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**Title:** *Urban sprawl, Rural turnaround and the changing shape of Utopia*

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**Abstract**

This paper deal with the rural-urban restructuring that postindustrial societies have undergone in the recent decades focusing on urban-to-rural migration patterns. In spite of being unexpected, these processes did not take place in an ideological vacuum context. On the contrary, as we attempt to show, they illustrate the changing social images and representations of Utopia in the postindustrial societies. If the urbe (as the place where modernity was outlined against the background of the traditional rurality as well as the arena in which the fordist modernization took place) was the central referent in the ideological configuration of the industrial society, the rural can be linked nowadays to the core issues of a new cultural-ideological postmodern configuration (nature, identity, quality of life...). On the basis of different researches in Spain we explore the social profile of newcomers and oldtimers as well as how the rural (as a symbolic referent) mediate the consumption patterns and lifemodes. The basic hypothesis is that 'the rural' became a key issue to understand the recent demographic, cultural and social processes that characterise the *postmodern experience*.

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**1. Fordist modernization, desorganised capitalism and shifting rurality**

During the last decades the migration flows between rural and urban areas have increased significantly in Spain. These processes do not alter significantly the total volume of rural and urban dwellers as long as the number of rural emigrants is similar to the number of rural immigrants. However, the turn in the residential patterns could be associated with a mayor cultural-ideological configuration of postmodern societies. If these processes and changes have been identified earlier in the North of Europe and the United States, in this paper we explore how they have taken place in Spain on the basis of different researches (Camarero, 1993; Camarero y Oliva, 1999, 2000, 2001).

The rural-urban restructuring undergone by postindustrial societies has led to a wide change in social trends and lifestyles. But, if productive restructuring and demographic

turnaround have been broadly identified and traced, as long as these processes were also unforeseen by researchers, the analyses of urban sprawl, increasing long distance commuting, rural revitalization and new residential patterns, etc. have been much more descriptive and specific than theoretical and explanatory. However, as we suggest in what follow, they do not take place isolated or in an ideological vacuum context. Moreover, we attempt to show that the way the changing images and discourses about the rural and the city (as social constructs and representations) illustrate some of the key issues of the *postmodern experience*.

It is clear that the *city* and the *countryside*, as ideological constructs historically derived, have played a key and changing role in the western social imaginary (Lefebvre, 1970; Williams, 1973; Girouad, 1985; Short, 1991). In this way, at the same time modernity was embodied in the metropolis of the end of the 19th century, *the rural* and *the urban* were studied and later theorised by distinct sociologies oriented to study differentiated societies. The city became the *scene* in which the new forces of *modernity* (the market, the masses, the traffic,...) converged and in their streets it was experienced as an original feeling (Berman, 1983; Simmel, 1903; Park, 1925). Thus, the triumphal articulation of reason, technology and progress displayed in the metropolis along the earlier decades of the 20th century could be ideologically conceptualised as the modern (urban) way of life and the city as the natural destination for the traditional (rural) society (e.g. the paradigm of *rural-urban continuum*) (Castells, 1975).

But if the *urbe* was the central referent in the ideological configuration of the modern-industrial society, nowadays is the rural (associated with nature, leisure, health, identity,...) a strategic symbolic referent in the discourses, social practices and lifestyles typical of the postmodern cultural-ideological turn. Many writers identified this fundamental change early in the North of Europe and the United States and associated it to the urban crisis of this time (Morin, 1973; Clout, 1976). Later on, these processes, the crisis of capitalist economies, the increasing deconcentration (residential, productive...) have been linked to a new context (postindustrial, postfordist, postmodern...). According to Lash and Urry (1987), the dispersed capitalist relations across regions, the diversification of territorial-spatial division of labour, the decline of industrial cities and deconcentration from the city centres to peripheral or semi-rural areas..., reshape a new *disorganized capitalism*. In a similar sense, Harvey (1989) contrasts the opposed tendencies in the *fordist modernity* (economies of scale, metropolization, centralization,...) and *flexible postmodernity* (economies of scope, counterurbanization, decentralization,...). As people became increasingly aware that the urban-industrial modernization could not be widespread in its original forms (massive waste of resources, contamination, large-scale urbanization,...) without risking the own worldwide survival and the *de-economies of agglomeration* (deindustrialization,..) became patent, the urban dystopia has provided expressive images of the city as a *pathology* of modernity (homeless, routine, violence, stress..).

