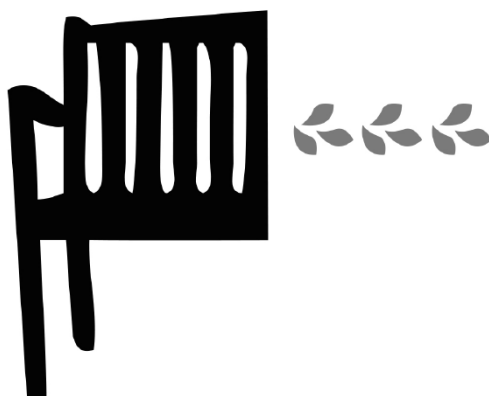


*Hidden Disparities in Rural Transition:
Cosmopolitanism, Socioeconomic
Decline and Accesibilities*



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DOI: 10.4422/ager.2021.10

ager

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

Hidden Disparities in Rural Transition: Cosmopolitanism, Socioeconomic Decline and Accessibilities

Highlights:

1. Rural depopulation also occurs in a context of sociological renewal.
2. Daily mobility shapes the social sustainability of the rural world.
3. The rural-urban gap defines unequal citizenships in current society.

Abstract: The characterization of the new rurality, as a category to differentiate the current rural life from the previous agrarian situations, is still an open debate. Despite the substantial changes that rural areas currently experience it is not clear what it means sociologically. In the last decades there has been a continuous need to adjust the analytical categories to the changing realities of rural world. Some seminal works tried to explain the deagrarianization as a result of the restructuring of regional economies by new productive and territorial logics. The emphasis was placed on the economic relations. However, in the context of the postmodern societies, these analyses forgot the cultural change and new patterns of consumption that defined rurality as commodity. Later on, other issues have been included in the theorization of rural change such as globalization and social diversification. The paper explores this last transition of rural societies by looking at the Spanish case and focussing on three main processes: the demographic transfer of vital generations from rural areas to urban centers, the cosmopolitanism and social diversification, and the role of mobility for the articulation of rural life-modes. The findings show the disparities underlying these rural changes and the need to review the theoretical approaches.

Keywords: Socio-territorial cohesion, depopulation, social inequalities, accessibility.

Las desigualdades latentes de la transición rural: cosmopolitanismo, declive socioeconómico y accesibilidades

Ideas clave:

1. La despoblación rural se produce también en un contexto de renovación sociológica.
2. La movilidad cotidiana conforma la sostenibilidad social del mundo rural.
3. La brecha rural-urbana define ciudadanías desiguales en la sociedad actual.

Resumen: La caracterización de la nueva ruralidad, como categoría para diferenciar la vida rural actual de las situaciones agrarias anteriores, sigue siendo un debate abierto. A pesar de los cambios sustanciales que experimentan actualmente las zonas rurales, no está claro qué significa sociológicamente. En los últimos decenios ha habido una continua necesidad de ajustar las categorías analíticas a las cambiantes realidades del mundo rural. Algunos trabajos seminales trataron de explicar la desagrarianización como resultado de la reestructuración de las economías regionales por nuevas lógicas productivas y territoriales. Se hizo hincapié en las relaciones económicas. Sin embargo, en el contexto de las sociedades posmodernas,

estos análisis olvidaron el cambio cultural y las nuevas pautas de consumo que definían la ruralidad como mercancía. Posteriormente se han incluido otras cuestiones en la teorización del cambio rural, como la globalización y el crecimiento de la diversidad y heterogeneidad social. El trabajo explora esta última transición de las sociedades rurales a partir del análisis del caso español y centrándose en tres procesos principales: la transferencia demográfica de generaciones vitales de las zonas rurales a los centros urbanos, el cosmopolitismo y la diversificación social, y el papel de la movilidad para la articulación de los modos de vida rurales. Los resultados muestran las disparidades subyacentes en estos cambios rurales y la necesidad de revisar las perspectivas teóricas.

Palabras clave: Cohesión socio-territorial, despoblación, desigualdades sociales, accesibilidad.

Received: 28th May 2020
Returned for revision: 8th December 2020
Accepted: 27th May 2021

How to cite this paper: Camarero, L. A., Oliva, J. (2021). Hidden Disparities in Rural *Transition: Cosmopolitanism, Socioeconomic Decline and Accessibilities*. *AGER: Revista de Estudios sobre Despoblación y Desarrollo Rural (Journal of Depopulation and Rural Development Studies)*, (32), 65-92. <https://doi.org/10.4422/ager.2021.10>

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1. The rural question: development, lagging regions and empty peripheries

The rural question, which ranges from the organization of the territory to its social sustainability, continues to be a main issue of concern in the post-global societies. While the criteria of cohesion between territories in planning and development policies, have levelled out certain rural-urban disparities, the gap regarding accessibility to opportunities and services remains a verifiable reality. Furthermore, the gradual integration of local resources and activities -such as agri-food and tourism industries- in the global markets and productive chains, entails selective reorganizations of regional economies. As a result, many areas become relegated to the background as redundant territories and societies. In this context, the mobilities of pendular workers, transnational immigrants, temporary residents, etc., complete the picture of a rural transition that need to be explored.

