



Counter-urbanisation and a politics of place: A coastal community in Cornwall and rural gentrification

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Counterurbanisation
Gentrification
Cornwall
Community change
Rural development
Assemblage
Complex adaptive assemblage

ABSTRACT

This paper uses a case study of Cornwall to address the question of what new politics of place that counter-urbanisation brings about. Counter-urbanisation to Cornwall in the SW of the UK has been popular for decades. Initially it was perceived as a way to repopulate this remote rural region, and challenge its sparse population distribution. Later it became a neo-endogenous growth tool to attract a creative class of dynamic entrepreneurs, and the population has steadily grown since the 1960s. However, Cornwall remains one of the poorest parts of the UK, and poverty and homelessness are endemic. This paper uses ethnographic data to explore the social and economic impact that this has had on a coastal village, the ways that newer residents are socialized into the community, and how the village has responded to challenges maintaining a vibrant village life. The paper will use the concept of the affective assemblage to explore the different imaginaries that participants hold about Cornwall in general and in the village in particular, as it tries to maintain a cohesive community during processes of rural gentrification. The paper uses the concept of the complex adaptive assemblage to show that although the village will remain over time, the question is about whether the community will be liveable for existing inhabitants, and for those who find themselves vulnerable. Furthermore, although it has raised some economic indicators such as the cost of housing, there has been no subsequent improvement in the economy of Cornwall as a whole, and many of the participants in this study discussed how their move was facilitated by their ability to work remotely, generating productivity elsewhere rather than locally.

1. Introduction

There has been a popular trope over several decades of rural studies, which runs something like this. Rural areas are poor, wages are low, and productivity lags behind urban regions. The problem is that we know that innovation and dynamism all happen in places with high population density. Rural areas are a bit sleepy, and lack innovation and dynamism. Therefore, (urban, dynamic) people need to be brought in to rural regions in order to reinvigorate and kick start the economy. Quite aside from the (rural) peripheralisation literature which points out that this perspective owes much to an urban mis-perception of the rural which is embedded in unequal power relations (see Eriksson, 2008; Willett, 2016; Willett, 2021), many academic approaches over the decades have sought to find ways in which to add the innovation and 'knowledge' which the rural allegedly lacks. These have included the counter-urbanisation literature of the 1980s (Dean et al., 1984); through to the 21st century iterations of Neo-endogenous growth (Bosworth & Atterton, 2012); the knowledge economy (Cooke, 2002); and the creative industries (Bell & Jayne, 2010).

This latter movement followed the *Creative Class* of Richard Florida (2002) which pointed to a correlation between creative free-thinkers moving to San Francisco and the birth, growth, and dominance of Silicon Valley's tech sector. Following this book, 'creative' persons were strongly encouraged to relocate to economically depressed regions (which clearly had no creativity) in order to reinvigorate creative dynamism (Herslund, 2012). At a similar time, the 'knowledge economy' in Europe grew from an EU recognition that in the contemporary global economy, productivity would focus on innovative 'knowledges' (Kok, 2006). For rural areas, this meant encouraging 'dynamic entrepreneurs' to relocate their innovative, knowledge-economy businesses, in order to kick-start the knowledge economy in the locality (Willett, 2010). Other scholars pointed out that this took a very particular look at what constituted as 'knowledge', which overlooked the ways that rural knowledges were also important contributors to innovation (Bruckmeier & Tovey, 2008).

In this paper, I question the extent to which counterurbanisation is an effective rural development strategy, using the case study of Cornwall. Cornwall is a peninsula in the far south west, almost entirely surrounded

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.habitatint.2023.102935>

Received 16 June 2023; Received in revised form 27 September 2023; Accepted 28 September 2023

Available online 17 October 2023

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by water. 56% of the population live outside of towns, 42% of whom live in rural settlements (European Network for Rural Development, 2018). It is a strong case study to explore these questions, as it has had an economic policy of counterurbanisation in its various guises, over many decades. This has shifted from an overt policy of population-led growth (Dean et al., 1984; Williams & Champion, 1998) to one which encouraged the inward migration of knowledge economy workers (Willett, 2016). This has been highly successful in as much as that Cornwall has avoided the fate of a shrinking population experienced by many rural areas in Britain and the US, and instead has increased the population from 381,665 in the 1971 census, to 570,300 in 2021.

However, economically it has also been stubbornly resistant to reversing regional economic decline, is the 4th least productive UK region in terms of Gross Value Added (69% UK Averages), has earned incomes of 84% of UK averages and housing is the 21st most expensive part of Britain in terms of housing/income costs (Economic Observatory, 2021). A 2022 report by the Institute of Cornish Studies showed that a couple on a median Cornish wage could only buy an apartment in 6 out of 47 postcode districts (Williams and Lawlor, 2022). Houses are completely unavailable to persons on Cornish incomes. Prior to the UK exit of the European Union, from the time that it became an eligible NUTS 2 region in 1999 Cornwall received the highest levels of Structural Funding (Objective 1, later Convergence) (Willett, 2021). This places Cornwall as one of the economically poorest parts of Western Europe. The combination of high house prices and low wages suggests an unequal distribution of wealth within the Duchy.

