

SPATIAL VARIATIONS IN THE QUALITY OF RURAL LIFE

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Introduction The late 1960s and early 1970s saw an increase in population in rural Ireland. Prior to this period rural populations were in a state of decline. This rural growth, however, was not uniformly distributed throughout Ireland, in fact, it had marked spatial variations. Those rural areas which lay adjacent to urban centres experienced growth while more remote parts of the country, peripheral to urban centres, did not. This two-fold classification of rural areas has important consequences on the quality of life experienced by the residents of such areas.

"Rural areas are worse off than urban areas and the more rural the area, the greater the discrepancy..." (Dillman and Trembly, 1977, p. 121).

The Demographic Account. Most geographers argue that demographic characteristics provide one of the most fundamental ways of assessing the viability of an area. Changes in the size and structure of a population are normally associated with the presence or absence of economic and social opportunities, therefore, these can be used as indicators to determine whether or not an area is experiencing development or decline. The importance of studying these population changes are underlined by Neate (1981), who stressed that the depopulation of an area:

"...is the ultimate protest and arguably one of the most potent indicators of relative disadvantage or deprivation". (p. 9).

Table 1 Percentage Population Changes

D.E.D.	1966/1971	1971/1981
Ballymodan	8.7%	40.7%
Kilbrogan	8.2%	19.2%
Kilkerranamore	3.5%	20.1%
Kilnagross	-1.4%	11.6%
Butlerstown	-1.6%	-13.0%
Cahermore	-7.9%	-10.8%
Bengour	2.0%	-10.7%
Rathelarin	6.1%	-8.3%

National Aggregate Rural Areas

Source: Census of population 1971 and 1981

Over the ten year period, 1971 to 1981, the two rural districts of Bandon and Clonakilty have experienced an increase of 12.5% and 2.3% respectively in their populations. The significance of this growth is considerably heightened because of its spatial dimensions.

Both Table 1 and Figure 1 clearly illustrate that a general pattern has emerged which facilitates the identification of two broad zones within each rural district. Firstly there exists a group of D.E.Ds which occupy a peripheral location and which are characterised by significant losses in their population over the ten year period 1971/81. Secondly, it is possible to identify an inner core of D.E.Ds related by their proximity to an urban centre and the considerable population gains they exhibit.

It was also found that very considerable differences existed in the demographic structure of the individual D.E.Ds. The research indicates that D.E.Ds close to urban centres possess a far more favourable population structure and one which is conducive to growth and development (in economic terms) relative to that which typifies the more remote peripheral D.E.Ds.

The population structure of the D.E.Ds (represented by Ballymodan) is dominated by young families, the type referred to by Duffy (1978) when he stated:

"Younger families come in, with different attitudes and motives. These are new people with no roots in the area, with kin and friendship networks widely spaced, who are more mobile, have higher incomes and often consist of two car households".

Evidence would suggest the existence of a pronounced division within the study area in terms of demographic changes and structure. Clearly the more accessible rural areas possess a more favourable demographic structure relative to that which exists within the remote countryside. Given the relationship between the demography of an area and its level of viability, the results of this analysis would point to the existence of significant variations in the quality of life between different rural areas, depending on their location.

Occupational Structures Several studies have attempted to identify the main components of life quality. (Pacione 1982, Moser 1970 and Smith 1973). Most suggest that the basic components are related to health,

standard of living, housing, education, leisure, mobility, availability of services and the social and physical environment. Clearly the level of income generated in an area will have a major influence on the quality of life experienced within it. It will determine the quality of the housing stock and its facilities, the rate of car ownership, and the amount of money available for the purchase of luxury items.

One of the most important trends of the previous decade or two within the Irish countryside has been the diversification of occupational structure. The strength of the primary sector has been weakened by the influx of people who are employed within the secondary and tertiary sectors. Such people tend to possess middle-class characteristics, while residing in the countryside and commuting to work on a daily basis. Since many of these people are employed within the service and professional sectors, they tend to generate an income in excess of that earned by the small to medium sized farmer, thereby having a very positive effect on the area in question. Consequently the percentage of an area's workforce employed in the tertiary and quaternary sectors of the economy will have an important influence on the quality of life enjoyed by its residents. Evidence would suggest that similar to the demographic analysis the more accessible parts of the countryside have a more favourable occupational structure relative to the remote peripheral areas. (Table 2)

