Chapter 1. Introduction

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Metrocentricity and the dominance of urban studies

This book takes its starting point in the current dominance of urban studies in contemporary educational research (e.g. Hargreaves, Kvalsund & Galton, 2009) and the scarcity of research on rural youth. Consequently, knowledge about young people's marginalisation and participation in education and the wider society is based on life in limited geographical / social contexts. Metrocentricity predominates and leads to the neglect of needs that are not visible in cities (Farrugia 2014, p. 293) and underestimates the problems of rural youth; despite research that shows that it is mainly young people from outside metropolitan regions who express a lack of involvement in Swedish society and a lack of confidence in the government and in parliament (e.g. Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2010). It also obscures the importance of categorisations of location, social class, ethnicity and gender as they are experienced across socio-spatial settings, since it is not clear what are to be seen as distinctly urban educational issues as opposed to generic ones (Campbell & Whitty, 2007). Thus, in order to get a more representative picture of young people’s situation and education we need to explore in more depth rural youth and their schooling.

The development of different communities and regions in a country might differ quite markedly. In Sweden cities are still generally growing in population and wealth, whereas rural towns and areas are shrinking in population and with some exceptions becoming more impoverished. Almost half of the country’s rural municipalities have smaller populations today compared to three decades ago. Schools are closing and pupils have to travel more and longer distances to get their
education; often at greater costs than before and with fewer and relatively lower State subsidies to support them (Fjellman, Yang Hansen & Beach, 2018).

The differences between urban (development) and rural (decline) areas begs questions about the claimed aspects of justice and equity in the education system in Sweden. Admittedly this system does seem to be ostensibly open and inclusive (Gudmundsson, 2013). Currently in Swedish schools upwards of 85% of all child cohorts between the ages of 3 and 19 are included for 6 hours or more each weekday in some form of organised institutional education or day-care, regardless of their social class, gender or racial or ethnic heritage or any possible physical or mental disabilities (Beach & Dyson, 2016; Beach, 2018). But inequalities still loom large, and as pointed out by others (e.g. Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009; Beach, From, Johansson and Öhrn, 2018; Beach, Johansson, Öhrn, Rönnlund & Rosvall, 2018; Fjellman, Yang-Hansen & Beach, 2018), despite already having been somewhat of a black-spot on the cartography of the social democratic welfare state, rural-urban disparities seem to have expanded significantly.

Research about education, place and the positioning of young people

The presence of studies on young people and their education in marginalised urban areas, stands in sharp contrast to the silence of rural youth and education. A Swedish review of 30 years of research on small rural schools concludes that there are few studies, and furthermore that the existing ones are primarily about the quality of educations, pupils’ academic performances or concerned with the closing down of schools (Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009). Studies of schools in their contexts – that are more frequent in urban research - are deemed very rare. That goes for the Nordic countries in general but is said to be particularly obvious in Sweden where such research is ‘almost non-existent’ (Hargreaves et al 2009, p. 28). This silence on the rural is not restricted to educational research, but applies to other fields as well. For instance,
youth research is said seldom to target rural youth and existing studies to focus on ‘move or stay’-issues (Svensson 2010, p. 279; also Möller 2011; Waara, 2011).

Central to the rather rich literature on urban education and place are the urban contrasts; on the one side, the urban associations with poverty, marginalisation and problems, and on the other, with opportunities, high culture and capital (see Öhrn & Weiner, 2007). This corresponds to a physical segregation with people with low income/education being grouped together in certain areas whereas those with more capital live elsewhere. The former ones are subjected to territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant, 2007) and people living there are ‘clearly aware of these pathologising discourses’ (Archer et al, 2010, p. 32). Such discourses appear as widespread across nations. For instance, there are obvious resemblances in the wordings of marginalised urban youth in Sweden talking about their neighbourhood as ‘poor’ and ‘immigrant’ and ‘ghetto’ areas (Öhrn, 2011), with that of urban Canadian pupils who refer to their schools as ‘ghetto’ or slum for poor kids (Kennelly & Dillabough 2008, p. 499). Place and location then, stands as strong signifiers of identity, class and ethnicity and communicate expectations of those living in marginalised urban areas (e.g. Andersson, 2003; Gietz-Johansen, 2003).

