

乡村并非偏远之地 ——以Company Drinks 饮料公司的实践为例

THE RURAL IS NOT REMOTE — THE CASE OF COMPANY DRINKS

如果乡村不仅仅被视作地理上的聚落，而是承载了人类印迹与记忆、精神与家族史的场所，它会带给我们什么新的启迪？如果跳脱出农业耕作、粮食生产和土地管理，乡村所包含的自给自足等一系列人类生产生活活动实践赋予了乡村哪些特性？乡村何时才能具有流动性？

在我们的生活中，越来越多的事物都充满了二元性，而“城—乡”是其中一项长期被视作对立的二元关系。据称，全世界已有逾半数人口居住在城市中。随着这一论断逐渐深入人心，乡村社群便陷入了不容乐观的境地，并成为了被城市化浪潮遗弃的少数群体。

然而，人类并没有意识到后乡村时代的影响，认清这一事实有助于我们理解乡村的真实内涵。实际上，乡村从来不是城市的对立面，也并非等同于开阔的牧场、牛羊零星散布的广袤田野，抑或是逃离城市的偏远之地。随着伦敦及许多其他城市向郊区的逐渐扩张，农田正慢慢被大型超市和配送中心所占据。

将乡村视为一种生活方式，而非一种空间形式，也许更易于理解以下问题：什么是属于乡村的实践？这些实践需要何种条件？这些实践的流动性、持久性和灵活性如何？它们对个人认同感和集体认同感而言意味着什么？如何构想它们的未来？本文关注乡村实践的传承与

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摘要

本文重点关注尚不平衡的二元城乡关系，并以Company Drinks饮料公司的实践为例，展现了一种不同于以往的城乡关系——城市人口暂时性地向乡村地区迁移。这种情况的出现与伦敦东区工薪家庭采摘蛇麻草的传统息息相关。在这一案例中，一座工薪阶层社区逐渐发展了一种适合他们的乡村实践——每年定期前往乡村参与劳作。Company Drinks饮料公司开创了一种新型企业模式，它基于人们对于“采摘蛇麻草”传统的集体记忆，为伦敦东区居民带来了一种契合当代生产生活条件、满足人们的实际需求的周期性集体生产方式。随着各项活动的成功开展，“采摘”已从一项东区传统转变为一种在不同文化背景、不同地域的人群中都广受欢迎的活动。本文作者认为，城乡之间的联系不能仅凭距离远近来界定，乡村不仅可以为城市社区提供传统农业知识及自然资源，也可供城市居民探索新生活方式。

关键词

城乡；乡村实践；社区；生产

ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the undesirable binary between the rural and the urban and uses Company Drinks as an example of a reverse rural-urban relationship, where an inner city population migrates temporarily to the countryside, which is relevant to the hop-picking tradition (“hopping”) practiced by working-class families from London’s East End. In this case, a working-class community has developed its own rural practice, moving between rural and urban settings on a regular basis. Company Drinks is a new model cultural enterprise that uses the collective memory of hopping as a starting point to rethink and reintroduce an adaptive collective production cycle into East London everyday life. With various successful activities being held, going picking has been far from an East End tradition and become a universal activity recognized and appreciated across different cultures and landscapes. The author believes that rural-urban link cannot be controlled from a distance. Rural society offers knowledge and resource that can empower urban communities, and can test and provide conditions for alternatives to urban lifestyles.

KEYWORDS

Rural-Urban; Rural Practice; Community; Production

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3. Company Drinks 饮料公司致力于开展循环经济。
3. Company Drinks: devotes itself to a circular economy.

间不再有明确的边界，且在过去几十年间，全球移民极大地改变了当地人口结构。如今，年度采摘这项公众活动已同种植、加工、品牌推广、贸易和再投资一样，成为该公司饮料生产链中的一环。Company Drinks 饮料公司将采摘收获的原料加工生产为一系列饮料，逐渐实现了盈利，并将独特的城乡文化遗产、本地资源、集体愿景，以及社区经济融合在了一起。该公司不仅组织居民前往附近乡村进行短途采摘之旅，而且在当地开展采摘园徒步旅行、追忆采摘往事的月度下午茶、培训项目、制作工作坊、社交、公开演讲，以及集体午餐等多种活动。

在公司举办的各种活动中，最受欢迎的是一年一度的肯特郡黑醋栗 (*Ribes nigrum*) 农场采摘之旅。前往农场的大巴几天之内就被预定一空，这些预定者的文化背景和种族不甚相同，但他们都渴望在乡间度过一天采摘时光。问及参加的原因，大多数人都提到乡间劳作使他们想起了曾经的日子。许多家庭中的父母都来自乡村，但却鲜有机会与子女分享他们在田间获得的经验和知识。由此，“采摘”已从一项东区传统转变为一种大众活动，在不同文化背景、不同地域的人群中广受欢迎。

