

# THE FUTURE OF RURALITY UNDER GLOBALIZATION.<sup>1</sup>

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**What can be said, 30 years afterwards, about the two main hypotheses launched in the beginning of the 1970s on rural regions destiny? Scientific evidence shows that the dynamics of some of these areas as local responses to globalization do not confirm extreme conjectures on 'complete urbanization' ou 'rural renaissance'. Natural amenities that are driving the rural population change, with an urban-rural shift of enterprise behavior, may be showing a new pattern of territorial employment distribution, that also means anew pattern of rural development. In short, this article argues that Lefebvre (1970) and Kayser (1972) were both mistaken.**

The debate about transcending the “urban-rural dichotomy” continues to turn on the polar opposites of the hypothesis of complete urbanization, proposed by the philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre (in 1970), and that of a rural renaissance, the counterproposal by geographer and sociologist Bernard Kayser (in 1972). After more than 30 years, can we state which of these two extreme hypotheses has been borne out by the current phase of the globalization process? Or is it the case, rather, that both are wanting, and that a new hypothesis is needed, which takes into account more recent evidence about both new forms of urbanization and a greater value now accorded to less artificialized ecosystems. In this case, what evidence is available regarding the current trends in spatial distribution of anthropogenic pressures? What does this suggest about the future(s) of the “rural world”? What does the globalization process hold in store for it?

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There has been little progress in developing new criteria that would allow a more adequate description of the new systems of human settlements and their corresponding degrees of artificialization of ecosystems. There is also still little insight into the more profound effects of globalization on the evolution of the different forms of human pressure. Thus this paper has two objectives: theoretical clarification of the principal issues involved in the debate about overcoming the urban-rural dichotomy, and updating the empirical evidence about these issues. A corollary byproduct is the outline of an hypothesis about the most probable fate of rural areas in the current phase of globalization.

### **The hypothesis of complete urbanization**

Proposed in 1970 by the French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, this hypothesis is based on a definition: he defines as urban society that which results from complete urbanization - "today virtual, tomorrow real". The expression is reserved for society that emerged from industrialization. "These words designate, therefore, the society constituted by this process that dominates and absorbs agricultural production" (Lefebvre, 2002:15). The concept of urban society is intended to denominate "post-industrial society", or that which grew out of industrialization and succeeds it (Lefebvre, 2002:15). And by "urban revolution" the author designates the set of transformations that contemporary society goes through in passing from the period in which issues of growth and industrialization dominate and that in which the urban problematic comes to dominate – "in which the search for solutions and modalities specific to the urban society come to the fore" (Lefebvre, 2002:15).

At the end of the book *The Urban Revolution* the author notes that the development of the concept of urban society, anticipated since the first page as a hypothesis, cannot be understood as the final word. "To treat it as such would be dogmatism. This would be to insert the concept of "urban society" into a suspect epistemology – suspect because it is premature, because it puts the categorical above the problematic, and because it restrains and perhaps misdirects the movement that raises the urban phenomenon to the horizon of knowledge" (Lefebvre 2002:151). Four years later, in the 423 pages of the book *The production of space*, which crowned an intense phase of intellectual development in urban

sociology (1968-1974), there is not a single reference to the 1970 book, and only rare and highly indirect allusions to the hypothesis of complete urbanization. In its place, he mentions a “spatial revolution” which parenthetically would subsume the “urban revolution”, analogous to the great peasant (agrarian) and industrial revolutions (Lefebvre, 1995:419). It would not be unreasonable then to speculate that the hypothesis of “complete urbanization” was not holding much appeal in 1973 to the person who formulated it. But this is not the opinion held by many of his admirers, as demonstrated by the recent translation of the book *The Urban Revolution* in Brazil, (1999, reprinted in 2002), with the preface and flaps filled with exalted praise, not to mention the endorsement of Octavio Ianni (1996:61).

