

# **Neo-rurality and the different meanings of the countryside**

*Néo-ruralités : les différentes significations de la campagne*

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## **Abstract**

*This paper looks at the diverse meanings that countryside may have for a variety of neo-rurals, having as starting point the case study of the residential restructuring experienced in the present context of Navarre (a region in north Spain). This is achieved through the analysis of the discourses expressed by urban-to-rural migrants in several in-depth interviews. In so doing, our aim is to explore some of the meanings that countryside may have for some of the main actors involved in the current (re)definition of rural spaces. These meanings also represent different ways of contesting the daily experience in contemporary society; different expectations about the extent they want to become engaged with the locality; and different ways of understanding the rural, the urban, and the relationship between them. At the same time, this paper attempts to observe the different (and contested) models of development underlying these (re)interpretations and expectations of the rural.*

*Key-words: Neo-rurals, countryside, residential restructuring, rural spaces*

## **Résumé**

*Prenant comme point de départ l'étude de cas de la restructuration résidentielle menée dans le contexte actuel de la Navarre (région du nord de l'Espagne), cet article vise à étudier, à travers l'analyse du discours exprimé par des migrants de la ville à la campagne dans plusieurs interviews approfondies, les différentes significations que la campagne peut représenter pour une pluralité de néo-ruraux. De cette manière, notre but est d'explorer quelques-uns des sens que la campagne peut revêtir aux yeux des acteurs principaux impliqués dans la (re)définition actuelle des espaces ruraux. Ces significations diverses représentent également différentes manières de répondre à l'expérience quotidienne dans la société contemporaine, différentes attentes quant au désir des néo-ruraux*

*de s'impliquer dans la localité et différentes manières de comprendre 'le rural', 'l'urbain', ainsi que la relation entre les deux catégories. Parallèlement, cet papier tente d'observer les différents modèles de développement sous-tendant ces (ré)interprétations et les attentes concernant 'le rural'.*

**Mots-clés :** *Néo-ruraux, campagne, restructuration résidentielle, espaces ruraux*

## **Introduction**

The great changes experienced by society as a whole during the last few decades have, obviously, been reflected in rurality and the countryside. Currently, *the rural* may be considered as a way of confronting urban life, a framework to discuss and contrast the model of economic development, and the basis for new demands of quality of life (Mormont, 1998). Similarly, countryside has become a desirable and feasible residential environment for an increasing number of people who decide to translate their preferences into residential practices by moving from town to a village. This arrival of neo-rurals has also been argued to reflect an attempt to question current urban life; and attempt to get a feeling of living in a community, a feeling impossible to experience nowadays in towns and cities (Halfacree, 1997). However, this interpretation of the 'lure' of the countryside as a socio-residential environment is not due to a hypothetical intrinsic character of town and/or country, but to the way they are currently being socially interpreted and constructed. Within this process of construction, social reinterpretation, or social spatial-temporal concretion/crystallization, there are many elements that will help to promote and shape this emergence of residential preferences for rural environments. Namely, its function as source of identities, the assessment of 'nature' as a positive added value to a wide range of products: food, fabrics, design, cosmetics, recreation, and so on. Therefore, when rurality is assessed according to its residential potential, quality of life becomes an important argument to legitimise the move from town to the countryside.

The aim of this paper is to explore how rural newcomers experience their life in the new residential place. That is, how do they 'feel rural' (if this is the case); how do they become engaged with the new place (if they so desired). In so doing, the paper also seeks to observe how rural newcomers represent and give sense to the 'lure' of the countryside, and whether their move could be understood as an implicit critique of current urban life. At the same time, this will lead us to see if the category neo-rural is a homogenous one, or if it hides a plurality of meanings, representations and expectations about the countryside. In order to do this, we focus in the case of Navarre (a region in north Spain) and the urban-to-rural migration that has taken place in the last years in this area. In the context of this research, several in-depth interviews were performed with rural newcomers in order to analyse the social representations they hold about concepts such as nature, village or countryside<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> These interviews were performed as part of a PhD research project undertaken at the State University of Navarre (Rivera, 2004). In this research, the only prerequisite interviewees had to fulfil was to define their move as an urban-to-rural one. Thus, they had to decide themselves where the place they lived in could be characterised as urban or rural space.

