

A conceptualization of the Environmental dimension and the Farmer in South-Europe

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1. Introduction

The environment is used as a determining notion in the restructuring process of rural areas, but this reconfiguration power brings out several aspects which fit a new stage of socio-economic opportunities and employment, along with social transformation, by severely modifying the farmer's traditional mentality and allowing the creation of new social groups. However, the environment configuration may also be perceived as a determining element in developing farmers' business activities, as a limitation to traditional property rights or as an intrusion of social groups, traditionally detached from rural surroundings.

Notwithstanding, this restructuring process based on environmental considerations can be constructed in a contrasting manner according to the characteristics of the area. However, at the same time, this opportunity - limitation dilemma gives rise to a variable assessment of the rural environment, by the different social players who reside there permanently or seasonally, for family reasons or else as visitors.

This new scenario, that currently adapts to different speeds according to the geographical areas and social groups, suggests a different way of building the rural environment compared to the past, from the perspective of new flows between non-dependent but definitely specialized areas.

Abstract

Farmers represent the most important social group in rural areas. The introduction of environmental considerations leads to a change in this hegemonic position since several modifications are induced concerning the activities carried out and the traditional goal they realize: the production of farm products. This environmental debate involving farmers is based on three main aspects: i. a change in the farmers' profession, following the post-productivist lost of professional identity; ii. a change in the farmers' political power, since the introduction of environmental considerations reduces their influence on rural policies; iii. and finally, a change in the farmers' traditional lifestyle. An outline is given of these significant changes, taking into account the peculiarities of rural areas in South-Europe.

Résumé

Les agriculteurs représentent le groupe social le plus important dans les zones rurales. La prise en compte de l'environnement a remis en question cette position hégémonique étant donné que des changements importants sont intervenus sur le plan des activités conduites et de l'objectif principal, traditionnellement poursuivi : l'obtention d'une production agricole. Ce débat environnemental, qui mobilise les agriculteurs, se caractérise par trois ordres de changements : 1) un changement de la profession des agriculteurs, faisant suite à une perte de l'identité professionnelle dans la phase post-productiviste ; 2) un changement du pouvoir politique des agriculteurs, étant donné que la prise en compte de l'environnement réduit leur influence sur les politiques rurales ; 3) et en dernier lieu, un changement du mode de vie traditionnel des agriculteurs. Dans le présent travail, on passe en revue ces changements significatifs, tout en tenant compte de la spécificité de l'espace rural dans le sud de l'Europe.

2. Two sides of the environment

Some time ago, the environmental question was perceived as going beyond the mere framework of strict management of natural resources, merging into activities, policies, reasoning and human behaviour that are based on the environment (Paniagua, 1997). In rural areas, the introduction of environmental considerations presents two clear viewpoints: on the one hand, the environmental question has increasingly been used since the mid-80s in Central Europe and since the beginning of the 90s in Southern Europe

as a determining and limiting factor to the farmers' customary production activities. The last CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) reform negotiations, held throughout the spring and summer of 2003, apparently focus more on the environment in order to maintain the farmers' subsidies level. Therefore, the environment shall play an increasingly important role in the rural development package (El País, 2003a). On the other hand, the environment seems to revitalize the rural economy from the consumer point of view in so far as it is crucial in the development of recreational and leisure activities and environmental services. Although these activities do not respond to the unreasonable employment expectations, they are qualitatively valuable as the urban world is more and more imbued with the rural one but distant from its strictly agricultural base.

