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*Commentary*

# Geographies of Peripheral Rural Areas—Some Comments

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**ABSTRACT:** The dominance of positivist approaches has led to the development of center-periphery models, which establish a relatively naturalized relationship between urban core areas and residual rural areas. Recent approaches to planetary rural geographies provide an opportunity to re-situate this issue and address it within the context of the revitalization of many rural areas, not only in the global North but also in the global South. However, multiple competing realities continue to shape the dynamics of these spaces. In large areas of the global South, material challenges persist despite some promising trends, while in the global North, dynamics are largely influenced by post-industrial societies. Africa serves as a relevant example to illustrate the limitations and shortcomings of recent planetary approaches to rural geography development. As an alternative, smaller-scale approaches focusing on community participation and the living conditions of people are proposed.

**Keywords:** Rural; Periphery; Geography; Global; Place© 2025 The authors. This is an open access article under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

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## 1. Introduction

The debate on peripheral rural areas must be contextualized in current geographic trends in planetary rural spaces. As Wang, Maye and Woods [1] suggest, it is possible to establish three geographies of planetary rurality: as a space of crisis, as a space of conflict, and as a space of hope, we call for planetary rural geographies that examine rural places as sites of interaction between diverse more-than-human relations we have called for planetary rural geographies that recognize the interdependence of rural and urban on a global scale but focuses on the specific roles that rural spaces, practices, and people play in planetary systems. Planetary rural geographies should be approached through a relational ontology, recognizing the more-than-human constitution of spaces we label as ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ as well as the complex horizontal and vertical global interconnections of rural and urban, place and planet.

But, Wang, Maye and Woods [2] (p. 3) also point out that the planetary rural geographies are an open research agenda: ‘We proposed planetary rural geographies not as a theory but as a research agenda’. While farmland abandonment signifies rural areas as spaces of hope, it also highlights conflicts arising from different claims about the use of rural space. Rural as a relational space of both crisis and hope is the main orientation. In sum, in this perspective, spaces of crisis, conflict and hope are a play of words with validity for all geographical spheres.

From the social and political point of view, Lees [3] proposes the existence of a planetary gentrification and urban authoritarianism that is not only normative or of the State but also ordinary and associated with everyday practices. The practices associated with the State are pro-gentrification policies in Western societies, which currently also characterize political approaches to rural space: ‘Urban authoritarian practices in relation to state-led gentrification have occurred in both democracies and non-democratic states, in Euro-American cities and others around the globe’ [3] (p. 729).

The imprecise concept of periphery or peripheral rural areas is a relevant research question, even in the last approaches. In accordance with this orientation, we briefly review the main points of view on centre-periphery relations in order to situate recent global or planetary approaches and to be able to analyze their limitations based on the example of Africa, where serious daily realities persist in rural populations. Is it possible to consider the global dimension of peripheral rural areas within the context of various national realities and local circumstances? But, in any case, peripheral rural areas hide multiple and contrasting realities that require different political responses and different research agendas.

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## 2. Peripheral Associated with Rural Problematic

The legacy of scientific positivism has a notable influence on the persistence of core-periphery approaches or models in modern geography based on an unequal distribution of power, population growth, or economic activity [4]. Typically, these are classic core-periphery indicators, such as population density, economic growth, geographical size, and economic activity. However, spatial inequalities exist not only in terms of material conditions but additionally produce and negotiating images and symbols of the place of power and culture [5]. Periphery, at edge or margin, based on core-periphery models, usually founded a natural uneven de-development, but uneven development is not inevitable with adequate long-term politics. The scales of the periphery, based on spatial inequalities, span a range of geographical levels, from global to local, with specific scales emerging within each continent or nation [4]. For example, according to the Council of Europe, the OECD Regional and Rural Policy Unit said that 40% of isolated or peripheral areas had seen a decline in their population and that, of these, 60% were a long way from major cities’ [6] (p. 1).

In this relevant context of urban-core approaches it is possible to point out renovate academic trends that suggest, as Souza indicates, that: ‘questions the present urban/core-based paradigmatic positions in academia, economic, political and social life. It is framed within a context of major global development issues and combined with a necessary bottom-up approach [7] (p. 1). In this same sense, Labrianidis [8] (p.1) points out that ‘Economic growth in rural peripheral areas is closely associated with the entrepreneurial capacity of the local population. Increasing awareness of the specificities, as well as the problems associated with the rural, and the ensuing adoption of a proactive approach at all levels of decision-making means that the role of policy agencies becomes increasingly important.

In sum, as a legacy of positivism, the peripheral areas have been considered in a residual way in relation to the urban core areas that were the prosperous and dynamic spaces. The rural periphery was usually a backward and problematic space with a lower quality of life for its dependent populations compared to urban areas. Nowadays, it is possible to relocate and balance this analytical perspective to highlight the constant processes of revitalization of rural areas not only in the global North but also in large regional spaces of the global South, such as in China.

## 3. Post Problems in the Global North, and Modern Problems in the South

There are different trends in the global north and in the global south in terms of distribution of resources, access to facilities, rate of poverty, relevance of agriculture in the economy, and relevance of the welfare state.... In this orientation, there are also difficulties in the micro spatial analysis derived from the standard of living in peripheral areas, but it is possible to point out some notable trends at a meso and global level, such as the increase in tourist and recreational activities, access to technologies of communication as a new problem and opportunity or the progressive dissolution of the structure and spirit of traditional local-rural communities. In any case, it is possible to point out a progressive increase of plurality in regions and place spatial levels (Table 1). In many rural areas of the global south, the rural periphery is associated with loss of population and spaces for material resources, in contrast in many rural areas of the global north, the development of the peripheral areas is founded on activities of consumption of recreational services and landscape conservation, associated with a post-industrial society.