The following sections explore the literature on counterurbanisation as a concept, leading to an examination of its apparent twin, rural gentrification. Next, I set out the analytical framework for this study, which uses the concept of the complex adaptive assemblage in order to consider not just the affect and impacts of the counterurbanisation, but what it means for how rural regions are able to adapt moving forward. I use ethnographic-inspired methods to explore the case study of Porthurst (a pseudonym, chosen by the community). Porthurst is a former fishing and farming community, highly popular with summer visitors and inward migrants. In the paper, I make the claim that the village itself will remain and adapt. However, despite a large injection of highly educated and wealthy counterurbanisers, village life is increasingly precarious, making it difficult for well-educated local people to remain. This raises questions about the ways that existing inhabitants are disadvantaged by counterurbanising processes. It also means that we have to ask whether we are trying to improve *places*, or the lives of the *people* that are from those places.

2. Counterurbanisation

The counterurbanisation literature is very broad, mostly covering Europe, with a bit of work about the US, and more recently, has started to include some research on emerging economies and the global south (Gkartziou & Halfacree, 2023). A key theme that emerges is around (economic) power and choice with regards to the decisions about relocating to rural locations, often relating to in-migrant motivations for some form of better quality of life – but which might not all be beneficial for host regions.

We begin this story in a UK context with the seminal work of Dean et al. (1984), who reported on the beginning of a startling new phenomenon. Rural areas began to grow, reversing the population decline that had plagued them since the industrial revolution. In some respects, this shouldn't have been a surprise. 1970s Britain was a major counterurbanisation decade which saw widespread non-metropolitan growth (Champion, 1994). Dean et al. (1984) used a case study of Cornwall, a peninsular in the far south west of the UK, to explore the migration patterns of return migrants, non-return migrants, and non-migrants. Return migrants tended to be a distinctive group, who may have had motivations around cultural affinity and kinship ties, but non-return migrants tended to come from affluent parts of the UK, be retired or

heading towards retirement, and tended to have a high class and cultural capital status. Non-migrants are generally the opposite, occupying a lower socio-economic position with lower educational qualifications. Research in Ireland confirms the motivations of return migrants around culture and kinship, combining these with narratives of counterurbanisation (Laoire, 2007).

This theme of highly educated and affluent in-migrants spans much of the scholarship across the UK and into mainland Europe (Bijker & Haartsen, 2012; Eimermann et al., 2012; Goodwin-Hawkins & Jones, 2022; Hansen & Aner, 2017). Goodwin-Hawkins and Jones (2022) talk about how in rural areas across the EU, middle class people are trading off career against access to lifestyle aspirations which make a middle-class lifestyle more affordable. The authors discuss how peripherality is transformed into 'enchantment'. This theme chimes with research that examines the phenomenon of in-migrant farmers (Ngo & Brklacich, 2014), or hobby farmers (Primdahl, 2014) who are able to use their urban careers and purchasing power to finance this lifestyle change.

However, other scholarship notes a heterogeneity amongst the findings. For example, Remoundou et al. (2016) identify that in their Greek case study, rural areas are more attractive to move to when they are closer to a city, and Hansen and Aner (2017) note from their Danish case study that young people and recent graduates might move to the countryside as a career stepping-stone. Grimsrud's (2011) Norwegian participants were often driven by family needs and financial matters, and other scholars note the pull of family/kinship networks (Scott et al., 2017). There are also challenges to perspectives that say that this is always about urban moves to rural locations. In fact, some studies find a significant amount of rural-rural migration (Scott et al., 2017; Stockdale, 2016).

It is noteworthy that despite the scholarship around the knowledge economy (Kok, 2006) and neo-endogenous growth (Bosworth & Bat-Finke, 2019), the counterurbanisation literature contains little about the idea of in-migrants being able to inject knowledge or social capital (Bosworth & Atterton, 2012) into a region. On the contrary, in an old but still thought-provoking study using longitudinal census data, Williams and Champion (1998) found that the economic fortunes of immigrants, alongside the economy of Cornwall (and unlike that in the comparator of Wiltshire), declined over time. The authors wonder whether Cornwall made in-migrants poor, or whether the characteristics and lifestyle aspirations of in-migrants made Cornwall poor(er). Additionally, it may be that as a policy discourse, counterurbanisation risks 'idealising' rural areas and lifestyles, and can miss underlying structural problems (such as declining birth rates in the case of Japan (Dilley et al., 2022)).

