

The Rural or the Rural Environment? Key Elements in the Social Construction of the Environmental Question in Rural Areas in a Historical Context of Change

Angel Paniagua

IPP-CCHS-CSIC.

Spanish Council for Scientific Research
Spain

Abstract

To define rurality has been a recurring problem in geographical debate since the beginning of this century. Since the Seventies, this distinction has been conditioned by a degree of functionality in relation to urban areas. In Europe until the start of the Nineties, a Fordist or modernist approach prevailed associated with a so-called underdevelopment of rural compared to urban areas. It is useful to identify certain parameters that characterize rurality when developing assistential policies and also to demonstrate economic progress in relation to the range of agricultural employment or other parameters.

Key Words: rural, environment, social construction, geography, Europe, postmodern

1. Introduction

There has been a notable change in the comprehension of rural space since the start of the Nineties from a postmodernistic perspective in which environmental aspects dominated and the social construction of the concept, often based on qualitative study techniques. These changes in the understanding of rurality, associated with the countryside and the environment (Cloke and Goodwin, 1992) are associated with transversal and global economic and social changes which are, consequently, not specific to one region or another. These environmental-related changes, both from a perspective of production and also of consumption, have had a marked regulatory or legislative effect that has clearly influenced academic circles.

Therefore, apart from a few clear exceptions, regulation based analyses have tended to dominate. There are numerous approaches to rural space that use policy analysis but, in contrast, very few studies are based on the social construction of space by social groups and none at all incorporate the environmental dimension as a determinant element in the comprehension of rural space by social groups (e.g. Little and Austin, 1996).

Recent studies have insisted, from a perspective of political and economic geography, that environmental analysis has had an especially legislative character, based on identifying the best regulatory processes and implementing them (Gibbs, Jonas and While, 2002). This has led to a weak theorization of governance at a local and regional level. Therefore, the interaction in implementation processes between economic aspects and the environmental demands of the civil society in the framework of restructuration processes have not merited constant attention (Marsden, Bridge and McManus, 2002).

Perhaps, environmental legislation has been most important in agriculture, resulting in changes in production, landscape, food production and even social and ethical aspects. However, the literature dedicated to analyzing the incorporation of environmental legislation in rural areas, especially agriculture has followed a similar analytical pattern. On a macro level it has focused on studying processes of incorporation of community agroalimentary legislation in each country, studying reciprocal influences in the Commission-Nations agroenvironmental legislation and discourse and the so-called generation of a Northern agroenvironmental model, valid for the whole European Union. On a subnational and regional level, many studies have aimed to ultimately test the *gap* between the regulatory-political phase and the implementation phase, highly relevant in policies of voluntary application by the farmers.

It has been implicitly and explicitly accepted that environmental legislation induced a new social conduct (understood as new environmentalism), and new individual behaviors of the social group most characteristic of rural areas: the farmers. When they became aware that the farmers behavior could be influenced by the benefits of the new agroenvironmental legislation almost all these studies aimed on a micro level to analyze the effect of economic or environmental factors on the farmers' attitudes by carrying out comparative analyses between different areas or between groups of farmers some of whom adopt certain agroenvironmental practices and others who do not. Implicitly, two facts were coming to light: that farmers constitute the social heart of rural areas, and that environmentalism has in these areas a clear either productive or non-productive sphere, but with clear economic implications.

Ultimately, environmentalism affects the behavior of the farming profession. This behavior can be induced by introducing legislation that awards the farmer economically. Following this line of argument, the environmental practices of the western farmer have a grant- or economically- motivated character, which, therefore, sheds doubt on the concept of environmentalism in the rural environment. The concept of the farmer as the "guardian of nature" or farmer stewardship reflects this clearly. Environmentalism in the western rural environment is associated with economic motivation. At this point we can ask ourselves the question "Can legislation and economic grants generate an individual environmental conscience or environmentalism as a social movement? This question implies a social reductionism by making the rural society equivalent to a social group. Similarly, environmentalism, which has been repeatedly described as one of the most outstanding ideologies and social movements of the post-(materialist, modernist and Fordist) societies and which for many sectors of the society still concerns an alternative personal and group approach, somewhat paradoxically, can be *created, regulated and managed* in rural areas, with all the special characteristics applicable to an individual area.

When consistent references are made to "the new environmental function of rural space" a role of conservation of the natural space is incorporated, which is also manifest in nature conservation policies and in the development of specific management practices (e.g. Berger and Rouzier, 1995).

2. The debate of the rural environment in a historical context of change

The entrance of the environment into the political arena since the end of the Eighties has had a pronounced influence on the nature and the number of environmental studies of Social Geography and Rural origin. This has resulted in other lines of work not receiving sufficient attention and has meant that a strong link has not been established between the social construction of rural and environmental issues, at the ideal moment, since both concepts include values accepted in western postmaterialist societies. Significant contributions in the area of rural change introduce environmental change via agroenvironmental policy (e.g. Potter, 1997, Traill, 1988).

