



An analysis of rurality performance and understanding of rural geography

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Abstract

Recent research in rural geography has shown growing interest in ways of showing diversity in which rural areas have been exhibited and enacted by diversity. In addition to implementing many roles in conjunction with researchers, funders and users, rural geographers have also demonstrated awareness about their 'performance' as researchers. This progress report for rural geography discusses recent contributions on these two related topics, in which research is presented briefly, before reviewing the publications, which Systematic development, position in rural research and political and policy engagement rural geography.

Keywords: rural space, methodology, rural identity, performance, positionality, qualitative and narrative research reflexivity, rural geography

Introduction

Writing in the Handbook of rural studies ^[1] noted that 'the ways by which the values of rural space and materiality's are consolidated, reproduced, contested, along with the identities of the individuals who stay and move inside them, can also be considered by analyzing how rurality is staged in order to oblige specific enactions. It is through the link between the array of characters perform specific roles, and the spaces in which they play out, that ruralities are regularly produced' ^[1]. Rural geographers have verifiably investigated the performance and rehearsal of rurality for some time now in work at farm identities, gender, adventure tourism and community life for instance yet acknowledgment of the importance of performance in the constitution of rurality has developed as specialists have scrutinized and sought to move past a social constructivist perception ^[2]. This incorporates endeavors to get to 'more-than-representational' rural geography by researching ways in which rural understandings are felt, detected, intuited through substantial activities and performances ^[3,4].

At the same time, awareness has also developed that as rural geographers we ourselves also perform and enact rural geographies through our research. This knowledge has been expressed not only through ongoing novelty in practical techniques in rural geography, particularly regarding subjective methodologies, but also in a number of papers that have critically reflected on the practice and positionality of being a rural researcher ^[5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11]. These reflections in turn point to the politics of rural research, which have also been addressed in broader debates about engagement with policy makers and about participatory research and contribution of rural communities in the investigation process.

Rural geography progress report sum up latest contributions on these 2 related subjects practicing rural geography and performing rurality. The first part observes the calls for greater attention to be funded to the performance and performing of rurality ^[1, 4] preceding talking about work in

rural geography and related disciplines that has already begun to examine phases of performance and performing, and considering the methodological effects of this turn. The second part moves the concentration to the exercise of rural geography, first observing the progress of new methodological approaches in rural geography, and afterward proceeding onward to talk about inquiries regarding the positionality of rural investigators and the politics of rural investigation.

Studying rural demonstrations

The growing interest of rural geographers in the performance of rurality reflects in part a recognition of the limitations of the social constructivist approach to conceptualizing the rural, which has been principal in rural geography since the 1990s, social constructivism highlights the addresses through which concepts regarding rurality are produced and reproduced and the texts through which they are represented, and has usefully provided an insight into the contingent and contested environment of rurality; yet, as discussed in a year ago progress report, social constructivism has also been condemned for ignoring the material dimensions of the rural situation that have an actual effect on the experiences of persons living, playing and working in rural space ^[12]. Studying the performance of rurality can help to link this gap, by revealing how addresses of rurality are performed and routinized with material effects, and showing how the performs and performances of rural actors in material settings add to the creation and proliferation of addresses of rurality.

While rural geography study has engaged with features of performance in readings of rural identities, presence and omission, and the commodification of rural practices for tourism, this has often been as an away and investigation of the real performance has rarely been foregrounded. The Handbook of rural studies is famous for creating the case for the investigation of rural performances to be placed more centrally in rural researches, and for outlining examples of how this might be done ^[1]. Edensor uses the term performance

broadly, encompassing enactments ranging from staged events to iterative everyday practices. Thus, he notices that ‘diverse rural performances are performed on diverse stages by diverse actors: at grouse moors, village greens, heritage attractions, farm life centers, long-distance footpaths and farmyards and mountains in the rural spaces recognized as “wilderness”. He offers as examples ‘the dramatized rituals of grouse and pheasant shoots, the performances of rural folk customs such as Morris Dancing and well dressing, folk music revivals, and popular film and television dramas’, before concentrating on case studies of the enactments of leisure-seeking city dwellers, the touristic staging of the rural and the everyday performances of ‘country folk’.

The rurality staged performances are designed events and scripted that clearly act out specific representations of rural life. These include the portrayal of rural life in film and television programs, dramatized reconstructions, museums, farm parks, heritage sites and interpretative centers, but also staging where the message is more implicit. Lewis Holloway, for instance, shows how agricultural displays are used as chances to ‘stage manage the performance of agriculture to huge numbers of non-farming visitors’ [13]. Re-Performances of rurality are also presented through the traditional and poetry music, with the representation present at the same time as both performance and text [14, 15].

