

Towards a Psychology of Rural Development Processes and Interventions

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ABSTRACT

A psychosocial approach to rural development and development interventions, which we designate as 'psychology of rural development' (PsyRD), does not yet exist as an area of research or intervention within the field of psychology or development studies, even though rural development is in part obviously shaped by psychosocial factors. Thus, in this discussion paper, we argue the need for PsyRD, explore how it may provide new insights and tools for analysis *vis-à-vis* rural development scenarios and issues of social equity and outline the shape that, in our view, such a psychology should take. First, the multiple dimensions of rural development and the many practical problems faced by rural development agents contain strong psychosocial elements that require contributions from psychology. Yet at the same time, the psychological literature on this topic contains many limitations and biases, which leads us to, in the second part of the paper lay the groundwork for a PsyRD that focuses on the importance of adopting a critical and interdisciplinary approach capable of dealing with complexity and multidetermination. Finally, we conclude by outlining the challenges of PsyRD. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: farmers; peasants; psychology; rural development; rural extension

INTRODUCTION

In this discussion paper, we argue that psychology, particularly community psychology, has great potential for contributing to rural development processes, both in terms of research and intervention. However, the contributions made to this field by this discipline are scarce, and their impact has been limited. In fact, psychology has not even been mentioned as a relevant science in the context of development studies, where social

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disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and geography, among others, have a prominent role. Thus, in this paper, we aim to highlight the need for psychology of rural development (PsyRD) so as to raise awareness about its potentiality and to outline the shape that, in our view, such a psychology should take. In order to do so, first, we need to clarify some key notions addressed in this paper, such as rural development and rural extension.

The notion of ‘development’ (and its counterpart, ‘underdevelopment’) arose in the mid-20th century linked closely to gross national product per capita (Álvarez, 2001; Landini, 2007a). This conception carried with it two consequences. First, modernisation (i.e. the process of transition from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern’ societies underpinned by technical and institutional transformations) was depicted as the main path to development (Arce & Long, 2000); and second, it legitimised development interventions in so-called ‘underdeveloped societies’ (Arce, 1995; Escobar, 2007). Increases in productivity through improved crop yields *via* the use of agricultural machinery and external inputs (such as hybridised seeds, fertilisers and pesticides), a process known as the ‘green revolution’, was seen as the key to rural development. Rural extension, a practice that emerged as a national strategy in the USA during the early 20th century, was popularised in this context and later exported to most Latin American countries as the main means of transferring knowledge and technology to farmers (Cimadevilla, 2004). This was carried out by rural development agents known as rural extensionists (De Schutter, 1982; Leeuwis, 2004).

This notion of rural extension was subsequently criticised in the mid-1970s onwards for being ‘top–down’ interventionist, and thus, the case was made for placing greater emphasis on social and cultural dimensions (Landini, 2007a). This paved the way for more differentiated notions of development and ‘modernity’ (Arce, 1995; Escobar, 2007; Long, 2007) that led scholars to reject the hierarchical, unidirectional and ideological structure of relationships established between rural extensionists and farmers (Freire, 1973; Leeuwis & Aarts, 2011; Schaller, 2006). Although the original conception of extension work is still supported and implemented in many contexts (e.g. Landini, 2012; Leeuwis, 2004; Marchesan & Senseman, 2010), many scholars have stressed the need for more ‘bottom–up’ (participatory) forms of intervention (Landini, Murtagh, & Lacanna, 2009). It has also been argued that the facilitation of innovation and rural development is a complex process (Leeuwis & Aarts, 2011; Klerkx, Aarts, & Leeuwis, 2010) that includes providing support for horizontal communication, conflict management, technical, commercial and organisational training and articulation between different stakeholders that could support innovation processes (Leeuwis, 2004). Given such modifications to the concept of rural extension, many authors suggested abandoning the concept (Leeuwis, 2004) and renaming it ‘communication for rural innovation’ or ‘agricultural advisory services’. However, because the name ‘rural extension’ is widely used in many Latin American countries, we will continue to use it, given that nowadays it tends to be used not to refer to its original meaning but to the general role of development agents supporting rural development processes, including a wide range of activities, from the old-fashioned transfer of technology approach to the support of systemic competitiveness through new social and interinstitutional arrangements. Besides, the conception of rural spaces has also changed, from being little more than areas devoted to agricultural activities to diverse and multifunctional territories wherein food production becomes one among other environmental, social and economic functions (Cotes, Urbina, & Cotes, 2007; Kopeva,

