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Rural Media Spaces: Communication Geography on New Terrain

By Magnus Andersson & André Jansson

From Simmel to the Chicago School and all the way to the current field of urban studies, cities have been at the centre of social and cultural theory. The emphasis on cities is particularly salient in the globalization discourse, where a number of books describe the increased significance of mega-cities in geo-political and politico-economic terms (e.g. Harvey 1990; Castells 1996; Sassen 2001), as well as in cultural terms (e.g. Zukin 1995; Massey 2007). Furthermore, the related field dealing with creativity and creative industries revolves around the city (Florida 2005; Hartley 2005). In addition to cities, the media, or rather information and communication technology, holds a prominent position in globalization discourse. Above all, there are two aspects of the media that are regularly attended to. The first regards the media's ability to connect and sustain networks, which certainly has increased with the digital development. This view is also an important foundation of the abovementioned theories of Castells, Harvey and Sassen. The second aspect has to do with the new significance of representation, image and symbolic value, resulting in phenomena such as place branding and urban cultural scenes (e.g. Lynch 1960; Blum 2003; Highmore 2005). These two aspects have led to certain intersections between urban studies and media studies, very often via the theories of Henri Lefebvre (Graham 2004; Jansson 2005).

Still, an important set of questions remains mostly unanswered: What happens to the places beyond cities in the processes of globalization and mediatization? What happens to rural spaces and rural societies in terms of connectivity, representation and, subsequently, social significance? How does "the rural", in turn, affect the very same processes? These questions have been dealt with within the tradition of rural studies but only to a certain extent. Notions such as "the global countryside" (e.g. Woods 2007) and "rural gentrification" (e.g. Phillips 2004) have set an agenda for studying the interconnectedness of rural spaces. Yet although rural studies is a transdisciplinary research field dominated by sociologists, geographers and ethnologists, perspectives on mediatization are rather absent, except from more general references to network society (Murdoch 2006) and arguments about the significance of representation predominantly in relation to the rural idyll (Bell 2006) and to the meaning of place (Halfacree 1993). Similarly, within media studies, there are examples of studies which illuminate the relationship between the media and the rural, for example, the infrastructural aspects of bridging places or the democratic meaning of media in rural societies (Green 1998; Bakardijeva 2008; Hansen 2008). In addition, a more general "spa-

tial turn” within media studies has been recognized by several scholars (e.g. Falkheimer and Jansson 2006; Morley 2000, 2006), demanding more thorough and systematized explorations of “media space” (Couldry & McCarthy 2004).

These complementary viewpoints indicate a potential research agenda for “rural media spaces” – an agenda that we think corresponds to the emerging subfield of communication geography. The potential of this subfield, which is concerned with the dual question of how communication produces space and how space produces communication, has been recognized within media studies (Falkheimer and Jansson 2006; Jansson 2007) as well as geography (Adams 2009). In accordance with these ambitions, this thematic section of *Culture Unbound* is thus an attempt to bring together an interdisciplinary group of scholars and provide a common ground for research on the relationship between mediation, mediatization and rurality in the global era.¹

Epistemological Points of Departure

In an account of the development of rural studies, Michael Woods (2005: 17-25) depicts a slow but steady transformation from a tradition firmly based on empirical investigation into a “critical rural social science” anchored in conceptual theories, which are primarily derived from political economy and the general cultural turn within social science. This is not an unfamiliar story among media scholars, whose discipline has undergone a fairly similar development. While the sources of theoretical inspiration have multiplied as the media have gained an increasingly comprehensive social status, the media, as a multifaceted phenomenon, have also attained a central position within the cultural turn. Within the context of “rural media spaces”, in our interpretation, the cultural approach (derived from the cultural turn) implies a focus on the interdependence between the settings, practices and experiences of rural everyday life, on the one hand, and the global conditions of socio-spatial restructuring, on the other. This dualistic focus is integral to all the articles of this particular section, including analyses ranging from the everyday responses to rural governance and infrastructural policies to more ephemeral matters of spatial imagination.

The very notion of “rural media space” can be conceived of through Henri Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) triadic model of spatial production, which includes *perceived space*, *conceived space* and *lived space*. These three realms are inseparable as they define the particular interplay between socio-material preconditions, representational patterns and imaginary structures within the production of a certain space and place. Appropriated within the problem area of rural media studies, these realms can be approached through the concepts of *connectivity*, *representation* and *imagination*. In combination, they provide a composite understanding of the contested nature of rural media spaces, which in turn relates to the overarching question of whether (and at what levels) “the rural” is subject to marginalization

or integration. While all six articles of this thematic section deal with the triadic interplay advanced by Lefebvre, they follow diverse analytical paths, focusing on different sides of the interplay depending on their object of study. While the imaginary realm of rural (and urban) ideologies, myths, and phantasmagoria saturates all articles as a kind of intermediary mental landscape, the structure of the section can be described as a movement from connectivity to representation.

Connectivity

Connectivity, to start with, is about the infrastructure of network society. Seeing the advantages of being part of the evolving networks and enabling an ever-expanding amount of practices to be conducted from “anywhere” are easy for rural areas. Digital networks may bring people in rural areas closer to urban nodes and the economic and cultural centres. In addition, communication technologies provide opportunities for teleworking and other forms of professional activities at a distance. In a political sense, the digital ICT networks may contribute to an expansion of the sphere of civic participation and political activism, that is, the foundation of dynamic public spheres. However, in spite of these potentials for spatial emancipation and rural participation, there are tendencies that new communication networks, in fact, boost the acceleration and extension of the urbanization processes and thereby strengthen the urban-rural divide. One must at least conclude that the development is uneven as it depends on a broad range of inter-related social, economic and cultural factors and turns certain rural areas into winners while others into losers.

The first two articles, “Imagining Rural Audiences in Remote Western Australia” by Lelia Green and “Supernetwork on the Praire: The Discursive Framing of Broadband Connectivity by Policy Planners and Rural Residents in Alberta, Canada” by Maria Bakardjieva and Amanda Williams, are about the implementation of new communication infrastructure in rural areas. The first article discusses the social impact of a number of infrastructural developments, from telephone services to satellite television. It uses interview data from qualitative field-work carried out among rural citizens and compares their experiences with institutional visions of connectivity. The second article analyzes a particular process of technological implementation, that of the semi-commercial SuperNet, from the viewpoint of both provincial government and industry policy planners and rural residents. Although the articles deal with different media technologies in different parts of the world, they encompass striking similarities. Both articles highlight the discrepancy between how policy-makers and residents envision connectivity. (Urban) policy-makers in both Alberta and Western Australia deemed their infrastructural projects able to bring a lifeline of connectivity to marginalized communities, able to open a window to the world, and able to break isolation. The residents, however, had other expectations. They wanted connectivity in order to

facilitate, and not to transform, their rural lifestyles. Moreover, they wanted communication technology in the name of spatial equality.

The two articles thus illustrate the ubiquitous political dimension of the urban-rural divide, which is present even in seemingly non-political questions such as infrastructure. While “urban” imaginations of the countryside are indubitably not unitary, they tend to be different from rural ones, largely following what Tim Cresswell (2006) calls a dominant “metaphysic of flow”. And as the case studies from Alberta and Western Australia suggest, politics and policies are predominantly based upon the urban(ized) imagination of the countryside. Getting access to new means of connectivity may even work as a reminder of these dominant distinctions, as shown particularly in Green’s article.

A fairly similar argument is put forward in the third article: “Mediatization, Spatial Coherence and Social Sustainability: The Role of Digital Media Networks in a Swedish Countryside Community” by André Jansson. Analyzing qualitative interview data, Jansson argues that under rural conditions global communication networks contribute to the integration and sustainability of the community as much as to processes of expansion and differentiation. This tendency partly stems from the implications of connectivity as such. Through their capacity of linking people to external realms of interest, while simultaneously reinforcing people’s sense of belonging in the local community, online media promote ontological security at the individual level. But the tendency also stems from representational processes and people’s experience of spatial coherence. As the interview data show, connectivity is turned into a symbolic and narrative asset for the local community as a whole. Jansson’s article thus points to the linkages between connectivity and representation in the making of rural spaces.

Representation

As indicated above, imaginations of “the rural” versus “the urban” are an essential aspect of (geo)politics and the (re-)production of the rural. They saturate a broad range of spatial representations (Lefebvre’s conceived space), everything from regional development plans to popular media content, integrating more or less ideological undercurrents. With the exception of local newspapers and certain forms of local broadcasting, the mass media has been an urban affair to a considerable degree. Slightly exaggerated, these dominant media forms can be seen as mediated urban events produced by urban people in urban areas for audiences that are, if not urban, at least willing to engage with urban(ized) matters. In the 1970s, Berger et al. (1973: 65-67), referred to this condition as the “urbanization of consciousness” – a process that allegedly operates in tandem with the mythological construction of the urban as “the mediated centre” (Couldry 2003). Still, this is, and has to be, a dual perspective. It implies that rural matters or areas are being dealt with within the dominant urban perspective, which involves a mythologization of the rural – whether a romantic idyll or a rigid backwater – in terms of “the

anti-urban” (Cloke 1997; Fish 2005; Cruickshank 2009). New means of production and distribution, such as web based media, however, hold a potential to promote a do-it-yourself culture, hence opening up opportunities for alternative representations of the countryside. Village communities, petty producers and municipalities may produce images and texts about life in their environments and form online communities and networks in addition to commercial outlets of various kinds. As demonstrated in Jansson’s and Bakardjieva and Williams’ studies, these new means of self-representation may diverge from the overarching urban ideology of network society, sustaining residual cultures as well as rural cultural complexity.

The last three articles of this special section deal precisely with the construction and negotiation of rural representations and the ideological struggles involved in these processes. Magnus Andersson’s “Provincial Globalization: The Local Struggle of Place-Making”, discusses the encoding and decoding processes involved in the implementation of spatial strategies in a Swedish municipality. Having interviewed both local policy-makers and inhabitants, Andersson shows how local symbolic strategies are marked by the global discourse of urbanism. This is particularly salient in municipal policy-makers’ attitudes towards place branding and policy networks, which they envisage as self-evident components of rural development and future. The inhabitants, on the contrary, crave less rhetoric and more investments in public facilities and services, facilities that should be both scattered and small-scale for present and future inhabitants. This demarcation, Andersson argues, may be conceptualised as a conflict between the “urbanization of the rural” and the “re-ruralization of the rural”.

In the subsequent article, “Reporting an Unsettled Countryside: The News Media and Rural Protests in Britain”, Michael Woods analyzes a site of “rural production” that has not been much studied previously: British newspapers. Woods investigates how a number of newspapers represented rural protests related to hunting and farm incomes during 1997-2007, and how these representations were related to rural campaign efforts. The main argument is that during this period, the homogenous “unsettled” image of the countryside was altered to a more complex set of viewpoints informed by the ideologies of different newspapers. The study highlights the crucial role of the media in framing rural events, discursively constructing the dominant image of rurality. It also indicates that as the amount of coverage increases and rural matters enter the news agenda, a more composite understanding is more likely to evolve. By relating Woods’ findings to the abovementioned discussions of online media, one finds clear reasons to investigate further into how converging modes of self-representation and co-production may affect dominant encodings of the countryside.

The problem of rural cliché images is also addressed in the last article, albeit from a more-theory driven perspective, which focuses on how dominant metaphors may actually open up for alternative readings of the rural. In “Reading

Rural Consumption Practices for Difference: Bolt-holes, Castles and Life-rafts”, Keith Halfacree unveils the internal complexity of three metaphors (those mentioned in the title) that can be used for labelling different styles of rural consumption. Consumption is understood here as both the consumption, or reading, of representations, and the practical enactment and reproduction of rural representations through consumption. Chiefly following Gibson-Graham’s (2006) alternative strategy of “reading for difference rather than dominance,” Halfacree depicts an image of the rural as heterotopic. This means, for instance, that the notion of the rural as a “life-raft” – as articulated through practices such as second home consumption – does not merely represent an escape from a dysfunctional (urban) “rest of the world”. As shown by empirical studies of second home ownership, the “life-raft” is not an isolated entity and must, instead, be understood as an integral, and potentially transformative, component of the home as such, part of what Halfacree calls “dynamic heterolocalism”.

Integration or Marginalization? The Mediation of Distance and Difference

What emerges from the studies compiled in this section of *Culture Unbound* is a rather contradictory view of “rural media spaces”. These spaces are on the one hand, dominated by urban(izing) modes of connectivity and representation, in which “the rural” constitutes the normative and mythological “other”. On the other hand, it is shown that rural spaces attain a great deal of internal complexity and transgression. What kind of argument may be derived from these observations? The most important point is to acknowledge the diverse and multilayered role of *mediation* – the constitutive process of rural media spaces.

By its very definition, mediation is about linking and the bringing together of people, places and ideas, which may occur – as discussed above – through technological or representational means or both (Fornäs 2000). But that various entities are linked together does not necessarily imply that the distances and differences between these entities are abolished. As shown by several studies, the opposite may just as well occur, meaning that the increased connectivity between “rural peripheries” and “urban centres” may lead to an accentuated awareness of pre-existing socio-material differences and distances between the city and the countryside (Green). Consequently, it leads to an increased engagement with what is conceived of as typically rural matters (Bakardjieva and Williams). From the rural viewpoint, therefore, the politico-technological promise of participation and integration is also the promise of autonomy and separation. Seen from another reading position, however, it may also be the threat of dominance, alienation and marginalization. The dual implication of “the problem of the last mile” is an interesting case in point here since this infrastructural problem, as it mutates into a problem of representation and identity, may not only foster experiences of mar-

ginalization but also catalyze substantial participatory efforts in order to diminish distance (Jansson).

Here, the articles by Woods and Halfacree provide important illustration of the contested relationship between the urban and the rural. The articles demonstrate that there is always a discursive space for alternative representations and (re)readings, whether in relation to dominant media channels or more specialized domains, as well as an inherent subversive potential within everyday consumption practices to destabilize the urban-rural divide. An understanding of the rural as heterotopic seems essential in this context since it holds that the rural is not only “something else” or “something different” from the urban but also a realm of internal differences that may separate or unite the rural and the urban through mediation. It is important to stress that mediation must be envisioned in much broader terms than matters of “the media”. Mediation indicates that images and understandings are not only represented but also enacted and negotiated through institutional processes as well as everyday practices. The complexity and, therefore, relatively unpredictable nature of these processes are also demonstrated in the articles by Andersson (local governance) and Bakardjieva and Williams (infrastructural development project), which point to an additional type of distance interwoven with the urban-rural divide, namely that between rural residents and institutional actors such as spatial policy-makers and entrepreneurs.

In addition to symbolic mediation processes there are also other flows and mobilities with relevance to the tension field between rural integration and marginalization, for example the mobility of people. Mobilities are generally of central concern for understanding contemporary society (c.f. Urry 2001: ch. 3); obviously, the flows of chiefly middle class people from the cities to the countryside (counter-urbanization) are significant to the urban-rural divide, as are the flows of most young people in the other direction: from the rural to the urban. Although much wider than the field of communication geography, the perspective is intriguing since different forms of mobility may intersect in different ways. For example, whilst media culture might inspire various kinds of movements, itinerant people can also be expected to have a particular relationship to mediated mobility. The intersection of these flows is a theme that is implicitly present in several of the articles (see Jansson, in particular). Accordingly, mobility as a phenomenon – and as a perspective (Cresswell 2006) – further accentuates the complexity and heterogeneity of the rural partly through the travelling of people, partly through mediations, and partly through the interplay between them.

Many complexities and contradictions are unveiled in this theme section; however, what also stands out as a common denominator and key argument is the hegemonic status of the urban-rural dichotomy. Whether we discuss questions of infrastructural development programmes or modes of representation, the spaces in-between, whatever these are, tend to evaporate. According to Halfacree in his article, as the rural constitutes “the other” to the urban, it also becomes something

that is somehow inherent to urban self-identity, whether as an escape or a threat. In addition, the same thing goes for rural appropriations of the city. One may thus argue that the (gentrified) inner city and the countryside are bridged by a spatial hegemony, leaving, for example, suburbs and small towns behind (see also Phillips 2004). The aesthetic dimension of the link can be traced to the aesthetic logic of reflexive modernity with its “econom[y] of signs and space” (Lash and Urry 1994), in which the residuals of former epochs are appropriated and converted to new means. The urban factory (modernity) is turned into an arty café, and the old rural barn (pre-modernity) is refashioned into a second home. As a key figure in the contemporary reflexive modernity stands the creative entrepreneur who thrives in both settings but not often in-between. An indication of the ideological penetration of this entrepreneurial imagination is salient in Bakardjieva and Williams’ contribution, in which some rural residents – that is, not policy-makers – saw the implementation of the communication infrastructure as a chance to draw, in their eyes, “quality people” to the rural villages of Alberta.

The mediations of the city and the country thus constitute a dualistic imaginary structure in which one side cannot be conceived of without the other. This imaginary structure, which is indeed a lived space, also saturates popular media representations to a great extent, promoting *either* the volatile urban cultural mélange *or* the sedimented rural idyll as the principal landscapes of desire (DuPuis 2006). Still, these seemingly opposed representational ensembles constitute one coherent set of modern consumption, excluding modes of consumption that do not “fit” while including non-desired forms of rurality and urbanity. Consequently, as the following articles scrutinize the multi-layered constitution of this interplay, a critical reader must also reflect upon where the real “other spaces” might be located. What is annihilated by the urban-rural divide?

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Notes

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Imagining Rural Audiences in Remote Western Australia

By Lelia Green

Abstract

In 1979, Australia's then-Communication Minister Tony Staley commented that the introduction of satellite communications to the bush would "dispel the distance – mental as well as geographical – between urban and regional dwellers, between the haves and the have-nots in a communication society" (Staley 1979: 2225, 2228-9). In saying this, Staley imagined a marginalised and disadvantaged audience of "have-nots", paying for their isolation in terms of their mental distance from the networked communications of the core.

This paper uses ethnographic audience studies surveys and interviews (1986-9) to examine the validity of Staley's imaginations in terms of four communication technologies: the telephone, broadcast radio, 2-way radio and the satellite. The notion of a mental difference is highly problematic for the remote audience. Insofar as a perception of lack and of difference is accepted, it is taken to reflect the perspective and the product of the urban policy-maker.

Far from accepting the "distance" promulgated from the core, remote audiences see such statements as indicating an ignorance of the complexity and sophistication of communications in an environment where the stakes are higher and the options fewer. This is not to say that remote people were not keen to acquire satellite services – they were – it is to say that when they imagined such services it was in terms of equity and interconnections, rather than the "dispelling of distance".

Keywords: Media, rurality, radio, satellite broadcasting, Australia

Introduction

The research upon which this paper is based was conducted against the exciting background of the introduction of satellite television broadcasting to remote Western Australia (WA). Remote WA audiences were among the last “western” populations on earth to receive live television broadcasts. Even though the government’s Remote Area Television Scheme had allowed towns of over a thousand residents in Australia’s outback to receive Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) programs from the late 1970s onwards, this service was not available to many smaller communities, or to isolated homesteads. There were a number of such communities, as Philip Skelton, of the WA Government’s Office of Communications was to make clear in commentary upon the communities outside metropolitan Western Australia. “A population of 200 is not counted as a ‘town’ by the Bureau of Statistics, but there are still real live Australians out there in communities of such smaller size” (1989: 52). Skelton also provided a breakdown of the population distribution among country communities at around the time of the satellite’s introduction:

Non-metropolitan population distribution WA	
More than 25,000	Nil
20 – 25,000	3
10 – 20,000	3
5 – 10,000	7
1 – 5,000	40
500 – 1,000	47
200 – 500	47
<200	74

(Skelton 1989: 52)

Table 1.

Given the 168 communities with fewer than a thousand residents in WA, and the hundreds of people living on rural properties and remote homesteads, remote area residents outside the larger townships found it comparatively difficult to access reliable news and information. They were reliant upon unpredictable shortwave radio reception, two-way broadcast-receiver Royal Flying Doctor Service radio sets, and intermittent face to face contact with neighbours and people in towns who may be hours away; accessible only by gravel roads. Additionally, newspapers were flown into the region and could be only collected on occasional trips to the bigger centres, while mail was also held until it was collected. In 1986 this challenging communications environment was set to be revolutionised by the first AUSSAT-delivered, Remote Commercial Television Service (RCTS) broadcasts. The possible number of Western Australians who could receive (assuming satel-

lite dish connections) television services for the first time following the launch of AUSSAT lay between 100,000 (Regional Television WA 1984: 10) and 150,000 (WA Govt 1990: 4).

Even after the launch of the satellite, many remote area residents were locked out of audience participation. There were a number of issues which had to be addressed in addition to finding the cost of the satellite dish. The thought that the decision would be a straightforward one in these circumstances was often taken as a further sign of how city people were out of touch with the realities of country life:

F 25-39 Alison Graham H: [All interviewee names and identifying characteristics altered.] Not all of us have got three and a half thousand dollars to fritter away on a television dish, and a lot of the people up here are mere employees on stations ... Very, very few places have 24 hour power, and if you're an employee on a station like most of the families on School of the Air are, it's not up to them when the power gets turned on, it's outside their control. It depends on the station manager and station policy about what hours they run their generator, so the station might have a satellite dish and might wish to watch *New Parameters*, but they can't because it's outside their control. You just cannot get that through to people down south or in the city, I suppose. (Green 1998a: 54)

The research reported here which looked at the impact of the satellite services upon remote Western Australia was foreshadowed by the 1985 launch of AUSSAT, Australia's domestic satellite and the start of RCTS transmissions in 1986. AUSSAT also carried the television services of the national broadcaster (ABC), but this provided undifferentiated programming across city and country areas. For this reason, there was particular excitement throughout the remote northwest of Australia that Western Australia's regional commercial television service, Golden West Network (GWN), would be providing broadcasts more particularly tailored for non-metro television audiences. For some communities, such as Fitzroy Crossing, it made financial sense to install a downlink and a rebroadcast facility for the new AUSSAT services. For others, such as Sandstone, the community was so small that it was more economic to subsidise the purchase of dishes by multiple individual households, meaning that the structure of reception was via the installation and commissioning of household satellite dishes. Regardless of the delivery arrangements, the advent of AUSSAT services for remote Western Australia heralded the introduction of the domestic reception of live television broadcasts and of a satellite-delivered commercial broadcast culture.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

The fieldwork from which this paper is drawn was based upon the ethnographic methodology outlined in Morley's *Family Television* (1986) with one important difference: participants were interviewed separately, and not in couples, and included respondents from high school age into their 80s. The ethnographic approach (Green 2003) allows the interviewee to choose the location of the inter-

view: however, since interviews usually average an hour, the interviewee often chooses to invite the interviewer to the family home. This is the space in which the media practices being discussed occur, and where the media of interest are consumed. The invitation to enter the family home offers the opportunity to take field notes about the placement and use of communications technology. The interview format used in this research was the in-depth, semi-structured research interview (Green 1999). The interview format is non-prescriptive in that although the interviewer has a check list of subjects to be covered, the interviewee is allowed to determine the flow of the interview and to give different topics the attention that they deserve: according to the interviewee's priorities and less driven by those of the interviewer. Shaun Moores described this approach in his study of *Satellite television and everyday life* (1996):

Interviews were relaxed in manner and conversational in tone – lasting up to two hours – and whilst I kept a mental checklist of key topics to be covered, informants were allowed the space to pursue issues which they perceived as important or relevant. They were actively encouraged to speak from experience and to relate episodes from their everyday lives. My style of questioning was chiefly open-ended, designed to produce narrative responses rather than brief answers (1996: 34)

Prior to the interview phase of the research, the author had been a member of a two-person consulting team commissioned to survey remote WA before (1986) and after (1987) the introduction of satellite broadcasting using volunteer-response mail-back questionnaires. This consultancy, funded first by the WA Government's Office of Communications, and subsequently supplemented by the federal Department of Transport and Communications, was written up in Green (1988). The field research was carried out two years later, in 1989, while the author was on maternity leave and was part of a doctoral research programme. The interview phase was unfunded, apart from some part-contribution from a university research grant (Edith Cowan University) to the basic expenses of petrol and camp sites, and there was no provision for full transcribing of the 140 in-depth interviews. Interviews were tape recorded, however, and notes made of the subjects raised and issues addressed by interviewees. These notes were then analysed to identify themes arising.

After themes had been identified, the tapes were replayed and relevant portions were transcribed verbatim to create a partial word-for-word record of the interviewees' contributions. In this way the process had some parallels with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) Grounded Theory approach to the analysis of qualitative data. The themes arising from the research included: the Australian policy debate about communications provision for remote areas; isolation; the home; gender; family; technology adoption, and the construction of community. Although Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley's (1992: 15-31) "Domestication of Technology" framework had not been formulated at the time of the 1989 fieldwork, the research was interrogated and analysed using a Domestication of Technology approach.

The Domestication of Technology framework argues that there are four main elements to the means by which a technology is domesticated (Silverstone et al. 1992: 15-31): “appropriation” – when the technology is brought into the home; “incorporation” – when the technology is integrated temporally within the daily lives of the household members; “objectification” – when the technological object is given a physical space within the home; and “conversion” – when the products of using and consuming technology are converted into raw cultural materials which household members use in their social interactions with each other and with their wider community. This paper mainly concerns the “incorporation” and “conversion” phases of the domestication process.

As is implied by the reference in the conversion phase to the consumption of the technology, the domestication framework as used here also addresses Daniel Miller’s Theory of Consumption (1987: 178-217). This argues that when people voluntarily consume cultural products they are participating in a process which creates value in both directions. The technology and media delivering the cultural products is valued for its contribution to an individual’s daily life, while the individual can claim an enhanced social presence through converting these cultural products into material used for conversation and other interpersonal exchange. The implication of this process of consumption is, as Hearn et al. argue, that “social identity can be interpreted as a function of consumption” (1997: 106). The media products people consume become an important way in which they develop and express their social identity. This dynamic has implications for those people who are prevented from accessing large amounts of the cultural material circulating in the wider society, for example, by their residence in remote areas and a consequently reduced access to communications channels.

It should be noted here that the broader research project in 1989 (1998a) compared respondents from four remote communities: Broome (B); Fitzroy Crossing (FX); Sandstone (S); and isolated homesteads (H) (even though “homesteads” form an imagined community), with those from two regional communities, Gnowangerup (G) and Esperance (E). The aim was to address the impact of the RCTS upon all six communities. For Fitzroy Crossing, Sandstone and remote homesteads, the process by which commercial television was introduced was also the process through which they first experienced broadcast television of any kind: commercial or the non-commercial public service ABC programming. Before the satellite, there was no broadcast television in these places, with the exception of a few homesteads which were comparatively close to a terrestrial broadcast network. The five hypotheses informing the original research were found to be too blunt to capture or acknowledge the nuanced responses of the interviewees and were discarded in the original study in favour of teasing out the complexities of the reactions of remote area audiences to their improved communications options.

In place of the five original research hypotheses which informed the 150,000 word PhD thesis (1998a), the research question addressed here is: “How did the

domestication of satellite broadcasting by remote area audiences impact upon their subsequent consumption of communication technologies?” The communication technologies to be addressed explicitly in considering this research question are: the telephone; the 2-way (broadcaster/receiver) RFDS radio; broadcast radio and satellite television itself. Each of these will be considered as a mini-case study, and the paper ends with some conclusions about the implications of this research for the provision of broadband services to remote area communities.

Remote Area Communications Prior to the Introduction of Satellite Broadcasting

Interestingly, the start of satellite broadcasting did not mark the introduction of televisual content into the remote household. Even prior to the commencement of remote commercial broadcasting, it had been established that about one-third of respondents already had a television set and video recorder and used this assemblage to play taped broadcast programmes including films, documentaries, records of major sporting events, dramas, soaps and educational broadcasting. As Delia Arnez (F 25-39 B) commented: “There’s always been a high proportion of video use here too [...] It’s probably decreased since the television stations, but you didn’t need TV to get videos – or TV reception, to be able to use videos. A lot of people had TVs and videos before TV came”.

Daily news programs, quizzes, light entertainment and other time-sensitive transient material tended not to be included in the recordings which were generally forwarded from friends and suppliers in the metropolitan core. The importance of the television and video-recorder set-up had been revealed in the before- (1986) and after- (1987) satellite broadcasting surveys of the remote towns of Broome, Fitzroy Crossing, Sandstone and homesteads. These volunteer-response mail-back questionnaires were used to gather some basic quantitative data about the impact of the satellite broadcasting services. The research was non-random and opportunistic, so not generalisable, but it was indicative, and a total of 805 responses were received over the two phases.

Community	October 1986		October 1987	
	No of respondents	Broadcast services	No of respondents	Broadcast services
Broome	202	(Intelsat) ABC TV ABC radio	199	(AUSSAT) ABC TV GWN TV ABC radio
Fitzroy Crossing	87	Variable shortwave radio reception	48	no change (introduction of services delayed)
Sandstone	24	Variable shortwave radio reception	16	Multiple purchase AUSSAT dishes: ABC TV GWN TV ABC radio
Homesteads	111	Various	118	Various
Total number of remote respondents	424		381	

Table 2: Comparison of responses from remote populations 1986–1987 (from Green 1988: 13)

This questionnaire research included some open ended questions which meant that respondents could make comments about the services available to them. Their contributions indicated that while a good television service was overdue (“What’s bloody TV mate?” [Green 1988: 30]), the lack of other communication technologies was judged to be more critical. The kinds of comments made included: “Stop fiddling while Rome Burns! Get comprehensive radio and telephone communications to the bush before TV and other ‘frills’. PS: A decent mail service would also help”, “I value the radio communications a lot more than I do the TV”, “Priority No. 1: decent radio transmission throughout remote areas” (Green 1988: 31, 36). As these responses make clear, for many respondents the pressing issue was not broadcast television communications, but private two-way voice communications and a reliable radio service.

Telephone

Unlike almost all other satellite services around the world, there were originally no plans for AUSSAT to provide a domestic telephone service. This was the case even though large numbers of people living in remote areas had no access to a

private phone service, and instead had to use the 2-way Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) radio channel for voice communications. In the face of the lack of satellite-delivered telephony, Skelton (1989: 56) was moved to call for the “eliminating or neutralising [of] Telecom’s paranoia about its monopoly [... thus] allowing the satellite provider to offer all the types of service for which satellites have a natural advantage”. The RFDS was semi-public communication since anyone within range who had the appropriate equipment could tune into the broadcast, and many people had such equipment available since it was the primary means of summoning help in the event of a medical emergency.

As Skelton intimated, whereas most satellite services were sponsored by the relevant national telecommunications provider, in Australia’s case AUSSAT had been set up in the face of opposition from the state monopoly provider, Telecom Australia. AUSSAT was planned and launched in the context of a global move towards service liberalisation, spearheaded by the break-up of American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T, or “Ma Bell”), which had started with a government-sponsored anti-trust case filed in 1974, and which culminated in the company’s court-ordered fracture in 1984. This Regan-era development ran alongside Margaret Thatcher’s UK privatisation of British Telecom in the same year.

It was clear to Telecom Australia that the government’s decision to create a separate company for AUSSAT, rather than place the service under the control of the then-monopoly telecommunications carrier, could ultimately form the basis for competition. Given this, Telecom Australia had gained a commitment from the government that telephony would not be among the services initially provided by AUSSAT, apart from an extremely expensive satellite phone service unsuited to domestic use. Instead of satellite telephony, Telecom Australia was permitted to make good its assurances that its experimental telephony network using the proprietary Digital Radio Concentrator System (DRCS) technology would ultimately deliver a comprehensive and private phone service for the outback. This Rural and Remote Area Program (RRAP) telephone service rollout had been promised for some time, but had yet to be widely delivered when the satellite began transmitting.

Although the DRCS phone network eventually saw service between 1985-91, its introduction in parallel with the satellite launch meant that many outback residents were cynical about Telecom Australia’s commitment to the bush, seeing the eventual delivery of a private telephone network as too little, too late. Some even suggested that the concurrent rollouts were evidence that Telecom Australia was adopting a “just in time” attitude to delay service as long as possible: compatible with ensuring that AUSSAT would be precluded from offering telephony. There was considerable scepticism about whether rural telephone services were ultimately delivered by the most appropriate and cost-effective means available (Paltridge 1990).

As had been suspected by Telecom Australia, 1991 saw the introduction of competition in the Australian telecommunications market. The ownership of AUSSAT was bundled into the sale to Optus of a telecommunications carrier licence as the Australian government followed in the footsteps of the USA and UK towards market deregulation. Most of the comments and vignettes about the absence of a good telephone service that follow in this paper were offered during the 1989 field research and refer to times in the 1980s and earlier, before the introduction of the DRCS telephone network. As remote homesteader Felicity Rohrer noted (F 40-54, H), “It’s made a big difference, telephone. That was the most isolating thing, especially when your children were away at school or your parents are getting older and [...] I think you need [...] That was the worst thing, not having a phone.” (Cited in Green 2005)

Another homestead interviewee was to underline the ways in which private communications were to alter the business of the rural sector; allowing a renegotiation of relationships with the state’s economic and political capital, at the expense of the previously pivotal role of regional hubs:

M 40-54 Arthur Porchester H: We do a lot of our business direct with Perth so if we... Rather than try and use the locals, because, with the modern day telephones, you can pick up the phone and explain to someone in Perth just as easily as you can in Carnarvon. Cut out all the middle person, ordering, etc, so then it’s just a matter of really saying, “yes this is what we want - put it on such and such a transport company”, who we usually have an account with... So I guess this new modern, or efficient form of telephone has enabled us to become a lot closer to Perth... I mean, talking about the stock exchange, I mean, I quite often ring the stock exchange now because I can’t get it on ABC radio, not unless I hear that one national report, I ring the local report in Perth.

Revealing the ways in which new technologies lead to innovation and new possibilities, Porchester went on to say: “Of course the only thing wrong with that is it [... the Perth Stock Exchange] only lists the shares that are traded in Western Australia. It doesn’t do the total trading for each share that’s traded. We’re limited in what’s really going on”. These innovations altered the individual homestead’s psychological neighbourhood, allowing the development of closer ties with more distant locations at the possible expense of close communications with the immediate geographical neighbourhood.

Andrea Dixon, another homestead respondent, saw very different benefits to the phone, but also located these firmly in rural life:

F 40-54 Andrea Dixon H: [*Do you find that the telephone’s altered your life much at all?*]

Yes. Dramatically [...] In times of crisis it’s – it just gives you so much flexibility. I mean, before, we – sometimes we would fly to Carnarvon or fly up to Nyang or something to use a phone to find out if someone was critically ill or if you’ve had a critical business thing, well, you’d just travel those distances to make a phone call.

In the historical moment represented by this research, through the introduction of a private phone service, a series of isolated people and communities finally felt themselves connected into the mainstream. Technology had been appropriated and

incorporated by remote area residents in a conscious, inter-related way which linked physical, geographical and technological communications channels to patterns of distribution and service provision, and then envisaged all of these elements as held together in an interconnected system. The technological system described here is envisaged by its new users as an improvised, pragmatic ensemble which paralleled communication systems available in larger regional and city communities, and which permitted greater autonomy for remote areas, together with a relationship between those areas and the core.