### **The hypothesis of a rural renaissance**

The inverse hypothesis was proposed two years later (1972) by the geographer and sociologist Bernard Kayser, who was part of the founding group of the journal *Espace et Société* (1970-1980), together with Henri Lefebvre. In the conclusion of his book *La Renaissance Rurale* (1990), Kayser reports the circumstances under which he first used the expression “rural renaissance”, well before its emergence in the U.S. academic literature, in the context of the debate around the significance of the demographic trend running contrary to the “rural exodus”, that was under way since the 1970s in most developed countries. This debate became more polarized after 1976, with the emergence of the term “counterurbanization”.

In fact, in his 1990 book Kayser no longer considered the “rural renaissance” to be just a hypothesis. He argued, rather, that it was a “situation”. It wasn’t the situation of all rural space, but it was sufficiently widespread to show its potential, until then obscured by the predominance of pessimistic and “catastrophist” perspectives in the media and technocratic spheres. These signs could only condemn the prophets of “desertification”.

Despite this conclusive tone, almost as a “proven fact”, at the beginning there is a much more prudent “*avant-propos*”, in which the author states that his objective would be achieved if the content of the book were treated as a set of hypotheses (“*corps d’hypothèses*”). This statement is immediately followed by a confession of two serious gaps: economics and ecology. The author recognizes that an analysis of this scale should

be supported by knowledge generated by these two disciplines, but that this would have become very difficult, both to write and to read (Kayser, 1990:8).

Kayser's central argument is that the changing demographic trends should not be seen as a superficial or temporary phenomenon. For him, something that might appear accidental or localized is in fact a true "societal" phenomenon. Repopulation, ways of life, restoration of small town life, non-agricultural activities, entitlement policies, local development policies, and cultural practices were showing that the demographic dimension is only one indicator of what was already occurring in developed countries – a rural renaissance.

### **Statistical evidence available in early 2004**

At the center of this debate are the changes to ecosystems caused by the human species. After all, nothing is more rural than nearly unaltered (or untouched) ecosystems, and nothing is more urban than the most artificialized ecosystems. One could imagine here the contrast between Paris, France and Paris, Texas. Table 1 compares the estimates available that permit such a comparison.

The first observation to make is about the contrast between the degree of artificialization of ecosystems in Europe and the rest of the world. Some 65% of European territory is intensely altered (both by human settlements and by intensive agriculture). In the other continents this fraction doesn't reach one third, and is less than 12% in South America and Australasia. Next, it should be noted that more than half of the territory of the Americas and Australasia were considered practically unaltered – because they maintain primary vegetation – and with very low demographic densities. Finally, it could be said that half the planetary land area remains practically unaltered, and another quarter is partially altered with extensive forms of primary exploitation. In other words, only one quarter of the global area is significantly artificialized by urbanization and by more intensive forms of agriculture.

**Table 1**  
**Human habitat and alterations by continent and in Brazil.**

	<b>Total area</b>	<b>Practically unaltered</b> (1)	<b>Partially altered (2)</b>	<b>Extensively artificialized (3)</b>
	Millions of km <sup>2</sup>	%	%	%
Europe	5.8	15.6	19.6	64.9
Asia	53.3	43.5	27.0	29.5
North America	26.2	56.3	18.8	24.9
Africa	34.0	48.9	35.8	15.4
South America	20.1	62.5	22.5	12.0
Australasia	9.5	62.3	25.8	12.0
<b>TOTAL w/o Antarctica</b>	<b>148.8</b>	<b>49.7</b>	<b>26.6</b>	<b>23.8</b>
Antarctica	13.2	100.0	0.0	0.0
<b>TOTAL WORLD</b>	<b>162.1</b>	<b>53.8</b>	<b>24.4</b>	<b>21.8</b>
<b>BRAZIL</b>	<b>8.5</b>	<b>63.0</b>	<b>18.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>

(1) **Practically unaltered:** areas with primary vegetation and with very low human densities.

(2) **Partially altered:** areas with extensive agricultural activities, secondary vegetation, and other evidence of human alteration, such as overgrazing or logging.

(3) **Artificialized:** areas with intensive agricultural activities and human settlements in which the primary vegetation was removed, or with desertification and other forms of permanent degradation.

