Crime, order and social control
Crime and the rural idyll

Interviewer:
Daniel, what do we mean when we talk about the 'rural' or the 'rural context'?

Daniel:
Well I think the rural is an unhelpfully generic term. A bit like community, or indeed the urban. Rural for me is a socially constructed contrast with the urban other. And it varies according to the number of different criteria, I think. For example, there's population density. And you expect the rural context to be lightly populated. There's the character of the landscape. We expect green spaces. There's also the character of the built-in environment. We don't expect to see big high rise blocks. There's also a degree of isolation in so far as people associate the rural with getting away from it all. There's also the culture of the population where people talk about the sense of community that exists in rural areas. And I think also probably we could mention the nature of economic activity. Where there is a particular emphasis on the rural upon agriculture.

Interviewer:
Are any of these things particularly rural? Or is it just a matter of degree?

Daniel:
I don't think any of them are distinctly rural. For example, you are going to get green spaces within cities. And you get factories in the rural. And I think probably each of those things could be seen as lying on some kind of urban rural continuum. Which means the rurality is really multi layered. And it creates a number of distinct types of rural space. You get for example the suburban fringe. Which is almost rural? Or perhaps the northern pit village. You get an isolated hamlet. Or perhaps market towns. They're all quite different types of the rural.

Interviewer:
When we think about the rural, we often imagine them to be homogenous places. I think we expect cities on the other hand to be very cosmopolitan or diverse. But we don't expect to encounter such diversity in rural areas. Or is this the kind of typical view of the city dweller?

Daniel:
I think it may be the view of a city dweller. Rural areas are characterised by diversity. Albeit at a different diversity from that which exists in the city. You get division for example between indigenous people and newcomers. Between people who work in the rural area, and people who visit it, as leisure seekers. Different users of the rural emphasise different aspects of rurality. And that has the potential for conflict, over the use of rural space.

Interviewer:
We've been talking about some of the changes in the urban environment. To what extent has the population in rural areas changed recently?

Daniel:
Up until the 60's, the key dynamic was rural depopulation. People were moving out of the country and into the cities. So it was rural depopulation, accompanied with urbanisation. And since the 70's, certainly the trend has been in the other direction. And has been overall counter urbanisation. With a flight from the urban, to the rural. Particularly for certain groups. Affluent people who can afford to live in the rural context. And also older people who like to retire there.
There are however a number of more immediate changes that you can draw attention to. For example, there's been an increase in the manufacturing sector, in the rural areas. A result of

development policies there. There's been an increase in the service sector. Particularly leisure and tourism. House prices have boomed in the rural area. And we've seen a growth in the second home ownership. With quite important social consequences for rural areas. We've seen a decline in agriculture. And as a result we now have agriculture as an employment sector. Which is characterised by insecure and low paid work. Some groups continue to leave the rural areas. Particularly rural young people and those on low incomes. Who are effectively priced out of rural areas. There is a growing phenomenon of rural homelessness. And there are problem as you would expect of crime and disorder as well.

Interviewer:
Nicolette and I talked about some of the changes in the urban environments. And how these were connected to concerns about crime and disorder. And people's willingness to tolerate particular practices and behaviours. And there's been a great deal of research now on the urban. And the problem of crime and disorder in urban areas. But we know relatively little about crime in rural areas. Why do you think that's the case?

Daniel:
I think there are a number of reasons why we don't know very much about crime in the rural area. Perhaps most obviously criminology really has been an urban discipline. Criminology was born pretty much the same time as the modern city was. And the two have almost developed together. If you think of things like the Chicago school in the 20th century. That certainly is the case. I think also criminology follows the problems that are identified by policy makers. And policy makers tend to be preoccupied with urban populations and urban problems.
I think also if anyone's trying to research the rural, they're faced with a number of methodological problems. The available data sources for example have a habit of homogenising the rural. And don't really reflect as true diversity. For example, in police crime statistics. A very crude division is made between urban and rural forces.

Interviewer:
I appreciate that it's difficult to find out about rural crime. But despite these problems, what do we know about it?

Daniel:
We have to make the usual methodological reservations. But subject to them, we can say that rural areas do appear to suffer lower levels and rates of victimisation, than you would find in urban areas. But that within some rural areas, there are particular locations where that may not be the case.
There are then some distinctive rural crimes. I guess I'm thinking of things like poaching, or wildlife crime. But generally speaking, rural crime tends to have a similar profile in terms of crime types. And in terms of the distribution of those crime types to urban areas.

Interviewer:
You mentioned the methodological problems. And we're aware of many problems associated with crime statistics. And indeed the way they're represented. But would you say that there are particular problems with the crime statistics in rural areas?

