

*Editorial Introduction:
Rural Global Transition: From
Agricultural Villages to New Ruralities*



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Revista de Estudios sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo Rural
Journal of Depopulation and Rural Development Studies

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Rural Global Transition: From Agricultural Villages to New Ruralities

It is common to refer to the intensity of change that, since the end of the last century, rural areas have been experiencing. We use terms such as "new rurality" that avoid the idea of transition involving a clean break in the history. The new adjective highlights our not wanting to lose sight of the old rurality. When speaking of the rural change, we think not to wilfully emphasising not the new processes but the deterioration in the previous ones. Nowadays, what happens in rural European areas is generally interpreted as being part of agrarian transformation, as are the losses of the ideals of family and farm workers. This dominant explanation omits and ignores the other processes of change that play a leading role. Although universal in nature and thought of as urban phenomena, rural-urban hybridisation, globalisation and "cultural turn" are also vehicles that contribute to rural transformation.

For an alternative perspective that seeks to dethrone the agrarian explanation, we united with a large group of scientists and social researchers from a dozen countries. It was September 2019 and little did we suspect that these conferences where we met in person were to be quarantined. There and then, in the heart of the IV European Rural History Organisation -EURHO, we debated the very articles that now are being published, as well as several other papers presented to the Panel denomina-

ted "Rural global transition: From agricultural villages to new ruralities", that we led together with Fabian Almonacid, from The Austral University of Chile. The outcome of that meeting was the coverage of four scenarios which these articles document. Normandie, northern Mediterranean and the hinterland of Lake Titicaca involve diverse situations and positions regarding the change of global ruralities, which let us observe rural transition decentred from agrarian change.

We enter into Italy through Davide Cacchioni's paper whose aim is to illustrate the change via one plant, hemp. This plant's cultural trajectory runs counter to other agrarian production. While traditional crops become industrial produce, hemp's industrial past was resumed with a variety of uses; therapeutic, foodstuffs, healthcare, beauty products, clothing, etc., which connect with new forms of consumption and has primarily re-established itself with small scale production and by means of local and associative organisation. Our tour of the Susa Valley in the Piedmont region shows the profound effects of rural deindustrialisation at the beginning of the century; it reminds us that not only did rural areas abandon agriculture, but that they were also deindustrialized. The context of new rurality is constructed by re-signifying its industrial past, and it revives the tradition with new forms of local economy. These elements of postmodern agriculture hover over the recampesinisation debate defended by Van der Ploeg.

Francesca Uleri focused on Puno, in the Bolivian plateau. Quinoa has witnessed an unprecedented expansion; demand that can only be explained by the transformation and a redefinition of consumption on the other side of the planet. Quinoa, the identitary crop and foundation for certain peasant communities, has become an export commodity and part of the transnational food chain. Compared to the big-enterprise extractive model used for other great commodities such as soya, here the process of commercialisation is carried out within the very farming communities; thus, evident contradictions are created. Particularly relevant is the possession of rights and passing on of land. Emigration and commercialisation erode the relationship between local residence and the usufruct of the land. Locals who emigrated maintain plots and invest in the tilling of new terrains, while the number of tenant farmers residing in the area is growing. Mobility emerges as an important explanatory force in understanding those places where large agrarian value chains begin and the multiple transformations in farming.

Anton Paumelle's attention was drawn to the area around Pays de Caux, in Normandy. His paper notes the transformations in those localities halfway between rurality and the city; that is to say the collection of small towns or large villages in the rural west that are resisting the forces of depopulation. Its perspective contrasts

with the changes in spatial morphology and in social structure. The towns have been progressively transforming into homogeneous residential areas and unifying their appearances. While growing, the rural appearance has also socially homogenised. The traditional residential segmentation between suburbs and villages and the established agrarian differences, which were palpable in terms of income and cultural levels, have become destabilised. They have levelled out morphologically and democratised residentially. We find ourselves with a good example of the process of hybridisation, and of constant rural-urban amalgamation; rural areas no longer distinguish themselves economically, but in terms of liveliness.

Finally, our paper broaches, in a general sense, both rural Spain and rural change as a whole. We further the process of rural transition that results from the unification of the transformation in the conditions of agriculture and food regimes, the demographic transition and development of the care economy and the expansion and multiplication of mobilities. In the first case, this analysis highlights the draining of vitality that continues in rural areas and is the result of the development model build on the basis of concentration of resources, labour, consumption and talent. Secondly, the book places emphasis on showing the negation of heterogeneity and cosmopolitanism, which are present in rural areas and are the result of the social imaginary about the old rurality, which lets us see what disappears rather than what appears. Finally, the paper indicates mobility as a support for rural life, as well as a new source of inequalities. Three ideas that countenance the perspective of the challenge of depopulation by understanding it as a socio-spatial phenomenon.

We trust that this set of papers provides a conceptual approach the complexity of the challenges that a global hybrid rurality opens up, and we wish to further this understanding beyond palliative economic development and the agrarian paradigm.