Indeed, the issue of housing and second homes raises a concurrent 'problem' of in-migration, regarding housing affordability (Loeffler & Steinicke, 2007). This is especially an issue for coastal communities post-Covid, which have seen their housing crises intensify as people realise that they can work from home in attractive rural locations (Colomb & Gallent, 2022) and which may feed in to the disparity between earned incomes and house prices (Williams and Lawlor, 2022) that we see in our case study of Cornwall. Barke (2008) argues that the Spanish housing market is differentiated between foreigners (who often intend that one day their second home will become their primary one), and people from Spain. Indeed, the issue of second-home tourism is a significant one which presents a challenge to communities (Eimermann et al., 2019) (particularly following the rise of the short-term lettings market). Here, we start to see housing becoming more unaffordable for local people, who we also know are likely to come from a lower socio-economic background.

In other words, processes of counterurbanisation might lead to processes of displacement, whereby persons with less wealth and fewer choices find their communities no longer accessible. Unlike in the US, the European literature does not seem to venture much onto the territory of gentrification, but this link is made explicitly by Phillips (2010), who connects counterurbanisation with processes of rural gentrification.

Rural gentrification is another important scholarship which given the issues of power and choices raised in the counterurbanisation literature, needs to be addressed further.

3. Gentrification

Gentrification is a way of describing how (usually) bohemians, 'hippies' and artists move into economically depressed areas, beautifying them, creating an artistic cultural scene, which transforms the struggling economy and makes the area much more visually attractive. This then attracts the migration of affluent, middle-class people, raising house prices, and displacing the poorer, usually working class people in the community who find that they are no longer able to remain there. More commonly this process is applied to cities, but sometimes it is used to refer to similar processes of displacement of poorer people from rural areas, by persons with money, and social capital. When we pair this with the counterurbanisation literature where educated, professional persons relocate to economically depressed rural regions, we can see an overlap with processes of gentrification. Counterurbanisation simply places less emphasis on gentrifications first phase of bohemian creativity. Moreover, some of the rural gentrifications literature also opens with professional, middle-class inward migration. We will see below how gentrification is also a deeply political space, raising questions about what rurality is for, the stories told about it, how people are displaced, and the distribution of wealth.

Most earlier sources refer to research from the United States, in particular the Rocky Mountains (Ghose, 2004; Pilgeram, 2021) and the American West (Bryson & Wyckoff, 2010; Hines, 2010). More recently, the concept of *rural* gentrification has begun to be used by European rural research exploring Sweden (Dahlberg, 2020; Eliasson et al., 2015) and Catalonia (Alcendor & Coq-Huelva, 2020). It has even migrated to research in an African context, such as Cavannagh et al.'s (2020) study of the gentrification of the Kenyan landscape. Whilst the politics of class and economic antagonisms remain the same, there are some variations in the life-stages of counterurbanising rural gentrifiers. For example, Eliasson et al. found that some of their Swedish in-migrants to a rural location near a city, were about 6 years younger than non-migrants and so in different phases of their lives, and Hines (2010) notes that rural gentrifiers after 'permanent tourism' in the Rockies, were mostly young, urban, post-industrial middle classes.

Another common theme amongst the US material in particular, which signals the heterogeneity of gentrification as a concept (see also Gkartzios & Halfacree, 2023), relates to shifting rural economic patterns. The extractive (mining and timber) industries of the past, together with the processes of industrialisation and globalisation means that factories have relocated to cheaper regions. Important local food growing and processing (such as milling, Pilgeram, 2021) lose purchase to larger, national or global competitors. This shift marks what we could describe as a politics of rural land use, whereby the attitudes attached to landscapes and environment changes from one of production, to that of the consumption of amenity value (Ladino, 2022; Nelson and Nelson, 2010). Bryson and Wyckoff (2010) tell us how the cultural clashes that arise between the differing perception of landscape use between older and newer migrants result in political resistances, risking a polarised community.

Sometimes, the American literature expressly discusses these processes as a form of colonisation. Ladino (2022:82) has a thought provoking quote about the way that capitalism "Colonises space and delivers economic, environmental, and social benefits to a select few at the expense of almost everyone else". Hines (2010b) argues that the colonisation of the rural by the urban, middle classes is a reworking of the modern desire for progress, where progress is reconfigured to mean a more environmental, 'back to nature' lifestyle. He also argues that the post-industrial middle classes are now signaling status in terms of the kinds of experiences that they are able to produce and consume. Perversely, this does not always mean that the landscape and

environment is protected, partly because of the large-scale housing that needs to be built to accommodate new-comers (Ghose, 2004) and partly because landscape amenity does not always equate to more environmental practices (Pilgeram, 2021).

For these scholars then, counterurbanisation is associated with rural gentrification, which equates to the displacement of poorer, and more vulnerable populations by an urban middle class, seeking amenity value (however they define it), in the local landscape. Whilst it may improve certain economic measures, these improvements are connected to wealthier in-migrants, and there is very little evidence in the scholarship about improvements to the lives of non-migrants. Instead, we are introduced to newer forms of exploitations and displacements. What we do see, however, are multiple differing politics of place, how it should be used, and by whom. This is what we will explore in the remainder of this paper, using the lens of the complex adaptive assemblage to consider the different ways that participants imagine Cornwall in general and in the village in particular, as it tries to maintain a cohesive community during processes of rural gentrification.

