

Forward-to-the-Land: Land Rights and Reform for a New Rural Economy

What are the emerging and potential land rights initiatives that can support a transition to a thriving ruralism and ecological *agriculture*?



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Who owns this landscape? –
The millionaire who bought it or
the poacher staggering downhill in the early morning
with a deer on his back?

Who possesses this landscape? –
The man who bought it or
I who am possessed by it?

False questions, for
this landscape is
masterless
and intractable in any terms
that are human.

Norman MacCaig, A Man in Assynt (2005)

Abstract

This dissertation will explore the emerging and potential land rights initiatives that can inspire a transition towards a new rural economy, based on thriving rural life and ecological agriculture. Through investigating the current movement for land rights, with interviews and direct observations of actors involved, it will attempt to draw out the relevant themes and central issues facing the movement for land rights, and its ability to push for a new rural economy. The main conclusion is that for change to come, there needs to be many layers of action. A movement must be built through individuals in the grassroots, and communities must access land where possible, support each other, and be willing to work with institutions. Centralised change must come, through specific policy and eventually through more systemic change, localising power and enabling people onto the land through a reinvigoration of democratic institutions.

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I. Introduction

All over the world, land-based ways of living are declining. The global industrial economic paradigm constantly threatens to take away the livelihoods of those living from the land. In England, the vast majority of people now live in cities, and only a small fraction of the population have land-based livelihoods. Farming has, to a great extent, become an industry rather than a culture, and many rural areas are devoid of community and life. The current mode of food production is unsustainable, as it treats nature and land as a commodity to be exploited, rather than a complex ecosystem, to be learned and lived with. However, there is strong resistance to the dominant paradigm. Alternative ways of living that are reconnected to nature, rooted in the land and inherently ecological, are constantly emerging and evolving. These are becoming beacons for those who wish to build a life that can be sustained, and rebuild rural life in a convivial way. This dissertation will explore the possibilities for a move forward into a future rural economy that is land based, looking through the eyes of those that are building alternatives today.

I.1 Agriculture, Rural Life and Land

The situation for agriculture and rural life in Europe is discouraging. There is a movement away from small-scale subsistence agricultural practices towards large-scale industrial farming and the concentration of land ownership is increasing. One large problem is that land has become a 'safe investment' in Europe, meaning just 3% of farms control more than 52% of arable land (Kay, 2016). Whilst there are some restrictions and regulations to prevent mass acquisition of land in most member states, there are also loopholes in the fact that company shares can be sold to agricultural companies without public control or taxes (Perroud, 2017), which encourages the continued acquisition of land.

Land in Europe is increasingly shifting from the primary basis of subsistence for small-scale farmers towards an object of speculation for investors. This not only threatens to prevent new farm

entrants from acquiring land, it threatens rural social structures, food quality and the ecological resilience of farming:

“When agricultural land, the soil that feeds us and that we regard as our home, becomes a globally tradable commodity and an object of speculation, there’s a lot at stake: our food security, the viability and quality of ecosystems and natural areas, small-scale farming, the economic and cultural cohesion in local communities and regions within Europe, and our society’s intergenerational contract” (Heubuch, 2016, p.4).

It is this movement which slowly begins to raise the prices of agricultural land, which in many regions has doubled in the past decade (Heubuch, 2016). The rising prices of this land, brought about by a combination of land concentration, market forces, structural barriers and land grabbing, can effectively deny entry for young and aspiring farmers (Kay, 2016). Land grabbing is increasingly becoming a driving force of land concentration in Europe, and whilst many controversial land deals are legal under EU enforcement, some suggest they should be rejected from a social justice point of view (Kay, 2016).

Additionally, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Europe’s agricultural subsidy platform, continues to favour the expansion of large industrial farms due to the skewed nature of a policy that rewards farms based on hectare ownership, which in turn encourages the buying up of land in order to activate entitlements (Kay, 2016). Whilst reform to the CAP has taken place, the objectives have remained unchanged, which has a clear and deep effect on the replicative nature of the subsidies in encouraging rising land concentration.

Whilst small farms are disappearing on a regular basis across Europe, around 69% of farms are less than 5 hectares, and these farms are an essential part of rural employment, production and equality (Kay, 2016). Questions are quite rightfully being asked about the nature of land ownership: who should own land? what is land for? The answers to these questions should be reflected in the policy. Across Europe, calls for a new CAP which recognises that land should be for all who need it, and which recognises that “the guarantee of land ownership... [is] part of the ecological, social and political foundation of the intergenerational pact on which our social constitutions in Europe are built” (Heubuch, 2016, p.32). Others call for a shift in the emphasis of land management from

market-based to human rights-based, in order to achieve a democratic and sustainable land governance framework for farmers and citizens across Europe (Kay, 2016).

In the UK, the same problems found right across Europe are also present: increased concentration of land, land grabbing, and a huge reduction in the number of small farms. In fact, land is unfathomably unequal in the UK: “nearly half the country is owned by 40,000 land millionaires, or 0.06% of the population” (Fairlie in Chamberlin, 2015). The same land concentration patterns are apparent with agricultural land, and there has been a 22% increase in the overall amount of land used by large farms (over 100 hectares) since 1990 (Kay, 2016).

One large obstacle for tackling land inequality and rising concentration of land, is that it is largely unknown who actually owns the land. Somewhere in the region of 50% of all land is not registered since there are no laws forcing people to declare and thus registration only occurs when land is bought, sold or mortgaged (Land for What?, 2016). The Land Registry set out to complete the registry of owners 150 years ago, and what it does know remains locked behind search fees (Shrubsole, 2017b). Who owns the land matters to a lot of people, as it sits in the heart of the social, economic and ecological issues that we face today.

Land concentration, whilst clearly a systemic issue, is not the only problem facing the future of British farming and rural life. Whilst agriculture in Britain uses 69% of the land, it only employs 1.5% of the workforce (476,000 people), and that is a declining statistic (LWA, 2016). Young people are also being discouraged away from farming as a way of life, as entry becomes difficult in the face of rising land prices. The average age of the farmer is now 59 years old. In fact, land prices are proving to be “out of the reach of many people who both live and work in the countryside” (LWA, 2016, p.2). The system makes it difficult for farmers to compete, as only ten percent of earnings from the UK food industry actually goes to UK farmers (DEFRA, 2015).

The decision by the British people to leave the European Union (Brexit) presents new problems and opportunities for land and agriculture. First and foremost, the CAP will have to be replaced once Britain leaves the EU. Whilst the CAP undoubtedly helps to maintain food production in the European Union, in the face of global exposure, this would not have been needed had protections from the free market been put in place for rural areas in the first place (LWA, 2016). The nature of the CAP is geared towards large-scale industrial farming, meaning 45.7% of total

holdings receive less than 5% of the pillar one subsidies (LWA, 2016). Whilst the payments were originally linked to productivity, subsidies are now given out based on acreage of land owned, “irrespective of whether or not it is being productively farmed” (LWA, 2016, p.3). They are also being handed out regardless of whether they are being sustainably or regeneratively farmed, or even farmed at all, as there is no mechanism to ensure that people actually working on the land are the recipients. Like everywhere in Europe, this means that small family farms continue to be swallowed up by industrially farmed holdings controlled by corporations:

“In 2000 the average UK farm was 169 acres, by 2010 it was 226 acres — an increase of one third. The average for the whole of Europe is 36 acres. Over the same period, 47,000 farms disappeared, a 20 per cent decline. UK farms are bigger than in any European country except the Czech Republic” (LWA, 2016, p.3).

The replacement of the CAP, whilst clearly the most central issue to the post-Brexit agricultural discussion, is not the only one. Many fear that Britain will face serious food insecurity once leaving the EU. The UK imports 80% of its fresh vegetables and 40% of its fresh fruit (Lang et al, 2017), and an ever decreasing amount of food is produced in Britain (less than 60% down from 80% only 30 years ago (O’Carroll, 2017)). The other pressing issue comes from the fact that UK agriculture relies on EU workers, with over 20% of all employees in British agriculture coming from abroad. In fact, up to 63% of meat processing workers, and 90% of vegetable and fruit harvesting comes from foreign seasonal workers (Rayner, 2017; Harris, 2017). The pay is low and the work is hard, monotonous and generally exploitative, meaning British workers will simply not do the work required to feed the industrial agriculture machine (Harris, 2017). The CAP continues to enable a movement towards the use of land for large industrial agriculture, encouraging a reliance on European labour to maintain production on such a large scale. Leaving the European Union pulls away the support for this approach to agriculture, in subsidies and in labour, rendering the system it has built obsolete.

1.2 The Emerging UK Land Rights Movement

1.2.1 The Call for a Movement to the Land

The state of agriculture and rural life, in Britain and around the world, has informed a new call for a rural renaissance to revive the countryside and an agrarian way of life:

“So that’s what the world needs. We need... an agrarian renaissance, applying the principles of agroecology, food sovereignty and economic democracy to establish enlightened agriculture as the global norm; and this renaissance must be led by us, the people at large” (Tudge, 2016, p.23).

This call is for a new system altogether, an agriculture that treats farms as ecosystems, a food system that provides sovereignty and control, and a principled economic democracy to help us transition there. There is a long way to go in reaching an alternative, as the list of systemic issues is long. The historical detachment of people from the land through its commodification and enclosure, the development of industrial agriculture, the system of subsidies that embed inequality into the system, the under-supporting of small farms and modern day land grabbing, all contribute to the production and reproduction of the dominant narrative. Whilst the land is a commodity, it will continue to be sold off to the highest bidder, and it will continue to support a destructive system of agriculture (Tudge, 2016).

1.2.2 Small Farm Revival

The call for a movement to the land is a call for a small farm revival, a revival in a farming which is valued for its ecological and community benefits, as well financial viability and yield (LWA, 2016). The Land Workers’ Alliance, the voice for small farmers in the UK and in the global fight for food sovereignty, outlines some of the growing evidence for the benefits of small farms. In ecological terms, allotment soils hold 32% more organic carbon (Edmondson et al., 2014) and using organic

principles can result in approximately 30% higher species richness and 50% higher abundance of organisms (Bengtsson et al., 2005). Small farms are recorded as more resilient, through being less wasteful and more efficient (Altieri et al., 2012), more energy efficient (Chappell and Laval, 2011), having higher water retention and less run-off (Gomez et al., 2011), and higher yields through greater resilience to droughts and pests (Frison, 2016). Small farms are inspiring innovation through appropriate technology, and inspiring a younger generation of farmers to move back into farming. The average age of the LWA is 37, compared to the UK farmer average of 59 (DEFRA, 2015), and they employ 26 times more people per hectare than the UK average (0.68 compared to 0.026; Laughton, 2017). Statistically, the case has been made to show that a small farm renaissance has the potential to offset some of the great issues facing agriculture and western society in general.

1.2.3 The Movement

“Rome fell; the Soviet Empire collapsed; the stars and stripes are fading in the west. Nothing is forever in history, except geography. Capitalism is a confidence trick, a dazzling edifice built on paper promises. It may stand longer than some of us anticipate, but when it crumbles, the land will remain.”
- The Land Magazine Manifesto (The Land, 2017)

Along with calls for a rural renaissance has come action. People are organising to find ways to revive the countryside from the ground up, or to campaign for reform from the top down. In recent decades there have been many instances of this movement. For example, the Diggers 2012 inspired by the 17th Century diggers movement (see section 2.1.2), moved onto disused land to cultivate it and build dwellings (Chamberlin, 2015). The Ecological Land Co-operative is a new initiative that attempts to encourage and enable new smallholders to work and live on the land, through buying back mistreated agricultural land and providing affordable, long-term leases (Chamberlin, 2015). Other elements come from the birth of The Land Workers' Alliance, which recently outlined a rural manifesto for equality in the countryside that was brought about through consultations with the smallholders and small farms that make up their membership (LWA, 2016). The Land magazine is the pinnacle and centrepiece of the movement for land rights today, holding

the thread between a practical political campaign and more radical suggestions for alternative livelihoods. The land right movement today is completely linked to the long periods of resistance to enclosure which will be outlined in section 2.1.2. It is also linked to the new back-to-the-land movements described in section 2.2.3, that seem to be far more politically, socially, and ecologically engaged than ever before. It is linked to and born out of the situation of depleting rural populations, and the growth of industrial agriculture.

1.2.4 Looking Forward-to-the-Land: the New Rural Economy

The movement for land rights is clearly up and running, yet the literature lacks a coherent synthesis between the critiques of the current system of agriculture and land, the analysis of the emerging movement, and the space in between the critiques and analysis: an outline of the genuine possibilities for change through land activism and reform, which can act as a guiding point on which people and organisations can focus their efforts.

This dissertation will thus reach through the historical context of enclosures, exploring the literature on ruralism and back-to-the-land movements, to eventually reach this question: *how can we move forward to a new rural economy?* It also seems clear that this question is really about land - who owns it, how it is governed, who has access to it - for there can be no new rural economy, without the land upon which it can be built. And so, the question expands: *what are the emerging and potential land rights initiatives that can support a transition to a thriving ruralism and ecological agriculture?* It is this question, and its many sub-questions, that informs this dissertation research. Whilst the concentration will be on England, this hopes to inform other places that are asking the same questions.

1.3 Outline of Sections

Section 2 will be a detailed engagement with the literature. It will begin in section 2.1 with a reach back to the history of enclosure in England and the root causes of the current predicament today, as well as outlining the history of the agrarian resistance movement, the more recent historical events in rural England, and the links to the global struggle. Following on from that, section 2.2 will explore the literature on ruralism, looking to define it and discuss the relevant debates within the literature with regards to rural life and agriculture. Section 2.3 concentrates on the back-to-the-land literature, exploring the new notion of neo-peasantry before analysing the changes in the motivations for movements back to the land over time.