In urban areas social differences and conflicts become obvious through housing and school segregation; ‘we’ and the ‘others’ are literally and visibly separated. Whether and how place signifies social positionings in rural areas, with its less distinct housing segregation, is not clear. Occasional studies suggest that heterogenous social groupings makes more complex relations visible than homogenous ones where pupils’ categorisation of ‘the others’ become more unambiguous (Lindbäck & Sernhede, 2010), and that class and ethnicity stand out as more central categorisations for youth in metropolitan schools than in rural ones (Öhrn, 2012a). Some also point to the importance of other kinds of social relations as family background, that might exceed class for social positioning in rural areas (Holm,
2008). However, class has also been less analysed in rural research than in urban, and its importance is thus still an open question.

There are different views on whether social differences are less pregnant in rural communities. Some would argue that small communities are ‘closer’ with more social fellowship building on common history and experiences, and family relations, whereas others in their turn consider rural communities not necessarily to have more in common or experience more fellowship than other areas (see Solstad, 2009). Urban research proposes that metropolitan areas are becoming more fragmentated and losing their former ‘community spirit’ (Sernhede, 2007, p. 466; also Wacquant, 2007). Occasionally, rural research also raises questions about the presence of local fellowship (Heggen, Myklebust & Øia, 2001), and again, calls for analyses of urban-rural relations and whether social fragmentation is a generic trend in contemporary Western societies, how it varies and what the implications are for young people’s belonging and sense of participation.

Research about education, local relations and young people’s participation

Media and policy debates have typically depicted young people’s exclusion and resistance as urban (male) issues (e.g. Nolan & Anyon, 2004; Öhrn 2012b). Ruralities are often presented as more idyllic, less subjected to social problems and challenges than urban ones. There is more concern and anxiety expressed for urban youth, although Swedish media in later times has paid attention to nationalist and xenophobic sympathies in rural areas. They are for instance concerned with the greater support of the Swedish democrates, a nationalist party, in rural than in metropolitan areas (Novus/Svt 20181).

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1 https://www.svt.se/special/valjarbarometern/, retrieved 2018-03-08
Urban research suggests that schools in marginalised areas are generally not very supportive in helping young people to understand such movements or social conditions, let alone to develop a critical perception of their social position and challenge it (Beach & Sernhede, 2011; Schwartz & Öhrn, 2012). Whether schools in rural areas are different in this respect largely remains to be seen. As concluded from previous reviews (Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009), this is not in focus in Swedish rural research. Occasional studies point to a more open attitude towards the local community in rural schools (Marklund, 2000), and also for the rural curriculum to include activities and competences central to local business, as hunting, fishing and forestry (Gustafsson & Öhrn, 2012). Similarly, Eskilsson (2010) shows that pupils are allowed leave of absence for participating in such activities. However, knowledge in this area is scarce and as pointed out by for instance Hargreaves et al (2009) there is a need for more research to understand how local conditions and community are addressed in rural education and what it implies for young people’s future work and life in rural communities. It might be that rural schools are more likely to address their local conditions in teaching, as this might appear as potentially less dangerous than in some urban ones in vulnerable positions with much tensions. However, some rural areas are certainly also subjected to harsh conditions as depopulation, unemployment, poverty, and shortage of teachers and schools and poor future prospects.

The project

Against this background, we designed a project on Rural youth – education, place and participation (VR 2013-2142, funded by the Swedish Research Council 2014-2017). The project was planned with the aim to develop an understanding of rural youth and their participation and agency. It set out to research young people’s social inclusion and participation in rural schools and how schools in different rural areas address young people’s opportunities to work and social inclusion. Central to this, and explored by use of ethnographic methods, are youth’s understandings of belongings, social relationships, differences and conflicts in various places, and the ways these
are addressed (or not) in teaching to allow for young people to understand and act on their social position.