4. The complex adaptive assemblage

In this paper I am interested in understanding how the differing communities within the case study navigate and negotiate their contested politics of place, and how these differences impact on how the community evolves over time. For this, the complex adaptive assemblage is an excellent tool, allowing us to see the relationships, intersections, histories and meanings through its assembled make-up; how different assemblages intersect, collide, and diverge; and the processes and meanings that impact on the different kinds of possibilities for what will unfold in the future.

The assemblage has been explored elsewhere in much more depth than we can do here. Some scholars provide us with a rich understanding of the concept (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004; Connolly, 2002; Bennet, 2010; Delanda, 2011), whilst others consider how it can be applied at a regional scale and the kinds of things that it shows us (Dovey, 2012; McFarlane, 2011; Willett, 2021). The key thing to think about is that the assemblage is 'complex', referring to a non-linear and emergent ecosystem of objects, meanings, institutions, practices, knowledges, people, activities, histories and beliefs that collect (assemble) around a given thing. By non-linear and emergent, we mean that assembled ecosystems are too complex to be understood as simple chains of cause and effect, but that the future emerges out of an interaction between the different parts of the system (see Connolly, 2002).

As will become clearer later, the assemblage of Porthurst is comprised of many other assemblages – for example, the assemblage around the gig club, the parish council, the cricket club, or the school. It connects to assembled neighbouring communities through things such as friendship groups, travel, work, access to services, and long-standing efforts to ensure that the rich Celtic Cornish culture, heritage, language, and practices remain vibrant and alive (Deacon, 2007). In so doing, it also intersects with assemblages which are concerned about Cornish cultural survival following decades of 'people led growth' encouraging inward migration (Perry, 1993; Deacon et al., 2003; Willett, 2021). Some of the practices, meanings, beliefs, and institutions connect the community to assemblages far beyond itself. These connections are always fluid and changing over time. For example, many participants were return migrants. Whilst they were living away, they would have provided a strong connection between Porthurst and their new home. This will have shrunk in significance as they have returned. In this way, although Porthurst is firmly embedded in the assembled 'Cornwall' and the 'UK' due to its geographical location, it is also extends much more widely.

While there will be many meanings and histories that are shared with neighbours – and with those within the Porthurst assemblage, there will be others that are different and distinct. Some meanings, affects or impacts (see Ahmed, 2004) challenge how as individuals we see the world

in such a way that we find them difficult to accept, or if we see them, we fail to interpret them accurately (Connolly, 2002). Sometimes a geographic community can be made up of assemblages that are aware of each other but rarely intersect because they are unable to find a space to learn how to develop a set of shared meanings (Willett, 2021). Equally, some of the affective (impactful) encounters that we have may completely transform how we think, in ways that we couldn't have previously predicted. It is this unpredictability over change that leads Latour (2005) to claim that as researchers of society we should be exploring change, and the processes, practices, and meanings underpinning change, rather than object which will inevitably be different on successive encounters.

Finally, the assemblage is adaptive because as they change, they are constantly adapting to the wider environments that they find themselves in. The ideas, institutions, affects, and infrastructure within an assemblage co-evolved, and therefore their developments are entangled with each other. These changes are, however, value free, so adaptation and evolution does not necessarily mean whatever version of 'improvement' we might follow (Connolly, 2011). This makes change an intensely political space, whereby individuals and groups need to try to find ways of ensuring that community changes reflect the kinds of future, or 'becoming' that they would like to see.

5. Method

The research for this study was part of a bigger project which explored how people in two rural regions (Cornwall, and the South West of Virginia, USA) experienced living in their localities. I was very conscious in this process of having 'conversations' rather than holding 'interviews' as a way of exploring the deeper phenomenological meanings and understandings underpinning what participants told me about the worlds that they inhabit (see Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). I interpreted these meanings through frameworks gathered from being immersed in the culture of the regions in which I researched. As part of this bigger study, and together with a local artist, I ran a day-long community story-gathering event in the village of Porthurst (population 1700). This was in late 2019, so a few months before Covid amplified many of the tensions discussed below.

We opened with a walk, guided by a local historian, during which participants were invited to talk to me individually about their reflections on living in the locality. Group discussions were recorded over the lunch break, and continued during a community painting session where participants depicted their community using pigments made from minerals gathered in Cornwall. The design was informed by principles of embodied research, whereby undertaking a practical activity that is connected to the questions at the centre of the inquiry, encourages and supports participants to fully engage with the topic, enabling deeper and richer phenomenological discussions (Spatz, 2017; Thanem & Knights, 2019; Vachelli, 2018; West et al., 2021).