In the next section we introduce the process of construction of our object of research and some of the preliminary questions. After, some explanation about the methodology will be outlined. In the following section, we will move to the different expectations and the different types of neo-rurals we explored through the interviews. In the subsequent section, we ask ourselves about the links between the different life projects involved and the kind of rural space they help to develop. Finally, in the conclusion section, some remarks are made concerning the possible alliances and oppositions between the three *countrysides* analysed here.

## 1. Construction of the Object and Preliminary Questions

When compared with other countries, we see that the shift from a traditional pattern of rural-to-urban migration process to the opposite one has occurred in Spain with some delay (Fielding, 1982; Kontuly, 1998). Despite intranational differences, during the eighties a renaissance of rural spaces is observed in the country as result of a growing number of people moving from urban to rural areas (Camarero, 1993). This trend is also seen in the case of Navarre, where an incipient process of population sprawl is observed from the second half to the eighties. This process increases gradually over the last few years, both in terms of the number of people concerned and in terms of the distance involved. In fact, the arrival of new residents to rural areas constitutes nowadays a new *social landscape* that shapes rurality in Navarre (Oliva and Camarero, 2002).

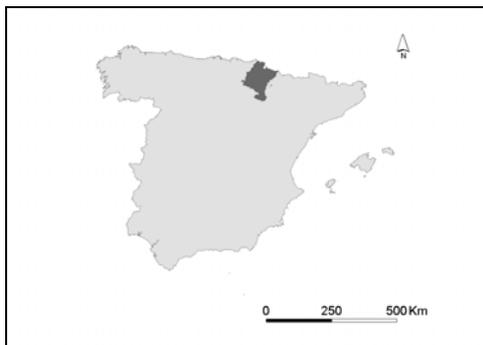
The increasing number of neo-rurals brings a diverse set of questions to address and to respond to. However, the label “*neo-rural*” itself indicates a widespread assumption, namely that all of them share some characteristics that make a clear opposition to those of local population (who also are said to share some conditions). Following this conception, much research into neo-rurals has been focused on the differences they have when compared to local population: higher level of education, lower involvement in agricultural activity, higher rates of women in paid work, etc. Similarly, less descriptive analyses have been made exploring the relationships between the two different populations: conflicts with locals, social integration and participation in local networks, and so forth.

Nevertheless, analyses of the new residential patterns showed that the process of rurbanisation in Navarre was due to the arrival of different profiles of neo-rurals. Along with the upper-middle class migration, the arrival of young people to suburban areas is also observed, as well as the arrival of people with few economic resources, such as immigrants and the unemployed (Camarero et al., 1998). Therefore, data reflected a diversity of characteristics, strategies and expectations hidden by the supposedly common category of *neo-rurals*. Being aware of this heterogeneity, one of the next questions was: why are they moving to the countryside? This question gave rise to related ones: what are they expecting to find in the countryside? Which are their expectations of the neighbourhood, nature, or the village? Are they moving in order to take up a new job in the vicinity or is there something else underlying their decision? It is clear that moving the residence conveys not just a spatial change, but also -and more importantly- a change in diverse aspects of one's everyday life, particularly when the move implies living in a very different environment.

Therefore, we may agree that each residential venture is a whole socio-residential project, a socio-biographic investment (Bourdieu, 1990). In this project, we find closely intertwined components of diverse nature: material possessions (i.e. objects), economic investment (i.e. family patrimony) and symbolic attachments (i.e. memories and desires).

But how could we relate the lure of the countryside and the vital ventures implied in every residential practice? In order to do that, we thought we should look at the way neo-rurals experience and express their relationship with their socio-residential environment in order to become engaged with the new place (if they so desired). To do that, three different levels of commitment were established. Firstly, the new home, as it represents the most intimate environment closely linked to our identity (individual as well as social) by being an '*irreplaceable centre of significance*' (Relph 1976, p.39). Secondly, the village as it is the most immediate space for sociability. Finally, the physical environment as such; that is, the countryside they move to. Through these three dimensions we explore the way neo-rurals represent and organize their everyday life; and the way they become (or not) engaged with the new residential place in three different milieus: private, social, and physical.

