



De-skilling the countryside? ...Change and challenge in rural economies and societies.

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- Traditionally **Rural synonymous with agriculture** ... great emphasis on breaking this relationship ... ushering in a new (more modern?) way of thinking
 - But ... maybe we have gone to far
 - Yes ... rural is more than agriculture But also need to remember that agriculture is very much part of the rural !



When we look at recent trends

- Food shortages
- Food security Policy CAP
- Food surpluses Policy reforms ...
- Post-productivism Set aside ... REPS
... decoupling
- ? And now
- Food Shortages



Why is this happening

- **Globalization** (increased demand; increased markets but also increased competition)
- **Energy** ... rising oil and energy prices effects entire food chain ... from fertilizer to grow ; tractors to harvest , trucks to market?
- **Biofuels** ... reduction in lands used for production of food and increase in lands used to grow biofuel crops
- **Population** ... economies of India and China expanding -> greater demand for food
- **Nature** ... natural disasters .. Major floods ... drought (Australia) ... destroy crops ... reduce outputs ..



So while we see an obvious shift taking place in agriculture in terms of.....

- Changes in policy, knowledge, practice, (Rural Development Pillar 2 funding)
- Increased recognition of role farmers play in landscape management / environment / sustainability / rural viability

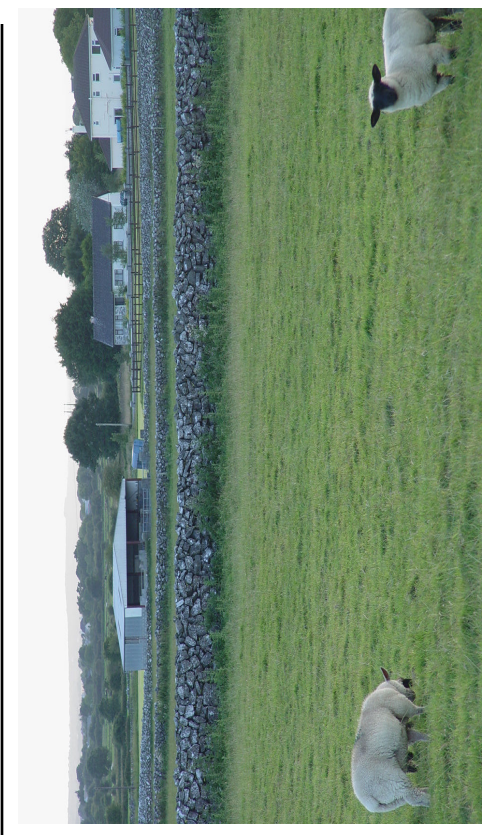
Biggest challenge?

- Food and energy security in the future?



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- Where do contemporary rural areas fit in this picture?

What's the typical scene in rural areas?





See

- Rural as a concept getting a ->
'battering from all sides'
...(something that is becoming)
'outdated, residualized' and
...'transcended by the spatial
hegemony of (urbanized)
capitalism' (Halfacree, 2004)

See rural areas as a different type of commodity ...





Recent newspaper advert ...

- HOW CAN YOU GET THE BEST RETURN FROM YOUR FARM? (Ganly Walters Auctioneers)

- **SELL IT**

- Pessimistic future??



EU Foresight (FFRAP) Report 2007

- 'in identifying and partly analyzing a total of 1308 foresights (July 2006) .. Only 7% (88) ... have a distinct focus on agriculture, food and rural areas ... indicat(ing) a relatively low emphasis on 'food', a major area of human needs and 'rural areas', an important element in the spatial organization of our societies' (p.18-19).
- Pessimistic future??



Also see in more recent times ...

- 'Soaring commodity prices may have lasting impact ...' (Helbling, 2008)
- 'food price rises threaten efforts to cut poverty ...' (IMF 2008)
- 'the rising trend in international food prices continued, and even accelerated, in 2008' (World bank, 2008)
 - Corn – up 30% +; Rice – 70% +; Soya – 80%+;
Wheat – 120%+; Cereal / Meat / Dairy all rising in price
- Pessimistic future??



○ on the other hand ...

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- Are we looking at an 'opportunity' and **agricultural 'renaissance'?**
 - Recent statement from FAO DG –
..... *'the time for re-launching agriculture is now and the international community should not miss the opportunity'* (Jacques Diouf, 2008).

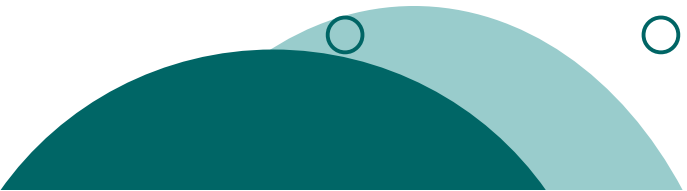
Optimistic future?

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- Before looking at possible opportunities ... look some more at the context and the driving forces ..