Madjarova, & Peneva, 2012). This leads to the increased visibility of multiple rural actors, not only farmers. However, the notion of rural multifunctionality, originated in the context of the so-called 'developed world', has been contested as means for understanding developing areas such as Latin America (Segrelles, 2007) where farming activities seem to remain fundamental in the context of rural development. Regardless, if in the past, agricultural extension was almost a synonym for rural extension, today, the former (besides becoming an old-fashioned concept) clearly represents only a portion of the second, which refers to much more than simply farming activities.

While these changes in the concept of rural extension occurred, the notion of development was also altered and became more complex and diverse. In terms of this paper, we define development not only as economic growth but also, at the same time and with an equal level of importance, social equity and environmental sustainability (Tobasura, 1996). What's more, we argue that development should not focus on the quantitative increase in the availability of objects (an idea related exclusively to economic growth) but to the qualitative expansion of human well-being. Thus, development becomes a notion centred on people's quality of life (Max-Neef, Elizalde, & Hopenhayn, 1993) and their capacity and degree of freedom to choose what kind of life they want to live (Sen, 1990). In brief, rural development, in the context of this paper, is considered to be a process of economic growth and societal revitalization taking place in rural areas whose root aims are improving people's well-being and widening their range of choices in life. This is the conception we will use as reference throughout this paper.

Having established the context of the paper, we aim now to analyse the need for a PsyRD. In doing so, we describe the problems occurring in the context of extension practice and development interventions, thus highlighting the many psychological components involved. We also underline the limitations of most psychological research pertaining to this area of study, emphasising that, despite there being an obvious need for it, psychology has not yet produced sound and useful contributions, at least in general terms.

Having argued the need for a psychology aimed at studying the psychosocial factors and processes relating to rural development, we outline the shape that, in our view, such a psychology should take. We claim that a truly useful PsyRD should be both theoretically strong and deeply engaged with practical issues and the needs of rural development agents and farmers. Additionally, it should adopt an interdisciplinary orientation that encompasses both the multidetermination of psychosocial phenomena and offering a critique of social institutional forms that reproduce underdevelopment and social inequity. Finally, in the conclusions, we discuss the scope of our proposal and define the tasks necessary to consolidate it.

WHY DO WE NEED A PSYCHOLOGY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT?

In the following section, we offer two interrelated arguments to support a PsyRD. The first concerns the problems that occur during development interventions and extension practices, and the second analyses the limitations of the current psychosocial approach to the topic. In doing so, we do not pretend to argue that extension practice and its problems are most important topics when addressing rural development processes and interventions from the field of psychology. We simply aim to address those topics building upon our own experience in order to support our argument in favour of a PsyRD.

Problems that occur during development interventions and extension practice

Rural extensionists face several problems or setbacks in meeting the objectives that they, their institutions and/or the beneficiaries they work with have defined (Landini, 2007b, 2009). Many of the problems they face are of a technical nature and require a technical solution, for example, difficulties that arise from advanced desertification, lack of rain or underground water or the presence of aggressive plagues. Often, commercial issues are of the utmost importance, such as problems selling produce or fluctuating market prices. Rural extensionists also mention economic problems, for example, lack of resources to invest or low profits. In such cases, they tend to believe that they have the appropriate background to understand and tackle these problems. Of course there are differences in the degree of control they can exert over such issues, but in general terms, they acknowledge them as being within the scope of their expertise. A second group of problems, which they feel are beyond their control and outside their area of responsibility, include legal issues (particularly relating to land tenure) and those relating to policy and political questions, especially where there is an evident lack of appropriate policies for rural development.

