

# Rural Realities: Challenges for Young People Living in the Countryside

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# Introduction

- Increasing quantity of rural research focused on the lives of children and young people
- Some challenges
  - Increased parental anxiety – reduction in children's range from home
  - Rural spaces away from the adult gaze encroached upon by other land users
  - Teenagers may feel marginalized and/or isolated
  - Lack of youth services
  - Adult fear of young people
  - Adultist attitudes – young people's restricted agency

# Introduction

- Ruth Panelli (2002) recommends that we construct dynamic understandings of rural young people's lives, the contexts in which they live, and the negotiations and multiple relations they engage in.

# Introduction

- This approach enables
  - differences within and between childhoods in different rural contexts to be explored
    - the emblematic and corporeal rural (Matthews et al. 2000)
    - the `rural idyll' and the 'rural dull' (Jones 1997; Powell et al. 2008)
- Today I focus on the experiences of young people who have counter-urbanised (with their families)

# Counterurbanisation and Family

- People identify rural areas with a white, family-centred, increasingly middle class domain
- Constructed as a safe, purified space away from the dangers of the city
- The dominant ideology is rural living being 'good' for children – offering freedom, fresh air, small schools and innocent rusticity
- Linked to parents' decisions to counterurbanise

# Counterurbanisation and Young People

- Polarisation of the perceived positive aspects of rurality – rural idyll – and the perceived negative aspects of urbanity – urban dystopia – specifically for children
- Links between rurality, childhood and nostalgia are represented concurrently with ‘moral panics’ surrounding childhood
  - Perception that children are growing up too quickly, becoming violent, deviant, rebellious and increasingly challenging adult authority

# Counterurbanisation and Young People

- Studies of rural childhoods often do not distinguish between young people who have always lived in the countryside and those who have in-migrated
- Differences in experiences are under-researched