**Source:** Hannah *et al.* (1994) for the continents. For Brazil, see EMBRAPA Satellite Monitoring:

[http://www.cobveget.cnpemembrapa.br/resulta/brasil/leg\\_br.html](http://www.cobveget.cnpemembrapa.br/resulta/brasil/leg_br.html)

Thus, a debate about the disappearance or renaissance of rurality should be focused on Europe, because the available evidence about North America, Australasia and other still less altered areas are of little value if the same patterns and trends are not also found in the more artificialized biomes. In addition, it would be as wrong to take a strictly ecological

perspective as would be an exclusively social or economic one. More appropriate, therefore, is to seek out criteria that can take into account at the same time ecological and socioeconomic aspects of the use of territory by the human species. And this was precisely the formidable challenge accepted by researchers at the Territorial Development Service of OECD, who were able to establish territorial indicators of employment, with a focus on rural development (OECD, 1996).

After a detailed analysis of the statistics on 50,000 local communities from the 2000 regions in the 26 member countries of the OECD, it was possible to distinguish between different hierarchical levels for the territorial analysis. At the local level, the smaller administrative units, and the smaller statistical units, were classified only as urban or rural. In a second stage, at the regional level, functional aggregations (such as provinces, or “commuting zones”) were classified as more or less rural.

At the local level, the OECD classified as rural those communities with a population density of less than 150 inhabitants per square kilometer (or 500 inhab/km<sup>2</sup> in the specific case of Japan). According to this definition, around one third (35%) of the OECD population lives in rural communities that cover more than 90% of its territory. These figures vary widely from country to country. The inhabitants of rural areas account for less than 10% of the population in Holland and Belgium, and more than 50% in Scandinavian countries. But in any case, since the choices and opportunities open to these rural communities depend to a great extent on the relationship they maintain with urban centers, what really matters is the regional approach. Thus, for the analytical purposes of the OECD, its 2000 regions were grouped into 3 subsets, as a function of the participation of the regional population that lives in rural communities. In regions considered predominately rural this share is higher than 50%. In those areas considered significantly rural it is between 15% and 50%. And in the predominantly urban regions it is below 15%.

Since rurality is complex and multisectoral, only a broad set of indicators can, according to the OECD, take into account the four dimensions that appear in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 – Basic set of rural indicators**

<b>POPULATION AND MIGRATION</b>	<b>SOCIAL WELFARE AND EQUITY</b>
Density Change Structure Homes Communities	Income Housing Education Health Security
<b>ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND PERFORMANCE</b>	<b>ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY</b>
Labour force Employment Sectoral weights Productivity Investment	Topography and Climate Land use changes Habitat and species Soil and water resources Air quality

Source: OECD (1996)

Around one quarter (28%) of the population of OECD countries lives in predominantly rural areas, in general remote, in which most people belong to small scattered communities. At the opposite extreme, around 40% of the OECD population is concentrated in less than 3% of the territory, in predominantly urban areas. The remaining third (32%) lives in regions of an intermediate category, classified as significantly or relatively urban. That is, each of the three types of regions contains rural and urban communities, but to different extents.

While in some Scandinavian countries the relative shares of regions predominantly or significantly rural are higher, just the opposite occurs in countries like Belgium, the United Kingdom and Germany. Other countries are characterized by a dualist structure, with high proportions of the population at the two extremes. This is the case, for example, with Ireland, Greece and Portugal. Also, in countries like France, Spain and Italy, the largest portion of the population lies in the intermediate category called significantly rural. (See tables 2 and 3)

