

# *A Tale of Two Rurals:* Antonymic discourses on the Portuguese countryside

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# Aim

- To identify and assess different images on the countryside by Portuguese residents

## How?

- Through the analysis of the results from a survey directed to a sample of Portuguese residents (N=1853)
- Through the analysis of 26 post-survey interviews to a sample of the respondents

# Theoretical background

- Rural areas, particularly in peripheral and remote regions of Europe and in consequence of major changes in agriculture, have undergone several socioeconomic transformations starting in the mid-XX century
- One of the manifestations of those changes is the passage of rural areas from places of production to spaces of consumption
- Accompanying these changes, major transformations seem to occur in the ways rural areas and rurality are socially represented

# Theoretical background

- A threefold narrative on the rural seemed to emerge from such transformations:
  - A “pre-modernity” or “rural crisis” discourse
  - A productivist perspective
  - A “rural renaissance” vision
- The “rural renaissance” vision – which emphasises the consumable character of rural areas – seems to be dominant among social representations, especially in the ‘global north’ (Cloke, 2006; Halfacree, 2006; McCarthy, 2008; Figueiredo, 2013)

# Theoretical background

- A big part of those social representations on rural areas have been widely influenced by mass media, cultural industries, tourism promotion, and political discourse.
- In spite of the growing hegemonic idyllic views on the rural in Portugal, following the tendency of other European countries, a diversity of rural social representations seem to emerge.
- Those are mainly related to historical, social and cultural specificities and, undoubtedly, to the importance rural areas and rurality have in national economy, society and cultural identity.

# Methodology

- A questionnaire was applied to a sample of the Portuguese population over 14 years old (applied between 11/2013 and 10/2014 and combining personal interviews and online answers)
- **A total of 1853 valid questionnaires were obtained** (59.8% - personal interviews / 40.2% online)
- **A quota sampling** approach was adopted based on the following criteria:
  - The municipality of residence categorized in three levels:
    - level 1 municipalities – most urban;
    - level 2 municipalities – the intermediate
    - and level 3 municipalities – the most rural
  - The parish of residence (categorized in two groups – urban or rural, according to INE classification)
  - Gender
  - Age

# Methodology

- The following task of the project involved interviewing 30 of the people who responded to the questionnaire in order to further assess their views on rural areas and rurality.
- The aim was to interview people with different views on rural areas while following the sample distribution in terms of gender, age, qualifications, municipality and parish of residence.
- To find homogeneous groups of people with different views on rural areas, we performed a Hierarchical Cluster Analysis.
- The main criterion for this analysis was the answer to the first question of the questionnaire, in which respondents were asked to describe rural areas using three words. Those words were grouped in nine categories.

# Images of the Rural - survey

<i>Image of the rural</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Rural as idyllic	639	34.5
Rural as anti-idyllic	165	8.9
Rural as disadvantaged	869	46.9
Rural as space of well-being	630	34.0
Rural as place of development/transformation	221	11.9
Rural as an inhabited place	117	6.3
Rural as space for economic activities	536	28.9
Rural as landscape and place of resources and natural elements	392	21.2
Rural as a physical space	177	9.6

*Table 1. Images of the rural conveyed by survey respondents*



# Groups of Respondents

<i>Groups</i>	<b>Images on Rural Areas</b>	<b>Traits</b>
<b>Group 1: The Anti-Idyllic Rural</b> (N=563)	Anti-idyllic Physical space Inhabited space A space for economic activities	Older people (50-64; 65+) Has lower qualifications Lives in the most urban municipalities Associates rural areas with industry more than other groups
<b>Group 2: The Disadvantaged Rural</b> (N=530)	Disadvantaged	Mostly aged 24-35 Has higher qualifications Lives in the most rural municipalities Economic activities: agriculture, forestry, livestock farming and tourism
<b>Group 3: The Rural as a Place of Development</b> (N=174)	A place of development and transformation	Mostly aged 25-49 Has higher qualifications Economic activities: tourism and leisure
<b>Group 4: The Idyllic Rural</b> (N=286)	Idyllic Space of well-being	Younger people (15-24) Has higher qualifications
<b>Group 5: The Rural as a Space for Economic Activities</b> (N=286)	Rural as landscape A space for economic activities A place of resources and natural elements	Younger people (15-24) Economic activities: tourism and leisure, agriculture/forestry/livestock farming

# Interviews

<i>Group</i>	<i>Number of interviews</i>
1. Anti-idyllic	8
2. Disadvantaged	8
3. Place of development	3
4. Idyllic	4
5. Space for economic activities	3

**Table 3. Number of interviews per group**

**Table 4. Images of the rural conveyed in the interviews**

<i>Image of the rural</i>	<i>Interviewees</i>	<i>% Interviewees</i>	<i>Number of references</i>
Rural as anti-idyllic	2	7.7%	4
Rural as space for economic activities	11	42.3%	19
Rural as a physical space	2	7.7%	2
Rural as an inhabited place	6	23.1%	8
Rural as landscape and place of resources and natural elements	10	38.5%	13
Rural as disadvantaged	17	65.4%	45
Rural as a space of well-being	16	61.5%	35
Rural as idyllic	11	42.3%	18
Rural as place of development/transformation	4	15.4%	5

# Interviews

<i>Image of the rural / Group</i>	<i>1 - Anti-idyllic</i>	<i>2 - Disadvantaged</i>	<i>3 – Place of development</i>	<i>4 - Idyllic</i>	<i>5 – Space for economic activities</i>
Rural as anti-idyllic	0	3	0	1	0
Rural as space for economic activities	4	2	2	5	<b>6</b>
Rural as a physical space	0	1	0	0	1
Rural as an inhabited place	2	3	1	2	0
Rural as landscape and place of resources and natural elements	3	2	2	1	5
Rural as disadvantaged	<b>9</b>	<b>25</b>	2	5	4
Rural as a space of well-being	6	8	<b>6</b>	<b>10</b>	5
Rural as idyllic	4	5	3	4	2
Rural as place of development/transformation	0	2	2	1	0

***Table 5. Number of mentions of each category per group of respondents***

# Conclusions

- The array of **positive**, **negative** and **neutral** aspects of rural and rurality conveyed by the people who were interviewed is sufficiently broad to conclude that **there's no hegemonic image of rural areas among** them.
- Most people express **antipodal** images of rural areas in their discourses:
  - peaceful *but* isolated;
  - beautiful *but* abandoned;
  - healthy *but* away from health and other public services;
  - a place full of good memories *but* out of job opportunities;
  - full of potential *but* lacking investment;
  - the perfect place to raise a family, *but* lacking schools and entertainment.
- Those *two rurals* overlap both in the minds of each respondent and in the bigger picture, and they fully demonstrate the complex reality of the Portuguese rural areas.

# Obrigado! Thank you!

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