Notably, books on environmental policy like Buller, Wilson and Holl (2000) and Whitby (1996) insist on a regulatory point of view and on the diverse national responses to environmental regulations. Indirectly, as mentioned previously in these significant contributions one can see the farmer's "passive" and secondary nature in his relation with nature, activated by measures arranged in nuclei of concentrations of power. The farmers rediscover their central role in a multifunctional rural space by earning new incomes (outside the rural environment) to conserve the landscape passed down to them from their predecessors (Paniagua, 2001 a).

The article reviewed by Wilson (2001) suggests that analysis of the change from a Fordist agriculture to a postfordist approach moves between a mainly policy-orientated economy and an actor-orientated economy. According to this point of view, either regulation could dominate (exogenous), or what we refer to above as *unbroken tendency* (the farmer as oriented actor), which is merely an academic translation resulting from a down-bottom-up analytical approach but that is not exempt from a regulatory analysis. The conclusion of this paper suggests the need to carry out research to study in depth the associations between rurality, agriculture, the post and the ism, that inevitably leads to analysis of the environmental implications (the central axis in the debate between the four elements) and the multiple relationship between actors and social groups. The weak progress in knowledge in this area can be due to the influence of lay discourses in the academic orientations of rural geography (Cloke, 1996, Hoggart and Paniagua, 2001a). It does not appear, however, to be a defined question: Lewis, Moran and Cocklin (2002) suggest that discussions about rurality are based on the associations between the society, production and the environment and its regulation but that this is expressed in multiple political positions resulting from the impact of the different social groups.

However, in spite of the clear importance that environmental considerations have come to occupy in the daily lives of western citizens, of their importance in the media and their political and legislative significance, there has not yet been any reconsideration of the influence of the environment on the conceptualization of rurality by social groups. There are a number of different analyses of greening processes in the rural space in western countries, as a general process, but almost no studies have focused on analyzing the interaction between rural and environmental issues by characteristic social groups. A large part of the literature on globalization and cosmopolitanism makes numerous references to the different social groups and focuses on technical or social aspects, associated with mobility, but almost never on environmental aspects (e.g. Szerszyndki and Urry, 2002).

Similarly, a differentiation has been made between greening or environmentalism, the former as an identifier of individual changes and social behaviors and the second as an institutionalization of environmental aspects (Buttel, 1993). However, usually only environmentalization has been developed in rural areas and agriculture especially via sectorial measures. In turn, even the academics themselves have not distinguished in rural research between a social approach and another institutional or regulatory approach. This has led to research being based on the more visible facet: environmental regulation of the farmers' activity. Some recent works escape this tendency via social constructionism by the farmers making environmental claims (Buttel, 1993). However, in rural areas and farming, usually only environmentalism has been developed especially via sectorial measures. In turn, even among the academics themselves no distinction has been made between a social approach and another institutional or regulatory approach. This has resulted in research being based on the "more visible" facet: environmental regulation of the farmers' activity (Morris and Wragg, 2003).

The North-South Axis. From Southern Europe the situation becomes more complex, given that numerous analysts have described certain special conditions compared with northern countries, resulting from some quantifiable environmental parameters (pollution levels, use of space per inhabitant etc.) and owing to the special nature of the physical environment and biodiversity, and also to political and administrative policies and values. However, this special perspective that has been devised for application to Mediterranean countries and that mainly affects environmental policy has not been paralleled in the study of different discourses on the rural environment.

Indeed, the different studies about the so-called environmental distinction between northern and southern Europe, arise from the argument of unequal power in the generation of European environmental policies between northern and meridional states, based on a long-standing tradition in the development of environmental policies and standards, especially sectorial ones and in more interest and political importance given to community government. Therefore, the debate has appeared in the literature as the so-called "Mediterranean syndrome", which is ultimately a formula which aims to define the special nature of the environmental situation in Southern European countries based especially on environmental legislation and politics (La Spina and Sciortino, 1993).

The slow implementation of environmental regulation, the grant-based nature of European environmental legislation and the inadequate nature of this to resolve Mediterranean environmental problems have been some of the characteristics that appear in environmental literature to date referring to southern Europe (e.g. Eder and Kousis, 2001; Weale, et al, 2000; Liefferink, Lowe and Mol, 1993).

In any case, this debate of the North-South axis has considered these two geographical regions as socioeconomic, political and even environmental units (Lowe, 1987), but has not developed even a comparative analysis according to social groups between northern or southern countries, of the environmental question in these rural areas.

Table 1. Priority in EU environmental actions 1999-2002. Per cent results

Euro-barometer	Greece	Spain	Italy	Portugal	EU-4	EU-15
Spring 99	93 (5)	81 (6)	81 (5)	86 (6)	85.2	83 (5)
Autumn 00	95 (2)	89 (5)	84 (5)	91 (6)	89.7	86 (5)
Spring 01	94 (6)	89 (6)	90 (1)	92 (5)	91.2	88 (4)
Spring 02	92 (5)	87 (6)	89 (7)	86 (7)	88.5	86 (6)

Source : European Commission. Different Eurobarometers. Own elaboration. (*) position of EU environmental objective.

Recent contributions to this debate, which constitute a second phase of the works in this area, insist on the same north-south axis, although they doubt the so-called originality or delay of the Mediterranean area in environmental policy or emphasize the relevance of the subnational sphere (Borzel, 2003; Brown, 2001).

