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# The rural - knowing where we are by retracing our steps

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Department of Urban and Rural Development  
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## Abstract

This thesis is a discourse analysis of rural studies literature, both rural sociology and rural geography, throughout depicted timely *eras* of *Modernity*, *Late Modernity*, *Postmodernity* and *Relational Rural*. It attempts to sort through vast literature, exemplifying a few works and postulating them as attempts under certain *eras*.

This thesis aims to investigate how the concept *rural* has been understood and used over time. The thought behind this attempt is that a clearer understanding of how the Rural has been conceptualised and reconceptualised will inform our present thought, allowing us a glimpse into where our scholarly efforts have been, and perhaps how we ended up with our present thoughts. It informs us that the rural has never been, nor will ever be a fixed concept. This overview allows us to trace concepts, as well as picking up on thoughts that have been left rather untouched, while also discerning some theoretical pitfalls along the way. Knowing where we are by retracing our steps.

*Keywords: rural, rural studies, rural sociology, rural geography, modernity, postmodernity, relational theory, hybrid theory*



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## Introduction

This thesis is a discourse analysis of the field of rural studies by selections of influential texts and those with new conceptualisations that have had impact on the evolution of social thought. The underlying question asks what we mean with the rural concept at present, but to know *where we are* in thinking it is equally important to retrace our conceptual development in an attempt to understand how we got to contemporary thought. Therefore this thesis comes to trace developments of thoughts. The essential drive and basis here enquires into whether the concept of *rural* is too loose and unspecific, a *generalisation* that may confuse scholars to believe we talk of one uniform place or share the same conceptual understanding, while in reality we might have created an elaborate but abstract understanding that has little to do with place-specific *non-town* realities. Rural then risks being a decorative term that in fact does not signify much at all, this would ultimately question its continued use. For this reason it is imperative to understand how scholars have and continues to comprise many different meanings, and uses, of highly complex spaces within the singular definition *rural*. Because human lives rely on *material* and *ideal* sustenance of rural areas we need to understand what and which *rural* is being referred to, how it is done and to outline possible implications any such referral may have. As Cloke (2006) puts it the rural world is a *material* object to visit, live and experience and an *imaginative* space filled with cultural meanings, yet given its importance there exist a surprising lack of adequate understanding of its underpinning concepts. It also asks of us to question traditions of thought to clarify what we could let go of. This requires an investigation into how the *rural* concept appeared and evolved. In agreeance with Cloke (2006) there is a need to emphasise how rural understandings are influenced

by *twin tracks of changing perspectives*: as different theoretical *frames* illustrates different rural pictures, alongside real rapidly changing material conditions of rural- life, place and politics.

The rural and urban dichotomy remains one of the oldest and most pervasive binaries, originating in the distinction between enclosed defensible spaces of early towns and open uncontrollable spaces outside while attaining great symbolic values, becoming embedded in our language and culture (Woods, 2010). Rural space contains multiple functions and meanings (past and presently): providing materials for building, clothing, writing, the majority of world food production, source of most energy production (fossil and renewable), water capture and minerals for industry demands (Ibid). The present world therefor remains heavily dependent on rural areas.

The term rural trace Latin roots (Ibid) as an adjective linked with the word *rus* meaning open space, incorporated into European languages in reference to things relating to areas outside of cities. Later rural became used as noun in academic writing, referring to an abstract space exhibiting rural characteristics but not necessarily tied to a certain territory. The word country comes from the Latin preposition *contra* (against) in reference to an area of land for either land contrasting town and/or land belonging to a certain people or nation. Countryside emphasises the definition of country relative to town (the *side* of town) gaining a symbolic meaning for various cultures. Many languages use terms for references of rural areas, rural people or rural landscapes often emphasising either association to land and agriculture, or national identity. The rural has likewise often been romantically imagined as a link to past; rural people iconised as a part of national population holding on to certain practices and tradition, spurring idyllic images of a sanctuary away from modern life pressures. (Ibid).

Rural ideas spread by European colonialism; the newly encountered land taken over, interpreted and altered in order to recreate a familiar countryside. Rural areas outside the European frame were deemed a wilderness to be tamed and conquered, preferably by creating familiar pastoral landscapes of home. As such the newfound countryside was a hybrid based on European ideas and models while embedded in its native landscape and dependent on its biophysical properties. Rural domestication held cultural and political significance, a



*demonstration of power*, endowing physical landscapes with *symbolic* meaning and familiarity, signifying safety and belonging. Yet transportation and implementation of rural ideas and objects was a two-way motion bringing new staple crops and dishes back to Europe, altering rural economic structures and practices. (Ibid). In hybrid relational terms, alterations of networks may have chain reactions upon the other networks they connect with, altering both ‘ends’.

This thesis will address changes in the rural sphere over the last century to present through depictions of rural theoretical works. Together rural geography and rural sociology have produced works on the rural making both disciplines valuable sources for rural discourses.

### **Aim and research questions**

This thesis aims to investigate how the concept *rural* has been understood and used over time. A fuller understanding of contemporary thinking and our present position requires an understanding on *how we arrived*; learning from past lessons will better our understanding of how to avoid repeating old mistakes while gaining insight of what we might want to revisit. It is thus valuable to map how the rural world has been depicted in various discourses, relaying insights of possible social consequences this may have had and/or continues to have.

The thesis is depicted through timely (but not time-specific) *eras* that host different thought traditions, with the research questions incorporated within each *era* throughout the discussion. It begs the reader to question whether *rural* as a *concept* is illustrative and useful, or vague and inadequate.

### ***The main research question is:***

*Rural* as a common term and concept suggests that it relates a general and clear understanding, yet much literature delivers a conceptual *rural* of subjective meaning, non-defined or lacking explanation. Thus the question is does the concept *rural* contribute to a broad understanding of rural phenomena, contain an intrinsic value, and is a worthwhile pursuit to define?

### ***Implicitly this also means that it is necessary to address:***

- ϕ How different rural studies discourses have *depicted* rural?
- ϕ What kinds of *understandings* these depictions have relayed?
- ϕ *Implications* of these thoughts on rural spaces and inhabitants?

## Theory

This thesis provides a discourse analysis addressing how a *rural* sphere has been depicted throughout rural studies literature. The discourse analysis used as *thinking devices* for inquiries of specific types of issues and questions (here *rural*), adaptable for the reader/writer's own purposes (Gee, 1999).

This thesis agrees with social-constructivism's (frequent in post-modern approaches) critical approach to knowledge: dismissing objective *truths*, while seeing knowledge as a product of social processes and interactions; the way we construct our world therefor carry direct and real social consequences (Burr, 2003).

*Discourse* have been derived from Michel Foucault (1972), as a way of understanding the world, making it possible to distinguish relationships, practices and subjectivities that make up a network of symbols, signs and practices through which meaning become ascribed to our surroundings. The discourse does not remain limited to written or spoken words, but includes e.g. images, actuation, thinking and practices, as such it is not a mere representation of reality, but forms reality by meanings and boundaries produced (Ibid). "Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth— that is, the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true" (Ibid:131).

Similarly, political and policy discourses concerning the rural informs politicians and state officials with an understanding of, and governance strategy for, rural space; media discourses depict both rural *realities* and *fictions*, popularising certain idealised rurals; while rural lay discourses become established on beliefs, descriptions and actions by people in daily life. Or as Gee (1999) expressed we are all members of, and shaped by, many different discourses. For this thesis the main concern lies with scholarly discourses of the rural sphere through time, which have come to shape policy and as such society.

Foucault (1972) saw truth as a discursive construction where different regimes of knowledge decided on *truth* and *false*, which actions *possible* or *not*: the control of discursive truth becoming a *power effect*. Power as both restraining and productive, creative and forming our social world while also delineating how it could and could not be talked about. Discourses generate *subjects* (who we could be) and *objects* (we could understand, or know), neither of which independent units but a medium for a specific social culture. (Ibid).

Likewise academic productions of rural theory have produced rural discourses: *acts* of power with *power-effects*, worthy of examination. Therefore we should contemplate how the initial *discourse of order* Murdoch & Pratt (1993) claim have supported rural studies emerged and how academic rural discourses strengthen or destabilise discourses coming from elsewhere; academic discourses should not be seen as closed but incorporating components from elsewhere while drawing into other discourses (Ibid).

Language fully integrates all elements of social practices (Gee, 1999), revealing different discourses where we may refer to the same thing but the *way* we do so may be of a different discourse. In so, discourses illustrate *produced* and *reproduced patterns* ascribing meanings to *things, actions, people* etc. according to *values/meanings* held important by that discourse, which also putting limits on what gives meaning. Thought and use of language thus an active matter of assembling contextual meanings necessary for taking action in the world (Ibid.). Discourses became active processes subject to change, though often rather consistent, therefore when a discourse became severely questioned, *turned-on-its-side* or abandoned, we talk of discursive breaks, often hard to revert from.

One common misconception is that the discourse analysis aims at understanding discourses and what people mean, but this goes against the very starting point of the approach, as there are neither objective *truths* nor *one real* reality to attain and understand (Jørgensen & Philips, 2000). The scholar should rather examine effects of *truths* constructed by discursive processes, look for patterns in language used and identify potential social consequences these might bring (Ibid).

Another concept many scholars have found useful is Kuhn's (1996) paradigm, illustrated by *normal science*, where research build upon detailed past scientific achievements that one specific scientific com-

munity, for some time, recognizes as foundational for their continued practice. Through this paradigmatic view certain works become established, validating problems and methods of the research field for successional researchers: forming coherent traditions of scientific research. The paradigm require two essential characteristics: being *novel* enough to attract and sustain a group of advocates, withholding them from competing modes of research, while remaining *open-ended* enough to leave problems for coming scholars to solve. Aspiring members would join a research field based on a few concrete models with research built on shared paradigms according to same rules and standards, producing certain commitments and consensus for particular research tradition. (Ibid).

Even though I appreciate the paradigm concept, discourse maintain one essential part, namely how discourse (or paradigm) does not remain contained *within* the scientific community (or any other) but also transfer out into society, affecting rural political and lay discourses and shaping them in subsequent steps.

I believe that rural scholarly depictions shape the rural (not only by influencing political outcomes) but also that there is a *time lag* before ideas reach and influence society, making the ideas influencing our present not *up-to-date* with current thoughts. For this reason scholar discourses in rural studies remain the basis for this thesis.

## Method

To understand how the *rural* has been, and continues to be, conceptualised and described, this thesis embarks on a discourse analysis of academic literature spanning the *eras*: *modernity*, *late modernity* (approaching a discursive break), *postmodernity* and *relational rural*. The *eras* are not time-specific, as scholars tend to be of various degrees influenced by different schools of thought, making time-specific intervals for theory fictional.

The theoretical framework used here consists of a collection of selected articles and books under the domain banner of *rural studies*. The works come from two traditions, rural sociology and rural geography, often possible to combine for a fuller picture. The selection aids in depicting how rural thought has changed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it also exemplifies different rural discourses, sometimes competing, e.g. an *idealised* rural discourse with rural society holding a higher moral ground or a more cohesive society; a rural *marginality* discourse of crisis and decline, or a discourse where rural is but another capitalism *production* sphere; as such different discourses depict the rural in highly different manners.

