

UNITED KINGDOM : THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT
IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF DEPOPULATED
RURAL AREAS IN BRITAIN

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1 . DEPOPULATION AND REPOPULATION IN RURAL BRITAIN

Much of Britain is highly urbanised. England and Wales, for example, cover an area of 15.1 million hectares and in 1981 had a population of some 49 million, giving a density of 3.24 persons per hectare. Even when the less densely populated area of Scotland is added in order to calculate a figure for Great Britain, the resultant density is still 2.24 persons per hectare. In one sense, then, Britain is an apparently overcrowded nation dominated by processes and vestiges of urbanisation. In another very important sense, however, rural areas are both important and significant, with some 77 % of the land area of densely settled England and Wales being in agricultural use, and a further 7.5% used for forestry. Thus while the population of

Britain can reasonably be described as Culturally, and to a large extent, physically urbanised, the vast majority of the land may be perceived to be countryside, and is subject to rural land use planning (see Cloke, 1989).

The mix of high population density and widespread countryside has rendered problematic any definition of rural areas in Britain. A multifaceted definition has been developed by Cloke and Park (1985) who suggest that the countryside should be viewed as an area which fulfils three important criteria:

- i) it is dominated (either currently or recently) by extensive land uses, such as agriculture and forestry, or large open spaces of undeveloped land.
- ii) it contains small, low—order settlements which demonstrate a strong which are thought of as rural by most of their residents.
- iii) it engenders a way of life characterised by a cohesive identity based on respect for the environmental and behavioural qualities of living as part of an extensive landscape.

There have been various attempts to portray the spatial variations of this rurality, and as Figure 1 suggests, even in the more densely populated England and Wales there are relatively remote rural areas in the south—west, east and north of England, and in Mid—Wales. These areas, together with the Highland and Lowlands of Scotland constitute the locals within which depopulation has been taking place both historically and in the first half of the 20th Century.

The extent of rural depopulation during the post—war period in Britain has been illustrated by Woodruffe (1976) who analysed population trends according to a six—fold classification:

- i) districts which were decreasing in population between 1951 and 1961 and in which the rate of depopulation increased between 1961 and 1971 (accelerated depopulation)
- ii) districts where population decrease between 1951 and 1961 slackened in the next decade (reduced depopulation)
- iii) districts where depopulation in 1951—61 was turned around to population growth in 1961—71 (reversed depopulation)
- iv) districts where population increase in 1951—61 was reversed to depopulation in 1961—71 (reversed growth)
- v) districts where the rate of growth in 1951—61 slowed in 1961—71 (reduced growth)
- vi) districts where the growth of population in 1951—61 proceeded at a higher rate in 1961—71 (accelerated growth).

The distribution of districts amongst these six categories is illustrated in Table 1, which suggests that at the 1971 census, some 32.8 % of districts were still depopulating. Figures 2 and 3 show that the areas worst hit by depopulation were the upland zones of England and Wales, although depopulation was also experienced

in a scatter of other remoter rural areas and, occasionally, in rural areas closer to the metropolitan centres. This district—level analysis hides the incidence of depopulation at a smaller scale. For instance there are several studies of prosperous agricultural areas in Britain in the 1970's which have uncovered depopulation at the parish level (see, for example, Drudy, 1978). Equally the micro—scale complexities of population change in other rural areas are important. McCleery (1979, 10) thus describes intra—area movements in rural Scotland in these terms:

"A region may be experiencing net population gain but within that region the more sparsely populated areas are more than likely to be losing out to the areas of established growth. Traditionally the Highlands have lost to the Central Belt and although this trend has recently been reversed, the Western Highlands continue to lose out to the Eastern Highlands".

This localised phenomenon of depopulation has been consistently obscured by the use of aggregated data for population change at the district level.

Post—war rural Britain, therefore, experienced a range of demographic trends. Although the figures presented here suggest that a minority of rural areas were suffering from the outcomes of depopulation, it is nevertheless the case that the development of social, economic and land use planning for rural areas attributed considerable importance to the need to provide housing, service and job opportunities either where depopulation was occurring or where the threat of a return to depopulation still loomed large. It is important to understand this particular context for the establishment of local authority planning and policy—making procedures for rural areas.

The results of the 1981 census in Britain showed a remarkable turnaround from this perceived extent of depopulation in rural Britain.

Champion's (1981) useful early analyses of preliminary census output indicate a significant change in the depopulation—repopulation balance, with a much stronger pattern of rural growth occurring during the 1971—81 period. Using a detailed socio—economic classification of districts in Britain (Webber and Craig, 1978) Champion isolates the population change within rural districts' in regional groupings (Table 2). These statistics clearly show a predominant pattern of growth across rural Britain, and even though Wales and the North grew less quickly, these areas far exceeded the national average growth rate of 0.3 percent. Table 2 also highlights the difference between spatially irregular population change patterns between 1961 and 1971 (admittedly subject to the error factors inherent in translating from pre—1974 areas to the new administrative boundaries) and the conformity of steadier growth over the following decade.

Further enlightenment of recent rural population trends is available from Champion's breakdown of census data into five rural clusters (Table 3) which

differentiate between remote districts in Scotland and Wales, less remote areas in west and east England, and least remote districts in peri-urban locations. This analysis suggests a marked revival in remoter rural areas (Clusters 7 and 10), a broad continuity of growth in west and east England (Clusters 8 and 9), although the rate fell slightly in East Anglia and the south-east, and a failure by peri-urban districts (Cluster 2) to maintain previous growth levels.

These results from the 1981 Census provide interesting evidence of the two main components of rural regeneration. Extended suburbanisation into pressured rural areas continues, but at a slower pace than before. Revival in remoter areas is indicated, but Champion's (1981) analysis of mid-term estimate data suggests that rural growth peaked during the years 1971-73 and that a subsequent deceleration of growth rates has occurred. Revival, then, may well have been a phenomenon of the early 1970's rather than of the decade as a whole. We await the results of the 1991 census in this respect.

2. EXPLAINING THE DEPOPULATION-REPOPULATION BALANCE

Before proceeding to discuss the major theme of this paper—that is the role of local government in tackling depopulation—it is important to offer a broader analysis of possible explanations of the turnaround of rural depopulation. Only in this broader context can the achievements of local authorities be properly evaluated.

Traditional geographic wisdom has consistently sought to explain rural population decline and growth in terms of macro-scale phenomena, despite the fact that variegated patterns of change at the local scale suggest that macrolevel explanatory structures should be viewed alongside and in conjunction with a series of local-level factors. Much has been written elsewhere concerning the broad process and ramifications of rural depopulation (see for example, Commins, 1978; Dunn, 1976; Lowenthal and Comitas, 1966; Mitchell, 1950). Several causal elements can be isolated and they have been summarised succinctly in the vicious circle' concept offered by Wallace and Drudy (1975) and illustrated in Figure 4. Structural changes in traditional rural industries have prompted a decline in rural employment. This trend is seen by Wallace and Drudy as one of the main causes of population decline, and they describe the subsequent decrease of population which itself results in a lowering of service thresholds. As fewer services are demanded, service levels will eventually contract, thus diminishing the economic attractiveness of the area which in turn preempts further employment opportunities being offered. In addition to these factors, a review of the causes of rural depopulation by the Department of the Environment (1977, p. 113) suggests that the increased expectations and demands of the rural population and the greater penetration of information concerning the better amenities and opportunities, either real or apparent, of urban living have both sustained the process of depopulation and indeed added to the strength of

urban pull factors which have promoted this movement of people out of rural areas.

It is possible to reverse this skeletal outline of broad factors in order to throw some light on the equivalent macro-scale phenomena which may have prompted repopulation in rural areas. Fig. 4 links together the cumulative causations of depopulation with factors influencing population growth which reflect possible strategic sectoral points at which the vicious circle may be interrupted or even reversed. Any reversal of cumulative depopulation is most likely to occur outside of planning in its traditional sense, as the structures of society and the economy dictate changes in the opportunities available to people in different socio-economic groupings. Nevertheless, planners have aimed to mimic the effects of these changes, for they recognise that political gains can be made by seeming to have caused change. The difficulty for planners is to recognise and understand the point or points in the cumulative causation where their intervention can induce or support repopulation.

