



Urban population looking for rural landscapes: Different appreciation patterns identified in Southern Europe



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 30 May 2014

Received in revised form

11 September 2015

Accepted 25 September 2015

Available online 9 October 2015

Keywords:

Rural landscape

Urban population

Landscape preferences

Land cover

Regional policy

Alentejo region

ABSTRACT

In the context of the peripheral European rural landscapes, the role of the urban population, generally referred to as the ‘outsiders’, has shown to be influential in the dynamics of rural space. This influence occurs namely through the demand for non-productive functions leading to the emergence of new modes of occupancy. In addition, the emerging policy framework concerning policies and planning in rural landscapes call for an improved understanding of the diversified social demands for these landscapes. We argue that a more profound knowledge on the urban demand for rural landscape is needed to better integrate the urban interests into rural policy and planning. The present paper aims to gain greater insight on this demand by identifying landscape preferences of urban users, framed by the multifunctional transition theory, and using a photo-based survey with contrasting land covers derived from CORINE Land Cover classes. Furthermore, the use of land cover classes as the main landscape component, and thereby relating preferences to specific land covers, offers a sound basis for a territorial approach, able to integrate landscape into rural policy and land use planning practice. A case-study in Southern Portugal was developed at the regional scale and results showed different appreciation patterns for rural landscapes varying from humanised and more naturalised landscapes according to the different functions sought by urban users. Another prominent result is that urban demand for rural landscapes, even if driven by consumption, is strongly influenced by both protection and production values. A deeper knowledge on the interests of urban population can be a step forward for rural communities, land managers, and sectoral policy decision-makers to better define investment strategies in rural-urban partnerships facing the growing urban demand over rural space.

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1. Introduction

In literature there is a growing awareness of the role of a variety of ‘outsiders’ in the construction of the rural landscape (Halfacree and Boyle, 1998; Primdahl and Swaffield, 2010; Woods, 2011). Today, urban population has greater economic resources, greater access to rural areas and their amenities and it is simultaneously in greater need of spaces that provide an escape from the stress of daily life (Claval, 2005). Urban population, especially from

metropolitan areas (Costello, 2009), represents a significant group looking for rural areas in particular for living and leisure activities (Claval, 2005). In fact, the interest of urban population in rural areas, motivated by ideas of the rural idyll (Woods, 2011), has been described in literature, not only in different rural regions in diversified contexts, but also considering different forms of consumption. For instance: the interest of the so called neo-rurals in recreation and living uses (e.g. Bijker et al., 2012; Costello, 2009; Guimond and Simard, 2010; Halfacree and Boyle, 1998); the interest of tourists in leisure activities and outdoor recreation (e.g. Farmaki, 2012; Kastenholz et al., 2012) or the interest in establishing a second residence in rural areas (e.g. Vepsäläinen and Pitkänen, 2010).

These multiple forms of consumption suggest that urban interests might significantly influence the dynamics of rural areas at several levels as highlighted by Buciega et al. (2009). The authors reported adaptive processes of traditional practices to the current

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urban demands, but also novel processes resulting in changes in land use or functions. This influence refers mainly to: (i) urban users ability to afford rural goods and services (Kalantaridis, 2010), and to invest in non-commodity activities (e.g. tourism, cultural activities or outdoor recreation); (ii) their human capital contribution, stimulating new consumption habits (i.e. traditional or organic food); (iii) their high capital investment capacity, adding a new source of financial capital in the housing market (Stockdale et al., 2000), which frequently includes the refurbishment of abandoned households as well as innovative approaches to land management of surrounding areas; and (iv) their contact network, which enables them to promote entrepreneurship, thus increasing the competitive performance of rural areas (Kalantaridis, 2010).

In addition to the traditional functions related to production of food and fibre, these new societal demands that value other landscape functions, related with sustainable resource management, landscape protection, leisure and recreation, are emerging in rural areas (Pinto-Correia and Breman, 2009; Primdahl and Swaffield, 2010; Wiggering et al., 2006). This multifunctional transition, as conceptualized both by Holmes (2006, 2012) and Wilson (2008), can be depicted on the basis of modes of occupancy, driven by the three basic goals of human occupancy: production, consumption and protection. According to Holmes (2006, 2012) these goals are linked with three driving forces that lead this transition to a multifunctional rural occupation: (i) *Agricultural overcapacity*, resulting from technological advances that had driven the intensification in favoured areas and extensification in less favoured patches (*Production goal*); (ii) *the emergence of market-driven amenity oriented uses* as a result of the growing demand for rural areas for new functions such as tourism or recreation and the increasing dependence of farm households on non-farming income (*Consumption goal*) and (iii) *the changing societal values* as evidenced by the growing social concern for sustainable resource management and landscape protection (*Protection goal*). This three driving forces contribute to increase spatial heterogeneity in the use of rural resources (Holmes, 2006:143).