Figure 1. Study area



## 2. Methodology

In order to answer the above questions diverse in-depth interviews were utilised. The way interviewees were selected and interviews were designed were conditioned by three assumptions:

- Migration is considered as a *cultural event* that reflects migrants' personality, loyalties, values and attachments (Fielding, 1992).
- New residential preferences are, to some extent, related to representations of *nature, countryside, village, neighbourhood, town, urban pace of life*, etc.
- As said, 'neo-rural' has become a label that entails a series of academic and statistically constructed notions that may restrict and neglect other experiences. For example, giving priority to the homogeneity of neo-rurals and their disparity with local population; considering 'new resident' those arrived in the ten years prior to national census; etc. Thus, we should attempt to avoid as much as possible this process of *conceptual purification* (Halfacree, 2001).

Bearing in mind these considerations, nineteen people who defined themselves as *neo-rural* were interviewed<sup>2</sup>. By giving them the power to decide whether they are part or not of such a category, we tried to generate final categories as a result of the analysis of the interviews instead of shaping the analysis in order to fit predefined categories. The interviewees were contacted through social networks, and in just 2 cases did migration take place over 10 years ago; in the remaining cases, the move took place within the previous 5 years. Interviews showed very different biographies and circumstances underlying the decision to move from town to the countryside: from elementary to superior education; from urban domestic servants with superior education (catering workers) to an employee in new technologies with elementary education (an industrial unskilled worker); from people aged 28 to 53.

The majority of interviews were performed in the homes of neo-rurals, and they lasted about eighty minutes when they were performed with one person only (11 cases) and about two hours when they were performed with a couple (4 cases).

- During the interviews different aspects of neo-rurals' expectations and experiences were explored:

- Plans for the future they had when they took the decision of moving to the countryside, and plans they have nowadays

- Reasons for moving and the method of making the choice in relation to the final location

- Involvement in local life: participation in political, social and cultural activities

- Everyday practices: work, shopping, socializing, leisure

- Representations of nature, village, town, home, countryside, rural-urban life, neighbours, quality of life<sup>3</sup>...

- In addition to the issues developed through the interviews, interviewees were asked to fill a '*spatial-mobility budget*'. They had to report the different displacements they made everyday in a normal week, and how long they spent in the different spaces, as well as in their displacements.

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<sup>2</sup> We believe that perceiving themselves as neo-rural was the lowest common denominator as a starting point. At the same time, they had to decide whether the place they lived in could be characterised as urban or rural. This was particularly relevant in the case of peri-urban enclaves. We should caution that return migration was not considered in our analysis. Similarly, we omitted for this analysis the urban professional migration to private developments, mostly in peri-urban areas.

<sup>3</sup> The analysis of social representations allows us to investigate how the environment is perceived and understood by individuals (from the most private -the home- to the widest sense of environment). One might say that social representations involve particular ways of thinking and decoding daily reality. They are spontaneous and practical knowledge, socially produced and shared, that play a relevant role in our understanding and control of our physical, social and ideal environment. They have the capacity to condense history, relationships, and the preconceptions we have in relation to objects, people, ideologies, and so on, into a mental picture (Jodelet, 1984). In so doing, they do not remain just as cognitive elements, but they shape our behaviour, our practices. Social representations are not static but inherently dynamic as they are constantly being remade. From the fact that they are socially produced, the comprehension scheme they bring to us is socially shared. Thus, their analysis allows us to move from an individual level to a collective one.

### 3. Differing expectations and Experiences

At first sight the analysis of interviews revealed a discourse based on the idea of the village as the ideal socio-physical environment to experience a sense of community, where personal relationships are honest, spontaneous, and based on mutual knowledge and confidence. The interviews also reflected the common acceptance of *neo-archaism* as an aesthetic value linked to (processes of) identity (Morin, 1973). Open fires, chimneys, wooden beams, and so on will be part of a symbolic complex that takes new settlers back to past times, where they seem to find a source of identity, a sense of belongingness. Finally, there was also the representation of nature as an abstract dimension that can be appropriated in diverse ways.

Nevertheless, when these representations were put in relation to the role that the residential move played in newcomers' vital project, this common undercurrent fragmented into diverse nuances. These nuances reflect the different expectations that newcomers had about their move, that is, about the new residential place, both as a physical and social environment. In so doing, they show different representations of *ruralities* and *countrysides*, and different relationships with the place. At the same time, they reflect some of the ways current rural space is being appropriated and experienced by newcomers. Looking at these differences, it is possible to distinguish three different types of rural newcomers. They move from a more pragmatic and instrumental point of view and assessment, towards a more existential and ideological one. However, it might be said that they do not represent fixed categories or profiles, but flexible frameworks to understand how the countryside is being appropriated by neo-rurals in Navarre. It should also be cautioned that despite the fact that our analysis seems to remain at a representational level, the typology of neo-rurals was made with consideration of social practices reported by interviewees such as: daily displacement to work, organisation of shopping, involvement in local activities, mobility patterns, etc. In so doing, we attempted to link expectations and discourses with social practices.

