Socio-cultural representations of greentrified Pennine rurality

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Abstract

This paper examines the processes of change in two ‘rural’ environs of Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, associated with the immigration and consumption practices of relatively affluent households. In doing so, we address the knowledge gap identified by Phillips (J. Rural Studies 9 (1993) 123) relating to the gentrification of rural locations. The term ‘rural greentrification’ is suggested to emphasise the varying cultural predilections of in-migrant households in the consumption of ‘green’ spaces. More specifically, a geography of greentrification is identified in the locale, which encompasses two socio-spatial relationships: ‘village’ and ‘remote’. These are interpreted as distinct constructions of rural ‘habitus’ and thus exemplify the significance of Hebden Bridge as a special place, where the multiple appeals and meanings of different representations of greentrified Pennine rurality enable cultural and social differentiation. The findings reaffirm the value of viewing the rural as a socio-cultural construct, tied to place and time, which is specific to individuals and social groups.

1. Introduction

A well-developed literature has evolved which explores how, why and where varying representations of rurality are consumed to fulfil the differing cultural predispositions of affluent households migrating to the countryside (e.g. Halfacree, 1993, 1995). There is a general consensus that this process is manifested in social, cultural, economic, physical and political changes, which can polarise, marginalise and/or displace relatively lower income groups (Cloke and Little, 1990; Cloke, 1997). However, we would argue, these processes have been under-researched in the rural context, and theoretical understandings and empirical groundings of this dimension of rural change require more attention.

To date, the major contribution addressing this knowledge gap has been provided by Phillips (1993), in an examination of rural change in the Gower Peninsula, South Wales. This study clarifies the link between new middle class settlement, socio-economic and cultural transformations of the rural landscape, and the subsequent displacement and marginalisation of low income groups, through a lack of affordable housing and services. Noting the parallels between such rural transformations and similar processes of revitalisation and exclusion in urban locations, Phillips (1993, p. 123) teases out some of ‘the commonalities and differences between rural and urban gentrification and also within gentrification in various rural localities’.

Within this paper we wish to elaborate on the latter strand of this discussion. We address Phillips’ (1993, p. 138) contention that there might be significant differences between expressions of rural gentrification, and we seek to reveal some of the contingent dynamics and outcomes which exist within rural locations. First, we draw upon the findings from a study of rural change in two environs of Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire, and, in line with Phillips, we reveal that the distinct consumption practices of in-migrant households are central to processes of gentrification in the locale. In doing so, we illuminate the varying predilections for different representations of ‘green’ Pennine rurality, which underpin the consumption practices of the in-migrants, and we emphasise the unique meanings of rurality which are associated with the Hebden Bridge district. Moreover, we put forward the term ‘rural greentrification’, in order to stress the demand for, and perception of, ‘green’ residential space from in-migrant households in the Hebden Bridge district (and other gentrified rural locations). This stands in contrast to the ‘urban’ qualities which attract in-migrant counterparts in urban locations.

The gentrification of rural and urban locations, and differences within and between rural locations, may signify the diverse cultural consumption practices of distinct segments of the new middle classes seeking...
different lifestyles. Hence, we would argue, it is essential to tease out the cultural and social differentiation which is embedded within and between particular spatial contexts. To this end, we seek to stimulate debate by suggesting that it may be inappropriate to simply overlay the term gentrification upon the rural terrain, despite the many overlaps between processes of revitalisation in urban and rural locations, and within and between rural locations.

2. The consumption of the ‘rural’ and processes of exclusion

It has been widely argued that rural places are ‘theatres of consumption’ (Leiss et al., 1986), which may be crafted, marketed and sold to the new middle classes. The consumption of reinvented images of rurality can provide a source of identity, shared living experiences, membership of social space and group, and can be perceived as a medium for obtaining a ‘sense of place’ in the world. Studies of new middle class consumption practices have highlighted the power of affluent in-migrants to inscribe their idealised vision of rural living upon the landscape. Socially constructed ‘rural’ spaces provide new leisure spaces, and positive (and exclusive) associations with nature and ‘natural products’. The commodification of the countryside and its products is often linked to an appropriation of the past in the form of nostalgia for ‘simpler’, rural living (Urry, 1995). The significant social, economic and cultural changes, which have resulted from this commodification, have been well documented (Cloke and Little, 1997; Halfacree and Boyle, 1998; Milbourne, 1998), as has the marginalisation and/or displacement of relatively lower income groups which once inhabited these areas (Cloke and Thrift, 1994; Murdoch and Day, 1998).

There is of course no singular middle class representation of the rural. A range of studies have pointed to the way in which social differences, along the lines of ethnicity and race (Kinsman, 1995; Agyeman and Spooner, 1997), gender (Agg and Phillips, 1998) and sexuality (Valentine, 1997) can have a bearing upon the ways in which rural landscapes are experienced and read. There are also significant spatial variations in the construction, promotion and consumption of rural imagery (Cloke et al., 1998). The ‘green and pleasant’ imagery of the Cotswolds, for example, differs from the ‘heather and bleak’ representations of the Scottish Highlands.

