About this newsletter

This is the fifth and final newsletter about the Grey and Pleasant Land? research project. It provides information about the overall aims of the project and summarises the activities and findings of the six ‘work packages’. You will also find details of the project team and a précis of the issues that were raised at a recent project stakeholder event.

Further information about the project can be found at http://www.newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk/rural-ageing.html

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About the Project

Grey and Pleasant Land is a research project that ran from April 2009 to March 2012. The project aimed to investigate the circumstances and experiences of older people’s inclusion (‘connectivity’) in civic society in rural areas in England and Wales. This project explores the nature and extent of older people’s cultural, spatial, social, economic and technological connectivity in rural community life and the role which these links play in facilitating civic engagement and the realisation of older people as rural community capital. The project is part of the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme, a 7 year multidisciplinary research initiative with the ultimate aim of improving the quality of life of older people. (www.newdynamics.group.shef.ac.uk/)

The project was carried out across six discrete but interlinked work packages, which are described below. Public participation and engagement was embedded in the project through various mechanisms including links with a range of non-academic partner organisations, a specially convened older people’s panel, working with members of the New Dynamics of Ageing Older Peoples Reference Group and an end of project stakeholder meeting.

Much of the data collection for the project has focussed on six case study sites across Wales and southwest England, as shown in the map on page 2. These were chosen to reflect a distinct set of characteristics relating to three area types: a remote and deprived area; a less remote and deprived area; and a relatively affluent and accessible area.
Work Package One. The Connectivity of Older People in Rural Areas: An Overview

Research Team
Nigel Curry, University of the West of England (UWE)
Vanessa Burholt, University of Swansea
Rhiannon Fisher, University of Gloucestershire
Simon Evans, University of Worcester

Aims and Objectives
This work package was based upon a community survey of three rural communities in south west England and three in Wales. The aim of the surveys was to understand how rural elders were engaging with localities both in terms of social participation and civic engagement.

Methods
Conducted in the summer of 2009 in three rural areas in England and three in Wales described as ‘remote’, ‘less remote’ and ‘in the influence of the city region’ (see map).

All people over the age of 60 were eligible to be interviewed.

Letters were sent to each of the communities in advance of interviewing and liaison with local organisations such as parish councils was undertaken.

150 face-to-face doorstep interviews were conducted in each of the locations with a pro-forma questionnaire.

Key Findings
Active participation
The surveys show that not everyone by any means takes an active part in community life (Figure 1). Two questions were asked in this area: “do you undertake any activities that involve assisting others?”, and “do you undertake any voluntary work?” Some 47% of those responding to the first of these questions felt that they did assist others and 38% claimed that they did undertake some form of voluntary work. Some 28% of respondents claimed to do both.

![CASE STUDY SITES - WALES AND ENGLAND](image_url)

![Figure 1. Participation In Civic Activities (%)](chart_url)
Statistically, this is higher for married people than for those living on their own, and reduces with age (35% of 60 – 69 year olds are active, 4% of over 90 year olds are active) and health (36% of people who consider themselves healthy are active, 13% of those who consider themselves to be in very poor health are active)

The strongest statistical relationships for being ‘active’ are former occupational status (38% of most senior positions are active but only 25% of ‘elementary occupations’) and levels of qualification (55%) of those with a postgraduate qualification are active but only 15% with no formal qualification).

There are only weak statistical relationships between activity and remoteness and no statistically valid relationships at all between active participation and length of residence, wealth and levels of ‘friendship, despite other studies finding these to have an influence.

**Active participation: reasons why not**
Of those not undertaking active participation over 84% said that they did not particularly want to. Only marital status and age were significant influences over this response. The reasons for this are in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 – factors influencing non-involvement in active community participation.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not interested</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations in health</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of time</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of access to transport</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of money</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling unsafe</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t get on with those already involved</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Critically, a lack of interest is the main driver. This has implications for policy that seeks to get more people actively involved.

