

# **Rural communities and education markets: A cross national analysis of ethnographies of education inclusion and involvement in rural schools in Spain and Sweden**

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**Abstract:** The present article uses 25 ethnographic publications as data for a cross-national meta-ethnographic analysis of school development in rural communities. The publications come from research in four research projects in two countries that were ethnographically exploring different challenges in schools in rural areas in relation to changes in State regulation from bureaucratic and professional control to market governance. Different schools in different types of rural area have been investigated. Different types of pedagogical and leadership challenges are identified as is the emergence of two different types of school; *communitas* schools and magnet schools; as two different ways of responding to market pressures. Parental co-operation and community involvement characterizes the former whilst finding ways to competitively expand and exploit resources to refine recruitment characterize the other. Both are contextually driven in relation to market developments but the latter is also recognized as a default position for school development in market conditions. Both are described as adding value for or to rural communities but in very different ways. These different ways are presented and discussed in the article. Based on this discussion the development of markets in education is described as very problematic for rural areas. Schools with greater access to resources are benefitted at the expense of other schools in ways that undermine fundamentally important rural community values.

**Key words:** Rural schools, parental choice, ethnography, meta-ethnography, inclusion, marketization

## **1. Introduction**

State education services have recently been transformed by policies of public choice, decentralization and competitive funding to create regional education quasi-markets where private (non-State) providers are able to run schools on an independent or partly or wholly subsidized basis in parallel with public ownership (Author1, 2010; Fjellman, 2019; Verger, Lubienski, and Steiner-Khamsi, 2016; Walker and Clark, 2010). Based on a meta-ethnography of products from ethnographic research in in four projects and fourteen schools in two countries (Spain and Sweden), the present article is based on an analysis of what can happen in these circumstances in rural different areas.

The introduction of policies of private choice, decentralization and competitive funding as governance tools in education systems represents a substantial change in the relationships

between education institutions, the state and its citizens (Beach, 2010). Education institutions have been increasingly key organizations for social integration and social control for the state, since the establishment of the concept of statehood in Westphalia treaty of 1648 (Sassen, 2006). Four principles defined the concept of state. These were, 1) having a defined territory, 2) a permanent population, 3) a government, and 4) a capacity to enter into relations with other territories and their governments that shared these three features. States existed prior to the Westphalia Treaty, but the treaty stabilized foundations for the modern state system and the concept of territorial sovereignty (Sassen, 2006).

Education institutions existed within states prior to the Westphalia Treaty. They were institutions that educated an elite governing class. Nationally consistent and controlled education systems under the control of official state bodies appeared later. They provided an education for the population in line with the first three of the four characteristics of the state outlined in the previous paragraph; education supply to population within given geographic boundaries under stipulations and jurisdiction (rules) controlled by state government as a principle of international law. Schools were to transform pupils into individuals that were able to uphold the values of the state and participate in the modern state economy, polity, and labor-market but the rolling out of education markets and the introduction of neo-liberal discourse destabilized the foundations for this (Ball, 1993; Reimers, 2006).

New laws replaced direct governance of education by a state agency for a population of common descent around a common language and common content. New governance policies introduced individual choices, increasingly privatized delivery, new public management, improved standards-based school performance measures, and cross-national policy borrowing (Ball, 1993; Beach, 2010). Individual schools were made subject to market-discipline and a new doctrine about governance through market forces where free individual consumers could determine the content and framing of the education system (Escardíbul and Villaroya, 2009;

Reimers, 2006) but what was ignored was that what seemed to be an objective and neutral development was anything but neutral and objective. How much currency can be brought to individual transactions determine education availabilities and patterns of consumption in these circumstances with serious challenges toward educational equity from unequal distributions of power and capital and interconnecting issues of class, race, region and gender as a result (Ball, 1993; Halpin and Troyna, 2001; Walker and Clark, 2010). What appears to be the introduction of freedom of choice may well fog over a geometry of power that adds to and extends existing educational inequalities rather than ameliorating them (AuthorÖ, 2019). Public voucher systems in Sweden and individual purchasing in Spain have facilitated the opportunities for individual consumption, and willingness to invest by private education (and state) suppliers has determined what can be chosen from (AuthorsBJ et al, 2019; Author2D, 2019a, 2019b; Fjellman, 2019). Neither of them have been able to ameliorate the challenges of educational inequality.

These problems of educational inequality exist both within rural areas, between rural areas, and between rural and urban areas. In rural areas, instead of increased incidences of choice, the number of rural municipalities that can offer school places from preschool, to infant, to upper-secondary levels has generally decreased compared to urban areas, and possibilities of choosing have also evolved differently in different places and for different actors (AuthorsBJ et al, 2019; Escardíbul and Villarroya, 2009; Fjellman, 2019). There has been a proliferation of schools in urban areas and rural towns, whilst the number of schools further away from towns in rural areas in both has fallen and choices are often non-existent (ibid; Hernández, 2000). Possibilities to freely establish schools have not meant that schools have become established and increased in number everywhere (Escardíbul and Villarroya, 2009; Kvalsrud, 2019; Fjellman, 2019) and even when choices exist, people have not been equally able to make them (Ball, 1993; Verger et al. 2016; Walker and Clark, 2010).