Within the context of a dispersed but interdependent community, such as operates between remote area residents, it was the privacy of the telephone which made a huge difference to some respondents' feeling connected in a way which helped protect them against feelings of isolation:

F 25-39 Alison Graham H: During the day it's not much different when my husband's here or when he isn't because I'm tied up with School [of the Air] and he could be out on the bore run anyway [checking water supplies for the livestock], but it's mostly in the evenings that I feel the loneliness or I want to talk to another adult and I can get on the phone and I can ring up someone and talk to them privately, whereas I could never do that on RFDS. I mean, you might hear all these voices and what have you, and you might have sort of business dealings through the RFDS but [...] you always had to be careful about what you said, whereas now I can ring my good friend at [station name] or wherever and you talk on the phone in station language if you like – “what have you been doing?” “Oh we've been fighting fires and having hassles” and you can say what hassles you're having, which you'd be reluctant to say on the RFDS ... because we've got everybody else listening in ... you just don't like everyone to know your own personal business.

The emphasis upon reduplicating the city-based norm of an individual, private, telephone service, and the lack of such a service in remote and regional areas until the start of satellite broadcasting, tended to obscure the creativity of different strategies to overcome communication barriers. One such was the small number of less-isolated areas served by “private” fence-wire telephones. These allowed “free” (no-cost) communication between those sharing the fence wire, but this branching system could also connect into the main network. Once again, the requirement to share the benefit of the communication option between neighbours in the area was secured at the cost of individual privacy; while the distances covered increased the risk of communications failure:

F 55+ Savannah Kingston H: We used a fence wire telephone system, connected to an operator in Meekatharra, and we were on a five-party line, which broke down fairly frequently, particularly if there was rain or thunderstorms, things like that. I mean a thunderstorm, often lightning would hit the wire and just fuse it, so you got no transmission. That was a hit and miss kind of thing. And also, there was no privacy of course, 'cos there were other people on the line.

Gillard et al. argue (1994: 21-2) that for some people the phone is a way of extending “private boundaries ... beyond their home to family and friends [who] were welcome to call any time”. The impression here is that the phone is used to “capture” a friend or household member and bring them into an elastic, psycho-

logical domain of private space. A “private” call has the effect of relocating the other psychologically within the domestic sphere; a “business” call psychologically propels a home-based individual from their domestic context into the public sphere. “A certain amount of pleasure or in some cases relief, is felt when a familiar voice is heard on the other end of the phone: ‘...like I feel a sense of relief, when I’ve heard mum’s voice, that feels, that’s odd to you, but when mum answers the phone, I think oh well she’s fine I’ve heard her voice’ (*Ava*)” (Gillard et al. 1994: 21-2, original italics). In contemporary societies, both imagined and psychological communities tend to rely upon mediated communications for their existence and pervasiveness.

For many isolated Western Australians, however, it was the 2-way Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) radio transceivers that had for over a generation formed the foundation for daily communications beyond the homestead, with their local community, and which formed the backdrop against which the new satellite broadcasts were positioned.

2-Way Radio: RFDS

Alongside the incorporation of new technologies into the communication choices of remote area residents ran a keen appreciation of the changes that had resulted. This was evident in discussions about the start of the telephone service, and the consequent, almost total, demise of the RFDS radio community which allowed households within broadcast range to hear exchanges going on, rather like a 2-way citizens’ radio band.

It was this very capacity for ubiquitous monitoring of RFDS broadcasts that has caused such problems for Anne Latour when she tried to keep contact with her children after they left their close-knit station-bound family home for boarding school in Perth, for the years of their secondary education. One in particular had had a number of problems with home-sickness and settling into school life, but for a long time Anne had no idea how this child was faring:

F 40-54 Anne Latour H: [*Couldn’t the children have let you know how they were on the [RFDS] radio?*]

Yes, but with a great deal of difficulty. You see, when Bree started school, there were actually no telephone calls on the radio. They only came in towards the end of the radio’s existence. In the beginning, the only way they could get in contact with us was a telegram, and that did happen occasionally, you know, but [...] that wasn’t really the thing to use, you know, to say things like, how you feel [...] Also, the radio having certain times really didn’t fit with a boarding school.

Right. So it must be quite difficult because station families are really very close, aren’t they?

[...] One day we got mail [left the station to collect it, a four-to-five hour round trip] after weeks, and the first letter I opened [Bree] was thinking of committing suicide, the second one she was deliriously happy, and the third one – I’m not quite sure what that was – and I’d actually opened them, and she hadn’t dated them so I didn’t know whether she was still feeling like committing suicide or happy or you know, and it really becomes..... was rather difficult.

From this exchange it was clear that the RFDS broadcasts had never permitted the communication of real-time uninhibited intimate family exchange, as was enabled by a private telephone service. Even so, over the years, many interviewees had found the RFDS chat sessions a particularly pervasive substitute for company:

F 40-54 Fran Coleridge S: The phone will lead to isolation. There's an old lady down here, she's about 80, and she housekeeps for her brother and she's still wearing – her mother died 50 years ago – but she's still wearing her [mother's] clothes. She is so encapsulated in her life. And she used to have her [RFDS] transceiver. Any time, Myrtle would know anything that's going on. Anything. Birthday party at [local station], she'd know about it. She knew everything. Because she used to have the transceiver on all the time. And now there's hardly any people on, and she's a poor little old lonely lady that doesn't hear anything now. Can you see that? (Cited in Green 2005)

The consumption of the RFDS in these circumstances could act as a means of integrating the individual household within the public social exchange of the local homestead community. The RFDS communications service was used to make a difference in a crisis, such as a health emergency, or a bush fire, but it could also communicate the ongoing conversation of a neighbourhood. One cost of gaining the privacy of a telephone was that community participation in RFDS broadcasts gradually withered away.

F 40-54 Anne Latour H: [*When did you get telephone?*]
I think it's two years now, and that was because it didn't exist up here before that. And yet, in another way, you were more out of touch on the telephone with your community than you were with the radio, which is quite funny but it's – you know, when the telephone goes off [hang up from a call] you're really alone, whereas when we had the radio, even if you couldn't pick up the people close by, there was always someone on the radio.

For people living in cities, that sense of an ongoing community exchange is often supplied by tuning into local radio broadcasts (especially call-back and listener response programmes); watching television; or using the internet. However, even in its role of connecting homesteads into a broadcast community, the RFDS was not always an effective technology. This could be especially true at times when it was most needed: when the weather was extreme.

F 40-54 Felicity Rohrer H: The atmospherics were so bad we couldn't hear half the people and they'd get sick of it and wouldn't come.
Right. [Interviewer though this comment referred to shortwave radio] *and was reception good on RFDS?*
Well, that's what I mean – it wasn't.
Oh. I see.
Oh, some times it used to be shocking – you couldn't get through. I often used to worry before we had telephones if we had an emergency. I had an emergency here one night and I couldn't get through, couldn't get through – you know, it was bad weather, and eventually after about an hour Meekatharra [base station] picked me up but it took ages and I was just about hysterical by the time I got through because it was quite serious. Somebody was quite seriously ill. So you don't always get through.

Alongside the concerns about privacy and reception, which balanced the positives of having access to a neighbourhood on the radio, were comments about control and the hierarchy of status related to RFDS use. According to Greg McGinley, although there might be a large staff on an isolated station or rural property, there was generally only one person with unfettered access to the radio set; the manager's wife:

M 40-54 Greg McGinley H: A lot of people talk about the community life on radio, how they kept in touch and talked to everybody. But really that was either just the managers or the owners talking to other people. The ordinary worker, he didn't have those communications, so he didn't have communications with anybody. Only the manager or the owner, if the owner happened to live on a property, he, they had the communication thing with the radio they talk about. But the ordinary worker didn't. He had nothin' [...] It was a necessity which was mainly performed by the manager's wife, you know, they had big Aboriginal staff on the station in those days, and you know there was a lot of medicals and telegrams going backwards and forth and you know, to me, not often the manager had the time to actually get on it – it was more the manager's wife – that was her job to talk and communicate on the radio, you know. Most times the manager would, in the wet, would generally listen at seven o'clock [am, when there was a roll call of stations in the area] because he got all the rainfalls, then he knew what was what – but other than that he didn't spend a lot of time on the radio.

What? Then he'd know which roads were passable?

Oh, which roads are passable or, especially if you live down-river, you knew when a flood was coming.

Can the connections forged in a phone call be differentiated from those pertaining to a RFDS 7.00am roll call? Anderson (1991 [1983]) has written extensively about the imagined community and its contribution to nation building, and comments that “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1991: 6). His view is that “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (Anderson 1991: 6). Yet what when the “primordial village” is not a village and is not face-to-face? It may be that where people need not “imagine” the members of their community, but instead know them in face-to-face encounters and regularly meet them in mediated communication, it becomes appropriate to talk about the invocation (the “calling up”) of a psychological community.

According to such an argument, a psychological community might be perpetuated through mediated communications which free a smallish group of people to engage in a community-building project regardless of the absolute limitations of geographical co-presence. The boundaries of RFDS radio reception created a number of radio-based communities around each RFDS base station. The daily managers' roll call, the background exchanges on the radio, and the lack of daily voice contact with people beyond the radio community all helped to construct a sense of community which did not rely upon imagination but upon the limited range of communication technologies available and upon a sense of inter-

dependent reliance at critical times, such as in the face of flood or fire. In domesticating the RFCS service, each homestead was also incorporated into an RFDS community and its residents learned how to look out for each other's interests even as they protected their own.

Each specific RFDS broadcast area was typically centred around a hub of medical, social, educational and economic services, such as located in a regional town like Meekatharra or Carnarvon. The psychological community of thirty years ago, created through RFDS exchanges, might have a number of parallels with a small online community today. The definition that Howard Rheingold gives for virtual communities is that these "are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (2000: xx). In effect, community is brought into being through affective investment both in mediated and face-to-face contexts. People feel themselves connected through emotional links forged in communicative exchange, rather than simply through co-existence in physical place.

Broadcast Radio

Moving from the potentially-domestic familiarity of the phone, and the psychological community built around the local RFDS service, the wider context of mass broadcast communications proved highly problematic for residents of remote Western Australia at the start of satellite broadcasting. As one Broome respondent commented in the questionnaire phase of the research (1987):

There's a deep need for programs that make people feel good about their region; and no need at all for programs (or a program philosophy) that makes people feel like country bumpkins, second-class citizens, or idiots for preferring simplicity and isolation over complexity, clutter and the cancer-inducing madness of the cities. We like it up here; not all Australians think the same; not all Australians need or want the same television and radio programs. Please help. (Green 1988: 27)

This quotation indicates a different "imagining of community": the perspective of a Broome resident conjuring up a policy maker or service provider intent upon homogenising the wider Western Australian audience, and resolutely determined to position remote area residents as "lesser", for their preferring not to be city-dwellers. A homestead respondent associated with the remote shire of Sandstone commented upon her perception that remote broadcasters focussed upon radio news and information programs at the expense of the music channels typical of city-based radio. This was interpreted as "an aside" about country people's ignorance and their over-arching need for information.

Rosemary Westlake complains that the ABC: (F 25-39 S) "Think that country people are idiots ... they think that all we ever want to listen to is information about what's happening in the world. We get very little music ... Virtually from six o'clock in the morning, all we have is talk-backs or interviews and I fail to see

– if the city people don't need it, why do the country people need it?" (cited in Green 2004). Here, the lack of entertaining radio content was deconstructed as an expression (by city-dwelling decision-makers) that country people are ignorant, if not actually thick. Such constructions were resisted by the remote audience, but they illustrate the importance of understanding the context into which broadcast communications are introduced.

Some young adult listeners could not wait for a "commercial radio" sound to reach towns and communities in remote areas. The loss was particularly acute when the would-be audience member had spent some years in the state capital, and keenly experienced the differences between the commercial radio stations in the city, and the ABC in Broome as a particular kind of loss and longing. With texture, pace, music and advertising, the commercial soundscape has a flavour of its own. Megan Garrard (F 18-24 B): *[Did you feel in any way cut off from your old life {in Perth}]* "Yeah, and also because of the radio. We only got the ABC radio [in Broome]. We didn't like that very much. It was good when we could go down to Perth for holidays and we'd tape 96FM [commercial] and bring it back up with us so we could listen to it." The ephemeral sound track of the city of Perth became this interviewee's abiding companion on the highways of rural and remote Western Australian communities.

There was widespread appreciation that the situation relating to radio broadcasting was overdue for change. Even while waiting for the commercial radio service to be on offer via the satellite, and at a time when audiences were restricted to the ABC regional radio offerings, the relative disadvantages of the outdated technology were clearly remembered:

F 40-54 Heather Bingham B: When we first came to the Kimberley, the only radio that was available was ABC shortwave and that was only – once the sun came up in the morning – that finished. So it was only available when the sun wasn't around. So you couldn't listen to a radio in the daytime.

Oh. I wonder why that was?

Because the atmosphere affected it. And that – it would have only been about five years ahead [of] the advent of television, that radio was available..... And even although there was radio during the darkness, this could go out with atmospheric as well, so it wasn't pleasant listening to short wave. Have you ever heard short wave? Beep, squeak, squeak. You tend not to listen to it a great deal.

Cedric Maplethorpe agreed (M 40-54 FX): "It was difficult ... I think I've destroyed two or three radios in my time. You'd used to be that wild – I'd throw them against the side of the wall." Some people, such as Stan Cathcart in Fitzroy Crossing, went to extreme lengths to try to set up systems which would deliver broadcast news and (the all-important) sport:

M 55+ Stan Cathcart FX I had seven radios here when I come to town. We used to have them out in the bush and got them all around the bloody joint and they're all tuned in. There's a dirty great big mark where Radio 2 was, and you'd switch over at bloody 25 past 7, 5 past 6 at night. They'd cut it out and you'd have to find what-saname, so you'd have two radios sitting there and tune the other one in. You just hit the buttons. But half the people up here never listen to Perth anyway.

In the early days – I’m getting back now – when I listened to the cricket in the old police station, we used to go down there and say to the coppers there, and we’d ring ‘em up and we had a dirty great big radio set-up down there, and find out the cricket results. Sit there drinking cans and listen to police reports coming in, and they’d come through to us, listening to what the results were. That’s in the early or late sixties, you know. It’s changed a bit you know, when you think of it.

There was an audience for sport in remote areas long before there was satellite television: F 40-54 Felicity Rohrer H “*Did they used to do that [talk sport] before you had the satellite dish?*” “Oh, I think so: because we used to get it on the radio.” There are some indications, in the lengths some audience members had gone to in order to secure an audible signal, that some technology consumption reflects the popularity of sports as a program genre, rather than determining it. One of the big advantages of consuming sports news and broadcasts, in a country as keen on sport as Australia is, is that sports programming provides ready access to cultural materials for social exchange. It is likely, for example, that a stranger or newcomer will welcome the opportunity to take part in a sports-based conversation, and a sporting discussion runs less of a risk of polarising a response than with an equivalent exchange around politics. There was some evidence that sports broadcast consumption was used in remote areas, as in some urban communities, to strengthen gendered community:

F <17 Naomi Rowe B: [*Do you think most girls and women are interested in sports programs?*]

Well I know at our school they are. All the schools I’ve been to, all the girls are really involved in sports.

In watching them as well as playing them?

Yep. Not all the girls, but most of the girls are.

Would you say that they are more interested, as interested, less interested, than the boys are?

Depends on what sport it is. If it’s footy, it’ll be mostly boys. But if it’s tennis or hockey or something like that that involves mainly girls, it’ll be mainly girls that’ll watch it then.

This conversion phase of using the raw materials of sports audience membership to participate in popular culture means that the enjoyment of taking part in the broadcast audience is offered added value in the construction and circulation of “social pleasures and meanings” (Turner 1996: 42) in conversation and exchange.

Satellite Television

A number of respondents had a vision of the entire process of satellite broadcasting from the recording through to the delivery, with the domestic satellite dish itself providing the final link in a near-miraculous chain:

M 40-54 Carl Brunell FX: Then to see, say, the FA Cup Final in colour. I mean that was just – it was marvellous, but you take it for granted now. And then, satellite TV is the same. I mean, to see it instantaneously from Wembley [Stadium in the UK], I mean that was – I’m of a generation that I can remember, I mean I came here by sea when I first came as a kid. It took us five weeks. I mean, and there was a lot of water

between here and the UK and I've done the trip two or three times, I might say, see, and then to see it instantaneously by satellite, you know, I still can't get over that. That to me is a big deal, but for this generation it's no big deal. For me, it's still a big deal.

Arguably, it may be the physical experience of the five weeks in a boat crossing "a lot of water between here and the UK" that gave Carl Brunell his keen appreciation of distance, and of the technological feats required to deliver a colour picture live from Wembley.

Because of its importance to some community members, the consumption of sport was used by some respondents as a justification for "indulging" in power generation during the day. At the time of the research, many remote area residents were not on "town power", the state electricity grid, but used a diesel generator to make their own power to run electrical appliances. For these respondents, the use of electronic technology involved running a loud, smelly, hot, expensive machine, often in the heat of an Australian summer. Sometimes the extravagance implicated in powering up the generator was justified in terms of owners'/managers' responsibilities to the "staff", rather than in terms of personal pleasure:

F 40-54 Felicity Rohrer H: [*How about the men {working on the station}? Are they keen on sport?*]

Oh, yes, they look at the cricket, test, Sheffield Shield and the footy. They all like the footy. Usually on Saturday afternoon we run the motor for a while, while the footy's on – from 3 or quarter to 3 or whatever it is until 5 – because the staff like to look at it over at the cottage and everywhere. And the Olympics – they like to look at those things.

Such considerations were also relevant when it came to deciding which station to watch, GWN or the ABC. A single feed from a satellite could not be used to deliver ABC and GWN simultaneously, so the person with the power to decide the channel often expressed a responsibility to take into account the (supposed) viewing preferences of other people who may be viewing. This remains a constant difference between consuming television in the city, and in homestead viewing; even after the introduction of satellite broadcasts: F 40-54 Felicity Rohrer H "We don't look at things that we like looking at as much, because we've got to think of the staff. See, they all look at things, so we do look at the commercial channel probably more than I would if there was no one else looking, because they like the ... well, we do too – but they like the comedies and the films and things like that" (cited in Green 2004).

The reverse perspective, from one of the residential staff (of a different station) indicates that these good intentions do not necessarily have the desired effect. Instead, Kylie Molkner F 18-24 H commented that it "can be incredibly frustrating if you're right in the middle of something and the boss doesn't want to watch it and it just flips over and you've got no say". Given the unpredictability of the programming, Kylie tries not to invest too much in planning or hoping for what she would like to see: "We don't buy TV programmes [guides] because we know

what we're missing out on because the big house controls the black box and what they're watching is what you see" (Cited in Green 2004).

The issue of needing power supplies on top of the expensive investment in satellite technology underlies discussion of radio, television, and VCRs in many remote areas. Tried and true strategies were used to circumvent this problem:

F 40-54 Felicity Rohrer H: We have bought an inverter so that we can have power in our television during the day without having to put the motor on. So we bought that – that's extra. We wouldn't have had it if we didn't have [satellite] television. So that we can pop it on if we want to look at something.....

What's an inverter?

Well, you charge up batteries – 12 volt batteries – and that's 12 volt power and then it comes through the inverter which changes it to 240 to run your electrics.

So when you have the generator on you'd be recharging these batteries and then you'll use them during the day when the generator's off?

Yes.

How many hours would that give you?

Oh, probably only about four with the television – with radio all day – it all depends what you've got.

Throughout the interviews there was a strong awareness of the personal costs of accessing satellite television and the lack of choice in services compared with people in the city. In some ways, even as the satellite broadcasts introduced a link with the capital, they underlined the implications for country people of being located so far from the urban centre, remote from the core.

Conclusion

A desire to “consume the city” became clear in some comments from country respondents. One such was by a homestead interviewee, Arthur Porchester (M 40-54 H). “As far as I'm concerned, you've got local radios that handle the local area and the last thing you need to have is the ABC that's going to be handling the local area as well..... Now, the contact that I love to have, mode of media, is to keep in contact with the city. So that I'm not just a country boy, if you like to call it.” Here the city axis is not only an emotional attachment; it is an indicator of “the significant other”. In further explanations concerning the inadequacies of a regional service, Arthur illustrated the empowering importance of understanding the city sufficiently, and having appropriate access to city information, to be able to take on the “others” at the essentially-city game of capital accumulation – and win:

M 40-54 Arthur Porchester H: I'm an avid stock exchange watcher, and at twenty past one every day on ABC [there] used to be a report on the stock exchange. That's no longer available to the regional listeners and to get that I have to use my dish and go through the Radio National and that's the only way I can get it [...] I think being, you know, producing an export commodity, I believe anything that's really happening politically, or to the value of the Australian dollar, affects us. Might not affect us right immediately but it certainly affects us in the long run, and I think it's very important.

Another benefit of satellite television was a mini-revolution in the daily experience of farming. Bart Cromack (M25-29 H) commented upon how useful it was that “every night you had an update – you could see the weather map for yourself. You could read what was going to happen the next day and also look at cyclone warnings”. But there was more: for Bart, improved communications helped ease the responsibilities of farming well. “It made life a whole lot more enjoyable, really. Instead of having to listen the radio every five minutes to find out what was going on, you could just go to the satellite and see”. The comments of Arthur Porchester and Bart Cromack underline the valuable economic and safety benefits of the satellite technology, particularly as these impacted upon rural life.

Ultimately, as well as making life easier, and more ordered, satellite broadcasting technologies introduced new ways of doing things, and new ways of seeing the world. One respondent commented on a change of outlook that she had noted within farming families:

F 18-24 Kylie Molkner H: The ones that are growing up, too, are starting to see their life as a business as well as a lifestyle. And I think that [a lifestyle] is what a lot of the old traditional farming families have been – you know, the old salt of the earth. And things – like, they’re televising video auctions of cattle now and this sort of thing. That’s bringing technological media into the farmhouse [...] that was never there before and it’s starting to become a lot more competitive and I think that’s where media has done that.

The Australian domestic satellite, AUSSAT’s initial subtitle, was commissioned to do more than “domesticate” remote Australia, and bring it into line with communities in regional and metropolitan areas. Even so, the translation of the public world of city politics and current affairs into the context of the remote household had the effect of unifying elements of domestic life throughout the nation, regardless of location, as households in remote areas incorporated the broadcast programs into the rhythms of their daily life and into the content of their conversation. The domesticated media product was then converted into public property in the process of community building.

Prompted by the introduction of satellite broadcasts, many remote area residents worked diligently to protect a distinct way of life and to assert the value of relating differently to broadcasting and its products. The introduction of television delivered directly by satellite became the trigger for a redefinition of what it is to be remote or regional, rather than a lessening of the experience of remote or regional life. In many senses the introduction of broadcast television heightened that sense of difference, sometimes by underlining the challenges of procuring the signal and the lack of choice when compared with equivalent broadcast audiences in the city.

In summary, when considering the research question which informs this paper: “How did the domestication of satellite broadcasting by remote area audiences impact upon their subsequent consumption of communication technologies?” it is clear that the processes by which media products had been circulated in RFDS

communities were harnessed and adopted to the new media technologies. The big differences introduced by radio and television meant that there was more cultural content to consume and convert into social currency, and that this cultural content was more likely to be shared with urban populations. At the same time, the advent of the private telephone offered a greater opportunity to connect with people beyond the range of the local RFDS base station. One impact of the changes in the communications environments is that there appears to have been some “romanticising” of the benefits of the RFDS two-way radio service: although many respondents were also clear about its disadvantages in challenging weather, when it might be most needed, and in terms of the lack of access for most people living on a station property.

When this research is considered in the light of Australia’s forthcoming rollout of the National Broadband Network (NBN), it is clear that the rationale for the broadband initiative runs into a significant problem. Although Australia’s Prime Minister Kevin Rudd couched the NBN initiative in terms of a unifying vision: “Nation building for the 21st century lies in building a new national broadband network” (Rudd, cited in IPA 2008) it instead runs the risk of re-inscribing the very communications divide that Tony Staley claimed in 1979 (2225, 2228-9) would be dispelled by the satellite. Given the extent of the Australian outback, it is almost impossible to consider cabling all communities and isolated homesteads. Even so, the proposed \$Aus43 billion dollar broadband service is built upon a fibre-to-the-home “superfast” 100 megabits per second internet service for 90% of the Australian population, coupled with satellite and wireless strategies to ensure a minimum 12 megabits per second service to the remaining 10% (DBCDE 2009).

There is a pattern of an increasing proportion of the population falling on the wrong side of the proposed digital divide. In March 2008 2% of Australia was to be excluded from the superfast broadband (Conroy 2008); but by April 2009 this proportion had risen to 10% (Conroy 2009). The difference indicates a change in exclusion from the full benefits of the NBN of “remote and very remote” Australians, who account for 2.3% of the entire population (ABS 2010), to include almost all Australians living in “outer regional Australia”.

Given that 498,168 people live in “remote” and “very remote” Australia; while 2,062,966 people live in “outer regional” Australia, the total of number of residents in very remote, remote and outer regional Australia totals 2,561,134: about 11.64% of the population of 22 million (ABS 2010). The indication here is that the 12mps service is going to be the default for almost every Australian not living in “a major city of Australia” or “inner regional Australia”. Policy makers are faced with a significant challenge in persuading Australians beyond the urban and regional cores that any equalisation of communication offered in the past 20 years has not been severely compromised by the relative disadvantages to be faced by rural audiences in the post NBN-future.

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Super Network on the Prairie: The Discursive Framing of Broadband Connectivity by Policy Planners and Rural Residents in Alberta, Canada

By Maria Bakardjieva & Amanda Williams

Abstract

This paper focuses on the case of the SuperNet, an infrastructure project designed and sponsored by the provincial government of Alberta, Canada with the objective of providing broadband connectivity to public facilities, businesses and residences in rural communities. The data were collected through individual interviews, focus groups, and town hall meetings in the course of a collaborative research initiative (The SuperNet Research Alliance) that investigated the social construction of the broadband network from multiple perspectives. The objective of the paper is to examine in parallel the discourses in which the concept of broadband connectivity acquired meaning and substance at the levels of 1) provincial government and industry policy planners and 2) the residents of the rural communities who were the intended beneficiaries of the SuperNet. Using actor-network theory as a departure point, this analysis takes stock of the framing devices employed in the two sets of discourses and of the distinctive worldviews that generated them. It looks for the meeting points and the disjunctions between the grand visions and the grounded projections underlying the positions taken by the two respective categories of actors. Differences in the interpretation and appropriation of broadband among rural Albertans themselves are discerned and related to social factors characterizing different situations within rural areas. Rural broadband connectivity thus emerges not so much as a one-dimensional access equalizer for rural people, but as a complex mediator of opportunity, participation and identity.

Keywords: Alberta SuperNet, broadband connectivity, actor-network theory, media space, policy planner discourse, users, sense-making, rural residents.

Introduction: A Rural Media Space in the Making

As the opening comments to this special issue suggest the question of how best to imagine rural media spaces in an increasingly global and technologically driven world has been largely overlooked (Andersson & Jansson 2010). This paper begins to address this absence by offering an empirically situated investigation of how two distinct “discursive communities”,¹ policy planners² and citizens, struggled in the early phases of a broadband policy initiative to assess the challenges and opportunities of an emerging rural media space. The term “media space” is employed in the sense proposed by Couldry and McCarthy (2004:2), as a term that:

...at once defines the artefactual existence of media forms within social space, the links that media objects forge *between* spaces, and the (no less real) cultural visions of a physical space transcended by technology and emergent virtual pathways of communication.

This concept is useful because it allows us to envision a complex and multilayered object of study that encompasses at the same time media technology and the practices of its construction and use along with the concrete physical and social environments that these artefacts and processes originate from and produce. All elements of this definition of media space are present in the case study that we consider in this paper. This discussion closely examines the construction of a broadband communication infrastructure driven by the explicit goal of transforming the political and economic landscape of rural Alberta by forging links with distant places and how that project struggled to fit into the existing physical and cultural spaces of the people it was supposed to serve. With these intertwined dynamics unfolding over a relatively short period of time, some clear observations of a media space in the making emerged, one that to this day is still solidifying.

This contribution begins with a brief discussion of the case in question: the Alberta SuperNet. The theoretical and methodological dimensions of this particular examination are then supplied. In this instance, it is argued that a useful way to begin thinking about rural media spaces is via the theoretical lens of actor-network theory. Following that, in the findings and analysis section, the understandings of the two specific discursive communities we studied are presented and then juxtaposed against each other. This permits not only a greater appreciation of the complexity associated with this case, but also allows us to formulate several general conclusions of practical and theoretical significance which are reflected upon in the final section of this paper.

Some Background on the Alberta SuperNet Case Study

The Alberta SuperNet is an over half-billion dollar publicly and privately funded initiative approved by the Government of Alberta in 2001. The goal of this project was to connect 429 communities (urban and rural) through 13,000 km of fibre optic and wireless infrastructure. Primary partners in the initiative included: the Government of Alberta who funded the construction of an “extended network” linking government facilities in over 400 of the smaller rural communities province-wide; the Bell Consortium that financed and built the privately owned “base network” linking 27 of Alberta’s larger urban communities; and Axia Net Media Limited, a company that took on the responsibility for managing and operating the extended portion of the network on the province’s behalf. Many have positioned the SuperNet as a “precedent setting” case in efforts to promote rural broadband connectivity (Axia Net Media Corporation 2007; Cherry 2004; Dutton et al. 2004; Mitchell 2007). According to its proponents, four contextual factors make the technical dimensions of this initiative particularly noteworthy.

First, the technical infrastructure of the SuperNet itself is an impressive achievement. It has been praised for both the sheer scale and scope of its overall geographical coverage and for the rapid time frame in which it was built (Cherry 2004; Mitchell 2007). The Canadian province of Alberta stretches over 661,848 square kilometres. Its relatively small population (approximately 3.4 million) is concentrated in six metropolitan centres. At the time of the SuperNet’s inception (2001), 80 percent of Albertans lived in urban centres, yet the government acknowledged that a great deal of the province’s economic success was generated by industries such as oil and gas, agriculture and forestry located in rural areas. The vast majority of these areas were still reliant on dial-up Internet services. Consequently, the government believed that rural jurisdictions might benefit from increased access to broadband and in the process help facilitate the province’s overall economic growth (Axia Net Media Corporation 2007: 1-2).³

A second notable feature of the SuperNet is its unique business model (Mitchell 2007). As a hybrid enterprise, the SuperNet demonstrates both a “supply side” dynamic associated with the construction of large scale technical infrastructure and a “demand side” component in which specific groups are expected to dictate the scope of development and use (Anderson & Christiansen 2007). The supply side dimension of this project emerged because the province and Bell took on the financial responsibility for building a technical network that links over 4,200 locations across the province including all provincial government offices, libraries, schools, and hospitals. The demand side dimension of the SuperNet project is twofold. First, in order for business and residential users to connect to the SuperNet, an ISP must be present in a specific community. The role of that ISP is to buy bandwidth on the SuperNet and distribute it further to private customers. Once an ISP decides to provide service using the SuperNet, they still require a “last mile” solution (be it wireless, cable, ADSL or fibre) to connect their user

base. In this way, it is the ISP that secures business and residential connectivity in rural communities and ultimately decides the end price for the customer and the speed of the services they will supply. The second, demand side dynamic, emerges because despite an initial capitalization by government to be linked to the SuperNet, public facilities (such as hospitals, health centres, government offices, libraries and schools) must still pay for their monthly Internet service. In sum, while the SuperNet's business model ensured the presence of a main connectivity "trunk" across the province, it also anticipated that ISPs would step in to provide last-mile connections and that social services would be willing to pay the required fees to utilize the SuperNet.

A third point of significance is that the SuperNet represented a somewhat unexpected public investment (Williams 2010). During the 1990s, building an information highway became a major priority for Canada, as it did for many nations around the globe. In 1994, the Government of Canada formed the Information Highway Advisory Council (IHAC) to provide direction about how best to proceed. As a response, IHAC produced two major reports, both of which urged the government to invest in constructing a national information infrastructure. Additionally in 2001, a newly appointed federal committee, the National Broadband Task Force, again reiterated the need for ubiquitous connectivity across the country. Despite these high level policy recommendations, very little federal support was ear-marked for making universal broadband access a reality (Matear 2002). While federal involvement in promoting broadband connectivity was underwhelming, several provinces consciously chose to expand and upgrade the telecommunications infrastructure within their jurisdictions. In this regard Alberta was the clear leader; its \$193 million investment in the SuperNet, represents almost half of the \$545.9 million overall provincial broadband investment from 2002-2006 across Canada (Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission 2007: 129). The interview data with policy planners, discussed in greater detail in the findings section below provide some insight into the factors that motivated this provincial decision. According to respondents, the central reasons why Alberta emerged as a leader in terms of broadband provision included: the presence of a politically savvy minister in a newly formed department (Innovation and Science) who represented a rural constituency (Interview 7); a strong internal bureaucratic team dedicated to making the Minister's ideas a reality (Interview 5, Interview 7); the existence of surplus budgetary funds, which permitted the initiation of new projects (Interview 4); an articulated need to diversify the Alberta economy and make it less dependant on oil and gas revenues (Interview 1); a desire to introduce some new players such as ISPs as additional telecommunication providers (over the incumbent Telus) into the market (Interview 3); and the presence of general information technology enthusiasm, or "bubble," that had yet to "pop" (Interview 1, Interview 5).

A final factor that makes the Alberta SuperNet an interesting case study is that it became the focus of a large collaborative academic researcher project: the Alberta SuperNet Research Alliance. In 2003, this multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional team set out to investigate the social, economic, and cultural impacts of the SuperNet on Albertan communities. At this time, members of the research team began to explore user relations through public consultations and survey work, and conducted specific studies of tele-health, distance education, emergency preparedness, libraries, business, and community sense-making practices (Mitchell 2003, 2007). The authors of this article were involved as researchers in this network, and thus had the opportunity to observe first hand through individual data collection projects, and two public symposia, some of the dynamics emerging across the province of Alberta as various actors tried to make sense of this specific policy initiative. While the findings of our individual projects have been published elsewhere (Bakardjieva 2008; Mitchell et al. 2006; Williams 2010; Williams & Langford 2007; Williams et al. 2007) we felt that an important contribution could be made to the existing knowledge base by exploring our data collectively in a holistic manner.

Conceptualizing the Rural Media Space

In deciding how to frame conceptually our understanding of the SuperNet as an emerging rural media space, actor-network theory (ANT) was an obvious choice for several reasons. ANT has been proposed by its key founders (Latour 2005; Law 1999) and those working within geography (Hitchins 2003; Murdoch 1997, 1998) as a theory-method uniquely suited for tracing the emergence of socio-technical ensembles that also holds the potential to radically transform conventional understandings of spatial analysis (Murdoch 1998). In addition, it has been argued that ANT promises new insight into the dynamics of political/policy spaces (Woolgar 2004). Finally, given its roots in both ethnomethodology (Latour 1999) and semiotics (Law 1999), ANT supplies a unique set of concepts that encourages a localized and relational look at the competing sense-making practices of various discursive communities.