Despite the experiences of rural development, the dominant economic paradigm continues to be supported on the economies of agglomeration and density that constitute important generators of rural depopulation. The concentration of population, activities, knowledge, and innovations in selected areas, as a driving mechanism to increase growth and reduce operating costs, involves diverse externalities. Some of them are recognized by the society, such as environmental pollution, but others, such

as the polarization of socioeconomic dynamism and the undermine of territorial cohesion, have usually been forgotten and their social effects underrated. Rodríguez-Pose (2018) has metaphorically named the space between the interstices of the attractor poles as the "*territories that do not matter*", to highlight political oblivion to which they are relegated in addition to their economic lagging. In the same vein, Guilluy (2019) connects this socio-territorial exclusion with the neo-liberal economic model developed during the last change of century and the recent political implications of this popular peripheries in different countries.

The emptying of large territories is not a phenomenon particular to the Spanish case but an issue increasingly noticeable globally. Li *et al.* (2019) warn about the increasing dependence of rural areas on urban economies and the expulsion of these regions from the knowledge economy. Their analysis, which addresses depopulation throughout the planet, points to emptying as the predestined future for the rural areas. Moreover, scholars such as Le Tournau (2020) note the importance and extension of the sparsely populated regions in the social and territorial fabric of the countries.

The economic and political centrality acquired by the metropolitan areas because of their economies of scale and global connections makes the rural regions satellites, pushing these territories to a peripheral status in relation to development flows, but also regarding the principle of citizen equality. A symptom of this is the proliferation of a wide and varied spectrum of social demands for solution of territorial disadvantages, that amplify social inequalities. Consequently, the issue of depopulation has become the flagship for territories that denounce a kind of state neglect regarding the delivery of public services, resources allocation and even the abandonment of private operators in the provision of basic services.

Many of these territories accumulate unemployment and under-employment problems, as well as social decapitalization. It can be also found in the agrarian counties that became the last link of the value extraction chains and face conditions of strong dependence on the agents of global distribution. In general, rural regions suffer deep demographic imbalances due to ageing, high dependency rates and masculinization (Hoggart, 1997; Elizalde-San Miguel & Díaz-Gandasegui, 2016), at the same time they absorb the surplus of international migration flows.

In southern Europe, the demographic transition towards ageing societies and the impact of the austerity policies in rural regions have been particularly important (Döner *et al.*, 2020). The erosion of the rural welfare because of the budgetary constraints challenged the future of many areas where ageing and poverty add to disad-

vantages of the habitat to configure lagging regions and even remote monitored ruralities. Regions threatened of became excluded peripheries under the influence of dynamics that reshape distances and disconnections in this transition.

In modern societies, rural change has been theorized from a variety of perspectives. The ideology of Fordist modernisation explained it over the last century as an evolution along a continuum that entailed the integration of isolated societies through urbanising processes. Since the 1980s, rural change has been studied as a territorial and productive restructuring and later on, the cultural turn provided an accurate understanding about the revalorisation of the rural in the new economies of signs and spaces emerging at the turn of the century. Finally, the globalization of mobilities, such as labour migration and tourism, and the 2008 financial crisis, has revealed a rural world particularly sensitive to global processes.

This paper expands from the hypothesis that ageing, social diversification, deagrarianization, and mobilities define a fundamental transition towards uncertainty rural futures. A shift that many rural societies start at a disadvantage because of the rural-urban divide, which we explore and try to highlight in the following sections based on an analysis of the Spanish case. As a second working hypothesis, we stress that challenges posed by these changes required for strength the rural resilience that currently is supported by the hybridization with the urban and the global.

We explore three issues that allow us to glimpse the ongoing rural transition¹. First, we analyse depopulation as an increasing range of problems that have to do with socio-territorial inequalities. Next, we show how an intense process of social renewal takes place, paradoxically, at the same time. Finally, we consider the fundamental role that mobility plays for social sustainability and citizen equality. The findings suggest the need to anticipate the social consequences of these changes, to rethink the analytical categories and implement a rural governance beyond neoliberal recipes.

1• An early version of the approach developed here was presented in the Panel on "Rural global transition: From agricultural villages to new ruralities", Rural History 2019 Conference, *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*, Paris. The analysis and results are based in findings from the project "Focus on rural gap: accessibility, mobilities and social inequalities -RURAL ACCESS-" (PID2019-111201RB-I00), funded by Spanish Program of Research, Development and Innovation.

2. Reestructuring, commodification and globalization of the rural

The continuous changes faced by the rurality in modern societies has redefined its functions and development-oriented policies (European Commission, 1988; OECD, 2003, 2006). This transformation of the rural accelerated the erosion of analytical categories, thus forcing the need to overcome the traditional meanings offered by agriculture and the assumptions about its rapid dissolution under the urban modernization. Since the 1970s, migratory movements towards rural destinations began to be identified in many countries, involving diverse sociological profiles in pursuit of suburban quality of life, environments for new life projects and to return to the place of origin (Berry, 1976; Champion, 1989; Kayser, 1990; Camarero, 1992; Buller and Hoggart, 1994).