Table 2 – Rural populations in OECD countries, 1990

	Population in rural communities (*)	Population by type of region (**)		
		Predominantly Rural	Significantly Rural	Predominantly Urban
	% of National Population	% of National Population		
Norway	59	51	38	11
Sweden	43	49	32	19
Finland	55	43	37	20
Denmark	42	40	38	22
Austria	42	40	39	22
USA	44	36	34	30
Canada	40	33	23	44
Australia	30	23	22	55
New Zealand	49	47	25	28
Iceland	39	35	8	57
Ireland	43	47	15	38
Greece	37	42	24	34
Portugal	36	35	22	43
Czech Rep.	29	15	57	28
France	37	30	41	29
Spain	30	17	46	37
Italy	22	9	44	47
Japan	27	22	35	43
Switzerland	19	13	25	62
Germany	21	8	26	66
Un. Kingdom	13	1	27	72
Luxemburg	30	-	100	-
Belgium	9	2	18	80
Netherlands	8	-	15	85

Notes:

- Does not apply
- ... Not Available
- (\*) Population in local communities with density of lower than 150 inhab/km<sup>2</sup> (and 500 in the case of Japan).
- (\*\*) Typology of regions according to the share of rural population (greater than 50%, between 50% and 15%, and less than 15%).

Source: OECD (1996)



**Table 3 – Distribution of employment among the tree sectors, in the predominantly rural regions, OECD Countries, 1990.**

	<b>PREDOMINANTLY RURAL REGIONS (*)</b>		
	<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Services</b>
	% of total employment		
Norway	8	33	59
Sweden	5	32	63
Finland	16	30	54
Denmark	10	30	61
Austria	13	37	49
USA	6	26	68
Canada	11	23	66
Australia	15	20	65
New Zealand	17	24	59
Iceland	37	21	42
Ireland	22	29	50
Greece	37	24	39
Portugal	23	31	47
Czech Republic	22	41	88
France	11	32	57
Spain	25	25	50
Italy	...	...	...
Japan	14	31	55
Switzerland	10	33	57
Germany	2	52	46
United Kingdom	10	28	62
Luxemburg	3	31	66
Belgium	11	21	69
Netherlands	10	34	56

Notes:  
 ... Not Available.  
 (\*) Typology of regions according to share of rural population: greater than 50%.  
 Source: OECD (1996)

By themselves, these data for 1990 don't serve to prove or disprove either of the two hypotheses. In order to find in them a signal favorable to Lefebvre's hypothesis, one could just assume that the advanced capitalist societies were on the path indicated by Holland, Belgium and Luxemburg, or even by the United Kingdom, nations in which the predominantly rural population is practically extinct. On the other hand, to see a confirmation of Kayser's hypothesis, one could use the example of Switzerland, in which a range of factors created in a very similar country (advanced and with limited territory) where the predominately rural population has greater weight than in Italy.

But these data have a very different significance when one takes into account the change in direction. The proportion of urbanites continued to increase in practically all the advanced countries until the mid-1970s, when the trend was replaced, in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by a decline in the extremes – both metropolitan and the “deep” rural – in favor of a strong population growth in the intermediate spaces, which in France are called the “peri-urban” spaces.

### **The middle way**

In the current phase of globalization<sup>2</sup>, rurality has neither disappeared nor been reborn in advanced countries, which allows the two hypotheses to be at the same time partially confirmed and refuted, which gives rise to the formulation of a third: *the most complete triumph of urbanity generates a recognition of the value of a rurality that is not being reborn, but rather is being born*. This is the hypothesis that appears to result both from the academic work on the issue and from the observation of institutional changes – especially in the area of the public policies in the European Union.

Over the past twenty years there has been an increasingly strong attraction to rural spaces in all the more developed societies. But this is a new phenomenon, which has little or nothing to do with the relations that these societies had in the past with their territories. This attraction results principally from the dramatic increase in mobility, with its

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<sup>2</sup> It is irrelevant here whether we consider the idea of a “new wave” (starting in 1980) or of “contemporary globalization” (since 1945). The first is from the World Bank (2002), which considers three waves: ‘1870-1914’, ‘1945-1980’ and the “new wave” (since 1980). The second is that of Held et al. (1999), who separate the process into four phases, of which three are “modern”: ‘1500-1850’, ‘1850-1945’ and the contemporary one (since 1945).

increasing array of dislocations, short or long, real or virtual. As Hervieu & Viard (2001), have said, the city and country have married, and while the former cares for leisure and work, the latter offers liberty and beauty. This phenomenon was perceived by both Lefebvre and Kayser but they misinterpreted its real nature. In fact the ‘revolution in space’ that engendered the “urban society” (or post-industrial society) tends to *reinvigorate* rurality, but through *mutation*, and not ‘renaissance’.

