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Social Relations Among Diverse Rural Residents in the Scottish Highlands

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Abstract

This article focuses on the development and the limitations of convivial, instrumental, and intimate family relations among diverse rural residents in the Inner Moray Firth area of the Scottish Highlands. Drawing on 22 semi-structured interviews with international migrants (EU nationals), internal migrants (UK nationals), and participants who were born there and never left, this article identifies and critically discusses how different types of social relations develop, or not, within and between these groups of rural residents. This article indicates that while all participants experienced convivial relations, these encounters did not always transfer into close, meaningful relations. The instrumental and meaningful relations, however, were more ambivalent in practice and related to internal divisions within rural communities defined along the lines of who is perceived to be "local" or "not local." The instrumental ties were developed among participants with common interests, similar life stages, and experiences and varied in terms of ethnic and national composition. Similarly, while family ties were crucial for a sense of belonging, their ethnic and national composition differed. By illustrating the complex composition of convivial, instrumental, and family ties in rural Highlands, this article highlights that meaningful social relations supporting social integration should not be understood via social encounters with "local" residents only, but also intimate and instrumental social relations within and between migrant populations.

Keywords

conviviality; migration; rural settlement; social integration; social relations

1. Introduction

The growing labour migration, transnational "lifestyle" migration, return migration, and the resettlement of humanitarian refugees have reshaped the ethnic and national composition of rural communities (Jentsch &

Simard, 2009). Some rural regions, including the Scottish Highlands, have particularly benefited from the post-2004 EU enlargement migration, with the increasing number of migrants from the 2004 accession states, mainly from Poland, finding employment in the agriculture, food processing, and hospitality sectors (de Lima & Wright, 2009). The rurality that is often associated with, but not limited to, geographically peripheral locations, more dispersed populations, limited access to public services, more homogeneous labour markets, as well as close-knit community relations and a high degree of self-organisation in associations or volunteering, however, creates a distinctive context for the reception of migrant communities (Bell & Osti, 2010; Woods, 2007). This article will contribute to the debate on the impact of migration on rural communities by focusing on the development of social relations among newcomers (internal and international migrants) and established rural residents in the Inner Moray Firth area of the Scottish Highlands.

The literature about migration to rural places has already highlighted that rural communities are being increasingly shaped by international and intra-mobility (Bell & Osti, 2010). Changes to social relations within rural communities as a result of international migration have been investigated alongside the idea of rural cosmopolitanism (Woods, 2018, 2022), conviviality (Neal & Walters, 2008), and multicultural relations (Wise & Velayutham, 2009). These concepts are useful in capturing diverse social encounters between international migrants and established residents in rural places, with empirical studies already exploring the reception of international migrants in rural communities as well as migrants' efforts to develop social networks with local residents (Rye & O'Reilly, 2021; Stachowski, 2020; Wilding & Nunn, 2018). While the existing studies explore diverse social encounters of international migrants in rural places, to date, there is little discussion about other types of mobilities, including internal migrants and their experiences of settling in rural regions. Furthermore, little is known about social relations between international and internal migrants in the rural context. This article will address these gaps by exploring the experiences of both internal and international migrants, as well as those rural residents who were born and never left the rural region. Such an approach is important to provide a more nuanced understanding of how social relations develop, or not, between and within a migrant population and the population who never left. By focusing on social relations among diverse rural stayers, this article addresses the question of how diverse social relations emerge, or not, in rural contexts, and how these relations vary in terms of ethnic and national composition. Such investigation moves away from a sole focus on international migrants to unpack complexities of social encounters within rural communities that also include internal migrants and local stayers.

2. Social Relations and Migration in a Rural Context

The increase in migration to and from rural areas contributed to the emergence of "new immigration destinations" in rural regions in many parts of the Global North (McAreavey & Argent, 2018). While rural regions had been perceived as largely homogenous and white communities, the increase in ethnic and national diversities as a result of migration reshaped the ethnic and national composition of the rural communities (Jentsch & Simard, 2009). As a result, important work has been initiated to focus on the transformative impact of international migration on rural communities in the UK (Moore, 2021; Neal & Agyeman, 2006), Australia (Radford, 2016; Wilding & Nunn, 2018), Canada (Perry, 2012), Europe (Stachowski, 2020; Whyte et al., 2019) and the Global North more generally (Stead et al., 2023). In so doing, existing studies have begun to draw on the concepts of rural cosmopolitanism (Woods, 2018, 2022), "everyday multiculturalism" (Wise & Velayutham, 2009), and conviviality (Neal & Walters, 2008) to analyse social

encounters between newcomers and established rural residents. This study will contribute to these debates by broadening the understanding of the incoming population and including both experiences of internal and international migrants, as well as rural residents who were born in and never left the Scottish Highlands.

