

Book review

Local Economy

2014, Vol. 29(3) 267–270

© The Author(s) 2014

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0269094214531166

lec.sagepub.com

Green GP (ed.) *Handbook of Rural Development*, Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, 2013; xix + 358 pp: ISBN 9781781006702, £130 (hbk)

Reviewed by: Tony Jackson, University of Dundee, UK

The editor, a sociologist, has assembled a multi-disciplinary group of contributors from American universities, mainly drawn from the Midwest, to produce a handbook which the publisher's blurb suggests will be indispensable not just to academics and their students but also to policy-makers and practitioners. Neither the brief preface nor the editor's co-authored initial chapter on rural development theory provides much insight into the analytical framework drawing together the 16 contributions. These are grouped into three sections, starting with rural development concepts and theories, followed by common themes and issues, and ending with regional trends and outlooks.

The contributors appear to have been asked to identify the main topics driving academic research within their subject remit and to provide succinct surveys of the relevant academic literature. This task is slightly spoilt for the assiduous reader by inadequate proof-reading allowing several chapters to quote sources absent from their list of references. Despite some efforts to consider other parts of the world, the main focus of the contributions relates to developed nations and in particular to North America. So this volume offers an insight into the current preoccupations of

academics drawn from such a background of rural development studies.

Thomas Johnson, writing about rural policy, provides the clearest oversight for the handbook. He draws attention to the efforts made by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in recent years to redirect rural policy from excessive concern with sectoral policies favouring the natural resource base (which may often benefit distant corporate interests rather than local residents) towards spatial policies of direct value to rural communities. In referring to the OECD's New Rural Paradigm, which emphasises the need to address the institutional 'idiosyncrasies' that pervade most rural regions, he observes that:

few rural and agricultural policy analysts today would argue, as many did in the past, that good farm policy was good rural policy...sectoral policies can no longer solve the problems faced by rural regions...place-based policies are called for. (pp. 45–46)

Johnson's ensuing emphasis on the need for investment in infrastructure and human capital to reduce social exclusion and boost wealth creation in rural communities provides a firm basis for policy-makers and practitioners to draw some pertinent conclusions, which they would struggle to do in reading the preceding chapter on globalisation. Here the author relates the evolution of various sociological constructs underpinning this concept, offering in the

process few linkages to their relevance for rural development. The first section is rounded off by a chapter on grassroots rural development, suggesting the movement is a reaction against top-down staples-driven activities.

The thematic section starts with Richard Stedman considering the impact of resource dependency on rural development. Drawing on his work with the Canadian Forest Service, he concurs with Johnson in stressing the need to distinguish between community- and resource-based rural development strategies. Stedman argues that for rural communities, dependence on staples 'often comes at a cost: poor outcomes and increased vulnerability are commonplace' (p. 88). He also stresses the importance of creating adequate statistical databases for analysing rural development issues.

The next two contributions reinforce some of these earlier observations. Golding and Curtis explore the linkages between labour migration and rural development, focusing primarily on the impacts in high-income nations, but also considering the impact of remittances on the areas from which migrants originate. The most commonly identified phenomenon relates to international movements, such as Mexican migrants who meet shortfalls in the supply of local labour for American farms. Similar patterns of migration are evident in Western European agriculture with regard to new European Union Member States in the east. In addition, more recently, the United States has seen the resumption of oil and gas booms involving the migration of some of its own labour force to formerly remote rural areas. In respect of all these types of migration, Golding and Curtis offer caveats similar to those of Stedman in respect of resource dependency and the resulting loss of resilience, finding these characteristics both in recipient communities as well as those in receipt of migrant remittances.

