

Housing Young People in Rural Areas

Introduction

In recent years, the inability of many young people to access homeownership or social housing has meant that some remain in the parental home for long periods of time, while others have turned to the Private Rented Sector (PRS) to meet their housing needs. This sector has nearly doubled in size in the past 15 years, with evidence indicating that since 2005, and for the first time since the 1960s, there is more privately rented than socially rented housing¹. Young people constitute 45-50% of private renters² which has given rise to the term ‘Generation Rent’. These young renters are likely to have different housing experiences in comparison to their parents’ and grandparents’ generations; stimulating debates about inter-generational conflict³. While the PRS began to grow prior to the 2007/08 financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures, the housing difficulties faced by young people have intensified in the post-crisis period. This is especially the case for those reliant on welfare benefits which have been continuously reduced since 2010⁴.

Whilst discussions about ‘Generation Rent’ typically portray young people as a homogenous group, evidence indicates that housing experiences vary and are intersected by socioeconomic status, education levels and household size⁵. Furthermore, evidence from the early-2000s suggests that young people’s housing experiences are also geographically variable, with those living in rural areas facing particular challenges in comparison to their urban peers⁶. Drawing on qualitative interviews with under-35s, [our research](#) has highlighted some of the ways in which the characteristics of rural housing markets can exacerbate the challenges faced by young people. While these may affect people of any age, we argue that the precarity of young people’s lives as they attempt to secure housing, begin their careers and form families of their own make them more susceptible to feeling the sharper end of rural markets.

¹ ONS (2014) ‘Trends in the United Kingdom housing market, 2014’, London: ONS, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160105160709/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_373513.pdf [accessed 02.03.2016].

² National Records of Scotland (2011) ‘Scotland’s Census 2011: shaping our future’, Edinburgh: National Records of Scotland, <http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/> [accessed 02.03.2016].

³ Howker, E. and Malik, S. (2013) *Jilted Generation: How Britain has Bankrupted its Youth*, London: Icon Books.

⁴ For more information, see McKee, K. and Hoolachan, J. (2015) *Housing Generation Rent: What are the Challenges for Housing Policy in Scotland*, St Andrews: Centre for Housing Research

⁵ Clapham, D. et al. (2014) ‘The housing pathways of young people in the UK’, *Environment and Planning A*, 46, 2016-2031 and Furlong, A. et al. (2003) *Youth Transitions: Patterns of Vulnerability and Processes of Social Inclusion*, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive Social Research.

⁶ See for example Jones, G. (2001) ‘Fitting homes? Young people’s housing and household strategies in rural Scotland’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 4, 1, 41-62.

Young People Living in Rural Areas

Literature has drawn attention to the small-scale nature of both housing and labour markets in rural areas. The supply of rural affordable housing has, historically, received attention since limitations on rural development were enshrined in the *Town and Country Planning Act 1947*. Despite considerable effort among planners and policymakers to deal with issues of supply, there continues to be a discrepancy between supply and demand in many rural areas. Less affluent households in particular are often unable to compete for scarce housing resources and this is compounded by ‘competition from commuters, retirees and second home owners’⁷. Issues of supply shortages and second-homes were raised by some of the young people in our research. In particular, it was felt that there was a low supply of affordable housing:

“I’ve looked at places around the Borders and there just seems to be nothing round here like in my budget.” (Kayleigh, 19, Scottish Borders, living with parents)

“House prices in Cornwall are disproportionate to the average wages. House prices are inflated by second home owners as well as people buying property to let out as holiday accommodation. ‘Affordable housing’ tends not to be actually affordable for people.” (Rebecca, 34, Cornwall, mortgagor)

The subject of second/holiday homes was also a key issue that was raised by our participants. Such homes were perceived to reduce the stock of housing available to locals, inflate the house prices and rental costs of surrounding properties, and compromise feelings of ‘community’ as one young person noted:

“We can’t avoid the fact that a lot of the houses that families lived in when I grew up are now second homes. Even if I could afford to live in that village, it would be hard trying to find a place that’s not somebody’s second home! It’s definitely had an impact on prices of houses and rent and the community itself, the fact that these second homeowners are moving in and prising us out a bit.” (Sophie, 27, Cornwall, social tenant)

This comment supports the ‘loss of community’ thesis which argues that rural communities are weakened by second/holiday homes as locals are priced-out and forced to move further afield. Yet, some authors have contended that the presence of such homes is a highly localised issue meaning that it does not apply to all rural areas⁸. Furthermore, Gallent (2014)⁹ has argued that the presence of second home owners in rural communities can be positive as they can extend the social networks of locals whose networks may otherwise remain ‘closed’ or ‘limited’. Indeed our data indicated that one of the attractions of out-migration to urban areas for young people was to meet new friends and engage in social activities that were not available in their rural hometowns. However, the young people did not make connections between social networks and second/holiday homes and our data indicated that such homes were generally viewed unfavourably.

⁷ Rural Housing Policy Review Group (2015: 3) ‘Affordable housing: a fair deal for rural communities’, Surrey: Hastoe Group, <http://hastoe.com/page/772/Affordable-Housing-A-Fair-Deal-for-Rural-Communities.aspx> [accessed 16.02.2016].

⁸ Gallent, N, Mace, A, Tewdwr-Jones, M. (2003) ‘Dispelling a myth? Second homes in rural Wales’, *Area*, 35, 3, 271-284.

⁹ Gallent, N. (2014) ‘The social value of second homes in rural communities’, *Housing, Theory and Society*, 31, 2, 174-191.

