

# Theoretical Guidelines for a Psychology of Rural Development

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## Abstract

Many processes related to rural development have a strong psychosocial component. Yet, there exists no specific psychosocial theoretical framework for addressing them. In this paper, then, we present a set of theoretical guidelines for analysing rural development processes and interventions from the perspective of psychology. In doing so, we draw upon an Actor-Oriented Approach and address concepts commonly used in rural development studies, such as human agency, social interfaces, worldviews, rationales and strategies, and explore their psychosocial dimensions. This enables us to advance a psychosocial understanding of the complexity and multi-determination that characterises processes of rural development, and thus in this way to add a new perspective to rural development studies.

## Keywords:

actor-oriented approach; farmers; rural development; social interface; psychosocial perspective

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# Lineamientos teóricos para una psicología del desarrollo rural

## Resumen

Muchos de los procesos relacionados con el desarrollo rural tienen un fuerte componente psicosocial, sin embargo, no existe un marco teórico psicosocial específico para abordarlos. En este artículo, por tanto, se presenta un conjunto de lineamientos teóricos para el análisis de los procesos y las intervenciones de desarrollo rural desde la perspectiva de la psicología. Al hacer esto, nos basamos en un enfoque orientado al actor y abordamos conceptos usados de forma común en los estudios de desarrollo rural, como la agencia humana, las interfaces sociales, visiones del mundo, razones y estrategias, y exploramos sus dimensiones psicosociales. Esto nos permite avanzar hacia la comprensión psicosocial de la complejidad y la multi-determinación que caracteriza a los procesos de desarrollo rural, y de esta manera agregar una nueva perspectiva a los estudios de desarrollo rural.

## Palabras clave:

enfoque orientado al actor; agricultores; desarrollo rural; interfaz social; perspectiva psicosocial

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# Orientations théoriques pour une psychologie du développement rural

## Résumé

Beaucoup de processus liés au développement rural ont une forte composante psychosociale. Néanmoins, il n'existe pas un cadre théorique psychosocial spécifique pour les discuter. En cet article, par conséquent, un ensemble d'orientations théoriques pour l'analyse des processus et les interventions de développement rural dès la perspective de la psychologie se présentent. En faisant ceci, nous nous appuyons sur une approche visant à l'acteur et nous discutons des concepts utilisés habituellement dans les études de développement rural, comme l'agence humaine, les interfaces sociaux, la façon de voir le monde, les raisons et les stratégies, et nous explorons leurs dimensions psychosociales. Ceci nous permet d'avancer vers la compréhension psychosociale de la complexité et la multi-détermination qui caractérisent les processus de développement rural et, de cette manière, il ajoute une nouvelle perspective aux études de développement rural.

## Mots-clés:

approche visé à l'auteur; agriculteurs; développement rural; interface social; perspective psychosociale

## Introduction

Psychology in general, and social and community psychology in particular, have a significant potential for contributing to understanding and supporting rural development processes (Barilari, Landini, Logiovine & Rotman, 2011; Landini, Leeuwis, Long & Murtagh, in press), thus composing a field of research and intervention that can be referred to as the Psychology of Rural Development (PsyRD). Nonetheless, there exists no specific psychosocial theoretical framework to address the complexity of rural development processes. In fact, most contributions made by psychology have tended to psychologise and oversimplify processes such as the adoption of technologies and rural innovation dynamics (Landini, Benítez & Murtagh, 2010; Murtagh & Landini, 2011), which are highly complex (e.g. Klerkx, Aarts & Leeuwis, 2010; Leeuwis, 2004; Leeuwis & Aarts, 2011; Van Woerkum, Aarts & Van Herzele, 2011) and cannot be explained only by individual psychological variables.

Thus, we aim to present a set of articulated theoretical guidelines from the field of psychology so as to address the complexity and multi-determination of rural development scenarios. In doing so, we also intend to situate the proposal within the wider context of development studies and agrarian social studies, thus incorporating concepts used in those fields and analysing their psychosocial components.

When discussing development, we must differentiate between “means” and “ends” (Landini, 2007), the latter referring to the state or situation characterised by “development” which of course can be achieved by a variety of means. The ends of development have been defined differently historically and in accordance with the kind of theory used to explain the process. In the 1950s, development was primarily defined in terms of gross national product per capita (GNPpc) (Álvarez, 2001), but this was quickly followed by debates about the nature of “development” versus “underdevelopment”. Indeed, for at least two decades, research focussed on issues of “modernisation” versus “dependency” theory, and it was not until several decades later that the very definition of development itself was challenged.

