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Publisher: Routledge

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European Planning Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ceps20>

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Published online: 01 Jul 2010.

To cite this article: COSTIS HADJIMICHALIS (2003) Imagining Rurality in the New Europe and Dilemmas for Spatial Policy, *European Planning Studies*, 11:2, 103-113, DOI: [10.1080/0965431032000072828](https://doi.org/10.1080/0965431032000072828)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0965431032000072828>

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Imagining Rurality in the New Europe and Dilemmas for Spatial Policy¹

COSTIS HADJIMICHALIS

[Paper first received, January 2002; in final form, March 2002]

ABSTRACT *In the discourse on European integration from the mid 1960s until the beginning of the 1990s, rural space and rurality have been traditionally associated with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), while little attention has been devoted to the spatial development of the countryside. These approaches and policies were associated with a 'geographical imagination' of rural space and rurality as a place of production, where the emphasis was on sectoral policies. In Europe today the discourse has changed dramatically. The current dominant geographical imagination of rurality is shifted to consumption and leisure, following both specific structural trends internally to rural areas and the more general post-modern trend away from production per se. These trends are discussed in a highly influential European document, the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) introduced in Leipzig in 1994 and formally adopted in 1999. In this document a new language and new policy guidelines are introduced, which openly support the consumption/leisure imagination, introducing at the same time spatial policies, which will deal more effectively with urban and rural spaces. Bearing this in mind, this article will try first to describe the two phases of imagining rurality in Europe (production versus consumption/leisure) and second their impact on southern European (SE) rural regions.*

1. Introduction

In the discourse on European integration from the mid 1960s until the beginning of the 1990s, rural space and rurality have been traditionally associated with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), while little attention has been devoted to the spatial development of the countryside. Economic and political dimensions have been the two main analytical foci in which all other dimensions have been submerged. In this context, rural space was incorporated into sectoral policies dealing with agricultural production, transportation and infrastructures, environment, tourism and housing. Additionally, for peripheral rural regions (identified mainly by agricultural characteristics) there were regional structural funds. These approaches and policies were associated with a 'geographical imagination' of rural space and rurality as a place of production, where the emphasis was on sectoral policies.

In Europe today the discourse has changed dramatically. There has been an erosion of power and influence of rural space and agricultural activity, as it was known until the beginning of the 1990s. According to Whatmore (1990) "we face a refashioning of rurality and

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most importantly about its meaning in the image of a predominantly urbanized and consumeristic social order". The current dominant geographical imagination of rurality is thus shifted to consumption and leisure, following both specific structural trends internal to rural areas and the more general post-modern trend away from production *per se*. The process is not entirely new or uniform across Europe. Rather, the ways in which this process has become dramatized and generalized, are taken up in public discourse, in public documents and policies (national and European Union (EU)) and in social movements (peasants and environmentalists).

One such highly influential European document is the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) introduced in Leipzig in 1994 and formally adopted in 1999 (CSD, 1999). In this document a new language and new policy guidelines are introduced, which openly support the consumption/leisure imagination, introducing at the same time spatial policies dealing more effectively with urban and rural spaces. Although these changes in policy direction cannot be a priori criticized, the ways of 'imagining' rurality in Europe are highly contested and can have particular negative effects in many rural regions.

In the process of European integration, the 'widening' and 'deepening' of the EU, 'geographical imagination' and the historical production of meanings is fundamentally important for European politics, with different definitions being developed to reflect or to challenge old and new forms of political power (Anderson, 1991; Massey, 1999). For example, the imaginative shift in rural space, from production to consumption/leisure, is a crucial cultural factor of enormous political, economic and social significance as the assumptions, pre-images and stereotypes on which it is based predetermine decisions and strategies. Without grasping the significance of geographical imagination it is impossible to identify the broad direction of changes in Europe and on a global scale.

Some 'imaginings', however, are more powerful than others and the capacity to impose/endorse them is strictly related to the particular strength of some against 'others' in terms of class, ethnicity, gender, religion, location, economic and, unfortunately, military power, as the recent foreign interventions in the Balkans remind us. The re-organization of space is a complex and often contradictory process in which different social actors and localities are constantly being redefined. Spatial policies whether regional, national or global, are fundamentally about different ways of 'imagining' the world and the uneven capacity to endorse these imaginings.

