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Rural Higher Education as Misrecognition: Reconstructing the Agrarian University from Latin America

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Abstract

This concept paper reconstructs the public agrarian university as an institutional configuration of recognition and reads the rural–urban gap at the threshold of higher education as one material expression of it. The reconstruction runs from Hegel's assignment of the agricultural estate to immediate ethical life, through the developmentalist reception of classical sociology, to Honneth's spheres of recognition, Fraser's institutionalized status hierarchies, and a Latin American rural sociology in which the peasant appears as knowledge-producer; it is anchored by an abductive diagnosis of published indicators. Across six Latin American countries with heterogeneous redistributive regimes, the rural–urban gap in secondary completion narrowed between 2010 and 2022, while the residential attendance gap at ages 20–24, an imperfect proxy for tertiary participation, converged more slowly in five of the six and not at all in three; the difference between the two trends is significant in every country except Chile. In Colombia, rural secondary completion rose by 20.6 percentage points while rural attendance at these ages rose by less than one. The patterns do not identify a causal mechanism; they delimit resource-based, Bourdieusian, capabilities, selection-based, and compositional accounts rather than refute them, and the paper states what would disconfirm its diagnosis. Three contributions follow. First, the non-reporting of rural origin in the higher education information systems is argued to be institutional misrecognition rather than a resource constraint: the same state records peasant self-identification in four statistical operations, the enrolment file records forty-one attributes of the student, and none is territorial origin, and the omission forecloses accountability for inequalities in admission, persistence, and graduation. Second, epistemic reciprocity is offered as the criterion of curricular reform. Third, the framework identifies reform sites and observable success criteria that resource-based accounts do not reach.

Keywords: rural higher education; recognition theory; epistemic injustice; agrarian university; rural–urban inequality; Latin America

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1. Introduction

Rural higher education in Latin America operates under a configuration that decades of redistributive policy have narrowed at the school gate and left standing at the university door. Of every hundred children of the rural domain in Colombia—dispersed rural areas and rural population centers—fifty-seven complete secondary education by the age of

twenty-four and, applying the rural immediate-transit rate to those fifty-seven, seventeen enter tertiary education of any kind [1,2]. The seventeen is a synthetic index and not a cohort rate: it multiplies two published rates measured on different populations, and Section 4 states its construction and its limits. How many of those seventeen enter an agrarian program, and how many graduate as agronomists, cannot be established from the public record: neither the national higher education information system nor the dropout system reports the rural origin of the student. Section 4.2 marks the point at which the pathway becomes unobservable. The pathway narrows across successive educational transitions and remains sharply unequal at tertiary access, where higher-education institutions begin to govern admission, evaluation, and belonging. Section 4 shows that the rural–urban gap in secondary completion has narrowed across six countries and every redistributive regime, while the gap at the threshold of higher education has narrowed more slowly or not at all in five of them, and in Colombia has not moved at all. The standard interpretive frame in education policy—rural educational disadvantage as a problem of resources, coverage, and infrastructural lag—helps explain the first movement but does not exhaust the institutional, status-related, and epistemic dimensions potentially operating at the second. The inference from that contrast to recognition is abductive and is defended as such: the margin that converged is the one that household transfers reach directly; the margin that stalled is the one governed by institutional judgements of admission, evaluation, and belonging; and the rival accounts that could produce the same shape without any such judgement—selective out-migration and the changing composition of the rural graduate pool—are confronted below and named among the disconfirming findings of Table 1.

Table 1. Abductive protocol: the inference the article makes and the conditions under which it would fail.

Element	Specification
Anomaly	The rural–urban gap closes at secondary completion in all six countries and closes more slowly, or not at all, at the tertiary threshold in five of them, across heterogeneous national policy configurations.
Rival explanations	Resource underprovision; Bourdieusian habitus and field; capability deprivation; selective rural out-migration; changing composition of the rural secondary-graduate pool (Section 6.1).
Recognition inference	Institutionalized hierarchies of status and epistemic authority are hypothesized to contribute to the tertiary transition that household transfers do not directly reach—admission criteria, evaluative regimes, and the institutional judgement of belonging; their independent causal contribution is not identified.
Evidence mobilized	Harmonized household-survey series for two educational margins; national transit rates; the public reporting architecture of the higher education information systems; documented institutional experiments.
Evidence not available	Individual trajectories of rural-origin students; enrolment, retention, and graduation within agrarian programs by origin; curricular content; institutional causality.
What would disconfirm	Evidence that the tertiary discontinuity is fully accounted for by prior attainment, by the changing composition of the rural graduate pool, by educational out-migration, by distance and cost, or by rural preference; or that faculties which have altered admission and evaluation show no change in rural participation at parity of resources.
Future test	SPADIES microdata; comparative documentary analysis of agrarian faculties; qualitative work on the reception of rural-origin students.

The contribution of this article can be stated in a single claim. The public agrarian university is reconstructed as reproducing an institutional configuration of recognition, and

the discontinuity documented at the tertiary threshold is read as one material expression of it. The Hegelian genealogy establishes where the configuration came from, Honneth's three spheres make it observable, Fraser's account of institutionalized status hierarchies explains why household transfers did not dislodge it, and Latin American rural sociology supplies the grammar in which an alternative could be built. The question is not whether rural students are poor, which they are, but what is gained when rural higher education is reconceptualized as a dimension of recognition rather than as a problem of resources. An additional institutional dimension is at work in the architecture through which rural-origin students are rendered intelligible to the agrarian university, and agrarian science to rural communities. Figure 1 maps the argument.

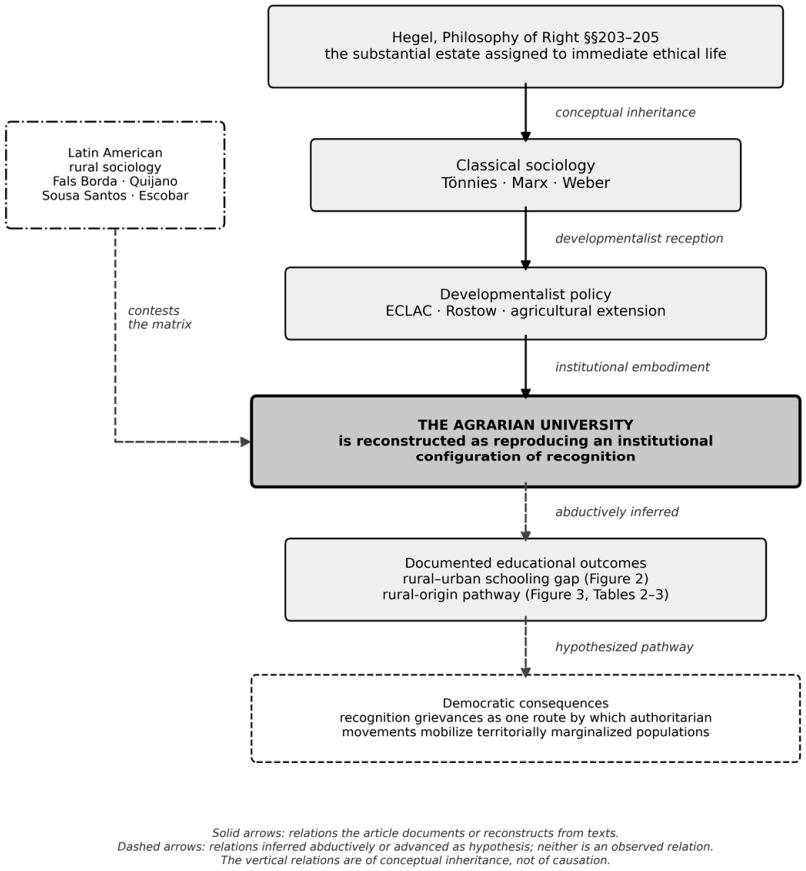

Figure 1. Conceptual genealogy of the argument. The vertical relations are of conceptual inheritance and institutional transmission, not of causation. The link to democratic consequences is a hypothesized pathway advanced as interpretation, and is not a finding established by the evidence presented here.

Two features of the claim require statement at the outset, since neither is self-evident. The first concerns the choice of institution. The evidence assembled in Section 4 identifies a divergence at the general tertiary threshold, not an effect located inside agrarian faculties, and the general barriers to higher education—cost, distance, information, prior attainment—bear on every field of study. The agrarian university is nonetheless the strategic case, for a reason that is conceptual rather than statistical. It is the one institution whose object is the rural world, whose credential is in principle redeemable in the countryside, and whose founding mission was to mediate between scientific and territorial knowledge. Where the general threshold keeps a rural-origin student out of a law faculty, the exclusion is a distributive fact; where it keeps the same student out of the faculty that trains those who will govern the knowledge of the territory that formed the student, and where that

faculty does not record the origin of its students, the exclusion becomes a contradiction between the institution's mission and its architecture. That contradiction is what the recognition framework is built to name, and it is why the agrarian university, rather than higher education at large, is the object of reconstruction. Whether rural-origin students fare worse inside agrarian programs than the general threshold would predict is an open empirical question, and Section 4.3 shows that the public record cannot answer it. The second feature concerns the reading of that public record. That the higher education information systems do not report the rural origin of the student is, in the first instance, an absence of data. That the absence is a form of misrecognition, rather than bureaucratic neglect or a resource constraint, is a claim, and Section 4.3 argues it on three grounds: misrecognition, in the status model adopted here, is a property of institutionalized patterns of classification and not of anyone's intention, so that its identification neither requires nor asserts that the omission was deliberate; the omission is selective, since the same enrolment file records forty-one other attributes of the student and the program; and the same state records peasant self-identification in four statistical operations, so the category is invisible by omission and not by impossibility.