Table 2. Occupational Structure

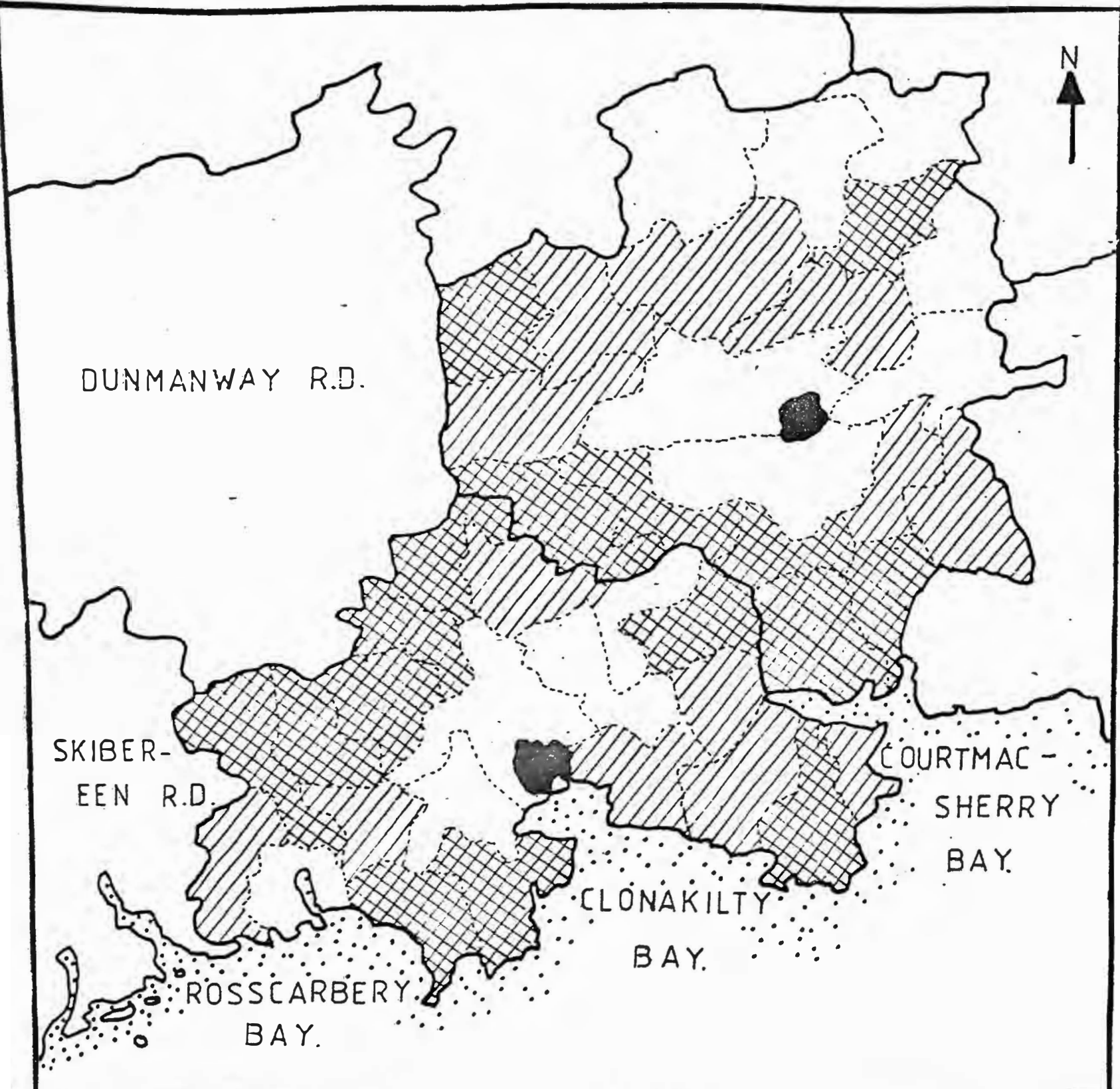
Categories	Ballymodan	Butlerstown
Agriculture	33.3%	70.9%
Professional	23.3%	3.2%
Services	26.8%	9.6%
Skilled/Manual	16.8%	16.1%




Source: Questionnaire




Despite the diversification which has taken place in the employment structure of rural areas, agriculture is still the single most important source of employment. Nevertheless the profitability of agriculture varies widely from place to place. Factors such as farm size, and the degree of specialisation, mechanisation and modernisation

Fig. 1

POPULATION CHANGES in the D.E.D.s within the RURAL DISTRICTS of BANDON and CLONAKILTY, 1971-81.



KEY.
COAST-LINE 
RURAL DISTRICT 
D.E.D. 

>10 % 
1 - 9.9 % 
<0 % 

SCALE
1" = .125 miles.

all influence the viability of farming. Therefore, it is quite possible to identify varying levels of agricultural productivity and profitability over space. There is evidence to suggest that a relationship exists between the level of income derived from agriculture and the location of the rural area relative to an urban centre. Evidence derived from data obtained in Ballymodan and Butlerstown (clearly) illustrate this point.