It was in this vein that Amartya Sen (1999) vigorously argued that development referred to people’s freedom to choose between alternative lifestyles. In tune with this, the Human Development Index used by the United Nations since 1990 included not only GNPpc but also life expectancy at birth and years of schooling as indicators of development (Noorbakhsh, 1998); and the proposal of Human-Scale Development (Max-Neef, Elizalde & Hopenhayn, 1993) focused on the culturally appropriated satisfaction of fundamental human needs instead of the availability of

goods. And further discussions highlighted the importance of also addressing social equity and environmental sustainability as constitutive elements of development (e.g. Di Pietro, 2001; Pérez & Carrillo, 2000; Sagar & Najam, 1998). Thus, nowadays, “development” emerges as a multidimensional notion that is under intense debate.

Regarding the “means” of rural development, the earlier conception of development as high GNPpc coupled easily with what later became known as the “green revolution”, a process of achieving increases in productivity through improved crop yields via the use of agricultural machinery and external inputs (such as hybridised seeds, fertilisers and pesticides). A background to this were of course the USA agricultural policies (following World War II) that stressed the transfer of technological advancements from researchers to farmers – a rural development strategy that became widespread across many countries (Cimadevilla, 2004). It was implemented by rural development agents known as rural or agricultural extensionists (De Schutter, 1982; Leeuwis, 2004) and eventually was exported to most Latin American countries (Schaller, 2006). This linear, top-down approach was criticised in Latin America by Paulo Freire (1973), who highlighted the unequal and hierarchical relationship established between extensionists and farmers and, instead, proposed a dialogical, horizontal interaction wherein farmers’ local knowledge was respected and acknowledged.

On a wider scale, participatory approaches emerged worldwide, among which the Agricultural Knowledge and Information Systems perspective stood out (Klerkx, Schut, Leeuwis & Kilelu, 2012). Though it stressed the importance of addressing the relationship between farmers, researchers and extensionists, it failed to take into account the broader institutional context. More recently, the conception of rural spaces has changed and moved away from agriculture *per se* towards a conception of multifunctional areas wherein food production is one among other environmental, social and economic functions (Cotes, Urbina & Cotes, 2007; Kopeva, Madjarova & Peneva, 2012).

In this context, in Europe (and in Latin America fundamentally via Spain), the LEADER approach emerged in 1991 and, though part of European Union policy, also emerged as an alternative to traditional rural development external interventions. Supported within a local development framework (Pérez & Carrillo, 2000), the LEADER initiative proposed a bottom-up approach through the creation of Local Action Groups (LAGs) in rural areas. These LAGs were composed of local public institutions and private social actors, who were responsible for building a

development strategy for the territory to be financed by both European institutions and entrepreneurs intending to establish their own businesses.

Within the framework of this approach, multi-functionality and the broader institutional context were considered essential. At the same time, but from a different standpoint, the Innovations Systems Approach also became a leading perspective for addressing rural development - in this case focusing on how innovation processes occur and may be facilitated through the interactions between different stakeholders (Klerkx, Aarts & Leeuwis, 2010; Leeuwis, 2004; Leeuwis & Aarts, 2011).

Now, in the context of these multiple strategies for generating rural development and the highly contested definition of what (rural) development might be, we aim to present some theoretical guidelines that address processes of rural development, while at the same time bringing psychology into current development debates.

## 1. Theoretical support for a psychology of rural development

Despite the existence of several analytical frameworks that address rural development processes and interventions, we opt to build upon an Actor-Oriented Approach (AOA) (Long, 1992; 2001) primarily because of its focus on human agency. As expanded later, the notion of “agency” refers to the capacity of persons and other social actors to process social experience (i.e. they acquire “knowledgeability”) and to act accordingly so as to cope with their life-circumstances vis-à-vis their own motivations and goals (“capability”) (Giddens, 1984; Long, 2001). This allows us to integrate psychosocial determinations of behaviour and social practices into the wider field of development studies.

