

Social and Environmental Inequalities in Rural Areas

A Rural Economy and Land Use Programme research project investigating the nature and extent of social and environmental inequalities and injustice in rural England.



Policy and Practice Notes

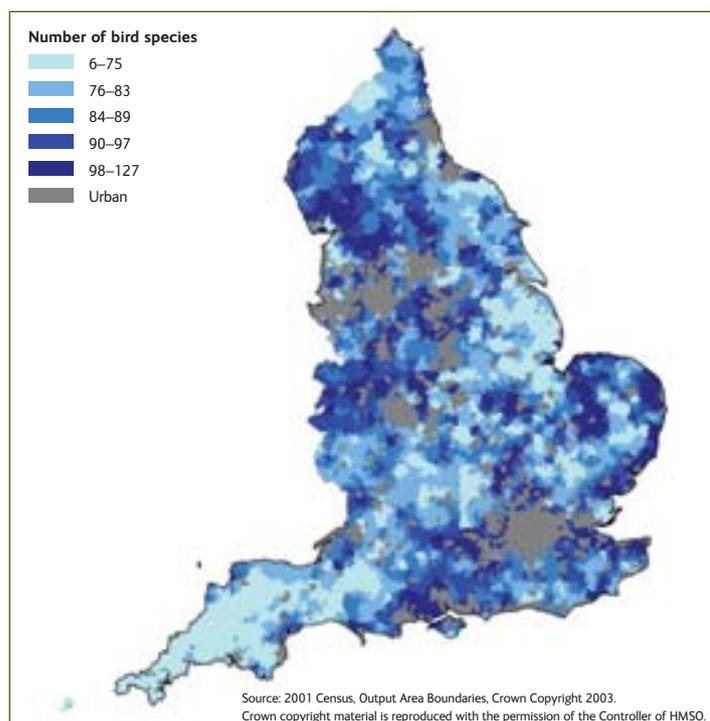
The Rural Economy and Land Use Programme is a UK-wide research programme carrying out interdisciplinary research on the multiple challenges facing rural areas. It is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and the Natural Environment Research Council, with additional funding from the Scottish Government and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Inequality in social, economic and environmental conditions has important implications for individuals or groups of people experiencing it, but also for society as a whole. In urban areas, poor environments are associated frequently with deprivation and social exclusion, but the relationship between environment and deprivation in rural areas is less well understood. Where the unequal distribution of social and environmental goods is considered unfair, it constitutes injustice. This project has quantified inequalities in social and environmental conditions throughout rural England and identified those areas where inequalities are greatest. The work has also enhanced understanding of perceptions of inequality and injustice in rural areas. The project shows how rural policy can be refined and targeted to tackle these multi-faceted problems in the most appropriate way for the benefit of society.

What is inequality?

Inequality relates to the distribution of something, whether it is a socio-economic measure such as income or an environmental one such as pollution.

- Many things are distributed unequally.
- An unequal distribution does not necessarily imply unfairness, inequity or injustice.
 - For example, bird species are distributed unequally through rural England (see map), but their distribution cannot be considered as unfair.



What is inequity?

Inequality is an objective measure of difference.

- For example, inequality in the number of bird species between the most species-rich and the most species-poor areas can be quantified.

Inequity, unfairness or injustice is more subjective than inequality, and what may be considered fair by some people may be thought of as unjust by others.

- Where a particular social or environmental characteristic is unevenly distributed in relation to income, there is the potential for social injustice or inequity.
- Information on inequality and injustice can be used to identify areas of rural England where policy intervention to reduce inequality should be targeted.

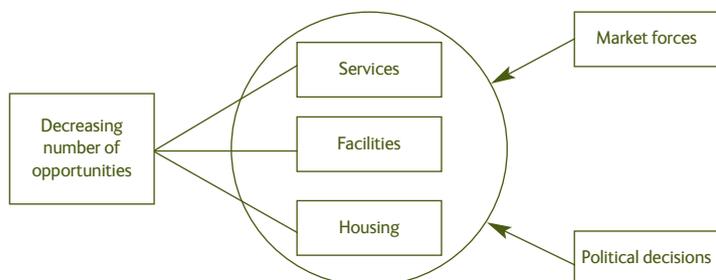
How are inequality and inequity perceived?