A total of 12 persons participated in the event over the course of the day, varying in ages from approximately their early 30s, to approximately their late 50s early 60s. Many (but not all) could be described as 'professional'. Some people discussed the challenges and opportunities that they saw reflected in the lives of their now grown-up children, providing additional insights into other age groups. At the time, I was not expecting that counterurbanisation would play such an important part of this aspect of the study. Consequently, data was not gathered on whether participants were immigrants, return migrants, or 'stayers'. However, over the course of the event it was clear that each group was vocally represented.

The community was selected for the insights that it offers in terms of maintaining a strong 'local' community despite the pressures of gentrification and counterurbanisation, finding ways to assimilate newcomers. As a fishing/farming community and popular visitor destination, it has experienced a considerable amount of social and economic changes over recent decades and I wanted to understand how

local people navigated this. I also had a contact with a local historian and parish councillor who was extremely well connected within the parish, and who was able to help recruit participants from amongst the local networks of which he was a part. Later, I also have become involved in some aspects of community life in the village, which helps for understanding some of the broader contextual issues and questions which were raised in this set of interviews.

The research for this study was approved by the University ethics committee, and all interviews from the day were fully transcribed, and coded for regularities and themes, together with the affective meanings underpinning what people said (see Ahmed, 2004). It became clear that participants were thinking about how they navigate 'change' within their jobs, the kinds of lives that they led, and the precariousness with which they experienced their lives. This forced them to reflect on how 'liveable' the community was for a range of different groups, and how that liveability had changed over time. It also became apparent that creating and fostering 'shared spaces' was seen as part of the solution to building the networks through which to tackle the problems that it faced.

6. Counterurbanisation, community change, and gentrification

In this section I use interview material to get some kind of idea about what the assemblages which comprise Porthurst, look like and how these assemblages fit together, looking in particular at the assembled imaginaries around the community. We see that there are different affective repertoires around the meanings attached to 'front of stage' visible assemblages and 'back-stage' meanings, stories, and knowledges which newer residents might not have access to. We also notice that it is this 'visitor' imaginary which attracts counter-urbanisers to move to the village, but that it is not a pre-given that newer in-migrants will be able to contribute to maintain a 'liveable' community, and engaged locals need to work quite hard to make sure that this happens.

Perversely, the visual attractiveness of the area contributes to an increasing sense of precarity for local residents who have to resort to a lot of self-help and interdependent support. Consequently, we will see that shared community spaces where different assembled groups can coalesce, build relationships, share knowledges, and use that for community action are important for finding ways to adapt to a future that works for all. However community vibrancy also is a double-edged sword as often individuals find it impossible to remain in the place in which they have dense and supportive networks, and jobs tend to become increasingly low-paid and insecure. In this section I highlight themes which discuss navigating change, liveability, and shared spaces.

6.1. History and place

Cultural entrepreneur and local historian Martin discusses some of the histories out of which the assembled Porthurst grew and which still provides much of the aesthetic landscape through which the locality is perceived. He tells us some of the meanings underneath old Cornish place-names, and about how the community emerged. He says,

(Porthurst) was literally a church, a pub, and a couple of farms. Cornwall has, just like the west coast of Ireland, an agricultural settlement plan, not like English villages with a feudal system, ... People just farming, and then cottages for their labourers, and then gradually, fishing villages grew up.

Much less visible to the casual observer now, mining was a major source of wealth and confidence amongst the community up until the 1990s. Laura now is a teaching assistant in a school but she remembers the impact of buoyant local mining employment from the paternalistic former mining company.

When they had a good year, they would give all their employees a share of some of the profits, a small payout. So obviously everybody

would go into town and spend their PPS (bonus). They could be very good payouts.

Laura went on to talk about the many different ways in which the former mining company looked after and supported current and former employees with holiday food parcels, pensioner holidays, and welfare officers for family support. However, although these stories and the meanings that they generate are a major part of what has made Porthurst into Porthurst, they are invisible to the contemporary outside observer who knows the parish for beautiful beaches and lovely coastal walks which make it into a popular tourist destination. These industrial stories are kinds of 'back-stage' assemblages that jar slightly with the visitor performance of the area, adding additional barriers to why newer community members might not seek out these kinds of local knowledges and might find 'local' assemblages challenging. Locals *also* love the beaches and walks, but have a different interpretive repertoire through which to view them.

6.2. Liveability

Additional changes that affect the liveability of the locality include the ability of younger people to remain or return to their home village. Tamsin speaks wryly of the experiences of her newly graduated children and their peers, reminding us that precarity is not necessarily about not having enough well-educated people. She says,

The highest proportion of graduate employment in the village which is a bakery and ... all the servers, more or less, are graduates who've come back.

