Global-Rural

Researching Rural Change
and Globalization

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https://globalruralproject.wordpress.com
Background

• European Research Council Advanced Grant
• February 2014 – January 2019

• Understanding globalization and its impacts in rural localities

• 5 work packages
  – (Re-)assembling the global countryside
  – Mapping and narrating the global countryside
  – Everyday globalization in a small town
  – Differential global engagements in emerging rural economies
  – Rural assemblages and grounding global challenges
Research rationale

- Bias to the ‘global city’
- Focus in rural research on transnational processes, flows and networks
- Tendency to study spectacular examples

- For most rural places, the impact of globalization is more subtle and mundane
Everyday globalization

How do these processes work together to change (our experience of) rural places?
Theoretical Context

Building on Prof Mike Woods previous work on the Global Countryside and DERREG FP7 project, which involved the application relational approaches to globalization and rural change.

The Relational Rural

- Rural places are not discrete, bounded territories that share an essential absolute rurality
- Rural places are complex assemblages of diverse social and physical elements that each part of wider networks and relations
- Rural places are always connected to other places (both rural and non-rural) through social, economic and political relations
- The rurality of place is always defined in relation to other places
- How do we develop the theorisation and application of the relational rural?
Theoretical context

Assemblage Theory

• “a collection or gathering of things or people” Dictionary definition.

• “assemblages are composed of heterogeneous elements that may be human and non-human, organic and inorganic, technical and natural.”
  Anderson and McFarlane (2011) in Area, p124

• “The term is often used to emphasise emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy, and connects to a wider redefinition of the socio-spatial in terms of the composition of diverse elements into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation”
  Anderson and McFarlane (2011) in Area, p124
A New Philosophy of Society, Manuel DeLanda (2005)

• Assemblages are dynamic, being continuously and actively stabilized and destabilized through processes of Territorialization and Deterritorialization
• Approach emphasises Material and Expressive roles of components
• An assemblage is given an identity through Coding and Decoding
• Assemblages are characterised by ‘relations of exteriority’
  “[The capacities of an assemblage] do depend on a component’s properties but cannot be reduced to them since they involve reference to the properties of other interacting entities” (De Landa 2005, p 11)
• Multiple assemblages co-exist and are mutually constituting. An individual entity can be a component of different assemblages simultaneously
  “A component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different” (De Landa 2005, p 10)
• Assemblage does not privilege one level of organization over another; social reality is ‘multi-scaled’
Assemblage theory and place

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

• Little examination of places as assemblages
Rural Places as Assemblages

- **Material components**: Landscape, buildings, crops, livestock, wildlife, economic commodities
- **Expressive components**: Aesthetic qualities of landscape, ‘rural idyll’, folk culture, emotional attachments, sense of identity
- **Territorialization**: Working the land, family inheritance, administrative boundaries
- **Deterritorialization**: Migration, loss of rural services, amalgamation of municipalities
- **Coding**: Description as ‘rural’, eligibility for rural development programmes
- **Decoding**: Changing meaning of rurality
- **Relations of exteriority**:
  - Interactions with local towns and the region
  - Migration flows
  - Economic transactions
  - Power relations
  - Intersections with ‘translocal assemblages’

*Understanding the relational constitution of rural place in the context of change, restructuring and globalization*
Why assemblage theory?

- Globalization is not an unstoppable, homogenizing force imposed from above
- It is reproduced through local places in acts of negotiation and contestation (Massey 2005)
- Need to examine the micropolitics of globalization in rural localities

- Assemblage as a *way of looking at things* – an ontology of relations and associations - as opposed to an explanatory framework
- *Bottom-up methodology* - a complex social system is best understood by building it from the ground up...
- Drawing attention to different aspects of rural change and restructuring
- Application of existing research methods in different ways
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  - Mapping and narrating the global countryside
  - A (counter-)topography of everyday globalization
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  - Rural assemblages and grounding global challenges

GLOBAL-RURAL Case Studies

- Newfoundland
- Wales
- West of Ireland
- Northern Sweden
- Hebei and Shandong provinces
- Tanzania
- Queensland
- Hawkes Bay
- Rio Grande do Sul
Newtown case study

Textiles

Agriculture

Population (2011): 11,317
Research questions:

• What social, economic, political and cultural connections link Newtown with the wider world?
• What have been the key factors in shaping the connected geographies of Newtown over the last 50 years?
• What has been the effect of evolving global connections on the social, economic and cultural life of the town?
• Have evolving global connections contributed to the development of a ‘global consciousness’ among residents of the town?
• What do the dynamics and experiences of everyday globalization in Newtown tell us about how globalization is reproduced through local places?
Points of entry
DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS
“irrespective of the level of population, a policy of reducing the existing scatter by nucleation into larger and fewer settlements should be implemented. This would enable improved services and social amenities to be provided at a lower cost and would form a structure upon which a viable economy could be developed to its fullest capacity.”
SURVEY WORK
Business survey