On the other hand, the postindustrial societies became progressively *nomadic* societies (Attali, 1991; Bericat, 1994). This nomadism takes different forms. First, the generalisation of private car and the improvements in telecommunications erode the former limits of the living space (massive daily commuting, mobile phone...), the *time-space compression* that Harvey (ibid.) has described. Second, the increasing circulation of tourists, refugees, poor immigrants, holidaymakers,... favoured a proliferation of others and moves (Augè, 1992; 1997; Lash and Urry, 1994; Urry, 1995). Finally, the

increasing circulation of images, information, capitals, signs... have brought forth a new *space of flows* (Castells, 1996) which shape and overlap the space of places. Sociologists have seen also that *postmodern* experience shaped by the passage from a solid (heavy) modernity to a *liquid* one (Bauman, 2000). The new *glocal* context (Beck, 1986) involves a wide change in our relations with places and its social representations (identity, belonging, utopias...). (Giddens, 1990)

It is in this context where the rural habitat became a "shifting rurality" (Oliva y Camarero, 2000), a world linked to new postproductive roles (residential, recreational, environmental, symbolic,...). The post-industrial nomadism differs from the usual ways of industrial mobility (mostly rural exodus) because of the wide diversity of destinations, directions and rhythms of the moves. The unidirectional pattern (rural-to-urban) favoured a distinction between in-migration and out-migration areas but, in the postindustrial context, all places underwent both in-flows and out-flows of immigrants. If the traditional rural-to-urban migratory pattern was the result of a model of productive organisation based on economies of agglomeration that concentrate labour, capitals, services and raw materials in urban-industrial centres, most of the new migratory flows are an outcome of the increasing individualisation of consumption, opposed to the collective reproduction that characterised the fordist era.

Here, social representations, images and symbolic values of the rural acquire a central meaning in the explanation of new residential changes as long as they can be associated with a new ethic that looks for the reconstruction of privacy and the utopia out of the city. In this context of an increasing multidirectional mobility of subjects (but also of objects and images), the rural acquires significance as space rather than as society. A space of private reproduction in post-industrial societies that have turned its former dominant productive role into a postproductive one. As Mormont (1987, 1991) has pointed out, the rural is fundamentally a social category that results from the process of social division of space as long as space becomes a mirror where social actors are reflected. In this way, the rural could be studied as a category of political negotiation.