Much scholarship on the social aspect of multicultural relations tends to refer to the concept of social integration (Grzymała-Kazłowska & Phillimore, 2017) or embedding (Ryan, 2018) to explain how migrants establish social relations after they arrive in a new country. While integration is defined as a two-way process (Ager & Strang, 2008), the focus of empirical studies is predominately placed on migrants and their actions and experiences upon arrival in a new country of residence. The social relations that migrants develop over time have been widely described as bridging social capital (Ager & Strang, 2008), that is, social relations formed with members of the majority society (Casey, 2016). However, the concept of bridging social capital has been criticised by scholars emphasising that multicultural, social interactions include different kinds of social encounters that are of different degrees of depth and importance (Wessendorf, 2013). In response to such critique, Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019) suggest three different typologies for capturing multicultural, social encounters including fleeting encounters, crucial acquaintances, and enduring, intimate ties that are important in the process of migrant settling. While fleeting encounters refer to convivial relations in public spaces, crucial acquaintances relate to meaningful, instrumental ties that are crucial for migrant settlement, and finally, intimate ties describe close relations and friendships. As these categories help identify important social relations that are instrumental for migrant social integration, this article will build upon Wessendorf and Phillimore's (2019) work to discuss how convivial, instrumental, and intimate family relations develop or not between and within diverse rural residents in the rural context.

The reception of migrants in the rural communities in the Global North has been described as "welcoming" and "friendly" (Wilding & Nunn, 2018). While discourses and perceptions of the rural community as "welcoming" contribute to the positive image of intercultural relations, these however may be more ambivalent in practice. Wilding and Nunn (2018) illustrate how the cross-cultural practices in rural regions in Australia are asymmetrical, with incomers being positioned as beneficiaries of various forms of support with little agency in deciding on the type of support being provided. Similarly, Moore (2021) indicates that despite convivial relations between Eastern European migrants and local residents in a rural English village, the imaginary of an English rural village as a "working village" serves to mask ambivalent attitudes towards migrants and an unequal power relationship between these two groups. The study by Glorius et al. (2020) also illustrates that while refugees experience convivial relations with rural communities in Germany, direct social encounters between local residents with refugees are rare. Similarly, Wilding and Nunn (2018) indicate that while convivial relations with newcomers were evidenced in public realms in rural Australia, these are very limited in private spaces. By exploring convivial, instrumental, and intimate social relations among diverse rural stayers in the Inner Moray Firth area of the Scottish Highlands, this article will explore the ethnic and national composition of these relations as well as their role in supporting the development of social integration and sense of belonging.

3. Methodologies

The study took place in the Inner Moray Firth area of the Scottish Highlands which is a triangular-shaped inlet on the north-east mainland coast of Scotland. Many places in the area have a rich agricultural heritage with the Black Isle, a peninsula between the Moray and Cromarty Firths, renowned for its fertile farming land.

In contrast, in the North of the area, in Invergordon and Alness, the steel industry and latterly oil industry dominate the local labour market. The area, however, is the most densely populated part of the Scottish Highlands containing some of the largest settlements including market towns of Dingwall, Invergordon, Alness, Fortrose, and Avoch where the study took place.

The article takes the lived experience of diverse rural residents as a starting point to outline and critically discuss how participants engaged in diverse forms of social interactions in the rural communities they live in. This article defines diverse rural residents, as individuals who lived in the Inner Moray Firth area of the Scottish Highlands for at least five years and made their home there. This research takes a more holistic approach and includes both internal and international migrants as well as those participants who were born in the region and never left. As such, this project not only moves away from the continual reconstruction of the "otherness of migrants" and the duality of the "migrant–citizen" (Garland & Chakraborti, 2006) to include multiple types of mobility to rural areas (e.g., international and internal) to unpack the different layers of diversities within rural communities.