In theory, each stage in Fig. 4 offers potential for altering the depopulation-repopulation balance. For example it is relatively simple to conceive of mechanisms through which rural population thresholds can be raised. Increasing rates of redundancy and opportunities for early retirement have supplemented the traditional trends of elderly people seeking to spend their twilight years in a rural environment. A survey by Norfolk County Council (1979) clearly demonstrates that British rural counties such as Devon, Cornwall, Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Kent host significantly higher than average proportions of the retired population, which is currently 16 per cent of the total in England and Wales. Increasing mobility has permitted a continuation of longdistance commuting by people in middle and high income groups who opt to live in rural communities. Many people now enjoy more financial freedom to act on their preferences; retirement benefits, rising affluence, and the availability of public assistance are enabling considerable numbers, both young and old, to enter into a free-floating population that can settle down where it chooses, temporarily and sometimes permanently" (Morrison and Wheeler, 1976, p.21). Robert and Randolph (1983) p.96 in fact go as far as to suggest that what England and Wales has experienced in its rural fringes is an augmentation of the forces which led to the development of, for example, Finsbury and Clerkenwell in the nineteenth century and Park Royal and Dagenham in the interwar years". In other words, even in remoter areas rural regeneration is tied in to the overall process of extended suburbanisation. It could equally be argued, however, that rural regeneration has been employment-led, and that fringe growth merely represents a housing market process as people are forced to follow the spatial deconcentration of jobs. Certainly several additional factors are worthy of consideration before a full explanation of rural population growth can be gained.

Although few would contend that service rationalisation away from smaller rural settlements is an initiating rather than contributing mechanism in the depopulation process, there are several ways in which a relative improvement in rural servicing conditions might be brought about. First, it should be recognised that many contemporary urban-to-rural migrants are characterised by a willingness and an economic flexibility to do without many of the necessities of urban life (De Jong and Sell, 1977; Long and De Are, 1982). There is thus a situation, in some rural areas, whereby ruralites are apparently out-migrating in search of urban service standards while urbanites are in -migrating with a back to the land' acceptance of rudimentary rural-standard facilities. Elsewhere, positive attempts have been made to improve access to services for rural residents. Moseley (1979) describes various British experiments involving "taking the people to the services" -via informal transport schemes such as community minibuses, postbuses, and voluntary car operations-as well as taking the services to the people" -either by mobilising a large range of private and public sector services into a regular peripatetic marketplace (say, one afternoon per week in each village) or by investing in a greater degree of dispersal of facilities to be sited in smaller rural settlements.

For those areas where rural regeneration has been attempted through job creation, attracting in-migrant employers and employees, planning agencies such as the Development Boards in the Highlands and Islands and Mid Wales have stressed the importance of the psychic as well as the economic environment and so have attempted in some ways to reverse the declining socio-economic attractiveness of their areas. This task has taken the form of direct provision of social facilities such as sports, community and shopping centres, as well as the more widely publicised advance factory building, industrial estate servicing and housebuilding. With the lack of anything other than broad inferential evidence, it is difficult to evaluate the success of these measures in promoting rural repopulation, but circumstances in Mid Wales (Clope and Edwards, 1983) suggest that repopulation trends are not attributable in great measure directly to the raising of socio-economic attractiveness.

Attempts to explain rural revitalisation have predominantly focused on employment growth as the major cause of population growth. Urban-to-rural manufacturing shifts in Britain have been reported by Keeble (1980) and Fothergill and Gudgin (1982), although the latter work is restricted by its concentration on pressured rural areas rather than remoter areas. Indeed it has been suggested that regeneration in remoter areas owes as much to expansion in public sector services in rural centres (hospitals, secondary schools, colleges, local authority offices-especially after reorganisation in 1974-employment and social security offices etc.) as to decentralised manufacturing (Cookem, 1981).

These macro-scale explanations of how repopulation has and could come about

provide a useful framework for an understanding of the changing depopulation—repopulation balance in rural areas. They do not, however, give sufficient reason per se for the spatial and temporal variations in that balance within any given rural areas. Some of the factors discussed above are permissive in that the market forces of world economy, and resultant social structuring, happen to generate conditions in some rural areas which favour a swing towards population intake (just as the concept of concentration of services and facilities based on economies of scale was instrumental in rural out—migration). Other factors are prescribed, resulting from policy—decisions by the central state or local government. It is important to note that neither type ensures a change in the rural population balance. Macro—scale factors, be they permissive or prescribed, permit rural repopulation to occur. It is localised conditions, however, which dictate whether population change exists, and the exact form which it takes.

Some rural locations appear more able than others to attract in—migrants and at the same time prevent excessive out—migration of their existing populations. Several localized factors are important here, and may be briefly listed as follows:

- i) land market—the localised availability of land in the desired quantities and at the right price will be important, for example, for those seeking to build a new house, hobby farm, engage in some self—sufficiency or small holding enterprise;
- ii) physical environment—footloose potential in—migrants and existing populations alike may be attracted by local environments which are perceived to have quality, heritage—value, or prestige, and other localities will be under less in—migration pressure because they lack these attributes;
- iii) settlement quality—the built environment is equally important in terms of perceived quality, and in particular those settlements which are planned for conservation and will therefore maintain and increase their value (in both aesthetic and economic terms) will be cherished;
- iv) housing market—the availability of suitable housing stock, again at the right price, will be a repopulation prompter: this factor not only involves luxury housing for the affluent, and bungalows for the retired, but also low—cost or rented accommodation for local families wishing to remain in the community rather than being forced to migrate to undesired urban living environments;
- v) employment market—similary the availability of a range of employment, both full—time and part—time, will add to the attraction of a local rural area, with pressured areas and those surrounding growth towns being more amenable to significant manufacturing deconcentration onto green field sites than their remoter counterparts;
- vi) social and community factors—this element is more difficult to define, but

includes available services and facilities, the prior existence of like-minded community groups to which in-migrants can relate (often important in the retirement location decision), the flow of short-term migrants, for example in tourist areas, where social and economic opportunities are available and so on;

- vii) accessibility—access to employment centres will be important for long-distance commuters, both in-migrants and indigenous.

This list is neither comprehensive nor innovative. Yet in situations where a combination of these factors occurs it might be useful to conceptualize local level variables as the predominant element underlying population changes in a particular location. In other words, change will only occur in areas which are receptive (through the quality of their physical, social, cultural economic environments) to the footloose state induced by larger scale structural circumstances. Localities where land is expensive, landscape unattractive and amenities and employment lacking will thus be immune to footloose in-migration because of a mismatch between the local factors and macro-trends. Although many of these local scale factors are structurally determined, the particular configuration of that determination in any locality will greatly influence the degree of receptiveness to population growth offered by that locality.

In contrast, structural changes in the local rural economy, either prompting decline through, for example, the shedding of agricultural labour, or growth through the imposition of a planned growth strategy, can create local situations whereby micro-scale factors are subservient to, or even swamped by the macroscale structures emanating from the national or international political economy.

It is interesting to note that the local scale factors listed above are almost all susceptible to planning. Apart from the physical environment which planners can preserve or conserve but not create, all of the remaining local prompts—land, settlement, housing, employment, socio-economic services and access—can be manipulated given sufficient political will and investment. It is equally the case, however, that the planning involved is a planning of conflict. Protection of the physical environment is set against house and factory building; prestige and value in the local environment and housing markets is set against the need for low-cost housing and new jobs for non-affluent families. The easiest forms of planning intervention is in favour of those who can afford to purchase access, land and housing in a conserved environment, but the corollary of this situation is that rural repopulation becomes as socially polarised as its predecessor, depopulation was. It is in this context that the achievements of local authority planning should be reviewed.

3 . DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN BRITAIN

The role of local governments in the development of depopulated rural areas has largely been constrained by planning legislation issued from central government. The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act placed responsibility for planning in the hands of 145 county and county borough councils. Lower tier administrative units—districts and (even smaller) parishes—were only to act in an advisory capacity. Each county authority was required to carry out a survey in its area, and to prepare and submit a development plan to the central government demonstrating how the land within its jurisdiction was to be used over a 20 year period. These development plans were supported by the introduction of the planning permission mechanism whereby landowners were required to seek the permission of the local planning authority before any material land—use alteration could be carried out. In this way, local authorities were given strong powers both to plan for a controlled allocation of development and to enforce individual decisions as part of the overall development plan.

Some commentators have suggested that this radical legislation gave local governments in rural areas a blank cheque to implement whatever policies they thought fit. This was not so. A series of circulars and regulations from the central Ministry of Town and Country Planning laid down firm guidelines as to how local government should proceed. For example, local authorities were instructed to concentrate their surveys on the social and economic functions of the larger rural settlements. Many county councils slavishly followed this advice and restricted themselves to a cataloguing of the educational, health, retail and social services which were provided in nodal locations. A further central government advice note in 1950 strongly suggested that the economic provision of services in rural areas could only be achieved by the selection of certain settlements for expansion. In the most extreme economic circumstances this type of policy was seen to suggest that in some non selected settlements planners would be forced to demolish and clear the village and resettle the inhabitants in new centres where jobs, houses and services could be provided.

The plans which were produced during this period are examined in the next section, but in summary three major constraints may be recognised which reflect the physical land—use orientation of the 1947 Act:

- i) the existing pattern of public investment in services and likely future expenditure;
- ii) the need to safeguard higher—quality agricultural land;
- iii) the desirability of locating new development on land of low landscape and ecological value.

