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Research Article

Deconstruction of Rural-Urban Divide in New Tools Prospective

Ana Rusta

French-Albanian School "Ernest Koliqi",
Tirana, Albania

Abstract

In this essay importance will be given to the traditional and contemporary conception of the rural-urban divide. The traditional approach influenced by a hegemonic perspective has seen rural as urban residual by believing in the idea of a clear division between urban and rural, driven by demographic, cultural and economic factors. But today's empirical research in different fields, reflecting strong local and global dynamics, proves that the split between rural and urban is impossible. The change of these realities at the local and global scale has influenced the development of a thesis that reformulates the urban/rural relation under the perspective of a continuum, hybrid or liminal state. Today's urban research backs the idea that it is impossible to define once and for all what is rural and urban. Concrete cases taken in Europe and in Albania prove that the existence of realities with particular typology not only makes the existence of a general and universally accepted definition problematic, but also creates the need for a continuous, dynamic, and temporary re-definition of urban and rural.

Keywords: urban-rural divide, deconstruction, continuum, liminal, hybrid

1. Introduction

Throughout modern urban studies, there is an idea that there is a clear distinction between rural and urban in terms of demography, social relations, ways of life, building environment, etc. Many empirical studies, under the influence of the phenomena of the time, supported the thesis that urban and rural are two clearly distinct concepts. But in today's situation, due to new phenomena at the local and global level, this classic design faces difficulties, creating the need to review such a perspective. Given the contributions of the various urban and rural disciplines, it is being proved that the new reality reflects a dynamic new relationship between them, where terminology, methodology and traditional indicators are inadmissible. For this reason, new research will argue the outline of a new relationship between urban and rural as a continuum, hybrid or liminality.

2. Methodology

The method used is a qualitative research. The essay is largely based on some important works and quantitative studies of a large number of researchers in the field of urban sociology. Through a descriptive and analytical approach, we will analyze the causes of the rural/urban divide thesis. Then, through recent empirical research, we will prove that a clear separation between rural and urban does not exist any longer due to modern dynamics and complex factors at the local and global level. As a concrete case, we will analyze findings obtained from specific studies done in Europe, as well as the informal areas around the city of Tirana, Albania.

3. The Epistemology of the Terms in Postmodern Condition

In the epistemological sense, many difficulties arise in the postmodern condition when certain entities are defined as 'urban' and 'rural'. Initially it seems that this conceptual obstacle comes from the tendency to read postmodern as a definable entity with clear and closed boundaries: reading postmodernism through modern psychology. For example, in relation to the city, Daan states that "the city becomes problematic only once one attempts to isolate a meaning or referent. Yet in the explosion of terms for the city, one can see a solution for both: the point is not to understand both concepts as useful for the purpose of delimiting, but as inclusive and expansive. They provide frameworks for bringing together phenomena, more than for pinning them down" (Wesselman, 2012, 22). But apart from the postmodern horizons that contain fluid and dynamic concepts, there is also the complexity of what is called 'urban' or 'rural'. In this sense, the definition of these concepts combines many disciplines of knowledge. For example,

> *"in the fields of literature and architecture, the objects of study are usually clearly defined (texts and buildings) and accordingly the focus is often on postmodernism (as a feature of the objects under investigation) ....[but].... the city as an object of study does not belong to a single, well-defined discipline; it is discussed in (human) geography, sociology, political science, urban planning, and anthropology, for example" (Wesselman, 2012,17-18).*

