



# Constructing Rural Geographies in Publication

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## Abstract

The paper compares American and British scholarship in rural geography. It argues that, among other reasons for the difference in “rural geography” between the two countries, their distinct publication strategies offer insights for potential interventions. To sketch how the field has been differently construed on opposite sides of the Atlantic, the article first examines several sub-disciplinary literature reviews. It then adds a materialist account to a performative perspective of sub-disciplinary formation by exploring how the publication industry helped shape distinct relationships between rural geography and theory. We suggest that rural geographers in the US might use new publication strategies to intervene in the shaping of a distinctive sub-disciplinary formation and to acquire greater visibility in geography.



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## Introduction

Over the last quarter century, contemporary theoretical perspectives have been a major concern among rural geographers in the United Kingdom, and some there claim a resurgence of the field in the wake of these engagements (Woods, 2005; Cloke, 1997). Rural geographers in the United States, in contrast, are less visible amongst geographers. They tend to publish more applied analyses of land use, more empirical studies of agriculture, and more Sauerian landscape interpretation (Duram and Archer, 2003; Forbes and Kaktins, 2003). Engagements with social theory are also less pronounced, and the potential exceptions that re-theorize nature/culture or address the globalization of agro-food production (e.g. Braun, 2004 or Goodman, 2001) are not usually associated with rural geography in the U.S. In short, American rural geography looks rather different from its British counterpart.

In this article, we examine some of the differences in the practice of rural geography in Great Britain and the United States. The comparison is not randomly chosen. One notable achievement in British rural geography is its degree of visibility in the academy. Yet, insofar as comparative analysis implicitly makes one thing the normative standard for another (Mongia, 2007), we do not want to suggest that American rural geography should look more like its British cousin. It is not necessarily the conceptual complexion of the sub-discipline found in Britain that we hold as a standard toward which rural geographers in the US might strive, only its visibility. That, in turn, constitutes the crux of the intervention we hope to make. In the pages that follow, our aim is to identify the heart of an actionable strategy through which rural geographers in the US might, in the future, hope to garner greater visibility in the discipline of geography.

Our analysis comes in two parts. In the first half, we sketch how rural geography has been construed as a field on opposite sides of the Atlantic. We do this through an examination of literature reviews. Our focus on overviews and trend reports is a narrow one, but the purpose is twofold. First, the approach provides an illuminating window on sub-disciplinary formations in the limited space of a paper. Second, it offers an opportunity to advance a theory on the politics of literature reviews. Ours is a performative theory, one that enables 'the literature review' to be seen as an interesting and active engagement that helps shape a field like rural geography. In the second half of the paper, we argue that distinct publication strategies contributed to giving 'rural geography' a significantly different shape in each country. Here we draw on Barnett's (1998) work on the diffusion of the cultural turn in geography and the making of celebrity academics through the publication industry, extending his analysis toward an account of the practice of rural geography in Britain and the US. In situating distinct trajectories and national sub-disciplinary formations in relation to the

publication industry, this part of the paper adds a materialist perspective to the performative account we offer in the first half.

In reading differences between British and American rural geography through the context of publication, we offer a partial account of their histories. Yet we do not want to suggest that the two formations are in any way reducible to the business of publication. If this paper were to be read as an intellectual exercise rather than as an analytical intervention, if its aim were to *explain* why British and American rural geography are dissimilar, then our focus on the publication industry would not suffice. We know that many other forces also shaped the field. For instance, research funding regimes, cognate disciplines, classroom teaching practices, and the nature of the phenomena under study all have been important in taking rural geography in different directions in the US and the UK. We only argue that, among these forces, the publication industry has played a significant role in shaping the practice of rural geography in its British and American contexts.

But we also have strategic reasons for highlighting the significance of the publication industry in the production of contemporary American and British rural geography: we suggest that the pursuit of certain publishing strategies might be a practical way to enhance the visibility of rural geography, both within the discipline of geography in the US, and in the academy more broadly. Few among us can probably do much to alter existing research funding regimes, the interests of other disciplines, or the rural landscape itself. Yet, cognizant of the industry with which scholars are entangled, rural geographers in the US can change their publishing strategies. Accordingly, we want to offer readers of *ACME* an opportunity to consider the weight that such strategies seem to have had in shaping contemporary British and American rural geography.