The thesis must be defended against five alternative explanations, each of which captures a substantial part of the problem, but none foregrounds the institutional distribution of epistemic authority in the manner developed here: the resource-based or human-capital account [3]; the Bourdieusian account of habitus and field [4]; the Senian capabilities account [5]; the account that explains the gap as an artefact of selective rural out-migration; and the account that explains it as a compositional artefact of the very expansion of rural secondary completion. Section 6.1 confronts all five.

The argument also stands in a determinate relation to the international literature on rural education, the immediate interlocutor of the present Special Issue. That literature has developed a critique of the metrocentricity of educational research—the tacit premise that the urban is the norm and the rural a deviation to be explained [6–8]—and, in Corbett's ethnography of a Canadian coastal community, its most precise formulation: schooling in rural places operates as an apparatus for learning to leave, since the credentials it confers are redeemable elsewhere and the price of educational success is the abandonment of the place that formed the student [9,10]. The convergence requires a statement of what is added. Recognition supplies that critique with a normative vocabulary it has largely lacked: misrecognition is not merely a descriptive fact about how a field frames the rural, but an injustice with identifiable spheres, carriers, and remedies. And the Latin American materials supply a counter-tradition in which the rural subject appears not only as the object of metrocentric framing but as the producer of a knowledge the metropolitan university has yet to receive.

The point of departure is Hegelian; the destination is the sociology and policy of agrarian higher education. Hegel's Philosophy of Right §§203–205 supplies the inherited matrix that fixed the rural in pre-modernity, and Section 3.2 traces its migration—through the developmentalist reception of Tönnies [11], Marx and Engels [12] and Weber [13]—into the frameworks that shaped twentieth-century Latin American agrarian extension. The reconstruction is conceptual, and its target is institutional: it explains why agrarian higher education inherited an architecture that addresses the rural-origin student as a subject to be modernized rather than as one whose knowledge enters into the formation of agronomic science. Against that matrix, Latin American rural sociology has articulated a counter-grammar [14–17] whose pedagogical implications [18,19] the public agrarian university has not institutionalized at scale.

The contribution to the present Special Issue is twofold. Educational inequality, reduced to resources, conceals the recognition deficit that the tertiary threshold makes

visible. And the place-based orientation the Special Issue invites requires a framework that treats the rural as a site of theoretical and pedagogical production rather than as a case to which already-elaborated categories are applied. A third, exploratory implication—that the recognition deficit may be one condition through which democratic backsliding becomes territorially mobilizable—is a hypothesis the present evidence does not test and is reserved for the conclusions.

2. Materials and Methods

This article develops a conceptually driven abductive analysis. Its primary contribution is a theoretical reconstruction of the agrarian university as an institutional configuration of recognition, empirically anchored through an original synthesis and secondary analysis of published indicators. The descriptive evidence is used to identify an anomaly and assess the plausibility of competing interpretations; it does not identify causal effects. The abductive inference is judged not by consistency alone—many accounts can be consistent with a descriptive series—but by explanatory scope, the specification of mechanisms, the generation of testable hypotheses, and the conditions under which it would be disconfirmed, which Table 1 states explicitly.

Three components organize the inquiry: a conceptual reconstruction of the category of recognition; a sociological reading that traces its migration from speculative philosophy into classical and Latin American sociology; and a diagnostic engagement with secondary statistics on rural schooling and agronomic higher education. The use of generative artificial intelligence is declared here and in the Acknowledgments. No data were generated, simulated, or fabricated by any such tool: every value reported derives from the published institutional sources cited below and is documented in Supplementary Table S1. A large language model (Claude Opus 5.5 and Claude Sonnet 5.5; Anthropic, San Francisco, CA, USA; accessed via the Claude web interface and API during 2025–2026) was used to generate draft analysis and plotting code—subsequently reviewed, corrected, and validated by the authors against the primary sources—for the derived series and least-squares trends reported in Section 4, to render the figures from those series, to assemble the reproducibility workbook, and to draft, revise, and condense text. Every derived quantity was independently recomputed and checked against the published sources by the authors, who verified every figure and every derived quantity and take full responsibility for the content of this publication.

Recognition is treated as a sociological operator rather than as a speculative concept, built from Hegel's assignment of the substantial estate to immediate ethical life [20], from Honneth's articulation of recognition across three spheres—love, right, solidarity [21,22]—and from Fraser's redistributive critique [23]. Section 3.1 develops the apparatus. Tönnies, Marx, and Weber are read because each articulated, in a distinct register, structural properties homologous with the Hegelian hierarchy that fixes the rural in immediacy—through conceptual affinity rather than direct intellectual transmission; the selection is representative, not exhaustive. For the Latin American counter-grammar, the criterion is convergence around the recognition of the peasant subject as knowledge-producer; Fals Borda, Quijano, Sousa Santos, and Escobar are read together not because they share an apparatus but because their contributions cumulatively articulate an alternative grammar.

Three families of sources are mobilized. Regional indicators come from ECLAC [1,24,25], the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) [26], the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) [27], and UNESCO [28]. National-level data for the Colombian case come from the CEPALSTAT harmonized household-survey indicators 2119 and 143 [1,25]; from the consolidated enrolment and first-course files of the National Information System for Higher Education (SNIES) and from the System for the Prevention of Higher Education Dropout

(SPADIES) [29]; from the Ministry of National Education for infrastructure and rural-education indicators [30]. Period coverage runs from 2010, the first year of the harmonized household-survey series, to the most recent year available in each source, typically 2022 or 2024. The six countries—Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru—are purposively selected on three criteria fixed before the analysis. Both CEPALSTAT indicators must be published with rural–urban disaggregation for at least six survey years within 2010–2022, so that a trend can be estimated on each margin; the country must have a large rural population in absolute terms, so that the rural series is not dominated by sampling noise; and the set must span the widest available variance in redistributive instrument and political orientation, so that the contrast between the two margins cannot be attributed to any one policy model. The third criterion is the one that carries the inference: a pattern that recurs under Chilean demand subsidies, Bolivian hydrocarbon transfers, and Brazilian conditional cash transfers is not a fact about any of them. Countries whose harmonized series do not meet the first criterion were not included, and Argentina was excluded on the second, since its household survey covers urban agglomerations only. Rural higher education is understood here as the trajectory and institutional reception of students originating in rural territories, with particular attention to agrarian and agricultural programs; it is distinguished both from higher education merely located in rural areas and from agronomic training as such. Four categories that the argument mobilizes are not interchangeable, and the article does not treat them as such. Rural origin is a territorial and statistical category, operationalized here as place of residence at the completion of secondary schooling, and the rural domain follows the Colombian administrative classification into municipal seats, population centers, and dispersed rural areas. The distinction between origin and residence is not pedantic, and it constrains what the evidence of Section 4 can be asked to bear; it is stated here once, in full, and the sections that follow refer back to it. The CEPALSTAT indicators classify a respondent by area of residence at the time of the survey, not at the completion of schooling: a rural-origin student who has moved to a city in order to study is counted as urban, at destination rather than at origin. Those series therefore measure a gap between rural and urban residents, and they measure the participation of rural-origin students only indirectly and with a bias whose direction is known. The immediate-transit series of the Ministry of National Education classifies the student by zone of residence at secondary graduation and is the origin-based instrument of the two; it is treated here as the primary evidence at the tertiary threshold, and the household-survey series as corroborating. The campesino is a social and cultural subject, not a residence: the official Colombian definition, produced by the Commission of Experts convened after the Supreme Court ordered the State to count the peasantry, describes an intercultural subject who identifies as such and is vitally engaged in direct work with land and nature, within forms of organization based on unpaid family and communal labor or on the sale of labor power [31]; since the constitutional reform of 2023, the campesinado is a subject of rights, of special protection, and a political subject. Indigenous and Afro-descendant identities are ethnic-political categories established by self-recognition, with their own juridical trajectories, and intercultural universities are not agrarian universities. The agricultural producer is a census and economic universe: the declared producer of an agricultural production unit. The four overlap and none contains the others; where the article speaks of peasant knowledge, it means the second, and where its data speak, they mostly measure the first. The operational definition of rural area follows the Colombian convention of dispersed rural areas and rural population centers for national indicators; for international comparison, the convention of each national statistical office is preserved, with the caveat noted at the foot of each table.

The function of the figures is diagnostic, not predictive. Where indicators with rural–urban disaggregation at the program level are not publicly available—particularly in SNIES and SPADIES, whose disaggregation by student origin requires administrative

microdata—the limitation is signaled in the tables by the entry 'not reported' and discussed at the foot of the relevant table.

The inferential strategy is structural diagnosis rather than causal identification. It identifies, through descriptive evidence, configurations whose properties are consistent with the recognition framework and not fully accounted for by frameworks that treat resource underprovision as exhaustive. A descriptive discontinuity does not prove misrecognition; it constitutes an empirical anomaly for which recognition theory provides an additional institutional and normative interpretation that the frameworks confronted in Section 6.1 do not foreground. The mode of inference is abduction, and the argument is answerable at that standard. The contribution is a conceptual reconstruction together with an original diagnostic synthesis of published sources, not a report of new primary data. This is what the article means by structural misrecognition: not a mental attitude, but a property of an institutional configuration that distributes legitimacy unequally across forms of life and forms of knowledge, producing material consequences that survive policy regimes which leave the configuration untouched.

Misrecognition, in this operational sense, is inferred from a displacement: the rural–urban gap closes on the margins that household transfers can reach and fails to close at the institutional threshold of higher education, across policy regimes that differ radically in instrument and ideology.

Because the standard of abduction is easy to invoke and hard to hold, Table 1 states the protocol explicitly: the anomaly to be explained, the rivals, the evidence mobilized, the evidence that does not exist, and the findings that would disconfirm the diagnosis. The article asks to be judged against it.