Farm size is one important factor which will either permit or inhibit a farmer from achieving a satisfactory income from his farm. A relationship has been found to exist between the size of farms in general and the distance of the rural area from an urban centre. Data collected from Ballymodan and Butlerstown illustrate this point.

Table 3 Farm Size

Size (acres)	Ballymodan	Butlerstown
<15	0%	0%
15-29	0%	25%
30-49	10%	53%
50-64	20%	15%
65-79	30%	8%
80-99	20%	0%
100+	20%	0%

Source: Questionnaire

One of the most characteristic elements within the agricultural sector in Butlerstown is the small farm size. One quarter of all the farms here are less than thirty acres in size and over one half are less than fifty acres in size. In Ballymodan the farms on average are considerably larger with sixty per cent of the farms over fifty acres in size and forty per cent over eighty acres in size. The large size of the farms in Ballymodan has facilitated increasing levels of specialisation and modernisation and also permitted the agricultural community to achieve a very satisfactory income.

It has been argued by many researchers (for example Clout, 1979) that small farm size will limit, and in many cases inhibit, specialisation. This would appear to be the case in Butlerstown where all the farm households interviewed are engaged in mixed farming. The equivalent figure in Ballymodan was thirty per cent

Other indices of modernisation examined included the type of winter feed used and the quality of milking equipment employed on the farm. For both criteria the situation existing in Ballymodan is superior to that in Butlerstown. It was found that one half of all the farmers in Butlerstown still feed hay exclusively to stock in winter. The equivalent figure for Ballymodan was ten per cent. The advantages of silage making over hay making are well established. It was also found that less than one third of all farmers in Butlerstown producing milk have modern milking parlours. The vast majority of these still operate with manual milking stalls. The situation in Ballymodan was one where ninety per cent of all milk producing farmers specialise in dairying and have the most up to date equipment.

All evidence would seem to point to the more favourable position of agriculture in rural areas which lie adjacent to urban centres. In addition, these zones also possess an occupational structure which is much more likely to result in a high standard of living relative to the occupational structure existing in peripheral localities.

The Quality of the Housing Stock The quality of the housing stock has been identified within the literature as being one of the components which will influence the quality of life within an area. In general the age of a house will determine its quality and indeed the quality of life within it. An analysis of the age of the housing stock within the D.E.Ds points to the existence of a marked divide within the study area.

Table 4 Percentage of houses built since 1961 and 1971

D.E.D.	1961	1971
Ballymodan	42.8%	30.0%
Kilbrogan	33.2%	26.8%
Kilherranamore	39.0%	27.2%
Kilnagross	22.0%	17.1%
Butlerstown	14.0%	7.8%
Cahermore	11.0%	10.4%
Bengour	11.8%	6.7%
Rathclarin	25.0%	18.6%
National Aggregate		
Rural Areas	30.5%	22.4%

Source: Census of population 1981

It has already been noted that the majority of houses built since the late 1960's and early 1970's were largely as a result of the influx of people into rural areas, who commuted to work on a daily basis. Such a process paralleled the diversification which was taking place in the occupational structure. Consequently the percentage of houses built within the past two decades in rural areas will have important implications on the standard of living and on the quality of life there.

It is also possible to identify a relationship between the age of the housing stock in an area and the quality of its facilities. The evidence presently points to the inferior quality and absence of many essential pieces of household equipment in the peripheral D.E.Ds. These also have an old housing stock. This in turn inhibits the inhabitants from enjoying, or even aspiring to, a lifestyle equivalent to that enjoyed by the residents within the more accessible rural area.

Table 5

% of Houses without	Ballymodan	Butlerstown
Piped water	3.4%	11.7%
Toilet	2.0%	12.1%
Bath	18.4%	34.4%
Telephone	10.0%	30.0%
Washing Machine	6.6%	25.0%
Fridge	6.6%	20.0%
Colour television	10.0%	35.0%

Source: Questionnaire

Service Provision and Accessibility The provision of services in rural areas has declined steadily since the end of the second world war. As Moseley (1979) points out, the tendency has been for service outlets to become fewer, larger and more widely spaced. The consequences of such developments are varied in their effects. The burden of the problem tends to fall hardest on those located in the more peripheral rural areas rather than those located in the more accessible parts of the countryside. All evidence from data collected in West Cork would appear to be in accordance with this statement. Within West Cork the people located in the more peripheral rural areas are at a disadvantage

in terms of the distances to be overcome in order to avail of the same range of basic services as residents close to towns.