**Degrees of involvement in community**
The literature suggests that despite the number of ‘actives’ in a community being in a minority, most people nevertheless do appreciate their communities. Two broad levels of appreciation can be distinguished that stop short of active involvement: a satisfaction from simply being in a community and a clear sense of belonging to a community.

We’ve called active participation bestowing so that we have three b’s! We designed questions to tease out these differences and the results are shown in table 2. These are responses to a question about ‘community’, where the figure shows responses about which more than 30% of respondents ‘strongly agreed’.

**Table 2 - differential attachment to community amongst rural elders in England and Wales**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>View on community</th>
<th>% strongly agreeing</th>
<th>Type of attachment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe and secure in my own home</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>Being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People around here are willing to help their neighbours</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Bestowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel safe to go out on my own after it gets dark</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People in this community can be trusted</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My community is clean and tidy</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I live in a community which cares for people when they become sick or frail</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Bestowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to find out about what health care services and information are available</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Belonging</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
By a considerable margin, the most important attachment to community relates to ‘being’: the community is safe and secure (63% of respondents strongly agree). Three of the five most common characterisations of community relate to ‘being’, and ‘belonging’ characteristics are at the bottom of this list.

Table 3 – characteristics of a sense of belonging to the community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having low levels of crime</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a feeling of space around you</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being surrounded by beautiful physical landscape</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in a community that is a quiet place to live</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having good neighbours</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing people in your community</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having friends nearby</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having people in my community recognise me and talk to me</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing things for others</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having family nearby</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having good access to social services and other support agencies</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being close to amenities and services</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having others who will do things for you</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a place of worship</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having clubs and organisations that you belong to</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being in a community that is easy to get around</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in a community that has good weather/climate</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second most important characteristic of community, however, was a ‘bestowing’ one.

Belonging
The question that asked specifically about ‘belonging’ was “what gives you a sense of belonging in your community?” The ‘very important’ responses are in table 3.

All responses of 70% and above relate to the place rather than the people (neighbourhoods rather than neighbouring), indicating the primacy of ‘being’ over ‘belonging’ or ‘bestowing’.

Significantly lower responses (in the 50% - 60% band) relate to aspects of ‘belonging’: being recognised, knowing people and having friends nearby. ‘Bestowing’, in the form of doing things for others, appears to be accorded a much lower priority: only 40% of the survey felt that this was very important. The other responses are lower than 40% and are a mixture of belonging and bestowing with a smaller element of being in these categories.

Work Package 1: Implications for policy, practice and public engagement

In what areas would any additional funding from government have the greatest impact in improving community participation amongst rural older people?

Are policies for ‘the Big Society’ anything new?

What kinds of things are likely to lead to greater active participation in community life amongst rural older people?
The only exception to this pattern, again, is ‘having good neighbours’. Although this is still less important than the four measures of ‘being’, (69% of respondents felt it to be very important) as a mixture of belonging and bestowing, neighbourliness appears to be a significant part of community for rural elders.

Work Package Two
Rural Memories of Culture and Community

Research Team
C. Hennessy, A. Phippen, G. Lankshear (Plymouth), Y. Staelens, P. Howard (Bournemouth)

Aims and Objectives
This work package has examined how older people’s participation in cultural and leisure activities is patterned across the life course and how these patterns affect participation in later life. It has also aimed to identify factors that act as barriers or facilitators to participation in these activities and the contributions that older rural residents make to the cultural life of their communities. Survey data from WP1 and oral histories designed to collect older people’s accounts of their lifetime leisure participation were used to address research questions around these issues. One element of this project has been an intergenerational oral history project intended to promote awareness of older people’s contributions to rural community culture. Outputs from WP2 have included community-based exhibitions of the project material in visual and audio formats, developed in collaboration with the MA Museum Studies programme at Bournemouth University, and a website showcasing the oral histories. The findings are being used to critically examine the effects of this project in respect to other successful intergenerational oral history projects designed to promote the role of older people as a valued part of cultural heritage.