One of the most compelling ideas offered by ANT which can be productively applied to the analysis of an emerging rural media space is found in Callon's (1986) notion of translation. This heuristic provides a way to look at how a specific initiative begins and what sorts of processes might be required in order for it to become a stable network of human and non-human actors (people, technology, ideas, etc.). According to Callon, translation can be understood using four key dimensions: (1) problematization, (2) interessement, (3) enrolment, and (4) the mobilization of allies. During problematization, an actor initiates a network formation by defining a problem and recommending solutions. In this early phase, the initiating actor will strive to position themselves, or another actor, as an indis-

pensable resource for solving whatever problem exists, or in Callon's words as an "obligatory point of passage" (Callon 1986). Intersement is the stage in which the initiator tries to convince others of the validity of their claims. This is accomplished by making the identities and interests of the other actors seem entirely consistent with the initiating actor's leading interests, as a form of goal alignment. The anticipated outcome of intersement is to lock potential allies in place, and co-opt those not yet convinced, which might require providing certain incentives. If intersement succeeds, enrolment is possible. Callon suggests that enrolment involves a definition of the roles of the various actors within a specific space. It is a strategic process which entails "multilateral negotiations, trials of strength and tricks" to achieve success (Callon 1986: 211). The final dimension of translation, mobilization, requires the enlistment of a dedicated group of spokespersons who speak on behalf of the many and behave according to the roles that were circumscribed for them, thus supporting the initiator's interests. Once such allies are mobilized, the socio-technical network begins to achieve stability. This is because its underlying logic (including the problem set, the assigned solution, and the circumscribed roles) are all taken as fact and consistently supported by the spokespersons. A successful, or complete, translation is believed to generate a shared space, equivalence, commensurability and alignment. Moreover, "irreversibility" occurs at the moment when a social investment reaches a point where withdrawal would be unlikely (Callon 1991). In contrast, an unsuccessful translation is one in which actors no longer communicate, they reconfigure themselves in separate places with no common measures or linkages (Callon 1991: 145). However, as Murdoch (1998) has aptly noted, networks can be comprised of multiple overlapping sectors such as "spaces of prescription" that are "heavy with norms", "predictable", and "taken to be a fact" and "spaces of negotiation" that remain "fluid" and "provisional" because the links between the actors are "divergent" (362). Murdoch's qualification is useful because it offers the possibility for socio-technical networks to be imagined simultaneously as sites of coherence and difference.⁴

Callon's notion of translation and Murdoch's application of actor-network theory to the understanding of space informed our data analysis in this particular instance. Using previously collected material from 10 focus groups in rural communities, 8 town hall meetings in rural jurisdictions, and 10 interviews with policy planners intimately involved in the conception and execution of the SuperNet initiative, this study was interested in describing the nature of the SuperNet as a newly emerging media space made up of technologies, social arrangements and practices, jointly constructed by a diverse cast of actors. Our central goal was to determine whether this media space was a shared space of equivalence, commensurability and alignment? Or was it rather something more fragile? If so, where did the fragility come from and what were the fractures preventing the harmonious alignment of the different actors' interests and meanings? Our answers to

these questions were gleaned by examining the qualitative data we had at our disposal with a view to discerning the specific points of potential instability in the accounts produced by the two types of actors. We were concerned with delineating the spaces of prescription (where policy planners and rural communities seemed to agree on their view of this particular initiative) as well as the unsettled spaces of negotiation. Finally, we were interested in elaborating the practical and theoretical insights that could be generated from this sort of exploration.

Findings and Analysis

What follows is a brief analysis of the key themes that emerged in the policy planners' and citizens' responses to what the SuperNet ought to accomplish, or of how the two discursive communities problematized the technical infrastructure. Each is presented separately first, after which an effort is made to evaluate what these various themes tell us about the overall nature of the SuperNet network as a constitutive element of a rural media space.

The Birth of a Super Actor: The Policy Planner Discourse

The ten semi-structured interviews reviewed for this portion of the analysis were collected with industry and government representatives from April 2007-September 2007. The sampling strategies for this data set was purposive and snowball in that several key actors were initially identified and after each subsequent interview respondents were asked to recommend other study participants. The people that agreed to be interviewed included the following: a member of the committee that first looked at requests for proposals (RFPs) to build and implement the SuperNet (Interview 2); two deputy ministers whose department sought approval and monitored the build (Interview 1 & 4); the Minister of Innovation and Science of the time who served as a public face for the initiative when it was first announced and presented to the public (Interview 3); the head of the communication team responsible for branding the SuperNet (Interview 5); the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Axia, who bid on the government RFP and won, and now manages the SuperNet on the government's behalf (Interview 6); the Executive Assistant to the Minister of Innovation & Science, who was instrumental in helping ensure that the SuperNet initiative passed through Cabinet relatively smoothly (Interview 7); two senior civil servants responsible for managing the SuperNet on the provincial government's behalf as it became operational (Interview 8 & 9); an Internet Service Provider (ISP) whose company was responsible for quality control and assurance during the building of the network (Interview 10).

In examining the interview transcripts several key themes were apparent which can be used to map out the policy planners' conceptualization of this emergent media space as well as to delineate the sources of both its stabilization and fragil-

ity. Each of these themes is identified, bolded, and discussed below in the context of the SuperNet as a translation attempt by the Alberta government.

First, at the level of problematization (the definition of the problem and the recommendation of solutions) the policy planners struggled with a key dilemma: *determining the role of government versus that of the local/global marketplace*. On the one hand policy planners presented the SuperNet as a way to promote a more equitable form of access across the province so that urban and rural jurisdictions had equal opportunities, or as a bridge over the “digital divide” (Interview 1, Interview 6). As one participant claimed the SuperNet was best imagined as “a made in Alberta solution for getting ubiquitous service in virtually every community” (Interview 1). Another asserted:

If I can be so bold as to sum it up in one statement, there is absolutely no reason why people in the rural parts of the province should not receive the same government services, access to the same business opportunities in the province... where you live should not matter... you can continue to enjoy your quality of life without moving into the big city. (Interview 7)

On the other hand, the SuperNet was also positioned as a way to promote innovation and growth in the telecommunications industry as articulated in the following claim: “we need[ed] to come up with a model that does not take anything away from existing ISPs... we did not want a monopoly but we also did not want the innovators... in small communities to suffer... we are not in the business of being in business, we are in the business of creating an environment where business thrives” (Interview 5). Or in the words of another respondent there was a hope that the government could create a “marketplace” where “businesses would lead” (Interview 6). In this sense, two somewhat incompatible goals were key to the problematization of the SuperNet: a desire to provide universal access as social welfare (where the free market had failed to do so) and a hope to foster the role of the market through new opportunities for growth. The crux of the dilemma was nicely captured in a comment made by one of the civil servants interviewed: “How do we enable and not compete? How do we ensure that Albertans have access to services while we don’t take business out of the game” (Interview 8)?

The desire to promote both these objectives simultaneously explains why the SuperNet’s business model was structured the way it was and also why right from its inception this network was fated to remain a precarious achievement. In hindsight, policy planners recognized the challenges in balancing these competing pressures and critiqued the assumptions of the business model intended to meet the two goals that proved to be rather contradictory. Several respondents argued that the government should have in fact “done more” in terms of *satisfying first and last mile concerns* (Interview 1, Interview 4, Interview 9, Interview 10) as ISPs are motivated to make money and thus in very small communities they might not see it as economically feasible to provide connections to business and residential users. As one respondent noted, “there is no money in it. You have to have a lot of customers to make it work. It is a tough business model for ISPs” (Interview

10). Ironically, the SuperNet managed to leave those potential users whom the market had not served in the first place at the mercy of problematic market forces once again.

Strongly linked to the policy planners' perception of the SuperNet itself as a solution to the rural and urban connectivity gap was the idea of bringing a *global economic dynamic* into rural Alberta. Policy planners spoke of the SuperNet as a catalyst of economic growth and as a driving force in making Alberta a "player on the world stage" (Interview 1) and "nudg[ing] the province forward" (Interview 4). This initiative was also connected by some participants (Interview 1, Interview 5) to the "Alberta Advantage" a provincial branding campaign designed to showcase why Alberta is a desirable environment in which to invest.⁵ These aspirations were unsurprising given the wider socio-historic context in which they were formed: amidst the excited rhetoric of the information highway (Interview 4) and in the presence of a still very much intact "e-bubble" (Interview 1, Interview 5). An explicit technological determinism underpinned these expectations of global economic grandeur. The technical network was construed as a powerful "super-actor" (Williams & Langford 2007; Williams 2010) that would engender automatic loyalty and alignment among the other parties involved. It was expected to draw isolated Alberta rural areas into global information flows thereby transforming rural businesses, governmental and educational bodies into active players on the international stage. The characterizations of the technical network contained multiple images of the SuperNet's extraordinary powers and abilities. Among the things the SuperNet was professed to accomplish were: "elimina[ting] geography" and "mak[ing] everybody connected" (Interview 1); "bring[ing] immediate benefits to Albertans... to build business opportunities" (Interview 4); "help[ing] rural development as it evolves" (Interview 8). It appears that, possibly led by their mandate to convince other actors this was indeed an "obligatory point of passage", policy planners had managed to convince themselves that the technology was going to produce transformative effects by virtue of its mere presence. Their comments suggested that this radical transformation could happen in a relatively short time span if rural communities were sufficiently receptive to such possibilities. Community residents and businesses were prescribed an enviable role in these stories as recipients and beneficiaries of the gifts brought about by the infrastructure. However, little attention was given to the demands and the challenges of their role as key inhabitants of the nascent media space and major players in whose hands it would be to determine the success or failure of the initiative. In other words the strategy of interestment employed by the government actors was to promise the advantages of an information economy and a new rural media space as something that could transpire unproblematically for citizens. While this strategy likely reverberated with numerous aspirations and perceived interests already present in rural communities, it fell severely short of envisioning and de-

scribing the concrete steps that community members would need to take for these promises to materialize.

Interviewed two years after the network had been “lit up”, policy planners displayed a *shared disappointment with the project’s outcomes*, and particularly with the fact that rural residents had not yet decisively embraced the SuperNet as the saviour it was intended to be. Their comments betrayed the regret they felt due to the lack of uptake by specific user groups and the rural population at large:

The original promise of SuperNet, part of the promise, was that it would also be a great help to research ...The SuperNet has been of very little value so far to Alberta’s researchers private and public... There are research projects out into rural Alberta, carbon sensors in various locations, biodiversity carbon monitors in several places, highway sensors, sensors Crowsnest Pass and... to my knowledge not one of them is using SuperNet. (Interview 2)

But it is now just a matter of you have this interesting tool, how do you use it to take advantage of it? At the business level I am really disappointed that apart from an increased use of the agricultural community for watching commodity prices and hedging, and issues like that, there is still relatively little use in terms of building business opportunities in rural Alberta and things like that...to take advantage of the system. (Interview 4)

If you ask me, ‘did SuperNet live up to its promise’? I would say probably not yet. I think it is still simply a possibility. (Interview 7)

This shift from bright-eyed techno-optimism to disenchantment occurred within the span of about two years and helped reveal the temporal assumptions that policy planners had tacitly made. These actors, it seems, had taken it for granted that the transformation of rural Alberta into a vibrant site of the global information economy could occur within a relatively short timeframe. Consequently, they were disappointed by a presumed lack of interest by citizens and the absence of any visible signs of economic growth or qualitative change in the ways rural Alberta did business and positioned itself in the global marketplace. The “nudge,” they believed, had been given, however the province had failed to jump forward. This realization led some interviewees (even the former Minister and chief champion himself) to express measured regret about the millions of taxpayer dollars that had “gone to die” (Interview 3) in the initiative because the opportunities it offered had yet to be realized.

In retrospect, the impatience and disillusionment of the policy planners seems somewhat paradoxical given the fact that they themselves had chosen a business model that depended on the market to take care of the final and decisive step of bringing broadband into the actual living spaces of rural Albertans. As will be demonstrated in the next section, this oversight was the source of frustration for many in the SuperNet’s anticipated user base. On the policy side, however, this specific choice was based on confidence in the automatic and instant capacity of market forces to recognize and grab opportunities when such are offered to them. In a large way, this unsubstantiated faith made rural citizens captives of the ability and willingness of local service providers to live up to the role set for them and

bring connectivity to isolated homes and businesses. A temporal and conceptual fracture in the stabilization of the network appeared when ISPs failed to jump to the task. Along with the overly ambitious definition of the local commercial providers' role, another reason for their disinterest was the lack of substantive financial incentives compelling their involvement.

To be fair, the policy planners who were interviewed were not oblivious to the problems associated with their enrolment efforts. For example, several respondents revealed that the government *did not do enough to reach out to rural citizens regarding the SuperNet's potential*: "there was a community engagement group but I think it got disbanded.... I think it should have been the next level of provincial investment" (Interview 1); "to realize those economic opportunities, the province has not done enough to date to promote that culture... we have the infrastructure, we just have to know how to utilize it" (Interview 5); and "the government has to put money into education....they have not done this" (Interview 3). The Minister argued that much of this outreach oversight was because the government became so caught up in building the infrastructure that they failed to develop a long-term vision for the project that might have increased user engagement. He claimed: "...our energy was taken up on the implementation of the project. That was probably my fault. While I did understand the technology I did not conceptualize what we would go through in four years.... and what this is going to look like in four years" (Interview 3). Several other respondents drew attention to the fact that the government remained highly pre-occupied with managing the internal tensions with the immediate actors in the network such as the telcos, the ISPs and other government departments (Interview 1, Interview 4, Interview 6, Interview 7).

Finally, some of the policy planners also felt that this initiative struggled in the last phase of translation (mobilization) because it *lacked a compelling champion within government committed to success* (Interview 1, Interview 5, Interview 7). A leadership issue emerged because there was a Cabinet shuffle and the Minister who conceptualized the SuperNet moved portfolios quite soon after the build began. According to one interviewee, "the new Minister did not have the understanding of what this meant for Alberta and for rural communities... he looked at this as a government infrastructure project... it never really regained momentum after that" (Interview 5).

In sum, the SuperNet struggled to solidify as a predictable network. The project was problematized using two incompatible goals, which resulted in a business model that depended primarily on market forces (the ISP community) and a powerful technological presence (a super actor). This was considered sufficient to entice the rural population to embrace the project without delay. The specific inter-essement and enrolment efforts needed to engage the rural communities fell to the wayside as the government became exclusively preoccupied with ensuring the construction of the technical infrastructure and with accommodating the interests

of the immediate project actors. This oversight was further exacerbated when a shift in leadership pushed the initiative outside of the government's immediate priorities.

Little Voices on the Prairie: The Discourses of Rural Citizens

We now turn our ear to the discourses of ordinary rural Albertans that our project elicited and collected over a period spanning three years. The material analyzed in this section comes from a variety of sources. It includes eight town hall meeting transcripts from 2003 that our research team conducted in rural jurisdictions just after the SuperNet was announced and the build began. The goal of these town halls was to engage potential users in a conversation about what the technology might do, and how communities might “define [their] distinctive needs and aspirations” in relation to it (Mitchell 2007: 10). An effort was made in selecting locales for these particular town halls to represent the diverse types of rural communities in Alberta (such as bedroom communities, truly remote locales, and those jurisdictions located on and off major transportation routes). The locations chosen (and codes deployed for the purpose of this discussion) were: Athabasca (ATH), Canmore (CTH), Drumheller (DTH), Grand Cache (GTH), Morinville (MTH), Pincher Creek (PTH), Rocky Mountain House (RTH), and Vulcan (VTH). The next set of data comes from a series of focus groups, which took place in 2004-2005, and involved discussions with rural business community members regarding the feasibility of a set of specific scenarios. The communities visited for this investigation included: Canmore (FG1), Drumheller (FG2), Grand Cache (FG3), Morinville (FG4), Rocky Mountain House (FG5) and Vulcan (FG6). The final set includes four focus groups conducted in 2004-2006, in which the central aim was to explore how rural citizens made sense of Internet technology, and how these existing notions and experiences prepared the ground for the conceptualization of the SuperNet. The communities selected in this round of data-collection were: Drumheller (FG7), Pincher Creek (FG8), Rocky Mountain House (FG9), and Thorsby (FG10).

This large body of discursive material allowed us to chart a wide spectrum of meanings through which rural citizens related to the *super actor* constructed by policy planners. Importantly, rural Alberta presented us with a complex canvas of differently situated and differently informed human actors who made sense of the SuperNet project in very distinct ways. Age, economic status, occupation and education were predictably among the central factors suggesting different positions in the debate, but the vicissitudes of geography including landscape, distance from central points, population density and even forestation emerged as situational features with high significance to residents. Residents' experiences of Internet connectivity were shaped by these factors and so were their projections and expectations with regard to what the SuperNet might bring about. Rural Albertans living in small towns already had some type of more or less affordable Internet

provision. Standard broadband in the form of ADSL or cable had become available to these communities in recent years. The farther one lived from such a hub of relative population density, however, the harder, more expensive and problematic it was to obtain quality service. Spread-out farms and residences had signed up for wireless provision where possible, but in some cases a hill, or even a bunch of big trees, could erect an insurmountable barrier for the signal. Depending on how badly the rural resident's livelihood depended on being connected, some farmers and entrepreneurs had invested in their own wireless towers or had subscribed for a satellite connection. Added to the Internet service subscription, the cost of the tower, and the satellite link, made these solutions unaffordable to many. The left-out people had to rely on their dial-up connections for whatever use of the Internet they had. From these diverse situated experiences and pragmatic interests came different questions and concerns regarding both the SuperNet and the Internet.

In terms of the problematization of the government initiative itself, many respondents *rejected the SuperNet brand while still recognizing the value of high speed Internet versus dial up*. Early on in both the town hall meetings and the focus groups, the utility of asking questions about the SuperNet and the Internet separately became apparent. There were significant differences in how these two notions were construed. The set of questions concerning the SuperNet itself typically elicited images of a nebulous entity with no clear features, purpose or application: a set of puzzling construction activities observed by the roadside on the way home; a spout of confusing tech-talk; a pompous rhetoric stemming from government press releases:

It seems the more I hear, the more confused I am getting... we were discussing between us what we thought the SuperNet was, I had at least three different versions in my mind and now I have four or five. It seems to me the marketing of it, the "be all and end all" of it... it's coming to your doorstep...it's like the new coming. (ATH)

I don't see an awful lot of demand for the speeds that the SuperNet claims to deliver for what they do... it is basically a government service, a service for the government not for communities. (FG1)

The invocation of "high-speed Internet", on the other hand, was often greeted with excitement and impatience, with accounts of little victories and substantive gains in one's capacity and action scope, and with hopeful projections as to what these minute gains could spell for the future of rural Alberta as they accumulate and proliferate. There were several distinct areas in which the benefits of high-speed Internet were clearly recognized and the need for it, where it remained inaccessible, was pressing.

First, those on the "more professional end of agriculture", as one participant put it, had discovered the possibilities of advertising their cattle online:

Those people have been able to promote their breeding through the Internet. You want people to buy the semen from your bulls. You can buy semen from bull right from Alberta. You can buy them from France, or you can buy them from England or whatever. And that is definitely very big time. The things with purebred horses, the

quarter horses, all that agricultural end, right down from getting a German Shepard to guard your farm. You can get those kinds of things off the Internet. (FG9)

This approach was bringing direct economic returns as recounted by one of the participating ranchers:

... So now about two years ago we had a sale and two days before the sale people were telephoning: "Could you send us a digital picture on the Internet from front to front, back to side..." And [I] went outside and took the pictures and ran them on the Internet and people ended up driving up for our sale and there were figures up to about \$10, 000... That was the highest selling that we had ever had in our sales. (FG8)

But it felt very stressful to do this kind of trade over dial-up. A rural web-site designer explained:

All of my sites involve lots of pictures of cattle and horses mostly cattle pictures. On a regular 56K dial up modem they will not download right away and that's a big problem when people go to your site and want to see a picture and they have to sit and wait, wait, wait, wait... But in order for them to make it a useful tool it needs to be faster, it needs to be more information, it needs to be more accessible to people. (FG8)

In a second important area of economic activity, rural entrepreneurs who were trying to run a business over dial-up felt the stranglehold of low speed and constantly busy phone lines. Many of the home-business operators we spoke to were in that position:

Um, I'm on dial-up so it is quite painful and especially when you're talking to someone from Calgary, they don't understand why, "Oh did you get that email?" ... They don't understand that you're still on dial-up and there's, you know, we don't have the same opportunities as them. ... I don't know, but everybody just can't understand why I can't, I don't want files that take forty-five minutes to download; why you can't do that two minutes before deadline... (FG10)

Another focus group participant needed high-speed in order to more effectively develop and use her business website to sell the parrot toys that she herself designed and made. Interestingly, this retired farm lady had learned the skills and created that website herself. A small business owner offering accounting services out of her farm summed up this need for speed thus: "Like, the dial-up has to go, or else I'm going to have an ulcer 'cause now my business is depending upon the Internet." (FG 10)

Bigger business had gone their own way of ensuring adequate connectivity such as wireless towers and satellite connections, but many of their professional employees did not have the luxury of high-speed when they went back home at the end of the working day. There, they had to put up with the "kerchunck, kerchunck" of low speed as one outspoken farm woman described the experience (FG 9).

In a third and broader-stroke conceptual move, rural people envisioned high-speed connectivity as a condition that would help expand their personal and professional horizons and lifestyle choices as well as change the makeup of their

communities. One vocal participant and community champion shared his vision of a new set of possibilities opening up to rural areas:

... I can relate back to my experience of being in the city when I was still working there and a lot of people who I was interacting with at that time came from rural communities; that tended to be the peer group that I was associated with. And they all wanted to come back to rural communities because that is where they grew up and that's where they felt most at home, but they were making a living through the knowledge economy somehow, the digital economy, and therefore unable to come back home because it would limit their opportunities to such an extent. ... It used to be just the major urban centers and now with high speed Internet through DSL and cable into those small towns you get some opportunity there and that allows you to participate to certain extent in the digital economy. (FG8)

This reverse migration to the rural area had already happened in the case of a highly trained computer programmer, currently website developer. She shared that finally, with the availability of high-speed, she had been offered a ticket out of the city and back to "small town rural life," that "place of sanity", as she saw it: "I live in Rocky not because I chose to do business here, but because I chose to live here. And finally I do business" (FG9). Importantly, for this woman and other professionals in our groups, high-speed connectivity allowed them to stay in touch with their professional peers and helped them be actively involved in their area of knowledge, mostly through participation in virtual communities and discussion forums. More powerful broadband could add voice- and video-conferencing opportunities to facilitate real-time meeting attendance, one business manager suggested (FG9). Thus pursuing professional careers and maintaining professional identities out of the rural heartland was becoming practically feasible.

Finally, if cases like these proliferated, rural residents surmised, "quality people" would be attracted to rural areas, which will transform into "exurbs." That would diversify rural communities' economy and brighten up their social and cultural life. Not the least, better integration and mutual understanding between rural and urban populations may take place. Not only new-comers or returning sons and daughters, but also the current dwellers of rural areas would have the chance to contribute to this positive change by starting new businesses (FG10) and telecommuting (MTH). Families would not need to leave for the sake of the education of their children, if a variety of online courses and other educational opportunities were offered to rural young people to help equalize their chances with those of urban kids (CTH, FG7, FG10, see also Bakardjieva 2008)

Given these numerous applications that some rural people had found for high-speed Internet in their thoughts, and in their daily lives, they could not wait to see broadband connectivity extended to all corners of the province, including the far-out farms and residences, at affordable prices. How did, then, the government-sponsored and promoted SuperNet infrastructure figure into these grounded needs and aspirations? Not well enough at the time we conducted our research. *The business model selected for the SuperNet caused frustration.* The crucial "last mile" connection, being left to theoretical free market players as discussed in the

previous section, was missing. This threatened to make the whole SuperNet enterprise irrelevant to many ordinary people. Needless to say, this absence stirred an outcry among those left out:

When they say last mile they mean last 300 miles... Where did the \$400 million go? If anything, a lot of it should have been subsidizing the end. Not just saying "here is a line, deal with it". (FG1)

Okay but so why isn't the government helping, like instead of sending [another] local company in the patchwork of who knows who, you know what I mean, why aren't they working our provincial phone company to bring it to the masses? (FG10)

All it is a wire in the ground that you might have seen this summer... It gets to your door, but it is like when you are standing in the car dealership and they say "want that car over there? Well you can have it but the keys are over here and you can't have the keys". (PTH)

Well, if everybody else decides that okay I'm going to go with satellite or go with a service provider who [does not use the] SuperNet, it was kind of a waste to put SuperNet in, if nobody's going to use it or it takes so long to get to us that we spend the money, or the satellite technology comes down and then you've got all this optic, fiber in the ground that we've spent I don't even know how many millions or billions on was a waste because people will find other ways around it. (FG10)

In some instances, citizens were not satisfied with simply criticizing the government's choices, but offered alternative models they felt the government could have considered such as making broadband services analogous to a public utility and building upon the existing co-operative structures which offer natural gas and electricity to Alberta's rural communities (FG2); or endorsing a demand side model that began in the rural communities and connected only those with an expressed need and desire for this sort of connectivity (FG1). A strikingly astute comment from one of our focus group spelled out an approach fundamentally different from that taken by the government:

They should have taken the whole budget and started the other way. Not try and build this network because the network is already there. If anything, [the government] should go to the small communities that don't have anything and ask them what they want and connect them to the major centres. Not go the other way. By leaving the *last mile* they still have not solved anything. (FG1)

Considered as a process of translation (as per ANT), this discrepancy between the visions of policy planners and rural residents demonstrates the difficulty SuperNet builders had tuning their message to the perceived interests and aspirations of Alberta citizens; or put differently they could not convince rural communities that the SuperNet was truly an obligatory point of passage. Although technically the SuperNet could be deployed to meet the pressing needs of rural people, because of its specific commercial model and hyped image, it missed the target both in terms of problematization and timing. Thus it alienated instead of winning over these very important actors.

As documented in the previous section, policy planners were quick to view the SuperNet singularly as a *super actor*, as a powerful presence with the potential to

improve Alberta's economic and cultural environment on its own. Rural citizens were not quite so ready to make that leap of faith. Our town hall and focus group discussions were interspersed with expressions of *measured skepticism about the SuperNet as a transformative force*. As one respondent noted the SuperNet was best imagined by community members as a "double-edged sword" (PTH) with the potential to enhance their daily lives while also possibly compromising many of the things they held dear. Rural community members were not prepared to ignore what they perceived to be the damaging edge of the SuperNet sword. A fear that the initiative aroused was the possibility of creating new inequalities of access and opportunity within the rural areas themselves. One respondent noted: "If the SuperNet is only developed as far as the terminal nodes in rural towns, it may accelerate the present exodus from the land to the cities" (PTH). Others worried that rural spaces as we know them could be undermined and lose their unique features when they get engulfed in information, activities and cultures originating elsewhere. This is well articulated in the following comments: "Rural people by definition are isolated and I'm wondering...whether or not this broadband experience is actually isolating people even more as their need for using the computer suddenly increases" (ATH); and "In small communities, we're losing the population, and I still think, in the end, we're still going to need that one-on-one contact" (VTH). Additionally, the idea that the SuperNet might create less connected and "less resilient communities" (FG7) was raised. Urban people assume a certain fabric of social connections and services that they can rely on in crisis situations. This was not the case with farmers scattered across the prairie. For them a migration to the virtual world did not feel too safe. As one participant stressed:

In case of a disaster, what happens if you do not know your neighbour? As neat as it may be to be able to e-mail people across the world instead of writing them letters, what do you do if your house is on fire? ...E-mail your friend in New York? I am sure that is not going to help. (FG7)

Finally, it was suggested the SuperNet itself could be used to harm communities by encouraging technical solutions as opposed to promoting human involvement in the workforce:

There are very, very few professional level jobs in a town of this size, and if we start eliminating potential teaching jobs [with technology], they are going to be cutting the throats of people who do want to live here and love this community. (PTH)

Unlike the policy planners, these participants were not easily swayed by the allure of a technical super actor. There were aspects in their pre-technology life that they cherished and wanted to preserve. They knew that some of the impending changes could be undesirable or destructive. The one-dimensional discourse in which policy planners couched the SuperNet project did not help address or assuage residents' very real and often concrete concerns. This suggests that facing and diffusing actors' anxieties around a technical innovation represents another critical moment in the translation process.

In summary, the citizens we spoke to were thoughtful, articulate and reflective actors who highlighted additional sources of fragility in the formation of this new rural media space. Citizens though not spokespersons for the SuperNet brand itself, were vocal proponents of the need for high-speed Internet connectivity over dial-up (not necessarily broadband). They were also acutely aware of both the benefits new technical capacities could introduce into their daily practices and the dangers that such developments potentially posed to their rural lifestyle choices. Like the policy planners, they were disappointed with the project's outcomes in its early phase. Paradoxically, their discontent stemmed not from lack of interest in what the SuperNet could potentially offer them, but from dissatisfaction with the timing and form in which that potential was being rolled out. Note, however, that the hopes they held out for the SuperNet were firmly embedded in the ongoing lives and situated projects of their families, their business and communities. It thus seems fair to claim that at the time our data were collected, in actor-network terms, citizens were still actively questioning the problematization of the SuperNet since it did not speak to their pressing issues in an adequate way. Moreover, they resisted accepting the SuperNet as an obligatory point of passage (a necessary step, if interestment is to be a success). They remained unimpressed with the government's existing enrolment strategy as it had very little real meaning to them. That is not to say they believed such enrolment attempts could not be improved. In fact, in some cases rural respondents urged the provincial government to become a model user in order to demonstrate exactly how the initiative could or should have meaning to them. In other words, they demanded from the planner to create a liveable media space rather than to simply construct an infrastructure, no matter how advanced and powerful it appeared to be.

Conclusion: A Tale of Two Discourses

As much as rural folks had to say to the "high uppers," their voices trailed away in the vastness of the prairie. But even if they were heard, from the elevated standpoint of policy planners, the expectations of ordinary residents may have looked too modest and unimaginative. Yes, residents did not care so much about the super qualities of the SuperNet. Their virtual undertakings were tightly intertwined with the actual spaces of their family life and work. Their journey into the media space of the Internet had certainly began, but with small and very practical steps. No big leaps of ambition, faith, or investment were registered in our focus group records. However, exactly by being small, practical and meaningful, the initiatives undertaken by rural citizens built a steady momentum for change.

This was obviously not the momentous change that policy planners had hoped for. One of them described the situation thus:

I use the analogy of you take somebody out of a fairly comfortable sedan and you give them a jet fighter and then you say "go fly," it shouldn't really be surprising

that people don't understand it and [don't] know what it can do for them, and there is an educational component that needs to be there. (Interview 1)

In other words, instead of initiating or luring in high-tech ventures to take advantage of the "real broadband," residents were doing things such as building websites and virtual stores, showcasing their local character, starting parrot-toy businesses, and trading bull semen online. But those parrot toys and bulls represented the grounded reality of rural Alberta. They were the practical projects that constituted the everyday lifeworlds of rural residents. The fact that these projects were finding their way into the media space of the Internet had high significance that politicians failed to recognize to their own detriment. Following a political logic marked by technological and market determinism, policy planners had anticipated that the very arrival of the optical trunk into the frozen soil of the prairie would rapidly transform the horizons of rural people's lifeworlds. It might have been much wiser, we suggest, to start the project by taking stock of the content and dimensions of these ultimate actors' lifeworlds and the material situations that generated them, an approach recommended by those that endorse constructive technology assessment (CTA) as the best way to make policy (see Genus 2006; Schot & Rip 1996)

Furthermore, we discovered that relevant actors reside in different strata of the social world and making translation work across these strata often requires a quantum leap and poses a major challenge. In the case of the SuperNet, the network builders, in their professional roles and perceived mandates, operated on the basis of instrumental rationality that, according to Habermas, is characteristic of the systemic relations underlying markets and bureaucracies (Habermas 1984).⁶ Accordingly, these actors were preoccupied with the mobilization of other actors functioning by the logic of market and bureaucratic systems: government offices and figures, legislative bodies, companies, industries, and markets, and employed their main "steering media," power and money. They underestimated, if not completely ignored, the need for taking their enterprise into the realm of the lifeworld of potential users and enrolling them by means of communicative understanding. In the best case, network builders thought of their possible outreach to rural Albertans as education, or informational campaigns, which would flow from the top down and would eventually help bind rural residents' activities into a set of systemic relations. Little consideration was given to the possibility of engaging rural citizens in communicative interaction, of tapping into their situated knowledges and hearing their messages, of which there were many as the quotes from our focus groups demonstrate. Interestingly, and perhaps somewhat comfortingly, the holdup of SuperNet adoption proved system rationality powerless to remodel the lifeworld at will to its own specifications.

Whatever future the SuperNet and the media space of rural Alberta might have, it will most likely be decided in the interplay between the systems of market and government on the one hand, and the lifeworld of users, on the other. From a theo-

retical perspective, then, we believe that highlighting the distinction between these two types of rationality and their pertaining strategies using a Habermasian view offers an important refinement to actor-network theory. The work of translation proves to be particularly challenging and uncertain across the rift separating these spheres of action. Thus specific strategies designed for closing that rift may be a critical area for actor-network scholars to focus on.

Finally, a parallel analysis of the two discourses reveals two distinct programs with regard to this emergent media space. The media site that policy planners had envisioned and worked to create was akin to what Lefebvre (1991) calls “abstract space” (50), an instrumental territory open for *colonization*, a space welcoming the formative flows of money in the form of investment, commodity and labour exchange, and power exemplified by efficient communication between the government and local administrations. This colonization prospect did not remain unnoticed by rural residents who spoke of the SuperNet as a “double-edged sword.” For their part, residents envisaged a media space conducive to *cultivation* through meaningful action. They imagined an environment that was tightly intertwined with their lived material spaces, yet also widened their horizons by enabling practices that would transcend the entrenched rural and urban identities. In short, they construed the media space as one of action, a space that would allow them to establish new connections with the wider world on their own terms.

Thus, in contrast to the preoccupation with “abstract space” characteristic of policy planners, rural residents conceived of the nascent media space as *texture*, which Jansson defines as the “dominant paths and patterns that are (re)produced through the repetition of practices within a more durable spatial structure” (Jansson 2007: 197). This texture of recursive practices is what the cultivation process evoked in citizens’ discourse would eventually produce, but it could not materialize overnight. Especially given that the infrastructure builders had devoted scarce thought to its creation. At the same time, the development of a media space with a dense and lively texture can be seen as the best way to stabilize the infrastructure’s otherwise precarious actor-network.