There is, however, a third group of problems that fall within their remit as rural extensionists but which they feel their training leaves them ill-equipped to deal with. Ongoing investigations in Latin America, in which rural extensionists were asked about their problems, revealed that the most often mentioned were the farmers' distrust of them and their peers, difficulties that arose within farmer organisations or cooperatives (Landini, 2013a) and, in general terms, struggles to support the development of farmers' organisations. Certainly, agricultural engineers learn little at university about how to build trust among community members or how to create viable rural organisations. However, this is not to imply that they know nothing about this issue, because they do acquire valuable \pm -job experience. Yet, on the other hand, it is clear that social psychologists have expert knowledge in group management, organisational issues and trust building (e.g. Boon & Holmes, 1995; García, Díaz, Delgado, & Grajales, 2005; Sacchi, 1995), which could help extensionists carry out their tasks. Nevertheless, whatever the case, and despite its potentiality, psychology in those areas has not yet been applied to the study of trust building and organisational problems in the context of farming.

Given that the 'transfer of technology' model in rural extension remains strong within rural extension practices in many countries (Landini, 2012), extensionists frequently mention farmers' lack of adoption of technologies as one of their greatest problems. Moreover, several studies underline the difficulties extensionists have in making sense of farmers' behaviour (Carenzo, 2006; de Vries, 1992; Mora, 2008), which sometimes leads them to interpret farmers' actions as nonsensical (Bennholdt-Thomsen, 1988; Cáceres, 2003; Landini et al., 2009). The following example portrays something of this: Many family farmers tend to use excessive doses of pesticides (when available) to obtain 'a better effect', an action that is neither technically advisable nor economically profitable but rather potentially harmful. This is because of their tendency to focus on immediate effects, and their excessive use occurs when the effects of pesticides are not immediately apparent (Landini, 2010). Another problem described by rural extensionists is the failure of rurals to participate in rural extension initiatives. In practical terms, they argue that farmers are often not interested in their advice (Landini & Murtagh, 2011) and may only opt to take part in initiatives to obtain benefits such as subsidies, without really being committed to them. Consequently, they are said not to assume the responsibility or take the active role

expected of them by technicians or project requirements. For example, this implies systematically failing to turn up for meetings or to comply with assumed responsibilities such as seeking information or bringing tools or animals to the agricultural workshops. In consequence, when talking with psychologists, rural extensionists often ask for strategies to increase farmer participation and engagement, because, despite it being perceived as part of their job, they feel they do not have the skills or appropriate knowledge to cope with such issues.

Finally, there is an issue that is characterised as the difficulty of ‘reaching’ farmers (Ingram, 2008; Jansen, Steuten, Renes, Aarts, & Lam, 2010). This refers to the perception of a large bridge or gap separating technicians from farmers and thus limiting the possibility of establishing a sincere dialogue that might convince or influence agricultural producers to adopt particular technologies or be involved in projects supposedly designed to benefit them. This leads extension workers, when interviewed, to request help for themselves when dealing with the human dimensions of their work (Landini & Bianqui, 2012). Clearly, this is because they recognise psychological/psychosocial dimensions as part of their day-to-day experience, although not part of their professional training.