Bearing this in mind, this article will try first to describe the two phases of imagining rurality in Europe (production versus consumption/leisure) and, secondly, their impact on southern European (SE) rural regions. The assumption remains (Hadjimichalis, 1987, 1994) that the majority of SE rural areas are integrated into the European division of labour as 'donor' regions and any spatial policy must take this seriously into account.

2. Imagining Rurality I: The 'Productivist' Phase

In eighteenth and nineteenth century western European literature and painting, there is a long tradition of pastoralism that idealizes or romanticizes the rural as a refuge of natural order, a place unpolluted in both the social and the environmental sense. Rurality and natural environment were conceived of as something outside or apart from the industrial society of the time.

This tradition has been criticized and marginalized during the 'short' twentieth century and the critique appeared in different forms in all major European countries. Rurality in the 1950s and 1960s was identified with agricultural production and its need for modernization, as it was considered as the most backward sector in European national economies. The whole of rural space was thus reduced to a mono-sectoral approach and economists and agro-

economists took the lead to provide solutions. Together with national and later with EEC policy-makers they have constructed an imagination of rurality as the place *par excellence* of agricultural production. This imagination, however, has taken for granted that the social and geographical division of labour of north-central European regions, as unproblematic and uniform across Europe. In north-central European regions agriculture was a clearly separated sector from industry and services; the socio-occupational status of the 'peasant' and the concept of 'family farm' was clear; productive traditions, technology, physical and climatic characteristics guided agriculture to produce specific 'strong' products; the spatial organization of markets, infrastructure and settlement patterns provided a framework that integrated agriculture with industry and retail; and finally, national States and later EEC policies have actively supported farmers.

This particular north-central European social and geographical division of labour found an explicit application in the CAP, the oldest and most expensive policy of the EU. CAP produced an image of mutually constitutive relations between farming and rural space in which agriculture was the encompassing concept. CAP's representation and policies for rural areas focused almost exclusively on issues of production and rural regions in the community were defined in terms of their economic dependence on agriculture. Rural space and society were a function, particularly of family farms constituted and encompassed by agriculture.

The productivist era was dominated by a concern (among policy-makers) to increase productivity as a step towards farmer prosperity: to raise their income by provision of financial incentives, guaranteed markets and price support. The cumulative effect was, however, not just to maintain farm income generally, but to stabilize the income of individual farmers in specific regions and for specific products (see among others Clark *et al.*, 1997).

Any discussion about the CAP has to put into question two basic issues. First, what type of agriculture was promoted by the policy under question and how the CAP achieved its aims (Louloudis, 1996; Gray, 2000)? And second, the main economic aim in the 1950s and 1960s was to increase agricultural productivity and food supply, while the social aim was to secure the income of the extensive rural population of the time. These objectives were achieved through mechanisms containing market intervention such as price support, import duties and export refunds for main agricultural products such as cereals, beef, lamb and milk. From a sectoral point of view, European agriculture was seen as a 'success story' in terms of the desired aims, with some major negative aspects, however, in terms of surplus production, the environmental cost and the high fiscal cost of subsidizing (Louloudis *et al.*, 2000).

Apart from structural deficiencies internal to the CAP and its applications, the major problem in this phase, according to Marsden (1999), was that agricultural policies have continued to be farm and sector oriented despite the increasing significance of the non-farm parts of the food supply chain and the growing non-agricultural character of rural population and labour markets. If this was true for the entire EU, it has been a particular problem in SE regions where almost none of the previously analysed characteristics of the north-central European social and geographical division of labour existed. Rural areas in SE differ markedly in their economic structure and activity, in their natural and human resources, in the peripherality of their location and in their demographic and social conditions.

SE agriculture differs considerably in many respects from the north-central European model on which CAP was founded. In practice it operates under a dual specificity: its own structural/regional characteristics and those of the national social formation to which it belongs (Damianakos, 1999). SE rural characteristics followed a different development path from north-central Europe, being a heritage of the 'long durée' (eighteenth–twentieth centuries) across the Mediterranean. Among the elements which played a key role we may underline land tenure structures, modes of agricultural production, forms of labour and social organization in the countryside and, most importantly, distinctive ways of State intervention

and incorporation of the ‘rural question’ into politics (Hadjimichalis, 1987; Kasimis & Louloudis, 1999).

