

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGES AND PLAYERS IN RURAL AREAS OF THE SOUTH OF EUROPE

Eduardo Moyano-Estrada
IESA-CSIC. Cordoba. Spain

ABSTRACT:

The aim of this paper is to analyse the way in which social and economic changes are perceived within the Southern EU rural societies (in particular, regions like Andalusia in Spain, Alentejo in Portugal or Mezzogiorno in Italy). To do this we shall take as our starting point the thesis that the perception of change is not homogeneous, but is differentiated according to the different groups that comprise the current rural society at the Southern countries. Some, including most farmers workers, see it as a traumatic crisis, the end of an era and the loss of their rights and their identities, while others –people living in rural areas but not involved in farming activities and more forward-looking farmers– see the change as an opportunity to take advantage of endogenous resources in different ways, and as the beginning of a new era, in which the countryside can be managed in harmony with the plurality of interests coexisting within it. We shall analyse the present process of change, paying particular attention to those factors (economic, social, political and cultural) that affect agriculture and rural areas in the Southern European countries most directly, and which explain the new expectations and the emergence of new interest groups. From a sociological perspective, these changes represent a new opportunity structure for the different players that comprise rural society in these countries. This structure offers resources to be exploited by the interest groups according to particular perceptions or interpretations of the process of change. Besides, we shall look at how this opportunity structure is perceived by those concerned, both farmers and non-farmers, and analyse their individual and collective responses to the problems they face.

BIOGRAPHY: emoyano@iesa.csic.es

He is agricultural engineer (University of Cordoba, Spain) (1978) and sociologist (Complutense University of Madrid, Spain) (1983). At present, he is research director in Sociology at the CSIC (Spanish High Council of Scientific Research) and Deputy Director of the IESA-CSIC (Research Institute for Advanced Sociological Studies). He has been professor of Rural Sociology at the PhD program of the Spanish universities of Cordoba, Seville, Granada and Barcelona, and visiting professor at several European and Latinoamerican universities. His research field is about the processes of collective action and organized interests (farmers' unions and federations of agricultural cooperatives), as well as the role of social players in the implementation of rural and farming policies. He has oriented some doctoral thesis on farm interest groups in Morocco, Argentina, Brazil and Mexico, and published seven books and more than one hundred articles in scientific journals (see www.iesa.csic.es). In 1996, his research on agricultural cooperatives in Europe was rewarded with the Arco Iris Prize. In 2001, he was named *Chevallier de l'Ordre du Mérit Agricole* by the French government recognizing his scientific researches on farmers' unions in the European Union. In 2005, he was nominated member of the French Academy of Agriculture at the section of Rural Sociology. Currently, he is editor of the *Revista Internacional de Sociología* (Spanish journal edited by the CSIC) and member of editorial board of *Sociologia Ruralis*, edited by the ESRS (European Society of Rural Sociology).

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, Western societies are undergoing an important process of change characterized not only by globalization and opening of goods and currency markets, but also by deep transformations of cultural and political values. Particularly, many of the principles on

which government policies were based during the 1960s and 1970s are being revised, and even the viability of the Welfare State itself, as presently constructed, is questioned. Behind the ideological arguments about the greater or lesser role of the state, there appears to be a general consensus on the need for reform in order to reduce budget costs and to improve the efficiency of delivery of government policies. It is a matter of political debate whether such reform should be dictated by deregulation and the retreat of the state and the return of civil society (neo-liberal position) or by a reorientation of the regulatory role of the state to guarantee equity and the general interest (social democratic position). Both schools of thought, however, regard reform as necessary.

A policy for agriculture was one of the first to be adopted by the welfare states in Europe during the 1950s, in order to guarantee incomes for farmers and stabilise the agricultural markets. In fact, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was the first common policy to be incorporated into the European Union (EU)¹, after the summit held in 1958 in the Italian city of Stresa. It is not surprising, therefore, that, as a result of the changes that have occurred during the last two decades, the measures adopted by governments to regulate agriculture and the rural society are now out of step with the new problems affecting it. Since 1992, there has been taking place within the EU the reform of the regulatory mechanisms that have defined agricultural policy in the last three decades. Firstly, Agenda 2000² and later the CAP reform passed in 2003 (so called the Fischler reform) recognised and confirmed widely that the farming policy must be made to function more efficiently, by reducing bureaucracy and by further decentralisation. The growth of inequality among farmers and between regions, which was not envisaged when the CAP was formulated in the early 60's, has to be addressed with new and complementary policies for taking advantage of the increasingly diverse functions of agriculture and rural society (multifunctionality paradigm).

The aim of this paper is to analyse the way in which these changes are perceived within the Southern EU rural societies (in particular, regions like Andalusia in Spain, Alentejo in Portugal or Mezzogiorno in Italy). To do this we shall take as our starting point the thesis that the perception of change is not homogeneous, but is differentiated according to the different groups that comprise the current rural society at the Southern countries. Some, including most farmers and agricultural workers, see it as a traumatic crisis, the end of an era and the loss of their rights and their identities, while others –people living in rural areas but not involved in farming activities and more forward-looking farmers– see the change as an opportunity to exploit endogenous resources in different ways, and as the beginning of a new era, in which the countryside can be managed in harmony with the plurality of interests coexisting within it.

To begin with, we shall analyse the present process of change, paying particular attention to those factors (economic, social, political and cultural) that affect agriculture and rural societies in the Southern European countries most directly, and which explain the new expectations and the emergence of new interest groups. From a sociological perspective, these changes represent a new opportunity structure for the different protagonists that comprise rural society in these countries. This structure offers resources to be exploited by

¹ Although the European institutional construct has been named European Economic Community, European Community and European Union in different periods, I will always refer to it as the European Union (EU).