**Table 1.** Tendencies of peripheral rural.

Global	Global South	Global North
Heterogeneity	Relevance of material conditions	Relevance as consuming spaces
Material conditions versus postmodern interest	New expectations in consumption activities and new development politics	Post-industrial expectative

Source: own elaboration.

Rural development since 2000 based on rural policies and politics of decentralization has become important. Rural changes in extremely rural areas suggest new policies for rural populations in shrinking areas in relation to urban populations. Connections of rural areas improve in general terms. The renewed value of the periphery of rural areas is a reaction of *placelessness* where places become more and more similar, so that the location losses a distinctive and particular sense of place. The renovated rural place is possible to situate in an extended landscape, and structure of feeling of populations. Africa is a key example to demonstrate the territorial disparities that exist in the extreme global south and the limitations of global interpretations of rural revitalization processes, where populations still have survival problems.

### *The Case of Africa, as Example*

Africa could be considered a great peripheral space within the global periphery. But, Pesche, Losch, and Imbernon [9] suggest in the case of Africa notable geographical contrasts between highly populated regions and largely uninhabited areas as a product of interconnected environmental and historical factors. In any case, population density and its geographical distribution in rural areas of Africa are characterized by significant variation across different regions. Rural areas in Africa vary widely depending on factors such as access to resources, infrastructure, cultural heritage and political stability. One major challenge facing economic development in rural areas of Africa is the lack of access to basic amenities such as electricity, water, and roads. Access to water in rural areas of Africa is a critical issue today.

Currently there is a continued increasing pressure on natural resources in rural peripheral areas of Africa. Yet, increasing agricultural income remains a key issue that requires proactive rural public policies. Many different factors are important in explaining the diversity of decentralization dynamics depending on the country: the colonial legacy, the strength of the institutional structures, the internal politics, between others factors. Decentralization is often perceived and presented as being able to play an important role in improving the living conditions of peripheral rural populations.

African growth population in cities and rural areas, with contrasted patterns of migration dynamics based on a new circular dynamic of urban-rural linkages that characterized the recent rurality of sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, a new role of small towns and the rural area of influence is a recent process associated with better governance, based on decentralization as a key role of day to day life of the rural population. Mobile technologies of communications break the traditional isolation of rural communities.

Agriculture is a key element of the rural economy and livelihoods in peripheral rural spaces of Africa, with a great dependence on environmental and territorial conditions. Overall, agriculture plays a relevant role in the configuration of sustainable rural communities in all spaces of rural Africa, providing food security and social and economic opportunities for a notable part of rural people. Tourism in rural areas of Africa is an emerging industry and a future opportunity for peripheral communities. The current expansion and relevance of mining activities is a component of a long and traditional historical process. In this perspective, mining activities are emblematic of the resource curse problems, given that the income obtained does not revert to the well-being of the population in general or the rural populations that support these activities.

The sub-Saharan Africa is a commonly accepted world region with a plurality of identities. Until recently in the global south, the problems of interaction between urban-rural or rural-urban migrations have not received much consideration in scenarios such as Africa [10], but currently, they have acquired renewed social and territorial relevance. In this sense, it is necessary to design specific policies for each territory, with its own and even unique tendencies in urban-rural relations. The rapid population growth of Third World cities gives rise to concerns about the notable changing nature of the relationship between urban places and rural territories in a fluid spatial context. The trends established in this section aim to provide a dynamic scenario of the main socio-territorial processes without the fixed framework of statistical data from international agencies. Thus, it is possible to indicate that even in the same country, processes of rural revitalization based on rural communities, resource extraction processes and communities that have difficulties in survival coexist. Everything seems to suggest that planetary approaches have serious limitations in their practice in the extreme global south.

## **4. Discussion and Conclusions**

The concept of rural periphery is a geographical concept in dispute [11]. In the context of planetary approaches, it can appear under multiple sides, but its consideration is still affected by the wide academic implementation of core-periphery models and the unequal distribution of resources [12]. In this perspective, peripheral rural areas were dependent on urban core areas and, consequently, have been labeled as problem areas with difficulties in adequate progress. The revitalization of many rural areas in the global north and global south suggests a new scenario for these areas that have a wide heterogeneity even at regional and place levels. In notable areas, they are still dominated by material problems that condition daily life and limit hopes for the future. In this sense, it would be necessary to build theoretical approaches aimed at divergent realities and, above all, emphasize those scenarios most dominated by poverty and survival problems. Access to water, poverty, adequate food and education still constitute the foundation in the life of many populations that surely do not have a planetary vision of their existence affected by daily survival. In this sense, it is necessary to consider the revitalization processes that, in some cases, are verifiable realities while in others, they are simple spatial notes in a still modernist context. Human welfare is still a key question in the global south in the wider context of a subsistence economy.

In short, it is possible to suggest that the paths of global and even planetary approaches contain notable nuances, which even raise other points of view when the socio-territorial realities are very contrasting and affected by realities that affect the very survival of rural populations. It would be necessary to establish flexible approaches but starting from the poorest or most needy material realities, not from the adaptive processes of the global north.

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### Informed Consent Statement

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### Declaration of Competing Interest

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