### 1.1 Rural development processes and interventions as multi-actor social interfaces

As was suggested earlier, rural development interventions always involve multi-actor situations and unintended consequences, even if it is claimed that proper planning and intervention will mostly result in positive outcomes (i.e. if certain steps are followed) (see Van Woerkum, Aarts & Van Herzele, 2011). Nevertheless, many so-called “failures” reveal that the variety of actors involved in such interventions often pursue their own agendas, objectives, priorities and values. That is, their own

rationales (Lapalma, 2001) are likely to differ profoundly from those of planners, agricultural experts and other practitioners. Hence, the active role of the stakeholders involved in rural development processes leads us to acknowledge that development interventions are not simple implementations of externally-planned actions but rather arenas wherein social actors with different worldviews interact, negotiate, and even fight and resist each other (Long, 1992; 2001).

Framing rural development in this way acknowledges the need for a theoretical approach that allows us to study the dynamics of development interventions and the (often conflictive) interactions that take place between social actors who possess different rationales. To this end, we propose to conceptualise development interventions as “social interfaces” (Long, 1989; 1992; 2001; 2004; Long & Villarreal, 1993). Long defines a social interface as “a critical point of intersection between different lifeworlds, social fields or levels of social organization, where social discontinuities based upon discrepancies in values, interests, knowledge and power are most likely to be located” (2001, p. 243). Thus, given such existing discontinuities, we expect to encounter arenas or spaces of struggle wherein different social actors negotiate, reconstruct and impose values, meanings and practices, in an attempt to exercise a degree of control or power over others.

Authors supporting a social learning approach to rural development have suggested analysing these processes in terms of multiple, interdependent stakeholders articulated around complex societal problems capable of collaboratively learning in flexible settings (e.g. Bouwen & Taillieu, 2004; Leeuwis & Pyburn, 2002; Pahl-Wostl, Craps, Dewulf, Mostert, Tabara & Taillieu, 2007). However, as AOA acknowledges, this is only one of the possible alternatives in regard to such dynamics. As a consequence, it is useful to understand rural development processes in terms of multi-actor social interfaces. This framing is particularly convenient for a PsyRD, since it allows for a focus on the dynamics of interaction, processes and power relationships that take place in social interfaces, all of which encompass strong psychosocial components.

## 1.2. Human agency, shared projects and psychosocial foundations

In this section we look more closely at the notion of agency and identify some psychosocial theories that could be useful for addressing it, thus contributing to “building a bridge” between psychology and the field of development studies. Long (1992, 2001), in a critique of structural models of development which tend to neglect the role of human actions and practices, and thus overweigh the importance

of structural determination in social dynamics, proposes instead to retrieve the tradition of what he names AOA, an approach that focuses on the role of human agency in development processes, thus allowing for the consideration of psychosocial determinations.

The concept of “agency” is key to understanding interface encounters since it highlights the fact that individual and group actions are not simply determined by structural constraints but are built upon actors’ own “knowledgeability” and “capability” (Long, 1992), which allows them to process their experiences and to behave in such a way so as to obtain a margin of manoeuvre for their own objectives and goals. Interestingly, this approach parallels the proposal of community psychology (Montero, 1994; 2004; Sánchez Vidal, 1991), which states that human behaviour is not simply a response to a previous stimulus (the behaviourist argument) but instead that people are active subjects who can shape their own environment and their own reality.

In practical terms, the notion of agency helps us understand that rural development projects are not simply implementations of policy statements or plans but arenas in which different social actors seek to understand each other’s proposals, behaviours and attitudes, through deploying their own common sense knowledge and acting in accordance with their own interpretations of the situation and thus affirming their own normative values and goals often through strategic actions. In this process, the social actors involved in development projects (and even different groups within them) retranslate the actions and objectives of the development initiatives to suit their own (e.g. Long, 2001; Long & Villarreal, 1999).

Thus, in social interfaces, we expect to find differences and struggles over meanings and over “correct” practices and behaviours - some more dialogical and others more enforced. Additionally, we also expect to encounter strategic behaviours and attitudes that do not focus on struggles over differences but use the understanding of others’ views to simulate agreement in order to obtain certain benefits derived from external accomplishments (e.g. Landini, 2012a; 2013).

Now, in the context of this psychosocial approach to rural development, an interesting aspect for discussion arises concerning the predominance given by AOA to social practices and relationships when studying and analysing agency. Indeed, Long has argued that it is only conceivable to assign agency to social groups when they have the capacity to formulate decisions and to act as a group, since only then is it possible to generate a network in which persons are enrolled in others’ projects such that they can delegate power to the larger whole (Long, 1992; 2001).

