



Assessing the ability of rural areas to fulfil multiple societal demands



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ABSTRACT

Rural areas are changing through a process of multifunctional transition. New societal expectations, including countryside consumption and protection, increasingly determine the way rural space is used. There is a pressing need to grasp the new relative balance between these drivers of the rural space, in each particular area, in order to target public intervention. Tackling differentiation within rural space will definitely contribute to developing the potential and vocation of each area while supporting territorial cohesion. In this context, sound analytical knowledge that reveals and characterizes this differentiation is required and novel analytical approaches are needed for this knowledge to be obtained. Based on the conceptual framework proposed by Holmes (2006, 2012), this paper presents two methodological pathways for defining a typology of European regions that considers the multifunctionality of rural areas today and the relative weight of the dimensions of production, protection and consumption. The classification is produced at Nomenclature Territorial Unit NUTS 2 level, using information derived from European statistical datasets compiling different cartographic sources. One of the methods used to develop a typology was a clustering approach while the other method used was an expert-based analytical procedure. Even when the limitations stemming from the data available for the whole of Europe are considered, the results are encouraging. The results show two different regional distributions in Europe. These distributions, which have some similarities but also certain differences, both reveal the general characteristics of NUTS 2 regions and shed new light on the ways in which societal expectations for production, protection and consumption might be spatially reconciled. The expert-based approach seems to produce a more faithful classification. Both typologies result in most regions being classified as pluri-active, or complex or multifunctional, which may indicate that multiple modes of rural occupancy are widely found in each region and therefore that a more detailed scale of analysis would be more likely to enable evidence-based decisions to be made.

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Introduction

Assessing the heterogeneity and complexity of rural change on multiple geographical scales and governance levels has proven difficult. On the one hand, there is a need to address the potential and vocations of the land. On the other hand, there is a need to address the various societal expectations concerning rural space. In recent decades, it has repeatedly been reported that societal expectations concerning rural areas have progressively been changing (Robinson, 2008; Swaffield and Primdahl, 2010; Woods, 2011; Pinto-Correia and Kristensen, 2013). Besides the production of food and fibre, new expectations are now emerging which are related to: (a) consumption, corresponding to market-driven amenity uses, including quality of life, leisure and health; and (b)

protection, encompassing sustainability and a bundle of environmental concerns related to the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity. The OECD views this trend as the emergence of a 'new rural paradigm' (OECD, 2006), reflecting the new combination of activities now shaping rural space as well as the more complex relationships that exist between urban and rural socioeconomic contexts (Brunori and Rossi, 2007; Woods, 2011; Ortiz-Miranda et al., 2013). Though these changing trends are acknowledged in the academic spheres and in policy strategy making, they may be hardly seen by public policy design and implementation, as these keep the traditional sectoral approach and have hardly changed into an integrative, territorial perspective. Thus, there is a need to better inform public policies, so that they may address and support in the best way the potential in each region to satisfy present and future societal demands. More precise assessments of what is going on in the rural space, and what society is expecting from each different region, are needed. For European level policies, a regional classification, helping to change the focus from the

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sectors to the territory, may be a way to overcome the mentioned limitations.

The post-productivism transition (PPT; Wilson, 2007; Robinson, 2008) has been one of the conceptual frameworks developed in order to conceptualize the interrelationships between the economic, social and ecological changes taking place in rural areas. In addition to those mentioned above, the conceptual framework proposed by Holmes (2006, 2012) also attempts to capture the broader dynamics of rural change. Holmes conceptualizes what is known as the multifunctional rural transition (MRT), which is based on two main concepts: (a) multifunctionality as an attribute of rural space; and (b) modes of occupancy as functions that society is either obtaining or expecting from rural areas. There is therefore a focus on societal dynamics and not solely on the intrinsic characteristics of the area. Holmes' framework (2006, 2012) therefore makes it possible to depict how different rural areas are positioned on transition pathways according to how they are affected by the relative importance of production, consumption and protection drivers as a result of their characteristics and their societal uses and expectations. Despite being well-acknowledged, the increasing societal expectations on consumption and protection, the recent food-safety scare, and the pressures on food-production standards have not made the connections between these demands any less complex. On the contrary, the provision of high-quality food that is widely available to citizens simply puts more pressure on space available for consumption e.g. leisure and the protection of agro-environmental resources (Brunori et al., 2013; Marsden, 2013).

Societal expectations correspond to the values attributed to the different rural spaces. Therefore, they need also to be considered when planning public interventions (Selman, 2012). Only by assessing both the changes taking place in society's expectations of rural space and, at the same time, the vocations of different rural spaces can public intervention be best targeted. In turn, this approach might contribute to developing the potential of each area while supporting territorial cohesion (Woods, 2011). The required flexible strategies and tools adapted to different regional characteristics and vocations need to be based on sound analytical knowledge that develops and characterizes this differentiation (Pinto-Correia and Breman, 2009; Breman et al., 2010; Markey et al., 2010).