As showed in Table 1, the European society attributes less

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Table 1. *Priority in the application of different CAP objectives (dates expressed per cent of surveyed population)*

	Greece	Spain	Italy	Portugal	Mediterranean countries	EU15
Maintaining EU farmers	85	66	61	68	70.0	60
Protection of EU farmers	80	73	60	75	72.0	62
Crop diversity	83	73	70	76	75.5	73
Economy/environment Balance	88	82	79	85	83.5	81

Source: Eurobarometer number 48. Autumn 1997. Own elaboration

importance to social objectives concerning the maintenance of the number of farmers and the protection of community farmers' interests compared to third countries. Conversely, the CAP environmental objectives, especially the maintenance of crop diversity, which is fundamental in the traditional European and above all Mediterranean countryside, and the maintenance of a suitable balance between growth and economic competitiveness and environmental protection have become a top priority. The reconciliation of these two types of objectives appears to be a preferential goal for most Europeans. The Mediterranean countries as a whole give a considerably higher priority to social objectives than the European countries, but they also take into account the environmental objectives. As a result, in Southern Europe, preference for the social - environmental binomial is more solid, although with noteworthy national disparities, due to the existence of a wide sector of semi-marginal elderly farmers, who help prevent depopulation of extensive disadvantaged areas. The sign of this binomial can be understood as the social acceptance of a two-sided approach of opportunity or constraint surrounding the environmental question and which entails the reclassification of rural areas, sustained by the maintenance of the traditional countryside and the population.

Some national surveys carried out in countries where rural areas occupy an emblematic position suggest a similar trend. A survey carried out on the quality of the rural space, indicated that in France, the society perceives the major effects generated by farming as follows: the conservation and

Table 2. *Situation of the agri-environmental sector in Southern European countries in 1998*

	Greece	Spain	Italy	Portugal
Number of aids approvals (per cent in the whole of EU-15)	0.13	2.0	9.8	7.9
Hectares (per cent in the whole of EU-15)	0.1	3.2	8.1	3.1
Average aid/ha. (in euros per ha.)	328	82	266	105
Average UGM assistance (in euros per UGM)	--	29	200	121

Source: European Commission (2002 yearbook). Own elaboration

occupation of natural means (75%); pollution (65%); the maintenance of the social fabric in the rural environment (60%) and the quality of life in the rural environment (59%) (Beuret, 1997).

However, to interpret the processes in which these two perspectives emerge around the environment and how this process is incorporated in the reasoning of farmers and of other social actors in rural areas, it is necessary to consider the huge diversification of Southern European coun-

tries in spatial terms, with multiple regional and even zonal meanings.

3. Environment, regulations and the limited farmer

Environmental considerations concerning the farmers' activity, the regulations and the effects on the farmers' reasoning and attitudes are surely the key factor in the evolution of the environmental question of rural areas in Europe during the last two decades. Apparently, this turning point has been reached following the application of environmental regulations to farming. However, such a change occurs at European, national or even regional decision-making level, and it leads to a considerable discussion about its true role as a wild card in the framework of the CAP evolution. Nevertheless, the true unregulated revolution is probably represented by the integration of environmental considerations in the farmers' reasoning. From the political viewpoint, this process would produce rural governance through self-regulation of the professional activity. Some authors have already emphasized the farmers' role in the generation of environmental claims (Morris and Wragg, 2003). However, this integration has not been thoroughly defined and it has reached a different stage in the various countries. On the other hand, it is also difficult to establish the final stage based on this reasoning, above all in the European Mediterranean countries, in so far as the environmental problems perceived, the environmental damage produced by farming (whether true or socially constructed) and the mono-functional productivist heritage are interconnected.

The peculiarity of Southern Europe has been indicated by the consumer data on fertilizers and phytosanitary products when the agri-environmental regulation was included in the CAP agenda. Farmers in countries with less developed agriculture use fewer fertilizers and have a lower mechanization index compared to their colleagues from Northern Europe. Nevertheless, there still exist significant regional differences within the South as well (Montanari, 1991; Black, 1992; Hoggart, Buller and Black, 1995). In addition, the integration of the environmental regulatory measures in farming coincides with the culmination of a social and even economic transformation process in the rural areas of Southern European countries. This has an impact on the

modification in the values of rural and agrarian population (Montanari and De Rose, 1991), and reflects the predisposition or resistance to carrying out environmental practices.