National agricultural policies and the CAP were ‘external’ to many rural areas in SE and failed to transform the majority of peasants to a distinct socio-occupational category. Apart from major physical geographical characteristics, for SE peasants-entrepreneurs and their family members, agriculture was not and it is not a ‘job’ per se but a social condition, in the absence of other more promising alternatives in the countryside. Of particular importance here are conditions of ‘multiple employment’ and ‘pluriactivity’, two widespread social conditions in SE rural areas, in clear distinction with north-central Europe and to which none of the European policies and programs (e.g. the CAP, regional development policies, LEADER and LEDA, social funds, etc.) paid any attention. For Portugal, Spain, southern Italy and Greece EUROSTAT estimated that in rural areas on average 51% of those at working age (20–45) are employed predominantly outside agriculture. Zakopoulou (1999) argued for the Greek case—and I could extend her argument to other SE regions as well—that it is more appropriate to talk about ‘pluriactive owners of agricultural holdings’ instead of ‘pluriactive farmers’.

Another important socio-spatial issue in many SE regions, rarely referred to in any EU policy documents, has been rural industrialization, a phenomenon that attracted initially the interest of Italian scholars (e.g. the *mezzadri* farming families of Third Italy) and later became a research issue in all SE countries (Bagnasco, 1977; Vázquez Barquero, 1986; Hadjimichalis & Vaiou, 1987; Kalantaridis & Labrianidis, 1999). Structural changes in the countryside were led by flexible management ventures in which peasant families were engaged in industrial activities as part-time wage earners. Due to their small, diffused and informal nature, these enterprises were in a position to minimize costs and avoid fiscal and regulatory constraint that applied to their larger, urban-based competitors (Hadjimichalis & Papamichos, 1990). The endowment with multiple resources, the combination of autonomy and control, the availability of social networks, the combination of local tradition with innovativeness and flexibility and not least, a gender division of labour that forced women to work with lowest salaries or as ‘unpaid family members’, constructed a ‘new mode of social reproduction’ in SE regions (Vaiou, 1995). This mode of social reproduction was highly competitive *vis-à-vis* other regions but highly exploitative of the people involved and with damaging environmental effects as all ‘external costs’ were dumped wherever it was possible.

The most important aspect, however, remains uneven regional development. Although sectoral approaches and policies succeed in helping many farmers and their families, the lack of an integrated and coherent vision about rural space contributed to the intensification of unevenness. As Louloudis (1996) pointed out, reducing economic inequalities and social injustice or dealing with the downgrading of natural environment, was never part of CAP’s aims. Furthermore, the price support policy for certain goods favoured ‘northern’ products at the expense of southern ones and within SE it encouraged certain production sectors (arable cultivations, industrial plants) at the expense of others (livestock breeding, quality products). As a result, spatial inequalities generating from these policies were intensified, while more specialized policies such as the structural funds or programmes for rural areas like LEADER and LEDA proved unable to compensate negative effects.

At present, amongst the socio-spatial trends that are more specifically differentiating SE rural areas from north-central European ones and which are reinforcing patterns of uneven development between localities and regions in the south the following may be realized:

- The decline in agricultural employment and in the relative economic importance of food production, accompanied by structural changes in the farming industry and food chains changed the local population structure. Spain, Greece and Portugal had during the 1980s

and 1990s the faster aging rural population in Europe. In these three countries 52% of peasants were older than 55 years. Lack of adequate education for innovation remains also a severe problem, particularly in mountainous and non-irrigated areas.