There is nevertheless little doubt that rural areas have proved very alluring for the new middle class, who, as Halfacree (1993) argues, often seek to consolidate their position in society through the acquisition of symbolic capital bound up with a ‘place’ in the countryside. Recent studies have explored how the new middle classes achieve and maintain positions of relative power in the countryside (Cloke et al., 1995), how they can influence and shape socio-cultural constructions of rurality (Fielding, 1998), and how the ‘local’ population may contest the ‘newcomer’ representations of rurality (Allan and Mooney, 1998). The findings point to a range of socio-cultural and political practices, which serve to reproduce and protect idyllic middle class images of the rural; representations which are frequently rooted in romanticised ideologies of the (white) British countryside (Abram et al., 1998). Importantly, the middle classes’ pursuit of a ‘new found’ identity, belonging and status often involves the preservation of a social and cultural distance between themselves and the local population (Murdoch and Pratt, 1997).

It can be argued, therefore, that the exclusion of undesirable ‘others’ from highly prized spaces is intentional; a strategic expression of the desire for social and spatial differentiation and the power of this group to protect highly valued space (cf. Ley, 1994 for parallels in the inner city context). These practices of exclusion have been explored by Cloke et al. (1998) in their discussion of rural ‘cultural competences’, which they argue influence the capacity of in-migrants to translate their abstract ‘geographies of the mind’ (i.e. perceptions of lifestyle and ways of life) into the rural setting; geographies which often conflict with the ‘local’ attitudes and perceptions of longer-term residents. The middle class hegemonic position is strengthened by attempts to ‘naturalise’ and ‘institutionalise’ their idyllic imaginations of rurality within the local corridors of power and thus undermine rival representations, which threaten their ideal (Buller and Lowe, 1990). By exercising control over local resources, vital to the process of preservation and/or change (e.g. improvement grants), and by exerting influence over the structural rules set by local political institutions (e.g. planning frameworks), the new middle classes can (re)produce and (re)align symbolic communication in response to challenges presented by other groups. This is well exemplified by the disproportionate local political and cultural influence exerted by the new middle classes in the resolution of land-use conflicts, which threaten the symbolic and economic capital invested in the recommodified landscape (Murdoch and Marsden, 1994).

Although much is known about the processes and consequences of the remaking and commodification of rural landscapes, there is still a gap in our understanding of the reasons why some rural areas experience gentrification, while others (often close by) do not. We therefore argue that a closer understanding of the connections between ‘places’ and their meaning to the ‘new middle classes’ is needed. Furthermore, we would argue that these connections can be highly specific, and that distinctive interpretations of rurality within as well as between newly commodified landscapes need to be
taken into account. To this end, we present a contextualised understanding of the middle class consumption of rurality in the Hebden Bridge district of West Yorkshire. The aim is to shed light on the connections between lifestyle aspirations of the new middle classes, who are central to the process of rural gentrification in this locality, and the consumption of particular Pennine landscapes within the Hebden Bridge district.1

Our paper seeks to exemplify the significance of Hebden Bridge as a distinct place; a place where the attributes of Pennine rurality take on special meaning for affluent in-migrant households. It also reveals the diverse representations of Pennine rurality, which are bound up with differing cultural predispositions of migrant households for ‘greener’ residential space. It is shown that distinctive identities and lifestyles underpin the restructuring and transformation of the rural locale through the greentrification process.

3. The processes of rural greentrification in the Hebden Bridge district

This paper focuses on the socio-economic and cultural transformations occurring in four discrete villages and the surrounding moor top locations above the small town of Hebden Bridge, in the Upper Calder Valley, West Yorkshire (see Fig. 1). We refer to the town and its rural environs as the ‘Hebden Bridge district’ (population 14,506 in 1991). Once a locale of textile production, Hebden Bridge and the surrounding countryside experienced a period of economic restructuring and industrial decline in the 1960s, which was characterised by disinvestment, physical decay, abandonment and depopulation of the working age groups. This decline was, however, arrested in the 1970s when the area experienced the beginnings of a process of revitalisation. The pattern and processes of change in our case study area strongly reflect those associated with inner city gentrification (e.g. Ley, 1996; Smith, 1996) and the rural change identified by Phillips (1993) in the Gower Peninsula, South Wales. For instance, the early stages of rehabilitation were initiated by a small influx of newcomers. In this case, they were drawn to the Hebden Bridge district by idyllic representations of Pennine rurality. They bought cheap, decaying properties, often in remote areas, which they renovated themselves. This physical transformation gained momentum during the late 1970s, when commercial interests became involved in the renovation and development process, producing ready-made ‘rural’ commodities aimed at attracting managerial and professional inhabitants. The redefined landscapes were actively promoted amongst the growing new middle classes of the surrounding metropolitan areas and beyond, gradually seducing increasing numbers of people who wished to (and could afford to) escape the highly urbanised environments of Leeds, Manchester, Bradford and even London.