At the same time, the productive decentralization configured in the 80s new regional and international divisions of labour (Massey, 1984; Storper and Scott, 1986; Lash and Urry, 1987) and local development experiences challenged the old Fordist model of work organization (Brusco, 1982; Piore and Sabel, 1984). Local economies usually oriented by the managing of their natural resources became then valued for the competitive advantages of their human resources. Additionally, the rural world was "de-agrarianizing" as this activity assumed post-productive functions and became integrated into the transnational agri-food industry. Furthermore, many rural residents no longer worked in the locality or depended on their activities, and long-distance commuting sometimes replaced previous migration strategies. The generalization of the personal car facilitated a greater porosity of territory and an increasing accessibility to outside labour markets.

The traditional approaches prevented theorizing these rural changes in a comprehensive way because of their taken for granted assumptions. As a result, its scope and relevance could not be adequately assessed until pioneering contributions about the *rural restructuring* perspective provided a whole understanding of interlinked economic, territorial, and social processes involved in rural change (Rees, 1984; Urry, 1984; Marsden *et al.*, 1990). However, as it placed the focus on the productive and class dimensions, neglected the symbolic and cultural issues underlying rural change.

New consumption patterns, lifestyles, and economies like tourism revalued intangible rural aspects in the postmodern societies. The increasing *commodification of the rural* imageries, such as the of rural charm and rural idyll, had been early high-

lighted by some scholars (Morin, 1973; Burgess, 1982; Goldman and Dickens, 1983). Nevertheless, it had not been addressed yet a comprehensive view of the significance of these symbolic aspects. It was traced later in the social narratives that struggled for defining the rural (Mormont, 1987, 1991) and the meanings circulating as dematerialized goods in the new *economies of signs and space* (Lash and Urry, 1994). Since then, the resources available to rural regions multiplied, from landscape and heritage to health and identity (Cloke, 1993; Perkins, 2006). Eventually, the approaches mature in rural studies as a "cultural turn" that addressed the rural in social representations underpinning residential strategies, social discourses, and ideologies (Halfacree, 1993; Marsden *et al.*, 1993; Phillips, 1993).

In the same vein, against the materialistic view of rurality as a fact determined by the environmental conditions themselves, Halfacree (2007) analysed it as the result of the production of rural space. Following the scheme that Lefebvre (1974) developed to explain the production of urban space, Halfacree (2007) provides an interpretive approach that comprises the locality, the representations, and the everyday lives. Rurality is produced by the social structure, the identities, and the social practices. These issues would be addressed in a profusion of subsequent works broadening the perspective on rural change, to deal with topics such as the "rural gentrification" and the post-productive economies.

The interpretive framework is crucial to understand the sociological nature of rurality and its insertion in the global urban context. The "cultural turn" allows us to understand that there is a process of rural re-signification and attribution of new meanings. Unlike productivism economies, such as the strategic agricultural enclaves of intensive production and high need of labour, the territories that home the so-called post-productive economies dealt with image, identity and place-branding as the main values for an economy of services (Figueiredo and Raschi, 2012). Placed in between these two poles could be found other hybrid scenarios, like retirement or second residence areas, dormitory towns, etc. All of them have been included in the landscape of the *new rurality*, the name suggested by Kayser (1990) to define a rurality that emerges dispossessed of its subsistence conditions and rebuilt with strong appeal.

More recently, the increasing interrelations of the rural with urban and global processes has led to emphasize the role that mobilities play in its sustainability and transformation. Once again, the "mobilities turn" reveals a better understanding of the current rural change (Urry, 2005; Bell and Osti, 2010) and the erosion of former analytical categories. For example, the early conceptualization of the 'rural turnaround' in highly industrialised countries led to uncritically use of the same concepts and its implicit assumptions in very different cultural contexts. Conversely, further findings

have showed the diversity of sociological profiles, destinations and motives involved in the migrations to the rural (Mitchel, 2004; Halfacree, 2008; Milbourne, 2007; Gkartzios, 2013; Champion and Graeme, 2014; Stockdale, 2015). As another example, the transnational labour migrations to rural areas reveals a rural complexity that requires a wider analytical framework (Kasimis *et al.* 2010; Camarero *et al.*, 2011; Halfacree and Rivera, 2011; Woods, 2016).

Regarding daily mobility, it has become the main resource for accessing opportunities and services in the rural areas. In this respect, the "mobilities turn" shifts the focus from locally circumscribed social relations to new ways of living, social justice and subjectivities constructed by the movement (Canzler *et al.*, 2008; Kaufman, 2017; Sheller, 2018). While those areas connected to the metropolitan dynamics underwent a sustained growth, the more disconnected and remote ones experience a demographic and economic decline (Cheshire *et al.*, 2012; Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, 2017).