- The emergence of a reserve army of agricultural labourers formed by illegal/legal immigrants from north Africa, south-east Asia and the Balkans, transformed dramatically rural social and labour conditions (Pugliese, 1995). These trends contributed to the reduction of labour costs in rural areas but they have also changed the social and cultural basis of SE regions introducing racism and xenophobia. In the most competitive farming sectors (dairy products, vines, greenhouse production, fruits for export, etc.), more than 60% of labour in Greece and Italy are foreigners from Balkan countries, south-east Asia and north Africa while in Spain and Portugal from Morocco and Black Africa (Martinez Veiga, 2001).
- A new crucial element, not yet fully integrated in the south, is the emergence of environmentalism as a powerful regional and political force in combination with the rise of awareness about the severe climatic changes and the problems in vulnerable SE territories due to erosion, forest fires and desertification (Faulkner & Hill, 1997).
- A new typology of rural regions is slowly rising due to emergence of new uses for rural space and new societal demands in relation to land and landscape. This is evident not only along the coast and on some islands (which first changed to tourism and second homes), but also towards the interior. Following Louloudis (1996) we may identify, first, rural regions specialized in mass agricultural production with high productivity and protection from the CAP; second, rural regions specialized in qualitative agricultural production, some with 'name of origin'; and third, rural regions with petty-farming and pluriactivity. A parallel tendency is in operation towards marginalization and abandonment of certain areas and a growing demand for 'nature' and 'rural heritage' in others.
- Two extreme developments are occurring at the same time: (a) a slow emergence of organic farming as a plausible agricultural practice and (b) a rapid expansion of agro-industrial food chains into the countryside (with subcontracting, dependent peasants, etc.).
- Finally, the shifting nature of State support and public expenditure and above all changes in agricultural and rural policies of the EU, must be emphasized. Here SE regions face two trends. The first concerns the shifting of structural funds eastwards to new members and pressures from free trade which is promoted globally. The second has to do with Germany's proposal for a 're-nationalization' of the CAP and regional policy. Taking into account the fragile economies of SE States, this last trend could jeopardize their efforts towards the monetary union and cohesion with other EU members.

These changes reflect both a global and a local reordering of the value placed on rural resources and of the chains of production in the countryside and the consumption of rural space. For instance, the value placed upon rural areas for different types of industry, tourism or recreation is dependent upon different strategies of local and regional agencies and political and economic alliances. Understanding these processes requires a more spatialized—as opposed to sectorally based—approach which would answer questions such as: what is the uneven distribution of local capacities and resources that determines the effectiveness of rural areas in responding to changing external conditions?

3. Imagining Rurality II: The 'Consumerist' Phase

Unlike other sectoral policies of the EU reproducing an a-spatial logic, the CAP was, in a contradictory way, a continuous reinvention of the rural as a distinct type of space(s). Although it primarily supported the needs of north-central European farmers, at the same time it became a major vehicle for the construction of a certain type of EU communal space. It has

changed the image of the rural from a vague, indeterminate practice to an objectified, publicly visible representation in the community.

The arguments for policy changes emerge from the realization that predominantly sectoral policies (agriculture, environment, transport, housing, and tourism) are no longer able to deliver policies appropriate to the changing needs of the countryside, villages and market towns. This is, however, a point addressed long ago by regional planners, who traditionally were the prime critics of sectoral policies and advocates for synthetic regional plans (see among others Friedmann & Douglas, 1975). The current policy proposal of the EU is to tie rural areas much more into their urban and regional contexts and transform the countryside both physically and socially into images and identities of those who consume rural resources.

The 1988 EU Report 'The Future of Rural Society' introduced officially a shift away from sector policies, changing at the same time the imagination introduced by the CAP. Agriculture exists now within, and is encompassed by, rural space and society rather than the other way round, as was the earlier representation. The document proposes an urban-centric spatial model that identifies three types of rural regions defined by their relation to large conurbations:

- Areas close to large cities experiencing pressure for change of land use and combination of agriculture, housing, industry, commerce and leisure.
- 'Outlying' regions with rural decline due to out migration where agriculture is important but with decreasing employment opportunities.
- Very marginal areas experiencing market rural decline and depopulation due to inadequate infrastructure.

These changing views are included in the core arguments of the ESDP, which aims at the development of the entire EU space and not only of rural areas. The *raison d'être* of the ESDP is an intervention in a development characterized by competition between regions and cities in order to secure a better balance between competition and cooperation.

The 'Leipzig Principles' of ESDP introduced in 1994 and agreed in 1999 (CSD, 1999, p. 1) are:

- Development of a balanced and polycentric city system and a new urban–rural partnership.
- Securing parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge.
- Sustainable development, prudent management and protection of nature and cultural heritage.