From idea to practice and from ethnography to multi-sited ethnography

Describing what ethnography is and involves is often considered to be straightforward: it is participant observation. However, as also Walford (2018) proposes the term has broadened in usage in the last few decades and for some has now become almost synonymous with qualitative research. This makes things more complicated. The association with qualitative research actually misrepresents ethnography, which does not traditionally recognize this distinction and often generates quantitative data as well as field-notes and descriptions to support any descriptions and arguments that are made.

We accept Walford’s descriptions here. We do not draw any hard lines between qualitative and quantitative methods and their data types and rather, as suggested by Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) we have aimed to produce multiple types of data within our investigations to try to develop our ideas about the researched settings and to interrogate, challenge and develop our theories ideas. This means that although we have not used sophisticated statistical analyses in the research and have tended to usually rely on other data forms than numerical ones, we have no problems with quantitative analysis as long as it serves a purpose in the research process. This is also picked up by Walford (2018) and Troman (2006). They describe ethnography as a practice involving seven key principles:

- A focus on the study of cultural formation and maintenance;
- The use of multiple methods and the generation of rich and diverse forms of data;
- The direct involvement and long-term engagement of the researcher(s);
- A recognition that the researcher is the main research instrument;
- High status being given to the accounts of participants’ perspectives and understandings;
- Engagement in a spiral of data collection, hypothesis building and theory testing – leading to further data collection; and
- A focus on a particular case in depth, but providing the basis for theoretical generalization. (Troman, 2006, p. 1)

Our original project idea set out to enact and operationalise these seven principles in six separate and particularly selected schools in different rural places through long-term participant observation and direct involvement and sustained researcher engagement at each setting. This was done to provide detailed accounts and thick descriptions of how the everyday practices of those engaged in educational processes took place and how these events were implicated in broader social relations and cultural production. The agency of educational subjects in these processes at each site was also going to be given specific attention in this analysis. However, when enacting the project a number of challenges had to be confronted and these resulted in innovatory grafts of some significant importance.

One of these grafts was introduced early, already at the stage of formulating the project plan. It concerned the diversity of rurality per se and quite simply that there are many different forms of rurality so that in order to avoid stereotyping rurality as one category, we had to include different types of rural areas in our investigations, such as sparsely populated areas, tourist municipalities and small industrial (and ‘de-industrialised’) communities. These each represent an official category in definitions of rural places (SKL, 2011) and the schools selected for the study were chosen to provide a variation along these lines. The one tourist municipality in the study however, was found to also be able to categorise as sparsely populated, and in the book we mainly discuss along this devide of sparsely populated and de/industrialised rural communities. The characteristics of the schools and their municipalities is shown in Table 1 below. All but two of them were the only secondary schools in their municipality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AREAS/SCHOOLS</th>
<th>Catchment/less or more than 3000</th>
<th>Upper secondary school in the municipality or distance to</th>
<th>Distance to higher education</th>
<th>History of production**)</th>
<th>Current labour market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coastal school/De/industrialised</td>
<td>More than 3000</td>
<td>No, between 50 and 100 to nearest, a wide range of national and local programmes</td>
<td>Between 50 and 100 km</td>
<td>Primary sector</td>
<td>Secondary sector and tertiary sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inland school/Sparse</td>
<td>Less than 3000</td>
<td>No, between 50 and 100 to nearest, only few of the national programmes</td>
<td>Between 150 and 200 km</td>
<td>Primary sector</td>
<td>Primary and secondary sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain school Tourist/Sparse</td>
<td>Less than 3000</td>
<td>Yes, only a few of the national programmes</td>
<td>More than 300 km</td>
<td>Primary sector</td>
<td>Tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River school/De/industrialised</td>
<td>More than 3000</td>
<td>Yes, most of the national programmes</td>
<td>Between 100-150 km</td>
<td>Military base, secondary sector</td>
<td>Secondary and tertiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest school/Sparse</td>
<td>Less than 3000</td>
<td>Yes, only a few of the national programmes</td>
<td>Between 150 and 200 km</td>
<td>Primary sector</td>
<td>Primary and secondary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sea school/De/industrialised</td>
<td>More than 3000</td>
<td>No, app. 50 km to nearest</td>
<td>Between 100 and 150 km</td>
<td>Primary and secondary</td>
<td>Secondary sector</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*) A similar table but with three types of areas (urban, peri-urban and sparse) instead of the present two (de/industrialised and sparse) occurs in some previous publications from the project (e.g. Beach et al 2018).