In Spain, the introduction of environmental considerations in agriculture has gone through several phases, but has mainly been related to the transposition of sectoral environmental farming policies, particularly following the development of national environmental policies involving farmers in Central European countries. Therefore, the introduction of agri-environmental measures is ascribable to a much more extensive geopolitical area rather than to the actual national interests. Since not all the Union States pursue the same goals in environmental policies nor exhibit the same initial conditions, the development of a common legislative framework might be viewed by some social and institutional players as an inevitable imposition (Paniagua, 2001), not only in Spain, but also in other European countries such as Portugal (Direccao Geral de Desenvolvemento Rural, 1997).

Over the last few years, various studies have been conducted on agri-environmental policies in Europe, to analyze how they are implemented in the various countries, from a political and regulatory point of view (Buller, Wilson, Höll, 2000) (Table 2), regardless of the indication about a considerable difference concerning their influence within the EU. This is much reduced in Spain and Greece and very much so in Italy and Portugal, apart from the problems related to its setting into motion. It can be stated that Southern European countries display some homogeneous characteristics which distinguish them from countries in the North. One common feature is the delay in the adoption of agri-environmental policies, which is the result of policy-makers' inertia regarding the productivist tendency that reached its peak at the beginning of the 90s. Another feature is the novel and difficult integration between environmental considerations and environmental institutions in the institutional and legislative agrarian world. Probably, the third component represents the remarkable ecological and landscape wealth in extensive areas of Mediterranean countries (Buller, Wilson, Höll, 2000, Paniagua, 2001). However, there is no contribution concerning the integration of the environment in policy-makers' and farmers' reasoning in South-Europe as a whole.

Although the agrarian elite has significantly assimilated the environmental considerations over the last decade, taking them as a structural element in agricultural guidance, there is a persistent specification of the South, due to the existence of an extremely specific habitat and to the difficult balance between environmental respect, depopulation and territorial integration. Notwithstanding, there is an increasing awareness about the interests and limitations of these territorial and environmental contrasts which oppose countries such as the Southern European ones. In every area or region, the effects and repercussions on professional farmers can be very different.

However, the integrated multi-functionality of rural surroundings and agriculture also includes accepting the development of new institutional structures, whose responsibilities will not be merely sectoral or agrarian, but will be compatible with those of other stakeholders involved in the rural or territorial development in its broader environmental meaning (departments responsible for the environment at state or regional level).

In turn, there is a growing consensus on the modifications introduced in the role and political weight of farmers concerning their environmental considerations about agriculture. This has generated a new reasoning in the associations that represent farmers both professionally and politically. The environmental function assigned to the farmer should always be linked to the perception of new income or revenues, replacing those that could be lost due to limitations on a strictly productive basis. Accordingly, farmers shall be relocated in the playground, despite some contradictions in their reasoning.

At farm level, the recent evolution suggest the emergence of a clear dialectic on the environment (nature) and the economic interest (Paniagua, 2001 and 2001 a). Farmers generally warn about the urban origin of environmental concern and, therefore, they place the environmental question in a rural - urban 'antagonism'. From this standpoint, the farmer is excluded in that he is viewed as the main socio-economic protagonist in rural areas. In this context, the environmental regulations on rural surroundings are perceived as measures which only try to restrict the traditional activities of the rural world, making the farmers responsible for environmental problems, without searching for the most favourable routes to bring together the economic activities and the environment (nature). This perception of the public policies on the country reinforces its 'urban' character in the farmers, who claim they are the custodians of nature.

In any case, the actual farmers recognize the character of social construction of the environment and its problems, not only by social groups, but also by fractions of a particular social group. This largely affects the components which make up the environment, perceived as 'a unique entity' in some cases or simplified in two or three natural resources, in others. In some parts of this reasoning, the construction of the environment forces farmers to be considered as something detached, distant, but at the same time alive like a deity or person who can be insulted or hurt. In turn, it is also considered as circumstantial: a fashion. The variety of components that can be added to design a picture of the environment (primary or secondary), along with its structural or secondary character, provide a great many possibilities for articulation in farmers' reasoning about the environment.