3. Conceptual Reconstruction: The Recognition Configuration and Its Contestation

3.1. Recognition as a Sociological Category: From Hegel to Honneth

The category of recognition mobilized here is the sociological operator Honneth reconstructed from Hegelian materials, not the speculative concept of the Phenomenology nor the moral-philosophical concept of Taylor's essay [32]. The starting point is Hegel's Philosophy of Right §§203–205. The substantial estate is assigned in §203 to immediate ethical life—family, dependence on nature, customary trust, in which the concrete universality of social life is present only in nuce [20]. The hierarchy tracked here follows not from that assignment in isolation but from its contrast with the reflecting estate of civil society and the universal estate of the civil service, on which §§204–205 confer a reflective mediation that the substantial estate is granted only in subordinate form. The agricultural class is not denigrated; it is assigned to a position of incipiency, and precisely thereby the bourgeois subject can appear as the bearer of mediated reflection. The architecture is hierarchical and operates through positive ascription rather than outright negation, and it is the inherited matrix that classical sociology will transmit to twentieth-century policy thought.

Honneth articulates recognition across three intersubjective spheres, each grounding a positive relation-to-self: love grounds self-confidence, right grounds self-respect, solidarity grounds self-esteem (Honneth, 1995a) [21]. Each has its form of misrecognition: emotional violation, juridical exclusion, the denial of social value. The move converts speculative architecture into a multidimensional operator applicable to concrete patterns of social organization. In Freedom's Right, Honneth [22] extends the framework toward institutional analysis. Fraser's complement guards against any reduction of distributive injustice to misrecognition while making explicit that the two dimensions are co-constitutive rather than independent [23]. Where the article applies the sphere of love to an institution, it refers to the affective and care-related institutional conditions of self-confidence, not to a claim

that a university loves; the corresponding row of the table in Section 6.4 is accordingly labelled by those institutional conditions rather than by the name of the sphere, since the extension of the sphere of love to institutions is one that Honneth's own framework resists.

Three implications follow. Recognition operates as a structural property of institutional configurations, not as the sum of individual attitudes: a curriculum or a research-funding architecture can confer or withhold recognition independently of the intentions of those who staff it. It is multidimensional: misrecognition in the sphere of love (affective devaluation of rural ways of life), of right (juridical exclusion of rural land claims), and of solidarity (devaluation of peasant knowledge in academic and policy spaces) operate together but not interchangeably. And it has a temporal structure, built up and dismantled historically, which requires genealogical attention to the institutional present.

A division of labor between the two theorists should be made explicit, since the definition of misrecognition used here—a structural property of institutions that distribute status and legitimacy unequally—lies closer to Fraser's model of status subordination and participatory parity than to Honneth's account of injuries to the practical relation-to-self. The article takes both and assigns each its office. Honneth supplies the typology of the injuries, in the three spheres, on which the pedagogical specification of Section 6.4 is built. Fraser supplies the account of how status hierarchies become institutionalized, and it is her formulation that governs the argument about redistribution. Quijano and Sousa Santos supply the colonial and epistemic dimension that neither European author thematizes. The three-sphere architecture is retained because it makes the diagnosis operational at the level of institutional devices, not as a claim that every dimension of the phenomenon fits within it. The operationalization recovers, for the sociology of rural higher education, an analytical resource hiding in plain sight in the tradition that bequeathed to social science the categories with which the rural was rendered unintelligible.

3.2. The Silent Matrix: Developmentalist Receptions of Classical Sociology

The matrix is silent in a precise sense. It does not announce itself in any canonical text of classical sociology, none of which proclaims a theory of rural inferiority. It operates as the unexamined horizon within which Tönnies, Marx, and Weber thought the relation between rural and urban modes of social organization, each transmitting, in a different register, a configuration of recognition that fixed the rural in pre-modernity. The transmission was not a conspiracy but the unintended consequence of a shared conceptual inheritance none of them had reason to interrogate.

Tönnies's 1887 opposition between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft has long served as one of the founding distinctions of sociology [11]. Tönnies himself did not denigrate community. The argument is therefore not about Tönnies but about the developmentalist reception of his binary, mediated through Parsonian modernization theory [33], which transmitted the typology stripped of its ambivalence. In that reception, Gemeinschaft is fixed in immediacy, and Gesellschaft is the locus of mediation and historical advance; the rural, identified ipso facto with Gemeinschaft, becomes the residual term of the modern. Marx's verdict on rural idiocy in the Manifesto—Idiotismus in its Greek sense of being closed to the public-political [12]—and the metaphor of the sack of potatoes in the Eighteenth Brumaire [34] extend the diagnosis: the peasantry is structurally absent from political agency, capable of being ruled but not of constituting itself as a political class. The late Marx, in the Zasulich correspondence, opened lines that complicate this verdict, but they did not enter the developmentalist canon. Weber adds a third register through his account of rationalization, centered on the city as the site where the modern type of social action emerges [13]: the peasantry is the site of traditional action rather than of the value-rational or instrumentally rational orientations that define the modern.

What follows is a conceptual genealogy, not a documented chain of direct intellectual influence: a structural affinity and a demonstrable inheritance. The early ECLAC documents of the 1950s and 1960s are saturated with the vocabulary of dual economy, of modern and traditional sectors; the traditional sector is rural, and overcoming it is the task of structural change. Rostow treats the transition out of traditional society as the condition for take-off [35]. Crucially, the inherited matrix structured the architecture of agrarian higher education itself. The founding institutions of the region, to which Section 6 returns, were built on different imported models of agronomic formation: Viçosa in Brazil on the United States Land Grant model; La Molina in Peru on the continental European model, through a Belgian mission from Gembloux; Chapingo in Mexico on a nineteenth-century foundation that predates the Morrill Act. What the models share is not a common pedigree but a common direction of knowledge: teaching, research, and extension calibrated to deliver modernization to the countryside through the urban-trained agronomist. Knowledge flowed from the agronomist to the rural producer; the reverse direction was not theorized as a possibility. Policymakers and university planners did not invoke Hegel; they invoked development. But the architecture of development they built into the agrarian university was structured by a recognition hierarchy that runs, through Tönnies, Marx, and Weber, back to the Hegelian assignment of the substantial estate to immediate ethical life.

Two consequences follow. Critiques that operate solely with the categories of resource scarcity or human-capital underinvestment cannot reach the configuration that produces the disadvantage: they presuppose the inherited matrix and propose to redistribute resources within it. And any sociology of rural higher education must engage that matrix as such, which is what Latin American rural sociology has undertaken from Fals Borda onward.

3.3. Contestation from the South: An Alternative Grammar of Recognition

Latin American rural sociology of the second half of the twentieth century articulated an alternative grammar that, read in the recognition-theoretic key proposed here, contests the inherited matrix at the level of the institutions that transmit it. Four authors carry the reconstruction. Three of them can be placed in a Honnethian sphere without forcing; the fourth cannot, and is not. What they converge on is the displacement of the peasant subject from object of modernization to producer of knowledge, bearer of rights, and agent of communal solidarities.

Fals Borda is the first figure. He undertook a systematic critique of the academicismo cientifista of mainstream social science, by which he meant the constitution of the rural population as object of study rather than as participant in the construction of knowledge [15]. Investigación-acción participativa is not merely a research technique but a sustained challenge to the recognition configuration of academic practice: the campesino appears as co-researcher, the knowledge produced is co-authored, and the criteria of validity include not only peer review but the test of communal usefulness. Read in Honnethian terms, Fals Borda articulates a counter-recognition in the sphere of solidarity: the peasant is recognized as contributing to socially valuable ends, and the researcher as participant in a shared enterprise rather than as expert observer of an external object.

Quijano contributes a second axis. His analysis of the coloniality of power does not focus exclusively on rurality [16], yet its consequences for the analysis of rural marginality are substantial. Quijano shows that the categories through which Latin American societies organize themselves—race, labor, knowledge, authority—were constituted in the colonial encounter as an integrated configuration: the racialization of indigenous and African-descended populations was inseparable from their incorporation into specific labor regimes, and from the epistemic hierarchy that placed European knowledge above local knowledges. The rural–urban hierarchy is therefore racially coded, and the recognition

deficit of rural populations is not a side-effect of modernization but a constitutive feature of how these societies were assembled. Read in Honnethian terms, Quijano articulates a counter-recognition in the sphere of right: the juridical exclusion of indigenous and Afro-descendant rural populations from full citizenship is identified as the systemic condition that the language of equal rights both presupposes and conceals.

De Sousa Santos [17] elaborates a third axis through the project of epistemologies of the South. The diagnosis is that modern Western knowledge has functioned as a monoculture of the mind, producing epistemicide—the destruction of knowledges that do not conform to the commitments of academic science. Against it, he proposes an ecology of knowledges. Peasant knowledge—of soils, weather, seeds, crop rotations, communal water management—is not pre-scientific in this framework but differently scientific, with its own criteria of validity. To take it seriously is to recognize the peasant as knower, which relocates the rural subject from beneficiary of knowledge transfer to contributor to a plural epistemic ecology. Read in Honnethian terms, this is a counter-recognition operating simultaneously in solidarity, because the peasant is recognized as producing socially valuable knowledge, and in right, because the formal institutions of higher education and research are reconfigured to accommodate the plurality of knowledges as a matter of epistemic justice.

Escobar develops a fourth axis through his territorial-ontological critique of development. In Encountering Development [14] and Sentipensar con la tierra [36], he argues that the discourse of development has functioned as the operator through which the Global South was constituted as the place of underdevelopment to be fixed. The peasant communities of the Colombian Pacific lowlands do not experience their relation to land, water, forest, and community as the deprivation of modern conditions but as a way of being—a relational ontology—with its own integrity; the application of development categories to such ways of being is a form of ontological violence. Escobar's contribution is not assigned to a sphere. What he documents—the denial of the relational constitution of the person and of place—cuts across the affective, juridical, and evaluative registers that Honneth separates, and the article uses it for what it is: the ontological ground on which the other three counter-recognitions stand.

