A typology of the employment-education-location challenges facing rural island youth

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Abstract: We present a typology of 'Stayers' and 'Leavers' among rural island youth (aged 18-30) to illustrate their employment–education–location decision, based on semi-structured interviews with 30 young adults, and 81 older adults, in rural locations in Ireland, Newfoundland, Faroe Islands, and Shetland. Although there are exceptions, rural labour markets tend to be less diverse, and jobs in the primary sector, which have historically sustained these communities, face restructuring and decline in many places. Regardless of location, young people typically struggle to find good-quality work because of their relative lack of credentials and/or experience, and a shortage of local options can trap some, and force others to look 'away'. Outmigration decisions are based on economics, but also social and emotional factors. Thus, even in places with low unemployment, young adults must consider where to live, and what to do next, and down the road. The reviewed literature suggests that there are commonalities among the choices typically facing those in rural and remote communities, whether on an island or on a mainland. We believe, though, that this dilemma can be exacerbated for those living on islands because of the logistical and psychological complexity of the 'stay or leave' decision. Rather than presenting detailed summaries from the young islanders whom we interviewed, our intended contribution is to present our typology as a way to spur on research towards specific policy remedies. The challenges facing any young rural islander can be complicated and individualized. Nonetheless, after conducting dozens of interviews in many island communities, some clear patterns of Stayers and Leavers emerged across the various jurisdictions. In turn, we argue for the development of social and economic policies tailored to suit each category of rural island youth.

Keywords: employment, islands, life satisfaction, outmigration, public policies, training, work quality, youth

Introduction

As a general rule, a few negative labour market trends are leaving young workers in the industrialized world with a complicated dilemma. First, the variation among working conditions is increasing in many jurisdictions, with a lucky minority of individuals seemingly holding good-quality employment, whereas others increasingly struggle to find a decent job. Second, young people are especially likely to be unemployed or underemployed because of difficulties transitioning from secondary school to a good job. A third labour market reality, not routinely associated with the first two, is the relative lack of steady and good-paying job prospects in many rural and remote communities. As a result of these employment challenges, individuals might have to consider relocating in search of employment or educational opportunities. Via the literature that is presented, we show that there are commonalities among the choices typically facing those in rural and remote communities, whether on an island or on a mainland. We believe, though, that this dilemma can be exacerbated for those living on islands because of the logistical and psychological complexity of the 'stay or leave' decision. Moreover, we believe that the employment-education-location decision is especially important for rural island *youth* because they are at a stage when post-secondary training and the pursuit of full-time employment typically occurs. The purpose of this paper is to develop and present a typology of rural island youth to illustrate the various ways that they assess their employment-education-location decision. In using the term 'education', we refer to the broad range of ways people can acquire skills after attending secondary school. In turn, we hope that our typology can assist researchers and decision-makers in the future as they try to devise more targeted public-policy alternatives to address the various challenges facing different sets of rural island youth. This topic is relevant because life satisfaction, fair access to good-quality employment, and being able to access opportunities to gain skills to get that employment are pillars of a just society.

Our typology emerged from interviews with 30 young adults, and 81 older adults, between 2009 and 2016, in rural locations in Ireland's County Donegal, Newfoundland, the Faroe Islands, and Shetland. (Since all of the interviews were held on the island part of 'Newfoundland and Labrador', we refer only to 'Newfoundland' out of convenience.) In broad strokes, the unemployment rate in the former two jurisdictions has been relatively high for the past decade, while the unemployment rate in the latter two jurisdictions has ranged from fairly to very low over that time period. Nonetheless, youth outmigration is a historic and ongoing topic of interest in all four places.

In this study, we first review existing literature looking at rural-urban differences in terms of employment and lifestyles especially for young people, and then layer on the additional nuances of island living. Then, we provide summary findings from our participants to show how our typology emerged. To be clear, we are not equating island living with rural living. Some islanders live in decidedly urban settings. Rather, our interest is in young adults who *also* happen to live in rural island locations, because they must explicitly or implicitly face what can be a gut-wrenching outmigration decision. Consistent with cited literature, we consider an island location or community to be 'rural' if it has a relatively low population level, and is beyond daily commuting to an urban centre. See the Methodology section for more details.

There is a substantial amount of published research, across many academic disciplines, documenting the trouble that young people can face in their pursuit of good- quality employment, especially if not available locally. There are also numerous studies focused on rural community sustainability as labour markets evolve and populations migrate, both on islands (e.g., McKee & Tisdell, 1988) and in general (e.g., de Haas, 2010). We have analyzed various island economies for years, and, to generalize, our findings have been consistent with those from other studies. In fact, the degree of similarities of results across regions, islands, and jurisdictions is so strong that we want the focus to change towards policy analysis. With this paper, our intended contribution is to encourage researchers to step back and look not at the trees or the forest, but rather for patterns of trees within the forest. Thus, we intentionally veer away from detailed results and, instead, propose our typology. We also admit that our study only examines rural youth in island locations *within* the industrialized world, and within the North Atlantic zone, in particular. Nonetheless, by including those from multiple islands and communities with varying economic and social conditions, we believe that our results could provide insights applicable to islands in the developing world as well. We have also written this paper in an interdisciplinary way. While we look at the economic conditions facing island youth, we recognize that social and psychological factors can be as, or more, important to them. We also admit that, as business researchers, we generalize and categorize 'data' in a manner that differs from other academic traditions. While case studies of the islandness of particular places are undoubtedly important, we gently argue that there needs to be space for all types of studies within our community of island researchers, and that our differences can be complementary.