The chosen theoretical material reviews depictions and thoughts on the rural, with theories compiled as of similar effort put into subchapters under unspecified time *eras*. Initially the attempt was to illustrate an evolution, or co-evolution, of social thought on the rural, as social scientific thought thoroughly influence policy, political agendas and – action. However, instead of a clear progression of thought, there exist multiple rural discourses that in some places connect (creating new combined discourses) while other discourses lay so far apart they never meet. In a sense the domain of rural thought contain a web of rural discourses, as such my attempt does not (nor does it aspire to) submit

a *full picture* of rural studies, but a structure to build on. As well as question how we can feel comfortable using a single-term concept like rural when it has, and continues to mean so many different things.

The literatures I have built upon have been subjectively selected for their contributions to rural studies. It was my intention to align different text and try to put them in order alongside each other, to point towards commonalities and difference. In practice I began searching for rural literature in general, from which I found well cited authors that I went on to read. I found the article by Murdoch and Pratt (1993) *Modernism, postmodernism and the 'post-rural'* and felt intuitively drawn to build upon their approach of trying to separate social thought over the time periods of *Modernity, Late modernity and Postmodernity*, to which I added *Relational rural* because I felt it to be such an infusion in social thought, a discursive break or paradigmatic shift, after which rural issues require redressal and reconceptualization. This could also be likened with what Cloke (2006) wrote on the development of three significant *conceptual frames: functions, political economy and social constructions*, influential in the conceptual construction of rurality. Under this framework of chapter *eras* (like frames), more or less coherent subchapter were identified positioned with literature in an attempt to elude how certain thinking return at different points: borrowing, building upon, or tearing down.

Some texts, influential in rural studies have gotten much space, like Michel Woods, frequently appearing in most articles I have read, his book *Rural* (2010) being one of those cornerstones helping me to grasp rural thought while formulating my own, alongside important works by Jonathan Murdoch and Marc Mormont that became indispensable inputs and certainly Bruno Latour as one of those important writers who ushered the hybrid field into theoretical focus.

Other texts come from less known works that influenced my thinking, and ultimately some authors have gotten much too little space, while a large selection on the drawing board have been left out due to textual limitations.

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## Modernity

*In this subchapter we attempt at an understanding of how what we call the modernity era came to be through rational enlightenment ideals with a prevalent emphasis on universality and order. Through which Rural as concept and term was created, as part of the Rural-Urban dichotomy (a universal division) that made up the whole of society. We also acknowledge that understandings of rural identities and rural communities were externally imposed onto rural subjects from more romantic interpretations of a rather rigid modernist framework that held firm understandings of rural subjects and what (dichotomy inspired) characteristics would be found in a study. With industrial revolution came industrialisation of agriculture altering rural areas and rural lives, depopulating areas or shifting its population makeup with farmworkers migrating to urban industries and eventually an in-migration of more wealthy middle class urban population. The rural was changing, which also meant that rural studies had to adapt, some approaches began to look mainly at agriculture, while others examined communities or social change. Critique of the rural-urban dichotomy and its firm characteristics also began to be voiced, as rural and urban got more entwined with each other.*

## Universality

Modernity could be seen an impulse attempting to purify and create distinct boundaries of *nature, social, science* and *politics*, with thoughts of a cohesive social totality (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993).

Characterised as a *perception of the world* (Bauman, 1992) out of the creation of *the state* and its urge for *social control* through centralisation of previously localised powers; transforming control into a focused action restrictively managed by state experts. This modern state was influenced by enlightenment ideals of rational governments, requiring uniformity and adherence to central power. With universality a measure of social improvement for a society of rational individuals; diversity something unwanted. States administered their territories rationally while in colonial time extending that same control over other territories, in so infinite power and intellectual reflections thereof, characterised the West European mental climate called modernity. Bauman (1992) saw sociology born out of this modernity, its central characteristics fixating on processes of socialisation, hegemony, civi-



lization and control, attempting to integrate agents into a social whole. The universalising ambitions of modernity became an analytical framework for understanding reality, concerned foremost with order and *discourses of order* which demanded structures and systems for sorting individual agents. The largest analytical totality: society was identified with the nation state which could be subdivided forming the dichotomy of *rural* and *urban*, its functions made more effective through rationally administered industrialisation. (Ibid).

There being no *expressed* rural before the modern nation state, merely areas lying outside towns, thus rural functions could be viewed as imposed, rather than sourced, onto created 'rural' areas (Scott, 1998).

## **Modernism and Order**

Murdoch & Pratt (1993) expressed that there was a flawed temptation to associate modernism with urban phenomena and rural with pre-modern following a narrative of progressive modernisation, while instead it should be acknowledged that rural was intricately bound to urban and just as *modern*. Williams (1973) understood the creation of 'country and city' distinction as fixating rural with urban as *meaning* and *power* granting *opposites*, linked dialectically but not as separate realms. The desire to separate and distinguish between the two enabled the influential conceptualisation of *ordered* rural alongside urban, in contrast to an *unruly* pre-modern country (Ibid.).

Early modernist social science followed positivism principles that objective facts could be discovered by empirical investigation. The social scientist attempted to objectively define rural by searching for functional characteristics that would statistically prove different from urban features. In Woods (2010) accounts early development of geography as academic discipline, the study of rural and urban was linked together in a *regional geography* approach. It aimed at describing geographical characteristics of particular regions, which reproduced popular assumptions of rural – urban relationship. These rural geographies were often described and explained by practical relationship or function to urban hubs as source of natural resources and food. (Ibid).

The early models neglected and missed diversity and vitality of rural areas (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993) but foreshadowed and spurred the development of an innovative systems-based approach that assessed regional geography as overly descriptive while lacking scientific thoroughness. The approach applied positivist principles for scientific

analysis using quantitative data in order to identify patterns and laws for spatial organisation but remained focused on urban geography, concerned with the mapping and modelling of urban systems, while its extension to encompass rural areas often effectively marginalised the rural as serving urban interest. No equivalent investigation was made on rural systems, instead a systematic agricultural geography developed, effectively reinforcing the connotation between rural and farming. Instead of wider conceptualisation of rural, the quantitative positivist enquiry produced models that generated multiple different rural descriptions, too task specific to relate or contribute to any general rural *bigger picture*. (Ibid). This overt focus on agriculture also neglected other types of rural activities, e.g. forestry, mining or fishing.

### **Rural identity**

Disregarding universalising tendencies of modernity, the rural - urban division held an impact on social life, in part due to widely different conceptions of the two spaces as the modernist impulse reinforced the identity of both (Ibid).

One distinct strain of social thought influencing early academic writings on rural was the *romantics*: an artistic, literary, and intellectual ambition emerging in Europe in late 18th century, for whom rural space embodied the natural elements necessary for a fulfilling life. The romantics coupled rural with *national identity*, *masculinity* (penetrating the land) and *femininity* (the fertility of land) where an organic society could be found (Woods, 2010). Creating an imagined countryside, (or *idyllic rural*) by the population located in urban areas (Murdoch & Pratt 1993). In this view the rural - urban dichotomy represented a sort of (imagined) moral and ethical division with rural considered a social world with a specific sociocultural system, a distinct *rural civilization* characterized through values and social relationships instead of economy (Mormont, 1990).

In structural-functional anthropology approach rural economic activity was seen as intricately linked within kinship networks establishing continuity and stability in rural communities (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). Rural characteristics and relationships were viewed as remote from urban areas, with the traditional rural society a *timeless, cohesive unit of tightknit relations* between family members, relatives and neighbours, fostering a sense of belonging (Ibid).

For Mormont (1990) there was no rural identity in pre-industrial society in the sense of shared common sets of meanings, instead each community had its own identity and relationships with the external world, mediated by local elites. These rural identities adhered to family and property relationships in local systems, establishing a *local specific* common social and cultural set of *values* upholding the community cohesion and homogeneity. In contrast the rural concept was developed further through distinguishing rural and agricultural, postulating it in relation to a social and cultural *context* brought by industrial development. The evolving rural narrative became a carrier of sets of meanings, translating into a rather explicit discourse ascribing rural with traits and characteristics. The rural population, in *idyllic* terms, thought carriers of grounded wisdom based on traditions of working the land. (Ibid).

Mormont illustrated this with a Belgian example, where in 1920 and -30s the agricultural modernisation movement attempted to transform the rural, to integrate it into the modern industrialised world. In oppositional resistance *rural way of life* became a distinct category and harmonious alternative model for society based on *claimed* ethical values: a social category defining a *moral* and *cultural* world with values upheld by participants of rural communities organised around personal relationships and active social life. This was joined by a rise of popular movements seeing a rural in crisis, at loss of their rural identity through social, economic and technological changes. Rural youth had to choose between *past* and *future*, making choices of farming methods, career, leisure and family relying on values of tradition or innovation; in effect forcing them to define their position. The Belgian state encouraged this moral rural for its population, especially for rural workers in urban areas, supporting and enabling it through development of extensive train networks enabling urban workers to remain rural residents. (Ibid).

This *idyllic* view of rural identity seemingly positioned rural as a living museum (for rural morale) yet alongside expanding agricultural industrialisation the *bigger picture* question of rural identity ceased to be addressed. Rural sociology instead embarked on two distinct tracks: towards sociology of agriculture to incorporate sector and social group into the national social organisation (Murdoch & Pratt,

1993) or towards ethnographic studies of rural communities by monographic approaches (Mormont, 1990).

## Community studies

Presumably there were always some forms of exchange between rural and urban lives, yet in pre-modern time (before a rural definition) societal interdependence may have been more *community/regional* influenced than *national/global*. This separation was undone by development of large-scale industrialisation which altered both rural and urban through rearrangements of the social and economic, blurring the distinctions (Robinson, 1990). The mechanisation of agriculture *re-configured* meanings of rural: *reducing* communal activity, social integration and homogeneity while *increasing* separation of residence from workspace; modern agriculture reducing labour and employment; with increasing pressures on ecosystem (Ibid). The emerging industrial agriculture could shed labour to urban industry and still deliver outputs that met urban demands (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993); working together in progressive modernity. Consequentially homogenizing landscapes as field enlargement eradicated a range of traditional biophysical landscape elements (Phillips, 2005).

Subsequent changes of industrialisation, socioeconomic positions became less indicative of local position while increasingly reliant on external relationships with markets and institutions; ensuing in consequence increasing heterogeneity in rural communities (Mormont, 1990). Society was perceived as under threat by imposed change and disruption from external forces with a rootless urban culture intruding on ways of rural existence (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). The question became how rural community cultures and traditions would persist under externally imposed social- and economic changes characterised as modernisation. Urban life and development was seen as *dynamic* in contrast to *static* traditional rural at loss with development and unlikely to recover from it (Ibid).

Community-focused rural studies, accepted two assumptions: first, that rural community embodied a space outside the influence of modernity; second, that forces of modernity were a severe threat to future traditional social systems (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). These assumptions were voiced through e.g. Tönnies (1957) concepts *Gemeinschaft* of preindustrial life based on an intricately connected community formed out of kinship and linked to a specific place, working in col-

lective action for a common good, and *Gesellschaft* of modern urban life, in a socially less connected and more individualistic society.