Nevertheless, the environmental reasoning presents some permanent characteristics: the first is the relation, normally in terms of confrontation, between ecologists (outers) and farmers (locals). Farmers consider their property rights,

farming business and territorial belongings to be limited by experts and associations who are alien to the community. They tend to break the natural links between farmers and the surrounding environment. They equally tend to disintegrate and break up the local community. The second is the utilitarian vision in the farmer's management of natural resources in response to an anthropocentric point of view. The third is the farmers' outstanding knowledge of the problems which is not always adequately combined with the anthropocentric point of view guiding the individual or collective behaviour.

The reasoning about the environment is linked to problems or to actions. It is particular for each area, associated to a specific environmental problem that agglutinates debate or environmental actions, normally concerning the management of protected areas or the designation of an ecological farming area. When the approach is expressed in terms of an environmental problems, in some areas, it may deal with the management of pig farming waste, in others, with the use of fertilizers, but nature usually seems to be in contrast with economic benefits. When the approach is expressed in terms of action, nature appears to be complementary to economic benefits. This happens, for example, in ecological farming or cattle breeding areas. In this case, even future expectations are based on this complementary relationship.

As regards the implementation of agri-environmental policies, this disparity in the environment construction translates into different views of the main objective at local level, supported by different coalitions with dissimilar aims (Clark and Jones, 2001).

The farmers' reasoning has also a moral base, which is connected to 'the good farmer', who is an integral part of nature. In this respect, there is a difference between the professional farmer and the city dweller and those who only try to take advantage of subsidies, as detailed below. In other words, farmers' professionalism is associated with the environmental friendliness of their agricultural practices. For a rural person, nature represents also a productive and economic framework (Paniagua, 1999, Garrido, 2000). From this perspective, farmers are critical about ecology since they understand that human activities may change nature.

We could say that there is a significant ambivalence in the relation between farming and the environment. On the one hand, farmers admit that some damage is unavoidable as a result of massive production at the lowest cost possible. On the other hand, there is a conservationist perspective about being conscious that this activity is carried out in natural surroundings. This is the major difference compared to the industrial or urban activities, because farmers, even though they cause damage to the environment, feel that they do not depend directly on the environment.

In this way, the conservation of the environment and of nature explicitly appears in farmers' reasoning as an already permanent constraint to their professional activity. As previously underlined, this brings about a reformulation of the

implicit agreement between farmers and the Society by which the population as a whole should support the conservative function of farmers.

The rural - urban dialectic can also be found in the foundation of the farmers' new environmental functions. The professional associations suggest that the introduction of environmental considerations in farming will reduce the business efficiency and therefore, this sector should be backed by the transfer of revenues mainly coming from urban areas. As a result, the multi-functionality of the farmers' role appears to be linked to the development of the rural world and to the environment protection. The environment conservation permanently appears in the professional future of farmers.

The rural - urban question seems to be far more complex and rich given the farmers' multimodal reasoning, with specific peculiarities according to the location and the social and institutional players:

- The first point is the farmers' professional identity (Kasimis and Papadopoulos, 2002). This provides a double perspective: firstly, the landowners who do not farm but receive subsidies under the CAP; secondly, the professional farmers, of a high socio-economic status, who reside in the provincial capital and have a second residence or even a secondary residence *de facto*, especially in inland cereal-growing areas.
- The second point is linked to the environmental quality of the habitat, and more exactly, to the demand for urban standards by new social groups and specifically, by those who periodically return for family reasons. This is particularly true in areas with intensive cattle raising farms. Moreover, there are significant differences with respect to the usual resident farmer. At the same time, the agri-environmental regulation and its implementation are indifferent to those returning seasonally, those born in the country village, mainly because of their invisibility.
- The third point appears linked to the urban - rural territorial comparison. It is based on the existence of a similar standard of living between towns and cities and it conceives the territory as a system of flows, based on rapid accessibility between rural and urban areas, in regions affected by depopulation and characterized by a continuous process of farms succession. The environmental question creates an obstacle to arbitration measures which generate effective and remunerated employment in farming. Accordingly, farming is compared to a factory or an industry: in order to be productive and competitive, it is necessary to contaminate something.
- The fourth point is linked to the functionality of the country with respect to the city and, therefore, to the residual meaning of the rural habitat, that is the fruit of an unequal relation and is marked by the breaking-up of two worlds, that are definitively different. This point includes the idea that it is the urban world which directs the integration of the environmental question in farming and, therefore, it is essentially a question of negotiating a new social contract

comparable with that of the Welfare State in the 50s in Europe.