As mentioned above, unemployment in Newfoundland and in Ireland's County Donegal has been relatively high for much of the past decade or longer, especially in more rural and remote areas. Past research involving rural youth in Newfoundland and Ireland's County Donegal (e.g., Cooke, 2012; Cooke et al., 2013) show that they typically faced compelling reasons to remain and other compelling reasons to go. Thus, even in places with low unemployment, young adults must consider where to live, and what to do next, and down the road. Of course, financial and career issues are not necessarily the most important factors in this decision, but it would be foolhardy to think that these are not among the important considerations. Thus, notwithstanding strong economic conditions recently, youth outmigration continues to be an issue in Shetland and the Faroe Islands as well. A main factor is that in both places, young people often want or need to leave for the mainland in order to access most higher-level education. However, there is a tradition for most people wanting to return after the completion of their education, provided that the return is able to fulfill people's career and lifestyle needs. For this reason, there will typically be a dip in population for people in early adulthood. This dip became severe in the Faroe Islands following the economic collapse in the early 1990s, something that has taken almost a whole generation to recover. Both the Faroe Islands and Shetland also have seen a considerable centralization, where the population in the capital and/or main industrial areas has grown, while the rural areas—especially the remote islands—have seen a sharp population decline over the last half century (Highlands and Islands Enterprise [HIE], 2014; Shetland Island Council, 2017; Statistics Faroe Islands, n.d., 2018) As an aside, the terms 'youth' and 'young adults' and 'young people' are used interchangeably to represent people 18–30 years of age to capture as a category those in early adulthood at an early career stage.

Review of literature

While labour conditions are in flux for many workers, young people often face particular employment challenges, as do rural and remote populations. Yet, studies exploring the work complications facing young rural individuals are uncommon (for an exception, see Culliney, 2014b), and studies on island youth in particular are rare indeed (e.g., Alexander, 2016). Admittedly, there are a number of educational studies looking at the transition from school to work, but these tend to contain only modest labour market details. There are also studies looking at youth and labour markets, but these tend to pay only modest attention to rural or remote locations, much less island locations.

Labour markets and rural youth

As mentioned in our introduction, working conditions have become polarized in the industrialized world, with a relatively small number of individuals holding good-quality (i.e., permanent, good-paying, stable) employment, whereas a growing proportion of the rest feel unable to acquire anything other than non-standard employment, in terms of part-time, casual, on-call, or seasonal employment, often with variable hours and modest working conditions (e.g., Betcherman & Lowe, 1997; ILO, 2016). There are, of course, other rural citizens who are content to hold seasonal or part-time employment, or who are content even if unemployed. While their quality of life might be good or at least good enough, these employment situations necessarily mean modest and/or uncertain income levels (see Cooke et al., 2013).

While there is a growing sense of economic insecurity among workers broadly, there are a number of reasons why rural workers face particular challenges that warrant a closer look. In simple terms, individuals either reside in an urban, commuter/suburban, or rural location. Our interest is in the rurally located individuals, to understand their distinct employment options and challenges. (See the Methodology section for more details.) On average, rural and/or remote labour markets are weaker and less diverse (Brezzi et al., 2011; Dickey & Theodossiou, 2006; Vera-Toscano et al., 2004), and employers tend to be smaller operators with limited resources and profit margins (De Hoyos & Green, 2011; Henderson, 2005). This tends to result in fewer good jobs, a higher proportion of temporary, part-time, and seasonal jobs, and also a narrow set of employment and occupational choices for rural workers (Culliney, 2014a; Paulgaard, 2012). On a global level, the industrial mix continues to evolve in industrialized nations toward service-based economies. However, for very rural areas, this can be particularly problematic as jobs in the primary sector (like fishing, farming, and forestry), which have traditionally sustained these communities as the major source of employment, continue to face restructuring and decline (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Corbett, 2010; Lindsay et al., 2003; OECD, 2006; Paulgaard, 2012). While these jobs historically often involved hard work and provided low wages, they also provided wide-scale employment in even remote locations, as well as a way of life, and sense of identity for many (Ellis & Biggs, 2001). With the reduction of these jobs, rural individuals have had to transition to new industries and occupations, and potentially have had to adapt by piecing together an annual income from multiple sources during a typical year (Alasia & Bollman, 2009; Cooke et al., 2013; Dickey & Theodossiou, 2006; Sultana, 2010). It follows that per capita income levels in rural areas are lower, on average (Henderson, 2005; OECD, 2006). Culliney (2014b)

refers to this as the 'rural wage penalty'. Also, education levels are lower and opportunities for skills upgrading and education are more limited (Culliney, 2014b; Gillies, 2014; OECD, 2006; Rérat, 2014; Vera-Toscano et al., 2004). A cycle can be created in which low population density and declining jobs in the primary sectors limit earnings and employment opportunities, which can trigger more net outmigration, leading to further population decline or stagnation (Lauzon et al., 2015; Simms & Greenwood, 2015).

Regardless of location or jurisdiction, young people tend to struggle to find good-quality work because of their relative lack of skills and/or experience (ILO, 2016). Even those who have acquired skills (whether or not via formal education) can be shut out. As a result, young workers are over-represented among those in entry-level jobs, non-standard jobs typically featuring seasonal or temporary terms, and jobs not requiring post-secondary certification (Corbett 2007, 2010; ILO, 2016; Lindsay et al., 2003).

Young rural individuals who have chosen to remain in their hometowns, but who want to improve their skills, might simply be out of luck (Cooke et al., 2015; Henderson, 2005). As mentioned earlier, there are typically fewer opportunities in rural areas to acquire more skills or education (Moazzami, 2014). But, as Gillies (2014) and others (e.g., Jentsch, 2006) discuss, if young people out-migrate to acquire education, they might not return, unless local employment conditions are robust. Similarly, if acquiring valued skills is another gateway to good-quality work, then a scarcity of local options can also push others to look elsewhere (i.e., away). Moreover, the more ambitious and skilled *among* young people are going to be more inclined to outmigrate (Corbett, 2007; Gillies, 2014; Henderson, 2005; Thissen et al., 2010). Thus, a harmful cycle can be created in which (primarily) young people and the more skilled are more likely to move away from rural areas for better job opportunities, leaving shrinking and aging populations, which can trigger more net outmigration, leading to further population decline and lessening economic and social vibrancy (Brezzi et al., 2011; De Hoyos & Green, 2011; Donegal County Development Board, 2010; Jentsch, 2006; Lauzon et al., 2015; Pedersen & Moilanen, 2012; Simms & Greenwood, 2015). That said, rural communities have different attributes and challenges, and different labour market opportunities (Paulgaard, 2012). Thus, the challenge for community stakeholders is to devise a workable plan to retain and employ their citizens, notwithstanding the structural impediments. For an early study of the causes and impacts of island outmigration, see McKee and Tisdell (1988). Alternatively, for a broader analysis of the various perspectives on the societal impacts of population migration, see de Haas (2010).

