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► **To cite this version:**

Philippe Perrier-Cornet. Social sciences and the transformations of rural areas and worlds. *Revue d'Etudes en Agriculture et Environnement - Review of agricultural and environmental studies*, 2015, pp.43 - 58. hal-01884920

HAL Id: hal-01884920

<https://hal.science/hal-01884920>

Submitted on 5 Oct 2018

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Social sciences and the transformations of rural areas and worlds

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Abstract – *The last thirty years have seen both a radical shift in the countryside's place in western societies and economies as well as significant changes in the approaches and analytical frameworks of social science studies on rural areas and worlds. The paper aims at giving an account of these two processes and discussing their interactions, and provides a brief summary of the main factual elements observed about the countryside's socio-economic modifications over the last thirty years. It then takes stock of the way in which social science research has evolved: to what extent have topics and analytical frameworks – and more specifically in rural economics and sociology – been revised to be able to take these transformations into consideration? Subsequently, it considers various perspectives for future studies in the continuation of these dynamics.*

Keywords: *social sciences, rural areas, rural worlds, rural transformations, environmental issues*

JEL Classification : Q1, Q13, R1

Various factual elements concerning contemporary rural transformations

One of the main transformations is of a demographic and social nature. Firstly, it translates as an inversion of birth-rate trends and above all in the population flow between towns and the countryside. This inversion began in France in the 1970s, with migratory flows from towns to the country becoming more significant than the historical movement of the rural exodus, from the rural to the urban. In parallel, the high birth rate that characterised rural areas gradually receded, to the extent that the natural *surplus* has now become an urban phenomenon. The major demographic trend is, however, the population flow from towns to the countryside, which has given rise to various studies and interpretations, in particular, in the beginning, with regard to rural geography in France with analyses in terms of “rurbanisation” and rural *renaissance* (Bauer and Roux, 1976; Kayser, 1990) as well as in the United Kingdom and the United States (Berry, 1976; Champion, 1989). There thus emerged an intermediate space between towns and the countryside—the peri-urban—the fruit of a process of urban sprawl that for thirty years has concerned an ever-growing number of towns and villages. This “new” spatial category is not only the seat of a demographic transformation, it is also one from a social

point of view and, as we shall see below, it affects the activities, use of land and planning of space and the environment. . .

This demographic evolution profoundly alters the social composition of rural spaces and areas. This modification is characterised by three main processes. Firstly, the ageing of the rural population because of natural movement. Secondly, internally, the “historical” social groups of rural areas, especially farmers, whose numbers have decreased threefold since the 1970s, are now in the minority. More generally, populations that have been established for a long time in the countryside, who live and work there, no longer systematically structure the social and economic life of the countryside as they did in the 1960s. Thirdly, the main process of social change is entirely exogenous, linked to the selective nature of cities’ residential migrations to rural areas. Households choosing to settle outside cities mostly do as first-time home buyers. They are generally employees of stable (or higher) sections of the working and middle classes. As young couples with children, often with limited financial means, they seek land prices that are lower than in towns as well as facilities and a living environment that corresponds to their aspirations and requirements, which they cannot find in the types of urban district from which they usually originate. As employees in the service sector, manual workers and lower managers, most of them commute daily and continue to work in urban centres. To a lesser extent, although it is increasing, rural demographic growth is also fuelled by urban retirees settling in the countryside, contributing to the ageing of rural populations.