These constraints led to a period of rural planning which operated through negative powers of control. Social planning was not provided for by the legislation and thus a

planning system ban of liberal and progressive aims of redressing social injustice was in fact instrumental in overlooking social issues in favour of a rigid and bureaucratic approach to resource allocation.

Development planning was overhauled with new legislation in 1968. The previous development plans were replaced by a dual-state system of statutory planning. At the broader level, structure plans were to be submitted by county councils for approval by central government. These plans were to contain proposals and policies for large-scale change over a wide area within a flexible and adaptive framework. They were to include social and economic circumstances as well as land use and environmental matters.

These strategic proposals formed a framework within which detailed smallscale planning could be carried out using local plans. Local plans were to be developed by the new lower-tier district councils which following local government reorganisation in 1972 were larger than previously. There would typically be four or five districts representing the rural areas of one county.

The 1968 system of development planning was also important because it was at this juncture that public participation became a formal part of the planning process. It was now required that opportunities be given for representations and objections from members of the public at the proposals' and draft' stages of both structure plans and local plans.

Again, the policies for rural areas which arose under this revised planning system are examined in the next section. However, it is important to note at this juncture that significant problems have arisen in the operation of post-1968 planning which may be traced back to the initial establishment of a two-tier flexible planning process. In particular, important tensions arose from the division of planning powers between county and district authorities. This shared function, where the county has strategic and large-scale development control powers, and the district has powers of medium- and small-scale development control means that one authority is inevitably affected by the actions of the other.

Interaction of this nature has led to severe conflict in certain areas over certain issues and often constitutes an even more potent recipe for delay than the bureaucratic nature of planning in general. Hall (1979) offers three further criticisms of the structure plan-local plan process:

- i) the system is weak and ambiguous. Structure plans are unlikely to be effective when the power for action lies with the district councils with their responsibility for development control and building public sector housing;
- ii) the system is not well understood by the people being planned, with the actual content of policies seemingly being far removed from the lifestyle and requirements of the population;

iii) the systems appears to have increased the input of manpower and other resources into planning but has produced no apparent concomitant increase in output.

Nevertheless, the 1968 planning system has been operational in Britain up to the present, although there are currently radical proposals from central government to abolish structure plans and to transfer powers of planning almost completely down to the district council (see Section 7).

4. RURAL SETTLEMENT PLANNING IN RURAL AREAS

It is within these legislative and administrative constraints that local governments in Britain had to formulate their policies to deal with problems of depopulation or the threat of a return to depopulation. The resultant policies have tended to incorporate a strategy of resource concentration into growth centres. In doing so there has been a rather vague hope that opportunities established in these selected centres would somehow be transmitted to the residents of surrounding hinterland villages. This strategy of resource concentration, despite regular updating and sophistication has been widely criticised on the grounds of its failure to accommodate the required socio-economic changes which might achieve welfare-oriented goals in planning. As a result, there has been a parallel search for alternative socio-spatial frameworks which might better service the interests of deprived and disadvantaged groups in the countryside.

The story of local government activity in developing plans for depopulated rural areas, then, is a story of the political debate between policies of resource concentration and resource dispersal. As these notions underpin all local government efforts to encourage development in rural areas it is necessary to give a detailed analysis of why and how resource concentration policies came about.

The explanation as to why planning authorities in Britain came to adopt resource concentration policies in the initial era of planning is difficult to pin down with any confidence or exactitude, although both theoretical and pragmatic matters are important. A series of neo-classical and locational theories have been recognised as important inputs favouring the concentration of rural resources such as service, employment and housing opportunities into selected growth centres. Central place theory was viewed with academic favour in the 1940's and 1950's during which time initial rural policies were devised. The inherent assumption that rural settlements occur as part of an hierarchical pattern was apparently adopted by planners who thus assumed that this hierarchy should be upheld by supporting nodal points within it. The commonly held view was that there is a 'proper relationship' between service centres and their hinterlands, and this in turn led to the planned promotion of service centres in post-war rural Britain. The work of Howard Bracey (1952; 1962) typifies the bond between theory and planning in this respect. He identified

central villages' which have disproportionately high levels of services for their population size, and was instrumental in securing these central villages as the foci for investment within the Wiltshire development plan (1953). There is no doubt that planners of this era did think in terms of central places, and this tendency has lingered despite the subsequent empirical investigations which falsify the universality of central place theory in real life, and the rejection of the neo-classical underpinning on which the theory is based.

Closely linked to central place theory was the early use of thresholds by planners to assess the viability of rural services. By indicating the minimum population required to support a particular service or facility, planners again tended to favour the safety of captured clienteles in larger population centres rather than risking an over-dispersal of service provision in more marginal (at least according to threshold theory) locations. Again, there have been subsequent criticisms of the threshold concept. Shaw (1976) has shown that no magic figure can in reality indicate the point at which a facility will appear or disappear in any particular location. These birth' and death' procedures rely far more upon the characteristics of the entrepreneur or public sector decision-makers concerned. Moreover, thresholds have been viewed solely in an economic light, ignoring the opposite and equally valid notion of social thresholds, that is the number of services and facilities needed to support the rural population in a fixed location. The predominance of economic threshold thinking has been a formative influence in the rise in favour of resource concentration policies, although its direct application has been somewhat reduced by the introduction of more flexible strategic policies during the 1970's.

Perhaps the most explicit formative influence on rural policy in the United Kingdom has been that of a search for economies of scale. Most professional planners and committee members would regard their decisions as being based on the realism and pragmatism of the economics of resource allocation during periods of financial restriction, rather than on the tenets of seemingly esoteric theory. Accordingly the presumption that resource concentration strategies will achieve economies of scale because bigger will be cheaper" has proved immensely attractive in policy-making terms. Ayton (1980) has laid down four tenets of economic reasoning which follow the assumption of economies of scale:

- i) small villages cannot independently support education, health and commercial services which require support populations of thousands;
- ii) public sector service options are constrained by limited and diminishing resources;
- iii) private sector service and some public sector services (for example, gas) will not be provided where they are unprofitable, and rural areas often fall within this category;
- iv) mobile services incur high running costs and offer a low quality of service.

These four principles lead directly to the practice of fixed—point service provision in sizeable centres.

Another set of theories which have had a formative influence in the concentration—dispersal debate are those connected with growth poles and growth centres. These theories have often been ill—defined but the two processes of backwash, where central nodes attract factors of production from surrounding areas and spread, where economic prosperity is transmitted from the centre to the periphery, have been adopted as ideal models for planning in pressured rural areas and remote rural areas respectively. Superficially, then, growth centre theory justifies the concentration of development into selected service centres in both pressured and remote rural areas. There are again, however, problems in the practical application of this theory, as the selected centres are depicted as both providers for and retarders of growth in smaller hinterland settlements. Obviously, then, there are difficulties in the exact implementation of backwash and spread mechanisms to suit local circumstances. In addition, there is theoretical and empirical evidence (Mosekey, 1974) to suggest that rural growth centres in Britain are not of sufficient scale to provide a full range of growth centre attributes. The benefits of resource concentration, then, may again be more apparent than real.

Paradoxically, these theoretical notions have been used both as an explanation of why resource concentration policies were initially favoured and in retrospective justification of those policies in subsequent analyses. Thus, although various theories offer trappings of respectability to resource concentration, there is more than a suspicion that conceptualisation has provided a cosmetic justification for policies which were created merely out of economic and administrative expediency. Certainly, there have been implicit ideological and political stances adopted by rural policy—makers which tend to support this contention. A review of the political economy context of rural planning (Cloke and Little, 1990) suggests that policy—makers have been consistently conservative and pragmatic in their evaluation of available policy options. Moreover such intervention as has been achieved by planners in rural areas for welfare objectives has itself been constrained by ideology and economic factors which place high priority on a minimisation of local taxes and public sector spending. Within these constraints, planners were originally searching for high—profile policy with which to demonstrate that rural problems were being tackled, and the key settlement policy of resource concentration presented itself as a convenient blue—print which was both visible and seemingly costeffective.

It is against this background that the performance of rural resource concentration policies in the United Kingdom should be judged. Failure should be viewed as a gap between rural need and rural opportunity provision, but it should also be measured against the fact that commentators have repeatedly expected too much from a pragmatic and broad framework policy.

Rural Development Under the 1947 Act

Given this range of theoretical and pragmatic promptings, it is hardly surprising that rural policies within the 1947–68 development plan era differs only according to the degree of resource concentration sought, rather than according to whether concentration was a more equitable or beneficial strategic option than resource dispersal. Three main categories of policy may be identified:

- i) Key Settlement Policies where comprehensive concentration of housing services and employment into selected centres is sought not only to build up the centres themselves, but also to provide opportunities for hinterland villages.
- ii) Planned Decline Policies in which direct attempts are made to rationalize the rural settlement pattern by refusing to locate public investments in outmoded small villages and by prompting a population shift into larger growth centres.
- iii) Village Classification Policies where villages are categorized according to existing service functions and environmental quality, so that growth can be allocated to suitable (usually larger) receptor settlements.