Young People Working in Rural Areas

Closely connected to housing markets are rural labour markets, yet these two structures are often discussed separately. Not only are job opportunities lacking in some rural areas, wages are often low. Therefore, even when house prices are below the national average, they remain unaffordable for those relying on local employment¹⁰. In addition, there are usually few opportunities in rural areas to attend Higher Education, as most colleges and universities are located in urban areas. Consequently, out-migration from rural areas to large towns and cities is common among young people wishing to attend university and enhance their employment prospects. This was apparent in our research when we spoke to one young person who had moved from her rural home in the East Midlands to attend university in Sheffield:

“My parents told me categorically I wasn’t allowed to go home after uni if I could avoid it. Because there just isn’t the...there’s no scope and no opportunities there.” (Dianne, 28, Sheffield, private tenant)

Yet, while youth out-migration may be frequent, there are also some young adults who make conscious decisions to remain in rural locations due to feelings of ‘place attachment’¹¹. These individuals were reliant on local labour markets for their income and to meet their housing costs. Within the context of limited employment opportunities, some spoke of friends who had started their own businesses:

“One of my friends owns a brewery [...] so he’s done very well [...] My best friend as well, she had her own business for three years which somehow thrived in a tiny village. I think they’ve done extremely well and they don’t really know how they’ve done it.” (Katie, 26, Cornwall, private tenant)

The success of these businesses was perceived to be the result of support from the local community. Thus, while the presence of second/holiday homes were regarded as detrimental to a ‘sense of community’, local businesses were viewed as facilitating a community feeling – a finding that is consistent with existing literature¹². However, it is important to note that these businesses perhaps owed some of their success to the tourist market meaning that they may not have thrived had they been located in non-tourist ‘hotspot’ areas.

Significantly, though, many young people indicated that it has become increasingly difficult to find well-paid, full-time, permanent jobs and they perceived most jobs to be poorly paid and on a fixed-term or casual basis. While it appears that large numbers of young people face unemployment and underemployment regardless of geography¹³, the small-scale nature of rural labour markets mean that young people working in these areas are likely to be additionally disadvantaged. In order to meet their housing and other costs, many young people had to piece together several small jobs which typically meant that they frequently moved from one job to another:

“For the last ten years I’ve been going job to job, you know, cleaning [...] it’s a hand to mouth existence.” (Sophie, 27, Cornwall, social tenant)

¹⁰ Jones, G. (2001) ‘Fitting homes? Young people’s housing and household strategies in rural Scotland’, *Journal of Youth Studies*, 4, 1, 41-62.

¹¹ Culliney, M. (2014) ‘Going nowhere? Rural youth market opportunities and obstacles’, *Journal of Poverty and Social Justice*, 22, 1, 45-57.

¹² Steiner, A. and Atterton, J. (2015) ‘Exploring the contribution of rural enterprise to local resilience’, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 40, 30-45.

¹³ MacDonald, R. (2011) ‘Youth transitions, unemployment and underemployment’, *Journal of Sociology*, 47, 4, 427-444.

Not only did such precarious employment have implications for financial security, our participants felt that such a piecemeal approach compromised their general wellbeing. In addition, there was some evidence that people living in rural areas were reluctant to claim welfare benefits and that they relied on the support of their social networks to 'get by' during times of unemployment.

Finally, underpinning some of the housing and employment struggles highlighted was the issue of transport. Several young people noted the lack of public transport in rural areas which meant they needed to have access to a car, adding to their household expenses. For those without a car, their housing options were reduced even further as they had to ensure that they lived within walking distance of their workplace or near to the few public transport links that did exist.

Discussion

Our findings are consistent with literature published in the early 2000s regarding young people's experiences of rural housing and labour markets, and it would seem that not a lot has changed. Young people in rural areas continue to face difficulties connected to low affordable housing supply, second/holiday homes and small-scale labour markets. Recent discussions of 'Generation Rent' have emphasised the difficulties that young people face in relation to moving out of the parental home and moving into a new home which is secure, affordable and of a decent standard. These discussions have been prompted by the growth in private renting as the PRS is less regulated and more expensive in comparison to other tenures. While our data incorporated young people from all tenures, and thus the analysis did not exclusively focus on the PRS, the phenomenon of 'Generation Rent' is a useful starting point for further exploration of the challenges young people are facing.

We argue that examinations of young people's housing and labour market experiences need to take account of geographical nuances, especially in relation to urban/rural distinctions. Future research (both qualitative and quantitative) on a larger scale is needed in order to make comparisons within and between rural areas in order to capture additional nuances in the markets and in people's experiences. It would be particularly valuable to incorporate comparisons across the different UK jurisdictions as housing is a devolved policy matter. Larger-scale research would also be able to capture additional rural housing distinctions including self-build, crofting, Community Land Trusts and issues regarding land ownership¹⁴. Finally, given that socioeconomic status intersects with young people's abilities to navigate housing and labour markets, it is crucial that future research takes this into consideration, particularly within the context of continuing welfare reform and austerity measures in the years since the 2007/08 financial crisis.

Further information

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¹⁴See McKee, A.J. (2015a) 'Legitimising the laird? Communicative Action and the role of private landowner and community engagement in rural sustainability', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 41, 23-36 and Moore, T. (2015) *The Motivations and Aspirations of Community Land Trust Volunteers in Somerset, Dorset and Devon*, Somerset: Wessex Community Assets.