作为一家本身不拥有土地亦不经营种植业的企业，Company Drinks 饮料公司的发展突破了乡村实践必须依赖土地资源的一般认知。通过重组经济结构并使饮料生产链脱离资本主义框架，这一实践为大伦敦地区的新型共享采摘奠定了基础。其目的并非为了赋予伦敦东区的

乡村遗产以浪漫主义色彩，而是为了使之成为人们共同的认知、记忆与愿景，以探索可以在乡村与城市、本地与全球之间建立联系的新文化。如今，全球化的资本主义似乎占据着我们生活的方方面面，由于缺少货币价值，那些曾经在农业社群中代代相传的技能和知识正在逐渐消失。在资本主义不断逐利的助推下，城市化、消费驱动和依赖型的生活方式正在成为一种不可避免的趋势，而乡村实践中的经验、智慧和手工技艺也逐渐被忽视、淡忘。

城市在保护和发展乡村文化以及积极支持乡村人群方面发挥着重要作用。人类社会由差异巨大的城市和乡村组成，城市社区亦受到城市范围之外事物的影响：即使对于特大城市而言，乡村也并非遥不可及。二者之间的联系不能仅凭距离远近来定义，也不应由政客和官僚远程操控。乡村不仅可以为城市社区提供传统农业知识及自然资源，也可以作为城市居民探索新生活方式的试验场。

Company Drinks 饮料公司以及其他类似案例促使人们思考这样一个问题：乡村是否可以摆脱边缘化地位，不只是如画风景和乡愁的代名词，而是成为更广义的现代城市文明的一部分？若要克服消费主义和资本主义带来的问题，实现一种更为健康、环保的生活方式，我们就必须尊重自给自足的传统并不断践行这一理念。如果有朝一日这类实践不复存在，这种优良传统也将永远消失。空有想法而无所作为，我们的美好愿景将永远无法实现。LAF

- 4-1. 伦敦东区巴金自治区于2019年3月开展的剥桦树皮活动
- 4-2. 英格兰东南部肯特郡于2017年7月开展的草莓采摘活动
- 4-3. 英格兰东南部肯特郡于2017年8月开展的黑醋栗采摘活动

- 4-1. Birch sapping on March, 2019, Barking of East London
- 4-2. Strawberry picking in July, 2017, Kent in southeastern England
- 4-3. Blackcurrant gleaning in August, 2017, Kent in southeastern England

What happens if you disconnect the rural from the countryside, when the rural is a practice, a memory, a mindset, or a family history? What remains of the rural when the countryside is not primarily seen as a site of agriculture, food production, or land management, but a set of practices, one of which is self-subsistence? When does the rural become mobile?

Our lives are increasingly being played out between dualities, of which the rural-urban is one of the most enduring and deeply assumptive ones. Since the impressive declaration that more than half of the world's population now lives in urban areas, the rural community has in addition slipped into the undesirable position of being the minority that is slowly left behind by unavoidable urbanization.

As a species, humans do not yet live in predominantly post-rural times, and it might be useful to adjust our ideas about the rural to its actualities. The rural has never been restricted to the anti-urban, pastoral open land, clearly distinct areas of green fields dotted with occasional animals, or remote destinations where you leave the city behind. London and many other cities are sprawling outskirts with farmland now buried under hypermarkets and distribution centers.

It is more useful to look at the rural as a way of living rather than a space. What are rural practices and what conditions do they require? How mobile and how durable and resilient are they? What is their meaning in terms of individual and collective identities, and how could we imagine their future? This article considers a continuation of rural practices that do not depend on individual land ownership, car journeys, or professionalized agricultural work, but on those which are mobile, resilient, and universal enough to shape new rural cultures and identities outside the context of countryside. These share a connection

to a collective and cooperative ethos that have always played a strong part in rural lives, partly for practical reasons (joint harvest is more effective) and social obligations (that enable small communities to function). But what happens to the rural identities, skills, and memories of those who recently moved to the city? If certain practices are mobile, there is no subsequent or fatal disconnection simply because someone leaves a village.

To look at how rural practices can find a place and a rhythm outside the rural environment is not to extend a longing for a non-existent pastoral arcadia, but rather to understand and develop the background that has helped shape the identity of more than half of the world's population.

The recent increase in popularity of urban growing and communal gardening is a good starting point to consider rural-urban practices. Initiatives range from established allotment schemes to community supported agriculture, from community orchards to medicinal gardens. These are providing opportunities for learning, socializing, therapy, research, and enterprise, as well as growing. They are also the space where individually maintained rural knowledge from elsewhere can be practised and shared, and shape a new trans-rural idea and collectivity. The role of most of these schemes is not to feed our cities but to offer a range of (re-)connections that we are gradually losing as a society, between the human and non-human, health and environment, food and land. Many of these initiatives acknowledge a fact that many of the residents have recently migrated from rural areas and have no space or means to continue, cultivate, or develop rural practices in their new urban and suburban homes.