Normally the analytic process of introducing agri-environmental regulations has been planned for family-type farms or simply on a set of farms in a specific area, without taking into account the attitude and environmental behaviour of important landowners. This subject is of utmost importance in Southern Europe since many of these large properties have a significant ecological value not only for their own country but also within the European framework. A paradigmatic case is that of the Spanish *dehesa* (pastureland) or the Portuguese *montado*. According to some recent surveys, there is an increasing confidence by the owners in the public aid system and the agri-environmental aid system and the integration of their practices in environmental services of a private nature on the farm. Therefore, the owners, whose revenues are not produced mainly through the farming of the pastureland, would preserve it even when the commercial profitability is null (Campos and Mariscal, 2000). Also this type of owner is more inclined to adopt practices of a traditional and agri-environmental nature (for example, integrate transhumance i.e. a seasonal migration) into their estates or convert them in ecological developments. These results could be extrapolated throughout the *dehesa* pastureland system (Spain) and the *Montados* (Portugal) (Díaz, Campos and Pulido, 1997). In this respect, some surveys carried out in a representative area at the European level, such as the Doñana National Park, emphasize the existence of at least 100 cattle breeders who preferably farm for their pleasure (Campos and López, 1998). Contemplating and managing a traditional agrarian system seems to lay the foundations for conservationist attitudes of these owners. Nonetheless, this type of results has also been obtained in the framework of classic forestry in central Spain, which suggests a sort of generalization of this behaviour in different Spanish agrarian and forestry systems.

In Portugal, as stated by Unwin (1985), there were no studies available until the middle of the 80s regarding the farmers' perception of their own professional activity. Some works carried out by this author in 1985 confirm the farmers' reasoning in Northern Portugal as regards their activity prior to the introduction of environmental considerations. Three change factors are highlighted: the political factors, the geographic and environmental conditions of a place and the accessibility to the markets and urban nuclei. As for the first factor, the situation varies even between municipalities, but those who long for changes rely upon the property reorganization and the production specialization. Concerning the second factor, those farmers located in municipalities with complex orography are less prone to introduce innovations and changes on their farms. Finally, the location constrains the access to information, resources and some specialized urban markets. In the most ideally placed municipalities, farmers were more inclined to introduce changes and innovations. However, this survey has clearly demonstrated that no environmental consideration seems to

appear among the factors determining change or permanency. There is no evidence of environmental considerations in the Portuguese farmers' reasoning during this period. The faring modernization and the geographical limitations are the central points of the reasoning. All this coincides with a generational renovation in farming that combines traditional values linked to the hard work and the farm continuity and modern values associated with autonomy and motivation for tackling new activities (Wall, 1994).

This probably explains why the implementation of the agri-environmental programme has suffered from various vicissitudes since when it has been originally introduced in 1994, including several reforms which were meant to extend the potential number of beneficiaries. These modifications include increased payments or the extension of zonal schemes in view of including more farmers and habitats (Eden and Vieira, 2000). For example, in the Algarve, 2 farmers out of 6 chose agri-environmental subsidies, especially for medium- to large-sized farming development (more than 100 hectares). They were mainly involved in extensification and maintenance measures of traditional extensive farming systems and in the conservation of resources and the countryside, namely the conservation of autochthonous tree and bushlike species of important biological interest (Direccao Regional de Agricultura do Algarve, 2000). The results of this agri-environmental programme are interesting, as decision-making is unified and has to face the same introductory problems in deeply decentralized countries such as Spain. In any case, this reflects the problems related to the assumption by farmers that they were reaching the peak of a modernization process through the access to the CAP.