Unfortunately, due to resource and time limitations our research did not follow the developments surrounding the SuperNet in these rural communities past the end of the SuperNet Alliance project.⁷ Thus, we are not in position to provide a happy ending with a definitive moral. Our account thus remains, as the section title above indicates, a cautionary tale of two discourses that have, each in its own way, shaped the cultural and media landscape of rural Alberta.

To conclude, in this discussion we have used the case of the Alberta SuperNet project to demonstrate how the close examination of the diversity and complexity associated with emerging rural media spaces offers insights with potentially broad practical and theoretical significance. We intend our work to encourage scholars to pay attention to the dynamics of the policy environments in which such spaces are conceptualized, designed and implemented. The allure of new technologies

seems to be something that policy planners have trouble resisting, yet technology-centred projects are costly and sometimes yield disappointing results. As we have shown, it should not be forgotten that the enrolment of various actors in socio-technical networks is hard work. Consequently, a larger and more inclusive blueprint of media spaces, as well as communicative involvement with the diverse actors expected to populate them, should be considered before substantial investments in technical infrastructure are made.

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Notes

- 1 The term “discursive community” is used within this context to suggest that knowledge is often produced, shared and appropriated locally within a specific group; it also implies that an exploration of communication practices within such a group may yield some fruitful research findings (Gberardi, 2000). It is however acknowledged that people may be a member of many sorts of different “discursive communities”; thus confining them to simply one for analytic simplicity has some limitations.
- 2 The term policy planner is used to refer to all those involved in the formulation and implementation of a policy idea, it thus includes industry representatives and other actors along with the traditionally expected policymakers.
- 3 Modern dial-up modems generally have a maximum theoretical speed of 56 Kb/s, the latency period of connectivity makes certain applications, such as videoconferencing, nearly impossible at slower speeds thus making broadband a more attractive option.
- 4 The performativity aspects associated with coherence and difference as concurrent spaces is explored by both Mol (2002) and Law (2003) in their discussions of “multiplicity”.
- 5 For more details on the Alberta Advantage one can consult the Government of Alberta’s website on this topic: <http://alberta.ca/home/43.cfm>.

- 6 We realize that Habermas' concepts are based on a social ontology very different from the one informing actor-network theory. We do not fully embrace the theoretical premises of either of these schools of thought. We are therefore treating them as useful heuristics and sources of conceptual tools for systematic analysis of social phenomena. Seen from this perspective, the two distinct registers can complement and inform each other.
- 7 Though SuperNet project has been operational for almost five years, a review of the Axia website in late 2009 indicated that over 185 communities of the 422 in Alberta still do not have an ISP offering service in their community (Axia Net Media Corporation 2009). Put another way many communities have yet to really see if the SuperNet will make a real difference in their lives.

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Mediatization, Spatial Coherence and Social Sustainability: The Role of Digital Media Networks in a Swedish Countryside Community

By André Jansson

Abstract

What does the implementation of new communication networks mean for the spatial coherence and social sustainability of rural communities? This paper takes its key from Wittel's discussion of *network sociality*, understood as the opposite of *Gemeinschaft*. Wittel's argument may inform our understanding of how communicative patterns in rural communities are partly re-embedded through ongoing media transitions. But it must also be problematized. Relating Wittel's discussion to Halfacree's model of spatial coherence and Urry's notion of network capital, as well as to findings from an ethnographic study in a Swedish countryside community, a more complex view is presented. It is argued that global communication networks under rural conditions contribute to the integration and sustainability of the community, as much as to processes of expansion and differentiation. The results show that network sociality and community constitute interdependent concepts. Through their capacity of linking people to external realms of interest, while simultaneously reinforcing their sense of belonging in the local community, online media promote ontological security at the individual level, thus operating as a social stabilizer.

Keywords: Media, rurality, community, networks, space, network capital

Introduction¹

The overarching aim of this article is to provide an empirical and theoretical account of the social role of information and communication technology (ICT) networks for the production of a global countryside. This particular notion of rural change has been stated within rural studies during the last decade, but it attains a focus on social and economic processes rather than on media and communication. Nonetheless, there are a growing number of articles that underscore the role of new networks in a broader sense (see especially Woods 2007) and thus implicitly highlight the need for rural media studies. As a contribution to the development of such a research field, this study seeks chiefly to ascertain whether the ongoing production of a global, networked countryside implies a growing sense of *spatial coherence*, following Keith Halfacree's (2006) Lefebvrian model, and sustainability, or leads to increasing disintegration. Based on qualitative interview data from a Swedish countryside community, it will be argued that the former scenario is the more likely consequence of rural mediatization.

The article begins with a theoretical discussion of how mediatization might affect the spatial coherence of the global countryside, and more specifically, whether the expansion of new forms of *network sociality*, defined by Andreas Wittel (2001) as the opposite of community, constitutes a potential threat to the social sustainability of rural areas. Next, presenting the empirical results from the Swedish countryside community of Granby (a fictive name) (where the expansion of new networks is an ongoing social and political issue) the article addresses the symbolic role of ICT networks in maintaining a coherent community image and narrative, as well as the social significance of possessing what John Urry (2007) calls *network capital*.

Studying Mediatization and the Global Countryside

In a recent article, Michael Woods (2007) suggests ten defining criteria of the global countryside: (1) dependence on elongated commodity networks; (2) corporate integration with transnational networks; (3) exposure to (global) migrant labour; (4) exposure to global tourism; (5) non-national property investments; (6) discursive commodification of nature; (7) containing commercially exploited landscapes; (8) increasing social polarization; (9) new sites of political authority (e.g. the World Trade Organization); and (10) collisions of interests, resulting in social and political conflicts regarding the development of rural spaces. While these ten characteristics together "reflect an idealized condition of global rural integration" (ibid: 494), their more exact implications must be studied at particular sites and in relation to their particular historical contexts. Accordingly, site-specific amalgamations (or hybridizations) of the processes suggested by Woods produce a multitude of global *countrysides*.

While the significance of the media and new ICT networks is not explicitly listed here, the expansion of such institutions and networks is clearly given as a precondition for several of the other processes. As Woods puts it, what is new about this particular stage of rural transformation “is the intensity and immediacy of the global networks of connections and flows into which rural localities may be enrolled” (Woods 2007: 500). Furthermore, there is a representational dimension to the role of media and ICT networks, according to Woods. Through discourse they produce the imaginary structures of rural spaces and places, which are in turn “conveyed through global networks, such that certain rural locations acquire a global significance in that they are known and have meaning in contexts geographically distant from the locality” (ibid: 501). I will, in this article, use the term *mediatization* to analyze the role of the media within this kind of social re-embedding processes (Giddens 1991). The term mediatization refers to a complex process through which the media (institutions, technologies and representations) disembed social practices and experiences, while simultaneously making these practices and experiences dependent upon the media as such, which means that a new kind of embeddedness is taking shape (see Lundby 2009, for an extended discussion of the mediatization concept).

For those who want to pursue the kind of situated explorations of the global countryside that Woods propagates, understanding the social dynamics of mediatization is a quintessential task. Such explorations, I argue, must be both *critical* and *multidimensional*. By “critical” I mean that rural media studies must try to engage with the ideological battles that surround the mediatization of the countryside, especially when it comes to detecting those dominant discourses that reproduce given “truths” about the consequences of new media. For instance, critical studies must not pertain narrowly to either a metaphysic of flow (nomadism) or a metaphysic of fixity (sedentarism) (see Cresswell 2006, for an account of these competing metaphysics). Full access to new media networks can never be a panacea for threatened rural forms of production nor sociality; nevertheless, a number of potentials can be opened-up (see Park 2004, for a visionary account). In addition, it cannot be assumed that “genuine” rural places and ways of life, seen from the sedentary view, will be swept away by media-sustained forms of post-productivism (see Halfacree 2007, for various scenarios of post-productivism). Social realities tend to unfold somewhere in between these two extremes in relatively contradictory ways.

This is also why rural media studies must be multidimensional. The best way to analytically grasp the spatial multidimensionality of mediatization, I suggest, is to apply Henri Lefebvre’s (1974/1991) triadic structure of social space. According to his viewpoint, the complexity of spatial production depends upon the interplay between (1) people’s activities in material landscapes (perceived space); (2) the circulation of spatial representations (conceived space); and (3) spatial imageries in the shape of ideologies, myths, and so on (lived space). A full understanding of

any given space can be reached only when these three realms are analytically inter-connected. This, in the case of *rural media space*, means that one must attend to (1) *material media infrastructures*; (2) *media representations* (whether development plans, place marketing, or popular culture); and (3) *lived media experiences and imageries*. Furthermore, one must attend to how these are embedded in various ideological formations (see also Jansson and Falkheimer 2006). A similar three-fold model, inspired by Lefebvre, is suggested from a rural studies perspective by Keith Halfacree (2006; 2007), who argues that rural space must be interpreted as a processual entity evolving through the relationship between three constitutive realms: (1) *rural localities*, (2) *formal representations of the rural*, and (3) *everyday lives of the rural*. Although Halfacree does not provide any separate account of media and communication, it is quite axiomatic that, as shown above, mediatization affects all three spheres.

An integrated triadic model of rural media space will help us to articulate the ways in which mediatization contributes to the production of a global countryside as understood, for instance, in terms of the ten key features listed by Woods. Moreover, it will show to what extent such mediatized processes involve conflicts and ruptures between (and within) the three spaces. Halfacree (2007: 127-8) points out that one might then distinguish different formats of a rural coherence from one another, based on whether a certain region or place is marked by congruence and harmony between the three spaces; or at the other extreme, chaos and incoherence. He states that: "In a congruent and unified coherence, with localities, representations and everyday lives internalizing each other, a clear degree of stability is suggested, at least in terms of spatiality; what is conceived is perceived is lived" (ibid: 128).

Following this Lefebvrian framework, I will in this article pay particular attention to how new global media networks affect rural everyday lives and the people's understanding of their own local municipality. A key-question therefore addresses the level of coherence persisting in the area under study. I will argue that the access to and the use of new media networks have a significant positive impact upon the level of spatial coherence. I will also argue that this coherence, in turn, is an important indicator of *social sustainability*. By social sustainability I am referring to the enduring potential of a particular community to maintain the social and cultural interests of its inhabitants, including equal access to various services; good opportunities for political and cultural participation, expression and integration; and an enduring *sense* of community. Social sustainability, which has been adapted in similar ways within rural studies (see e.g. Scott et al 2000; McKenzie 2004), can thus be analyzed through the triadic model of spatial production and points to a particular balance between social continuity and change.

My key point is that the new socialities, which are enabled through ICT networks, are crucial for maintaining a sense of social continuity. I will thus problematize some of the ideas on the expansion of network society which have invoked

an opposition between network sociality and community (see especially Wittel 2001). Before turning to my empirical data, I will briefly present the theoretical discussion which implicitly suggests that the implementation of ICT networks and social media, particularly in rural areas, would lead to incoherence and conflict.

Rurality Versus Network Sociality

The division between the city and the countryside – between urban and rural – overlaps with other fundamental social dichotomies, such as global versus local; flow versus fixity; and transition versus tradition (cf Cresswell 2006). As several theorists have pointed out, this division is deeply rooted in modern history. It also has a tendency to get reproduced through mediated public discourse in which the countryside, in general and in terms of particular locations, is typically understood as either a romantic idyll or a rigid backwater (see e.g. Bunce 1994; Fish 2005; Short 2006; Juska 2006; Cruickshank 2009). This imaginary structure was statistically confirmed in a recent Swedish survey. While city life among the Swedish population connotes more cosmopolitan characteristics such as openness and global engagement, the countryside is associated with for instance solidarity and local engagement (see Jansson 2009a). In other words, the people's understanding of the countryside conforms to Ferdinand Tönnies' (1887/2001) classical concept of *Gemeinschaft*, which is a particular type of social communion that stands in opposition to both modern ways of administrative social organization (*Gesellschaft*) and social modes that more recently have been associated with network society.

In this context, I want to pay particular attention to Andreas Wittel's (2001) discussion of *network sociality*, which he explicitly defines as counterposed to *Gemeinschaft*. According to Wittel, who is inspired by thinkers such as Giddens and Castells, social organization is disembedded in the information age (in which knowledge and experiences are exchanged through globalized networks). "Networking" becomes a key social practice which occurs more and more often over large distances and which implies that social relations become more fleeting, transient and commodified. However, it must not be understood as a general and evenly distributed phenomenon. Wittel stresses that the rise of network sociality is especially visible in urban (post)industrial spaces and among the new middle classes of media and computer-literate people (ibid: 53). Network sociality is thus an emergent social mode, an aspect of mediatization, that negates the lived space of "rurality as *Gemeinschaft*", both conceptually and demographically.

This does not mean that Wittel's analysis is entirely pessimistic. He does not argue that network sociality automatically eliminates the social significance of *Gemeinschaft* or that network sociality is something inherently bad as such: "Instead of perceiving this process as de-socialization, I suggest a shift away from regimes of sociality in closed social systems and towards regimes of sociality in

open social systems” (ibid: 64). This would also imply a shift away from those community forms based on what Robert Putnam (2000) calls *strong ties* (relations marked by reciprocity, trust and mutual obligations), towards those based on *weak ties* (more loosely associated networks). Putnam argues that strong ties condition the accumulation of *social capital*, since people’s ability to successfully pursue joint projects must always rely on a sense of personal trust and a shared knowledge horizon. Such conditions are, according to him, foremost at hand in small scale communities – an argument that has been articulated also in public debate, e.g. by the Slow City movement.

In what way does the potential expansion of network sociality affect rural settings? While Wittel’s analysis revolves exclusively around the urban classes that were up-and-coming at the turn of the millennium, almost a decade later the spread of mobile telephones and the popular use of networking platforms (such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc) ask us to broaden his research scope. We must direct our attention to society at large, including the most remote and most recently connected regions of society, in order to grasp what the social intersection of traditional communities (closed systems) and an expanding order of network sociality (open systems) may look like. The empirical results below suggest that once we take a closer look at concrete sites of rural life, we find that network sociality often is a much more complex and socially embedded phenomenon than Wittel’s study suggests. This is not only because the empirical setting is different from the one that he studied, but also because there are certain components within the logic of network sociality that nurture, and are nurtured by, social proximity and trust. John Urry’s (2007) concept of *network capital*, which I will return to later on, is useful for apprehending how new technological networking resources in countryside regions may contribute not only to network sociality, but also to social capital, a sense of stability and spatial coherence. This occurs at two principal levels: firstly, at the level of local community maintenance for which the very introduction and appropriation of new infrastructures may enhance the sense of symbolic and social integration; and secondly, at the level of social agency and everyday life in which network sociality may actually evolve through ritualized social practices, which hold a time-binding function and contribute to the individual’s sense of ontological security. While these two levels are mutually dependent, testifying to the complexity of mediatization, I will discuss them separately for the sake of clarity.

Community: ICT Networks as a Symbol of Continuity and Integration

The current research has taken place in a small countryside community in the region of Värmland, Sweden. The region is located at the same latitude as Stockholm and Oslo and borders Norway. I have chosen to use fictive names through-

out this analysis, calling the community Granby and the broader municipality Storvik. The study is based on qualitative interviews with ten persons who live and work in the area, as well as several periods of ethnographic observation.² Four of the informants have been interviewed in their professional capacities as leaders and administrators within the local authorities. The rest of the interviewees have participated as residents.

The municipality of Storvik has been, and still is, dependent on a few mechanical industries. It has been heavily affected not only by the general transitions of (post-) industrial society, but also by the economic crisis that began in 2008. However, the Storvik municipality is well-known for its rich cultural heritage and attractive surroundings. It hosts several major cultural events, especially during the summer season, and is a popular shopping destination among Norwegian visitors. Granby is marked by the transition from traditional forms of production to a more service oriented, or “post-productivist”, economy (Halfacree 2007), involving for instance wilderness tourism and innovation industries. Compared to many other similar countryside communities, Granby has experienced a positive development during the last decade due to increasing tourism and the establishment of successful businesses. While the entire community was under threat around the turn of the millennium, when several local services closed down, the situation has stabilized. The school has expanded, and the area is catching up with infrastructural developments. People in the central parts of the community have broadband access, and the mobile network covers a growing area. However, this does not mean that the new digital networks reach all inhabitants. There is still a split between people within the reach of ICT networks and those beyond. The boundary in regards to the mobile coverage is fleeting, but when it comes to broadband there is a distinct split between those who have access and those who have not.

The transition of Granby can thus be understood through a combination of factors that affect both social structures and the population’s sense of belonging. Ronny Johansson, who is the chairman of the Storvik municipality council, points to this interplay in terms of a new “mental position”, but he also stresses the key role played by mediated symbolic components.

Ronny Johansson: Previously, when a new entrepreneur came to Granby people were skeptical – they did not expect anything else than “yet another fucking allowance applicant”. But now when people see what has happened they have raised their shoulders and heads in a fantastic way. “We are indeed something.” It shows how different phases affect people and people’s reactions. [...] Ten years ago the attitude was extremely negative out there. [...] People’s mental position changes, and that is very important when thinking of the media and its role. [...] It is very easy to make the media write about economic cuts and misery, but when it comes to new employment and new opportunities, it is much more difficult to get the conversation going.

The affirmative community narrative of Granby has found its way into local and regional news media and has gained a much deeper significance than ordinary political clichés or media management formulas. The story is vividly retold by the

rest of my informants, and the strength of the story is reinforced by the fact that many people characterize change as an outcome of both fortunate coincidences (unexpected new industries) and collective work, rather than of “artificial” political programmes. Social change is thus understood as “real change” and something that people want to identify with. The expansion of broadband and mobile telephone networks is a case in point and has evoked civic engagement at various levels. Different actors, both private and corporate ones, have tried to bring about this development during a long period of time; and they have succeeded to a great extent. However, there are still people and businesses “on the border” whose interests are too expensive to satisfy, both for the municipality and for private telecom companies. Under such conditions it becomes obvious how the realization of new infrastructure affects people’s overarching sense of spatial coherence. For instance, the tourism business of the wilderness camping in Fors (a small community some miles away from the centre of Granby) is in great need of digital networks but must still operate under highly ambivalent conditions. Nina Eklund, the director of the wilderness camping, points out that insufficient ICT networks lead to a perceived lack of services among their customers.

Nina Eklund (director): Mobile coverage... we get lots and lots of questions about why it doesn’t work as it should. Last year it got better when they set up three new masts in the area, but unfortunately they don’t cover Fors, and that’s where our guests are most of the time. It’s crazy! We have been writing for years about this, mentioning our work needs and also the security of our guests if there are accidents in the forests. [...] Now when they set up these masts, we thought that it would cover enough, but not Fors [...] it’s a disaster. Obviously the mast is too low!

These conditions threaten the long-term sustainability of Fors as a whole. Firstly, if there is no broadband connection (which there is not yet), the main office (including booking administration, marketing, etc) cannot be moved to Fors but has to stay in its present location in Storvik. It will also not be possible to make wilderness tourism a year-round business, even though such a development is much requested. Secondly, most guests are international (coming from Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands), and their demands for wireless internet service and mobile coverage on the campground are steadily increasing. Altogether, Nina Eklund’s statement points to an enduring sense of dissonance between ambitions and resources – an experience of being somehow marginalized within the overall narrative of the Granby community. The general mediatization of society has thus resulted in a sense of lack at the local level, which could even be seen as an integral component of mediatization as such. The situation is also paradoxical from a spatial point of view; while wilderness tourism generates global mobility of people and information, those in charge of the business can neither develop their market concept as they would prefer, nor keep up their work at the very “site of production”.

In my material there are also examples of how the practical and symbolic appropriation of new communications infrastructure corresponds to an increased

sense of local belonging and integration. Erik, who lives with his family in an old house beyond the limits of the broadband network, describes a long period of fruitless battles with the municipality representatives. Erik and his neighbor, John, eventually made contacts with a private company that is developing a new analogue transmission system for mobile networking. Starting out as test pilots for this new system, the households of Erik and John now have permanent access to the internet and other networking services.

Erik: We were among the first who got this, so then we skipped the local authorities. Instead we could be part of building up this new system. John, who is a real enthusiast, was in contact with the company director almost every week in order to increase the speed of the connection. The boss even went here to study our specific conditions, because they were so unique. [...] Previously John and I had even said that we could have dug down the cable ourselves, because I can get hold of an excavator, and those [other households] who wanted to connect along the way could have done that.

This example characterizes the cooperative tradition and do-it-yourself culture that flourishes in many rural areas. During the past years, there have been a great number of similar cases in Sweden. Rural interest groups have "rolled out" the cables themselves and thus ensured more equal access to the new means of communication where the local authorities had failed to do so. Similar events have taken place earlier in history, for example, during the first years of the telephone era in the late 19th century America. News reports from that time and context describe how farmers sometimes created local neighborhood networks by using the middle-wire of pre-existing barbed wire fences. Many of these local networks were eventually connected to main lines and large companies (see Kline 2000; Zimmerman Umble 2003). There are also similar examples from more recent times (see Green's article in this journal issue). As shown by the interview extract above, the experience of having found one's own solution to the problem of connectivity contributes to a sense of local pride and becomes a symbolic confirmation of local sustainability in times of social transition.

An important point here is thus that the very quest for obtaining access to networks reinforces a shared identity and commitment among those households and entrepreneurs which are located beyond the regular networks. Furthermore, in successful cases like the one just mentioned, collaborative efforts have wider consequences than the reproduction of social capital; they lead to practical consequences such as new opportunities for carrying out private and professional duties at-a-distance. As will be shown in the forthcoming section, these new opportunities may actually affect people's decision to remain in geographically "peripheral" regions.

Everyday Life: The Integrating Force of Networking

Moving to the theoretical level of everyday life, there are two points I want to make in regards to the role of new communication networks in rural areas. Both points entail a problematization of Wittel's (2001) argument as to the rise of network sociality. While my first point (a) is to prove the usefulness of network capital as a term for grasping how new ICT networks contribute to spatial coherence, my second point (b) highlights the time-binding role of network sociality.

(a) The Key Role of Network Capital

As shown in the previous section, among the people I have interviewed, social capital is a prevailing resource that ties the individual to the local context. Most interviewees are also active in local organizations and interest groups related to, for example, sports, music and religious matters – a condition that further express the commonalities between their identities and Putnam's understanding of social capital. The rise of new mediated forms of interaction has clearly affected the ways in which this local orientation is embedded, also involving the potential for network sociality, that is, contact making within open social systems. However, in the rural setting the social mechanisms and implications are not as clear-cut as in the urban area that Wittel (2001) studied. Among my interviewees, the social role of new media is constituted through a process in which network sociality interweaves with the acquisition and expression of social capital. Network sociality is thus integral to community building at the local level. The following extract from my interview with Thomas, who plays in a band with members from the wider municipality of Storvik, provides a good illustration.

Interviewer: How do you use the Internet?

Thomas: Email is very much used, partly for communicating with the others in the band, and we also have a MySpace page that we maintain. And then... for a while it was much downloading of movies, and now I have discovered Spotify, if you know what that is, and I'm all excited! I can put on exactly the music I want to hear. And browsing through different radio stations is also a very nice thing about the internet, I think. [...] We've gotten a lot of friends through MySpace... It's very good to have that page which we can refer to. And people can go in there and have a look. [...] It's a contact network. Soon we'll give a concert at Royal, and before that we can communicate through MySpace.

Thomas's glocal repertoire of online practices highlights the problem of analytically separating network sociality from community. As John Urry (2003) argues in his discussion of the relationship between networking and meetings, these two forms of interaction are not substitutable but tend to reinforce one another within the process of mediatization. More networking in general means more meetings, whether we look at the local community level or at the wider geographical context. Similarly, John Tomlinson (1999, 2001, 2008) points out that it is problematic to believe that people lose their general sense of local community only because they start using a wider range of communications media. Tomlinson en-

courages us to also consider the opposite viewpoint: many new media (perhaps especially networked ones) operate as “technologies of the hearth”, through which close relations are maintained rather than challenged (Tomlinson 2008: 67-8; see also discussion in Morley 2007: Ch. 7).

The interview with Thomas also shows that the dual potential of online media (to operate simultaneously as “technologies of cosmos” and “technologies of the hearth”) is realized only through a process of social shaping, that is, through the exercise of a particular habitus and lifestyle, which this kind of technology both reproduces and is culturally defined through (see Bourdieu 1974/1984, on the cultural mechanisms of social classification). At the structural level we may conclude that increasing internet access in rural areas affects the likelihood for people with a more cosmopolitan outlook (like Thomas) to nurture and exercise their interests. It further enables them to sustain bonds with others who may not be located within the immediate proximity, but in the adjacent regional context. Accordingly, the centrifugal impetus of networking (partly articulated through different forms of network sociality) may encourage people to stay where they are and to become more deeply involved in their local communities instead of moving to more central areas or nodes. This can also be understood as a socially extended consequence of the phenomenological “doubling of reality”, or “doubling of place” (Scannell 1996; Moores 2004, 2008), which the media enhance.

At this point John Urry’s (2007) concept of network capital becomes useful. It helps one to understand the intermediary, stabilizing role of digital networks and especially social media. Network capital refers to all those resources that enable people to move and make contacts in smooth and controllable ways, notably in the global context. Expressions and sources of network capital are, for instance, efficient communication devices, appropriate travel documents and visas, as well as access to convenient meeting places. What makes network capital such a useful concept is its dynamic nature. Firstly, network capital entails a dual movement between separation and integration. The possession of network capital refers to a capacity of letting go and to integrate with distant others, while not being forced to do so. In contrast to social capital, Urry (ibid: 200) argues that “the more general concept of network capital brings out how co-presence and trust can be generated at-a-distance”. The concept thus bridges the epistemological gap between network sociality and community.

Secondly, network capital is not merely about mobility as such, but just as much about the experience of being potentially mobile and connected. While grounded in very concrete spatial resources (Lefebvre’s perceived space), network capital largely operates through spatial imagination and experience (Lefebvre’s lived space). Even though a person like Thomas may not be a frequent traveler, access to global communication networks enhances his sense of connectivity and global orientation (even “exitability” (ibid: 201)) and thus his sense of possessing an adequate amount of network capital. In this case, the perceived resonance be-

tween spatial attitudes and possibilities may be interpreted as an aspect of spatial coherence even though many (presumably most) possibilities will never be explored (see also Jansson 2009b). The following story of Erik further underscores how the gaining of network capital, although we are here dealing with very moderate amounts, entails a glocal re-composition of lived space.

Erik: My daughter got married and my wife was worried: "I don't have any clothes!", but I said "let's have a look on the web". And we could browse through and look at all kinds of dresses and shoes and so on, so I sat there with the Internet and saved all the images that I thought were nice, because she wanted me to do that, and when she came home she glanced through them... and she was very satisfied. [...] Finally, we got in touch with a woman in Skåne (Southern Sweden) who made her own clothes, evening dresses and so on, in her own design, which we thought was nice, and through email we got exactly the color and size we wanted. It was perfect! [...] But the most funny thing, we thought, were the shoes. We bought them in America! [laughter]

Erik further describes how he could track the exact location of their order through DHL's online system, which revealed that it took two days to transport the shoes from the USA to the city of Karlstad (in the nearby region) and then another eight days to get them delivered to the pick-up spot in Granby. Erik's story expresses a contradictory spatial experience: network capital provides access to a plethora of online spaces of sociability and commerce, engendering an entirely new image of a "world within reach", while it is partly corrupted through the inescapable unevenness of material infrastructures (the well-known "last mile problem" – see Bakardjieva and Williams's article in this special issue). While this condition highlights an enduring problem of spatial incoherence, the most important conclusion from a sustainability perspective is that the access to a networked space of flow makes it easier to carry out rural everyday life – in its traditional as well as in more innovative forms. This suggests that network capital, as opposed to mere network sociality, is a key asset for sustaining the cultural diversity of rural communities in times of mediatization.

(b) The Time-Binding Function of Network Sociality

My second main point comprises that network sociality in itself attains an important time-binding function, and thus may operate as a social stabilizer under conditions of volatility and uncertainty. In his characterization of network sociality, Andreas Wittel (2001: 66-8) points to a shift from durable to ephemeral relations and from narration to information. Both aspects seem to identify a new temporal regime in which longstanding relationships based on trust, regularity, and shared life biographies are replaced by rapid alterations in loyalty and affection. Similar transitions have been extensively discussed in Zygmunt Bauman's books about liquidity (e.g. Bauman 2000). As Wittel and Bauman argue, networked media hold a great potential to reinforce this new regime of liquidity which also reproduces itself through the ideology of urban nodes (see e.g. Sassen 2001). However, while the hegemonic interpretations of network society (sometimes blatantly

echoed in critical academic discourse) depict it as an increasingly flat space of immediacy (or amnesia), the actual appropriation of networking technologies in everyday life is a much more multi-faceted process; one in which the desire to nourish one's life biography is often just as significant as, or even stronger than, the wish to expand one's network.

In the early 1990s, Silverstone and Hirsch (1992) presented their ground breaking ethnographic study of how the uses of television and other electronic devices were shaped through, as well as shaping, the "moral economy" of the household – a concept pointing to the enduring, largely inherited normative structures through which economic and other practices are socially regulated. Similarly, scholars like Bakardjieva (2005) have more recently pointed out how computer technologies are incorporated in household time-spaces and how online virtual sociality may not only provide an expanding network, but also enhance existing bonds of community and transform anonymous sociality into more intimate and enduring forms of togetherness. Bakardjieva (ibid: 176-80) mentions how interviewees who had gone through what we may call "fateful moments" in their life biographies (Goffman 1967; Giddens 1991) – facing a particular medical diagnosis or trying to cope with the disruptive experience of being an immigrant – could find support and a new meaning through online contacts that were anonymous from the very beginning.

In a similar manner, it is obvious that the online practices among those of my interviewees who use social networking platforms on a regular basis are both routinized and attached to the narrative of the self. They are thus time-binding in a double sense. Richard, who after many years of dwelling in other parts of Sweden moved back to Granby to live in the inherited family house with his partner, describes how MySpace and Facebook now help him tying together the time-space slices of his life biography – while simultaneously opening the gates for new acquaintances on a global level.

Richard: I use MySpace because it's fun, and for meeting friends and listening to their music. They are everywhere from Istanbul to Japan. It's a little exciting. [...] I have one page of my own, and then I have one page with each band, and then all members have their pages. [...] In the beginning, I was online on a daily basis but now it's perhaps twice a week. Now I'm also forced to be part of Facebook... it fills a little function because I can talk to old friends, and post some sentences, chat a little. One of the old members of the band who is in Stockholm, I chatted with yesterday. [...] And we are also a group who has created a community on Facebook with the name *Young in Storvik 1965-75* with nostalgic pictures and so on.

While Richard's networking practices are largely interest driven and circle around music and culture, they also represent an ongoing ambition to create continuity – a meaningful narrative of the self. His statement provides an interesting illustration of how different temporal layers intersect through online spaces of practice and thereby contribute to a particular biographical rhythmicity and resonance within everyday life. This sense of continuity and resonance is important to the establishment of ontological security and thus an important groundwork for coping

with uncertainty and social change (conditions that often characterize rural areas to a much greater extent than what is suggested by popular clichés of slow-paced traditional communities). Even though the community of Granby is currently undergoing a period of mostly positive social transformations, the daily incorporation of glocal networking routines and rituals must be regarded as a means of coping with future ruptures and threats to the lifeworld.

Conclusions

This study has looked at one particular aspect of mediatization; the ways in which new ICT networks affect the spatial coherence of a “global countryside”. If we reconsider Michael Wood’s (2007) ten forces for the making of a global countryside that I presented in the beginning of this article, we may easily envision spaces of fragmentation and rupture where the inflow of competing interests and experiences, paired with the uneven distribution of resources, threaten the sustainability of small communities. While new ICT networks are clearly not the sole solution to the negative side effects of globalization, this article has illuminated their socially stabilizing and intermediary potential. Applying a Lefebvrian model of rural media space, I have argued that new networks attain great symbolic significance for small communities in times of globalization – greater than in urban areas, where media infrastructure is not as scarce a resource. In the empirical case of Granby, new ICT networks have contributed to a more coherent narrative of positive structural change where one of the potential causes of incoherence has been (and to some extent still is) the limited reach of these networks themselves. This situation underscores the multilayered character of mediatization as a process of social re-embedding.

I have also argued that networking resources in general and social media in particular are a potential key to the socio-cultural sustainability of countryside communities, as the interest driven interaction patterns of these resources comply with the intersectional and narrative character of identity creation. Networked interaction sustains the production of glocally defined life stories, and thus contributes to the socio-cultural diversity of the countryside (if other spatial means of attraction are also at hand, that is to say). In this context I have particularly pointed to the analytical potential of John Urry’s (2007) concept of network capital, through which we may conceive of the networked production of a global countryside as a dynamic interplay between community and network sociality. The possession of network capital provides a *sense* of connectivity as well as direct networking abilities. This means that network capital contributes to the coherence of perceived, conceived and lived spaces. An important future path of study would be to establish a more exact understanding of how the distribution of network capital interacts with concrete patterns of mobility among countryside populations – locally and globally. Furthermore, it is important to analyze to what extent the possession

of network capital, as this study indicates, contributes to making the “global countryside” a “cosmopolitan countryside”.

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Notes

- 1 This study is part of the ongoing project Rural Networking/Networking the Rural, financed by The Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning.
- 2 Before and during the research period, I have spent several week-long stays in the community. This enabled me to gather a broad understanding of people's life conditions through observations and everyday conversations, which I have followed up in the interviews.

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Provincial Globalization: The Local Struggle of Place-Making

By Magnus Andersson

Abstract

This paper focuses on the global presence in the local processes of place-making in a rural area in Sweden. As a result of increased competition – fueled by a reorganization of global capitalism – between places, symbolic strategies (i.e. place marketing and place branding) have become a central dimension of both urban and rural governance. As a consequent, places – while still being sites for the residents’ day-to-day life – are being turned into commodities in the market of potential investors and tourists to a great extent. Subsequently, this paper deals with how this global agenda affects a rural municipality in the Swedish countryside suffering from depopulation. The paper confirms earlier statements (Woods 2007) that globalization processes should not be considered as external forces reshaping and homogenizing rural villages; rather, globalization processes are locally negotiated. This, however, does not mean globalization has no impact on rural places. In these negotiation processes global and local virtues are intertwined but not evenly. In some municipal strategies, the impact of global discourses is more explicit, for example, policy-makers accept and incorporate strategies of place branding and policy networks while they neglect other aspects of a relatively standardized “place marketing tool kit”. Furthermore, the study shows that rural residents, also, consider the village and its global future carefully but differently from the policy-makers. The residents dislike expressions of urbanity and advocate a general small-scaleness as a strategy for the future.