²The Agenda 2000 was passed by the European Council in Berlin Summit, June 1999.

the interest groups according to particular perceptions or interpretations of the process of change. In the second section we shall look at how this opportunity structure is perceived by those concerned, both farmers and non-farmers, and analyse their individual and collective responses to the problems they face.

2. THE CONTEXT OF CHANGE

In the case of agriculture and rural society in those countries, the present context of change can be characterised as a series of interrelated factors whose effects are felt at every level, in economic and social life, in politics and culture. For the purpose of analysis alone, we shall treat them separately (see Table n.1).

Table n° 1
The context of change in the EU Southern rural society

<i>Level</i>	<i>Factor of change</i>
<i>Socio-economic changes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Agriculture has lost its importance as a production activity ○ Agriculture still retains its importance for the dynamism of many rural areas ○ Pluriactivity and some agricultural works are made externally ○ Development of telecommunications and improvements in infrastructure in rural areas ○ Establishment of new industries and services not related to agriculture ○ A new and increasingly important sector of businessmen and independent professionals has emerged around those new activities ○ New local actors linked to health, education and social services
<i>Cultural changes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Rising of “post-materialist” values ○ Rediscovery of “the local” ○ Sustainable development paradigm ○ New opportunity structure for rural areas
<i>Political changes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ WTO agreements on the liberalisation of agricultural markets ○ Process of constructing Europe (enlargement to PECO, Agenda 2000, CAP reform, new rural policies) ○ New policies are incorporated into EU agenda (weakness of agricultural interest) ○ Agreements with Mediterranean countries ○ New principles to regulate public subsidies (equity, modulation, efficiency)

Source: Moyano-Estrada and Garrido-Fernández (2003)

2.1. Economic changes

Although in economic terms the agriculture has lost its importance in the Southern EU countries, as witnessed by the gradual reduction in the working population in agriculture and by the declining significance of agricultural and livestock production in its GNP, it still retains its importance for the dynamism of many rural areas. Besides, much other

employment in manufacturing and service industries depends on it, such as machinery factories and workshops, fertilisers and pesticides businesses, insurance companies, and agri-food industries. What is significant for the argument of this paper is that those involved in these activities dependent on agriculture are from an urban industrial background, imbued with a business ethic independent of government subsidies, and with a non-agrarian view of the value of the countryside. Farmers and non-farmers may share a business relationship, but not necessarily a common system of values when it comes to deciding the fate of the countryside in their local community.

At the same time, the spectacular improvement in telecommunications and roads in these regions (due to the EU social cohesion and structural funds) have reduced the traditional isolation of rural areas and encouraged the establishment of new industries and services not related to agriculture. Around these activities has emerged a new and increasingly important sector of businessmen and independent professionals with a free market background, whose values are also quite different from those of farmers. Other employments, linked directly to the welfare society, are also creating an unprecedented dynamism in the countryside. This is occurring notably in, on the one hand, the government health, education and social services, and, on the other, in those areas created by the leisure requirements of the population at large, in tourism, second homes, retirement, sport and recreation. The rural population is increasingly involved in such employment, which offers new and non-traditional ways of integrating society and work (Navarro-Yáñez, 1999).

In other words, rural society in these Southern regions has become more complex, economically and socially, with greater internal differentiation and a greater diversity of employment. It is having a significant effect on local life, by reducing the power of the landowners and encouraging the growth of new elites. There is a new dynamism at the local level and new opportunities are created for political activity, marked either by cooperation or by confrontation between the old and the new protagonists, depending on their perception of the changes confronting rural society.

2.2. Cultural changes

Two important cultural changes are evident. On the one hand, there is the rise of so called 'post-materialist' values (Inglehart, 1977), as ever widening sections of the population are no longer mainly preoccupied with satisfying their material needs, but with factors related to quality of life, such as the deterioration of natural resources, the loss of biodiversity, the degradation of the countryside, the contamination of rivers, and, most recently, food health and quality. There has been an important cultural change in educated public opinion, based on the concept of sustainability minted at the end of the seventies in the now famous Brundtland Report. It lends legitimacy to the demands of new social groups, but, at the same time, introduces important restrictions on the use of the countryside by farmers for agricultural production.

Another change stands out, within the cultural context; that of the rediscovery of 'the local', which has occurred in the last twenty years in these regions at the same time as the extension of globalization. Although apparently contradictory, these processes are, if examined more closely, coherent. The rediscovery of 'the local' is a process of recovering identity, searching for roots and tangible references, of closeness and proximity, in a world that is increasingly globalized and whose physical and social coordinates are weakened by being stretched out across the planet. In this context, people rediscover 'the local', revive

the values of their neighbourhoods (*pueblos, agrovilles, agrovillages, ...*) and seek to remain in them. They attempt to equip them with what they need and to exploit the comparative advantages of the advances in technology and telecommunications offered now by the same process of globalisation. Local development projects are taking place at what some authors have called the 'interstices of globalisation' (Renard, 1999). These projects attempt to value native resources in order to make different forms of development viable and allow rural populations to remain where they are in dynamic communities. This has important economic and political repercussions and it is seen as a revitalising factor for democracy at the local level (Halfcree, Kovach and Woodward, 2002).

In short, there is a new cultural context in the rural society of the South of Europe, characterised, on the one hand, by a revaluing of the countryside, according to criteria which have more to do with the quality of life than with production, and, on the other hand, by a revitalisation of 'the local' as a central framework of reference for the whole population. Consequently, a new opportunity structure has also been created, which is exploited by the various economic and social players, according to their particular interpretation of the changes taking place.

2.3. Political changes

Some events of the last two decades have undeniably affected the framework within which the problems of European rural society in general and of Southern (Mediterranean) countries in particular, are addressed.