Nonetheless, if we accept that agency is shaped and organized through the way in which different social groups at different levels understand, frame or give meaning to their experiences and social interactions (i.e., that individual and collective attitudes, behaviours and practices are oriented and guided by individuals and social groups common sense knowledge) (Howarth, 2006; Jodelet, 1986) then we have to admit that a psychosocial approach to the “realities”, “frames of meaning” or “common sense knowledge” shared by different social groups is relevant and even necessary for understanding rural development processes. In fact, such a study could help us comprehend the psychosocial foundations or “conditions of possibility” for comprehending how different persons and social actors are able to reach agreements and to enrol others in their own projects (or simultaneously are themselves enrolled), and even how they are able to agree and act together without having to reach any explicit agreement. Certainly, Long (2001) leaves open the possibility of including a psychological approach but at this point does not explore this any further.

This argument underlines the need for a better understanding of the psychosocial foundations of human agency and the issue of the construction of collective “projects” that can impact significantly on the social dynamics, thus allowing us to integrate psychology into the field of development studies. There are multiple psychological theories that could be useful in this context, some of which will we refer to in illustrating the argument. First, it is worth mentioning those that address the question of under what conditions are people willing to make use (or not) of the resources they have built up in order to obtain certain ends. In this sense, “learned helplessness theory” (Seligman, 1989) and the notion of “the locus of control” (Visdómine & Luciano, 2006) highlight the importance of perceiving that desired results can be reached through personal efforts, an issue that authors coming from a critical social psychology have re-analysed in terms of fatalism (e.g. Blanco & Díaz, 2007).

Furthermore, studies addressing social influence may also prove useful in this regard. Moscovici’s genetic approach (Doms & Moscovici, 1986) seems particularly interesting for addressing struggles over meanings and knowledge that take place at development interfaces, especially his notion of “tacit negotiation”. Furthermore, the role assigned to consistency in minority innovation, the analysis of the strategies for masking power relationships and concepts such as “styles of negotiation” (Mugny, 1981) could all help to understand the dynamics of social interfaces and the construction of shared projects.

Thirdly, social identity theory (Tajfel, 1984) may also be useful for studying why horizontal interchange of knowledge is so difficult between rural extensionists

(usually perceived as being a comparatively high status group) and small farmers or peasants (a low status group), and under which conditions it is more likely to happen. Finally, game theory and studies on cooperative behaviour (e.g. Good, 1995; Kelley & Stahelski, 1970) could contribute to the study of cooperative/competitive behaviours in the context of social interfaces and the factors relating to the development of shared initiatives or projects.

Before concluding this section, we wish to underline that we are not suggesting giving priority to psychological processes when approaching rural development, since it remains necessary to continue to give recognition to social processes, material determinations and knowledge and technologies, since they all play a fundamental role in the context of rural development.

### 1.3. Worldviews, rationales and strategies in the analysis of social actors' practices

In this section we continue to stress the integration of psychology into development studies as well as looking for construct-valuable analytical tools for PsyRD to work with. With this end in mind, we draw upon notions such as “worldviews”, “rationales” and “strategies” which are commonly used to study social practices in farm settings- thus seeking to visualize their psychosocial dimensions and determinants.

To begin with, we assume that, within societies, there exist different social groups or social actors who occupy different social positions, and frequently maintain somewhat different social networks. That is, societies are composed of differentiated social groups and social categories that generally form distinct epistemic communities (Long, 2001) which, according to social constructionism and the theory of social representations, build different “social realities” or ways of comprehending “the world”, “others”, themselves, and specific social objects (Gergen, 1996; Ibáñez, 2001; Marková, 2003). In this paper, we refer to these (not always integrated and even sometimes contradictory) sets of beliefs, interpretations and common sense knowledge that characterize particular social groups as their “worldviews”. As argued earlier, this common sense knowledge, now described as worldviews, is what shapes agency in psychosocial terms and thus organizes individual behaviours and social practices.

The notion of “rationale”, though less utilised than that of “strategy”, is of particular interest to psychology since it focuses on social actors' representations rather than their practices. When we talk about the rationale of a particular social

actor we point to the internal (emic) logic that the actor's beliefs, decisions and practices have in themselves, in the sense that they are perceived to be coherent, logical and available in the context of the actor's worldviews and experiences. Thus, we prefer to talk about "rationales" instead of "rationalities" in order to avoid observer/outsider interpretations.