The data collection included 22 online, semi-structured interviews with eight EU nationals (mainly from Poland), five internal migrants, four local stayers, and five service providers who work in education, local government or are engaged with either migrant or local community work in the Inner Moray Firth area. This study only engaged with EU nationals as they represent a majority of the international migrant population in the Scottish Highlands (Highland Council, 2018). The profiles of the participants with their pseudonyms are provided in Table 1.

Due to restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online. While the online interviews had their limitations due to the lack of presence that impacts opportunities for observation and thus nuanced understanding of the interview situation, the widespread usage of online communicators during the Covid-19 pandemic and accessing an interview in the home environment provided the participants with a sense of familiarity and comfort. Online interviews also allow access to participants that would otherwise be hard to reach due to geographical distance.

Multiple sources of recruiting participants were applied including community organizations, public bodies, social media, and local media news to mitigate selection bias, ensure the maximum diversity within sampling (i.e., according to age, gender, class, and household composition and place of living), and thus increase the rigour of the project. The interviews focused on exploring individuals' experiences and routines in workplace, household, and leisure activities in rural to provide a better understanding of how participants engage in the social, economic, and political life of the rural community, but also how these spaces provide the context for diverse social encounters between diverse rural residents. The interviews with service providers also focused on community relations to provide a greater understanding of community rural life and complement data about individuals' experiences of rural context.

The purpose of the data analysis was to identify how participants engage in the social life of the rural place. This study utilised thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) to identify diverse forms of social encounters that our participants experienced on a daily basis and perceived as meaningful for their social integration and sense of belonging. The thematic data analysis also identified how social encounters developed, or not, in the workplace, household, and their social and leisure activities. The following sections discuss these in detail.

Table 1. Participants profile.

ID	Household composition	Nation of birth	Participant category
Kate	Single parent	Switzerland	International migrant
Audrey	Partner & children	France	International migrant
Ewelina	Widow	Poland	International migrant
Marta	Partner & children	Poland	International migrant
Kinga	Partner & children	Poland	International migrant
Magda	Partner & children	Poland	International migrant
Karol	Single	Poland	International migrant
Darek	Partner & children	Poland	International migrant
Linda	Partner	Highlands	Local stayer
Claire	Partner	Highlands	Local stayer
Freya	Partner	Highlands	Local stayer
Dorothy	Widow	Highlands	Local stayer
Niamh	Partner & children	Ireland	Internal migrant
Sheila	Partner & children	England	Internal migrant
Kirsty	Single	Scotland	Internal migrant
Robert	Partner & children	Scotland	Internal migrant
Jane	Partner & children	England	Internal migrant
Debbie	Partner & children	Scotland	Service provider, education service
Agatha	Partner	England	Service provider, migrant community
Charlotte	Partner	England	Service provider, migrant community
Stephen	Partner	England	Service provider, rural community
Iain	Partner & Children	Scotland	Service provider, local government

4. Rural Communities Within the Inner Moray Firth Area

The total population of the Inner Moray Firth area was 157,934 in 2018 (Highlands and Islands Enterprise, 2019), which is around 60% of the total population in the Scottish Highlands. Service providers outlined diverse forms of mobility to and from the area, including arrivals of international migration after European world wars, the increase in migrants from Eastern Europe (mainly Poles) since 2004, post the UK's exit from the European Union return migration and the resettlement of Syrian families as part of the UNHRC resettlement scheme since 2015, as well as the internal migration of individuals and families from England and Central belt Scotland or out-migration of young people. These multiple migration patterns resulted in a greater presentence of rural residents of diverse migration backgrounds. Claire, who was born and raised in the Inner Moray Firth area described her neighbourhood as follows:

> My next-door neighbour is not local, she's from England...the guy across the road, he's from Dingwall, so very local, then the people opposite us again, their mum lives round the corner...[they're] local in the respect that they are from Invergordon....Dingwall has a mix of people....There are a lot of Polish people in Dingwall and very recently Syrians. (Claire, local stayer)