In the case of the European Union, by far the most significant, the collective awareness of this phenomenon emerged very early on, since its “southward expansion” in 1981 and 1986. The overcoming of the exclusively sectoral (agriculture) focus of its rural policies and the resulting transition to a territorial approach began to emerge in the mid-1980s and was concretized for the first time in the reforms of the “structural funds” in 1987. And the deepening of this trend could be assessed based on the two documents that became emblematic: a) the European Commission’s communication to the Council and Parliament titled “The future of the rural world”, from 1988; and b) the famous “Cork Declaration” that emerged from the conference “Rural Europe - Future Perspectives”, held in November 1996. Along with clearly articulating the foundations of the current integrated rural policy of the EU, these two documents synthesize the principal analytic consensuses that had been gradually built over the initial period of erosion of the Common Agriculture Policy (PAC). These difficulties only increased after the loss of legitimacy of this, one of the first integrated policies of the European Economic Community (EEC, which preceded the European Union, or EU), which required various revisions after 1992. Thus it is no coincidence that the paradigmatic program LEADER (Links between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy) was launched in 1991.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. the website <http://europa.eu.int/comm/archives/leader2/rural-pt/>, as well as Sumpsi (2002), Pérez Yruela et al. (2000) and Abramovay (1999).

## Figure 2

### Basic consensus, in the mid-1990s, about advanced rurality.

1. The rural areas, which include the places of residence of one quarter of the European population and more than one fifth of the U.S., and more than 80% of their territories, are characterized by unique cultural, economic and social fabrics, an extraordinary mosaic of activities and a great variety of landscapes (forests and farmlands, untouched natural areas, villages and small towns, regional centers, small industries, etc.)
2. The rural zones, as well as their habitats, form a fundamental wealth for their regions and countries and can be very competitive.
3. The majority of European and North American rural spaces comprise agricultural lands and forests that strongly influence the nature of the landscapes.
4. Given that agriculture will certainly remain an important interface between society and the environment, farmers increasingly perform the role of managers of many of the natural resources of rural areas.
5. But agriculture and forests have ceased to play a predominant role in the national economies. With the decline in their relative economic weights, more than ever rural development must involve all the socio-economic sectors of rural areas.
6. Since European and North American citizens place increasing importance on quality of life in general, and in particular issues related to health, security, personal development and leisure, rural areas will occupy privileged positions in satisfying these interests, because they offer extensive possibilities for an authentic, modern, quality development.
7. Agriculture policies must adapt to the new realities and challenges, both in terms of consumer desires and preferences, and trends in international trade. In particular, an adaptation that forces a transition from a regime that maintains prices to one that supports rights.
8. The subsidies established through the respective agricultural policies will be increasingly contested. And there is already a broad acceptance that future public subsidies should be increasingly conditional on an adequate management of natural resources and the maintenance and restoration of biodiversity and cultural landscapes.
9. Agricultural policy reforms of the first half of the 1990s preserved inconsistencies, duplications and high legal complexity, despite the undeniable advances in terms of transparency and effectiveness.
10. It has become absolutely necessary to increase the local capacity for sustainable development in rural areas, and especially private and community initiatives that are well integrated with the global markets.

From the other side of the North Atlantic came what could be considered a similar manifestation (one among others), the workshop titled *Post-Industrial Rural Development: The Role of Natural Resources and the Environment*, which some months before the Cork conference had brought together a group of 47 experts to discuss the opportunities that were being created when some flexibility began to be introduced into U.S. agricultural policy.<sup>4</sup> And the consensus set of ideas that these two events helped to consolidate could be reasonably summarized in the ten points presented in Figure 2.