Indeed community psychology, Lapalma (2001) has argued that paying attention to the rationales of social actors is needed in order to understand their potential actions and positionings in the context of community interventions. In this sense, he proposes to look at the values, goals, priorities and methodologies of each social actor in order to identify potential "collective" movements in a community setting.

In addition, Cittadini, Burges, Hamdan, Natizon, Pérez & Dedieu (2001) have argued that practices are not arbitrary but refer to a collective underlying behavioural rule or rules. Thus, one aims to understand actors' rationales as consisting of a set of underlying, meaningful principles, rules, assumptions or beliefs that guide, organize and shape the social practices (understood as collective behavioural patterns) of a particular social actor or group. Using these terms, rationales are clearly related to worldviews. In fact, one could argue that rationales are practical guidelines for behaviour or social practice derived from actors' worldviews.

The concept of "strategies" has been widely used in studying farmers' and other actors' practices (e.g. Cáceres, 2006; Cittadini et ál., 2001; Landini, 2011; Ramírez, 2008). Among the military, the notion of strategy pertains to a particular plan of action used to achieve specific goals, and likewise in the social sciences to the analysis of choices made by social actors in attempting to achieve their objectives. More concretely, Silvetti & Cáceres (1998, referring to Bourdieu; 1988, and to Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1995) argue that the "strategies of social reproduction" feature a wide set of actions implemented by individuals or social actors aimed at maintaining or improving their social position or maximizing their access to different kinds of material or symbolic benefits, always in the context of the constraints of existing institutional frameworks.

Thus, we can define "strategies" as regular or relatively stable options taken by individuals, groups or other kinds of social actors to achieve material subsistence, social reproduction and/or improvements in their life-conditions or their social standing (Landini, 2011), which are selected by taking into account perceived, relevant constraints that arise when attempting to reach desired objectives. This may include, among others, material, environmental, institutional, social and economic constraints.

Furthermore, it is in this context that the interdependencies existing among different social actors, mentioned by social learning theory, can be analysed in terms of specific contextual constrictions which, in turn, may be considered as “resources” when there exists the possibility that a particular strategy, including cooperation, can be utilised.

We argued previously that social actors’ guiding principles for action (known as “rationales”) are derived from their worldviews. Now we add that social actors’ strategies represent the different ways in which rationales are put into practice in different contexts, depending on the availability of resources and the social, material, political, economic and environmental constraints. As a consequence, within this schema, rationales are judged less diverse than strategies in a social group, since the latter would, for example, include the consideration of available assets or family or individual circumstances, such as the availability of family labour and skills within the domestic unit.

Without clarifications, this model could present a static and/or deterministic view of social reality. Thus we must first stress that behaviour and social practices are not solely determined by representations (i.e. the worldviews). Indeed, to understand them one must take into account both shared frames of meaning, as well as individual beliefs, vis-à-vis the various situations that enable and constrain the elections and actions of people and their families. Secondly, we must acknowledge that shared frames of meaning, worldviews and rationales are not static but in constant transformation. In fact, as many scholars have argued, experiences that arise when confronting “reality” may reorganize the theories and assumptions that guide these practices. This implies that experiences can, in turn, reorganize frames of meaning at various levels (see, for instance, the Piagetian school and the conceptual framework of implicit theories).

Moreover, at both interpersonal and social levels, meanings and representations are not given once and forever but are arenas in which those considered legitimate are always potentially under dispute (Burr, 1995; Howarth, 2006; Landini & Murtagh, 2011; Long, 2001; Long & Villarreal, 1993), and may thus be considered simply as moments in an on-going process. Finally, we should also avoid a static and crystallised image of worldviews, rationales and practices, since people have multiple social belongings and identities (Bolaños, 2007; Landini, 2012a; Long, 2001; Pereira, 2002).

For instance, a person can be both a Christian and a lawyer, wherein each identity may (to a certain extent) be related to different shared frames of meaning,

and may also possess different social representations of the same objects at the same time (Landini, 2012a; 2013, Howarth, 2006), which can be differentially activated in accordance with particular social, material or interpersonal contexts, thus shaping different practices.