Central to the wider processes of gentrification in the Hebden Bridge district is a marked distinction between the small town of Hebden Bridge itself and the village/moor top locations. This marks both a physical and a cultural gulf, which separates those affluent in-migrant households attracted to the more urbanised environments from those moving to the village/moor top locations. In the latter areas, farmsteads, barns and weaver/farmer cottages have been preserved in a ‘blackened’ state, reflecting the industrial pollution associated with the textile industry of the Upper Calder Valley. However, within the town, textile mills and unique Victorian terraced property (‘double-decker’) have been stone-cleaned to reveal a honey-coloured facia. The successive systems of agricultural and textile production of the past are intimately bound up with the differences now inscribed within this contemporary cultural landscape. Each phase has left its mark in the form of buildings which, having fallen into decay from the 1950s onwards, have been renovated and adapted to meet the demands of a new population with back-grounds, lifestyles and consumer habits very different from those of past Hebden Bridge residents (Smith, 1998).

Demand for the reconstructed and recommodified landscape grew throughout the mid to late 1980s, leading to escalating house prices in both Hebden Bridge and the surrounding rural locations (see Fig. 2). As a result, low income groups, including the ‘local’2 population, have been gradually marginalised. Not only have house prices risen beyond their economic means, but proposals for low cost housing schemes have been opposed by the more affluent newcomers. The displacement of lower income groups so often associated with urban gentrification is therefore clearly evident in this rural environment.

The house price changes indicate that the socio-economic transformation taking place on the rural hillslopes above Hebden Bridge is not unique within the Upper Calder Valley. This area, with its distinctive Millstone grit scenery, has recently begun to attract new residents with middle class backgrounds to the rural

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1Given our interest in the cultural consumption of different representations of Pennine rurality, we have excluded Hebden Bridge itself from our discussion of gentrification. It is, however, acknowledged that the close proximity of the small town settlement and symbolism of Hebden Bridge (see Smith (1998) for more detail) has played a role in understanding the processes of revitalisation in the rural environs.

2In line with Cloke et al. (1998) we would reiterate the dangers of employing the ‘local’ versus ‘newcomer’ dichotomy, and emphasise that these concepts are highly subjective, fluid and inherently diverse.
environ above the neighbouring small towns of Todmorden and Mytholmroyd as well (see Fig.1). However, these latter settlements have not witnessed the processes of gentrification evident in Hebden Bridge, but instead continue to experience physical, social and economic decline. Within the sub-regional context, the Hebden Bridge district is thus distinctive in the nature of its wholesale social, physical and cultural transformation.

The attraction of Hebden Bridge as a district has much to do with its historical significance as a place, renowned for its radicalism, non-conformity and tolerance of ‘otherness’. The location has long provided a magnet for those in pursuit of ‘difference’, including ‘hippies’ in the past, and more recently artists, craft-workers and ‘new age travellers’ (White, 1998). These historical connections, coupled with the availability of cheap property, has not only attracted new middle class in-migrants from the surrounding urban conurbations of Leeds, Bradford and Manchester, but from as far away as London and the south-east as well.

This paper examines the contingent forces underlying the gentrification of this Pennine location, drawing primarily on an interview survey (conducted in 1996) of a stratified random sample of 112 households living throughout the Hebden Bridge district. In-depth interviews with key housing institution managers, developers and architects operating in the locality were also conducted. Central to the findings was the significance of the countryside for many of the new middle class in-migrants. Over three-quarters of those settling in the rural environs of Hebden Bridge saw ‘rurality’ as the defining characteristic of the area. However, their constructions of rurality were contextualised, diverse and complex, and, as we shall see, were strongly related to their lifestyle preferences. For those drawn to the moor tops, for example, remoteness was the greatest asset of the location. Meanwhile, others were attracted by the villages and landscapes synonymous with working farms, country lanes, green fields and sheep. Their particular constructions of the location’s rurality were rooted in images of villages and working farms; the remote moor tops held little significance for them.
The diverse representations of rurality were clearly intertwined with particular constructions of Pennine rurality and closely linked to selective and idealised versions of Pennine pasts. For example, the blackened millstone grit landscape in the villages and on the moor tops symbolised a romanticised bygone era of a domestic system of textile production. The ‘roughness and darkness’ of the scenery was perceived as a special feature of the location, distinguishing it from other locations in the Yorkshire Dales and Peak District. According to some respondents, these settlements simply ‘didn’t look right’ because they were ‘too clean looking, too bright, less natural and sanitised’. The Yorkshire Dales and Peak District were seen by some as ‘too manicured’. As one moor top resident commented, ‘here it is less polished’. In the search for ‘authenticity’, the less palatable elements of the industrial past (disease, pollution, poverty) were subsumed in idyllic representations of the relationship between worker and land. As one respondent noted rather cynically: ‘the blackness on their stonework is pollution from an industrial aberration, not the natural rural paradise that they perceive’. Both the contemporary village and moor top landscapes thus reflect a repackaging of the past and a reconstruction of meanings.