The second visible area of these transformations, connected to the demographic and social changes, is that we are witnessing a marked modification in economic activities and jobs in rural areas. From this point of view, *l’agricole ne fait plus le rural* (rural no longer exclusively means agricultural), with farms now accounting for less than 10% of rural employment in France and the entire agriculture-agrifood industry-forestry sector for 20%). Nevertheless, in some rural areas, the ripple effects from agricultural and agrifood industry activities on the local economy may still be marked, as it is in Brittany. Even if rural industry resists decline better than the rest of national industry, it still only represents around 20% of rural employment in France; it sometimes benefits from a decentralisation of urban industrial establishments to nearby rural areas. The remaining rural activities and jobs—which make up the great majority—are now based on the expansion of the rural economy’s service sector, which is mainly supplied by what we call the residential or presential (“in-place”) economy. The growth of these services, whether purely commercial (shops, housing, *etc.*) or administrative (education, health, social, *etc.*), is directly linked to the demographic growth of rural and peri-urban areas, whose population is increasing in most rural towns and villages in France and very rapidly in those that are becoming peri-urban.

However, morphologically, peri-urban spaces, like the countryside further from urban influence and sprawl, continue to be marked in their physiognomy

by primary, agricultural and forestry activities. They remain areas of relatively low density (in France, 70 inhabitants/km² in peri-urban areas and 30 inhabitants/km² in the most remote countryside). Over 80% of rural and peri-urban land is still used for agriculture (60%) and forestry (over 20%). Nevertheless, it is clear that urban sprawl translates as a consumption of land area that is mainly to the detriment of agriculture, with significant consequences near cities. Competition for access to land and conflicts about its use, which have given rise to a very large body of studies over the last decade (Jeannaux, 2006; Guérin, 2005; Torre and Kirat, 2008), are growing in connection to the increasing overlap between cultivated land and urbanised areas. They also have an environmental impact on processes and functions to preserve the quality of natural resources and biodiversity.

The surge of environmental issues thus constitutes the third element that marks the contemporary transformations of rural areas and worlds. They are, in fact, varied in nature. On the one hand, there are fairly anthropocentric environmental approaches, championed by residents, especially new arrivals, in a logic of natural amenities, to maintain the quality of the elements making up the living environment that they have chosen, and sometimes idealised, the landscape aspect of which is important. Vigilant with regard to the activities and initiatives that are likely to affect this setting, they can rely or put pressure on local representatives to pass on their concerns. Involving, as it does, common-pool resources, public, local or more global intervention, with an array of modes of action, is directly concerned and inevitable, in the same way as it is for farmers' activities insofar as it is they who primarily occupy the rural area and land. In parallel and on the other hand, the environmental issue is based on a biocentric conception of nature. It covers the functions of rural spaces as natural spaces, independently of the preferences of the current inhabitants, consumers of the rural living environment. It involves the mobilisation of rural areas to conserve biodiversity, to preserve the quality of natural resources over the long term, to regulate ecosystems, to contribute to preventing local and global natural risks, especially from global warming, *etc.* This second conception, promoted by injunctions, policies and more global measures, can lead to serious tensions to arising between it and the first conception, and gives rise locally to numerous conflicts over land use in which residents or farmers find themselves on the front line.

To summarise these observations, the transformations of rural areas and worlds can be understood based on two significant processes: the evolution of city-countryside relations and that of the uses and functions of the rural space and its resources.

Historically, relations between cities and the countryside have been structured by the flow of products and labour: cities were the centres, their market places supplied with agricultural produce and manpower from the neighbouring countryside. However, owing to agriculture's reduced territorialisation, its organisation now mainly in vertical chains, increasing

regional specialisations, and the growth of international trade, the flow of goods no longer structures local city-countryside relations in most European countries. At the same time, because of changes in lifestyles and *habitat*—the spread of a “living in the country and working in the city” model linked to urban sprawl—population flows now structure city-countryside relations more than the flow of goods and labour in an entire section of the European rural space. In France, the new population flow from urban areas to rural ones, with regard to residential choices, is now on the point of being twice as significant as the traditional rural exodus population flows from the countryside to the city.