Methods:
Analysis of WP1 quantitative survey data on activity participation using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Recruitment of three subgroups of participants to take part in oral history interviews focusing on leisure participation from a life course perspective. These included:

- 33 participants from the quantitative survey respondents in the North Cornwall case study area;
- 25 participants from outside of the quantitative survey sample in the Port Isaac community in North Cornwall. These interviews were co-conducted with pairs of children from the Port Isaac Community School as part of an intergenerational community oral history project. The impact of participation in the project on the children’s attitudes towards ageing and older people was evaluated via pre- and post-test survey measures and focus group data;
- 12 older members of the Gypsy Traveller community were interviewed with a culturally adapted version of the oral history interview protocol.

Qualitative data from the oral history interviews was coded and analysed for thematic content.

Key Findings

- Leisure participation was characterised by both continuities and discontinuities in activity patterns across time. These patterns were determined by factors including an individual’s socioeconomic circumstances, education, gender, and by on- and off-time life events (e.g., the disruptions of World War II, divorce, children leaving home, widowhood).

- Later life was typically described as a period of continuing or renewed interests in leisure pursuits that involved adaptations to one’s circumstances and abilities in older age (e.g., having more or less discretionary time, changes in health).

- Watching television, reading books, and listening to the radio were among the leisure activities that respondents reported engaging in on a daily basis; gardening and taking walks in the countryside were also common activities among respondents. The frequency of participation in these leisure activities declined with age.
Leisure activities in later life also functioned as a means of creating social capital (networks of social ties, reciprocity and trust) within communities through activities such as volunteering.

Work Package Two: Implications for policy, practice and public engagement

How can leisure participation in later life be used to create social capital ('community glue') in rural areas?

What can local agencies and other groups do to encourage and support participation of older people in cultural and leisure activities in rural areas?

How might the kinds of activities and outputs produced in this work (intergenerational oral history project website and exhibitions) be used to promote the participation and inclusion of older people in rural areas?

Hence, in addition, the work for WP3 has added to knowledge about how carbon-intensive travel by rural elders needs to be, and the wider implications of substituting virtual mobility for movement. Therefore a key output of WP3 is a series of practical toolkits to support the diversification of mobility and transport mode choice, to enable older people, practitioners and researchers to support sustainable mobility and mobility-related quality of life: allowing full and active participation and engagement in society through a combination of less carbon-intensive physical travel options and effective substitution of travel where appropriate with virtual mobility. These are being made available through traditional and web-based media.

Methods:
Data from WP1 was subjected to additional analysis using descriptive and inferential statistics.

Thirty eight people who had responded to the WP1 survey across the six case-study areas were recruited to take part in semi-structured qualitative interviews lasting around one hour each. The focus was to understand how transport options facilitated or restricted community engagement. Coding and thematic analysis was carried out.
An additional ten survey respondents were recruited to take part in phenomenological interviews in participants’ homes, lasting upwards of an hour. The focus was the spatial dimensions of what it is like to live in a rural area and the everyday experiences of traversing rural space. Transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis.

Seven people were recruited from outside of the quantitative survey sample specifically to increase the representation of seniors who had recently given up car driving.

**Key Findings**

- Spatial mobility was variously experienced by the participants as any of the ways that personal life activities normally required the ‘traverse’ of space, including ‘literal mobility’, ‘virtual mobility’, ‘potential mobility’ and ‘imaginative mobility’.

- The transport and mobility needs of older people living in rural areas could not be meaningfully understood without understanding their well-being priorities, the kinds of movement that constituted well-being, and how this related to the phenomenon of ‘dwelling’, which included their feeling of ‘at-homeness’ in their rural environment.

- The connection between well-being and rural place can be summarised as **rural living being a portal to well-being in older people**, constituted by two interrelated experiences: the importance of dwelling and slowing down in older age, and the importance of a ‘rich textured locale’ for the well-being of rural older people.

- In practice, nearly four-fifths of the quantitative survey respondents did not regard transport as a barrier to participation in local community activities, although we should not ignore the important minorities which found transport to be a severe limitation (5%) or in fact prevented involvement (7%).