#### 1.4. Complexity, multi-determination and context

While studying the psychosocial dimensions of rural development we should not make the mistake of psychologising the phenomena under study (Landini, Benítez & Murtagh, 2010; Martín-Baró, 1986). This implies that PsyRD has to acknowledge the multi-determination and complexity of development processes and rural innovation (e.g. Klerkx, Aarts & Leeuwis, 2010; Leeuwis & Aarts, 2011; Van Woerkum, Aarts & Van Herzele, 2011). Thus, after having proposed a set of interrelated concepts to approach rural development processes from a psychosocial standpoint, we will need to widen the framework by analysing the articulation between psychosocial and non-psychosocial processes. This enables us to address the complexity and multi-determined nature of rural development and innovation processes.

By “multi-determination”, we imply that psychological phenomena should not be considered the principal or foremost dimension when analysing rural development, but only one of those involved, which may or may not be important, depending on the situation and the topic of interest. Furthermore, multi-determination also implies recognising that psychosocial phenomena may also be determined by factors that are not strictly speaking of a psychosocial character, such as environmental, economic, or political components (Freitas, 1994).

For instance, in many cases, rural extension policies may favour peasants adopting passive positionings and attitudes (Landini, 2011; 2013). This will tend to happen when peasants present themselves as being defenceless in persuading practitioners to behave as resource providers. Thus, socio-political processes often partially determine psychological phenomena. Supporting the multi-determination and thus complexity of such intervention processes is Morin’s (1994) characterisation of the entanglement of actions, interactions and feedbacks through which processes are organized.

Recognising the complexity of multi-determination therefore means avoiding linear or unidirectional analyses or causalities. something common to psychosocial studies that focus on topics such as the adoption of technologies wherein only

psychological variables, such as intelligence, locus of control, flexibility and the need for achievement, among others, are taken account, thus neglecting the economic and social conditions related to those variables (Landini, Benítez & Murtagh, 2010). This position leads us to thoroughly consider how phenomena at different levels, and pertaining to different disciplinary fields, are organized (García, 1986; Ussher, 2006).

In this vein, we propose to understand complexity in terms of a more or less rigid organisation of elements and processes (both human and non-human), articulated at different levels and observable from various angles or scientific disciplines, in which these elements, processes or levels may be salient or more decisive in different situations or regarding particular analysis, goals or interests. In consequence, we must explore several concrete factors or processes that, in our experience, prove fundamental to understanding the articulation of psychosocial and non-psychosocial, and local and extra-local, dimensions of reality in regard to rural development when conducting psychosocial research.

Given that rural development studies and interventions are often localized in defined territories, it is useful to distinguish between two types of contexts. The first is the spatial context, which refers to extra-local or general (national or international) processes that have a discernible impact on the local processes under study, at both psychosocial and non-psychosocial levels. The second is the non-psychosocial context, by which we mean the non-psychosocial factors, local and extra-local (such as the economy, political structure and types of landholding and farm technology) that have a psychosocial impact in our area of study. Thus, theoretically, we might encounter:

a. *Non-psychosocial (local and extra-local) factors or processes that have direct or indirect potential influence on local psychosocial processes.* This includes soil types (particularly their fertility and productive capacity), local climate (e.g. rainfall, temperature, etc.), the road system (which allows for the transport of people and goods) and the provision of public services (such as electricity, water, etc.) –all of which, in a material sense, constrain but also enable (and thus shape) people’s possibilities, actions and experiences. For example, land fertility affects productivity, and the condition of the roads, the cost of transport which impacts on both income and, indirectly, the perception of being able to survive and obtain sufficient monetary income through ones’ own effort.

In addition, the legal aspect of land tenure may play a salient role in certain contexts, leading to different affective bonds *vis-á-vis* land, and thus different perceptions of material stability and the nature of interpersonal conflicts related

to the possible use of such land. What's more, for farmers, crop prices, input characteristics, and the distance and availability of markets, are of the utmost importance; and likewise the dynamics of market chains, systems of intermediation, relationships between intermediaries and farmers, and the existence of local industries that require certain crops as raw material. Here, a very common situation is the perception of being exploited and expropriated by intermediaries who are seen as obtaining the greater part of the profits, which thus influences identity and self-esteem (Landini, 2012a; 2012b). Also, public policies affecting farmers and farming practice (such as social aid, development initiatives, regulations over markets and farming activities, etc.) must be taken into account, as well as the organization of local politics (whether paternalistic, clientelistic, participatory, etc.) which, for instance, may induce passive attitudes and positioning related to survival strategies, carried out in an effort to obtain public assistance (Landini, 2013). Additionally, the presence of specific organizations, institutions or social actors (NGOs, local government agencies, churches, farmers' organizations or cooperatives, etc.) acting in or influencing the dynamics of the territory, may also have to be considered.