At the same time there was growing interest of researchers in the different dynamics of rural areas, and in the policies that would help to bring about the “revitalization” of the more remote or depressed areas.<sup>5</sup> And the principal results of this scientific production point to a concentration of competitive advantages of rural areas in which four resources that had been underestimated by almost all the theories of growth and development: civic commitment, culture, environment and local knowledge.

### **Advanced Rurality: from discourses to facts.**

The broad consensus crystallized in the 1996 Cork Declaration combined three discourses about the new profile of rurality in advanced countries, which Frouws (1998) classified as “agri-ruralist”, “utilitarian” and “hedonist”.

In the first, the emphasis is on renewal of the social contract between farmers and society that dates from the beginning of the 20th century. This meets the need for multi-functional practices that address the new social demands ranging from healthy foods to open-air recreational opportunities, and including pure drinking water and the beauty of natural landscapes. Even through the rural domain of a country or region is no longer seen as the

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<sup>4</sup> The complete proceedings of this workshop were published by *North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, Iowa State University*, <jstewart@iastate.edu>.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the *Journal of Rural Studies* (published in England since 1985), as well as in some of the websites dedicated to the issue of rural development. Three of the most significant such websites are: a) the “**DORA**” network (“Dynamics of Rural Areas”, run by the Arkleton Centre for Rural Development Research, of the University of Aberdeen, Scotland: [www.abdn.ac.uk/arkleton](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/arkleton)) ; b) that of the “**NRE**” project (New Rural Economy Project, of the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (CRRF): [nre.concordia.ca/crrf\\_publications.htm](http://nre.concordia.ca/crrf_publications.htm)); and c) that of the Center for Rural and Remote Area Studies (**CRRAS**), of the Institute for Social Research, Whyalla campus of University of South Australia: [www.unisa.edu.au/crras/](http://www.unisa.edu.au/crras/).

exclusive domain of agriculture, farmers are the principal actors in creating, maintaining and ensuring this social, economic and cultural space. In the discourse that Frouws considers “utilitarian”, the emphasis is much more on the possibility of taking advantage of the new competitive advantages that rural spaces can offer for business, principally involving real estate, whether residential, tourism, sports, artistic and other forms of recreation. And for the third – “hedonist” – all the emphasis is placed on the cultural dimension. Here the central issue is the contribution that rural territory makes to quality of life, principally in terms of aesthetic attraction.

Even if there are serious reasons for conflict between the social bases of these three discourses, it is clear that they tend to be combined in any rural “renovation” project or strategy. And the success of this type of project or strategy will depend much more on the concrete circumstances of the predominantly or significantly rural regions, than on the possible relative influence of each of these three rhetorics. Thus, the most fruitful line of inquiry can only be that which seeks to identify the factors with the greatest influence on the dynamics of the rural areas, starting with their different economic performances.

Comparisons between rural areas of developed countries with different levels of performance, with the objective of identifying “levers” or “triggers” of dynamism, were carried out in two broad and recent research programs, with very similar, where not identical, results: “DORA” (Bryden & Hart, 2001) and “RUREMPLO” (Terluin, 2003). And the results point to a kind of dominance of “subjective” (or “less tangible”) factors in the development process. The principal conclusion is that the adaptation to the more recent economic circumstances under globalization depends essentially on cultural and social traditions, with the proviso that these can also be encouraged/discouraged by styles of governance, institutional arrangements and forms of organization that encourage or undermine the more positive characteristics, such as self-determination, independence and local identity.

Although not sufficient, the autonomous, accessible and democratic operation of public organizations is absolutely necessary, and they must not only act responsibly, but cannot have overlapping functions and must be able to avoid institutional conflicts. These factors

play the greatest role in conditioning a local innovative entrepreneurship, the key factor that can be driven by educational opportunities created in an environment of collective confidence. Relative remoteness (“geographical peripherality”) continues to be a disadvantage, especially in areas with sparser populations and more isolated or distant locations. Nevertheless, some of the more peripheral rural areas of Europe have been able to create jobs through economic diversification. In the 1990s, only five of the sixteen rural areas studied under the DORA project performed more poorly than predicted based on sectoral and national trends. Of course, the most notable case was Emsland, located on the border between Germany and the Netherlands, where employment increased almost 20%, compared to a predicted reduction of 5%. But also in the remote Scottish islands of Orkney, employment increased almost 6%, with a forecasted reduction of 9%. And in the Greek region of Corinth employment rose almost 9% while a drop of 4% was predicted.