This obvious inequality seems to be a global phenomenon (Hargreaves, 2009, 2017; Rauhut and Littke, 2016). As Solstad (1978) identifies, the introduction of school buses in post-war years in Norway enabled school authorities to conduct a large-scale amalgamation of rural schools across the period 1950-70 and to reduce the number of primary schools in rural municipalities. This was allegedly for creating schools for rural children that were as large and resourceful as urban schools were but it also led to lengthy travel times and increased stress for many of them (Solstad, 1978), and these conditions have also generally worsened following the introduction of market reforms (Solstad, 1997). Schools closed in rural areas despite pupils there generally performing better than average on national tests and having more stable and positive attitudes towards school and schoolwork (Hernández, 2000; Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009) and children now often have to travel long distances to their school with significant negative effects on their health and wellbeing (Kvalsrud, 2019; Solstad, 1997). The introduction of market politics into educational governance did not create rural-urban imbalances in education justice and availability (Corchón, Raso and Hinojo, 2013; Marklund, 2000; Richardsson, 2010; Vázquez, 2016; Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009). The political solution has for some time been to create bigger schools for rural pupils on the basis of the rather false assumption that this would provide greater levels of equality (AuthorsBJ et al, 2019; Solstad, 1978, 1997), but there is evidence that the market reforms may add to and exacerbate these problems (AuthorsBF, 2018;). The number of pupils in Spain and Sweden living more than 20 km from their school is increasing. Schools in sparsely populated areas are facing enhanced chances of closure (Escardíbul and Villarroya, 2009; Hargreaves, 2009, 2017; Hernández, 2000; Kvalsrud, 2019; Marklund, 2000; Vázquez, 2016; Åberg Bengtsson, 2009) and inequalities are increasing within and between rural areas, not only between rural areas and urban ones (AuthorsBF et al, 2018; Fjellman, 2019). The present article uses a meta-ethnographic analysis of research to explore these issues.

## 2. Samples, data and analysis

Rural sociological research by Halvacree (1995), rural geographic research by Hedlund and Lundholm (2015), and rural education research by AuthorsBF et al, 2018, AuthorsBJ et al, 2019; Bagley and Hillyard (2015), Corbett (2015, 2016) and Corbett and Forsey (2017) present rural communities and their schools in terms of their spatial relations and historical material development. In this sense, they distinctly connected to a specific local spatial geography and history, but without being fully independent and autonomous in terms of their structural social relations and development (AuthorsBÖ, 2019; AuthorÖ, 2019; Kvalsrud, 2019). They are in other words distinct institutions at the micro-level, but are also sites that are part and parcel of larger political, economic and social structures (ibid; AuthorsBJ, 2019; Halfacree, 1995; Hargreaves, 2009; Shucksmith, 2018; Solstad, 1997) that are therefore amenable to comparative analysis if suitable methods are adopted. This perspective has guided our research design. For instance, when selecting rural areas for our research we have recognized that rural provinces cover close to two thirds of Spain's total area and contain 20% of the population (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/ESP/spain/rural-population>), whilst in Sweden the rural population proportion is slightly lower but the areal proportion is similar ([https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Sweden/rural\\_population\\_percent/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/Sweden/rural_population_percent/)). They include the following classifications and we have chosen research to cover each of them:

1. Rural towns built around transport intersects or industrial developments
2. Peri-urban rural areas within 45 min of a population center of 3000 or more people
3. Sparsely populated areas with less than 5 persons per square kilometer
4. Remote settlements that are more than 45min by car from a population centre with more than 3000 inhabitants.

There are different types of schools in these areas. There are small schools with less than four classrooms, intermediate schools with four to six classrooms, and large schools comprising at least six year groups with at least one school class each. Table 1 shows the basic characteristics of the schools and the areas they are from in the ethnographic investigations in our research projects.

**Table 1. Researched schools and their locations**

Small secondary school in sparsely populated highland area (Sw: Mountain School)	Secondary and tertiary sector employment in the area and amongst the parents
Small school in a remote rural village (Sw: Inland School)	Primary sector employment. Few service sector positions outside the school
A rural village school (Sw: River School)	Small scale industries and primary, secondary and tertiary sector employment. Mainly secondary among parents.
Large school in a rural town (Sw: Coastal School)	Mainly secondary and tertiary (and a little quaternary) sector employment. Some commuting staff and pupils.
Small school in a sparsely remote village (Sw: Forest School)	Mainly primary sector employment. Few service sector positions outside the school.
Medium sized school in a large village with small scale industrial developments (Sw: Sea School)	Some primary but mainly secondary sector employment in the area. Little tertiary employment. Mainly secondary sector work amongst parents
Small school in a sparsely populated peri-urban agricultural area (Sp: Lirural School)	Primary sector employment amongst parents. Some secondary sector work outside the schools
Small Northern mountain school (Sp: Trarural School)	Tertiary sector employment among parents. Local tourist industry. Some primary sector employment in the area.
Small Northern highland school (Sp: Panrural School)	Tertiary sector employment among parents. Local tourist industry. Some primary sector employment in the area
Small primary school on the outskirts an agricultural area town (Sp: Alrural School)	Secondary sector employment among parents. Some primary sector too. High concentration of ethnic minority and transnational pupils
Small sparsely populated area school (Sp: Pirural School)	Primary sector employment amongst parents
Small rural school in a sparsely populated fell land area (Sp: Anrural School)	Primary and secondary sector employment amongst parents
Large school in an attractive rural area (Sp: Barural School)	Secondary sector employment amongst parents. Some commuting in. Primary sector outside the school
Large school in an attractive rural area (Sp: Jarural School)	Tertiary and secondary sector employment amongst parents. Primary and tertiary sector outside the school

The ethnographies in these schools involved initial periods of observation at each of the sites, followed by successive separate visits spread over one to two years along with interviews with school inspectors, teachers, head-teachers, pupils, parents and community members from

the schools and school districts. They generated several books and multiple articles, book chapters and conference presentations. Such products form the primary data for meta-ethnography (Noblit and Hare, 1988). Table 2 presents our actual data corpus.