In this line, the recent work by Weale et al. (2000) is interesting and results from the analysis of interviews aimed at environmental policy-making elites and leaders on environmental organizations in different Southern European countries that reveal the different perception in each meridional country of the north-south dilemma and how it affects the process of political decision making via a double process of north-south diffusion and learning about the environmental peculiarity of the south in the environmental framework of the European Union.

Table 1 reflects the priority given to environmental objectives compared to other possible objectives of EU policy. Southern countries give them the highest priority in the different questionnaires studied. The high priority given by Greek citizens is interesting, probably associated with their fragile environment and the positive evolution of the priority give to the environment by Spanish and Italian citizens. Consequently, one can argue that as a political objective within the EU, the environment is more highly valued in the South than in the North, perhaps due to it being more fragile in physical or climatic terms. These must be considered together with the strictly-Mediterranean problems, such as desertification or the loss of flat land of high landscape value for construction purposes and the deterioration of coastal areas owing to tourist development (European Environment Agency, 2003).

This argumental framework based on the environmental specificity of Southern Europe has been used to interpret globally processes of change in Spanish rural areas (Paniagua, 1997, 2001 a and b). As a result of this analysis, one can observe the special case of southern Europe concerning environmental matters in rural areas, the non-existence of a social perception of environmental problems in rural areas, the social prestige of small villages and of farming as a profession and, finally, the clear grant-based nature of agroenvironmental regulation with much regionalized policies. However, in the context of the agroenvironmental policy it can not be claimed that the “gap” or lack of implementation is a characteristic of the Mediterranean syndrome as occurred for the industrial sector where the decision for implementation is more concentrated than in the agricultural sector, where the decision is made by the farmers and is not mandatory. Ultimately, this characteristic, together with regionalization of the environmental problem of agriculture makes it difficult to support the so-called nature of North as leader and South as laggard. In any case, also a concept of south of the south would be pertinent, resulting from the differences mentioned between meridional and septentrional areas in countries such as Spain, Italy and Portugal both in rural dynamics and in the relevance of environmental policies or in the urban-rural relationship (Rodrigo and Moreira, 2001; Fonte, 2001).

To this north-south axis one must also add the effect of the *balance between rural and urban communities* since its equilibrium is considered by the EU to be essential to guarantee appropriate land use management and mobility of its citizens (European Communities, 2002). This country-town interaction presents specific characteristics in southern Europe (resulting from the agricultural-rural interaction, an extension of the rural and urban and a lower density, as Jollivet and Eiznen (1996) pointed out) which, aside from popular socioecological considerations, has been dominated by a residual perspective of rurality arising from an urbanistic tradition and approach that has left little room for reflection about the nature of rurality, reducing the debate to one of land occupation and, more specifically, to the occupation of fertile soil (Garcia Bellido, 2002).

Policy analysis has been dominant in geography in the interpretation of rural and environmental interactions. The exploration of new processes and the generation of new structures from a perspective of social class analysis have had almost no effect until the present day. This academic perspective has two values: *an exploratory value*, owing to the lack of previous studies and a *singularity value* due to the possibility of making comparisons with results established or reported in other more advanced research contexts such as those found in Britain or the US (Hoggart and Paniagua, 2001 a and b).

There is a good consensus over the social construction of environmentalism, as for any other ideology. Consequently, this does not have very defined limits and has multiple possible analytical perspectives (Harper, 1993), this can be specific to a certain social composition or its development can be conditioned by a relatively untransformed environment, compared to other clearly artificial or congested ones. It can, therefore, be used in very different ways, formulations and for diverse interests, by social groups or fractions and in time and space.

More or less parallelly to constructivism, it has been considered as an alternative approach to studying rurality, in relation to spatial or regional aspects, more centered on facts, either related to the population, legislation, employment etc. (Blanc, 1997; Jean, 2003). The spatial categories are generated by social representations (Halfacree, 1994), in which the attributes of rurality are often confused with rural ones.

Under these conditions, construction of rurality is not only based on morphologies, landscapes, architecture and the size of villages or towns but also on traditions, feelings or behaviors making it very difficult to accurately define *the limits of the discourse on rurality* (Paniagua, 2003).

However, in a deconstruction exercise of the interaction between rurality and environmental matters it is necessary to try to find the interpretative keys characteristic of this debate. One can argue that a dominant discourse can be established in each area, depending on its social composition, but that also different discourses can also coexist in the same area generated by the different social groups.

3. Environmental perspectives on new rurality

One could say that there are four main perspectives of the environmental implications of the new rurality that suggest the appearance of different discourses in different social contexts.

(a) *The environment as an individual lifestyle or way of life.* This perspective is associated with the emergence of a new social class or the transformation of the old in rural areas. This is associated with the Rural Idyll concept and usually incorporates the more symbolic aspects and expresses the point of view of the middle classes and, consequently, the dominant image of rurality in each national space (Clove and Godwin, 1993; Cloke and Jones, 2001). This helps to *confine* a discourse, an image, within certain limits: national borders. Other key environmental questions that have helped to generate awareness in the population transcend national limits and have, therefore, not been incorporated into this imagery.