Section 3 will outline the methodology, beginning with an overview of the aims and objectives and a justification for the different methodological practices used in the research. It will then describe the process which was undertaken in completing the research, from the specifics of the semi-structured interviews to the selection process and finally the thematic analysis.

Section 4 will begin by outlining the themes that were found through the research process, before diving into an analysis and discussion of the relevant themes, exploring the relationship between crisis and opportunity, the routes and preventatives for land-based livelihoods, the stories of success, the need for building a movement, and finally a discussion surrounding the importance of governance and ownership of land.

Finally, in section 5 I will conclude, synthesising the dissertation and offering final remarks and reflections.

2. Literature, Theory & Analysis

2.1 Historical Context: Enclosure, Resistance and the Death of Rural England

*Inclosure came and trampled on the grave
Of labours rights and left the poor a slave...
And birds and trees and flowers without a name
All sighed when lawless law's enclosure came
And dreams of plunder in such rebel schemes
Have found too truly that they were but dreams*

John Clare, The Mores, 1821 (Williams and Williams, 1986)



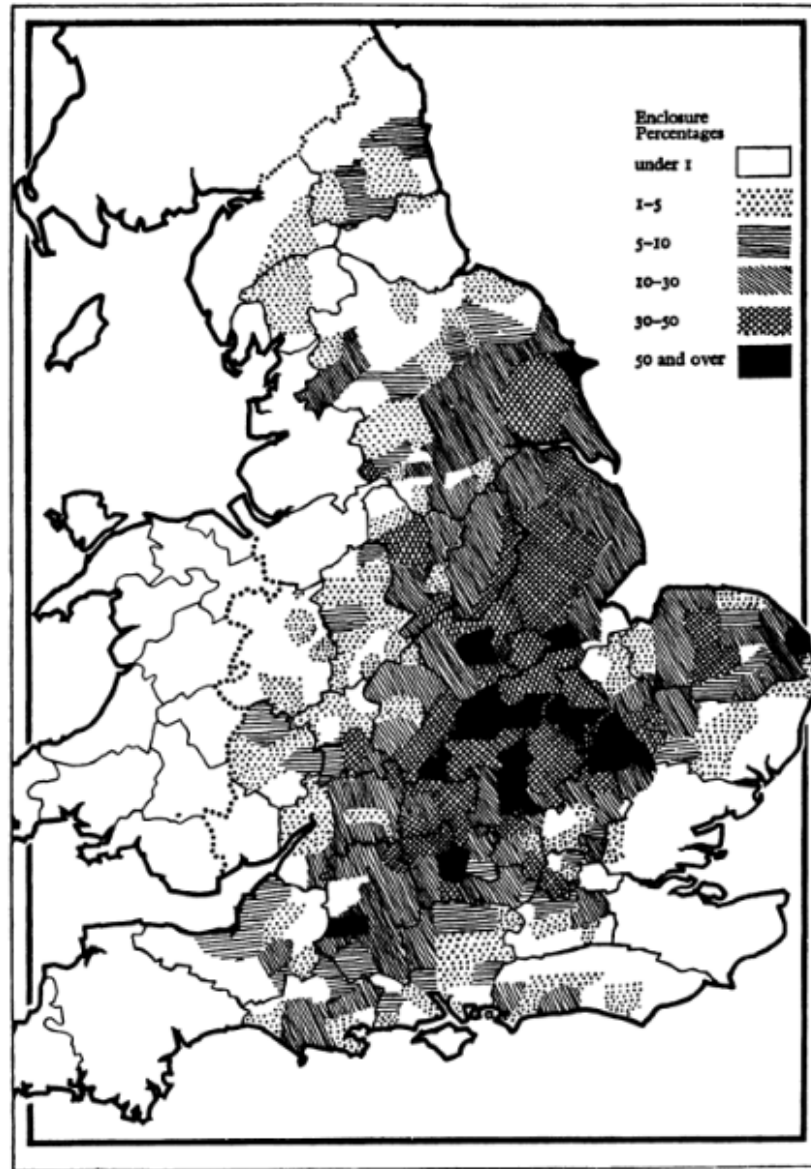
John Clare, writing in the early 19th Century, affectively told the story of the rapid decline of rural life in England. He was a poet speaking from direct experience. He was thrown off his land, along with his family and thousands of other people across Britain, during the parliamentary enclosures. To understand the current crisis of land, and of rural life in its entirety, we must track back to Clare's time to see through his eyes. We can not reduce the history of rural or agricultural England to the enclosure of the commons, or a romanticised idea of an idyllic common ownership of land, but neither can we understand the current predicament without looking back at these historical periods which helped to shape the hierarchies we experience today. The invention of class structures and an agrarian capitalism which continues to reverberate across the English landscape must not be ignored, even if the form today is an unjust land system of different flavour.

2.1.1 Enclosure and the Proletarianisation of the Peasantry

During the period of enclosures, between the 18th and 19th centuries, agrarian capitalism began to shift whole landscapes and their concomitant way of life. The most devastating shift was the invention of the agrarian capitalist class structure. By 1850, 75-80% of land was owned by landlords, farmers rented this land off the landlords employing agricultural labourers who relied on the wage-labour as a means of survival (Overton, 2004). The period of enclosure occurring between 1750-1850 (see Figure 1) was not necessarily a destruction of a peasantry in the normal sense of the word, as the tripartite structure was already in existence “by the middle of the 18th century at the latest” (Hobsbawm and Rudé 1969, p.24). To detail more the nature of this division, around 1200 people owned a quarter of the United Kingdom in 1871, 300,000 tenant farmers rented large plots of land from landowners, often exploiting both them and the 1.5 million agricultural labourers they employed to work on the land (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969). Even the idea of a peasantry was contested and misconstrued long before the enclosures. In 19th century England, when most people in the world were “still practicing subsistence agriculture” (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969, p.23), peasants were already an unimportant minority, and “when politicians and pamphleteers spoke of the English ‘peasantry’ they did not mean direct family cultivators, but agricultural wage-labourers” (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969, p.23).

The parliamentary enclosures were the final nail in the coffin for the existence of a peasant culture in England. Between 1760 and 1870, approximately 7 million acres (about one sixth the area of England) were changed, by some 4,000 acts of parliament, from common land to enclosed land (Fairlie, 2009). As land became capital, self-sufficient peasantry died in England (Linklater, 2013), private property rights eventually became a universal replacement of feudal tenures, and the percentage of the population working in agriculture decreased from 80% in 1500 to 20% in 1850 (Overton, 2004).

Figure 1: Enclosure of Common Field by act, 18th-19th Centuries



Source: Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969, p. 26

The arguments spouted for parliamentary enclosures came at a similar time to the rise of the early classical economists. It was an origin of free market economics and of 'improvement' through division of labour, mass production, and exploitation of capital. Thus the arguments for enclosure came from an economic logic which saw the open field system as inefficient, the waste lands and common pastures as overstocked and worn, and the people who lived on the commons as lazy and poor and thus needing to be forced into employment (Fairlie, 2009). This economic logic was the

same logic which saw the need to subjugate nature across the globe (see section 2.1.4), and to industrialise the cities through mass production.

The effect was that an agricultural revolution brought about vast increases in output. Contrary to many ideas this came without the introduction of mechanisation, through bringing new land under cultivation, applying the best of traditional farming methods more widely, adopting certain common-sense innovations which had long been practiced sporadically and applying systematic business calculation to farming (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969). The shift to a capitalist system, rather than bring an immediate mechanisation of agriculture, brought about a new way of farming based on economic rationality and profit maximisation:

“The peasant does not operate an enterprise in the economic sense; he runs a household, not a business concern. [The farmer, on the other hand, runs] primarily a business enterprise, combining factors of production purchased in a market to obtain a profit by selling advantageously in a product's market” (Wolf, 1966, p.2).

The farmer became a business-man, a remote boss for the labourer, as they rarely did any personal labour themselves (Colman, 1851). At the same time, the working agricultural labour became proletarianised, they relied on a limited wage labour and a *Poor Law*, which:

“had become, especially since 1795, a supplement to wages... and one which increasingly allowed the employers to pay far less than a living wage in the certainty that the rates would bring it up to at least... a bare subsistence minimum” (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969, p.34).

Thus, whilst enclosure was certainly relevant to the invention of a working agricultural poor, dependent on the market for existence was “one, but by no means the only... element in rural proletarianisation” (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969, p.13). The main problem was not enclosure per se, but the exponential inability of small marginal cultivators to be able to survive in a system of capitalist agriculture. The social institutions which helped to maintain the sovereignty of the rural poor also died through the invention of capitalism:

“instead of the village community (as symbolised by open field and common) there was now enclosure. Instead of mutual aid and social obligation, there was now the Poor Law, administered exclusively by the rulers of the countryside. Instead of family, patronage or custom, there was now the straightforward nexus of wages, which bound the landless to the landed” (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969, p.37).

The overriding significance of enclosure was that it “dissipated the haze which surrounded rural poverty and left it nakedly visible as propertyless labour” (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969, p.35), as the cottager was turned from a labourer with land, to a labourer without (Hammond cited in Chambers and Mingay, 1966).

2.1.2 Resistance

The situation for agricultural labourers and dwellers shifted drastically over these years, which of course brought with it resistance. The resistance was scattered, and often incoherent, but its existence was hugely important, and reverberations of these movements can still be felt in the contemporary land rights movement. Many enclosures happened before the mass parliamentary acts, using the *Statute of Merton*² to convert arable land into sheep pasture. With this period of privatization came resistance movements too. For example the peasant’s revolt in 1381, the Jack Cade rebellion in 1450 and the Kett rebellion in 1549 are but a few (Fairlie, 2009). Most notable of these pre-parliamentary enclosure resistance movements was the *Diggers* in the mid-17th Century. This was a movement aiming to reclaim land through historical ties. It was mostly led by people coming from the towns, the original back-to-the-land movement:

“Take note that England is not a Free people, till the Poor that have no Land, have a free allowance to dig and labour the Commons, and so live as Comfortably as the Landlords that live in their Inclosures” (William Everard cited in Fairlie, 2009).

² Guaranteed the lord of the manor’s right to the enclose common land, from 1235.

The Diggers, like all agrarian resistance movements, couldn't quite achieve what they set out to do. Arguably the most impressive reactionary movement came between 1790 and 1844, and it is heavily documented in Hobsbawm and Rudé's *Captain Swing*. According to the historians, the labourer "could hardly *not* resist" (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969, p.16), such was the depth, visibility, and deeply painful nature of their experience of oppression. The purpose of the resistance was, first and foremost, economic. It was a demand for higher wages, better employment and more social security (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969). Land reform was not on the agenda, it was considered a "nostalgic dream of townsmen [(as in the Diggers movement)], but not a serious concern of rural proletarians" (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969, p.17). Their protests peaked in the riots of 1830 during which they used every means the working poor could acquire: arson, threatening letters, inflammatory posters, robbery, wages meetings, assaults on overseers, parsons, and landlords, and, most memorably, destroying many of the threshing machines that had replaced their winter labour (Hobsbawm and Rudé, 1969). These were not revolutionaries, their demands were often seen as fair by the farmers, but the government reacted fiercely, executing 19 men and transporting hundreds more to the penal colonies.

In the late 19th Century, the *Three Acres and a Cow* movement, which was a call for smallholdings and allotments led by the grassroots and supported by a liberal MP. It resulted in a series of parliamentary statutes which all gave local authorities the power to acquire land³(Fairlie, 2009). Other responses came in different forms, such as usury laws, rights of commons and other kinship and civil society institutions (Polanyi, 1957). Thomas Spence led that introduction of Parish Land Trusts to capture economic rent for local citizens (Thompson, 1998), Robert Owen developed a new co-operative movement (Owen, 1991), the Chartist Co-operative Land Company was formed by securing capital from trade unions for developing new villages (Birchall, 1994), and John Stuart Mill supported new co-operative movements, arguing for the gradual municipalisation and nationalisation of land progressively (Mill, 1848).

³The Allotments Act of 1887, the Smallholding Act of 1892 and the Smallholdings and Allotments Act of 1908

2.1.3 A Recent History of Rural England

The enclosure of the common lands set the theme for the story of rural England in the 20th century and beyond. It consisted largely of the industrialization of farming, village desertification, a reduction in agricultural employment and further agricultural revolution through the use of chemicals and intensive farming. The early 1900s were signified by these continued patterns, as well as an increasing movement of the urban elite towards the proclaimed countryside idyll (Howkins, 2003). After the war in 1945, there was a movement towards technical and intensified agriculture. It was brought about most notably through the *Agriculture Act* in 1947 which aimed:

“to promote a stable and efficient industry capable of producing such part of the nation’s food as in the national interest it is desirable to produce in the United Kingdom and to produce it at minimum price consistent with the proper remuneration and living conditions for farmers and workers in agriculture and an adequate return on the capital invested in the industry” (Holderness, 1985, pp.13-14).

With an industrialisation of agriculture came a dramatic fall in the number of agricultural labourers over the course of the 20th century, causing an end to the historical tripartite system towards a capitalist agriculture of different flavour. The number of full-time farm workers dropped from a million in 1945 to less than 100,000 by 1990, and the few labourers that remained became strangers in their own land, and often sought unlikely alliances with the farmers and even landowners (Hawkin, 2003).

The second most significant shift was the introduction of new policy through joining the European Union. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) brought about through the European Union benefitted the industrial farmers who “were able to exploit economies of scale and increase production” (Martin, 2000, p.161). Whilst some have argued that the CAP has propped up the supply of high quality produce and kept farmers on the land, others rightfully point out its effect on mass inequality in rural England, the increasing land prices and the pushing of small farmers out of their livelihoods or into increased precariousness (Hawkin, 2003). Agriculture well and truly became

agribusiness by the start of the 21st century, where even Margaret Beckett⁴ gave the following speech at a labour party conference: “there is no long-term future for an industry which cannot develop in line with market forces. No matter what the industry, its history, or the wider contribution it makes to society” (Beckett cited in Hawkin, 2003).