3 major shifts taking place

- Move from production-related supports to **Single Farm Payment**
- Move from competing in a protected market to **open competition**
- A rethinking of the **relationship** between agriculture / food production and broader society / environment



Rural space undergoing major transformation in terms of ...

○ Economy

- Agricultural restructuring – decoupling and the breaking of the link between subsidy and production; growth of service industries; tourism etc.

○ Society

- Depopulation; increases in pop.; counterurbanisation; new rural dwellers – immigration; new migrant workforce; commuting; issues of access & mobility; isolation; deprivation; poor service provision

Environment

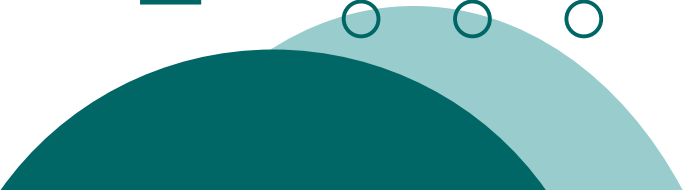
... custodians ... strict environmental and animal welfare standards ...REPS?

What we also see emerging within rural areas is a

- Post-agricultural society
 - Not only areas of production but also consumption and conservation
- Alternative uses of rural space
 - Diversification -tourism, services etc.
 - Changing settlement patterns
 - Demographic adjustment / imbalance
- Re-configuration of rural employment
- Rethinking of strategies relating to rural space

....on the farm ... we see ...

- Major structural adjustment taking place –
- **Decrease** in the numbers employed in agriculture
- More farmers relying on **non-farm payments** – with policy doing little to change this (almost encouraging it)
- Of 125,000 holdings in Ire (2005) – 68% of agri area in less favoured / mountain areas
- 1% organic farms
- An **Aging workforce** ...48% 55yrs +; 10% women; 8% younger than 35yrs



Butif everything points to a

- Post -agricultural phase ...
- Is that it ?
- Argue That rural areas will become more important in terms of production
 - So this can't be ignored or left out of our thinking
- Optimistic future?
 - If we can see it and if we can take it

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- So what do we need to do for this optimistic future?
 - 4 possibilities



1. Knowledge is everything!

- The ability of farmers to receive / have access to the latest technologies; innovations; market opportunities etc. are crucial
- Hence major role going forward for the **Extension Advisory Services**
- Biggest question here is whether the current set-up is equipped with the skills to move to more multifunctional advice that is now required
- Indications are that they are not



2. Need to promote agriculture to young people

- *But big problems here*
- *'The way the SFP is structured at the minute, there is no incentive what so ever for the older farmer to give up farming. He doesn't have to have any stock to draw on his SFP and that has a huge disadvantage for young people who want to get into agriculture'*
- *'(of course) there is a rise in part-time farming There is just not sufficient money coming from farming in the future, this (will) lead to the offspring of present farmers ...giv(ing) it up altogether'*



So

- Given trends in general economy (growth in PT farming and subsequent threat to typical jobs taken ...i.e. construction)
- Age profile ... 48% are 55yrs +
- Re-emergence of food shortages? threats to future food supply? Need for future management of the countryside?
- Who will do this if not the next generation?

3. Need to reassess our Policy directions...

- short-sighted
- REPS – more harm than good?
 - Important addition re conservation / management of the landscape; water quality; protection of biodiversity
- But needs to be a balance ... ‘freedom to farm’
- Maybe we’ve been too hasty to move to a post-productivist countryside where we ‘manage’ rather than ‘produce’ ...
- Post-productivist thinking has removed many of the ‘old’ agricultural practices ..
- **Deskilling the farming population?**
- Need to be able to grow our own food ... but who is going to know how? Migrant workforce?



4. The growing importance of the ‘Local’...

- See competition squeezing farm incomes imports undercutting domestic products ... squeeze at farm gate as opposed to supermarket in terms of price
- But ... oil; energy; food pricesmajor effect on food imports
- Increasingly likely to be a more significant place for **locally produced foodstuff** ..
- Farmers markets – huge growth in the US and UK



In conclusion ...

- Decoupling may be a good thing but a '**freedom to farm**' will increasingly determine rural futures
- willingness and ability to **innovate** will be crucial
- Our **knowledge base** and technology need to be continually developed to keep pace globally (importance of R&D-)
- Need to recognise the **local** as an increasingly important marketplace
- Need to see that a **strong farming sector** will make for strong and sustainable rural communities (and vice versa)



Finally

- Need to make explicit the multifunctional nature of Rural areas ..
- Need to make apparent that agriculture is a key part of a multifunctional countryside and is not only about
- the production of **environmental** goods;
 - **quality of life** enhancement ... but also ..
 - the production of **foodstuff**;
- Need to remember that while the rural is not just agricultural agriculture is a key component of the rural



- Thanks for listening

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