- Surveys (online, self-administered and researcher-completed) & with follow-up, in-depth interviews with representatives of businesses based across Newtown’s 3 industrial estates
- Of the 48 businesses that completed surveys...
  - 31% Manufacturing; 35% Retail
  - 47% with <9 employees; 45% between 10-49 employees
  - 35% of businesses established in Newtown before 1990, 65% of businesses after 1990
  - 48% made purchases from suppliers outside of the UK
  - 33% made sales to international customers
Q12. Please estimate what percentage of your sales from Mid Wales are made to customers in the different geographic areas illustrated on the previous page:
Contact Attachments

- Relocated to Newtown in 1970s due to government-backed financial incentives
- Manufacture of forklift truck attachments
- Customers include: BP, the UN, Chevron, Singapore Airlines, Eurostar, Honda, Glaxo-Smith Kline
- Internet sales
- Poor transport connections

Map of Contact Attachments’ customer base
Business networks

• Behind the ordinary facades of the industrial estate are a complex set of international networks and supply chains
• Newtown residents enmeshed in the global economy through their everyday work
• More-than-human mobility of materials, components & products and human mobility of managers, sales reps, migrant workers
• Affinities through networks but vulnerabilities to distant events
• Re-territorialization of industries and production
INTERVIEWS & ORAL HISTORIES
Migration stories: what drew people to Newtown?

“Newtown was a place I never, kind of, envisaged that I would live. Well when I did my teacher training I was obviously starting to look for jobs. I was living down in South Wales at the time and I kind of always thought I’d live around that area for a long time... then the job in Newtown came up and I thought oh Newtown. That sounds lovely and I looked online a bit and thought it looks like quite a quaint farming, just a nice rural place...”

My brother came first in 1975. He was one of the (Vietnamese) refugees. That was actually from a boat. So he landed in Aber and from Aber they rehomed him and things. So he was taken in by a family and then we got escorted over here.

“I WAS BORN IN THE WEST MIDLANDS IN A PLACE CALLED ROWLEY REGIS WHICH IS NOT FAR FROM DUDLEY. I CAME HERE IN 1947 AND HOW WE CAME HERE WAS THAT MY FATHER WORKED IN THE CYCLE INDUSTRY IN THE MIDLANDS AND HE CAME HERE SATELLITE WORKER TO START THE CYCLE FACTORY WHICH IS NOW THE LION WORKS ON THE POOL ROAD”

I used to work for an American company and they chose Newtown purely because of the beautiful site they see in the countryside. The alternative was Merthyr Tydfil and the WDA were desperate for them to go to Merthyr Tydfil... (but) they just stopped here for lunch that’s all and said, that’s it. This looks like a nice place. We’re going to stay here...
How do people live in a small town in a global world?

“I’ve just got used to Internet shopping quite a lot. I mean, there is enough here for people to... and a lot of people like the town and the shops that are there. It’s just not what I’m used to, but when we’re having to travel for forty-five minutes to have a decent shopping experience”

“They sit along those red benches and sometimes you’ll walk past a group of about seven or eight students and they’re all just sat with their heads in their mobile phones. Some actually communicating to each other sat next to each other on the bench”

“I have to say that YouTube, I mean, I burn it really. You know, I’m downloading stuff all the time now. It’s just fantastic because in more recent years music has really got hold on me and realising that I’ve got a whole new world to discover”

“I booked myself a holiday to Jordan and... it was a wonderful holiday. It was really wonderful and it was the food and I came back absolutely, completely transported by my middle-eastern food. I really, really loved it... put it this way I keep the cumin industry going!”

“you think oh gosh how does a place like Newtown get a McDonalds? Everybody was very grateful for that... (But it’s) not just like a food outlet, it’s more like... it’s a meeting place. It’s a social place because everybody, you know, meets at McDonalds”

“Basically it’s [a] one horse town, for the best graduates to want to come and make a life here. It’s a nice place to bring up children.. but maybe not to consider coming here when you’re twenty-one, twenty-two ... it may be more difficult to go on progressing your career if you got stuck here”

“...the Internet has enabled me to move here and carry on working and live in the area”
PARTICIPATORY TECHNIQUES
Methodological challenges:

• How do you engage people in more mundane discussions of everyday life???
  – It can be hard to convince people to talk to you if you do not have a clear agenda and specific issue

• Accessing everyday practices and knowledges
Postcard project

- Working with approximately 60 school children, aged 8-11.
- Send a postcard to relatives/friends in other parts of the world
- Mapping these connections
- Recipients undertake survey exploring their relationship with Newtown
- Engage with ideas around communication, technological change and migration in the classroom
Food diaries

• 15 members of Newtown WI
• Food diary for 2-week period over Christmas
• Recording what they cooked and why?
• Reflecting on incorporation of international influences into our food practices and traditions
• Issues of food provenance, sourcing etc.