2.1.4 This is a Global Struggle: Land Grabbing and Enclosure around the World

“The labourers are first driven from the land, and then come the sheep. Landgrabbing on a great scale, such as was perpetrated in England, is the first step in creating a field for the establishment of agriculture on a great scale.” - Karl Marx (1887)

Whilst this dissertation will concentrate primarily on the issues of land rights in England, it is important to recognise the systemic and global nature of these issues. We must acknowledge the similarities between the enclosure of the common land in England, the colonisation of land and cultures all around the world, and the development paradigm of today. But we must not conflate the issues for rural livelihoods into one single story across the world. Once we have highlighted the uniting essences, we must be aware that there are many aspects separating the way in which different groups are struggling to recover or retain land rights.

The fact of the matter is that land has always been taken, sometimes from those who owned the land but mostly from those who had no idea land could be owned (Linklater, 2013). Whilst we can trace the origin of land ownership to the enclosures and privatization of 16th century England, as highlighted above, it was the same logic which drove the colonial steamroller. This can be demonstrated through a number of ways. First, the same language of ‘improvement’ was used to justify the enclosure of the rural English common land and the invasion of other countries:

“Let us not be satisfied with the liberation of Egypt or the subjugation of Malta, but let us subdue Finchley Common, let us conquer Hounslow Heath; let us compel Epping Forest to submit to the yoke of improvement” (Neeson, 1993, p 31).

⁴ A member of parliament for the labour party (the left leaning social democratic party of the UK).

The force with which this occurred was far less brutal within the United Kingdom. When Cromwell invaded Ireland and eradicated communal ownership, Irish Catholics were murdered and displaced, leaving Protestants in ownership of 90% of the land, which was then measured out to be sold as private property and held under English common law (Linklater, 2013). Today, as long as capitalism continues to encourage the endless search for rent, regardless of productivity, there will be an inherent incentive to remove people from the land (Fairlie, 2013). Second, the proletarianisation of the poor. In 18th century England Adam Smith argued that the agricultural poor subsisted in idleness and thus needed to be put to work (Neeson, 1993, p.28), and today the World Bank talks of a “deep inertia in people’s occupational transformation as economies restructure” (World Bank, 2008, p.28). Finally, as land becomes commodified, the economic viability of owning a small plot of land reduces dramatically (Fairlie, 2013). The World Bank’s policy favours this same pattern away from the secure rights of the autonomous smallholder and towards the competitive expansion of commercial smallholders and the conversion of land to a more profitable use, which causes:

“a gradual process of dispossession from below, in which the pressures of market competitiveness lead to the exit of independent farm production by the rural poor, and the increasing concentration of farm property” (Amanor, 2012, p.736).

To conclude, by the 18th Century, enclosure was a symptom of and a further catalyst to a dominant paradigm of laissez-faire liberalism: “dispossession and proletarianisation of the peasantry, the commodification of land and the concentration of landownership — were becoming the accepted norm” (Fairlie, 2013). Today, this paradigm has evolved into a neoliberal capitalism which encourages land grabbing, the pursuit of capital, and the continued destruction of the self-sufficient peasantry.

2.2 Ruralism in the Literature

2.2.1 Rural Planning and Development

The way development and planning takes place within England is informed by the mainstream understanding of rural areas, which in turn is informed by mainstream economic discourse. The mainstream understanding is that the rural landscape must be conserved, and only farmers who contribute to the GDP, productivity and wealth of the nation, should be allowed on the land (Hannis, 2010). People should be kept in built-up areas, and any efforts to “dwell in the land” are resisted due to the alleged “detrimental effect of human presence on valued landscapes, and/or to a perceived imperative to make agriculture more ‘efficient’” (Hannis, 2010). This even prevents new farm entrants from being able to live on their smallholdings, as low impact operations often require high labour and humans living on the land. Policy against “new residential development in the open countryside” means that very few applicants have the money, time and expertise to prove that their project requires residential living and is a functioning viable business (Hannis, 2010). Thus planning in a rural setting tends to result only in the introduction of a capitalist patterns of land use, based on the pursuit of economic growth.

2.2.2 Defining the Rural

Looking at rural life and landscapes through a more holistic lense is essential to be able to solve the multi-faceted complex issues of today. The literature is abundant in further ways to approach the rural. These stem from geography, political science, anthropology, and place-based indigenous wisdom. An economic understanding of rural areas that is informed by these other academic traditions would be a far better place to start, and thus any analysis will try to incorporate this diverse range of viewpoints.

First, the idea of *rural*, is a contested and “slippery idea that eludes easy definition and demarcation” (Woods, 2011, p.1). Rurality refers to a diverse and often conflicting range of imagery: as the signifier of national identity; as the counterpoint to modernity; as wilderness; as idyll; as backward, under-developed and in need of modernization (Woods, 2011). Its etymology stems from *rus*, which is the latin noun for an open area (Ayto, 1990), and it is also often seen to exist only in contrast to the urban (Williams, 1973). It is essentially a dichotomy that is ungrounded and unwarranted, since “intra-rural differences can be enormous and rural-urban similarities can be sharp” (Hoggart, 1990, p.245). The distinction between urban and rural misunderstands that they can never truly be separate entities, they are “inextricably linked in a spatial and temporal web of socio-economic forces, forming and informing each other” (Froud, 2013). They are interconnected civic spaces that we co-create together through our work, lives, diet and travel (Froud, 2013). Given this, attempting to box and enclose rurality, and then prescribe policy for its development or conservation, makes little sense, since the notion of rural is complex and subjective. In fact, there is even literature to suggest that rurality is entirely a social construct:

“Rurality is... an imagined entity that is brought into being by particular discourses of rurality that are produced, reproduced and contested by academics, the media, policy-makers, rural lobby groups and ordinary individuals” (Mormont, 1990, p.40).

This concept of rural, as a social construct, finds no place in mainstream discourse, yet understanding rurality in such a way provides a new holism founded through malleability, providing a way to analyse and understand rural space, which is changing in an increasingly interconnected and total manner (Woods, 2005).

2.2.3 Representations of Rural England: The Productivist vs the Radical Rural

There is plenty of literature that describes the British countryside as a productivist space in which agriculture is a capitalist industry and production efficiency is maximised (Bowers, 1985; Ilbery and Bowler, 1998; Woods, 2005). The *Agricultural Act* of 1947 “sought to facilitate the

transition from farming as a 'way of life' to farming as a commercial economic sector working to the discipline of efficiency gains and technological modernization" (Murdoch and Ward, 1997, p.320). This direction is made clear throughout agricultural literature (Morgan and Munton, 1971; Tarrant, 1974), government reports on the countryside (Gray, 2000), and academic journals describing farmers' embrace of agriculture as industry (Marsden et al., 1993; Burton, 2004; Cloke and Goodwin, 1992). Pretty (2002) even describes the effect of this productivism as a creation of a 'monoscape' of sameness.

However, there is emerging literature describing a possible combatant to the productivist assault on rurality, the radical rural. This is the realm in which contested forms of living exist, often drawn *from* communism and anarchism (Iunt and Wills, 2000; Pepper, 1993; Dobson, 2003) and reactive *to* the capitalist productivist system described in the literature above, but also manifested through proactive and constructive green politics and action (Halfacree, 2007a). There is thus a large amount of literature alluding to the existence of a rural counter-culture movement based on low impact living, characterised through back-to-the-land migration (see section 2.3.2), permaculture, place-based practices, new education and craft revival (Pretty, 2002; Schwarz and Schwarz, 1998),

The localisation movement that is challenging the dominant productivist destruction of rurality, makes the case for a movement back to an interconnected food system, based on ties between producer and consumer, and an encouragement of a reintegration between urban and rural life (Hines, 2000; Simms et al, 2002; Woodin and Lucas, 2004; Shiva, 2000; Norberg-Hodge et al., 2002). These forms of radical ruralism argue for a redefining of rural as land-based:

"This is the only definition of the rural that has any robust meaning. A rural economy, if the term has any meaning at all, has its foundation in the land and what it produces—animal, vegetable and mineral. A rural culture is distinctive because it grows out of the land. Rural culture is rooted in the earth" (Fairlie, 2001, pp. 9–10).

Getting a foothold on the ownership of rural land is essential for moving from the productivist to a rural economy which fits its rightful definition.

The failures and frailties of these movements is also heavily documented. Many of these radical rural movements are described as precarious, often involving evictions, challenges to

planning application and insecurities (Webster and Millar, 2001). They are seen as escapist drop-outs (Halfacree, 2006; Hardy, 2000) or clutching at straws, never quite able to shift things on a larger scale (Pepper, 1991). Needless to say, the overwhelming consensus in the literature is that alternative lifestyles are made possible in rural spaces, and these are continuing to grow in the face of uncertain futures. These forms of rural spaces are contributing to what I describe as the new rural economy.

2.2.4 On Agriculture

*“Whether Autumn will bring wind or rain,
I can not know,
but today I will be working in the fields”*
- Japanese Country Song (Fukuoka, 1978, p.113)

There is vast literature on the metaphysical underpinnings of (a) what is wrong with the productivist rural, and (b), why we need a radical rural. This literature comes from an understanding that the way of agriculture has separated the land worker from nature: “the husbandman had become the farmer, and, instead of ‘husbanding’ nature, was seen as an entrepreneur, calculating the costs and benefits of alternative courses of action” (Overton, 2004, p.206). The literature describing this separation between the farmer and nature in the industrialised agricultural model is vast (For example: Berry, 1992; Schumacher, 1973; Schumacher, 1994; Kumar, 2013; Scharmer and Kaufer, 2013; Pollan, 2006). One of the most influential of writers on these matters is Wendell Berry. He writes extensively on the importance of homesteading and the failures of modern agriculture in political, spiritual and economic terms. He claims that the industrial way of agriculture has attempted to produce food without the essential ingredient needed for an ecological relationship to the land, husbandry:

“To husband is to use with care, to keep, to save, to make last, to conserve...Husbandry is the name of all practices that sustain life by connecting us conservingly to our places and our world; it is the art of keeping tied all the strands in the living network that sustains us. And so it appears that most and

perhaps all of industrial agriculture's manifest failures are the result of an attempt to make the land produce without husbandry" (Berry, 2009).

Masanobu Fukuoka, in *the One Straw Revolution* (1978), also provides a damning critique of the industrial way of agriculture, claiming that "agriculture must change from large mechanical operations to small farms attached only to life itself" (p.10). Fukuoka revolutionised a movement of Japanese youth back to the land. For him, farming provided a kind of freedom that is sacred, one which allowed the farmer to spend the winter months hunting rabbits, writing poems and composing songs (Fukuoka, 1978). He makes clear that there is a great beauty in a "natural way of farming", to be caring for a small plot, as was the original way of agriculture:

"So for the farmer in his work: serve nature and all is well. Farming used to be sacred work. When humanity fell away from this ideal, modern commercial agriculture rose. When the farmer began to grow crops to make money, he forgot the real principles of agriculture" (Fukuoka, 1978, p.113).

The original way of agriculture which Fukuoka believes must be resurrected, was not just about growing crops, it was concerned with "the cultivation and perfection of human beings" (p.119). Fukuoka and Berry add to a great body of literature which speaks to the deep importance of agriculture, not just for growing food in an ecological way, but for providing a true and meaningful livelihood.

2.3 Back-to-the-land in the Literature

2.3.1 *Neo-peasantry*

The word 'peasant' has become tainted in the English language. One need look no further than the dictionary definition to see this:

“a person who owns or rents a small piece of land and grows crops, keeps animals, etc. on it, especially one who has a low income, very little education and a low social position. This is usually used of someone who lived in the past or of someone in a poor country” (Barron, 2013, p.6).

The word itself died in the same time that the peasantry died in England, and in fact the word became tainted and used in a derogatory way, or misused to signify the agricultural wage-labourer. The word *yeoman*, “a man holding a small landed estate; a freeholder under the rank of gentleman...esp. one who cultivates his own land” (Barron, 2013, p.6), does better to describe the condition from which the word was formed. This is the peasant as the ultimate free person, who strives for autonomy and self-sufficiency through cultivating the land.

But what is the place of the peasant in the global industrial context. There is a movement of neo-peasantries that have been born, “not as backward remnants of some premodern world but as a result of, or a response to, incorporation into the modern global economy” (Smaje, 2013, p.29). All around the world, from new subsistence cultivators in postcolonial countries (Araghi, 2009), to the western new entrant farmers that are aiming to build alternative livelihoods in a fight for food sovereignty (Van der Ploeg, 2008; Brunori et al, 2011). There is a movement of repeasantization across Europe, born out of a growing need for a farming that cares for the wider community and that is able to produce food locally in the face of climate uncertainty. The international voice of the peasant movement, La Via Campesina, describes the peasant as:

“a man or woman of the land, who has a direct and special relationship with the land and nature through the production of food and/or other agricultural products” (LWA, 2013).

This definition brings forward the word to its rightful place in contemporary struggles. It unites the diverse range of agricultural workers under one tangible word, allowing for solidarity across borders and on a global scale. It means we can call for a peasant movement that is forward thinking, supporting the direct relationship between the people and the land in creating a livelihood.

2.3.2 Back-to-the-land Movements

There is a diverse and fairly wide range of literature on back-to-the-land movements. Back-to-the-land can be described as the “intended adoption of a primarily agrarian lifestyle by individuals from non-agrarian backgrounds” (Wilbur, 2013, p.149), with a concentration on self-sufficiency and experimental social organisation. Whilst neo-peasantry is one form that is referred to in the literature, other names include neo-farmers (Malifert, 2007), new pioneers (Jacob, 1997), and new agrarians (Trauger, 2007), and back-to-the-landers (Wilbur, 2013).