An example of a contemporary practice of a continuation of a particular rural culture and heritage is Company Drinks in



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East London. However, it is a reverse rural-urban relationship, where an inner city population migrates temporarily to the countryside, which is known as the hop-picking (*Humulus lupulus* picking) tradition “hopping,” practiced by working-class families from London’s East End. In this case a working-class community has developed its own rural practice, moving between rural and urban settings on a regular — in this case annual — basis. At the height of hopping, between the 1850s and 1950s, up to 80,000 Londoners, mainly women and children, would move to Kent for three to four weeks in late summer to provide a cheap seasonal agricultural labor force to hand pick and harvest the profitable hop crop. Advertised and promoted as a “working holiday,” reasons women gave for “going

picking” were manifold, from earning much-needed money to fresh air for their children and getting a break from the harsh realities of life in the dockland slums. Described by many as a temporary matriarchy away from the treadmill of everyday life, hopping developed as distinct working-class rural practice and culture which is still fondly remembered today: “it was not just about the money; it was about being in good company.”

Company Drinks is a new model of cultural enterprise that uses the collective memory of “hopping” to introduce a communal production cycle into East London which responds to contemporary conditions, desires, and needs. In 2014 Company Drinks invited residents in the Borough of Barking and Dagenham to “go picking” again, but this time the context of major geographic and demographic changed in the area. There was no longer a clear boundary between rural (Kent) and urban (London), and global immigration in the last decades has dramatically changed the local population. The annual picking event has become part of a publicly accessible drink production cycle, alongside growing, manufacturing, branding, trading, and reinvesting. Company Drinks processes the harvest into a drinks range, slowly establishing an economic enterprise that merges a distinct urban / rural cultural heritage, local resources, collective desire, and community economy. The company organizes picking trips to the nearby countryside as well as picking walks within the borough, monthly reminiscing hopping afternoons, educational programs, production workshops, social events, public talks, and communal lunches.

One of the most popular Company Drinks trips is the annual gleaning trip to a blackcurrant (*Ribes nigrum*) farm in Kent. The coach is fully booked within days by families from a broad range of cultural and ethnical backgrounds who are eager to go picking for the day. Asked why they come along, most state that it reminds them of things they enjoyed in the past; many of the parents had rural upbringings themselves but have little or no opportunity to share their experience, knowledge, and culture with their children. Thus far from being an East End tradition, going picking has become a universal activity that is recognized and appreciated across different cultures and landscapes.

Company Drinks, which does not own land or grow food, has developed the fact that rural practices depend on access to land as resource to process and transform produce. It sets up an infrastructure for a new shared practice of picking within the Greater London, by reorganizing economic structures and taking the drinks production cycle outside a capitalist framework. Its aim is not to romanticize an East London rural heritage but rather to collectivize knowledge, memories, and desires in order to explore a new culture to create connections between rural

5. Company Drinks饮料公司组织的社区采摘和加工活动
5. Community picking and processing with Company Drinks

- 6-1. 蓼科植物苏打水
- 6-2. 醋栗花和樱花苏打水
- 6-3. 草莓果汁
- 6-4. Company Drinks饮料公司将采摘之旅的照片制作作为饮料瓶标签
- 6-5. Company Drinks饮料公司系列产品（詹尼弗·巴尔科姆摄于2018年）



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- 6-1. Knotweed soda
- 6-2. Flowering currant and cherry blossom soda
- 6-3. Strawberryade
- 6-4. Company Drinks uses picking trip photos as bottle labels
- 6-5. Company Drinks Range. Photo by Jennifer Balcombe (2018).

and urban, the local and the universal. Skills and knowledge that are traditionally passed down through generations within agricultural communities are disappearing, largely because they have little monetary value within the globalized capitalist dynamics that seem to dominate our individual and collective lives. To ignore the experience, intelligence, and ingenuity of rural practices is part of a forceful tendency towards urbanized, consumer-driven, and dependent lifestyles propelled by a capitalist focus on profit.

Cities themselves are key to preserving and developing rural cultures and to actively supporting the rural population. Society is connected across the rural-urban divide, and urban communities are affected by events outside city limits: even in our largest cities, the rural is not remote. This link cannot be

controlled from a distance, nor should it be left for politicians and bureaucrats to organize remotely. Rural society offers knowledge and resource that can empower urban communities, and can test and provide conditions for alternatives to urban lifestyles.

Company Drinks, and projects like it, ask whether the rural can re-enter the wider culture of modern urban society without being marginalized as picturesque and nostalgic. If consumerism and capitalism are to be overcome in order to establish a way of living that does not exploit fellow humans or the earth itself, then it is essential that self-sustaining practices are respected and nurtured. Once such practices are lost, a common and cultural good will simply disappear. And ideas alone will not feed us. **LAF**



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