

Revisiting ‘counterurbanisation’: recognising the full picture

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Some three decades on from its initial labelling by Brian Berry in the USA in 1976, ‘counterurbanisation’ remains the object of considerable academic interest. However, the concept itself remains very far from acquiring any clear definitional consensus and in many ways retains the characteristics of one of social science’s ‘chaotic conceptions’. Nevertheless, actual studies of counterurbanisation – whether by academics or in the media - tend to focus on certain types of migration trends and experiences and to develop generalisations based on these. Whilst such selectivity and generalisation is both useful and necessary, it is a sleight of hand that neglects other migration-related experiences that could be seen to exist within a richer, more embracing and inclusive concept of counterurbanisation. These experiences would include those of the foreign immigrants to small towns and rural areas that are the focus of this workshop and also more counter-cultural ‘back-to-the-land’ experiments. Recognising such strands gives a much fuller and more interesting picture of both migration and the dynamic changes being experienced by rural areas in the global North today.