In close association with the idealized image of the rural environment is the rural idyll. The concept of rural idyll is not new and has appeared in academic circles since the Sixties in western countries and has been developed to the present day with numerous contributions. However, not many studies refer to its influence on the different social groups that reside in the rural areas (Little and Austin, 1996). It was first used to explain the mass attraction of urban populations to rural areas for environmental or recreational purposes. After this its use was more complex and it has even been used to define rural areas as social space of a social geography. If rurality is understood as a social construction it is influenced by the social, ethical and cultural values that prevail at the time. Normally, the conformation of rural images does not represent all social groups of civil society equally. They are usually representations directed by dominant social groups and in western societies are usually influenced by the middle classes (Bristow, 1993). However, in any case, the notion that is used of countryside, or of rurality, usually benefits the interests of the social group that defines it. It is widely known that this image of rurality in western countries is strongly influenced by environmental factors and by the defense of traditional values and that this perception causes a more or less generalized attraction of the urban populations to the rural areas. According to data from the last environmental eurobarometer, environment is equivalent to a green and pleasant landscape for 11 per cent of Europeans and to nature conservation for 22 per cent (The European Opinion Research Group, 2002).

In Spain, this perspective can be explored by studying opinion polls carried out during the last decade on residential preferences and the environment and show a permanent idealization of small municipalities and a tendency to live in them. At the start of the Nineties, 43 per cent of the population wanted to live in communities considered as rural (especially the population of peripheral areas), while only 5 per cent showed a preference for the cities (Paniagua, 2001b).

According to these polls, the residential satisfaction is much greater in individuals living in villages (78.3 per cent want to stay living in the same place and this percentage rises to 93 per cent for isolated country cottages). At the end of the Nineties, this satisfaction with the residential surroundings *increased* in the inhabitants of rural nuclei: 8 out of 10 wanted to stay living in the same place (COAG, 1999).

This tendency has also been observed in other European countries, in France between 1978 and 1999 from 43 to 45 per cent wanted to live in a village (Boussard, 2000; Beuret, 1997).

Normally, the middle classes have been thought to be the most representative of environmentalism and of processes of social change in rural areas (Harper, 1993; Murdoch, 1995). Within the middle classes, the new service classes are a socioeconomic group with a clear concern for environmental problems and this has been related with information on these issues and their usually high cultural level (Merting and Dunlap, 2001, Cloke and Thrift, 1990, Halfacree, 1994, Paniagua, 2002). This is revealed by the latest national opinion polls.

For example, the CIRES-94 poll indicates that 87.5 per cent of free professionals believe that the natural resources are becoming exhausted while this belief is much less strong in other self-employed socioeconomic groups, such as the farmers in which only 52.6 per cent hold this opinion. Also, consequently, free professionals interviewed believe more than any other group that natural resources are insufficient at present (37.5 per cent). A total of 83.3 per cent of free professionals and experts interviewed consider that the environment should be protected before fomenting development both on a general and national level and in their place of residence.

This conclusion is reached almost permanently when analyzing the CIS-96 survey, according to which this group considers the environmental problem to be the most important, 41.3 per cent compared to a mean value of 23.9 per cent in all the socioeconomic categories.

This clear concern for environmental problems is revealed by the results of the CIS-96 survey. According to the analysis of this survey, for 42 percent of professionals and experts their most important concern is that of environmental damage in their place of residence compared to a mean value of 37.5 per cent of the same opinion.

Attraction to the rural environment is shown by the fact that 24 per cent of individuals interviewed express the desire to spend their holidays in rural areas (village, countryside, mountains) (CIS Barometer, Sept. 1999, number 2369) and 67 per cent of the urban population travel to the countryside at least once a month (COAG, 1999).

(b) The environment as seen from the perspective of productive activities. This discourse is dominant in rural areas and is the most dominated by the regulatory perspective; it is socially represented by farmers, as a socially important group in rural areas of southern Europe and closed on itself (Newby, 1980).

In any case, farmers have been considered to be the socially dominant group in rural spaces although the introduction of environmental considerations has affected this position by conditioning their activity and the previously clear objective of this activity, production, together with other possible aims, conditioned by other social groups.

The environmental debate between farmers has three main axes:

Farming as a profession. This axis is based on postproductivism as a loss of professional identity. The concerns the traditional management of natural resources and the objective perceived from a business perspective (Paniagua, 1997).

In general, as we have mentioned elsewhere (Paniagua, 1997), successive opinion polls have revealed how farmers are one of the best thought of professional groups in our society. Farming is usually the most sought after profession. This can be partially due to its function as a food producer but also probably due to the farmer's lifestyle and the "natural" character of the activity (Paniagua, 2013). Moreover, it is usually the small holders and farm-workers that are the most highly appraised, among other reasons for the environmental implications of their activity and their association with nature. This, therefore, to a certain extent protects them from possible negative considerations about their profession.