### **Constructions of a Field**

According to recent trend reports and overviews, rural geography looks very different in Britain and America. Such reviews are illuminating, and we sketch three in detail below. We start with an article by Cloke (1996) about theory and rural life-styles in Britain. His article appeared in an issue of *Economic Geography* devoted “the new rural geography.” Where a US contributor in the same issue (Page, 1996) stated that the geography of agriculture was relatively “undertheorized,” Cloke argued that rural geographers in Britain were using many political-economic and socio-cultural theories. He then used a social constructionist perspective to build a narrative of research about rural England. The social constructionism in Cloke’s review reflected what he took to be the latest of four major theoretical perspectives in British rural geography. The first was functionalist, where ‘the rural’ was defined in the 1970s as the space outside the city. The task of research was then to identify the functions that characterize that

residual space (e.g. Cloke, 1977). The second phase was marked by the use of political economy perspectives, where rural areas were articulated in relation to the changing dynamics of a regional and global economy (cf. Cloke, 1989). In a third regime starting about 1990, rurality could “no longer be represented as a single rural space, but as a multiplicity of social spaces which overlap the same geographical area.” Cloke (1996, 435) saw this as a development within a collective research agenda that mirrored changes in the British landscape. Increased residential mobility, greater economic heterogeneity, and competing interest groups in rural areas resulted in “a multiplicity of versions of rurality.” It was then that rural geographers became “interested in the way meanings of rurality are constructed, negotiated, and experienced.” Cloke suggested that a fourth style of analysis had emerged as more complex theoretical frameworks such as discourse analysis, semiotics, and actor-network theory were adapted and developed in British rural geography. Thus, Cloke narrated a history of British rural geography as a movement from functionalism to political economy, to a multiplicity of social constructions, to what he calls “postmodernist thinking” by 1996, with each representing a predominant theoretical fashion rather than a total paradigm shift (Cloke, 1996).

Several other geographers have since outlined a similar transition. In *Progress in Human Geography*, Marsden (1996, 246) sketched a new research agenda for rural geographers that deepened their ambit “into the sociological, cultural, and ideological worlds.” His agenda drew especially on critical poststructuralist approaches. In the *Journal of Rural Studies*, Cloke described what he was, by then, calling a “cultural turn” for rural studies. The change, he argued, extended a general cultural turn in the social sciences, and it held significant “implications for the importance of rurality as a socially constructed and discursive category” (Cloke, 1997, 368). A year later in the same journal, Phillips (1998) specified the parameters of this shift as a new focus on the political and non-material. And again in *Progress in Human Geography*, Little (1999) extended and critiqued the sometimes “simplistic and uncritical” application of the cultural turn in rural geography, arguing for more analysis of the processes of marginalization within rural spaces.

In the late 1990s, these geographers were bearing witness to something: a cultural turn, new poststructuralist approaches, or some other shift. Yet all of their post-1990 citations were works about rural British geographies, most by geographers in Britain. It is useful to compare these reviews—all of which appeared in ‘international journals’ (but see Paasi, 2005; Berg, 2004; Gutiérrez and López-Nieva, 2001)—to overviews of the practice of rural geography in the US. In doing so, we do not presume that ‘rural geography’ is well-defined in advance of our analysis. Rather we assume the field is constructed as an object through a body of contestations, practices, and statements, and we approach rural geography as an

ongoing process of sub-disciplinary formation rather than as a fixed object or stable collection of themes. Thus reviews by Cloke, Marsden, Phillips, and Little are not definitive of rural geography in Britain. Instead, we read them as performances. They are not wholly objective reports of what is in the literature; they are the products of specific authors in certain contexts, informed by particular theories and understandings. Trend reports, in a performative approach, do not just report on trends in a field: they make some trends visible while rendering others less recognized or less recognizable. Nor do the reviews then sit idle. Once in print, others choose to use, contest, or ignore the way these reports frame a field. From this perspective, literature reviews are understood as active engagements that help shape future formations of a field.