4. Diagnostic Evidence: The Persistence of the Rural–Urban Configuration

4.1. The Regional Displacement: Where the Gap Closes and Where It Does Not

The conceptual reconstruction requires empirical anchoring. Three blocks organize the diagnostic: the trajectory of the rural–urban gap across the region (Section 4.1); descriptive evidence from Colombia (Section 4.2); and the reporting architecture of the higher education information systems (Section 4.3). Structural context first: rural monetary poverty in the region stands at 39.1 per cent against 24.6 per cent in urban areas [24]. It is context, not evidence of the educational mechanism, and is not treated as such. One regional indicator bears directly on the argument, and it is suggestive rather than decisive. Among 20-to-24-year-olds, tertiary attendance reaches 52.9 per cent in the top income quintile among urban residents and 26.7 in the bottom; among rural residents the corresponding figures are 28.5 and 15.4 [37]. The quintiles are those of the national distribution of household per-capita income, cross-classified by area of residence [25]: a rural young person in the fifth quintile therefore belongs to a household at least as well off as any urban household in the first. On that construction, attendance in the rural top quintile barely exceeds attendance in the urban bottom. Being rural and nationally affluent buys little more tertiary attendance than being urban and poor already confers, and whatever separates the two trajectories at this margin is not, or not only, income. The comparison is offered with two cautions: the rural fifth quintile is a small and selected group, and the indicator classifies by residence, so

that part of what it records is the departure of rural students to study in cities. The indicator is reported regionally because national data on the tertiary participation of rural-origin students are seldom disaggregated—a limitation taken up as an argument in its own right in Section 4.3.

The argument must be articulated on an educational indicator rather than on a poverty indicator. The six countries compared here are governed by radically heterogeneous redistributive regimes—Chilean demand subsidies within a privatized system, Bolivian hydrocarbon rents channeled through direct transfers, two decades of Brazilian conditional cash transfers, Peruvian Juntos, Mexican rural transfers from 2018, Colombian investment in rural education after the 2016 peace accords—and regional monetary poverty fell to 27.3 per cent in 2023, the lowest since comparable records began [24]. The redistributive effort has been substantial and effective at the level of household income. The decisive observation is that these instruments are household transfers. They raise incomes. They do not alter the admission criteria of an agronomic faculty, the evaluative regime that governs what counts as agronomic knowledge, or the pedagogical relation through which a rural-origin student is received. A resource-based account is therefore not refuted; it is placed in its proper scope. The question the evidence must answer is not whether these instruments worked, but where they stopped working.

Figure 2 presents the educational counterpart of that argument, and its first panel concedes what a recognition-theoretic account is often assumed to deny. Panel (a) traces the rural–urban gap in secondary completion among 20-to-24-year-olds, the cohort actually exposed to the transfer programs [1]. The gap narrows in every one of the six countries, and it narrows appreciably: in Colombia from 38.1 to 28.3 percentage points, in Brazil from 30.5 to 20.6, in Peru from 32.2 to 16.0, in Bolivia from 35.6 to 24.3, in Mexico from 24.4 to 19.2, and in Chile from 12.9 to 3.2, where it is now close to closed. Rural secondary completion in Colombia rose from 36.1 to 56.7 per cent of the cohort. The convergence is real; it is regionally general, and it does not depend on the ideology of the regime: Chilean demand subsidies and Bolivian hydrocarbon redistribution produce the same direction of movement. Redistribution has worked on the margin it was built to reach, and this article does not dispute it.

Panel (b) is where the argument turns. It plots the same gap, in the same six countries and the same years, for school attendance among 20-to-24-year-olds—the age at which attendance corresponds predominantly to tertiary study [25]. Convergence slows markedly and is absent in several of the selected countries. Over the observed period, the tertiary gap closes more slowly than the secondary gap in five of the six countries, and it does not close at all in three. The least-squares trend is flat in Colombia, at +0.06 percentage points a year against +1.05 at secondary completion, and in Mexico, at −0.01 against +0.55; it moves against convergence in Brazil, at −0.41 against +0.76; and it narrows in Peru at less than half the secondary rate, at +0.54 against +1.28. The Bolivian rural series carries the ECLAC small-sample flag and swings by some thirteen points across the period: its attendance gap moves at −0.29 a year against +1.34 at secondary completion, which places it among the five, but no direction is claimed for the attendance trend taken alone. Chile is the exception and is treated as one below: it converges at both margins at the same rate, +0.95 against +0.94. The difference between the two slopes is tested in Table S1. It is statistically significant in Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Bolivia, and Mexico ($p < 0.01$ in each case) and indistinguishable from zero in Chile ($p = 0.97$); the test treats the two slopes as independent, and since both series are estimated from the same surveys their sampling errors are, if anything, positively correlated, so the test is conservative. The claim is deliberately not that the tertiary gap widens everywhere. An endpoint comparison would say so—in four of the six countries the last observation lies below the first—and it would be fragile, because on these short and

noisy annual series the result would turn on the choice of endpoints; in Colombia it turns on the 2022 observation alone. The trend is the defensible statistic, and the trend is enough: the margin that responded to redistribution and the margin that did not are the same six countries, observed in the same surveys, on the same definitions of the rural domain. The contrast does not depend on the pandemic: re-estimating every slope with 2020 and 2021 removed, and again on 2010–2019 only, leaves the direction and rough magnitude of each trend intact—secondary-completion convergence remains positive in all six countries, and the tertiary stall in Colombia and Mexico and the divergence in Brazil persist (Table S1, Figure S1).

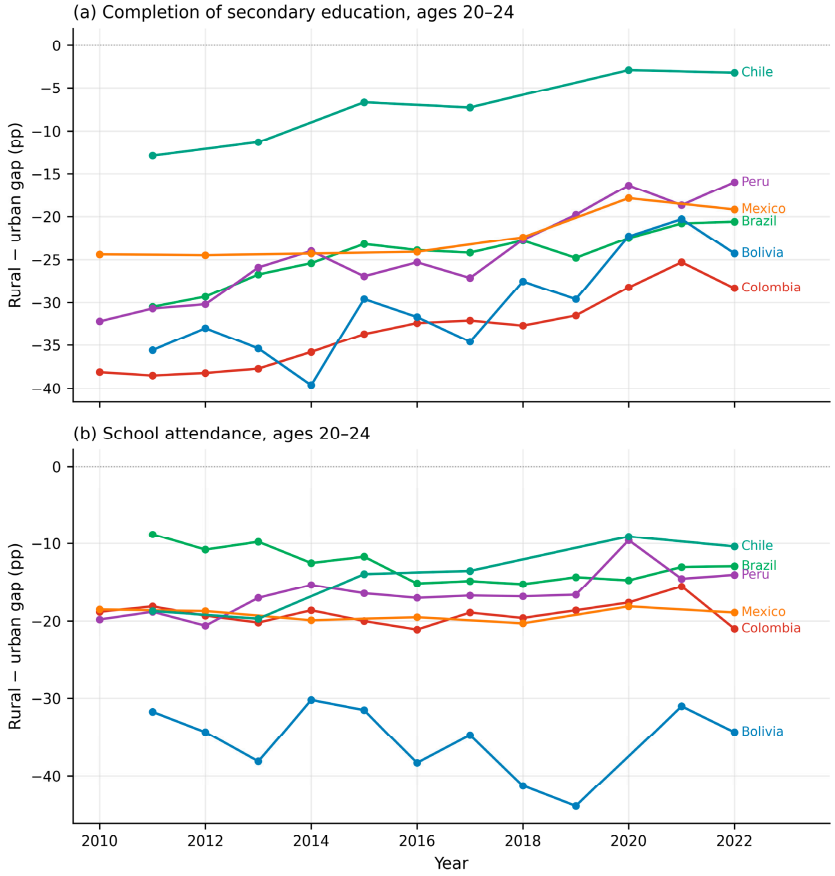

Figure 2. Where the rural–urban gap closes and where it does not. Rural minus urban gap, six Latin American countries, 2010–2022. (**a**) Completion of secondary education, ages 20–24. (**b**) School attendance, ages 20–24. Source: authors' compilation from CEPALSTAT indicator 2119 in panel (**a**) and indicator 143 in panel (**b**), ages 20–24, by geographic area [1,25]. The gap is rural minus urban and is therefore negative. At these ages, attendance corresponds predominantly, though not exclusively, to tertiary study. Both panels are drawn from the same household surveys on the same rural definitions, so the two margins are comparable within each country, while levels are not comparable between countries. Both classify by area of residence at the time of the survey, with the consequences stated in Section 2; the origin-based evidence is the immediate-transit series reported in Section 4.2. Trends reported in the text are least-squares slopes over the observed period. Series construction, country-specific survey years, the ECLAC small-sample flag on the Bolivian rural series, and the slopes are set out in Supplementary Table S1.

4.2. The Colombian Case

Colombia offers the clearest instance within the selected cases. Rural secondary completion rose by 20.6 percentage points; rural attendance at ages 20 to 24 rose by 0.4—from 10.3 to 10.7 per cent—while the urban rate rose from 29.1 to 31.7. The country produced a large new cohort of rural secondary graduates without a comparable expansion of tertiary-

age attendance among rural residents. The origin-based instrument tells the same story and tells it better, because it is not exposed to the residential reclassification of the student who migrates in order to study: rural immediate transit rose from 22 to 30 per cent between 2016 and 2024 and urban transit from 41 to 51.1, so that the transit gap widened from 19.0 to 21.1 points [2,30]. Access improved, and the distance from the urban trajectory grew. This is the displacement the article names. The gap closes where the constraint is material, and the instrument is a household transfer; it stops closing at the one transition where the constraint has the profile of an institutional mechanism—admission criteria, evaluative regimes, and the judgement of who belongs. This discontinuity is consistent with recognition-theoretic mechanisms operating at the tertiary threshold, though the diagnostic design does not permit isolating their causal contribution. The evidence is consistent with redistribution being necessary and insufficient: it moved the margin it could reach and left the other where it was.