Daniel:
Yes. I think so. I think there is evidence to suggest that public reporting may well be lower in rural areas. And I think also that because there are scarce police resources. And because the police adopt a more informal policing style. It's likely to be the case that there is less crime recorded by the police in rural areas. So we can't really be that certain, that crime is as low as it is portrayed in official statistics. Or that it appears to be the case. There's a general perception in rural locations that crime is on the increase. But that operates through the more or less powerful lens of the rural idyll.

Interviewer:
The idea of a rural idyll is particularly interesting. And it's something that we'll come back to. But how might we best understand the crime problem in rural areas then?

Daniel:
I think we have to look at the way that the crime problem is represented in rural areas. Both by professional and in lay discourse. One very dominant representation is, and this I think again comes from the influence of the rural idyll. Is simply that there is no crime problem in rural area.

There's then I think a second discourse, where crime is linked or perceived to be a consequence of external threats, to the rural location. So we have things like bogus callers. Or travelling criminals. Also the threat that is perceived to be posed by travellers and gypsy people. Who together may be regarded as in one or another socially undesirable. There is also with the dispersal policy at the moment. Some concern in rural areas about asylum seeker populations. And also with newcomers who bring this different culture with them. Towards the end of the 1980's for example, there was a concern about lager louts in rural areas. And today perhaps there's a similar concern about the quality of parenting from urban newcomers in rural areas.

There's another representation which is not as powerful as the other ones. But shows again as we see in urban areas that crime is linked to internal social problems. You have the problem particularly in rural areas, of young people failing to make the transition. Because of the expense of housing, and the insecurity of work. That they have a number of housing problems, and because of failing to make the transition, we can see problems with alcohol and drug misuse. Problems with anti social behaviour as a result of the lack of services and space provided for young people in rural areas and the gap that they perceive between their aspirations, which are obtained from the globalised media and the reality in which they find themselves.

Interviewer:
What about fear of crime?

Daniel:
I think there is an issue around fear of crime, in rural areas. Partly that might be a demographic issue. Because there are more older people there. And older people as crime surveys show are generally more fearful of crime. But also fear I think is linked to the similar kinds of things that we see in urban areas.

Interviewer:
We've heard earlier about the struggles over urban space, in Leith, between the different interest groups, over the toleration zone. Are there similar examples of conflicts in rural areas? For example, do groups have different ideas about the rural and the kind of order that they prefer?

Daniel:
I think there are some episodic instances of conflict, which you see emerging in the rural areas. For example, the conflict between fox hunters and hunt saboteurs. The conflict that you get between conservationists and people who want to use the land in ways that conservationists don't support. So I guess would include there travellers, people holding illegal raves, or even motor sports enthusiasts, who want to take their scrambling bikes or four wheel drives over the countryside. There also tends to be a conflict between environmentalists and animal rights protestors, and farmers with their dubious modern farming practices. And also even on the 'right to roam', a conflict between ramblers and land owners, who would seem are overly keen to close off their land from public use.

Interviewer:
Do these different sets of interests then become apparent in discussions about regulating, or responding to crime?

Daniel:
I think the episodic instances that I've just referred to, don't really come out as a problem as far as the routine government of crime is concerned. Police sometimes use rural crime as an issue to lobby for additional resources. Certainly in the mid 1990's there was a raised public concern about rural crime. And certainly rural constabulary chief constables were drawing attention to the way that certain rural crime rates were higher than inner city crime rates. And

that they were encountering those problems with considerable fewer officers. But as far as patrol or response officers are concerned, they have to rely more upon informal dispute resolution and a role of mediation.

We've also seen in terms of governments of crime in more recent years, the emergence of a community safety infrastructure. So parish or town councils have a responsibility now to consider crime prevention in their routine activities. But they often don't really choose to do so. Because they also may be influenced by this rural idyll, where they want to keep their areas to be perceived at least as crime free. There are also district Local Authority at higher tier of local government. Some of those I think are disinclined to see crime as their business. There's an old slightly unreconstructed view I guess from Local Authorities, which sees crime as the job of the police. And it will remain ever thus. Perhaps that view is partly borne from necessity because they don't have the resources to do anything particularly substantial about crime problems.

There is also I think in Local Authorities, a rural equivalent to the urban boosterism, you see in the cities, where the image of a crime free rural area, is being used to promote the local economy. particularly tourism. But also for economic relocation.

Interviewer: I understand then that perhaps unlike in urban areas, where the more facilities might be available although of course under considerable pressure. But the capacity to respond to victims might be especially limited in rural areas. I'm thinking for example, that there might be fewer specialist services to respond to victims of sexual violence or domestic violence for example. Or perhaps facilities to cater for the needs of some offenders, for example drug misuse treatment programmes and so on.