**Table 2. Cross-case cross-national comparative publications**

<p>Andrés Cabello, S. &amp; Giró Miranda, J. (2016). Families involvement in school: a complex question. <i>Revista de Evaluación de Programas y Políticas Públicas</i>, 7, 28-47.</p> <p>Andrés, S. &amp; Giró, J. (2016). El papel y la representación del profesorado en la participación de las familias en la escuela. <i>Revista Electrónica Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado</i>, 19(1), 61-71.</p> <p>Author1, 2017. Research article. Blinded.</p> <p>Author1, 2018. Research article. Blinded.</p> <p>Authors, 2019. Book chapter. Blinded.</p> <p>Authors2G, 2010. Research article. Blinded.</p> <p>Authors2S, 2014. Research article. Blinded.</p> <p>Authors2S, 2015. Research article. Blinded.</p> <p>Authors2D, 2017. Research article. Blinded.</p> <p>AuthorsBF et al 2018. Research article. Blinded.</p> <p>AuthorsBJ et al, 2019. Article. Blinded</p> <p>AuthorsBJ, 2019. Book chapter. Blinded.</p> <p>AuthorsBÖ, 2019. Book chapter. Blinded.</p> <p>Authors2D, 2019a. Article. Blinded.</p> <p>Authors2D, 2019b. Article. Blinded</p> <p>AuthorÖ, 2019. Book. Blinded.</p> <p>Giró, J. &amp; Andrés, S. (2016). Instalados en la queja: El profesorado ante la participación de las familias en las escuelas. <i>RASE Revista de la Asociación de Sociología de la Educación</i> 9(3), 334-345.</p> <p>Giró, J. &amp; Andrés, S. (2017). La participación del profesorado en la escuela. En J. Garreta. <i>Familias y escuela. Discursos y prácticas sobre la participación en la escuela</i> (pp. 125-147). Valencia: Pirámide</p> <p>Johansson, M. (2017). Yes, the power is in the town: An ethnographic study of student participation in a rural Swedish secondary school. <i>Australian and International journal of rural education</i>, 27(2), 61-77.</p> <p>Johansson, M. (2019) Blinded. In Blinded.</p> <p>Plaudàrias, J.M. (2017). Cómo se entiende la participación de las familias en y desde las escuelas. En J. Garreta. <i>Familias y escuela. Discursos y prácticas sobre la participación en la escuela</i> (pp. 27-48). Valencia: Pirámide.</p> <p>Rosvall, P-Å. (2017). Understanding career development amongst immigrant youth in a rural place. <i>Intercultural Education</i>. 28(6): 523-542.</p> <p>Rosvall, P-Å. (2019). Blinded. Book chapter in Blinded.</p> <p>Rosvall, Per-Åke and Rönnlund, Maria (2019) Blinded. Book chapter in Blinded.</p> <p>Rönnlund, M. (forthcoming). I love this place, but I won't stay. Identification with place and imagined spatial futures amongst youth living in rural areas in Sweden. <i>Young</i>.</p> <p>Rönnlund, M., Rosvall, P.-Å., &amp; Johansson, M. (2017). Vocational or academic track? Study and career plans among Swedish students in rural areas. <i>Journal of Youth Studies</i>, 21(3), 360-375.</p>
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We read the above texts for the present article and made independent lists of their key metaphors, phrases, ideas and concepts. We then compared and discussed the two lists, aiming to arrive at a shared interpretation and agreement concerning the main concepts (translated into English) and their meaning in each independent study (translated into English). We then coded text segments using this list and grouped segments with common codes into categories. The categories were compared and an attempt was made to thematically express a shared understanding of the category relations (in English) and also to generate a narrative about what seems to be happening in rural school development and leadership in the different schools concerned in the present era of education market governance. Table 3, adapted from Authors (2014) provides an overview of the process.

**Table 3: Seven steps of meta-ethnography**

Phase 1. Getting started: Assigning a focus for the analysis (the development of rural schools and education relations in conditions of market politics)
Phase 2. Selecting articles, books, reports or chapters addressing the chosen focus
Phase 3. Reading them and identifying key themes and concepts
Phase 4. Using thematic and conceptual comparative analyses to translate the studies into each-other and search for possibly common meaning
Phase 5. Drawing meanings together to develop an overarching interpretation of key features of rural school development in market conditions and produce new knowledge
Phase 6. Expressing this interpretation by tailoring its communication to a line of argument narrative that can be tested through comparisons with research products from other studies

By developing and testing categories and themes and developing a narrative synthesis in the above way, we tried to generalize in a different way than usual, where quite abstract representations of rural conditions and needs. Such representation tend to operate at national political levels in ways that risk hiding the characteristics of local conditions and silencing local voices (Halfacree, 1995; Hargreaves, 2009, 2017; Shucksmith, 2018). We wanted to be



able to generalize but not abstractly without grounding regarding the materiality of different rural contexts (Author2D, 2019a, 2019b) and the voices of rural people there (Andrés and Giró, 2016; AuthorBJ et al, 2019; Corbett, 2015, 2016; Green and Letts, 2007; Ruddock and Flutter, 2004; Shucksmith, 2018). We wanted to generalize to counter rather than reproduce and reinforce the ideological imposition of abstract semi-fictional hegemonic products of modernity and postmodernity on rural spaces (Bagley & Hillyard, 2014; Corbett, 2015, 2016; Hargreaves, 2009, 2017). Our hope was to be able to challenge the negative valuations imposed on rural spaces and their people through hegemony of metro-centricity (Author2S, 2014, 2015; AuthorBÖ, 2019; AuthorÖ, 2019) by adding social and material nuances to knowledge about rural values, opportunities, outcomes and needs (Clarke & Wildy, 2004; Corbett and Forsey, 2017; Corbett and Helmer, 2017). Bell and Sigsworth (1992) and Galton, Hargreaves and Comber (1998) have emphasized the need for attending to concrete details and analyses of the political economy of rural areas and school quality, and we have structured our analyses accordingly. Massey's (1994) relational theory for understanding space and place in regional studies and Brox (2006) and Green and Letts (2007) theoretical writing on space, equity and rural education have helped us to drive our analyses. These perspectives are well known from research in rural sociology and rural geography.