Although there are exceptions, this above pattern of struggling rural communities holds for islands as well, at least in our North Atlantic zone of interest. For instance, as Bjarnason and Thorlindsson (2006) point out, Icelanders have been migrating away from rural areas towards Reykjavík. The more remotely located Icelandic villages have had to deal with declines and upheaval in primary industries that traditionally provided the bulk of local employment. Smith et al. (2014) speculate about the uncertain futures of remote Newfoundland villages due to (centrally determined) policies that are too inflexible and impractical for local citizens to follow and still make a (traditional) living in the fishery, as previous generations have done. Even in the Faroe Islands, where unemployment rates are low and the population is growing, past economic crises and waves of outmigration remain in the collective consciousness of the people (Petersen & Cooke, 2014). Ultimately, the choice of living location depends upon one's life and work priorities, and that holds regardless

of whether a person is island-based. Corbett (2007) noted how some rural individuals are willing to accept an economic penalty, if necessary, to enjoy the benefits of rural living. This willingness has similarly been found among those in rural island communities (Cooke et al., 2013). Yet, Gillies (2014) had documented the ongoing outmigration from remote Scottish villages in places where there are limited local post-secondary education and/or (steady) employment options. Similar movements have been found among rural island youth as well (e.g., Cooke, 2012). To be fair, it is more accurate to talk about the net inflows or outflows of people from (rural) communities, as opposed to just outflows. For instance, Stockdale (2002, 2004) has examined the various reasons for in-migration to, and outmigration from, rural Scottish villages, although she concludes that the overall pattern is one of net outmigration (see also Jentsch, 2006). We also note that Stockdale found similarities in the migration patterns and causes in rurally located, but nonetheless mainland, villages compared to those in rural island communities.

Individual labour market responses

While lower-paying and/or seasonal jobs typically are more prevalent, rural economies also require highly trained workers for jobs such as teachers, nurses, police officers, accountants, and technicians. But, in order to get into these occupations, prospective applicants need to gain the skills, education, and experiences that employers are seeking (Corbett, 2005, 2007; Culliney, 2014b; OECD, 2012). The problem facing rural youth is that in order to enter those credentials or skills, they potentially need to leave their communities (Cooke et al., 2015; Rérat, 2014). The typically limited local education and training options in remote areas increases the likelihood that youth will end up as so-called 'NEETs' (i.e., people neither employed nor in education or training programs), either because they cannot find employment, or are disillusioned with the choices that are available to them locally (Culliney, 2014a, 2014b; OECD, 2010). Of course, some young people transition smoothly from adolescence into adulthood by seeking and acquiring training/education, and then attaining a job in a field that interests (and fits) them. But, existing research shows how difficult and intimidating the process can be for youth, even for those in urban settings (Furlong et al., 2003), and certainly for those in rural island communities (Cooke, 2012). Further, we are not suggesting that good-quality, steady jobs do not exist in remote communities. Indeed, there usually are some very high-paying blue-collar and white-collar jobs. The point is that there tend to be fewer of those sorts of jobs, vacancies tend to occur infrequently, and having a chance at getting one of those coveted jobs might require 'living away' to acquire the necessary credentials (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Cooke et al., 2013; Lindsay et al., 2003).

Tang (2009) differentiates between those rural island youth who prefer to move away, versus those expecting to *have to* do so, to achieve one's life goals. This is echoed by Locke (2010), who found that, among rural Newfoundland youth, the relative attractiveness of outmigration depended upon whether local options are sufficiently appealing, and the way individuals view those options is shaped by their own experiences as well as the experiences of family members and others in their social circle (see also Corbett, 2010; Nixon, 2010). Different people seek different job elements, and place different importance on work within their lives (Cooke et al., 2013; Findlay et al., 2013), and also their tolerance for risk and change (Corbett, 2007, 2010). Depending on the strength and diversity of the local labour market, those seeking employment might also be tempted to out-migrate, especially those

more skilled or career-focused (Cooke, 2012; Pedersen & Moilanen, 2012). Thus, it is important not to presume (incorrectly) that only ambitious people leave and unambitious people stay. There are also degrees of willingness, and ability, to relocate, if necessary. While some young rural people are adamant about staying in their hometowns, others would move reluctantly; some would move if the right employment or educational opportunity arose; some would consider moving to other locations in the general vicinity; while others are ready, willing, and able to move wherever the best perceived opportunities are, even if that means severing existing social ties (Corbett, 2005; Culliney, 2014a).

In spite of the potentially greater career options available to those who are mobile, many young people are determined to stay, and to accept the best available local options (Bjarnason & Thorlindsson, 2006; Corbett, 2005, 2010). This signals a willingness to sacrifice some employment opportunities, for the sake of priorities outside of work (Corbett, 2007; Culliney, 2014a), since a person's assessment of the quality of available local jobs is subjective and individual (Cooke et al., 2013; Findlay et al., 2013). As discussed by Taris et al. (2005), the way that individuals perceive the attractiveness of, or satisfaction from, a particular job is affected by one's expectations, values, wants, and needs, as well as local employment conditions, and other personal and volitional factors (see also Culliney, 2014a). Not surprisingly, these same factors are among the ones that affect the life satisfaction of island populations (Alexander, 2016; Podgorelec et al., 2015). Of course, some young individuals will always be keen to out-migrate to experience different (i.e., urban) lifestyles and opportunities, regardless of the benefits of their rural hometowns (Cooke, 2012; Corbett, 2010; Henderson, 2005). In Rérat's (2014) opinion, it is more accurate to view the decision to stay or go, and study or work, as being shaped by social factors (such as the strength of ties to one's hometown), historical factors (such as the length of time one has lived in a hometown versus other locations), and personal/volitional factors (such as career ambitions, ability to afford to travel away to school), and family factors (such as employment held by parents). Similarly, Thissen et al. (2010) suggest that young people's outmigration decisions are based on economics, but also social and emotional factors (see also Alexander, 2016; Fenton & Dermott, 2006; Podgorelec et al., 2015). Researchers (e.g., Cooke et al., 2013) have also documented a phenomenon in which some people are able to create a sufficient annual income, even in an area with few steady year-round employment options, by combining multiple seasonal or part-time jobs and other paid gigs. It is even argued that, for people living on islands, this ability to balance multiple income prospects is a way to mitigate risk and create some financial stability (see Baldacchino & Bertram, 2009; Sultana, 2010).