A first reading of these documents reveals some positive steps, although ESDP does not have a legal status in any formal sense. The changing role of rural areas is recognized, in which agriculture is no longer the main economic activity, a fact studied and documented long ago by rural sociologists and political economists (Kasimis & Louloudis, 1999; van der Ploeg & Renting, 2000). The spatial approach will provide a basis for spatially allocating funds on a new basis, not just according to sectoral characteristics. The introduction of environmental protection measures and concerns about urban and rural sustainability is also something positive. And the regional level emerges within the ESDP as an increasingly important locus of EU policy, which apart from good news for regional planners, is also a significant modernization for centralized member states such as Greece and France.

As it often happens, however, ESDP is the outcome of power struggles between different interests, where knowledge and truth are contested and the rationality of policy-making itself is exposed as an area of conflict. Ideas on policy are tailored to suit the political environment in which they operate while altering the conceptual basis of existing policy. Conceptual development is always part of policy-making. In this respect, through the spatial policy process a new discourse of European spatial development is taking shape, along with the definition of

a new policy language, new knowledge forms and new policy options (Richardson, 2000). According to Richardson (2000) the role of ESDP within this wider process can be seen as two-fold: firstly, framing a common vocabulary of symbols and visions, part of the structuration of a new discourse of European spatial policy; and secondly, incorporating new institutional forms and relations which reproduce the discourse across and beyond EU spatial arenas.

The conceptual and ideological identity of ESDP under a market-oriented integration system has specific implications. It is framed within the wider twin processes of globalization and intensified competition. The two main strategies are polycentricity and mobility, while key terms in this new policy language are also efficiency and accessibility. Polycentricity is associated, though not explicitly, with the 'European Pentagon model', the system of cities contained within the core area marked by London, Paris, Milan, Munich and Hamburg (Williams, 2000). This is a 'dynamic global integration zone' (CSD (1999), p. 20, Figure 1) and other regions are advised to organize their urban systems accordingly. The strategy of mobility and the related issue of accessibility are associated with Trans-European Networks (TENs). Europe is conceived and articulated as a space of flows (see also Castells, 1989): of frictionless mobility within a polycentric spatial form. It is not necessary, however, to recall Gunnar Myrdal and others, to argue that transport infrastructures of the TENs type could easily contradict goals such as balanced development, if any, and could strengthen the core at the expense of the periphery.

From a rural point of view, there is a strong urban bias here. On the one hand, cities are constructed as the driving forces and 'motors' of regional development. The spatial consequences could be "... a widening of the gap between winner and loser cities, further decentralization of activities within urban areas and an erosion of rural settlement patterns" (Masser *et al.*, 1992). On the other hand, the polycentric model may be relevant in flat, economically mature north-central EU countries like north-central France, Germany, Benelux, Denmark (and maybe in Italy to the north of Tuscany) but it marginalizes SE and Nordic rural geography. As Richardson and Jensen (2000) argue, Nordic countries are opposing the urbanized centre-periphery thinking of ESDP and try to introduce a 'Nordic' version. Unfortunately there is no such an initiative yet from SE countries.

In this powerful imaginary of spatially integrated Europe, rural space is conceived as a shrinking entity with a communications infrastructure that is getting faster and faster. The areas crossed by the proposed high-speed rail and road corridors are imagined and framed as shadow regions in the grand vision of networked cities and regions. Concerns in the ESDP about 'pump' effects (where new high speed infrastructure removes resources from structurally weaker and peripheral regions) and 'tunnel' effects (where such areas are crossed without being connected) (CSD, 1999, p. 26) are only a pretext. And contrary to highly optimistic reports, new telecommunications and information technology illustrates how new trends can include and exclude places and people, and this raises a more general issue of how processes of marginalization and exclusion operate in rural areas. These trends are dramatically opportune for the majority of Greek regions, the Mezzogiorno, the Spanish inland regions including parts of the Basque country and Galicia and the Portuguese far north and south.