Firstly, it is worth stressing the agreements on the liberalisation of agricultural markets, that took place in the GATT (in springtime 1996, in Marrakesh, Morocco) and, subsequently, those signed in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (begun in autumn 2001, in Doha, Qatar, and not yet finished). These agreements have clear political implications, in that they limit the room for manoeuvre of national governments in maintaining traditional protectionist policies, particularly those affecting agriculture. Some of these implications are clear today in the tendency towards a progressive reduction of guaranteed agricultural prices and their comparison with market prices as was just established in Agenda 2000 and the CAP Fischler reform (2003). They are also to be seen in the elimination of every type of subsidy for production –in order to reduce agricultural surpluses and avoid their negative effect on international markets– and the implementation of direct (*decoupled*) payments to farmers.

These political decisions have important economic and cultural repercussions for the agricultural sector. In fact, from an economic point of view, they introduce a new element of competition, confined previously to those sectors that were not sheltered under the umbrella of protectionist policies (mainly, horticulture and fruit). In fact, farmers, co-operatives and agri-food companies in general are now forced to take competition into account in order to take advantage of the opportunities that wider markets offer. As for the cultural repercussions, these political decisions make necessary important changes in education and training, and in the attitude of farmers towards market and business. In this context, the new EU regulation on rural development is going to have relevant implications in the strategies of farmers and rural population.

Secondly, the process of constructing Europe has important political implications, for two main reasons. On the one side, the enlargement of the EU toward new countries is

representing a high level of expenditure in the EU budget that will require the introduction of important restrictions in the CAP, particularly if this enlargement has to take place without increasing the contributions of the member states to the common budget. On the other side, the process of constructing Europe also implies the incorporation of new policies on the environment, education, research and development, and infrastructure. These policies are funded from the EU budget. The "agricultural policy community" (Frouws and van Tatenhove, 1993; Daugbjerg, 1997) is now faced with the predicament of having to compete for available resources with other interest groups. These are emerging in a context in which the place of agriculture in European political and social agendas has changed, with the establishment of the principle of open agricultural markets.

Thirdly, the strategic and geopolitical position of the EU in international relations between North and South introduces a very important factor for Mediterranean areas. The growing tide of immigration from the north of Africa is forcing EU states to change their traditional immigration policies and call for a policy of restricted entry in the short term (viz. the Schengen agreement) and, in the longer term, for an increase in cooperative funding for development in the countries of origin. Such cooperation implies the adoption of measures to open European markets to mainly agricultural and livestock products from these other countries, particularly from countries of the Maghreb, with significant consequences for the agricultural sector of the South of Europe.

Fourthly, an important element of political change and, perhaps, the most far reaching in its implications in the medium to long term, stems from the crisis in the Welfare State which is affecting Western countries and forcing them to review many of the principles that have inspired government policies, including those related to agriculture and rural development. The national budget deficit and, particularly, unemployment, and problems related to environmental degradation and food safety, have now to be taken into account in the necessary reformulation of different policies, including the CAP. In the document "For a necessary change in European agriculture" (Brugge Group, 1998), it is pointed out that agriculture policy in future, if it is to have any legitimacy, must take these elements into account. An agricultural policy which demands government resources to guarantee farm incomes has to derive legitimacy not only from its contribution to the self-sufficiency in food, but to the creation, or at least not the destruction, of employment, equity in the distribution of the CAP direct payments, and the protection of the environment and management of the landscape. These principles, which imply a fundamental change in the coordinates that have served with reference to farmers and which have inspired agricultural policies since the fifties, are those on which the policies of the future must be based.

In this context, the political debate on the status of EU agricultural and rural policies for the future is focused on an important issue. It is about the relationship between rural development policies and policies for regional development. Briefly, the issue is whether there is any sense in defining autonomous policies for rural development with their own funds and integrated into an independent institutional framework or whether it would be more logical for them to form part of more general policies for regional development. Rural areas in the South of Europe are tending to lose their special status, and many of the factors on which their development depends, such as road infrastructure, networks for collective ownership of equipment, state health and education services, etc., transcend narrow local boundaries and are outside the decision making powers of local authorities. The implementation of the new EU regulation on rural development (Reg. 1.698/2005) is in the heart of this debate in some countries.

In brief, the above mentioned context of change, within which debates about the future of rural society and the role of agriculture in its development have to take place, has many elements. These include the waning importance of agriculture in the general economy, the decline of the farming population in rural areas, the diminishing influence of the landed elites at the heart of decision making, the diversification and greater structural complexity of employment in the countryside, and market liberalisation. They also include the recuperation of 'the local' and the encouragement of local development initiatives, concerns about the quality of food and the protection of the environment, with the achievement of self-sufficiency in food, the restrictions imposed by the process of European construction, and new government policies to overcome the crisis in the Welfare State. A new opportunity structure is created in this context, for both individual and collective action by the different social and economic protagonists in rural areas. Their actions, however, can be explained, not by any structural determinism, but according to our understanding of how they perceive and interpret these opportunities.

3. PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE IN THE SOUTHERN RURAL AREAS

Perhaps the most important sociological factor in all the changes that are taking place in rural areas of the South of Europe is the increasing complexity of its social structure. The diversification of economic activity, encouraged by programmes for local/rural development, the growth of the agro-food sector and of an important tertiary sector, the growing presence of public services linked to the welfare state, the encouragement of the recreational and leisure function of the countryside, and the promotion of its environmental role, are important factors in this. Beside the farmers and agricultural workers, and their different associations, there are now non-agricultural interest groups with their new dynamism and different perception of the changes taking place.

Even within the agricultural sector itself processes of differentiation can be seen, depending on the type of production and management of different farms, so as on their position in the market and the policies regulating them. The traditional corporatist scenario, based on the principle of common interest among farmers, is being replaced by one of plurality. This is reflected in the diversity of discourses, strategies, and options for organisation within the farmers' unions.

There are also important elements of differentiation within the agricultural workers sector, traditionally characterised by strong internal cohesion with respect to land reform. On the one hand, there are those whose integration in the labour market is more or less stable –workers in secure employment and casual workers whose employment is regular, but not continuous– and, on the other, seasonal workers forced into itinerant work with long periods of unemployment. As with farmers, these differences are reflected in the diversity that exists within the agricultural workers' unions.