However, as Edensor proves, rurality is also done in a less-staged way in the regular performing of people who live or work in the geography, and in the sometimes self-conscious rural acts of visitors and tourists. These enactments are commonly loosely scripted or choreographed by guidebooks or instruction manuals, and involve the use of props, such that ‘culturally specific ways of acting in rural cinemas are organized around which photographing, clothes, expressing delight, recording, styles of movement, communicating meaning, modes of looking and sharing experiences are deemed to be appropriate in particular contexts’ [1]. After time, though, the repeated acts of everyday exercise becomes natural and intuitive: So, the ways of working, dwelling, relaxing and socializing in rural space can be measured as largely quotidian performances, un-reflexive habits, that lead people to place, creating serial atmospheres via daily tasks, pleasures and routines. In the geography, as elsewhere, distinct structures of feeling are created through a feel for the errands at hand and for the situation in which they are performed, as repetitive interaction with space, tools, humans and other creatures is carried out [1]. These everyday exercise can include forms of personified being in rural space that can’t be effectively represented in language or text, and which rural sociologist has defined as ‘thinking-as-bodies’ [4]. Carolan says that abstracting the rural as a sociocultural phenomenon and mental construct is invalid because ‘we can’t separation mind from body when speaking about information, perception and understanding of the world’. Rather, he contends, ‘mind is body; awareness is corporeal; thinking is sensuous. Briefly, our understanding of space is more than representational. It is a lived process. To avoid how understandings of the geography are personified is to cut from our investigation a major (truly the main) understanding source’.

Carolan proves this argument through an investigation of ranchers in Iowa who he recommends demonstrated knowing

the geography through their bodies. Thus, when ‘asked to describe “the geography”, specifically in terms of what it meant for them, the respondents often concentrated on the kinesthetic and somesthesia sensations that came from their bodily presence in that space’. The farmers talked, for example, about understanding the geography from their tractor, which not only allowable a diverse perspective over the countryside, but also intended understanding the land through feel the contours, wet spots and soil types.

Potential conceptual and rational coherence frameworks for an already proven body of investigation on presentation in rural geography [1, 4]. In specific rural sociologists and the geographers of rural have engaged with performance in three well-known contexts.

1. Investigation of rural communities have recognized the importance of collective practices and social interactions to the constitution of community. Casual surveillance, taking part in village associations and sports clubs, exchanging gossip, joining community events, coordinating, socializing and drinking or working communal land are between the performances that have been noticed as exercise that help to perform rural community [16, 17, 18, 19, 20]. These performances are performed within stadia including societies and clubs, Women’s Institute and Young Farmers Clubs, village events and shows, shops and post offices, the public houses and school gate and pubs [21]. Indeed, bars and pubs shows in the case of the gypsy-traveler community in England and the Apple by novel Fair. Can give stages for more formalized performances of rural identity, mainly by in-migrants trying to fit in [21], as well as for performs that reinforce gender labels and boundaries of presence and omission in rural communities [22]. Equally, staged events and performances can provide opportunities for the assertion of alternative representations of rural life by otherwise excluded groups [23].
2. Farm households has shown the meaning of personified practices to the formation of ranch cultures and identities along with the constitution of gender roles in agricultural, for example, rented the anthropological notion of ‘lifescape’ to define ‘the ethical, spatial and emotional dimensions of the relationship among farming community and livestock and landscape [24]. Which is expressed through the iterative regular exercise of the farm household. Gendered addresses of farm work are based at least in part on perceptions of physical knowledge and linking to the land, such that ‘a woman is shown as not being able to ranch on her own because she lacks an embodied information of farming and an embodied linking to the land’ [25, 26]. Moreover, the gendered separation of farm workers is reproduced through performance, as farm women and men split tasks in accordance with the label, but can also be contested through exercise, as women take on traditionally masculine characters like tractor driving [26].
3. Rural tourism has observed the tourists performances in enacting specific rural experiences, physical information and sensations that form portion of these experiences. In specific, these presentations have been examined with respect to adventure tourism activities with jet boating,

bungee jumping, 4-WD safaris, and whale watching and swimming with fishes like dolphins, and kayaking^[27, 28]. All of which arguably include staged performance degree but geographers also highlighted the personified performances intrinsic to more everyday recreational activities, like walking^[29, 30]. Especially, reveals the performed and personified features of walking in her investigation of a group of visually impaired walkers and their sighted controllers, in which she displays the utilization of the rural landscape as an inter-corporeal experience, consulted between bodies as the located guide defines the landscape to their accomplice^[29].

