



In Education

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“Gilder considered unit costs but on a different basis. He was not interested in the per capita costs against the education budget of small schools as opposed to larger ones. He was interested in education as one of four major services provided by County Councils, from a planning point of view. As a planner he was interested in the costs of providing rural services in order to judge where it would be most economic to locate surplus population feeding at the time into his District Council. He quickly saw the relationship between population, planning and educational viability. His findings were quite startling. Measuring the cost of providing a service like education against the rate-paying base it proved cheaper to do so in the smaller locations than in the “key” villages of County Structure Plans that reflected contemporary thinking, and most costly in the towns. The same was true of locating surplus population. It would be cheaper to build small clusters of housing in the smaller villages than elsewhere. Not only is any such extra housing crucial in terms of size of school and small school survival, but Gilder’s economic findings are the exact inverse of analyses deriving from raw unit costs.”

In that section I was developing the argument that small school economics must have a community benefit dimension, as had earlier been argued by the DoE’s seminal Scottish study from Nisbet and Forsyth at Aberdeen University in 1983. Gilder argued that costs were lower because the demand for services was lower and would remain so. At the time the Audit Commission first reported that even in the most rural shire counties much less was spent on village rate-and tax-payers than on their urban counterparts in the market towns and so that also argued the lower cost factor found by Gilder. The school is often the only return such moneys provide and this should be an argument for greater appreciation by those elected for rural wards in rural areas.

Gilder’s findings covered education and three other major public services and were so startling that they were replicated for education alone by two further studies and confirmed:

References:

Gilder I.M.: *‘Rural Planning Policies – An Economic Appraisal’* published in ‘Progress in Planning’ Vol. 11 No.3: Pergamon 1979 (November)

Morley R.A. et al. *‘Rural Service Provision and Rural Settlement Policy’* Planning Paper No. 37: Leeds Polytechnic: 1983

Curry N (Ed) *‘Rural Settlement Policy and Economics’*: Gloucestershire Papers in Local and Rural Planning, No. 12: 1981

My major reference source were the two parallel DoE/DES research studies, of which that with the most developed reference base was the Scottish study. The other was based at Aston University.

Forsyth D: *‘The Rural Community and the Small School’* DoE/DES research projects: Aberdeen University: 1983

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