People recognise that rural areas have a lack of affordable housing and offer limited local services and opportunities for recreation.

- These disadvantages affect people differently according to their means and expectations, and for some they may be offset by aesthetic benefits and a strong sense of community.
- But the heavy burden on local communities to provide essential services on a voluntary basis is perceived as unfair.

Inequalities become unfair when:

- People have no choice
- Political decisions are made without accounting for local concerns
- Market forces exacerbate local problems



How can rural areas be characterised?

Based on a full dataset comprising 32 variables (6 related to economic activity, 5 related to income and wealth, 10 related to health and wellbeing and 11 related to ecology, land and environment), the characteristics of rural areas can be clustered and simplified into four overarching factors (see table) which the project has labelled:

- Disadvantage
- Remoteness
- Richness
- Pollution

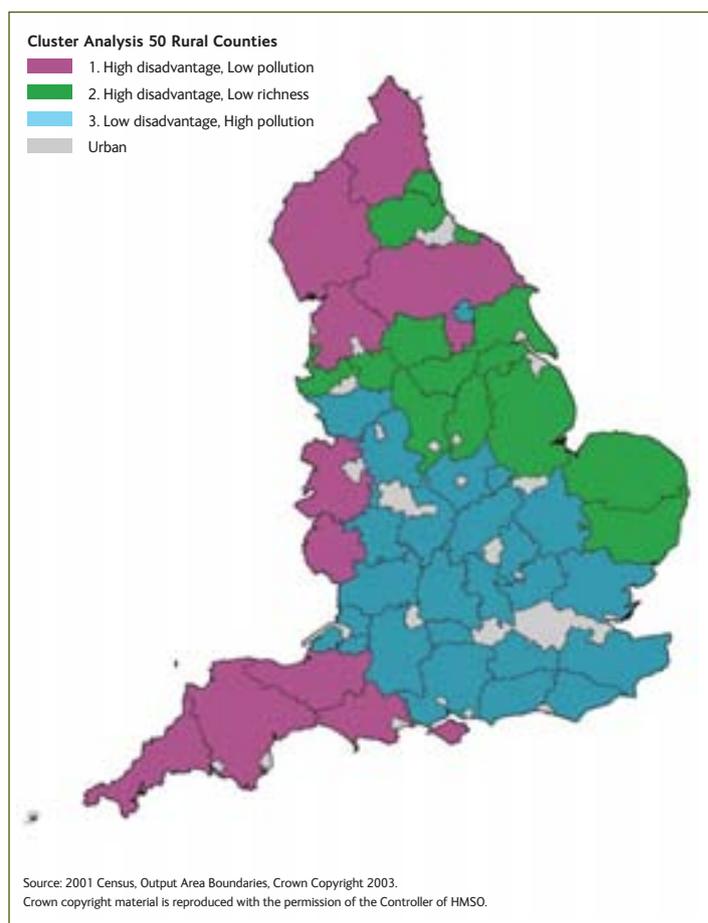
Disadvantage	Remoteness	Richness	Pollution
Educational disadvantage	Further from primary school	High probability of badgers	High PM ₁₀ pollution
Income deprivation	Environmentally sensitive agriculture	High house prices	High NO ₂ pollution
Low mean incomes	Lot of farmland	High bat species richness	High crime rates
Poor mental well-being	Further from secondary school	High business activity	
Low employment	Few sports and leisure activities	High land cover diversity	
Fuel poverty	Good quality rivers		
Barriers to housing	Little local work		

What patterns exist at a county level?