Several important questions should be raised about the underlying aims of rural policy during this period. Was the settlement pattern being supported? Was it being deliberately rationalized? Was the objective a more simple one of establishing a convenient basis for the service—provision obligations of local authorities? Finally, was the fundamental objective urban—based one, namely to secure protection against undue urbanisation of the countryside? These questions may be addressed by study of the various perceived successes and failures of rural planning in the development plan era.

Many analysts have been extremely critical of policies and planning during this time period. Darley (1978, 299) concludes:

“Blind acceptance of policy dogma, such as key settlements or short—term economy measures bringing with them long term deprivation, without the background research into the effects of such policies has landed the rural areas in a mess.”

In a more down—to—earth analysis, MacGregor (1976, 526) is first understanding, then damning:

“The idea of putting all the services into one village to serve several surrounding ones offers a financially viable solution to this problem, and is therefore very attractive to administrators and planners. Unfortunately when one puts all the council houses and old people’s bungalow allocation for the area into one village, leaving the other villages to die naturally’ (i.e. be taken over by the better off...) this destroys the natural balance of social groups.”

In fact, the negative assessments of the performance of key settlement policies have

reached almost bandwagon proportions, such that it is difficult to break through this institutionalized criticism in order to discover any acknowledged achievements of the key settlement type of policy. Nevertheless some positive achievements should be recorded.

First, in terms of land use, it is clear that policies of resource concentration have usually been effective in preventing sporadic development in the countryside (Working Party of Rural Settlement Policies, 1979). By channelling growth into selected centres, key settlement policies have also to some extent aided the increased provision of infrastructural services such as sewerage networks, electricity and telephones (see, for example, Gilder and McLaughlin, 1978). These successes should not be underrated as it is clear that in many areas the concentration/conse-
rvation ethic has limited undue urbanization in the countryside, environmental quality in many small villages and achieved pragmatism in the provision of statutory services.

The weakness of resource concentration policies is to be found in their preoccupation with physical planning to the detriment of social conditions in rural communities. It should be remembered that two basic objectives were sought via these policies —the build-up of centres of opportunity (the key settlements'); and the use of these opportunities to improve conditions for residents in hinterland villages.

Some success has been gained in the build-up of key settlements. Case studies in the two English counties of Devon and Warwickshire (Cloke, 1979) suggest that concentrated housing and employment provision (the latter often using industrial estates and advance factories to attract entrepreneurs) has occurred in some places and has ensured that rural people do receive opportunities to live and work in the countryside rather than being forced to migrate to higher order urban centres. These broad trends, however, mask a considerable diversity of achievement in establishing thriving rural growth centres. In cases where growth trends existed prior to the policy, there has often been a continuation of growth, but where no such prior impetus was available there are few examples of a key settlement policy being able to reverse the downward spiral of lost opportunities and depopulation.

The second key settlement objective of maintaining villages in the rural hinterland has been less successful than the first. There is clear evidence that the use of resource concentration policies has coincided with a general deterioration of service, housing and employment opportunities in small villages. Although it is difficult to assess the degree to which planning policies are responsible for these trends, the planners' reluctance to permit housing and employment development in non-selected villages has exacerbated rural housing problems in small settlements. Many young families have been forced to leave their home villages not only because of competition in the housing market from the gentry, the retired and second homers, but also because of the lack of local authority dwellings. Moreover, there are small but significant numbers of deprived households who have become trapped in these unsupported settlements, as in situ services disappear and public transport links to the nearest service centres are not maintained (McLaughlin, 1986).

Two broad criticisms of the social role of key settlement policies appear valid. First, the county-level plans have assumed that there is a standard type of rural community and ignore the local scale variations which demand flexible planning solutions. Second, these plans have not proved easy to adopt in the light of changing circumstances in rural areas. In particular rural policies have ignored the scope for the dispersed provision of small scale housing, service and employment schemes in hinterland villages.

More importantly, a series of problems with resource concentration policies occur outside the remit of current planning powers. Direct provision of rural employment, suitable housing for local rural needs, service opportunities for non-mobile groups, and adequate public transport links between key settlements and hinterland villages are beyond the direct control of planning authorities, yet it is the lack of these various opportunities which has prevented the framework policy of resource concentration from fulfilling its full potential. Isolated cases of positive planning have occurred, but generally there have been insurmountable financial and administrative barriers preventing a coordinated approach to rural planning during the development plan era—a situation which Green (1971) has described as twenty years of wasted opportunity for positive rural planning.

Rural Development Under the 1968 Act

Essentially, there has been no apparent policy re-direction away from resource concentration and towards resource dispersal during the presentation and implementation of structure plans in Britain (Cloe and Shaw, 1983 : Derounian, 1980). The previous criticism of key settlement policies has been ignored by decision makers in favour of a continuing allegiance to the perceived qualities of channelling growth into rationalised centres, rather than dispersing opportunities into the small, more needy, settlements.

A survey designed to test planners' attitudes towards the concentration/disper-

rsal debate during their preparation of structure plan policies for rural areas (Cloke, 1983) provides an interesting insight into why the expected policy shift towards resource dispersal did not take place. When asked whether greater levels of dispersal of resources and opportunities to smaller villages was recognised as a desirable planning goal, a clear majority of planning authorities rejected any support of resource dispersal, even in this hypothetically—phrased situation. The reasons for continuing to support resource concentration may be summarised in three main categories:

- i) Opposition to resource dispersal on the basis of experience from previous rural settlement policies. Many respondents concurred with the authour of the following comment:

"It still appears to us that if we had allowed a greater dispersal of development it would have done little to boost or maintain services in the smaller settlements ... the end result of dispersal would simply be more people living further from a good range of services."

- ii) opposition to resource dispersal on theoretical grounds. One respondent struck a chord echoed by many others:

"Dispersal policies do little to maximise opportunities in the form of providing access to the outside world'. They seem to be pointing us back in the direction of the self sufficient' villages of the past which were of arguable merit then and are of doubtful value to the modern world."

- iii) opposition to further resource dispersal because sufficient dispersal had already taken place. Many countries had nominated up to 70 key settlements during the development plan era, and this spread of opportuni—ties was considered as sufficient (some would say excessive) to meet the needs of equitable dispersal investment. The survey did highlight the view expressed by a minority of planning authorities that resource dispersal was a desirable planning goal. This view espouses a rejection of past policies and the criteria on which theyare based, as summarised by one respondent:

"econmic criteria will nearly always point to concentration for greatest economic efficiency; unfortunately the service consumers in rural areas are generally not so conveniently concentrated. Their needs should be balanced in the equation, and the means of ensuring a greater dispersal of development sought."

These underlying attitudes expressed by rural polilcy—makers give a strong hint as to why structure plan policies continued to seek a concentration of rural resources. Other, more pragmatic, factors are also explanatory, however, in this context. The reality of the situation for most counties was that they were faced

with insurmountable previous commitments to the development plan framework of key settlements. Planning permissions had been granted for major housing developments, and such permissions are extremely expensive to rescind. Long term investment strategies based on a centralization of resources, had been entered into by agencies dealing, for example, with water, health and education services. These, too, would be extremely difficult to halt and redirect into more dispersal oriented rural locations. Perhaps most important of all, central government showed no sign of wavering from its tacit support of the economics of resource concentration. Thus when structure plans were

presented to the Secretary of State for Environment for his approval, such approval was not forthcoming unless certain standards" of financial house-keeping were maintained. These standards were such that resource concentration was an inevitable conclusion:

The details of structure plan policies for rural areas have been analysed by Cloke and Shaw (1983). In summary, six types of policy were identified:

- i) market town policies, where resources are to be concentrated into focal market towns and restraint will be exercised over resource allocation in smaller rural settlements.
- ii) key settlement policies, where certain settlements (sometimes smaller than market towns) are selected to receive comprehensive growth of housing, services and employment so that they may in turn act as centres of opportunity for the surrounding rural hinterland.
- iii) tiered policies, where growth is allocated to different tiers of selected growth centres, ranging from comprehensive investment in the largest, to the provision of small levels of housing opportunities in the smallest selected settlements.
- iv) Severe restraint policies, where rural areas immediately adjacent to metropolitan centres, are subjected to severe restrictions on any resource growth in order to conserve the rurality of the area in the face of rampant urbanization pressures.
- v) hierarchical restraint policies, where in similarly pressured areas, small levels of growth are permitted in a strict hierarchy of rural centres. Growth is nevertheless restrained in most settlements especially the smaller villages.
- vi) area policies, where some attempt is being made to divert from strict policies of concentration either through permitting housing growth in settlements within an area which is well-served by an existing centre, or by considering the use of village cluster techniques (outlined in Section 3).