The differing socio-cultural representations of rurality expressed by the newcomers to the villages and moor tops were closely associated with culture and lifestyle differences between them. The survey revealed a broad distinction between two groups of in-migrants associated with what we have termed the ‘greentrification process’ of the rural locations under study: remote greentrifiers, who have sought the solitude of the moor tops, and village greentrifiers, who have settled in the moor edge village communities. The two groups were also characterised by different social, economic and demographic characteristics (see Fig. 3).

In short, the remote greentrifiers are typically owner-occupier households, young heterosexual couples (over half are aged between 25 and 44), who are at family forming stages of their life-cycle. Importantly, both partners tend to be well-educated (often university graduates) and are employed in high income legal, business and financial professions. Hence there is a high proportion of ‘dual career’ couples living on the moor tops. Some of these households moved into the moor top location from Leeds, Bradford or Manchester, where many of this group still work and commute daily by car. Others have relocated here from places as far away as London and the south-east of England. Similarly, the village greentrifiers tend to be owner-occupier households. Like the remote greentrifiers, there is a high proportion of young couples, aged 25–44. However, fewer of the village greentrifiers are at family forming stages of their life-cycles. More are either post-family forming (i.e. ‘empty nest’) or have postponed or rejected family forming and marriage. Also in line with the remote greentrifiers, there is a high proportion of
university graduates, yet the socio-economic and occupational characteristics of the village greentrifiers differ, with a higher incidence of individuals working from home, or employed in the ‘teaching professions’ and ‘other associated professional’ occupations. This latter trait may explain the low dependence on cars for commuting to their place of work and relatively lower (and compromised) income levels of the village greentrifiers. As we will see in the following sections, these different demographic and socio-economic attributes are associated with the contrasting cultural predilections of the remote and village greentrifiers.

4. Remote greentrifiers

The smallest of the movements of the new middle classes has been associated with scattered settlement on the remote moor tops above Hebden Bridge. Central to the remote greentrifiers’ choice of the moor tops was the desire to escape to an environment devoid of the intrusions of the ‘big city’, as clearly exemplified in the following two comments:

I lived in London for a while and I lost myself. But here I just have to look out of my window and all I see are endless moors, hills and sky. My view is not stopped by houses, lamp posts, cars or people. It’s just me and the moors. This gives me a chance to contemplate and work out who I am. There’s nothing to distract me but nature.

You don’t get distractions on the tops and gradually you start to become interested in the surroundings. You start to feel the value of the earth, the trees growing, the grass growing. They start to have a real value, not just things to look at and this provides you with energy and therapy, to find yourself.

For many of those living in these remote locations, the socio-spatial isolation of the Pennine moor tops was perceived to be therapeutic and provided a means to

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Village</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>25.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>11.4</td>
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<td>28.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehensive / secondary modern</td>
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<td>68.4</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Family type</strong></td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>(%)</td>
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<td>26.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Over £25,000</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>31.3</td>
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Fig. 3. Demographic and socio-economic profile of greentrifer households.
'self-realisation' (Giddens, 1991). Three-quarters of the remote greentrifiers interviewed stressed that living on the moor tops allowed them time to reflect and ‘find themselves’; an opportunity to negotiate lifestyle and sense of identity in a fast, chaotic post-modern era. For these individuals, the voyage of self-discovery through contemplation is facilitated by the socio-spatial isolation associated with the unrestricted spaciousness and limitless horizons of the moor tops. A search for solitude was commonly expressed; two-thirds of the remote greentrifiers interviewed cited physical isolation as a major attraction of the moor top location. This group apparently reveled in the harshness of the moor top climate, which appeared to reinforce their affinity with the landscape. For example, one remote greentrifier admitted to being pleasantly surprised by the harsh isolation imposed by the winter:

> When you are snowed in on the moor tops, can’t get your car out and have to get through 3 miles of snow drifts; it can be bit of a pain. Although it is bleak in the winter, it is good and healthy. It is natural! That’s why I came here in the first place.

As will be seen in the next section, the desire to connect with what was perceived and valued as a wild, isolated existence in a sometimes hostile ‘Brontesque’ landscape clearly distinguishes this group from those who have settled in the villages on the edge of the moors.

For many remote greentrifiers, the quest for self-realisation involved more than just forsaking city living; it was strongly linked to the desire to pursue a ‘natural’ and ‘survivalist’ way of life. This manifested itself in the appropriation and commodification of an idealised version of the Pennine past embodied in the farmer–weaver’s traditional way of life. The independence and insularity of those who had once worked within the traditional domestic system of textile production inspired and fascinated these remote greentrifiers. They were thus keen to pursue (selectively) the traditions and to purchase the artifacts which seemed culturally in tune with their new, ‘natural’ lifestyle. For example, old stone Pennine country properties were perceived, and marketed by local agents, as highly desirable; a home which could symbolically ‘place’ them in the past. Indeed, just over half (54 per cent) of the remote greentrifiers interviewed had sought to purchase this highly prized and expensive commodity. This lifestyle statement frequently went hand in hand with other manifestations of the ‘natural survivalist’ way of life aspired to by many of this group; for example, the hand-cutting of logs for open fires, the milking of goats and the collection of ‘free range’ eggs were keenly embraced in the process of identification with the past.