Amenity-migration provides a different form of driver for rural development, one related not to the productive potential of such areas but to their appeal to those of a country's own citizens willing and able to search for congenial locations to live and work. This form of migration has resulted in certain rural montane settlements displaying the highest rates of population increase for any North American communities over recent decades. Golding and Curtis acknowledge the importance of amenity migration as a consumption-based engine of rural development for locations able to exploit high levels of suitable natural amenities, but they also identify some of the costs to the recipient local rural communities which accommodate this form of gentrification. David Marcoullier's subsequent discussion of the literature dealing with the contribution tourism can make to rural development acknowledges both the trade-offs between productive and consumptive uses of natural amenities, many of which are in public ownership, and similar potential trade-offs between the amenity values sought by migrants and by tourists.

In examining the relationship between agriculture and rural development, Lobao and Sharp conclude that the growth of industrialised farming techniques in high-income economies has been detrimental to the rural communities in which these activities are located, and that the farm support programmes which promote such trends are generally inimical to rural development. They observe that that these supports make a major contribution to rising land values and reduce the risks of farming, which:

over time promotes the growth of larger and fewer farms..., a trend...that appears to harm rural well-being. Farm programs tend to subsidise rural elites, farmers and other property owners, as opposed to the mass of rural people. (p. 126)

Lobao and Sharp argue that spatial non-farm programmes 'tailored to local populations are far more effective... if the goal is to stimulate rural development' (p. 126). However, their survey of 'alternative' food systems and community-supported forms of agriculture finds little evidence that this approach can offer a viable rural development pathway. One contribution in the final section of the volume, which focuses on specific regional problems, resonates with these observations. Elisa Da Vià's survey of institutionalised appropriation of land (land-grabbing) by complicit national governments in sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Asia on behalf of global corporate interests, often facilitated by international development agencies, is shown to displace local subsistence farmers in favour of multi-national businesses involved in industrialised agriculture or mining. The growth of these land appropriations provides depressing global confirmation of the lack of concordance between promoting sectoral natural resources output while attempting to protect the interests of rural communities.

The remaining chapters in the thematic section provide few policy insights. Goetz finds existing US statistical sources on entrepreneurship offer limited information on its contribution to rural development. The absence of suitable data may explain why, in contrast to the European Union, rural communities in America have no federally-funded spatial development programmes targeted at stimulating their entrepreneurially activities. Chapters on gender and on microfinance provide descriptive surveys of the literature, with little attempt to offer development guidance. The final thematic contribution considers the impact of expanding corn-based ethanol production within the American maize belt under the stimulus of federal government subsidies. Given the economic costs involved in the inefficient conversion

of these resources into bio-fuels, and the sectoral rather than community-based targeting of such programmes, Goe and Mukherjee unsurprisingly find this policy has little to recommend it as an instrument for sustainable rural development.

In addition to the contribution on land-grabbing, the final section of the handbook consists of three other chapters that focus on non-American rural development issues: rural development in sub-Saharan Africa, urbanisation in China and rural change in Latin America. For the latter, Michael Dougherty observes the ongoing switch from peasant cultivation to industrialised farming and mineral extraction, reiterating the associated problems of lost resilience and increased vulnerability in rural communities noted by earlier contributors, and reaffirming the problems associated with migrant workforces and remittance dependency. He argues for institutional reforms associated with land tenure and joins the call for place-based forms of rural development.

Sub-Saharan Africa presents even greater challenges for rural development, even though many African nations are attracting global investment to exploit their natural resources. In addition to land-grabbing and reduced resilience mentioned in other contributions, David Kraybill notes the lack of investment in hard and soft rural infrastructure in most such countries, causing their communities to suffer from lack of opportunities for rural improvement, which is compounded by the lack of political leverage the countryside exercises in the minds of many of the urban political elites responsible for assigning national development priorities. Li Zhang tracks the stages through which Chinese rural communities have passed since the Communist revolution to reveal the astonishing capacity of the Chinese peasantry to absorb and recover from extreme political and economic challenges,

including the remarkably high rates of urbanisation in recent decades. Overall, although this collection offers an interesting set of surveys of current academic research on rural development, which should be of

value to fellow academics, it offers limited guidance for policy-makers and practitioners seeking ways of promoting spatially-oriented pathways for rural development.