

Abstract

In this paper, realist findings from the philosophy of social science are summarised and implications for rural research methodology are drawn out. Four specific ontological claims are fleshed out. These ontological claims act as grounding assumptions for social research and knowledge, but are not foundational in the essentialist sense. Examples are used to illustrate realism in action in empirical research in India. Then several epistemological themes underlying realist village research are also spelt out. The paper offers a very explicit introduction to a range of sophisticated themes in realist social research. Overall the paper contributes an original line of argument to the debate about realist research methodology and techniques.

Keywords: realism, social structures, village studies, ontology, epistemology, case-study method, protocol.

Acknowledgements:

The support of the Economic and Social Research Council (UK) is gratefully acknowledged. The work was funded by the ESRC Global Poverty Research Group. I wish to thank Jamie Morgan, David Byrne and Dan Neff for their support and encouragement.

Wendy Olsen is a Lecturer in Socio-Economic Research at the University of Manchester