As explained by Claire, there is a clear differentiation between those rural residents who were born and raised in the Inner Moray Firth area and thus categorised as "local" and others, the incoming population who are seen as "not local." Such perception refers not only to international migrants, including Poles or Syrians but also to internal migrants from Central Scotland or England. The perception and understanding of "not being local" implies some degree of otherness of "not local" residents who are different from "local" residents who have strong local roots and attachments. Kirsty explained how the general perception of being "local" and subsequently "not local" resonates with diverse patterns of hierarchies within rural communities:

> There are proper local people and these are people who live through generationally in the area. There is a middle category, which is people who are Scottish but move to the area for different reasons, for example job or marriage. And they are the others who moved to the area from different parts of the UK. And then there are other people coming from different countries: Poles, Chinese, French, or Syrian. (Kirsty, internal migrant)

According to Kirsty, the boundaries between "local" and "not local" residents are defined through the extent to which individuals could express different levels of local roots and attachment. These, however, range from people born locally to families who have expressed generational attachments to their place of living, to a more recent incoming population from Central Scotland, England, and overseas. The perception and understanding of local roots and attachment also resonate with patterns of hierarchies, with Scottish internal migrants being described as the "middle category" and the remaining as the "button category," including both internal migrants from England and international migrants. While existing studies on multicultural relations in rural places explored cross-ethnic and race divisions in rural contexts (Radford, 2016; Whyte et al., 2019), this study shows that categories and hierarchies of otherness can also relate to the perceptions of being "local" that is defined via place-based attachment, rather than via nationality or ethnicity.

Regardless of internal divisions, all participants in this study described the Inner Moray Firth area as a friendly place, referring to positive and convivial everyday social encounters between diverse rural stayers in their neighbourhoods and public spaces. However, a general perception of the Inner Moray Firth area as being friendly does not always correspond with the development of stronger, social connections that go beyond superficial interactions. The following sections will focus on three types of social relations—weak, convivial ties, instrumental social relations, and intimate relations—to critically discuss the development and limitations of diverse forms of social relations that created a complex mosaic of community relations in the Inner Moray Firth area.

5. Conviviality: Prospects and Limits in Rural Context

Perception of the Inner Moray Firth area in Highlands as a friendly, smaller, quieter, and safer place to live was shared by all participants in this study. This was supported by friendly, social encounters including simple acts of kindness from other residents such as smiles in the street, and greetings of "hello" that offered opportunities to engage in fleeting relations with other people living locally. The convivial, every day and routine social encounters provided opportunities for unreflective social interactions that form the grounds for emergent positive relations. Rural places are often characterised as having a limited number of public spaces including schools, parks, playgrounds, high street shops, or community halls which means that all residents use the same public spaces on a regular basis. Such characteristics of rural places however enable a high number of direct

contacts between incoming and established rural residents living locally. For example, Jane explained how regular meetings with other carers at primary school premises facilitate social interactions between different community members:

> You walk to the school, it's like four minutes away, and then you pick your kids up and you walk to the park...you see the same people every day, over seven years of primary school, so you know them. (Jane, internal migrant)

By creating opportunities for engagement in conversations and activities, school premises can be recognised as "micro spaces of conviviality" (Neal et al., 2019) that mediate and support social encounters between diverse rural residences including local stayers, internal, and international migrants. As well as the school premises, local parks, high street shops, and supermarkets were identified by Magda as local places where you meet other residents living locally on a daily basis:

> We have one Tesco and one Lidl and you would always see the same people, either local residents or tourists or sometimes newcomers. Since you see the same faces all the time, you recognise them and say "halo." (Magda, international migrant)

Public places including schools, parks, local streets, and shops were identified as key sites in which convivial social encounters were practiced by all participants of this study. Conviviality in rural places may be therefore encouraged not because of common diversity within the public places, as described in an urban context (Wessendorf, 2013), but may follow from the necessity of sharing limited public spaces that introduce regular and frequent social encounters. Conviviality as a common norm in public spaces in rural contexts can also be encouraged and maintained by social control related to close-knit community relations, as Sheila described it: "Everybody knows everything about you and what you do."

A general perception of the Inner Moray Firth area as being friendly does not always result in the development of stronger social connections nor go beyond superficial interactions, as further described by Hania:

> They accept us since we are here, but sometimes I feel there is a distance between us. "OK—you are here but we will not be best friends." You can feel this. (Hania, international migrant)

As explained by Hania, the importance of civility as an element of conviviality should not be underplayed and such encounters, although fleeting, have an important role in developing social connections however, they did not always result in developing stronger ties within local communities. The following section will focus on discussing the development of instrumental relations between diverse rural residents in the Inner Moray Firth area.