- Moreover, a statistically-significant age difference was identified: nearly half of those respondents who were over 80 reported some degree of difficulty connecting due to transport and 15% said they were prevented from being involved for this reason.

- The factor of car availability also showed a statistically significant difference, with two-thirds of those without car access reporting some difficulties, but only 15% of those with a car available.

- Evidence was also found of those with cars available needing to limit their use of cars due to rising motoring costs, limitations to driving ability, or due to the vehicle being used by someone else.

- Nearly two-thirds of the regular trips for community activity were reported to be less than a mile long, and many of the rest shorter than five miles: a finding which challenges the commonplace assumption that all journeys in rural areas are long and require cars or buses to be undertaken.

- Over three-quarters of respondents had walked for a trip of more than 15 minutes in the last week. A similar number had used a car.

- Buses, cycles, taxis and mobility scooters had all been used by many fewer respondents in the week prior to the survey, less than a fifth in each case, although looking over the last month or year these means of transport all showed higher levels of use. Each of these means of transport may of course be very important for the mobility of particular older citizens.

- Some respondents reported having used five or six means of transport in the last year: as in the case of younger age and urban groups, the travel choices of older citizens show flexibility and variety over the period of a year.

- Considering travel for all types of purpose, not just community connectivity, approaching half of respondents reported at least some difficulty accessing at least one type of destination, whilst around 15% indicated great difficulty accessing at least one destination type.

- Facilities most often identified as problematic to reach were hospitals and cinemas, the police and museums (around a fifth of respondents
identified these), whereas relatively low levels of problem were reported for post offices, doctors, food shops, petrol stations and libraries; perhaps surprising given the media focus on the accessibility of some of these services. Banks and dentists represented an intermediate category whilst, the least problematic category were village halls and places of worship, which still tend to be found in most rural settlements.

→ There were no statistically significant differences between three types of rural areas in terms of difficulty of accessing facilities. However, those over 80 were much more likely to report difficulties (one-third of respondents).

→ Movement within the community is a key valued, facilitator of social and environmental interaction and inclusion: informal, unplanned contact on the bus, or whilst walking, cycling, or ‘scootering’; observing the latest changes in the built and natural environment first hand.

→ The desire for community interaction whilst travelling, combined with the short distance of many trips, the frequency of walking behaviour already and the limited availability of cars for some suggest a more significant role for walking, and to some extent cycling, is both possible and necessary.

→ Rates of walking and cycling are currently suppressed by concerns about road safety.

to improve infrastructure and manage the threat from fast-moving vehicles to make walking more practical, pleasant and safe.

Cycling and scooter use offer all of most of the same benefits, for smaller groups of older people.

Buses are also important for a significant minority in accessing facilities further afield, and for community interaction. Again, walking is often required to access a bus stop, reinforcing the importance of this other mode. Limited and falling bus subsidy means that traditional public transport supply is falling. It is unclear how far community transport can replace this capacity and provide for rising demand. Policy consideration needs to be given to flexible and efficient models of collective mobility provision in rural areas, taking advantage of the best available vehicle and operations management technologies.

Cars remain important to many older people in rural areas, but the availability of this travel resource is not evenly distributed, and the total availability of cars may fall with the growth in the number of people over 75, rising motoring costs and increasing concern about the safety regulation of drivers. Opportunities for more sharing of cars in rural areas should be given greater consideration.

**Work Package 3: Implications for policy, practice and public engagement**

Mobility policy for older citizens in rural areas needs to consider travel for essential social and community needs which are important for health and wellbeing, alongside essential physiological needs (such as access to food and healthcare). Walking in particular is a mode available to most, and suitable for the length of many of the journeys considered in the study. It has both physical and mental health benefits through movement within the social and physical environment. More needs to be done
the project focused on connectivity and the intersections between place, space, age and identity. Connectivity and identity are central concepts within the project, developing an understanding of how sense of belonging may be negotiated within a rural context. Connectivity can be understood as the ways in which individuals identify and connect themselves with others and the ways in which this may be filtered by aspects of their age and sexuality. Identify and the ways in which older lesbians and gay men chose to disclose their sexuality as part of their identity exert influence on the ways in which individuals make connections within the wider community.