Therefore, it is clear that the rural society in these Mediterranean regions is today characterised, in sociological and economic terms, by a plurality of interests and by complexity. Nevertheless, when we look at the works of sociologists about social change in rural society we find that the dominant perception is still that of crisis, as though it were a traumatic process for the rural population.

This approach is, in my opinion, partial and reductive. Most of the social scientists specialising in rural studies still come from an intellectual tradition with its cultural roots in agriculture. The majority have come from university faculties of agriculture or from the Ministries of Agriculture itself. By choosing to centre their research on the farming sector, they bring to it a –generally held by farmers and agricultural workers– of the change in rural society as a crisis, since it has modified deeply the framework of reference that guided the economic strategies of farmers and workers, and has breached the social hierarchy in which their status has traditionally been assigned.

Fortunately, a new generation of social scientists from a non-agrarian intellectual tradition, and attracted by the vitality of some rural areas, has brought a wider approach to studies of rural change. Their research on the rural population as a whole, and not just on farmers, provides evidence for the complexity of the social structure, the plurality of interests and diversity in the perceptions of the process of change. While it is true that these social scientists continue to recognise that this change is traumatic for farmers and agricultural workers, they do not extend this view to the rest of rural society in these regions. Their work is interesting, therefore, because in it they have revealed different perceptions of social change and have shown that for some groups it is seen as an opportunity to use the countryside and the landscape in a different way from the traditional one of agriculture.

3.1. Change as a crisis of identity for farmers and agricultural workers

Sociologists have shown that, in advanced industrial countries, change in agriculture and rural society generally represents a crisis of identity for farmers and agricultural workers, since it questions their whole economic and socio-cultural system in some domains (Hervieu, 1993; Hervieu and Viard, 2001). Besides, one can add that this process of change has broken the traditional unitarian ideal that farmers belong to a homogeneous and strongly cohesive social body with its roots in a common value system.

The present explosion of plurality in the agricultural sector is a reflection of the process of social and economic differentiation that accompanies its full integration into the market, once the old systems of government protection are eliminated. However, there is still a feeling of victimisation among certain groups of farmers, particularly those who have traditionally been in the forefront and who consider it their duty to protect an ideal whose rupture they blame on outside political forces attempting to undermine their internal unity (Moyano-Estrada, 2000; Halpin, 2005).

In the case of agricultural workers we could add an important rupture in their historical claims for land redistribution and agricultural reform. The changing status of the farming sector and the new symbolic and economic value of land ownership in advanced industrial societies have shifted land reform away from the centre of debate among wide sections of the agricultural proletariat. Many of them are now more concerned with stability of employment –and systems of social protection, where these do not exist– and with the improvement of working conditions through collective negotiation.

This situation provokes a generalised feeling of identity crisis among farmers and workers, even though the way in which the problems are confronted may not be the same. The very diversity and plurality of the responses reflect the reality of a farming social

structure that is increasingly differentiated. The different interest groups interpret and respond to the new opportunity structure differently, both individually and collectively.

3.1.1. The individual responses of farmers and agricultural workers

There is a diversity of individual responses among farmers (see Table n. 2). Firstly, there are small farmers, owners of uncompetitive farms, who have achieved a certain stability through a combination of different sources of income, whether from the farm itself, from CAP direct payments, from other employment of family members as workers out of the farming sector, or from different forms of state aid such as unemployment subsidies and welfare payments (for example, the retirement payments).

Table n° 2:
Individual responses of farmers

	<i>Passive</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Innovative</i>
<i>Type of farmer</i>	Small farmers, owners of uncompetitive farms	Farmers with medium and large sized farms	Heterogeneous profile (small, medium and large farmers)
<i>Main source of income (by order of importance)</i>	Retirement payments, subsidies Incomes from the farming activity Family incomes out of the farming sector CAP direct payments	CAP direct payments Incomes from the farming activity Incomes from non-agricultural activities	Different sources of income Incomes from the farming activity CAP direct payments
<i>Perception of change</i>	Positive Changes offer new opportunities as long as state intervention continues	Negative Change is perceived as a threat for their rights and a loss of political and economic influence in rural society	Positive Change as new opportunities to start with innovative projects
<i>Attitude in relation to changes</i>	Passive Dependent on public subsidies	Conservative Traditional Corporatist retrenchment	Active Enterprising Openness towards new opportunities and other social groups

Source: Moyano-Estrada and Garrido-Fernández (2003)

For this group, whose role is fundamental for the dynamism and vitality of many rural areas in the Mediterranean countries and who would be condemned to exclusion if the central European farming model were applied, the present changes offer new opportunities as long as state intervention continues. Without these protective measures, they would find

it difficult to survive as farmers. Consequently, it cannot be said that they view change as traumatic, since their present position is no worse than it was formerly, when emigration was their main escape.

Secondly, there are farmers with medium- and large-sized farms who restrict themselves to following a conservative strategy of collecting CAP subsidies, which, together with income from the sale of their products on the market, guarantees their livelihood at minimum cost and with very little risk. The traumatic nature of the change for this group lies in the growing realisation that these subsidies are being cut and may even disappear in the future, and in the threat that the opening up of the market, for which they feel unprepared, represents. It is this group, from which until very recently the elite of many rural communities were recruited, which is affected by the loss of political and economic influence of farming interests. They view the participation of the new emerging groups – particularly the environmentalists– in decisions that affect the fate of the countryside, as interference in the affairs of the farming community. This produces a sort of corporatist retrenchment among them and their discourse becomes that of victimisation, a breeding ground for proclamations that demonise politicians. It is, however, a very ambiguous discourse, since it demands state protection at the same time as rejecting any control by official bodies, and defending the right to private ownership of land and the exercise of freedom in farms.