To compare the performance of rural geography by academics in Britain against the way the field has been constructed in the US, the best equivalents are those that appear in the latest edition of *Geography in America* (Gaile and Willcott, 2003). While some have observed that the precise purpose of these volumes is not entirely clear (Agnew, 2006; Johnston, 2004), the chapters still function like trend reports, in that they are both formative and performative. Where trend reports trace new developments, however, contributors to the new volume of *Geography in America* were asked “to present the most significant work done by American authors in the last decade” (Gaile and Willcott, 2003, 3). That is, the chapters were designed to work as snapshots. But they do not just survey, record, and report. In their inclusions and boundaries, the reviews also give shape to a field of inquiry, just as literature reviews in *Progress in Human Geography* do. Two chapters are especially relevant, thematically and organizationally, for a comparison against rural geography in Britain. One is titled “Rural Development” (Forbes and Kaktins, 2003) and the other, “Contemporary Agriculture and Rural Land Use” (Duram and Archer, 2003). Each chapter reviewed work of interest to Association of American Geography (AAG) Specialty Groups with the same titles, and these were the two groups that merged to form the Rural Geography Specialty Group at the AAG meeting in 2002.

Forbes and Katkins start their chapter with a definition: “Rural development could be defined simply as economic development in rural areas” (2003, 339). This opening has two effects. First, the adequacy of “mere economic strategies” for rural development is brought into question, while questions about how “the rural” is constituted are sidelined. Second, with the production of 210 citations, their synopsis creates a system of distinction: authors in the US (although some cited are not) who problematize existing development strategies, and who can be set against UK-based geographers who, according to other reviews, brought the rural itself into question. Only the first issue is central to the chapter’s theme: that rural development research is an integrative field that reaches beyond economics and engages with physical, social, and idealized aspects of the rural. What this research

integrates, according to Forbes and Kaktins, is a diversity of approaches and topics. Most of their performance then consists of diverse lists grouped within four sections: “Theory,” “Topics,” “the US and Canada” and “the Developing World.” Their lists invite many different perspectives and issues into the field. In the second section for instance, the topics of class structure, sustainability, and tourism are each written up in a separate paragraph. But the liberal pluralism that informs this style of *doing* a literature review creates an inconsistency: the chapter’s narrative style (nested lists of references that are left largely unrelated to one another) toils against its theme (the integration of approaches and topics). The style sits in contrast to the trend reports, which render up current geographical research as additions to a growing scaffold of theoretical and empirical work.

The fact that writers in the AAG’s former Rural Development Specialty Group emphasized the problematic nature of development over that of rurality may reflect real differences between American and British rural geography. However, our concern here has been the portrayal—the way ‘the field’ is partially produced through literature review. In our third and final illustration, we extend this concern to the media (books and articles) through which an American rural geography comes to represent itself. The chapter by representatives of the former Contemporary Agriculture and Rural Land Use Specialty Group (Duram and Archer, 2003) helps to make more apparent the array of publications that structure American rural geography.

We need to highlight two other aspects of the chapter beforehand. First, Duram and Archer frame the scope of inquiry as one largely contained by North America. As they put it, “various dimensions, consequences and policy implications of long-term sustainability of rural landscapes in industrialized, capitalist countries, and particularly in North America, have been matters of special attention” (Duram and Archer, 2003, 326). They thereby differentiate their field from that of the rural development group. Second, Duram and Archer’s concerns are not empirical sites or events, nor ‘the rural’ as an ontologically given entity, but identifying causal mechanisms and limiting conditions. Attention to representations of the rural (the “quaint scenes of chickens and pigs printed on paper towels”) is quickly displaced by a focus on the “current realities of rural areas,” which they describe as the “cultural, economic, environmental, political, and social forces that influence and continue to influence rural places” (Duram and Archer, 2003, 326). A critical realist approach thus informs their review of research that is also concerned with mechanisms of causality, conditions of occurrence, and regularities or patterns.