The historical origin of the contemporary back-to-the-land movement is uncertain. Some literature points to the main cause being an anarchist movement stemming from an individualist libertarianism, which itself stemmed from the 19th century encouragement of the self-reliant homesteading in the U.S. (Bunce, 2003; Marshall, 1993; Ward, 2004; Lind, 2007). Other areas of literature suggest that Henry Thoreau’s (1854) great work on homesteading provided a critique of capitalist work routines and an alternative which influenced many, and this was later backed by other writers (Berry, 2009; Fukuoka, 1978). The Great Depression is signified as another cause, as many moved back to the land out of economic necessity, which, in turn, shifted policy towards a framework that promoted subsistence farming for low-income urban emigrants (Jacob, 1997). Finally, the 1960’s civil rights movement, which was a battle of resistance to the Vietnam war, of environmental conservation and against alienation from consumer culture, encouraged a large shift of people back-to-the-land (Allen et al, 2003).

The strength of the “cultural mythologising and essentializing of the late 1960s” (Donnelly, 2005, p.3) has meant that back-to-the-land is often only associated with that time, and any idea of a contemporary back-to-the-land movement is dismissed. Of course, there is a new movement of people going back to the land, and whilst this movement bears similarities to the 1960s form, such as the anti-capitalist stance (Howkins, 2003), there are important differences too. These mostly come down to the focus on spiritual and societal ties, which “comes across as presenting a more engaged relationship, both with the land and with surrounding communities” (Halfacree, 2007b, p.4). This engagement, both locally and internationally, represents a genuine desire to contribute to society.

Contemporary back-to-the-land is generally seen as a positive pro-rural reaction to globalisation (Halfacree, 1997; Halfacree; 2008), but the movement is hard to trace, due to spatial diffusion, a lack of place-specific research (Wilbur, 2013), and the difficulty of distinguishing between those that are truly back-to-the-land movements, and those that aren't (Halfacree, 2007b). Mitchell's (2004) research helps to distinguish between the alternative forms of counterurbanization (Dean et al., 1984; Lewis et al., 1991), illuminating instances which are classed as back-to-the-land. Mitchell places these in three categories: ex-urbanization, which is motivated by a desire to live in a less-concentrated area, but maintain close ties with the city through work; displaced-urbanization, which is motivated by economic needs such as employment or the cost of living, and does not always result in a movement away from the urban if economic conditions are met; and anti-urbanization, which is motivated by a desire to both live in a rural environment and work in a less concentrated setting (Mitchell, 2004). Of these three categories, back-to-the-land movements fall under anti-urbanization, yet even within that category we must distinguish between the reactionary anti-urbanism and more pro-ruralist motivations (Fairlie, 2010; Herring, 2010; Kingsnorth, 2010).

The literature also present other causes of the contemporary movement back to the land. Some people aim to enhance their self-sufficiency and reclaim power from market providers, producing infrastructures to meet their own basic needs (Carlsson, 2008). Others note the existence of a back-to-the-land movement as an opposition to a modernity that diminishes the importance of agriculture and rural life for the sake of capitalist accumulation of wealth (Agnew, 1996; Gibson et al., 2010; Shiva, 1989). Brunori (2011) describes a motivation stemming from a desire to connect to local ecologies whilst Halfacree (2007, p.3) call this a "desire to reconnect more fully with the land and 'nature'." This distinguishes the contemporary back-to-the-land movement from those of the past, and is reflected in the quotidian practices that are adapted once people have moved back to the land.

Essentially, back-to-the-land movements have the potential to shape the rurality of the future, because of the way in which "back-to-the-landers collectively inscribe certain values on the countryside" (Wilbur, 2013, p.157), such as cooperative labour and sustainability and alternative agriculture. The success of these movements in achieving desired change relies on their ability to gain a foothold on the genuine structures that shape rural life.

3. Methodology

3.1 Overview

3.1.1 Aims and Objectives

The preliminary aim of this dissertation is to provide an **analysis of the current situation of rural life in the global industrial society**. Second, the thesis aims to **analyse the resistance to the dominant narrative of rural depletion, historically and in the contemporary context**. The main aim is to provide a synthesis of literature and active research which in turn has **implications for the future new rural economy and the movement for land rights**. Finally, this thesis aims to provide conclusions born out of this synthesis, in the form of **prescriptions for action, on the individual, organisational and government level**. In as much as this thesis calls people to act, it is activist work, its aims are not merely to add to the body of knowledge, but to call on its readers to engage with the issues that are highlighted through this research.

3.1.2 Justification for Approach to Methodology

The methodology intentionally borrows from a diverse range of methods and disciplines, in seeking to achieve the above aims and objectives. There is a need to approach the methodology with an acceptance of the interdisciplinary and complex nature of the topic. Land quite rightfully plays a central role within debates about economics, politics and ecological issues. It is clear that matters relating to rural issues are complex, iterated by Woods (2011), and further reiterated by Halfacree (2007a). Land is also a contested and complex issue, requiring an interdisciplinary and relaxed approach to research, as the historical context is misunderstood and often contested (Overton, 2004), and the issues of land rights today are inherently systemic and complex, as Linklater (2013) presents on the global scale, and Shoard (1993) in the context of Britain.

The methodology draws from phenomenological research, in the sense that it aims to “illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in a situation” (Lester, 1999, p.1). The aim of such research is to describe the “lived experience” of a phenomenon, in this case the possibility of rural revival through land reform, through an analysis of the meanings and narratives extracted from the perceptions of participants operating within the phenomenon (Waters, 2017). There is a focus on a “deep understanding of the meaning” which is found through abstracting the collective themes (Waters, 2017). The analysis, through interpretation, allows for some generalisability and thus for it to “inform, support or challenge policy and action” (Lester, 1999, p.1).

3.2 The Process

3.2.1 Semi-Structured Interviews and Direct Observation

The research consisted of, for the most part, semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are open ended, but follow a general script and aim to cover a list of topics that is informed by the preliminary desk research (Bernard, 2011). The idea is that this type of interview gives the interviewer control over the general direction, but also leaves room for the interview to focus on particular aspects of the research, and for the interviewer to follow new leads (Bernard, 2011). This mode of research make sense for a phenomenological inquiry, which requires “minimum structure and maximum depth” (Lester, 1999, p.2).

The interviews lasted between 30-75 minutes, and took place through the phone, on skype, or the preferred option in person at Schumacher College, or in the homes and on the land of participants. They were all audio recorded with the permission of the interviewee and in accordance with Plymouth University’s ethical and compliance guidelines. Interview questions were created under themes that were gathered and based on the relevant conclusions found in the desk research, and acted as a guide for the interview. I wanted to begin the interview by hearing the stories of the interviewees, which would help to contextualise each participant for later analysis. Other questions were selected based on the most pressing themes: the future of rural life, the approach to planning,

the constraints to getting on the land, and examples of innovative land initiatives. Further questions were developed in attempt to engage participants with wider systemic issues, the contemporary political situation, and the global context. Whilst I did prepare this vague plan, often other factors came into play, such the knowledge and interests of the participants and the setting, which affected the direction of the interview (Miles and Huberman, 1994). For example, when interviewing people on their land, interaction with the physical surroundings added to the direction and focus of the interviews.

Table 1: Interview Questions
<p><i>Personal Background</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How did you get involved with land and/or food and farming? 2. What is your project? How did the project begin? <p><i>On Ruralism and Access to Land</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. What do you see as the role for rural life in the UK? 4. How do you see the current approach to land and rural planning? 5. Have you experienced any problems in trying to set up a new land initiative? How were these overcome? 6. What do you see as an alternative way to gain access to land? Are there any examples of this happening here in the UK? <p><i>Systemic Issues</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. What do you see the role of the government in reaching an alternative system? 8. What will be the biggest challenges to overcome in reaching a new system of land rights? <p><i>Contemporary and Global Context</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. What are your worries and/or excitements for the future of land rights in the UK after leaving the EU? 10. What do you see as the role for global movements such as Via Campesina?

The other element came from direct observation, as in some cases it was either inappropriate to interview the participants, or certain themes and ideas came to mind through visiting projects and people on their land and attending events during the time of the research. These notes were written in my journal, and divided between descriptive notes, such as descriptions of the physical settings, and reflective notes, such as “speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices” (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992, p.121). Later these were analysed alongside the interview transcripts.

3.2.2 Selection Process

The selection of individuals for interviews and meetings was done with purpose, since “the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and research question” (Creswell, 2009, p.178). Thus, participants were selected based on the desk research, which provided a picture of the engaged actors in the land rights movement in the UK (see list of participants below). All participants in this part of the research have some connection to the current land rights movement in the UK. Some of these people live on the land themselves, as smallholders or in low impact dwellings, others are engaged in the political discussion on the future of land rights, and others in creating new models for land. Some were asked in person at relevant events, others were contacted by email. Some participants were identified by other participants during the interviews, and others were identified when relevant themes became apparent during the research process. For example, Tao Wimbush was interviewed when it became clear that the One Planet Development policy in Wales was an extremely important win for the land rights movement in the UK, and it seemed important that I interview a direct beneficiary of the policy in order to provide a better picture of its impact. I also originally planned to interview a number of individuals from within government, rural planning and mainstream industrial agriculture, so I could compare and contrast these with those involved in the land rights movement. I interviewed one member from DEFRA⁵, who requested to remain

⁵Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

anonymous, but later realised that my time constraints signified the need to focus on the land rights movement specifically.

Table 2: List of Participants

Name	Participation	Background Information
Ed Hamer	Interview	Chagfood, Land Workers' Alliance, The Land Magazine
Colin Tudge	Interview	The College for Real Farming, Six Steps Back to the Land
Ruth West	Interview	The College for Real Farming, The Real Farming Trust
Mike Hannis	Interview & Visiting Land	The Land Magazine
Anonymous	Interview	DEFRA
Helena Norberg-Hodge	Interview	Local Futures
Harriet Bell	Interview	Dartington Community Resilience Manager (Food and Farming)
Caroline Aitken	Interview	Permaculture Design Teacher, Smallholder
Chris Smaje	Interview & Visiting Land	Vallis Veg, Small Farm Future (Blog)
Guy Shrubsole	Interview	Who Owns England? (Blog)
Ben Eagle	Interview	Thinking Country (Blog)
Pat Conaty	Interview	Community Land Trust Network, NEF
Zoe Wangler	Interview	Executive director at the Ecological Land Co-operative
Helen Kearney	Interview & Visiting Land	Smallholder on Elder Farm at Greenham Reach (Ecological Land Co-operative)
Tao Wimbush	Interview	Founding member at Lammas Ecovillage
Isabella Coin	Interview	Shared Assets
Simeon & Mara	Visiting Land	Members of Landmatters Co-op Permaculture Project

3.2.3 Processing the Data: Thematic Analysis

The interviews were transcribed in full, and field notes collated and written up more clearly, with further reflections when needed. The following stage involved reading through all the data and selecting relevant themes, which were then collated (these can be found at the beginning of section 4.1). The themes were then analysed, compared and interpreted (Creswell, 2009), to provide a list of points, which in turn were used to interrogate the texts and structure and summarise the data (Hycner, 1985). Rather than merely recounting or summarising the data, I aimed to analyse and synthesise, speaking through the words of those I interviewed, discussing the relevant issues and implications within the findings.

4. Findings & Discussion

“Land is actually at the centre of this whole issue.”

- Colin Tudge (2017)

○

“Everything comes down to land.”

- Ben Eagle (2017)

○

“The land and the planning question is the key to opening up the locked gates.”

- Pat Conaty (2017)

○

“What it all comes down to is land ownership.”

- Caroline Aitken (2017)

4.1 Themes

The key themes and their sub-themes, derived through an analysis of the interviews and field work are outlined in the table below. This section will explore the themes in detail, using the words and stories of the participants, and referencing back to the desk research to draw synthesis and conclusions through them.

Table 3: Themes

Key Themes	Sub-Themes
Crisis and Opportunity	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The Crisis2. The Opportunity3. Brexit
Routes to the Land	<ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Education5. Beyond Reactionary Anti-urbanism6. Towards a Proactive Ecological Ruralism
Preventatives	<ol style="list-style-type: none">7. Priced Out8. Work, Skills and Diversification9. Finance10. The Planning System
Success Stories	<ol style="list-style-type: none">11. Wales - One Planet Development12. The Ecological Land Co-operative13. Scottish Land Reform
Building a Movement	<ol style="list-style-type: none">14. A Coherent Philosophy15. Informing the Public16. The New Land Movement17. From Separation to Mass Movement18. A New UK Peasant Movement
Governance and Ownership	<ol style="list-style-type: none">19. This is Systemic20. Nationalisation of Land21. Community Ownership22. Public-social Partnerships23. Localisation of Power

4.2 Introduction

I sit amidst a sporadic crowd of people, young and old. On the stage a woman and a man, armed with a guitar and their voices, are singing a story⁶. It's a long story, one that stretches back hundreds of years. The story is about land, about how it was taken, robbed, acquired, transformed, but most importantly, about how *we* resisted. The crowd jeers and cheers as we hear of old heroes who put their life on the line, who fought the dominant story, who challenge the hegemony. From songs about the 17th century Diggers who fought for their right to a livelihood, to anarchistic ballads protesting the Peterloo massacre⁷, we sang this history of resistance. And some of these stories are new. We sang to Ru Litherland, who had recently acquired some land on the outskirts of London to grow food and build community⁸. We called out, “mulch, sow and then reap!”, channelling the farmers of old and encouraging a good harvest. What stories and songs will there be in the future? Who will we sing for? What battles will be won in this long war for land rights? This is what I hope to learn.