The critique on many community studies was the over-romanticised and nostalgic view of rural life with a clear anti-urban bias while neglecting to acknowledge that much rural poverty, exploitation and class division was evident in academic studies (Robinson, 1990), failing to involve a wider external world (Marsden et al., 1993).

The rural had been measured by its remoteness from the modern world, spatially, but rural sociology was transforming, advancing an evolving social set of meanings by also ascribing importance to the temporal dimension: defining rural in relation to changes influenced by external factors (Mormont, 1990). The rural was a combination of imposed change, resistance and adaptation, taking place in the local arena. As such the new function of rural sociology, instead of evolving rural social identity, gradually became the study of social change in response to modern changes. Rural societies were diverse in social composition, economic organisation, history and culture, yet considered meaningful to study in parallel to determine their position in relation to similar changes. As such they were a *singularity*, a common rural and the distinctive relationship between them and forces of modernisation, granted a unity (though not specificity) for studies of local space-times transformations under the impact and influence of *modernisation* change. (Ibid).

### **Critique of Rural – Urban dichotomy**

The meaning of the term *rural* remained rather unquestioned and secure until Pahl's (1965) critique on sustaining the rural - urban dichotomy weakened its status, suggesting class more appropriate for determining particular spaces. The dichotomy was challenged because most post-war community studies had been conducted in more 'traditional' settlements of peripheral areas, far from effects of urbanism, neglecting that dramatic changes had reconfigured the countryside with urban growth problems entering the rural. These conflicts arose from multiple actors and interest groups, previously urban arriving in rural settings. An in-migration (perhaps spurred by *idyllic* notions) of an influx of mobile, middle-class commuters of different economic and social worlds who brought new class structures to the rural (Ibid).

Pahl later (1970) examined *urban* characteristics of these rural areas illustrating how a mobile middle class moved into attractive village

surroundings while maintaining connections to urban society, conducting much of their lives outside. His conclusion was that the *main concern* for rural studies was to explore how *national* impacted on *local*, as for him the *gemeinschaft/gessellschaft* dichotomy could not be sustained as a range of values and lifestyles, urban and/or rural, could be found in both settings, intricately bound in various constellations. The *traditional* rural as a description of social systems was overcome by the *modern* and in so the distinction between them lost. (Ibid).

## Late Modernity

*In this subchapter we approach what is referred to here as the era of late modernity, as the latter part of modernist thought brought a loosening of theories, opening up for redressals of rural. The rural began to be seen in more integrating and new ways, through e.g. the study of class, although this effort largely came to reduce rural as merely agricultural based. The study of class was one of the larger theories to take command of the era and rural studies, part of and followed by Political economy influenced by Marx, attentive to capitalism, class, state and transformations of the agricultural sector becoming a capitalism production sphere. Out of Political economy developed a restructuring effort, or rather there developed a need to restructure theories according to the new capitalism production perspective. The focus of attention in rural studies adopted a new spatial unit of analysis - localities (or ruralities) that could perhaps be seen as a restructured community study effort, under the influence of global capitalism. Eventually, however there came the need to include other non-economic dimensions, opening up for a new phase without certainties, the scholastic view opening up to thoughts outside of rigid modernity.*

### Rural class studies

The first integrated approach of rural geography recognising rural as more than agriculture appeared in early 1970s, but rural remained in theory a *coherent* and *distinct system* separate from urban, focused on productive land use (Woods, 2010). This rural geography accepted *rural space* as a container for their studies, while in endeavours to find rural *essence* their authoritative mapping of spatial boundaries suffered problems with its methodology, criticised for flawed assumptions and descriptive concepts (Cloke, 2006).

The diminishing significance of the urban-rural divide as explanative ground for a range of economic, social and cultural processes, led to applications of e.g. class analysis of agriculture (part of political economy)(Robinson, 1990; Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). This alignment towards sociology of agriculture reduced much rural to agriculture.

Some advancing modern approaches used class analysis of rural population with a set of pre-existing categories imposed on social groups (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). This suggested that rural and urban

difference largely rested on how lower population densities limit access to facilities and occupational choice, while others argued rural had no explanatory significance but was an empirical category (Ibid).

Newby et al. (1978) analysed capitalist farmers and class structure, focusing on assessment of agricultural communities, with specific attention on positions of farmers and agricultural workers within class structures. In emphasising how farm landowners maintained dominance in rural areas under *economic, social, political and cultural threat of urbanisation and industrialisation*, they distinguished property over occupation as the defining principle of rural class structure. They saw farmers and middle class settlers shared interest in conserving the rural, farmers to limit economic competition, settlers for preserving property values: a shared protective *localism*. (Ibid).

Murdoch & Pratt (1993) saw this rather confining approach as placing agriculture (the rural within) in the *national* class structure, with property the crucial characteristic of agricultural class relations, explaining rural distinction as class-informed. This application of class concepts to uncover agrarian social relations almost replaced rural sociology with sociology of agriculture (Ibid).

## **Political economy**

The political economy approach, after Marx, was concerned with the modernisation of agriculture, but at loss with rural diversity (Marsden et al., 1993). The authors summarised political economy as centred around *four pillars*: first, how capitalist penetration of agriculture happened and explanations of its failure; second, depicting the characteristic nature of agrarian class structures; third, family farm transformation and resistance in advanced capitalist agriculture; fourth, focus on state - agriculture relationship (Ibid).

Agriculture was conceptualised as a distinct *production sphere*, part of capitalist development, thus *rural* distinctiveness of early rural sociology was largely replaced by distinctiveness of *agriculture* and its linkage to the agribusiness complex (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). The analysis emphasised how farming had been structured as a capitalist industry, subject to the same desire for capital accumulation as other industries; dismissing romantic notions of farming as *core* of traditional rural life while addressing global processes over local issues (Woods, 2010). Other studies observed rural planning and processes of economic development, searching for the capitalist state, concerned



with rural-urban manufacturing shifts and service sector employment, holding realignments as of spatial division of labour (Ibid).

On a whole, studies indicated that *regional*, *national* and *global* processes were heavily involved in shaping contemporary rural spaces and societies. The impact of these wider social and economic processes on rural spaces also depended on how local factors produced *uneven* development, but local factors varied in rural-urban localities alike. Through these studies scholars again questioned the descriptive use of rural–urban dichotomy and the value of a rural concept, the concept saved ultimately for its persistent wide recognition and use within general populations. (Woods, 2010). Still even if rural was seen as agriculture at least it was distinct from urban, therefor the urban-rural division could be upheld (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993) even though political economy generally treated rural areas and people as *passive recipients* of national and international forces (Marsden et al., 1993).

While political economy analysis did not separate agriculture from widespread developments of industrial change, there was some recognition that much agricultural production was poorly integrated in the global economy, heeding a warning against the production of deterministic models for agricultural development (Ibid). In order to comprehend these new production patterns social scientist had to develop new theories (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993).

## **Restructuring**

The restructuring approach developed out of political economy, retaining a Marxist perspective of capitalist production underpinning the secret workings of uneven development under capitalism (Marsden et al., 1993). Dramatic political and economic changes worldwide were evident throughout the 1970s in relation to the receding post-war boom of economic performance, progress and its repercussions on employment. As many of these trials were unpredicted, they presented profound challenges to established ideas and theories about the nature of modern society, requiring a restructuring of theories. The worldwide trends and combined impacts caused much uncertainty for nation states and local communities, undermining regional economic and political stability, ushering in global restructuring emphasised on how *politics*, *economics* and *social* interacted within and between different *local*, *national* and *international spaces* (Ibid).

With restructuring gaining popularity and influence in rural studies the distinction of agriculture was lost. The prevalence of agricultural production occurring in rural areas was seen as merely reflecting historical patterns of investment: agriculture but another segment of capitalist production (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). Production was seen as driven by profit-seeking behaviour with *all* economic activity aimed at profit generation by individual organisations; in this pursuit of profit capital controlled labour for surplus value, suggesting social conflicts a characteristic of capitalist development (Marsden et al., 1993).

Restructuring literature reconsidered the most appropriate spatial unit of analysis adopting *localities* (in rural studies *ruralities*) since most of *working-*, *social-* and *residential life* occur within restricted geographical areas, tied into *general patterns of change* through capitalist production relations and the market. With regions and nations often categorised according to levels of capitalist penetration, rendering theory *general* rather than *specific*, a weaknesses inherited from political economy. (Ibid).

Lovering (1989) identified restructuring as of *three* different uses: first, referring to how capitalist enterprises reacted to changes in competition by *altering* products, services and/or production: affecting numbers and task of employees; second, addressing how changes resulted in *shifts* of economic activity organisation across geographical space, by manipulating spatial divisions of labour; third, concern with *explaining links* between geographic pattern of social relations and spatial division of labour.

The status of rural remained quite secondary in this work, put forward mainly as a space for capital investment subject to availability and quality of labour power; holding area expansion or development reliant on its capacity for labour (Marsden et al., 1993). How rural localities organised themselves, however, was importance for their response and ability to cope with external economic restructuring and change affecting them. The focus on specific *development trajectories* of each locality could not be understood only by capital reason, nor could rural localities be accepted as merely unique but tied into uneven restructuring processes. (Ibid). This upheld a constant need to identify underlying mechanisms giving rise to specific spatial effects, while studies of *localities* had to maintain and emphasise the importance of the *unique* and *distinctive* of each place and social rela-

tions therein (Massey, 1984; Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). This maturing restructuring approach required that central views of capitalist production remained while also accepting the inclusion of other non-economic dimensions like social relations, (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993).

The main critique on restructuring theory regarded the distance of abstract categories in Marxist analysis from recognisable empirical categories, with reproduction of labour power focused solely on demands of capital too reductionist (Ibid).

## Postmodernity

*Here we enter the Postmodernity era. This do not to demarcate a defined temporal position of dramatic or visual change, but a distinct paradigmatic shift in scholar thought echoed through different conceptual strains of thought in various fields, culminating in vast reconceptualisation of theories. Not all scholars became postmodern theorist but for those who did most ideas of Modernity had to be thoroughly reconfigured or discarded, such as universality and absolute truths. Scholars began to examine real effects of their theories on the world of their study, and how theory had to change with a changing world. Interlinked with it the analysis of power of definitions and discourses placed on rural subjects. Some authors argued for a Post-rural theory to reconceptualise and foster further reflexivity, seeing the rural as always locally practice based, ultimately leaving the universal rural/urban terms behind. The 'cultural turn' in rural studies emphasised the importance of how different cultures construct their own realities, while deconstructing dominant ideas regarding rurality. The continued effort came to see place as of multiple meanings and multiple identities, approaching neglected people of rural areas and furthering studies of different ruralities, with each rurality socially constructed by the people in that space. We also find a postmodern reconceptualisation of social and spatial identity.*

With the Postmodern entry, the *universal laws* that scholars of modernity had explored as basis for the social world were discontinued alongside claims of *objective knowledge* independent of culture, gender or place, and concerns with finding *truth*. All *truths* became subjective cultural constructs, of multiple conflicting meanings, and all versions of reality (e.g. identity, gender, language) *social constructs*.