The "rural gap" has been highlighted by the impact of the last crisis on rural societies. We can consider the rural gap refers to the inability of rural regions to match the standards of quality of life, services, and opportunities with urban areas. It can be defined as the cumulative effect of different processes (demographic, economic) and disparities (accessibilities). The rationalization of public services has been a general policy in Europe since the end of the last century (Woods, 2005; Moseley and Owen, 2008) and the disconnection of many regions from urban processes has favoured opposite patterns of demographic evolution in rural Europe (OECD, 2016). The distribution of welfare policies based on aggregate demand criteria, in contrast to territorial equilibrium, implies unequal access by the rural population to public services (Shucksmith and Chapman, 1998; Shucksmith and Brown, 2016; ESPON, 2017; Bock, 2019).

As a consequence, the continuous loss of young people and particularly young women erodes the demographic potential of many rural areas. A decisive disadvantage in the current context of knowledge economies that increase the innovation processes of urban areas and the marginalization of the rural (Li *et al.*, 2019). The future of rural areas can be defined by its social capital. A concept that condenses the overlap of economic and social relations in real life and has been considered a predisposing factor for local development (Coleman, 1988; Putman, 1995; Portes, 1998; Garrido and Moyano, 2002). Furthermore, the lack in social capital prevents them to compete for development projects and funds, as stated by the Cork 2.0 Declaration (European Commission, 2016).

Therefore, it can be noticed an evolution in the approaches to rural change from the traditional rural-urban dichotomy and modernization to more conclusive perspectives addressing the increasing hybridization of the rural with the urban and

the global. An approach that allows to understand how rural societies change not in a passive way but rather through processes that entails negotiation and re-signification (Woods, 2007; Camarero and Oliva, 2016) and why theorize the ongoing transition became crucial for the rural studies agenda.

3. *Objectives and methodology*

The vitality of rural areas is closely related to the possibilities that these environments offer for the development of life projects. The Spanish case allows us to explore the current rural transition through the analysis of some key processes that will configure their future in the midterm. Different indicators are studied to illustrate the complexity underlying demographic decline, vicious circles of poverty and deprivation, sociological diversification as well as the role played by mobility for the rural sustainability.

This methodological approach seeks to put into dialogue different dimensions of rural transition that are usually addressed separately in spite they are rather symptoms of the same restructuring process. To this aim it is analysed the extraction of demographic vitality from rural areas, the cosmopolitan renewal of its population and the centrality of mobility in the articulation of the rural life. The information used comes from the sources and databases provided by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (Population Census, Continuous Household Survey), Eurostat (Labour Force Survey, Living Conditions Survey) and the Spanish Directorate-General of Traffic.

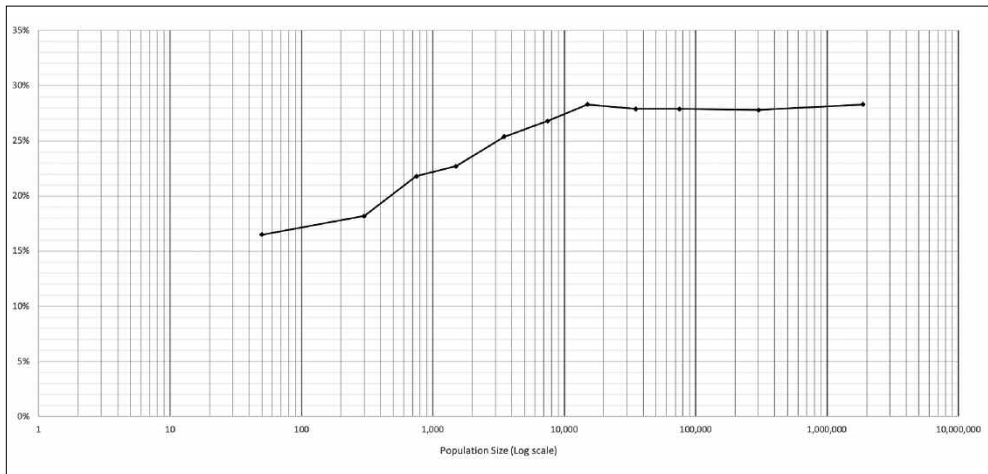
The research looks at key indicators to explore how youth decapitalization, social diversity and mobility configure the rural gap. These selected metrics outline crucial disparities and changes, such as the population between 25 and 34 years old; the population with completed university studies; the households with very low employability; the foreign workers in agriculture; the children by national origin; the daily commuting; the index of motorization and the households with car.

Because of the research limitation the results do not allow an extensive review of all the issues involved in the "rural gap". The aim of this work is not to develop such an in-depth examination. However, the analysis and data show the structural transition that rural societies are experiencing and provide a ground for the understanding of the impact on the territories' mid-term futures.

4. Results: rural depopulation, social diversification and mobility

An important factor in determining the rural future is the ability to support the population in a vital and economic sense. The proportion of people in central ages is crucial. They are the ones who concentrate the potential of social and demographic capital of the community. For analytics purposes we can consider demographic vitality about the group of the population aged 25 to 44, which concentrate the highest activity and employment rates, as well as the reproductive capacity. As we can see, the figure 1 shows the contraction of rural areas in terms of demographic and social capital. While municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants record close to a third of its population within this group, in the smaller habitats this proportion falls to a quarter and even below a fifth in the most rural areas.