It is transparent from this taxonomy that policy types (i) to (v) represent variations on the theme of rural resource concentration. Only in the small minority of counties preparing area policies (category (vi)) does there appear to be any shift

towards resource dispersal. Even in these cases, however, the wish to disperse resources has not been easily implemented. For example, the North Yorkshire Plan (1980) sought a redistribution of opportunity and development in rural areas of the county by identifying socioeconomically cohesive village groups which would act as service centres for the less prosperous areas. Opposition to this overt form of resource dispersal was encountered both from various agencies responsible for rural service provision, and from the more prosperous districts who objected to the uneven distribution of potential investment. The Secretary of State was therefore able to veto the identified village groups and thus removed the teeth from a potentially innovative policy. The plan for Gloucestershire (1980) has encountered similar difficulties. It, too, supported the idea of village clusters as centres of investment in areas of rural decline. This intention has also so far been thwarted by resistance at both central government and local government levels.

The story of structure plan policies for rural areas, therefore, is largely of a direct follow on from the development plan penchant for resource concentration policies. Those few attempts to deviate significantly from this theme have been frustrated by the resistance of other agencies within the rural planning system. The only signs for optimism are that more efficient mechanisms for coordination and co-operation between resource-allocating agencies have been established under the structure plan system, and that many rural counties have shown some willingness, within their resource concentration strategies to release small amounts of housing for local needs' in smaller villages.

Nevertheless, the essential problems in rural communities remain. The withdrawal of in situ services within wider-scale rationalization schemes, the withdrawal of public transport services; the failure to provide low-cost housing for non-affluent households; and the failure to respond to problems of unemployment and low wages in rural areas, have all combined to exacerbate the plight of the rural disadvantaged. Some deprived groups and individuals are still being stranded in settlements without services, public transport or private mobility. Others are being forced to move out of their preferred village home because they cannot compete in an unevenly expensive housing market. In both cases a similar result occurs. Rural planning is permitting a gentrification of smaller rural settlements and a social polarization whereby the affluent can benefit from the conservation policies for scenic villages while the poor are being channelled into the larger centres and thus are denied the benefits of a small-scale rural living that are enjoyed increasingly by affluent sectors of the population. Despite the improvements of the structure plan era, these basic problems are not being addressed by rural planners within the statutory planning system.

In conclusion, it has become generally recognized that the strategic level considerations of key settlements and other types of policy cannot of themselves

solve rural problems. Policies of resource concentration and resource dispersal merely act as spatial umbrella policies within which the essential acts of resource allocation are performed. Thus the provision of housing for local needs, employment, services and access opportunities, are specific tasks which require lower-level and specific decision-making within the umbrella planning framework. In one sense, then, to focus rural planning debate on the framework policies is to miss the very important point that most impacts of rural planning occur at the local level as a result of specific decision-making. This decision-making may not be local, however, as many such local impacts are caused by regional, national and international policy-makers. However it is in this area of the implementation of local government policy that the success or failure of development for depopulated rural areas is actually worked out.

5. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RURAL PLANS

The implementation of local government policies for rural areas in Britain has been subject to a number of important constraints. In particular, three crucial sets of relations have to be acknowledged in this context.

1) Central-local government relations

The allocation of resources to rural areas is channelled through a fragmented system of public administration. County councils are responsible for strategic planning, education, social services and transport services, while district councils are responsible for local planning, council housing and other services such as refuse collection. Regional agencies have responsibility for health, water and electricity services. A key concern, therefore is not only the co-ordination of agencies between the centre and the locality but, more importantly, the degree of discretion afforded to local elites, managers or society more generally in arriving at policy decisions. Closely related to this issue is the degree of willingness demonstrated by local government politicians (often politically conservative) to accept and make use of whatever discretion for local action is available. Wright (1982) makes the point that local state programmes of investment are devised: with at least one eye on the central department's policies and priorities, and are implemented with the knowledge that the central department monitors the implementation of programmes closely' (pp.6-7). In addition, evidence concerning the take-up of available discretion (see, for example, Newby et al., 1978; Glover, 1985) suggests that local authority members are often ideologically reluctant to agree to feasible levels of intervention in local housing and service markets.

With high-profile incursions by central government into the local state domain over recent years, it can be strongly suggested that local

government is becoming increasingly subordinated to externally defined priorities rather than being unfettered in its policy and implementation decisions (Harloe, 1981). Through restrictive financial and legislative controls, the central state appears to be tightening its grip over the local arena, and these restrictions have significant impacts on policy decisions by officers and members at the local level.

ii) inter—agency relations

Although central state restrictions on local agencies are becoming more severe, further implementation restraints occur when such agencies have to interact with each other. A traditional panacea for the ills associated with putting into practice rural policies has been the recommendation for greater coordination and integration of decision—making agencies (Working Party on Rural Settlement Policies, 1979; Smart and Wright, 1983).

Behind this recommendation lies a chequered history of poor coordination and isolationist stances by many rural agencies, including individual departments within local authorities.

The notion of corporate planning has been officially adopted by many agencies, particularly local authorities following the reorganization of local government in 1974. Any great expectation that agency coordination will radically improve the ability of rural planning to respond to problems is likely, however, to be misplaced, because it is clear that agencies continue to preserve their spheres of influence and power wherever possible. The compromises inherent in corporate decision—making have tended to founder on this rock of agency egocentricity. Many examples of this process in rural areas support these contentions. Packman and Wallace (1982), for instance, in their survey of the management of rural services in East Anglia, demonstrate that each agency involved operates within a clearly defined and jealously guarded delimitation of responsibility, and services a distinct group of clients. Any cooperation in service provision is greatly inhibited by these factors.

Discord between agencies should not merely be put down to inept coordination. There are several circumstances in rural areas when deliberate non—cooperation takes place between agencies. Healey (1979) has demonstrated that the uneasy division of planning responsibilities between county—level strategic policies and district—level development control is often marked by opposition between the two agencies. District authorities will sometimes stretch to the limits the discretion available to them so that local preferences can override strategic policies. They are aided and abetted in this task by central government, which has supported districts both by amending structure plans to their advantage and by ruling against counties

in key appeals procedures.

Interagency relations are thus pervaded by conflicts of interest, and policy and action in rural areas are distorted as a consequence. The situation is thus ripe for any divide—and—rule tactics which the central state might wish to employ to maintain its own dominance.

iii) public—private sector relations

Private—sector agencies and the capital at their disposal are usually vital factor in the enactment of public—sector policy. In many instances, pressure for development from the private sector represents the motive force for change in an area and planning is merely a passive or reactive mechanism to this pressure. In terms of service provision, market—led trends have sought the concentrated clientele and economies of scale to be found in growth centre locations. Such objectives have led to a contraction of private—sector services from many locations. Similarly in the public sector, limited finance for direct provision of rural opportunities has prompted the pursuit of rationalization policies, effectively mirroring the private sector's locational decisions. The dependence on private capital to finance development ensures that investment patterns in rural areas are dominated by the logic of the marketplace and the motive of profit.

The role of planners in this relationship is reduced to one of advocacy and informal persuasion, seeking to encourage private—sector interests to provide opportunities in locations recognized by planners as zones of need but not necessarily by developers as zones of demand. Patently, however, the distribution of this investment occurs well beyond the direct control of planning and as a consequence further significant restrictions are placed on the art of the possible' for rural policies and planning options.

The private sector is also instrumental in exerting indirect influence on public policy through activities aimed at reducing such overhead costs as tax payments. Austin (1983) suggests that corporate pressure is brought to bear on policy—makers to encourage them to minimize collective expenditure on public services. Such less obvious factors in the public—private sector relationship are particularly important in those rural areas whose conservative political representatives often rely on these very same corporate interests for the continuation of their political and economic status.

Planning and policy—making for rural areas can be rendered relatively impotent if the will and motivation of private—sector interests do not happen to comply with public—sector aspirations. Indeed, public policy usually takes full account of known private interests prior to the finalisation of rural planning strategies.

The practice of local government planning is clearly affected by the constraints on action imposed by these three sets of relations. An illustration of the practical difficulties involved may be drawn from a survey of planners in 36 county councils in England and Wales (Cloke and Little, 1986) which sought answers to a number of different questions about implementation:

a) what is the nature of implementation?