The same approach enables Duram and Archer to analyze this body of research in the US as the product of structures and mechanisms. Consistent with realism’s emphasis on abstraction, the authors point to “the broadest conceptual

level” as their guide for splitting the citations into four groupings. They first divide the field into two themes: rural and agricultural geography. They then split each theme into two streams, first with books and articles that take *patterns* as that which need explanation (“Rural Regions and Landscapes” and “Agricultural Location Theory”), then the work that takes *processes* as its targets of explanation (“Rural Land Use Change” and “Agricultural Sustainability”). Next the authors trace “the distinctive intellectual origins” for each of the four streams of research. Agricultural location theory is linked to work in economic geography and “the foundations” set by von Thünen; land use is introduced through Turner’s thesis and subsequent research on changing population distribution; and sustainability research is energized by recent public concern about environmental pollution. Yet Duram and Archer give rural regional synthesis the most space in the chapter. Here they follow the ongoing impact of Whittlesey’s (1936) article, then proceed to review six monographs: Aiken (1998), Hart (1991; 1998), Hudson (1994), Starrs (1998), and Wallach (1991). While also associating this stream of research explicitly with cultural geography, their review implicitly suggests that this is the only cluster of work that comes in the form of research monographs, a form that is scarce among the citations for the other research streams (Duram and Archer, 2003). Monographs seem to have been the principal mechanism of production through which “rural regions” research in the US made itself known in the 1990s.

Our argument so far is that literature reviews are performative work. Sub-disciplinary overviews are endeavors that make otherwise intangible bodies of research more visible, giving them structured coherence and identity. Likewise, theoretical starting points make a difference in the way ‘a field of research’ gets reconstructed. Cloke (1996), for instance, used a social constructionist perspective to assemble rural geography as a changing field in Britain; Forbes and Kaktins (2003) used a liberal pluralist approach to pull American literature together on rural development; and Duram and Archer (2003) drew on realist strategies to carve out four distinct streams of research in contemporary agriculture and rural land use. Yet our account has said little about the material, conditions, or constraints with which these authors exercised their performative work. Accordingly, we situate the trajectories of rural geography described above in relation to the publication industry.

We extend Barnett’s (1998) work on the making of celebrity academics and the diffusion of “the cultural turn” in geography to offer an account of some differences in the practice of rural geography in Britain and the United States. We argue that distinct publication strategies were one of the important reasons for differences in the way rural geography has been perceived in the two countries. In making that argument, we add a materialist perspective to our performative account of the construction of the field in print.

## The Material Production of a Sub-Discipline

In their reconstruction of rural geography, what Duram and Archer identify as rural regional synthesis in the US bears some similarities to rural geography in Britain as described in the trend reports. Both are less agricultural in focus, and the emphasis on culture, landscape, and historical explanation is a common feature. Yet if regional synthesis in the US seemed to come in the form of monographs, British rural geographers often published their work in edited volumes. The form no doubt has something to do with the subject: a persuasive regional interpretation favored by US-based authors would seem to require an entire book. Yet a more adequate account should not ignore the profile of those for whom university presses were willing to risk their investment. The six monographs identified by Duram and Archer (2003) had been penned, with only one exception, by relatively senior scholars. Aiken, for instance, had obtained his PhD from Georgia in 1969, Wallach from Berkeley in 1968, Hudson from Iowa in 1967, and Hart from Northwestern in 1950 (Association of American Geographers, 2002).

The point needs to be contextualized. Publishers need not always favor those with long track records of publication to produce a profit. In this case, the decisions were taken in conditions that favored what Barnett (1998) calls “new forms of academic celebrity.” The re-orientation of much Anglo-American human geography toward the humanities over the last thirty years drew with it classical notions of authorship as the original productions of a unique and learned individual, as the culmination of what Hart (1982) called “a lifelong commitment” to one topic. Furthermore, the development of identity politics also changed the disciplinary landscape of publication, as Barnett suggests, in favor of the personification of scholarship in particular names, faces, and biographies (thereby displacing more collective forms of writing). If such sentiments circulated among US-based geographers and other potential readers, publishers may have been inclined to look more favorably upon rural landscape studies by senior names from the discipline.

Yet the same conditions would have favored the appearance of rural regional monographs in the UK. What was comparatively unique to the US was the coherence of regional synthesis as an identifiable ‘market’ category. Its connection to a visible tradition of regional geography in the mid-twentieth century helped shape “rural regional synthesis” as an identifiable subject in the 1990s. This is not to resort to a foundational and ontological claim that a body of research already existed as a tradition. Rather, discourses about the influence of Sauer and the debates between Hartshorne, Schaeffer, Sauer, and others on the nature of geography helped to write an American regional tradition into the history of the discipline (Livingstone, 1992). Nor need we argue that certain men (and shamefully few women) paved the way for the making of a rural regional research



stream. Rather, the conditions of discourse, publication, and distribution were such that, by 2003, only five names and six books needed to be listed to constitute a genre. The monographs came together as a subject in the US—for publishers, Duram and Archer, and other readers—because a significant category of texts already had made its way, earlier in the century, onto the bookshelves of graduate students and American university libraries.