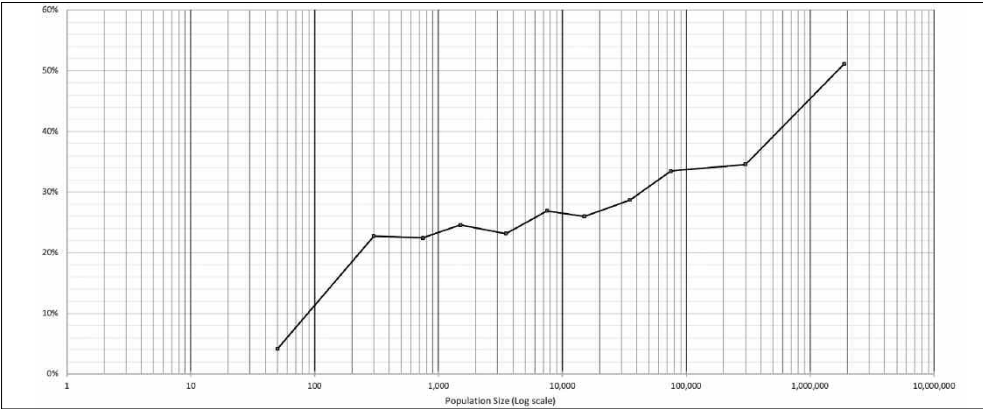
Figure 1.
Percentage of population between 25 and 44 years by size of municipality. 2019



Source: Continuous Household Survey, 2019. INE. Own elaboration

In line with this process that transfers the vital capabilities of rural regions to the metropolitan areas, the concentration of talent in the later is also evident -see figure 2-. While university students are around 20 % in rural municipalities these figures double in large urban centres. Accordingly, the current depopulation process led to a strong imbalance in human resources and innovation capacity. There is a strong territorial inequality in terms of knowledge that makes it difficult for local economies to insert themselves into economic flows. The feedback between emigration, knowledge and social capital generates circles of decline that are transmitted in the long run in circles of social exclusion.

*Figure 2.
Percentage of population with completed university studies by
size of municipality. People aged 25-44 years. 2019*



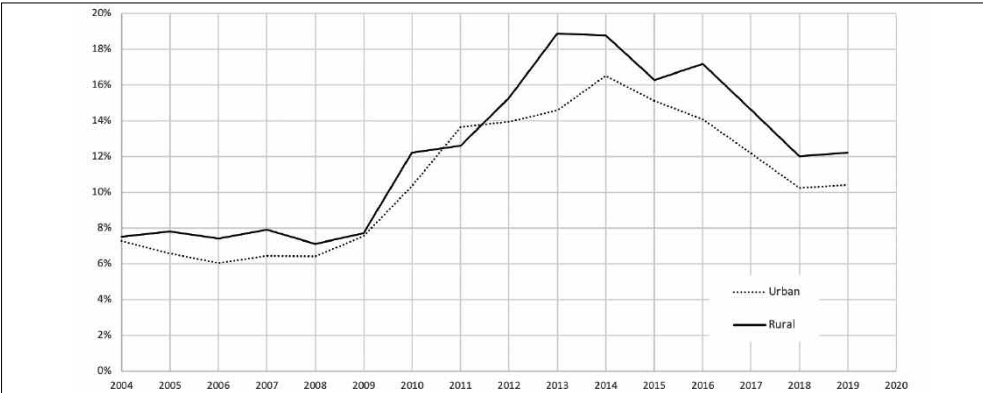
Source: Continuous Household Survey. 2019. INE. Own elaboration

Different studies coincide in pointing out that the European areas in terms of depopulation show a higher dropout rate and a higher proportion of people at risk of poverty (Delivorias and Sabbati, 2005). A relevant indicator that belongs to AROPE² is

2• Abbreviation for the expression At Risk of Poverty and / or Exclusion is the reference indicator for monitoring poverty in the 2020 Strategy and defines the population "at risk of poverty or social exclusion" as the total number of people at "risk of poverty", "Severe material poverty" or living in "homes with very low or low intensity of work".

the number of households with low employment intensity³. The economic recession following 2008 led to a general increase in these households during the period 2009-2014 (see figure 3). Spanish rural areas reached very high rates during the crisis, about a fifth of households did not achieve minimum employment rate. Although since 2014 the employment rates previously to the crisis were slowly recovering, the rural-urban differences were not reduced in terms of exclusion. The crisis deepened and broadened the rural gap that concentrates precariousness and de-skilling in rural areas reducing drastically both their possibilities of integration into the information economies and their ability to articulate their own development.

*Figure 3.
Percentage of people in households with very low employment intensity. Evolution 2004-2019*



Source: Income and Living Conditions Survey (EU-SILC). Eurostat. Own elaboration.

In urban areas, the categories of the degree of urbanization classification corresponding to Cities, Towns and Suburbs have been included.