The majority of respondents defined implementation in terms of the most tangible of their tasks—that is, those activities of land—use control. Here there are established legislative controls to be performed, and implementation is perhaps at its most rational. Definitions of implementation were founded on this incontrovertible base. Some respondents viewed implementation as the pursuit of agreed policies by county council departments; others included the work undertaken by external agencies in pursuit of agreed policies. A small minority defined implementation as the pursuance of a wide agenda of activities, unrestrained by official' policies. Obviously the perceived successes and problems of implementation will depend on the initially defined ambit of implementation activities. Given a narrow definition, implementation can be seen as unproblematic, whereas more ambitious objectives are frustratingly difficult to enact. A clear schism emerged from the survey between perceivedly straightforward development control tasks, and the wider ambitions of policy. The latter area of policy and action gives a relatively unconstrained scope for action. According to one respondent: it [implementation] is also any involvement with what is happening in the area. It is a wide—ranging definition that encompasses virtually anything which helps to achieve the objectives of the local authority'.

Although the scope in unrestrained, the means of enactment were seen by many planners to be dominated by the external restrictions within which planning operates.

The following comment is typical: Implementation, without power... is merely an acceptance of the market mechanisms and their resulting actions, whether in line with policy or not'. The nature of implementation, then, differs with the scope of the aims and objectives of policy and this survey therefore seems to support the idea of a policy—action continuum. Narrowly defined tasks such as development control provide the tangible, straightforward element, while the wider socioeconomic and environmental concerns are very definitely seen as subject to many of the external constraints discussed above.

b) what are the major problems with implementation?

Although the activities perceived to be associated with implementation

varied from county to county, the difficulties experienced in enacting agreed policies or broader objectives were uniform. Five problems predominated:

1. Interorganizational conflicts—wherein local planning authorities have no direct control or influence over other resource—allocating agencies.
2. Lack of finance—a reflex response, of obvious' relevance and importance but rarely detailed as to finance from what source and for what purpose.
3. Lack of control over private—sector interests—what happens in rural areas is often dictated by a relatively undirected wealth of private resources whose investment may not concur with policy goals, and indeed may conflict with them.
4. Government policies—deficiencies were highlighted here due to the fragmentary nature of enabling legislation and lack of statutory support for local authority initiatives in rural areas.
5. Local political and public commitment—the survey consistently exposed a lack of political resolve to go beyond the status quo and to opt for rural development policies rather than conservation.

This backwashes to the vocal opposition from many sectors of rural communities (frequently non—indigenous population groups) to rate—based spending on rural services and development proposals. These five groups of difficulties experienced by those involved with practical policy and action closely reflect the constraints due to relation discussed above. Central—local (2, 4, 5) interagency (1) and public—private sector (3) relationships all figure prominently in this one illustration of implementation in practice.

c) how can implementation problems be overcome?

The structural nature of perceived implementation problems means that few simple or immediate methods are available to planners with which to improve their implementation procedures. Three types of answer were suggested in this context:

1. Alterations to the implementation process.
2. Alterations to policy.
3. Changes in the central government framework for planning.

In their discussion of these three options, two consistent reflections on the interrelations of 1) to 3) were in evidence. First, planners who by the very sampling frame of the survey had necessarily been deeply involved in structure plan policy—making were inclined to look upwards to the central state and downwards to the implementers' for improvements rather than to potential policy alterations. Clearly, it is both convenient and organizationally responsible for planning officers to identify potential changes in the actions of other decision—making agencies and in the administrative and financial

groundrules laid down by central government, rather than in the agreed policies of their own authority, which in any case had been subjected to the feasibility test' before they were agreed. Second, the range of options for overcoming implementation problems was viewed as being an interdependent vested hierarchy of proposals. Alterations to implementation processes were viewed as dependent on policy changes, which in turn relied on changes in central government attitudes towards planning so as to provide scope for wider policy options. Apart, then, from some very small-scale fine tuning, the notion of being able to overcome perceived implementation problems is viewed as involving far-reaching structural changes to the discretion granted to local-level policymaking and planning.

d) have there been any recent improvements in implementation?

More than half of the sample reported no significant improvements although some of this negative response may have hinged on varying definitions of significant'. The nature of the positive responses, however, suggests that no important improvements were missed by this semantic difficulty, in that the reported improvements tended to be low level and pragmatic in nature. The funds of initiative and technical competence within county planning departments are clearly being outworked not in the conventional implementation role but rather in an environment of opportunism for the practical enactment of policies and objectives. Any resource either directly available to the authority, such as Manpower Services Commission (a government employment training agency), labour, or indirectly available through localised coordination schemes (often liaising with the voluntary sector), will be fully utilized to pursue the planning task. It was stressed by respondents, however, that planning-by-opportunism has arisen because of the severe restrictions on straightforward rational planning imposed by the central state's view of the role of planning and public-sector intervention in rural affairs. These external restrictions are reiterated throughout the survey responses. In conclusion, one of the respondents to the survey states:

Whilst a sequential view may appear rational and have value in justifying or explaining what is happening it does not adequately represent the actual processes of change. Policies of the authority are intentions, desirable courses of action, a base line for negotiation, and implementation can be putting these policies into effect. The distinction between policy and implementation is in practice blurred and artificial when the main emphasis is how can the local authority best respond to the problems that exist in its area.

Placed in a broader context, conclusions such as these suggest that rural

planning and policy-making do not suffer from an implementation problem' per se. Attention should rather be focused on how to develop a response to rural problems within a climate of insufficient corporate responsibility for planners and inadequate financial resources for their projects. This response can be pragmatic within current restraints, or progressive in removing some current constraints.

6 . PLANNING OUTSIDE LOCAL GOVERNMENT : THE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS

Given this constraining context of planning within the local authority sector, it has perhaps been inevitable that specific and high profile initiatives in depopulated areas have occurred through quasi-governmental agencies which are only loosely connected with elected local government. Within the overall climate of planning by opportunism, central government has attempted to provide new funding and initiatives through the establishment of three rural development agencies. One, the Development Commission, has responsibility for rural socio-economic development in England. It not only funds the Rural Community Councils, which have now been established in each county with the task of coordinating voluntary initiatives in rural areas, and COSIRA (the Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas) which is specifically concerned with establishing small-scale industries in rural areas, but it is also responsible for a series of Rural Development Programmes in specific problem areas (Figure 5) (Development Commission 1984, 1985). These programmes consist of:

- a) the generation of a long-term strategy of responding to social needs, including an evaluation of housing, employment, services and facilities;
- b) the generation of a detailed programme of action, including funding of advance factors and workshops.

These programmes have been recently reviewed by Smart (1987: 210):

With guidance as necessary from the (Development) Commission, they now contain creditable assessments of needs, statements of objectives and self-generating programmes which are monitored and rolled forward each year. Indeed, focusing on economic development, housing, transport, services and social facilities (sometimes even education) and with regular involvement of bodies such as MAFF (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) and the Tourist Boards, the RDPs (Rural Development Programmes) could in time begin to read across' at central government level. Thus they could enable government departments to identify policy and organizational decision issues that might not otherwise be seen.

Despite this potential, the Development Commission has a fraction of the budget of the Ministry of Agriculture and without a major redistribution of financial resource its activities will of necessity take the form of nibbling at the

edge of major structural problems other than biting deeply into them.

In Scotland and Wales, partly as a response to the debates over nationalism and devolution, specific and separate rural development agencies have been established. The Highlands and Islands Development Board (HIDB) (Figure 5) was established in 1965 to promote economic and social development in the northern parts of rural Scotland, and the Development Board for Rural Wales (now Mid Wales Development—MWD) was set up in 1977 to do a broadly similar job. The major task undertaken by both agencies has been the creation of employment, through direct provision of sites and buildings, through grant and loan support for fledgeling enterprises, and through a range of support and advisory services. On a smaller scale both agencies have been enabled to offer grants and loans for the provision of local social and cultural infrastructures. In Mid Wales this has ranged from providing new communal television aerial systems in areas of poor reception to staging concerts by big—name rock bands in obscure locations in the middle of rural west Wales! In an excellent review of these organizations Williams (1984:82) concludes:

In an economic sense, the achievement of industrial diversification through the various advance factory development programmes, and the wide ranging training and marketing initiatives available from specialist agencies, has undoubtedly stimulated local entrepreneurial development... In community development terms, support for community initiated and implemented social projects in rural Wales and Scotland improves the quality of life in the short term, and may encourage the development of local skills, and motivation for enhanced participation in the long term.

