

INTERPRETIVE POLICY ANALYSIS CONFERENCE 2021

Panel Title:

P14 - Interpreting Public Policy for the Rural Periphery

Panel Convenors:

Prof. Jane Wills, Professor of Geography (University of Exeter)

Dr. Joanie Willett, Senior Lecturer in Environmental Politics (University of Exeter)

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Over recent years there has been a correlation between the dissatisfaction of rural peoples, and a rise in populism in national politics. This includes key moments such as the rural vote for Donald Trump in the USA; the rural vote for Brexit in the UK, and the Gilet Jaunes protests in France. These examples expose long-standing geographical fractures in the political community, as rural areas fall further behind their urban counterparts across a range of measures of economic success, political voice and social outcomes. Widening disparities indicate that policy makers are failing to develop successful tools to bring about social, economic and political cohesion between rural and urban areas. There is also a danger that rural communities lack the capacity to respond to contemporary challenges such as climate change, the ecological crisis, and post Covid-19 recovery, further compromising rural resilience.

Our panel will explore how policy can bolster resilience in the rural periphery, and whether we need new frameworks to interpret the needs of these areas and the associated policy challenges. This is especially pressing as the low population density of rural areas combined with a current policy emphasis on developing cities, can lead to the rural periphery becoming invisible in contemporary policy discourse. Further, we need to find better ways to understand the lives and capacities of people who live in rural areas, if we are to be able to address the challenges that rural people face as they try to navigate contemporary challenges.

This panel welcomes papers addressing these issues, including key questions such as:

1. Are current perspectives adequate for interpreting rural peripheral areas and their associated public policy challenges?
2. What kinds of analytical approaches are best suited to understanding the challenges and opportunities facing rural peripheries?
3. What kind of interpretive methodological innovations are best suited to respond to these questions?
4. What are the emerging policy narratives that might reposition the rural periphery in national debate (and the panel might explore new ideas about natural capital, nature recovery, green and blue growth, landscape regeneration)?