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BOOK REVIEWS

Holloway, L. and Kneafsey, M. (eds.)

Geographies of Rural Cultures and Societies: Perspectives on Rural Policy and Planning

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, 326 pp., £ 49.95.

At the beginning of the 21st century Culture Geography was not a discipline on its own, being a subject matter for urban and rural studies as well. The book *Geographies of Rural Cultures and Societies* is based on articles given at the “Progress in Rural Geography: Towards 21st century Geographies of Rurality” Conference (held in Coventry University, July 2001) and provides an excellent example for this tendency. The book deals with “cultural turn” in rural studies, a matter that is not commonly used in this discipline.

“Cultural turn” describes developments in cultural studies; it describes a shift in emphasis towards a view that, in rural studies, has mainly been associated with “a shift from a concern with the material world toward an interest in the immaterial dimensions of social life” (introduction, p. 1). The impact of the “cultural turn” on rurality is part of the new image of rurality (rural as idyllic, as a tourist attraction, as a cultural phenomenon or a lifestyle which reflects quality of life) and of the diversity of interests in rural areas – their economy and cultural resources.

The book is divided into four parts. Part one, *Thinking Ruralities*, includes four articles; all of them trying to define rurality in the light of the “cultural turn”. The first deals with Jean Baudrillard's metaphorical terms to describe rurality – obesity and pornography. The second article concerns the narrative style of rural studies. The third article (Chapter 4) deals with the issue of how academic researchers have implicitly or explicitly conceptualized power in their studies of rural communities. The final article in this section focuses on methodological issues. It analyzes three case studies: a study from Denmark, Senegal and Egypt, each. Its purpose is to show that many of the issues and dilemmas which derived from the “cultural turn” widen the gap between research in the developing and developed countries.

The second part of the book, *Rural Societies: Inclusions and Exclusions*, contains three articles, all of them dealing with the political and social processes characterizing the rural space. The first (Chapter 6) analyzes various forms of rural protest (in the UK and France). By analyzing three case studies the researcher emphasizes the rural power relations and the power of the rural environment to encourage its population for such protest.

The second article deals with rural lone parents. In contrast, the image of rurality was associated for years with the model of the nuclear family – two parents and heterosexual. This article is another example of the “cultural turn” which is the main issue of this book. Chapter 8 discusses the image of rural space as a crime-free space. It is another example of viewing rurality as a socially contested environment – a discussion which was raised by other researches in this book. For years rural policy was recognized different than urban policy; according to this research the “tranquil rural area” is only an illusion.

Part three – *Community and Governance* deals with ideas of community and the role of the rural community in the definition and management of the rural space. The first article in

this part (Chapter 9) describes relationships between the community members, local institutions and the state. Chapter 10 describes a specific case of partnership led in a historical site which became a tourist attraction in Ireland. It emphasizes the role of rural development initiatives in re-imagining the rural areas. The final article in this part presents participation among individuals, representing different groups and interests, in relation to rural environmental protection. The final part of the book focuses on Cultures, Farming and Food. The three articles present the importance of continuity for stabilizing the nature of rural space and its society. In Chapter 12 the researcher discusses the relevance of the subject matter of this book – the “cultural turn” – for studies of agriculture. Emphasis is on the importance of rural cultural studies for a better understanding of the rural social life. In Chapter 13 the editors of the book, Lewis Holloway and Moya Kneafsey, examine the different ways in which notions of “closeness” between food producers, consumers and food, are established in four different sets of “alternative” food relationships. The final article (Chapter 14) describes a new dimension of agricultural identity amongst young farmers in Ireland. The researcher illustrates the importance of masculinized farming identities among young men who chose to stay in agriculture.

Over the last 25 years – especially in the light of the “cultural turn” in the social studies, key questions have been asked about the significance of culture – its meanings and influences – at various degrees of rurality. This book offers an insight into research on rural culture, and in so doing it provides a perspective on the broader subject of how culture has become increasingly important in general rural studies. Re-reading the book, I find its four parts more theoretical than practical. As such it is bound to attract a wide range of readers including researchers, policy makers, planners, managers, investors, farmers and all those connected, directly or indirectly, with the new image of rurality.

Irit Amit-Cohen
Bar-Ilan University
Ramat-Gan, Israel

Labriandis, L. (ed.)

The Future of Europe's Rural Peripheries

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, 334 pp., £ 49.95.

The collection of studies in this volume is quite unique. In an era of continuously declining agriculture in Europe and a process of depopulation of the peripheries through urbanization, there is an air of intellectual freshness in the detailed empirical treatment of rural areas and peripheries covered by the present volume. It reports of an ambitious inter-European survey on ten C.S.A.s (Case Study Areas), in five European countries.

