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Rural Living Project

Briefing Paper One

Staying in Rural Places

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This briefing paper summarises the findings of the Rural Living Project led by Emilia Pietka-Nykaza from the University of the West of Scotland, and Helen Baillot, an independent researcher based in the Highlands. The data collection took place in the Inner Moray Firth area of the Scottish Highlands between October 2021 and April 2022, and included interviews with seven UK nationals, eight EU nationals and eight service providers. In addition, the team undertook site visits to Dingwall, Alness, Fortrose, Invergordon and Avoch to capture the landscapes of places identified by the participants as significant. This paper is designed to share key findings that could inform policies that aim to retain rural populations and build sustainable communities in rural places. The full research report is available at the project website: www.rurallivingscotland.com

A Framework to Understand Staying

The research team applied existing frameworks to understand and analysis the project data. These indicate that staying in rural areas can be understood as an on-going process that is shaped incrementally and facilitated or undermined over time in relation to the reciprocal importance of:

- 1 Tangible assets:** material things such as housing, education or income.
- 2 Intangible assets:** social, psychological and political assets, such as household and community networks; rules, norms and the giving and receiving of help.
- 3 Linked Lives:** the actions and decisions of significant others for example, family, friends, partners.
- 4 Sense of Belonging:** the sense of socio-psychological stability and security that can lead to people feeling settled in a new or substantially changed life environment.
- 5 Changing Places:** the physical spaces that play a role in shaping people decisions to stay.

The role of different elements of the framework in supporting or hindering the staying process are summarised in the table below. Under each framework heading, we identify the different components that can support staying, their role in doing so, and the risks that can undermine people's desire or ability to stay.

Assets		
Assets	Role	Risks
Education	<p>High quality of educational provision for children is one of the key assets valued by parents. It can motivate both moving to and staying in rural areas.</p> <p>Opportunity for children to continue education through childhood to primary and secondary school with the same peers was considered as added value of rural living.</p> <p>Families may decide to stay in rural areas in order not to disturb children's education.</p>	<p>School located outside of the community limit carer's opportunities for regular and ongoing social interactions.</p> <p>Such limitations have an impact on community cohesion.</p>
Employment	<p>Stable income generates sense of stability and material security.</p>	<p>Ethnic clustering within labour market limits opportunity for co-ethnic relations within workplace.</p> <p>Lack of opportunities for career progression push individuals, particularly young people, to move to urban areas.</p>
Housing opportunities	<p>House ownership supports place attachment .</p>	<p>Scarcity and cost of housing can limit some people to social or private rented accommodation.</p> <p>High number of second homes in the region limits available affordable housing stock.</p>
Closeness to natural landscape and less dense population	<p>Having a more 'balanced life' outside of the busy and congested cities.</p>	<p>Facilities and amenities that are more spread out and less accessible force rural stayers to rely on using private car. This creates barriers for those without private cars or driving licence.</p> <p>Increased fuel prices can impact rural stayers' access to services and natural resources.</p>
Social connections	<p>Social networks are an important source of instrumental support, assistance and provision of welfare services.</p>	<p>Lack of confidence in English / opportunities to learn limits the social connections to co-ethnic ones. This can create unequal power relations with ethnic communities, leading to unrealistic expectations and conflict within the migrant community.</p> <p>Lack of self-confidence and perceived inability to initiate social interactions can result in social isolation.</p> <p>Full-time employment pattern in lower-skilled jobs limits opportunities for social interactions outside work-place. This is especially problematic for rural stayers in lower skilled jobs e.g. agriculture, food production or hospitality.</p>

Linked Lives		
Significant Others	Role	Risks
Children	<p>Moving to rural areas or staying there long-term is linked to parents' desire to raise their children in small and safe communities.</p> <p>Having children is often a pivotal point for parent's making decision about staying long-term. This is to not to disturb children's education or peer-to-peer relations.</p> <p>Raising children and taking part in child-focused activities may contribute to developing further anchors in the place of staying.</p>	<p>Distance from significant others can prompt individuals to leave.</p> <p>People without children can feel excluded from child-focused activities and the opportunities these offer to build links with others.</p> <p>Young people often leave home and move outside of rural areas in search of improved career or educational opportunities.</p>
Parents	<p>Obligation and desire to look after elderly parents living in rural areas may contribute to long-term staying or return migration.</p>	<p>Distance from significant others can prompt individuals to leave.</p>
Partner	<p>Moving to or staying can relate to partner's change of employment. This is often gendered – often it is women who move to follow their partner.</p> <p>Choice of destination for settlement may relate to partner's place of origin.</p>	<p>Staying can be dependent on family calculation of their financial position and perceived life opportunities. It is therefore contingent on families feeling that the benefits of moving to and staying rural areas outweigh the costs for all family members.</p>