In summary, the reviewed literature suggests the following: i) that acquiring good-quality employment is a challenge for many people; ii) that, all else being equal, it is harder to acquire good-quality employment if living in a remote and/or rural/island location; iii) acquiring good-quality employment typically requires acquiring skills, education, and/or credentials beforehand, and these are more readily attainable in urban settings; and iv) acquiring good-quality, or good enough, employment is an important consideration, but is only one of the factors (including lifestyle, familiarity, proximity to friends and family) that affect one's life quality. Because young adults are at an early career stage, they must make important choices about where or whether to seek employment, where or whether to attend post-secondary educational institutions, and where to live.

Methodology

Research design

This paper emerged from a multi-year project exploring rural employment quality among different age cohorts. Data collection has occurred in a number of North Atlantic jurisdictions, and included semi-structured interviews, supplemented by observational analysis and gathering survey data. With multijurisdictional research, it is possible to explore the work opportunities, and resulting effects, facing individuals subjected to different degrees of rurality, and living in jurisdictions with different employment and social policies. The Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador was the primary focus of the larger study because of its well-known regional disparity, and persistently high unemployment (and associated challenges) in remote coastal island communities.

Newfoundland has a pronounced urban-rural divide, where two sets of citizens have different economic opportunities, but also different lifestyles, preferences, and life experiences. The region in and around the capital of St. John's has traditionally had a stronger and more diverse economy than rural Newfoundland. For the purposes of this paper, data collection was expanded to North Atlantic jurisdictions (Ireland, the Faroe Islands, and Shetland) with comparable climate, lifestyles, geography, and industrial mix, to be able to assess whether any differences in employment experiences potentially could be attributed to different government policies and cultural differences.

More specifically, we collected data in island communities that are small and remote enough that we categorized them as being rural, which is consistent with existing classifications (e.g., Brezzi et al., 2011; Lauzon et al., 2015). For this paper, 'rural' refers to communities that are relatively small, and are located beyond 'suburban' communities, the latter of which are located adjacent to or nearby urban centres, while the former are remote enough to render daily commuting to any urban centre impractical if not infeasible (see, for example, Lauzon et al., 2015; Partridge et al., 2010). Similar to the notion of island 'smallness', the boundary between rural or not rural is subjective, but for our research question, we follow the lead of others (e.g., Culliney, 2014b; Vera-Toscano et al., 2004) who categorize locations according to commuting distances and localized labour markets, rather than just population size. The reality is that whatever definition is used, the boundary is imprecise between urban, suburban, and rural. The island communities examined ranged from towns of up to 20,000 people (as long as remotely located) to isolated hamlets of less than a couple hundred people. The first methodological restriction was to select 'rural' participants who lived a substantial distance from any urban centres (and hence were neither urban nor suburban). More importantly, our second restriction was to rely on the opinions of the interview participants themselves. We only included those island youth who self-identified that they live, or had lived, in a rural community. It should be noted that a few of our 30 young participants had recently or temporarily left their rural island home for an urban centre in another jurisdiction.

Studying island populations is an inherently multidisciplinary undertaking, since geography, politics, economics, and especially sociological, psychological, and historical factors can influence 'islandness', or culture of a place (Baldacchino, 2006). While islands tend to be thought of as unique places, there are some common elements, such as the presence of a distinct boundary, and thus a heightened awareness of 'place'. Thus, Baldacchino (2004, p. 278) suggests that "there is no better comparison for an island than another island." Moreover,

the separateness of islands, whether physical or psychological or both, can even foster creativity and a sense of community (Stalker & Burnett, 2016). In other words, the relative remoteness and separateness of islands can also be a strength if it leads to things like a sense of community, place, self-sufficiency, wellness, and/or initiative (Alexander, 2016, Podgorelec et al., 2015).

Islands within islands: the urban-rural divide
Within islands (or groups of islands), there will often be an urban-rural divide where the 'capital regions' will have a considerably more urban feel than the smaller and more remote towns and villages. Sometimes, the urban and the rural will be divided by water, as in larger, more central islands versus remote, typically smaller, islands. We see this in both the Faroe Islands and the Shetland Islands. While the water may make islanders "more aware of and more confronted by the fact of boundaries than are most peoples" (Hay, 2006, p. 21), the mere distance 'rural' island people sense from the more urban centres will at times give them a feeling of separateness to those among people in communities separated by water. We see this to a considerable degree in the Newfoundland outports, and to some degree in the other three locations in our study. This is in part because most of these communities are located by the ocean or distanced by other physical or psychological barriers. Furthermore, until relatively recently, some/many of these villages were only accessible by boat or ferry (and some still are), something that has instilled a strong sense of community. Thus, while there is a clear distinction between island and the larger mainland, there is within islands an urban-rural divide, or of islands within islands, even if some of these 'islands' are connected by land. As described above, when categorizing whether people are rural or urban, we take a phenomenological stance by defining the distinction based on how people (i.e., interviewees) experience their place and location.

Research locations: life on an island
For Newfoundland, the social and economic challenges are substantial. The people living in the massive rural areas (i.e., outside of the capital region) face sharply higher unemployment rates, ongoing youth outmigration, and a shrinking and aging population at a time when the whole province is facing a severe public debt problem (e.g., Cooke et al., 2015; Moazzami, 2014; Simms & Greenwood, 2015). But, the employment prospects for the future are best described as mixed. Newfoundland society has been transformed by the growth in its resource sector (i.e., oil/petroleum, mining, and hydro development) over the past two decades, resulting in economic and income improvements (Conference Board of Canada, 2013) but also growing inequality of incomes and opportunities (Gibson & Flanagan, 2014). Moreover, Newfoundland's fiscal situation took a sharp downward turn when oil prices collapsed in 2014 (Conference Board of Canada, 2017).

