotional life, the home in which fear, anger, love and longing all come to the fore (Keaveney).

The second session of four papers showed a more diverse range of emotions and ruralities. Little and Panelli discussed the often poignant pursuit of heterosexual love in remote rural areas in Australia and elsewhere and how place, gender identity and rurality fold (are folded by TV series) together. Dunham took to the past rurality of the English countryside and the elegiac nature 'emotional narration of landscape' by the great Diarist Francis Kilvert and the more shadowy sexual emotions to be traced there. Haartsen and Jansen took up back the contemporary rural in the performances of Dutch rural hip-hop and the way this negotiated urban-rural identity formation. Finally, in session 2, again in contemporary European rural context, Italy Miele and Bastia discussed the emotional dynamics of new entrepreneurial farm businesses in which place, landscape, tradition and quality are key elements.

The third session of four papers clustered around the key notion of nature. Jones discussed how, in representation of rural life, close contact with and attachment too animals is a key element of collective and individual rural identities. Ólafsdóttir, through the prisms of dwelling and performativity, showed powerful and embodied emotional responses to the dramatic natural

landscapes of Iceland. Towns explored how senses of identities were being re-negotiated in the very different nature landscapes of the growing National Forest in the UK. Finally, returning the topic of food, Slocum discussed white food spaces in the USA, focussing on diversity of engagement in Farmers Markets in Minnesota and the stickiness of white identities.

In retrospect, the range of papers shows just how important the 'emotional dimension' is in rural space. The area is likely to develop by focusing more closely on specific areas such as emotion, gender and rurality, animals, emotion and rurality, food, emotion and rurality, this, to some extent, is already happening, but there is plenty still to do.

Owain Jones (University of Exeter)

Wittgenstein's Lion

As one of the largest and most populated AC2006 sessions, the RGRG sponsored Wittgenstein's Lion session hosted 14 papers stretching across three session slots. The papers covered a wide range of epistemologies for exploring human-animal interaction and understanding, from film and observation to experimentation within a wide variety of contexts including dog walking, pig production, coarse fishing, aquaria and blind dogs. Eric Laurier, from an ethno-methodological standpoint looked at the ways in which animals and humans share forms of life together through his analysis of 'ordinary episodes', such as walking through a park. The 'interrupted life' of Angelica the octopus was considered by Chris Bear in a paper that looked at the relationships between the zoo, the animal and the public. Marc Higgin's paper, using guide dogs for the blind as a case study explored more-than-human engagements with the worlds and the development of the dog-blind human functional partnership. Three papers that considered farm animals in particular were those of Andrew Donaldson, Adrian Evans and Mara Miele and that by Richard Yarwood. From different research perspectives, including the assessment of welfare, the nature of breed development and animal socialisation, they brought insightful analysis to how shared lives and shared understandings might be developed within the social sciences. Max Graham's well illustrated paper on elephant movements looked at opposing philosophies of nature and of naturalness. An intriguing paper on fishing was presented by Jacob Bull who explored the mechanisms by which coarse fishing imitates nature (the fly) to catch the natural (the fish), all within a 'natural' setting and, in doing so transcends the boundaries between human and non-human. Another interesting paper on pigeon management in London was delivered by Maria Escobar, again exploring simulacra (false eggs) in nature management. Similarly, Merle Patchett, in a paper on taxidermy looked at visceral practices associated with representing nature and naturalness through taxidermy. Finally, taking the session in new epistemological territory, Chris Wilbert and Rikke Hansen looked at the 'performing' actor dog, Bombon in the film of that name. How does the notion of 'acting' and performance relate to animals such as Bombon ?

Henry Buller (University of Exeter)

3.2 New People in the European Countryside - 5th British-French Rural Geography Colloquium, 15-20 May 2006, in Vichy hosted by CERAMAC.

A slightly smaller group of British researchers joined their French counterparts for the most recent joint meeting of British and French rural geographers in Vichy in May 2006. Nevertheless, the meeting proved as convivial and rewarding as the previous four symposia. The meeting started with two full day field excursions into the Massif Central including a visit to the largest wind farm in France, which had been brought to fruition by the good offices of an energetic mayor trying to stave off further population decline in her village.

The paper sessions were held in Vichy and included several papers from French colleagues investigating the extent and impact of foreigners coming to live in various parts of the French countryside. These were interspersed by contributions from British colleagues, some of whom had participated in these joint meetings since the outset in September 1989 at the University of Caen, others were from newcomers savouring the unforgettable delights of French hospitality for the first time. The papers ranged across a number of themes linked together by the notion that the arrival of new socio-cultural groups in the European countryside were leading to significant changes in production and consumption patterns.