**Methods**

A range of methods were used to generate the storied biographies of older lesbians and gay men about their rural experiences. These biographies then formed the basis for a script used in the creation of the short, professionally made film *Rufus Stone* which starred the TV, film and theatre actor William Gaunt and was directed by Josh Appignanasi (*The Infidel*).

**Key Findings**

→ Although the laws changed regarding the illegality of homosexuality in 1967, men whose sexuality identity developed before that change were profoundly marked by growing up during the period when homosexuality was illegal and punishable by imprisonment.

→ Although it is often assumed that those living in a rural setting have always resided *in situ*, in fact most of the people interviewed for the study moved from village to village, or village to town, village or town to the city and back again over their life course. Being born in one particular rural location and spending a lifetime there is extremely rare. It may in fact be the case that many who complain of ‘incomers’ in rural areas were, at one time, incomers themselves.

Prejudice was reported against gay men and lesbian citizens, particularly in small rural communities.

→ A secondary danger was uncovered in an attitude of ‘we don’t like to mention it’ regarding the sexuality of others amongst rural dwellers – a rural version of a ‘don’t ask don’t tell’ mentality.

Many older gay and lesbian citizens need to negotiate ‘acceptance’ in rural areas by being extremely cautious about to whom and when they ‘came out’, if at all.

→ Negotiation with service providers also is often either fraught with difficulties or non-existent in many of the reported cases.

→ Stories of suicide amongst older gay men were prevalent in several of the accounts that participants gave. The given reasons for these tragedies ranged from a profound inability to accept one’s sexuality, being ‘outed’ or fear of being ‘outed’ in the local community or becoming overwhelmed by family pressures.

**Work Package 4 (1): Implications for policy, practice and public engagement**

The project aimed to empower older lesbians and gay men in rural areas through a collaborative multi-method participatory action research design that continues to embrace inclusionary principles in its dissemination plan. The projected impact of the film is to begin to change minds, change attitudes and help to build communities where tolerance and understanding are keys to connectivity and to increasing the value of the social capital of all citizenry in rural settings. By using film and the facility of ‘entertainment’ to suspend disbelief, the potential to change hearts and minds becomes possible. The Project is currently seeking funding to screen the film and hold discussions in rural communities in south west England and Wales via a mobile cinema and village and town meetings.

Problems of isolation, mobility, friendship and support networks, along with issues of lack of service provision, are all discussed amongst older gay men and lesbians, much in the same way that they are concerns for the larger heterosexual ageing population. Living amongst an unfriendly or even hostile population of contemporaries, however, has resulted in a cohort of rural dwelling gay and lesbian citizens who have developed
particular coping skills to deal with their environment and its social resources. This includes managing stigma and discrimination from an early age.

Whether real or imagined, class is also a major component in many of the stories reported. Class and perceptions of class are issues that came up over and over again in the life stories of participants. In fact, class prejudice is often more easily accepted than homophobia as the “excuse” for gay hostility in the countryside. Further investigation of the impact of class as an exclusionary factor alongside homophobia, heterosexism and age is needed to understand better the complexities of rural identity for older people, including older lesbian and gay citizens.

A ‘Method Deck’ of cards is being produced through a grant from the Big Lottery Fund. This follow-on project will provide a playful tool for use by service providers and community groups to begin to deal with prejudice against and isolation of older gay and lesbian citizens within community groups and services. Through the use of the deck of cards, participants are able to begin to confront misunderstanding and misinformation and begin to become more inclusive within their interface and interconnectivity with older gay and lesbian citizens.

**Work Package 4 (Project 2)**

**Arts-led approach to understanding rural older adults’ experiences in North Cornwall**

**Work Package Personnel:**
Iain Biggs, University of the West of England
Jane Bailey, University of the West of England
Sarah Blowen, University of the West of England
Dan Buzzo, University of the West of England

**Brief Description of Aims:**
Adults’ understandings of, and relationships with, the physical, social and cultural landscapes in which they locate themselves. Focusing on issues of place and identity, it aimed to pay particular attention to the diversity of relationships to lived landscapes, including perspectives of people born and bought up in the north Cornwall area and those who moved in later in life.