Similar to those in Newfoundland's past, citizens in rural and suburban Irish communities have experienced employment struggles, and industrial restructuring over several decades (Stead, 2011). That is, many communities and individuals have struggled to adapt from small-scale subsistence farming and fishing to the 'new economy', to retain sufficient population levels necessary to sustain local (retail and other) businesses, and to raise human capital levels so that local workers have the skills sought by employers (Brereton et al., 2011). To be fair, though, Ireland's economic growth has been remarkably strong for

much of the past quarter-century (Dorgan, 2006), despite the sharp temporary downturn in 2008-2010 (Ruane, 2016). There were social successes as well, since financial supports to unemployed and underemployed members of Irish society received comparable increases at the same time (e.g., Teague & Donaghey, 2015). That said, County Donegal is tucked away in Ireland's northwest corner, and has lagged behind most of the other regions of the country in terms of population density, per capita incomes, and labour market participation (Donegal County Development Board, 2010; Government of Ireland, 2013; 2015). While there is a high-quality, albeit small, post-secondary institution in the county, successive generations of young adults have become accustomed to looking outwards (to Irish cities or beyond) for employment or educational pursuits (Cooke et al., 2016).

The Faroes are still heavily dependent upon the commercial fishery and related marine industries, despite ongoing efforts (and successes) to diversify the archipelago's economy (Statistics Faroe Islands, n.d.). In fact, the Faroes experienced a serious fishery-related economic crisis in the 1990s which caused significant outmigration of the population, and whose ripple effects are still being felt today (Hamilton et al., 2004). That said, more recently, the unemployment rate in the Faroes peaked at 7.4% in 2010 during the recent global economic crisis, but, as of 2017, has since returned to the very low levels (of 2% or less) enjoyed a decade ago (Faroe Islands Government, 2017).

Turning to Shetland, although its population of only 23,000 is on par with that of a few decades ago, the current population is tangibly older, and about one quarter of citizens are 60+ years of age (Shetland Islands Council, 2014), indicating net outmigration, and/or return migration of older persons. On the other hand, Shetland has been able to maintain significant levels of employment in its primary industries like fishing, aquaculture, and agriculture, despite its small, remote location (HIE, 2014). Shetland is also poised to develop its oil and gas industries in the coming years (e.g., Shetland Island Council, 2017).

Data and sample findings

Between 2009 and 2016, we conducted semi-structured interviews in several island communities, with a total of 30 young adults, which we define as those 18-30 years of age. Nine, nine, seven, and five interviews were conducted in Ireland, Newfoundland, Faroe Islands, and Shetland, respectively. Additionally, 51 and 30 older rural adults (of 40+ years of age) were interviewed in that same timeframe in Ireland and Newfoundland, respectively. Often, while describing their own experiences, these older individuals shared thoughts on the situation facing young people in their communities. Participants were located initially via community newspaper advertisements and door-to-door flyers, as well as snowball sampling, using our community contacts. We selected communities on the basis of population size, distance to urban centres, degree of rurality, and our sense of economic vibrancy. Any Newfoundland location outside of, and beyond commuting distance to, the capital region is categorized as rural. In Ireland's County Donegal, we avoided interviews in the border/commuter region between Letterkenny to Derry City. All other parts of the county are categorized as rural. Because of their remoteness and low population density, all Faroese and Shetlandic participants are categorized as rural, including those resident in Torshavn and Lerwick. We reiterate that the interview participants in these 'capitals' indicated that their community was 'rural', not 'urban'.

Interviews had an average length of 60-75 minutes and were recorded using handwritten notes. Participants were asked questions like: 'What is a good job around here? Who is able to acquire a good job? What is it like to live in this community? Do people leave for work elsewhere? Have you considered leaving? Where would you go?' Participants were also asked about their own employment experiences and plans for the future (in terms of where they wanted to live, preferred lifestyles, and the type of job that they were hoping to get). The older participants were also asked questions like: 'What advice would you give to young people in your community?' These questions provided enough flexibility to allow participants to focus on employment, lifestyle and living conditions, and the associated causes and effects. The older participants provided important insights because they saw longer-term employment and lifestyle changes—good or bad—within their island locations. They also provided information about the types of leavers who had already out-migrated (and whose experiences we would have missed by interviewing only those remaining in these communities). While many participants talked about their own life experiences, others mainly chose to talk about the experiences of others within their community. Thus, individual participants cannot necessarily be assigned to a particular category within our typology. Instead, the categories emerged from the bottom up as we looked for patterns from the set of respondents about their own experiences, as well as those of others—past and present—in their communities. As is common in qualitative research in our field, we were interested in capturing the variety and depth of responses, rather than mathematically mapping each respondent into a specific category.

Summary results and typology of the employment-education-location dilemma facing rural island youth

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, our contribution is to develop a typology of rural island youth based on the issues that we were told by participants, whether these experiences were related in first or third person. Other published papers exist that summarize our empirical results in detail (e.g., Cooke, 2012; Cooke et al., 2013; Cooke et al., 2015). Nonetheless, to show how the typology emerged, we present a sample of the experiences that our interview participants described. Since those who have already out-migrated were unavailable to be interviewed, it is likely that the individuals we interviewed would have a high attachment to their community and region because they have stayed. We found this to be true, but also found that many of the interview participants talked about the potential need to out-migrate in the future. Moreover, many also talked about friends, family, and/or community members who had already out-migrated. Those who remained were rather realistic, or even partially fatalistic, about local employment options. Generally, they were hopeful of getting a good enough job, and would prefer to remain in their current location. However, several were weighing their options. We also found that several had intentionally decided to enter a local post-secondary program, to minimize living and travel costs. In some cases, these individuals chose the local institution first, and then chose from the available options, as opposed to choosing a program and then seeing which institutions (locally or 'away') offer it. We also detected an interesting connection to 'place'. Few of the Irish youth we interviewed were interested in relocating within Ireland if forced to move. A small proportion was willing to consider relocating to Dublin, the capital, if the opportunities were

better there, but others said that if they had to leave, they might as well go wherever the best chances are, even if abroad. There are substantial similarities in the experiences of the rural youth we interviewed in Newfoundland compared to the Irish participants, although there are some modest differences. The Newfoundland participants tended to be more willing to relocate within the province/island, from their rural location to the capital region around St. John's. That way, they still felt close to home. We also interviewed multiple participants who had originally chosen to stay in their rural hometown, but who had eventually out-migrated temporarily for better work opportunities. Several participants mentioned that older folks had reluctantly encouraged them to consider out-migrating. Nonetheless, some rural youth had intentionally looked for *local* post-secondary education options, and were planning to look locally after graduation for any work opportunities, as a preferred first option.