**) The primary, secondary and tertiary sectors represent various business types and the goods they produce and sell. They might be though of as a chain of production, from extracting the raw materials (primary) through manufacturing (secondary) and to servicing the end consumers (tertiary).

As indicated by the names of the schools, the selection includes both inland/-mountain/forest areas and seaside/coastal ones. They are from Southern as well as Northern Sweden. Sweden is the third largest country by area in the European
Union but has a population of only 10 million compared to France’s 65 and Spain’s 46 million respectively (the two larger nations by area). The sparsely populated areas are mainly in the North but there are also some further South. They are generally associated with forestry, timber, wood-pulp manufacturing, tourism, and previously also in some places mining.

*Contextual constraints in our enactment of ethnography and multi-sited ethnography*

Although we would have liked to spend more time in the field at each site, due to the restricted budgets granted by our main funding agency, a maximum of five weeks of continuous fieldwork was considered possible in each school for each of the three project field researchers. The plan was to carry out this fieldwork in 2015-2016 at each site, and to follow up this restricted but sustained period of participant observation with further occasional visits. Temporally compressing fieldwork in this way is one of several ways of using research time ethnographically (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). However, due to other labour demands on the field research team, accommodating five consecutive weeks in the field at each site was found to be impossible and the corresponding time had to be carried out as one to two week visits at each site by each field researcher instead, in one site also followed up by occasional visits.

In Jeffrey and Troman (2004) this kind of temporal ordering of fieldwork is called an intermittent time mode. As an ideal type it is meant to allow a flexible approach to the frequency of site visits and is organised around the concept of progressive focusing in ethnography in relation to the development and continual evaluation of a characteristic ethnographic spiral of research planning and reflection. Data production and analysis, new planning, and further data production and analysis are organised in an ongoing dialectic process.

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However, instead of this flexible approach to fieldwork as an evolving process, we were really forced to adopt the intermittent time mode a priori, which together curtailed researcher autonomy. We did so though within a collective approach to the ethnography, where although each individual field researcher concentrated primarily on one designated research site, data and ideas were collectively shared, and investigations were also strongly jointly planned through regular collective discussions. The collectivisation of the ethnographic venture involved the team members doing the following:

- Reading and contributing to a collective and continually evolving joint plan of action that held a common focus but also sufficient degrees of freedom for individual variations in terms of project activities where this was jointly considered to be of value to the project aims
- Reading each individual researcher’s fieldwork narratives carefully to identify the main concepts and ideas and their possible relationships and general implications
- Checking the relevance of the concepts within the scope of the project
- Identifying patterns in the field terms of the cultural processes that may be evident
- Following these up in further research production

Thus, our collective ethnography contained elements that are common in multi-sited ethnography and vertical case analysis, where joint discussions and analyses are often used in the ways we used them in order to identify tentative themes and questions about emergent ideas and to develop common practices, discourses and tools as a way to keep research productive and flexibly focused across different institutional arrangements and various sites over time (Eisenhart, 2017). For us, to a large degree we developed multi-sitedness and cooperation partly as a way to cope with contingent developments and emerging needs. As a more deliberately planned activity Eisenhart (2018) uses the term ‘multi-scale ethnography’ for research that tries to respond in one way or another to the desire to identify and understand
cultural forms that travel across spaces, times, and levels. She described three types of multi-scalar ethnography: multi-sited ethnography, meta-ethnography, and comparative (or vertical) case study. Multi-sited ethnography is the methodology we have chosen.