4.3 Crisis and Opportunity

4.3.1. The Crisis

It was clear to all participants that we are quite clearly deep into a period of crisis for agriculture and rural life in the global industrial society, on social, ecological, political and economic levels. Our societies are completely disconnected from food and farming, “and this is a disconnection from the natural world” (Norberg-Hodge, 2017). From a social and ecological perspective there's not much left of rural life in the UK:

⁶ I saw the group, *Three acres and a Cow* (2017), performing at a festival in July 2017. Named after the political movement in the late 19th century, they perform “a history of land rights and protest in folk song and story.”

⁷ Taking place in Manchester on 16th August 1819, cavalry charged into a crowd of 80,000 people who had gathered demanding parliamentary reform (see *Three Acres and a Cow*, 2017).

⁸ See Litherland, 2017

“our agricultural landscape is a desert really, there’s no life there... since the industrial revolution people have moved from the countryside to the urban areas, and they’re growing and growing, and the surrounding landscape is getting more and more depopulated and devoid of any life or culture” (Aitken, 2017).

On a political level, several participants alluded to there being no space for rural issues in mainstream political discussion, even across the political spectrum. For example:

“Certainly in this country, the left wing has abandoned agriculture, it doesn’t register. The whole labour movement in Britain is an industrial movement... and farming has become essentially a right wing pursuit” (Tudge, 2017).

No aspect of the crisis was more commonly alluded to than the ecological crisis, and the economic structures that are destroying the environment. Participants referred to the problems that climate change will bring, given that “we’ve become more and more reliant on the semi-arid continental grasslands” (Smaje, 2017) for growing our food, we’ve become far less able to produce food locally (Norberg-Hodge, 2017; Hamer, 2017) and we’ve inherited an agriculture that is ecologically destructive and economically inefficient (Wimbush, 2017).

4.3.2 The Opportunity

Having said that, participants would often turn that around, speaking about the potential for opportunity in the face of crisis: “a lot of people say that we must reach a crisis point, where the people at large say this just cannot go on, and then maybe something will happen” (Tudge, 2017). Chris Smaje (2017) spoke of the current political climate as being ripe for change and opportunity:

“These big seismic political events we’ve seen in recent years, you could argue in some ways are a kick-back against globalisation, people are beginning to call that model into question, even if it’s in ways that I don’t agree with, so there are opportunities there. The power of the status quo and big

agri-lobbying is hard to contest, but you can see it beginning to unravel a little bit in political events.”

Whilst many participants agreed that there is an opportunity they would often, tongue-in-cheek, call for a revolution to get there, whether it’s “flying the flag of the Peasant’s Republic of Wessex⁹ in Bristol” (Smaje, 2017), or starting a revolution to rebuild communities living on the land (Aitken, 2017). Tao Wimbush (2017) quite clearly claimed that a revolution was not only eminently possible, but an inevitable outcome, because “the one thing about an unsustainable system is that you cannot sustain it.”

4.3.3 Brexit

All participants referred to the current political climate, particularly in reference to the recent referendum in June 2016, in which the British public marginally voted to leave the European Union¹⁰. Many people place this decision as a symptom of a wider and international dissatisfaction with the political status quo since the financial crash of 2008, apparent in the rise of populist politics from right to left (for example, Trump in the U.S.¹¹, Podemos in Spain¹²).

This decision to leave the EU has caused a huge shake-up in politics, including for the future of agriculture and rural life in Britain, and it accentuates clearly the relationship between crisis an opportunity. Evidently, and this view was shared by many participants, the current “single farm payment... that pays you on a per acre basis without making a clear distinction between a farmer and a landowner” (Smaje, 2017), is a failure. It is quite clear that the direction of the subsidies are influenced by the “hugely powerful political lobby” (Anonymous, 2017), as even when given the opportunity to support small-scale farming the government has consistently failed, favouring big-scale commercial farming:

⁹The Peasant’s Republic of Wessex is a concept invented by Chris as “a future polity in the west of England where about a fifth of the working population are engaged in producing their own agrarian subsistence” (Smaje, 2016).

¹⁰The vote was 51.9% to 48.1% in favour of leaving the EU (see BBC, 2016)

¹¹Donald Trump unexpectedly won the presidential election in the U.S. (see Roberts, 2016).

¹² Podemos, a party formed only in 2014, won 20.7% of the vote in the Spanish election in December 2015 (see Jones, 2015).

“The government withdrew subsidies to anyone with entitlements of less than 5 hectares, which they didn’t have to do. And, they could have capped subsidies at €150,000, but they didn’t. They were pushing against small-scale and pushing for the big guys” (Smaje, 2017).

The government has missed opportunities to reform CAP in a more equitable and ecological way, which also brought participants to doubt the possibility of a movement away from the single farm payments that reward landowners. Further fear arises through looking at these political issues with a holistic lense. This brings to light the fact that shifts in agricultural policy will also affect other aspects of rural society:

“Your guess is as good as mine as to what the agricultural world is going to be like post-Brexit in a few years time. And likewise, how that's going to impact on rural communities, rural employment and rural culture and society as well” (Eagle, 2017).

A number of participants also predict that the shift is likely to move toward an internationalist approach to trade. Mike Hannis described the current conservative government as “free market ideologues” (2017), Caroline Aitken (2017) referred to their “religious approach to the market”, and Helena Norberg-Hodge (2017) described them as “hell-bent on ever more global trade”, meaning they will naturally look to import the cheapest possible food around, rather than look to alternative, ecological or local modes of production.

Whilst most participants have doubts about there being a change in CAP that supports small-scale farmers and shifts the direction, others alluded to the fact that this large political change could provide an opportunity, and gave examples of what they believed should be done in the face of Brexit. In fact seven participants directly described Brexit as an opportunity. For example, Chris Smaje (2017) said that we should be placing more emphasis on national food security, which means “intervening quite significantly on the food markets, clamping down on the supermarket capture of value in the food chain and producing most of the basic food that we need as a nation.” Mike Hannis (2017) also referred to a similar possibility, explaining that it would “make sense to be trying to incentivise food security and production for local consumption.” Others highlighted the opportunity as a chance to put pressure on the government and give voice to the issues being faced

by small-farmers. Helen Kearney (2017) spoke of how the Land Workers' Alliance are doing that, and Ed Hamer (2017), a founder of the LWA, explained that they have “created Brexit proposals after a consultation with the membership.” Many participants believe that it will now be possible to completely rethink policy, as the EU’s “regulation is to tie you into the WTO and a whole range of pretty awful treaties, which restrict what can be done from a public policy perspective” (Conaty, 2017). The consensus is that these political events are representative of a crisis that is being faced within the structures of the politico-economic spectrum, in turn providing opportunities for change.

4.4 Routes to the Land

This section will outline the possible routes to the land, through analysing the reasonings, motivations and benefits cited by the participants. In section 2.3.2 I outlined the different and changing motivations for moving back-to-the-land, most notably that the back-to-the-land movements of today are positive pro-rural movements rather than negative anti-urban movements. This, to all intents and purposes, is backed up by the findings in the active research. In fact, Ed Hamer (2017) even explained that the generation of 20-30 year olds that are experiencing the crisis of inequality, climate change and globalisation are finding “a new desire to embrace a positive response, recognising the possibilities of growing food and building alternatives.”

4.4.1 Education

Many participants mentioned their own experiences of particular forms of education as being motivations for their route into land-based work. In fact three participants, who were all now living in smallholdings on the land, directly referred to the Permaculture Design Course (PDC) as a big influence. Chris Smaje completed his PDC after his wife Cordelia found it quite inspiring, and whilst he has since been slightly critical of the permaculture movement, he admitted that it was his route into food and farming. Helen Kearney explained that ever since she completed her PDC in

1997, she “always wanted to get land-based” (2017). Caroline Aitken (2017), now a permaculture design teacher, also explained that doing her PDC made her want a land based livelihood. She went on to say that “a lot of people describe doing a PDC, and it being like the light bulb being switched on. It’s a holistic view of the world which makes sense.”

4.4.2 Beyond Reactionary Anti-urbanism

Most participants described their movement back to the land through arguments that alluded to a pro-rural attitude, rather than an outright rejection of the state of modern society. Participants at Landmatters¹³ were in some ways an exception. Simeon, the member from the community that greeted me upon my arrival and gave me a tour of the place, explained to me that he had sought a change once he “realised something was wrong” with modern life and the motivations were political rather than spiritual or practical. He had spent many years travelling with his wife and children, lived in Tinkers Bubble¹⁴ and eventually settled at Landmatters, wanting to put roots in the ground. Having said that, in a later conversation he described that it is starting to shift. He is beginning to ask questions about how they really want to live, and whether they can grow enough food to live off the land and create a genuine alternative. Mara, a founding member with whom I spoke to as we went over to fill a bucket with solar-heated well-pumped water, also described her original motivations as political, but that it “became much more about connecting to land, to becoming the land, to feeling the four elements and being able to survive with the land, not from it.”

¹³Landmatters Co-op is “a rural Permaculture Project working within Devon to promote land based communal living” (see Landmatters, 2017).

¹⁴Tinkers Bubble is a “fossil fuel free community and organic smallholding” based in Somerset, UK (see Tinker’s Bubble, 2017).

4.4.3 Towards a Proactive Ecological Ruralism

The majority of the participants' motivations for returning to a land-based lifestyle were united in an inherently proactive attitude, and in the need to build new lifestyles in the face of climate change and other crises. Chris Smaje (2017) referred to this need as being “a real renaissance of rural life...a more self-reliant rural economy which is geared to providing for needs locally.” Caroline Aitken (2017) believes that issues as divergent as new ways of farming, population growth and well-being could all be tackled through a movement in this way:

“If you think about all of the issues that we have, and then think about actually moving the people from the cities back onto the land, and creating a network of small, diverse and integrated farming systems which serve their local communities, then you can just go right down this list of problems that we have now and tick them off.... What might be considered rosy and idyllic from where we are standing now, in some ways is the only solution to all of those problems.”

This need for change is also supplemented in the very real possibilities of new ecological livelihoods, in that “the idea of an autonomous dwelling that is making all its own power is not some hippy dream anymore” (Hannis, 2017). The possibilities for new livelihoods on the land have encouraged a revival of forms of agrarian practices that have died in many parts of the world. As Chris Smaje gave me a tour of the land on which him and his family live, we walked through the fields which make up their market garden enterprise, and over to the chickens, and an area where he used to keep a few pigs. Later, as we walked past a very old piece of tractor equipment used to plant potatoes, he told me he would like to call himself a homesteader, and is working increasingly towards subsistence living.

Tao Wimbush (2017) explained that the reason himself and others founded Lammas Ecovillage¹⁵ was to be able to live in an ecologically and spiritually beneficial way, to be in control of his own impact on the earth in a shift towards “personal responsibility for lifestyle.” He explained

¹⁵Lammas is an ecovillage situated in Pembrokeshire, Wales (see Lammas, 2017).

that through approaching living on the land in this way, “the landscape has transformed from one of degraded pasture to a diverse mosaic of productive ecosystems”, in which birds, insects and mammals have returned. Not only has this approach decreased the impact of human living on the environment, but it has restored the ecology. It is for this reason that Tao sees a future in “a population that is distributed within the landscape”, as conservation and ecological lifestyles come from developing direct relationships with the landscape:

“If you have a direct relationship with where your water comes from, you care about it. If you have a direct relationship with where your organic waste goes, you care about it. If you don’t, you don’t, because you don’t relate to it. You don’t know where it comes from and you don’t care where it comes from.”

What he is describing is the need for a *proactive ecological ruralism*, a movement *forward-to-the-land*. The possibility of restoring the landscape ecologically through proactive and practical land-based work provides the empirical means for a mass movement onto the land. However, the political power is still lacking, and the challenges to get there are great in number.

4.5 Preventatives

This section identifies and analyses the preventatives to individual and collective movements to the land, as outlined by the participants from their own experiences, or through their own analysis of the current situation for land-based livelihoods.

4.5.1 Priced Out

Participants often described situations in which “people that really want to work the land... are being priced out of it” (Kearny, 2017). In some cases participants referred to the fact that housing in rural areas is unaffordable for people earning an income from agriculture. They explained that agricultural land with housing is far too expensive to be rented or bought by most entrants (Bell,

2017), and the planning restrictions prevent individuals from building on agricultural land (see section 4.5.4). The problem with the price of agricultural land, rather than rural housing, was spoken about far more often by participants. Harriet Bell (2017) told me that “during the recession the value of land went up more than gold”, as a result of price wars and a large amount of investment in land. The price of agricultural land also rises as a result of speculation: “once the planning authority authorises land as development land then all of a sudden it's worth can expand by 10 to 100 times the value” (Conaty, 2017). Historically, the labour party have been battling the conservative party to prevent rises in ‘land value of betterment’, which occur through private organizations buying up land in order to increase its value, blocking new entrants from the market (Hannis, 2017).

4.5.2 Work, Skills and Diversification

The skills needed to start a land-based livelihood are often far more diverse and hard than is expected. Land-based work is undervalued and often it is hard to make a livelihood through working on the land, forcing people to diversify away from agriculture, again requiring more skills. Simeon explained that at Landmatters, most individuals make income from working with the land, yet this is through secondary products, such as straw bales, wooden necklaces and horse-assisted therapy. Tao also described a similar situation at Lammas:

“Generally, people here generate their incomes from value added produce rather than direct produce. So rather than people trying to sell carrots, people sell carrot wine, rather than growing and selling herbs people sell skin care or herbal products, rather than firewood people tend to sell craft.”

Even on a functioning market garden, such as Chris’ site at Vallis Veg, diversification has been essential for survival. At Vallis Veg they have introduced camping, renting a section out to a forest school, and other things. Chris also explained that even large scale farmers introduce b&bs or weddings to actually make a living, as it “seems to be easier to make money from non-farming than from farming.”