As the interviewees acknowledged, however, their appropriation of the Pennine farmer–weaver lifestyle was selective. In particular, their isolation was cushioned by their connections to the outside world. The majority, for example, are dependent upon the surrounding metropolitan areas for employment and social interaction. The ability to commute to, and regularly connect with, urban life was thus integral to their moor top lifestyle. The Pennine moor tops could therefore be said to offer ‘attached detachment’, rather than isolation, to this group. This was openly admitted by many of the remote greentrifier respondents, for example:

> Living here enables us to live in a relatively detached situation, a healthy environment. We are as close to it as you can be, without being part of it, because we can easily get back to the towns to work.

In addition, the new middle class moor top incumbents were steeped in ideologies which often conflicted with those embedded in the ‘traditional’ moor top lifestyle. This manifested itself in the objections to field sports, such as grouse shooting, on the moor-lands. Some of the more established residents thus resented the incursion of urban newcomers. As one long-term moor top resident asserted: ‘If the townies wish to move to a rural area they must learn to fit in with the rural ways and not try to change things to suit themselves’ (Hebden Bridge Times, 8/1/93). ‘Locals’ often saw ‘the townies’ as lacking the qualities needed to live on the moor tops, as evidenced by scathing references to their inability to survive the harshness of the winter. Particularly vituperative comments were heaped on the head of urban southerners migrating into the area. For example, as one long-term resident of the moor tops stressed, with reference to a southerner who had recently bought an old farmstead in the locality; ‘although he is less than two miles from the nearest pitted black olive, the winter winds of the Pennine tops are likely to leave him scarred’ (The Sunday Times, 15/11/92).

Although the remote greentrifiers greatly valued the physical attributes of the moor top location, they derived little social capital from the locality. The newcomers had little sense of a collective identity rooted in the moor top location; their social connections were generally elsewhere. Indeed, 90 per cent of the respondents in these areas said that their social life was largely based outside the remote areas and very few (5 per cent) belonged to a locally based institution or group. Their failure to participate in local community life was resented by some residents of the village locations, who regarded them as introspective, disparagingly referring to them as professional ‘rural hermits’. This group of well educated, articulate, professionals did, however, temporarily engage in local affairs when the character of the environment into which they had bought was threatened. For example, many became involved in a campaign to oppose a wind-farm planned for the moor tops. Their arguments against the proposed development were replete with Bronte...
references and the need to save the cultural heritage of the Bronte landscape which they valued.

Embedded within the Brontesque constructs of rurality were notions of ‘Englishness’, which were explicitly bound up with nationalism, and implicitly with ‘whiteness’. Nationalistic sentiments were evident in the recounting of particular cultural events; for example, it was described how ‘VE and VJ Day were celebrated up here in a big way, we had a massive ‘Union Jack’ flying all day in the pub car park. It was wonderful’. The symbols of national identity invested in the wild Pennine landscape connected with the metaphorical image of the Pennines as the ‘Backbone of England’.

Although ‘race’ was not explicitly raised as a subject for discussion in the interviews, it became evident that the remote greentrifiers’ constructions of rurality and implicit notions of national identity were synonymous with ‘whiteness’ (Jackson, 1999). The attraction of the moor tops as white spaces emerged in the construction of rurality in oppositional terms to urban living, with over two-thirds of remote greentrifiers referring to the multi-racial composition of the large metropolitan areas as one of their reasons for leaving. Some respondents conceptualised this in terms of a lost sense of belonging, for example: ‘I lived in the inner city of Manchester and to be honest, I just didn’t belong there anymore, I felt like I was in the ethnic minority, not them anymore’. The 1991 Census indicates that most of the population in the remote (and village) locations were ‘white’ (99.9 and 98.8 per cent, respectively).

In the process of rural greentrification, the moor tops have therefore largely become the territory of the relatively affluent ‘white’ middle class professional. Like elsewhere, the process of rural greentrification in the case study area has been predominantly a ‘white’ phenomenon (Kinsman, 1995). However, the distinct lifestyle of the remote greentrifiers is specific to the remote moor top locations of Hebden Bridge. It is a pastiche, involving the appropriation of a redefined rural past of the location, financed by present day urban capital, which insulates them from the harshest realities of moor top life. The four wheel drive vehicle symbolises their life-line to the city. The moors thus offer them isolation of the mind rather than physical exile. Although the remote greentrifiers expressed a strong sense of belonging to the locality rather than its people, they have therefore largely become the territory of the middle class professional. Like elsewhere, the process of rural greentrification of the 1970s and 1980s. These village greentrifiers, like the moor top newcomers, were interested in a lifestyle change which permitted an exploration of ‘self’. In contrast to the remote greetrifiers, a sense of belonging to the local community was also deeply implicated in their lifestyle aspirations.