Postmodern theory concerned research, analysis, or description of theory itself, appropriate for reviewing sociology and studies of culturally diverse, historically specific subject matter (Rizter et al., 2001). It discarded grand narratives, ultimate goals and essential meanings of literature, favouring continual deconstruction of discourses; presenting scholars with new patterns of thought and tools. (Ibid).

The constitutive power of theory should force scholars to monitor the *impact of theory* on the social world, and voice a need to change theories according to changes occurring in that world (Ibid). As “dis-

course about society reflects and engenders discourse within society” (Brown, 1992, p. 237) while “accepting a theory can itself transform what the theory bears on” (Taylor, 1985, p. 101). As such postmodern studies encompassed the study of *real* societal effects and implications of previous theories.

Postmodernist held power analysis central to understanding social life. Power in modernist sociology was conceptualised as a *cause* located in, and imposed by, social structures, while the postmodern perspective conceived power as an *effect*, a result of exercises of particular social relations and practices (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). Society was also seen as an *effect*: a situated outcome of social relationships, illustrating an analytical shift from universal to specific (Ibid). As such power similar to e.g. gender (cf. Butler, 1988) becomes performative, and the same would hold true for rural identity.

Latour (1986) called it the ‘performative definition’ of power, the *powerful* not the ones who *hold* power but the ones (re)defining what essentially *holds* people together. If power emanate from somewhere, e.g. society, then neither power nor society require explanation as they simply exist for us to observer, but if power and society were *made* one must understand the relations enabling certain definitions of society and power patterns. This illustrated how academic discourses of society, rural and urban, had to be assessed, as discourses attempt to demonstrate what society is and how it holds together and must be understood as a *strategy of enrolment* to convince others. This concept of power attempted to impose a definitive rural domain becoming an *exercise of power* favouring one definition of society and set of social relations, over another. The solution, instead of searching a definition of (rural) would be to explore how (ruralities) become constructed and positioned in different contexts. (Ibid).

## **Cultural turn**

The *cultural turn* depicted a highly important and influential backdrop in the postmodern *era*, introducing postmodern and poststructuralist theories, laying a conceptual framework for exploring meanings of rural localities and rural space (Woods, 2010). It relocated rural studies from an easily quantifiable basis towards engaging with what is culturally implied by the category the rural (Neal, 2009). Emphasising the importance of how individuals and societies construct their own realities, enabling them to make sense of the world (Woods, 2010).

The cultural turn allowed for the deconstruction of how dominant ideas regarding rurality had been produced and reproduced, spurring explorations of alternative experiences and meanings voiced by other rural groups. The turn permitted a new way of engaging with “the complex interplay of power, politics and representations of social relations and countryside spaces” (Neal, 2009). It realigned the scholarly gaze on the place-specific local communities.

### **Neglected geographies / Localities**

Massey (1991) saw locality as made of a certain mix of social relations merging in a specific space, with place having multiple meanings and identities. These spatial identities lacked pre-given characteristics linking to place or class, but were most likely constructed out of a combination of *both*; the meaning of a specific place constructed through the mix of multiple social relations (Ibid).

In a related effort Philo (1992) criticised rural research for portraying rural populations as a *general* category of: employed, white, asexual, healthy men without religious or political identity. Instead he called for engagement with *neglected rural geographies* of overlooked, less stereotypical social groups. Philo urged rural studies to confront the *other* rural groups and communities. Connecting with Lefebvre’s idea of the always existing *third space*, the other: not explained or understood in binary definitions (Corbett in Schulte & Walker-Gibbs, 2016) or Latour’s (1993) *missing middle ground*.

Philo searched ways to approach these *neglected others*, and multiple forms of *otherness* in rural studies focused on average persons; with considerations to structure and experience of gender, age, health and sexuality relations as well as addressing rural nomadic lifestyles. Philo’s effort dealt with both structure: *external*, e.g. capitalist agriculture structuring the rural, and agency: *internal*, selection and use of space (Philo, 1992). He demanded rural studies to acknowledge the neglected and hidden variables in examinations and analysis of rural spaces, shifting rural studies further away from positivistic (modernist) interpretations: measurements and quantitative approaches of objective indicators, definitions of population size, land use, rural economic and policy organization (Neal, 2009).

Murdoch & Pratt (1993) held in critique that understanding how particular identities, cultures and communities appear and where some have the ability to impose themselves onto others, required exposing

the relations that led to marginalisation or neglect, while simply “*giving voice to others*” (Ibid, 1993) did not guarantee that discovery.

## Ruralities

The extended research building on localities observed *effects* of wider processes on smaller places and the way social processes interacted in place, influencing outcomes that fed back into general processes.

The cultural turn in rural studies moved studies away from structural characteristics and dynamics of rural localities, towards representations of rural (Woods, 2010). Locality had indicated distinctiveness of a physical place where certain institutional mixes generated a recognisable local culture and economy (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993), but rurality became understood as a social construct, an imagined entity, brought into existence by discourses of rurality *produced, reproduced* and *challenged* by academics, media, policy-makers, lobby groups and individuals (Woods, 2010).

Mormont (1990) held that rural could not be measured by searching for particular unifying conditions, nor a specific social category but should be understood as the *inclusion of multiplicities* of local communities under one banner: *rurality*, neither a valid territorial unit nor object, but *derived* from socially produced sets of meanings.

Social constructions of rurality often referred to practices, places and material objects, but not necessarily tied to them. Cloke (2006) saw rurality as *multiple social spaces* overlapping in one geographical area. For Phillips (2005) constructions of rurality could not be directly associated with particular social groups but influenced the development of certain socio-spatial identities and power relations, indicating that constructions of rurality could also be *imposed* externally.

Ruralities around the world held elements of commonality and differences, yet due to distances from urban centres, *materially* and *ideally*, were related with marginalisation (Corbett in Schulte & Walker-Gibbs, 2016). Constituting an important category for analysis as spaces frequently *downgraded* in various discourses to “a natural resources container that requires little human population, and/or a historical remnant to be left behind” (Ibid).

Halfacree (1993) suggested the vast increase of different representations of rural space signalled how rural progressively was separated from reference of geographical space. The rural imagined through popular discourses did not resemble actual rural realities, being neither

grounded in real places or experience, yet the influential power and popularity of these ideas attempted to form rural space after its image. Halfacree argued that rural studies required an approach intersecting the polarity of locality- and social representation based approaches, while seeing rural space as *imaginative, material* and *practised*. Social representations of rurality required some form of imagined rural locality, while definitions of rural localities depended on actualisation of certain ideas about what rurality should be and as such rural spaces became both *material* and *ideational* in practice. (Ibid).

Additionally Neal (2009) argued for the wider view of rurality to incorporate and recognising that rural spaces have *emotional aspects*, generating personal and public “attachments, investments, enchantments, anxieties and ambivalences” (Ibid).

### **Spatial identities**

Mormont (1990) saw how new relationships of space and society, rural and urban, had increased mobility of people and goods; delocalising activities making regions *heterogeneous*, neither strictly agrarian nor industrial, creating new uses of recreational space in tourism, national parks and development zones by *non-local* agents, for *non-rural* users. Explaining the term *rural space* as emerged in reference to functions performed in rural areas for *non-rural* users, characterized by their existence independent of action from rural populations; rendering rural populations a surplus not necessarily involved in the use of rural space. Increased mobility did not homogenize space but created a new hierarchy of space based on market values ascribed to space, not necessarily doing away with local space characteristics but creating a new type of locality. The new localities were the result of interactions of various forces ascribing value onto space. (Ibid).

Increasingly rural became *abstract spaces* overlapping or interlinking: a space for natural or historic conservation; for agricultural or industrial development. There was no longer one *single* space, but a *multiplicity* of social spaces, each respectively of its own logic, institutions and network of actors, *specific* not local, no longer belonging to a single actor: local community. Territorial units seldom gained geographical identity based on regional inhabitants, but rather through scenic, ecological or tourist concerns, circumventing local social habits. Rural regions could thus gain other meanings, their identity interchangeable. As such, rural structural properties were not necessarily



cultural characteristics of their elites, but an outcome of main conflicts in rural regions between those elites (their meanings) and groups with new ideas and new use for rural space. (Ibid).

As identity and space relationship were profoundly changed, with the exception of certain powerless (neglected) groups tied to particular space, it became impossible to identify persons or groups as *belonging* to one single space. Instead social actors should be viewed through the extent of which one could *realise an aspect* of individual identity across multiple locations presently held: space a social classification, broken down into a multiple of social sub-identities. The question of being rural had to be readdressed in terms of how inhabitants of rural space felt- or became rural. Mormont had two hypotheses: first, *social identities exist primarily in relation to space*, and secondly, *identity as not a whole, but a number of recognised characteristics valid in a certain context, and a certain field of relationships*. With different partial identities realised in rural space as social actors voiced and exhibited value systems not as easily expressed in urban life. (Ibid).

All rural populations recognised the countryside differently with alternative approach to its use, therefore rural influence on identity depend less on belonging than on opportunities to partake in daily activities through *participation* (mobility) in networks of relations (Mormont, 1990). These new relationships were becoming more *nomadic* and of a *multiple-locality*, relationships were defined by *mobility* instead of belonging, with security originating rather by the ability to communicate than from enclosed space. (Ibid).

This held both social and spatial concerns for the rural: spatially presenting a distinction between rural spaces as physical space, used for a variety of functions, and also as a locus for social relations. Similarly, concepts like community could no longer be explained through specific geographical contexts, but required definitions based on *place-specific*, relational events (Robinson, 1990).

## **Post-rural**

Murdoch & Pratt (1993) pressed for a new concept of knowledge based on fundamental reconsiderations of rural. This would be achieved by advancing further *reflexivity* in that social actors build *society* and *power relations* therein. Breaking the rural-urban dichotic division by acknowledging both as *practised* and *selectively organised* by individuals or collectives, creating new forms of social relations.

Establishing rural involved in reconceptualization, emphasising the need to withdraw from universal concepts like rural and urban. Rural studies should explore how universal concepts became locally produced, with rurality practiced in *multiple ways, places and environments*. (Ibid). Post-rural would highlight the reflexive nature of rural, calling for reconceptualization of *experiences of place* sensitive to productions of meanings that enable plentiful rural experiences. Providing an epistemological opening for rural studies to escape the modernist trap of marginality, by offering a way to explore the construction of difference and go wherever those constructions lead. Different versions of rural, all *outcomes* of practices, with the selection of certain versions in places a demonstration of power: an *effect*. (Ibid).