Keywords: Rural, globalization, symbolic strategies, mediation, encoding/decoding

Introduction¹

Rural restructuring due to globalization has been on the agenda of rural studies for a while. There are several reasons for this, one being socio-economic transformations in which an economy based on agricultural production is turned into a service-based economy, including a view of landscapes as consumable (Marsden 1990; Cloke 2006; Fløysand & Jakobsen 2007; Halfacree 2007; Conradson & Pawson 2009). Another reason is spatial complexity as a consequence of time-space compression – fuelled by communication technology (Cloke 2006; Woods 2007; Paniagua 2009). This paper anchors these sometimes rather sweeping theoretical statements in an empirical case study of a rural village. It depicts the geopolitics of place in the context of cultural globalization; how local place is contested, but also negotiated and given meanings. Following Michael Woods' (2007: 502) call for place-based studies highlighting the micro-processes in which politics of the global and the rural become entwined, the article pays particular attention to the *symbolic* dimension of this global – local intertwining. More specifically, the focus is on the global-local mediation of the symbolic; how rural municipal symbolic strategies are adopted and enacted against a global backdrop, and how they are perceived by the residents. This mediation is a multilayered process; different actors – in this case municipal policy-makers vis-à-vis residents – relate to diverse strands of a multi-faceted globalization and "pull" the rural place in different directions.

After a brief presentation of the case study beneath, the article sets out with an unfolding of the concepts of globalization and post-industrialism, and how they bring symbolic practices to the fore. That is followed by a discussion on symbolic strategies and their route from urban to rural settings. The review of varied aspects of symbolic strategies is thereafter turned into arguments for theoretically approaching rural transformation as processes of mediation, in which Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model can be deployed. The following sections present the empirical findings on the local negotiation of globalization, underscoring that global discourses are decoded and negotiated at several levels; by policy-makers as well as by residents. The article ends with some concluding remarks: Theoretically, the article argues for the continuous relevance of a cultural perspective focusing the (ideological) struggles of meaning in which symbolic as well as material resources are at play. Empirically, the article opens up for a discussion on a rural future in which "re-ruralization" may be an alternative.

The Case Study

To illuminate the amalgam of local and global processes constituting a rural locality, the study is based on interviews with residents of a small village – let us call it Svenvik – in a rural municipality in Skåne, the southernmost province of Sweden.

Svenvik has about 280 inhabitants. It is within commuting distance from larger towns and it is about 120-140 km from Malmö-Copenhagen, the centre of the transnational Öresund region. Svenvik is idyllically placed by a lake with rich animal life, making it a quite popular tourist site, to which a camping and a canoe centre also contribute. There are a few small enterprises in Svenvik; most of the inhabitants commute to towns and villages in the vicinity. Historically, stonemasonry has played a vital role for the village and the whole municipality. Today, some old abandoned quarries remain in the surroundings, and there is a stone museum, established and administered by the local village community. Svenvik is situated in, and governed by, a municipality with 13,661 inhabitants², which is small by Swedish standards. In addition, the municipality suffers from depopulation related to industrial closures (displacements) and rationalizations. Manufacturing industry has long been the dominant sector of employment. Hence, problems associated with post-industrialization, more commonly linked to urban areas, have some relevance here. The municipal council has a Social Democratic majority.

In these settings I have interviewed seven residents in Svenvik, three women and four men, all of them between 35 and 60 years old. In the group there is a mix of locally born residents and in-migrants coming from villages in the vicinity or cities or towns in the province. In addition, I have interviewed three local policy-makers: the chairman of the municipal council, the administrative director of the municipality, and a project manager responsible for local development issues.³

The Multifaceted Globalization

There is a vast literature on globalization, especially since the 1980s. Over the years the focus has shifted from an emphasis on a quite uniform process to something more nuanced, multiple and multifaceted (cf. Tomlinson 1999; Savage et al. 2005: 2-7; Woods 2007: 491-2). A dialectic perspective has emerged and become dominant within social and cultural theory, emphasizing the articulation of global and local processes. A dialectic perspective means that globalization is not considered as an external force, homogenizing everything in its way. Instead, as Ulrich Beck claims, “‘Globalization’ is a non-linear, dialectic process in which the global and the local do not exist as cultural polarities but as combined and mutually implicating principles” (2002: 17). Also John Tomlinson recognizes the relational character of globalization and defines it as “complex connectivity”, referring to “the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern life” (1999: 2).

Connectivity also means the involvement of power. Not everyone is connected to the same distant agents or nodes; some connections are truly *inter*-connections, while others are typical one-way connections or they are accessible to just a few. Relational thoughts on place are elaborated by Doreen Massey (1994, 2005) who

considers interrelations as essential in geography. These interrelations constitute a global power geometry in which access to the networks is very unevenly distributed:

This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation to the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: some people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it (Massey 1991: 25-26).

Arjun Appadurai (1990, 1996) has also made valuable contributions to a nuanced concept of globalization, stressing the disjunction of processes. Globalization is complex; it cannot be reduced to transnational economic flows between global financial centres in the world. Besides flows in *financescapes*, there are movements of people in *ethnoscapes*, global circulation of images and symbols in *mediascapes*, diffusion of technological devices in *technoscape*, and a global spread of political ideas, narratives and key words in what Appadurai calls *ideoscapes*. These flows are not parallel, they do not emanate from the same centre and they do not reach the same nodes. Although interlinked they constitute five different network structures with different centres and peripheries, where the tension and friction between them contribute to the complexity of globalization.

The mediascapes and the ideoscapes are of particular interest in the context of provincial globalization. Considering the impact of globalization on rural localities, it is easy to "fall back" on a functionalistic model of diffusion in which globalization trickles down from the top, reaching lower (institutional) levels in order of scale. Such a model would imply that rural residents encounter globalization first and foremost from above, i.e. through the governance of their municipality or through external forces. However, current transformations of mediascapes blur boundaries. Globalization cannot be regarded as a huge linear communication model of sender-receivers in which rural societies are the last link. In the mediatized and media-saturated world there are always communication collaterals making connections in a non-linear and asymmetrical manner. Hence, people get in touch with, and experience, globalization in many different ways. This relates to Appadurai's discussions of the global imaginary and the work of imagination. Appadurai insists on the importance of electronic mediation and migration to produce a global imaginary – not just to the few, but to everybody (1996: 2-9). Thus, people's daily interaction with "non-local" images, people and technologies contributes explicitly to the re-definition of the local place itself (Savage et al. 2005: 7). It is not hard to imagine that this process of re-definition is pertinent for residents as well as municipal leaders.

These different arguments about globalization as relational, dialectic, mediatized and multifaceted illuminate two aspects of certain pertinence for this study. First, the local dimension of globalization and its negotiated deployment means that globalization is best studied locally, in place-based studies where the

different threats and interconnections are followed (Woods 2007). This is particularly relevant on the basis of the argument that for most people globalization is primarily experienced from home ground (Tomlinson 1999: 9). Second, emphasizing flows, connectivity and interrelationships as the core of globalization, there are no theoretical warrants for the sometimes taken-for-granted association between globalization and cities (cf. Savage et al. 2005: 4; Cloke 2006; Woods 2007; Cruickshank 2009). The vast literature on "the global city" deserves a counterpart.

After Industrialism

Post-industrialization is a theme related to globalization, which describes the reorganization within capitalism itself. The concept refers to a new global division of labour in which the Western world to a large extent is drained of manufacturing industries, since the same industries are now to be found in low-wage countries, very often in the east.⁴ Hence, from a Western point of view post-industrialization is associated with (among other things) an increased focus: on production of services and experiences, on consumption, and on the significance of image (Lash & Urry 1994). In such a context, place is considered as a commodity – something to be consumed (Urry 1995). These processes concern rural areas as well, which have been transformed "from landscapes of production to landscapes of consumption" (Cloke 2006: 19).

In an often cited article, "From managerialism to entrepreneurialism", David Harvey (1989) describes the consequences of post-industrialization for urban governance. He argues that post-industrialization has contributed to new competition between places. To survive, places must attract investors, creative entrepreneurs and tourists: "The task of urban governance is, in short, to lure highly mobile and flexible production, financial, and consumption flows into its space" (Harvey 1989: 11). To do that, public facilities and provision of services for the urban inhabitants have to stand back for local economic development and the creation of an attractive public image. External judgements are more important than ever. This brings to the fore how reflexivity and self-monitoring are of central concern in late modernity – not only to individuals as Giddens (1991) argues, but to institutions as well (cf. Lash & Urry 1994: ch. 4).

Such transitions have paved the way for place marketing, city-branding and (public) image management. These are related terms, sometimes used synonymously, although place marketing is a broader term including practices of regeneration, branding and advertising. Branding is symbolic practices; a marketing strategy to ascribe certain features to things (products, services, organisations) in order to define them for intended target groups – and create emotional bonds between them and the consumer (Hemelryk Donald et al. 2009: 7). Hence, place branding is about the production of a public image, charging a place with sym-

bolic value in order to curb and govern the construction of meaning of the place. To do that, both discursive and material components are used; slogans are produced, as are spectacular buildings. The discourses of place marketing and image management are good examples of how ideoscapes – the global diffusion of ideological frameworks – are working. In a post-industrial society marked by neoliberalism, commodification and marketing are taken for granted and consumable places become self-evident. Urban and rural development are part of a general image culture (Jansson 2001), continuously reproduced by the symbolic work of commercial as well as non-commercial institutions, like planning departments, tourist boards, marketing agencies, creative industries, media industries and many others. However, to consider image management as a global discourse spread in ideoscapes does not mean it is diffused evenly in the world. Image management represents a power geometry in which the central nodes are placed in the wealthy Western world from which the strategies are diffused.

To summarize, post-industrialism is a significant process behind rural restructuring which highlights symbolic strategies. The global agenda of these symbolic strategies is to a large extent dictated by Western metropolitans. The question is, then, which strategies are "offered" to the places beyond the metropolitans?

Post-Industrial Governance and Symbolic Management

City-branding, i.e. the symbolic packaging of cities in order to reconstitute them, started as a metropolitan phenomenon but has spread also to towns and smaller places (Nyseth & Granås 2007). Branding may have different aims. In some cases it is used to create a new region, for example the transnational Öresund region (Ek 2003; Falkheimer 2006), or to market whole nations (Roosvall & Salovaara-Moring 2010). In other cases image management is part of coming to terms with an industrial past: in the service economy of the Western world, no place wants to be depicted as a centre of manufacturing industry. Old factories have to be "funkified" (Waitt & Gibson 2009: 1224) – turned into something spectacular such as a cultural arena, or fancy offices for companies within, for example, the symbolic industry (cf. Willim 2005).

To carry out these procedures of image management, resources are required: symbolic experts as well as economic means. Very often these projects involve policy networks, i.e. formations of public-private partnerships as a kind of governance networks, implying an obvious risk that political questions are turned into administrative or technical ones, which means de-politicization (Harvey 1989; Scott 2000; Ek 2003). The development of place-marketing as a professional field has led to certain standardization of deployed strategies and of themes brought to the fore. Richard Ek (2003: 29) distinguishes four typical development strategies: the physical upgrading of the territory; exploiting local history and local culture in cultural strategies; spectacles; and marketing. A "catchy slogan", a waterfront, an

industrial area turned into designed cafés and bars, a spectacular building working as a landmark, a big sport event or a festival with a historical theme are all common means in these processes – which can be encountered in all parts of the world. Thematically there are particular themes that have acquired global impact, for example creativity, cosmopolitanism and sustainability. Manchester (Young et al 2006) and Nuremberg (Macdonald 2009) are just two examples of cities aspiring to appear as "the cosmopolitan city". Likewise, in the wake of Richard Florida's theories on the creative class as the key to urban development, there are many cities describing themselves as "creative cities", for instance Amsterdam (Oudenampsen 2007) and Wollongong (Waitt & Gibson 2009). These examples hint that image management works as both a means and consequence of globalization.

History is often a usable component in place marketing, not least due to its flexibility. Specific details can be highlighted, while others are neglected, quite similarly to the way history is used when the narrative of a nation is created (cf. Hall 1992). In *Difficult Heritage* (2009) the anthropologist Sharon Macdonald studies how the city of Nuremberg relates to its Nazi past, including its Nazi architectural heritage. The city's relation to this has swung over the years, which indicates the historical shifts concerning the ideas of place and heritage management. During certain periods the heritage has been seen as a burden obstructing the symbolic work of projecting the image of a "lively, modern and creative city" (Macdonald 2009: 99). In the latest phase of image management, however, the city has adopted the slogan "the City of Peace and Human Rights", manifested with a new Documentation Centre on the Nazi regime (Macdonald 2009: ch. 6).

Within the discourse of image management there are tendencies which can be read as reactions towards a global urbanity. In American urban planning a neo-traditionalist trend is identified, which attempts to create places – through architecture and published "historical newsletters" – echoing of an America long gone. "Authenticity", "community" and "the good life" become the symbolic values the policy-makers evoke, in order to attract people who find the globalized world scary (Till in Cresswell 2004: 95-6).⁵ This should be related to what has been called "the ruralization of the urban", which Cloke (2006: 19) describes as a "striving for a set of virtues in the city which are more commonly associated with the rural – seemingly fundamental and permanent virtues such as protection, solidarity, community spirit and identity". A current example is the emergence of urban village communities in many Western cities today. Altogether, this illustrates that there is scope for local negotiations and options beyond the global symbolic main roads, in spite of certain global standardization of symbolic strategies.

Symbolic Strategies and the Meaning of (Rural) Place

All these efforts and investments shed the light on the relationship between image management and the meaning of place. With a point of departure in Lefebvre's (1991: 38-39) conceptual triad of produced space, constituted by *spatial practices* (perceived space), *representations of space* (conceived space) and *spaces of representation* (lived space), one may conclude that the image management operates within the representations of space, which obviously is not the full story of the meaning of place (cf. Halfacree 2006, 2007). The produced public image has to compete with other representations, such as journalistic ones and representations produced by others – residents themselves, for instance. In addition, there are contributions from cultural practices such as literature, film and music (Cresswell 2004: 82). Besides representation of space, there are spatial practices and the lived space of everyday life. As Cresswell puts it: "Places are never finished but produced through the reiteration of practices – the repetition of seemingly mundane activities on a daily basis" (2004: 82). Thus, the meaning of place is never fixed; its permanence is imagined, carved out through the processes producing space (Halfacree 2006: 50). Place is always contested, a battleground for struggles of meaning.

From this it follows that places have to be considered as multilayered cultural formations. And again, this includes urban as well as rural places. Structural transformations take place in both settings: the majority of manufacturing factories are displaced from the cities in the West – as is the majority of farms in the countryside. Extrapolating that sentence, one may say that while the factory has become the fancy office of a marketing agency, the farmhouse is turned into a second home for the marketing manager. Halfacree's (2006: 44) definition of rural space as a "socially produced set of manifolds" emphasizes that the rural has to be considered in social, cultural and economic contexts. This implies, according to Cloke (2006: 19), that "rurality is characterized by a multiplicity of social spaces overlapping the same geographical area, so while the geographic spaces of the city and the countryside have become blurred it is in the social distinction of rurality that significant differences between the rural and the urban remain".

Thus, while there are blurred boundaries between the city and the countryside due to, among other things, mediation and mobility, there is still an imaginative structure of rurality, defined to a large extent in opposition to the urbanity. The question is how this imagination is related to the symbolic work of the post-industrial rural municipality. For example, do rural municipalities through their symbolic work reinforce or undermine that distinction? It is particularly interesting in times of mediatization, when global mediascapes provide the most "peripheral" municipal policy-maker with the image management strategies of the global metropolitans. There are some empirical studies that illuminate these questions. Swedish municipalities – especially rural ones – have increased their investments

in place marketing to attract in-migrants, according to Niedomysl (2004). He concludes that these efforts have had poor effects, at least in quantitative terms, and suggests further qualitative explorations. One such example is the report *Place reinvention in the North* (Nyseth & Granås 2007), in which the authors summarize how places and municipalities in the north of Scandinavia have dealt with, and adapt to, globalization processes. They identify many strategies similar to those in the cities, for example, short-term flagship projects (often with cultural connections) and branding campaigns (Nyseth 2007: 148-50). In line with Harvey's argument about the new entrepreneurialism, Nyseth argues that the competition between places is a significant reason behind the transformations: "This competition has been partly forced and stimulated by new indexes produced by researchers and consultancies, e.g. creativity indexes, sustainability indexes, urban indexes, and so on" (Nyseth 2007: 151). The authors of the report also found a range of different economies in the regions, from Fordist economies to economies based on knowledge, service and consumption. Worth noting is that these differences did not correlate with the transformations: some places were in the middle of reinvention processes – with an economy based on manufacturing industry (ibid.). In line with the logics of post-industrialism, the researchers also found many examples of image management projects in which public, civil and business actors co-operated in governance networks (Nyseth 2007: 153). Another interesting feature of the study, directly related to image managing, is that it is possible to discern very different directions among the applied strategies. Some places work in extension of the rural and invest in nature, offering either the "authentic" experience of peacefulness or a site for spectacular and exotic adventures, like extreme sports (Granås & Gunnarsdotter 2007). Either way underscores that nature is there to be consumed. Other places, however, have adopted very "urban" approaches, giving rural places almost metropolitan silhouettes with "culturalized" old industry plants (Benediktsson & Aho 2007). In relation to the previous discussion on blurred boundaries, these could be regarded as tendencies to blurred boundaries also on an imaginative and representational level.

Rural Transformation Through the Lens of Mediation; an Analytical Approach

To empirically grasp the symbolic aspects discussed, there are good reasons to turn to the term "mediation", since, as Woods argues, "globalization processes are *mediated* through and incorporated within local processes of place-making" (2007: 494, *my italics*). An obvious advantage of the term is that mediation means something else than transmission. To think in terms of mediation, as media scholar Roger Silverstone argues, "requires us to consider it as involving producers and consumers of media in a more or less continuous activity of engagement and disengagement with meanings which have their source or their focus in those

mediated texts, but which extend through, and are measured against, experience in a multitude of different ways” (1999: 13).

Inspired by Macdonald (2006), who has deployed this rather media-specific way of thinking on tour guides in Nuremberg, I want to deploy it in a rural context. That implies a focus, not only on rural place, but on its “production” as well as “consumption” – which connects to Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model, originally intended for studying ideological reproduction through television news (Hall 1980a). The model has been deployed outside media studies, for example in urban development (Jansson 2005) and, as mentioned, in the context of tour guides (Macdonald 2006). It has, as I see it, three qualities rendering it particularly relevant in the context of provincial globalization. First, Hall makes a point that the produced (“encoded”) meaning and the consumed (“decoded”) meaning are two separate things; there are no such things as behaviouristic responses or passive transmission in processes of mediation; there are interpretations and appropriations of symbolic material. Hence, the municipal encoding of an area through material and symbolic means has to be interpreted by, in this case, the residents and visitors. Second, since the interpretation is not determined, there will always be a struggle of meaning. This means that ideology is always at hand in processes of mediation. Strong interests want to pull the interpretation in different directions. Through theorizing, Stuart Hall identifies different positions of reading, constituted according to their relation to the dominant ideology. This further denies communication processes as transmission of meanings. It also indicates that the meaning of place is negotiated and struggled over (as is further discussed later). Third, the theoretical model is cyclical and thereby processual. The encoding is preceded by a decoding, which in the rural case means that the municipal staff are not only encoders – they are also decoders of globalization discourses.

Governing a Rural Municipality

To scrutinize the mediation of global processes, and the rural negotiation of globalization, I have studied a small municipality in the south of Sweden. The social and demographic statistics are not happy reading for the municipal council. The population decreases yearly by 90 persons, and in January 2008 it was down to 13,661. Of the residents, 19% have post-secondary education, compared with 35% for Sweden as a whole. The proportion of unemployed is 8%, slightly over the national average of 6%. The manufacturing industry is the largest sector, employing 39%, which is over twice the national average of 17%. The average income in the municipality is 235,000 SEK (≈22,000 Euro) per year, whereas the Swedish average is 252,000 SEK. In addition, the municipal composition of age compared to the national average shows that the municipality has an under-representation in ages between 25 and 35, whereas the ages over 60 years old are somewhat over-represented.⁶

According to Sven Svensson, the Social Democratic chairman of the municipal council, the municipality is in the middle of a third critical structural transformation in a short span of time: the first was the closure of the textile industries in the 1960s, and the second was the closure of the large paper mill in the beginning of the 1980s. And quite recently they have experienced the displacement of a larger factory supplying the car industry, which was employing 550 people. The largest company today is in the wood industry. The company is doing very well, steadily increasing its production. Still, due to modernization, it has reduced the number of employees by more than 50%. When describing the municipality and the challenges it is facing, Sven Svensson considers the lack of railways in the municipality as a huge problem, especially since the public transport is underdeveloped. It means that commuting residents are more or less dependent on private cars. He also mentions the lack of a regional centre, a main town with public and commercial facilities. Instead these services are scattered among the handful of villages in the municipality. The public image of the municipality is a great problem perceived by all the interviewed policy-makers. It has a reputation of being dreary, as they put it. In addition, an extensive survey study, carried out by Statistics Sweden, shows that the residents are more dissatisfied than in other Swedish municipalities.

The interviews with the municipal staff reveal that they do take these problems seriously. They have initiated a range of activities, on different fronts, to come to terms with the structural problems, especially the depopulation which they consider the key problem. Following the analytical approach discussed previously, these activities can be considered as encoding practices. First, they have made staff recruitments; an administrative director from the business world and a project manager responsible for development issues were employed in 2008 (and both have been interviewed). In addition, they are planning to recruit a marketing director, who partly is going to replace the information officer they had earlier. The new administrative director considers this replacement as a central matter for a more offensive marketing strategy. Second, the new administrative director has started the implementation of a new organization structure inspired by Lean⁷ in order to provide better services to local enterprises and to citizens. Third, the municipal council has launched a long-term vision; in six years (2015) the municipality should have 15,000 *proud* residents. Education, communication and transport, housing and enterprising are prioritized areas. In addition, civic engagement and participation are central in the municipal program – as well as knowledge, creativity, culture and marketing, according to the press release. Fourth, the municipality officials have intensified their networking activities. They are highly aware of the conditions of the network society. To cope, Sven Svensson says that his strategy is to appear everywhere and in all kind of networks: “because you never know where the opportunities emerge”. Hence, he and his colleagues participate in a number of different networks, crossing geographical as well as political bounda-

ries. This is a necessity, he says, and continues: “The key to our municipal development is not to be found within the municipality”. Their networking activities mean that the municipality has: developed strong bonds with local enterprises, for example through arranging a lunch for industrial people every month; established diverse contacts with universities in the region; developed cooperation with other municipalities in the region; and revitalized contacts with their twin towns in northern Europe. They also keep themselves informed of what happens in the EU regarding rural development. Not least, they have made surveys among the residents (and plan to do so regularly) to improve their relationship.

Thus, a lot of “encoding” activities are going on or have been initiated, or are still in the planning stage. So far no evaluations have been made, but the interviewees experience a vast difference compared to how they used to work. They realize that they have to do something because if they cannot turn the depopulation around, the revenue from taxation will decrease steadily. Some investments have already paid off. For example, the network engagement of the chairman of the municipal council has put them in contact (almost accidentally) with a Danish architectural firm, which has subsequently bought attractive land in one of the villages (Svenvik) for building a large housing area (80 houses) with ecological houses. Another achievement is that they have succeeded in getting a regional LEADER office (Woods 2005: 150) placed in the municipality. Of particular interest for this paper are the explicit and implicit symbolic aspects of the municipal strategies. By “explicit symbolic aspects” I mean discursive symbolic strategies, i.e. marketing and media strategies, whereas “implicit symbolic aspects” refer to the symbolic meaning of other processes. For example, fundamentally the whole process of reconstitution has an implicit symbolic value. It signals: “In times of crisis this municipality does not become completely powerless to act”. In this perspective the new Lean-inspired organization is interesting – originally an idea that the administrative director brought from the industry. The main goal is rationalization of the municipal routines and daily business, but the symbolic effect is not innocent. For example, the reorganization has led to a number of invitations to gatherings and workshops – some organized by the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise – where municipal representatives have presented the municipality and the implementation of Lean. There are also symbolic aspects on home ground. In the local newspaper there have been articles in which representatives of the local industry comment on the municipal reorganization in a positive way. The representatives especially appreciate that they themselves, the local industries, appear explicitly in the organization plan. The long-term vision also has virtues of image management. The launch was a big thing, described by the administrative director in the following way:

We used a method, frequently used within business, where you try to see things from above, partly your own organization, partly the surrounding world. This process provides issues which then are discussed in different workshops. Hence, a group of us went away for two and a half days with loads of data of different kinds. Com-

munication was central in the setup; you have to be able to communicate your conclusions. Immediately when we got back – it was a Friday – we called our local newspapers and said that on the following Wednesday, we would present our long-term municipal vision. It's probably the fastest visionary work process in Sweden ever!

Regarding the symbolic, the vision is successful. It is a recurrent subject in local newspapers, it appears on the municipal website, and most of the residents are aware of it. Problematic, however, is that there is no earmarked budget for the project, and there are no strategy documents on how the goals are to be fulfilled. The modest concrete content so far indicates that the symbolic value may have been the top priority.

From implicit to explicit symbolic aspects: as noticed in the quotation above, contacts with the media are an important strategic aspect of the municipality's work. The administrative director considers the local media as key actors in "encoding" the municipality's public image – which is not without problems for the image management:

The newspapers are quite critical here. There is competition in the newspaper market, which I think is an important reason for that criticism. From my industrial background I know the importance of getting access directly to your target group, without the distortion of middlemen. Right now, the residents experience the municipality mainly through the local papers, but we are going to start a small community paper. Thus, our message will reach every citizen in 9000 households, four times a year. It will be financed through ads, so the costs are no problem. And the funny thing is that it is the local newspaper that will produce it – they are usually very keen to criticize us!

The media, and in this case journalism, may provide means as well as obstacles to the image management. Hence, media strategies have a key function in symbolic work since media attention is a goal in almost all its practices. The development of media and communication technology has undermined traditional media enterprises' monopoly of media production, allowing more agents to be producers. Bypassing traditional media could be important for subcultures – as well as municipal councils.

Place marketing is another explicit symbolic aspect. Until now marketing has been an activity with relatively low priority in the municipality, but a shift is at hand. When the new marketing director takes up his/her duties, his/her main task will be to brand the municipality. Until then, it is a matter for the project manager. The lack of economic resources is a problem, however, and her plan is to turn the marketing project into a LEADER project – an EU-supported project in cooperation with the local industry and associations of the civic society (cf. Woods 2005: 150). This would guarantee a proper budget, because, as she says, it is too important to end up in any half-measures: "I'm not talking about producing brochures or putting a film on YouTube. The top priority is to figure out what we are going to market! If that isn't clear we can put in an endless amount of money without any results". The first step in the marketing project is to prioritize potential inves-

tors and potential residents. Tourism is downplayed at the moment, not least since the competition is so hard. The project manager is a bit sceptical towards the "rural trend" of idyllicism: "every rural municipality with self-respect makes an effort to get tourists – it seems like everyone has beautiful nature, peace and quiet and some tourist sites".

What, then, does this say about the globalization in the rural municipality in southernmost Sweden? Summing up the municipal actions, one may say that these different strategies illustrate quite well Woods' argument that globalization is "incorporated within local processes" (Woods 2007: 494), rather than penetrate the local. Yet it is important to stress that even though globalization is negotiated and hybridized locally, a rural municipality does not have a central position in "wider power-geometries" (ibid.: 497). Local policy-makers are more often on the receiving end of globalization than being the initiators of flows and movements. In spite of that, the study brings the aspects of negotiation to the fore, a central term in the encoding/decoding model. Global discourses are not mediated passively through local policy-makers. They are decoded (interpreted) and thereafter appropriated and practised – encoded – in a locally adjusted form. A quotation from the chairman of the municipal council illustrates this:

Google is fantastic! If you just curious you'll find all you want. Browsing the web, creating networks and using your own lived experience – that's the way one works today! [...] You have to be careful with trends, but there are always tendencies that need consideration; do they mean problems or benefits for the municipality? As a local politician you need to take account of what is happening in the surrounding world; you have to read a number of books and newspapers – and keep informed of what is happening on the web.

The statement can be connected with the presence of buzzwords, drawn from global discourses, in the municipal long-term vision. At the same time, however, it is important to note that the main goal of the vision is *not* an increased amount of visitors and entrepreneurs, which would be the case if determination or imperialism were involved. The present goal of an increased population and of changing its attitude towards the municipality ("proud residents") illustrates the presence of negotiation in the global-local relationship.

If the project of the long-term vision is characterized by negotiation and locally shaped appropriation, there are other aspects in which the reproduction of dominant ideologies is more explicit. In these cases the policy-makers make a "preferred reading" of the global discourse and its ideological content. The municipal engagement in policy networks is such an example. The municipal staff has no (political) doubts about running projects or cooperating with industry. Collaborations are taken for granted. As discussed earlier, governing through policy networks implies certain risks of de-politicization, since questions tend to be treated as technical rather than political. Embedded conflicts are played down in favour of the appearance of consensus (Zukin 1995: 271). As an expression of a global discourse, the principle of policy networks is particularly strong due to the explicit

support from the political establishment. It is, for example, possible to consider LEADER, the EU programme for rural development, in which representatives from municipality, industry and the civic society have to cooperate in order to qualify, as a strong support for network alliances within rural development. A remaining question concerns the residents, their relationship to the surrounding world, and their decoding of the municipal strategies.

Living in a Rural Idyll

A common denominator among the interviewed residents is an engagement, to varying extent, in a local village community, to which more than half of the population belongs. The village community marks the village in different ways, which become obvious in the interviews.

When the residents talk about Svenvik, almost all of them express an appreciation of its peacefulness and of having nature right at their doorstep. Both locally born residents and in-migrants are pleased with the village and its environment, and many of them convey negative feelings about cities and city life. Some of the in-migrants from cities emphasize that nature is not enough for moving to the countryside; it has to be a socially vital village where you can make friends and experience community. The small-scaleness seems to attract. Ulla, a woman in her 30s, originally from a larger city, puts it thus: “In wintertime you meet everybody when skating and everyone helps to shovel the ice. And in summertime you meet at the same place while bathing. To know everyone provides a special kind of feeling”. She also talks about the disappointment she felt when the small school in the next village closed down. Today her children have to go by bus to a larger school farther away. Ulla has her own marketing agency with several clients around Malmö (where she lived earlier), something she comments upon with a smile: “I don’t like to go to Malmö – it’s too hectic and too many people”.

Since the residents care a lot about Svenvik and its future, several of the interviewees are very engaged in the village community. The association does not solely focus on local heritage, which otherwise is common in the Swedish countryside; instead they arrange different activities – a cooking course for men, for example – and they act as a pressure group in questions about local development. Hence, the residents and their activities are a significant aspect of the character of the village. They make the place/village through their routinized practices and their daily interactions – the spaces of representations in Lefebvre’s terms. In addition, they contribute symbolically to the village (representations of space) through different representations, creating links to the past as well as to the future. Their “symbolic work from below” includes, for example, a yearly arranged music festival and a local portal on the Internet, including a community paper. Furthermore, they have established a museum to display the local heritage of stonemasonry and a track where one can see the old quarries. Yet their top priority dur-

ing recent years has been their engagement with the development plan of Svenvik. With the help of an acquainted architect, the village community has produced a new detailed development plan which they have handed over to the municipal council.

The negotiation with the municipality over the detailed development plan has proceeded for several years, and a certain bitterness with the policy-makers is evident among the residents. They are not content with the way the municipal council governs: they think the municipality should be more attentive to the local residents, especially the engaged village community which, in spite of its members' deep engagement, never had received any credit. The municipality's administration of the detailed development plan – which has been “unprofessional” according to the residents – was an upcoming subject in almost all of the interviews. Still, after many years of civic work, the work with the plan is not yet initiated. But the residents are not only criticizing and complaining. Some praise the small-scaleness, which makes it possible to negotiate directly with the municipality, something they realize one cannot do everywhere. Just like the municipal policy-makers, the interviewed residents realize that their village is a rural idyll with huge potential for exploitation. They recognize the potential improvements also for them: opportunities for better public service and facilities, maybe even a country shop. But the residents seek a restricted or at least controlled exploitation, so that local resources – for example the view over the lake and the open spaces in front of the lake – are maintained, since these are central in the community life. When asked explicitly about the municipality's work in relation to Svenvik, most of the interviewed residents are sceptical for different reasons. Some are scared that Svenvik will be over-exploited, whereas others think the local governors talk too much and act too little. Ingvar, a man who was born in Svenvik, is upset with the municipality's aesthetic prioritizations:

Instead of providing public facilities the municipality puts money into rebuilding streets, pavements and bus stops and they put up designed streetlights in the larger villages [...] If the facilities are okay and you feel secure in your day-to-day life, then I think people might accept a road that is a bit bumpy. The municipality has reconstructed all the centres in the larger villages – with the help of expensive consultants, of course. In one of the villages it turned out that buses could no longer pass the central roundabout, because it had become too small. So I maintain that they invest in the wrong things.

The reconstructions Ingvar mentions were carried out some years ago; but also more recent municipal activities, like the long-term vision, are met with a certain scepticism, even though the reactions are blended. There is appreciation that the municipality does something, and several of the interviewees think the visionary goals are relevant. As Alan, very active in a local development group (subgroup to the village community), puts it:

I can see how they [the policy-makers] think: they need to anchor their work among the citizens, and they have to start with something positive. Overall, the basic idea is

good, I believe – it's a citizen perspective. But the vision has to be filled with content without being daft. That's the challenge!

The municipality's weakness with taking action is a recurrent theme in the interviews. A woman, Eva-Britt, describes how she has searched for an action plan for the long term-vision on the municipal website, but she could not find any. That confirmed her general view of the municipality: "It's a lot of catch phrases and buzzwords, whereas I want something tangible. I've even written a letter to the editor about that". The interviewees' earlier experiences of the municipality explicitly mark their attitude towards the new vision. They have long experience of municipal lack of money. Stig has lived in the municipality since the 1970s, when he and his family moved to Svenvik in an act of counter-urbanization. He has been engaged in the village community almost since then:

We've seen too many projects – initiated with red carpet and all – go down the drain. They have all vanished as soon it becomes serious or starts to cost. Once, for example, we were appointed municipal ambassadors, getting pins, badges, flyers and stuff, and we took part in a lot of meetings. But it all vanished after a while. The new vision sounds good, but over the years I've learned not to have an opinion until I see something really happening.

As mentioned, however, the residents do not only sit back and grumble; they also take action. They have strong opinions on local development which they convey through the village community. The residents advocate a development strategy that enhances in-migration – while taking present residents into consideration. They welcome tourist flow – as long as the tourists respect the nature and spend money locally. The residents are positive towards the new building project, which they think may enrich the village – and they appreciate the ecological focus. However, some hesitation is expressed about the target group: who are going to afford moving to these rather expensive houses? Ulla really appreciates the ecological line, but at the same time she is afraid the houses will be turned into second homes for wealthy people from Copenhagen. If so, their chance of getting a country shop and other public facilities will decrease – as will the municipal tax revenues.