On the other hand, if we rearrange the urban/rural relation, the problem is complicated when the analysis supports a radical mental thinking culture. Unlike modernity, the postmodern condition constitutes "this possibility of tinkering about with these forms, through a kind of juxtaposition in complete promiscuity of everything in sight" (Baudrillard, 1993, 22-23). In this situation there is no principle, taxonomic system or hierarchy of privileged categories. "In such a world and reality one is thus left with coexisting entities (cultures, aims, ideals, truths, . .) with no hierarchy among them, that is to say, with a multiplicity of spaces and places" (Portugal, 2011, 46). Therefore, analysis regarding the urban/rural relation requires "the immense process of the destruction of meaning, equal to the earlier destruction of appearances" (Baudrillard 1994, 161) where "multiculturalism, minoritization, and hybridization define the postmodern urban condition" (Flusty, 1998). And at this point "the reference to topology is not accidental. It formalizes a boundary problem that is central to postmodernism, the problem of distinguishing the real from the unreal, including the problem of distinguishing between real and unreal boundaries" (Reinhold, 2010, 4). Thus postmodern criticism through the deconstruction of rural-urban divide is not only a theoretical but also a practical task. In this optics, the criticism emphasizes the idea that the urban/rural relation in today's conditions appears more indefinite by being expressed in terms of continuum, hybrid, or liminality.

4. Deconstruction of Rural-Urban Divide in Myth and Ideology Prospective

From the exercise of deconstruction it must be admitted that "...the rural/urban divide has been kept alive by a binary model of thinking, peddling ideas of separation, difference and even opposition between the urban and its rural other" (Cloke & Johnston, 2005 , 11). One of the perspectives that this criticism produces is expressed through the use of a third term that serves as a vector to explain the transition from one category to another and vice versa: the so-called urban-rural continuum thesis.

Further, the rural-urban divide perspective should be understood not as a natural, but a socially constructed perspective. Often, in postmodern thinking (Foucault, Derrida), the idea is that the construction and use of polarized binaries hides power relations where dominant groups rule minorities. According to Derrida it is not enough "simply to neutralize the binary oppositions of metaphysics. We must recognize that, within the familiar philosophical oppositions, there is always 'a violent hierarchy.' One of the two terms controls the other (axiologically, logically, etc.), holds the superior position. To deconstruct the opposition is first to overthrow [renverser] the hierarchy" (Derrida, 1997, LXXVII). In this context, the urban-rural divide has been created for and has responded to the need for urban domination over rural. This domination implies that "the urban/rural divide per se attains a hegemonic status in contemporary culture and society, and that the

perceived dominance of "the urban" over "the rural" is an expression of overarching moral geographies that the media (understood at the aggregate level) reproduce" (Jansson, 2013, 89). But when moral considerations are involved (urban-good/rural-evil) it is understood that "such a category alludes not only to objective conditions, but also to social legitimation. Obviously, depending on its content, a social set of meanings will confer a greater or lesser degree of validity on each social group" (Mormont, 1990). This social impact is seen in the ideological dimension of pro-urban and anti-rural narratives as well as in the definition of 'rural' as what remains after the definition of urban. To understand more simply this hegemony and bias of urbanity versus rural, it is worth pointing out the recent developments of rural-urban research. Even when rural research began to emerge (though fragmented and scarce in number), it did not enjoy its autonomy but was produced as an effect of urban studies and prejudices (positive or negative) that nourished the latter. So, for example, in terms of a pro-rural myth, people imagine massively rural communities as "...the ideal of the concept of community and, as such, have been the source of social science research for decades. If one pictures the countryside, idyllic images of rural communities are often conjured. A place where everyone knows everyone else, people say "hello" to everyone and there is a smile on every face. Of course, this is not the reality of many rural communities, but many people romanticize the rural as space of common values and morals" (Del Casino, 2011, 123-124). Therefore, the deconstruction of polarized rural-urban binaries seems to challenge representation structures through new ways of thinking and new emancipatory practices.

