

Rural Realities: Challenges for Young People Living in the Countryside

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Despite the increasing quantity of rural research focused on the lives of children and young people, there are research gaps and a coherent geography of their lives in the countryside has not been developed. Researchers have concentrated on exploring the previously neglected experiences of children in the countryside, which, it could be argued, has resulted in isolated pockets of research. Ruth Panelli (2002) suggests that it may not be possible, or even desirable, to develop a coherent geography of rural youth. Rather, she recommends that we construct dynamic understandings and experiences of their worlds, the contexts in which they live, and the negotiations and multiple relations they engage in. This approach is helpful in enabling the differences within and between childhoods in rural contexts to be explored, as well as the differences within and between the contexts in which those childhoods are enacted and experienced. This paper contributes to this growing body of work analysing young people's experiences of rural living after counterurbanisation.

The English countryside has been idealised as a place in which to bring up children and the idea that the countryside offers a safe environment for children and young people has led to the suggestion that families move to the countryside 'for the sake of the children'. However, studies of rural children's and young people's experiences often do not distinguish between those who have always lived in the countryside and those who have migrated to rural areas during childhood. Hence the ways in which migrant young people's experiences of rurality may differ from non-migrant young people's experiences has not been fully explored. Within the context of increased counterurbanisation in Britain, i.e. increased movement of families from urban to rural areas, in this presentation I discuss young people's own comparisons of their experiences of living in an urban location and a rural location within Britain.