Thirdly, there is an innovative sector of farmers, drawn from different segments of farming society, which is introducing important changes in its farms. In fact, they are farmers who are opting for new areas of production –the products for bioenergy or the products for the textile or pharmacological industries– and who are exploiting the opportunities offered by new technologies to improve their management. They are also farmers who are developing non-agricultural activities in their farms, such as rural tourism, hunting, forestry, education for children, etc., as complementary sources of income within the framework of the new policies for rural development. Interesting initiatives are to be seen in the sustainable use of natural resources, whether for a more balanced exploitation of agricultural land or a more rational use of chemical inputs to reduce the costs of production. These different responses may be inspired by the principles of a new environmental ethic (Thompson, 1995) based on the recognising of damage done to the environment by intensive agriculture, or by the criteria of ‘green’ capitalism, concerned about the degradation of natural resources as factors in production. They may simply be, however, pragmatic responses to the new opportunities created by changes in consumer habits, as is happening in the case of the emerging market for organic produce, or by the incentives provided in the agri-environmental programmes of the EU, which offer the possibility of obtaining complementary sources of income (Whitby et al., 1996; Garrido-Fernández, 2000). This innovative sector of farmers is clearly conscious of the complexity of the changes facing agriculture and of its new position, not yet a leading one, in official agendas. Their attitude in response is not corporatist; there is no retrenchment or looking inwards, but an openness towards the new opportunities offered. Information and training, rather than protection, are sought from the public sector to help them adapt to the new situation, as well as incentives to encourage projects to convert their farms. In their social relationships, they are willing to become involved in joint projects with other interest groups, whether in working with technicians and scientific researchers to study changes in

agricultural practices or in collaborating with the authorities in protecting the environment, for example, in fire prevention campaigns.

In the case of the agricultural workers their responses are different, but not necessarily exclusive. One response is to stabilise the situation in the labour market, by exploiting opportunities arising in different sectors of production and accepting fixed or discontinuous contracts, and another, to take advantage of government systems for social protection which combine unemployment subsidies with programmes aimed at promoting new jobs in rural areas. A third response is to opt for seasonal migration at times of harvest and other agricultural activities.

3.1.2. The responses of agricultural co-operatives and farmers' unions

In agricultural sector, forms of association play a fundamental role, both in its economic functioning –mainly in the form of co-operatives– and in providing the central framework of support for union representation –as with the farmers' unions. The strong presence of co-operativism –with its extensive network of co-operatives throughout rural society– and the capacity for mobilising shown by the unions, enables both of these types of associations to influence greatly the attitudes and behaviour of farmers to set themselves up as important intermediaries in the implementation of rural and agricultural policy in these countries. Their political representatives are leaders of public opinion, and their position on agricultural matters resonates in the media and is a point of reference for farmers. For this reason, it is important to analyse how these associations perceive the present process of change and how they respond collectively, given their influence on the definition of the farmers' preferences.

a) Organized interests in agricultural co-operativism

Agricultural co-operativism in many rural areas of the South of Europe (particularly, in Spain, Portugal and some Italian regions) is characterised by a high degree of fragmentation, with a predominance of small scale co-operative models whose sphere of activity does not reach beyond the borders of the area where their head offices are located. Nevertheless, in recent years there has been an intense process of concentration through merging or co-ordinating their strategies to enable them to broaden their sphere of economic activity and meet market demands (Moyano et al. 2001). In spite of this fragmentation of co-operativism, it can be said there is a fairly homogeneous perception of change, strengthening the professionalising tendency in the cooperatives, and the introduction of enterprise-oriented criteria in their management, in order to respond to the new climate of competition. For example, the CCAE, which is the federation covering almost all of the agricultural co-operatives in Spain, quite clearly shows an entrepreneurial outlook –cooperatives are companies who have to seek maximum profits in the market– and the old mutual ideal is considerably diluted. Its organisational model is increasingly dominated by vertical structures comprised of different farming branches. Unity based on shared economic interests in a given branch or area of production predominates over the old principle of unity based on a sense of belonging to a social movement (Entrena-Durán and Moyano-Estrada, 2006). In Italy, although co-operativism is divided into three large federations of co-operatives, from different ideological and cultural traditions (the left-wing

ANCA-Lega, the catholic Confcooperativa, and the liberal AGCI), the tendency toward the professionalising in cooperatives and the introduction of enterprise-oriented criteria is today evident.

b) Farmers' unions

In contrast to the co-operative movement, plurality is the norm in farmers' unions (Halpin, 2005). Two ideal types of response can be distinguished here. Firstly, there is the 'enterprise response' (agrifood and market-oriented one), espoused by those organisations that mainly represent the interests of medium- and large-scale farms (for example, ASAJA in Spain, CAP in Portugal or Confagricoltura in Italy). They endorse closer integration with the agri-food industry, through interprofessional structures in each branch, and a single, rather than multi, sectorial model for the organisation of agricultural interests (Table n. 3).

Farmers are encouraged from these organizations to adopt new management methods and to continue modernising production in their farms. As for the status of the agricultural policy, they contend that it should remain independent of policies for rural development, so that they require programmes that provide incentives for farmers to modernize more and more their farms and integrate into much wider commercial networks. Future agricultural policy has, therefore, to continue to provide the impetus for modernisation to improve competitiveness, particularly in the Mediterranean area, which is backward in comparison with regions in central Europe. That is why these organizations do not agree with the proposal of integrating agricultural policy into policies for rural development, since it would mean subordinating it to a social logic, based on the generation of employment, an impossible objective for modern agriculture, characterised as it is by increased productivity and the reduction of the labour force.

Finally, with regard to environmental policy, the enterprise response is not opposed to it, although it is of secondary importance in its concerns. Problems in the relationship between agriculture and the environment are expressed by these organizations only in terms of economic sustainability, when the deterioration of natural resources represents a threat to their availability as a factor in agricultural production (in other words, 'green' capitalism, mentioned above).