**Methods:**

*Walking, talking and joining in;*
Walking, talking and photographing with north Cornwall walking group, Stroll Back the Years – focusing on interactions with the environment and subsequent conversations.

In depth conversations with selected people aged 55+ in north Cornwall, including people born in the area and those recently arrived, in order to understand their perspectives.

Joining in community activities and events to understand the roles older adults take in village life.

*Generating opportunities for creative interactions;*
Children devised and asked questions of older adults invited to their primary school – and then produced creative work drawing on these conversations.

An open afternoon and presentations in a Village Hall enabled group conversations to take place in response to artworks and research activities shared there.
People were invited to take part in small-scale creative projects, for example, painting onto printed aerial-images of north Cornwall, adding to a list of *Sounds of St Breward* and sharing photographs of the area.

*Creatively exploring the research material;*
The above approaches produced photographs, audio recordings, text, video clips, maps, drawings and images - generated by the researchers, older adults, and community groups - which contain layers of potential meanings that were explored through creative processes.

In creative works, such as *Either Side of Delphy, Bridge* and *Pack o’ Cards*, selected words, sounds and images from the research were placed side by side.
side in sequences or ‘threads’, which were then ‘interwoven’ to produce new ‘patterns’ - inviting the viewer to make connections between the material and to contribute their own understandings to it.

Key Findings
The researchers are still exploring the rich material generated and hence the ‘findings’ presented are tentative.

→ ‘Joining in’ and leading
In the communities with which we interacted, older adults fulfill key roles in community life: organising and running community events, caring for the physical landscape, conserving local history (and so a certain sense of identity), promoting community engagement and planning for the future.

→ People and place enmeshed through everyday living
Some people are enmeshed within the landscape, through lives spent working and living in it, and hence are not accustomed to see and discuss it as a separate ‘thing out there’.

Remembering and sharing deep knowledge of the landscape, gained, for example, through working on Bodmin Moor, can generate emotions in the present and enrich the listener’s sense of the place.

Attitudes to parts of the natural world, particularly specific animals and birds, was a point of difference between some older people.

→ Fruity relations
Although surface tension was expressed between some older people born in the area and some ‘incomers’, these views were understood within the context of daily lives that included community activities with a cross-section of individuals. It was also noted that these views included requests for more participation by both sections of the community. In the village in which we spent time, we found community groups that combined long-term residents’ deep knowledge of ‘place’ with the resources of some of those more recently arrived (e.g. fundraising skills) for mutual benefit.

The combined perspectives resulted in understanding of how the particulars of the past are playing out in the present, and how the ways in which the community functions is shaping their futures.

Work Package 4 (2): Implications for policy, practice and public engagement

How can metropolitan policy-makers be encouraged to recognize their own ‘urbanist’ presuppositions so as to tune their listening to the diverse voices and conversations of rural contexts?

How can conditions for the kinds of fruitful relations based in sharing experiences that we have witnessed, be encouraged in a range of rural contexts - for example, through cultural activity?

Is there scope for ‘embedded’ brokering organisations to partner communities/representatives when working with larger institutions or projects?

How can we encourage younger people to see themselves as future older people and to connect with the young person in older adults, for example through the mutual generation of shared locally or regionally-based narratives?
Work Package Five
The Well-Being and Welfare of Older People in Rural Areas

Research Team
Paul Milbourne & Shane Doheny (Cardiff University)

Aims and Objectives
Focusing on the material, socio-cultural and physical dimensions of well-being, this work package examined the nature and extent of material deprivations experienced by older people in the study areas, and the relations between these deprivations and social (dis-)connectivities associated with different levels and forms of social inclusion/exclusion and social capital. A range of factors were considered relating to the material circumstances of older people on low-income, including their quality of life, personal mobilities, health and well-being, financial situations, housing circumstances, access to services, as well as their perceptions and experiences of local living and their civic participation.