In terms of **average levels** of these four factors, there are three types of county:

- High disadvantage but low pollution
 - isolated rural areas of the south-west, Cumbria, Northumberland, the Yorkshire dales and moors and the Welsh borders
- High disadvantage and low richness
 - intensive arable farming areas of eastern and northern England
- Low disadvantage but high pollution
 - Midlands and south-east; areas that could be characterised as dormitory settlements for the major conurbations

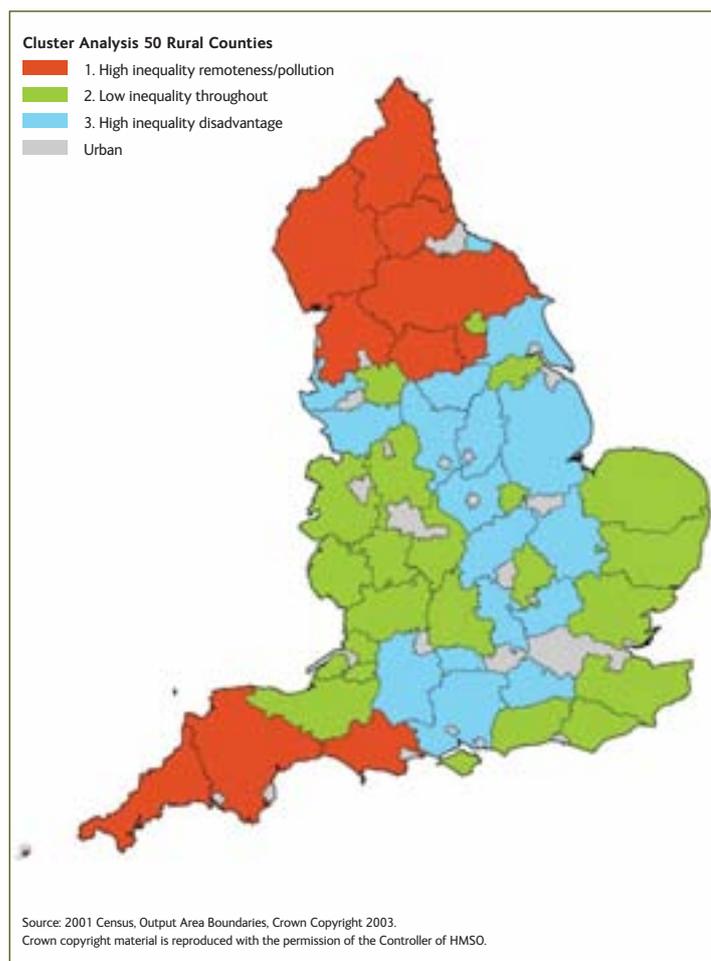
However, average levels may mask internal inequalities.



In terms of **inequalities**, there are three types of county:

- High inequality in remoteness and pollution
 - south-west and northern England
- Low inequalities for all variables
 - west, eastern and south-east England
- High inequality in disadvantage
 - Midlands and central southern England

These illustrations are based on an analysis at county level, but the same methods can be applied at any administrative level required.



How can we target policies to reduce inequality and injustice?

Information on the absolute level of social and environmental factors, together with consideration of the inequalities in distribution, can inform the direction of policy, as well as the appropriate scale and type of intervention needed.

For example, in addressing problems of disadvantage:

- High priority rural areas are those areas with high levels of disadvantage and high inequality in disadvantage, such as the north-east and the south-west
- In such areas, a focus on specific pockets of disadvantage would be the most efficient approach
- Where there is a high level of disadvantage and high inequality in inaccessibility, policy should be designed to take account of varying levels of accessibility of services.

Further information

This project has been carried out at the University of York, in partnership with the Commission for Rural Communities and the Environment Agency.

Key Contact:

Dr Meg Huby,
Department of Social Policy and Social Work, University of York
Email: meh1@york.ac.uk

Useful resources:

Huby, M., Cinderby, S., Crowe, A.M., Gillings, S., McClean, C.J., Moran, D., Owen, A. & White, P.C.L. (2006). The association of natural, social and economic factors with bird species richness in rural England. *Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 57, 295-312.

White, P.C.L., Cinderby, S., Raffaelli, D., de Bruin, A., Holt, A. & Huby, M. (2009). Enhancing the effectiveness of policy-relevant integrative research in rural areas. *Area*, 41.4, 414-424.

Huby, M., Cinderby, S., de Bruin, A. & White, P.C.L. (2009). Measuring inequality in rural England: the effects of changing spatial resolution. *Environment and Planning A*, in press.

Project Website:

<http://www.sei.se/relu/seira/>

The project dataset can be downloaded from here.

Other websites:

Commission for Rural Communities –

<http://www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk>

Environment Agency –

<http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/>