Day 1. Date: 22 December

Chicken breast cooked in oregano & rosemary sauce, including potatoes, garlic, red wine and rice. I had some left over from a previous meal. I roasted the chicken and sauce and served it with rice.

Day 2. Date: 23 December

Leftover chicken with homemade stuffing. I made some stuffing with mushrooms, onions, and garlic. I served it with mashed potatoes.

I'm trying to incorporate more international influences into my cooking. For example, I like to use coconut milk in my curries and use fish sauce in my stir-fry dishes.

Reflecting on my food practices and traditions, I'm interested in the origins of the ingredients I use. I try to source local and seasonal ingredients whenever possible.
Crowd-sourcing data

Newtown, in Powys, is typical small market town, an urban centre in a rural setting, common to many parts of the UK and Europe. Like all these other towns Newtown is also totally unique, with its own history, its own mix of people and businesses and buildings, and its own problems and opportunities for the future in a rapidly changing world. Like most rural towns it has been integrated into international networks of trade and culture for a very long time. It has experienced peaks and troughs and had to continually reinvent itself as markets and social attitudes have changed.

The Aberystwyth University Geography Department is leading an international research project looking at how rural places are changing in response to global events and global processes, and how people in different places increasingly interact with each other in a world where distance does not seem to matter. This larger project (GLOBAL-RURAL) is

Submit Your Stories
Tell us your story.
Send us your pictures, memories and thoughts about the town and how it has changed or will change in the future. Or get in touch if you would be willing to be interviewed for Assembling Newtown.

Our Projects
Assembling Newtown involves a broad range of investigations into the ways Newtown is connected with other parts of the world. Some of these issues are being explored through a large number of in-depth
REPRESENTING THE DATA
Newtown Storymap

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE:
Wool – unravelling an assemblage...
Newtown Wool Industry

• **1820s** – Newtown was the largest producer of woollen fabrics of Wales
  – River Severn providing power, railways facilitating exports

• **Pryce Jones** – World’s first mass mail order company
  – Sold Welsh flannel to European Royalty, German Army and customers in Australia and America

• **1880s onwards** – decline due to competition from modern factories in N England

• **Today** - Local sheep farmers remain, with the British Wool Marketing Board maintaining a regional collection depot in Newtown
Woolly networks

- Range of actors represented in narratives on global wool production, including:
  - Sheep farmers
  - Wool Merchants
  - Processing and manufacturing companies
  - Retailers

- Economically-centred accounts tend to overlook more-than-human factors, including:
  - Sheep
  - Wool
  - Land
  - Climate
  - Viruses and pathogens

Roche, 1995
Farm
British Fleece Wool Price Indicator

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“As a percentage of what that sheep makes, I think it’s definitely a by-product. It’s a by-product that’s got to be taken off the sheep. If people could get away with not shearing they would, and some people sell their old ewes before. They’ll sell them in the market prior to shearing to save the cost of shearing [...] People shear then at the moment because if you don’t the sheep will be dead and they get struck with maggots without treatment and they will be dead”. (Steve)

“We’re talking about £5 a ewe at the most when it’s costing you £1 just to pay the shearer. The actual gathering and then packing, because for every shearer you’ll need probably one and a half men after to get the sheep in. To pack the wool. Sort the sheep and get them back in the fields and so on. Then you get it packed, you’ve got to deliver it and get a date in which to take it in, and it’s a bulky product and it’s not the easiest thing to carry. We had five tons of wool here last year and it takes a lot of room.” (Steve)
Wool Producers
Wool Grading Depot

British Wool Marketing Board
Grading Depot, Newtown
“Some of the data is not really relevant for certain wool types like your kempy mountain types, but for other types your finer, sort of, bred type wools where it’s going to go into cloth or knitting and then it does have a bearing on what we’re prepared for pay it on a given day. It tells us that it’s suitable for a certain product which one of our customers will need” (Wool buyer)
Auction

British Wool Marketing Board
Auction Rooms, Bradford
“China obviously is a big market where they have a lot of primary processing, scouring and combing. **So there’s a lot of business there which goes out in greasy wool.** So it’s not processed in this country, which in a way is a shame that you’re not adding value more within this country, but that is an effect of globalisation as well”.

(Curtis Wool Merchants)
Blending

Haworth Scouring and Combing Plant, Bradford
Marketing provenance
Feedbacks...

- Currency fluctuations, policy and regulations, climate change, diseases and pathogens
- Opportunities and Vulnerabilities

Summary...

- Place-based processes and interactions between human and non-human components
- Material and discursive mobilization of wool between sites
- Integration of Welsh sheep farmers into global wool assemblage
- Feedbacks from distant events and dynamics

- More-than-human Globalization
Next steps:

- Ongoing research themes
e.g. travel, migration, global consciousness
- Online research
- Ethics
- Data analysis
Feedback and Questions:

- Resonate with your own projects
- Methodological and ethical issues encountered?
  - Institutional ethical guidelines and their ability to react
- Practical issues
  - Ability to trace assemblages and follow connections
  - Where to stop???