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Rural Geography – Rural Development: An Examination of Agriculture, Policy and Planning, and Community in Rural Areas

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1.0 Introduction

Every four years since 1991, a small group of rural geographers from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, with guests from Ireland and Australia, have met to present their latest ideas and research results. These meetings have also contributed to the development of a community of scholars interested in wide-ranging rural issues. The meetings rotate between the three geographic regions. With all but the first conference, edited volumes have been published, including: 1991 in the U.K., 1995 in North Carolina (Ilbery et al., 1997; Walford et al., 1999), 1999 in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (Beesley et al., 2003; Millward et al., 2000), 2003 in Plymouth and Exeter (Essex et al., 2005), and 2007 in Idaho and Washington State (Winchell et al., 2010). The most recent meeting was held in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Rather than an edited volume, the editors accepted an invitation from this journal to have their peer-reviewed papers published as a special issue.

Sustainability and rural change have been guiding themes within these meetings. This is not surprising, given that rural sustainability and change (e.g., restructuring, innovation) have been core perspectives within rural geography for decades (e.g., Gilg, 1985; Ilbery, 1998; Woods, 2011). While agricultural contexts have been popular, increasingly a range of rural and community interests have been covered. The intention of the 2011 meeting was to continue with the theme of sustainable rural change but with a focus on development, including identifying policies and programs used by agricultural sectors, and communities to respond to restructuring. Thus, while there was overlap, we have placed papers into one of

three categories: 'agriculture', 'policy and planning', and 'community'. The following overview provides a description of the work included in each theme.

2.0 Agriculture

Agricultural restructuring has been a dominant theme within modern rural geography. The papers in this section of the special issue build on the recent theoretical and conceptual debates about the future shape of the agrarian sector. Brian Ilbery and his colleagues examine the stage of the supply chain at which risk and management of plant disease takes place. They adopt a 'whole chain' methodology to examine diseases in the wheat sector in England. Their research informs the emerging conceptual debates on food security and risk, helping to move such themes to centre-stage in the restructuring literature. Turning to animal-based diseases, Damian Maye and colleagues measure farmers' trust in institutions through their study of a badger vaccination program in England and Wales. They found farmers were wary of a program meant to address Bovine tuberculosis (bTB).

Jill Clark and Darla Munroe adopt a relational economic geography framework to analyze business dynamics in peri-urban agricultural areas of the United States. They conclude that in an effort to support the development of regional food systems and community-based agricultural economic development, policies and programs could be better targeted towards peri-urban areas. Nick Evans then draws upon historicity, conflict and neo-industrialisation to illuminate the development trajectory of locality based horticultural tradition in the Vale of Evesham. This agricultural region of the English Midlands is a useful study area given the time-depth of diversified agricultural commodities produced there. Turning to Australia, Tony Sorensen conceptualizes the processes at work in transforming the agricultural landscape, which is mainly due to growth in Asian markets. He examines three phenomena responsible for this change: corporatisation of the countryside, internal farm policy changes, and multinational investment from Asian interests.

Clare Perkins develops a conceptual framework of knowledge-cultures to examine 'neo'-productivist changes in farm practices in Wales. Her ethnographic study describes how technological adaptation on farms is based on cultures of knowledge. Building upon the cultural themes in agricultural geography, the last paper in this section, written by John Smithers and Sridharan Sethuratnam, investigates ethnographic shifts in Canadian agriculture. Using the Province of Ontario as the study region, they conclude that for new ethnic groups to be successful in agriculture, training programs and better access to resources will be required. Together, the papers in this section illustrate new conceptual and empirical perspectives in agricultural geography, and at the same time recognize the continued importance of locality in understanding adaptation to external forces.

3.0 Policy and Planning

As the author of *Rural* (Woods, 2011), it is appropriate that Michael Woods leads off this section that concerns how the public and private spheres attempt to plan and manage rural spaces for development. In his paper, he develops a typology to illustrate the important roles that regional development agents play in responding to forces of globalization. The next three papers provide examples of policy and planning in the United States. The first paper is written by Holly Barcus, who

investigates integrated rural tourism as a development response to achieve sustainable community development. She draws upon a case study in the Midwest United States, Bayfield, Wisconsin, to apply the integrated tourism development model developed by Jenkins and Oliver (2004). Not too dissimilar to tourism development, Jesse Abrams and his colleagues then analyze Wallowa, Oregon, as a gentrification example for urbanites seeking authentic rural landscapes and experience for living. Dick Winchell provides an example of indigenous economic development in the United States. His research shows the importance of including tribal governments in economic policy decisions with economic success being followed by other improvements in indigenous communities.