With regard to the evolutions of uses and functions of the rural space, agrarian monolithism has had its day. We need to invent new frames of reference to grasp the growing diversity of uses. They can very simply be arranged into three major conflicting functions and uses of the countryside, each promoting social uses and economic functions but also projects and conceptions about what the rural space is or should be used for (Perrier-Cornet, 2002). The first is the *countryside as a resource*: the rural space and its resources are mobilised and used as a support for economic activities. The agricultural economy (but also the forestry economy, the rural manufacturing industry, *etc.*) is at the heart of this function. The second is the *countryside as a lifestyle*, the space consumed by rural residences. It is also the space of the residential economy, *i.e.* all the jobs and sectors of activity corresponding to services for the resident populations. The third function is the *natural countryside*. As we have just pointed out, this covers the functions of rural areas as natural areas, independent of the preferences of its inhabitants, consumers of the rural lifestyle. These countryside functions interact, and mobilise the same, rare resources—hence the tensions between them and conflicts of use, but also possible synergies as suggested by the example of the multifunctionality of agriculture. The relative significance of each of these functions is extremely variable depending on the area and the way in which they interact with each other. In contemporary times, France has thus moved from a hegemony of the *countryside as a resource* situation to a kind of *ménage à deux* or “two-parent household” with the spectacular rise of the residential functions of these rural areas since the 1970s and 80s. More recent is the new triangular configuration with the emergence of environmental issues and their incorporation into the rural agenda, whether directly into the CAP with increased agro-environmental incentives and measures or in the national orientations of French policy following the Grenelle Environment Forum.

In this context, how have lines of research into rural areas and worlds evolved? There has been a major revival for both the rural economy and rural sociology. One point that earlier approaches in these two disciplines (as well as rural geography) had in common was a traditional representation of the rural based on the division, the opposition between town and country and on a series of dualities setting tradition against modernity, stability against mobility, *etc.* This approach has gradually lost its explanatory force. Moving

on to other representations occurred over several phases but it required a shift of paradigms that took different routes in economics and sociology. Here we shall focus on four of them – two in rural economics and two in rural sociology – which seem to us to be the most significant and promising with regard to scientific revival, without claiming to provide an exhaustive review of the evolution of social science research over the last thirty years.

From agricultural rural economics to spatial and regional economics

Until the early 1980s, with a few exceptions (Brun, 1980), studies by rural economists remained strongly rooted in agricultural economics. The field was dominated by analyses of agrarian systems and productive structures. With regard to a strictly agricultural economic approach, the advantage of the so-called rural economics approach lay in its taking into consideration the differentiated combination of production factors according to regions, contexts and historical and cultural factors (tradition, skill, and trajectory). However, analyses remained focused on explicative factors internal to the local system, to the detriment of external factors (Larrère, 1984), and on farms. An initial evolution in research took shape in the mid 1980s, which led to a whole series of publications of a new kind over the decade (*cf.* among others, Daucé *et al.*, 1986; Perrier-Cornet, 1986; Cavailhès *et al.*, 1987; Allaire, 1987). The mainspring of these studies was the fact that they took into account farms' local or regional economic environment. They took the form of analyses of regional sectors or regional productive systems, often by means of regional comparisons within France or across Europe (Perrier-Cornet, 1990). They emphasised the role of industrial capital whose differentiated regional configurations were presented as being the essential determinants of the agricultural and agri-food dynamic and factors explaining their performance. In this, they were similar to the sector-based approaches developed in the 1970s, notably by teams of rural economists from Montpellier (Lauret, 1983), which, however, had been carried out until then without any real connection to the concerns of a regional agricultural economy.

In France, until the beginning of the 1990s, most of these regionalised approaches remained sector-based, focusing on agricultural and agri-food sectors (Cavailhès and Schmitt, 1990), despite the fact that at the time, and for at least a decade already, a growing number of Anglo-Saxon and North American rural economists had been insisting upon the progressively less agricultural nature of rural economics and the need to study the evolution of relationships between town and country, similar to the approaches of urban economics (Edwards, 1981; Irwin *et al.*, 2010). This shift occurred in France in 1992 with the seminal study by Brun *et al.* with the significant title *Les espaces ruraux revisités* or "Rural Areas Revisited" (Brun *et al.*, 1992; *cf.* also Cavailhès *et al.*, 1994). A research programme then began to take shape "that explicitly brings together the analysis of the rural dynamics of the regional and the urban

economy and that aims to open up three complementary areas of research: the first focusing on the microeconomic determinants of households' residential choices; the second on activities' location logics linked especially to the job market but also to localised demand; the third on the organisation of areas" (Aubert and Schmitt, 2014, p. 33).