Clout (UCL), a stalwart supporter of this series of British-French symposia and unflappable translator, provided a retrospective review of the Auvergnat countryside going back to time of his doctoral research during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Thompson (Glasgow), another stalwart translator and participant of the British-French rural geography meetings, also provided a reflective account of how changing internal and external physical and economic circumstances in rural communes result in the periodic re-evaluation of the resource base which can have a radical effect on population trends. Boulay (Kingston) provided an interesting perspective on the “néo-ruraux” or newcomers in Manche department and their acceptance, or otherwise, by indigenous inhabitants and their contribution to rural economic development. Robinson (Kingston) took us to another part of Europe, Bosnia and Hercegovina, to examine the nature of the new rural communities emerging in Hercegovina (western Bosnia). Congreve (King’s College, now UCL) brought us back across the La Manche, the English Channel to the unenlightened, to explore how the issues arising from urban growth encroaching on the countryside are represented in the media.

Smith (Brighton) sought to redress the lack of attention paid attention to interconnections between processes of rural gentrification and the role of urban-based gentrifiers and institutional actors in reproducing and transforming rural spaces in the particular context of the South Downs. Phillips (Leicester) also addressed the rural gentrification theme focusing on the significance of gentrification within the social restructuring of rural populations and spaces. Walford (Kingston) explored the enduring migratory and geodemographic connections to Mid-Wales and urban areas

throughout England and the rest of Wales over recent intercensal decades. Halfacree (Swansea), representing a joint paper with Holloway (Hull), focused on less conventional new rural inhabitants by examining individual, family and collective attempts to move 'back-to-the-land' and how these might produce new forms of 'earthy' rootedness.

Wilson (Plymouth) took a mainly theoretical and conceptual approach, drawing on examples from various European settings, to discuss whether European agriculture and the countryside are moving towards a multifunctional agricultural regime. Continuing the food and agriculture theme, Maye (Coventry), locating his paper in Scottish-English borders, explored ways in which microbrewers and bottled water producers are tapping into the growing interest in local food economies. Buller, representing the Buller and Little team (Exeter), explored the relationships between, space, rural migration and local food, in particular investigating how food consumption contributes to a wider set of life style decisions and experiences.

In a few years time, most probably 2010, it will be the RGRG's turn to host the 6th 'Réunion Franco-Britannique' and no doubt some of those attending the meeting in May 2006 are already polishing up their French in preparation. On behalf of all delegates, I would like to record our thanks to our French hosts, especially Prof. Jean-Paul Diry, who worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the meeting. We now look forward to publication of the collected papers in Spring 2007 and hope that members of RGRG and others will ensure copies are purchased for their institutions' libraries.

Prof. Nigel Walford (Kingston University).

3.3 The Rural Citizen: Governance, Culture and Wellbeing in the 21st Century, 5-7 April 2006, University of Plymouth.

"Who gets to decide about our rural futures, and how?" This was the central challenge for rural citizens identified by Dr Stuart Burgess, Chair of the Countryside Agency and the Rural Advocate, in his address to a conference at the University of Plymouth in April 2006 entitled, "The Rural Citizen: governance, culture and wellbeing in the 21st century". In his speech, Dr Burgess also stated the need for critical measures or indicators which would help understand and define rural wellbeing, and for better understanding of the land as central to the rural cultures of the future.

The three-day conference, organised by the Rural Futures Unit in the Plymouth School of Geography, attracted 170 people from across the UK and the rest of Europe and involved the presentation of over 80 papers. The guiding principles behind the conference were those of the Unit itself – crossing boundaries between disciplines, between communities of practice (academic, professional, voluntary), and between geographical arenas (local, regional, international). Among the keynote speakers were Prof Guido van Huylenbroeck, University of Gent, on multifunctional agriculture and the rural future; Robin Turner, Cornish entrepreneur, leading figure in the fishing

industry and village regeneration; Prof Michael Winter, University of Exeter, on rural governance; James Heartfield, of *Audacity* on 'the end of the town-country divide', and Prof Alexander Alekseyev, Moscow State University on the options for development of the Russian countryside in the twenty-first century.

Contributed paper sessions covered a wide range of issues, for instance: health and wellbeing; participatory processes in governance; agri-food networks; cultures and commodification; active citizenship; disadvantage, deprivation and welfare; views of the rural. Perhaps more consistent with the 'boundary-crossing' principle were a suite of workshops contributed by a variety of organisations, and we are resolved to develop that aspect further in any future events. Finding ways of making such a conference attractive both to academics (who want to get a paper on their CV) and practitioners (who value more interactive, action-oriented processes) was perhaps the biggest challenge.