### **3. Results**

The results have been organized in two sections according to two main emergent themes. They are called “The value(s) of local capital” and “Magnet schools (and their effects) in rural markets”. They have been produced as thematic lines of argument narratives from a meta-ethnographic analysis that was conducted along the lines described in the methods discussion (see Table 3) on the article research corpus presented in Table 2. The two lines of argument are associated with and are meant to analytically relate to and express themes connected to

and illustrating and explaining actor dispositions toward school development and pedagogical action in market conditions in the different rural areas and schools that the ethnographies in the research corpus were carried out in (see Table 1). Two very different types of school, which we have called *communitas* schools and magnet schools respectively, are described in the lines of argument narratives.

The two concepts of *communitas* and magnet schools have some of the surface characteristics of ideal types in the Weberian sense, as they express analytical syntheses of different, sometimes somewhat diffuse, goal-, value-, emotional- and traditional rationalities towards and object (in this case schooling) that have been identified and described in different ethnographies, based on the expressions and actions of agents in the rural education marketplace. But the concepts of *communitas* and magnet schools are thus *both* researcher (and as such artificial) analytical constructs that enhance certain aspects of social reality, *and* at the same time, also empirically grounded constructs that express and to an extent analytically present differences between two types of market regional conditions and the dispositions, needs and demands of and on different agents there.

In this the two concepts of *communitas* and magnet school are quintessentially ethnographic concepts that combine products from emic analyses and the member-relevant rules of locally studied groups, and etic analysis, as created around the application of research (science theory) driven analytical concepts. They fuse distinctions in other words that stretch back to classifications in ancient Greek philosophy, where insider or ‘emic’ views described characteristics pertaining to a specific culture, while ‘etic’ perspectives refer to composite concepts and theories what had been designed to represent and analyse the perspectives and actions of a collection of different cultures (AuthorsBJ et al, 2018, Bell & Sigsworth, 1987, 1991; Brox, 2006). Nuance and differences are found both within and between the different contexts and our results are organized in relation to both similarities and differences.

### **3.1. The value(s) of local capital**

As in work by Clarke and Wildy (2004), AuthorBJ (2019) and AuthorsBÖ (2019) in AuthorÖ (2019) argue that although rural areas are often constructed from outside in line with either a romanticized ideal as happier, healthier, and with fewer problems than urban areas, or alternatively as emptiness and challenging areas inhabited by people who will need special help if they are ever to become usefully integrated into the urban constructed idea of the social whole, they are neither of these, though at times local descriptions might contain elements of either or both (AuthorBJ, 2019, AuthorsBÖ, 2019; Author2D, 2019b; Author2S, 2014, 2015; Giró and Andrés, 2016; Rosvall, 2019; Rosvall and Rönnlund, 2019). This is of course a point that has also been made in international research literature as well (Brox, 2006; Corbett, 2016; Corbett and Forsey, 2017; Corbett and Helmer, 2017). Rural areas are resourceful areas that are inhabited by knowledgeable and creative local people who can be and often are of great value to schools and very active in identifying means of support to help teachers and head-teachers to cope with their professional responsibilities (Authors, 2019; AuthorBJ, 2019; Author2D, 2019a, 2019b; Rosvall, 2019; Rosvall and Rönnlund, 2019). AuthorsBÖ (2019), Author2D (2019a), Author2G (2011), Johansson (2019), Rosvall (2019) and Rosvall and Rönnlund (2019) have all made similar points to these. But they also add that local capital tends to be undervalued outside local areas (Author2S, 2015; AuthorsBJ, 2019; AuthorsBÖ, 2019; Rosvall, 2019; Rosvall and Rönnlund, 2019).

These ideas have been checked against international research. Bell and Sigsworth (1987), Clarke and Wildy (2004), Corbett (2015, 2016), Farrugia, Smyth, and Harrison (2014), Forsey (2015), Green and Letts (2007) and Hedlund and Lundholm (2015) were examples and they have also argued along these lines, about the need to consider concrete local details in ways that represent people from rural communities and their relationships to

the local school on local terms. This is also a very clear finding in the present analysis. Considering local details brings into play broader forms of local capital in relation to the actions of schools and the people in them and this opens up different kinds of representation of the value added by schools in local communities to those present official political discourses (AuthorsBJ et al, 2018; AuthorsÖ, 2019). Schools as institutions not only confer forms of scholastic capital on pupils, as we know through the hidden curriculum, that is the processes of transmission of values, and beliefs outside of scholastic capital that are mediated in the classroom and the social environment, they also confer other forms of capital as well, and on both students and other agents (AuthorsBJ, 2019; AuthorsBJ et al, 2019; AuthorsÖ, 2019; Author2D, 2019a, 2019b; Author2S, 2014, 2015; Johansson, 2019; Rosvall, 2019; Rosvall and Rönnlund, 2019).

The articles by Author2D (2019a, 2019b) and Author2S (2014, 2015) were particularly powerful sensitizers concerning the value of local capital. They concerned a small school (Lirual) in an economically poor agricultural area outside a rural town and a larger school in a territorially stigmatized area on the outskirts of a large rural town. The first of them had lost all of its middle-class pupils to a private school in a neighboring area and the second comprised a significantly large proportion of ethnic minority pupils and the children of transnational migrants and had also experienced a flight of white middle class pupils from the school role to other schools close by, particularly a local private (chain) school. Both schools were under pressure through this in terms of maintaining school numbers, recruiting staff and upholding resources for provided enriched curriculum experiences for the pupils.