4. Discussion. Urban demands and urban limits: urban society impacts on farmers' uncertainties

Two points of view can be accepted in the relationship between the urban and rural (farming) society: the first point is founded on a system of compensation and demand and is supported by a mono-social conception of the rural space, in which the social contract has typically been made by the farmers and the civil society since the gestation of the EU (Paniagua, 1997, 2001). This has led to attribute to the farming policy a character of exceptionalism, in particular, throughout the existence of the CAP, by treating it as something other than a sectoral policy; the second point is essentially founded on a spatial dimension where the generation of new socio-economic processes of a global nature gives again the sense of rural spaces, specializing them (Marsden, 2003) within a flow system, where no dependent relations should exist, but simply multi-specialization. In social terms, a multi-social rural space is thus accepted.

Since the 50s, Western Europe has been dominated by the perspective of a social contract due to a system of guaranteed prices that allows the farmer to progress towards a

standard of living comparable to the urban one and ensures food supply. In the 80s and at the beginning of the 90s, a series of social phenomena appeared clearly. The system in operation until then was put into crisis. Regardless of the problems closely related to the CAP management (surpluses, budgetary repercussion on the EU, inefficiency, environmental problems), the social confidence should be emphasized concerning food supply and its lower importance in the family budget, along with a greater sophistication in food preparation (Reig and Picazo, 2002); an increase in mobility and spare time, and a tendency of the urban population to exploit the rural space for leisure and holidays. In addition, the gap between the standard of living of urban and rural populations tends to become closer and, for example, in 1993 the average income of households in rural areas was already higher than the average in Spain (El País, 1995).

All these elements bring about a modification of the social contract between the Society as a whole and the farmers that shifts from the initial productivist approach to a more environmentalist approach. This already involves new social actors or modifies the nature of the most traditional ones. Furthermore, the existence of an environmental problem in agriculture is accepted in its broader meaning (Paniagua, 1995). Therefore, at present and from an environmental perspective, the European agriculture displays a dual reality, since the extent and the causes of the agricultural impact on the environment vary quite significantly in Europe. All in all, the search for efficiency and increase on production scale exerts a continuous pressures on the environment. Nonetheless, farming represents a large proportion of the landscapes, perceived as a cultural result. This double role is mainly evident in agrarian systems of high natural value, compared to low-input areas and more traditional farming (European Environment Agency, 2003).

Results from the 1997 Eurobarometer (European Commission, 1997) concerning the CAP priorities seem to highlight this transient situation. The only questions which are a priority for more than 80% of the Europeans would be: guaranteeing food safety (89%); ensuring the animal welfare (84%); fighting against fraud in the agricultural sector (83%); and, finally, balancing the economic growth and the environment protection (81%). In other words, sanitary, ethical or environmental aspects are predominant, along with the budgetary efficiency, relegating to a lower position some social aspects as maintaining of the number of farmers, ensuring a decent income to farmers or protecting the interests of European farmers as opposed to third parties. In Southern European countries, although in accordance with the European tendency, ensuring a decent income to farmers is taking centre stage. In four Mediterranean countries, with the exception of Italy, citizens give this objective a priority of more than 80%. Therefore, in this reconfiguration or dissolution of the social contract towards a system of territorial specialization, the Mediterranean countries offer an original point of view, where the farmers' standard of living

still holds a preferential place, although in many cases it is only symbolic. The last point of view is taken into account in the current negotiations for the CAP reform, where the left-wing political parties and all the farmers' unions are voicing their concern about the negative effects on farmers, not only in terms of income lowering but also in terms of disappearance of nearly 400 thousand farmers in Spain (El País, 2003b). Besides, in countries like Spain rural areas are seriously affected by environmental problems, such as desertification which concerns over 31% of the territory and whose social implications are complex. They interact not only with the significant intensification of farming and depopulation but also with the urbanization process.