Central to an understanding of the distinctive village-based cultures of this locality is the presence and influence of members of an earlier ‘hippie generation’ in the locality.

These individuals moved into the villages from the more remote rural locations they had once colonised in the 1960s and early 1970s. Cheap land, derelict properties and a local tolerance of cultural difference had been instrumental in attracting those wishing to pursue a subsistence, anti-materialist ‘good-life’ culture to the location (Smith, 1998; White, 1998). Over time, however, a reappraisal of the values and hardships involved in following this lifestyle brought a cultural shift and a change in location for some. Indeed, two-thirds of village greentrifiers interviewed provided biographical accounts of how they had ‘dropped back in’ from their ‘hippie’ lifestyle, to become part of the new middle classes of the 1980s, some taking jobs in the city as solicitors, surveyors, accountants or architects. For some, however, their brush with ‘yuppie’ lifestyle was temporary. As one pioneer village greentrifier explained:

We decided that lifestyle [the ‘good-life’] had limitations and we entered the big bad world, using our many competent skills to make our fortunes. But now we have gone back to our ‘good-life’ roots, minus the poverty and discomfort of the sixties.

Many village greentrifiers were keen to draw a distinction between themselves and other new middle class products of the ‘eighties urban yuppie culture’. For example, as one respondent asserted:

We are not like the middle classes who live in the suburbs of Manchester, Leeds or Bradford or any other metropolitan town or city. We are, if I can use the term, the ‘hippie middle class’ who have grown up and got older. A better label to use would be the ‘non-conformist middle class’. We are less materialistic, less competitive and more co-operative.

Parallels can be drawn here with Heelas’ (1995) discussion of contemporary expressivist self-ethic forms. Heelas asserts that many of the cultural values and expressions of the hippie lifestyle of the 1960s and 1970s have been taken on-board by ‘New Age Professionals’. However, there is an important distinction to be made between the two cultural forms, since the New Age Professionals have not ‘dropped-out’ of the capitalist mainstream. Rather they continue to work, yet in more flexible relationships. The middle class households in the
villages could certainly be described as ‘stepping-out’, rather than a ‘dropping-out’ from the ‘rat-race’, with approximately one-third of respondents describing themselves as artists or craftworkers who work from home. For these individuals, it would appear that village life and a connection with rurality offers an opportunity to reconcile ‘life’ and ‘work’, to balance their concerns for an equilibrium between financial and health status (Heelas, 1995).

The village areas thus symbolise a retreat from the pressures of the modern world, a movement into imagined therapeutic rural space, which has been most explicitly embraced by those who have chosen to work from home. This point was clearly illustrated by an architect who had made this choice:

I was very senior in a number of different corporate organisations in London and Manchester. It got to the point where I wasn’t doing what I wanted to do. I was doing what everybody else thought was logical to do. I was going out and earning lots of money. I was able to earn a big fat pay cheque every month but it didn’t seem right for me. It seemed daft that I was having to get up at 6 o’clock every morning, get on a train and struggle to get to the centre of London, work until seven in the evening and do the same thing five days a week. At the end of the week I still hadn’t done enough. So the rat race was wrong for me and I came here to escape and get away from all of that. That is what I mean by quality of life rather than quantity.

Importantly, some village greentrifiers have not ‘stepped out’ of the rat race, to the extent of becoming homeworkers. Rather there is a segment which continues to commute to the surrounding metropolitan centres and are predominantly employed in the teaching professions. However, many of this latter social grouping share many of the antimaterialistic cultural traits associated with Heelas’ ‘New Age Professionals’. Indeed, interviews with all types of village greentrifiers, whatever their employment or occupational status, revealed a further overlap with Stott’s (1986) description of an ‘Alternative’ social grouping, founded on a combination of 1960s radicalism, Eastern Mysticism and post-industrial ‘greenish’ politics, which has:

Seen through all the materialist striving for bigger houses, faster cars, more expensive holidays, and better paid jobs—or they think they have. They are into self-exploration and voluntary simplicity. The ‘outer directedness’ of ‘conspicuous consumption’ has become the ‘inner directedness’ of the New Age. Their basic attitudes stress self-development, non-aggression, emphasis of the feminine side of human nature to redress the existing imbalance. They lay store to the less ambitious, less planned, less competitive lifestyles (Stott, 1986, p. 8).