In any case, their long-standing engagement and their acting as a pressure group have resulted. For example, the public transports have been improved and it seems that their proposed detailed development plan for the village will get through without too many modifications. Ingvar has a clear idea of the municipal strategy – and how it differs from his own view:

If you are going to invest in Svenvik – and I know the municipality wants to do that – it has to be in something substantial. It's not enough telling potential residents that "the view over the lake is marvellous – and you can paddle canoe!" No one today has the time or the money to move to a place just because of the view! Well, maybe pensioners, but they're not the target group in this case. For ordinary people, working five days a week, the view is just the icing on the cake; useful when you have guests, but you can't live on it. But the municipality is convinced that the peace and quiet and the environment in itself will attract people. Instead, we try to convince

them to invest in a small day nursery. That's what attracts families with children! The municipality has to be pro-active in this case – one can't wait and see if families move in. Good service already in place is fundamental to a modern family! That's the basis of day-to-day life, and then comes the rest. I think that's the way to draw people from the cities.

This is a different view of the strategies for the local development. Less rhetoric and symbolic, more focused on public improvements, to support present residents as well as future ones. The residents do believe in marketing, but also in this case they have a different view than the municipality. As Stig, who is partly working with marketing, puts it:

I think the municipality should invest in less badges and glossy brochures and do more proper marketing to attract more residents. Why not going on a serious recruitment tour in Malmö?⁸ There's the place to tell about the nature, the environment, the atmosphere and the low housing prices!

Svenvik – a Relatively Contested Place in the Swedish Countryside

A local place is contested. There are many forces pulling it in different directions and, as discussed earlier, there is a manifold of social spaces “overlapping the same geographical area” (Cloke 2006: 19). Svenvik is at the same time an exploitable rural idyll, as the municipal policy-makers like to view it, and the site of the residents' daily business. The residents experience, maybe not a clash, but at least friction between these two spaces. Picking up a theoretical thread from earlier, it could be expressed as a disjuncture between the symbolic meanings created (“encoded”) by the policy-makers and those experienced (“decoded”) by the residents. There seems to be a mismatch between their imaginative representations of a future Svenvik. It is not that the residents do not see post-industrial threats that globalization is bringing, i.e. the threats the municipality acts upon. It is rather that the residents interpret them differently. This could be traced, among other things, to different access to globalization, which brings us back to the role of mediation and the “global diffusion of global discourses” in mediascapes. Roger Silverstone comments on the dynamic and multifaceted character of mediation in a vivid way:

Mediated meanings move between texts, certainly, and across time. But they also move across space, and across spaces. They move from the public to the private, from the institutional to the individual, from the globalizing to the local and personal, and back again. They are fixed, as it were, in texts, and fluid in conversations. They are visible on billboards and web-sites and buried in minds and memories (1999: 15).

There are many ways – mediated and non-mediated – to experience globalization for the rural residents, and many of these ways bypass the municipality. On the basis of the amalgam of their lived experience and mediated meanings, the resi-

dents create their own accounts of Svenvik and its future in a globalized world – and they take action to realize it. Their action in turn may cause ripple effects and have consequences in other parts of the global network. In this way the residents may, if not change, at least alter sections of the power geometries of globalization, which justifies a term like provincial globalization. Furthermore, this conflict is the consequence of overlapping social spaces – associated with different media spaces. The making of Svenvik is a struggle, although a relatively calm one, and as Chantal Mouffe (2000) claims, such conflicts are productive. Consensus is not a goal in itself; the conflict is a sign of a vitality in public life and a deliberative democratic process.

Concluding Remarks

When Paul Cloke discusses the future of rural studies, especially vis-à-vis the cultural turn, he is concerned with “the depoliticizing tendencies of a cultural focus” and argues for a repoliticizing:

[W]hen the conceptual fruitfulness of the cultural turn is pursued in conjunction with a more critical analysis of power relations there is a potential to add significantly to the broader understandings of, and critical importance of, rural policy agendas (2006: 26).

I believe that a focus on mediation; the struggle and interplay of meaning between the symbolic and the material, an approach with roots in the Centre of for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham (cf. Hall 1980b), is a passable – and relevant – road to go. This could be the “cultural” crossroad where Rural Geography and Media and Cultural Studies meet for mutual inspiration – as Peter Jackson (1991) once proposed. Such a perspective has in this study led to valuable insights regarding the “micro-politics of negotiation and hybridization” which is the core of globalization’s re-fashioning of rural places (Woods 2007: 502).

Finally, a comment on the rural future. Concerning Svenvik, three distinct municipal strategies are discernible in the study, all of them connected with the interplay of meaning between urbanity and rurality on a representational/imaginative level. First, it is possible to market the municipality in general and Svenvik in particular as the rural idyll; the peaceful and quiet antithesis to the urbanity discourse. In such representational imagination the qualities of beauty and closeness to nature are brought to the fore, which in turn are associated with the virtue of authenticity (cf. Bell 2006; Granås & Gunnarsdotter 2007). Second, another route is to affirm urbanity and create a “sense of the city”. This is an expression of the much-discussed “urbanization of the rural” (Cloke 2006: 18; McCarthy 2008; Woods 2009). It is, for example, possible to trace urban aesthetics in rural rebuilding projects (cf. Benediktsson & Aho 2007), communicating some kind of aesthetic up-to-dateness. A very different example is the emphasis on the possibilities of commuting in the municipality’s marketing material. In this case, the rural vil-

lage becomes similar to suburbia: a place for private withdrawal and family life – in contrast to the city with its professional connotations. It seems that the municipality in the present case study blends these two strategies, on the one hand asserting the beauty of, and wilderness around, Svenvik, and on the other hand reconstructing village centres in an urban fashion. There is a third strategy, however. Some essential similarities exist between what has been called ”ruralisation of the urban” (Cloke 2006: 19; Woods 2009: 853) and the residents’ views on the local development. Both can be seen as reactions to (urban) large-scaleness due to rationalization processes. In both cases there are demands for community spirit and small schools and day nurseries in the neighbourhood. In short, what is pursued is a general small-scaleness, which is not “gated” or closed, but serves as a solid and secure ground for the practices of everyday life. Just like the first alternative, this one is heavily marked by the imaginative city, shaped as the latter’s antithesis as it is. Is it time for a re-ruralisation of the rural?

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Notes

- 1 This study is part of ”Rural Networking/Networking the Rural”, an ongoing research project financed by Formas, the Swedish Research Council for Environment, Agricultural Sciences and Spatial Planning.
- 2 The number is from 2001-01-08, according to the municipality’s website.
- 3 The interviews were carried out during the spring of 2009. All interviews were between 50 and 150 minutes, following previously designed interview-guides.
- 4 As Patrik Åker (2008: 92) notes, a linked document on Latvia’s official webpage contains an open invitation to industrial investors – emphasizing the low wages and the low commitment to the trade union in Latvia (<http://www.tartu.ee/data/SMARTlocationFinal.pdf> 2010-01-10). Thus, poor working conditions may be used in the marketing of a nation.
- 5 There are many similarities to ’gated communities’, despite the absence of gates.
- 6 All figures are from 2008-01-01, except those regarding unemployment which are from March 2009. Source: Municipal Facts, Statistics Sweden [Statistiska centralbyrån], www.scb.se/kommunfakta.
- 7 A method for rationalization within manufacturing industry. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lean_Manufacturing.
- 8 The city of Malmö has almost 300,000 residents and is about 110 km away.

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Reporting an Unsettled Countryside: The News Media and Rural Protests in Britain

By Michael Woods

Abstract

Most analyses of the role of the media in shaping and reproducing popular discourses of rurality have focused on film, television drama and literature. Comparatively little attention has been directed towards the role of the news media in framing perceptions of contemporary rural issues through reportage and commentary. This paper examines the engagement of the news media with a series of rural protests that developed in Britain between 1997 and 2007 around issues such as hunting and farm incomes. The news media had been complicit in maintaining the previous discursive construct of the countryside as a settled and almost apolitical space, but the emergence of major rural protests forced a shift in the representation of rural life. News coverage of rural issues and rural protests increased with the adoption of a new discourse of the "unsettled countryside". In adjusting to shifting news values, the news media initially bought and reproduced the frames promoted by the major rural campaign group, the Countryside Alliance, including tropes of the "countryside in crisis", the "countryside comes to town" and the "countryside speaks out for liberty". Over time, however, a more complex web of representations developed as the perspectives adopted by different media outlets diverged, informed by political ideology. As such, it is argued that the news media played a key role not only in mediating public reception of rural protests, and thus modulating their political significance, but also in framing the rural protests for participants within the rural community, and as such contributing to the mobilisation of a politicised rural identity and an active rural citizenship.

Keywords: News reporting, rural protest, discourse, rurality, Britain

Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, the countryside became big news in Britain. For decades, rural news and countryside issues had occupied a marginal position – if any – in the national news media. Stories about farming and agricultural policy, hunting and field sports, or the challenges faced by rural communities, were largely the preserve of the specialist farming press, regional newspapers and field sports magazines. Only occasionally did stories of rural conflicts or politics infiltrate into the mainstream national media, usually as novelty items, positioned as curious exceptions to the prevailing discourse that the countryside was a somehow "apolitical" space (see Woods 2005). To be taken seriously, rural news stories had to transcend their rural setting, latching on to wider concerns about the environment (as in the case of anti-roads protests) or food safety (as in scares over salmonella and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)).

Things changed in the summer of 1997. That July, over 120,000 pro-hunting supporters rallied in London, and rural politics were suddenly taken seriously. Through the next decade, British "broadsheet" newspapers frequently carried news reports, feature articles and commentary pieces following the political struggles over hunting, the future of farming, and major developments such as windfarm construction, as well as other issues affecting rural communities. At the peak of the trend in 2002, the *Daily Telegraph* newspaper carried nearly 100 articles concerning rural protests or political issues.¹

The most prolific coverage concerned the prospect of a ban on hunting wild mammals with hounds following the Labour election landslide in 1997. Starting with the Countryside Rally in July 1997, opponents of a ban, led by the Countryside Alliance, organised a number of high profile demonstrations over the next seven years, including two large marches in London, and a plethora of smaller protest events and campaigns around the country. These protests received substantial media coverage, with editorial space also devoted to the parliamentary debates on hunting and to tensions over the issue within the Labour government (see Woods 2008a). The passing of the Hunting Act in November 2004, and the introduction of the resulting ban in February 2005, were both heavily covered; and many newspapers have continued to periodically publish articles charting the impact of the ban and the attempts of hunts to operate within the law.

Moreover, once the concept of the "countryside in crisis" had been established, the news media began to pick up other stories that corresponded with this theme. Articles appeared on the fluctuating fortunes of farming and about localised conflicts over windfarm developments, house-building, new supermarkets and the closure of schools and post offices, all presented as further tales from an unsettled countryside.

This explosion of coverage of rural politics in part reflected the proliferation of rural protest events that occurred in Britain in the decade since 1997. The pro-

hunting Countryside Rally, Countryside March and Liberty and Livelihood March were major political events involving an unprecedented mobilisation of a traditionally conservative rural constituency. Protests by farmers at ports in December 1997 were similarly unusual, and when farmers later blockaded oil depots in September 2000 they nearly starved the country of fuel and came close to bringing down the government (Woods 2005). The Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic in 2001, meanwhile, cast a shadow far beyond the farming community as exclusion zones were established, public rights of way suspended, tourist attractions closed and events cancelled.

However, it can be argued that the news media did not simply report these events, but that they also played a significant role in creating and reproducing them. Without mainstream national news coverage, the pro-hunting protests would never have mobilised the number of participants that they did, and would not have had the significant political impact that they did. The media hence became complicit in reproducing the interpretative frames of the countryside lobby, and in so doing they helped to reshape popular and political discourses of rurality in Britain.

This paper examines the engagement of the British news media, and in particular national "broadsheet" newspapers, with the rural protest movement in Britain and investigates its role in the frame alignment of rural protest. It also identifies the subsequent emergence of frame dissonance, as the stance of different newspapers began to diverge according to ideological position and readership, and as the government struggled to assert its own alternative political construction of the rural. The paper draws on research funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, including interviews with key activists in the rural protest movement, a survey of Countryside Alliance members in four districts, and analysis of media coverage.²

The Construction of Rural News

The role of the media in producing and reproducing discourses of rurality is well established in rural studies. With most people in countries such as Britain living in urban areas, information and impressions garnered from the media are influential in shaping individuals' perceptions of the countryside, its people and its problems. Even for rural residents, messages received through the media can be important in reinforcing, explaining or challenging personal experiences, thus helping to convert individual positionality into collective identity.

Television dramas and films are particularly influential, with their capacity to present stylised representations of rural life to large and diverse audiences (Bell 2006; Phillips 2008; Phillips et al. 2001). The fictionalised countryside they portray tends towards one of two polar, stylised caricatures. In some cases media discourses draw on the historic association of rurality with wilderness to present

the rural as an anti-idyll: an isolated, insular, desolate, backward and dangerous place (Bell 1997). More commonly, however, the countryside is portrayed through the prism of the "rural idyll": as a safe, comfortable, tranquil, unhurried and untroubled place, where life proceeds in harmony with nature, free from the hustle, bustle and stresses of city living. The prevalence of the rural idyll myth in media representations has had a material impact in stimulating the growth of rural tourism and counterurbanisation and informing the expectations of visitors and migrants; in disguising the existence of rural poverty and class conflict; and in promoting benign and anthropomorphic representations of animals and nature that have helped to shape public opinion on issues such as farming, animal welfare and hunting.

Whilst studies have analysed representations of rurality in the entertainment media, far less attention has been directed toward the news media. To some degree, this bias has reflected the relatively limited coverage of rural issues in the mainstream print and broadcast news media. One study in the United States, for example, found that network news programmes on the three major television networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) featured only 48 rural-themed stories in 2004, and that only 481 rural-themed stories appeared in seven national newspapers and magazines (including the *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Time*) in the same year (Harper 2005). Moreover, only 3 per cent of these stories mentioned farming, and only 1 per cent directly concerned agriculture. The large majority focused on the perceived threat to rural landscapes from urban expansion, and thus presented rural America from a nostalgic perspective informed by the rural idyll (ibid.).

Indeed, the relative absence of rural news not only corresponds with the rural idyll myth, but helps to reproduce it – the countryside being implicitly constructed as *a place where nothing happens*. As Bunce (2003) observes, rural news stories frequently only break through into the mainstream media when they concern events that appear to threaten or disrupt the rural idyll – disease, such as an *E.coli* outbreak (in Bunce's example), or the BSE or Foot and Mouth epidemics in Britain; the incursions of new age travellers, environmental protesters, or music festivals; or village political disputes initiated by the obduracy of urban incomers. In reporting such events as exceptions and anomalies, the news media reinforces the imagined normality of the rural idyll.

At the same time, however, elements of the media with a stronger tie to rural areas – regional newspapers and the farming press, for example – have also latched on to the rural idyll as a means of promoting a positive image of rural life (see for example, Hidle et al. 2006, on the portrayal of the rural "good life" in the Norwegian *Nationen* newspaper). Yet, changing perspectives informed by the rural idyll within the rural population, particularly those of in-migrants, have also presented a challenge to rural regional newspapers that have traditionally championed primary industries such as farming, forestry and mining. Newspapers have been forced to reflect the increasingly complex web of opinions in rural society,

but at the cost of being able to present a coherent platform of regional interests to external audiences (MacDonald 2004).

The emergence of a new "politics of the rural" as a consequence of rural restructuring, in which the major foci of conflict concern the meaning and regulation of rurality (Woods 2003), has also begun to chip away at the neglect of rural coverage in the mainstream news media. Initially picked up as novelty items, the politics of the rural has been taken more seriously when it assumed significance for national politics or for urban populations. In Lithuania, for example, coverage of rural issues fluctuated with political interests during the post-Communist transition. As Juska (2007) shows, during the 1990s the pro-reform newspaper *Lietuvos Rytas* significantly increased its coverage of rural stories, but did so in a manner that drew on urban prejudices about rural society and presented rural populations as scapegoats for the spatially uneven outcomes of liberal economic reform. However, after 2000, as Lithuania began to prepare for entry to the European Union, with the prospect of significant investment in rural development, the newspaper adopted a more positive tone, emphasizing the potential for rural entrepreneurship. As such, *Lietuvos Rytas* acted as a conduit for rural news to the urban population and thus helped to produce and reproduce the shifting discourses of rurality in Lithuanian political debate.

The British News Media and the Countryside

Britain has a distinctly centralised news media, with ten London-based national titles accounting for three-quarters of all daily newspaper sales. These include both mass-circulation tabloids, with an emphasis on entertainment news and sensationalist content, and more serious "broadsheets" with more extensive political coverage (from divergent standpoints) but more limited sales (Table 1). As table 2 indicates, there are notable differences in the geographical distribution of these titles. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* have a disproportionately large readership in significantly rural regions, whilst the readership of the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Times* is more strongly urban. Tabloid newspapers, however, are the largest selling titles in both rural and urban regions.³

Reflecting these patterns, Petrie and Wainwright (2008) observe that, "in very recent times, the *Guardian* was something of a rarity in many parts of the English countryside. A copy or two in the village store would be overshadowed by a pile of the shires' apparently preferred choice of reading, the *Daily Telegraph*" (vii). Petrie and Wainwright go on to note that the circulation of the *Guardian* has broadened with the recomposition of the rural population, but their initial observation continues to hold true for rural residents engaged in traditional pursuits such as farming, hunting and shooting, who have formed the bedrock of the countryside protest movement. Our survey of Countryside Alliance members in four districts of England and Wales found that half read the *Daily Telegraph*. Only one per cent apiece read the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, and only three per cent

read one of the mass-circulation tabloids (Table 3). Specialist farming, hunting and field sports publications were also widely read within this community, with two-fifths of survey respondents reading *Horse and Hound* magazine, and a third *The Field* magazine (Table 4). As such, activists in the rural protest movement largely received news from a fairly narrow section of the print media which broadly shared common conservative values.

Yet, at the time of the start of the rural protest movement in the late 1990s, the rural-urban differences in newspaper readership were not prominently reflected in the coverage of rural issues by the national titles. The *Daily Telegraph* and the *Times* may have carried more rural stories than the *Guardian* or the *Independent*, but they generally shared the same idyllic perception of the countryside as an essentially apolitical space, as was reflected in their news-gathering structures. The *Daily Telegraph* employed an "agricultural editor", but its coverage of rural issues as the protests gained momentum was led by its "environment editor". Reports on rural issues and protests in the *Guardian* and the *Independent* similarly have tended to be covered by either environment reporters or regionally-based reporters. Only the *Times* has a formally designated "countryside editor", a position created following the mobilisation of the rural protest movement, and combined by its first incumbent with the post of consumer editor.

Similarly, whilst all the "broadsheet" newspapers have carried regular "countryside" features, such as the *Guardian*'s long-running "country diary", these have tended to focus on nature, landscape, rural property and recreation, and have only rarely acknowledged social and political concerns. Thus, the positioning and presentation of "countryside" features and articles in the British national press has conventionally reinforced the rural idyll discourse. A recent anthology of articles on the countryside from the *Guardian* records examples of the newspaper reporting political stories from an anti-corn-law meeting in 1843, through mass trespasses on private land in the 1930s, to farmers' protests in the 1970s, but these are a minority alongside articles on country walks, wildlife, rural customs, angling, agricultural shows, and landscape conservation, as well as occasional reports on social and economic changes in agriculture (Petrie and Wainwright 2008). Only in the selected articles from the last twenty years does coverage of a politicised countryside become more apparent.

Framing Rural Protests

The stimulus for the mobilisation of the contemporary rural protest movement in Britain was the Labour election victory in 1997. The hunting of foxes and deer with hounds had been a controversial issue for over a century, with repeated unsuccessful attempts to introduce a ban. The anti-hunting majority in the new parliament signalled a clear opportunity for animal rights campaigners to finally achieve this ambition (Woods 2008a). With hunting popularly perceived as an

out-dated, elitist and arguably cruel sport, hunting supporters realised that they risked being isolated and overwhelmed in a debate. To have any chance of resisting a ban, hunting supporters needed to turn public opinion, and to turn public opinion they needed to capture the attention of the news media.

The media, however, had shown little interest in promoting the pro-hunting case during previous attempts at legislation. The most recent attempt, in 1995, had prompted debates on television and comment pieces in newspapers, as well as some coverage of regional rallies in support of hunting. Yet, as George (1999) observed, “there had been no visible presence in London while the Bill was being debated, and although the Rallies had attracted considerable local press and some fair coverage in the nationals, the cheering antis outside the House and the anti-hunting barge on the Thames dominated Friday night’s television news” (81).

The scale of the challenge was brought home to the individual recruited by the British Field Sports Society (BFSS) to coordinate the pro-hunting campaign, Simon Clarke, at an anti-gun-control rally in London in February 1997. As Hart-Davis (1997) reports, Clarke was enthused by the atmosphere of demonstration, attended by 22,000 protesters, yet “he was dismayed to find that the demonstration received minimal press coverage: tiny, single-column reports in the *Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, and a little bit more in the *Daily Mail*” (4).

The response of the pro-hunting lobby was two-fold. On the one hand, the lobby moved to increase its organisational capacity. The BFSS recruited additional staff with campaigning and logistical expertise, and joined with two smaller organisations in a new coalition, the Countryside Alliance. Volunteers were also engaged in helping to organise two major demonstrations in London, the Countryside Rally in July 1997 (attended by 127,000 people) and the Countryside March in March 1998 (attended by 250,000), as well as a plethora of supporting initiatives such as long-distance marches and beacons. Central to this organisational strategy was the strengthening of its media work. Shortly after the failed 1995 Hunting Bill, the BFSS expanded and professionalised its press team. Among the initiatives of the new Chief Press Officer, Janet George, was establishing contacts with the tabloid and left-leaning broadsheet press, which had not existed previously (George 1999). Relations with the media were used to refute anti-hunting claims, promote positive pro-hunting stories, and build the interest of the news media in the Countryside Alliance’s planned protests. The success of this strategy is demonstrated in George’s own account of the Countryside Rally:

The day of the Rally was fine and the day started with the usual dash around the studios, before I headed up to Hyde Park for a live interview with Michael Foster MP [sponsor of the anti-hunting legislation]. Then it was back to the VIP area where press (and VIPs) were queuing for their passes. We had to grab extra hands to cope with the numbers and eventually ran out of passes and press packs when more than 500 journalists had been dealt with. While staff in the press area juggled interviews, found “celebs” for journalists (and journalists for celebs) Alison Hawes spent most of the day doing the studio circuit. When the media report arrived, it was clear that staff and volunteers had participated in more than 300 radio and television inter-

views in the UK on the day – with dozens more for overseas radio and television crews and a multitude of journalists. (George 1999: 125)

At the same time, these organisational developments were entwined with and reliant on a parallel discursive strategy, aimed at re-framing the hunting debate and shifting media, public and political perceptions of the contemporary countryside. In the language of social movement theory, the discursive strategy enabled the emergent rural protest movement to achieve "frame alignment" (della Porta and Diani 2006; Snow et al. 1986) – bringing into line the interpretative frames of the protest organisers, the potential participants and the media to promote the protagonists' interests. As Snow et al. (1986) describe, frame alignment can take different forms, three of which are evident in the case of the rural protest movement.

Firstly, the discursive strategy aimed to re-frame the hunting debate away from the question of animal welfare by connecting the fate of hunting with the wider fate of the countryside as a whole. This was an example of "frame extension", in which the specific interests or goals of a social movement organisation are linked to much broader concerns in order to make the campaign relevant for a larger number of potential participants (Snow et al. 1986). This strategy was reflected in the adoption of the name "Countryside Alliance" for the coalition organising the initial pro-hunting protests, the branding of the first two mass demonstrations as the "Countryside Rally" and the "Countryside March", and the positioning of both events (and other related activities) as being protests not just about hunting, but also about other rural concerns including farm incomes, housing development, property rights and the closure of village services. At the same time, hunting was presented as being central to rural life, thus suggesting that a ban on hunting would affect the whole social and economic structure of the countryside.

Secondly, in order to maximise the mobilisation of rural participations, the strategy appealed to their core values, beliefs and identity in a process of "frame amplification" (Snow et al. 1986). Emotive language was used to describe the meaning of hunting to rural communities and the desperation of people who felt that their way of life was under threat. A sense of rural identity was invigorated by constructing the notion of an urban-rural divide in which opposition to hunting, disregard for the problems of agriculture, and other perceived threats to rural interests all stemmed from urban "ignorance" and "intolerance". Moreover, the rural lobby also tapped into values of tradition and patriotism by presenting the proposed hunting ban as a modish act of unnecessary modernisation and as being "unBritish". Crucially, in evoking these representations, the rural lobby connected with the core values of the conservative newspapers that were mostly widely read by their target rural constituency, which consequently became enrolled as vehicles for achieving frame amplification.

Thirdly, to be successful in blocking the proposed hunting ban, the pro-hunting lobby needed not only to mobilise sympathisers in protest activity, but also to change public and political opinion. This meant converting erstwhile opponents of

hunting, including more liberal elements of the news media. To pursue this objective, the pro-hunting lobby attempted a process of "frame bridging" (Snow et al. 1986), connecting hunting to conventional liberal causes, particularly civil liberties. Supporters of a ban on hunting were presented as being "illiberal" and "intolerant", whilst opponents of the ban were presented as the defenders of liberty. This message was reinforced in the branding of the third mass demonstration in London, the "Liberty and Livelihood March" in 2002, as well as in speeches, articles and publicity materials that positioned the countryside protests in the tradition of libertarian protest and evoked Ghandi and Martin Luther King.

The achievement of frame alignment involved the repetition of certain key tropes, including ideas of the "countryside in crisis", the "countryside comes to town" and the "countryside speaks out for liberty", explored further below. These tropes were articulated in the publicity materials and press releases produced by the Countryside Alliance, as well as in speeches and articles by hunting supporters. However, they also came to be independently reproduced by the news media, as the interpretative frame promoted by the Countryside Alliance was implicitly adopted by newspapers and news programmes in the reporting of rural politics and in columns and feature articles.

The Countryside in Crisis

The notion of the "countryside in crisis" was an important trope in the reporting of the early rural protests, both endowing the protests with a sense of urgency, and hence newsworthiness, and offering the media an explanation for the sudden emergence of protests from a countryside that they had conventionally represented as tranquil and "apolitical". By referring, implicitly or directly, to a present or predicted "crisis", the news media constructed the mobilisation of rural people in protest events as an emotional responses, rather than as an act of political calculation. Coverage of beacons lit around the country in February 1998 before the Countryside March, for example, carried headlines of "The countryside burns with anger" in the *Daily Telegraph* (27 February 1998) and "Flames of rural anger stoked" in the *Guardian* (27 February 1998). Whilst the *Telegraph's* coverage was more prominent and extensive than the *Guardian's*, both reports emphasised the emotion of the protests:

Across Britain last night 5,000 beacons lit up the skies signalling the anger of country people at Government policies on farming, foxhunting and public access to private land (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 February 1998: 9)

The countryside is under attack. The town is out to get us and a way of life is being threatened, from the BSE crisis to the banning of beef on the bone (Beacon organizer, quoted in the *Guardian*, 27 February 1998: 9)

The trope of the countryside in crisis also contributed to the process of frame extension, connecting the threat of a hunting ban with other rural concerns. This was articulated in part in reporting on the motivations expressed by protest partici-

pants, as in a *Guardian* article on long-distance marchers from Wales to London ahead of the Countryside Rally in July 1997, which quoted one marcher explaining that,

The hunting thing is just part of the problem. We're treated like nothing. They've closed our hospitals, cut back on our services, everything is more expensive for us. The countryside is becoming a sink for the poor. They are pushing us further and further (Countryside marcher quoted in the *Guardian*, 5 July 97: 3).

However, the media also drew these connections in banding together coverage of various rural issues and protests, especially once militant farmers started to mount pickets and blockades during the winter of 1997/8 in protest at falling farm incomes, in parallel with on-going hunting protests. As discussed further below, this approach helped to legitimise and attract media coverage for smaller rural protests, organised without the professional resources available to the Countryside Alliance. The trope was arguably pushed to its extreme by the Welsh regional daily newspaper, the *Western Mail*, which published an issue with multiple tagged with the strapline "Rural Wales in Crisis", which included not only stories about farming and school closures, but also a rumoured threat to axe the long-running rural-set BBC radio series, *The Archers*.

The Countryside Comes to Town

A key component of the Countryside Alliance's strategy was that pro-hunting demonstrations needed to be held in London if they were to attract media coverage and be taken seriously. This spatial dislocation, however, also assumed a symbolic significance in the trope of the "countryside comes to town", which featured in newspaper headlines for the Countryside Rally ("The country comes to town", *Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1997: 1) and the Countryside March ("Hunters carry torch to London", *Guardian*, 28 February 1998; "The day the city became a shire", *Guardian*, 2 March 1998: 1). The trope intrinsically reproduced the conceit of an urban-rural divide, enabling issues around hunting, farming and access to private land for recreation to be presented a clash of cultures. Thus, the *Daily Telegraph* stated in its front-page report on the Countryside Rally that:

This crowd wanted nothing banned, repealed, subsidised or paid for. But the gradual encroachment of city authority into country life, epitomised by the proposed ban on foxhunting, had gone far enough. A line had to be drawn and it was. (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1997: 1).

The left-leaning *Guardian*, less instinctively sympathetic to the rural protesters than the *Telegraph*, nonetheless reported the articulation of the urban-rural divide in its coverage of the early countryside protests, one article for example carrying the sub-heading, "John Vidal listens to the lament of rural marchers who see their way of life threatened by 'arrogant metropolitans'" (*Guardian*, 5 July 1997: 3).

The trope of "the countryside comes to town" not only constructed a binary divide between city and country, but also exaggerated the homogeneity of the two elements. As such, its use in reports on the Countryside Rally and the Countryside

March implicitly suggested that rural communities had come en masse to London for the demonstrations. Most newspapers carried maps showing the number of participants in the Countryside March expected from different regions of Britain – based on coach charters registered with the organisers, and giving the impression of a nationwide movement. Similarly, the *Daily Telegraph* reported in its front-page coverage of the Countryside Rally that,

In their tens of thousands they had come, from farms, moors and fells, emptying villages and leaving nature to its own devices for a day in order to let the urban majority know that the rural minority wishes to be left alone. (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1997: 1)

Moreover, in representing the countryside as a homogenous entity, the trope of the "countryside comes to town" suggested that the protesters were representative of the rural population. Whilst the *Guardian* and the *Independent* carried articles critiquing this notion, it was explicitly reproduced in the coverage of conservative newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*. The *Telegraph* coverage of the Countryside Rally, for example, included an article headlined "Pack instinct cuts across class barriers to preserve way of life" (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1997: 4), featuring examples of a landowner, a hunt servant and a gardener who had participated in the rally; whilst its coverage of the Countryside March included a report on "socialist hunt stalwarts" from the former mining communities of South Wales.

Similarly, in accepting the construct of an urban-rural binary, the media coverage exaggerated the *naïveté* of countryside protesters. In spite of an opinion poll finding that fifteen per cent of participants in the Countryside March lived in towns or cities (reported in the *Guardian*, 3 March 1998), several newspapers found individuals for whom it was their first visit to London. Unfamiliarity with the big city was further associated with political inexperience (perhaps accurately as our survey of Countryside Alliance members found that 90 per cent had not participated in a political protest before 1997), which in turn allowed the demonstrations to be represented as being *different* to previous political protests. As the *Daily Telegraph* again reported for the Countryside Rally:

There has certainly never been a cleaner multitude in [Hyde Park]. These were country people and, even here in the heart of the baffling metropolis, they applied the country code rigidly. Clapham Common may have required days of rubbish gathering after Saturday's Gay Pride march but just an hour after yesterday's rally, litter was scarce and Hyde Park's grass looked its normal self. (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 1997: 1)

The Countryside Speaks Out for Liberty

The tropes of the "countryside in crisis" and the "countryside comes to town" contributed to frame extension and frame amplification respectively. The third trope, "the countryside speaks out for liberty", sought to advance both frame amplification and frame bridging. It did this by presenting the countryside protests as

patriotic acts in defence of traditional British values of freedom. There has historically been a strong association of the countryside with British national identity and in invoking this tradition the trope appealed to the conservative values of hunting supporters and reassured them that their actions were respectable and mainstream. The patriotism of the countryside protests was articulated in their dramaturgy, with the use of flags and other national symbols, the singing of jingoistic songs and the plotting of routes and venues around iconic national landscapes. It was also reproduced in the coverage of the protests by conservative newspapers. A week before the Countryside March, the *Daily Telegraph* published a comment piece by the Conservative Party leader, William Hague, which appeared with the headline "Marching for Freedom" beneath a cartoon that showed a harmonious crowd of tweed-suited country folk and farm animals bellowing at Big Ben under a banner reading "Wake up Westminster". In the article Hague claims that,

If you believe that the particular British ability to change gradually and peacefully contributes to the quality of our life; if you believe that institutions should grow organically and not be imposed according to the latest blueprint, however "cool"; most of all, if you believe that your life is your responsibility, and not that of a minister or civil servant, then you should know that the Countryside Marchers are marching for you as well. (Hague 1998).

The message was reinforced following the march in comment piece by the *Telegraph* editor, Charles Moore. Suggesting that, "We have grown so used to rent-a-mob that we have forgotten what a genuine mass demonstration is like" (Moore 1998: 20), Moore asserted that, "I was not marching with sadists yesterday, but with tens of thousands of good true British people" (ibid.). Developing the theme, he drew together the threads of patriotism, liberty and solidarity, observing that, "We are dealing with an aspect of the British character which is common to all classes. This is a phenomenon which has led our country to win wars. It is summed up in the phrase 'Leave us alone'" (ibid.).

In a swipe at attempts by the Labour government to re-brand the image of Britain, Moore concluded his article with the reflection that,

I was struck even more forcibly than before with the utter absurdity of Cool Britannia. Among the 280,000 or so smiling faces, with caps above them and tweed below, I could see not one single person who answered the Mandelson depiction of our nation. Warm, yes; cool, no. (Moore 1998: 20).

The *Times*, however, in its editorial on the day before the March reached out to the "one nation" vision of Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair in a further act of frame bridging:

An England where the pink [hunting] coat vanishes from the village green, the landowner is shorn of rights and thus neglectful of obligations, and the din of the city shuts out the countryside's cries may be moving with the times. But it is less "one nation" than a nation needs to be. The marchers who meet in London this weekend are treading, in the proper sense, a traditional pathway. And their voices, if not all their demands, should be heard. (The *Times*, 27 February 1998).

The patriotism played less well with the left-leaning press. An article in the *Guardian* reviewing the limited-licence radio station, March FM, broadcast during the Countryside March, ridiculed the selection of rousing patriotic music: Land of Hope and Glory, Souza's Dambusters theme, Rule Britannia, I Vow to Thee My Country. The playlist, the article commented, seemed "to suggest that you can only be truly British if you live in the countryside and like to kill animals" (*Guardian*, 2 March 1998: 5).