As a result of this transition rural landscape is changing from being mainly a place of production into more complex and multifunctional modes of occupancy in which urban population plays an important role (Holmes, 2006:144). For example, Sofer and Applebaum (2006) highlighted the effect of newcomers, mostly of urban origin, in a process of rural reconstructing where new economic activities have replaced farming as sources of income. Increasing attention has been given to the “virtues” of multifunctionality particularly in low input traditional farming systems of peripheral areas in Europe (Breman et al., 2010), of which the Alentejo region in South Portugal is a good example, and where the integration of production, protection and consumption functions is already in place (Pinto-Correia and Carvalho-Ribeiro, 2012; Pinto-Correia and Breman, 2009).

In this context, the assessment of the value that urban population attributes to particular features of rural agrarian landscapes comes out to be of great relevance. This gain a particular significance when the territorial dimension is considered as it provides an important knowledge to define indicators of societal appreciation for rural landscapes and consequently to inform decision making and policy action. The new policy framework shaping European policies until 2020 is, eventually more than ever, stressing a territorial component. The European Union has no mandate to legislate on spatial planning but many of the European policies have strong spatial implication (Faludi, 2009). In fact, cohesion and agriculture policies stirred cannot be ignored in their capability to shape landscapes throughout Europe. In the new policy framework, the European Commission introduced new tools cohesion policy (i.e. community-led local development and integrated territorial investments) that aim at implementing territorial strate-

gies identified in each Operational Programme at regional scale (Mourato, 2013). Moreover, the new Common Agriculture Policy, grants member States with increased flexibility and freedom to “customise” national policies according to regional specificities and development objectives. Together, both policies are expected to enable regional authorities to better target social demands at local and regional levels. However, a territorial approach implies the acknowledgement of complementary assets of rural and urban areas, in order to foster their integration and thereby benefit from their complementarity.

In this respect, the OECD has been emphasizing the need to invest in “rural–urban partnerships” as a way to enable rural–urban co-operation (OECD, 2013) and taking advantage of the multiple relations that beyond the exchange of goods, include also the movement of people and the services provided (OECD, 2011). Such recent developments are in line with the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP) launched in 1999 to guide planning at the European scale (Zonneveld and Stead, 2007). In this emerging policy framework, targeting policies and planning in rural landscapes call for an improved understanding of the interest of the urban population in these landscapes. How and why they move to rural areas? What services they are looking for? Finally, it is also relevant to understand how land cover affects the preferences for alternative landscapes.

Several studies on landscape preferences conducted in Alentejo region (Barroso et al., 2012; Pinto-Correia et al., 2011, 2010; Surová and Pinto-Correia, 2009) provide evidence of urban demand for rural landscapes in this region, looking especially for residence and leisure activities. However, there are still large gaps in our knowledge on urban users’ preferences, particularly those related with its diversity and the functions they look for in rural landscapes. We postulate that landscape preferences are as diverse as the urban population itself. As such, this paper presents the results of a study, where the preferences of urban users for rural landscape in the Alentejo region have been assessed, through a photo-based survey with contrasting land covers. The results concerning the diversified demand of urban users are discussed and interpreted in the light of the new modes of rural occupancy as proposed by Holmes (2006, 2012) and the integration of this knowledge into public policy for rural areas.

2. Study area and methods

2.1. Study area

This study was developed in Alentejo, a NUT II region in Southern Portugal, which covers a third of the country’s area (31,551 km²) (Fig. 1). The landscape is dominated by large areas of Montado – an extensive silvo-pastoral system – combined with small-scale mosaics of other land cover types resulting in a specific landscape character that has been shown to be highly attractive for the urban population (Carvalho-Ribeiro et al., 2013a; Surová et al., 2014). The region comprises 47 municipalities. A sample of 10 municipalities has been defined, to represent the diversity of characteristic land cover types of the whole Alentejo. Enquiries were applied in these 10 municipalities. For a more detailed explanation on the selection of the case study areas please see Carvalho-Ribeiro et al. (2013b).

2.2. Sampling design

The survey guide was developed in order to obtain direct replies about how the rural landscape is used and which land cover classes best suit the preferences of those who use it, as well as how much agriculture plays a role in the preferences expressed—how important is the agricultural system and production in place for

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