Sense of Belonging	
Role	Risks
<p>Having diverse economic and social ties or roots within local community developed the feeling of being of part of it. Such feelings had positive impact on desire to stay long-term in rural.</p> <p>Diverse social networks are crucial in relation to developing 'ways of knowing' rural communities and the feeling of being part of it.</p> <p>The feeling of safety in the community was important condition for sense of belonging. This related to the perception that rural places are quieter and less densely populated.</p>	<p>Weak roots in the local community contributed to participants feeling 'stuck' in the place and/or deciding to leave.</p> <p>Experience of discrimination and xenophobia undermine feelings of safety and contribute to the feeling of exclusion from the community.</p> <p>Perception of the rural community being 'reserved' towards newcomers and 'not engaging' in further than friendly social encounters can result in limited strong co-ethnic interactions and friendships within rural communities.</p>

Place		
Places	Role	Risks
School	<p>School premises facilitate diverse social encounters ranging from strong friendship to fleeting encounters. These are facilitated through routine and regular contact of school users - carers, pupils and members of staff over an extended period of time.</p> <p>These in turn create diverse opportunities for social interaction that go beyond school premises and include public spaces such as parks, and more intimate spaces like home.</p>	<p>Proximity of the school determines the transport used to get to school (walking versus driving or public transport). Individuals who need to drive miss the opportunity to mingle with other parents during their journeys to school.</p> <p>English language skills can limit opportunities for social encounters between international migrants and other parents; and can contribute to ethnic clustering around school.</p> <p>Different patterns for pupil drop off and collection at secondary level limit parents' opportunities to connect with others once children leave primary school.</p>
Parks	<p>Regular use of local parks via play dates, picnics, walks or social gathering played a key role in developing localised attachment.</p> <p>Parks are animators of social interactions through accidental but also routine social gatherings and encounters.</p>	<p>Proximity of the park or other green places may have negative impact on accessibility of the place, especially for those without private cars.</p>
Community Halls and Leisure Centres	<p>Community Halls (CH) or Community Centres (CC) were important places for dedicated, organised activities including child-focused activities (art and craft, mothers and toddlers groups), social gatherings or organised community meetings that provided another opportunity for social encounters.</p> <p>Centrally managed leisure centres offer an important set of sporting activities for families and adults contributing to their general health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Activities at CH are often directed at interest groups including young mothers, parents, elderly or community councils. This may exclude individuals for whom the activities are not relevant.</p> <p>Scarcity of public transport may limit access to leisure centres for those individuals who do not have access to a car.</p> <p>Increasing fuel prices may further limit rural stayers' access to leisure and sport centres.</p>
Natural landscape	<p>Natural landscape played important therapeutic role related to walking, the natural surroundings, greenery, peacefulness, beautiful views and presence (and sounds) of rural fauna.</p> <p>Natural landscape offered opportunity for outdoor activities that were free of charge and contributed to participants' health and wellbeing.</p>	<p>Scarcity of public transport may limit access to outdoor activities within natural landscape for those individuals who do not have access to a car.</p>

Place (continued)		
Places	Role	Risks
Church: places of worship	<p>Social networks are an important source of instrumental support, assistance and provision of welfare services.</p>	<p>Lack of confidence in English / opportunities to learn limits the social connections to co-ethnic ones. This can create unequal power relations with ethnic communities, leading to unrealistic expectations and conflict within the migrant community.</p> <p>Lack of self-confidence and perceived inability to initiate social interactions can result in social isolation.</p> <p>Full-time employment pattern in lower-skilled jobs limits opportunities for social interactions outside work-place. This is especially problematic for rural stayers in lower skilled jobs e.g. agriculture, food production or hospitality.</p>
Shops, cafes and private business	<p>Local high streets, with their selection of shops and businesses is often recognised as a signature place that displays elements of local heritage or history.</p> <p>High streets are space where local business co-exist with large shops and ethnic services which produce visual representation of 'rural cosmopolitanism'.</p>	<p>Over-reliance on travel by car to local services, can limit the opportunities for casual social encounters that contribute to the feeling of 'familiarity' and 'friendliness' among rural communities.</p>
Home	<p>Private home is a space for maintaining intimate and strong ties with family and friends. These ties provided import emotional support maintaining individual wellbeing and thus supporting sense of safety and stability.</p>	<p>Intimate and strong ties may illustrate mono-ethnic and mono-national divisions within the rural community</p>
Work places	<p>For people in paid employment, the workplace is an important physical space that our participants visit on daily basis.</p> <p>Some employers offered support with paperwork and facilitated access to leisure facilities e.g. providing Highlife card.</p> <p>Employment provides an important source of material security (see assets).</p>	<p>An ethnic division of labour market opportunities in rural contexts contributed to little ethnic and national diversity within workplace and thus created little or no opportunity for social encounters among rural stayers.</p> <p>Little opportunity for social encounters in workplace may contribute to further social isolation of migrants in low skilled sectors who tend to work long hours and thus had little time outside work.</p>