Turning to the Faroese and Shetlandic participants, one interesting variation is that the majority of these participants have already moved away from their island community, to an urban centre, 'away', such as Copenhagen or Aberdeen, where 'ex-pat' communities are established. The typical reason for the move was for work or education, and in a number of the cases, the participants had already returned home due to homesickness, or merely temporarily while deciding their next step. It appeared that participants from the Faroes or Shetland were more optimistic about the prospects for good employment at home, and this makes sense given the lower unemployment rates in these jurisdictions compared to County Donegal or Newfoundland. That said, as expected, the prospect of a good job was only one of the issues that our participants valued. Typically, they indicated an interest in trying urban living, and also mentioned the rite of passage when 'the thing to do' is for young people to leave their rural island community to seek adventure, and new experiences, before returning. We did not detect any tangible differences in the patterns of experiences among the participants if separating by jurisdiction (i.e., Newfoundland, Ireland, Faroes, and Shetland). That is, the rural youth in these island locations seemingly face similar types of thought processes.

As we had presumed, most participants we interviewed firstly must choose between education or immediate employment. However, upskilling potentially means out-migrating, depending upon the availability of local post-secondary institutions and other training providers. Moving away, though, can be very difficult for those who are attached to local family, friends, and place. Not surprisingly, then, some rural youth prioritize staying, and then look for local employment and educational options. Others, perhaps with weaker community attachments or different career priorities, are more willing to look elsewhere. In all locations in which interviews were conducted, a subgroup of individuals was found to be intimidated, or disillusioned, by the choices they faced. A few of these rural youth fit the definition of 'NEETs' (i.e., not employed, nor in an education or training program), but the majority of these were more accurately described as sporadically employed and in a holding pattern as they search, or at least hope, for a better job opportunity.

These examples illustrate the interwoven nature of the factors shaping the employment-education-location decision. Career, social, and other pressures need to be considered, as well as comfort with risk and change. It would be unfair, however, to imply that skilled and/or ambitious people leave, and that the less capable people stay. Rather, one's penchants for skills upgrading and/or upward mobility are only some of the factors affecting the employment-education-location decision, along with one's lifestyle preferences and values, social/family factors, and community characteristics. Thus, one key factor is the degree to which an

individual is keen versus reluctant to out-migrate, among those who have decided to do so. Similarly, a person might be fully committed to staying 'home', while another 'stayer' might be equivocating. Thus, the degree of certainty of the decision varies as well. Some felt conflicted while others had long decided what to do. For some people, a job is at the centre of their identity. Their occupation—and all it entails—cannot be easily separated from other aspects of life. The things they do 'on the job' can be more a way of life than merely a set of required tasks. At the other extreme, there are people who are anxious to leave their office, plant, or shop at the end of their shift to get on with other aspects of life. Thus, the employment-education-location decision depends upon a range of considerations such as (hometown) community attributes (judged subjectively), social/family characteristics, and individual factors.

As discussed in the literature review, changes to the labour market have made good-quality, stable employment difficult to acquire (e.g., Betcherman & Lowe, 1997). This can be especially true for rural workers if they face rather limited options in terms of local industries and occupations. Yet, individuals have to decide on the appropriate strategic response to the options available to them, and that includes two interrelated parts: the 'stay or leave' decision, and the 'work or learn' decision. Our typology represents the different subgroups of individuals that were encountered or discussed, as young rural individuals considered their choices, explicitly or implicitly. Table 1 shows various types of 'Stayers', meaning those currently planning to remain in their rural community, whereas Table 2 shows the various types of 'Leavers'. The key factors affecting an individual's decision are one's personal characteristics (such as values and preferences), proximity of friends and family, and local employment and (long-term) career options, as well as local lifestyle options. Any given rural community has a unique set of local career/work options, education options, and lifestyle options. But, how any particular young rural adult perceives the attractiveness of those educational, employment, and lifestyle options, as well as the intensity and proximity of social connections, is also affected by individual (or internal) characteristics. Implicitly or explicitly, each individual considers those external (i.e., community, local, or regional) factors as well as internal factors (e.g., personal preferences, risk tolerance, and values, etc.) when deciding what to do, or even deciding not to think about what should be done. All of these interrelationships ultimately lead to a 'stay versus leave' decision, and hence the two sets of categories in the tables.

In essence, the net results of the personal, social, community, and infrastructural characteristics act as either a tether or slingshot, to bind young rural workers to their home region, or to push them away, as they make their decision regarding if and when and where to seek employment or education. The employment-education-location decision is simplified if a young person can find sufficiently good-quality employment locally within their community, and wishes to remain within it. That decision can become a dilemma, however, if there are opposing pressures, such as if local employment options are seen as unattractive but a person does not want to move, or if a person is somehow 'tied' to home (due to elder care or child care responsibilities, for example), but also craves opportunities elsewhere. We also note that some island youth will relocate to an urban centre that is 'nearby' from their 'rural' hometown. But, in our study, these internal migrants would have been excluded. We remind readers that we define 'rural island youth' as being individuals living in a small and remote community that does not have any urban centres *nearby*.

Table 1: 'Stayers' among young rural islanders.