The countries were selected carefully, giving representation to the developed North (Germany and the United Kingdom), to the relatively less developed South (Greece and Portugal) and to the largest ex-communist emerging country (Poland).

Within each country two C.S.A.s were selected, from two distinctly different environments, reflecting different sets of circumstances and problems, all typical and characteristic to the countries in the sample.

The major issue upon which the contributors focused their attention is the set of requirements necessary to activate entrepreneurial initiatives in areas which are poor in such initiatives. All C.S.A.s selected for this research are situated in both rural and peripheral regions. Consequently, the central issue is, as suggested by two of the foremost contributors to

this book, D. North and D. Smallbone, to conceive appropriate “policies to foster enterprise in rural peripheral areas” (pp. 137-155).

The two fundamental circumstances of all ten C.S.A.s are Rurality and Peripherality. However, there are quite conspicuous differences in the social and environmental circumstances as well as the economic settings between the countries in the North, (Germany and England) those in the South (Greece and Portugal) and the emerging ex-communist country (Poland). Obviously, since the actual studies reported in the book were taken from regional samples, each of which reflects rather specific regional problems, the inter-country distinctions show degrees of differences rather than clear cut divides. As expected, the differences we refer to, are the “expression of the interplay of factors of regional, national and international scope” (L. Labrianidis, p. 299).

Nevertheless and in spite of the overall common characteristics of the ten surveyed C.S.A.s, the micro-regional features in each country are eventually a mirror of the socio-economic and historic heritage of the countries in which each C.S.A. is located.

This observation is significant as, despite of the mutually shared Rurality and Peripherality, and despite the fact that only rural and peripheral samples were selected and all countries experience heavy urbanization and globalization, the national characteristics seem still dominant in each C.S.A. Take for instance the level of education, one of the critical variables to predict the human capital factor for expected entrepreneurship. The German C.S.A.s are far ahead of the rest, “with 81.5% of the respondents in Waldshut and 87% Nordwest-Mecklenburg (the two German C.S.A.s) having at least a technical or university degree.” (p. 206) Or at the other end of the spectrum, in Portugal, less than 20% and 18% of the population in the two C.S.A.s had more than 9 years of elementary education (p. 253).

If, as sought by the authors of the volume, entrepreneurship is the dependent variable, “a multiplicity of entrepreneurial processes” are “at work; some of which are locally specific, whilst others appear in more than in a national context” (Labrianidis, p. 299).

Another factor to influence entrepreneurship in the various C.S.A.s is in-migration. The reasons are obvious. Rural and peripheral areas, in general, suffer from population loss through emigration, of particularly the young and the more energetic segments of the local population. This finding is strongly corroborated by the C.S.A.s in Greece “In the study areas of Greece, for example, local entrepreneurs are typically very conservative and risk averse. Moreover, they are often not well educated, usually older than the average population”. (p. 152) Therefore, “The population survey has shown that in-migrants are an important source of entrepreneurs in some rural areas”. This is particularly true in the English C.S.A.s, which are perceived as being environmentally attractive. In the German C.S.A. Nordwestmecklenburg “...the main body of entrepreneurs (58%) are in-migrant to the region” (p. 209). Consequently, in-migration to the rural periphery contributes to both populations, human capital and hospitality to innovations.

The book, as mentioned, is a collection of 13 studies, 7 of which are of a more general character, while 6 review in some details the ten C.S.A.s, more or less in a similar fashion.

The book is a rather refreshing intellectual experience on a presently critical topic in the European socio-economic development, when the dangers of urban sprawl in the metropolitan regions on one hand and demographic shrinkage in the peripheries on the other, are undermining the environmental balance of the countries of the European Union.

Yehuda Don
Bar-Ilan University
Ramat-Gan, Israel

Leimgruber, W.

Between Global and Local – Marginality and Marginal Regions in the Context of Globalization and Deregulation

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004, 338 pp., £ 40.00.

The author – a geographic researcher coming from the studies on borders, namely, marginal regions – offers us a very wide, deep, enlightening and systematic analysis of marginality in the context of the globalization process. He does it under the impact of the events of September 11th, a fact that no doubt has had some influences on the positions expressed in the book.

Marginality – a condition of an area or people laying out of the central processes of a given system – is presented here not only *vis-à-vis* centrality but also as distinct from peripherality – an area or people in dynamics and a vivid un-equilibrated relation with the center. Marginal regions really stand at the edge of a system or even outside it.