Multi-sited ethnography was originally defined by George Marcus (1995, p. 105) as a methodology “designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations” in which ethnographers have established some form of presence based on an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among these sites. In it, as suggested by Eisenhart (2018), cultural forms produced or circulating in one locale are followed and explored in other places, with the intent of identifying and understanding connections among them and researchers are, thus, quite literally following connections, associations or relationships across specific time and space scales. As also Kenway et al (2018) have put it, researchers might follow the interpretive logics of a group of people as they move from one site to another or the pedagogical practices of teachers as they move back and forth between their rural homes and their schooling, or the interactions of pupils in school and in various after-school activities, but in each case the intention is to offer a means of understanding how activities, concerns, and needs depend on and are constrained across groups, sites, systems, and periods of time. This is also the logic we have adopted to cope with and begin to collectively theorise about the variations of rurality and the relationships between education and place there.

*From theory to method and back again*

In addition to being collaborative, intermittent, and multi-sited, as a form of theoretically informed ethnographic studies (TIES) the project also attaches to specific theories. These are elaborated on in the individual chapters of the book, but will be briefly introduced here, to show their general role in the design, collaboration and analysis of the project.
The theoretically informed ethnographic methodology is described by Willis (2000) and by Willis and Trondman (2000). It is also discussed by Trondman, Willis and Lund (2018), who express it as a methodology which entails being in the field among those whose lives are investigated for an extensive period of time, with the ambition of understanding and theorising the meaning of their lived experiences in order to bring illuminating and surprising answers to puzzling research questions that prepare the ground for social criticism and are able to alter our senses of the world and our capacity of seeing things differently. It is propelled as much by theoretical as by empirical argument. This means that whilst we cannot do without empirical evidence in ethnography in turn cannot do without theory: i.e. cannot do without a scientifically cultural analysis of meaning (Willis, 2000; Trondman et al, 2018).

Our research has been informed theoretically by the theories and concepts of space developed within the work of especially Doreen Massey (e.g. Massey, 1994/2013). In her theories space is a quintessentially important concept which is understood as continuously in process and shaped through socio-spatial and material practices in forms of interaction that both produce and contextualise the historical social relations of production, and, by virtue of their interpellations, also to some degree individual identities and actions as well. Actions are not purely voluntary from this theoretical position and there is a close connection between space, place and the construction of social relations, practices, meaning and spatial identities.

The concept of social class is also a central analytical concept in relation to our ethnographic project. In relation to it we take as a first point of departure the important recognition made by Marx concerning the development of social classes as emerging historically and contemporaneously first and only under specific socio-historical conditions and in relation to the development of the productive forces and the social division labour. However, we take a somewhat broader perspective on class within the vista of Marxist class analysis than that expressed in Marx own writing and own time (e.g. Marx & Engels, 1848/1969). Like Harvey (1996), when analyzing the materials related to social class we instead seek a concept of class that
can be used within the scope of a critical analysis of rural education and schooling in more complex social conditions than those of previous centuries. Our interest is still for divisions and differences and their consequences read in terms of the development of subject identities, social rights, life conditions and future possibilities (Harvey, 1996, p. 5), but more specifically we are also interested in how differences in education possibilities and experiences are produced and work in class terms in different rural spaces and communities.

This represents a particular challenge. What we require is a broad cultural historical and materialist concept of class that, as Harvey (1996, p. 6) wrote addresses things like the politics of identity and ‘difference both in terms of important abstractions in a search for a ‘socially just’ social order-within particular material circumstances’: specifically those prevailing in our chosen rural areas and their communities and schools in Sweden today. This is a difficult challenge, not the least in ethnography where, as for instance Maisuria and Beach (2017) point out, we have to both avoid fetishising the particular for its own sake and a universalism in our generalisations from social class, that is indifferent to geographical (space) and difference. We are seeking abstractions then that are both distinct from immediate material circumstances and possible to locate within specific material conditions.