5. Deconstruction of Rural-Urban Divide in Tools Prospective

Regarding the idea that in today's conditions it is impossible to distinguish clearly between urban and rural, we will list analytically several reasons why: First, any definition and categorical definition of what is urban or rural depends on the paradigm and the ideological aspect in the mind of researchers. From the time of Aristotle, but also reinforced by the industrialization process of the 19th century, social science studies have traditionally recognized urban as the locus of industry, while rural as the locus of agriculture. Based on a traditional bias, rurality was defined as a residual (and after-urban was measured) and compensatory effect of negative phenomena appearing in the city (rural as virgin nature, tranquility, lack of crime). But after World War II, rural sociology began to be established as autonomous discipline and rural began to be no longer defined as a residual of urban. It started to enjoy a special status and studies in this sphere were significantly increased over time. Secondly, in the epistemic sense, the concept of what is 'rural' and 'urban' depends on the theoretical definition of space. If we accept a physical or environmental concept of space, then the distinction between 'rural' and 'urban' will be determined from this point of view. This perspective created from Simmel to Wirth has conceived urban and rural differentiation in terms of density and heterogeneity of population, territory and so on. "However, with increasing levels of population mobility, although people's place of residence may be urban or rural, they can be spending significant parts of their lives in other areas as a result of commuting or circular migration of various kinds" (Hugo, 1982) . It is precisely today that there is a more complex classification system in terms of what is called urban or rural. These classifications "point out that both of the schemes considered above form a settlement continuum based on population size, population density, levels of urbanisation, commuting patterns and adjacency. They created an abridged composite five level version of the rural/urban settlement continuum classifying centres which they apply at the sub-county level, arguing that the county is not an appropriate spatial unit for this purpose because of its heterogeneity" (Cromartie & Swanson, 1996, 5). In today's perspective it seems that the rural / urban dichotomy has little applicability and "any specific instance in the real world, therefore, can be viewed as demonstrating relative degrees of rurality and its opposite, urbanity, falling somewhere along the continuum between the two extremes" (Lang 1986, 120). If we were to accept a more complex conception of space such as Lefebvre (1991) then we realise that 'rural' and 'urban' terms have a threefold meaning: as spatial practice (a specific geographic location and set of residents); as representation of space (representation through disciplines and scientific studies) and; as representational spaces (sublimated display of symbols, codes, signs, etc.). In this triple perspective of space, we often see that the symbols of rural and urban areas are

separate from actual and ordinary landscapes and locations. For example, the rural image of quiet life is required to be implemented in urban planning under the *garden city* model, or as is the case of "the Creole *quartier* as Chamoiseau describes it is an intermediary, hybrid form of urbanism- a transition zone between the rural and the urban" (Prieto, 2012, 166). Thirdly, defining what is 'urban' and 'rural' depends on the differences and dynamics of a given state. Based on a variety of specifications, today there is no definite definition of what is called 'urban' and 'rural'. The United Nations itself accepts in its article 4.92 that "because of national differences in the characteristics that distinguish urban from rural areas, the distinction between the urban and the rural population is not yet amenable to a single definition that would be applicable to all countries or even, for the most part, to the countries within a region" (United Nations Statistical Division, 2017, 188). Further, in article 4.93, the UN acknowledges that "in many developed countries this distinction has become blurred, and the principal difference between urban and rural areas in terms of living standards tends to be the degree of population concentration or density. On the other hand, the differences between urban and rural ways of life and standards of living remain significant in developing countries, but even here rapid urbanization in these countries has created a great need for information related to different sizes of urban areas". (United Nations Statistical Division, 2017, 189). Fourth, the physical territory and its interpersonal or social perception must be distinguished. "In these kinds of ways, the difference between urban and rural goes beyond the material look of the land and implies more deep-seated differences respectively born of a separation from and an attachment to the nature of the physical environment" (Cloke & Johnston, 2005.10). But in addition to the methodological deficiencies that have quantitative measurements, the latter tends to simplify reality. Thus, "although statistical evidence can be used to identify areas with the outward characteristics of 'rurality', rural areas are not static over time and it is over-simplistic to suggest that a data profile alone can provide an adequate measure of what we consider to be 'rural'" (Gallent et al., 2008, 9). Therefore setting the indicators to measure what is rural and urban is too complex. "Thus, for example, population numbers are calculated on the basis of where people spend the night and are registered. Daily, weekly or seasonal back-and-forth migrants, people on vacation, people visiting summer homes, tourists, traditional and contemporary tramps and homeless people—these often appear in no population register" (Kûle, 2008, 9-17). Therefore, the idea of measuring and censoring should not depend on the perspectives of demography, geography, number and physical features of the environment. "The opposition between town and country now has hardly any social meaning for the majority of inhabitants: from within an area which is mainly strongly urbanized, country life is perceived above all as having residential advantages (quiet, pleasant surroundings) and disadvantages (more difficult access to services, to shops), but no longer as life in a different social world" (Mormont, 1990). Consequently, different scholars constantly recreate variables and hybrid categories to more accurately describe spatial and country dynamics by creating new terms such as "sparsely populated rural areas, rural core zones, urban-adjacent rural areas, and urban area" (Muilu & Rusanen, 2004, 109-117). In essence, it seems that this tendency for constant redefinition is conditioned by the fact that social context and social action builds 'rurality' and 'urbanity' dynamically and fluidly (Haugen & Lysgard, 2006). Fifthly, 'urban' and 'rural' should be understood as perception and feeling state (as identity). In this premise, "some researchers, for example, have suggested that while 'rural' might be seen as a geographical state, the term 'rurality' should be attributed to a mindset or behaviour style and treated as a 'social construct'…. [where] rural places and experiences are more than the sum of a few statistical measures" (Gallent et al., 2008, 9-12). According to an empirical study, Shirley describes that "the correspondents were asked if they lived in the countryside, a small town, or even a suburb that is rural. The majority did not feel able to class where they were living as rural, however many described their locations as having rural elements such as green fields and open spaces. The general feeling of confusion about what constituted 'proper' countryside speaks of the persistent problems of terminology surrounding discussion of non-urban experience" (Shirley, 2015, 6). Therefore, "geographers in the UK – who have been at the forefront of this debate – were initially disciples of 'indexing' but now tend towards 'description' usually concluding that 'rural is what people recognise as rural" (Gallent et al., 2008, 10). Sixthly, regarding the indicators that define 'urban' or 'rural', one must understand the function of a given urban place and the way it is