The second ideal type of response could be described as 'neo-peasant' (countryside-oriented one), since it emphasises the values of a rural society that has undergone social and cultural renewal, and in which the role of the family farm (a renewed and modern conception of peasantry) should be central for dynamizing the countryside. This response, unlike the first, is voiced by organisations representing the interests of small farmers –UPA and COAG in Spain; Coldiretti and CIA in Italy, and CNA in Portugal, are the best examples. Their policies are concerned not only with production, but also with employment diversification and countryside, and they support the horizontal, rather than vertical, model of representation of agricultural interests and encourage collaboration with other groups in rural society³.

Regarding the role of state, they support strong state intervention to regulate market imbalances, and to encourage associations that represent small farmers. There is unanimity among them not only on the usefulness, but also the necessity of applying differential

³ Examples of this are the Rural Platform set up by COAG, and the collaborative agreement between UPA and the environmental association for the protection of birds, SEO (*Sociedad Española de Ornitología*).

criteria in the distribution of CAP subsidies. In the face of growing restrictions when assigning resources to regulate the different CMOs, modulation of CAP subsidies is regarded as necessary since these need to be concentrated on the least competitive farms, if small farmers are not to abandon the farming sector. It is also considered useful in restoring legitimacy to agriculture in the eyes of the general population, which views with surprise, if not indignation, the way in which certain groups of farmers amass great fortunes from CAP subsidies, financed from contributions and given with no undertakings in return and no clear justification.

Table n. 3
Ideological discourses and strategies of farmers' unions

<i>RSES</i>	<i>DISCOU</i>	<i>ENTERPRISE DISCOURSE</i>	<i>NEO-PEASANT DISCOURSE</i>
<i>Conception of farming activity</i>		Market-oriented productive activity	Labour and countryside-oriented activity
<i>Status of farmer</i>		Entrepreneur (profesional status)	Farmers with multifunctional status
<i>Role of State</i>		Low level of state interventionism (to guarantee the stability of markets)	High level of state interventionism (to guarantee farmer's incomes and correct social and economic inequalities)
<i>Fonction of agricultural policy</i>		Agricultural policy guided by a production-oriented logic Direct payments to farmers to compensate them the competition of open markets	Agricultural policy guided by a non-productive logic and integrated in integral rural development policies. Direct payments to farmers based on equity.
<i>Relationship between agriculture and environment</i>		Environment is perceived as productive resource (green capitalism) Emphasis on the economic dimension of sustainability The agri-environmental policy is perceived as a complementary income to farmers and a incentive to better use production factors Organic farming is perceived as an interesting market to grow the farmer's incomes	Environment is perceived as important element of dynamisation of countryside Emphasis on the social dimension of sustainability The agri-environmental policy is perceived as a new source of social legitimacy for both farming activity Organic farming is perceived as a way to avoid the social exclusion of small farmers

Source: Moyano and Garrido-Fernández (2003)

With regard to future agricultural policies, they argue that these should be an integral part of rural development, and include the encouragement of the family farm. For these organizations, criteria should be based not on competitiveness, but on the idea of avoiding the exclusion of small farmers, whose fundamental role in the life of rural areas and countryside, they fully recognise. Environmental policies are viewed, too, as integral to the

offering of new opportunities to complement agricultural income, a new way of integrating farmers and countryside into society and a new legitimacy for agricultural policy.

In short, within the Southern rural areas themselves there has been an explosion of plurality, reflected in the different responses, individual and collective, of farmers and their organisations to the new problems they face. It is true that the present process of change is perceived as a crisis by the farming sector as a whole, but responses are diverse, as is to be expected in a social structure that is increasingly differentiated.

3.1.3. The responses of agricultural workers' unions

In relation to agricultural workers' unions, and using as a basis for analysis some characteristic elements of the context of change, such as the loss of the economic and symbolic value of land ownership, the loss of the labourers' identity as a social movement, the improvement of working conditions through collective negotiation and national plans for rural employment, responses can be differentiated into two ideal types in terms of their discourse, claims and strategies (see Table n. 4).

Firstly, there are two responses: 'adaptive' and 'reformist'. The 'reformist response' is characterised by a substantial modification in the traditional position of workers regarding land ownership, in order to adapt to the new context of change. It has moved from outright rejection and the denial of any social function of large landowners, and demands for official expropriation of their land, to a position where land ownership is no longer questioned in principle. A distinction is made between large farmers who use available resources appropriately and exercise a recognised social function, and those who flagrantly misuse resources and who should be penalised.

The 'radical response' continues to question the very basis of the current structure of land ownership, which it denounces as the illegitimate fruit of the historical pillaging of peasant land and, particularly, of the usurpation of their land rights during the disentanglements of the nineteenth century in some of these countries. For this response, agrarian reform is still seen as the payment of a historical debt. The illegitimate nature of the current structure of land ownership justifies the use of measures to expropriate large farmers, whether or not they use their resources well.

As far as the social position of agricultural workers is concerned, there are clear differences between the two responses. The reformist unions accept the gradual conversion of agricultural labourers, and demand that their treatment should be compared with the rest of the working population in improvements in working conditions and salary, and in social benefits. Consequently, these agricultural workers' unions have integrated within umbrella organizational structures together with agri-food workers' unions.

The radicals unions, on the other hand, locate the agricultural workers movement at the centre of the problems of rural society, whose identity and survival require a fundamental critique of the current model of economic development. Their discourse is, therefore, extended to include topics not directly related to agricultural workers, but to the problems of rural society as a whole. Far from following the tendency of reformist unions in assimilating their social bases to those of the rest of the working population, radical unions incorporate other social movements, such as those of unemployed young people, women, and immigrant groups.