Alongside of all the insistence in these studies on the importance of “cultural traditions” that favor the generation of institutional arrangements appropriate to the current phase of globalization, there is also a certain demystification of the role of “networks”. The final report of the DORA project treats networks as an “ambiguous factor”, because in some cases they are precisely the cause of the lower economic performance of particular rural areas. This is especially the case when they serve to exclude other networks, blocking access to information, and as a result increasing crucial transaction costs (Bryden & Hart, 2001:20).

### **The contradictory influence of globalization**

The different levels of economic and social performance of rural areas have been seen as “local responses to the process of globalization”<sup>6</sup>. The explanation for success or lack thereof always comes back to the interdependencies between a range of key factors of the process of development that are “inextricably linked to the opportunities and threats created by globalization” (Courtney et al., 2001:19). But what are the opportunities and threats that the current phase of globalization offers to rurality? Only a good answer to this

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<sup>6</sup> This is the title of an important project carried out by the team at The Arkleton Centre for Rural Development Research, of the University of Aberdeen: Courtney et al. (2001).

question can definitively justify the need to transcend the hypotheses of Lefebvre and Kayser through the formulation of another, called above the “middle way”.

There are at least two key dimensions of contemporary globalization that affect the fates of rural areas in contradictory ways. The economic dimension – which involves production chains, commerce and financial flows – act essentially to make them increasingly peripheral, or marginal, in the context of what was called by Sassen (1998) “geographies of centrality”. Alongside the new regional hierarchies there are vast territories that are becoming increasingly excluded from the key dynamics that feed the growth of the global economy. Simultaneously, the environmental dimension – which involves both the natural amenities and sources of energy and biodiversity – acts primarily to increase the value accorded to quality of life, or well-being, as Dasgupta (2001) prefers to call it. It was only in the more recent period of globalization that civic responsibilities for the natural conditions of human development were extended to form part of the agenda of international relations.

The simultaneous action of these two trends appears to have a dual effect on rurality. On the one hand, it means that the “remote” or “deep” rural areas that predominate in the regions that OECD classifies as “essentially rural” are increasingly conserved, even through a variety of low impact economic activities may be permitted. On the other hand, it means that the “accessible” rural areas, characteristic of the regions that OECD classifies as “significantly rural” are host to new socio-economic dynamics that are part of Sassen’s “geographies of centrality”. It is worth noting that it was the identification of “localized economic constellations that overcame the recession” in relatively rural areas such as Toscana and Emilia-Romagna (Italy), Baden-Württemberg (Germany), Cambridge (England), Småland (Sweden), and even essentially rural areas, such as West-Jutland (Denmark), that led a group of researchers linked to ILO to ask themselves, since the mid-1980s, if this virtuous combination of efficiency and high employment levels could become a model for other regions. And the point of departure was – “it was no contest”, said Benko (1995:57) – the research program of Arnaldo Bagnasco, Carlo Trigilia and Sebastiano Brusco about the “Third Italy”.



It is because of a failure to recognize this dual nature of the influence exercised by globalization on rural areas that some analysts underestimate, or even discard, the possibility that they can react positively to the process. A glaring example is Vázquez Barquero (2002), who dedicates an entire chapter of his book to arguing that cities constitute the only space of endogenous development! Yet, since the 1960s, the most powerful locational trend in the distribution of jobs and economic activities in the United Kingdom was the shift of production and jobs from large cities and conurbations to small towns and rural areas.