Until now, this section has outlined problems described by rural extensionists containing a strong psychosocial component that are common to development interventions, thus using them as arguments to support the need for a PsyRD. It is essential to take into account said problems when working and interacting with rural extensionists and development institutions in the context of a community psychology approach. Nevertheless, this does not mean accepting the underlying assumptions that are implicit in such framing of problems, which oftentimes are supported by authoritarian, ethnocentric conceptions of ‘development’ and ‘rural extension’. As argued previously, in different contexts, rural extension practice is still often hierarchically organised, an approach that is in line with a more traditional model (Sánchez Cadena, 2011; Saraiva & Callou, 2009). Interestingly, this problem is not only mentioned by scholars but also by extensionists themselves, authorities of development institutions and even farmers, who wish for a more dialogical, horizontal and participatory extension practice (Landini, 2012). Thus, a new problem, in tune with the approach of community psychology, arises: the psychosocial entanglement of these hierarchical, authoritarian extension practices and the alternatives to reshape them through reflexive, psychosocial interventions. In fact, it has been argued that extension practice is articulated with extensionists’ identities (Leeuwis, 2004), with their representations and perceptions of farmers (who may be viewed as ‘passive’, ‘intelligent’, ‘traditional’, etc.), and with their beliefs about what is ‘true’ and ‘valuable’ knowledge, and who possesses it (Landini, 2013b; Landini et al., 2009).

In brief, rural development agents and development institutions describe and face problems that have a strong psychosocial component. What’s more, these setbacks often times may need elucidation in order to make explicit the ethnocentric assumptions embedded in the framing of such problems, which could lead to psychosocial interventions aimed at reshaping extension practices in a more horizontal and participatory way. Thus, it is clear that psychology has an important role to play in the context of extension practice and development interventions. Finally, we wish to mention that we not only imagine psychologists working with rural development agents or with development institutions but also directly with communities and with farmers’ or peasants’ organisations. In any case, the idea of ‘development interventions’ would be difficult to avoid in the context

of PsyRD, given that even when they are working directly with communities, they would still be external agents aiming at supporting rural development processes.

The gap in psychological research on development issues

Having argued the existence of a strong psychosocial component in rural development processes and extension interventions, we must now address the contributions that psychology has made. The lead author of this paper and his colleagues (Landini, Benítez, & Murtagh, 2010; Murtagh & Landini, 2011) studied the production of psychological papers that dealt with farmers. Of the research found, the authors categorised and analysed all the abstracts relating to psychology and farm issues found in the American Psychological Association (APA) database, identifying 74 abstracts relating to the area they named 'development and productive practices'. Within this category, 44 abstracts stood out. What was interesting about them was that they tended to use the same methodological approach based on a selection or division of farmers into two groups: Those who had adopted technologies were more productive and thus considered to have 'progressed' *versus* those who had not. They had a research structure that focused on quantitative evaluation (through questionnaires or tests) of the differences between these groups at a psychological level. The general research conclusion was that factors such as an internal locus of control (Abregana, 1988; Hayati & Karami, 2005), the existence of group norms favourable to adoption (Fielding, Terry, Masser, & Hogg, 2008) and a favourable attitude towards risk taking (Sagar & Ray, 1985) were associated with indices of 'progress', 'development' and/or technological adoption. However, the problem with this approach, which correlates individual psychological factors with levels of rural development/economic achievement, is that it tends to psychologise processes that are highly complex (e.g. Klerkx et al., 2010; Leeuwis & Aarts, 2011; van Woerkum, Aarts, & van Herzele, 2011), and therefore, in this sense, the perspective is inclined to oversimplify, universalise and explain 'innovation', 'adoption' and 'development' using internal factors when in fact they are products of a complex and entangled set of interrelated variables and processes located at different levels. Thus, within this approach, complexity is reduced to and explained solely by internal psychological causes, which allocate responsibility for poverty and underdevelopment to the poor themselves, thus obscuring the social and material determinations of this reality. These scholars reach their conclusions not because poverty and underdevelopment are primarily caused by internal and individual psychological factors, but because their framework is shaped by the theoretical and methodological assumptions of this kind of psychological explanation (Martín-Baró, 1986, 1987). Indeed, following this line of analysis, one might argue that the cause of the poverty of a particular small farmer and his family is due to a lack of entrepreneurial behaviour (i.e. by certain personality traits, individual and internal factors), while a broader analysis might reveal that the absence of entrepreneurship relates to an economic and social context within which such attitudes have never been rewarded (or may even have been punished). Obviously, this is not to say that there are no individual determinants of behaviour but rather that complexity and socio-historical conditions have to be taken into account seriously.