Thanks to innovative funding from the Regional Development Agency, the Commission for Rural Communities, and Devon Rural Network, academics and rural development professionals were joined by a significant number of rural dwellers and workers, enabling real dialogue between stakeholders on a number of issues. Summarising key themes at the end of the conference, Prof Geoff Wilson from UoP argued for extending that dialogue into practice - between academics and practitioners; between natural and social scientists; and between those working in the developed and the developing worlds, for instance.

Feedback from attendees was very positive, and we have been encouraged to run a second 'Rural Citizen' conference in early April 2008. We are in the process of planning the form and content of the conference: if you have any ideas, proposals, offers, or just want to be put on our mailing list, please email Susie Bissell at s.bissell@plymouth.ac.uk.

Martyn Warren, Director, Rural Futures Unit.

4. CALL FOR PAPERS

4.1 RGS-IBG Annual International Conference 2007, 'Sustainability and Quality of Life' 28th-31st August 2007, RGS, London

Lively non-human temporalities: towards rhythmanalysis of hybrid nature-society time-spaces.

More people than ever live in cities and to speeds and rhythms set by the clock, driven by schedules of work, family, leisure, and electronic media/information. Much is made of how social processes are speeding up and smoothing out (24/7), floating free of 'old nature' in technological

webs. But despite this, many forms of natural rhythms remain profoundly influential in shaping our lives. Obvious examples are diurnal and seasonal rhythms and organism body-clocks (human and non-human) which respond to them. Within and alongside these pervasive natural rhythms are all manner of other velocities and pulses such as multiple geo-rhythms (e.g. tides) and the specific temporalities in the umwelten (lifeworlds) of animals, plants and trees. All these orchestrate into the complex timescapes of cities, buildings, countrysides, farms, forests, and myriad other forms of temporally hybrid spaces/places.

Latour (1997) argues that space and time are 'the consequences of the ways in which bodies relate to each other [] instead of a single space-time, we will generate as many spaces and times as there are types of relations'. Socio-ecological processes/spaces/places are thus not only the result of 'a multiplicity of differing agents [], human and non-human, technological and textual, organic and (geo)physical, which hold each other in position' (Whatmore 1999) but also of the intermeshing temporal signatures of those entities/processes.

How 'social' systems interact with, shape and are shaped by natural rhythms, and how multiple rhythms gear together in spaces/places, are questions of profound importance for understanding ecological, economic and cultural systems (inc identity), human/non-human health and quality of life, ecological planning and governance, and sustainable development.

The temporalities of the seasons and day and night have been gestured towards in recent accounts of time geographies (e.g. May and Thrift, 2001) but little sustained work is done on these and other key rhythms. Think of our estuaries as huge volumes of water flow in and out of them twice daily in complex rhythms which cut across the 24 hour clock. Think of the multiple rhythms of the city, say, the changes in the affective life from a hot summer's day to that of a freezing winter's night, and back again. Think of economic assemblages in which animal or plant life rhythms are central.

The aim of the session is to explore, amongst other things,

the presence and functioning of differing natural temporalities in socio-ecological formations

how to approach the rhythm analysis of such formations (a difficult challenge - Amin and Thrift, 2002)

temporality and ecological planning and ecological governance

hybrid temporalities in ecologies of place, landscape and dwelling

Please send abstracts of no more than 200 words to o.jones@exeter.ac.uk by 31st January 2007.

'Reconceptualising multifunctionality: neoliberalism, agricultural transitions and agendas for future research

There is a growing consensus amongst rural researchers that agricultural regimes and rural areas around the world are at a crossroads. On the one hand, the emergence of a neoliberal policy agenda for agriculture suggests a pathway towards policy retrenchment, agricultural restructuring and the commodification of rural space. On the other, those promoting a 'multifunctional' agricultural regime emphasise the need for continued state action in order to sustain socio-environmental public benefits associated with continued agricultural occupation of rural land. This tension is giving rise to a rich academic debate concerning the nature of the neoliberal challenge and the extent to which the concept of multifunctionality can be regarded as part of a discourse of resistance towards it.

The purpose of this conference session is to bring together researchers working on the neoliberalisation of agriculture and/or the evolving concept of 'multifunctionality' in order to explore the connections between these two policy discourses. Papers are invited which deal either with concepts, applications or practice and we are particularly keen to hear from contributors who are able to offer country, regional or international perspectives on agricultural liberalisation and the validity of the multifunctionality paradigm.