## **Relational rural**

*Here Relational rural have been portrayed as another era, although it could also be viewed as a profound turn in Postmodernity. The relational approach marked a highly reflexive development turn of rural study emphasising the importance of networks, flows, links and mobilities in space-place constituencies alongside forms and processes associated with social, economic, cultural and political aspects. We see scholars argued for recognition of the active rural voice, mobilising and stabilising rural and various powers of rural as material, symbolic and relational, moving rural away from passivity. With an illustrative model for rural space show how the whole of rural could be understood through a division three different interlinking facets. The relational approach opened up for seeing relationships between more than just social actors and space, hybridity taking account of both human and non-human relational networks. Thus rural became more than social and less than natural, constructed of both in different mixtures, allowing for the study of rural socio-natural complexity. This hybridity become exemplified with the Actor Network Theory, with actor referring to a social, natural or a technological entity, whose ability to act depends on its involvement in a network. Based on a symmetrical treatment of human and non-human entities analysis must follow all actor relations. This allow rural to be understood as composed of different network configurations, removing singular thoughts on rural experiences or space, clarifying ruralities as continuously interchanging based on exchange of properties between actor entities.*

## **Relational approach**

The Relational approach rejected conceptualisations of place and space as *fixed entities*, constrained by static or hierarchical design of territory, instead space become dynamic and contingent, “a product of practices, trajectories, interrelations” (Massey, 2004). The identity of place a *relational construction* “inevitably historically changing” (Ibid) the same way personal identities became constituted through *interactive* relations of engagements and practices. Essentially, relations do not happen in spaces but *make* spaces, with space understood as *constructs of relations*, subject to change depending on the relational mix therein.

Relational approaches came (among other reasons) in response to the time-fixation of social sciences, space and place could no longer be seen as a mere setting (unlike e.g. rural idyllic approaches holding rural as a timeless container of romanticised values of tradition). As such it developed in response to deterministic social studies, going beyond dualism with *practice* as central to meanings placed on space.

The relational mind understood rural as a social construct, “brought into being as it is imagined” (Woods, 2010), the social construction of rural embedded in (*global* and *local*) networks of social, economic and political relations; the idea of rural formed in ruralities through networks relations encompassing multiple actors, human and non-human, indigenous and exogenous (Ibid).

### **Active voice of the rural**

In an attempt that echoed Massey’s (1994) question “(i)s it not possible for a sense of place to be progressive; not self-closing and defensive, but outward-looking?”, Bell et al. (2010) argued for “recognising the active rural voice in the mobilisation and stabilisation of the rural.”

The authors criticised contemporary theory for generally referring to rural issues in a highly passive voice, as such they sought to intervene the debate around rural vitality or demise, by arguing “for an active understanding of the many powers of the rural with all its *materiality*, *symbolism* and *relations*”. Pursuing a rural account based on *practice* over priori definitions, as *through powers of practices* rural and its politics become an active part of our lives.

They termed material practices *rural power*; symbolic practices *power of the rural*; relational practices of materially bounded relations *rural constituencies*; and symbolically bounded *constituencies of the rural*; holding material, symbolic and relational performances of the rural as articulated aspects of contemporary politics. (Ibid).

Material *rural power* equated to food, water, wood, minerals and energy as most production occur in rural areas, and implicitly also involved parts of surrounding social and environmental conditions and histories, the *mobile* rural. The symbolical *power of the rural* related authenticity and power placed on rural settings e.g. of novels; movies; local food; country homes and wildlife, indicating that rural ideas transcend boundaries. Relational *rural constituencies* could be rural voters living in low population areas, and *constituencies of the rural* groups held together by rural ideas, e.g. advocates of organic agricul-

ture, who are not necessarily rural residents but *align* with and become *activated* by rural interest; both manifesting *materially*. As follows new rural politics become complex, constituted from engaging both constituencies. This active perspective developed along the considerable rise of interest for mobilities studies as theoretical perspective for, and empirical account of, the rural. Their concern were that the scholarly *mobilities turn* could lead to repetitions of rural passivity and demise, while missing the active significance of the rural by not recognising *stabilities* as equally important as mobilities and an active political act in both rural and urban space. (Ibid).

The authors termed passive imagination of rural *the passive rural voice* with rural portrayed as largely defeated; passive in face of active sources like capital, globalisation and technology sustained by urban with change happening to the rural not created by it: the rural victim. Instead rural should be understood as in a perpetual flux, *rural plural*, always seeking balance and equilibrium points, neither static nor singular but a rural multiple of expanding knowing and being with practical politics, in constant dialog along differences, connections, and change. Such conception held the *active rural voice* in mobilisation and stabilisation of practices of human politics. (Ibid).

They saw the prevailing mobilities paradigm among scholars as a helpful and important theoretical intervention, providing a desirable variation and active stance against static views of modernist reductionism. In addition they emphasised that the same *active voice* should be recognised in the rural setting, to demonstrate that a mobile understanding of rural help making sense of its politics. Mobilities research privileged mobility over stability yet stability should be viewed as *equally* active, prompting the use of both *mobilisation* and *stabilisation*, implying activeness in *both* movement and staying put. (Ibid).

### **Three-folded model of rural space**

The relational approach also saw how different societal *spaces* maintained relational bonds between themselves and other spaces, so that changes in one manifest outcomes for another *space*. The social world thus built upon how relationships develop, which in effect spurred new relationships effecting older ones. Space could therefore be conceived as relations of different spaces which together compose one rather unified spatial context.

Halfacree (2006) outlined a “three-fold model of rural space” with: *rural localities*, created through relatively distinct spatial practices linked with production or consumption; *formal representations of the rural*, expressed by e.g. capitalist interests, referring to how the rural was placed within capitalism processes; and *everyday lives of the rural*, combining both individual and social elements for negotiating and understanding rural life. Together these facets make up the whole rural space, yet not necessarily joined together to produce a consistent unified rurality, but different ruralities (Ibid).

He illustrated the model by exemplifying the centrality of *productivist agriculture* in post-war rural Britain, with productivism as a policy discourse for creating systems for agricultural production maximisation, which became a key part of rural life from the late 1940s to 1980s. Leaving its mark on *rural locality* with a predominance of specific productivist agricultural practices, like industrialised forms of farming that carried broader social, economic and environmental effect on ruralities. This productivism was reinforced by *formal representations of the rural* in policy and legislation, and ultimately through its influence on rural areas and societies, in so *everyday lives of the rural* became formed around the productivist vision. (Ibid).

Initially this three-fold produced a largely congruent and unified coherence in which British rurality and productivist agriculture strongly connected, creating a *rural locality*.

Over time however, facets of productivist rural space became challenged as not all agriculture adopted the productivist regime, with traditional farming persisting in some *rural localities* and *everyday lives of the rural*. The dynamics of urbanisation and later counter-urbanisation presented alternatives to the rationality of productivism, while also productivist *formal representations of the rural* were confronted with other *formal representations* e.g. rural conservation discourse; the combined result of this three-fold ultimately facilitated the end of productivist hegemony. (Ibid). Illustrating how ruralities never remain static but always change.

## Hybridity

The relational approach also began to open space for hybridity which did not privilege social relations but collapsed the dualism of nature and society. Adopting a position that saw all entities as equal parts

within a network, each with the capacity to change outcomes by their involvement or not.

Those engaged with *social* aspects of rural saw e.g. tight knit communities with deeper and lengthier personal relationships than in their urban counterpart, as such social constructivist perspectives could uncover reproductions of prevalent sociocultural aims, processes and norms (Murdoch & Pratt, 1993). In the same way those engaged with studies of a *natural* perspective, rural could stand for a place of natural beauty, of animal life, in connection with the biophysical. Natural perspective contested the idea of rural as a mere social construction, because of insufficient interpretation of natural entities found there; similarly *social* perspectives stressed the social impact on natural systems could not be neglected. In so rural became *more than social* and *less than natural* (Murdoch, 2003). Revealing a material complexity hardly reduced by only social or natural categories (Ibid). The combination was missing in the analysis to deal with these separate perspectives, rural not *social or natural*, but *both*.

Latour (1993) argued that modernity should not be regarded as gradually diminishing natures' significance (although our increased control of its environments): rather modernity was established on hybrid and heterogeneous economic, social and technical processes where humans progressively became more bound to non-human entities. Rather than escaping nature humanity plunge further into it; the essence of nature also hybridised interlinked into complex relations with other social and technological entities and systems. Latour expressed that although the modern world was founded upon hybridity, interestingly it was also distinguished by the inability of modern humans to recognize this. (Ibid).

This was enabled by using *binary categories* like nature, society, or culture effectively removing the role of hybrids, yet attempts of ordering the modern world inevitably created more hybrids. Thus this hybrid world should be studied not only by categories of natural or social but with concepts that reflects on the complexity of *the missing middle ground*, planting ourselves firmly in the *hybrid centre ground*. (Ibid).

The hybrid theories offered a different understanding of complex interrelations between societies and environments to fully engage both; rural understood as a co-construct by human and non-human entities

opening up potentials to capture the socio-natural complexity with less effort than traditional representation methods. (Ibid).

In a social perspective, rural often represent social relations believed to produce certain forms of ordering, the shape of rural determined by and reflective of dominant societal structures like capitalism, patriarchy, class or nationality (Ibid). The hybrid approach suggested an analytically different starting point seeing rural as made up of *multiple different entities*, in *multiple combinations*, and this complex heterogeneous spatial form would be difficult to understand from one single vantage point. Hybrid spaces always branched off by new networks of relations, the hybrid perspective understood that rural reflect representations of multiple socio-material formations, of multiple networks and spatiality shapes (Ibid).

Because of multiple co-existing processes hybrid theories propose that networks establish different space-times, space therefore becomes highly complex. This complexity is due to interactions between new networks, existing spaces and networks constructing their own spatial coordinates. (Ibid). Some rural relations organise a standardised space where entities line up according to formal rules and norms, other times more fluid relations with unexpected outcomes develop; rural thus made up of a *variety of network types* but cannot be seen as a mere aggregation of network effects (Murdoch, 2003). This complexity may be reduced by imagining rural consisting of three main spatial categories: *regions*, *networks* and *fluid*. The most familiar spatial type, *region* space was used for spaces with rather fixed coordinates, with rural as a zone that could be known and recognised from e.g. maps or local development plans, regionalised by placed boundaries and categories on rural space determining its spatial uses. The second type, *network* space referred to relations linking entities in ways that fixate their particular space-time coordinates, meaning space in network not dependent on proximity but on the network elements and their connections. In the third type, *fluid* space, links remain loose and unstable between entities enabling multiple identities in and of that space; its objects rather vague and subject to alterations. (Ibid).

In this way rural become separated from *one* single analytical reference point, instead its meaning affirmed through relations subject to variations according to the socio-spatial context, with attention to how



*region, network* and *fluid* space generate three very different ways and sets of distinctly varied spatial relations (Ibid).

Hybridity informed us of another way to talk about rural with relationships between natural and social worlds so intimate they can no longer be separated (Murdoch, 2006).

### **Actor Network Theory**

The Actor Network Theory (ANT) has remained a central hybrid theory, emerging from sociology of science, developed through separate works of Latour, Callon and Law in late 1980s early -90s. It combined an ambitious method of abolishing dualistic thinking with systematic reconceptualization of research practices (Wilkinson, 2006). Studying the meeting ground of two (natural and social) worlds, the exchange of properties between entities and how heterogeneous actors come into being. The world understood as consisting of collectives of human and non-human entities, all given identities specific for the network they are part of. If identities remain and relations between actors stabilise the network will have an impact. This perspective demanded a symmetrical treatment of human and non-human entities without any special emphasis as incentive for change may be spurred by either and therefor analysis must follow all actor relations. (Ibid).