Two mechanisms could produce this shape without any institutional judgement of belonging. The first is compositional: as rural secondary completion expands, the marginal completer is drawn from lower-attainment strata, and the transit rate can stagnate with no change whatever in institutional behavior. The second is educational out-migration, which the household-survey series cannot see, for the reason stated in Section 2. Neither is dismissed here; both are confronted in Section 6.1, and both are named in the disconfirmation row of Table 1. They are the reason the panel is offered as diagnostic evidence and not as identification.

Table 2 sets out the Colombian case of the regional pattern, on the two educational margins and at the transition between them.

Table 2. The Colombian case: where the rural–urban educational gap closes and where it does not, 2010–2024.

Indicator	2010	2016	2022/2024	Source
Secondary completion, ages 20–24, rural (%)	36.1	—	56.7	ECLAC 2119
Secondary completion, ages 20–24, urban (%)	74.2	—	85.0	ECLAC 2119
School attendance, ages 20–24, rural (%)	10.3	—	10.7	ECLAC 143
School attendance, ages 20–24, urban (%)	29.1	—	31.7	ECLAC 143
Immediate transit to tertiary, rural (%)	—	22.0	30.0	MEN [2,30]
Immediate transit to tertiary, urban (%)	—	41.0	51.1	MEN [2,30]

Sources: rows 1–2, ECLAC [1], CEPALSTAT indicator 2119; rows 3–4, ECLAC [25], indicator 143, both computed from the Colombian household survey; rows 5–6, MEN [30] for 2016 and MEN [2] for 2024. Rows 1–4 classify the respondent by area of residence at the time of the survey; rows 5–6 by zone of residence at secondary graduation. The two blocks are therefore not comparable in level. Indicators of producer schooling, of test-score gaps, and of monetary poverty were considered and not retained. Full derivation, and the reason for each exclusion, is in Supplementary Table S1.

Table 3 documents enrolment and structure in the principal agrarian programs of Colombian higher education. Three observations stand out, and the third is not a datum but its absence. The field represents a relatively small share of national undergraduate enrolment, although it comprises nearly fifty thousand students: 49,817 undergraduates, 3.21 per cent of national undergraduate enrolment, delivered through 453 of the 13,393 programs registered in SNIES; and of the 460,093 students who entered an undergraduate program in 2022, 13,612, or 2.96 per cent, entered the agricultural field [29]. Whether that share has grown or contracted since the commitments of the Plan Especial de Educación Rural [30] is not established here, because only the 2022 cross-section is reported. And, decisively for what follows, the columns the argument most needs are empty. Dropout enters the table only as a system-wide memorandum line, because SPADIES publishes it neither

by program group nor by student origin. What remains in their place is the entry 'not reported', which is itself the finding developed in Section 4.3.

Table 3. Publicly available indicators for selected agrarian program groups in Colombian higher education (enrolment year 2022).

Program Area	National Enrolment (Approx.)	Rural-Origin (%)	Cohort Dropout, 10th Sem. (%)	Rural-Origin Dropout (%)
Agronomic Engineering	15,540	not reported	not reported	not reported
Forestry Engineering	5941	not reported	not reported	not reported
Zootechnics	8928	not reported	not reported	not reported
Veterinary Medicine	18,256	not reported	not reported	not reported
Subtotal of the four listed program groups	48,665	not reported	not reported	not reported
Memo: Colombian higher education system, all areas	—	not reported	23.15	not reported

Sources: authors' computation from the SNIES consolidated enrolment file for 2022 [29], second semester, undergraduate university level, aggregated by Núcleo Básico del Conocimiento; agronomic engineering combines the Agronomía and the Ingeniería agronómica, pecuaria y afines cores. The four groups account for 48,665 of the 49,817 students enrolled in the CINE-F 2013 broad field of agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary science. The memorandum line is MEN [29], SPADIES 3.0: average cumulative cohort dropout of 23.15 per cent at the tenth semester, university level, 2023 (statistical cut of 2024). 'Not reported' denotes that the variable is not published, and the omission is exhaustive: the consolidated file carries forty-one variables, and not one of them records the origin, the prior residence, or the peasant self-identification of the student. Derivation in Supplementary Table S1.

Figure 3 derives the pathway announced in the Introduction and stops where the public record stops. Of every hundred children of the rural domain, 57 complete secondary education by the age of 24 [1]; applied to them, the rural immediate-transit rate of 30 per cent in 2024, against 51.1 per cent for urban residents [2], yields 17 of the original hundred entering tertiary education of any kind. The two remaining stages—entry into an agrarian program, and graduation as an agronomist—are left blank, and the reason is precise. The national share of entrants into the field is known exactly: 13,612 of 460,093 in 2022, or 2.96 per cent [29]. What cannot be established is whether rural-origin students are over- or under-represented within that share, because neither the enrolment file nor the first-course file records the origin of the student. The numerator is published, the denominator is published, and the one cut on which the argument turns does not exist. Subject to the qualifications set out in the note, the pathway narrows at every observable transition, and most sharply where the system evaluates the candidate's belonging; that these are sites at which recognition mechanisms may operate is an interpretive hypothesis and not something the figure demonstrates. That the last two stages cannot be computed at all is not an interpretation. It is the architecture of invisibility, appearing in the figure as the shape of the argument.

Three lines of recent empirical work converge with the diagnostic. Regional assessments of higher education identify cultural and pedagogical factors—the misalignment between the implicit assumptions of academic curricula and the experience of students from non-traditional backgrounds—alongside the economic factors that have received more policy attention [27,38]. Regional monitoring of education policy finds that progress stalls where inclusion policies must reach the hardest-to-reach populations, residents of remote rural regions among them, and that access to tertiary education in rural areas increased only slightly between 2015 and 2020 [39]. And studies of agrarian extension document the persistent assumption that knowledge flows from agronomist to producer rather than in both directions [40,41].

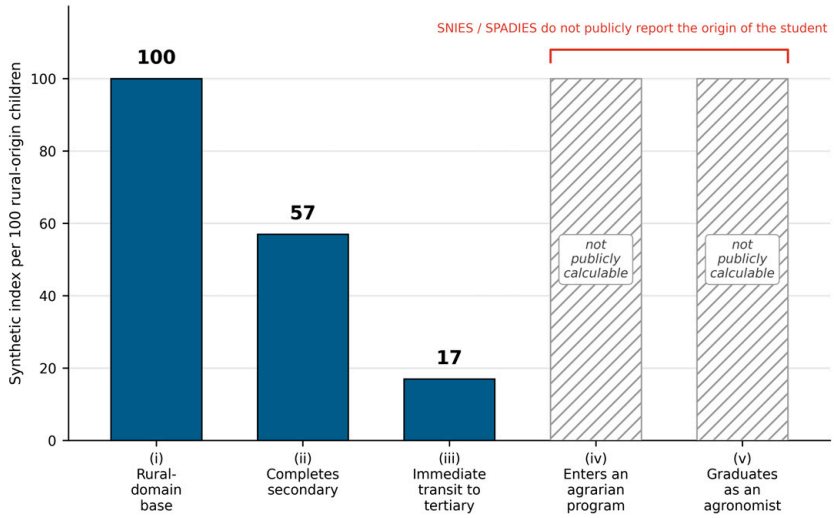

Figure 3. Illustrative synthetic pathway of rural-origin educational transitions in Colombia: observed stages and the point at which the public record ends. Stage (i) is a normalization; stages (ii) and (iii) are derived from published rates; stages (iv) and (v) are not publicly calculable. Source: authors' compilation. Base = 100 children of the rural domain in Colombia. Stage (ii): rural completion of secondary education, ages 20–24, 56.7 per cent in 2022, rounded to 57 (ECLAC [1], indicator 2119). Stage (iii): stage (ii) multiplied by the rural immediate-transit rate of 30 per cent in 2024, against 51.1 per cent for urban residents [2]; immediate transit is a lower bound on eventual access. The figure is a synthetic index and not a longitudinal cohort: stages (ii) and (iii) come from different measurement regimes—residence at the time of the survey and residence at secondary graduation—so their product is an index and not a cohort rate. Stage (iii) counts entry, whereas the attendance indicator of Figure 2b counts enrolment at a point in time: 17 entrants per hundred and 10.7 per cent currently attending are different quantities, and part of the difference is educational out-migration. Full derivation in Supplementary Table S1.

4.3. Non-Reporting as Misrecognition

A limitation of the public data must be acknowledged, and in a particular way. SNIES and SPADIES do not publicly disaggregate enrolment or dropout by the rural or urban origin of the student, which confines much of the diagnostic to indirect inference and accounts for the columns marked 'not reported' in Table 3. The obvious reading is that better data would remove the limitation. The reading proposed here is different, and requires a distinction between three situations: a variable not collected; a variable collected but not published; and a variable existing in microdata to which the researcher has no access. The evidence available establishes public non-reporting and restricted access to institutional microdata; it does not establish whether the rural-origin variable is collected at all. Place of residence at secondary graduation is not a public reporting variable in SNIES, and SPADIES microdata are restricted to institutional users.