The new urban-rural partnership is an attempt to deal with the criticism of urban bias "... to move away from the outdated dualism between city and countryside (CSD, 1999, p. 19). And "... instead to focus on functionally integrated regions" (p. 23). But again here the principal focus is on large urban areas and 'their' needs. In a 'Strategic Study' commissioned by EU to apply ESDP principles for urban-rural partnership the evidence of urban priority is clear:

... The need to go beyond a dichotomic vision of urban/rural relationship is considered to be part of the more general theme of *urban* sustainability ...

Environmental equilibrium and territorial efficiency in rural areas depend on the success of *urban* production ... (Strategic Study, 1999, p. 1, emphasis added)

The advocated urban–rural partnership is thus submerging small rural towns to their large counterparts. There is no discussion about rural industrialization or the endogenous industrial potential of many small towns, which immediately threatens SE industrial districts and innovative ‘milieux’. Small and medium-sized towns in SE cannot survive in rural areas only under conditions of offering infrastructure and services for economic activities in their region. This proposition by ESDP presupposes a Christaller-type urban hierarchy unknown in the south. In an inter-urban competitive environment such as the one envisaged by ESDP, small-medium southern cities will find it difficult to adopt their economic base. This may sound logical from an efficiency point of view when analysts are dealing with firms. It is questionable, however, whether this approach can be applied to urban and rural areas, i.e. assuming that they can go bankrupt following the example of Orange County, California (see Soja, 2000). It is therefore striking that in the entire ESDP document there is no mention of social concern. As Richardson and Jensen (2000) politely have argue “... there is no social dimension in the urban agenda ... the fight against social exclusion and ghettoisation is not exactly the hallmark of ESDP” (p. 511). The ESDP objectives and policies relating to rurality are thus strongly contested, reflecting different interests in the specific construction of rurality.

Furthermore, differences between north-central and SE have often been associated to different planning and administrative traditions. This is a valid point but more important seems to be the role of structural funds which are linked directly to the ESDP framework. The reform of structural funds in 2003 and new agreements with the World Trade Organization (WTO) will probably lean towards re-nationalization of the CAP and regional policies, the two major redistributive mechanisms in the EU, and will introduce major cuts with immediate negative effects on SE peripheral regions. SE regions could see implementation of ESDP and the reform of structural funds as a threat to their interests due to newcomers from eastern Europe. Instead of using EU enlargement and the next GATT round to challenge the current form of direct payments to farmers and, indeed, the principle of continued farm income support, the proposed re-nationalization simply reproduces known problems of the past. Localization and regionalization of some elements of the CAP could offer a better possible response and could link more effectively with changes in structural and rural development policies.

It seems therefore that from the CAP period, when local farmers were relying on price support mechanisms to produce agricultural commodities for people outside their region, rural localities are now places that people from outside come into to consume the diversity of things that now constitute rural space (Gray, 2000). This is a shift from a sectoral approach assisting agriculture to a territorial approach supporting ‘coherent and competitive projects’ in specific rural localities. An urban-based image of rural community verifying Delors’ view of modern Euro-peasants as the ‘gardeners’ of European landscape: to keep it beautiful and preserved so that urban middle classes can enjoy it. In this respect, the representation of rural areas for leisure and environmental preservation re-introduces the moral-reproductive function of the earlier fundamental rural imagination of the nineteenth century, lost during the ‘productivist’ phase. Rural locations should be preserved now not just for farmers living there but for the benefits of urban society as a whole.

Finally, what is striking is that the major problem of uneven regional development is not discussed. The polycentric core area of the EU, the ‘Pentagon of Power’, comprises 20% of the territory, 40% of the population and 56% of EU gross national product (GNP). Competitiveness and efficiency would reinforce this concentration which in the end will

jeopardize cohesion. ESDP asks for more balanced spatial development, but this is left only to market forces and not to any planned redistribution. It puts the emphasis on development of “dynamic zones of global economic integration” and the assumption is—as in the old days of neo-classical regional development models—that this will reduce disparities between core and periphery. It seems that 45 years of experience in regional policy are forgotten and the old phantoms of self-equilibrating forces are coming back.