Methodologically, research on performing ruralities has tended to combine interviews with participant observation, allowing for the researcher to directly experience and record performances as well as for the observed actor to describe and discuss their actions in their own terms^[29]. However, difficulties still exist in sufficiently capturing and interpreting embodied performances, particularly where these include more than representation elements. Moreover, rural geographers' analysis of their recordings of rural performance could benefit from the borrowing of analytical frameworks from anthropology or performance theory. Indeed, the growing interest of rural geographers in performance presents opportunities for greater interdisciplinary engagement with both anthropology and performance studies.

Methodological development in the practice of rural geography

The search for appropriate methods for researching the performance of rurality is just one area of methodological exploration and experimentation in rural geography in current years. Traditionally, rural geography was described as exhibiting a 'fetishism' with numerical data corresponding with a lingering prevalence of positivist epistemology^[30]. Since the early 1990s, though, the increasing influence of cultural perspectives in rural geography has been accompanied by the application of qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant and ethnography observation, and textual investigation^[31]. However, the impact has been to polarize approaches to research in rural geography, with studies tending to employ either quantitative or qualitative methods.

Truly mixed or multi method studies are mainly missing in rural geography, at least beyond the basic level of following up a questionnaire survey with interviews, or quoting descriptive Census statistics as context for qualitative case studies. Integrative use of multi-methods, with qualitative and quantitative techniques employed as part of a coherent whole^[32]. They illustrate this with two examples of analysis of the use of rural space, from Senegal and Denmark. In the first case, techniques including GPS measurements of cattle mobility, interviews with pastoralists and participant observation were used to triangulate information. In the second case, quantitative and qualitative data about afforestation obtained through interviews with farmers was digitized and entered into a GIS, facilitating the combination of landowners' values and practices in 'an iterative practice to create a typology of farm owners, which was capable of

explaining the location of new woodlands in the landscape', suggest that multi-method approaches can assist the study of the practice and values of individual actors to enhance knowledge of the utilization of rural space in both developing and developed world settings^[33].

Another development that transgresses the quantitative/qualitative divide has been the promotion of Q methodology in rural research. Q methodology allows a 'scientific' study of people's perspectives, meanings and opinions^[34], and has been labelled as a 'qualiquanto logical' method, for its focus on the quantitative factorization of qualitative data. This is operationalized through a five stage process^[35].

1. The first stage is the identification of the discourse under investigation, from which a 'concourse' or series of issues existing within the discourse is drawn
2. Second stage this is normally expressed through statements, but could be done through non-verbal representations such as images, and Interviews can also be prepared from current literary.
3. In the third stage, a 'Q sample' or 'Q statement set' is developed from the concourse, taking the form of series of statements or propositions, which participants are asked to rank during interviews.
4. In the fourth stage on a continuum from 'most agree' to 'most disagree'. The closing stage of the Q methodology involves a factor-analysis of participants' responses to recognize patterns across individuals^[34].

Q methodology 'gives a chance to shift our focus from a specific individual narrative to a study of the range of viewpoints that is favored and shared by a particular group of participants, additionally, they propose that Q methodology should be attractive to rural researchers because it privileges the everyday and local, subverts the power of the researcher and acknowledges the problematic nature of concepts such as 'truth' and language 'and' opens up multiplicity, complexity, tension and discrepancy in subjectivities and between subjectivities'^[36].

The interest in Q methodology can also be situated as part of a wider progress in qualitative rural investigation of techniques for recording and analyzing lay narratives of rural life and rurality as well as giving voice to the discourses of diverse rural artists, ideological emphasis was laid on rural areas in the form of social fabric and widespread concern^[37, 38]. Adoption of oral history as an approach in rural geography, aimed at deepening engagement with individuals' narratives of change, and, as such, enriching understanding of the consequences and micro scale dynamics of rural restructuring. A similar glimpse of narratives that would not be likely to be forthcoming in a traditional interview format is provided by^[37] in a discussion of using fiction to frame meanings of the rural life. This approach was discovered accidentally by Nairn & Panelli in research on youth experiences in a small New Zealand town, when respondents referred to a short story that they had read in school as a means of explaining and reflecting on their own experiences. In the story concerned, a 'fat boy' is picked on as the scapegoat for a small town's problems, and the young people interviewed by Nairn & Panelli drew parallels to the story to explain adult attitudes to

young people in their own town.

Moreover, both the oral history approach employed by Riley & Harvey in 2007 and the exploration of fiction in explanatory narratives discussed by Nairn & Panelli in 2009 emphasize the performed character of the investigation process. Riley & Harvey, for instance, pay more attention to the dynamics of interviewing than to the questions asked, revealing the benefits gained from sequential and group interviews and from the embodied practice of 'walking-and-talking' around the farm.