Yet, shorn of patriotism, the theme of liberty was considered by Countryside Alliance officials to be a mechanism that could resonate with liberal opinion. They claimed to detect a moderating in the position of newspapers such as the *Guardian* and the *Independent* during the months of the first countryside protests. It was in a comment piece in the *Guardian* that the then Countryside Alliance chair, John Jackson, articulated a case for supporting hunting supporters who engaged in civil disobedience by ignoring a hunting ban that they considered to be unjust (Jackson 2002: 20). Countryside Alliance officials credit this strategy with changing the position of liberal newspapers:

If one thinks about the left-wing commentators they realise that... this hostility to rural interest has not been for well-founded and intellectual reasons, that it's not soundly based. That's why the commentators in the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Observer*, or whatever, have not been persuaded by left wing parliamentarians of people of the left in parliament who have taken a view on this particular piece of legislation. (Countryside Alliance Deputy Chief Executive, interview)

Now it's a situation where, say, papers like the *Independent* and the *Guardian* may not be pro-[hunting], but they are opposed to the [Hunting] Act on libertarian grounds. (Countryside Alliance Regional Director, interview)

The Frame Splinters? From the Countryside March to the Liberty and Livelihood March

The voluminous press coverage of the Countryside Rally and the Countryside March marked a clear departure from the previously limited coverage of rural politics in the British news media. The shift did not occur organically, or as a news-values-driven decision, but rather was orchestrated by the Countryside Alliance and its press department. The strategy was aimed at using the sympathetic conservative press to energise and mobilise instinctive supporters in rural communities, whilst at the same time reaching out to liberal opinion through the left-leaning media. Initially, at least, it appeared to be successful in both respects.

That the Countryside Rally and Countryside March should have received sympathetic coverage in the conservative press is not surprising, but the scale of the coverage was unprecedented. The *Daily Mail* published a seven-page special section entitled "Save our Countryside" two days before the Countryside March (the cover of which was used as a placard by numerous protesters), followed up by a four-page souvenir supplement with a colour poster. The *Daily Telegraph* simi-

larly produced an eight-page souvenir supplement two days after the march, in addition to three pages of news coverage, an editorial and a comment article on the day after the march. As such, the conservative press moved beyond simply functioning as a conduit for the publicity put out by the Countryside Alliance, to being active agents in the production and reproduction of the new media discourse of an unsettled countryside. In particular, by the scale of their coverage and the production of souvenir supplements, the *Mail* and *Telegraph* discursively positioned the Countryside March as an historic event, not just another political protest.

Equally notable was the extent of coverage in the tabloid and liberal broadsheet press. The *Guardian*, for example, ran nearly three pages of news coverage of the Countryside March the next day, plus an editorial. The tabloid *Daily Star*, *Mirror* and *Sun* all carried illustrated reports of the march, with the *Sun* evoking the discourse of an urban-rural divide in its headline, "Townie Blair gives in to country marchers" (*Sun*, 2 March 1998). Reports on the Countryside March in all newspapers tended to reflect the key tropes of the countryside in crisis, the country comes to town, and the countryside speaking up for liberty. However, this was balanced in the liberal broadsheets by more critical perspectives. The *Guardian*'s report on the beacons lit around the country by Countryside Alliance supporters in the week before the march, for example, included a comment from a spokesperson for the little-known "Countryside Protection Group" which claimed that the march did not reflect the interests of the rural majority (*Guardian*, 27 February 1998); whilst its coverage the day before the march highlighted a critical quote from the Ramblers' Association suggesting that participants had been manipulated by landowners, alongside a quote from the National Farmers' Union declaring agriculture to be in crisis (*Guardian*, 28 February 1998). Columnists and letter-writers in the *Guardian* and the *Independent* also presented more critical perspectives, including David Aaronovitch who caricatured the discourse of a rural-urban divide in the *Independent*:

[In this discourse]... the city is degenerate, addicted to fashion, a sink of vice, a destroyer of health and corrupter of morals; it makes men effete and women adulterous. Removed from any connection with a "natural" world that it cannot understand, it nevertheless reaches out tentacles of pollution and development to destroy the peace and happiness of Arcadia (Aaronovitch 1998: 21)

These critical interventions advanced an alternative representation of rural Britain, which did not contest the notion of the countryside being unsettled and mutinous, but questioned the attribution of blame. Rather than representing rural people as a minority oppressed by urban interference, it portrayed a countryside still dominated by a privileged elite that had exploited and manipulated the working classes. The *Guardian* and the *Independent* both carried stories suggesting that the Countryside March had been "hijacked" by hunting interests (*Guardian*, 28 February 1998), or by the Conservative Party (*Independent*, 27 February 1998), and reported that landowners were forcing tenants and employees to participate in the

march ("Yeomen get marching orders", *Guardian*, 21 February 1998). This alternative representation was further reinforced by a cartoon in the *Guardian*, which showed a peer with crown and ermine robes being pulled along in a range rover with the slogan "The Countryside March – Be there or be sacked" painted on the side, by a "country bumpkin" figure wearing a sweatshirt reading "Preserve the Forelock" (*Guardian*, 27 February 1998).

The Unsettled Countryside

Coverage of the countryside protests replaced the previously dominant perception of the countryside as a harmonious and "apolitical" place, with a new representation of the unsettled countryside seething with discontent. This new discourse positioned rural protests as newsworthy events, ensuring continuing coverage not only for the hunting debate and the Countryside Alliance campaign, but also for other protests and conflicts that reinforced the impression of the countryside in crisis. In doing so, it altered news values and facilitated news coverage for protest groups that lacked the professional resources of the Countryside Alliance.

When militant farmers in North Wales spontaneously decided to picket Holyhead docks in protest against cheap beef imports from Ireland, they did not have a media strategy. Yet, as the picket was repeated night after night and spread to other ports, the protests were picked up by the national media as evidence of a new front in rural politics (Woods 2005). Individual farm activists developed contacts with journalists that were later used in planning further protest actions. Local campaigns against new supermarket or windfarm developments, or the closure of rural schools and post offices, also received publicity as evidence of the unsettled countryside; with e-mail and mobile phones enabling campaigners with limited resources to gain access to journalists who were already attuned to the newsworthiness of their cause. Whilst such local conflicts were primarily reported through the local and regional media, occasional examples penetrated the national press, especially where individual journalists had been successfully courted.

At the same time, however, the newsworthiness of rural protests rested in part on their perceived novelty, and news coverage hence decreased with repetition. This presented a particular challenge to the Countryside Alliance, which needed to maintain its level of media coverage in order both to sustain pressure on politicians and to meet the expectations of its supporters:

One of the dangers ... was that anything not on the front page of the *Telegraph* was perceived as a failure from then on. And that's quite a challenge ... that's how it was measured by our supporters. If they went to Parliament Square and held up a placard and it was on page 17, it was a failure. (Countryside Alliance activist, interview)

In response, the Countryside Alliance varied its protest methods, with regional rallies, pickets at party conferences, and long distance marches, as well as softer campaigns such as "countryside in the town" information stalls. Nonetheless, frustration at the decreasing media coverage of these activities led some hunting activ-

ists to form more militant breakaway groups committed to direct action. One of these, the Real CA, in particular, effectively harnessed the power of the media with limited numbers, but significant financial backing and good media contacts. Its use of publicity stunts such as placing a giant papier-mâché hunter on the ancient "White Horse of Uffingham" chalk figure, and hanging a banner reading "Love Hunting" from the Angel of the North sculpture on Valentine's Day, achieved a series of news articles, which commonly quoted anonymous sources warning of more disruptive actions such as attacking electricity pylons and reservoirs to generate a sense of menace that exceeded their actual capacity to act (see for example, *Daily Telegraph*, 27 May 2002; *Times*, 28 May 2002; *Northern Echo*, 6 June 2002; *Guardian*, 22 July 2002; *Times*, 28 August 2002; *Guardian*, 30 August 2002; *Daily Telegraph*, 17 November 2002).

Farm protesters similarly found that the newsworthiness of their demonstrations dwindled with repetition, and as with pro-hunting supporters, frustration at the lack of media coverage prompted a change to more militant tactics, notably the blockade of oil depots in September 2000 (Woods 2005). The impact of the blockade in disrupting oil supplies, prompting panic buying and provoking a national political crisis, secured print and broadcast news headlines for the protests for several days, but the fuel blockades also marked a threshold in the coverage of rural politics. Whilst the campaign to reduce fuel prices was vociferously supported in populist newspapers, other newspapers adopted a less sympathetic representation of a small minority holding the country to ransom.

The outbreak of a Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic in February 2001 also became a key event in the evolving news discourse about rural Britain. The spread of the epidemic to over 2,000 farms, the severity of control measures including the closure of all rural footpaths and many tourist attractions, the imposition of exclusion zones and a precautionary cull of livestock, the seven months taken to eradicate the disease and the total cost of £2 billion to public funds (Woods 2005), all made the outbreak the major news item of the year, with over 19,000 articles in the national press.⁴ Superficially, at least, coverage of the epidemic and its impact revived and reinforced the discourse of the "countryside in crisis", articulated through headlines such as "Farms: yet another crisis" (*Guardian*, 22 February 2001), "The Killing Fields" (*Mail on Sunday*, 25 February 2001), "Funeral Pyre for British Farming" (*Sun*, 26 February 2001), "Flames fan the fears of traumatised community" (*Daily Telegraph*, 27 February 2001), "Rural Fear and Loathing" (*Guardian*, 28 February, 2001), "The day they closed the countryside" (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 February, 2001), and "The land where spring went up in flames" (*Times*, 25 April 2001).

Beneath these headlines, however, a more complex set of representations developed. Protests by individual farmers and communities against the cull of healthy livestock or against disposal pyres and pits were widely reported, but they lacked the clear anti-urban narrative of the earlier countryside protests. The *Ob-*

server (a liberal Sunday newspaper published by the *Guardian*), reported calls by militant farmers' leaders for resistance to the cull by observing that "Once more the countryside is in revolt" (18 March 2001: 9), but also noted that the National Farmers' Union had backed the plan. In different articles farmers were presented as both victims and villains in the crisis. The *Observer* again reported news of the economic impact on rural tourism of the precautionary measures with the headline, "Now our tourism industry faces ruin. All because of farming" (11 March 2001: 1); whilst columns, letters and leaders in several newspapers blamed farmers for the outbreak (*Daily Mail*, 28 February 2001; *Express*, 28 February 2001; *Independent*, 28 February 2001), or argued that the epidemic presented an opportunity for reforming agriculture and rural policy (*Guardian*, 29 March and 4 April 2001). An erroneous over-payment of compensation to farmers was reported by the *Times* with the headline, "Government to blame on payout" (7 August 2001), but more provocatively in the *Observer* as "The millionaire farmers who made a killing" (5 August 2001).

Over time, therefore, reporting of the "unsettled countryside" in the news media became increasingly nuanced, with diverging perspectives on the workings of power and politics in rural Britain. These tensions, which broadly reflected the ideological leanings of different newspapers, came to frame coverage of the Countryside Alliance's Liberty and Livelihood March in 2002, and the final stages of the hunting debate.

The Liberty and Livelihood March

In September 2002, the Countryside Alliance held its last, and largest, mass demonstration in London. Timed to respond to a renewed determination by hunting opponents in parliament to push for legislation introducing a ban, publicity for the rally nonetheless again drew on themes of the countryside in crisis and the countryside comes to town to embrace other rural concerns. However, in explicitly branding the demonstration as the "Liberty and Livelihood March", the Countryside Alliance prioritised frame bridging and the goal of reaching out to liberal opinion ahead of the anticipated new hunting bill. The different name and format of the march, and the targeted higher number of participants, were also aimed at maintaining media interest.

In both of these respects, the Liberty and Livelihood March was only partially successful. As table 5 indicates, coverage in national newspapers was significantly more uneven than for the earlier Countryside March. Whilst the *Telegraph* carried 53 articles about the march during the fortnight before and after, the *Daily Mail* printed only seven articles (in sharp contrast to its special sections on the 1998 Countryside March). The *Sun* mentioned the march in two articles, one of which was in characteristic style a "page 3" semi-nude photograph of three models it claimed had been on the march. Its Sunday stablemate, the *News of the World*,

mentioned the march only in passing in coverage of an anti-war demonstration the following week.

Much of the coverage of the Liberty and Livelihood March reprised the same tropes as employed for the earlier protests (see also Anderson 2006). The *Sun*, for example, stated that “everyone from farm labourers to lords of the manors are furious at the destruction of country life, the loss of rural post offices and shops, the foot-and-mouth disease fiasco, the collapse in farm incomes and the loss of jobs if hunting is banned” (*Sun*, 20 September 2002). The *Times* and the *Telegraph* similarly echoed earlier coverage with headlines including, “Townies prepare to host their country cousins” and “How townies turned me into a troublemaker” (*Times*, 21 September 2002), “Heart of the capital beats with undying spirit of the country” (*Daily Telegraph*, 23 September 2002) and “Something must be done. Rural life is eroding away” (*Daily Telegraph*, 17 September 2002).

The *Telegraph* also faithfully reproduced the trope of the countryside speaking out for liberty, arguing in one article that “everyone who believes in liberty should march. Those who stay at home on Sunday because they oppose hunting are missing the point” (19 September 2002: 28), and described the march as “the biggest civil liberties protest in British history” (23 September 2002: 1). Moreover, the *Telegraph* actively promoted the march through editorials, features and news articles. In the weeks preceding the march it carried several stories featuring individuals explaining why they would be joining the march, including celebrities, prominent rural campaigners, farmers and both rural and urban residents. A week after the march, its leader column declared simply, “The March Worked”, noting a poll showing that public opinion on hunting was evenly divided (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 September 2002). The coverage cemented the newspaper’s position as a key actor in the rural movement in its own right, as signalled earlier in the year when the editor had told the *UK Press Gazette* that he was “determined to ‘ginger up’ countryside organisations to be tougher with the Government” (*Press Gazette* online, 30 May 2002).

In contrast, coverage in the *Guardian* and the *Independent* was distinctly more negative than for the earlier Countryside March. Both newspapers questioned the march’s objectives in leader articles and carried stories featuring rural residents opposed to the march (*Guardian*, 21 September 2002; *Independent*, 21 and 23 September 2002). In another report, the *Independent* described the march as “the rural revolt that began with dinner at a top London restaurant” (21 September 2002: 3). Through these articles, the *Guardian* and the *Independent*, together with the *Guardian*’s stablemate the *Observer*, consolidated an alternative representation of rural Britain that had started to emerge in earlier coverage – with the countryside presented as a society beset with problems, but the Countryside Alliance protests portrayed as sectional actions focused on the wrong issues and not representing real rural interests.

The respective articulation of these representations became itself a focus of argument between sections of the media. *Telegraph* columnist Tom Utley attacked a "nasty" cartoon in the *Guardian*, that he claimed portrayed all march participants as ridiculous, ugly, arrogant and stupid (*Daily Telegraph*, 28 September 2002: 24), whilst *Independent* columnist David Aaronovitch criticised the partisanship of right-wing columnists (*Independent*, 1 October 2002). Both interventions were framed by controversy over a *Guardian* column written by Rod Liddle, editor of the flagship BBC Radio morning news programme *Today*, in which he had suggested that glimpses of "the forces supporting the Countryside Alliance" reminded him why he voted Labour (Liddle 2002: 5). Liddle was subsequently forced to resign as the editor of *Today* by a *Telegraph*-led campaign that claimed his expressed views on the march compromised the political neutrality of the programme.

Indeed, the *Telegraph* had already repeatedly criticised the BBC's coverage of the countryside protests. It had pointed out that the Countryside Rally in 1997 had been only the third item on the BBC evening television news, and that the Countryside March in 1998 had received only five minutes of coverage (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 September 2002). Following the Liberty and Livelihood March, it reported criticism of the amount of coverage by the BBC, and the broadcaster's equivocal statement that the march "has been described as one of the biggest demonstrations in Britain in modern times" (*Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 2002: 4).

Although presented as evidence of BBC pro-government bias, the BBC's coverage was little different to that of other broadcasters and reflected the difficulty of broadcast news in reporting the countryside protests whilst maintaining political balance. The apparent solution was a third representation, in which the sense of change in rural Britain was reported but largely depoliticised. This representation was reproduced not only in news reports, but also on non-news programmes such as the BBC's weekly rural magazine programme, *Countryfile*, and its farming-based radio soap opera, *The Archers*. Similarly, whilst the new frame of the unsettled countryside was reproduced in a number of documentaries – including "The Hunt" (BBC2 1998) "Beastly Business" (BBC2 2001), "Countryside at War" (BBC1 2002), "Countryside: Death of a way of life" (BBC2 2002), "A Very English Village" (BBC4 2005), "The Hunt" (BBC2 Wales 2006), "The Last Tally Ho?" (BBC1 2006) "The Lie of the Land" (More4 2007) and "Power to the People" (BBC2 2007) – these programmes tended to present themselves as social history records of inevitable rural change, divorced from political context, or to portray rural campaigners as bumbling amateurs ("Blood on the Carpet", BBC2 1999; "The Big Day", BBC Wales 2000) in a manner that drew implicitly on established rural stereotypes.

Conclusions

The volume of news media coverage of rural politics in Britain increased sharply in the late 1990s, as issues such as hunting, the future of farming and access to rural services gained prominence on the political agenda, and as various protest movements were mobilised around these issues. The change in media coverage was not just quantitative, but also qualitative. Prior to 1997, the predominant representation of the British countryside in the media was of an idyllic, untroubled and largely "apolitical" society. National news coverage of rural political issues was limited, and when the occasional local conflict was reported, it was generally presented as an anomalous intrusion of urban-style politics into the rural idyll (Woods 2005). After 1997, the media performed an apparent about-turn, representing the countryside as an unsettled place, seething with discontent, yet this new discourse also evolved, becoming more complex over time.

Initially, during the period from 1997 to 2000, the news media's framing of the "unsettled countryside" continued to be informed by the tradition of the rural idyll, as well as by the perspectives spun by the rural lobby. Accordingly, reports and commentary generally accepted the underlying frame of an urban-rural divide, and suggested that conventionally uncomplaining rural folk had been compelled to protest by a growing countryside crisis that was the result of urban ignorance and interference. Only a few articles in the more liberal press dissented from this representation. From late 2000 onwards, however, the perspectives advanced by different sections of the news media began to diverge more markedly. Although the discourse of the unsettled countryside continued to be widely reproduced, opinions differed on the causes and solutions. Whilst newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph* became more entrenched in their representation of a beleaguered rural population fighting against urban intolerance, others such as the *Guardian* and the *Independent* increasingly presented the Countryside Alliance as a sectional movement that failed to represent the real interests and problems of rural Britain.

Neither was the growth of news media coverage of rural issues a purely reactive and news values driven response to independent events. Rather, the mobilisation of the rural movement and the shifting media representation of rural Britain were co-constructed and mutually dependent. The Countryside Alliance's demonstrations would never have achieved the scale that they did, or had the political impact that they did, without the support of the media. Equally, the media were amenable to being enrolled into the Countryside Alliance's frame alignment strategy because their existing frames did not allow them to interpret the new phenomenon of rural protests, and because the Countryside Alliance was offering explanations that corresponded with their own wider values.

Thus, as in the case of Lithuania described by Juska (2007), the shifting representation of the countryside in the British news media must be understood in terms of the media's own political and commercial interests, and the wider politi-

cal context. The Countryside Rally in 1997 was the first significant act of opposition to the Labour government elected earlier that year (Woods 2008b). For the conservative press, coverage and promotion of the rural protests became a way of putting pressure on the new government, not just over hunting and farming, but also on its wider modernisation agenda, its attempts to rebrand British identity, and its priorities. For Labour-supporting newspapers, the rural protests were similarly newsworthy as a test for the government, but more emphasis was placed on the government's response. Some individual journalists on the left bought the framing of hunting as a libertarian issue and opposed a ban as part of a wider concern about the erosion of civil liberties. More significantly, however, exposing the sectional interests of the Countryside Alliance became a way for the liberal press to attack the Conservative opposition as elitist and old-fashioned at a time when the government's popularity was beginning to slip.

Moreover, by 2002 the prospect of war in Iraq had replaced rural discontent as the media's preferred focal point for opposition to the government, and the volume of coverage of rural issues accordingly decreased, tailing off to close to pre-1997 levels after the eventual introduction of the hunting ban in 2005. The one exception was the *Daily Telegraph*, the newspaper with the strongest readership among Countryside Alliance supporters, for whom continuing to promote the "countryside" cause made good commercial sense.

There is little doubt that the intensity of news media coverage of the early countryside protests amplified their political impact, causing the government to prevaricate on its support for a hunting ban and to work on articulating its own political construction of the countryside (Woods 2008b). There is evidence too, of some impact on public opinion, with polls showing an increase in support for hunting, although the protests ultimately failed in their objective of defeating a hunting ban. More broadly, however, the effect on popular perceptions of rurality in Britain is questionable. The notion of an "unsettled countryside" has now become embedded in news media discourse, and will most probably be resurrected as appropriate issues arise in future; yet, it is unlikely that the adoption of more nuanced perspectives on the changing British countryside in the news media will have done much to dent the overwhelming influence of the rural idyll reproduced through the entertainment media.

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Notes

- 1 Data obtained from analysis of Lexis/Nexis online newspaper archive.
- 2 "Grassroots rural protest and political activity in contemporary Britain", funded by the British Economic and Social Research Council (RES-000-23-1317), 2006-7. The investigators on the project were Michael Woods and Jon Anderson, with Steven Guilbert and Suzie Watkin as research assistants.
- 3 Percentage figures are approximate due to overlap between some television regions. Regions with a mixed rural-urban population (Central (Midlands); Tyne Tees (North East England); and Yorkshire) are excluded from Table 1 for clarity. The data is published by television region as it is primarily made available for marketing purposes.
- 4 Between 1 January and 31 December 2001. Data from Lexis/Nexis online newspaper archive.

Tables

Title	Classification	Base	Politics	Average daily sales (July-Dec 2007)
The Sun	Tabloid	London	Conservative	3,117,679
Daily Mail	Mid market	London	Conservative	2,349,782
The Mirror	Tabloid	London	Labour	1,545,245
Daily Telegraph	Broadsheet	London	Conservative	884,601
Daily Express	Mid market	London	Conservative	790,198
Daily Star	Tabloid	London	Right-leaning	782,790
The Times	Broadsheet	London	Right-leaning	637,776
Financial Times	Broadsheet	London	Pro-business	439,710
Daily Record	Tabloid	Glasgow	Left-leaning	402,757
The Guardian	Broadsheet	London	Left-leaning	360,263
The Independent	Broadsheet	London	Left-leaning	239,244
Regional evening newspapers (15 titles)	Generally mid market	Various regional centres	Varies	2,629,193
Regional morning newspapers (72 titles)	Generally mid market	Various regional centres	Varies	656,243

Table 1: Daily newspapers in Britain. (Sales figures from the Audi Bureau of Circulations)

Region	The Daily Telegraph	The Daily Mail	The Guardian	The Independent	The Times	The Mirror	The Sun
Anglia (Eastern England)	302	581	101	56	230	313	802
Border (Cumbria & S Scotland)	11	56	7	4	12	59	145
Wales & West Grampian	127	450	85	45	131	456	551
(Northern Scotland)	24	87	14	12	28	21	216
Meridian (South East England)	380	780	106	98	285	305	908
West Country (South West England)	69	219	27	30	53	125	225
Significantly rural regions –total	913 (48%)	1983 (41%)	340 (30%)	245 (36%)	686 (38%)	1279 (36%)	2847 (36%)
Granada (North West England)	204	571	117	59	176	593	541
Central Scotland	32	237	46	15	56	92	791
London	616	1279	514	324	754	930	2393
Predominantly urban regions – total	852 (45%)	2087 (43%)	677 (59%)	398 (58%)	956 (54%)	1615 (45%)	3725 (46%)
Total national readership	1898	4853	1147	688	1812	3529	7956

Table 2: Estimated readers (thousands) of British national daily newspapers by selected television regions, 2009.

Source: National Readership Survey and www.nmauk.co.uk.

The Daily Telegraph	50.3%
The Times	16.5%
The Daily Mail	15.6%
Financial Times	3.4%
Daily Express	3.0%
Racing Post	1.9%
The Sun	1.7%
The Guardian	1.0%
The Independent	1.0%
The Mirror	0.9%

Table 3: Newspapers read by surveyed Countryside Alliance members (n=1207)

Horse and Hound	39.4%
The Field	32.5%
Farmers' Weekly	21.6%
Country Life	21.4%
The Shooting Times	19.9%
Farmers' Guardian	15.6%
Countryman's Weekly	6.0%
The Countryman	3.6%

Table 4: Rural, farming and field sports publications read by surveyed Countryside Alliance members (n=1207)

Newspaper	Number of articles and letters			Total
	Positive	Negative	Neutral or minor reference	
Daily Telegraph and Sunday Telegraph	49	0	4	53
The Times and Sunday Times	15	0	2	17
The Express	14	0	1	15
The Independent	0	9	1	10
The Independent on Sunday	4	5	1	10
The Guardian	2	6	2	10
The Observer	4	4	1	9
Daily Mail	5	1	1	7
Mail on Sunday	2	0	1	3
The Mirror	1	2	0	3
The Sun	2	0	0	2
The News of the World	0	0	1	1

Table 5: Articles and letters mentioning the Liberty and Livelihood March, published between 8th September and 8th October 2002 in British national newspapers. (Source: Lexis/Nexis)

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Reading Rural Consumption Practices for Difference: Bolt-holes, Castles and Life-rafts

By Keith Halfacree

Abstract

Based mostly on evidence from the UK, this paper challenges the rural's usual association with predominantly conservative politics and practices. It advocates showing awareness of ambiguity in how representations, and specifically in this paper rural representations, and their numerous associated consumption practices are interpreted. A focus is given on the possibility of interpreting these practiced rural representations in the context of responses to the negative features within everyday life identified by writers such as Lefebvre. Drawing specifically on the "postmodern Marxism" of Gibson-Graham (2006), and particularly beginning to deploy what they term "reading for difference rather than dominance", the paper introduces three "styles" of consuming the rural. These are expressed via the metaphors of bolt-hole, castle and life-raft, and it is argued that they can be read as expressing critique of urban everyday life. In the concluding section, the lessons learned from reading rural consumption practices for difference in this way are brought together to suggest that not only can the rural today be regarded as an active "heterotopia" but that this alternative status could be used to underpin an urban-focused social movement for reclamation of what Lefebvre termed "everyday life".

Keywords: Rural, reading for difference, representations, consumption practices, everyday life, social movement

Introduction: Beyond the Conservative Rural

Apart from the sensory deprivation of nothing to do, whenever I've ventured into the rural wonderland I always seem to land up in some small-minded little England. A bad-taste, intolerant, prying land that time forgot, where everybody looks and thinks and dresses and moans and eats the same. ...the fact that everybody looks the same because everybody is pretty much the same is one of the reasons why I find the countryside dreary and rather depressing. But I also fear that it's one of the reasons some people are attracted to it. Those who sing the praises of rural over urban life always point out that there is an annual exodus from cities to towns, as if all those people upping sticks to move to the sticks can't be wrong. Well, some of those people may well be moving for what I would definitely consider to be the wrong reasons. ... A retreat into the uniform monoculture of old England because of an inability to accept the challenges and pleasures of genuinely multicultural cities, is, I'm sure, one of the reasons why some people choose to relocate in the laager of the shires.

(Elms 2001: no pagination)

Representations of rural England as negative as that in Elms's polemic are relatively rare but tap into a popular representation of the countryside as almost irredeemably "conservative". This sense of the rural being somehow out of kilter with the urban mainstream has a long history (Williams 1973). It is, for example, one of the evaluative legacies of the dualistic spatialisation of Tönnies's developmental *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* concepts into rural and urban, respectively (Savage et al. 2003). This paper, however, mostly drawing on UK material, challenges this predominant conservative reading of the rural and its consequent disparaging by radical thinkers. It argues that many rural consumption practices, appearing at first conventional and conformist express innate critique of aspects of everyday life and experiences when read differently, making denigrations such as that by Elms one-dimensional at best.

The paper explores how one can view rural consumption practices not only through a lens set within the predominant contours of the capitalist consumer society but also through a more critical lens observing from a different topography of everyday life. The premise is that even within seemingly mundane and mainstream acts there may lurk more subversive currents:

The ordinary can become extraordinary not by eclipsing the everyday... but by fully appropriating and activating the possibilities that lie hidden, and typically repressed, within it. (Gardiner 2006: 207)

To develop the argument, the paper's next section advocates awareness of ambiguity in how representations – rural representations specifically – and their associated consumption practices are interpreted. It calls for deploying what Gibson-Graham (2006) term "reading for difference rather than dominance". This disposition is made relevant in the following section in respect of interpreting rural representations in the context of responses to negative features within everyday life. Bringing these previous two sections together, the paper next introduces three

“styles” of consuming the rural, expressed via metaphors of bolt-hole, castle and life-raft, that can be read as expressing critique of everyday life. In the concluding section, the lessons learned from reading rural consumption practices for difference are brought together to suggest that not only can the rural today be regarded as an active heterotopia but that this status can underpin an urban-focused social movement for reclamation of what Lefebvre termed “everyday life”.

Interpreting Rural Representations and Consumption Practices

Practicing Rural Representations

Understanding the rural as (partly) representation is established within rural studies. For example, several years ago the present author defined “rural” as a “social representation of space”, one of the:

organizational mental constructs which guide us towards what is “visible” and must be responded to, relate appearance and reality, and even define reality itself. ... Social representations consist of both concrete images and abstract concepts, organized around “figurative nuclei”. (Halfacree 1993: 29)

However, besides not overstating the social character of representations, their structured, thereby relatively fixed, cognitive character should be questioned (Halfacree 2006a). They are to be seen not as sitting *tout court* in the background – “out there” (Hanna et al. 2004: 477) – subsequently dictating actions but as mutable and always enmeshed with the actions they partly inform.

The danger of setting up representations and practices in binary opposition has been taken up in a study of heritage tourism, where Hanna et al. (2004: 461) depict representation as “work”, with “representation and embodied practices... inseparable aspects of the reproduction of tourism spaces... not... binary opposites... but... mutually constitutive”. Expressing similar sympathies, Del Casino and Hanna (2006: 36) depict “maps and mappings... [as] both representations and practices... simultaneously”. Expanding this depiction but substituting “rural” for “maps”, the following summarises how rural representations are understood through consumption practices (see below) in the present paper:

the [rural] representation can always be exceeded and used in different ways as individual social actors mark the [rural] with... new objects of their own personal... interest. As such, [rural representations] are never fully complete nor are they ever completely inscribed with meaning through production. Rather, consumption is production. [Rural] spaces are processes, fluid and contested, although they find themselves temporarily fixed through certain practices of consumption that (re)produce these objects in new and unique ways. (after Del Casino and Hanna 2006: 50)

Within rural studies, the link between representations and practices is widely acknowledged (Cloke et al. 2006). Conceptually, for example, a Lefebvrian model of rural space presents rurality with three facets related to representations, practices and everyday lives (Halfacree 2006a). Reiterating, connections between the

elements should not be interpreted as representations “defining” practices but as representations providing, for example, rules and resources (Giddens 1984) implicated in actions. For example, rural walking can be linked with but not reduced to Romantic representations of the rural (Edensor 2000; Wallace 1993), in turn reproducing such representations, and counterurbanisation migration is underpinned by often unexamined “idyllic” representations of rurality (Halfacree 1994; van Dam et al. 2002).

Reading Rural Consumption

With rural representations linked to practices, how these practices are to be read comes via Bauman’s (1992: 106) advocacy of an “interpretive” stance to yield “enrichment” of one’s own tradition, through incorporating other, heretofore inaccessible, experiences. In other words, it is accepted that one may know – whether as academics or members of the public – a great deal about the rural practices concerned but also that this knowledge can be added to.

As a first stage in this reading, “practices” will be re-scripted and narrowed as “consumption”, or the purchase and use of goods and services. Within this characterisation, emphasis will be given to usage rather than to acts of purchase. Following Miller’s (1987) Hegelian perspective, consumption is not “only... an aspect of the general problem of commodities” (189), in terms of alienation especially. Instead, focus is on “the period of time following the purchase or allocation of the item... [as] the situation is radically transformed upon obtaining the goods in question” (190). Through consumption, that which is being consumed can – but, as Miller stresses, does not always – turn on and seek to negate the alienated market-based relationships within which it was originally set. This can serve positive transformative ends:

far from being a mere commodity, a continuation of all those processes which led up to the object... the object in consumption confronts, criticizes and finally may often subjugate these abstractions in a process of human becoming. (Miller 1987: 191-2)

Talking of rural consumption *practices* rather than simply rural consumption also seeks to bypass *a priori* distinctions between, for example, (urban) consumption of the rural, (rural) consumption in the rural and other conceptual distinctions, such as the regulationist (Goodwin 2006) idea of “rural consumption regimes”. This is not in any way denying that these distinctions are often extremely useful but an emphasis here on practice seeks to develop analysis more in the direction of the emotionally-charged everyday ways of living with which the consumption acts are enmeshed, rather than on the “colder” terms of the what, how, when and where of specific acts of consumption.

Although Miller’s insights into consumption suggest exciting potential for rural consumption practices, reading these practices initially takes a more conventional line. This is because probable first response, and likely most commonplace, is to place such consumption within the “consumer society” mainstream (Clarke 2003).

Countryside consumption bears many of the well-known hallmarks of consumption within mature capitalist society generally. This reading, implicit or explicit, underpins the idea of the countryside as commodity (Clope 1992) and “consumption countrysides” – where the rural “fulfils a role of socially providing a variety of marketed goods and services to non-rural people” (Marsden 1999: 508) – replacing erstwhile production countrysides.

In media terms, for example, rurality’s prominent role within both advertising and popular drama merits attention, wherein idyllic representations of rurality (see below), in particular, are often vigorously deployed. Thus, in advertising, “Rural images are central to the marketing of a huge diversity of products, ranging from biscuits to home wares, weekend retreats and ecotourism” (Winchester and Rofe 2005: 269; also Bunce 1994; Hopkins 1998). Similarly, rural places that have been or still are sites of popular television series or feature films, in particular, have become very popular tourism sites (Halfacree forthcoming c), a development which in part reflects the still growing popularity and importance of explicitly mediated ruralities (Phillips et al. 2001).

Reading rural consumption practices within a consumer society rubric fits initially, for example, “mainstream counterurbanisation” (Halfacree 2008), an example which further suggests the often seamless connections made between academic, media and promotional discourses. Mainstream counterurbanisation comprises largely middle-class flows of residents to rural areas within much of the global North, drawn especially by high quality of life associations with the rural (Gosnell and Abrams 2009). It is, on the one hand, strongly represented and often satirised within the media and popular culture but, on the other hand, also badged with promotional normativity through being institutionalised in and through facilitating networks comprising agents such as banks, building societies, letting agencies, mortgage providers, removal companies, decorators, utilities companies, and further underpinned by norms of migration discourse such as quality of life, accessibility, retirement, or children’s welfare (Halfacree forthcoming a).