However, in the debate on the new farmers' function, the urban - rural contraposition and the complexity around it immediately appears. Farmers believe that they do what the urban society, where decision-makers are placed, requests. Until the 80s food safety was demanded (in relation to supply) coupled with a greater production at reasonable prices and so, production intensification was the solution adopted. In this context, the last actors responsible for the pollution generated by this type of conventional and intensive agriculture would be the city consumers, who demand products that mainly look good and are abundant. But, this reasoning is adopted by farmers who are mainly subordinated to the urban world (and who are set between the elite and the actual basic farmers), since they realize that the Society has assigned them a new role. By reducing the efficiency of a business activity following the introduction of environmental objectives, farming should be backed by transferring funds to the whole society. Therefore, subsidies will continue to be essential although their function is now different (Paniagua, 1997). Along these lines, it can also be argued that environmental problems, directly generated by conventional farming and, in particular, those caused by the use of pesticides and fertilizers, occupy a medium-to-low position in the concerns of Europeans compared to other problems of an environmental kind (The European Opinion Research Group, 2002). More exactly, 31% of the Europeans are very worried about pollution from farming and 36% about the use of pesticides. In Southern Europe, the situation is very diversified and ranges from 56% of the Greeks being very worried over pollution from farming to 25% cent of the Spanish. Nevertheless, this low level of concern is nowadays on the decline given the decrease in fertilizer and pesticide consumption observed in Europe.

The last CAP reform seems to assimilate the point of view of the European public opinion by decoupling production aids and introducing environmental, sanitary and ethical requirements to farmers to be still supported by the CAP. According to the analysts, the German and French theses have been imposed (El País, 2003c), thus arousing harsh criticism from Spain as regards their effects on the depopulation of rural areas and their repercussions on the economy of many farming concerns located in the country's interior. On top of that, the farming deprofessionalization is encour-

aged. This aspect seems to be strongly linked to the environmental debate concerning farming in Southern Europe. As previously underlined, this had already emerged in the environmental debate in Spain.

Nonetheless, the last CAP reform would seem to be a step forward a post-productivist and sustainable dynamics of the rural space, thus leading to the second aspect of the relationship between the country and the city: a series of flows (social and economic) in a globalized society where both the country and the city get specialized, although still interdependent to some extent, but without any explicit compensation. However, the route to this type of relation shows some pitfalls, especially in Southern Europe, given the high level of active population employed in the primary sector (15.5% on average) (Beopoulos, 2003) and the close relations that many urban inhabitants have with their home towns, as indicated for Spain (Hoggart and Paniagua, 2001 b), Greece (Beopoulos, 2003) or Italy (Censis, 1991). In significant areas, especially in the interior, the social group that still supports and grants continuity to the life of many villages is that of the farmers, who are mostly in advanced age. Since the antecedents of this reform, the Agenda 2000, some of those in charge at the Spanish Ministry of Agriculture had indicated that it would be 'the squaring of the circle', due to the complexity of its implementation (Trueba, 1999).

However, the professional farming organizations insist on the so-called 'Hollywood effect' on the young farming community, which shows them the beauty of living in the city, where there is a higher standard of living but probably not a better quality of life (Desertización Rural, 1996).

"The exodus initiated in the fifties has not stopped and this means that the primary sector is dismantled. The world of direct farmers gradually disappears and the active population becomes less, reducing what is considered to be the strategic activity of a sector and eliminating other complementary village occupations..." (J. A. Desertización Rural, 1996).

Amid the possible alternatives, an emerging model pleads for the quality and management of the environment, among other elements, with the support of professional farmers, linked to the perception of revenues, which seems to coincide with the public opinion of Southern countries, as stated before. In this respect, we should consider that the family farms income in all the Mediterranean countries is 37.4% below the European average (European Commission, 2002 yearbook), and any opportunity or limitation concerning the environmental question should take into account this significant exception.

Notwithstanding, within the rural - urban debate, there are multiple conflicts: the modification of what is rural, with its consequent conflict in rural areas, which is also reflected in the distribution of funds at a more micro- or regional level. The originality of the budgetary or macro-level reflecting changes in the demand and the positions of high-level politics; and another probably intrarural level which is the

result of social and economic exceptions in the diversification processes that consider Southern Europe subdivided in regions to lay the foundations for the CAP re-nationalization processes.

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