Selecting one out of the varied approaches to marginality, the author prefers the subjective criteria – defined by the perceptions of the marginalized people – a path that skips through the problematic of the definition's parameters but takes us to a veiled relativistic perspective. This perspective enables the author to include and to link with marginality cultural and spiritual aspects (out of the scientific sphere), but contradicts the clear and declared defined position of the author who advocates a democratic and participative effort of the Governments, NGO's and International and other Institutions in developing marginalized areas and people. An open-minded insight is presented later in the book, when Leimgruber refers very positively to them and their impact, but determines clearly their elitist characteristic. This relativism or contradiction is implicit, when he discusses at the same level the marginal situation of regions in Switzerland and the marginality of the poorest people in Africa.

The author sets the frame of the book by discussing the meaning of marginality and globalization, the last spurring the expansion of the first. He puts little emphasis on deregulation, although his analysis of deregulation as a re-regulation by new institutions is presented convincingly and specially their implications on the development of uneven conditions for the people. As is commonly known, globalization increases the gap between the "winners" and the marginalized. It is worthwhile to point out the analytic comments of the author about the accepted assumption that bottom-up planning effectively reduces marginality. Yet, at the same time, he adds that a different and perhaps contrary tendency was obvious which deepened our dependency upon professional planners and managers, *i.e.* the technocrats. It is easy to show it in the example of the efforts by the European Union to improve the situation in its geographically marginal and peripheral areas. This effort has resulted in the strengthening of the supranational level and in the need for experts and services, which further contributed to the appearance of a centralization and top-down trend, which is contrary to the previously prioritized local and territorial aspects, as argued by the author.

The mixing in the book of different kinds of perspectives deems the methodical and scientific presentation of the theme. Leimgruber intends to go much more ahead – or behind – the science, attempting to reach the "invisible background that guides human thinking and decisions", in the author's words. It refers to supernatural, metaphysical and religious factors, and without analyzing here the substance of his problematic arguments, it is clear that all these different aspects of the theme are interfering with the solidity of the author's construct throughout the book and weaken the scientific analysis of marginality. The important theme of the values could be discussable as a background of the theme, but the central place it takes

and the unscientific points of reference prevent it from being effectively incorporated into the debate.

The globalization impacts the position of areas in the continuum between center-margin and the author shows this analyzing the local-global play in varied contexts. An example is the status of an area in England that changed because global conditions changed. But he shows also the possibility the people have to influence historical processes through the example of the bottom-up defense of the environment by the Swiss people.

The book develops step by step the concept of marginality in spatial and time dimensions; all these from the point of view of economics, sociology, politics, psychology, culture, society, development, agriculture, environment and also as a “state of mind” (a subjective fact). Here it is possible to see the contact with the terrorist’s events, an expression of the growing rift between North and South. The refugee camps are marginal regions within marginalized countries in the marginal world, a consequence of the unbounded market liberalism, the anti-globalization movement is fighting against. Here, as in other parts of the book, the author’s political position is discernible when he refers to Israel as Palestine or when he avoids to consider the Israeli kibbutz as an example of utopian/social experiment whilst many less important cases are presented.

Leimgruber uses correctly Beck’s (2000) definitions of *Globalism*, *Globality* and *Globalization*, the last becoming a Western lifestyle and form of civilization. He presents clearly his position against the neo-liberal thinking. Nevertheless, he presents the “positive side” of globalization as fighting against corruption, humanitarian aid, human-right campaigns, etc. (All of them European – liberal/catholic/individualistic aims and values).

Of certain interest is the analysis of New Public Management, concerning governments in a time of transformation from monopoly to “the market”, becoming agents among others (technocratic management of state-agencies) and provoking remote areas to pay the price of this “development”. So, in such regions in the last 50 years the urgency arose of state intervention, as an effect of privatization on unemployment and marginalization.

Also Important, is the analysis of the different perspectives of and approaches to development and its place as part of a historical process, with emphasis on the characteristics and conditions impelling the state intervention.

Amongst the critical questions we can ask while reading the book, there is one that arises when the author clearly determines that “This book looks at marginality from a wide angle, irrespective of the definition of the term” (p.46). If this is the respect the author concedes to the term, why are we then required to learn and discuss so much about approaches, definitions and distinctions between concepts. In any case the author does not respect those analytical insights. After the intense analysis of distinctions, these comprise indistinctly the marginality of people, areas, environment, culture and spirit. Not only is the varied range of fields extremely confusing, but also the fact that in each of them the author is overlapping marginality and peripherality, defining some kind of the last – “angle-mort” periphery – as identical to the definition of marginality.