Category	Description	Dominant Factor/Issue(s)
i. The Socially Contented	Are rooted to the community by choice. Choosing current location due to their social network, and willing to accept available training and work options.	Social characteristics (Positive social connections; proximity of friends and/or family).
ii. The Tethered	Are rooted to the community by family or social circumstances (e.g., family obligations).	Social characteristics (i.e., proximity of friends & family), but acting as a tether, not a preference.
iii.The Lifestylers	Committed to current hometown and region, but for lifestyle reasons rather than social connections	Community characteristics (Attractiveness of local lifestyles/activities).
iv.The Risk Averse	Not willing to leave, and thus will take a local option.	Risk aversion; appeal of the do–nothing option.
v. The Disengaged	Unsure about what to do, and that means staying. Lacking drive and direction to acquire more skills and experience.	Individual characteristics (e.g., apathy, low self–esteem).
vi. The Strategic	The ones who want to acquire valued skills, and see the value in doing so close to home, and who are willing to stay if good local programs are available.	Attractiveness of local education options, but also individual characteristics such as discipline and foresight.
vii. The Stymied	The ones wanting to stay and work, but cannot find local options. Thus, are flight risks.	Suitability of community attributes, but also worried about employment options.
viii. The Minimalists	The ones wanting to stay, and happy with the options they find, due to modest expectations.	Rural 'values'/preferences, thus increasing the perceived attractiveness of local options and social connections.
iv. The Money Makers	The ones willing to stay and work because decent quality employment has been acquired.	Attractiveness of short-term (i.e., current and local) work options.

Table 2: 'Leavers' among young rural islanders.

Category	Description	Dominant Factor/Issue(s)
i. The Cosmopolitans	Desiring the lifestyle of an urban (or metropolitan) centre.	Individual characteristics (Prefers/craves an urban lifestyle).
ii. The Urbanites	The ones who simply do not like rural living. Feeling that 'there is nothing here for me'.	Individual characteristics (Seeking to avoid a rural lifestyle).
iii. The Reluctants	They want to stay locally, but there is not a sufficient local employment option.	Community characteristics (Perceived unattractiveness &/or unsuitability of employment conditions trump positive social connections).
iv. The Disappointed Learners	The ones who are emotionally bound to their home community, but cannot find the education option that suits their ambitions.	Community characteristics (Perceived lack of suitable local education options trump positive social connections).
v. The Ramblers	Keen to leave for new adventures, and so leaving for a new community for work &/or school. Change is good.	Individual characteristics (i.e., risk-taking). Seeking new adventures in new places.
vi. The Program Focused	Focused on educational programs that are only available in urban areas.	Lack of local options in specifically sought education program. Also, focused on long-term educational and work goals.
vii. The Mercenaries	Intent on going to best work opportunity, regardless of location.	Community characteristics (Relative strength of local labour market. Willing to relocate to the one perceived to be the best, wherever that might be).
viii. The Unattached	Not tethered to rural location. Unlike many other 'leavers', do not have a specific reason for leaving. Rather, does not have a specific reason to stay.	Lack of longevity or strength of connections of friends and family in rural location.
ix. The Conflicted	They have calculated that, when considering education, employment and lifestyle options, moving would seem to yield a net benefit, but are uncertain.	Balancing lifestyle preferences with educational and employment options, and recognizing that moving involves pros and cons.

To look at the envisioned categories specifically, the Strategic, the Program Focused, and the Disappointed Learners all make their employment-education-location decision primarily on the basis of the attractiveness of local (i.e., within their rural hometown) education options. The Stymied, The Money Makers, and the Reluctants decide primarily based on the perceived attractiveness of local career/work options. The Lifestylers, Cosmopolitans, Urbanites, and The Conflicted all heavily weigh the attractiveness of local (rural) lifestyles/activities when deciding. The fourth cluster, consisting of Socially Contented, Tethered, and Unattached are affected most by the proximity and extent of friends and family within their rural hometowns. Finally, the decision-making of the Risk Averse, Disengaged, Minimalists, Ramblers, and Mercenaries are affected most by one or more individual characteristics. It is worth stating that the categories are not necessarily meant to be exhaustive or even completely mutually exclusive. On the contrary, as public policy initiatives impact rural employment and/or educational, and/or lifestyle conditions, a young rural adult belonging to one category could or would conceivably drift into another, or straddle both. To be blunt, good public policy making should allow more 'Leavers' to decide to be 'Stayers', *and* for the proportion of discontented or demoralized 'Stayers' to decrease (with the proportion of contented and productive 'Stayers' increasing).

Discussion

The message from this study is the recognition that volitional, personal, family, community, and government policy variables can shape the decisions facing rural island youth. For example, one's individual preference might be to seek immediate gains, whereas others are cautious and more inclined to think of the long-term and a career goal. In turn, the choices that rural youth make, at an individual level, affect the short- and longer-term employment and life choices available to themselves. The decision to stay or leave one's hometown, and the decision to seek more skills (via training or education) versus trying to find employment immediately, are not passive ones made in isolation. Those choices are partially in reaction to environmental conditions, and partially a result of one's values and strategic choices. If a young person has strong academic skills and performance, they might be enticed to aim towards higher education relative to those who have struggled in secondary school. Those within the latter group might be more inclined to seek immediate employment, rather than post-secondary education. Similarly, those from a poorer family situation might also be more likely to seek employment if additional education is financially infeasible. That might not be the case, however, if training programs are available within the local community or region, and if governments ensure that skills upgrading options are accessible. Given the correlation between education and positive labour market outcomes (ILO, 2016; OECD, 2006, 2012), the higher the proportion of rural youth seeking to upgrade their skills, the better, all else being equal. Thus, in terms of government policies, income supports, tuition costs, program availability, and public transit infrastructure can be influential.

One important consideration is the role of community attributes and facilities *that can be altered*. For instance, building a new bridge or tunnel, expanding a road, or simply increasing the scheduling and reliability of ferry services could turn a heretofore rural community into a suburban/commuter one. Similarly, increasing the technological connectivity of a rural community can reduce its degree of isolation, in a virtual sense. Nonetheless, a rural

community is, by definition, one with a low level of population, and having at least some degree of remoteness (although both of those thresholds are subjective). Yet, individual workers can do more than passively react to environmental influences. They can try to affect their own employment (and life) outcomes by making strategic choices. We believe that includes deciding where to go (or stay), whether to find a job or seek more training or education, and also includes prioritizing how important 'work' is compared to other aspects of life.

Local community representatives and decision-makers should be working together to help young people transition smoothly between studying vocational or academic programs at local institutions, temporarily studying at 'away' institutions, and/or working locally in meaningful jobs, so that more see 'staying home' as an attractive and rewarding option. If rural youth have desirable 'stay' options, more will take that choice. That would and could create a cycle of more young staying, meaning more vibrant rural communities, which, in turn, means even more youth might feel able, or desirous, to remain on 'their' island.