It can be argued that residual elements of a ‘good-life’ counterculture exist in the values and lifestyles displayed by the village greentrifiers, such as the value placed on ‘self-discovery and a lifestyle rooted in a desire for ‘natural’ products and ‘authentic’ artifcats from the reclaimed Pennine past. For instance, the perceived link between the rural landscape, the character of this Pennine locality and the search for ‘self’ was deemed by both the homeworkers and commuters to be a vital part of the inspiration for their work and quality of life. Typical comments included:

Everything goes too fast in the cities and you don’t notice anything. But up here, you have the time to study yourself, the landscape and other things around you. This gives ideas and inspiration.

Like the remote greentrifiers, newcomers to the villages derived value from their attempts to connect with the Pennine past. For example, half of those interviewed (51 per cent) had confined their search for housing to Pennine weaver country cottages. The properties’ attraction was not merely aesthetic, but constructed in terms of their (idealised) historical links with the domestic system of textile production and homeworking. Typical remarks illustrating this point include:

If you are going to work from home, there’s no better place to do it than in a weaver’s cottage. I mean, they were built centuries ago, so that you could live and work under the same roof. So I thought, why not do it now!

For some, these connections were explicit before the purchase; for others, the past had been appropriated after learning more about the history of the cottages. These connections were used to forge the sense of belonging to the village locations that was sought by many of the in-migrants to this newly repackaged landscape.

Village life was also perceived to offer a ‘less competitive’ lifestyle. Hand in hand with this went the search for an idyllic village lifestyle, based on idealised notions of an intimate and supportive community, with caring neighbours. These comforting images of the rural are anathema to the wild representations of rurality held by the remote greentrifiers. Indeed, while 43 per cent of village greentrifiers said they were attracted to the village locations by the sense of community, only 4 per cent of remote greentrifiers saw this as an attraction.

The village greentrifiers’ search for a communal lifestyle is also manifest in the revival of local Methodist membership in two of the villages, although there were no indications that the village greentrifiers were
attracted to these villages by historical connotations of religious non-conformity associated with this area of the Pennines (Jennings, 1992). For this group, Methodist membership does not necessarily constitute worship. Rather the chapel is viewed as both the centre of village life and a link to the past; it symbolises unity and communal relations. As many as three-quarters of village greentrifiers admitted that they felt compelled to join in community activities to obtain village citizenship. Significantly, these activities centred upon the chapel. As one village greentrifier commented; ‘I just wanted to be a part of the village and if that means joining the Methodist Church, so be it, as long as I don’t have to worship’. The village greentrifiers are thus ‘conforming’ to obtain village membership and a sense of belonging, but importantly conformity is on their own terms.

The gregarious village greentrifiers’ sense of belonging is founded in an attachment to institutions, people and place. The desire for a regeneration of community spirit in the locality was summed up by an architect, who explained:

We are trying to get some sort of community regeneration going up here. The Parish Council and the local Methodist Church have got together to organise the first ever village fete. They have got together to try to put a sense of community back into the place.

The affluent newcomers were well represented on the Parish Council committees in all four villages. This served as a vehicle for strengthening and redefining community life. For example, in one village, a parish newsletter containing snippets of history and tales from the past was published with the specific aim of engendering a sense of place and communality through a reinvention of the past. More concretely, an architect and member of the local Parish Council, who had recently moved into one of the villages, helped to modify the physical form of one of the villages to reinforce its spatial identity. As one respondent recounted:

When you come into the village now, you come into a village which is built up on both sides and you know that you are physically in a village. You know that you are entering a real village community and then the road splits and you are out again.

Over half of the village greentrifier interviewees expressed delight at the development, lamenting the lack of a clear physical identity for the location prior to this.

Village greentrifiers’ constructions of rurality were thus rooted in meanings widely associated with the ‘rural idyll’; a sense of village community and belonging to an environment that was perceived as peaceful, ‘natural’ and distinct from urban living was important to them. In this sense, the newcomers to the villages of Hebden Bridge have much in common with those seeking the rural idyll in other parts of the country (Matless, 1994). However, there were also particular characteristics which made living in the village locations distinctive. Significantly, the village greentrifiers partly derived their identity by stressing their difference from those living on moor tops. Negative stereotypes of the ‘other’ group were employed by both the village and the remote greentrifiers, thereby strengthening their own identity and reinforcing the socio-cultural boundaries between them (cf. Bourdieu, 1984). For example, one middle class moor top resident characteristically derided the village in-migrants in the following way:

They (the village greentrifiers) are extremely skilled people who are essentially non-competitors, living and doing their jobs in a non-competitive environment… The village is the hub of the alternative non-achiever.

Meanwhile, the following comment is illustrative of the stereotypes used by village greentrifiers to describe the more competitive moor top newcomers to Hebden Bridge:

The moor tops are where the brash breed live, the sort of Thatcherite yuppie. There is a competitive edge to many of them, a sort of one-up-manship and bugger the rest of them mentality.