Given the recognition of this challenge, like Harvey (1996) therefore, we define class in terms of human situatedness and positionality in relation to various processes of accumulation, including economic accumulation. Again, this is a definition that is broader than standard Marxist class definitions connected to the social relations of economic production, but it is also more specific than the neo-Marxian conceptualisations of the super-structural reproductions and aberrations of class relations that rejects the positive content of empirical knowledge entirely and obscuraes class relations and interests behind the smudge of interdependence. As Harvey (1996) points out, we all live within the realm of capital and we all live out our lives within its processes of accumulation. But these are also often both very
disparate and operating according to radically different socio-temporal scales where situated differences of things like gender, ethnicity, race and sexuality can only with the force of great symbolic violence be frozen into essential identities.

This idea about not all inequalities being reducible to the same categories and socio-cultural scales is very significant to the present investigation of space and equality/inequality in education. Differences such as those of gender, ethnicity, sexuality and race are often compared to class, but they do not have the same social ontology in terms of a specific material basis in society. They too exist within the class structure, but unlike for instance the existence of the bourgeois or the working class, they are not specifically created by the capitalist mode of production. Capitalism could not survive without wage labour or the privatisation of the means of production, but there is no exclusive relationship between any specific economic system and patriarchy (Hartmann, 1979). The gender order certainly relates to economy but as theorised by Connell (1996; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) gender relations develop differently in various contexts also due to other conditions, and need to be understood in relation to local (and regional) variations. Hence, they cannot be reduced to assumptions of any general form, but should be actively explored in relation to the material and social conditions in a certain place. As shown by Massey (1996, p. 178) such variations can be substantial even between rather close localities, and she emphasises the necessity for a “thoroughgoing theoretical anti-essentialism at this level”.

Compared to class, gender is more explored in rural settings, although certainly much less than in urbanities. When researched in rural contexts, gender relations are typically presented as more distinct with more fixed femininities and masculinities (cf Härnsten et al, 2005) and often focussing on traditionally male activities and settings (Forsberg & Stenbacka, 2013). Some research also suggests that boys and young men are more likely to be included in local rural groupings (Waara, 2011), to
rely more on social networks to provide them with future work (Öhrn, Asp-Onsjö & Holm, 2017) or for other reasons become more positive to their rural neighbourhood and the idea of returning after their (urban) education (Svensson, 2006). Rural girls talk more about moving to urban settings and about education being the way to achieve this (Sandell 2007; Öhrn et al, 2017). There is some indication that school content, when occasionally adjusted to local traditions is rather in line with traditionally male activities and interests than female ones (Gustafsson & Öhrn, 2012). However, there are also studies from small de-industrialised societies pointing to the rather harsh effects on young men of disappearing industrial work and wage opportunities, with the following erosion of working-class masculinities and positive self images (Weis, 1990; Trondman, 1995). In this respect, local conditions and what kind of rural area that is researched might be of interest, and the difference between de/industrialised and other (forest/agricultural) areas worth exploring (cf Forsberg & Stenbacka, 2013).

The existence of rural inequality is one of the most important and often forgotten problems of equality in our time. It is not reducible to capitalist accumulation or capitalist production relations but it exists within the realm of capital and the people who are involved live within processes that are both very disparate and that operate according to different socio-temporal scales.

Concerning specifically rural theory, in line with the above, theoretically rurality is not a passive object in our research but it is not a fully floating signifier in the sense of being totally free from spatial relations or capitalist relations of production and accumulation. Is constituted within these relations but determined by them. Ruralities are plural not singular and experiences and understandings of them are capable of changing teacher and pupil behaviour and affecting education motivation and performances, and our committed belief is that any research or theory of rurality in education needs to take this into account.
Such place conscious theories of rural education relations and practices are rare (Hargreaves et al, 2009), but they are also likely to be of greater value to educational stakeholders, including teachers, pupils, their parents, local businesses and educational politicians and policymakers (Bagley & Hillyard, 2014). As Corbett (2015) has suggested, education is as significant in and to local lives as is labour or production: and as are community and production relations, education relations and experiences and understandings of them are formed in concrete space and time contexts (Balfour, Mitchel & Moletsane, 2008; Bagley & Hillyard, 2014). A certain place at a certain time will always contain, mediate and develop a particular mix of social relations in particular ways in particular spaces that can be culturally observed, experienced, documented, discussed and analysed (Massey, 1994), but that the identity of the place will also always be experienced as meaningful in the sense of it deriving at least some force from the specificity of its interactions with spaces outside (Massey, 1994/2013; Bagley & Hillyard, 2014; Vigo & Soriano, 2014; Johansson, 2017).