Politics of status and rural research

The qualitative turn in rural geography has been accompanied by a heightened sensitivity to the practice of the research process and to the positionality of the researcher. As in human geography mostly, awareness of researcher positionality in rural geography has been informed by feminist theory, but also shows a concern for empowering marginalized voices and views. Consequently, attention has been focused on the practice of the investigator in mediating the production of knowledge, and on the roles and identities performed by the researcher in enacting the research process. For research with rural communities, the identities framing researcher roles include not only gender, age, ethnicity, education and so on, but also the dichotomies of insider or outsider, rural or non-rural, farmer or non-farmer that position the researcher relative to the community and are drawn on in shaping the presentation of narratives.

Pini in 2004, for example, describes how she inhabited multiple identities while conducting research on women's participation in the Australian sugar industry, including those of 'farmers' daughter', 'Italian-Australian', 'nice country girl' and 'woman'. These identities informed her interest in the topic, such that she notes that 'I could not separate myself as the "daughter of cane farmers" from myself as "academic" as traditional research paradigms would assert is necessary'. They also shaped her engagement with research participants, with respondents projecting onto her expected ways of acting determined by her perceived identity.

The complexities of Pini's positionality were conditioned by conducting research in her home region, thus blurring the insider or outsider binary. A similar experience was reported by Chacko in 2004 on undertaking ethnographic research in villages in northwest India as an Indian-born but American-based doctoral student who found that 'linguistic capability does not translate into cultural fluency' and that like many Indian researchers she 'had more in common with Western social scientists than with rural Indian women'. He describes how her positionality influenced her engagement with research subjects and her interpretation of her observations.

While questions of positionality and performance are relevant to all types of research, critical reflection on these dynamics has come to the fore as rural geographers have sought to engage with previously 'neglected' and 'othered' rural social groups, and have adopted research methods that erode distinctions between researcher and participant. The challenges of research with rural young people, noting not only the logistical problems encountered in designing and implementing the research, but also issues about positionality, building trust with young generation, communicating with

young generation and giving feedback.

Meanwhile, reflects on her dual identity as both a researcher and employee during the conduct of ethno-scientific investigation in a rural housing association. She explains how this specific situation gave birth to specific challenges including adapting to having been in the field even before I commenced the research and thus having to create space for a parallel research role to emerge alongside that of employee. Moreover, McAreavey found that she had to negotiate sometimes conflicting interests between her researcher persona and her employee persona, noting that:

Success in research terms did not necessarily correspond with project success for [the organization]. This created tension between myself, my employer and the project funders. I found myself in an uncertain position arising from the oscillation between my insider-outsider status and from the tension between integration and detachment due to my concurrent roles and responsibilities arising from my employee and researcher roles^[10].

Such experiences highlight the politics of rural research, by which I mean both the dynamics of power relations within the research process between the researcher, sponsor and research subject, and the relevance of rural research for broader policy and political issues. Indeed, the significance of government agencies as sponsors of rural research, the relevance of many rural research topics to key policy areas and the fact that much rural research engages with groups that perceive themselves to be politically disenfranchised (including 'othered' groups such as young generation and ethnic minorities, but also mainstream farming communities) can serve to throw the politics of rural research into sharp relief.

As contributions to these sessions showed, rural geographers encounter the same challenges as other human geographers in pursuing policy-relevant or politically engaged research [39]. However, two key concerns can be distilled from these contributions and other recent publications.

1. Rural geographers are concerned with how to most effectively inform policy agendas without comprising academic integrity, including consideration of interactions with policy-makers and other stakeholders^[40] and collaboration with other researchers to construct appropriately integrative policy relevance knowledge^[41].
2. Rural geographers are also concerned to facilitate research that empowers research subjects in the political process. Participatory research methods have increasingly been employed to achieve this, sometimes as part of broader participatory development or governance initiatives. However the effective implementation of participatory methods can be testing, requiring groundwork to identify and engage appropriate stakeholders and the establishment of institutional mechanisms to enable ongoing stakeholder participation^[8].

Conclusions

Rurality is performed by farmers, rural residents or rural immigrants, landowners, labors, tourists or tourist attractions, entertaining visitors, media, policy-makers and academic researchers. Current work in the rural geography has started to engage with the performance of rurality, moving beyond

previous foci on the materiality of the rural, on its political-economic structure, and its social construction. This development has not only raised new research questions for rural geographers, but also stimulated innovations in methodology, and opened up opportunities for new interdisciplinary connections, particularly with performance studies and anthropology. Apart from this, even when identified as a rural, it means that they accept the methods in which the rural geographers adopted the rural areas through our research reflecting on our situation, our involvement with research-funders and users, along with various rural research topics, our selection and the use of various research methods, and the policy and political tangle of our work. In these ways, the exercise of rural geography is closely linked to the performance of rural geographers and rurality have not only been disclosed in the form of supervisors and recorders of villagers but also those who produce, reproduce and exhibit in rural areas. Active Agents have also been detected as.

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