In addition, it is important to note that this kind of approach, which psychologises the causes of development and wealth, while neglecting the social determinants of poverty, ends up supporting the idea that 'everyone obtains in life what he or she deserves'. Thus, psychology becomes ideological, in the sense that it supports and legitimises an unjust

social order. In addition, this methodology does not provide tools to overcome these problems or to catalyse rural development. In fact, what this approach does is to deem poor farmers and peasants responsible for their situation, which avoids the analysis of both the limitations of rural development/extension strategies and interventions and the inequities of the social system as a whole.

The APA database focuses on papers written in English, but it is also worth analysing what has happened in the Latin American context, a subcontinent where a social and community psychology aimed at the resolution of social problems of communities and oppressed people emerged in the 1970s and, according to Montero (2004a), developed a specific scientific paradigm known as 'Latin American Social Psychology'. In fact, when reviewing Latin American literature, the situation seems to be rather different. There, despite the use of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies (where in this case the former accounted for the majority of the papers), we encounter the opposite of what was found in the APA database. Namely, the topics chosen for research do not focus on internal psychological factors related to development, income or adoption of technologies but on participatory processes, social organisation and cultural beliefs related to farming, technology and development. For example, Huerta (2005) explored issues concerning social organisation and participation in a Colombian cooperative; Canelón (2005) analysed traditional forms of social organisation deployed in the valley of Quíbor (Venezuela) to distribute irrigation water and Berrueta, Limón, Fernández, and Soto (2003) explored peasant participation in the design and construction of technical implements. Regarding the evaluation of attitudes and beliefs, authors such as Moyano, Cornejo, and Gallardo (2011) studied environmental beliefs and how they relate to economic liberalism; Rocha, Albuquerque, Coelho, Dias, and Marcelino (2009), using the theory of planned behaviour, analysed beneficiaries' intentions *vis-à-vis* the repayment of loans in Brazil and Guillén, Sánchez, and Mercado (2004) addressed the factors motivating weed control in maize cultivation in Mexico.

It is clear that these papers are more socially oriented and more related to practitioners' practices and problems than those identified in the APA database. It is also of importance to note that not all Latin American authors addressing psychosocial issues in the area of rural development come from psychology. For example, Berrueta Soriano is an electro-mechanical engineer. Hence, psychosocial processes are not only seen as belonging exclusively to the field of psychology but are also identified by many other professionals in this field.

From the APA database, we might conclude that, despite its potentiality, psychology has produced few useful contributions aimed at providing a fuller understanding and improvement of rural conditions and development outcomes; while on the other hand, the Latin American bibliographic references, although scarce, provide support for the kind of research advocated by PsyRD.

WHAT KIND OF PSYCHOLOGY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT DO WE NEED?

A useful and scientifically sound PsyRD, capable of researching and intervening in matters of rural development, should, we believe, be based on the following guidelines. First, it should be strongly grounded in social, community and environmental psychology. However, as Montero (2004b) argues, given the complexity of innovation and

development processes, it should also be committed to some degree of interdisciplinary research, while retaining the capacity to articulate psychosocial theory in a coherent framework, alongside contributions made by other social sciences, particularly anthropology and sociology. In this process, two potential shortcomings must be avoided. The first concerns the belief that psychology itself is enough to address rural development issues; the second concerns the loss of potentially innovative contributions to issues of rural development if one forgoes the use of a psychosocial approach.

Directly articulated with the need to be interdisciplinary is the need for PsyRD to recognise the multidetermination of reality. As argued earlier, psychology becomes ideological (and weak at a scientific level) when it psychologises rural development determinants and neglects their social, historical and economic underpinning. On the contrary, PsyRD must approach reality from the recognition of its complexity and its multiple determinations. No single science can claim the right to understand and describe reality as a whole, given its complex and entangled multiplicity.