If the materiality, distribution, and identification of these monographs helped to create one of the conceptual categories of an American rural geography, our analysis has said little about the political economic conditions in which such material comes to publication. To explore how the publication industry contributed to the shaping of a contemporary British rural geography, we again draw on Barnett (1998). He situates human geography's "cultural turn" in relation to the formation, internationalization, and institutionalization of cultural studies in the late 1980s, arguing that its formation was "in no small part dependent on the activities of publishers" (Barnett, 1998, 384). Routledge was a key player. The company had been aggressive in recruiting celebrity academics like Gayatri Spivak, Cornel West, and bell hooks in the 1980s (Boynnton, 1995), but it was soon engaging in a new strategy for market success.

Three elements are important. First, Routledge maximized its academic audience by labeling work as "cultural studies," promoting these texts to faculty across disciplinary lines, and selling the new field to librarians through trade-book techniques. Second, with books like *Cultural Studies* in 1992, the company published more collected volumes and readers, which helped to shorten the turn-around time between the emergence of new research and the circulation of that research in commodity form. Third, by focusing more on collected volumes, the company moved away from the production of long-standing 'classics' to be held at cost in inventory. For Routledge in the 1990s cultural studies was a veritable profit-making strategy (Lorimer, 1993). This analysis should not be taken to disparage cultural studies or the cultural turn. Barnett's point, and ours, is rather that the academic world is not "unsullied by commodification" (1998, 385), and that in a fully reflexive analysis, this point needs to be acknowledged. Indeed, work in cultural studies is admirable precisely because it engages in the analysis of the conditions of its own production.

Barnett (1998) suggests that the move to more edited volumes was also vital to the institutionalization of the cultural turn in human geography. Collections like *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988), *Writing Worlds* (Barnes and Gregory, 1992), and *Place/Culture/Representation* (Duncan and Ley, 1993) assembled material in such a way that it could be placed in bookstores for graduate seminars. Furthermore, while those seminars built a market, the move was reconfiguring the peer review process. More than just an accumulation strategy, the

volumes intervened in the mechanisms through which academic authority was fashioned. Material no longer had to be routed into an authoritative monograph or through scholarly journals that often served as gate-keepers along traditional disciplinary lines (Berg, 2001). The volumes created a new space for collective authorship and the presentation of dialogue and difference. For many feminist geographers, this point was critical (cf. Women and Geography Study Group, 1997; Jones, Nast, and Roberts, 1997). In these ways, the circulation of a cultural turn in human geography was partly dependent on the activities of publishers.

According to the reviews by Cloke (1996) and others, scholars had witnessed a similar turn in rural geography in Britain around the same time. Yet this was not a matter of following theoretical fashions. Under pressure in research-intensive departments to publish quickly and often, self-described rural geographers in the UK took up the edited volume strategy. They turned to small publishing houses like University College London Press, Pinter, Paul Chapman, and Ashcroft, as well as majors like Routledge. Titles included *Constructing the Countryside* (Marsden et al., 1993), *Writing the Rural* (Cloke et al., 1994), *Revealing Rural Others* (Milbourne, 1997), and *Contested Countryside Cultures* (Cloke and Little, 1997). In effect, the strategy helped them produce books for students and to maintain the visibility of rural geography among colleagues, while a more theoretical emphasis offered numerous frameworks for chapter-length contributions. These were far shorter and quicker to produce than either *Rural Geography* (the classic textbook that Clout, 1972, had written in London)<sup>2</sup> or the US-based rural monographs with all their rich historical excursions. Moreover, British rural geographers expanded their audience as they made their own cultural turn in these edited volumes, thereby remaining in close conversation with other human geographers in the UK.<sup>3</sup> Critically, and in contrast to conditions in the US, the volumes offered conveniently packaged material by early- and mid-career scholars, dynamic material with which yet another generation of students could readily be invited into rural geography.