Recent studies insist on the same tendency in opinion. From the COAG study it can be deduced that almost all interviewees consider that farmers play an important role in our society (COAG, 1999). This same study also shows that 57 per cent of the urban residential population agrees that agriculture is one of the main jobs in our society. It is not only implied that the farmer must produce food but that he must also develop other functions such as that of environmental conservation (according to 83 per cent of subjects interviewed), preserve rural culture (78 per cent) or, finally, care for the landscape and woods (70 per cent). But, in spite of these new functions the predominance of the productionist model continues: the production of food (95 per cent) or obtaining benefits from the farming activity (94 per cent) are the most frequently reported options. This is, somewhat, justified if we consider from the CIS 2405 poll of the year 2000 that half the Spanish population consider that there could be a food shortage in this century.

Opinion polls carried out in other countries where rural society is also very important, such as France, suggest that farming was increasingly valued during the Nineties although it is not completely idealized. In 1998, 70 per cent of farmers wanted their children to be farmers too. This wish was also expressed by almost one of every two French men or women (Boussard, 2000).

Another aspect to consider is the farmers' opinion about the relationships between their profession, agriculture and the environment.

Successive polls carried out during the Eighties and Nineties by different institutions have revealed a relatively lower environmental sensitivity in farmers (Paniagua, 1997) and a clear difference compared to other professional groups in this sensitivity depending on which environmental issues are considered. For individuals working in agriculture, the solution to environmental problems should be based on social modifications. According to the CIRES survey of 1994, 8 out of every 10 farmers support this point of view compared to a minority group that opt for technological development as a solution to the environmental problem. The socioeconomic group comprised of the farmers is the group that considers environmental conservation and economic development to be incompatible (Paniagua, 1995, 1997, 2001b).

The development of environmental action by farmers is very small. They show almost no wish to associate themselves with the green movement and very few supports the ideology of paying higher prices to protect the environment. They are also very mistrustful of protectionist measures. Ultimately, the very reduced sensitivity of farmers is also manifest in their little environmental concern or activity. However, as mentioned previously (Paniagua, 1997), their environmental attitude and action is at least partially modified in relation to problems that can affect the productivity of their activity.

However, apart from interpreting opinion polls, the implications of the environmental question for farmers should also be studied qualitatively. In the farmers' discourse, according to several research carried out in recent years (Paniagua, 2001a and 2001b), there is a clear dialectics between the environment (nature) and development. Farmers, in general, warn about the urban origin of the environmental problems and, consequently, consider the environmental question as rural-urban antagonism. The farmer can be excluded from this perspective by playing the main socioeconomic role in rural areas. This is the situation of the environmental regulations of the rural environment, that only attempt to limit the traditional activities of the rural environment, blaming the environmental problem on the farmers without looking for optimum approaches to the problems among economic and environmental activities (nature). This perception of public policies for the countryside reinforces their "urban" nature for the farmers who claim the role of nature's guardians (Newby, 1980).

However, the farmer's discourse also has moralizing foundations related with the idea of the "good farmer", which forms part of nature, from where it arises and of which it forms part (Paniagua and Hoggart, 2002). At this point in the discourse one can distinguish between the professional farmer and the one who lives in the city and only wants to make the most of the grants. Hence, the farming profession is often usually associated with the benefit of his farming activities to the environment. Nature for the countryman is both his economic and productive framework. From this perspective, there is a criticism from the farmer of greening in that any human activity, whatever its nature, will affect the environment.

One could claim that there is a clear ambivalence in the association between agriculture and the environment since; on the one hand, the farmer admits that he can not avoid causing some damage resulting from mass production at a reduced cost but, on the other hand, he has a conservationist perspective. The farmer is aware that his activity takes place in nature. Therefore, environmental conservation or, more explicitly, of nature appears in the farmers discourse as a permanent conditioning factor of its professional activity that would lead, as mentioned above, to a reformation of the pact between farmers and the Society, by which the population as a whole must sustain the farmers' conservationist role (Paniagua, 1997).

Farmers and political power. There is a clear consensus about the changes that environmental considerations bring about in the role and political weight of farmers in agriculture. This has produced a new discourse between the associations that represent farmers professionally and politically. The environmental function assigned to the farmer must be associated with new incomes to replace those he must lose by restricting the production function. This involves a change in the social contract between Society as a whole and the farmers that move from an initial productionist approach to another more conservation-orientated function in which new social agents are involved or the nature of the original ones is altered. On the other hand, the whole environmental problem surrounding the farming activity is taken over.

However, in the debate about the farmers new role there immediately appears an urban-rural conflict. Farmers obey the demands of the urban society, which has the decision-making power. Until the Eighties, the demand was for a guaranteed food supply and large production at low costs consequently leading to an intensification of production. In this context, ultimately urban consumers are responsible for pollution generated by European farmers, by demanding abundant and varied products with a standard appearance (Paniagua, 1997).

The rural-urban discourse is also found in the foundations of the farmers' new environmental role. The professional societies propose that the introduction of environmental objectives in agriculture reduces its business efficacy, which should, consequently, be maintained by the transfer of income mainly of urban origin. Therefore, the multifunctionality of the farmer is associated with rural development and environmental protection.

This multifunctionality of the rural environment and agriculture also requires the development of institutional structures and sharing of authority that was previously purely sectorial or agrarian with other institutions related with regional or rural development in a wider sense (departments responsible for environment on a state or regional level).

Farmers and lifestyle. Changes in the environmental question, understood in the widest sense (social and professional attitudes and behaviors), imply a change in the perception of the context in which they develop their activity and their lifestyle, either in relation to the city or in relation to past activities.