This has had specific connotations for our understanding of the formation of different (and differences in different) rural spaces. We have identified sparsely populated areas, tourist municipalities and small industrial (and de-industrialised) communities and we have situated our research fieldwork in schools in six carefully selected places there, where as Massey (1994) and Chandler (1990) point out, the growth of industrial capitalism will most likely have acted with different effects. As these authors and others, such as for instance Harvey (1996, 2003, 2006) point out, the growth of industrial capitalism saw the massive reorganisation of vast areas in rural spaces in Europe like those we have done our research in, with this creating pockets of semi- and peri-urban industrialisation and settlement in some of areas, whilst leaving other areas relatively untouched with their settlements remaining quite sparse. The capitalist industrialisation process has worked (and works still today) quite differently in different (types of) areas and places (and the spaces within them). It has either pushed populations out of a rural area, drawn them in or seemingly ignored them, depending on what are politically defined as predominant national
economic needs and current economic climates (Balfour, Mitchell, & Moletsane, 2008). Currently the global concept of fracking is being given great attention from multiple directions in these respects.

What we have become most involved with in our investigations have been the subsequent concomitant relations of dependency and independency on global capitalist relations of production (and corporate organisations) in particular places and the subsequent effects on education from both global, national and local forces. These can take form through influences that seem to emanate from production directly. But they also appear indirectly too, in terms of the construction of understandings of and practices in education authorities and schools, in terms of classification and framing of curricula and the construction of local articulations of global pedagogical discourses. Rural spaces and their schools and school curricula are often depicted as simple, but they are in fact complex and multi-layered social constructions in respect to which understandings of local educational needs and possibilities become manifest (Balfour et al, 2008).

**The role of critical theory**

The theories of Massey belong to and are influenced by what is broadly known as critical social theory that makes visible the linkages, tensions, and solidarities within and between groups, in terms of dependencies and inter-dependencies across time and space and the distribution of wealth, poverty, power and influence. In our research we connect these up in relation also to education availabilities, accessibilities, understandings, outcomes and experiences. They form the basal-structure in this sense upon which our research on the daily lives of people has been theorized and engaged with. They represent in other words our theoretically formed and over the years empirically and theoretically argued convictions that refuse to reproduce representations of individuals or groups to autonomous, self-contained units that are able to pursue their life choices unencumbered by any form of constraint (Beach, 2011). It is a use of/approach to critical theory and analysis in ethnography similar to the understandings in Weis and Fine’s (2018) concept of
critical bifocality, that calls for documenting at once both the linkages and capillaries of structural arrangements and the local discursive and lived out practices by which privileged and marginalized youth and adults make sense of their circumstances and act within those circumstances.

We too have engaged in this type of research (e.g. Beach & Sernhede, 2011; Beach Dovemark, Schwartz & Öhrn, 2013). As did Weis and Fine, we did so as a way to open up quandaries about how to document and theorize what is purposely designed to be unseen, with this being the invisible hand of the movement and consolidation of capital, racism, or neo-liberalism in education, as a way to both open up and answer questions about things like educational justice, privilege and dispossession. When doing so we set out to highlight the implications of deep structural shifts in the global economy and the ways in which aspects of the now global economy can play out in and on education relationships and outcomes, which is also implicated in our present project too, where we deliberately theorize about how the realignment of capitalism at the global level has attendant consequences at the national and local level with regard to lived-out social and economic dynamics of individuals and collectivities as a global fact in respect of current educational relationships, experiencees and lived possibilities.