In addition to the move of vital generations out of rural territories, the changes experimented by agrarian activity has had an important impact on the modes of eco-

³ People from 0 to 59 years old who live in households in which their members of working age did less than 20 % of their total work potential in the year prior to the interview.

conomic activity. By one hand, the initial decline of the family farm, followed by the decoupling of the local population from agriculture are sources of diversification and hybridization of rural identities, strongly supported by the new opportunities for mobility. On the other hand, the emergence of agricultural enclaves has attracted new workers from abroad. As we can note (figure 4), since the beginning of this century, there has been a significant increase in the number of foreign workers in agriculture. Nowadays, they constitute near of the fourth part of the agricultural workers -23,7 % of those working in agriculture in 2019, annual average-.

This foreign population does not manage to settle in rural regions or in the agricultural sector, and their employment and residential strategies are based upon mobility. Generally, they opt for peri-urban residences that allow them to move about more easily so that they can combine seasonal and temporary work in agriculture, tourism, and construction. As we can see, the mobility is changing the relationship between agrarian activity and territory. Near half of the family farmers are living in urban municipalities, and most of them are traveling daily from their urban residences to rural agricultural holdings, in the opposite direction that is defined by traditional commuting movements. This set of processes highlights the increasing separation of agriculture activities from local labour markets and their high dependence on global labour markets.

Figure 4.
Foreign workers in agriculture (1987-2020)



Source: Labour Force Survey. INE. Own elaboration.

Focussing on the social diversity that is produced by international immigration in rural areas, and their impact in the medium term, we have examined the composition of new rural generations by national origin. Table 1 shows an estimate of the combined effect of birth and immigration / regrouping of children under 13 in rural areas. This age group corresponds to the so-called "second generation immigrants" - those under six years of age, who have hardly known the country of origin- plus the group constituted by those who arrive between the ages of six and 13, called the "1.5 generation" (Rumbaut, 2004) because they are not immigrants themselves, nor do they strictly belong to the second generation. The balance of those born in Spain plus those regrouped constitute the group of minors that remain and make up the new generations of rural people. This estimate allows us to see the incidence of change in the next generations of rural inhabitants.

Table 1.

Generations of minors -children under 13 years old- by national origin and habitat size

	Spanish nationality from birth	Non-Spanish nationality at birth	Born to a foreign-born mother	Percentage of foreign origin
<500 inhabitants	48,715	6,551	10,079	25.4 %
501-1,000 inhabitants	70,353	10,197	8,520	21.0 %
1,001-2,000 inhabitants	97,548	7,401	9,499	14.8 %
2,001-5,000 inhabitants	276,790	25,160	36,664	18.3 %
5,001-10,000 inhabitants	440,780	44,866	52,425	18.1 %
>10,000	3,524,581	599,481	681,548	26.7 %
Spain	4,458,767	693,656	798,735	25.1 %

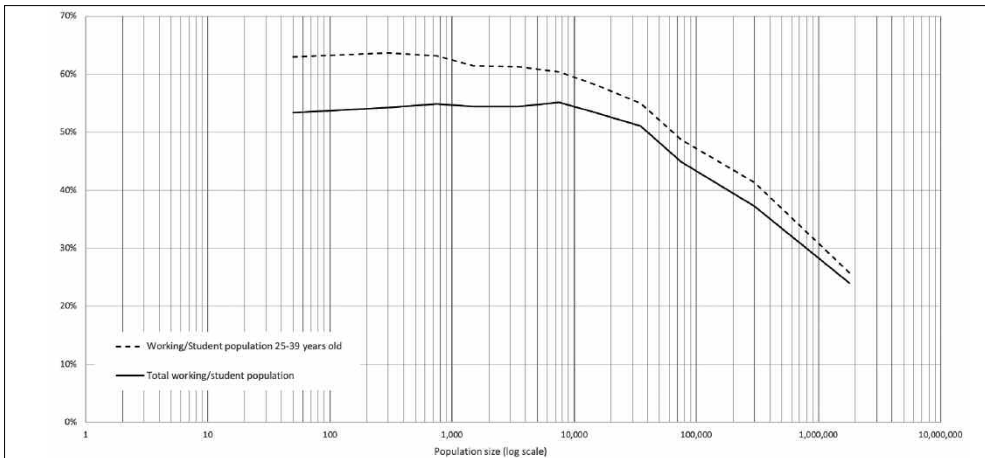
Source: Continuous Household Survey. INE. 2019. Own elaboration.

For Spain as a whole, we have estimated that 25 % of children under the age of 13 are originate from outside the country -table 1-. These figures are higher in urban areas but the weight in rural areas is important, especially in smaller municipalities strata. In municipalities with less than 1,000 inhabitants, almost a quarter of minors have been born or are the children of families from abroad. The new genera-

tion of rural children who have foreign ancestry is well-identifiable numerically and proportionally over the whole.

Sociologically, Spanish rural areas have become not only more diverse but highly interconnected with urban dynamics. The significance of mobilities such as commuting to work, stays outside for training, displacements to second homes, etc., define the daily rural life. For example, the economically active population is highly dependent on non-local labour markets. As data census show in small municipalities -less than 10,000 inhabitants- more than a half of working population move daily for work to another place. For the central age working group -25-39 years- the rate of commuting is near to two thirds. Only one of each three is working in their residence locality (See figure 5).

Figure 5.
Daily commuting rate by population size



Source: Population Census 2011. INE. Own elaboration.