While it is important to understand the variations in the location-employment-education decisions that island youth face so that more targeted public policy responses can be developed, economic efficiency needs to be balanced with empathy and social justice. That might mean expanding the education and employment options within rural communities, even if less efficient from an economic perspective. A presumption of this study, is that, *all else being equal*, there are more opportunities within urban centres than rural communities in terms of access to i) education and training programs and facilities, ii) more extensive varieties of employment, iii) public transportation, and iv) government offices (and hence information and counselling about eligibility and availability of social supports and programs). As a result, it is argued here that one of the effects is that rural island youth face a potentially harrowing set of interrelated decisions. That is, to stay or go, to study, to commute for work (on a daily or long-distance basis) or to accept whatever is available locally. Some young people do not want to leave, and others are unable to do so. Because communities suffer if young people do leave, the appropriate public policy response is to invest in rural communities to provide more incentives and opportunities for those staying. Despite the divergence of economic and social conditions among the four island jurisdictions that we studied, we found similarities in the types of rural youth we interviewed. While the proportions of youth within each category might vary if our study is replicated in other island jurisdictions in the industrialized world, we presume that the same types of rural island youth would be encountered.

Our typology undoubtedly raises more questions than it answers. For instance, for those emotionally connected to their hometowns like the Socially Contented, Tethered, The Strategic, and/or Disappointed Learners, we ask: What specific skills/education options need to be available in rural areas? In how decentralized a manner should, or can, the programs be delivered? For those dissatisfied with local employment options (like The Stymied, The Reluctants, and The Conflicted), should governments feel obligated to directly invest in rural job creation or incentivize employers to create and sustain rural jobs, or is that too interventionist? Whether one thinks of access to good-quality employment as a human right or merely a noble objective for a compassionate society to strive for, barriers to employment have negative implications for individuals, and, in turn, families and island communities. We hope that by highlighting the specific subsets of rural island youth, and the specific dilemmas they face, that researchers can propose more promising—and targeted—policy alternatives. We believe that while labour market uncertainty is the new normal, the magnitude of the

challenges facing rural youth is so unjust and inequitable that it deserves more attention. For example, we note that some of the 'Stayers' are unsure about what to do, or are willing to settle for low-quality work, if available now. They would benefit from different policy interventions than some of the 'Leavers' who prioritize education or training over location. We view our typology as a starting, not finishing, point. The next step is for other researchers to layer on the different experiences of individuals in terms of social class, gender, ethnicity, and/or sexual orientation and identity, or presence of a physical or intellectual disability, as well as differences based on the degree of rurality.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to present a typology of the employment–education–location decision facing rural island youth. The typology emerged from a series of semi-structured interviews conducted within Ireland, Shetland, Newfoundland, and the Faroes. The message from the reviewed literature is that labour markets are changing, and in some ways and places, deteriorating, in terms of stability. Thus, the task of acquiring and maintaining good-quality employment is a growing challenge, especially for those without skills that employers are seeking. Our categories are consistent with the reviewed literature on employment conditions and labour markets, but we contend that the format of a typology adds value by sharpening the focus of the particular issues facing, and decisions being made by, particular subsets of rural island youth. That is, there is now a body of research documenting the employment challenges that rural and/or island youth can face, but we could find far fewer studies that propose specific policy responses. Rather than adding to the former, our intention has been to present a typology to spur on more of the latter.

Few observers would advocate forcing or manipulating youth into staying, when their personal preference is to out-migrate. Rather, the collective challenge is to create the conditions so that a larger proportion of the 'Leavers' would choose to stay, and/or that more in-migration and return migration occurs. Importantly, this would also mean that 'Stayers' similarly would or could benefit from having more appealing local work, employment, and/or lifestyle options. In conclusion, we hope that this typology helps clarify that it is much more complicated than that 'motivated people leave and unambitious ones stay', or 'our young people want to stay, and will if they get a job'. There are grains of truth to those views, but we suggest that to get more people to stay and be productive and committed, it is necessary to understand what they value and why, and what specifically will address their wants and needs. The challenges facing any young rural islander can be complicated and individualized. Nonetheless, after conducting dozens of interviews in many island communities, we detected some patterns of Stayers and Leavers that cut across the various jurisdictions. In turn, the appropriate policies to help rural island youth presumably differ from category to category as well. We encourage researchers to refine or improve upon our categories, and to propose specific policy responses for each. For instance, some individuals within at least five of the categories of 'Leavers' would or could be enticed to stay if local employment and educational options were improved. Turning to 'Stayers', it is fair to say that individuals within at least a few categories are potentially headed towards financial and employment insecurity due to a lack of educational and/or employment prospects or plans. In the end, we hope that our typology identifies specific categories of rural island youth who

could use a helping hand via active labour market policies and coordinated government policy interventions. But, again, we leave it to others, and to future papers, to present specific policy alternatives that are being, or could be used.

Limitations and future research

One limitation of this paper is that the presented categories are a conceptualization of the first and third person situations discussed by the young rural adults that we interviewed. Not all participants neatly fit statically within a single category. Nonetheless, our typology is grounded in empirical data and published literature across several academic areas. A second limitation is that our typology is based on data found in only four island jurisdictions, all of which are industrialized and within the set of OECD nations. Thus, the types of young rural adults that were interviewed might not fully map the range of young rural adults existing in other locations, even within the developed world. Of course, the issues facing rural island youth in the developing world are equally worthy of attention, but were simply beyond the scope of this paper. We are optimistic, however, that our typology can assist researchers exploring the issues facing youth in a range of island and/or remote jurisdictions with different levels of industrial development, and different social and economic policy regimes. Due to space constraints, gender, socioeconomic class, and other demographic differences are only peripherally considered in this paper. Thus, future studies that refine, extend, or contest the presented typology of rural island youth are also encouraged, but we would hope that future studies focus on the particular experiences of marginalized or at-risk members of the population. While we are currently studying some of these complications, we considered them to be beyond the scope of this conceptual paper. We do believe, however, that we have captured enough complexity and variability among the lives and choices of rural island youth to be able to present a typology that shapes and refines and categorizes the key choices facing this disparate group.

Acknowledgements

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