

Review of: "Encounters with Others: Student Growth through Fieldwork Studies in Rural Areas"

Luis Antonio Sáez-Pérez¹

¹ Universidad de Zaragoza

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

I think that the policy studied, "Fieldwork Studies in Rural Areas", is very important, and Shiro Horiuchi makes a good example of applied research by writing a relevant work.

Firstly, because, although he does not write it explicitly, he takes as the conceptual framework of reference one of the most suggestive notions of development, in my opinion, which is that of Sen and Nussbaum's[1] capabilities and agency.

This approach has been taken into account by many researchers in the social sciences, and some institutions[2] (United Nations, OECD, European Union) have been inspired by it to reformulate statistics, indicators, and reports. In that sense, if the author would consider it appropriate to work with it, I think it could help him to delve into the double edge of these policies: *Fieldworks* in rural areas make the citizens more capable and more socially relevant, as well as the students, who see their capabilities developed by being active agents of their own lives and local community, despite their youth.

On the other hand, in my opinion, the author uses the neoliberal concept in a generic way, simplifying much more complex dynamics, some of them chronologically prior to the success of that political economic approach (such as the pull of human capital towards cities, the magnetism of agglomeration economies, or the competition for wealth, which are structural trends common to any kind of political economy). And I think it would be doubtful nowadays to maintain its full validity, when most of the responses to the COVID-19 crisis have been of a Keynesian style, and flourishing populist movements tend to be, for the most part, interventionist in their economic policy.

The author conducts 40 interviews and derives very important arguments. However, they are not systematized (he doesn't offer any type of indicators, tables), so it would be possible to conclude more robust discussions. If the information were organized, for instance, according to the type of studies, ages, gender, previous links or not with the rural world, and positive and negative aspects of the experience, among many other possibilities, I believe that certain hypotheses could be tested on education and learning for life, biographical trajectories, and attraction to the rural world. In my opinion, the author does not take advantage of all the wealth of information he has in his interviews.

In any case, I find Horiuchi's work very interesting and necessary for research, as it completes empty areas regarding the role of expectations of young people in rural areas. The community and intangible aspect of development (social capital, relational capital, political capital, innovation/creativity, and talent), which, as I said at the beginning, deals with the capabilities and agency of people, has been less taken into account when we talk about development, and in relation to the rural world, it would be very fruitful. This research makes important contributions to this line of study, opens minds, and

suggests new policies. I think it would be even more consistent if it took advantage of the data obtained from its interviews and had a less biased vision towards the markets and the economic policies carried out by governments.

[1] <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/capability-approach/>

[2] <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/8131721/8131772/Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission-report.pdf>