The inverse commuting from city and towns to rural areas is relevant too. Using census data, we have estimated that the in-out balance is positive⁴ for municipalities

⁴ From rural to urban daily commuters are 577 thousands, and from urban to rural 778 thousands. The balance is positive for municipalities less than 10,000 inhabitants in thousands.

less than 10,000 inhabitants. The impact of urban commuters in rural areas are relevant: more than one of each four jobs in rural areas are held by urban residents.

As we can see, the rural inhabitant's participation in the activity is carried out through great daily mobility. The personal car has become the main resource to live in sparsely populated areas and remote rurality. As can be seen in Table 2 the Motorization Vehicle Index, that indicated the number of passage cars per 1,000 people, increase in the lower municipal strata. A similar distribution of ratios can be seen in relation to male drivers.

Table 2.
Vehicle Motorization Index and drivers by size population strata, 2015

	Drivers Men %	Drivers Women %	Motorization Index
< 2,000 of inhabitants	69.7	42.8	623
2,000 – 5,000 of inhabitants	70.1	47.2	553
5,000 – 10,000 of inhabitants	69.2	49.2	501
10,000 – 20,000 of inhabitants	68.1	48.8	492
20,000 – 50,000 of inhabitants	66.5	47.7	473
50,000 – 100,000 of inhabitants	65.2	47.2	464
100,000 – 500,000 of inhabitants	67.0	46.1	457
500,000 – 1,000,000 of inhabitants	68.4	44.7	434
> 1,000,000 of inhabitants	63.2	41.0	423
All the municipalities	67.1	46.3	479

Source: Dirección General de Tráfico, 2015. Own Elaboration.

This generalization of the personal car has changed the keys for rural development and sustainability bringing the territory porous and easier the access to opportunities (such as jobs, qualification, and social networks). The difficulties for implementing efficient public transportation systems in sparsely populated areas and its gradual erosion because of the rationalization of rural services have made the car a main, and frequently exclusive resource, to achieve accessibility, particularly for some types of household, as shows Table 3.

Table 3.
Proportion of households with car by urbanization degree

	One- person households	One- person households aged over 64	Several adults households	Households with children
Sparsely-populated areas	76.7 %	17.7 %	83.1 %	94.7 %
Densely populated areas	66.3 %	19.7 %	77.2 %	87.1 %

Source: Living conditions Survey. INE. 2012. Own elaboration.

5. Discussion. The rural transition: processes and paradoxes

In terms of life chances, rural habitat continues to maintain notable disparities (Hite, 1997; Malecki, 2003). The Spanish case illustrates how this gap has become a crucial challenge for their future. Insofar as citizenship is recognized through the place of residence, to live in the rural involves undermined access to conditions of collective well-being. Additionally, the impact of austerity policies following 2009 crisis have been a major issue for rural areas in Southern Europe. In Spain almost half of the municipalities face the problems of depopulation, including some inland towns and regional capitals that show a constant emigration of the youth trained people (Sáez *et al.*, 2016).

As we have seen, demographic imbalances excludes many areas from reaching a critical mass of youth and social capital. Moreover, the out-migration increase in trained and qualified people, who has fewer opportunities for employment locally. All these groups could play a critical role in the articulation of the territory and rural society. The potential of local societies both to promote or to adapt to changes depends largely on maintaining the social capital in the territory. While regions with appropriate social capital increase their chances and social well-being of their population, decapitalization increase the risks of poverty and exclusion. In the Spanish rural areas these situations increased considerably before stabilizing since 2013 at more than a third of its residents.

The vicious circle established by the inequalities in training, emigration and disqualification of local labour markets eventually shape environments where formative

careers and educational paths for employability become devalued. If there are no quality jobs, training is dismissed as an opportunity. This is well illustrated by the high weight of early school leaving in many rural regions.

The combined impacts of these downward spirals amplify the "rural gap" (Camarero and Oliva, 2019). Different cumulative and vicious circles of decline exacerbate rural disparities and undermine the opportunities (European Commission, 2008, 2011). The circle of demographic decline deteriorates the possibility of revitalization, increasing youth migration, ageing and masculinization. The circle of accessibility reduces the residential attractiveness and economic potential. The training circle involves low educational levels, disqualification, and lower employability. Lastly, the circle of the precariousness of local employment and professional out-migration entails loss of talent.

We have also shown that, within the current process of rural depopulation there is an important sociological renewal. Several demographic processes converge in the second rural depopulation such as aging, low birth rates, youth emigration and, in the case of Spain, stop of international immigration because of the crisis. Since the Spanish agriculture became integrated into the European Economic Community and the third agri-food regime (McMichael, 2005), production was left in the hands of major industrial groups and family farmers were asked to reduce their production, thus reducing the CAP's costs in subsidies, and freeing up funds for rural development. In the new agri-food regime production become increasingly independent of rural populations and rural areas have attracted foreign labour force not just for farming but for all the activities. Depopulation and ageing of rural population favoured the settlement of immigrant population.