## **2. Exploring the spanish rural turnaround: counterurbanisation or urban sprawl?**

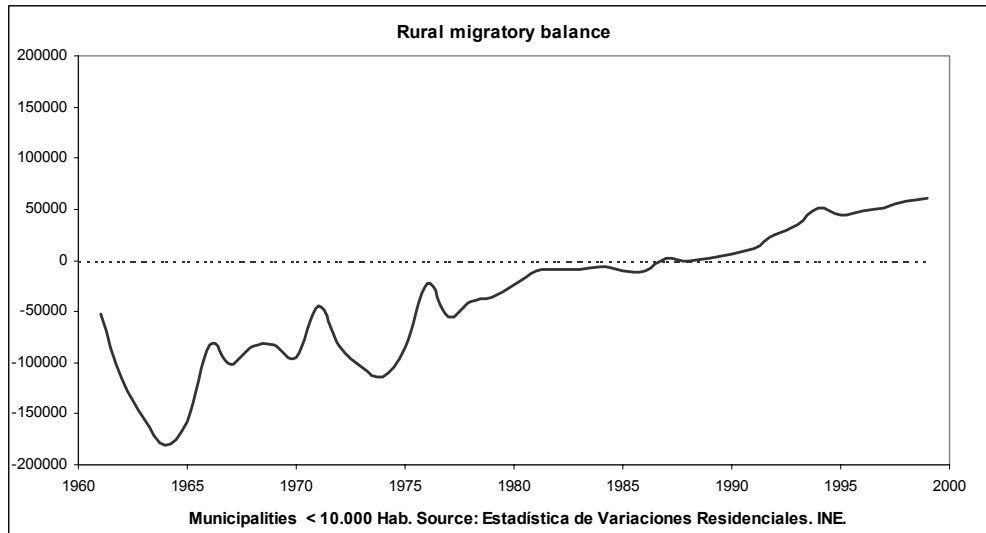
The late capitalist modernisation of the spanish economy started when Franco's autarky (a self-imposed isolation during 20 years after the civil war) petered out at the end of the 1950s and the progressive liberalization favoured a dramatically restructuring, a traditional agrarian society on the basis of rapid changes that involve hard social costs. As long as the dictatorial régime was accepted as a member of the international organizations (FAO, ONU..) and economic planners (*tecnócratas*) followed the recipe for modernisation (see Rostow, 1960), the urban-industrial areas became the places in which resources and investments had to be concentrated and organised to maximize internal economies of scale and external economies of agglomeration. A mass rural-urban exodus gave rise to a radical redistribution of population. In 1950 more than 50% of the workforce was involved in agriculture and 63% of population lived in rural areas with less than 10.000 inhabitants. By 1976 more than 5 million people had migrated to mayor cities and capitals and 2 million had moved to the most industrialised countries of North and Central Europe. The foreign investment and transfer of american technology, the arrival of North European tourists, the periodical savings remitted by emigrants.....favoured the integration in the

international capitalist economy as well as a rapid (but highly disorganised) economic growth. Many rural areas (mostly mountain and inner regions) underwent an irreversible depopulation and rurality, as a whole, became subjected to a circular cumulative process of social and economic deprivation.

However, these processes were also possible by the wide spread of new social values associated with modernity and adopted by emigrants in the North European metropolis, promoted by television (introduced in 1956) and displayed by the tourists that arrived massively every summer. These facts favoured a wide cultural and social change as well as a durable representation of the rural as outmoded and the urban as up-to-date. If the Spanish postwar novel had shown recurrently the dark side of a rough, primitive, suffocating and even brutal countryside, the cinema and television of the 1950s and 1960s (the years of *desarrollismo*) depicted the yoke, the stupidity of rural and a celebration of the urban way of life. The rural exodus was a long process. As a result, if the aim of the first immigrants to the city was to get a job, the following moves were also motivated by the wish to join themselves to the new modern way of life embodied by the industrial urbe and to conceal their rural (provincial) identity. Thus, the urbe was presented as the best place to work, reside and leisure time but the peasant migration involved also a conversion to the new modern (urban) values.

The turning point in these social trends started at the end of the 1970s. On the one hand, the political process that led to the end of dictatorship favoured a wide activity of local, regional and nationalist political parties and social movements. As a result, local identities and local past acquired an increasing interest. Illustrations of this is the revival undergone by folk music, local festivals, etc. But it was reflected also in the numerous celebrations of scientific meetings and congresses about local history, anthropology, etc. On the other hand, the proliferation of second homes in rural and natural areas and the fashion to buy a plot of land to build a house on or a vegetable garden (*huertos, parcelas*). Some of the writers at that time described the process of countryside commodification illustrated by this "*parcelación*" (to divide up into plots and buy of many places such as the mountain areas surrounding Madrid) as a "contested rurality" (Gaviria, 1971; García Bellido, 1986). Finally, the population of rural areas became increasingly post-agrarian (Camarero, 1993; Oliva, 1995). The Spanish rural turnaround was evident at the middle of the 1980s decade when rural settlements started to gain immigrants (see Figure 1).