The smaller of the two schools was suffering strongly in several respects. The school had only 14 pupils left on role at the time the ethnographic work concluded. The low number was experienced as a problem by teachers. There was a fear of closure and little chance of employing more staff, and any specialist staff had to be ambulatory and shared with (or

borrowed from) other schools. Moreover there were also other challenges as well. Somewhat beyond the ordinary, to paraphrase Author2D (2019b) and Author2S (2015), they came from the unusual fact that the 14 pupils on role came from no less than 8 national backgrounds in the local multi-ethnic agrarian-proletariat and had Spanish as a second or third language. They were also seen, as were the pupils at Alrural School, the other school with an economically poor recruitment that was experiencing resource draining to other local schools, as meeting a very bleak educational future according to interpretations of the head-teachers. They had complex lingual and transnational diversity and mobility challenges and the areas around the schools suffered also from territorial fixation, advanced marginality and a spatial stigmatization of the precariat condition of the population. Access to valuable exchange (social, cultural, symbolic and economic and the sense of Bourdieu) and bridging capital (in the sense of Puttnam, 2002) was limited and there was a lack of respect and a reluctance to form networks of trusting relationships to the areas across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society (Author2D, 2019a, 2019b). They appeared to be territories of abandonment in these respects, as both marginal to mainstream society and as “off-places” for the construction of meaningful educational investments (Beach, 2017). The concept of off-place comes from writing by Agier (2009). It describes marginal peripheries as territories of abandonment for discarded lives and encouraged resistance or reluctance by entrepreneurs for making investments in the development of agglomeration capital in the areas.

This reluctance to identify reasons to invest was a mistake according to our reading of the ethnographies about the two schools and other small schools in the sample. For although definitely not part of the concept of the rural idyll, Lirura, Alrura, and the other areas in which small local schools and spatial marginality were found, were not empty, awful and isolated places, bereft of all valuable forms of bonding, bridging, social and cultural capital from which to build an educational return value. They were rather places with their own specific

resources that also came to good use in the local schools and added significant value to education interchanges in them (AuthorsBJ et al, 2019; Author2D, 2019b).

These schools were small local schools with locally recruited pupils. They were under immense pressure at times from small roles and fears of closure, and the performances of pupils on standardized tests were usually (for various reasons) lower than national averages, which contributed further to these fears. However, despite what might seem to be very challenging if not surmountable circumstances, the writing by Authors2G (2010), Author2S (2014, 2015), AuthorsBJ (2019), AuthorsBÖ (2019), Rosvall (2019) and Rosvall and Rönnlund (2019) each identify specific qualities that show how the schools fed and supported quality learning and instruction for their pupils and were also able to generate other positive contributions to the local community thanks to certain characteristics in the local social architecture and interactions in the school and community (Authors, 2019). They included the following features:

- The teachers and head-teacher recognized the challenges and threats that were realistically faced by their school and sought help from people in the local community, (including the parents and family members of the pupil group) to deal with them
- Families recognized that teachers were committed and they and other community members then became involved in school as resources. They backed up teachers and gave support in the classroom and with outside activities, and encouraged by teachers, they also took initiatives to come with their own educational ideas and proposals
- Education activities took place both within and beyond school walls, linking schools and pupils to other formal and informal institutions and public spaces, in ways that were thus at one and the same time both broadening and deinstitutionalizing intellectual work (around teaching, learning, and the curriculum), and generating broadened conceptions of intellectualism for supporting school pedagogy

- In the process of unveiling these relationships researchers also became interested in participating in acts of support of local communities, engaging in open days and meetings and supporting local action groups

Although modest and not possible to count as significant interventions into the broader social relations between groups and classes either locally, regionally or nationally, the support from researchers was appreciated in local communities and was described by informants in the ethnographies as encouraging senses of community and involvement in the life of the school (Authors, 2019). We have taken the term *communitas* for these schools to reflect a spirit of mutual belonging and unity that characterizes them (Author2D, 2019a, 2019b; Authors2G, 2010; Author2S, 2014, 2015). They are schools where relations of cultural production in school are more horizontal than in other schools and where involvement of the local community in forming and delivering educational content is a common feature (AuthorsBJ et al, 2018; AuthorsBJ, 2019; AuthorsBÖ, 2019). They are very different to most other schools because of this. The head-teacher at Jarural School described his school as an “other” type:

Many rural schools are in difficult areas. But we are in a nice place and have also joined a chain of schools that attract pupils from outside to get good results. We are able to attract outsiders because of this and keep high quality teachers who will commute to teach here. (Head-teacher, Jarural School)

There are three schools of this “other” type in Table 1. They shared features that were very different to the schools we have named *communitas* schools:

- They were in accessible areas with high degrees of spatial agglomeration of capital in terms of e.g. neighbouring companies, available consumers and workers, transport, and physical attraction, and they used marketing strategies that lifted up these features,

together with descriptions of what were purported to be the deficiencies of other ‘typical rural places and their schools’ so as to pose as desired and desirable

- The schools used webpages, but also head- and some other teachers were active in trying to attract clients (and thus also income) from outside
- This helped the schools draw in and retain teachers from other schools that lacked these obvious market growth features in their local geographies. But it sometimes involved agents discursively attacking other schools as average (or worse) to promote their own relative value, and when successful it meant that these other schools risked being further drained of resources
- These other schools were defined as lacking value and this meant that they were considered to be ‘fair game’ and ‘justifiable targets’ for drawing recruitment from. They were usually described as having little of real educational value or professional rewards to offer pupils or staff respectively
- Some magnet schools were (or were trying to become) members of attractive chains of schools (in Spain)

Descriptions relating to the discourses about and from attractive larger schools in areas with agglomeration capital in the above respects were found in numerous ethnographies in our research sample, including those by Authors (2019), AuthorsBJ (2019), Authors2S (2014, 2015), Rosvall (2019) and Rosvall and Rönnlund (2019). However, at the same time and as already indicated, these ethnographies also very clearly described the negatively portrayed schools as far from negative in the ways referred to. Rather than being empty and/ or devoid of positive forms of capital and value they were surrounded by resources that were also made use of in instruction and for learning (AuthorsBJ et al, 2019; AuthorsBF et al, 2018) and the creativity and commitment of teachers and local people in these symbolically violated schools was of a high local positive value in several ways (Authors, 2019; AuthorsBJ et al., 2018;



