

## **Rural Migrations And A Radical Theory Of Place**

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I begin by discussing the initial formation of the role of amenities and other non-economic quality-of-life drivers on rural migration as a counterpoint to development models, whether neoclassical or Marxist, that are situated within a framework privileging economic materialism and consumerism. The quality-of-life countermovement began in a small number of universities in the USA and was initially treated with skepticism. However, now it is widely accepted though not, I will argue, in the way it was originally intended.

I contest, using examples from the American West, that the original aims of the rural quality-of-life approach as a transformative and liberating theoretical framework has been co-opted; having been incorporated into the neoclassical economic growth-is-good consumerist approach to development, one that is not sustainable and increases spatial inequalities. Economists especially have taken the amenity argument and adapted it to their utilitarian framework.

The significance of the original rurally centered amenity/quality-of-life approach was that it broke out of a reductionistic, algorithmic and economic view of life. It aimed at providing an alternative to our increasingly economistic way of viewing life. The quality-of-life approach points towards place, community, and, as importantly, democracy rooted in people living in real places.

My focus has been on the rural American West. I, and my colleagues have over the last twenty years surveyed over 15,000 persons in high amenity rural regions of the US. This survey data provides the empirical context addressing a wide variety of issues of why people moved to rural areas, how welcome they felt, and how they feel about their lives after their moves.

The findings and lessons learned from the US are relevant to other geographic contexts, especially given the global nature of the changes taking place in the American West and elsewhere around the world, especially the interplay between macro-scale forces associated with global trade liberalization and the actions of individual human agents in search of idyllic spaces within which to live and recreate.

I argue for a place-based approach that recognizes a geography-of-limits, specific to places and regions. I outline how this can be part of a radical approach that has different assumptions and an approach that can result in vital rather than parasitic communities, as unfortunately, many of the amenity based communities, in the US and Europe are, or are in danger of becoming.

I discuss why and how we have to experiment with new institutions to develop alternatives to current trends. There are not many alternatives out there now, but there are some. There are examples of alternative rural spaces outside of, or transformative of, global capitalistic networks of production and consumption. Scholars and others can add new dimensions of theoretical inquiry that will provide new insights on the diverse forms that can be derived from rural migration as well as the potential consequences of such trends.