b. *Psychosocial extra-local factors or processes that have a potential influence on local psychosocial processes.* When focussing on the study of local psychosocial factors, processes or the dynamics of rural development and farming issues, we must also consider how social imaginaries, ideologies, social representations and other relevant shared frames of meaning that are widespread or hegemonic at a social level, influence and are discussed or resisted at local level (e.g. Howarth, 2006). Within these, then, those that shape rural development interventions are of utmost importance, including, among other aspects, development ideologies, conceptions about the role of the state in society and suppositions on what constitutes valid knowledge and how "expert" and "local" knowledge ought to be interrelated in development interventions.

Figure 1 presents a graphic representation of how psychosocial processes are articulated with socio-political, economic and bio-physical realities or levels of analysis, and how they may be integrated or combined with the previously analysed concepts of agency, strategies, rationales and worldviews. In the present proposal, the concept of bio-physical reality refers to materiality and its own determinations. Following García's recommendations (1993), we must create conceptual or interpretive models appropriate for comprehending a notion of reality considered in its full complexity.

In addition, the figure shows how different contextual factors impact on psychosocial processes, and how human agency is articulated in psychosocial terms. We locate psychosocial processes at the centre of the figure, given that they constitute the focus of our analysis and not because they are deemed the most important or relevant. Besides, it is within psychosocial processes that we situate people's capacity to make sense of reality, i.e. the surrounding world, a precondition for individual and social action. As a consequence, it is not argued that local processes are mainly articulated through psychosocial processes, since it is clear that the fertility of the land, a bio-physical factor, makes possible as well as constrains economic activities.

Nonetheless, we do argue that the capacity to understand or, put differently, to secure the knowledge that guides and frames social practices, must be considered constitutive of human agency - a process that takes place at a psychosocial level. Thus, we locate, at this level, actors' worldviews and rationales, which organise their ability to give meaning to reality and in this way underline that human agency implies the capacity to understand. Finally, worldviews are significant since they allow people to make sense of the context and rationales which act as guidelines for action that take place within the constraints and resources present in the socio-political, economic and bio-physical context, and thus shape behaviours, social practices and strategies, and underline the dimensions of social action that constitute the nature of human agency.

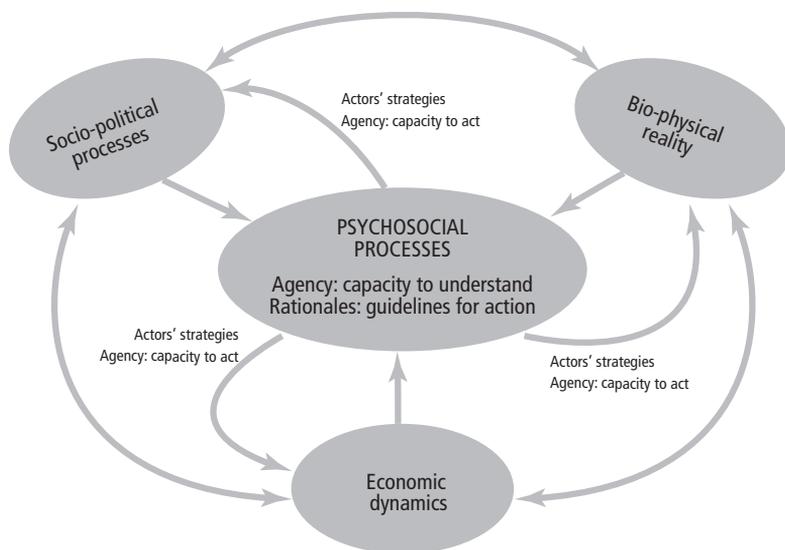


FIGURE 1. Agency and psychosocial processes in the context of complexity

SOURCE: authors

Before concluding this section, three additional reflections are required. First, we have to explain how this analysis can be articulated with an interface approach. As we indicated earlier, the notion of social interface offers a useful heuristic device for identifying and analysing the critical points of intersection between different fields or levels of social organisation in which discrepancies in attitudes, values, interests, knowledge and power are likely to be revealed.