#### 3.1. Pragmatic dystopians: peri-urban spaces as adaptation spaces

This first category includes those people who understood their move from Pamplona to the country as in some way a *forced* decision, due to the circumstances and restrictions of the moment. On the one hand, circumstances were related mainly to the need of bigger space for new family members or workspace, and to the foundation of a new family. On the other, restrictions were linked to economic limitations and the need or desire of proximity to Pamplona –the county town of Navarre- and its outskirts, where they keep commuting everyday for diverse reasons: work, socializing with friends and relatives, shopping, and so forth. Consequently, this residential strategy takes place in the metropolitan area of Pamplona, both in small and bigger villages. It is a strategy based on mobility, as it becomes essential for everyday experience.

According to the discourse expressed in the interviews, this residential strategy is legitimised by a pragmatic discourse, as it was the response to specific circumstances. It is important to have this in mind in order to better understand their discourse. In fact, as they

moved primarily due to the need for a new house, this is the construct that in the main part structures the whole discourse, against the other two constructs analysed here: the village and the countryside. The new house (whether it was a cottage or not) was the main element to assess the improvement in relation to the previous house. If the greater physical space was the main reason for the move, the seclusion allowed by the new house is also considered as a positive value. On the one hand, it reduces the possibilities of conflicts with undesired neighbours, on the other; it conveys greater independence from them.

Unsurprisingly, the construct of village was not very pronounced in the discourse of pragmatic dystopian rural newcomers; after all, the decision of moving from Pamplona to a village was not deliberately chosen. This apparent lack of interest in their closest socio-residential milieu is linked to their vital project. As previously noted, they keep all of their everyday life in town: work, friends, social activities, etc. Therefore, keeping their social networks in town, they do not appear to be very interested in becoming engaged with new social relations in local networks. Although at the representational level they may consider village as a space for a better kind of relationship, they also remark upon some negative aspects such as the locals' curiosity and attempts at social control.

In relation to countryside, this typology of rural newcomers assesses it from an instrumental point of view. They understand countryside as a surrounding nature, as the environment where their new house is placed, but as something external to them. In so doing, interviewees placed themselves in an observer's position, experiencing countryside as an object that may be viewed, strolled upon, and so on. By emphasising the possibilities of recreation provided by it, they reduce countryside to a landscape that may be appropriated through aesthetic and recreational use.

### **3.2. *Refuge utopians: alternating town and countryside as an individual salvation***

We observed a second profile of neo-rurals constituted by those who interpret their move as a freely chosen action; as the result of an old dream (to live in the countryside), but who do not desire to give up 'urban life'. The move took place both at the foundation of a new family unit and in subsequent years, without being linked to moments of great change in family life. Although this category of newcomers shares a daily experience based on commuting with the previous one, the character of this residential venture is very different. In this case, neo-rurals legitimise their move as a means of being able to cope with everyday urban lifestyle. That is, they will try to build around them a shelter where they may rest and rid themselves of the stress generated by urban pace of life. Hence, despite being based on mobility (as it was the case of pragmatic dystopians) this residential venture searches for a bigger symbolic and spatial distance from town. Consequently, it takes place over an area further away from Pamplona.

Refuge utopian neo-rurals will build their shelter around the ideas of the cottage and the village, while countryside will be the frame where both of them are possible. In first place, the cottage is assessed also in terms of space, though in a rather different way to the pragmatic dystopians. They consider the advantage of having greater space and the isolation from neighbours it brings, but they also emphasize the possibilities that the new space brings for their sociability. In this sense, the new space gives them the possibility to

enjoy diverse activities they could not in town. For instance, playing music with friends until late or having a party. In order to feel good in the new home, neo-rurals imbue cottage with neo-archaic features. Stone structure, wooden floors and joists, an open fire and so on become elements embodied with aesthetic, as well as symbolic value. But this neo-archaic reconstruction is not enough for refuge utopians. They will recreate *small pieces* of nature at home, by taking care of and enjoying their private (vegetable) gardens. Hence, domestic gardens become a highly significant space where flowers, flowerpots, plants and trees are objects of worship and expressiveness showing the great emotional investment made by new settlers.