The rural development boards in Celtic Britain therefore offer perhaps the best example of direct intervention on behalf of rural people. The activities and priorities of the boards have certainly not been exempt from criticism, particularly from those who seek specific sociocultural initiatives in Welsh—and Gaelic—speaking areas (see e.g. Wenger 1980). Nevertheless, with combined annual budgets of nearly £50 million and with specific legislative backing for promotional activity and socio-economic planning, these agencies have suffered fewer of the constraints imposed by central government on their local authority counterparts. Two important issues in a broader political context are noteworthy here. Firstly, despite the success of the boards, the concept behind them has not been extended to cover the whole of rural Britain, or even all the remoter areas of Britain. The Development Commission has far fewer powers and resources to employ in England than have the HIDB and MWD in Scotland and Wales. Political legitimization for the Celtic regions is obviously, therefore, an important factor behind their special treatment in this instance. Secondly, HIDB and MWD themselves are under increasing pressure because of Thatcherite policies at central government level. MWD, for example, has already had

to change its strategy consequent on the loss of central government regional aid from its area. In many different ways, these boards are having to change their role in response not only to the changing expectations of government but also to the veiled threat of resource cuts or even termination of the agencies in their current form. Thus Pettigrew's (1987) recent account of industrial development in Mid Wales reflects the shift from grant-aid to marketing-aid in line with what he describes as the political roller-coaster'. It could be that the high profile and in most respects successful interventions by these public sector agencies will in the end be their downfall in a political regime which increasingly seems to favour the market rather than the planning policy.

7 . CONCLUSION : THE CHANGING ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

As a final comment to this paper it should be stressed that the ability of local government to encourage development in marginal rural areas is becoming increasingly constrained during the Thatcher era of government (1979 —). Over the last nine years there have been significant shifts in intergovernmental relations and in government attitude to planning. All of these shifts have altered the state's ability and willingness to intervene in rural communities.

During this period, central government has assumed increasing levels of power over local government, using legislation advice and financial control to restrict the autonomy of local governments to intervene in their areas. In spite of this trend of centralisation, the responsibility for service delivery in most key areas of the welfare state—including housing, education and social services—remains with the local authorities and has thus become further removed from the centre of political power and local agencies have become increasingly reliant on a form of planning by opportunism', often having to harness community self-help as their only available instrument of activity.

A further rolling back of the welfare state has occurred in shifting publicprivate sector relations. In particular, privatisation targets have been seized as they have become attainable, and although the impacts of privatisation are as yet largely in the realm of conjecture, some outcomes may be hinted at:

"both in terms of ideology and in terms of pragmatics there does seem to be a strong case for arguing that rural areas are often a poor arena of competition and that the least affluent rural people will be disadvantaged by the excesses of nationwide policies of privatisation" (Bell and Cloke, 1989).

Therefore, not only can the privatisation of state services be seen as an effective reduction in the scope of the welfare state in Britain, but it can also be seen as a further limitation of the ability of public sector agencies to shape and invest in community development in rural (and other areas). In this way, the political impacts

of social recomposition, and the ideological and pragmatic policy outcomes of Thatcherism merge in a public sector hands—off' approach which increasingly transfers responsibility for community development to the private sector and the laws of the market—place.

Two broad outcomes of changing governmental relations should be stressed here. First, we are witnessing the demise of local authorities at the county level as agencies of community development. Under the public choice theories favoured by new right political groups, the market—place is seen as the central mechanism for decisions regarding the allocation of goods and services. Moreo ver, the efficient operation of the market is seen as being hindered by representative democracy and public—sector bureaucracy. Local government can thus be tagged as wasteful, inefficient and profligate—characteristics which can be rectified by centrally—imposed policies of privatisation (especially contracting out), deregulation, and the fragmentation of administrative units. County councils in Britain are under direct threat from this political analysis. The opting—out by schools from council control, the deregulation of bus transport (and consequent breakdown of regulated and integrative transport planning by county councils) and the proposed changes to town and country planning procedures (effectively removing the county council's role) will all serve to emasculate an agency which has traditionally been viewed as one of the major forces for rural community development in Britain.

The second outcome of changing governmental relations is the rise of antiplanning which seems to be required as a new political economic environment for the current and projected rounds of economic environment for the current and projected rounds of economic restructuring. The old readiness to intervene in economic and land use change is being replaced by particular forms of planning deregulation, including:

- i) the deregulation of planning itself including a reduced role for strategic planning, and thus greater opportunity for developers to bring direct pressure on lower—order district councils (often through the bribe' of planning gain); an easing of development control procedures on some agricultural land; the as yet foggy idea of simplified planning zones in unspecified rural areas where a general permission for development will giveprimacy to private developers over any public interest in development; and the reduced role of major planning inquiries.
- ii) the deregulation of housing development with the removal of theoretical limits on housing development (but important locational differences exist here between the SE and elsewhere); the increasing obligation on planners to find suitable development land in their jurisdiction; and the increasing success with which major developers are appealing against local authority refusal to develop.

- iii) the deregulation of commercial and industrial development with increasing freedom granted to out-of-town developments, motorway corridor developments, and any industrial development which will secure new employment in the area (particularly outside the London fringe).

The sum total of these changes in governmental relations has been an ideological, financial and pragmatic limitation on intervention by planning authorities and stat-sector servicing agencies in the development of infrastructure and facilities in rural localities. Losses of rural services, rural housing problems, and wider symptoms of rural disadvantage have gone largely unnoticed in a political climate of market-orientation and self-help. It will take a considerable political sea change to reverse these trends by which local government is finding it increasingly difficult to intervene effectively in problematic rural areas.

NOTE

Some of the material for this paper is drawn from the author's previously published work, viz:

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TABLES

Table 1
Trends of population change, 1951-61-71

	Rural & Change Districts			Total	
	in			No.	%
	England (%)	Wales (%)	Scotlans (%)		
Accelerated depopulation	4.4	22.0	34.3	99	14.9
Reduced depopulation	7.8	22.0	22.2	89	13.3
Reversed depopulation	23.2	23.7	15.7	140	21.0
Reversed growth	2.2	6.8	9.1	31	4.6
Reduced growth	14.9	6.8	7.6	80	12.0
Accelerated growth	47.5	18.7	11.1	228	34.2
	100.0	100.0	100.0	667	100.0

Source: Woodruffe (1976)

Table 2
Population change in rural local authorities, 1961-81, by region

Region	No. of districts	1981 popu- lation (000s)	Percentage population change		
			1961-71	1971-81	Difference
Scotland	24	998	-1.9	9.6	11.5
Wales	13	583	0.6	6.8	6.2
North	6	276	1.0	4.3	3.3
Yorkshre & Humberside	7	453	10.4	12.0	1.6
East Midlands	8	560	9.2	10.1	0.9
South West	20	1.368	10.3	11.0	0.7
West Midlands	8	427	7.7	8.1	0.4
East Anglia	12	1.035	14.5	12.9	-1.6
South East	4	357	21.1	12.1	-9.0
All rural districts	102	6.056	7.5	10.2	2.7
Great Britain	458	54.129	5.3	0.3	-5.0

Source: Champion (1981)

Table 3

Population change in rural local authorities, 1961-81, by type of district					
Region Cluster	No. of districts	1981 population (000s)	Percentage population change		
			1961-71	1971-81	Difference
Rural Wales & Scottish Islands	16	645	-0.2	7.0	7.2
Rural, mainly West	32	2.009	7.2	8.8	1.6
Rural, mainly East	31	2.411	15.0	12.7	-2.3
Rural, mainly Scotland	23	911	-1.9	9.3	11.1
Sub-Total	102	6.056	7.5	10.2	2.7
Rural Growth areas	31	2.872	22.0	8.6	-13.4
Total	133	8.928	11.8	9.7	-2.1

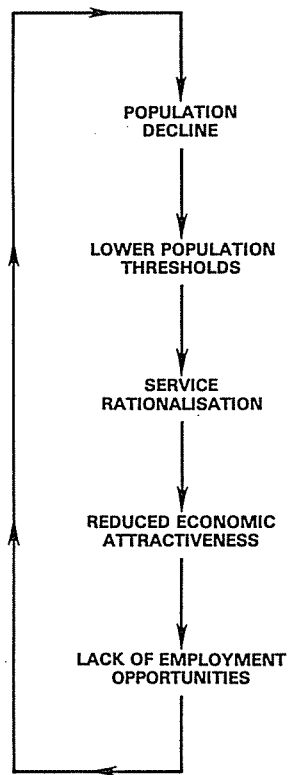
Source: Champion (1981)

FIGURES

- Figure 1 Rurality In England and Wales, 1987
Source: Cloke & Edwards (1986)
- Figure 2 England And Wales: Population Trends 1951-61 and 1961-71
Source: Woodruffe (1976)
- Figure 3 Scotland: Population Trends 1951-61 and 1961-71
Source: Woodruffe (1976)
- Figure 4 Factors & Influencing Depopulation And Repopulation
Source: Cloke (1986)
- Figure 5 Rural Development Agencies And Areas
Source: after Gilg (1985)

Figure 1

Vicious Circle of Depopulation



Macro-scale factors likely to influence repopulation

- EARLY RETIREMENT
- INCREASED UNEMPLOYMENT
- LONG DISTANCE COMMUTING
- INCREASED BIRTH RATE
- DECENTRALISED SERVICES
- MOBILE SERVICES
- INCREASED ACCESS TO CENTRALISED SERVICES
- RAISED STANDARD OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT
- SUBSIDY OF - Employers
Services
Housing
- INDUSTRIAL DECENTRALISATION
- RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT
- AGRICULTURAL LAND USE CHANGE
- LABOUR INTENSIVE AGRICULTURE
- ALTERNATIVE LIFE-STYLES