It is remarkable to note the important cultural change and renewal produced by these flows. Rural populations are fewer but increasingly different. The rural policies should take this social diversity into consideration as it will increase when new generations become adults. Spanish rurality is an increasingly cosmopolitan rurality and multiculturalism offers an enormous potential to innovation processes recapitalization. However, it is a phenomenon usually absent from the imaginary of rural development.

Finally, the socio-technical configuration of different maps of accessibilities and provision of services may give rise to smart or lagging regions, but also shrinking territories. As Krugman (2019) noted regarding the United States, regions where decline in opportunities configure a special typology of poverty, such as the "white ghettos of deep America". The current rural transition poses major challenges related

to mobilities and how socio-technical configuration of the territories favour the rural-urban hybridisation of some and neglect others.

For example, the fluidification of social life facilitated by the ICTs and automobility differentiates rural societies. The corollary of poor accessibility is a selective depopulation that expels youth, women, qualified groups, and families with children who require widespread access to services. Accessibility to opportunities, public amenities and collective resources is mediated through the communication technologies and mobility. Both modes have become crucial to cope with the spatial and temporal requirements of daily life in modern society (Milbourne and Kitchen, 2014; Oliva and Camarero, 2019). Easy high speed internet access improves the local attractiveness and new forms of mobility (as a service, on-demand, shared) increase the quality of rural life. As a result, social structures, inequalities and opportunities are being created around the socio-technical configurations of the rural transition.

On the one hand, the digital divide relates to inequalities in personal skills and reliable connectivity. According to the Spanish Economic and Social Council by 2019 only 30 % of rural areas have broadband coverage of 30 Mbps and just 15.8 % reach a speed of 100 Mbps. The diffusion of ICTs would allow, under universal availability and adequate skills, the accessibility to many services such as shopping, education, and administrative process.

On the other hand, the disadvantaged in mobility is defined by public transport systems and the requirements for use a car –such as driver license, vehicle ownership, skills and capacities–. For these reasons, the issue of mobility led to greater and more subtle forms of social inequalities in rural areas. Some groups became dependent and vulnerable, such as teenagers, woman and aged because of the lack of autonomy (Farrington and Farrington, 2005; Farmer *et al.*, 2011; Committee of the Regions, 2014) and still other –such as poor– face serious risks of discrimination because of the strong interconnections between physical mobility and social mobility in modern society (Kauffman *et al.*, 2004; Canzler *et al.*, 2008). For example, car ownership has been repeatedly considered a determining factor for poverty (European Commission, 2008, 2011).

6. Conclusions

The exploration of the rural transition in Spain shows the gradually transnationalization, loose of social capital and importance of accessibility. While many all these

features analysed -such as aged, diversification and poor accessibilities- reproduce the conditions of the rural gap, mobilities articulate the territories. The revitalization of rural economic and demographic structures is increasingly dependent on how social diversification and accessibilities are integrated in rural policies. The premise of modern societies of equality in access to opportunities and resources face an important challenge in rural areas. Social inequalities do not have an exclusive economic nature and include the social appropriation and production of space (Lefebvre, 1967; Cresswell, 2001, 2006; Savage *et al.*, 2005; Soja, 2010).

Rural areas can hardly innovate and continuous to be represented as traditional societies and places of passage, in a distorted view from their cosmopolitan composition and increasing mobility. Socio-territorial policies are still inspired to a large extent by the assumptions of statism -such as the equivalences between places of residence, work, and sociability implicit both in the intervention programs and local discourses that demand appropriate policies-. On the one hand, as Sherry and Shortall (2019) highlighted, it is necessary to incorporate the local diversity to face the "rural needs". On the other hand, as Murdoch (2006) noted, we have assumed that rurality remains stabilized at any juncture despite its dominant condition today is fluidity. The focus on mobilities allows us to understand how they produce socially and materially the modern world (Büscher and Urry, 2009).

7. *Future questions*

A more comprehensive approach is needed to address this rural gap, that is primarily a problem of social inequality and, politically, it has turned from being considered as a question of economic development to be seen as an issue of social cohesion.

The social changes that accompany the transition towards older societies and new paradigms of accessibility need to be further addressed. There is also a need to develop approaches that provide further understanding about the social morphologies populating the rural, as well as the cultural processes underlying the renewal of rural populations and sources for social recapitalization of the territories.

Because of daily and cyclical mobility have substantially changed the factors for development, territorial cohesion, and social sustainability, it has become at the

same time a major source of inequality. Different people can be excluded or forced to move, and how these issues impact on the social capital in the territory need much more research. For example, recent studies show the importance of bi-locality and circular migrations as subsistence strategies –such as the case of rural residents who are temporarily urban workers– and how these family strategies maintain models of dependent rurality (Rudiarto *et al.*, 2020).

8. References

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Authors' contribution

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Conceptualization	50 %	50 %
Data curation	75 %	25 %
Formal analysis	75 %	25 %
Funding acquisition	25 %	75 %
Investigation	50 %	50 %
Methodology	50 %	50 %
Project administration	25 %	75 %
Resources	0 %	0 %
Software	0 %	0 %
Supervision	50 %	50 %
Validation	75 %	25 %
Visualization	75 %	25 %
Writing – original draft	50 %	50 %

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