New entrants often face unexpected challenges, realising that the skills they need to successfully run a farm are out of their comfort zone. Harriet Bell (2017) had considered becoming a cattle farmer, but felt she didn't have the skills required:

“Unlike my boss at the time who can walk into a field and diagnose every animal within about 20 minutes, it took me two and a half hours, because I had to go round and check them each individually, whereas he could just do it by sight looking across the whole field.”

Harriet also went on to explain that, for example, a new entrant that has trained as a horticultural grower may know a lot about how to grow crops, yet very little “about land management, costs, rights, access issues, rents, FPTs, tenancies, licences and water rights” meaning they do not have the skills “to understand the market of land that they need to enter into.” Isabella Coin also spoke of the diverse skill set to be a smallholder as a barrier for new entrants:

“You might need to know how to grow food, but you also need a background in business development or planning, and often these projects run through lots of volunteers or trainees, so you need to be able to manage people as well, you need to be able to forge partnerships between landowners, the council and other people.”

4.5.3 Finance

The issue of finance is often overlooked as a barrier to entrance, but many participants described how it plays a key role in encouraging new land-based initiatives. For example, Colin Tudge (2017) elucidated that “if you try to set up a small mixed farm, you are landed in a mess, because you don't get grants for that sort of thing.” Harriet Bell also highlighted finance as a huge problem for smaller tenancies, and Chris Smaje further backed this claim: “the cost of establishing a farm from scratch is hard to do unless you can tap some alternative source of finance.” Chris later explained that having come from London and being allowed to buy the land outright helped to insulate him and his family from the “harsh realities” of setting up a small-scale agricultural enterprise, and he very openly recognised that finance wasn't available for most new entrants.

Some participants talked about ways forward. At Landmatters, I was told that it costs £3000 to become a member for a one year trial, but now that they have earned enough money to pay back the initial investment in the land, they hope to move to a position where they can enable anyone to live off the land, regardless of income. More structural combatants were suggested, such as using innovative legal structures in order to attract funding (Conaty, 2017) or encouraging the introduction of farm finance or farm credit (Smaje, 2017). The idea of national investment banks and regional banks that could support smaller-scale entrants into farming was also suggested as a route forward:

“Banks create money by just creating it out of thin air. Why leave that to private banks to do? The public banks can create ten times deposits as money, therefore local government and the state don’t have to borrow and don’t have to tax” (Conaty, 2017).

Pat went on further to say that these banks could be set up “by Bristol city council, or the county council in rural Cornwall”, which could encourage opportunities at the local level.

4.5.4 The Planning System

The planning system was cited as the greatest constraint for people in pioneering new land-based projects. It was founded in 1947, in a country completely stressed after the second world war, through the *Town and Countryside Planning Act*, which set out that the countryside should be reserved for agriculture and people should be concentrated into the towns where they can be easily serviced. It was also bolstered by a well-reasoned conservationist approach to the countryside, placing barriers to “protect land and the environment from over-development” (Coin, 2017). Caroline Aitken (2017) critiqued this idea, saying that the way we manage our landscapes and countryside, through keeping people away from them, is not necessarily best for the environment:

“we look at our landscapes now, and see them as being wild and natural and beautiful and teeming with wildlife.... Actually, if somebody was taken from a time machine from the turn of the century

and came here, they'd be probably on their knees weeping because there's nothing here, there's no life."

Essentially, she explained that preserving things as they are today is not necessarily what's best for the ecology or rural communities, and it prevents people from being imaginative about what is possible.

A number of participants described their own experience of dealing with the planning system, and how the results of a blanket idea of how people should live in the countryside affected their own ability to move to a land-based livelihood. Chris Smaje explained that him and his wife started a veg box scheme on his farm, Vallis Veg. They ran it from off-site for 3-4 years and eventually ran themselves into the ground, realising that there was a need to live on site for the business to function. He explained that the two key things the planners need to see are that you can "justify why you have to be on the site...and that you've got a viable business" (Smaje, 2017). For Chris, there's a huge contradiction in the process, either you convince the planning inspector that you are running a successful business from off-site, meaning you don't need to live there, or you say that you are not running a successful business, meaning that you shouldn't be allowed on anyway. They appealed, and went through a stressful process in which an external government bureaucrat eventually decided to allow it. This led to an approval for three years of temporary accommodation in order to get established on site and prove the viability of the business. A few weeks before I visited Chris it had finally been approved.. When I visited Mike Hannis (2017), who has a lot of personal experience with the planning system, I explained that Chris and his family have just received permanent planning permission after a 6 year battle. He responded: "it is completely ludicrous for him not to be able to live on his land and do his thing, people want to eat his vegetables, he's doing everybody a favour, it's a no-brainer."

When I arrived at Mike's home at King's Hill, it was completely covered in woodlands, and in many ways life had returned to a place that used to be open fields. Mike has experienced his own battle with the planning system, when he moved onto this agricultural land with a group of people in the mid-1990s. At the time, they had put in an application, had it rejected, appealed, lost the appeal, and then had the appeal overturned on a human rights related point. They were allowed to put in another application, which was rejected and appealed again. This led to a second public

inquiry and through a lengthy and publicly visible affair, the decision in 2000 was to give permanent permission for temporary structures: “they were trying to legitimise what was already there without legitimizing any new development or more intensive or increased development.” Mike went on to say, in a very humble manner, that it shouldn’t necessarily be for anyone to decide what to do with the land, and thus a planning system of some sort is a good thing: “it’s kind of essentially a socialist enterprise. You’re talking about nationalising the right to decide what happens on the land. I think that sort of decision should be made in the public interest.” He was clear that in some cases it might not be right for people to start building homes on agricultural land, and restrictions need to be in place.

However, he was adamant that individuals working through small-scale agricultural production for subsistence should not be obstructed from living on the land. I visited Helen Kearney, resident at Elder Farm with her husband Stuart and their three daughters. They live on five and a half acres of land, growing and processing organic medicinal herbs for commercial use, and food for their own consumption. She explained that they were currently going through their own process with the planning inspectors in providing what is needed to be able to build their own permanent home on their land. Helen and her family acquired the land through the Ecological Land Cooperative and received some support in the planning applications (this model will be discussed in section 4.6.2). Many people told her that she doesn’t need ‘functional need’, but her work requires so much cropping, harvesting and processing of herbs that they need near-constant attention. She talked about the problem with planning being that there are only guidelines for planning inspectors to follow, which leaves a constant “niggling seed of doubt” about receiving planning permission, as no matter how good your arguments are, it feels like a “step into the dark.” For example, the financial test requires the enterprise to generate enough income to provide one full-time worker with minimum wage. This works out at £13,000 a year, but even if you reach this number, the planning inspector may still decide against it, and this causes a lot of stress for somebody already trying to set up a functional business.

Helena Norberg-Hodge (2017) explained that the problem is not necessarily within the specifics of the planning system, but rather that “it really isn’t about protecting the land from humans, it’s about protecting it for big business.” This was supported by Chris Smaje, who also said

that the planning system is set up for commercially productive businesses, and there is a mindset about the need “to protect the countryside from people living there” which translates more to wanting a countryside for big scale, industrial agriculture.

Many participants explained that the problem with the planning system is its inability to be imaginative: “people tend to think humans in natural spaces is bad... there’s no future looking and thinking how can we make this better, there’ no holistic view” (Aitken, 2017). Whilst new initiatives and theories, such as the regenerative ability of permaculture or agroecological systems, are being proven as positive things, these don’t make their way into the mainstream agenda (Smaje, 2017). As Helen Kearney (2017) described so clearly, if they don’t make their way into the mainstream agenda, it is very hard for people working in planning to understand the possibilities:

“What we’re doing is permaculture, but we will be agriculturally assessed by an agricultural appraiser... they’re used to straight rows of bare soil and tractors and certain ways of doing things, and it’s difficult to translate what we’re doing...They can’t understand how we’re going to make money off 5.5 acres, when 155 acres can’t make profit now.”

Mike Hannis (2017) suggested that it could be as simple as being able to “distinguish between ecologically damaging development and ecologically benign development.” This would allow for smallholders and “experiments in living” to be enabled and encouraged. If the planning system exists to provide for the public interest, maybe it requires asking again what serves the public interest, what should land be for and what is “common good land use” (Coin, 2017). For Caroline Aitken (2017), who sees through the eyes of a permaculture perspective, if we “repopulate the countryside with small communities that are able to almost support themselves with food... that is much more sustainable, wholesome and healthy” than the current system.

4.6 Success Stories

This section outlines the examples of models and places in which the constraints to rural renaissance and movement to land-based livelihoods have been challenged and overcome. These were either experienced by the participants, or the participants identified them during the interviews.

4.6.1 One Planet Development

The One Planet Development policy was regularly cited as a good example of public-social partnerships enabling systemic policy change, and in turn enabling a movement of people onto the land through overcoming some of the preventative challenges outlined above. Since its conception in 2010, it has enabled 24 individual One Planet Development smallholdings across Wales (One Planet Council, 2017). Its aim is to encourage low impact plots in the open countryside that exist within the confines of the global average availability of resources, 1.88 hectares per person. Thus these developments must have a light touch on or benefit the environment, must be land-based and provide for the minimum needs of residents in terms of food, income, energy and waste assimilation, and must have a low ecological footprint (Welsh Planning Policy Development Programme, 2012).

I spoke to Tao Wimbush, a founding member of Lammas Ecovillage, a pioneering movement to land-based livelihoods intended to showcase the One Planet Development policy. He in fact told me that Lammas was born out of a number of things. At the time when the Welsh government was receiving devolved powers over its planning system, it commissioned a research paper to explore whether low impact development had a role in the Welsh system, which led to the conception of policy 52 Low Impact Development, an experimental initiative by Pembrokeshire county council that enabled the birth of Lammas (Wimbush, 2017). Whilst Lammas was in the planning system, the initiative was “scaled up from the local level to the national level, in response to the research papers and grassroots pressure” (Wimbush, 2017), and Lammas was designed to “create a flagship for this

policy.” Tao was extremely humble about the “relatively small” movement of people onto the land through the policy, and he attributed its scale to a lacking culture that is sympathetic to such an experimental way of living. As the OPD policy enables “a sustainable lifestyle within the context of an unsustainable system”, it is heavily controlled narrowing the scope of the applicants. Thus it still faces some of the other constraints that were highlighted above, such as access to finance and affordable land. Having said that, Tao hopes that Lammas and other One Planet settlements, as an example for efficient and ecological land use, can spark new policy in others parts of the world:

“the 76 acres that constituted our first applications for 9 smallholdings formally was just a small part in one household’s farming business, and now largely supports 9 households. So, there’s a future there.”

Not only does Lammas use the land in a more efficient way, in terms of supporting more people, it has been a success for its ecological effects on the landscape.

4.6.2 The Ecological Land Co-operative

The Ecological Land Co-operative (ELC) was cited as the most successful model in which individuals have created change and provided new opportunities for entrants on the land, without shifts in national or local level policy. I spoke to the executive director of the ELC, Zoe Wangler, who told me that the aim of the ELC is to “facilitate access to land for ecological land-based activities.... offering more affordable housing and land, with 150 year leases allowing for long-term plan.” In addition, the co-op provides the opportunity to become part of the bigger movement and support tenants with “grant application, mentorship and planning applications.” The co-op acquires finance through share offers, most recently securing £455,051 of investment in June 2017 (ELC, 2017). It uses these funds to buy agricultural land, applies for planning permission, puts in infrastructure, and the land is then sold or rented to tenants at a more affordable price. Currently they oversee three smallholdings at one site in Devon, Greenham Reach. When I visited Helen Kearney, one of the smallholders there, she explained that it enabled her and her family to access the land on a 25

year rent-to-buy, and still have the certainty of a 150-year lease, as long as they continue to run an agricultural business. However, one of the biggest advantages comes from the support that the ELC offers:

“The land co-op obtain the planning permission for us, they do all of that for us, and we work with them. They fund all of that as well, which is great... we’ve seen so many people try to get their own planning permission, and they become so stressed and tired that they either give up, or by the time they gain the planning permission they’re exhausted... That’s what really attracted us about the land co-op, they’re the experts and they’re doing that, we should just be getting on with the farming” (Kearney, 2017).

The land co-op have a management agreement and inspect the smallholdings twice a year in order to keep the land in the community and maintain the ecological standards of the land (Wangler, 2017). There are restrictions on the size of the dwellings, and if the tenants wanted to leave they would have to sell everything back to the co-op at a cap, meaning the tenants won’t be able to make a profit and the land is prevented from re-entering the free market (Kearney, 2017). The co-op has now acquired a second site in Sussex and is searching for a third, in order to give access to land to as many people as possible. This means they are no longer priced out, finance is less of a constraint, and they are supported in the planning system, clearly overcoming many of the obstacles outlined in the previous section.

Having said that, whilst all participants that mentioned the ELC spoke very highly about its success, some were still wary of getting too over-excited about the model. It does enable access to land, but it is not without imperfections. Ruth West (2017) was critical of its “small scale” and Chris Smaje (2017) brought to light the issue that “they’re raising a lot of money which is basically going into the pocket of landowners” when they buy the land. Helen Kearney (2017) explained that “you still have to have some money to be able to get here, and some way of generating money or taking out a loan”, even though it was her family’s “best shot” at accessing a land-based livelihood. Zoe Wangler (2017) clarified that they are aware of the limited scale at which they operate, which is why they also work for more fundamental change:

“We want to facilitate the ecological management of land, with a knock-on effect for systemic change, and aim to be a success story, providing materials for others in land acquisition.”

Their willingness to engage in the wider struggle for access to land is what makes the ELC an ideal mix of practical action within a system that has failed many, and optimistic and hopeful activism in order to inspire more fundamental shifts. The ELC enables a solidarity economy for land access, moving from the battle of the individual against the powerful state or the unequal market, towards a shared solidarity for gaining access to land.