The first two of these three research areas fall exactly within the framework of spatial economics, with the central issue becoming the distribution over the area of populations and economic activities, and thus the employment linked to them. Within this framework, we could describe the development of research into rural economics since then as a double fertilisation. On the one hand, research was firstly fuelled by the contribution of the historical fundamentals of spatial economics that were new to most rural economists (from Von Thünen to Alonso (1964) among others), and then many of these were incorporated into developments in new geographical economics following the seminal studies of Paul Krugman (Krugman, 1991; Krugman and Venables, 1995; Fujita and Thisse, 2002), to which they have been contributing ever since. The fertilisation is two-way because, on the other hand, the adaptation of these analysis frameworks to the characteristics or specificities of rural areas introduced original elements into spatial economics models usually more concerned with the determinants of agglomeration mechanisms than by the play of dispersion forces. The founders of the new geographical economics stress the play of agglomeration forces *versus* dispersion forces, but it is the mechanisms of agglomeration—the formation of cities, among other things—that they essentially study. The focus on rural areas, areas of low population density, has led to far more in-depth examination of the dispersion forces “likely to explain the out-of-town location of certain population and employment categories [...] [and to] establish a coherent analysis framework adapted to contemporary rural areas” (Aubert and Schmitt, 2014, p. 45). From the very start, the framework of the new geographical economics seemed pertinent to understand the process of urban sprawl—peri-urbanisation—*i.e.* population dispersion forces. Completed by labour-market economic approaches, it also provided an angle to understand the localisation processes of companies and jobs between urban and rural regions (Blanc *et al.*, 2008; Gaigné and Goffette-Nagot, 2008; Aubert and Détang-Dessendre, 2014). In parallel to their introduction into and recognition within the academic scientific circles of spatial and regional economics made possible by the evolution of the rural issue, these studies led to rural economists becoming far more visible on an institutional level and being increasingly invited to advise organisations responsible for land use and development planning in France. This can be seen in the partnerships and collaborations established in the second half of the 1990s with the main organisation producing economic data and statistics in France: on town-country relationships and the production of data and classifications for rural areas (initiated with the INRA-Insee study *Les campagnes et leurs villes* 1998; (the countryside and its towns), *cf.* also rural economists'

contributions to drawing up the new spatial classification suggested by the Insee, the ZAU or “zoning into urban areas” and its additional rural category). It can also be seen in rural economists’ various participations in discussions and prospective studies with the DATAR (incorporated into the CGET—general commission for territorial equality—in May 2014) including steering territorial prospective groups, being closely involved in the territorial observatory, *etc.*

From rural territorial organisation to local public economics

The third research field in this revival of the rural economics paradigm—territorial organisation—has not, so far, led to significant unification based on an organisational approach as the two earlier fields have done with the new geographical economics. Some studies first drew their inspiration from the institutional approaches of organisational economics, examining the interactions between economic agents in rural areas and their possible specificities in forms of coordination and cooperation, discussing, in particular, the interplay between public and private spheres in rural areas. This gave rise to a proposal for a frame of reference for the economic functioning of rural territories based on concepts of organisational capital and organisational structure (Jayet, 1996), which was tested in certain emblematic fields (Guérin *et al.*, 1998; Aubert *et al.*, 2001). In a similar vein, others developed studies in terms of social capital (Callois, 2004 and 2005) in line with development economics approaches (Putnam, 1995).