Another fundamental issue is that of avoiding a positivistic psychosocial stance, which is less useful for tackling issues of complexity, and instead build, as Álvaro (1999) has argued, on more sociologically oriented versions of social psychology, which appear more appropriate for dealing with complex and aggregated issues. In this context, community psychology (Montero, 1994, 2004b) emerges as a particularly stimulating approach because of its interest in the problems of the most underprivileged sectors of society and in processes of social change and community development. Either way, and despite our own particular theoretical preferences, we argue that PsyRD should be a pluralistic area of research and intervention at both a theoretical and a methodological level. It follows, therefore, that the selection of research topics should principally be defined on the basis of practical problems, their complexity and the key research questions that should be addressed, thus avoiding wherever possible any academic dogmatism. And, in tune with this research programme, we support the idea of selecting methodological approaches judged useful for reaching particular ends and not because they are deemed as being more 'objective'. In consequence, we expect to integrate, within PsyRD, explanations that embrace the meanings that particular social actors give to their practices (i.e. what in social anthropology is termed an 'emic' approach and that has the support of many nonmainstream social and community psychologists) and those that adopt a more externalist ('etic') approach, characteristic of most mainstream social psychological trends.

Moreover, in line with the values promoted by community psychology and its commitment to social change (Montero, 2004b), we strongly believe that PsyRD should not only concern itself with the study of rural development practices and processes but also play an active role in bridging the interfaces between local rural actors and various external organisations and interest groups linked to state institutions and nongovernment organisations (national and global). This consideration, inspired by community psychology's orientation to social change (Sánchez Vidal, 1991), opens up the possibility that PsyRD could (and perhaps should) be expected to provide insights that contribute to the resolution of practical problems involving issues of well-being and inequity, as well as to the launching of new development initiatives. In this vein, sustainability issues also have to be taken seriously into account, given that they are constitutive components in rural development, a field in which environmental psychology could play a strategic role (Pelletier, Lavergne, & Sharp, 2008; Moser, 2003).

With regards to the discussion over neutrality in the context of the production of scientific knowledge and in agreement with Ibáñez (2002), we argue that social sciences cannot be deemed as being neutral: In fact, the knowledge produced by them always supports certain social interests instead of others. Thus, we consider that researchers should clearly state their own positions and that PsyRD should explicitly commit to the underprivileged sectors of society, the poor, the peasants, indigenous people and the oppressed in whatever sense, in the same way that Montero (2004b) makes her case for community psychology.

Finally, we also maintain that PsyRD, despite giving core importance to farming activities in the context of rural development in developing societies such as Latin American countries, should also take into account and be open to the nature of multi-functionality in rural areas. This implies considering the (potential) existence of multiple economic activities in a territory other than farming (rural tourism being one of the most mentioned) and of new roles or functions for rural inhabitants, such as guardians of landscapes and protectors of water uptake areas.