To produce such knowledge, which is useful in targeting policy and monitoring changes, various typologies have recurrently been developed (Mücher et al., 2010; Hazeu et al., 2011; Haines-Young et al., 2012; Ortega et al., 2012; Verburg et al., 2013). A review of the recent literature demonstrates that, despite the many simplifications underlying all spatial typologies in Europe (Pinto-Correia and Breman, 2009; van Berkel and Verburg, 2011; van Eupen et al., 2012; Carvalho-Ribeiro et al., 2013a), such typologies can contribute not only to obtaining a higher level of understanding of the differentiation taking place but also to depicting the main trends characterizing the changes that are occurring. Furthermore, typologies may be applied at different scales of analysis, allowing analytical differentiation to take place at the scale on which the process is occurring. Thus, typology development is widely used to support decision-making at different governance levels. To better provide classifications at different scales, it is necessary to address: (1) approaches to upscaling and downscaling; (2) the available scale-specific indicators; and finally (3) the thematic accuracy of synoptic assessment and standardization. For more on these topics, please see the other papers in this special issue (Carvalho-Ribeiro et al., in this issue; Jones et al., in this issue; Paracchini et al., in this issue).

However, typology development needs to be carefully implemented as it is well known that automatic statistical analysis can lead to results of almost any type. Completely different typology outcomes might be achieved, depending on the applied method,

the indicators selected and the quality of the datasets used (van Eetvelde and Antrop, 2009; Chuman and Romportl, 2010; Metzger et al., 2010; Mücher et al., 2010; Hazeu et al., 2011; van Eupen et al., 2012). Therefore, data-driven typologies are often poor in terms of their explanatory capacity. They show how different areas are closer or more distant from each other but they fail to identify the determinant characteristics of each set of areas (Carvalho-Ribeiro et al., 2013b; Verburg et al., 2013). Producing typologies on the basis of a clear conceptual framework reduces this weakness, delivering a clear positioning in relation to the processes to be addressed. Nevertheless, using an advanced conceptual framework as the background for a typology may be problematic as theoretical frameworks are usually not produced in order to allow an analytical expression to be obtained. Therefore, finding the right method can be highly challenging (Pinto-Correia and Breman, 2009). Despite acknowledging the trade-offs inherent in the process of incorporating theoretical frameworks into typology-related analytical procedures, we found it essential in order to grasp the complexity at stake. Furthermore, we found it to be highly productive and informative in analytically exploring Holmes' concept (2006, 2012) of the modes of occupancy of rural space. Holmes proposes that there are three main groups of driving forces linked to the three basic purposes underlying the human use of rural space: production, consumption and protection. For methodological purposes, these three groups of drivers of human occupancy are hereafter referred to as 'dimensions'. Holmes' work (2006, 2012) has inspired fresh insights into the pathways of change taking place in rural parishes and areas in peripheral regions of Europe (Pinto-Correia and Breman, 2009; Carvalho-Ribeiro et al., 2013a). However, it has not yet been applied on a continental scale.

With this background in mind, the aim of this paper is to:

1. Demonstrate how the conceptual framework on new modes of rural occupancy can be applied to a new typology of rural areas of Europe;
2. Test the performance of Holmes' conceptual framework against two contrasting typology approaches, namely, clustering and expert-based AHP;
3. Discuss the potential and drawbacks of using Holmes' conceptual background for the two different methodological pathways.

Methods

Analytically representing Holmes' conceptual framework

The conceptual framework proposed by Holmes (2006) is represented in Fig. 1. It concerns the broader dynamics of rural change, with agricultural production being one of the components (Holmes, 2012). It is therefore not centred on agriculture or the farm unit as providers of multiple functions but on the multiple functions of rural space as it is. It focus on society and relates to all of the functions that society expects from rural spaces, including all those linked to the social dimension. It is based on two main concepts: (a) multifunctionality as an attribute of rural space; and (b) modes of occupancy as the functions that society obtains or expects from rural areas. Holmes' framework shows how different rural areas are differently placed on transition pathways according to how they are affected by the relative importance of production, consumption and protection drivers. Therefore, in Holmes' framework there is an issue related to the relative importance of the three sets of drivers and it is this relative weight that places a rural area in one or another mode of occupancy. If all of these drivers, or societal uses, were equally important, then the area would be classified in the same way as if all of these drivers were equally low. Holmes (2006, 2010, 2012) also shows that the relative importance of the

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