These approaches then evolved or shifted, mobilising to an ever greater extent the tools and concepts of local public economics, mainly in two different directions. On the one hand, some studies evolved by analysing fiscal competition between municipalities and the perimeter’s influence on them in a general perspective of financial and territorial federalism. The atomicity of rural municipalities in France, and debate about the perimeters of public action and merging rural municipalities, or rural and urban territories, have made these issues of territorial competition and cooperation particularly intense with regard to our *objet rural* [“rural” as a research subject in its own right]. On the other hand, local public economics is used as a reference by those studying conflicts of use, a research theme that has developed considerably since the 2000s in response to the multiplication of conflictual situations observed in rural areas. These studies examine the conflicts mainly as a means to assess local (or more global) public decisions: they raise the question of compatibility between individuals’ interests and the general interest, which leads to a request for intervention by the authorities. The goal is to “conduct an economic assessment of public decision-making because public choices modify resource allocation and use of resources and participate in changing society in general and rural areas in particular” (Guérin and Jeannaux, 2014). In this context, several empirical studies were initiated into challenges to local public decisions, using original data sources (searching through regional daily

newspapers and administrative tribunal rulings *cf.* notably, Jeannaux, 2006). In a similar way, analysing the provision of environmental public services by regional and local authorities in rural and peri-urban areas also mobilises local public economics tools (Aznar *et al.*, 2014).

Shifts in “traditional” rural sociology with the integration of environmental issues

Until the end of the 1970s, rural sociology generally gave the impression of functioning in a vacuum, focusing on a relatively closed or autonomous *objet rural*. Jean-Paul Billaud, partly in response to the work of Marcel Jollivet, retrospectively demonstrated how it was based on a founding paradigm organised around two things (Billaud, 2012; Jollivet, 2001). On the one hand, it involved the premise “of a symmetry between a territory, a productive community and a lifestyle” (Billaud, 2012, p. 100). This premise was put into practice in two themes or fields of research: i) the issue of peasant farming and agriculture’s modernisation, ii) monographic studies of rural micro-societies. The latter gave rise to two major waves of studies on “rural collectivities” in France, mostly on a village scale (Jollivet and Mendras, 1971; Jollivet, 1974). On the other hand, all these studies had four shared characteristics: i) a divide between town and country, ii) the idea of rural worlds’ marked specificity and particularity, iii) a vision of rurality based on peasant farming and iv) an analysis of the change seen essentially from the angle of peasant farmers’ entering into modernity. The critique of this approach in the early 1980s echoed the crisis of the *objet rural* itself as it was portrayed in this sociology: the premise of a symmetry between territory, community and *habitat* flew in the face of town-to-country migration and the process of the countryside’s urbanisation. In the same way, the concept of the town-countryside divide and the farming-centred rurality it conveyed were no longer tenable.

Rural sociology began to reposition itself around environmental issues, taking increasing interest in the rural space as a support for natural objects, and analysing the humankind-nature relationship thus became central. To do this, multidisciplinary approaches were developed, taking ecology, and, more broadly, life sciences into account. This did not, however, signify a complete departure from the earlier question as it was applied by taking up its two main themes. Firstly, the peasant farming (now called agricultural) question: agriculture lies at the heart of the most crucial environmental issues and has led to reopening the debate about peasant farming and social change. Secondly, the question of localised social groups and local authorities, the heirs to the monographs of rural collectivities: “The multiplication of consultation processes is reconfiguring the conditions of local authorities exercising their powers. . . whether this involves integrating on different scales the disruptions revealed by an environmental problem or whether it involves satisfying demands for new resource distribution for new protection from risks, the construction of regulations constitutes a key moment in collective action

generated by environmental issues” (Billaud, 2012, p. 109). One of the most emblematic studies demonstrating this shift in paradigm, the revitalisation of “historical” rural sociology was certainly the collective study *Du rural à l’environnement* (Mathieu and Jollivet, 1989). Likewise, the research of other INRA sociologists took the same direction, entering the field of political ecology to expand their analyses of rurality (cf. among others, the studies by Pierre Alphandéry and the special edition of *Ecorev*, the critical review of political ecology, *Figures et enjeux de la ruralité* published in 2002).