interpreted by peoples. A given place can enjoy significant rural or urban elements but is interpreted differently over time by individuals. An example of this aspect is the case of the provision of urban spaces on certain days as a wide market for fairs with products from rural areas. In this situation, urban space becomes a meeting and melting point between urban and rural, transforming the nature of the economy in terms of the rural-urban divide. Thus "…there is no city without rural characteristics…" (Karp et al, 2015, 36-37) and "given that the nature of the city has been radically changed, both by centralizing tendencies and by decentralizing practices, it can be argued that an important slice of contemporary urbanity can now be found in the village, and that the urban form thereby now encapsulates very strong rural characteristics and influences" (Marsden, Mooney & Cloke, 2006, 19). Now, agriculture in terms of space does not happen exclusively in the village but also in the middle of the city. In terms of social interaction, these social meetings between urban and rural residents confirm and construct their identity as complementary to one another. In the cultural aspect, some rural areas that make up a tourist attraction are also seeking to attract attention by organizing cultural or artistic activities (once typical of the city) to promote their economic and social potential to urban residents. This approach is also noted in former communist countries like Albania. After the collapse of the communist regime, it was noted that the rural economy model could not be based only on agriculture and livestock. Many rural areas, thanks to investments and policies at central and local level, are building a new economic model in sectors such as farmhouse, adventure tourism etc. Seventh, the dynamic and rapid change of the urban and rural landscape in terms of local and global phenomena requires a redefinition of urban/rural divide. "Thus, with respect to migration, it is necessary to consider not just rural to urban movement but also urban to rural, international and urban to urban and rural to rural movement" (Thorns, 2002, 42). Meanwhile urbanization cannot be understood without understanding the nature of rurality because urbanization as a phenomenon goes beyond the dimension of the city and affects rural communities as well. Earlier, "victorian technology has literally invaded the rural landscape and given new life to it" (Downey, Kinane & Parker, 2017, 217) but at the beginning of the 21st century this process accelerated and intensified in its virtual tools mass communication. The critical movements that typically characterize the city now affect the village as well. "The growing interest in visiting and living in the countryside, with particular expectations and demands in terms of landscape, conservation, animal welfare, heritage, leisure and recreation have fundamentally affected how we use and view the countryside as a resource" (Scott et al ., 2007, 21).