AuthorsBJ, 2019). It provided a secure space for children, an arena for the positive valorization of local capital, and there was abundant evidence of children learning things in rural schools that they wouldn't learn anywhere else, and in ways that were creatively different than learning was in other types of school (ibid). Similar arguments are found in international research (e.g. Bell & Sigsworth, 1992; Galton et al, 1998). Point for point:

- There was a sense of a real need and use value of the small peripheral schools among the parents and other members of the local community
- Parents knew that small schools were at risk of closure, that schools were becoming increasingly segregated and polarized, that some would be hard to get into and to, and that their children could be identified as culturally and socio-economically deficient and backward there anyway, so they wanted to keep their own schools open
- The power geometry of educational market reform in rural places was distinctly uneven and offered unequal opportunities that produced very uneven outcomes

Communitas schools were not easy to package for discerning consumers. They did not have obvious forms of agglomeration capital in their local geographies of the kind that magnet schools did and their pupils were rarely if ever children of mobile middle-class parents. The schools and their pupils were instead in a sense stuck with each-other, whether they knew it or not or liked it or not, and were stuck too with limited access to conventional scholastic resources. The schools turned to outside involvement, from people from the community and learning opportunities were made available by this that wouldn't be otherwise (Authors, 2019; AuthorsBJ et al, 2018). Teachers, parents and other community members acted to create stable conditions that helped to keep the school open, but through this involvement, experiences and opportunities of solidarity emerged that are difficult to develop in other kinds

of context (ibid; AuthorÖ, 2019). Perhaps this has always been the case in sparsely populated and remote rural areas and their schools (Marklund, 2000; Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009).

### **3.2. Magnet schools (and their effects) in rural markets**

The concept of magnet school has already been introduced as a school that exploits the mobility features created by private choice and market reforms, and that draws most of its pupils from outside the area the school is situated in. However, this possibility of choice means also a possibility for mobile choosers to choose to leave a school as well. This was a clear threat that was recognized in the attractive schools in the Spanish sample. School agents knew very well there that parents who have the mobility and resources choose a school for their children also have the mobility to choose to leave should they wish to. Mobility was the key. As Solstad (1997) identified, without mobility school choices in rural areas really are not an option (Fjellman, 2019). Bussing pupils to schools is possible in some cases, public transport is possible sometimes too, and schools on transport nodes do have greater opportunities to recruit from outside the area. But usually private arrangements are needed to get children from remote regions to school and to and from schools in remote regions.

The magnet school owners and staff know these things and they work hard to attract and retain pupils on role. They make it known that they have specialist teachers, good resources, and are in attractive areas to attract parents as consumers (Author2D, 2019a, 2019b). But they are very clear that parents are not needed in order to run the school curriculum. This may be the case in other schools but not in theirs. Attracting patronage from mobile middle-class families and keeping “desirable” parents committed to the school is important only for maximizing the school’s market potential. Three schools from Table 1 can be identified as magnet schools. They have four things in common:

- Relatively easy access to and from other areas and sufficient natural and other agglomeration capital to produce attraction effects
- Marketing strategies to attract mobile children of middle-class parent-choosers and pull in teachers and pupils from other local areas
- Local middle-class support in relation to the school bringing benefits to the area, such as in terms of community facilities, school proximity, and even real-estate effects from school presence helping to raise residential property values
- Higher than average performances amongst pupils on scholastic tests

This is a different kind of list to that of the characteristics of *communitas* schools. There, high levels of cooperation, communication and trust were needed between the school and the community in order to run the school and the curriculum and educate pupils. *Communitas* schools also provided facilities for local social and cultural activities and generated interfaces where staff, pupils, parents and other family and community members built relationships. A different kind of leadership developed too, based on valuing community participation and shared decision making to meet local needs.

Magnet schools are different in every way. Their teachers and leaders demand full control over the curriculum and leaders at magnet schools pride themselves in line with this on their educational management skills and abilities to lead highly motivated specialist teachers and motivate successful and enthusiastic young academic learners, rather than on their ability to create external involvement in the school. Moreover, as most of the parents live and work in other areas, the majority of pupils commute to the school and are involved in scholastic and extra curriculum activities there only during the 3 to 6 years they are on role. The school is thus not important as a local community feature (AuthorsBJ et al, 2019; Author2D, 2019a, 2019b). It is a place for secondary socialization only and to learn and acquire scholastic

knowledge in, and magnet schools pride themselves on going to great lengths to be very excellent in these respects. They:

- Employ specialist teachers who commute to the school to teach specialist subjects to the children of demanding mobile middle class parents
- Are aggressively competitive towards and construct negative discourses about other schools in order to be able to draw resources and clientele from them
- Leave the children of the less mobile families trapped in schools that despite the values they add to their communities are symbolically violated and materially depleted
- Treat white middle-class pupils as good learners and as an asset and treat “Otherness” as problematic unless it can be made profitable
- Confer capital on capital as magnet schools actually deselect pupils from poor backgrounds and “off-places” (perhaps inadvertently) despite evidence that the proportionate gain from attending magnet schools could be higher for these pupils
- Claim to make a positive contribution to the local community

In many senses then magnet schools seem to represent a default (almost classic) market type for competitive markets. They self-identify as strongly independent and able to thrive by fighting for and attracting specialist staff and middle-class parents and pupils who are willing to commute, and they have negative effects (perhaps deliberately) on potential competitors, who lose income and sometimes teachers too in competition with them. Moreover magnet schools are even able to break down opposition to their depletion effects in the depleted areas themselves, as many of the local middle-class there are no-longer assets in the performance and support of schools in these depleted areas, as they have become choosers of and assets in

magnet schools instead (AuthorsBJ et al, 2018; AuthorsBÖ, 2019; AuthorÖ, 2019; Author2d, 2019a, 2019b; Authors2G, 2010; Authors2S, 2014, 2015).