In 1983, according to the CIS study number 1363, only 17 per cent of farmers considered that country people lived much better or better than people in the city, while 62.6 per cent considered that they lived worse or much worse. The percentages corresponding to the specific position of the interviewee are higher, 19.9 per cent, in relation to the positive perception (much better or better) of rural compared to city life, and less express a negative perception (52.4 per cent). All cases, however, tend to idealize conditions of city life compared to a poor opinion of life in the countryside.

(c) *The environment as the natural and cultural resource.* This is the most classical discourse of environmentalism in rural areas. It is associated among other facts to the development of a policy of protected areas and also to a popular comparison of natural resources with the countryside. This comparison is traditionally associated with facts, or with a physical environment, both from an extractive and from a conservationist perspective. This perspective is reflected in the different opinion polls carried out in Spain. In the mid-Nineties a large proportion of the population associated environment with countryside (Paniagua, 1997, 2001 b). More recently, and most clearly after the Nineties, it acquires symbolic components and is a discourse shared by several new and traditional, rural and urban social groups. The environment is not only associated with measurable resources, including food production, but also with non-measurable resources, such as certain landscapes, typical villages, the conservation of traditions. These intangible resources, including that of fresh air, peace or visual perspectives are usually ascribed to the rural environment. This ambivalent discourse oscillates between sublimation and the problem itself, often two sides to the same problem, with more or less importance depending on the discourse of the social group.

These difficult to measure values are the counterpoint of the environmental problems perceived in the cities. For example, in France in 1998, 62 percent of the population quoted pollution and noise as being the most important environmental problems for them personally (Boussard, 2000). In Spain, although the environment is a marginal problem for most citizens compared to other social problems, it is always mainly associated with pollution or urban environmental problems and is considered to have become worse in the present century (see the barometer Dec. 2000, CIS study 2405).

(d) *Environment as a spirit of rural community.* One of the areas of research on rurality is the rural community or Arcadian spirit, with strong interpersonal relationships and mutual support being a social differentiating factor from the urban life, which is more anonymous, competitive and impersonal (Hoggart and Buller, 1987).

Usually, together with the discourse about the facts there is this idealization of the rural environment, both in its interpersonal relationships and in the "sublime character" attributed to small rural communities. Indeed, in Spain the time dedicated to intercommunity relationships and relationships between members of a family in villages is almost double that in cities. In other countries such as France, in successive surveys in the Nineties, it has been shown that 8 out of every 10 individuals consider life in the countryside to be pleasanter than in the city and relationships between individuals to be more human (Boussard, 2000). This quality of the human relationships (relationships between neighbors, more human relationships, solidarity, local encouragement, man's quality etc.) has also been described by Beuret (1997), who claims that 70 percent of French citizens regard it as an element of environmental quality of rural spaces.

To this one must add a clear idealization of the environmental behavior of village residents. Normally, it is perceived that inhabitants of small, rural municipalities have more environmental idiosyncrasy and a clear integration and harmony with the environment.

One out of every two individuals considers that village inhabitants are more environmentally sensitive than urban residents, as a component of the social material (Paniagua, 2001b).

4. Conclusion

The development of environmentalism has given meaning to constructivist approaches to rurality, not only owing to the flourishing of the environmental debate that has separated rurality from agriculture but also because the environment, especially in western countries, is confused with an idealized view of the countryside. One could even suggest that the debate on rurality has been relaunched by its current environmental implications (Friedland, 2002).

However, as it has recently been shown, the development of constructivism can give a scientific character to the conclusions of the analysis (Demeritt, 2002). This can be the case in certain areas of work where the ultimate aim is to give a social significance to usually spatial categories related with regions and places. The attempt to construct *place to place rurality* in each national community can lead to sterile results (Cloke and Jones, 2001, Holloway, 2002, Murdoch 1995) pointed out social class analysis has not often been used in rural geography owing to the unitary consideration of rural space; What about the city?, perhaps also to the oversight of a social differentiation in rural areas resulting from the tradition of studies on peasant societies.

Paradoxically, (in comparison to structural perspectives and to the post environmentalist character, e.g. Lowe, 1988), the development of constructivist approaches in the analysis of rurality and environmental issues has coincided with (and given) greater relevance to social group analysis, especially to the importance of new social groups in the social construction of rurality, derived from its sensitivity and environmental preoccupation. These groups, associated with urban-rural migration that have denominated new middle classes have had a highly relevant importance in the economic and social construction of rural areas and have been notable for their conservation of the environment and their lifestyles (Cloke and Goodwin, 1992 and 1993). These approaches coincide with studies on globalization and cosmopolitanism that give a wider relevance to constructivist approaches in an attempt to appropriately conceptualize these phenomena. It does not seem, however, that a unanimous relevance is given to the environment from this perspective but instead to spatial aspects associated with mobility and social aspects, in relation to a change or interaction of values (Bryant, Paniagua and Kizos, 2011). However, this literature does give any value to the others or to the place, owing to potential consumption and the value of the construction of cosmopolitanism at the expense of local issues and populations. Hence, there would exist, as in all new social movements different starting points and destinations which, if studied together can constitute larger kinds of environmental movements (Szeszyski and Urry, 2002; Urry, 1995, 2000).