## FIGURE 1

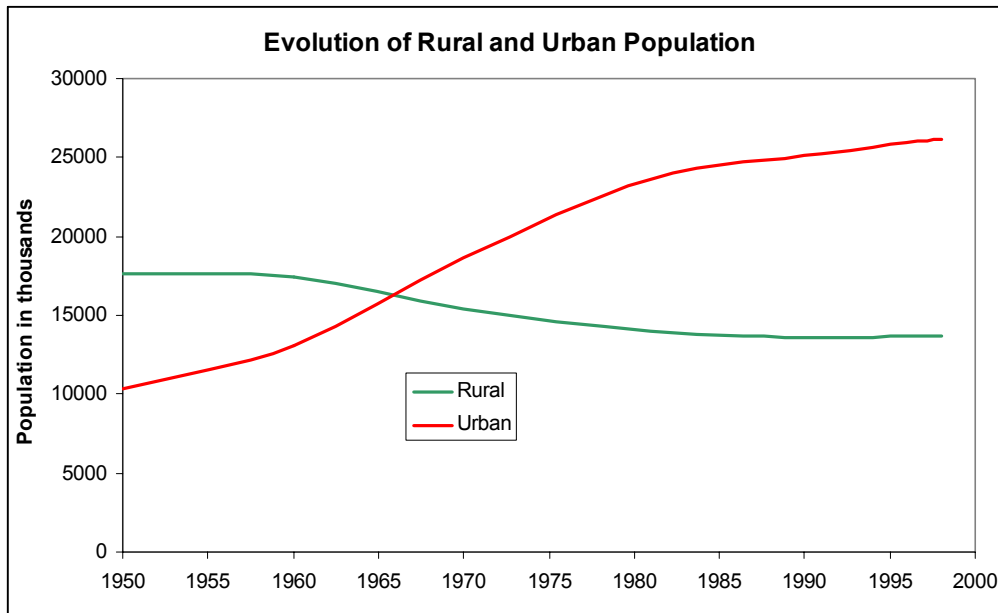


Note: Rural: Settlements with less than 10.000 inhabitants. Urban: Settlements with more than 10.000 inhabitants.

Source: Population Censuses. INE. Prepared by authors.

In a strict sense it does not mean a clear process of counterurbanisation such as it had been described by geographers. For example, Berry pointed that *"counterurbanisation is a process of population deconcentration; it implies a movement from state of more concentration to a state of less concentration"* (1976: 17). With respect to this it is important to note that in the Spanish case, turnaround does not imply deconcentration (see Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2.**



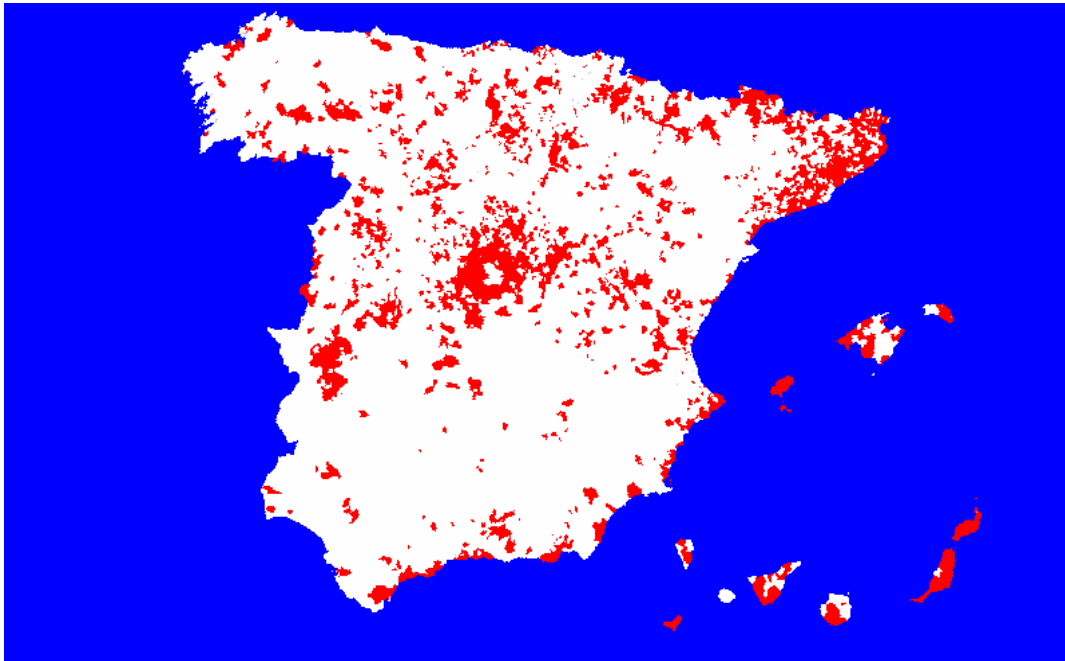
Note: Rural: Settlements with less than 10.000 inhabitants. Urban: Settlements with more than 10.000 inhabitants