6. Instrumental Social Relations: Development and Limitations

Social connections, meaning people's relationships with individuals, organisations, and statutory bodies are proven to have a critical role in supporting social integration (Ager & Strang, 2008). Rural communities have been described as the ones with a high degree of self-organization in associations and volunteering, which can present opportunities for greater social participation of diverse rural residents living locally

(Arora-Jonsson, 2017). Participants in this study provided several examples of community involvement in the form of diverse activities including simple food-sharing, sports club activities, art classes, social clubs, shared transport initiatives, mother and toddler groups, or ethnic community groups including the Polish Saturday School. Those organised, interest-focused community groups played multiple roles in the community living in the rural Highlands. These groups not only allowed our participants to gather around particular interests like art classes, woodworking, and outdoor activities but also responded to their immediate needs like childcare, social isolation, or leisure. They also played an important social function in connecting people of similar interests or life circumstances and experiences. Those participants, like Marta, who moved to the Inner Moray Firth area explained how she developed her friendships via participation in local, mother and toddler groups:

> I think what helped was a mother and toddler group to which I went regularly. I met a lot of mums there, which didn't make me feel lonely anymore. Each mother was facing the same issues, so that was something that reunited us….They organised different activities for young mums there and it was good, but the best was the fact I was able to meet many people….I also learned that the girls were not from here, some had husbands from France, and others were from Germany, and Argentina. Of course, there are some English and Scottish people as well. We are all different but also there are many connections between us. (Marta, international migrant)

Participation in the mother and toddler group provided Marta with an opportunity to develop networks with other women living locally, with whom she shared similar life circumstances. Such regular contact and shared live experiences around motherhood have contributed to the development of stronger, intimate social connections between Marta and her local friends who were both internal and international migrants. This corresponds with Wessendorf and Phillimore's (2019) argument that meaningful and bridging social relations should not be defined through social relations with only the white, British population, but should also include different ethnicities and nationalities.

Female participants with young children like Marta emphasised the importance of the mother and toddler groups in building up confidence around motherhood and social isolation, others whose children were of school age like Jane, explained how mothers who live locally support each other with organising after-school childcare:

> After-school childcare is organised by mums in the area in the local community hall. (Jane, internal migrant)

Jane's and Marta's experiences emphasise the important role of gender and life course stages, like having children, in creating common life experiences around motherhood that facilitate the creation of intimate and close relations with other women living locally. Thus, having children of similar age helped to develop stronger relations with other rural residents living locally. This was either via meeting other, local mums at organised activities at a community hall, or meeting other parents at children's play time as explained by Audrey:

> We met a lot of people living locally through our children, these are often parents of friends of our children….Children play while we have a meal. (Audrey, international migrant)

Those participants who moved to the area but did not have children tend to indicate that having a hobby or particular interest was a good way to engage with the local community in a more meaningful way. Kate described how having a horse helped her to develop important local social connections:

> I probably had the benefit, when I came, of having a horse and getting to know local people through that then being informed about events and things going on. (Kate, international migrant)

Participation in diverse community group activities not only facilitates but also maintains "meaningful contact" between incoming and local population that translates beyond the specifics of the individual moment into more general positive respect for others (Valentine, 2008, p. 325). Similar to those participants who moved to the Inner Moray Firth area, Linda who has lived in Highlands her whole life, also pointed out that her friendships have developed mostly around interest community groups, for example, outdoor community groups:

> I've got friends who are Dutch, friends who have come up for work and stayed in the Highlands, [they] come up from England and a mix of Eastern European, quite varied...and a small network of friends who grew up here and have come back and settled here. I met them mostly through the outdoors, you meet one person and then someone else, there's quite a small outdoor community, and everybody gets to know each other. (Linda, local stayer)