From theorised analytical methodology to results

Altogether some 340 hours of classroom observation have been conducted in the project. They have been focused on presentations of place and on participation, pupil influence, and conflicts in the school, as well as on how places and their relations have been presented and positioned in the classification and framing of curriculum content and interactions. They have included field conversations and formal interviews with pupils (68 boys and 68 girls) and staff at the schools, which have been further supplemented by observations in the local neighbourhood and document analyses.

By doing ethnography we have placed emphasis on learning from informants and
through this we have been particularly strong at providing details from interactions inside everyday life contexts and settings, which have been meticulously documented. This responds to points made by Walford (2018) that ethnographers are interested in the accuracy of their descriptions and analyses and try to take pains to ensure that they have sufficient evidence for all the claims they make. In line with our aims and theoretical positioning, whether and how teaching relates to place was inquired into, as was young people’s views of inclusion, fellowship and conflict, and their positioning of the local school and community. Our analyses pointed to considerable differences between the researched schools that were in their turn related to their relationships within and to the global capitalist national political economy in broad terms and in terms of local contingencies and conditions. The results are organised under a series of thematised chapter headings that try to express this. These chapters are described in the following section.

**Chapter disposition** Will be completed when all empirical chapters are finished

This first chapter sets the scene by presenting the research field, and some core questions for the research project relating to the dominance of urban studies in education (and social sciences more generally) and the silence on rural conditions and problems. The chapter also presents the research project and its theory, methodology and data production to provide a coherent background and frame for the thematic chapters so they can focus on their findings and discussions.

The following empirical chapters focus on prominent themes emerging from the fieldwork and address both rural schooling and youth’s rural lives more generally. This is in line with the chosen theoretical understanding of place as central, requiring that education, as other institutions, is analysed in its socio-spatial context.

Chapter 2 (Young people about their rural place: A rural idyll?) focuses on place and draws especially on youth’s presentations of the researched places. It includes sub-themes concerned with the various images of places and of strategies to maintain
place relations. In this respect there are similarities, but also differences between the different ruralities.

Chapter 3 (title) moves the analyses to the different schools and their relations to the surrounding communities. Central to this, is the presentation of the places and their relations (conflicts, values, silences) found in teaching and their relations to other places. The analyses point to some differences between ruralities in this respect, with schools in the sparsely populated areas more likely to explicitly position themselves in the rural local context, and valorise the rural positively in education exchanges, content and interaction compared to the schools in small (de)industrialised communities, with positive effects on young people’s understandings.

Chapter 4 (title) focuses on young people’s views of their future options and their dreams of further education and work in relation to the local material conditions of the rural places, such as the labour markets. Gendered and classed characteristics are found to be of particular importance in the process of shaping the young people’s ideas of future careers, both limiting and broadening their views.

Chapter 5 (title) emanates from the chosen theoretical framework of the project that emphasises place as constantly in process and reshaped. In this respect, migration poses as a special challenge and an option for sparsely populated and de-populated areas. In the researched sites, we note an influx in recent years of refugees – particularly apparent with the unforeseen inflow of refugees from Syria during the fieldwork - but also of labour migrant from Northern Europe. Taking this as a starting point, this chapter analyses issues concerned with various groups’ understandings of place and its relations.

Chapter 6 (title) addresses themes of gender and class. It presents previous research on gender and class in relation to rural youth and education and from this, moves to present some of the main findings from our research. These indicate less stereotyped
gender relations than in much previous research, but still an overall trend towards masculine activities and values.

Chapter 7 (title) focuses on relations between rural and urban areas, their respective conditions, problems and challenges. This is a central question for the book and this chapter aims to present a synthesising discussion. It draws on previous research of urban and rural youth and their schooling, and explores the under-researched rural dimension by use of our data to discuss rural understandings and responses to socio-spatial issues.

The final chapter 8 draws together central themes from the previous chapters. These are concerned with various aspects of social structures, social relations, their implications for social inclusion, and how these are addressed in school and teaching. It also returns to the initial questions posed in the first chapters about rural – urban relations, metrocentricity and marginalisation.

References