Please send abstracts of no more than 200 words to geoff.wilson@plymouth.ac.uk or c.potter@ic.ac.uk

Rural Housing, Sustainability and Spatial Planning

The way in which the planning system deals with the delivery of new housing in the countryside is set to change dramatically. The Barker Review of Housing Supply (2004) together with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (2004) signal a new emphasis on strategic planning and market responsiveness. New planning policy on housing – PPS3, published in November 2006 – states that housing provision should be a product of a 'strategic' and responsive approach, having regard to housing market areas set out at the regional level and using 'market information' to guide new development. A big issue for rural England is how this new system will a) operate and b) impact on local housing delivery and on sustainability / quality of life. But it also returns us to the basic question of how far it is possible to solve housing problems through the market. As it stands, Barker's 'price signals' (triggering further land releases during the planning cycle) could see reserve housing land released in overheating markets (markets like the Cotswolds or parts of Cornwall, where second home buying and retirement are major housing market pressures), but such a strategy is of course questionable (and highly controversial), so the signals might instead be used as a framework for targeting investment in low-cost housing, or the release of

land for social housing. The sub-regional / market area / visionary and strategic approach to housing provision touted in PPS3 are components of the broader 'spatial planning' approach advocated by government. This session will look at rural housing problems (including the social exclusions and quality of life issues that emerge as a result of market 'inequities' and planning) and responses, paying particular attention to spatial planning and emergent market-led approaches to rural housing supply. Papers that examine the future of planning for housing in rural areas, and the role of the market in addressing housing problems / sustainability / quality of life concerns are particularly welcome.

Nick Gallent, n.gallent@ucl.ac.uk

Ethical food-scapes?: Conceptualising the premises, promises, and possibilities of alternative food networks

In the last few years, alternative food networks (AFNs) have become ascendant in academic and policy work on food systems and those in the UK in particular. In short, these networks are constructed as containing a series of cross-cutting alternative socio-economic production/consumption imaginaries and materialities. Most predominately, AFNs are understood as the provisioning of quality foods that work to 're-embed' the relations of production, consumption and ecology in notions of connectedness and closeness. More recently, local food provisioning and processes of 're-localization' are beginning to figure predominantly in academic and popular accounts of AFNs. The growth of local food networks has quickly claimed the cultural, economic, and political imaginaries of academics, food activists, the media, and a growing number of consumers. And yet, short of a few germinal papers, the moral and ethical premises, promises and possibilities of these growing networks have remained in their empirical and theoretical infancy. This is surprising given the so-called 'moral' turn within AFN studies, the discipline and critical theory more generally. Against these theoretical and empirical concerns, we seek papers interested in exploring the discursive and material creation of the moral economies of AFNs and the potential to which, at wider conceptual and geographic scales, we are seeing the beginnings of a 'moral landscape' in the constitution and expression of AFNs in the UK food-scape and beyond. And, while the focus is AFNs, the session is keen to attract papers that fall outside this conceptual boundary, especially as a device for critical comment. Ethical food-scapes are, for example, promoted by corporate business and retail, with strategies in place to promote social responsibility, ethical auditing, supply chain transparency and community cohesion. Some potential key questions/topics include:

- How and why are particular production and/or retail standards enshrined as 'ethical' and how do they work in practice?
- What is the role of food policy and institutional governance in developing and policing such standards, including mechanisms to meet consumer interests?

- What are the (dis)connections between 'ethical/moral' and 'alternative' in AFNs and/or conventional food networks? In other words, is there slippage between the discursive and material constructions of what is 'ethical/moral' and 'alternative' in AFNs and conventional networks and what does this mean for conceptualising these networks?
- How do these networks understand and express notions of 'place' and 'space', and indeed, ethics/morality, differently than conventional food networks and how might this contribute to our understandings of rural, urban and consumption spaces, places, and ethics? In short, what are the 'politics of place' and/or 'politics of rurality/urbanity' in AFN networks?
- How are ethical food-scapes studied, especially as heuristic devices to understand the premises, promises and possibilities of AFNs? In short, what are the methodological implications?

Please send abstracts of 200 words for papers addressing these and other related questions by 31st January 2007 to: Mike Goodman (michael.k.goodman@kcl.ac.uk), Damian Maye (d.maye@coventry.ac.uk) and Lewis Holloway (L.Holloway@hull.ac.uk).

Lifecourse geographies

Jointly sponsored session between the Women and Geography Study Group and the Geographies of Children Youth and Families Working Group.