In contrast to reading rural consumption as general consumption practice, an alternative reading places it in a reactionary light (though still involving capitalist consumption). This came through in Elms’s opening quote and is linked to long-standing ideas that the rural – and associated practices – is somehow stubbornly resistant to the status quo or “progress”. Presented “positively” as nostalgia, the idea of the rural as timeless runs deeply through the rural idyll, discussed below, for example, but a more negative sense of reaction is reflected in various anti-idyllic rural representations, from the imbecile British “country bumpkin” beloved of cartoonists, through the imagined Appalachian who is “white, poor, rural, male, racist, illiterate, fundamentalist, inbred, alcoholic, violent” (Stewart 1996: 119), to the “rural horror” of the *Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (Bell 1997). From this perspective, which is also clearly highly amplified by the media, consuming the rural

can be read as somehow anti-modern and backward-orientated, if not plain unintelligible.

However, the interpretive operation now returns to Miller's (1987) emphasis on the openness of consumption to argue that reading rural consumption does not have to fit within the with-the-flow / against-the-flow binary suggested thus far. Instead, it can express a more sublatory role of superseding yet preserving what this binary encompasses. In short, one can identify within rural consumption a third set of readings neither fully complicit with the status quo nor simply a reactionary *non*; that articulate the consumer society context, whilst expressing critique of that same context. This builds on Marsden's (1999: 508) quote given earlier, which goes on to suggest consumption countryside allow "non-rural people" to "distance themselves from the pathologies of urban life, either temporarily or permanently".

An excellent way into appreciating these other readings is through Wright's (1985) recognition of the potential for multiple, often contradictory, readings of mundane or even seemingly conservative phenomena. Wright's subject was "heritage", typically like rural often seen as underpinned by conservative or reactionary politics (Hewison 1987). Whilst not refuting this, Wright (1985: 78) also tellingly observed how:

Like the utopianism from which it draws, national heritage involves positive energies which certainly can't be written off as ideology. It engages hopes, dissatisfactions, feelings of tradition and freedom, but it tends to do so in a way that diverts these potentially disruptive energies into the separate and regulated spaces of stately display.

Taking this perspective further connects to the work of Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006). For Gibson-Graham, the idea that capitalism in all of its dimensions is literally "everywhere" and "inescapable" is, simply, one of the great myths of the modern age since, as Holloway (2002: 187, my emphasis) expresses it, capitalism is really "a society of *non-correspondence*, in which things do not fit together functionally". Gibson-Graham (1996) criticise predominant modes of thinking that distance the economic from politics and which reify, totalise and make holistic the former. Rejecting the idea of any singular capitalist system, they call for "a new political imaginary" (Gibson-Graham 2006: xix), contributing to this left renovation with illustrations of alternative economic set-ups.

For the purpose of this paper's interpretive focus, within Gibson-Graham's (2006: xxix-xxxiii) "thinking techniques", anti-essentialism can be expressed through "techniques of rereading" (xxxix). Methodologically, one way to disrupt any ideologically inscribed totality is to undertake "Reading for difference rather than dominance" (xxxix-xxxix), which seeks to uncover "what is possible but obscured from view" (xxxix). Rejecting "masterful knowing" (6) and "refusing to know too much" (8), one can acknowledge "future possibilities [that] become more viable by virtue of already being seen to exist" (xxxix).

Returning to rural consumption practices, the insights from Miller, Wright, Gibson-Graham and others suggest the need for extreme wariness in **only** acknowledging the predominant story of human practice within a capitalist society that these practices represent – although such acknowledgement is nonetheless essential. Instead, within these practices, possibly – even probably – both highly obscured and inevitably battered and compromised, may be detected other stories that when pieced together and read express a degree of substantive critique of that society.

Rurality and the Critique of Everyday Life

Reading for difference may thus enable interpretation of at least some rural consumption practices as expressing radical critique. The target of that critique, as Marsden (1999) suggested, given that these practices are often relatively mundane and ordinary, is likely to be elements of the similarly mundane experiences of urban everyday life. Therefore, this section briefly considers everyday life and its critique, before outlining how rural representations associated with consumption also speak critically to conditions of everyday life.

Everyday Life and its Critique

An upsurge in studies on everyday life and on ordinariness and the mundane generally (for example, Eyles 1989; Gardiner 2000, 2006) is inspired in part by perception that everyday life has more to tell us than just what seems obvious and banal and is traditionally lambasted by “legislative” (Bauman 1992) voices from across the political spectrum. In other words, everyday life is duplicitous (Halfacee 2007a), with much of its seeming openness and lack of guile profoundly misleading.

One of the first to examine everyday life as crucial for understanding the contemporary human condition was Henri Lefebvre (especially Lefebvre 1991/1958, 1984/1968). He understood everyday life and the academic challenge it poses as follows:

work, leisure, family life and private life make up a whole [everyday life] which we can call a “global structure” or “totality” on condition that we emphasize its historical, shifting, transitory nature. [In] ...the critique of everyday life... we can envisage a vast enquiry which will look at professional life, family life and leisure activities in terms of their many-sided interactions. *Our particular concern will be to extract what is living, new, positive – the worthwhile needs and fulfilments – from the negative elements: the alienations.* (Lefebvre 1991/1958: 42, my emphasis)

Everyday life is so important because it is where people are constituted (Gardiner 2000).

Within contemporary “neo-capitalism” (Lefebvre 1984/1968), everyday life has been broken-up and reduced to mundane and unrewarding routines underpinned by the logic of commodities and their exchange values. Consequently, people in-

creasingly “do not know their own lives very well, or know them adequately” (Lefebvre 1991/1958: 94, emphasis removed). However, people are not passive. They seek to (re)capture what they sense is lost, especially through leisure and other forms of consumption, although this is largely unfulfilling due to the alienated character of such consumption, not least within neo-capitalism’s increasing reliance on images and sign, fantasies and make believe (Lefebvre 1984/1968). However, and showing some affinity with Miller, Lefebvre had “faith in the regenerative capacity of everyday life” (Gardiner 2000: 99). Although everyday life remains thoroughly rooted within and inscribed by neo-capitalism, with its sustained class character, for example, this is never a done deal. In short, utopian expressions of “real” need continue to leak out; the system is never sealed, no matter how well lubricated its workings. For example, leisure activities “contain within themselves their own spontaneous critique of the everyday. They *are* that critique in so far as they are *other* than everyday life, and yet they are *in everyday life*, they are *alienation*” (Lefebvre 1991/1958: 40). For Lefebvre (1984/1968: 172), *desire* “refuses to be signified” as it is far too alive.

Rural Representations as Critical Resource

As a final primer for reading rural consumption practices for critique of everyday life, attention is now given to characteristics of rural representations that may be conspirators within this critique. With space tight, attention will just flag the content of two families of rural representations, although, for a full appreciation of rurality’s critical potential, other representations, rural practices and embodied rural lives also require scrutiny (Halfacree 2006a, 2007b).

The first family of representations are summarised by the term “rural idyll” (Halfacree 2003), a family conventionally seen in a conservative light but of considerable significance to rural consumption practices, not least in the UK (Lowe et al. 1995) but also across much of the global North (Bunce 1994). As Bunce (2003: 14) expresses it with reference to a Canadian newspaper story:

Picturesque, farming, community, recreational, bucolic: these are the words of the conventional rural idyll, of the aesthetics of pastoral landscapes, of humans working in harmony with nature and the land and with each other, of a whole scene of contentment and plenty.

Irrespective of this representation’s actuality, and it is of course widely critiqued (for example, Cloke 2003), its resource potential is clear.

Looking more closely, the social aspect of this selective representation imagines peaceful, unchanging, small-scale, fundamentally communitarian landscapes, within which people experience:

a less-hurried lifestyle [and] follow the seasons rather than the stock market, where they have more time for one another and exist in a more organic community where people have a place and an authentic role. (Short 1991: 34)

Besides this link with community, idyllic rurality is also integrally linked to a strong sense of place and placeness. Additionally, and tying community and place aspects tighter together, it is also strongly associated with a form of dwelling based on “interactive productivity” (Falk and Kilpatrick 2000: 93) and engagement. From this depiction, one can thus appreciate why Bunce (2003: 15) observed that “the values that sustain the rural idyll speak of a profound and human need for connection with land, nature and community”.

The content and implied sympathies of a second family of rural representations demonstrate similarities with the rural idyll but express them in a different accent. These representations are associated with a “radical rural” (Halfacree 2007b). On the one hand, they imagine the countryside as a diverse home accessible to all but, on the other hand, such accessibility requires considerable effort within distinctive and challenging lifestyle choices.

Two anchors of radical rural representation are, first, “localisation”, “a set of interrelated and self-reinforcing policies that actively discriminate in favour of the more local whenever it is... reasonable and conveniently possible” (Lucas 2002: unpaginated). Expressions of localisation tend to start with farming and food, before moving outwards to encompass normative everyday life generally. The second key anchor is the idea of rural as rooted in land-based activities. This was well expressed in a polemical pamphlet, where Fairlie (2001: 9-10) mourned the eclipse of the rural by an urban interest and asserted that:

rural means land-based... A rural economy, if the term has any meaning at all, has its foundation in the land and what it produces – animal, vegetable and mineral. A rural culture is distinctive because it grows out of the land. ... Rural culture is rooted in the earth. (Fairlie 2001: 9-10)

Other important elements of the radical rural representation include: strong “community” discourse; promotion of meanings of land beyond that of means of production; ecocentric and deep ecological beliefs; and celebration of the values of physical labour as a way of attuning to and appreciating one’s humanity and place in the world (Halfacree 2007b). This illustrates clearly the overlap between the claims of both idyllic and radical representations in celebrating a particular suite of interlinked social-environmental relationships.

From this brief discussion of rural representations, one can posit the rural as “unfinished” (Neal and Walters 2007), duplicitously expressing a seemingly conservative socio-spatial imagination but one whose internal resonances may be read as critical of urban everyday life. Hence, one can begin to appreciate how rural consumption phenomena such as counterurbanisation, engaging as they do with these representations, may express such a critique by seeking an engaged dwelling within the subtle, less pacy, more distanced yet inscribed “sophisticated simplicity” of the communitarian, place-based countryside (Halfacree 1997). This is an understanding commonplace within media stories (for example, *Guardian* 2004). It can be appreciated still more by noting how community, place and dwelling have become strongly imaginatively spatialised into the rural, just as their sup-

posed expulsion from the urban is frequently mourned (Swyngedouw and Kaika 2000; Thrift 2005).

Finally, Lefebvre muses on how his critique of everyday life could be expressed spatially. First, he talks of the desirability of a “differential space”, where the “produced” difference of a counter-space relative to mainstream abstract space could thrive (Lefebvre 1991/1974: Chapter 6). Second, within his desired “city as play” (Lefebvre 1984/1968), themes such as festival and creative communities feature prominently. Taken together and playing with Lefebvre’s terminology in the light of the rural representations just outlined, one can suggest that sometimes, in some places, and through some consumption practices, a quasi-counter-spatial ludic city (*sic.*) might be located imaginatively within the rural, as representations imaginatively displace out of the city and (re)place into the rural Lefebvre’s desired “urban” characteristics:

Urban society is not opposed to mass media, social intercourse, communication, intimations, but only to creative activity being turned into passivity, into the detached, vacant stare, into the consumption of shows and signs; it postulates an intensification of material and non-material exchange where quantity is substituted for quality, and endows the medium of communication with content and substance. (Lefebvre 1984/1968: 190-1)

Reading Rural Consumption Practices for Difference

Reading rural consumption practices for difference, this section sketches three metaphorical “styles” of consuming the rural that incorporate critical responses to mainstream everyday life. Their critique should not necessarily be seen as explicit, intentional or even acknowledged by those involved but as often predominantly immanent and implicit. An “external” reading and subsequent framing of a diverse set of practices (re)presents them in a new light. The three styles should also not be seen as providing complete high-order interpretations of the consumption practices concerned as this would go too far towards the “soliloquy” of legislative reason (Bauman 1992: 126), Gibson-Graham’s (2006: 6) masterful knowing.

The three metaphorical styles, especially the first two, have been named with a deliberate nod to how the practices they engage with have been represented within the popular media. They deliberately hope to provoke some emotional resonance in the reader, as the practices they seek to represent need to be seen as alive, meaningful and impassioned enough both to bear and to merit a reading for difference.¹

Moving through the three metaphorical styles, one shifts from the rural presented as some “separate sphere” from the urban to seeing it intimately connected to the urban but, crucially, not somehow the same. Moving through the styles also reveals something of a paradox. On the one hand, one seems to move away from radical resistance to the status quo to consumption practice congruent with it. Yet,

at the same time, the latter has perhaps the most radical political potential, being best attuned to contemporary everyday socio-spatial conditions.

1. “Bolt-Holes”

The first style through which rural consumption practices critique everyday experiences starts from the idea of the rural as both a relatively distinct space and as somewhere one can “escape” into: down nameless roads to be lost in the nooks and crannies of the countryside, somewhere outside of or beyond urban society. In other words, the rural is a “bolt-hole”, with the practices associated with it those of flight and disappearance.

The best example of the rural as bolt-hole is that of people moving to the rural in a quest for a self-contained “back-to-the-land” lifestyle (Halfacree 2006b). Whilst those engaged in such actions usually have some normative goal of making a living from the land or gaining artistic inspiration, flight and disappearance elements are clearly strong. This was demonstrated strongly by the 1960s counter-culture, within which by as early as 1970 a back-to-the-land trend was observed in the UK (Young 1973), US (Hedgepeth 1971) and elsewhere.

The dominant reading of this trend is encapsulated in one term: “dropping out” (implicitly from the city and/or industrial capitalist society). “[O]pting out of the mainstream society and living in the interstices and backwaters of the system or in enclaves of kindred spirits” (Zicklin 1983: 26) seemingly heeded Timothy Leary’s 1966 call to “turn on, tune in, drop out” (Leary 1983). Such a reading could note of course that those involved may be “pushed”:

In the light of the mounting frustration at the recalcitrance of the rest of society to embrace and support [their] vision, faced with the open hostility of those in power and the fear and contempt of much of the straight world... hundreds of young people began moving to the country to make and preserve a world of their own. (Zicklin 1983: 27-8)

Nonetheless, the reading is usually one of crisis or failure, and in conservative or even mainstream hands this easily fed into popular cultural and media stereotype of the feckless, filthy, free-loading “hippy”, despoiling the countryside and consuming it in anti-social and highly irresponsible ways. It is a representation that persists, reappearing recently in popular depictions of “new travellers”, for example (Hetherington 2000).

However, just as Leary’s call to drop out was *not* to “Get stoned and abandon all constructive activity’... [but] meant self-reliance, a discovery of one’s singularity, a commitment to mobility, choice, and change” (Leary 1983: 253), reading “dropping out” for difference can emphasise instead, first, how the desire for such a rural existence had a long historical and cultural pedigree and typically also formed part of a more general radical social critique, with elements of “normal” life rejected in favour of “alternative” living arrangements (Howkins 2003). Second, these experiments often attempted to consolidate a utopian rural alternative,

in both their communal and individual forms (Halfacree 2006b). They aimed to establish forms of living as models for a new social order that would gradually emerge (Rigby 1974); a paradoxical dropping-out to create a new society. As Nelson (1989: 124, my emphasis) gleaned from analysis of contemporary “alternative” media:

communal living is not about achieving a sudden change in the nature of society, but is a gradual process with revolutionary potential, being the first essential step towards the wider, more fundamental revolution, in that communal living involves *individuals taking a firmer control... over their own lives*.

Looking at rural Wales, its current lively “alternative” character has been moulded strongly by the consequences of what at first might seem merely attempts to drop out (Halfacree forthcoming b). For example, the Selene Community that coordinated, through *Communes* magazine, the Commune Movement settled on rough land in Carmarthenshire in 1966 (Nelson 1989; Rigby 1974), before upgrading to a hill farm and becoming a key alternative magnet for fellow travellers, many remaining in the area. An even better example is the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) near Machynlleth, Powys. Now a highly respected pioneering site for “alternative technology”, it was founded in 1973 on a disused slate quarry by urban drop outs. It has since spun-off companies promoting environmental technologies and forged strong links with the formal university sector (CAT 2009).

For an individual, too, dropping-out could be a constructive life experience. A good example comes from the life of singer-songwriter Vashti Bunyan. Disillusioned with her life and stalled musical career in late 1960s “swinging” London, she undertook a lengthy migration with horse, cart, dog and partner Robert Lewis to a remote Scottish island and beyond (Halfacree 2009). Although having setbacks, the experience was overwhelmingly positive personally as Bunyan got to live her dream of “be[ing] self-sufficient as possible and rear[ing] dogs, horses and children” (Bunyan, quoted in Dale 2001: 7). Furthermore, it proved inspiring through heightened appreciation of “nature”:

Living outside changed the way I saw the world to the extent that the trees, hills, roads and everything took on personality. ...living close to the ground I think had this effect. I felt I was part of my surroundings. It made me more careful of them. (Bunyan, quoted in Dale 2001: 9)

Nonetheless, dropping out did not – and still does not – always take heed of what exactly a new rural life entails. Life often proved very unsatisfactory very quickly, breaking down for a myriad of reasons, from homesickness to lack of resources to being unable to cope with the rigours of an often tough rural existence. Thus, Rivers (1978: 25) stresses how potential back-to-the-landers should have no illusions about the challenges of rural living, cautioning against “the hollowness in... popular motives for ‘dropping out’”, whilst Nelson (1989: 130, my emphasis) drolly noted how:

the idea of community was strong and attractive, but the reality of... harsh living conditions, and mundane labour such as hedging and trenching, had a *dispiriting effect*.

Consequently, popular cultural stereotypes of the hippie seeking “to get his/her head together in the country” all too often has as sequel the equally stereotypical “failure” of this life change and subsequent return to (urban) “straight” existence (Halfacree 2009).

More fundamentally, the underlying socio-spatial imagination behind the rural as “escape” has to be substantially critiqued. Firstly, as the structured character of the rural idyll (Bunce 2003) illustrates, rurality can be far from infinitely malleable and this must be come to terms with. More fundamentally, the idea that the rural exists as some world entirely apart from the urban is unsustainable. The conceptual and socio-cultural inseparability of urban and rural has long been a strong critical strand within debates about defining rural (for example, Copp 1972; Hoggart 1990). It is one that even populist guides to starting a new life in the countryside acknowledge:

Much as you might like to fool yourself, you’re not going to change personality just because you change locality. (Craze 2004: 88)

2. “Castles”

The second style through which rural consumption practices critique everyday experiences display initial echoes of the reactionary reading noted earlier. It positions the rural once again as both a relatively distinct space and as somewhere one can “escape” into, but this time the sense of separation is less certain and accompanied by an often intense sense of threat or challenge. In short, the rural is represented less as secure bolt-hole but as “laager” (Elms 2001) or “castle”, to be fortified as (urban) threats are without, albeit possibly still not in sight. The ensuing practices are those of defence and insulation through vigilance and reinforcement.

This style, again widely reproduced within popular culture and the media, will be illustrated through consideration of counterurbanisers’ association with various forms of anti-development politics. The association is widely acknowledged by the literature from which this brief sketch is drawn (for example, Murdoch and Day 1998; Murdoch and Marsden 1994; Murdoch et al. 2003; Short et al. 1986) and has developed particularly strongly since the 1980s in the UK (Woods 2005). Focus will be on opposition to house-building but resistance is also manifested towards various other forms of development (Woods 2003, 2005).

The dominant reading of the involvement of counterurbanisers, middle-class counterurbanisers specifically, with anti-development pressure group politics is encapsulated again in a popular term: “pulling up the drawbridge” having attained one’s “rural idyll”. People become, in the equally well known expression, NIM-BYs (Not In My Back Yard), resisting any development perceived as having po-

tential negative impacts on their quality of life. Ambrose (1992: 186-7) illustrates this dominant reading well:

The group [NIMBYs] has come to these “rural areas” primarily to enjoy leafy seclusion. The last thing they want is another group of arrivals. In other words they are rigidly opposed to any more housebuilding if it will spoil their view or possibly have an adverse effect on property values. They may well be in favour of more development in the general vicinity ... but they will often use their considerable expertise to organise resistance to development in, or within sight of, their particular village.

Of course, academic work has investigated more deeply the NIMBY impulse and rapidly moved on from simple status defence to detailed appreciation of how resistance to further development is linked to class identity and formation. Savage et al. (1992) asserted that class formation does not take place on the metaphorical head of a pin but is always implicated with place. This idea was developed by Lash and Urry (1994) to draw out the importance of “aesthetic reflexivity” for middle-class identity and, within this, the prominent position of the countryside as representing somewhere both rich in “the past” and, through “tradition”, resonant with “community”. The resulting overall thesis, itself resonant with Elms (2001) at the start of this paper, can be expressed as follows:

The rural domain is reassuring to the middle class. It is a place where gender and ethnic identities can be anchored in “traditional” ways, far (but not far enough?) from the fragmented, “mixed-up” city. Within the rural domain identities are fixed, making it a white, English, family-orientated, middle-class space; a space, moreover, that is imbued with its own mythical history, which selects and deploys particular, nativistic notions of what it is to belong to the national culture. That this is what attracts middle-class in-migrants to the countryside is rarely made explicit. Instead, the rural is extolled for the virtues of peace and quiet, of community and neighbourliness. (Murdoch and Marsden 1994: 232)

Consequently, understanding middle-class resistance to development becomes readily apparent (Woods 2005).

Yet, within both the previous quote and this body of work more generally can be seen traces of a different reading of middle-class defence of place. Specifically, the motivational either/or between fixed conservative identity and rural tranquility can be queried. As Woods (2005: 186, my emphasis) puts it, “the politics of development in the countryside have increasingly been framed around the consequences of middle class *investment* in the countryside under counterurbanization”. This investment is fiscal *and* emotional (Woods 2003, 2005) *and* related to class/identity formation and reproduction. Staying with Woods’ terminology, it is an holistic and multi-sided investment that the middle-class make through “aspirational ruralism” (Woods 2003: 318). Although class identity is vital, it does not provide the full picture. From the emotional angle, “virtues of peace and quiet, of community and neighbourliness” should not be so readily dismissed.

One gets more sense of this multidimensional middle-class investment when anti-development pressure groups are investigated in detail. For example, whilst Ambrose (1992) outlined three groups of conservationist –“genuine”, “social” and

“‘pull-up-the-ladder’ group of recent arrivals the ‘born again conservationists’ or NIMBYs” (186) – these are ideal type abstractions. Powerful groups such as the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) in practice represent a coalition of all three groups and, furthermore, express “a trenchant critique of the neo-liberal free-for-all mentality” (Ambrose 1992: 187). Similarly, in depicting the “preserved countryside”, Murdoch et al. (2003) emphasise “preservationist networks” (81) or a “preservationist coalition” (82) and the discursive operation of these groups through “local conventions associated with neighbourhood, community and environment” (87) indicate the aspirational importance of a quasi-idyllic rural “moral geography” (Woods 2005: 171).

Overlaying this multi-stranded, entangled sense of anti-developmentalism, adopting a more affective perspective (Halfacree forthcoming c) draws attention to the lived consequences of counterurbanisers’ “attempt[s] to ‘escape’ the social through an immersion in ‘country life’” (Murdoch et al. 2003: 71). Such immersion, no matter if based initially on overtly romanticised representations of rural life, may well lead to changed priorities, awareness of place, and so on. Embodied encounters with rurality involving physical, social and emotional aspects – encounters which inevitably implicate the seemingly indelible association between rurality and *nature* (Halfacree forthcoming c) – may enhance celebration of and thus the defence of the rural for its own sake and as a bulwark against negatively experienced features of (urban) everyday life.

Articulations of rural as “castle” may contain radical critique of everyday life but, like its articulation as “bolt-hole”, one must end on critical reflection. First, and clearly demonstrated by studies of rural pressure groups, defence of metaphorical castles re-states the predominant conservative picture of the rural and its politics. Second, the metaphor of rural as castle remains rooted in a limited socio-spatial imagination. Whilst not now seen in the separatist terms of the bolt-hole, a rural separate identity to that of the city still features. Third, the links between the actions of anti-development groups and class reproduction with its consequent exclusion can never be overlooked. There is “always... a strong dose of class conflict” (Woods 2005: 186) in rural middle-class pressure group politics and their success inevitably, if usually unintentionally, enhances rural social exclusion (Murdoch and Marsden 1994). Thus, this section ends with an ambiguous reflection on “rural community” that expresses the ambiguity of “castle” style rural consumption generally:

rural communities yield conflicting perspectives... stable arenas in which social relations and identities can be forged in ways which exclude, to some degree, market and economic relations, while, on the other, they exhibit defensive and exclusive tendencies which reproduce some of the most pernicious forms of social closure. (Murdoch and Day 1998: 196)

3. “Life-rafts”

The third style through which rural consumption practices critique everyday experiences again begins with the rural as both a relatively distinct space and somewhere one can “escape” into but this time connection with the urban (“rest of the world”) and the everyday remains centre-stage. The rural becomes a space from which critical engagement with a dysfunctional world becomes grounded. It is represented as a life-raft in a stormy sea, with associated practices of existential and potentially critical empowerment more than flight or insulation.

This third style could be illustrated again with reference to consumption around urban-to-rural migration, as counterurbanisers might be seen as using the rural as predominantly neither bolt-hole nor castle but as a life-raft within everyday life (Halfacree 1997, 2007a). However, instead, focus is on practices of second home consumption (Halfacree forthcoming a).

Second homes are “an occasional residence of a household that usually lives elsewhere and which is primarily used for recreation purposes” (Shucksmith 1983: 174). They are found across the world (Bendix and Löfgren 2008; Hall and Müller 2004a), in urban as well as rural environments, numbers growing through the past century. In many countries, second homes are generally regarded, within popular discourse as well as academia, as an elite form of consumption and this informs strongly the dominant reading. Within British studies of second homes, for example, their consequent political sensitivity is an over-riding theme (for example, Coppock 1977). In contrast, in Scandinavia the political shadow over second homes is less intense, due to spatial separation from first home settlements and, most strongly, because second home ownership is far broader sociologically; recent estimates suggesting 40% of Norway’s population have access to an estimated 420,000 second homes (Overvåg 2009).

In terms of reading for difference, Scandinavian studies of second homes reveal considerable intensity and diversity of engagements between owners and both their properties and the surrounding environments. Whilst, on the one hand, leisure use is a predominant theme (for example, Hall and Müller 2004a; Kaltenborn 1998; Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen forthcoming), on the other hand, their less controversial, arguably normative cultural position has promoted fuller investigation of everyday usage. At first sight, consumption can be read as the second home providing an “escape” or “vacation” from predominantly urban modernity (Kaltenborn 1998). This could position their consumption in the bolt-hole style. However, the adequacy of such a perspective has increasingly been questioned, with second homes being seen as an integral part of everyday existence or dwelling (Bendix and Löfgren 2008; Overvåg 2009; also Gallent 2007).

For example, Garvey (2008) and Quinn (2004) accept at one level the role of the second home as providing an “escape” but note how any nominal escape from urban daily routine is always accompanied by much of this same life; existential issues accompanying everyday life stay with the second homeowner. Desires to

“create a sense of connectedness” (Quinn 2004: 118) with people, place, and everyday experiences are (imagined as being) facilitated at the second home, where one can “achieve some dimension of lifestyle that is not available at [the] primary residence” (Hall and Müller 2004b: 12). Thus, “peoples’ desire to escape is strongly tempered by an attempt both to re-connect with experiences from their past and to strive for a continuity that will strengthen into their futures” (Quinn 2004: 118). The overall result is “more a negation than flight from everyday existence” (Garvey 2008: 205). Consequently, life in the second home and its “appreciation of what is not achieved within [the rest of] daily life” (Garvey 2008: 218) can provide a life-raft to revitalise “home life in the primary place” (Quinn 2004: 117); “first” and “second” homes are mutually supportive rather than antagonistic. Significantly, therefore, second homes comprise an integral element of *home*, not somehow existing outside and independent of it (Overvåg 2009).

In an increasingly everyday condition of normalised circulation (Quinn 2004), a key component of any emerging “era of mobilities” (Halfacree forthcoming a, after Sheller and Urry 2006), “work, home and play are separated in time and place, and meanings and identity are structured around not one but several places” (McIntyre et al. 2006: 314). From this, second home consumption can be associated with “double homes, double lives” (Bendix and Löfgren 2008: 7) or “dynamic heterolocalism” (Halfacree forthcoming a, after Zelinsky and Lee 1998). This posits the idea of an emergent identity / home / dwelling routed through and emergent from everyday connections between places of diverse “everyday texture” (Conradson and Latham 2005: 228). A dynamic heterolocal reading of rural second home consumption thus does not assume rural and urban to be “the same”, even as it acknowledges their intrinsic entanglement. Furthermore, the recognised “need” for the everyday texture seen as provided by the rural can be read as potentially radical critique of the inadequacy of urban dwelling, or what this paper has termed, after Lefebvre, everyday life. The promises of consumer society are unable to deliver on needs for “things” (objects, experiences, affects, emotions, and so on) accreted to the rural environment. By accessing such things, albeit initially through the market but also through more embodied, affective engagements, an increasingly dynamic heterolocal existence provides through rural consumption practices aspects of “being human” at best animated only in watered-down form within the rest of everyday life (also Garvey 2008).

In summary, rural consumption read differently in the style of life-raft presents the rural not as a fundamentally separate realm from the urban but as its complement; a place where stability-within-movement (Sheller and Urry 2006) may be attainable.² It presents an Other to the urban, not as its opposite but as expressing qualities of difference – “different moods and modes of domesticity” (Bendix and Löfgren 2008: 14) – to the experiences of everyday life the urban offers. The latter is seen as inadequate in many respects and is challenged by values ingrained both within representational expressions of the rural and within less representa-

tional, more affective encounters. Whilst this suggests a wellspring of potential radical critique, one must again end on three critical reflections. First, consumption is once again initially attained through the market, with all the economic and class exclusions and limitations this implies, even if the affective “reality” of rural living, in particular, can suggest that the eventual full consumption experience (Miller 1987) can often go on to “exceed” its commodified form. Second, dynamic heterolocalism suggests a political compromise, partially accepting the existential dilution of urban everyday life with the promise of rural “re-enchantment” (Maffesoli 1987; Thrift 2003). This accommodation, inaccessible to many, is only challenged if dynamic heterolocalism attains political form with transformative intentions, a potential considered in the conclusion. Third, as indicated recently in a special edition of *Ethnologia Europaea* (Volume 37: 1-2, 2008), “[t]he materiality and emotionality of living in two places” (Bendix and Löfgren 2008: 14) can prove immensely challenging, with the potential threat of “a double homelessness” (Bendix and Löfgren 2008: 8) a real possibility.

Conclusion: From Heterotopia to a Social Movement for Everyday Life?

To think of opposition to capitalism simply in terms of overt militancy is to see only the smoke rising from the volcano. ... People have a million ways of saying No. ...being a revolutionary is a very ordinary, very usual matter, ...we are all revolutionaries, albeit in very contradictory, fetishised, repressed ways. (Holloway 2002: 159, 205, 211)

Through adopting a reading for difference perspective when considering rural consumption practices, one sees that whilst these practices can be either complicit with or crudely reactionary towards the predominant, mainstream experiences of urban everyday life (arguable both examples of reading for dominance), they also speak of varied styles of resistance to these same experiences (reading for difference). Thus, something quite extraordinary can lurk within the seemingly ordinary (Halfacree 2007a). Moreover, whilst these styles of resistance through consumption may be critiqued on the basis of being rooted in the very consumer society they supposedly ultimately critique (arguably they cannot be otherwise; Clarke 2003), such as being often aligned strongly with class positions, and whilst some are also rooted in naïve ideas of socio-spatial difference, in alliance they tell a different critical story and indicate different everyday priorities. Together, they present the rural as heterotopic (Halfacree 2009; Neal and Walters 2007), with heterotopic places being “real places . . . which are something like countersites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia” (Foucault 1986: 24), especially active during relatively disjunctive “slices in time” (26), demonstrated by the life-raft reading of second home consumption, for example. (Indeed, Foucault (1986: 27) represents the “ship” as “heterotopia *par excellence*”, keeping “dreams” alive as it floats across an often troubled sea.)

However, moving on from representing or even experiencing the rural as heterotopia, as was concluded in the last section there is scope for political work to forge an alliance, possibly some kind of rural social movement (Woods 2003, 2005), that critically interrogates the urban everyday life of Lefebvre's neo-capitalism, positively engaging the "misanthropic city" (Thrift 2005: 140). Such a movement, almost inevitably "decentred, multi-leadered, amorphous and often contradictory" (Woods 2003: 324), would not be like the UK's Countryside Alliance, for example, with its conservative ideology of rural separatism, nor even centred on the "politics of the rural" (Woods 2003, 2005), although it necessarily also involves the latter to maintain the critical rural everyday texture. Instead, this movement can be orientated towards the politics of everyday life. In short, the everyday textures of the rural are to be deployed to turn and face the city and, ultimately, take it back; perhaps realising Lefebvre's (1996) "right to the city", with its renewal of everyday life.

It is not easy to suggest practical terms for forging this rural social movement but relevant sensitising comes first from Miller (1987). He suggested that for consumption to work for dis-alienation purposes we must cultivate an appropriate cultural context. This is not guaranteed and we should not replace Romantic disparaging of the everyday with "an alternative Romanticism about modern consumption always acting to create inalienable, highly sociable communities" (Miller 1987: 206). Clearly, media representations can play a major role in developing this context, just as they do in respect of representing rural consumption practices more generally, as noted earlier. There is a need both for "self-education" and for helping people become "thinkers of theorized possibility" (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxvii). This suggests a tactic of (re)iterating the readings of difference to be found within rural consumption practices so as to popularise, normalise and proselytise the movement's basis and facilitate its required coalition character. It also suggests the importance of especially valorising the life-raft style, rooted as it is more fully within our contemporary era of mobilities and not grounded within any, at best, redundant urban/rural dualism, whilst at the same time acknowledging that those consuming rurality may sequentially or even simultaneously be involved with all three styles as they live their lives. A final suggested route for developing a sympathetic cultural context is through more fully acknowledging practical examples or lived attempts, with all their messiness, uncertainties, false starts and blind alleys, that chip away at "negating that which exists" (Holloway 2002: 23) so as to let alternatives come through (Gibson-Graham 2006). And here it is important to observe how satisfying rural consumption practices can be for those involved. *Contra* Elms (2001), this does not solely reflect joy at leaving behind the "multicultural city" – although this can be an element – but is indicative of the continued representational, affective and existential critical vitality of the rural today.

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Notes

- 1 The metaphors also clearly come from the author’s British background, and alternatives may be far better suited to other cultural contexts and readers are thus encouraged to develop these as appropriate.
- 2 Likewise, as one referee suggested, urban consumption may also act as a life-raft but this time providing a place where movement-within-stability (Sheller and Urry 2006), in contrast, may be attainable in response to a too stable rural.

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