We draw three points from this analysis. First, the coherence of rural geography in Britain was partly structured through the practices of publication. Of course, the research funding landscape and the geography curriculum in the UK should not be ignored, yet strategies and contexts of publication played a significant role in the visibility of contemporary British rural geography. Second,

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<sup>2</sup> In outlining the context in which his textbook came to print in 1972, Clout (2005, 375) also notes that “frankly, there was not much theory around in rural geography back then.”

<sup>3</sup> This is not to claim the move to edited volumes, or toward “the cultural turn,” was instrumental in nature. *Constructing the Countryside* (Marsden et al., 1993), for instance, was the result of a long-term collaborative research project supported by the UK’s Economic and Social Research Council, which favors such outputs. The argument above is only that these two moves in British rural geography had strategically useful *effects* in regard to the visibility of the field.

the US publication industry has not facilitated the production of high-profile books by early-career scholars as part of a market in rural geography. While there are numerous exceptions among senior scholars, early-career practitioners are somewhat more likely to incorporate contemporary theoretical debates into their work with legible enthusiasm. Third, in the absence of an array of such high-profile books, geographers in the US are more constrained in their ability to offer rural geography courses with broad appeal to students. And in the absence of many such courses, American publishers may well be hesitant to take on new titles.

## Discussion

Traditionally, a lot of research in rural studies has been empirical in nature, but over the past 25 years a more critical rural social science has developed which has employed a range of conceptual theories in its analysis (Woods 2005, 17).

The block-quote above appears in a new textbook titled *Rural Geography* by Michael Woods. With case studies from Britain and the US and distributed by Sage Publications, the book is designed to satisfy a strong market among students in Britain and, at the same time, potentially to appeal to American undergraduates as well. We see Woods' text as a salutary intervention in the ongoing processes of sub-disciplinary formation, offering material that others can use to invite students to consider the significance of contemporary ideas in rural geography. However, the quote above gives away the British context in which it was penned (though not the Welsh). This is because the theoretical developments it introduces (i.e. "political economy" and "the cultural turn") have each had their own "emplaced" histories (cf. Morin and Berg, 1999).

Yet the textbook suggests that enthusiasm for both theoretical developments has been widespread. This seems to have been less the case in the US, and if rural geographers in American colleges are not as visible in geography compared to their British counterparts, Woods' remarkable new textbook may not significantly change the latter situation. Nonetheless, if Woods has offered an intervention for use in classrooms, we offer ours—via *ACME*—for use in discussion amongst scholars who wish to engage the academy as self-described rural geographers.

In that regard, there are two major points that we have *not* been trying to make. First, it is worth repeating that distinct publication strategies do not explain why rural geography looks different in the UK and the US. If our objective had been to undertake an intellectual exercise rather than an analytical intervention, if we had compared American and British rural geography in order to reach a satisfactory explanation for the differences between them, then necessity would

have led us to consider a number of other forces in addition to the practices of publication. One is the varied interaction with other disciplines in the UK and the US. Rural sociology and agricultural economics both have a strong presence in many American universities, and this would need to be addressed if a compelling, rounded explanation had been our goal.

Another element is teaching. As much as publication, pedagogy is critical in shaping the practice of rural geography,<sup>4</sup> and a thorough explanatory analysis would need to survey syllabi from each country to learn how rural geography is being constituted through assigned readings and lectures.

A third set of forces are the research funding regimes, which offer different constraints and priorities in Britain and America. In British geography departments, the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) encourages originality and “agenda-setting” research (Berg, 2006; Martin, 2001), but in American land-grant universities and the state colleges where many US rural geographers are found, opportunities tend to support research that is more applied in character (Sheppard, 2006; Demeritt, 2000). This has had a profound impact on the constitution of rural geography in each country. A fourth aspect involves department priorities. As Johnston and Sidaway (2004) point out, departments in Britain often hire with regard to filling out their collective research agendas. In the US, filling out the curriculum so as to attract large numbers of students (often through world regional surveys or GIS courses, for instance) is frequently high on the agenda when hiring a new member for the department. That divergence in investments affects the practice of rural geography. Nor should we overlook the influence that the disparate rural landscapes in the two countries have in shaping the differences in scholarship.