That the absence is a form of misrecognition, rather than bureaucratic neglect or a resource constraint, is a claim and not a datum, and it rests on three grounds. The first is conceptual, and it removes an objection before it is raised. On the status model adopted in Section 3.1, misrecognition is a property of institutionalized patterns of classification and evaluation that deny some participants parity of standing; it is not an attitude, and it does not require an intention [23]. A reporting architecture that renders one category of student invisible misrecognizes that category whether or not anyone designed it to, exactly as an admission rubric can disadvantage rural applicants without any admissions officer intending that it should. A demand for evidence that the data are deliberately withheld for exclusionary purposes therefore asks for something the diagnosis does not claim and would not be strengthened by: a showing of intent would establish discrimination, which

is a different and narrower wrong. The second ground is the selectivity of the omission, and it is what separates misrecognition from neglect. Neglect is indiscriminate; it fails to record what it has no reason to record. The consolidated enrolment file records forty-one attributes of the student and the program—sex, institution, program, academic level, modality, knowledge area, and the department and municipality in which the program is offered, among others—and the dropout system records the department of the secondary school, the student's sex, the band of the state examination score, and the band of family income. The information systems classify the student along several dimensions of potential disadvantage; territorial origin is not among them. The third ground is that the same state does not lack the category, the instrument, or the mandate to record a rural social category when it decides to.

Following the Supreme Court's order to count the peasantry, the national statistical office adopted the official definition and now collects peasant self-identification through direct questions in four statistical operations [31,42]. The higher education information systems are not among them. The comparison must be stated with care, since peasant self-identification and territorial origin are different variables, and the article has taken pains to keep them apart: what it establishes is that capacity, not that self-identification would substitute for origin. The reform the diagnosis requires is the recording of both—territorial origin, as area of residence at secondary graduation, as a reporting variable of the higher education information systems, and voluntary peasant self-identification alongside it. What can therefore be asserted is that the rural origin of the student is publicly invisible by omission rather than by impossibility, and that a system in which the category is invisible cannot be held to account for the deficit it produces, cannot evaluate any policy designed to remedy it, and cannot even observe it. The rural education literature has named the operation as the erasure of rurality from the statistical categories through which educational systems know themselves [6,7]. Public statistical invisibility is, in this precise sense, a form of misrecognition, and it identifies the public reporting of rural origin as the first concrete reform the diagnosis requires.

An attempt to approximate rural-origin dropout using the finest publicly available territorial proxy instead demonstrates the limits of the reporting architecture. SPADIES does permit one cross-tabulation the public dashboards do not foreground: dropout by the department of the student's secondary school, the finest territorial origin variable the system records. Cross-tabulating the six agrarian knowledge cores at the university level (Agronomía; Zootecnia; Medicina Veterinaria; Ingeniería agrícola, forestal y afines; Ingeniería agroindustrial, alimentos y afines; and Ingeniería agronómica, pecuaria y afines) by this variable and by dropout status yields dropout rates that range from 20 to 52 per cent across departments of origin (Table S2). Yet the variation cannot be assigned to rural origin. An unweighted department-level Pearson correlation between cumulative dropout in the agrarian cores and the departmental share of population in rural areas [43] appears positive at first ($r = 0.40$ across the 32 departments with at least 500 records). But it is an artefact of two of the smallest units: Amazonas and Guainía, with fewer than a thousand records each against Bogotá's two hundred thousand, sit at the top of the range, and removing them reduces the correlation to zero ($r = 0.00$; among departments with at least a thousand records, $r = 0.00$). Weighting the thirty-two departments by their number of records—the appropriate estimator when the units differ by three orders of magnitude—gives $r = 0.06$ before any exclusion (Figure S2). The department-level signal is therefore not interpretable as a rural effect, both because it vanishes under the mildest robustness check and because the department aggregates precisely the rural and urban populations the argument must distinguish—Antioquia contains both metropolitan Medellín and its dispersed rural periphery under a single code. Decisively, 28.7 per cent of all records carry no origin information

at all. The finest instrument the state publishes cannot separate the rural-origin student from the urban one, cannot identify the campesino, and for nearly a third of students cannot even locate the department. The recognition mechanism therefore remains unidentified. What the analysis establishes is that the publicly available information system cannot test it at the territorial resolution the hypothesis requires, and this reporting failure is itself institutionally consequential because it prevents the evaluation of rural-origin inequalities in admission, persistence, and graduation. The exercise probes the most relevant publicly accessible dataset for the claim and finds it insufficient—which is the argument of statistical invisibility made concrete.

The scope condition stated in the Introduction applies here without attenuation. Nothing in this section locates a causal effect inside agrarian faculties. What it locates is the point at which the public record ceases to be able to answer the question that the agrarian university's own mission poses, and that point is the same for every faculty—which is why the reform it identifies, the reporting of territorial origin, is a reform of the information system and not of the agrarian curriculum alone.

5. Epistemic Reciprocity: Recognition Without Relativism

One objection must be met before the pedagogical specification of Section 6.4 can be stated, because it is the objection on which proposals of this kind ordinarily founder. If peasant knowledge is to enter agronomic science on its own criteria of validity, what happens when peasant knowledge is wrong? A soil practice may be inherited and mistaken; a planting calendar may be ancestral and no longer matched to a shifted climate. An answer that exempted peasant knowledge from correction would purchase recognition at the price of relativism, and it would fail the rural producer twice—first by patronizing the producer, then by leaving the producer with a practice that does not work. Recognition does not require that answer. Recognition, in the sphere of solidarity, is not immunity from criticism. It is admission to the space of reasons on symmetric terms. Peasant knowledge enters agronomic science as a claim that can be tested and can fail, exactly as an academic claim can. What the article objects to is not that claims are tested but that the obligation to justify runs in one direction only: the campesino must demonstrate that their practice works, while the agronomic protocol arrives already certified, its criteria of validity treated as the neutral background against which everything else is measured. Epistemic reciprocity is the corrective. The agronomic claim submits, in turn, to the test of territorial practice—whether it functions on this slope, in this soil, under this labor regime, at this price—and where the two conflict and both have been tested, the conflict is settled by the evidence and not by the institutional rank of the claimant. Reciprocity does not require that both bodies of knowledge submit to identical tests; it requires that the criteria be explicit, the burden symmetric, the procedures mutually contestable, and territorial validity not be mistaken for universal validity. The institution's obligation is to guarantee a test both parties can recognize as fair.

The proposal stands in a determinate relation to the literature on epistemic injustice, and the relation should be made explicit. Fricker [44] distinguishes two forms of the wrong. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker receives less credibility than the evidence warrants, because of a prejudice attaching to the speaker; hermeneutical injustice occurs when a gap in the collective interpretive resources leaves a group unable to render its own experience intelligible. Both operate in the agrarian faculty. The campesino whose account of a soil, a pest, or a seed is received as anecdote rather than as evidence suffers a credibility deficit of the first kind. The absence, from the agronomic curriculum, of concepts adequate to the labor regimes, tenure arrangements, and ecologies within which peasant knowledge is produced is a hermeneutical gap of the second.

What epistemic reciprocity adds is an institutional criterion rather than a further diagnosis. Testimonial and hermeneutical injustice name wrongs done to knowers; reciprocity specifies what an institution must do in order to stop committing them, and it does so without conceding the relativist ground on which proposals of this kind are ordinarily defeated. It requires neither that the campesino be believed nor that their knowledge be exempted from test. Credibility is not redistributed by decree; it is earned under symmetric conditions.

6. Discussion

The diagnosis and the criterion converge on one institutional question: what would the public agrarian university look like if it took them seriously? What follows confronts the rival explanations of the diagnosis, examines the institutional experiments that have already given the alternative grammar organizational form, identifies the three constraints and the one opening that condition reform, and specifies the pedagogical devices a recognition-theoretic reform would install.

6.1. Why Recognition? A Confrontation with Five Rival Explanations

Recognition is not the only available explanation of the patterns documented above. Five alternatives compete for the same explanatory ground, each with substantial empirical support. Structured comparison clarifies what recognition adds and where it depends on the other frameworks.

The resource-based framework, in its dominant articulation through human-capital theory and school-effectiveness research [3], treats the rural–urban gap as a function of underprovision: rural schools have fewer teachers, weaker infrastructure, and lower per-pupil spending, and closing the resource gap should close the outcome gap. The framework is not refuted by the evidence assembled here, and the article does not claim to refute it. A material account does not predict that any redistributive policy will eliminate the gap: it can predict partial reductions, lagged effects, insufficient intensity of intervention, or persistence through accumulated disadvantage, and Figure 2 is consistent with each of those readings. What the evidence establishes is narrower and sufficient. The material account predicts that resource-sensitive margins respond to resource-sensitive instruments, and Section 4 shows that they did: secondary completion converged in all six countries. What it does not predict is that convergence should halt precisely at the threshold governed not by household budgets but by admission criteria, evaluative regimes, and judgements of belonging—and that the same six countries, in the same surveys, should fail to converge there at anything like the same rate. A resource account can accommodate the discontinuity through accumulated disadvantage, cost, distance, territorial supply, and prior attainment. Recognition theory adds a specification of status, epistemic authority, and institutional belonging that material explanations do not necessarily foreground. Figure 3 does not identify the mechanism that produced each transition; a synthetic pathway cannot do that. It claims that those transitions are plausible institutional sites at which recognition mechanisms may operate, and that recognition, unlike the resource account, supplies a vocabulary for naming what would be found there.