A parallel and “exogenous” revival of the sociology of rural worlds

Another—parallel—sign of another form of revival in sociology can be seen in the recruitment by the INRA and social science departments of Agronomics Schools and some universities of young sociologists of backgrounds and environments differing from those of traditional rural sociologists, whose evolution towards a sociology of the environment we have just described. It was not by chance that a special edition of the journal *Politix* (83, 2008) brought together the most influential academics in this direction. These new ways of looking at rural worlds fall mostly within the framework of political sociology. The work of Julian Mischi, recruited by the INRA in 2005, contributed to this orientation (Mischi, 2008). This approach joined with those of social anthropology developed since the 1990s in line with the work of Florence Weber (Weber, 1989) by Nicolas Renahy on the rural working classes and workers, the famous *gars du coin* or “local lads” (Renahy, 2006). While historical rural sociology was forging a new legitimacy based on the relationship between humankind and nature, these new approaches, this blend of political sociology and collective ethnology that was expanding field studies, had gradually become accepted over the decade through an original and promising research programme on the management and sociability of rural worlds, examining more specifically the working classes, their social behaviours and their militant, partisan or political engagement.

In another collective work of reference in this branch—*Les mondes ruraux à l’épreuve des sciences sociales* (Bessière et al., 2007)—the authors underline the plural nature, the diversity of social spaces, which they set against a vision of the rural that is too often homogenous. The plural nature of rural worlds is developed both theoretically and in numerous empirical studies. “Rural worlds seemed to be remarkable places from which to analyse the influence of different scales between general process and forms of recomposition from the bottom (transformations of professions, frameworks of sociability), between the emergence of new injunctions and the way in which they are appropriated locally. Far from being reduced to ‘tradition’ or ‘local’ against ‘modernity’ or ‘global’, they are therefore considered here as the sites of a composition between different scales. The localised observation of social and political conflicts, of engagement or distance from engagement in contemporary rural

communities, gives us a better understanding of how political and militant human resources are renewed – how the mechanisms of representation are reconfigured” (Mischi and Renahy, 2008).

It is interesting to note in this line the revival over the last decade of ethnographic surveys focusing more specifically on peri-urban spaces, in the footsteps of the pioneering work of Catherine Bidou in the early 1980s (Bidou, 1984), which met with almost no response for a long time. This recent research also echoed the idea of a diversity of peri-urban worlds. Denis Lépicier and Yannick Sencébé thus demonstrated that urban to rural migrations integrate heterogeneous migration logics, emphasising the social differentiation of migrants’ profiles and spatial segregation processes (Lépicier and Sencébé, 2007). Other contemporary studies prompt us to qualify the theory of relegation “that prevails in the often negative rhetoric about low-income peri-urban households. Recent research understands the residential and socio-professional trajectories by the yardstick of social aspirations. . . [that] are also, in other examples, sources of feelings of esteem and social respectability. . . Above all, the idea of a mosaic and diversity emerges, a far cry from certain academic and media stereotypes” (Girard and Rivière, 2013).

In short, this revived sociology of rural worlds does not consider the rural and the peri-urban as subjects for study in their own right, but as ideal areas to study the social dynamics of societies characterised by strong interpersonal relationships, as places made up of various elements between different scales, *etc.*

The rural, from a subject in its own right to a remarkable field for study: research perspectives

A dual shared characteristic emerging from this—inevitably incomplete—review of thirty years of evolving research into rural spaces and worlds is without doubt the end of an approach emphasising agriculture and its stakeholders and the abandoning of an endogenous approach that gave more weight to the internal factors or characteristics of so-called rural areas than to the elements that cross through them connecting them with towns or that transform them from the outside. This represents the calling into question of a conception of the rural as a circumscribed, specified or even reified object. Nevertheless, this evolution has not eliminated the issue of the specificities of these areas and their position in the spatial organisation of the economic and social system (Jeannaux and Perrier-Cornet, 2014).