This is doubly personal to Laura. Her son has a Masters degree but no driving license. He needs to live at home because accommodation is so expensive, but with a poor public transport system, is unable to access the towns 15 or 20 miles away where he might find work where he can use his skills. Incidentally, this is a cross-Cornwall issue which has significant impact on some otherwise thriving industries (Willett, 2021) faces the knowledge that her son will probably decide to leave Cornwall. Whereas Laura's son (and his skills) is trapped in the village, others are locked out of the place in which they derive most of their meaning.

For example, Chris is a tradesman in his early 30s, from a village over 10 miles away which has lost all of its services and community activities. He socializes in Porthurst, and is a member of several local activity clubs. However he is unable to afford anywhere nearby, so straddles the space between a dead but affordable locality, and a vibrant but unaffordable one. Underneath the idyllic, visitor facing assemblages of Cornwall, Chris notes a kind of hostility for persons tied to local incomes, which risks spinning them outside of the towns and villages, region, and supportive networks in which individuals have grown up and through which they have learned how to navigate the world. Chris says,

The likes of me, and the likes of my friends, that are actually Cornish, that want to stay in Cornwall, but it seems to me are actually being pushed out - they have to go upcountry or abroad just to try and earn money, and try and live, have a better life.

Healthworker Martha feels that this is something that is growing. She moved to Cornwall and to Porthurst in 2011 and made the slide from visitor-facing assemblages to becoming folded into becoming embedded in more long-term, local ones. Over time she has been unable to remain in the village where her friends and networks are and after a period of homelessness, had to move to a much cheaper area 35 min drive away. Martha and Chris showcase the ways that connections between place-based identities and territory have become ruptured, dispersing people into other assembled Cornwall's. However, Martha says that this gives her a sense of dislocation and fragmentation, describing it as a

Feeling (of) alienation partly, to have a separate life here, but here is where I go to have good times, you know.

That Martha, a counter-urbaniser, has been able to find an emotional home like this is a testament to the open-ness of the back-stage, hidden, assembled 'local' spaces. In many respects, this has been essential for the survival and liveability of the community in several ways. For example, Lynn observes over lunch,

Look at the demographic of even this room, how many are Cornish, and how many are not. And that has changed our village enormously - not saying it's for the good or for the bad. But it has changed it. So there's very few Cornish people that are around now.

6.3. Newcomers and the visitor imaginary

Newcomers (including persons owning second homes or holiday homes) can sometimes inhabit very different assemblaged meanings and stories about Cornwall than more settled residents, and have a very different sense of attachment to place and embeddedness within the economy. Martha (herself a counter-urbaniser) relates this to the different assembled versions of Cornwall that visitors experience.

It's where they come on holiday to get away from everything. ... when people come on holiday to Cornwall, they tend, in my experience ... to go for rural communities, their peace and tranquility of space away from whatever urban environment they live in. ... So they assume that when you live down here, you don't see anybody for a week.

For John, these kinds of visitor imaginaries risk hiding other assembled Cornwall's around differing economies.

The image that Cornwall is now downtrodden, is wrong, and there are so many things going on here that people don't know about. Certain little industries that are cropping up and people working in small communities and travelling, you know, a lot of the people I know actually work for international companies, from small villages in North - you know, in West Cornwall and it's a completely different game.

Martin tells of this with regards to a flooding event.

Three years ago, ...we had really bad storms, me and Sarah were going around trying to rescue garages that'd been smashed into, and we phoned up various second home owners and said, you know, your front door's have been smashed into, and some were really lovely ... others just didn't care.

Later Martin talks about how the number of second homes has been growing beyond the 'pretty' cottages in the heart of the village, to the bungalows on the outskirts. He is fearful that second homes, and in-migrants who chose not to become a part of community life, will mean that

We won't have a youth club, we won't have a school, we won't have a pub open still, and that's already beginning to happen.

Village institutions, which help to provide the community with what Bergson (2004) calls '*elan vital*', or 'life force', are dependent on active participants to get involved, move between local institutions, and create and update new local meanings and knowledges. However, these institutions were in a catch 22 situation. In-migrants with families (as opposed to retirees) were attracted by its '*elan vital*' (including good local schools), but the popularity of the village for temporary accommodation meant that there is a declining resident population to support local services - which then reduces the attraction of the area to families who are planning to relocate. Martin tells about how the community then have to step in to either provide these services locally, or campaign hard to keep them.

I really agree with the Parish Nurse, but it almost feels like because - we're almost trying to do our own NHS. We're trying to run our own -

we do our own toilets. We thought we're going to have to do our own surgery. We run all our village halls, we run our own community bus

Part of the problem is that the hollowing out of community ties due to many newer residents and also houses being used for short term lets and second homes, reduces the capacity of the community to help each other and address community needs.