The term actors refer to social, natural or technological entities, whose ability to act depends on its involvement in a network. Action only possible together with others, and behind all actions exist networks: hybrids networks made up of heterogeneous entities in different configurations (Ibid) its shape emerging from negotiations between the entities (Murdoch, 2003). These actor entities and networks are multiple, including: animals, environment, infrastructure, farming practices, political- and economic policies (Ibid).

As natural and social entities combined in novel ways, generating multiple different effects and further expansions of new actor networks, rural should be expect to be equally entwined within diverse settings. Murdoch (2003) argues that in many rural relationships the analysis could benefit from the hybrid description e.g. to better understand development processes reshaping *natural* landscapes according to *social* desires or economic demands and how that fosters new networks with future effects, e.g. how recreational activities may rely as much on technological gear as on environment and climate.

The theory is ideally resourceful in challenging dualism, its symmetrical treatment principle of (human and non-human) actors ascribing new statuses to things, e.g. bringing life to commodities and their supporting structures, opening for new analysis. Its network concept allow for shifts in ideas of closeness and action possible at distance, while encompassing the need for a relational power analysis, addressing performative feature of discourse and understanding space as defined from inside networks. (Wilkinson, 2006).

## Discussion

This thesis has, to inspire thought in the reader, outlined different theories and infusions of thought positioned as a time analogy for sequences of events, or distinct points of division, where rural theorising separated into different approaches. It investigates how the concept *rural* have been understood and used over time, as such through the development of different *discourses* of the rural sphere. These are distinct in the way that new thinking changed how scholars looked at rural significantly opening up for new thought developments to occur, similar to how networks of relations develop unexpectedly and continually. For this reason there is value in examining where our thinking have been, where roads diverted and where thoughts lay presently.

This thesis attempt to map out rural thought along a conceptual timeline, *not* by following yearly progressions or with attention to decadal developments, but by mapping out kindred theoretical approaches under more general terms of *eras* put together under subchapters postulated as *Modernity*, *Late Modernity*, *Postmodernity* and *Relational Rural*. This has enabled an overview of how different schools of thought adjacent in time developed, sometimes interrelating while other times vastly separating, co-evolving and/or in some ways co-dependent. It was written to resemble a historic document of *what has happened*. This also allows for an understanding of how the concept *rural* has held different meanings that have changed over time, and still do. The evolution of thought in rural studies was far from a clear development, did not follow an expected trajectory nor could its outcome be modelled.

What I suggest we see is rather the development of thematical networks, where different schools of thought may be seen as conceptual entities (or actor networks), the relational and hybrid approach could

then be used as a metaperspective for viewing rural theory as a complex network of networks, interrelated and co-dependent on each other for its development.

By following the concept *rural*, we also find how discourses flowingly changes nature, and how sudden we may come to see new *truths* or realign with the *echoes* of our time. In a sense then it is also the human dimensions surrounding conceptual developments that become interesting. When, and where, a thinker is subsumed with an idea, it impacts his perception; it affects his work, and clings to him until it is actively discarded. I believe we are all under the influence of ideas; the key point is to acknowledge and actively *know* so, to contemplate on how this affects our thoughts and choices, past and present.

## **Modernity**

This thesis have demonstrated that modernity relied on a discourse of order, upholding universality and objective knowledge, where everything should be separately understood and enhanced for a progressively improving societal machine. This thinking formed the reality of the time, and informed its truths. The modernity discourse created its object rural by narrowing it down to a set definition that could only be understood through discourse-produced concepts and boundaries, effectively creating its subjects by defining the real rural inhabitants, implicitly informing how to become one. This could be termed along the lines of Kuhn (1996) as establishing a paradigm for rural studies, with certain works, theories and models to be established as mandatory foundation to build science upon.

In early Modernity the rural concept was a connotation and name for all that other land area that lay outside the cities. The urban city was highly dependent of rural natural resources and products, in ways portrayed as two halves of one whole. In this rational burst of early modernity there was high respect for universal laws, with society resting firmly upon firm pillars of truths and purpose which social scientist should aim to understand. To retrace Murdoch & Pratt (1993) the distinction of boundaries of natural or social, clearly showed how modernist *reductionism* was put to use in understanding how everything, including social lives, was possible to study and divide in segments to understand its minute workings and function. Rural inhabitants were seen as a homogenous group, a *part* contributing to the progressive *whole* societal body. Similar to what Foucault (1980) saw as a change that had occurred with the role of the intellectual in modernity, from

an *individual figure of universality* eager to know everything towards a *specific intellectual* of compartmentalised knowledge. If everything was to get progressively better, every part had to be finely tuned to maximise its output or use, even the scholar.

This also illustrated how rural areas served a provisional function with *material* rural subjects (workers and students) for urban society, where urban centres in turn supplied *ideal* education (rationality and innovation): both important parts of the functioning State. The industrial revolution spurred by urban science and innovation placed industries in urban or close-proximity rural areas, altering/adding to urban function by turning parts of cities into manufacturing hubs. The multitude and diversity of industries and factories indicated the influence of reductionism in modernity, with diversity as means for reaching universality in both specialisations of factories and segmentation of workers (living in specific, supplied, lodgings), the ordered parts working towards a unified goal.

Correspondingly the modernity discourse understood that rural functions also had to change, with rural area and its inhabitants becoming a part to be shaped for improved usefulness in supplying its urban counterpart: implementing the agrarian revolution to co-evolve with urban industry. As industries demanded more workers for their factories, and rural employment declining, rural workers began to pursue occupation in urban areas but still, the urban life had to be sustained by steady supplies of rural resources like food, minerals and wood material. The rational solution to this, more than only scientific interest, was implementation of (urban) innovations by mechanising the agriculture (among other rural resources) with additional introduction of fertilisers and pesticides to secure high yields with relative low manpower. To trail Foucault (1980) knowledge and discourses form a *productive network* emanating through the whole social body. Rural areas were transformed by realisation of urban ideas like industrialisation of agriculture, taking place in rural areas but *providing* for urban demands. Urbanisation was furthered by massive loss of agricultural employment (alongside other primary productions) in connection with increasing work opportunities in urban industry. This illustrates how rural-urban connected and supplemented each other, and how a modernity discourse implemented rational reductionist solutions for universal progress: picking the world apart into cogs of a machine to work at highest efficiency through mechanisation and specialisation.

Woods (2010) highlighted that a focus on *functions* dominated the perception of rural. In turn, the rural function most important for urban progress was production and usefulness, discernible in rural studies turn to *agriculture* and *regions* contributing to this logic by positivist quantitative methods (measurements and calculations) separate from human subjects, in effect *marginalising* rural diversity (Ibid).

In other modernist thought we saw an imagined and moral rural as exemplified by Mormont (1990) in thoughts on rural moral benefits for urban workers (with perhaps the background idea of morality making the subject a better worker). Perhaps the Belgian state wished to create an embedding rural structure (existential safety net) where old traditions could find new ways, lessening the impact of dramatic new change while upholding certain directions (disregarding whether aims laid in satisfying inhabitants or improving workers, or both). In similar ways this thinking could be useful in exploring movements like the romantics, as both examples hints towards some important attribute of rural areas e.g. the *natural* as of some special properties with positive impact on man. Still, thoughts of rural as a moral and cultural world in modernist discourse lacked addressing *more than social* (Murdoch, 2003) aspects.

Through communities studies it became possible to sense an introduction of a scholarly discourse or paradigm of rural identities and cultures, as imagined and imposed by urban educated scholars, tellingly so in Mormont's (1990) phrasing that *no rural identity existed* in pre-industrial society. As such, if rural was a modernist conception used to counterbalance an urban construct it had to be justified by finding commonalities (structural functions or social laws) to establish a cohesive (urban) understanding of rural. This could be seen in theories like Tönnies (1957) *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* equipping scholars with theoretical lenses for interpreting social landscapes, while narrowing their approach. As such in creating e.g. the rural idyll, an investigation of motives could suggest that rural allure was used for encouraging hard work as means of saving up for retirement in an idealised countryside, promoting rural natural elements; in the post-war (II) boom this perhaps spurred the counter-urbanisation of wealthier urban residents.

With time industrialisation made both rural and urban space more heterogeneous, space-time decreased with transportation, communica-

tion and information becoming more available and affordable for most households. This brought concerns for the study of rural societies as identified by scholars because rigid theoretical concepts did not fit a rapidly changing world. Scholarly attention instead turned to *sociology of social change* (Mormont, 1990) by modernisation change, developing into an analysis of resistance to change, putting rural concepts and theories at risk of becoming obsolete.

The persistent modernity discourse began to blur because while striving for progress remained highly important it also carried a threat to the theoretical rural-urban dichotomy as both spaces were progressing simultaneously, progressively becoming more and more alike. Similar thinking was raised by Pahl (1965) in that rural was gaining more and more urban characteristics perhaps signifying that the dichotomy concepts had served their purpose long enough. Industrialised agriculture had ventured far from the family farm, becoming cost efficient, profit driven and joining the competitive market fuelled by capitalism, prompting the establishing of large agribusiness which brought commercial crop specialisation and landscape homogenization (Phillips, 2005).

Through this examination of *modernity* it should be clear that first, *depictions* of the rural followed a distinct *regime of truth* (Foucault, 1980) with a highly ordered and narrow gaze upholding *universality, rationality* and *objective knowledge/truths*. This shaped society, politics, function and structure with rural as part of a societal whole to be studied with reductionist methods to pinpoint specific rural functions (production and usefulness). Rural areas and inhabitants were as such depicted as one rather homogenous space and group.

Second, the *understandings* relayed by holding rural as a fixed entity and counterbalance to an equally rigid urban construct demanded commonalities (structural functions or social laws) to be found. This encouraged compartmentalised social sciences ascribing meanings and rigid concepts to the rural, while also suggesting a rural that did not exist for itself but for supporting urban development (dismissing other meanings than productiveness).

Third, *implications* of this meant those parts of rural not addressed in scholarly rural description remained neglected and unseen, in effect

creating its subjects by establishing an *abstract* homogenous rural sphere fit for theories but one that could hardly depict reality.

As such, in *modernity* the rural concept related a general and clear understanding between scholars based on accepted *truths*, yet academic reductionism and compartmentalisation created narrow constructs far removed from a daily rural world, which question its contributions.

### **Late Modernity**

In *late modernity* scholars still clung to a discourse of *structures, functions* and *divisions* (with some gradual loosening of theory), thus although rural geography was developing and recognising rural as more than agriculture, rural remained a distinct *system*. Rural space was seen as a *container* for rural events; the evolving concepts like rurality described specific rural spaces and societies but failed to explain how the characteristics found were essentially rural.

Through critique from Cloke (2006) we could speculate on biased academic tendencies selectively choosing *which, what* and *how* rural was examined and which characteristics were sought or upheld. If true then knowledge advanced upon selected concepts had furthered an elaborate yet *abstract* rural understanding. To exemplify, the entry of *rural class* studies aspired to uncover agrarian social relations by a paradigmatic determination to find class hierarchies in agriculture, found class by insisting on its existence.