It could be argued that organised community groups in rural contexts play the important role of "transversal enablers" (Wise & Velayutham, 2009) that facilitate meaningful social interactions between different rural residents living locally. As described by Marta, Kate, and Linda, social relations established via community interest groups went beyond fleeting relations and played an important role in fulfilling their social and emotional needs. While instrumental social connections were an important source of support for all participants, the development of these networks across diverse rural residents in the Inner Moray Firth area was more ambivalent in practice. According to Jane, some of the constraints in developing instrumental relations related to internal divisions within the community that refer to who is perceived to be "local" and subsequently "not local":

> I'm aware that I'm not from the community. I'm one of them English, which I know isn't always appreciated here as such in the Highlands. But I also feel like I've made lots of friends, like people see me as me, maybe not as where I'm from. And I think having a small child helps because you meet lots of mums in the schoolyards and toddlers, and that's why you make a lot of friends. And then if you've got these mum friends, you feel part of the community quite well with that. And, you know, actually, quite a lot of people you meet here now aren't from here. (Jane, internal migrant)

While Jane was very much connected with other rural residents living locally, these connections were primarily with the incoming population rather than perceived "local," rural stayers. Jane perceived her experiences of little meaningful social relations with "local," rural stayers to be related to her English nationality and stereotypical perceptions of English people in rural Scotland that are often defined as arrogant and unfriendly (Lindsay, 1997). Following McIntosh et al. (2004), it could be argued that the stereotypical assumptions about English in the rural Scottish context are also reminders of Jane's otherness understood as not being "local." While these stereotypical assumptions, did not convert into personal

hostility, they did however have an impact on Jane's sense of belonging. While all participants perceived the community in which they live as friendly and safe, some participants who migrated to the area from Poland referred to diverse experiences of verbal abuse, prejudice, or general distance from established local residences. These experiences included, for example, name-calling such as "being a f....Pole," as indicated by Hania, or being seen as "taking our jobs," as experienced by Karol. As these experiences juxtaposition the perception of rural communities as "welcoming" and "friendly," they were downplayed by both Karol and Hania, as being related to people who "had too much to drink." The positive perception of the rural community as being friendly, while important, can idealise its cooperative nature and thus overlook internal power relations. The experiences of Karol, Hania, and Jane also show a different position of power between the "local" and "not local" population. While in the context of this study, all participants were white, the experiences of Karol, Hania, and Jane could also illustrate different power relations attached to white Poles, white English, or white Europeans, who were commonly recognised as different from a rural, white "local," rural resident in Scotland.

In addition to internal division within the rural community, participants talked about being unable to develop co-ethnic relations with residents living locally due to the language barrier. For Kinga, who lacked English language skills, setting up more meaningful networks with residents living locally was difficult:

> I'm annoyed that I can only go to the shop and say "good morning, how are you? Nice or bad weather that is it." It is annoying. I don't have that much contact with the language and people here and I want to return to Poland. (Kinga, international migrant)

Little language proficiency, but also limited availabilities of classes for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) in rural areas and thus an opportunity to develop language skills undermined Kinga's well-being and thus contributed to her desire to return to Poland. Whilst the access to formally organised migrant associations and activities in the study area was limited, the daily lives of migrants from Poland were involved in quite extensive networks and interactions with their co-nationals through Polish Saturday School, businesses like hairdressing, Polish shops, or the Catholic Church. While co-ethnic social relations were important for our participants to maintain the cultural practices and language, or find initial employment, this is not to say that these relations were universally positive. Such experience was outlined by Ewelina:

> When my husband arrived, he went to the high street and heard a Polish voice, so he came to those people and explained that he was looking for a job. They helped him....In the next two days, he had work. Also when I arrived they asked me if I wanted to have a job and I said, yes sure, and I found work in a food processing company....But, I also tried to help other Poles when they arrived but I had a bad experience so I stopped. You will give them one finger and they would like to grab the whole hand. I hate this demanding attitude. (Ewelina, international migrant)

As explained by Ewelina, co-ethnic relations can be instrumental for finding employment, but in low-skilled occupations with high co-ethnic concentration. A high concentration of Polish migrants in particular segments of the labour market may, however, foster conditions as Stachowski (2020) argues, promoting primarily social exposure of the migrants to their co-ethnic groups, isolating them from the wider local community. Co-ethnic relations, as outlined by Ewelina, are rather complex and can be based on obligations that could lead to over-reliance on co-ethnic assistance and result in broken expectations. Finally,

employment in low-skilled occupations was often linked with long working hours that leave little time for social interactions beyond work as explained by Ewelina:

> I work as a food quality officer in Scotland. I work primarily with other Poles....You stay in the production line for 8–9 hours in the 9-degree room, and the working conditions are not easy....When I return from work I don't have the energy to go for a coffee and chat, I need peace and quiet to rest. (Ewelina, international migrant)

Not only employment in low-paid sectors of the rural economy but also geographical distance to work created obstacles to developing and maintaining social relations locally. Such experience was shared by Kirsty who, after 30 years of living in the Inner Moray Firth area, migrated to Inverness:

> I came here from Glasgow and I worked as a teacher outside of the community after many years of traveling to work fewer and fewer of the locals knew anything about me because I just left early in the morning....And I only knew some people around my house, but there were people at the end of the street that I've never seen I didn't know who they were. Hmm. And I think over the years that's been a pattern generally.., it becomes just a place I lived. (Kirsty, internal migrant)

Constraints of limited employment opportunities as described by Kirsty had a knock-on effect on the development of stronger ties with local neighbours or engagement with community initiatives and a sense of belonging.

7. Intimate Family Relations

All of our participants indicated that home is a place of close and intimate relations with family and friends. Family relations were defined through blood relations, marriage, or partnership, and tend to express a high sense of obligation toward each other. As described by Kate, our participants had a clear distinction between close, intimate relations and instrumental or convivial ones:

> I work and I have my private life....I've met loads of people, wouldn't call them friends but you get along, and have a good time but I wouldn't call them close friends. (Linda, local stayer)

The close intimate relations were more segregated and often reserved for family members. Those participants who were born and raised in the Inner Moray Firth area, tend to refer to generation of family members living in the local area:

> My parents are still here...and my brother is still here....I suppose it's nice to have family around you, you can feel that you're in touch with them more, my parents live in the same village, my brother lives in Conon Bridge so not too far away, I see him fairly often. My family lives here and this is my place too. (Lindsay, local stayer)

The composition of those family relations predominately includes local, rural residents who were born and lived in the region through generations. Others like Jane, Magda, or Kinga moved to the area with their family relatives from abroad or other places in Scotland or the UK. As a result, these relations were not developed locally, but they were transferred from their home country or region and then acquired upon arrival:

> We came here because we wanted our family to live in a small, rural community....We like this place and the community, and because we have children, we are not planning to move. (Jane, internal migrant)

As explained by Jane, having close family members was an important factor contributing to the desire to settle in the rural place. Despite these close intimate relations were not developed locally, raising family in rural places was often the reason why participants moved to rural places in the first place and wanted to settle in the area. Intimate family relations, in particular having children were important factors contributing to our participants' desire to settle and their sense of belonging. Marta, who was married to a local stayer, indicated that raising children made her feel part of the local community:

> My husband is local and I'm always introduced as his wife...and local people know me that way. They are his friends, not mine. My friends call me Marta, and this is different. I know many of my husband's friends, but they are his friends, not mine. Most of my friends are not local but we share a lot together....I don't sound like a Highlander, I have my eastern European accent, but my children grow up here, so I'm also from here. I don't feel much different here, this is my home. (Marta, an international migrant)

Marta differentiated her husband's friends from the close, friendship relations that she had developed with other residents living locally. While most of Marta's friendship relations were with other-than-"local" residents, these relations provided an important source of social and emotional support. For Marta, raising children was the pivotal moment that contributed to her feeling of belonging to the local community despite her perceived otherness from the local population. In contrast with Lindsay's, Jane's, and Marta's experiences, Kirsty, who lived in the area for more than 30 years, explained that because she didn't have close family members living locally, she felt less connected to the community she was living in:

> And then other friends of mine who came up, married into the local community. They married for example a local farmer or somebody who lived here all their lives. So they in a sense became more a part of the community. And because I didn't have family and they had, then they belonged more because then they got into contact with others who went to the primary school or if their children went to nursery, that kind of thing. Whereas I didn't have those links, so I was out of this place. (Kirsty, an internal migrant)

As explained by Kirsty, having close family members made other residents "belong more" than her and, as a result, she felt uprooted and "out of this place." Thus, while the ethnic or national composition of family relations could vary as illustrated in Lindsay's, Jane's, and Marta's examples, they provided important contributions to a sense of belonging and desire to settle in a local, rural community.