The Bourdieusian framework is the more sophisticated alternative [4]. The rural-origin student arrives with a habitus formed in a different field, and the misalignment generates dropout, underperformance, and the lateral transfer that the data record. Three considerations delimit it, and the first must be stated with care, since the claim that Bourdieu lacks a normative foundation is contested [45,46]. Symbolic violence supplies resources for criticizing how a field universalizes as legitimate the capital of its dominant groups; what it supplies less readily is the claim that institutions owe repair. Bourdieu explains how the

hierarchy is reproduced; recognition makes explicit that the misalignment is an injustice institutions are obliged to redress. Second, in many institutional applications the mismatch is operationalized as a student deficit, even though a Bourdieusian analysis can equally expose the arbitrariness of the criteria. Recognition treats the rural habitus as carrying knowledge resources that ought to enter the academic field rather than be displaced by it: the asymmetry lies not in the student's adaptation but in the institutional refusal to recognize what the student brings. Third, the Bourdieusian framework operates within a model of social reproduction that recognition contests: recognition treats institutions as historically transformable through the struggles of subordinated groups, and the analytic vocabulary should leave room for both outcomes. The Bourdieusian categories are therefore absorbed as descriptive tools while the normative and transformative apparatus is provided by recognition itself.

The capabilities framework, articulated by Sen [5] and extended by Nussbaum [47], treats the rural–urban gap as a deprivation of substantive freedoms that education ought to expand, and it captures a connection between education and freedom that outcome-based measures miss. Two limitations matter, and neither is a limitation of the framework as such. Sen incorporates agency and social choice, and Nussbaum's central capabilities include affiliation and control over one's environment; it is the standard policy operationalization that focuses on individual opportunity sets and gives less explicit attention to epistemic status and to the institutional valuation of collective knowledge. The recognition framework operates at a different analytic level: it identifies structural properties of institutional configurations that distribute legitimacy unequally across forms of life, and a rural population may improve its capability set substantially while that configuration remains intact. Second, mainstream capability-based applications in education do not foreground epistemic status, collective knowledge, and institutional authority as explicitly as recognition theory does: peasant knowledge, communal solidarity, and place-based ontologies are not capabilities in the technical sense, and treating them as objects of injustice calls for a vocabulary that recognition supplies directly.

A fourth explanation requires separate treatment, because a reader trained in economics will reach for it first. On this account the gap is an artefact of selection: the ablest rural youth migrate and are counted at destination rather than at origin. The mechanism is real and is not disputed. What is disputed is that it is an alternative explanation. Corbett's [9,10] finding is that rural schooling is itself the apparatus of the selection: the curriculum, the credential, and the aspirational horizon it transmits are redeemable in the city and nowhere else, so that educational success is defined, from the first grade onward, as successful departure. Selective out-migration is not simply a rival to the recognition diagnosis; it is, in part, the form in which the diagnosis is realized. Migration also responds to wages, labor markets, family networks, and security, and recognition is one mechanism among several. The mechanism also contaminates the measurement, in the way Section 2 states, and that is precisely why the origin-based transit series, classified by residence at secondary graduation, is treated as the primary evidence at the tertiary threshold; it is that series, not the household surveys, which shows the gap widening. The agrarian university is where the point becomes decisive, for the reason stated in the Introduction: it could in principle issue a credential redeemable in the countryside, and whether it does so is a fact about how the institution has been built, not about rural aspirations.

The fifth explanation is compositional, and it is the sharpest of the five, because it predicts the anomaly rather than merely accommodating it. As rural secondary completion rises from 36 to 57 per cent of the cohort, the marginal completer is drawn from progressively lower-attainment strata; the average preparedness of the rural graduate pool falls; and the transit rate can stagnate, or the gap widen, with no change whatever in institutional

behavior. On this account the failure at the tertiary threshold is the arithmetic shadow of the success at the secondary one. The mechanism is real, and it is not disputed. Three considerations delimit it. The first is that a pure compositional account predicts that the rural transit rate conditional on completion should fall as the pool dilutes; in Colombia it rose, from 22 to 30 per cent, while the urban rate rose faster. Composition is therefore not sufficient on its own, though it may well account for part of the differential. The second is that composition predicts a transitional phenomenon that should attenuate as the secondary margin closes, and Chile, whose secondary gap now stands at 3.2 points, is the one country in which the tertiary gap converges at the secondary rate—an observation consistent with composition and equally consistent with a recognition account on which a system that has stopped sorting by territory at school stops sorting by territory at the university. One case cannot separate them, and the article does not pretend otherwise. The third is that composition is an account of who arrives at the threshold and is silent on what the recognition framework is about, which is the criteria through which the institution judges whoever arrives. Separating the two requires exactly the microdata the diagnosis of Section 4.3 shows to be unavailable, and that is why the disconfirmation row of Table 1 names it.

Two implications follow. The recognition framework does not replace the alternatives but identifies the constitutive level at which they operate: resource provision, habitus formation, capability expansion, and the composition of the graduate pool all take place within an institutional configuration whose recognition properties condition how they are converted into educational outcomes. And the diagnostic bears differently on each rival, which should be stated without evasion: against the resource-based framework the evidence does not refute but delimits; against Bourdieu it is not decisive at all, and the point is conceded, since a theory of social reproduction predicts precisely that the gap survives changes of redistributive regime, so that the argument against it is normative and transformative rather than predictive; against capabilities it is one of analytic level; against selection, one of mechanism and of measurement; and against composition, one of insufficiency, since the conditional transit rate rose where dilution predicts it should fall, with the concession that separating the two fully requires microdata that do not exist.

6.2. The Recognition-Theoretic University Already Exists

Institutional experiments have already given organizational form to the alternative grammar of Section 3.3, and Table 4 sets them out [48]. Each institutionalizes recognition in a determinate sphere, each carries a curricular innovation that follows from it, and each is bounded by a limitation of the same kind: in each, the peasant or indigenous subject enters the university as knowledge-producer rather than as beneficiary of transfer.

The record of these experiments does not refute the diagnosis; it specifies it. The limitations in the final column of Table 4 are not accidents of implementation: the experiments are marginal, fiscally or in enrolment, and in several cases that marginality was written into their founding. They differ among themselves, and PRONERA, the UNIBOL, the intercultural universities and the UAIIN should not be collapsed into one model. What they share is position: they have been built beside the agrarian university rather than inside it, while the agronomic faculties—Viçosa, La Molina, Chapingo, the agrarian campuses of the Universidad Nacional de Colombia—train the region's agronomists at a scale the experiments do not approach, and it is there that the deficit is reproduced. The Bolivian case is instructive. Post-neoliberal redistribution there was accompanied by an explicit politics of plurinational recognition, and the tertiary-age attendance gap shows no sign of closing (Section 4.1); the objection would conclude that recognition fails where redistribution fails. It does not follow: recognition politics operated at the level of constitutional

declaration and of institutions built at the margin of the university system, and it did not reconfigure the architecture of the agronomic formation the state continues to fund and accredit. Recognition declared is not recognition institutionalized, and the distance between the two is the space in which the argument of this article operates.

Table 4. Intercultural and campesino university experiments in Latin America: sphere of recognition, curricular innovation, and limitation.

Country	Institution (Year)	Sphere Institutionalized	Curricular Innovation	Limitation
Bolivia	UNIBOL: Aymara (Warisata), Quechua (Chimoré), Guaraní and Lowland Peoples (Kuruyuki), 2008 [49]	Right and solidarity: created by supreme decree as state institutions under indigenous governance	Agronomy, veterinary science, zootechnics, fisheries; instruction in the language of the territory; graduation requires a productive undertaking rooted in the community	Financed from a fraction of the Indigenous Development Fund and excluded by decree from the resources of the public university system: fiscally marginal by design
Mexico	Universidades Interculturales, twelve institutions, first at San Felipe del Progreso, 2004 [50]	Solidarity: cultural and linguistic pertinence as institutional mandate	Curricula built within indigenous and rural regions rather than extended into them	Have never exceeded approximately one per cent of national higher education enrolment
Brazil	PRONERA and Licenciaturas em Educação do Campo, from 1998 [51]	Right: the agrarian movements recognized as interlocutors of the federal universities	Alternance pedagogy articulating university time and community time	Built beside the agronomic faculties rather than inside them; dependent on the political cycle that funds it
Colombia	UAIIN of the Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca; state recognition 2018 [52]	Solidarity and right: criteria of epistemic validity set within the community the university serves	Community-defined curriculum and community participation in evaluation	Scale, and no articulation with the agrarian faculties that train the country's agronomists

6.3. Institutional Constraints and Openings for Reform

The first pressure is the metric regime. National research evaluation systems, ranking pressures, and researcher incentives have converged on a model of academic productivity that disadvantages the slow, place-based, community-articulated work a recognition-theoretic pedagogy requires. Viçosa illustrates the configuration: it placed ninety-fifth in the world, and first among Brazilian federal universities in the area, in agricultural and forest sciences in 2024 [53]. The researcher who spends three years co-designing a participatory variety-selection protocol with a peasant cooperative produces fewer indexed publications than the colleague running greenhouse trials, and the administrator who hires the former does so against the incentive structure. The metric regime tends to count as scientific what bears the formal marks of urban-academic production. A ranking position evidences the incentive structure, not the epistemological content of an institution, and the inference here is confined to the former. Reforming it is a precondition, not a consequence, of any sustained recognition-theoretic intervention.

The second pressure is the international accreditation regime. The criteria that govern Latin American agronomic and forestry programs draw substantially on North American and European standards, and in several national systems they are structured around competencies that presume the urban-modernization model of agronomic science. The claim is advanced as an interpretation of the accreditation architecture and would require a systematic comparison of national frameworks to be established. La Molina operates within licensing and accreditation frameworks that codify competencies derived from the metropolitan model. Programs that incorporate peasant knowledge as methodologically integrated content—rather than as ethnographic ornament—sit awkwardly with those criteria, with consequences for mobility, hiring, and reputation. The recognition-theoretic agrarian university must either operate within regimes that constrain the work the diagnosis demands, or undertake the harder political work of reforming them.