# Internal Child Migration

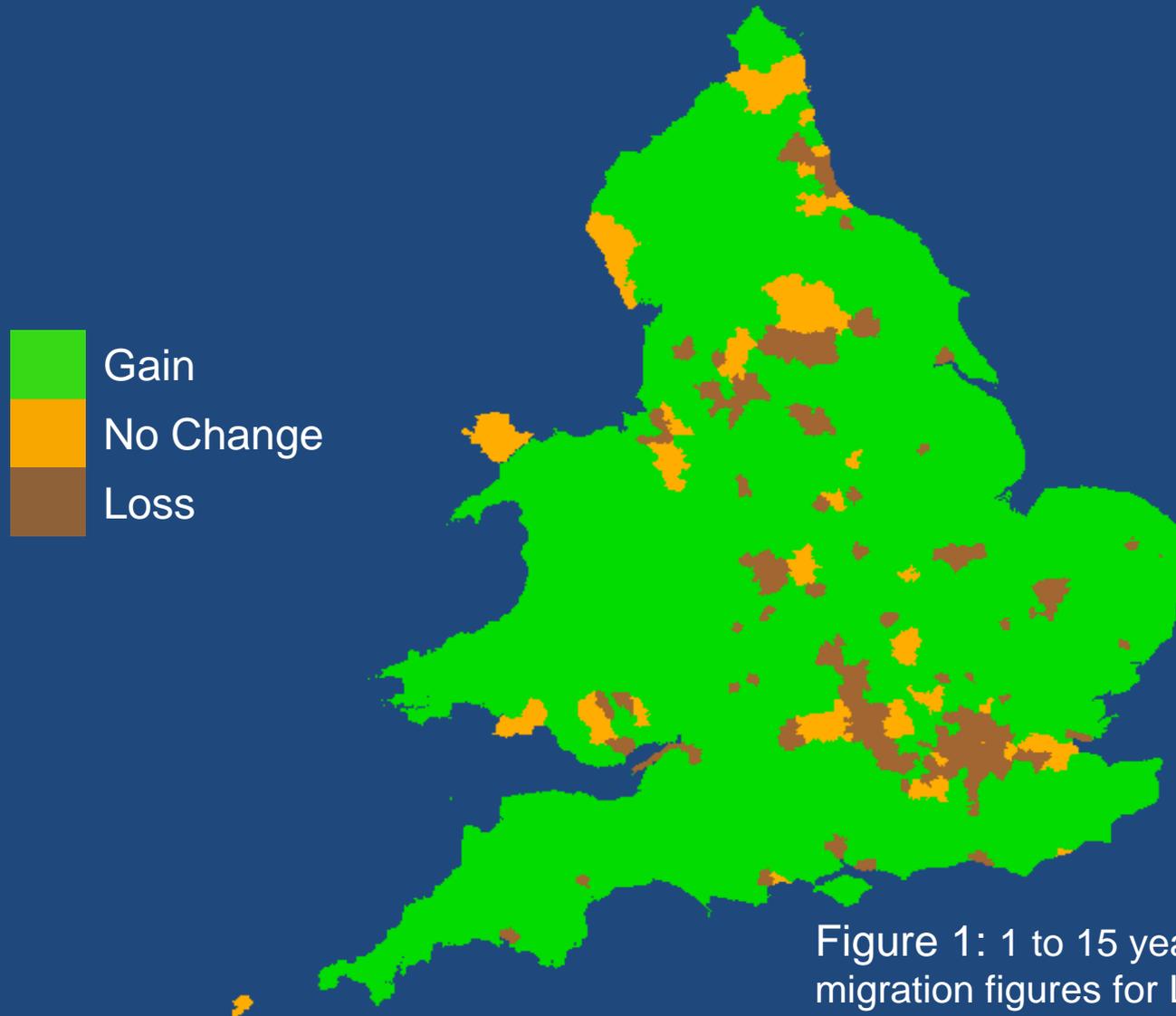
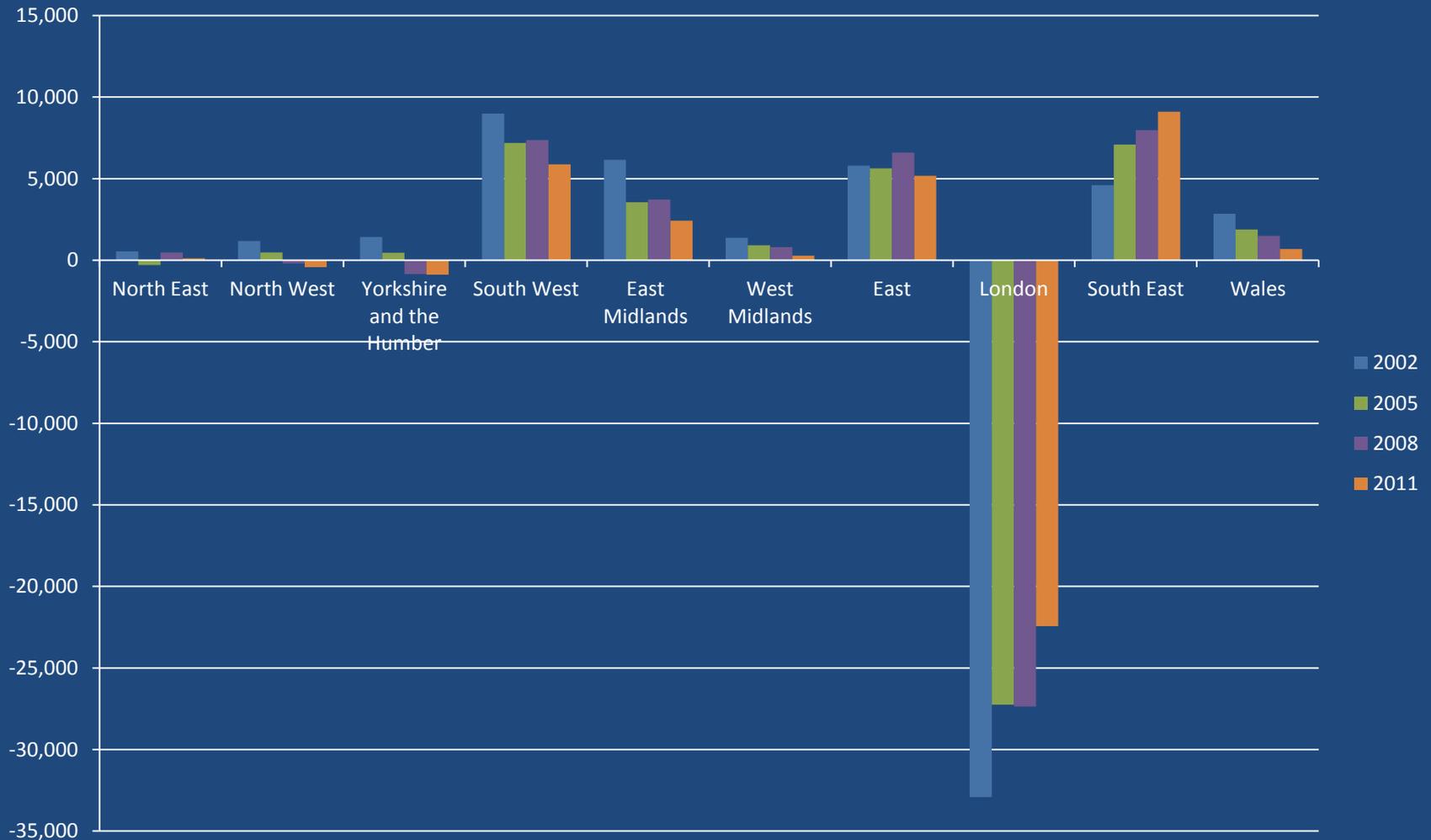


Figure 1: 1 to 15 year olds internal migration figures for LAs in England and Wales (Census 2001).