6.4. Community shared spaces

This is where community shared spaces have become vital in Porthurst. Many of the participants at this research event – people from Porthurst, and newer migrants alike, were also members of the gig rowing club (a traditional Cornish sport). The club seemed to provide a kind of central node through which newcomers came to learn about the kinds of knowledges which make up the assemblages which longer-term residents inhabit and create some fluidity between and amongst the different assembled Porthursts. Indeed, Martin even ran a weekly local history session to share local stories. The gig club also became a place where community members could build the kind of supportive social infrastructures to become invested in a place, and become involved in shaping that community. In some respects, in collecting together a range of (old and new) locals from across the different demographics and divides in the village, it was also providing the space for community leadership which Garry recognized to be important. He said,

(if you can have) social conscience, social responsibility, ...people don't mind pulling together, and the thing is that if everybody digs in a little bit, nobody has to do too much. But it needs to be led, they need people like ... to get out there, that will turn up at anything, you know, do anything, and that's what you need: community leaders.

The assemblages that make up Porthurst have been changing very rapidly due to the impacts of counter-urbanisation – which slide into gentrification. Consequently, this has created a number of important societal shifts. Longer term local assemblages risk becoming dissipated as individuals become dispersed outside of the parish and even outside of Cornwall, taking with them community knowledges which have co-evolved over deep self-help support networks over time. This also meant that newer members of the community risked not encountering knowledges about Cornwall in general and Porthurst in particular, which counter idealistic visitor imaginaries. These processes threaten the ability of Porthurst to adapt and evolve as a liveable community which this particular village is currently able to navigate by having key shared spaces where newcomers can learn what it means to be from their new home, facilitating knowledge exchange between the different assembled parts of Porthurst. Over the final part of this paper we will address the question about what new politics of place Counter-urbanisation is bringing about in Porthurst.

7. Counterurbanisation and the politics of place

The above interview extracts provide us with a window on the different ecosystems within Porthurst, and the challenges that the village (and Cornwall in general) faces as it decides how to navigate the changes brought about in recent decades. The processes explored and described by Dean et al. (1984), 40 years ago, are now more embedded and more entrenched. However over the course of this time, at no point do we get a sense that counterurbanisation, and its projected injection of knowledge and skills (Bosworth & Atterton, 2012) represents a kind of knowledge-sharing which spills over into other assembled Porthursts and further afield, Cornwall. Instead if anything, over time it has hardened the boundaries surrounding visitor-type imaginaries of Porthurst and made these types of assemblages much more visible, risking inhibiting meaningful knowledge-sharing.

One way to take this analysis further in future work would be to explore the nature of the communities which collect around these

different of assemblages. From this study it appears that the degree to which individuals are socialized and embedded within intergenerational knowledges, matters. This points to explanations around concepts such as Homi Bhabha's (2004) Third Space (see also Giyoo and Wertsch, 2001). Another explanation would be to explore the impact of inward migration on the processes involved in Putnam's (2000) social capital, looking at the relationship between group dynamics, migration histories, and bridging and bonding capital (Atterton, 2007; Ryan, 2011). It would also be valuable to understand this material more about the relationship between the cultural memory of Third Space and what Markides and Cohn (1982) call 'external conflict/internal cohesion' which shape the nature and degree of cohesion and conflicts between groups.

Perhaps Goodwin-Hawkins and Jones (2022) offer us a way of understanding the subjective processes around the migration of professional people, which they understand as being about middle class people trading off career against lifestyle aspirations in a place where a middle class lifestyle is more affordable. It also makes us think about Williams and Champion's (1998) study where they found that in contrast to Wiltshire, in-migrants to Cornwall become poorer over time. It seems that these in-migrants are attracted by the visitor imaginaries and middle-class lifestyle which they have had a ready access to and so have been able to use their numbers and social capital in order to recreate these imaginaries and the meanings and knowledges that go with them. This underscores the ways in which immigrants can end up coalescing and co-evolving within different assembled imaginaries than persons raised in the area are more likely to be situated in.

We also see through our example of Porthurst that having affluent and highly skilled people moving to your area, does *not* necessarily have the causal effect of creating more highly-skilled jobs. Quite the opposite. Alongside the risk of knowledge pooling in different imaginaries, in Porthurst the problem is not about a lack of knowledge. Instead, many highly skilled local young people are unable to either live in or move around Porthurst in particular and Cornwall in general, and therefore take their home-grown knowledge and skills into the local workplace. In part this is because of how local economies have changed and in part because of more global economic pressures. However, the research supports the literature which explains the ways in which because of housing unaffordability, local people become structurally displaced from tourism economies (Barke, 2008) and especially post-covid, coastal areas (Colomb & Gallent, 2022). What we are less clear about is in the role of visitor imaginaries in these processes, and how they impact on community liveability.