There are two basic elements in the interpretation of these phenomenon: a) the capacity of certain rural areas to attract potential entrepreneurs due to the environmental characteristics of residence; b) a entrepreneurial dynamism focused on emerging markets, with considerable innovation, and which exploits the competitive advantages resulting from more amenable living and working conditions, along with a work force with greater stability, quality and motivation, at a lower cost (Keeble & Tyler, 1995). And it comes as no small surprise to observe that in terms of innovation, firms located in more “remote” rural areas do not lag behind those in the more “accessible” rural (North & Smallbone, 2000).

Two studies completed at the end of the 1990s by researchers from the Economic Research Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (ERS/USDA) demonstrated that in recent decades it was natural amenities that had become the principal comparative advantage of rural areas. McGranahan (1999) showed that in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century changes in rural populations were highly correlated with natural amenities, principally climate, terrain and access to water (lakes, rivers and ocean). Changes in rural employment also show a strong correlation, but lower, principally due to the influence of other concurrent factors that also create considerable employment in rural counties in the U.S., such as casinos and prisons, for example. With a greater interest in economic growth itself in rural areas, Aldrich & Kusmin (1997) concluded that the principal factor was the ability to attract retired people, which was directly linked to rural amenities.

Thus, during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the dynamic of the rural economy of the more developed countries went through three principal stages. In the first, it was determined by natural wealth such as fertile soil, timber or minerals. These comparative advantages did not disappear, but were being replaced by other factors of production, such as cheap labor, deficient regulations and weak unions. That's how the rural component of the industrial labor force in the United States grew from one fifth to more than one quarter of the total between 1960 and 1980. However, in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the principal comparative advantages once again became natural wealth, but a different kind. Now it is the charm of the rural context – beautiful landscapes, tranquility, silence, clean water, pure air – all linked to the quality of the natural environment. And the chance to participate fully in this third generation of rural development is small for areas that were previously committed to primary and secondary industrial systems with negative environmental impacts.

In addition, the most dynamic regions of the First World – i.e. those creating the most jobs – are not essentially urban, nor essentially rural, but rather those in which there is a dynamic interaction between adjacent rural and urban spaces. These are exactly the regions that the OECD classified as significantly rural, in which from 15 - 50% of the inhabitants live in rural areas.

## ***Conclusion***

The evidence presented refutes the hypotheses advanced by Lefebvre and Kayser just over thirty years ago. But for very different reasons. The most mistaken is the first, about complete urbanization. And the only way a thinker as brilliant as Lefebvre could have made such a fundamental error is if he committed was guilty of reducing the rural to the agricultural. There were many reasons in the early 1970s to predict the inexorable disappearance of the type of agrarian society that he knew so well and analyzed in his rural sociologist phase. But rurality was never reduced to the social relations linked to

agricultural activities, even in the short historical phase in which this economic sector was dominant in extra-urban territories. The second hypothesis could appear more correct, since all the evidence presented tends to confirm those indications that led Kayser to envisage a rural renaissance. However, the term renaissance doesn't appear appropriate to characterize an entirely new phenomenon, as is the case with this rurality that has been variously called "post-industrial", "post-modern", or "post-fordist". The need to use the prefix "post-" should not be ignored, because it reflects the need to express a change that is not incremental, but radical. The current rurality of Europe and North America did not result from an impulse that brought back the foundations of some past rurality, even if it could coexist with aspects of continuity and permanence. What is new in this rurality has little to do with the past, because there have never been societies as opulent as those that are today according greater value to their relation with nature. Not only in terms of the awareness of the threats to biodiversity or the thermal regulation of the planet, but also in terms of the liberty won by senior citizens to spend their retirement living in the best remaining natural areas. In addition, the hypotheses of Lefebvre and Kayser permit for rurality only one fate. And what the most recent phase of globalization is indicating is that rurality will have a diversity of fates. For now, it is clear that there are substantial differences between the "remote" or "deep" rural, as the Anglo-Saxon or French are inclined, and the "accessible" or "adjacent" rural. This hypothesis is convergent with the analyses of Wanderley (2000) and Abramovay (2003) and also, to some extent, with the approaches of Moreira (2001) and Moreira (2002).

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