# Inter-Regional Child Migration

## Inflow/outflow aged 0-15 by region



# Research Background

- In-depth interviews
- 1.5 to 4.5 hours
- Parents and young people:
  - 39 families
  - 72 young people aged between 5 and 18.
- Interviews with 9 community leaders
- Primary motivations for CU
  - Lifestyle factors – 22 families
  - Employment – 9 families
  - Family fragmentation – 5 families
  - Children's well-being – 3 families

# Youth Spaces in Rural Centres

- Some young people participated in structured activities
- Some visited youth clubs or youth cafés – semi-structured spaces
  - Young people could choose which activities they participated in and usually they were only semi-monitored

# Youth Spaces in Rural Centres

**Ben:** There never used to be like youth clubs and leisure centres right by where we used to live. I mean there were but we couldn't get to them on our own.

**Rebecca:** There were but it wasn't safe to go by ourselves but this one is just at the bottom of the town and so we can all walk down there altogether.

# Youth Spaces in Rural Centres

**NT:** So what sort of things do you do?

**Jacob:** Just go to the skate park and stuff.

**NT:** Oh right.

**Jacob:** Or to the dirt track for the bikes and that's quite good as well. And then we just go to the shops sometimes. Or hang about outside the fish and chip shop.

# Spaces in Smaller Rural Communities

- Some smaller rural communities used village halls or local school facilities for a weekly youth club
- Often parents had started youth clubs because they were aware of the lack of facilities for young people in their locations and young people had wanted somewhere to congregate.

# Lack of Activities and Transport

**Patsy:** [...] I still go out but not as much as I used to. I used to go out with my friends to the cinema but I haven't been once since I moved here. [...] I'm used to jumping on a bus and being there in 20 minutes, you know. I can't get out of here at the weekends as much.

**Dad:** We would always take you. But the thing is you wouldn't want me to take you.

**Patsy:** No, 'cos you'd make a prat of yourself! There's just nothing to do in the village...apart from going and sitting in the park and getting cold.

# Transport and Reliance on Parents

**Cathy:** Here [the buses] they're every hour and some of them are long routes like Exeter. In the morning they are every hour but towards like the afternoon, they are like every hour and a half. Places like to [name of town] I think are every hour. So you have to find out where they are, where they come from and where they go to and what time you're meant to be there to get the bus. But I haven't actually; I have only been on the bus twice. I just go with Mum in the car.

# Isolation

**Jack:** I used to be able to go out friends where used to live but now I can't 'cos there's no friends [living close by] really to go out with. So that's a bit of a difference.

**NT:** How is it different?

**Jack:** [Pause] It just gets a bit lonely I s'pose.

# Use of Space – Rural Idyll

**NT:** What sort of thing do you do now that you didn't before?

**James:** We're outside more I guess. I do more things outside like climbing and walking a stuff.

**NT:** Do you like living here?

**Chris:** Yes, definitely. I've got much more space. Also, down at the bottom of the field there's a wood and a stream going through it.

# Use of Space – Rural Idyll

**Brian:** There's a nice five mile bike ride that one of my friends down the road showed me. He said that it would take half an hour but the first time I found part of an old car that I brought back under one arm and the second time we saw a rabbit sitting at the side of the road and it was a bit stunned so we watched it for while. But Mum was a bit cross when we got back because we'd been so long.

# Contested Space – Rural Dull

**Kate:** We go to the football club but it's not open everyday and sometimes they chuck us out for being too noisy. Every time the police come round we say 'Where do you want us to go?' and they say 'We're trying for you'. But nothing ever happens. The people that come out and tell us to move on a usually quite reasonable apart from the man who comes out with his cricket bat! They do say they're trying to get things[...]. It's not really fair 'cos the little kids never get told off and they play ball games on this little grassy bit where it says no ball games and when we go and play ball games there they call the police on us.

# Rural Idyll – Rural Dull

**NT:** So how would you describe living here?

**James:** It's like an idyllic village really.

**Alex:** There's a post office and a pub with pool. Although the landlord's not very happy with us at the moment because we go in get a glass of coke and then take up the pool table for the next ten hours!

# Rural Idyll – Rural Dull

**Abi:** I had to look after this paralytic kid on Friday. I don't drink. I don't drink at all anymore. I looked after this thirteen year old girl who was paralytic really [...]. There are lots of drunken people. Like 13, 14 year old girls came in the youth café like that, paralytic. I was like 'What the hell do you think you're doing?! You're only thirteen and you're drinking like that! You need to control your drinking and stop drinking 'cos it's ruining you.' It's horrible just seeing little girls pissed out of their faces.

# Summary

- **Positive experiences**
  - More freedom in outside spaces
  - Feeling of safety
  - Appreciation of some aspects of 'rural idyll'
- **Challenging experiences**
  - Lack of transport services
  - Lack of (and reduced) youth services
  - Isolation
  - Contested spaces
  - Adult fear (ageism)
  - Limited agency
  - Risky behaviours