Source: Populations Censuses. INE. Prepared by authors.

In absolute terms, urban to rural migration is higher than rural exodus, but the total rural population continue decreasing (see Figure 2). The cause of this paradoxical relation is the highly aged rural population as a result of the dramatic rural exodus that took place during the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. High aged population involves a considerably high mortality rate and this fact together with the rapid decline of fertility rates led to a slightly negative natural balance. The rural net migration gain is largely due to urban-rural migration. This flow is higher than the opposite move, but the moves to both destinations are very high.

At first, the social profiles of rural emigrants and rural immigrants are the typical described by the early international literature about rural turnaround. If young rural people continue migrating to urban areas looking for instruction and job opportunities, aged population and retired workers move from urban centres to rural settlements. During the 1990s this pattern resulting from the mix of typical rural exodus and retirement migration took a significative change, as we will see further. Map I shows the geographical distribution of newcomers. As we can see, the dispersed pattern is clearly noticeable. The importance of the new residents along the rural fringe of the urban hinterlands, illustrates the urban sprawl and a new dispersal model of cities. But we can note also the revitalization of selected rural areas (e.g. natural and mountain areas such as the Pyrenees Mountains). On the other hand, the coastal line is marked as an important attractor of newcomers. This geographical diversity of settlement patterns in rural immigrations shows the variety of social processes related to the Spanish rural turnaround.

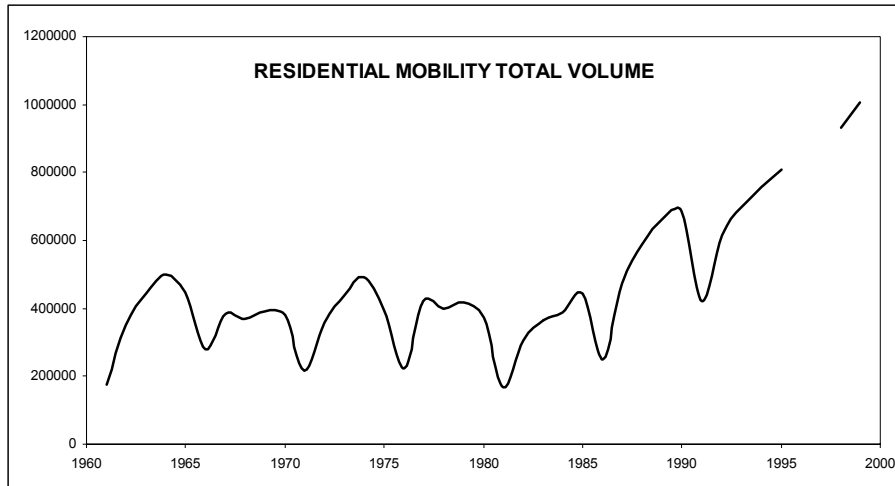
**MAP 1.**  
**Municipalities with more than 15% of new residents. (1981-91).**



Source: Population Census 1991. INE. Prepared by the authors.

Spanish researchers have identified in this increasing, accelerated and multidirectional mobility many and different kinds of residential strategies. The long distance commuting, the seasonal moves looking for recreational activities, leisure and tourism, holidaymakers, ...extend progressively the rural destinations. Apart from that, another recent processes, such as the non-European Union migration which are mostly involved in agricultural and rural labour markets, favoured an increasing social heterogeneity of rural settlements.