Alex Martin takes us north into remote British Columbia (B.C.), Canada, with his exploration of restructuring in the forestry sector. In responding to restructuring, new relationships between the private and public sectors were developed. In addition to changes in the sector itself, northern B.C., like much of the world, was hampered by an exhaustive recession beginning in 2008. His research showcases how companies in three communities were able to respond to uncertainty by negotiating flexibility and rationalized business practices. In the last paper in this section, Guy Robinson describes the role of lottery funding with two case studies from the West Midlands of England: the 18th century landscape restoration at the Leasowes estate near Birmingham and Malvern Hills, Worcestershire. He concludes that future research should look in more detail at the conflicts between cultural and institutional views of landscape preservation. As in the agricultural section, the papers in this section illustrate the importance of locality and agency in rural development.

4.0 Community

Eight articles are included in the section on community, all of which explore the inter-relationships between people, land and regulation of rural space. Darren Smith opens this section with a paper that investigates the controversial sale of 'public' lands in the United Kingdom. Using Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, as a case study, Smith describes the conflicts, including NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) issues, as private interests gentrify land and buildings. Similarly, Ryan Bergstrom and Lisa Harrington address the public-private land use conflict by analyzing how residents perceive and prioritize changes in public and private land development in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, which crosses three state borders in the US. These two papers provide very useful examples of the dynamics between public and private interests in development.

Fiona Haslam McKenzie and her colleagues from Australia then provide an example of development and land use change as mining activities have recently begun encroaching on agricultural regions and lands. In addition to the conflicts posed to agriculture, the paper also describes the environmental and social impacts of this development on the local communities in two states in Australia: Queensland and Western Australia. Turning to Canada, Hugh Millward takes a regional approach to understanding life satisfaction within the rural-urban continuum of the Halifax Region in the Province of Nova Scotia. Among other findings, Millward discovers that life satisfaction is generally higher in the inner city and inner city commuter belt than in the suburbs and the outer commuter belt. Both papers illustrate the importance of understanding social impact and quality of life within communities.

The next three papers focus on aspects of migration. Christina Noble examines return migration to rural Ireland following the boom period of the late 1990s and early 2000s that saw a shift from emigration to immigration, including return migration to rural areas. Through personal interviews, she uses life story narratives to describe the experience of returning ‘home.’ Her research illustrates a sense of belonging in changed places. This is followed by David Storey’s paper on the migration of primarily Eastern Europeans to the United Kingdom. Through his case study of the County of Herefordshire in the English West Midlands, he finds that recent migrants have greater mobility, are more educated and through technology can be better connected to their other ‘homes.’ Then, Aileen Stockdale and her colleagues offer a unique perspective on migration in their study of retirement-based migration, and in particular pre-retirees (aged 50-64). They express concern that the transition to retirement in rural areas creates distance from family support, and places pressure on communities that lack the services required by ageing populations.

We conclude this special issue with a paper evaluating an educational program that includes farming. Gina Thornburg offers an extensive look at the Farm to School (FTS) program in the United States by bringing together three literatures: agricultural geography, sociology of agriculture, and nutrition studies. Through a case study in Oklahoma, she examines the actors, including the farmers that provide the food to the FTS program for the National School Lunch Program. In doing so, she draws upon three concepts: embeddedness, marketness, and economic instrumentalism.

5.0 Summary

It is often said that the only constant is change. This is true of agricultural practises, rural communities, rural regions, and rural economies. Regardless of the forces of globalization, changing wants and needs of society, increased mobility, environmental change, or changing population structures, ‘the rural’ continues to survive, if not thrive, thus creating its own destiny. The papers in this special issue, *Rural Geography – Rural Development*, build upon more than twenty years of effort by a core group of rural geographers who have contributed to the advancement of rural studies both theoretically and empirically, exploring and presenting new possible avenues of research.

The rural development theme builds on the previous themes of economic restructuring, sustainability, and rural change. In fact, the themes of the previous meeting (Winchell et al., 2010) were: ‘Farms and Farming’, ‘Remaking Rural Communities and Rural Space’, and ‘Policy and Action in Rural Development’. The opportunity to meet every four years to share ideas and research findings from different regions of the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, and periodically Australia and Ireland, has resulted in a substantial research collection (see reference section). We are pleased to be a part of this process at the *Journal of Rural and Community Development*.

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