Brox (2006), Shucksmith (2018) and Smith and Higley (2012) have made similar points to this in international literature. But what they also highlight is that whilst we cannot statistically deny that the more socially homogenous middle-class pupils who study under the guidance of specialist teachers in magnet schools do usually demonstrate higher levels of scholastic performance on average than pupils in other schools do, we cannot say that this is because they are in better schools, or that pupils in other schools are worse-off there than they would have been elsewhere. The analyses that are made possible by standardized tests don't allow such comparisons. However, what we can say is that magnet schools not only fail to fulfil the goals of free choice that they are said by their supporters to represent, uphold and in fact be based upon, they also obstruct the development of community as well, and in both cases by turning it into a consumer product that is accessible on foundations that favor mobile middle class consumers and discriminate against others.

But what the above paragraph means is that whilst from the outside magnet schools do appear to work more effectively than other schools do in conferring scholastic capital and those involved with them also try hard to show and maintain this standard, what appear to be struggling schools in unattractive areas with complex learning conditions may actually be better schools for rural communities than magnet schools are. Magnet school agents effectively attack other schools and try to accumulate resources from them and they exploit the concept of the rural community idyll as part of a branding strategy in order to do so, but these then struggling schools still create an environment for learning for rural pupils who can't get to another school that would value them, they also have other values for the community as well. They include the development of local solidarity and parental social capital, and also not symbolically violating other areas and the schools in them by trying to

“steal” their mobile middle-class pupils. This is why we call these schools *communitas* schools. They represent a structure of community for a sustainable rural common life and a moral approach to live this life well by that has also been identified previously for small rural schools and their communities (Bell and Sigsworth, 1987, 1992; Smith and Higley, 2012; Vásquez, 2016) and represent important points for understanding what kinds of policies may be of most benefit to the development of education in rural communities.

There is a greater diversity of school choices when public transport networks and greater access to information work to facilitate wider possibilities for selection (Ball, 1993; Solstad, 1978), which might thus therefore make markets workable in some urban areas. But when we are looking at rural areas, accessibility restricts mobility and doesn't allow market choices to develop without public subsidy for non-mobile groups and individuals (AuthorsBÖ, 2019; Fjellman, 2019; Solstad, 1997). So instead of increased incidences of choice for all, the introduction of education market governance usually reduces the number of rural municipalities that can offer school choices from preschool, to infant, to upper-secondary levels and effects possibilities of choosing differently for choosers of different class backgrounds and in different types of rural areas.

The introduction of market governance in education in rural areas has in other words introduced also a new spatial geometry of power that adds to existing inequalities. It applies not only for rural areas compared to urban ones, but also quite clearly both in and between different rural areas as well (Authors BJ et al, 2018; AuthorsÖ, 2019) and magnet schools are playing an important role in (and in changing) this power-geometry. Magnet schools are rural schools that actively seek to attract external private and state capital. They are found in accessible areas with high levels of agglomeration capital, they have (usually) a wealthier population than average for their region, and they are in this sense not the areas that seem to need investment the most. But when they get it these schools then use it to also draw in

mobile middle class consumers from outside, to further advance their role, income, and levels of performance on scholastic tests, whilst leaving other schools behind with dwindling resources. The operation of education market politics in rural areas is thus subtly deceptive (Fjellman, 2019). The promise is for equal opportunities for education choices and participation in markets for all, but the outcome is that capital expenditure is once again being conferred on existing capital in ways that add further weight to regional and class inequalities.

The formation a new geometry of power one of the currently most ignored features in the making of education politics and policy following the introduction of market governance. It is extremely obvious in some of the ethnographies in our sample (e.g. Author, 2018; Author2D, 2017; AuthorsBJ, 2019) but it is also very clearly presented by other researchers as well (e.g. Escardíbul and Villaroya, 2009; Hernández, 2000; Villaroya, 2000). It refers to the capitalizations that take place when magnet schools increase their market share, the ways in which investments in magnet schools tend to confer capital on capital rather than creating new value, and how solidarity is destroyed by competitive market politics. However, whilst all this may be true, the introduction of public sector market politics didn't create education inequality in rural areas. This existed long before the introduction of education markets (ibid; Author1, 2010, 2018; Hargreaves, 2009; Hernández, 2000; Solstad, 1978, 1997; Villaroya, 2000), and although some things may have been made worse for some rural areas and schools in them subsequent to the switch to market governance the generation of parental social capital in *comunitas* schools is also present as a telling feature of market development that should be given more attention in rural education politics.

#### **4. Discussion**

Using Noblit and Hare's (1988) concept of meta-ethnography and following lines of analysis developed by Brox (2006), Farrugia, Smyth and Harrison (2014) and Hedlund and Lundholm

(2015), and theories developed by Massey (1992, 1994) and Walker and Clark (2009), we have attempted to develop a synthesizing analytical meta-narrative in relation to ethnographic studies about the development of and in rural schools through market governance under conditions of mobile modernity. Two different and opposing (yet also dialectically related) types of school have been particularly in focus. They make up half of the schools in the research sample in Table 1 and form key analytical objects.

The first are schools that have developed strong links to families and the local community through teachers, parents, pupils and community members working hard together for their school and its survival. The second are magnet schools that have refashioned the concept of rural community and rural schooling as a commodity to deliberately, aggressively and competitively sell to mobile middle-class-consumer parents for their children. Magnet schools are thus a default concept for successful school development in market conditions (Author1, 2010). They exploit their existing forms of capital and develop and use negative discourses of belittlement pertaining to other types of school in other areas to expand this capital further and thus also undermine solidarity to become top schools, no matter what the costs might be to other schools and the rural areas they are meant to serve. Rural schools form different types of institution in different rural areas in relation to the notion of place as capital as a result (AuthorÖ, 2019; Massey, 1994). The magnet school is one of them: one that confers capital on capital and may be having seriously damaging effects on other schools and on rural education and values more generally.

