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*Rethinking Rural Studies* is a novel reflection on rural studies through the lens of the structure and well-being of rural people and communities in the UK, the US, and Europe. The authors, David L. Brown and Mark Shucksmith are both emeritus professors and remain enthusiastic and active in research in rural societies and urban-rural interfaces. David L. Brown, a sociologist by training, is an emeritus international professor at Cornell University. Mark Shucksmith is an emeritus professor of planning at Newcastle University. In this book, they probe retrospective theories, knowledge, and experiments with supporting cases in rural research and practices, using a forward-looking perspective to identify emerging issues and propose new research agendas and possibilities for civic discourse and public policy formulation. Viewing rural studies as holistic and trans-disciplinary, they underscore the need for multi-methodological research strategies to foster innovation and in-depth examination of places embedded within the intricate and interrelated economic, social, and environmental systems.

This book's structure is clear and effective. The introduction sets a tone for readers by clarifying essential terms of rurality and rural studies, introducing core themes as guiding principles for examinations, and reflecting on the purposes of rural studies as a public social science. The subsequent eight chapters traverse various focal areas, providing a forward-looking critique of theoretical and empirical approaches while developing insights that tackle contemporary and emergent challenges in research and public policy. The conclusion concisely encapsulates those insights as implications for hopeful rural studies with a collective imagination.

Chapter 2 prepares readers with a multi-scalar perspective on the interrelationships in a nation's settlement system, which evolved from but diverged from the conventional top-down hierarchical perspective utilised in central place theory. The relationships rest not only within rural communities but also among bigger and smaller places, as well as between society and nature. Thus, boundaries such as the rural-urban interface are perceived less as

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'lines' than as 'porous spaces' that could enhance understanding of the rural across scales. This perspective provides a fundamental frame for the following examination of the book.

Chapters 3–6 investigate the interrelated focal areas of family livelihoods, well-being, and social-spatial inequalities. Brown and Schuksmith unpack the rural economy, as the foundation of economic well-being, by illustrating how family livelihood strategies are affected by the array of human and social capital resources, alongside macro socioeconomic and political factors (i.e., neoliberalism, globalisation, industrial restructuring, innovation information technology, and increased international migration). Then, they elucidate the concept of wellbeing, which emerged as a new paradigm of development, shifting from the quantitative GDP-centric measurement of human progress to a multi-layered and multi-dimensional one applicable as a framework for policy and practices. A collective well-being approach is called for as value-infused, vertical-integrated, and multi-scalar governance, centred on the moral idea of 'living well together' to promote public discourse. The persisting issue of social and spatial inequalities resulting from the asymmetrical relations is examined in terms of power relations, Weberian and Bourdieu class analysis, and the reframing of 'left behind' places, to identify various causes and outcomes.

Chapter 7 focuses on rural population changes, with special attention to migration. Brown and Schuksmith highlight that the organisation and well-being of rural communities are largely shaped not by density change, but by social demography, including age, race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status. Such demographic change is substantially impacted by the older in-migrants and younger out-migrants, whose decisions are interdependent with social and economic contexts at different (community, regional, national, and global) levels, necessitating various responses in places.

Chapters 8–9 extend the discourse to society-nature interactions, focusing on the food and fibre system as well as natural resources and environment. The relational perspective of food and fibre production, distribution, and consumption being embedded in economic, social, and natural systems, allows for a re-examination of farming and agriculture in a holistic way. This embeddedness is examined with a focus on science and technology, along with its pros and cons impacts on broader society and environment. As a reciprocal system, resistance from local entities such as farmers, communities, consumers, and nature is evident in notable ways. The interrelationship between nature and society is clearly explained through four different cases, which also pose challenges regarding rural sustainability and just transitions.

This book stands apart from conventional studies in the way it embeds rural people and communities within broader societal history and global systems and discusses relationships among the intertwined focal areas. Following their earlier work *Routledge International Handbook of Rural Studies* (2016), Brown and Shucks Smith continue exploring ways to rethink rural studies for a better future as civic discourse and public sociology for collective well-being. The authors reject the rural-urban dichotomy and other related binaries and invite scholars to think beyond city territory and consider the land, the earth's surface where people settle, produce and create culture, in a trans-disciplinary approach. The idea draws on Henri Lefebvre's (1991) inclusive notion of place and his emphasis on the use of value and social relations, as discussed in Chap. 4 about the potential of the 'right to the countryside'.

David L. Brown and Mark Shucks Smith's book is therefore meaningful with its academic merit and social manifesto significance. It will be of interest to Global North scholars, par-

ticularly those concerned with rural development and public sociology, as well as to planners, policymakers, and rural institutions and communities, who will appreciate the specific insights concerning civic debates and public policy. For Global South scholars, they will be also able to find shared ideas and knowledge, gaining insights from the practices and lessons learnt.

The eBook version is priced from £20/\$26 from eBook vendors while in print the book can be ordered from the Edward Elgar Publishing website.

## References

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