Also it is at such critical junctures that one is likely to observe the processes by which differing points of view, interests, and values are reaffirmed or renegotiated. And it is here that issues concerning the availability of resources and the existence of constraints in the bio-physical, socio-political and economic fields come into play and perhaps reshape actors' differential worldviews. Understanding these processes will of course provide insights into actors' guidelines and strategies which will in turn help to contextualise how modes of human agency are expressed in behavioural terms.

The second reflection concerns the necessity of looking at the historical dimension of these processes (Álvaro, 1999) since, in understanding a specific state of affairs, it is important to take account of its antecedents. Taking serious account of historicity also means acknowledging that social structures and institutional frames, and the legitimacy of discourses that support them, are also historical and, in this sense, contingent (Ibáñez, 2002).

A third comment concerns the need to study not only how different non-psychosocial processes may have a psychosocial impact, but also how and under what conditions the dynamics taking place at a local psychosocial level can significantly impact on wider fields of psychosocial, social and material life (Cerullo & Weisenfeld, 2001; Freire, 1970; Martín-Baró, 1985; Montero, 1994).

## Conclusions

In this paper, we have presented a set of theoretical guidelines aimed at exploring critically issues of rural development from a psychosocial point of view, thus promoting a Psychology of Rural Development. We sought to articulate these proposals within the wider context of development studies, drawing upon contributions from the field of psychology. Alongside this, we inserted some psychosocial contributions to understanding the complexity and multi-determination of rural development.

In the first place, we presented several frameworks for addressing rural development and innovation processes as well as more planned policy interventions that involve multi-actor situations and several types of social interface. Then, drawing upon An Actor-Oriented Analysis which addresses human agency in the context of social interfaces, we explored several psychological theories that could contribute to a deeper understanding of these issues and more generally to the study of rural development scenarios.

In addition, we analysed notions, such as worldviews, rationales and strategies that are commonly used in rural development studies, and discussed their psychosocial connotations and significance for incorporating a psychosocial approach in the field of development studies. Finally, we addressed the complexity and multi-determination of rural development processes and interventions which we argued could benefit from the further integration of psychosocial approaches to rural development, human agency and actor strategies in the context of socio-political processes, economic dynamics and material and bio-physical determinants.

Thus, we expect to have presented a set of sound and articulated theoretical guidelines for a Psychology of Rural Development that allow us to widen our understanding of social phenomena in general and rural development processes and interventions in particular.

These proposals and contributions are particularly interesting given that they make apparent the need for a greater involvement of psychology, thus opening new possibilities and alternatives in the field of rural development.

In summary, if the arguments presented here are accepted, then it implies that a new, relevant dimension for the analysis of these processes has been opened up, which includes the incorporation of a battery of psychological concepts and methodologies, some of which has been described in this article.

In similar vein, this paper has also contributed, though tangentially, to reflecting upon the psychosocial foundations and determinants of human agency. In this sense, it paves the way for further analysis of how psychology can expand our understandings of anthropology/sociology on human agency, thus allowing a greater involvement of psychology in the fields of social science.

Needless to say, this proposal also needs both further theoretical reflection and in-depth empirical exploration. At a theoretical level, these guidelines and arguments require additional discussion and concretisation. This implies that they should be thoroughly addressed by scholars aimed at identifying weak points and

proposing improvements, but also so as to clarify specific articulations *vis-a-vis* concepts or theoretical traditions stemming from the field of psychology. Likewise, at an empirical level, it is also fundamental to put into practice these theoretical proposals and analyse whether they are really useful when attempting to widen the understanding of particular phenomena. Additionally, putting it into practice will be potentially useful in terms of discovering theoretical limitations, which eventually could lead to new conceptual improvements.

Finally, this proposal still has to prove its usefulness in contributing to the solution of specific practical rural development problems. This implies helping institutions and practitioners to overcome barriers and solve problems, as well as contributing to the improvement of farmers and other rural inhabitants' quality of life, particularly the poorest tasks that will only be achieved if researchers identify scientific problems and build proposals that take serious account of practitioners' and farmers' interests, priorities and points of view.

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