**FIGURE 3**



Source: Residential Variations. INE. Prepared by the authors.

### 3) The mobility effects on rural populations: the case of the Basque Country and Navarra

The evolution of migratory trends in rural villages of the Basque Country and Navarra is a good example of this restructuration (Camarero, Oliva y Sampedro, 1998; Camarero y Oliva, 2000). In these territories, situated in the north of the Iberian Peninsula, a diffused model of industrialisation remains with an important number of industrial and service workers as daily commuters. We consider the profile of rural newcomers on the basis of 1990 Population Census. In this light, we can see how these processes raise two significant changes in the rural populations. On the one hand a social polarization, on the other hand a revitalization of population. Different regional studies have shown that socio-economic profiles of newcomers and oldtimers are widely differentiated.

As we can see in Table 1 the newcomers<sup>1</sup> enjoy high economic and cultural standards and high rates of steady jobs. They are mostly engaged in the tertiary economic sector and their work place is located in metropolitan settings. On the contrary, the oldtimers have lower cultural and economic standards, higher rates of employment casualisation and they are much more dependent on the local labour market than newcomers. On the other hand, they are engaged in higher proportions in agrarian and industrial occupations. Finally, in the Basque country the newcomers are significantly young and enjoy high occupational levels. These characteristics differ from the typical profile of newcomers at the beginning of the rural turnaround process (usually formed by aged and inactive people, mostly retired).

<sup>1</sup> For statistical purposes newcomers (*new residents*) were defined here as that people aged 10 or over, that in 1991 had lived less than 10 years in the locality and those people who have been living in it during the last decade or more were defined as oldtimers (*permanent residents*).



**TABLE 1****COMPARATIVE CHARACTERISTICS BETWEEN NEW AND PERMANENT RESIDENTS**

<b>AGE</b>	Permanent Resident	New Resident
<20	14,6%	12,7%
20-30	17,4%	26,0%
30-45	22,7%	<b>36,0%</b>
45-60	18,8%	12,9%
>60	<b>26,5%</b>	12,3%
Total	100%	100%

<b>EDUCATION STANDART</b>	Permanent Resident	New Resident
Low	<b>85,2%</b>	66,4%
Medium-High	14,8%	<b>33,6%</b>
Total	100%	100%

<b>EMPLOYMENT</b>	Permanent Resident	New Resident
Occupied	38,7%	<b>46,5%</b>
Unemployed	6,7%	9,6%
Retired	<b>14,9%</b>	7,4%
Student	14,8%	13,8%
Home-worker	19,3%	19,8%
Others	5,6%	2,9%
Total	100%	100%

<b>PROFESIONAL SITUATION</b>	Permanent Resident	New Resident
Employer	3,1%	<b>5,5%</b>
Manager without salaried	25,6%	14,5%
Cooperativist	2,3%	1,3%
Family Worker	1,2%	1,0%
Permanent salaried	44,3%	<b>52,8%</b>
Eventual salaried	21,5%	22,3%
Others	2,0%	2,7%
Total	100%	100%

<b>ACTIVITY BRANCH</b>	Permanent Resident	New Resident
Agriculture	<b>22,5%</b>	5,3%
Fishing	0,9%	0,6%
Mining	2,0%	1,6%
Food Industry	6,1%	4,1%
Industry	29,4%	25,8%
Construction	8,7%	8,2%
Trade	10,0%	<b>17,5%</b>
Transports	4,5%	3,8%
Services	15,9%	<b>33,2%</b>
Total	100%	100%

SOURCE: Population Census 1991. Prepared by the authors.

We have elaborated a model to explain the causes of rural attraction for new residents. Considering the main differences of socio-economic profiles, it is possible to identify three large groups. They sum almost half of the total of the actives newcomers<sup>2</sup>. The results are showed in Table 2.

<sup>2</sup> The model has been elaborated using a segmentation analysis (CHAID) of the main census variables looking for the differences between newcomers and oldtimers. This analysis is only possible for active population. While the sum of the three profiles is 45% of the newcomers, it is lower than 15% of the oldtimers.