Trying to sum up, in the new discourse of the EU, rurality is defined in relation to the urban and in a way that subsumes the rural into a new European regional economy. Cities and urban regions are the principal units of implementation of EU policies, they are the basic actors. This development marks the end of a long period in which rural social forces had considerable political power and were lobbying at both national and EU level. Now the balance of forces has changed and new urban middle classes have the upper hand: they consume both urban and rural space, living in towns and having a second home in rural areas, or living in the countryside and working in towns. In SE these new middle classes include today not only ‘old’ natives but new ones as thousands of Germans, English, Dutch and Nordic people live permanently in rural sunny areas and small cities. The natural, aesthetic and historical values of rural areas became key ingredients in the construction of complex and geographically heterogeneous European lifestyles. Hence the policy trend towards urban–rural partnership highlights basically the same group of people.

4. Concluding Remarks

The shift from the productivist to the consumeristic phase in European rural discourse is a good indication of how different people in different locations promote different political interests through the use of this particular discourse. Unlike the search for one distinct type of rural space, there are now as many ruralities (from the valued place—images of country life, to devalued place—images of rural backwardness, stasis and decay, to the invisibility of the rural within a dominant urban based Europe) as there are different social positions from which it was constituted in discourse.

The attachment of value to a particular environment or landscape feature reflects the wider power relations and social divisions. Science, scientists, politicians, policies continue to pay attention to certain representations against others. Through their ‘scientific’ power and policy power they provide legitimacy and authority to these representations. The final result is a complex politics of representation of the environment and of rurality, a constructed imagination (Whatmore, 1990).

It seems that we can reach a general agreement that a shift from sectoral-based price support schemes applied to agricultural commodities to regional-based schemes is a positive step. That economic diversification, infrastructural improvement, rural heritage, protection of the environment and the landscape, etc. will benefit rural areas. New rural identities and cultures may emerge as new social and economic relations take shape in the European countryside. But this agreement cannot justify spatial policies which assume regional equilibrium, ‘resource endowment’ and authenticity, ignoring the negative experience of lessons from the 1950s and 1960s. It may be fashionable today to ignore the political economy of rural space and that of uneven regional development on the premise of a supposedly ‘discredited’ left-wing criticism. But issues of unequal relations between regions, economic exploitation and the ‘donor role’ of rural areas cannot be ignored if the principle of balanced development is to have a meaning. Performance of peripheral rural areas depends not only on their ‘internal’ structural characteristics but also on their articulation with the rest of the European economy and with the international market. And this articulation contains a ‘*longue durée*’ of unequal

relations in which a continuous income transfer has taken place from rural to urban areas (Hadjimichalis, 1987, 1994).

There is a need, therefore, to be concerned with identifying a new rural geography of 'ennoblement' and 'constraint' which seeks to explain why people in some areas seem quite capable of responding creatively while others do not. In other words we need a new political economy of rural space, which gets to grips with the causes and expressions of the uneven development of rural regions (Marsden, 1999). The need is for comparative alternative research across EU regions, where there is not a model for rural development, but many of which cannot be prioritized against others.

The social, economic and above all political and ideological restructuring of rural space, from agricultural production to tourism, leisure and second homes has gone so far that agriculture has disappeared. The challenge for EU agricultural policy and for farmers today is how to reintegrate agriculture into the countryside, how to put agricultural production back into the rural economy and the rural environment. In SE peripheral regions where agriculture remains a dominant sector, the challenge is its structural adjustment to the benefit of local farmers.

Rural interests had political significance in all member states during the 'productivist' phase. Hence the social objective of maintaining the farmers' standard of living, and preserving the family farm as the major feature of agriculture, which in turn had effects on rural society and space. Today the political significance of farmers is considerably reduced with the immediate effect of a 'silence' of rurality and its replacement by urban interests. This points to the political defeat of European farmers and their replacement by the more efficient—from the WTO point of view—agro-industrial food chains. Or—and this is my optimism—they can be replaced by another kind of urban–rural partnership in which inequalities and uneven development are acknowledged and farmers and non-farmers pursue radical alternatives and sustainable modes of regional development.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the organizers of the Villa Real meeting, L. Louloudis, N. Beopoulos, B. Kassimis for their comments in an earlier draft and two anonymous referees for their suggestions. Responsibility for its final form, though, remains mine.

Notes

1. An earlier version of the paper was presented as a keynote speech to the VIIIth APDR National Meeting: 'Development and Ruralities in Europe', Villa Real, Portugal, 2001.

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