5. References

- Berger, A. and Rouzier, J. (1995) 'L'espace rural, élargissement conceptuel et orientation méthodologique', *Economie Rurale*, 229, pp. 3-10.
- Beuret, J (1997) 'L' agriculture dans l'espace rural. Quelles demandes pour quelles fonctions?', *Economie Rurale*, 242, pp. 45-52.
- Blanc, M. (1997) 'La ruralité : diversité des approches', *Economie Rurale*, 242, pp. 5-12.
- Borzel, T. (2003) *Environmental leaders and laggards in Europe. Why there is (not) a southern problem*. Ashgate, London.
- Boussard, I. (2000) 'Cinquante ans de sondages d'opinion', *Economie Rurale*, 255-256, pp. 21-32.
- Bryant, R. L., Paniagua, A. and Kizos, TH. (2011) 'Conceptualising 'shadow landscape' in political ecology and rural studies' *Land Use Policy*, 28, pp. 450-471.
- Bristow, T (1993) 'Environmental awareness and societal change in the UK', in S. Harper (ed.) *The greening of rural policy. International perspectives*. Belhaven Press, London, pp. 42-63.
- Brown, A. (2002) *EU environmental policies in subnational regions. The case of Scotland and Bavaria*. Ashgate, London.
- Buller, H., Wilson, G.A. and Höll, A. (eds) (2000) *Agrienvironmental policy in the European Union*. Ashgate, Aldershot.
- Buttel, F. (1993) 'Environmentalization and greening: origins, processes and implications', in S. Harper (ed) *The greening of rural policy. International perspectives*. Belhaven Press, London, pp. 12-15.

- Cloke, P. (1996) 'Rural life-styles: material opportunity, cultural experience, and how theory can undermine policy', *Economic Geography*, 72-4, pp. 433-448.
- Cloke, P. and Thrift, N. (1990) 'Class and change in rural Britain', in T. Marsden, P. Lowe and S. Whatmore (eds) *Rural restructuring. Global processes and their responses*, David Fulton Pub., London, pp. 165-181.
- Cloke P. and Goodwin, M. (1992) 'Conceptualising countryside change: from post-Fordism to rural structured coherence', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 17, pp. 321-336.
- Cloke, P and Goodwin, M. (1993) 'Regulation, green politics and the rural', in S. Harper, (ed.) *The greening of rural policy. International perspectives*, Belhaven Press, London, pp. 28-41.
- Cloke P. and Jones, O (2001) 'Dwelling, place, and landscape: an orchard in Somerset'. *Environment and Planning A*, 33, 649-666.
- COAG (1999) *Población urbana, población rural: necesidades recíprocas, posibilidades de encuentro. Estudio de necesidades para la explotación de nuevos yacimientos de empleo en el medio rural*. COAG, Madrid.
- Demeritt, D. (2002) 'What is the social construction of nature? A typology and sympathetic critique', *Progress in Human Geography*, 26, pp. 767-790.
- Eder, K. and Kousis, M. (eds) (2001) *Environmental politics in Southern Europe*, Kluwer, Netherlands.
- European Communities (2002) *A European Union Strategy for sustainable development*, European Commission, Luxemburg.
- European Environment Agency (2003) *Europe's environment: the third assessment*, European Union, Copenhagen.
- Fonte, M (2001) 'Reconstructing rurality in mediterranean Italy', in L. Granberg, and I. Kovach and H. Tovey (eds) *Europe's green ring*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 263-284.
- Friedland, W. (2002) 'Agriculture and rurality: beginning the 'final separation'?' *Rural Sociology*, 67, 350-371.
- García Bellido, J. (2002) 'La cuestión rural: patología urbanística del espacio rústico'. *Ciudad y Territorio. Estudios Territoriales*, 132, pp. 277-321.
- Gibbs, D., Jonas, A. and While, A. (2002) 'Changing governance structures and the environment: economy-environment relations at the local and regional scales'. *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 4, pp. 123-138.
- Hoggart, K. and Paniagua, A. (2001 a) 'What rural restructuring?', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 17/1, pp. 41-62.
- Hoggart, K. and Paniagua, A. (2001 b) 'Rural restructuring in Spain?' *Journal of Rural Studies*, 17/1, pp. 63-80.
- Holloway, L (2002) 'Smallholding, hobby-farming, and commercial farming: ethical identities and the production of farming spaces', *Environment and Planning A*, 34, pp. 2055-2070.
- Halfacree, K. (1994) 'The importance of 'the rural' in the constitution of counter-urbanization: evidence from England in the 1980s'. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 34, pp. 164-189.
- Harper, S (1993) 'The greening of rural discourse', in S. Harper (ed) *The greening of rural policy. International perspectives*. Belhaven Press, London, pp. 3-11.
- Hoggart, K. and Buller, H. (1987) *Rural development. A geographical perspective*, Croom Helm, London.
- Jean, B (2003) 'La construction sociale de la ruralite', in P. Poulladuec-Gonidec, S. Paquette, S and C. Damon (eds) *Les temps du paysage*, Les Presses de l'Universite de Montreal, Montreal, pp. 105-124.
- Jollivet, M and Eiznen, N (1996) *L'Europe et ses campagnes*, Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, Paris.
- La Spina, A., Sciortino, G. (1993) 'Common agenda, southern rules: european integration and environmental change in the Mediterranean states', in J.D. Liefferink, P. D. Lowe and P.J. Mol (eds) *European integration and environmental policy*, John Wiley and Sons, Chichester, pp. 217-236.
- Lewis, N., Moran, W and Cocklin, C. (2002) 'Restructuring, regulation and sustainability', in I.R. Bowler, et al. (eds) *The sustainability of Rural Systems*, Kluwer academic, Dordrecht, pp. 97-121.
- Liefferink, J.D., Lowe, P.D. and Mol, P.J. (1993) *European integration and environmental policy*, John Wiley and Sons, Chichester.
- Little, J. and Austin, P. (1996) 'Women and the rural Idyll', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 2, pp. 101-111.
- Lowe, P. (1987) 'Environmental concern and rural conservation politics', in M. Whitby and J. Ollerenshaw (eds.) *Land-use and the european environment*, Belhaven Press, London, pp. 68-77.
- Lowe, P. (1988) 'Environmental concern and rural conservation politics', in M. Whitby and J. Ollerenshaw (eds) *Land-Use and the european environment*, Belhaven, London, pp. 68-77.