Second, we want to make it clear that we are not arguing that rural geographers in the United States should try to publish more edited volumes and, in doing so, follow the lead of British rural geographers. This might be one tactic for consideration, but times have changed. Publishers now look less favorably on “the edited volume” than they once did, so the publication strategies that worked for British rural geographers in the 1990s may not work as well for others in the twenty-first century. And it is not simply that the publication industry has changed. American publishers have been printing scholarly books on rural topics in recent years, but as one of our readers observed, those series dedicated to rural studies in the US generally include a predominance of rural sociologists and agricultural economists on their editorial boards. This does not mean that rural geographers are barred from publishing their work in such series, but given differences in

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<sup>4</sup> As it is in many fields: pedagogy has also been important, for instance, in reshaping economic geography in recent years (cf. Roberts, 2000; Crang, 1994)

methodological training, theoretical development, and scholarly ethos between disciplines, we believe this context has made it more difficult for rural geographers to highlight the challenges of the field as such through the various “rural studies” series in the US. For both of these reasons (the shifting publication market and differing academic contexts between the US and Britain) we would hesitate to recommend “the edited volume” strategy that British rural geographers followed.

What, then, would we recommend? If rural geographers in the US believe that the field has substantial contributions it can offer, if it can make a substantial difference—not only to the lives of rural residents, but also to the spatialized and uneven processes of knowledge production—then our analysis would suggest the consideration of new strategies for publication. Ideas might include, but are not limited to: the editing of “special issues” in existing journals, and perhaps the founding of a new journal, devoted to rural geography; publication in open-access venues in order to make rural research more readily available to those who lack sufficient academic library resources; publishing in online journals to facilitate timely dissemination of research findings and disciplinary dialog; where appropriate, the inclusion of ‘rural geography’ as keywords in more articles submitted for journal publication; and not least, the discussion of other tactics and objectives, at conferences and in print. Through these and other means, US rural geographers can deliberately intervene to make the field more visible.

Why does visibility matter? According to the 2000 Census, the United States still has approximately twenty-one percent of its population (some fifty-nine million people) living in rural areas. Increasingly, proponents of economic development strategies and social scientists alike are discovering the importance of ‘place,’ a central tenet of geographical analysis. While urbanists like Richard Florida (2005, 2004) advance provocative theories about economic and cultural growth in cities, US rural areas seem to have been abandoned by those seeking to understand and address economic and cultural woes ranging from depopulation to the decline of ‘traditional’ economic activities like manufacturing and agriculture. For those practitioners of rural geography who envision a reinvigorated rural, visible attention to rural people, places, and issues is—or should be—a priority.

But herein lies the problem: scholarly attention to rural places and issues in the United States, and even within the discipline of geography, has been fragmented and compartmentalized to such an extent that it is difficult to develop and promote any systematic awareness of rural problems or generate informed theses about how to remedy them. Rural geography, with its inherent focus on place, should be well positioned to bring together these necessary threads of analysis, except that few scholars self-identify as ‘rural geographers,’ and ‘rural geography’ in the United States has traditionally lacked disciplinary visibility. We argue, then, for interventions by those who self-identify as US ‘rural geographers’

to promote the visibility of rural geography as a timely and necessary field of inquiry with the explicit goal of making rural areas more functional, attractive, and wholesome places to live. With our account of differing publication trajectories in the United States and Great Britain, we have highlighted one key mechanism through which rural geographers in the US could intervene in the ongoing process of sub-disciplinary formation to promote its greater visibility as a field, should they wish to do so.

## **Conclusion**

We have argued that rural geography can be understood, theoretically, as an ongoing formation, as an object partly and continually constituted through a body of statements, practices, and contestations in print. This perspective, we think, better enables scholars to develop and change the construction of that which is understood to be rural geography. Further, we have argued that differences in the field in the US and Britain have been partly a product of distinct publication practices. In Britain, the publication of edited volumes compressed turn-around times in the academic marketplace, brought ideas from newer scholars into circulation, and maintained the visibility of rural geography as such. In American markets however, a legacy of rural regional monographs among rural geographers helped to create conditions that made it more difficult for new scholars to publish books in the field. This has constrained the venues available for dialog among rural geographers in the US, simultaneously hampering the ready identification of a characteristically 'American' rural geography. Yet if the visibility of British versions of rural geography is any measure, rural geographers in the US might want to intervene by way of a new assortment of individual and collective strategies for publication.

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