Table 6 Distance travelled to Primary School

D.E.D.	Average distance travelled	Longest distance travelled
Ballymodan	1.0 miles	2.5 miles
Butlerstown	2.8 miles	4.0 miles

Source: Questionnaire

Table 7 Distance travelled to Post-primary School

D.E.D.	Average distance travelled
Ballymodan	1.2 miles
Butlerstown	10.5 miles

Source: Questionnaire

Historically the rural population in Ireland was well serviced by a network of primary schools. With a decline in population, however, the closure of small schools became inevitable. The result is that large numbers of children in remote areas walk considerable distances to collection points and spend long periods of time travelling to and from school. Consequently they have suffered disproportionately from the policy of closure. This is clearly evident in Tables 6 and 7.

There is a continuing trend towards the centralisation of health service facilities. The inhabitants of the more remote rural areas are at a disadvantage when they require the services of a General Practitioner or dentist. They are even further disadvantaged (because of their location) when they want to avail of more specialised medical services which are located only in the larger cities.

Table 8 Average distance travelled to avail of the following medical services*

Services	Ballymodan	Butlerstown
G.P.	1.5 miles	6 miles
Chemist Shop	1.5 miles	6 miles
Specialised medical services	20 miles	37.5 miles

Source: Questionnaire

Note the distance recorded was the distance to the nearest service, whether or not it was the one availed of in each case.

The local shop, frequently with a public house attached provides a third very important service in rural areas, and has often served as a social focus for the community. The number of rural shops have declined continuously during the past two decades, and similar to the other two services examined above the effects have been most severe in the more remote rural areas.

Table 9 Average distance travelled to nearest town and city

Urban Centre	Ballymodan	Butlerstown
Town	1.2 miles	10.5 miles
City	20 miles	37.5 miles

Source: Questionnaire

People living in more accessible rural areas have access to a wide range of shopping facilities, all located within urban centres. At the other end of the scale the inhabitants of the peripheral rural areas have a considerably longer distance to travel in order to avail of a similar range of shopping facilities. Therefore, if the distance cannot be easily transgressed these people are at a considerable disadvantage

The nature and composition of the rural population poses particular problems for the provision of services. These problems are likely to be greatest in those areas which are remote from developing urban centres and where the cost of providing services to a declining population will become increasingly important. Moser (1970) and others have referred to the relationship which exists between the quality of the service base available to a community and the quality of life experienced in that area. The variations in the quality of the service base available to rural dwellers implies that the quality of life in rural areas will also vary.

The well-being of individuals, families and rural communities depends on access to employment and to basic services and amenities. Transport is the main agent enabling people to satisfy these needs. For the majority of people living in rural areas, the private motor car has come to be the main, or preferred, mode of transport. It enables individuals to overcome some of the accessibility/mobility problems

already discussed. The inhabitants of remote rural areas can solve, to some degree, their problems if they have access to a private motor car. To what extent have the residents of the rural D.E.Ds in West Cork succeeded in achieving this? The results obtained suggest that remote rural communities have a significantly lower level of car ownership than their neighbours in the more accessible rural areas. The level of car ownership is far higher amongst the inhabitants of Ballymodan than it is amongst those residing in Butlerstown (table 10).

Table 10 Car Ownership %

D.E.D.	One Car	Two Cars
Ballymodan	93.3%	46.6%
Butlerstown	80.0%	15.0%

Source: Questionnaire

Conclusion Over the previous few decades a number of organisations have become active in an attempt to improve the quality of life existing in rural Ireland. The workings of the Common Agricultural Policy (C.A.P.) have had a profound influence in modernising Irish agriculture. The Industrial Development Authority (I.D.A.) has done a tremendous amount of work in encouraging the decentralisation of industry, from the larger urban centres into the smaller rural communities. The result has been a major improvement in the standards of living in rural Ireland.

The improvement in the quality of Irish rural lifestyles has had one major drawback, however, and this can be related to its spatial distribution. The process of growth, development and economic rejuvenation have not been uniformly distributed throughout the countryside. It is those rural areas which lie adjacent to urban centres which have benefited most. More remote rural areas have not participated in this growth and in many cases they have experienced stagnation and decline over the past two decades. Consequently the quality of life in rural Ireland has marked spatial variations.

Variations in the quality of Irish rural lifestyles have been the topic of many recent discussions, and a variety of means have been adopted to analyse such variations. A study of the demography of rural communities provides the initial insight into the standard of living.

In this study it is clear that remote rural communities can be characterised by a demographic composition which is unfavourable to growth and economic development. As a result such areas tend to generate an income level which is substantially lower than that generated in rural areas which lie adjacent to urban centres. Remote rural communities also possess an inferior housing stock and are deprived of the same range of services in the accessible rural areas due to their lower rate of car ownership.

The quality of life experienced by any rural community in Ireland, varies with respect to its distance from an urban centre. Remote rural communities possess a standard of living which is far below that of communities residing in areas which are not as peripheral as Dillman and Trembly (1977, p. 121) conclude:

"....and the more rural the area the greater the discrepancy".

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