Methods
Conducted additional analysis of WP1 quantitative survey data focusing on income and quality of life data, and comparing this with data gathered by the Wales Rural Observatory

Recruited 63 of the quantitative survey respondents in the six case-study areas to participate in semi-structured qualitative interviews lasting around one hour each. These interviews are being analysed using thematic coding techniques.

Made approaches to community or parish councils in the six case study areas, and carried out semi-structured scoping interviews with nine participants in five of these areas

Nine of these interviewees agreed to keep diaries for one month to record their activities and experiences in this period. Follow up interviews were then carried out with these participants

The Research Assistant also took photographs in each of the case study areas

Carried out semi-structured policy related interviews with senior executives in local authority social services departments in all six case study areas

We also carried out semi-structured policy related interviews with council representatives (five county council, and one district council representative) in all six case study areas

Carried out policy related interviews with Age UK personnel in five case study areas

Key Findings
→ Continued / increasing significance of poverty among older people in rural places
→ Income plays an important part in shaping experiences of later life and age influences experiences of poverty
→ Complex relations between material poverty and social exclusion, including employment histories (and futures), dynamics of poverty, the social and natural contexts of place, and local cultures of rurality and moral discourses of welfare

Work Package Five: Implications for policy, practice and public engagement

How should policy/practitioners deal with the apparent contradictions between material hardships, cultural denials of poverty and social inclusion?

To what extent does social and community inclusion problematise anti-poverty actions?
Work Package Six
Connecting rural stakeholders using the Internet

Work package team:
Roy Jones, George Giarchi, I. Maramba (Plymouth), Janet Smithson (Exeter)

Brief Description of aims:
Work package 6 aimed to explore connectivity of stakeholders in rural ageing within the UK and internationally, building on the involvement of collaborating stakeholder groups in this research programme.

Activities included making findings from all work packages available and open to comment on the project website; gathering views on the relevance of the project findings to stakeholders from south west England, Wales and North America; and developing the use of online technologies and older participants’ preferences, experiences and patterns of use of synchronous (webcast supported chat room) and asynchronous (discussion forum and email) and the effect these methods have on levels of participation.

Questions explored include: how do methods of recruitment and technological methods affect participation and engagement between individuals and groups? The findings from this WP are being be used to develop guidelines on the engagement of older rural stakeholders.

Methods:
- Inclusion of questions on Internet use in the WP1 survey.
- Recruitment of older people, members of support organisations and academics, through online ‘snowballing’ of contacts.
- Invitations to take part in the discussion forum, live webcast events, and email discussion.
- Invitations to Grey and Pleasant Land? Work package leads to present their findings for discussion.

Key Findings:
- The WP1 survey confirmed that almost half of older people do not have broadband access. It was possible to recruit for the study through email. Just over half the stakeholders participated in synchronous live webcasts and slightly less in the asynchronous forum. The timed synchronous events generated more interest despite greater technical difficulty.

- Topics generating the most discussion were practical issues such as transport and Internet access. The work package was started ‘too early’ when there were insufficient results to discuss. When momentum was lost it was difficult to restart. When ‘restarted’ towards the end of the GAPL project, short timescale events over one week were more effective in engaging stakeholders.

- Discussion over one-week using an email listserv was the most effective in engaging stakeholders and was the most practical and least costly method.

Work Package Five: Implications for policy, practice and public engagement

Online engagement of stakeholders in rural ageing should use email over a defined period of a few days.

Even so, this is likely only to engage older people who are already engaged in other aspects of community life.

More needs to be done to ensure digital inclusion of older people in rural areas.
The Canadian Connection

The Grey and Pleasant Land project is linked to Canadian researchers at the University of Alberta who have recently conducted a national study of older people in rural areas in Canada. This partnership has been further expanded under a new joint initiative funded by the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR) and the New Dynamics of Ageing programme. This new three-year project, 'Connectivity of older adults in rural communities: Health in context', is led by Professor Norah Keating at the University of Alberta.