8. Conclusion

This study was conducted in the Inner Moray Firth area of the Scottish Highlands. While migration to and from the Scottish Highlands is not a new phenomenon (Jentsch & Simard, 2009), internal and international migration to rural places can contribute to internal divisions within rural communities that are defined through the perception of being "local" and "not local." Defining the meaning of "being local" in the region where the study took place related less to (in)tolerance of ethnic or national diversities, and more to the extent to

which individuals could express their rootedness to place and locality defined through generational family ties and attachments to the rural area. Unpacking the perceptions of what it means to be "local" within rural communities may therefore provide a more nuanced understanding of social and cultural divisions along with internal power dynamics within the rural communities than more general categories of ethnicity or nationality.

This article shows that characteristics of rural places can both encourage or limit positive social relations between the incoming population and established rural stayers. The necessity of sharing limited public spaces on a daily basis, along with social control related to close-knit community relations, and a high degree of self-organization in associations and volunteering, create particular dispositions within rural communities that can positively encourage the development of convivial as well as positive, meaningful social relations among diverse rural residents. On the other hand, as illustrated in participants' narratives, limited employment opportunities in the local labour market and thus the necessity to travel long distances to work, along with segregation in the rural labour market, can hinder the development of social relations between the incoming and "local" rural residents.

This article critically analyses three types of social relations including convivial relations, instrumental ties, and intimate family relations to explore how these relations develop, or not, among diverse rural residents including internal and international migrants, and rural stayers. While rural communities have been described as friendly and welcoming (Neal & Walters, 2008; Woods, 2018, 2022), this study illustrates that such relations may be further encouraged by particularities of rural places such as the necessity of sharing limited public spaces that enable frequent and regular contact, and social control related to close-knit community relations. While the importance of conviviality should not be underestimated, the development of close social relations between incoming and "local" rural residents may be more ambivalent in practice. The barriers to developing bridging networks between the incoming and "local" residents included the stereotypical perception of English or Polish migrants that contributed to the otherness of the incoming population and the duality of "local" and "non local" residences. This could suggest that the perception of a rural community as "welcoming" can also idealise the cooperative nature of these communities and thus overlook internal power relations. While all participants in this study were white, their experiences illustrate different power attached to white identities, including white Poles, white English, or white Europeans, who were commonly recognised as different from rural, white "local" residents. Further research is therefore needed to explore the concept of whiteness in multicultural rural communities.

The instrumental relations between internal and international migrants and rural stayers were more complex and ranged from friendship and intimate relations to distance and resistance. This article outlines the important roles of community-led organisations in providing an opportunity for incoming and "local" rural residents with common interests, needs, and life circumstances to meet and socialise. Participants' experiences illustrated in this study show how gender and motherhood, shared live experiences, and interests or hobbies have contributed to the development of stronger, intimate social connections between diverse rural residences and thus contributed to their social integration. While the majority of participants felt socially connected to the community they lived in, these meaningful social relations were not only limited to social relations with "local" rural residents. This means that bridging networks supporting social integration in rural contexts should not be understood solely through the social relations between incoming (both internal and international migrants) and "local" residents, but also should include instrumental relations between diverse incoming populations. Similar to Wessendorf and Phillimore (2019), this study illustrates

that the composition of important instrumental relations that support social integration varies in terms of ethnic and national composition. This study also illustrates that instrumental co-ethnic relations were not always the source of positive support. For example, while Polish participants' co-ethnic networks may be a source of employment, they also lead to ethnic clustering. Further, co-ethnic support may also be based on obligation, rather than mutual exchange, and thus lead to broken expectations and tensions.

Finally, intimate relations were reserved for family relations and had an important role in developing a sense of belonging and attachment to the rural community. This study illustrates the diverse composition and development of intimate relations in rural places. While local stayers referred to generations of family relatives living locally, other participants developed their family ties through marriage with local residents or transferred them from abroad or other places in Scotland or the UK. While family intimate relations vary in terms of ethnic and national composition, not having close, intimate relations locally had a negative impact on a sense of belonging to the rural community.

Conflict of Interests
The author declares no conflict of interest.

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