

The countryside is a contested space – with news items commonly featuring stories of plans for rural development, the role of rural areas in food production and as a leisure resource, as well as stories of conflict and disturbance in rural localities. This module concentrates on these contemporary geographies of rural space. The module takes a broadly socio-cultural approach. It first considers the various academic approaches taken to the study of rural space and society and the problematic nature of the term ‘rural’. From here the module explores the interrelation between rural localities, rural lives and representations of the rural. The first section of the course considers rural localities through a focus on the changing nature and use of rural space and the different conceptualisations applied, by academics, to this rural space. The module also discusses rural ‘nature’ – paying attention to the recent discussions with geography and social science of nature-culture divides and reconnections, and a focus on the growing literature relating to the geography of animals. Processes taking place within rural space are considered through a focus on the evolving geographies of food and rural conservation. Here attention is given to the studies from within geography on the development of alternative food systems and the conceptualisation of conservation behaviours and activities. The final section of the course considers the interrelation between representations of rurality and rural lives. The importance of rural representation in the way people use, experience and sell the countryside is discussed, followed by a consideration of how such representations may both mask and reinforce the marginalisation of specific groups within rural areas.

The module is taught through a mixture of lectures, seminars and discussion groups and is assessed by both coursework and a final examination.