4.6.3 Scottish Land Reform

Almost all participants, at some point in the interviews, highlighted that Scotland were doing far better than England in terms of land reform and enabling land-based livelihoods. The movement for land reform has completely rocketed in Scotland, both at the grassroots and parliamentary level. The historical roots for Scottish land ownership and access to land share similarities with the rest of the UK, in the sense that many parts of Scotland witnessed a movement away from open agricultural commons towards private ownership (Elliot et al, 2014). However, there are also great historical differences, most notably in the retained rights of the Scottish crofters, through the Crofters Holdings Act of 1886 and its descendants, which “created crofts and crofting as a distinct form of agricultural land tenure in Scots law” (Elliot et al., 2014, p.180). Today Scottish crofts, defined as “an agricultural smallholding that.... provides the crofter with a part time means of subsistence or income” (Elliot et al., 2014, p.180), are 18,000 in number and cover 750,00 hectares, of which 538,000 are common grazings shared by crofters. Their existence has played a key role in maintaining the economic and social fabric of rural communities, and the national sympathy towards issues of land rights and access to land. Throughout the 20th century, the rights for crofters has been reinstated through parliamentary acts, such as The Crofters Holdings Act in 1955 which “re-established crofts and crofting as a distinct form of land tenure” and the Crofting Reform Act of

1976, which “gave crofters a right to acquire ownership of their croft from their landlord” (Elliot et al., 2014, p. 182).

The recent surge in land reform, whilst partially enabled by a different culture surrounding land rights in Scotland, is rooted in the 1999 Scotland Act, which formed the Scottish Parliament giving them power to pass laws on domestic matters (Wightman, 2016). This saw the birth of the Land Reform Policy Group (LRPG), which led to a comprehensive land reform act in 2003, covering issues from agricultural holdings to new crofting legislation (Elliot et al, 2014). In more recent years, the Land Reform Review Group (LRRG) was set up by the Scottish government in 2012, under the remit: “the relationship between the land and the people of Scotland is fundamental to the well-being, economic success, environmental sustainability and social justice of the country” (Elliot et al., 2014, p.5). The group aimed to identify how land reform can enable more access to the ownership, governance and management of land, assist with the acquisition and management of land by communities, and generate new relationships between land, people, the economy and the environment (Elliot et al., 2014, p.5). Their review led to another Land Reform Act in 2016, which, amongst other things, offers protections for new tenant farmers, ends tax relief for estates and creates a new Scottish Land Fund of £10 million to support community buy-outs of land (Brooks, 2016). These radical shifts in policies reflect a completely different atmosphere and opportunity surrounding access to land in Scotland, and call upon a new movement to take place in England.

4.7 Building a Movement

It became clear throughout the research that whilst the problems being faced were being combatted and challenged at the individual level, these small pockets of success have only been able to chip away at the status quo. There needs to be a wider movement for land reform and land rights if change is going to happen on a larger scale, like what has been seen in Scotland. Participants offered insights about the needs and possibilities of building a movement for land reform in England, and this section will draw on and synthesise their ideas.

4.7.1 A Coherent Philosophy

Participants referred to the underlying need for a coherent philosophy that ties together the arguments for rural renaissance and the need for a land rights movement in reaching that. For example, Colin Tudge (2017) explained that whilst there are a lot of good things happening, we lack an “underpinning coherent philosophy”, which he tries to encourage through his work on The College for Real Farming. The concept is a “a conscious attempt to get the ideas together and make a coherent philosophy”, to stop teaching things in isolation - farming, science, economics - but to draw them together, contextualising the issues within a wider and more holistic space. The imagination is to have a place to study the science and art of growing food, whilst also learning about moral philosophy, metaphysics and politico-economic theory. Through learning about these issues in tangent, rather than in isolation, you are empowering people with the tools needed to bring about an agrarian renaissance.

4.7.2 Informing the Public

Many participants also referred to the need for a way of informing the public in order to bring issues of access to land and land rights into the mainstream. Chris Smaje (2017) explained to me he believed a lot can happen without major legislative change. Through “a slightly different culture within planning departments, and a slightly different public mentality” we can have a positive culture surrounding a movement of people onto plots of land for growing food, and policy will follow that. Helen Kearney (2017) also explained the personal need she feels in spreading the word about what she is doing, “because the more people that hear it, the more it will make sense and the more it will become mainstream.” Helena Norberg-Hodge (2017), on a number of occasions, explained the importance of spreading the message about the possibilities of an alternative to the current situation for land and farming, for example “that small, diversified farms can produce more food per-acre.” She explained that it is a blindness to this which allows policies to continue to promote the large and global over the small and local and described the urgent need to raise awareness:

“far too few resources and efforts are put into an educational campaign for civic society to build up more pressure on government and business, and to create more awareness, even among farmers, how destructive this path is.”

Some participants described the ways in which the existing actors in the movement are trying to do exactly that. Mike Hannis (2017) highlighted that “part of the low impact development movement has always been about bringing these questions into public awareness more”, Helen Kearney (2017) told me that “the ELC’s aims are education as well as agriculture”, and Guy Shrubsole (2017a), described the main aim of his work on ‘Who Owns England?’¹⁶ has been to “expose some of the concentration of ownership” to the general public. If we can inform the public about the issues, then change is likely to come.

4.7.3 The New Land Movement

Participants spoke about the existing movement for land rights that has emerged over the past few decades. Whilst the movement was partially outlined in section 1.2.2, many aspects were clarified by the participants. Mike Hannis (2017), an editor of *The Land* magazine, explained to me that the magazine was a coalescence of the different facets of the “mid-90s bubble of interest in land rights and land ownership”. In particular it was inspired by *The Land is Ours* campaign and the *Chapter 7* newsletter. The newsletter was run by Simon Fairlie¹⁷ and named after chapter 7 of the agenda 21 which, amongst other things, stated that:

“All countries should, as appropriate, support the shelter efforts of the urban and rural poor by adopting and/or adapting existing codes and regulations to facilitate their access to land, finance and low cost building materials” (*The Land is Ours*, 2017).

¹⁶ Who Owns England is an attempt map the major landowners in England, combining public data with Freedom of Information requests (see Shrubsole, 2017b)

¹⁷See Fairlie, 2009

Whilst most people saw the agenda 21 as applying to countries in which land-based culture was still fairly alive, the newsletter challenged that and made the case for the assistance of land-based lifestyles, rather than their eradication (Hannis, 2017). The Land magazine has since been writing about these issues in an attempt to “campaign peacefully for access to land, its resources and the decision-making processes affecting them” (The Land, 2017).

Other aspects of the movement were identified, such as the growth of permaculture practices (Aitken, 2017) and the revival of local food (Norberg-Hodge, 2017). Ed Hamer (2017), a previous editor for The Land magazine, described to me other elements of the movement that have risen from the anti-globalization stance and the global financial crisis. He was involved in the 2008 Reclaim the Fields movement, which aimed to fill the gap between the “desire from urban based anarchist activists to get involved in land based work, and the complete lack of skills and practices to match that desire.” Later, Ed had been involved in forming the Land Workers’ Alliance (LWA), a movement born out of Via Campesina, aiming to specifically give voice to and empower the UK’s small-farmers, as a political union and through networking and skill sharing (Hamer, 2017). Chris Smaje, Harriett Bell and Helena Norberg-Hodge all referred to the LWA as being a stalwart in the current land movement, but equally they described the need for the LWA to “tap in and work with” (Bell, 2017) organisations that having a bigger seat at the table.

The formation of the Land Justice Network¹⁸ in 2016 provides another sign of the emergence of a land rights movement in the UK. They are a network of individual groups, uniting under the common goal of land reform, recognising its central importance to the diverse struggles for social and environmental justice (Land Justice Network, 2017). The network sees that society, culture and economy are all dependant on the resource of land, and thus that it should be held as an asset for the common good. Isabella Coin (2017) described the recent conference, in which many of the different social and environmental groups joined together, as an exciting opportunity for finding common ground across the activist spectrum.

¹⁸See Land Justice Network, 2017

4.7.4 From Separation to Mass Movement

Whilst there was agreement that some form of a movement exists, participants were critical of its lack of confluence. Colin Tudge (2017) went as far as to say that there are possibly hundreds of thousands of people moving things in the right direction, but what is “missing with all these initiatives is a lack of coherence.” Pat Conaty (2017) described this in different terms:

“you have lots of organisations doing very important things - groups working on community energy, groups working on local food systems, other groups working on affordable housing issues, others working on workspace, but... they’re working on the parts and not collectively on the whole.”

Pat further explained that he saw a uniting factor between social and environmental activists which would allow groups to collaborate effectively, without sacrificing their own causes. He identified this common ground, this “key to opening up the locked gates” as the land question, calling it “a unifier for securing almost everything.” In fact Guy Shrubsole explained how the land question, at least the pursuit for transparency over who owns land, can help unite people across political lines:

“Whether you’re a small c conservative who believes in a property owning democracy and everyone owning a little bit of land... or you’re an anarchist who doesn’t believe in anyone owning a bit of property, or a state socialist who believes that the state should take over anything... [you] should have a basic shared interest in finding out who owns stuff” (2017a).

This possibility to transcend ideological and political boundaries and to unite social and environmental activists, calls for a mass movement united around the central systemic issue of land reform, which many participants alluded to throughout the research. Ruth West (2017) called for a further national political land platform to unite different groups in England and Helena Norberg-Hodge encouraged “a people’s movement” to truly solve the issues. Colin Tudge (2017) believed that “there really does have to be a huge political movement...comparable to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in the 1950’s”, uniting high profile political thinkers, philosophers and

grassroots movements on the streets. There is clearly a need for a movement which stretches above and beyond those directly affected by land inequality and access to land, uniting a coherent philosophical and educational stance, with a practical and active citizens movement.

4.7.5 A New UK Peasant Movement

The participants often alluded to the need for a new peasant movement here in the UK. The lack of a peasantry in England in comparison to other parts of Europe was highlighted by a number of individuals. For example, Colin Tudge (2017) noted the difference in Southern Europe: “I used to say I didn’t know any Italian who didn’t have an olive grove somewhere.” Chris Smaje (2017) mentioned the need to bring a political movement back to the countryside:

“the whole allotment movement and tradition of socialist self improvement happened in the towns in Britain historically, but not so much in the countryside which is a much more conservative place. I think we need to bring that back to the countryside.”

Participants alluded to the possibility that a peasant movement may start in that new process of identification, a revival of the idea of the peasant as a positive thing. Helen Kearney, as I started walking back up the path out of her land, shouted over to me, “I would like to be a first world peasant!”. Caroline Aitken also described a new need to identify with the peasant:

“Who are the peasants? That’s us, it’s the folks on the ground, and by giving people the skills to feed themselves and re-establish connections with their local community, you’re giving local communities skills and resilience that will help the transition from where we are now to where we need to be... We’re tackling the grassroots end of things, that’s our job.”

She describes the peasant way of activism as to empower yourself from the grassroots, rather than wait for any kind of larger-scale political change. Mike Hannis (2017) whilst agreeing with the “key struggle” to support people who are facing centuries of displacement and destruction of subsistence

livelihoods, was wary of using the term and claiming to be in solidarity with people around the world:

“We have this ideal of the peasant on a couple of acres on the other side of the world, completely supporting themselves off this little bit of land, and people here say “I want to do that!” And yes, you might want to do that, but to identify your struggle to do that in this country with their struggle to do that over there is often a bit naive, because it's not exactly life or death in the way that it is in Brazil or South Africa.”

A grassroots movement of individuals aiming to empower themselves and others in returning to the land is different from the everyday struggle of people attempting to maintain their only possible livelihoods, and whilst both are important struggles, conflating one with the other may not necessarily be conducive to either's emancipation.

4.8 Governance and Ownership

The most common and prevalent theme extracted from the interviews is that a true movement to a new rural economy requires a critique of the current neoliberal capitalist system of governance and ownership of land. This section will analyse the broad spectrum of possible politico-economic systems that were identified in the research, from free market economics to socialist nationalisation of land, and everything in between.

4.8.1 This is Systemic

The systemic nature of the struggle for land rights was highlighted by all participants. Many were humble in the way they placed their own, often revolutionary, lifestyles within the wider need for systemic change. I was constantly amazed to witness people who had managed to create a livelihood through the regeneration of a natural environment, living off-grid for water and energy,

and eating most of their food from the land, yet still they were enthusiastic about engaging in what is clearly a systemic politico-economic struggle to rebuild rural life.

Participants highlighted a diverse range of manifestations of the systemic issues. For example, Chris Smaje explained that “the systems really aren’t geared to the notion of a small-scale, local, sustainable farming” (Smaje, 2017). In fact, many people talked of how they shifted from the small-scale issues to engaging with the wider systemic struggle. Isabella Coin (2017) explained that Shared Assets¹⁹ originally began with interventions at the local level, but soon shifted to working “at the policy level to actually try and change and influence the structures that affect how land is managed.” Additionally, Mike Hannis (2017) described the objectives of his “funny little shanty town” as “part of a much bigger struggle”, and that “these tiny little niches” won’t make a difference without challenging “the fact that everything is completely nailed down by private property ownership and all legal frameworks... prop that up.”

The current situation is that the market rules, and decisions regarding how land is used are determined by those in power, which is in turn determined by who owns the land. The proof is there that leaving things to the market will always gravitate towards commodification and inequality. Guy Shrubsole (2017a) explained that, looking at the data made available through Freedom of Information applications, reveals that there are “50 companies that own at least a million acres of England and Wales.” The remaining 24 Dukes left in the UK together own a million acres of land too. This calls for a serious debate over the question of ownership and leaving the market to decide.