6. Discussion

In this paper, we have sought to deepen our understanding of the breadth of processes of gentrification in the rural context. For this purpose, we have examined the in-migration of relatively affluent households into the Hebden Bridge district; a movement motivated by cultural aspirations to consume specific representations of greentrified Pennine rurality. We have suggested the term ‘rural greentification’ to emphasise the in-migrants’ cultural predisposition for ‘green’ residential space. Indeed, we would argue that a consumption-led focus within a gentrification framework provides an effective starting point to illuminate the differences between processes of revitalisation within and between rural locations.

The focus of this paper, therefore, reaffirms that rural locations are ‘theatres of consumption’, which the new middle class ‘buy into’ to obtain senses of identity and belonging, as well as (non) membership of social spaces and groups. In making this case, we have provided an illustrative example of the new middle classes seeking to display different amounts of social, cultural and economic capital in a location which evokes diverse
meanings of rurality. This has ensured cultural and class differentiation and self-preservation through varied cultural competences.

One way in which this cultural practice may be exemplified is to posit that the collective agency of the greentrifiers aids the creation of distinct place-specific forms of ‘rural’ habitus. Indeed, and in line with Bourdieu’s (1984) definition of habitus, a set of dispositions and principles, which structure the social practices of households, can be identified in the village and remote locations. We would argue that these social boundaries and norms underpin and are pivotal to the reproduction of the socio-spatial relationships identified in this paper, and are integral to the expressions of cultural and economic capital associated with the ‘green’ rural Pennine lifestyles of the village and remote greentrifiers. This viewpoint is represented diagrammatically in Fig. 4, which contrasts the components of the village and remote habitus and shows some of the key dimensions of the asymmetrical social bases of identification for the remote and village greentrifiers. This integration reflects the interplay of normative expectations of (non)traditionality, as revealed by the greentrifiers’ attitudes towards: partnering and parenting; employment and occupational orientations; tolerance of unconventional social relations, and; belonging to social groups and communities within the respective rural contexts.

It can be argued that the interpretations of these social practices, contextual codes and ‘norms’ enable both the village and remote greentrifiers to make distinctions between ‘them’ and ‘us’. This routine underpins the social categorisations which are tied to the village and remote locations (i.e. the ‘under-achievers’ and ‘brash Thatcherite types’, respectively). This finding reiterates Lamont’s (1992) call to acknowledge the centrality of context to processes of identification. In this sense, the abstract social and cultural boundaries intrinsic to the village and remote habitus are clearly embedded within, and concretised by, the greentrifiers’ shared consumption orientations and reproduction of lifestyles, and interaction with the rural Pennine location.

A further common thread running throughout the paper has been the varied appeals of Pennine rurality, reproduced through the consumption and lifestyle strategies of both the remote and village greentrifiers. In the Hebden Bridge district, the greentrifiers are clearly consuming rurality in different ways and for different reasons. This highlights the benefits of teasing out the different geographical dimensions of the rural when examining processes of change, in particular, the impact of different representations of rurality on socio-spatial concentrations and segregations between groups (e.g. Halfacree, 1994, 1997). This reiterates the need to view the rural as a pluralistic and subjective socio-cultural construct and links these arguments into the wider debate of how and when to utilise the concept of rurality.

The empirical material presented in this paper indicates the need for future studies to explore some important issues which may be shaping contemporary abstract and concrete expressions of rural change. Key questions are: how widespread are the ‘greentrification’, consumption-led, in-migration flows witnessed in the Hebden Bridge district, within the wider rural context? To what extent do these population shifts compound the marginalisation, polarisation and displacement of the exclusion of low-income and other marginal households from rural locations? Do similar antithetical representations of the rural, such as remote/village, exist within other rural contexts? For instance, is the symbolism of the rural location as a less competitive social environment, when compared to the urban setting, becoming a widespread phenomenon? If so, will an increasing proportion of rural locations become the haven for (middle-class) social groups seeking non-conventional employment and occupational orientation, with value placed on the integration of work and home, and a cultural inclination towards a less-materialistic and less-stressful lifestyle, where financial and health concerns are balanced? Likewise, are predilections for ‘good-life’ counter-cultures becoming a common trait of contemporary rural societies, and are these changes tied to particular regions or places? Are these less-conventional lifestyles bound up with the back-to-the-land movement (see Jacobs (1997) for fuller discussion) and the constitution of ‘alternative’ new middle class groupings in rural locations? How will these ‘other’ emerging geographies of rurality and social practices impact on the existing lower income resident households in rural locations? These questions point to a research agenda of important political and social significance.

![Diagram](image-url)
7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have shown that the consumption of rural spaces is a significant medium of identification for the new middle class in-migrants to the case study area, which is bound-up with processes of greentrification. The social and spatial separation of greentrifier types also points to significant cultural differentiation within the incoming group and the diverse appeals and meanings of Pennine rurality, and points to the construction and maintenance of spatially distinct rural ‘habitus’. This is manifest in representations of the remote moor top and village locations as competitive and non-competitive spaces, respectively. Such representations of rurality have in turn been reinforced by a distinctive ordering of identities and tastes of the new middle class in-migrants, particularly in terms of their difference from middle class rural ‘others’.

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References