Communitas schools embody different values and convey different forms of capital compared to magnet schools. In communitas schools, community members are recognized as having something worthwhile to contribute to the school other than economic capital, and the benefits of the school to the community are also seen in other terms than those of capital returns for individual community members through grade accumulation and rising real-estate



values for private property owners. These are values that can be accumulated of course thanks to the presence of investment choices and markets. But the choices that are said to be available to choose schools are not possible for everyone and are basically non-existent for many rural people, particularly the rural poor and particularly those in sparsely populated areas. Subsequent to market politics large swathes of the rural poor have largely been left without choices, and needing instead make do with what is on offer locally in terms of social institutions (Timár and Velkey, 2016; Weist, 2016), including schools (Brox, 2006; Corbett, 2016; Escardíbul and Villaroya, 2009; Fjellman, 2019; Vásquez, 2016), and of course they then attempt to make the best of this (AuthorsBJ, 2019; AuthorsÖ, 2019).

Markets are often biased in these ways (Ball, 1993; Beach, 2010; Verger et al, 2016). They are pretexted as amoral and they pretend to be class, gender and racially/ ethnically/ linguistically neutral and objective. But as the ethnographies have pointed out, even by the admission of their key agents they are neither of these things. They confer capital on capital, normalize middle-class mobility, and render Otherness as problematic, and even though they claim to be efficient and to develop valuable forms of scholastic capital for their pupils, they are actually not efficient at all as in the majority of cases scholastic capital is accrued by pupils from backgrounds with existing strongholds of cultural and economic capital, and in ways that deny high-quality qualifications to groups who could benefit from them more.

We want to be very clear about this. As is discussed in AuthorsÖ (2019), Author 1 (2017) and Authors2S (2014, 2015), the types of foreign pupils from economically poor backgrounds in territorially stigmatized areas that magnet schools deny their education to, are very capable pupils (Authors, 2019). Many of them not only very quickly learn to understand and speak a new language (having previously spoken Punjabi, Arabic, Chinese, Bambara or Bomo), they also become capable of studying meaningfully in their new language in a school that also helps to develop the social and linguistic capital and skills of parents and other

community members as public intellectuals. Education politicians could learn something here. Magnet schools appear to aspire to excellence and to being better and creating better performance levels and more productive learning conditions for pupils than other schools do, but this does not mean that they are better schools, not even for the pupils that go there let alone for those that do not (Escardíbul and Villaroya, 2009). In many senses they are not (AuuthorBJ et al, 2019)!

There are two points here. The first is that magnet schools represent a default policy response to competition as a key characteristic of market politics and its efficiency (Author1, 2010), but one that is destructive toward communitarian (community) values. Their agents construct discourses for marketing purposes which are particularly aggressive toward the existing value in other areas and the people in them. These discourses not only fail to identify or give positive recognition to other places and the people who live there, they actually significantly misrepresent them as sub-standard “off-places” that are not quite good enough for developing a modern meaningful education in (Authors, 2019; AuthorsÖ, 2019). The second is that producing better scholastic level performances on culturally biased tests in a culturally selective school isn’t necessarily the most legitimate way of assessing the development of educational value anyway (Escardíbul and Villaroya, 2009).

Magnet schools do recruit and retain highly trained skilled professionals. There is no doubt about this and their pupils do obtain significantly higher grade point averages on scholastic tests than pupils in communitas schools do on average. But this doesn’t mean they are better schools and what might be our most important contribution emerges here. It concerns the communitas schools that because of the damage and threats to their existence created through market governance in conditions of mobile modernity face the intensification of already complex challenges brought about by low roles with predominantly non-mobile pupils of an (at times multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and transnational) agrarian proletariat. The

creation of school markets in rural areas and the default condition of the magnet schools and their aggressive scavenging for recruitment have significant material consequences.

But the real contribution from this article does not rest only on repeating this piece of obvious knowledge. It is more that the people in and around communitas schools have not remained passive in the face of the destructive effects of market pressure. Instead, they have created conditions that provide welcoming and supportive learning environments for pupils who would most likely be “Othered” and feel foreign outside their local environment, and they also make spaces for active and meaningful involvement in the life of the school on the part of parents and other community members. Moreover, the learning they provide is probably more enriching than is the mechanical, rote procedures of scholastic learning for the accumulation (only) of school grades based on following steps that are told to the children by the teachers and that the children copy to arrive at right answers. The staff members at the schools know there is little intellectual value in these kinds of activities where reproducing right answers are rewarded by a good grade. On the contrary, the students are continually asked to express and apply ideas and concepts in spoken stories or in other art, graph, or craft form (Authors, 2019; Author2D, 2019a, 2019b) and we suggest more research is needed to draw attention to the addition of value in these schools as a way of improving the possibilities of meaningful and sustainable schooling in rural areas.

## **5. Concluding remarks**

The concluding point for this article is an obvious one. It is that the problems that have been created for education systems by the introduction of market governance are not only urban democratic problems (AuthorsBJ et al, 2018; AuthorsBJ, 2019). They are often presented this way, but as the soil upon which bourgeois social relations and consciousness thrive, markets; including the creation and operation of education markets; are also problems in rural areas

where the introduction of market governance has added to existing educational inequalities within and between rural areas and between rural areas and urban ones (AuthorÖ, 2019; Authors2, 2014, 2015). Yet at the same time, the picture is not only a dark and sinister one, for the introduction of market governance has also created a research focus through which we have been able to identify a special response in terms of the socio-cultural architecture for komunitas schools. These schools provide an example of rural resilience and creativity. Rural populations have been subjected to metro-centric ideas from political capitals that favour capitalist actors who exploit rural resources in private interests for decades. But the people in these areas have always managed to develop a creative ingenuity against these impositions (Authors, 2019; AuthorsBJ et al, 2018). Komunitas schools illustrate this. They show us the values that can underpin a good countryside to live in and the role education institutions can play in the realization of these values.

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Funding: This work was supported by the Government of Education in Aragon (Spain) and the Ministry of Competitiveness in Spain and the Swedish Research Council in Sweden.

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