TABLE 2

MAIN GROUPS OF NEWCOMERS (Active)	
<u>HIGH STATUS</u>	<u>20,7%</u>
<u>YOUTH HOUSING</u>	<u>16,2%</u>
<u>MARGINALITY</u>	<u>7,0%</u>
<u>OTHERS</u>	<u>56,2%</u>
<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>100%</u>

Source: Population Census 1991. Prepared by the authors.

First, we can identify a group of high status people. It is composed of employers, managers, directives, and qualified professionals. This high incomes group, because of their better working conditions (such as flexible timetable, work at home facilities, etc.) can enjoy much more residential freedom and variable mobility patterns. This group comprises one out of five new residents. In the rural localities, they look for not only a better environmental quality of life than in the urban areas but an opportunity to construct a distinctive private life-mode alternative to the collectivised reproduction of urban areas. In this sense, they frequently move to the smallest settings (See Table 3) where the lack of collective local services is more evident. It is particularly significant the kind of house they usually choose to live: detached isolated houses with a great extension of land. A second group formed by young couples is involved in a different strategy. The expensive urban houses forces them to look for cheaper ones in the surrounding rural areas. They frequently live in flats located in villages that have good public transport and community facilities. Finally, the analysis led us to consider a third group also forced to move out to the rural settlements. This case comprises those low incomes people, immigrant groups, unemployment mature people and people that face with high employment casualisation. As in the former case they have to look for cheaper renting houses or affordable collective services (municipal taxes, parks...) in rural settlements

TABLE 3

RURAL NEWCOMERS (Actives)				
Distribution by size of township				
	<1000	1000-2000	2000-3000	3000-5000
HIGH STATUS	26,2%	25,2%	17,3%	17,6%
YOUTH HOUSING	10,9%	13,6%	20,9%	20,0%
MARGINALITY	9,0%	6,0%	6,7%	6,1%
OTHERS	53,8%	55,3%	55,1%	56,3%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Population Census 1991. Prepared by the authors.

The second effect of rural turnaround is the renovation of rural population. As we said at the beginning of the paper, the volume of rural population is decreasing caused by the negative natural balance. In this context the positive immigration rates led to an accelerated process of population change. At the end of the 1990s the immigration rates to rural habitat reached positive balances with values nearly 6 per thousand a year. However, this little gain is the result of a high population exchange. This balance is the outcome of the loss caused by the emigration of 1,7% of rural population a year. A loss

that is counterbalanced by urban-to-rural moves that rose 2,4%. This is important because this little growth point to a continuous rural population renovation. If we consider the negative natural balance in one year (for example 1998), the result of this mobility is 2,2%. But a full interpretation of this requires that the readers keep in mind that, an ideal isolated population which every year substitute 2,2% of its members, will be comprised, 30 years later, of half indigenous and and half immigrant people.

#### **4. The rural as a representation: selling and looking for utopia out of the city**

As long as the residential strategies that move people out of the city gain importance and they are progressively consider a reflect of the new cultural-ideological configuration wide spread since the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is much necessary an interpretative approach that explores what meanings (constructed in concrete socio-cultural contexts) people attach to them. Furthermore, as this cultural-ideological configuration takes place in a new *economy of signs and spaces* (Lash and Urry, *ibidem*), in which the *rural* (as a symbolic referent associated with the local, the natural, the wealth, the identity, etc.) mediates the commoditization of a wide variety of products, services and images (housing, prepared-food, tourism,...) . As Morin (*ibidem*) pointed out, both the counterculture criticism of the end of the 1960s and the generalisation of a new ecological paradigm have converged, favouring a wide commoditization of *rusticity* as a sign in the new cult of the natural elements, the nature and body, the rustic gastronomy and natural dishes, the rustic decorative fashion... Most of the elements that nowadays we use to define the *quality of life* are associated with a *rustic charm* (country landscapes, living close to nature, traditional food...). It is important to note, for example, how the masification of turism (trips to the countryside, summer holidays in villages, climbing, trekking and other open air sports..) has given away a *tourist gaze* that valorises the landscapes and the places, favouring their abstraction and redesigned as consumption objects (Urry, 1995b). As Halfacree (1994, 1995, 1997) has showed, the social representations of the *rural* are used in everyday life providing resources to the social discourses and practices, otherwise distorted and idealized. This author has considered the *ruralisation* of middle-class as a sign of the *postmodern experience*. In this sense, this abandon of the collective imaginary of emancipation that modern city once represented could be seen as a present response to the vertigo and excess of supermodernity (Vicente-Mazariegos, 1993).