Figure 2

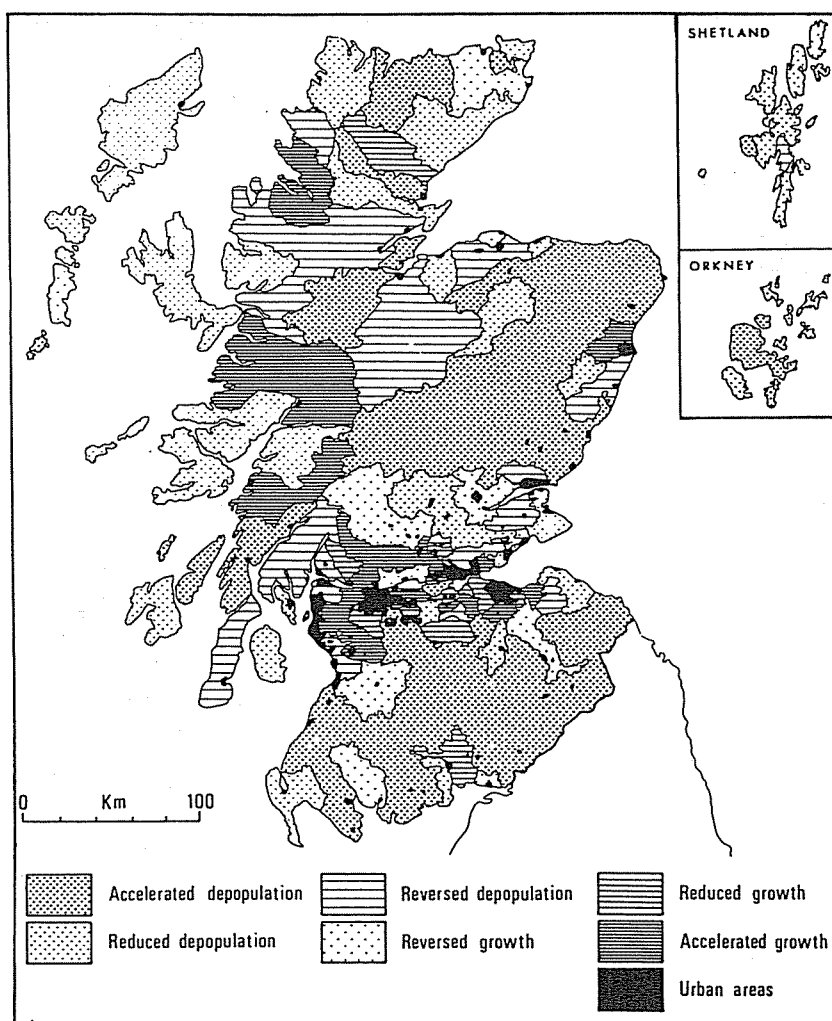


Figure 3

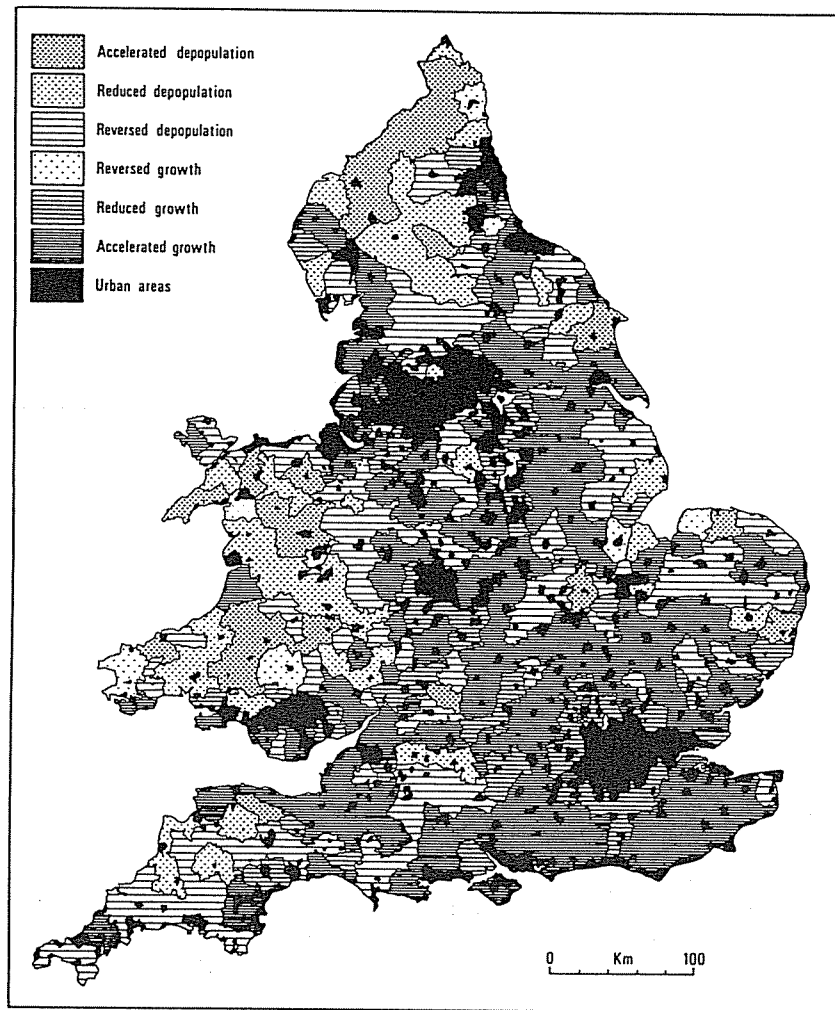


Figure 4

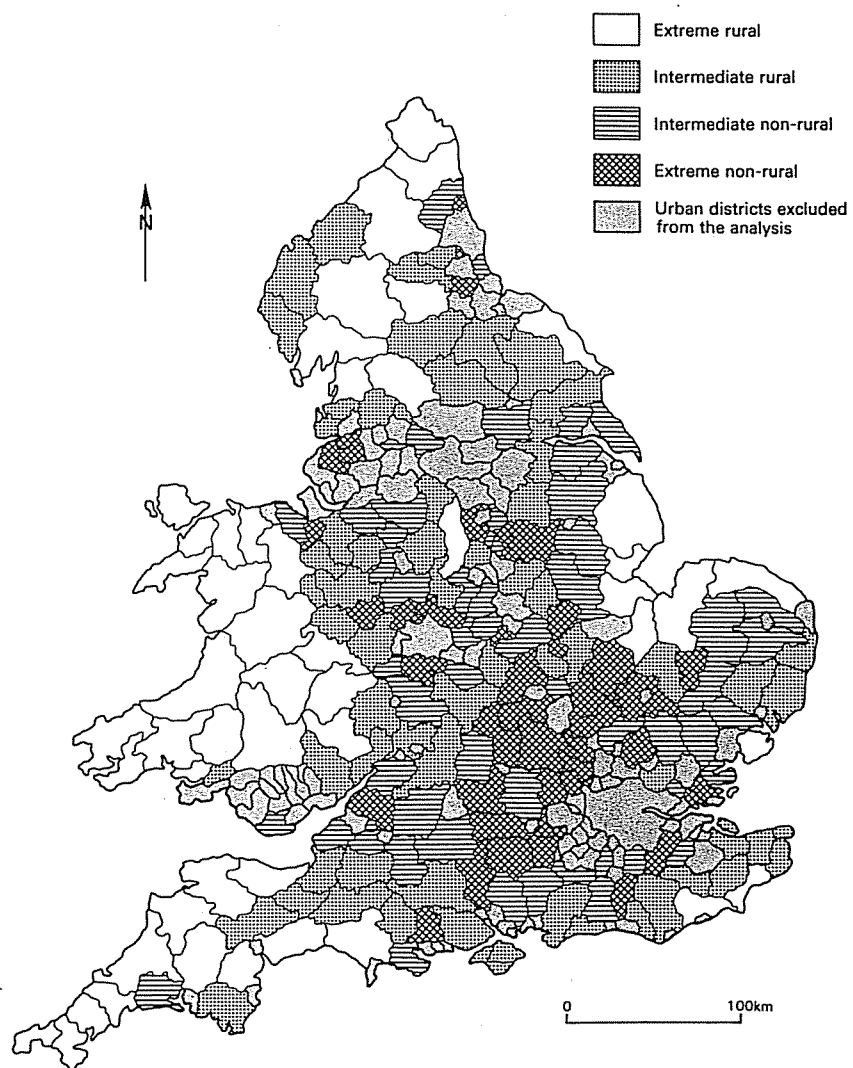


Figure 5