This session will bring together varied work that has as its focus the relationship between stages, or a stage, in the life course and the social production of space or place. There is currently a good deal of work being undertaken in Geography on varying age groups (from children and youths to the elderly), varying households/ family types (symmetrical, non-symmetrical and GLBT families) and on social change conceived under the banner of the second demographic transition. The session hopes to bring together some of these strands and in doing so encourage further theorisation of the role of space/place in the lives of individuals and families at various stages through the life course and the role of changing household demography and composition in the transformation of places. While much of the initial interest in the broad areas of life course, age and family have emerged from a gender perspective, parallel interests are burgeoning in the marginalisation and 'otherness' of groups in rural areas and this session hopes to provide a useful forum for dialogue between those researching in these areas. Possible themes may include, but are not be restricted to:

Changing household geometries and rural/urban transformation
 Spaces and places of childhood/youth/young family life or parenthood/old-age
 Risk and change and the life course
 Work-life balance
 Migration, housing and the life course
 Household consumption at different life course stages
 New considerations of the 'family farm'
 Changing nature of [rural] work

The changing nature/de-traditionalisation of the life course

Informal enquiries, and abstracts of no more than 200 words, should be sent to Carol Ekinsmyth (carol.ekinsmyth@port.ac.uk) or Mark Riley (mark.riley@port.ac.uk) by February 2nd 2007.

IBG/RGS AC 2007

Henry Buller (Chair RGRG) attended the RGS Research Groups sub-committee on the 22nd January 2007 which was essentially given over to planning the AC 2007. One new element that merits reporting to the RGRG here is that, from now on, each Research Group is allocated 6 days worth of Guest admission to the conference. Although these have to be formally applied for by the Research Group Chair, the RGRG can apply for all 6 if we so wish. I invite session convenors to forward names to me for nomination. The rules governing Research Group Guests are available on the conference website but if anyone is interested, I can forward them on request.

5. FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES AND EVENTS

Anglo-US-Canadian Meeting

The RGRG is sending a delegation of 13 rural geographers to the Sixth Quadrennial Conference of British, Canadian, and American Rural Geographers at Spokane in Washington State, US, from the 15th to the 20th July 2007. The theme of the Conference is *The Global Rural: Rural Change, Connections, and Scale*. A range of papers are being offered by the delegation and it promises to be a most interesting event.

6. NEW WEBSITE

The Rural Evidence Research Centre (RERC) was established by Defra in 2003 to provide it with innovative, independent research to support policy development in the area of rural affairs. Our broad approach has been to develop understanding of 'rural people in places' and to explore the local and regional dimensions of rurality rather than emphasising an urban/rural divide. We have also been concerned not to duplicate the approaches of other government agencies and rural research units but rather to provide a context in which their work could be viewed.

The results of our research, evidence gathering and the dissemination of results within Defra in particular and government more widely are now available on the RERC website at www.rerc.ac.uk. The site has been designed to be useful to a wide range of rural 'stakeholders' including academics and students. It also provides interactive mapping for deriving information on rural areas. We welcome comments via merc@bbk.ac.uk on the

site itself and the information it contains. We propose to hold a 'round up' conference focused on our work later in 2007.

Professor John Shepherd (Birkbeck College)

7. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Current members and contact details:

Chair: Professor Henry Buller – h.buller@exeter.ac.uk

Treasurer: Dr Darren Smith - d.smith@brighton.ac.uk

Membership and Prizes Officer: Dr Lewis Holloway – L.Holloway@Hull.ac.uk

Newsletter Editor: Dr Mark Riley – mark.riley@port.ac.uk

Ordinary Members: Dr Keith Halfacree - k.h.halfacree@swansea.ac.uk; Dr Jo

Little j.k.little@exeter.ac.uk; Professor Guy Robinson

g.robinson@kingston.ac.uk;

Postgraduate Member: Kate Mahoney - apx324@coventry.ac.uk

8. ITEMS FOR SPRING 2007 NEWSLETTER

Articles, letters, comments and other items for inclusion in the Spring Newsletter should be sent to: Mark Riley, RGRG Newsletter Editor, Department of Geography, University of Portsmouth, Portsmouth, PO13HE, Tel: +44(0)23 9284 2493; email: mark.riley@port.ac.uk

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

The RGRG, like many other research groups, is making increasing use of electronic means of communication.

Please update your email address!

Email is increasingly used to distribute the bi-annual Newsletter and urgent items of news throughout the year. Although email addresses are now available for about half of RGRG members, several appear to be out-of-date. If you have changed your email over the past few months or have recently gone 'on-line', please send your new address to Mark Riley mark.riley@port.ac.uk

The RGRG Web site (<http://www.geog.plym.ac.uk/ruralgeography/default.htm>) has been up and running for a few years. If you have any items that you wish to have posted on the RGRG web site, please contact Stephen Essex (University of Plymouth) preferably by email: s.essex@plymouth.ac.uk.