Today, in economics just as it is in sociology or social geography, the rural is above all considered as a pertinent and remarkable field for study, a framework for research that is *particulier mais non singulier* (distinctive but not singular) to borrow Maget’s historic phrase (Maget, 1955-1989). Recent studies by rural spatial economists demonstrate how the rural space, as they understand it, constitutes a particularly pertinent field to implement and

advance frames of analysis in geographical economics, providing research subject matter and applications in the complex interactions and mechanisms between forces of agglomeration and forces of dispersion. Rural areas also constitute a remarkable field of study for research questions that assume a close interrelationship between production and consumption. Historically, this was the case for studies of peasant and family farming. Today it is also the case for the abundance of space, another characteristic of rural areas: it is both a productive resource and a source of consumption, especially with regard to living environments. With the rural being where natural resources and elements of biodiversity are mostly located, it is also “naturally” an ideal field for the sociological analysis of relationships between humankind and nature as well as for the environmental economics and the production of local environmental services. As it is also an area of low population density and “proximity”, it can encourage a certain type of social interaction that is, in principle, heavily personalised, making it an excellent site to study residential interpersonal acquaintance and its effects on the processes of sociability and political or militant engagement. In addition to the research programmes already underway, these different examples—which need to be completed—open up broad perspectives for rural economics and sociology freed from navel-gazing ruralism.

On the other hand, however, it cannot be said that there has been an evolution of the same magnitude in rural politics, especially what are known as rural development policies. French rural development policies, like those of the European Commission, are still very strongly inspired by a conception of rural development seen as *un développement agricole élargi* (expanded agricultural development) to repeat a phrase that Marielle Berriet-Sollicec, Pierre Daucé and I used in our policy assessment studies (*cf.* especially our contributions in Trouvé, Berriet-Sollicec and Lépicier, 2013). It would be worth discussing what appears to be a delay—a form of hysteresis—in the field of the rural, between the societal or economic dynamics that are now given much attention and the processes of public decision-making and the directional choices of public policies. New political science research, in line with the avenues opened up by Pierre Müller, among others, in the 1990s, would be welcome today to shed light on the persistence and elements of durability of these distortions where appropriate. This is an interesting question. France, for example, is one of Europe’s greatest champions of this conception of the rural as expanded agricultural development in European Commission negotiations despite the fact that residential development in France’s countryside has been underway for at least thirty years and farmers represent less than 10% of the active population living in rural areas.

These observations are an invitation to broaden research perspectives into rural areas and worlds. They demand broader approaches and more diverse fields of study beyond France or Western Europe, whether towards Eastern European countries, such as the inroads made by studies by Marie-Claude Maurel and Pascal Chevalier (Maurel *et al.*, 2014), or towards the Global

South and towards other configurations of “developed” countries. This sets the framework for comparative approaches in social sciences, with all their interesting contributions but also their limitations and controversies as emphasised by Marc Maurice (Maurice, 1989) and reiterated by Jean-François Bayart: “We should therefore bear in mind that comparison cannot be in one direction only and that the historicity of European societies has as much to gain from being measured by the benchmark of African and Asian societies as the other way round. In short, we need to compare in order to individualise, and to de-individualise in order to universalise” (Bayart, 2008).

Acknowledgement

For some sections of this article, I make use of analyses developed in parallel in the book I am coordinating with Philippe Jeanneaux—*Repenser l'économie rurale*, 2014—, especially, in addition to our own chapters, contributions from Francis Aubert and Bertrand Schmitt, whom I would like to thank. Thanks are also due to Isabelle Perez, at the Bartoli Documentation Centre at Montpellier SupAgro, for her support in documentary research.

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