If cottage represents a space where to enjoy privacy and partially recreate nature and rustic atmosphere, village is represented as the space for social relations. It is believed to be the space where communitarian atmosphere can be experienced. Due to its lower number of inhabitants and its surroundings, it is conceived as the ideal residential space for neighbourhood cohabitation, personal knowledge, mutual confidence and spontaneous relationships. All these characteristics will enhance the role that the village plays as the perfect socio-environment for child rearing. The safety of the place, the close contact with nature and confidence in the neighbours lead to the village being considered the perfect environment for children, both physically and socially.

Looking at the way that refuge utopians understand the construct of the countryside, we see that they assess it in terms of the aesthetic value (views) and recreational possibilities that surrounding countryside may have: strolling, going on an excursion, etc. However, besides these recreational possibilities, actors give greater relevance to the representation of countryside as a space for retreat and regeneration. Living in the countryside gives them a feeling of freedom, vital space, inner calm and tranquillity. It is the space where they are able to forget the problems that go along with urban life: work, stress, tiredness, and so forth. Nevertheless, similarly to pragmatic dystopians, refuge utopians regard countryside from a spectator's point of view. That is, as the external environment of their shelter.

### **3.3. Deep-rooted utopians: looking for a new life through a collective project**

Finally, a third group of neo-rurals (namely, deep-rooted utopians) emerged from the interviews. Similar to the second strategy, their move is seen as a response to an old dream, although their relationship with the final place is different. This strategy spreads over remoter areas of Navarre. In this case, neo-rurals voluntarily stop daily commuting to Pamplona as they join a new work in the new locality or vicinity. In fact, this is an important difference in relation to the previous categories. Deep-root utopians seem to be more concerned with experiences of rootness and belongingness than mobility, which was essential to make feasible everyday practices in the other two strategies. In fact, while the discourse of pragmatic dystopians reflect cars and mobility as realities set in their everyday life, and refuge utopians' discourse presents them as essential elements for accessing the lifestyle they wanted to join, deep-rooted utopian neo-rurals assess the reduced need for a car as an advantage of their vital option. In their case, the move was not motivated by the new job but, on the contrary, the new job was determined by the move. Therefore, deep-root utopians link their move to an overall change in their lives, joining a lifestyle radically

different from their previous one. They will try (with differing grades of success and difficulty) to join new social networks in the new place of residence.

When they look at the cottage (whether it is old or new), their discourse is based on the images of neo-archaism as a way not just to aesthetically recreate rustic homes, but also to symbolically feel rooted in the past by living with diverse rustic objects. Nevertheless, we should remark that this is probably the construct they develop most superficially during the interviews. This is not surprising at all, as their move was primarily a vital strategy, and not just a residential venture. In fact, the relationship between cottage and environment seems to be the inverse at that hold by pragmatic dystopians and refuge utopians. If these conceived the environment as the external surroundings of the new house, deep-rooted neo-rurals focused more on the environment. In so doing, the internal/external dichotomy is overcome in favour of a feeling of oneness with nature and between the three constructs analysed.

Similarly to refuge utopians' representations about the village, deep-rooted neo-rurals hold the image of this construct as the idealized habitat ruled by a community spirit. But in contrast with refuge utopians, they will try to get involved with all aspects of life in the locality, and to become engaged with local networks of relationships. They will try to take an active role in the political life of the locality, as well as in diverse socio-cultural associations and activities. Although refuge utopians also take part in the cultural, social and political life of the locality, they participate mostly in socio-cultural activities (and primarily in those related to activities for children)<sup>4</sup>.

If pragmatic dystopians and refuge utopians represented the countryside from an instrumental point of view (though with different level of complexity), deep-rooted neo-rurals approach the countryside from a more existential perspective. Although they are aware of the recreational and aesthetic appropriation of the countryside, they give priority to the intangible benefits obtainable from it, such as retreat, inner calm, and regenerative potential. However, this representation veils a critique about contemporary society that was absent from dystopians' discourse and only partial in refuge utopians' one. On the one hand, deep-rooted utopian neo-rurals seem to be more concerned about getting a sense of oneness with nature, instead of being mere observers and consumers. In so doing, they place themselves in a *dwelling* perspective as an attempt to overcome ongoing split between people and place by taking care of nature in relation with past, present and future (vide Ingold, 1995). On the other hand (but closely linked), the rupture between society and nature is also overcome. Deep-rooted utopians feel themselves as an integrating part of what is going on around them. Finally, being part of this countryside helps deep-rooted neo-rurals to keep away from the pace of urban life, ruled by the widespread use of *clock* and *instantaneous* times, and experiencing the slowly and *evolutionary* time of nature (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998).