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The project focuses on the health of older adults in relation to their inclusion ('connectivity') in rural communities in Canada and the UK. This research will increase our understanding of how social relationships and engagement in rural places enhance or constrain quality of life in older age, and what constitutes ‘age-friendly’ communities across Canadian and UK rural settings.

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Stakeholder Event

In February 2012 the project hosted a stakeholder event in Bristol. This was attended by a range of non-academic partners, older people and members of the project team. The purpose of this event was to share the findings from the project and discuss how they might be used to influence policy and practice. The day was very successful and closed with a panel question and answer session that focused on key messages from the project findings. A sample of these is summarised below.

Question: Under the Big Society initiative, do we need at least one paid local person to coordinate things on the ground?
Answers:

• Yes, in that it creates a formal contract under which someone is responsible for making things happen.

• The USA version of the Big Society has adopted the practice of paying local coordinators.

• It is important to remember there is no Big Society initiative in Wales. Localism brings the danger of losing national oversight.

• Older people need to represent their communities, but this is seen as a low priority by government. Their voice is needed to inform local partnership bodies.

Lots of community groups are folding, with new organisations replacing established grass roots groups.

Question: What can be done to make transport provision more integrated in local areas?
Answers:

• Transport decisions have tended to be based on silo thinking. For example, major provider organisations such as First have not been invited to key discussion and decision making forums. There is a tendency for the transport sector to focus on urban areas. Community transport organisations have started bidding for, and winning, commercial contracts. We need joined up thinking across sectors.
• In terms of factoring transport into the location of facilities, the NHS needs a more holistic health economics approach that also takes into account telecare and telehealth.

Question: Is it better to be poor in a rural area compared to an urban one?

Answers:
• It is important to consider when policy makers and practitioners should intervene, given that policy interventions often add to the visibility of a problem. The urban literature suggests that people on low incomes report similar experiences and levels of satisfaction to everyone else. The importance of place seems to be more pronounced in rural areas.

• Informal support is effective but it also contributes towards the invisibility of problems.

• The government has focused on the most deprived places as defined by the Index of Social Deprivation, but this doesn’t work in rural areas as it based on clusters of poverty. Owner occupation is the dominant sector for older people in rural areas and fuel poverty is a big issue.

Question: How can arts led methods inform policy makers?

Answers:
• There are some good examples of this approach working; e.g. setting up conversations between professionals and substance users to promote understanding and inform policy.

• There is a substantial literature and evidence base on the health and wellbeing impact of older people’s involvement in cultural activities, by for example increasing social contact and building support networks. Intergenerational contact is also important: there is evidence that younger people’s attitudes towards ageing impact on health outcomes in later life.

• One delegate gave an example of a tank museum where retired engineers work with young offenders and develop mutual respect based on a shared passion. Shared passions are effective in bringing people together.
Grey and Pleasant Land? is an inter-disciplinary project involving researchers from diverse backgrounds and multiple organisations. The full research team is listed below. We would also like to thank the many older people and organisations that contributed to this work.

**Plymouth University**
Catherine Hennessy (Project Director)
Ray Jones | Andy Phippen | Gloria Lankshear George Giarchi

**University of the West of England**
Robin Means (Project Deputy Director)
Nigel Curry | Graham Parkhurst | Iain Biggs |
Charles Musselwhite | Ian Shergold | Jane Bailey |
Dan Buzzo | Sarah Blowden

**Bournemouth University**
Kate Galvin | Kip Jones | Les Todres | Lee-Ann Fenge | Yvette Staelens | Rosie Read | Marilyn Cash | Peter Howard

**Cardiff University**
Paul Milbourne | Shane Doheny

**University of Swansea**
Judith Phillips | Vanessa Burholt

**University of Worcester**
Simon Evans

**University of Gloucestershire**
Rhiannon Fisher

**Exeter University**
Janet Smithson

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Finally we would like to thank everyone who took part in the research, both older people and professionals from a range of areas and settings.

Some of the project team at the Annual Conference of the British Society of Gerontology in Bristol.