On the other hand, the deep impact of globalization in the field of information, labor market, advanced technologies, virtual services sector etc. has produced phenomena that include certain topological and typological elements of rural to urban (ruralization of urban) and urban to rural (urbanization of rural areas). For example, since the Second World War in the field of urban planning, elements and characters of rural lifestyle have been implemented in certain urban areas (lack of urban pollution, greenery, quiet life). Meanwhile, in terms of the urbanization of the rural we notice the trend of housing construction in rural areas under the auspices of ecological approaches such as the Netherlands or Germany. Even in terms of population in the pace of uninterrupted fusion, populations called 'neourbane' or 'neorural' are being created. The latter have embodied more consistent elements of rural culture as individuals choose to reside there for a long time or eventually settle there. But this two-way process through the diffusion of urban elements in these rural areas has also created a hybrid typology. The latter is characterized by the eclectic form of liminal nature. But here we are not talking only about the physical, but also the cultural and social dimensions. In the case of Albania, for example, often the thesis of a continuum between urban and rural is problematic as between the city and the country there are areas that are neither urban nor rural. In the vector of space movement there is no direct transition from rural to urban and vice versa but a transition mediated by these so-called informal areas. The latter were created after a long period of internal migration, mainly from the mountainous areas of the north and south of Albania towards the metropolis. These areas as physical and social forms cannot be categorized as urban or rural. Informal areas like Paskuqan, Bathore etc. seem to stay in "media res" as a hybrid product between rural and urban. But what shapes more this hybrid nature is the highly heterogeneous cultural and psycho-social capital of the populace populating these areas. Under a strong urban influence, residents of these areas borrow cultural values and aspects and then

translate them into existing values traditionally described as typically rural. In the methodical sense we can emphasize that it is not difficult to identify these areas as hybrid entities. The problem, then, is not so much of a definition, but of representation. The nature of these areas cannot be crystallized into a designated physical symbol as being a famous building or in a familiar narrative (eg, internal migration, large population density). It is both more and more undetermined than that. In analyzing this situation a gap is created between the instruments, indicators and physical reality already built, a gap that readily available conceptual apparatuses for understanding the reality mentioned here cannot explain. There seems to be an incommensurability of such a reality that is plural, eclectic, simultaneous and tensional. In these informal areas there is a present tension between what is perceived as urban and rural, responding to a liminal state. By definition, "liminal spaces are those which are, simultaneously, place *and* space. They are familiar, yet unknown; they are secure, and yet intimidating" (Downey, Kinane, & Parker, 2017, 3). In this sense, for residents, this space is a place that expresses security (a cozy and stable accommodation) but also a kind of discomfort and anxiety due to the eclectic nature of the psycho-cultural behaviors and values that exist between them. It seems that it is the liminal situation that explains why these areas challenge the urban-rural entity division, because they are not only the product of an in-between situation but exist in this situation through a tension between rural and urban. Theoretically, "in simple paradigmatic terms, one cannot occupy an in-between space or exist (in-)between two binary states without a resultant tension and/or mobility between both elements of the binary, which resist but also merge with the middle in-between" (Downey, Kinane & Parker, 2017, 6).

6. Conclusions

Unlike the period when urban and rural areas determined in the strong influence of modernity and industrial revolution emerged as separate and opposite entities, the postmodern situation has put this reality into crisis. Major changes in the field of communication technology, economy, mobility on local and global scale have created a new relation between rural and urban, much more unstable and undetermined. Various empirical research efforts in the urban area tend to redefine this relation to reflect the new reality as realistically as possible. Different methodological and taxonomic systems, and different number of indicators and methodological principles in this research prove the thesis that a clear separation between urban and rural is impossible. This relation is increasingly being defined in a dynamic perspective that creates hybrid and transitory realities, creating the impression that a definitive definition of this relation extending over time and space does not exist.

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