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<sup>4</sup> Accordingly to the relevant role that utopian neo-rurals (both, refuge and deep-rooted) give to the representations of the village-like relationships (that is, honest, founded in mutual knowledge and confidence, and so on), they lead to disappointment when the latter are compared with everyday experience. It is in everyday life where utopian projects come up against locals' lives and attitudes. In many cases, the initial desire of integration becomes difficult to reach and new settlers find themselves restricted to superficial and courteous conversations with local people.

## 4. Differing Rural Spaces for Different Projects of Life

Sharing undercurrent imagery about neo-archaism, the rural habitat as a space for sociability (safety, mutual knowledge and confidence), and countryside as a peaceful environment to enjoy, the different types of rural newcomers reflect different expectations about their life in the countryside. That is, different ways of looking at, and giving meaning to, these dimensions. In so doing, they also represent different ways of understanding the rural, the urban, and the relationship between them, and also different ways of confronting the urban experience. Nevertheless, the different categories of rural newcomers are not just the expression of differing, and sometimes contested, interpretations of urban and rural life. They become important actors of the current constructions of rural spaces. Therefore, we should ask ourselves how the arrival of different newcomers influences in the present and future of rural areas, and which model of development are they sustaining.

In the case of deep-rooted utopians, it is easy to see the important impact their arrival may have for the locality. They are relevant in terms of holding back a population recession, but they also become important actors of the socio-economic renewal of the locality, as they take up local jobs, mostly different from traditionally agricultural ones. These jobs may strengthen internal relations (i.e. opening a hairdressing salon or becoming a painter), but they may also reinforce interdependence between local economies and 'global' processes - commodification of countryside, and the cultural dimension of the rural- (i.e. opening a restaurant, organizing guided tours, or running an information point for pilgrims). The success of some of these new activities could come into conflict with the success of locals' economic activities in a kind of productivist/postproductivist model of development. Having in mind the dreams and aspirations underlying deep-rooted utopians' move, the rural space resulting from this residential venture could be put on a level with a space for identity, sociability and belonging; a space where the arrival of newcomers reflects more clearly a critic of current urban life; a space where it is possible to embrace 'community life' by becoming involved in social networks rooted in locality. Thus, we can interpret this strategy as an attempt to build a vital project rooted on different basis to those ruling contemporary urban experience. It is a project closely intertwined with the future of the locality and locals' lives, as they give meaning to this strategy. We could also consider this project as a response to current urban life by getting involved in a project of collective future and identity.

In the case of refuge utopians, the role in relation to locality represents more a gradual population renewal than the strength of the socio-economic network of the locality. On the one hand, they keep their previous job. They do most of their shopping in town or shopping malls, though they buy some food in the locality. Thus, they do not greatly influence the economic renewal of the area. On the other hand, they help to reactivate social life (i.e. organizing socio-cultural activities) in some areas where local population may be elderly and does not take part in social activities any longer. However, those areas repopulated mainly by refuge utopians could experience an overall change if the trend keeps in the future. Nowadays, agricultural jobs play only a marginal role in local economy as secondary activities or activities carried out by retired locals, as younger generations tend to

have moved to Pamplona in the past, going back to family house only in holidays and weekends. Therefore, it could be the case (in some years' time) that most inhabitants will be working in town, and agriculture could be abandoned. If so, this rural space will become a mixture of refuge-homes and second homes of local families. Thus, a space for residential and leisure purposes may result if the expansion of refuge utopians overwhelms other categories of rural newcomers. This would be a space for residential purposes, that is, for private reproduction, but also for leisure and recreation as they are some of the main ways that refuge utopians appropriate the space and nature. Although this residential project involves a critique of urban life, the response it represents is not based in a collective alternative. It may better be understood as an individualistic escape as they do not link their future to the socio-economic development of the locals and locality. Moreover, they try to privately reproduce nature at home through the spread of domestic (vegetable) gardens.