The gentrification literature in places with strong or emerging visitor economies is very clear that the shift in landscape use from one that considers the environment to be a place in which to consume an amenity, rather than produce things (Ladino, 2022; Nelson and Nelson, 2010) leads to clashes about what the community is for (Bryson & Wyckoff, 2010). Moreover, rather than initiating an improvement to local economies and the lives of local people, it results in multiple displacements due to housing pressures (Ghose, 2004; Hines, 2010; Pilgeram, 2021) which fragment communities. These are processes which we see strongly in Porthurst too, where housing pressures risk dispersing the local assemblages around institutions, clubs, services, and community action which help to keep the community alive and as a living space. We also have seen how this means that recent graduates find return migration difficult, and it is unclear how many other potential return migrants are also unable to move, because of the gentrified costs of living in Cornwall (see also Willett, 2021; Williams and Lawlor, 2022). This risks losing the positive spillover effects which come from revitalised and reinvigorated kinship networks (Laoire, 2007). However, we also understand that people's motivations behind their counterurbanisation are heterogeneous (Grimrud, 2011; Hansen & Aner, 2017; Ngo & Brklacich, 2014), with different imaginaries about the place that they are moving to. This signals that there is a much more nuanced discussion to be had about the impacts and effects of counterurbanisation

to understand where and how it works well, and where it becomes a problematic gentrification.

This is where the politics of place becomes very visible. Firstly, it is about (re)creating what kind of community Porthurst is. For the participants in this study, whether Counter-urbanisers, return migrants, and persons with a multi-generational history in the village, it is about negotiating and challenging different knowledges, stories, and histories. Porthurst is *both* somewhere with a strong visitor economy, *and* a place with a rich history and national minority culture which often conflicts with the kinds of back-of-beyond and sleepy narratives traded by the visitor industry. But what we have also seen in the interviews is that these visitor and sleepy assemblages can come to dominate local imaginaries. Although some people knew of the more innovative and highly skilled industries in Cornwall more broadly, many felt disempowered by the belief that the visitor economy was all that there was moving forward into the future. This politics of place is a politics about how Porthurst (and by extension, Cornwall) can adapt and evolve into the future (Willett, 2016). Clearly, Porthurst will continue to evolve, but the challenge is to make sure that this is in ways in which it can remain as a liveable community and for this, sharing the different Cornwalls is important. This is where the gig club seems to play a vital role as a space where different assemblages of Porthurst can intersect, interact, share knowledges, navigate their differences and negotiate a co-evolutionary shared future. One of the challenges moving forward is to understand more about what it is about the gig club and similar spaces whereby these become places where different assemblages can intersect, where local meanings can be made and re-made, and the community helped to survive this challenging time. Gig rowing is a traditional Cornish sport, but it is unclear what attracts immigrants to the activity, and enables them to feel that this is something that they are welcome to participate in.

8. Conclusion

This paper began with a question about the extent to which counterurbanisation is an effective rural development strategy. We have seen here that counterurbanisation is not always positive for rural economies. Immigrants do not necessarily have ways to share their social and economic knowledges with local people and this can contribute to fragmented, rather than cohesive communities. We have also seen how the gentrification which can go in tandem with counterurbanisation, can make it harder for local people to live in the places in which they come from. Further, poor infrastructure rather than a lack of knowledge and skills, can inhibit locals from deploying their own skill-sets. This does not mean that counterurbanisation might not be a solution in particular situations, but it does problematize the idea that it might be *the* solution. However we first need to understand much more about the situations in which it does and does not work, and the social and business infrastructural investment required to make it work better.

What does this paper add to the scholarship? Firstly, (and assisted by a more anthropological set of research methods), we see that the processes involved with counter-urbanisation are much more complicated than simply injecting knowledge and skills into an underperforming area, which raises questions about whether we are trying to improve *places*, or the lives of people currently living in those places. Currently, we do not understand enough about the motivations of counter-urbanisers, and how this may or may not affect their ability to make a positive contribution into the new economies in which they find themselves. We observe in this paper that possibly the very narratives and stories which attract new people to a place might have a range of undesirable consequences on how liveable the local community is. Places adapt, but adaptation is value free. Sometimes the ways in which places adapt is beneficial for particular communities, and sometimes it is not. The political challenge for communities experiencing counterurbanisation and its twin, gentrification, is to ensure that community evolution benefits *all* in the locality, not just the people with power and

choices and currently we see from the gentrification literature and from Porthurst's example, that this is not really happening. Instead, counterurbanisation here is benefitting the place, but not local people.

This is the contribution of the complex adaptive assemblage. Currently, there is a risk that although we understand fragments of counterurbanisation processes (Hansen & Aner, 2017; Primdahl, 2014; Remoundou et al., 2016; Scott et al., 2017), we don't understand how these fragments connect into the wider ecosystem of the socio economy. In particular, the space between which knowledge and skills go from being passive things which just 'exist' in the economy, to being things which have an active role community evolution. The assemblage also helps to make particular processes visible. For example, it is easy to see how assemblages can form around particular objects and institutions. It is less easy to observe the ways that different parts of our communities can hold different meanings and interpretations around these same objects and institutions. The complex adaptive assemblage helps us to observe these subtle distinctions, and to explore how these different knowledges do or don't connect.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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