- Marsden, T., Bridge, G. and McManus, P. (2002) 'Beyond the social construction of Nature: rethinking political economies of the environment', *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning*, 4, pp. 103-105.
- Merting, A.G. and Dunlap, R.E. (2001) 'Environmentalism, new social movements, and the new class: a cross-national investigation', *Rural Sociology*, 66 (1), pp. 113-136.
- Morris, C. and Wragg, A. (2003) 'Talking about the birds and the bees: biodiversity claims making at the local level', *Environmental Values*, 12, pp. 71-90.
- Murdoch, J. (1995) 'Middle-class territory? Some remarks on the use of class analysis in rural studies', *Environment and Planning A*, 27, pp. 1213-1230.
- Newby, H. (1980) *Green and pleasant land? Social change in rural England*, Century Hutchinson, London.
- Paniagua, A. (1995) 'Espacio rural y medio ambiente. Problemas, políticas y perspectivas', in *Primeras Jornadas sobre Desarrollo rural y medio ambiente*, Junta de Castilla y León, Valladolid, Forem, pp. 18-30.
- Paniagua, A. (1997) 'Significación social e implicaciones para la política agraria de la 'cuestión ambiental' en el medio rural español', in C. Gomez Benito and C. González, C. (eds) *Agricultura y sociedad en la España contemporánea*. Madrid, CIS-MAPA, pp. 975-1016.
- Paniagua, A. (2001a) 'Agri-environmental policy in Spain. The agenda of socio-political developments at the national, regional and local levels', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 17, pp. 81-98.
- Paniagua, A. (2001 b) 'European processes of environmentalization in agriculture: a view from Spain', in H. Buller, and K. Hoggart (eds) *Agricultural transformation, food and environment. Perspectives on European rural policy and planning. Volume 1*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 131-164.
- Paniagua, A. (2002) 'Counterurbanisation and new social class in rural Spain: The environmental and rural dimension revisited'. *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 118(1), pp. 1-18.
- Paniagua, A and Hoggart, K. (2002) 'Lo rural ¿hechos, discursos o representaciones? Una perspectiva geográfica de un debate clásico', *Información Comercial Española*, 803, pp. 61-72.
- Paniagua, A. (2013) Farmer living in remote rural areas: the worth of permanence in the place. *Land Use Policy*, 35, pp. 1-7.
- Potter, C. (1997) 'Conserving nature: agri-environmental policy development and change', in B. Ilbery (ed) *The Geography of Rural Change*, Longman, London, pp. 85-105.
- Rodrigo, I and Moreira, M. B. (2001) 'Portugal: the emergence of the 'rural question'', in L. Granberg, I. Kovach and H. Tovey (eds) *Europe's green ring*, Ashgate, Aldershot, pp. 238-262.
- Szerszynski, B. and Urry, J (2002) 'Cultures of cosmopolitanism', *The sociological Review*, pp. 461-481.
- The European Opinion Research Group (2002) 'The attitudes of Europeans towards the environment' European Union, Luxemburg.
- Trill, B. (1988) 'The rural environment: what role for Europe?', in M. Whitby and J. Ollernshaw (eds) *Land-use and the European environment*, Belhaven Press, London, pp. 68-77.
- Urry, J. (1995) *Consuming places*, Routledge, London.
- Urry, J. (2000) *Sociology beyond societies*, Routledge, London.
- Weale, A. et al. (2000) *Environmental governance in Europe. An ever close ecological union ?*, Oxford Univ. Press., Oxford.
- Whitby, M. (ed.) (1996) *The European environment and CAP reform. Policies and prospects for conservation*. CABI, Wallingford.
- Wilson, G. (2001) 'From productivism to post-productivism.... And back again? Exploring the (un)changed natural and mental landscapes of European agriculture', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 26, pp. 77-102.