Finally, it is easily observed how pragmatic dystopians play a very different role in the economic development of the area, except for occasional shopping trips to local shops. However, these practices are similar to those of the locals, who also work, do shopping, socializing, etc, in town. In fact, while agriculture might be found in these areas, they are rarely the only economic activity of the household. On the other hand, pragmatic dystopians greatly affect the property sector by increasing the demand for residential spaces, which may become a problem for young locals trying to buy a house in their village. Therefore, we can see that the outskirts of Pamplona are shaped by different newcomers, and are becoming an extension of the sprawling town. It will become a deeply differentiated space, as it will be a space for small and countrified villages that may be the location for urban professional middle and upper classes looking for segregated and socio-economically segregating spaces; a space for cheaper residence (and/or greater space); and a space for countrified localities near to Pamplona. This space will become as internally fragmented as urban space. However, in all the cases, social networks and everyday practices are linked to Pamplona much more than to the new locality<sup>5</sup>. Consequently, within the protagonists' discourse and practices it is difficult to see in this strategy a deep critique of urban life (apart from facts such as the price and size of flats or relationships with neighbours). It is more a reflection of their adaptability to diverse limitations.

## Conclusion

As noted previously, these three types of neo-rurals are different interpretations of (rural) society. They are not isolated categories, but they are in permanent contact and relation, both spatial and symbolically. In this interaction, there is an unequal relationship as they may reinforce and clash each other in different ways. It is a relationship based on the main dimensions of each category (figure 2):

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<sup>5</sup> Though not in the case of exclusive residential developments, as they also build spaces for socializing with peers (that is, those with similar status): golf and social clubs inside the development, facilities solely for residents, and so on.

Figure 2

	<b>Condition for success</b>	<b>Relation with town</b>	<b>Relation with the locality</b>
<i>Pragmatic Dystopians</i>	Mobility	<i>Proximity</i>	<i>Residential</i>
<i>Refuge utopians</i>	Mobility	Spatial Flexibility	Residential Recreational
<i>Deep-rooted utopians</i>	Belongingness	Distance	Identity

In the ‘battle’ over the transformation of rural space according to their own expectations, refuge utopians are the group with the greatest influence. In first place, it should be remarked that it is unlikely that dystopic and deep-rooted strategies dispute the same space. The proximity and mobility necessities for the former are difficult to develop in the space for belonging and distance ruled by the latter. Nevertheless, pragmatic dystopians may become users and consumers of the rural space shaped by deep-rooted utopians (i.e. going to their restaurants, getting involved in rural tourism, and so forth). A second possibility would be a rural space disputed by pragmatic dystopians and refuge utopians, that is, whether a rural space close to town will become an undifferentiated extension of urban space or a space for recreation. In this case, those who looked for retirement in rural space may experience the ongoing sprawl of town as a real menace to their ‘shelter’. However, the discourse of both types may support each other through a new assessment of rural space as residential environment for everyday life. The last possibility would be a rural space where both categories of utopian neo-rurals try to define the space according to their own representations. In this case, if the social networks of the village become weakened by the arrival of refuge utopians that keep their everyday practices and networks in town, deep-rooted utopians may feel that they are losing the possibility of becoming engaged with and committed to a real community. As in the other situations, actors in this symbolic battle may support each other. On the one hand, this is because they share at some extent a cultural and symbolic assessment of village and countryside. On the other, because they may socialize together in order to overcome the indifference and reluctance of the local population.

However, the battles to be fought in order to impose one’s own expectations and definition of the countryside will not be just representational ones. It is expected that the different vital projects will shape neo-rurals’ everyday experience in many directions, including the way they experience the achievement of their expectations, the strategies they develop to avoid –or relativise- the failure of such expectations, the way they keep connections with town and the way they influence in local economy. All of these different expectations and practices will translate into different articulations of interests and sociations. That is, different vital projects will lead to different networks of loyalties, associations, distrust, reluctances, and so forth. These networks will not be limited to the interaction between neo-rurals, but they will create relations between different actors and interests, inside and outside the locality.

Conversely, we may conclude that the way neo-rurals interact and articulate their relationships and practices at the spatial and social dimensions is determined by their expectations about their residential place. And these expectations are closely intertwined to differing representations of the countryside.

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