4.8.2 Nationalisation of Land

One alternative cited by the participants is to make the case for the nationalisation of land, putting land into public hands which can then be redistributed fairly. Mike Hannis (2017) described that fight for land rights as “an irreducibly political struggle”, and explained that avoiding interaction with the state does not get you out of the debate. He went on to say:

¹⁹Shared Assets in a London-based organisation, working under the guise “that land is a common good that should deliver shared benefits for everyone” (see Shared Assets, 2017).

“I’m quite in favour of public ownership of land... you have lots of people who consider themselves anarchists, and don’t want the state doing things, but from the other side, if you get everybody’s interests together and say we’re going to act on this, that is the public, that is the point of democracy.”

With land in public hands, there is a possibility for democratic control of decisions made, and a strong campaign for land to be distributed in a way that helps the revival of rural life could be more worthwhile. Public ownership of land should in theory “remove land from the market in perpetuity and socialise rents in the process” (Ryan-Collins et al., 2017). However, the likelihood of “some kind of communist-style revolution” (Smaje, 2017) which would ignite the possibility of public ownership was questioned: “there’s no way that I can see something radical like nationalisation of land happening” (Eagle, 2017).

4.8.3 Community Ownership

There was far more enthusiasm surrounding the possibilities of community ownership of land than a reliance on the state. For many people, to empower yourself from the grassroots is the greatest way to shift land into ownership for the common good. Isabella Coin (2017) explained her desire to see “local control of land... and more power in the hands of people who actually use the land”, and the role of big government policy is “to enable that kind of ecosystem.” Rather than have the government control all the land, the government should put in place infrastructure for communities to be able to own and govern land themselves. Zoe Wangler (2017) also explained that she got involved with the Ecological Land Co-operative, as she “felt that community ownership of land is key for a more just society.”

Caroline Aitken (2017) explained that starting from the grassroots level and actually getting “land back into the hands of more people” is the only thing we can do right now. She was doubtful over the possibility of systemic change under the current right-wing government, and fearful over

the way in which a socialist state ownership of land would work. So she believed in the power of community as the best place to focus our energies:

“Communities have the power to reclaim little bits of land that do belong to them... Get together with your community and stake a claim on whatever land you can, there’s more of it than you might imagine.”

Many of the participants thus highlighted the importance of communities fighting to change the system from the ground up, building projects and getting access to land, much like the ELC has been doing, rather than waiting for government level policy change to come.

4.8.4 Public-social Partnerships

The actions of communities and individuals in trying to rebuild rural life, giving access to land to as many people as possible, is commendable. However participants suggested that the way forward may not be as radical as one could imagine, but rather to embrace the power of the progressive partnership in the search for more dramatic change. In fact, Mike Hannis (2017) highlighted that the lack of these partnerships is preventing a more dramatic move forward to the land: “it’s all going on, but there’s no real meeting between those grassroots pressures and the state level structures.” The calling is to start to fill the space in between the successful grassroots activist movement and the willingness for change in the institutions of the political sphere, at the local and regional levels. For, as Mike continued later in the conversation, “it’s not that we’re all powerless, but we actually need to operate power through the institutions of public sector structures that we have.”

It is for this reason that participants pointed to the need for more partnerships between the state and grassroots. For example, Pat Conaty (2017) clearly expressed his beliefs in the power of these sorts of partnerships. He said that, whilst it is admirable to take an anarchistic approach, trying to build things without the help of the state, “it takes a long time to succeed and it very seldom leads to big breakthroughs.” He went on to explain that, in the U.S., Bernie Sanders became the mayor of Burlington in Vermont, and managed to shift the Community Land Trust from a

“hippy idea” to a widespread success through the local development fund of \$1 million: “they succeeded in Burlington by developing a public-social partnership between grassroots organisations and the city to work out how they could make this happen together.” He also explained how, in Wales, he had personal success in achieving six co-op housing projects in a few years, because of a partnership with a minister who “wanted to see some forms of democratic housing emerge.” Tao Wimbush (2017) also attributed the success of One Planet Development policy in Wales to a similar sort of partnership between the grassroots movement and Pembrokeshire county council. The essence of the matter is that, if you have “politicians who understand what you’re doing” (Conaty, 2017), within regional or county level government, they will be willing to work with the grassroots and can push for new land rights and reforms that will help to rebuild rural life. It does not require a revolution, it merely requires the right kind of partnership. Historically, too, large changes have come through these sorts of relationships, such as the government funded Land Settlement Association which, since 1934, provided “over a thousand five-acre smallholdings” (Chamberlin, 2015).

Of course, public-social partnerships will not always be perfect. If a new model appears, and facilitates a movement to the land through challenging some of the preventatives, they often fall at other hurdles. For example, planning restrictions may subside, but that is quickly replaced by the problems of finance preventing a larger scale of projects happening, such as is the case for the One Planet Development policy. Tao Wimbush (2017) explained that he would like to see a scaling up of One Planet settlements, to “100 units, or 1000 units, or 10,000 or even 100,000 units”, and we then must question what sort of public support might be needed for that to take place.

4.8.5 Localisation of Power

The devolution of power to increasingly local levels of government is the systemic step beyond public-social partnerships. You could argue that public-social partnerships are examples of the need to invoke a localisation of governance and democracy. As Pat Conaty (2017) said, we should “never underestimate the importance of a revival of local government”, and its ability to encourage participation from the grassroots, that can inform and affect change at increasingly higher levels.

The form of devolution could come in a secessionist movement, in which more rural and regional parts of the country start to move towards a revival of small-farming and subsistence where possible (Smaje, 2017), using the powers that they have now and encouraging more powers to return. Institutionalised change through localisation of power has come in other forms in the past, for example through the municipal socialist movement in the end of the 19th century, which “created libraries, schools, swimming baths, electricity, clean water, public health, a whole bunch of stuff” (Conaty, 2017). Today, the municipal movement is experiencing a revival. Its current form is rooted in Murray Bookchin’s (1987) libertarian municipalism, which “proposes that land and enterprises be placed increasingly in the custody of the community.” Essentially, it enables a democratic removal of land and services from the market into the hands of the public, taking a step further than just public ownership through institutionalizing radically democratic processes, such as participatory budgeting, in which citizens are able to take control of their services (Russell and Reyes, 2017). Whilst this has been taking place around the world, from Barcelona to Beirut²⁰, this has been a city-level revolution (Russell and Reyes, 2017). However, for Bookchin the city is not a monolithic city, it’s a collection of communities in neighbourhoods. Their population isn’t something precise but each component should be humanly-scaled and able to efficiently operate from a public assembly meeting style basis (Bookchin, 1987). So the small town or rural community are equally as valid units in the movement as the city, though because they don’t have the same progressive thinking or necessarily as stark an experience of crisis they are not as ready to mobilise. The step beyond is to confederate the villages and fight for a reinvigoration of the mutual aid networks and social institutions which were swept away in the 19th century. Then, through linking with the wider municipal movement, build a rural renaissance through the institutions that presently stand in its way. This can only remain a dream until a number of vital steps are taken. A stronger municipal movement must reach England, and there must be a clearer grassroots voice for rebuilding rural areas and acquiring access to land.

²⁰Barcelona en Comú and Beirut Madinati (see Russell and Reyes, 2017)

5. Conclusions

This thesis has aimed to explore the possibilities of a rural renaissance, identifying the different routes to a revival of land-based culture at the individual, collective and political level. It has done this mostly through the exploration of the collective themes found in a series of semi-structured interviews *with* and direct observation *of* actors working within the movement for land rights and rural renaissance. The interpretation of these themes has allowed for conclusions to be made, which can also be made generalisable to inform policy and action. I will briefly recap on the journey that this thesis has taken, before going through the final synthesis and conclusions.



Much like the movement itself, the path forward towards a new rural economy in England is neither clear nor congruent - it requires patience and perseverance. It is essential to move above and beyond the status quo. This means an abandonment of a productivist ruralism which is characterised by a capitalist industrial agriculture and a landscape devoid of life. There are deep historical roots tying the state of the current rural economy with the actions of the past. It is the same past economic logic that led to an enclosure of common land and a destruction of subsistence peasantry in the 19th century as the present economic logic which encourages a capitalist pattern of land use, and an agricultural policy that continues to favour economic efficiency and subsidisation. The logic is one which places efficiency before sovereignty, and the free market before community. Just as the social institutions which maintained life in rural communities were ripped away at the time of enclosure, they struggle to find their way into rural economies today. This correlation, between the past history of the invention of capitalist agrarianism, and the present day existence of a neoliberal capitalist rural economy, was clear throughout the analysis of the participants' observations of the crisis. Participants described a situation in which the routes into rural, land-based livelihoods are blocked by the bureaucracy and institutions that are propped up by the

neoliberal capitalist system. Access to land for those wishing to live in a sustainable way, making a livelihood from the land, is continually denied.

Thus we sit in the midst of a crisis, at the precipice between two stories. The story of the new rural economy that we desperately need is already being dreamed, as was clear in the words and stories of the participants. Its essence is a rural economy that has its foundations in the land and what the land can produce, and creates a deeply rooted culture and livelihood that is determined by the land. This means a human-scale agriculture that is inherently ecological, that invokes a husbandry of the land. It means humans being integrated into the rural landscape, creating ecological lifestyles through direct relationships with the land, finding our place in the ecosystems in which we live.



Above I have outlined (a) the current predicament for rural life and land-based livelihoods in the global industrial society, and (b) the dream for the new rural economy. I will conclude by outlining the space in between. Essentially, I will synthesise the findings through answering two questions:

1. What are the ways in which we are moving from (a) to (b)?
2. How we can continue to build that movement and hope for a new rural economy of the future?



There are lessons to be learned from the stories of success, outlined and often enacted by the participants, that are helping along the transition to a new rural economy. In England we must learn from the successes that have been made in recent years. At the grassroots level, the Ecological Land Co-operative has been the greatest model for providing access to land, as it builds bridges between the different actors within the neoliberal capitalist land system, removing the powerless individual

from a battle against the market and the state. At the regional level, a partnership with Pembrokeshire county council saw the planting of the seeds for One Planet Development, a national level reform which has enabled a number of new smallholdings around rural Wales. In Scotland, through a grassroots encouraged, government enacted campaign, there have been centralised systemic changes that are putting the foundations in for community buy-outs of land and a revival of Scottish crofts.



Whilst it is undeniable that the dominant narrative of land ownership is to leave the market to decide who owns, governs and makes decision about land, it is not all encompassing. Pockets of resistance exist throughout society proving that new relationships between communities and land are possible. To encourage a shift to a new rural economy, one must reach out to the existing pockets of post-capitalist, commons-driven land initiatives and feed their growth, even if that sometimes means working with the institutions that already hold power.

An important thing to remember is that none of these successes happen in isolation. They all inform the wider public on the art of the possible, they become beacons for others to learn from and follow. One Ecological Land Co-operative can never do enough to rebuild land-based societies, and one public-social partnership can never be enough to transform a stagnant local government system, and even one shift in national land policy can never be enough to rebuild the social institutions that are required for thriving rural life. None of these things alone are sufficient enough to rebuild rural life and an ecological agriculture, but all are necessary. Furthermore, these movements happening in tangent, like a confluence of rivers meeting, can maybe gather enough momentum to push through the neoliberal capitalist dam, and eventually change the system. The revolution, if there is going to be one, will not be that of a mass scale violent overthrow of the oppressor, but rather it will be a slow and laborious process of individual communities getting hold of land whenever they can, working with the institutions when the opportunity arises and at the same time continuing to fight at the higher levels for larger scale reform.

And thus it is imperative that we act at all levels that we can, attaining all powers that we can. As individuals we must build a people's movement, we must re-invigorate the idea of a peasantry, we must access the funding that is available, we must join in solidarity with all those who fight the same fight, and we must constantly be making the case that a more ecological land-based rural life is possible. As communities, we must get access to land where possible, we must use existing models and build new ones, and we must also operate through institutions that already hold power. The more these issues infiltrate the mainstream institutions, whilst at the same time building community connections and resilience, the more possible a wider, systemic change becomes.

There is also something to be said about the possibility for centralised reform. If the planning system does what it is supposed to do, which is to socialise the right to decide what happens on the land, then it must reflect the people's demand for new ways of living. Here it is important to recognise the alignment between the findings in the literature on back-to-the-land movements and the recounted experiences of the participants that had returned to a land-based livelihood. That being, the contemporary motivations usually stem from a desire to connect to local ecologies, with land and nature, and genuinely build an alternative through living on the land. This was clearly portrayed in the lives of those I spoke to and visited, from the regeneration of the ecology that was described by Tao at Lammas, to the motivations of the participants living at Landmatters, and in most cases in which people have moved onto the land. Thus, it is clear that the demand from the people for a land-based livelihood is valid, particularly given the imminence of the climate crisis, and that is neither enabled nor encouraged within the current English planning system. This is not a revolutionary request, it is a fair and necessary demand.

There is a strong need to push things forward through a devolution of power to the local level. For, as was demonstrated time and again, the critical opportunity for fundamental change exists in the space between the grassroots momentum and the institutional willingness. It feels clear that without a localised and democratic relationship between institutions and grassroots, a new rural economy based on ecological agriculture and thriving life is not possible.

○

I would like to end by bringing my voice into the conversation. My personal journey, as somebody raised in an urban setting, disconnected from any idea of a rural, land-based livelihood, but also as somebody keen to learn how to live from the land, left me deeply placed within this question. Thus the experience of this research has been transformative. It has brought to light the existence of a movement which had only really lurked in the shadows of my awareness. I was constantly confronted by people who had found a way to build their own livelihood through their connection to the land, but who were also completely engaged with the wider struggle for the rebuilding of rural life. Witnessing this coexistence of an alternative way of living, and a deep commitment to fighting for systemic change, left me energised and empowered. I feel a responsibility to dedicate my time to fighting for the rights of people to live on the land. To reiterate Colin Tudge's words: we may not feel optimistic, but we must never give up hope.

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