In consequence to the previously proposed guidelines, PsyRD must also adopt a somewhat critical stance *vis-à-vis* its research and conclusions. First, it should not see itself as a technocratic area of research and professional practice aimed at producing only tools (i.e. recommendations, actionable knowledge) to improve or enhance rural development projects or interventions. That is, like anthropology and the sociology of development (e.g. Arce, 1995; Arce & Long, 2000; Long, 2007), it must reflect critically on the ends of development interventions, including at least the acknowledgement of the power relations established between external agents and local communities and the implicit imposition of Western cultural values in arguing the existence of a single development model or path. Furthermore, given the fact that psychology, as a discursive practice, can contribute to maintaining or transforming social practices and structures (Iñiguez Rueda, 2003) and in so doing may favour certain social interests over others (Martín-Baró, 1990), it has to be critically aware of the social and political impact of its own actions and theoretical propositions. Thus, because it is impossible, at least in this field, to produce neutral knowledge, the values and social aims of the researchers should be explicitly discussed, so that they do not become entangled and hidden in epistemological or methodological choices, as Montero (2001) points out. In consequence, PsyRD needs to be aware and be critical towards the objectives of development programmes, the effects of psychological interventions in the area of rural development, and the theory, epistemology and methodology used to produce scientific results.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have argued that a PsyRD is much needed, because of the following: (i) the fact that rural development processes and interventions have a strong psychosocial component; and (ii) because, to date, psychology has not produced enough sound and useful contributions to the topic, despite its potentiality to do so. We have also proposed the shape that we believe PsyRD should take in fulfilling these expectations. In this vein, we have underlined that it should be strongly grounded in psychology but with a plural and interdisciplinary orientation that allows us to take into account the complexity and multidetermination of rural development processes. In consequence, we also have argued

that it should become a critical and useful tool aimed at supporting the livelihood struggles of the underprivileged sectors of rural society.

In this process, however, we have neither clarified what we specifically mean by a PsyRD nor have we discussed the relationship between PsyRD and community psychology. Regarding the first issue, we do not wish to propose that PsyRD is somehow a new subdiscipline within psychology (like social psychology, educational psychology, clinical psychology, etc.) Instead, we maintain that PsyRD simply constitutes a set or field of interrelated psychosocial problems, issues or topics relating to rural development at both the level of research and intervention. Or, expressed differently, it is the study of the psychosocial factors relating to rural extension and rural development processes. Thus, we do not aim to create a new subdiscipline but only to highlight an area that, we believe, has tended to be neglected by psychology and to which end we have coined a specific name.

Now, regarding the relationship between PsyRD and community psychology, we strongly believe that the former should be based on, and could benefit from, the latter, particularly in terms of its understanding people to be active social agents who have capacities and potentialities; its valorisation of participation, awareness processes and empowerment; the horizontal relation proposed for the interaction between communities and external agents (the latter being simple catalysts of internal processes) and its orientation to such issues as democracy, social change and equity (Montero, 1994, 2004b; Montero & Giuliani, 1999; Sánchez Vidal, 1991). However, although rural development can successfully be addressed by community psychology, it may also of course be approached from a different angle, for instance, a more positivistic and/or technocratic one. Hence, we recognise the legitimacy of different approaches.

Finally, we would like to point out three tasks/challenges faced when shaping and consolidating PsyRD. First, we need to discuss and clarify the specific potential contributions of psychology to rural development processes and interventions. In this paper, we argued the need for a PsyRD and proposed some general guidelines to shape it. Nonetheless, the role of psychology and of psychologists, as well as the most relevant areas of research and intervention of PsyRD, are still unclear and need further analysis through dialogue with development agents and rural communities. Second, rural development psychologists should be deeply aware of the power relationships established between external agents and communities as well as of the existing risk of supporting the imposition of foreign value systems in the context of development interventions. In this vein, when interacting with rural extensionists and other development practitioners and their institutions, these psychologists should listen sympathetically to their problems and practical needs and attend to the underlying way in which they frame the problems they face. This implies avoiding being trapped by the assumptions and values embedded in such framing, making them explicit when interacting with development agents and institutions, and supporting the construction of horizontal and dialogical ways of interacting with rural communities. Third, exploring the articulation between a psychosocial and a socio-anthropological point of view in this area of research and practice also constitutes a core challenge for PsyRD. Hence, we consider the actor-oriented approach (Long, 1992, 2007) to be a particularly interesting perspective, given its emphasis on human agency and social interfaces wherein social actors with different backgrounds and world-views (e.g. psychologists or development agents and communities) interact in the context of rural development.

Finally, to conclude this discussion paper, we would like to reiterate that this notion of a PsyRD is, for the time being, more a proposal than a reality. Nonetheless, we hope to have shown that it is something worth working towards.

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