The political economy discourse likewise concerned itself with modernisation of agriculture, seeing a distinct production sphere part of capitalist development, structured as an agricultural industry fuelled by capital accumulation. Its impacts shaping the local (by *regional, national* and *global* forces) while local factors also influence the production of space, enabling uneven development. The discourse followed in legacy of Marx (we could also call it a Marxist inspired paradigm) with a *regime of truth* (Foucault, 1980) that held forces of global capitalism the culprit behind it all.

Again the rural concept was discussed, its descriptive use questioned and held as misleading because scholars no longer saw one general rural, but instead different localised ruralities (or localities) reproducing different responses to external pressures. Nevertheless the rural concept could not be removed as it invoked meanings among general populations, therefore while still a poor general concept (lumping rural together with agriculture) at least it distinguished from urban.



The restructuring approach appeared alongside dramatic global changes that emphasised how *politics*, *economics* and *social* interacted within and between different *local*, *national* and *international* spaces. Through its development out of political economy some core beliefs remained with agriculture as part of capitalist production occurring in rural localities because of historical investment patterns.

The restructuring could be seen as of two efforts (Lovering, 1989). The *stronger* version was concerned mainly with capitalist endeavours, shifts and divisions of labour (inspired by Marx) but portrayed as lacking empirical evidence and highly reductionist by merely pointing towards abstract categories in relation to capitalism. Still, it managed to destabilise many solidified theories which led towards the reimagining and growth of new ideas. Its *weaker* counterpart in contrast gradually began taking localities study away from general processes towards confrontations with non-economic dimensions, becoming more subjective. (Ibid).

As such, the discourse of order was diminishing through political economy, offsetting the modernity discourse, followed by a restructuring discourse seeking to revise old theories while producing new patterns of rural understanding. Thus restructuring could also be addressed under Kuhn's (1996) description of paradigm for being *novel* in attracting and sustaining scholarly interest and followers, while also *open-ended* enough to leave problems unresolved (in both capitalism was the general problem) with exact workings left for others to work out. In continuation these were the seed that would sprout what is referred to as the *cultural turn* with post-modern and post-structuralism theories were introduced in rural studies; moving away from quantitative study towards more qualitatively interpreting cultural meanings. Moving thought away from objective truths towards more subjective experiences. Taking theory towards more open accounts inspired by multiple truths and ways to study subjects, breaking uniformly held ideas and notions of objective knowledge.

Therefore through late modernity it should be remembered that first, depictions of rural were becoming recognised as more than agriculture with a gradual opening of theory alongside rising critique on outdated theory, while still much scholarly attention remained fixating on (new) structures, functions and divisions. The rural concept was discussed

and questioned with scholars no longer talking of a general rural, but of different localised ruralities (or localities) creating different responses to external pressures. Political economy studied agricultural modernisation as part of global capitalism development impacting on rural localities. Followed by restructuring theory emphasising on reconstruction of theory according to *political, economic* and *social* interactions occurred within and between different *local, national* and *international* spaces. The *stronger* restructuring destabilised many old theories sprouting new ideas and concepts, while *weaker* restructuring began confronting non-economic dimensions, becoming subjective.

Second, this held *understandings* that much old theory was outdated, flawed or obsolete; unfit for a changing world. As such *facts* and *truths* were reconsidered in favour of more contemporary thought realigned with global events, although both political economy and restructuring remained rigid in their preoccupation with capitalism.

Third, the *implications* this often held a victimisation of rural space and inhabitants as struggling against uneven and unfair developments affecting them through global capitalism or rural class hierarchies.

As such, in *late modernity* scholars turned their attention to how contemporary politics and economics affected rural, instead of redefining or evolving the rural concept. Therefore any generally shared understanding among scholars on rural was if anything that of *victim*. Yet, those scholars who asserted that rural localities should be studied as distinctly different in organisation and outcome helped turn rural theory towards subjective experiences of different ruralities.

## **Postmodernity**

The entry of postmodern thought delivered a discursive break or paradigmatic shift with scholars dramatically readdressing theories of modernity to think outside of dualities and singular truths, yet as we have seen this *break* also gradually built up through *late modernity*. They saw the resulting confusion of local that an overt focus on global processes had, and urged for turning from universal to local which in the process would dissolve many fixed ideas.

Perhaps we should not say that a unified postmodern discourse appeared but if we mean discourse as *a way of understanding* the world then a *general postmodern discourse* and its “*regime of truth*” (Foucault, 1980) would hold a critical approach to knowledge, without objective truths, with knowledge as a product of social processes and

interaction. It dawned that discourses had to remain active processes, subject to change. If we prefer to call it a postmodern paradigm, we could state that postmodern scholars agreed on *there being no rule-book* since nothing remained stable, furthering a progressively reflexive attention. It seems fairer to say that instead of postmodern scholars, we accept scholars as of varying degrees of postmodern application, removing us from modernist notions of ordered positions of thoughts and things. Likewise postmodernity discarded grand narratives and essences of theory as overtly focused theories failed to see *rural* for all reductionist approaches, their specialised parts could never be assembled into a whole picture.

The metatheoretical aspect of postmodern theory (Ritzer et al., 2001) highlighted the use of postmodern thought to re-examine *societal* implications of previous theories. For example Foucault's postmodern analysis saw the societies around him as informed by "the 'political economy' of truth ... centred on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it ... subject to constant economic and political incitement ... produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political and economic apparatuses (university, army, writing, media)" (1980:131). Similar analysis could unmask rural *truths* of certain *eras* as distinctly different, with rural defined and fixated by power-institutions as an *effect*. Attention to specific concepts during certain times could clarify how concepts trickled out and affected society. Latour (1986) called it the *performative definition* of power, the *powerful* has the ability to define or redefine what essentially *holds* people together. In so, claims that rural areas revolve around farming, *makes* them revolve around farming. Thus postmodern scholars understood that when rural was understood as only agriculture those ideas came to effect policies with subsequent help for rural areas carried out by financial benefits for agriculture (furthering agriculturally focused networks) but failing to address the *whole* rural. This furthered differentiation of who the *real* rural person was (along with differentiations of financial benefits) producing tangible impacts on rural populations and demography. Likewise postmodern studies today should examine new keywords or concepts for rural *strategies* of contemporary policies, as strategies will not attract everyone but could potentially discourage or marginalise people who does not want to (or cannot) partake or do not feel in-

cluded. As such *constitutive power of theory* (Ibid) become realised, with theory a discursive act of power with seen and unforeseen effects; stressing the importance of postmodern study in how theories need to be reassessed and shaped according to world changes.

The extended study of localities, Massey (1991) and others, saw localities created by certain mixes of social relationships, acknowledging that place contain multiple meanings and identities. This allowed for understanding space as subjective, becoming meaningful through people traversing the space who establish relationships through which place is experienced. Still postmodern application had to *go further*, as attempts to discerning individual meaning of place require an understanding of subjective life trajectories, as essentially conceptions of space also depend on individual *stage* and *experiences of life* and respectively for the place of meeting and stages of people there. For example the difference of being a student *or* senior citizen in one place, or a solitary elderly or grandparent in close proximity to a grandchild impacts on experience of place. For this reason Philo's (1992) call to acknowledge and understand *rural others* and *hidden geographies*, such as elderly, youth, gender and different sexualities, was importance for rural studies because it reinforced that scholarly gaze had to realign and opened up to different rural groups.

This opened up for a scholarly paradigm (partially inherited from *weaker* restructuring) recognising ruralities as socially constructed and thus social relations necessary to understand. It also opened up for emotional aspects acknowledging the importance of feelings, of belonging or not. If rurality centred on the *embedded* and *embodied* life of rural dwellers, then community- and monographic approaches in postmodern format were useful without preconceived ideas about findings to restraining scholars and subjects. While some ruralities shared common denominators others would be far apart, some socially *inspired* local cultures others socially *restricting* due to e.g. limiting political or economic strategies (e.g. social impacts of closing the local school). Therefore ruralities (localities) was a useful concept for illustrating differences, while a concrete mapping of ruralities remain impossible as they are continually subjected to *social, political, economic* and *natural* change. As Mormont (1990) put it there exists no *particular unifying condition* or a *specific social category* of the rural.

As relationships between identity and space changed towards belonging to *multiple-localities*, individual identity moved to how one realised aspects of identity across a spectrum of spaces. This realisation clarified that one express both rural and urban identity through navigating daily life; these are therefore not whole identities but aspects of identities fitting the logic of a specific social space.

Murdoch and Pratt (1993) argued for fundamental reconsiderations of rural in their *Post-rural* approach by placing attention on *moments* of change or decisions in the creation and maintenance of specific spaces. Realising rural as both *practised* and *selectively organised* by individuals and collectives, continuously generating new social relationships. Thus rural was practiced in many ways and without spatial limitations, the reason why found predominantly in countryside space remain an *effect* of choices, action and policies as well as being where we tend to look for it. Their *Post-rural* highlighted the reflexive nature away from modernist rural *marginalisation* calling for reconceptualization of place experiences, holding different rurals as merely different outcomes of practices.

The Postmodern discourse *regimes of truth* (Foucault, 1980) could thus be thought of as the ever expansion of *reflexivity*, the more we *know* the more we need to *understand*.

Through this examination of *postmodernity* it should be remembered that first, *depictions* of rural shifted as scholars dramatically re-addressed theories of modernity critically approaching knowledge as a product of social processes and interaction, going beyond dualities, objective truths while turning from universal (general) to local (specific). It dawned that scholarly discourses were active processes subject to change, which required a discard of grand narratives and theoretical essences to further progressively reflexive attention.

Second, this relayed *understandings* similar to Murdoch and Pratt's (1993) *post-rural* understanding of rural as *practised* and *selectively organised* by individuals and collectives, forever creating new social relationships illustrating a *multiple* rural without spatial limitations calling for reconceptualization of place experiences. Massey's (1991) take on localities as socially constructed by certain mixes of social relationships with place containing multiple meanings and identities. This recognised space as subjective, given meaning by people in spac-

es who establish relationships through which place is experienced. Combined with Philo's (1992) call for *rural others* and *hidden geographies*, reinforced that rural study had to view neglected rural groups.

Third, the *implications* of these thoughts on rural spaces and inhabitants foremost recognised ruralities as socially constructed which required understanding of social relations. Postmodern theory brought a meta-theoretical aspect useful for re-examining *societal* implications of theory; such analysis could unmask rural *truths* of certain *eras* as *effects* introduced by timely powerful institutions. Scholars understood that a fixed understanding of rural influenced policies which *furthered* and *enabled* that same fixed rural, producing real life impacts.

As such, in *Postmodernity* the *general* concept rural was discontinued in favour of the *specific* ruralities concept illustrating differences, continually subjected to *social, political, economic* and *natural* change. It centred the embodied life of rural dwellers, making monographic approaches in postmodern format (without preconceived ideas) resourceful again as there may be commonly shared denominators between ruralities, while some remain socially *inspired* local cultures others socially *restricting*. This enabled the comparison of different ruralities, but a rural concept itself does not contain intellectual *truths*.