The third condition is territorialization, and it is an opening rather than a constraint; Chapingo provides the most instructive recent case. It introduced in 2026 a modality of regional entry allowing its Centros Académicos Regionales to establish programs with preference for candidates resident in specified territories. The modality operates so far in a single center and for a single program, the newly created Ingeniería en Agricultura Regenerativa, open only to candidates resident in defined zones of seven states [54]. The scale is modest and the institutional logic explicit: the university statute empowers its regional centers to offer programs with regional admission preference. The Universidad Nacional de Colombia, through its Sedes de Presencia Nacional and agrarian campuses, La Molina, the Brazilian federal universities, and the Universidad Agraria del Ecuador have developed analogous variants. The territorialization is uneven, fragmentary, often underfunded, and frequently subordinated to the metropolitan campus in budget and prestige. The recognition diagnosis identifies it as the most promising contemporary institutional development for acting on the framework, and identifies the condition under which it fails to do recognition work: when the territorial campus reproduces, in the periphery, the metropolitan curriculum and the metropolitan pedagogical relation.

The fourth pressure is fiscal. Public higher education across the region has operated under sustained fiscal pressure, and the recognition-theoretic pedagogy is not a low-cost intervention: it requires sustained investment in territorial campuses, in faculty hiring oriented towards rural communities, and in methodologies that allow peasant knowledge to enter agronomic science on terms that respect its specificity. The fiscal constraint will not dissolve. The marginality of the intercultural experiments is the cautionary precedent: an experiment financed outside the ordinary budget remains hostage to the political cycle that funds it, so the reform must be lodged inside the ordinary budget or not at all. And some components may be supported through the reallocation of existing expenditure: agrarian extension programs that operate on the urban-to-rural transfer model could be redirected to participatory and territorial models, although the net fiscal implications of the reform require a separate costing exercise.

6.4. Pedagogical Specification and the Criterion of Success

Table 5 specifies what a recognition-theoretic pedagogy would do inside the agrarian curriculum, and against what it would be measured. The specification follows the three spheres rather than an inventory of good practices: each device answers a determinate form of misrecognition, and the final column states the indicator that would show whether it worked. None of the devices is novel; each exists somewhere in the region. What does not exist is their articulation as a program, and recognition theory supplies the principle they have lacked. The incorporation of peasant knowledge presupposes no homogeneous, static, or authentic corpus of rural wisdom; it presupposes only that the burden of justification runs in both directions. The devices also answer the critique the rural education literature has developed: a credential redeemable in the territory is the counter to schooling as an apparatus for learning to leave [9], and a faculty that records the rural origin of its students is the counter to the metrocentric erasure of rurality from the categories through which education systems know themselves [7].

The criterion of success is Fraser's. Reform is not evaluated by counting the devices installed but by asking whether they achieve participatory parity: whether rural-origin students and peasant knowledge can participate on a par with others in the institutional life of the agrarian university [23]. The criterion is demanding and falsifiable, and the final column of Table 5 states how it would be tested. A faculty may adopt participatory variety selection, invite producers to teach, and record the rural origin of its students, and still fail if the campesino remains an informant whose knowledge is collected while the criteria

of validity that govern the collection are set elsewhere. Parity of participation, not the presence of the devices, is the standard.

Table 5. Pedagogical devices of a recognition-theoretic agrarian curriculum, by sphere of recognition, with the indicators against which each would be evaluated.

Sphere	What It Concerns	Devices in the Agrarian Curriculum	Observable Indicators
Solidarity	Social valuation of what the subject contributes	Participatory variety selection with producer associations inside plant-breeding courses, not as outreach; field methods taught by producers and not only about producers; thesis co-supervision in which a community organization holds an evaluative role alongside the academic committee; assessment criteria that credit knowledge validated by the community of practice and not only by the disciplinary literature	Number of courses with producer co-instruction; share of theses with a community co-evaluator; share of research projects co-designed with rural organizations; assessment rubrics that credit community-validated knowledge
Right	Formal standing of the subject within the institution	Admission criteria that weigh territorial trajectory rather than treat it as a proxy for deficit; representation of rural and peasant organizations in the bodies that approve curricula in the agrarian faculties; recording of territorial origin, and of voluntary peasant self-identification, in student information systems, without which none of the preceding can be evaluated (Section 4.3)	Rural–urban differentials in admission, retention, and graduation, reported publicly; voting presence of rural and peasant organizations in curriculum committees; territorial origin and voluntary peasant self-identification recorded in student information systems
Affective and embodied institutional conditions (Honneth's sphere of love)	Institutional conditions of self-confidence	Mentoring of rural-origin students by staff with territorial experience; contextualized psychosocial support; institutional policy against territorial stigma; housing and mobility arrangements that preserve rather than sever community ties; bilingual or intercultural pedagogy where the student population requires it; a pedagogical relation in which the knowledge the student brings from home is neither presumptively treated as error nor exoticized	Rural-origin students' reported sense of belonging and territorial stigma; retention of mentoring relationships; graduate employment and residence in rural territories five years after graduation

6.5. Qualifications and Limitations

Two qualifications contextualize the proposal. The recognition-theoretic pedagogy is not a substitute for redistribution: recognition without redistribution can become a merely cultural acknowledgement that leaves the material conditions of disadvantage intact, and what is proposed here is the articulation of the two. And even if implemented at scale within universities, it would not by itself resolve the structural inequalities that produce rural marginality: land tenure, market access, rural infrastructure, public services, and climate adaptation each require their own treatment, and the educational reconfiguration sketched here is one component of a broader project of agrarian transformation.

Limitations of the present inquiry should be acknowledged, and they are extensive enough to be listed rather than narrated. The construction caveats of Figures 2 and 3—the synthetic character of the pathway, the country-specific definitions of the rural domain, the ECLAC small-sample flag on the Bolivian rural series, and attendance at ages 20 to 24 as a strong but imperfect proxy for tertiary study—are set out at each figure and in Supplementary Table S1. The six countries and the four institutional experiments are purposively and not probabilistically selected, on the criteria stated in Section 2. The design cannot separate recognition from other mechanisms operating at the tertiary threshold—distance, cost, prior attainment, information, rural preference, the changing composition of the rural graduate pool, and educational out-migration—and it identifies no causal effect of any institution on any outcome. The residence-based classification of the household-survey series, stated in Section 2, applies to every use made of them

here. The article has no data on rural-origin students inside agrarian programs: not on admission, not on retention, not on graduation, and not on their experience, which is the deficit its own diagnosis predicts. The aggregate category 'rural' conceals inequalities of gender, ethnicity, class, region, and land tenure, and the article resists but does not fully escape the temptation to run rurality, peasantness, and indigeneity together. The SPADIES cross-tabulation reported in Section 4.3 and Table S2 uses the department of the secondary school as the only available origin variable; it is an ecological proxy that cannot separate rural from urban students within a department, is an accumulated historical count rather than a cohort series, and carries no origin information for 28.7 per cent of records, and it is offered as a demonstration of the limits of the public data rather than as a measure of rural-origin dropout. The political hypothesis of Section 7 is not tested and cannot be tested with these data. And the argument is developed with concentrated attention to Colombia; its categories would require adaptation to Mexican agrarian transformation, Brazilian land conflicts, or Andean indigenous-rural articulations. Primary research that operationalizes the framework—SPADIES microdata, comparative documentary analysis of agrarian faculties, and qualitative work on the reception of rural-origin students—is the natural continuation of this work.

7. Conclusions

The central claim of this article is that rural education in Latin America cannot be adequately understood as a resource problem alone. The gap is simultaneously distributive and recognitional, and the evidence assembled here shows where the seam lies: the gap narrowed at the school gate and did not narrow at the university door. The public agrarian university is where the claim acquires its sharpest institutional form.

Two implications close the argument. The epistemological one concerns what the social sciences are for. Latin American rural sociology articulated the orientation that the inherited matrix lacked, and the continued marginalization of that tradition within the metropolitan canon is itself a recognition deficit at the level of disciplinary self-understanding. The point has a concrete institutional edge: a field whose public instruments do not report the rural origin of the students whose trajectories it studies operates, before any analysis begins, within an architecture in which that category is not made visible. The recognition deficit therefore reproduces itself not only in what education research says about the rural, but in what its own instruments are unable to see. A sociology that takes recognition seriously must reorient itself toward the traditions of the Global South not as objects of comparative interest but as theoretical resources the discipline cannot do without.

A second implication is political, and it is offered as an agenda rather than as a finding. Rural populations whose forms of life and forms of knowledge are systemically denied recognition may become available to movements that promise the recognition the institutional order withholds—a pattern documented for rural consciousness in the United States [55,56]—but the Latin American evidence resists any identification of rurality with the authoritarian vote: Brazil's far-right vote of 2018 concentrated in the agribusiness frontier rather than in the impoverished Northeast [57,58], and Colombia's conflict-exposed rural municipalities voted for the 2016 peace accord [59,60]. Establishing any pathway requires research this article does not undertake, and the hypothesis is named only to mark it as work the diagnosis makes urgent.

The sociology of recognition of the countryside does not add a chapter to the existing sociology of rural education. It reconfigures the object, the methods, and the public responsibility of the field in the Global South. If recognition is one of the institutional conditions of democracy, then agrarian universities are not peripheral educational institutions. They are central democratic institutions, and they have not been governed as such.

Supplementary Materials: The following supporting information can be downloaded at: https://www.mdpi.com/article/10.3390/soc16100339/s1, Table S1: Series construction and rural–urban gap trend estimates for Figure 2, with standard errors, R^2, robustness checks excluding the 2020–2021 pandemic years and restricting to 2010–2019, and the test of the difference between the secondary-completion and tertiary-attendance slopes; Figure S1: Rural–urban gap trends under the robustness checks reported in Table S1; Table S2: University-level dropout in agrarian knowledge cores by department of secondary-school origin (SPADIES cross-tabulation), with departmental rural-population shares; Figure S2: Dropout in agrarian knowledge cores against departmental rural-population share, weighted by number of records.

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