The book also contains some other confusing – or not clear enough – points as the use of the concept “marginal” for people that we read how they influence their collectivity in a large pace; or the argument that “Opening up perspectives is thus the positive side of marginality”, but at the same time this is defined as not able to influence the system, or to develop through the interaction with the center. So, the “new” perspectives of development of the marginal areas remain to stand “out of the system”, as a local solution for the survival without disturb-

ing the center, or the system.

The erudite analysis of different kind of marginality is one of the more equilibrated parts of this un-equilibrated book, with its analysis of geometric marginality (in essence, periphery), the dynamic dimension, the social aspects, the state's role, the rural-urban poles not as opposite but as a continuum in interaction and an overlapping between each of them.

The same cannot be said about the author's calling for integration between science (presented as the western/colonial world-view) and religion or the accepting of invisible forces (related to God), as the way to return to a balanced interaction with the ecosystem.

The economic perspective is presented seriously and critically, but with very different kind of examples. These span from the macro level of the entire world, through the continental gap, the disparity within countries through the case of Switzerland or the analysis of border regions, passing to the micro level with the marginalization in political systems until the marginalization of the environment. At each level we find the Core-Marginal or Rich-Poor divide. I can illustrate the structure of this part of the discussion through the citation of the themes under the debate on Social Marginality. It includes *Ethnicity* (The Aborigines in Australia, the Roma [Gypsies] in Europe, Immigrants-refugees-asylum seekers); *Poverty* (monetary, spiritually, and the duality of the poverty concepts: absolute – relative; material – immaterial; temporary – permanent; voluntary – involuntary; objective – subjective; primary – secondary); poverty in the cities; rural poverty; working poor, as a new face of poverty; *Language* (marginalization of minority languages) and *Religion* (Church as a power system) and the influence of globalization in the diffusion of spirituality.

The uneven aspect I refer to is the varied type of the cases analyzed, taken part of them from real life, part from the declarative "reality", part from the ethic view (means in the eyes of the scientist).

In the chapter on Policy Responses to Marginality, the author presents critically the common top-down perspective of the policy-makers and describes sympathetically specific intents of bottom-up planning, as the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). The calling for state intervention is focusing not on an overall implementation, but as guiding principles with national, regional or local implementation, taking account of the cultural diversity of people and communities. The national state is considered a European import to Africa, when the human development remains yet to take place at the local and families level. So, the regional disparities demand regional policies. Demarginalization in the rural area demands regional or central government policies to reduce it, because normally the rural area lacks the resources to compete with the central or urban ones. Bottom-up or top-down motives are possible, but the population must be taken into account, though if it may demand a long process. The way is not clear, as we can understand from the data that although the EU has implanted a policy of assistance to the more marginal areas, the fact is that from 1995 to 2000 the rate of disparity has not changed at all.

The way the book proposes is the interplay between public and private actors, allowing the state to show a concern for a balanced society. It is in its interest to avoid extreme disparities, and regional policy is an adequate tool. The private sector, for its part, must agree to this form of regulation, even if it may run contrary to its objectives of free markets and optimal profits. After all, the political system is a buffer between the population and the economy, each side striving for some sort of legitimacy. So, total deregulation is not possible. But, asks the author, what is the limit? What can the people themselves do to escape marginalization? The answer that true demarginalization (*i.e.*, leveling out disparities and escape from a hope-

less situation) can only be achieved if the people concerned can participate in designing the goals to be reached and the instruments to be applied. In this vein the analysis of the global action takes the author to believe that there is room for personal initiatives for the starting of grassroots movements. "The marginal are not powerless, as long as they believe in their own strength and potential", he says optimistically, concluding: "For a region and his inhabitants, to become marginal may also be a chance to develop new energy and overcome the dissatisfaction with the current situation. What, however, must be countered is the exploitation of a marginal situation by the powerful".

Despite the intensive and illuminating discussion the author develops all along the book on this distinction, he does not succeed in clarifying the concepts emerging from the conceptual definitions and referring to a typology of categories and examples. But, after all, this point is not an important one in the wide range of themes the book deals with; despite its focused title.

Another critical weak point of the book is the subtle influence of the European mind of the author in spite of his clearly emphatic position about the non-European peoples. This is easy to see in his top-bottom tone about the bottom-up cause, or in his inference that a local self-reliance approach in local communities in Sweden was effective, but not so in India, where they still lack modernity and large scale development strategies.

Menachem Topel
Yad Tabenkin, Israel

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Please address correspondence to the Hon. Secretary & Treasurer, The Indian Society of Agricultural Economics, 46-48, Esplanade Mansions, M.G. Road, Fort, Mumbai-400 001, India

Telephone: 022-22842542 Fax: 091-022-22838790 e-mail: isae@bom7.vsnl.net.in