## **Relational rural**

*Relational rural* made a subchapter *era* because of the theoretical implications it held, radically readjusting our academic lenses. It could be seen as an additional track of postmodern discourse but perhaps better yet positioned as a discursive break because it put relations as focal point. We could also term this a relational paradigm, continually building upon previous relational accounts. Its underpinnings being the rejection of place and space as fixed entities, instead seeing them as dynamic and contingent, continually changing and fixating; space as made by relations therein.

As Bell et al. (2010) argued for recognition of the *active rural voice* and active part of *stability* just like mobility, our thinking took another turn. Especially for a rural that has spent so long on the marginal portrayed as a *passive* victim opposite to its *active* urban counterpart, a passivity stemming from scholarly use of either *materialist-* or *idealist* conceptions of rural. According to Bell (2007) these binaries should be tied together in a *rural plural* mix as conceptions that *evolve, inter-change* and *influence* each other. This sum up much rural studies of

modernity: an overt focus on *one main aspect* whether it be *idyllic* notions of rural (as fostering high moral), or *materially* focus on agricultural industrialisation seeing rural as a coherent and distinct system focused on land-use productivity. The *rural plurals* entanglement, illustrate how *idealist* notions reshape according to *materialist* realities, with new *materialist* realities leading to new *idealistic* notions, rural always *active* and changing (Ibid).

In defining *rural power* (Bell et al., 2010) as rural material (food produce, water, energy and minerals) power became mobile with rural materials everywhere and an important part of daily life for all. Likewise *power of the rural* or rural appeal could be found everywhere, in the allure of the wild in imagery and writings, or the authenticity placed on local food labels or farmer's markets, transcending any rural boundaries. Similarly rural voters (*material*) in small areas termed *rural constituencies* have influence on rural politics, but also *constituencies of the rural* as in groups external to rural areas but whose interest (*ideal*) lies with rural interest can affect. This illustrated a rural continuously in movement, *materially* and *ideally*, but also how rural is an evidently large part of the complexity of daily life: everything *both* rural and urban. This correspond to what Foucault (1980) said about discourse as not limited to written or spoken words, but also found in images, actuation, thinking and practices.

This relational approach seemed to almost naturally evolve and open up towards accepting hybrid theory with its wider approach that saw relations between humans and non-humans. This moved scholars away from initial social constructivist focus of relational thinking towards collapsing the nature and society dualism by granting *equal* importance to all entities forming the networks that makes up rurality.

The inception of *hybridity* provided a possibility to dismantle the separation of social- and natural sciences perspectives in rural studies. The *natural* perspective contested and dismissed the social idea of countryside as a social construction because of its lacking accounts of natural entities; while *social* perspectives held that social impact on the natural world could not be neglected or removed, in *hybridity* rural countryside could be understood as *more than social* and *less than natural* (Murdoch, 2003) and dependent on both worlds.

Latour's (1993) infusion placed us in a modern world founded on hybridity, although our focus on dualities and binaries had hid the role

of hybrids, creating a *missing middle ground* or *hybrid centre ground*. The hybrid discourse understood rural as made up of multiple divergent entities, intermixed in numerous combinations; therefore its complex and heterogeneous spatial form could not be understood through one single vantage point. Hybrid spaces continuously branched off into new networks of relations and multitudes of social-material formations, acknowledging multiple shapes of networks and forms of spatiality. In order to study its complexity Actor Network Theory ascribed the same status of both human and non-human entities in shaping any network. In this discourse rural understanding become enriched when conceived as a hybrid network made up of hybrid relations e.g.: agricultural production equally reliant on farmer *and* machines; tourism dependant on visitors *and* natural scenery or wildlife; fisheries depend on fishermen *and* boats *and* fish. The actor entities and networks including: animals; environments; infrastructure; farming practices; disease control; political- and economic policies with novel combination of actors, creating new hybrid networks spawning new actors. Societies and environments thus seen as complexly interrelated only understood together as a socio-natural complexity, activated and mobilised in networks. These functioned through: *regions, networks* and *fluids* (Murdoch, 2003), *region* known through maps; *network* interlinked entities in space-time coordinates based on importance of network elements rather than proximity; *fluids* loose and unstable network relations. Nothing remains static, which begs the question why scholars would maintain theories established while rural was seen as a static field.

This complex discourse view of rural as a hybrid network dependent on and in constant flux allows for a *dynamic* view, showing rural studies as far from stagnant and morbid (unlike the old passing reference of rural life), with rural instead an *active* and exciting arena of networks, of differences and resemblances but never the same. Our contemporary world dependant on *both* rural- and urban worlds as thought in modernity, although differentiation of the two questionable. Both exist through constant renegotiation between actors in networks that are neither rural nor urban but *both* which connect to Gee (1999) in that we are all members of many different discourses and likewise shaped by discourses as actors moving through spaces of relational networks and altering those same networks by our presence.



For Foucault (1980) discourses generated *subjects* and *objects*, neither independent units but a medium for a specific social culture, thus we see the *creative* force of discourse; add Massey's (1991) multiple meanings of place constructed through multiple social relations therein for a *multi-spatial* discourses, or discourse tuned according to its spatial context; in combination with Latour's (1993) hybrid *missing middle ground* we see both human and non-human entities impacting on space, place and relations, implicitly so also on discourse formation with discourse becoming place/space specific according to hybrid network constellations therein. To uphold one rural discourse becomes impossible, with *scholarly* rural discourses as different between institutions as *societal* rural discourses differ between rural spaces.

After this examination of *relational rural* it should be remembered that first, *depictions* of the rural held relations as focal point with its foundation in rejection of place and space as fixed, understanding them instead as *dynamic*, constantly changing and fixating, made up of relations therein. The approach opened up for hybrid theory seeing relations between humans and non-humans in various network configurations, moving rural studies away from social constructivism while collapsing the nature-society dualism by ascribing *equal* importance to all entities forming rural networks, merging social- and natural sciences perspectives. Bell et al. (2010) argued for recognising an *active rural voice* and active part of *stability* just like mobility, away from depictions of a *passive* rural spurred by single use of either *materialist-* or *idealist* conceptions. Arguing for a *rural plural* mix where conceptions tie together, *evolving*, *interchanging* and *influencing* each other in an ever *active* and changing rural (Ibid). Through depictions of rural *powers* they also illustrated an *active* and *vital* part of contemporary society continuously in movement, *materially* and *ideally*.

Second, hybrid *understandings* of rural saw a network built up of many different entities in numerous combinations, a complex and heterogeneous spatial form where hybrid spaces continuously branched off into new networks of relations and social-material formations, recognising multiple shapes of networks and forms of spatiality. This portrayed distinctive hybrid networks in constant flux, with our contemporary world dependent on rural- and urban spheres in constant renegotiation, neither rural nor urban but *both*.

Third, the *implications* of relational and hybrid theory led scholars to understand how relationships between human and non-human entities impact on *space, place* and *relations* according to network constellations therein. This implied that societies and environments exist as an interrelated socio-natural complexity activated and mobilised in networks: the rural *more than social* and *less than natural* (Murdoch, 2003). Therefore each rurality has to be understood through place-specific relationship networks rather than broad theories.

As such, any rural concept in *Relational rural* could only be used in *place-, time-* and *network-specific* ways. Making universal definitions impossible as societies and environments remain a socio-natural complexity (activated and mobilised in networks) any rural concepts may therefor only relay difference and resemblance between ruralities.

## Conclusion

It remains important to understand that throughout turbulent times of change social scientific thought have been actively entwined, just as ways of industrialisation of both rural and urban areas were employed by scientific thought of the time, with natural scientific thought reinforcing thinking of boundaries, functions and progression, postponing the question of *thinking outside the box*. Our pitfall, upon revisiting literature lies in that we might accept the straight lines, while reality is anything but straight lines.

The rural concept was a modernist impulse of assigning order to an unordered pre-modern countryside. The conceptualisations of rural space suffered from limiting misconceptions since its beginnings.

Relational thinking have become a vital readjustment of scholarly theoretical lenses through which the rural becomes built up through and around relations we *create, enter* and *leave*, affecting not only the *social* but also our spatial experience. In turn, we cannot use general and static expression, for something we understand as fluid and changing, always.

This relational thinking joint with hybrid theory, combining *social* and *natural* have opened up a much more complex world for us to study, of everything built up through networks, everything *human* and *non-human* forming connections explicit to spatial locations and dependent on the actors therein.

If these lenses are used for rural studies, it enables a move away from universal concepts like rural and urban by seeing that each locality (or rurality) is made up through its own workings, and while it may to some extent be informed by general processes (that we may contextualise as rural or urban) these become but one of many influences that contribute to our understanding of that rurality.

Rurality studies further the understanding that panacea solutions to solve economic pressures in rural areas, such as branding or making place a commodity may do more harm than good in certain places, exhausting the locally produced culture that has developed. While sometimes, for some ruralities, new ideas of developments may be useful, like giving voice to neglected few, as change can be both good and bad, the same goes for tradition. Clinging to *rural* or *ruralities* might make us unintentionally focus or see certain aspects we have been led to know are often present. Ideas are powerful.

It has been my intention that this thesis would provide a broader view of the *thought eras* I have depicted in order to give the reader something to lean on and use in developing his or her own understanding, a map of sorts so that we can know where we are by retracing our steps. Initially I thought to trace an evolving rural concept, but it dawned that there was never a *one* concept to follow.

In *modernity* conceptualisations were used to give order and to create a binary opposite to the ordered urban, creating a homogenous and rather narrow textual rural construct. In *late modernity* the concept remained clung to structures, functions and division while loosening through ideas of there being many ruralities instead of one general sphere of uniformly held configurations. In continuation *postmodernity* furthered progressive reflexive attention, discarding grand narratives and theoretical essences going beyond the rural – urban dichotomy. Ruralities being seen as *practised selectively organised* and *made meaningful* by individuals and collectives, creating multiple place-specific ruralities. Ultimately in *relational* thought rural became even more *dynamic* giving equal importance to all *human* and *non-human* entities forming *rural networks*, activated through daily practices and constantly changing, making universal definitions impossible. Rural have thus gone from a clear and uniform concept towards understanding ruralities as always different and therefore perhaps only suffice as a directional pointer for where to look.

To answer the main research question of whether or not the concept *rural* imply a generally similar or clear understanding, so that scholars understand what other scholars have meant when they have used the term I believe require a general understanding of *timely* and *spatially* influenced discourse(s) surrounding the author(s) and production of written material. If one does so, I believe the concept may be instruc-

tive in the sense of pointing towards one way to start. Yet seeing how many different meanings *rural* may imply, to take the concept out of different *eras* and expect to find congruency will only create misunderstanding: not only are they not depicting the same space *historically* but they also remain *conceptually* different, thus not compatible *unless* this is taken into consideration alongside understanding the influence of *truths* of the times. An accurate all-encompassing rural definition cannot be found, and should not a focus for rural studies.

The rural concept is not a sufficient explanatory term, but a general indication of what we talk about, due to infused *temporal*, *spatial* or *societal meanings* accumulating over time. The rural carries multiple meanings and does not depict either spatial or temporal imagery but perhaps *both* and *more*.

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