We have explored in different qualitative approaches in Navarra (see Oliva, Camarero y Bidegain, 2000; Oliva y Camarero, 2002). Our interviews with newcomers and oldtimers from different rural areas highlighted how the representations of the place, the others, the local, the countryside and the city, etc, are constructed in the dicourses of these groups. In our surveys we found that there were different strategies. Some variables such as lenght of residence, age, gender, previous place of residence, income, mobility,... play a significative role in their symbolic and imaginary constructions. It is not only a move out of the city but an "emotional invest" in the city, the others, family and privacy. This subject is reflected by the housing advertising. A comparative analysis of two samples of adverts collected from two different historical periods (on the one hand, the 1950s and 1960s, on the other hand the 1990s) have showed how advertising industry worked in the past to encapsulate the urban utopia (the years of *desarrollismo*) and how nowadays works to outline the rural and suburban ones.

In this sense, we can interpret every residential strategy as psico-sociological investments in which different images of the *rural* mediate our representations of identity, nature, social distinction, privacy, etc. If we link the geographical distribution, the urban form and symbolic representations in a broad outline we can identify firstly a *dispersed ruralisation*. Here we find moves in that involves a special *neoruralism* ideology (young couples and middle class that invest in a rural house) and involves not only a move to a place but the participation in local institutions, clubs and associations). But we could sum up here another strategies such as retired people, young returned, etc. Sometimes identities (local, national...) can play a key role in all of them.

Second, a *metropolitan sprawl* (the new urban development in the valleys and villages next to the capital). This process involved distinct incomes and generational groups. We found young couples that moved in looking for low rural flat prices, middle class mature couples that invest the capital accumulated after selling the former urban flat, etc. in a terraced house. This second move frequently led to an isolation of the old village centre from the new urban developments. Because of the numerical importance of newcomers and the economic, professional and life-modes differences both between themselves and between them and *locals*, it is frequently a latent and symbolic conflictivity reflected on the process by which locality is reconstructed (local festival dates, local clubs, local regulation of urban planning and services...). The *rural* is associated here by newcomers to images that stress the local as a safety free-risk space (traffic, noise, mass...). A passage from one interview portrays quite graphically this when they described themselves as “*urban people from the city living a village life-mode in the rural*”.

Finally, a third kind of moves which claim for *isolate private utopias* could be identified. Usually founded and marketed as residential exclusive colonies located in enclaves separated from any village, they are frequently advertised as luxury housing development complexes that include sport and recreative facilities such as golf club or high standart sport facilities. They are placed usually in natural environments or close to pieces of cultural heritage (such as a castle or a palace-house) and attract high income groups and proffessional service class. This is a move that involves a much more calculated solitude. On the one hand, because of their economic freedom of election. On the other hand, because it is symbolically legitimated as a strategy of social distinction and claim for an exclusive utopia out of the city. It is clear that the identity of social class and lifestyle play a major role here than in the rest of cases. This is not a move to "the rural", but a move to "the natural". This is not a move to a place but a private utopia. It does not look for a local identity but differentiating oneself and the reaffirmation of a distinct life-style. The *rural* is replaced here by the signs of nature, healthy, idleness and social distinction (e.g. going in for open-air sports like golf). It is not just a desire to live in a bucolic and idyllic rural community but the celebration of the own personal success. The collective, emancipatory utopia of modern city is dead, but it is possible to construct a new, private utopia, as a distinctive "back to the land".

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