Table n. 4
Ideal responses of the agricultural workers' unions

<i>DISCOU RSES</i>	<i>REFORMIST AND ADAPTATIVE</i>	<i>RADICAL AND RUPTURIST</i>
<i>Land ownership</i>	<p>They question no longer land ownership</p> <p>They claim no longer land reform</p> <p>They distinguish between large farmers who use resources appropriately, and those who misuse them and who should be penalised</p>	<p>Land ownership is still denounced as the pillaging of peasant land</p> <p>They continue to claim land reform</p> <p>They continue to claim the use of measures to expropriate large farmers, whether or not they use their resources well</p>
<i>Identity of agricultural workers</i>	<p>They accept the gradual conversion of agricultural labourers and claim the improvement in working conditions and salary</p> <p>They assimilate agricultural workers to working population</p>	<p>They locate the agricultural workers movement at the centre of the problems of rural society, and include topics not directly related to them</p> <p>They incorporate other social groups (unemployed young people and immigrant groups)</p>
<i>Collective negotiation</i>	<p>They support for negotiate with representatives of agricultural employers to improve the conditions workers (neocorporatist pact)</p> <p>They are characterized by umbrella organizational structures to participate in neocorporatist agreements</p>	<p>They refuse to negotiate with representatives of agricultural employers, and use of mass action as an instrument of pressure</p> <p>They are characterised by the lack of formality in their organisational structures, and they are closer to social movements</p>
<i>Government programmes for rural employment</i>	<p>They consider that programmes for rural employment should be directed at agricultural workers exclusively</p>	<p>They demand that such programmes should be extended to the rural population, whether or not linked to the farming sector</p>

Source: Moyano and Garrido-Fernández (2003)

With respect to collective negotiation, the reformist unions are characterised by their support for participation in neo-corporatist pacts with representatives of agricultural employers, to improve the conditions and pay of the workers. In this sense, and in accordance with their adaptative ideology, they have accepted the neo-corporatist pact on the understanding that the interests of the workers they represent, who are mainly integrated in the labour market, can be well protected in collective negotiations with employers' organisations.

The radical unions, on the other hand, have refused systematically to participate in these neo-corporatist pacts, since, according to their more radical ideology, the interests of agricultural workers are not to be identified solely with improvements in pay, since there are other problems in rural society. In their opinion, these general interests should be fought

for in other ways, in decentralised organisational structures. This explains, for example, the lack of formality in their organisational structures and the systematic use of mass action as an instrument of pressure, as in the numerous marches and occupations of big farms.

Lastly, there is an important difference in relation to government programmes for rural employment and protection against unemployment. While the reformist response accepts that these should be directed at agricultural workers exclusively, the potential beneficiaries having been previously defined precisely from the census, the radical response demands that such programmes should be extended to the whole of the unemployed rural population, whether or not linked to the agricultural sector.

3.2. Change as new opportunities for the non-agricultural rural population

The non-agricultural rural population has, until now, rarely been asked how it perceives the change affecting agriculture and the countryside. The agricultural background of many social scientists has, as remarked on earlier, influenced their thinking on this change. Since farmers have been the preferred reference group when explaining the change in rural society, it is not surprising that their perceptions have dominated rural research work until very recently.

As I mentioned above, a new generation of social scientists has emerged in the last years, including sociologists, geographers and anthropologists, from different universities and non-agricultural backgrounds, who are beginning to analyse rural change from the perspective of groups unrelated to farming⁴. The work of this new generation of sociologists is important for this discussion because it demonstrates a perception of change that is very different from that of farmers, and is accompanied not by the traumatic crisis of identity that characterises their response, but by a noteworthy dynamism. It shows that, for many groups in the non-agricultural population, the present process of change offers great opportunities for revitalising the countryside and enhancing its use, in accordance with society's new expectations (see Table n. 5).

The first example of this is in local/rural development programmes, which, channelled through the European schemes (like Leader), have made possible the emergence of new protagonists in the economic and social life of rural communities⁵. New business initiatives, as well as the proliferation of experts and local development agents, and youngers and women's associations bring a dynamism to rural areas that helps them to perceive the processes of change differently from farmers. In some instances, these rural

⁴ For example, at the last three meetings organised by the Spanish Federation of Sociology (FES) in 2001 (Salamanca), 2004 (Alicante) and 2007 (Barcelona), more than two-thirds of the papers presented in the rural sociology workshop were related to local development, the environment, rural tourism, crafts, fishing, mining, the management of natural parks, etc., all of which, while not excluding farmers, are new topics unrelated to agriculture.

⁵ The European Commission Initiative Leader and the Spanish operative programme for rural development (Proder) are programmes of bottom-up development that extend throughout the country a network of 233 Rural Development Groups in areas with fewer than 100,000 inhabitants. For example, in Andalusia, that is the biggest region of Spain, 666 of the 770 municipalities (85.4% of the total number, 88.6% of the land area and 41.8% of the population) were affected by rural development activities under these two programmes, during the period 1994-2002 (see Garrido-Fernández, Mauleón and Moyano-Estrada, 2002).

development programmes are also making it possible for the more dynamic farmers to be incorporated into development projects, by offering them the opportunity of diversifying their activities and introducing innovations in the management of their farms. Those playing a part in local/rural development, who have hitherto been dispersed and confined to their particular programme, are now beginning to form associations, not only to share experiences, but also to take action on a wider scale and to participate for the first time as a collective voice at national and international forums where the content of rural development policy is agreed. Since rural areas have, for them, singular features that make them very different from other regions, they are in favour of maintaining policies for rural development independent of those for regional development. They are critical, however, of the agricultural bias of rural development policies, and propose that they should no longer be channelled through government departments of agriculture, but instead should be implemented by interdepartmental, horizontally structured government agencies.

Table n° 5
Ideal responses of non-agricultural rural population

	<i>Social profile</i>	<i>Discourse</i>	<i>Attitudes and strategies</i>
<i>Actors of the rural/local development</i>	Local policy-makers (mayor, councillor) Local development agents (Leader/Proder) New entrepreneurs Rural enterprising	Neo-rural	Diversification of activities Rural development policies Risk logic New uses for rural areas (non agricultural)
<i>Actors emerging under the auspices of the welfare policies</i>	Doctors, teachers, social workers, etc	Countryside-oriented	Services in the rural area Regional development policies
<i>Actors coming from urban areas</i>	Pensioners Second homes Holidaymakers	Cultural mixture	Rural culture is influenced by urban culture Urban culture is influence by rural culture

Source: Moyano and Garrido-Fernández, 2003.

The second example is in the emerging groups under the auspices of the Welfare State, in health, education and social services, who are dynamically redefining the future of rural society and are frequently involved in development programmes. Improvements in communications and the quality of life in rural areas have encouraged these civil servants to live in the villages where they work, and to break the habit, common until very recently, of leaving them at the end of the working day. Their importance cannot be denied, for the

impact of education and health policies, in the location of schools and health centres, on the future of rural areas is very often much greater than those for rural development. That is why these new social actors support regional development policies to try solving the problems of rural areas more than independent rural development policies.

Lastly, those from urban areas, such as holidaymakers, weekend and day visitors, rambblers and those interested in country sports, are encouraged by the attention paid to the leisure and recreational functions of the countryside. While rediscovering the old rural folk traditions, they are, at the same time, managing to introduce typically urban patterns of behaviour, young people staying out late at night, discotheques, mass car use, etc. The involvement of young people, too, in the new aspects of agriculture –in, for example, organic farming, where they often work with local environmentalists– brings a non-productionist agricultural slant to the exploitation of natural resources. This distances them from the traditional discourse of farmers and provokes internal division in the local farming sector.

The present context of change offers opportunities for all these groups to revitalise rural society, allowing them, by their participation in local policy-making, to influence decisions taken at the local level. It is increasingly common to find councillors in rural authorities who are doctors, teachers, social workers, representatives of environmental groups, etc., taking their place alongside professionals and businessmen from outside agriculture in the new local elites.

The responses of these groups are, however, varied, and this demonstrates a diversity of interests, which must continue to be an object of research for social scientists, to enlarge our understanding of the social and economic dynamic of rural society today in the South of Europe. Social scientists have an interesting laboratory in which to discover whether or not a new rural identity is emerging, no longer characterised exclusively as agricultural, but a synthesis of different activities and professions, including agriculture. These come together as development takes place in small- and medium-sized centres of population, and have a special connection with the area. The question to be resolved is whether this identification between the different groups in rural society is strong enough to allow one to speak of the existence of a new rural identity. What may exist, on the contrary, are groups with distinct, and unconnected, identities, with no feeling of belonging to a cultural community and no interests in common.

4. CONCLUSIONS

An analysis of the processes of change in rural society can contribute to a better understanding of social dynamics in contexts of new opportunity structures. These are exploited differently, according to the particular perception and interpretation of the process of change, and strategies developed, individually and collectively, to confront the problems that arise. Several conclusions can be derived from the analysis offered in this paper.

In the first place, in the contemporary context of globalisation and the reform of traditional protectionist policies, the rural society of the South of Europe is no longer a world apart. It is increasingly influenced by the wider society, reproducing the dynamism and diversity of interests characteristic of open societies.

Secondly, it is understandable that farmers see the process of change as a crisis of identity, since it is producing a radical transformation of the frame of reference within which they have acted in the last four decades. The gradual integration, however, of agriculture into the market, once the umbrella of protectionist policies has been removed, produces economic and social differentiation among farmers themselves. This is reflected in the different perceptions they have of the context of change and their different responses to it. The principle of unity in the agricultural sector, more symbolic than real, has given way to that of plurality, as shown by the diversity that exists within farmers' unions.

Thirdly, agricultural workers are undergoing a profound modification in their reference system both socially and symbolically, owing to the changing status of agriculture as an industry and of land ownership as an economic resource, and to the reform of the labour market. In this context, the dominant response is to adapt to change and exploit the new opportunities it offers to improve the conditions of agricultural workers. In certain rural areas, however, responses are more radical, the demand for land reform is maintained and a new identity for workers sought, within the framework of the new values emerging in the countryside.

Fourthly, groups not directly related to agriculture are establishing themselves alongside farmers, and are bringing both a new cultural dynamism and values that are different from those that have dominated the rural society of the South of Europe until now. The social structure has become more complex and relationships between the different groups more dynamic, sometimes through cooperation, and other times through conflict over the definition of the countryside in these countries.

Fifthly, in a sociocultural context characterised by self-sufficiency in food, the growing popularity of post-materialist values, the demand for a sustainable development model, the reaffirmation of the local in the face of globalisation and the need to redirect the role of the welfare state, the countryside is defined as multifunctional. This has important repercussions for the principles that have inspired official policies and particularly agricultural policy, whose justification has been to exploit natural resources to provide food. In the new context, agricultural policy has to seek new legitimacy for farmers to continue to receive subsidies. In the debates on the future of agricultural policy and rural development, some emerging elements are the generation, or at least not the destruction, of employment, equity in the distribution of payments, and food quality, its contribution to the management of the land and the protection of the environment.

In short, in a context marked by a diversity of expectations and plurality of interests in rural society, policies, too, should be different. Old agricultural policies directed to market regulation and structural modernization are being reformulated according the paradigm of sustainability and ecological modernization, and new policies are emerging to regulate the many functions of the countryside. Old and new policies and protagonists coexist in this period of transition and give rural society a dynamism unknown before, which offers a new opportunity structure to the different social groups. For the population, individually or collectively, of rural areas this structure merely provides a stage. Its proper subjects are those who, through their particular ways of interpreting it, define their preferences and exploit the resources at their disposal.

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Eduardo Moyano-Estrada, IESA-CSIC, Cordoba, Spain



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