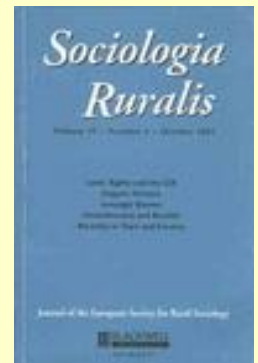
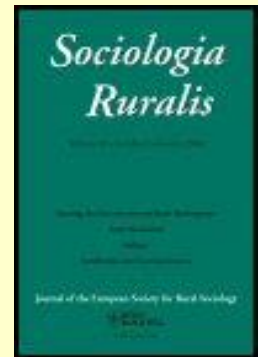
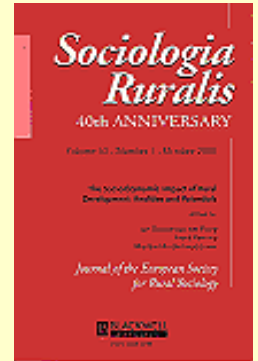




Sociologia Ruralis: The Mirror and the Lens

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- 1. Sociologia Ruralis and the ESRS *Leitbild***
- 2. A contested vision**
- 3. Towards a new rural sociology**



“It is well known that interest in rural sociology **was slight** in prewar Europe. Indeed, geographers and sociologists wrote a number of papers on rural subjects, but most of these were **general** rather than specific, **descriptive** rather than analytic. They made **little or no use of sociological theory** or of the research methods that had been developed in the social sciences. And the authors knew too little of the concrete problems in the countryside and of agriculture to have been able to **contribute substantially** to the work of **policy-makers**”.

(E.W Hofstee, 1960 p. 3)



“People had a nostalgic desire for the good old times. They wished to see the troubles of the thirties and the War as ugly accidents which should not have happened. They wanted to continue life as it had been before, or they yearned for a new start on the same basis. They forgot that what had happened was more than just an accident”

(Hoftsee, 1970, p. 339)

“Rural man in our society has to live and increasingly wants to live in a large ever expanding social world. If he wishes to take part economically, socially and culturally in modern Western society he has no choice; **he has to fit into the formal organisation of this society.** The tragedy of a diminishing but still important part of the rural population in Western Europe is that it is not yet adjusted, or at least not yet sufficiently adjusted, to the formal organisation of our society. [...]In short they are our backward farmers, backward not only socially and culturally, but also economically and technically”

(Hoftsee, 1960a).

“Change in itself is senseless when there is no aim, when the process of change is not pointing at a *Leitbild*”

(Constandse, 1964)



A.K. Constandse, 1929-1989

More than ever in this rapidly changing, and in many respects unhappy world, **sociological insight into the problems of our own countries and of the world as a whole is a bare necessity for the improvement of the situation.** A sociologist who is interested in the welfare of people - and anyone who is not should not be a sociologist - simply cannot be indifferent to the activities of governments which, to such a high degree, are decisive for the well-being of everyone

(Hoftsee, 1960b)



“The sociologist is **now** more concerned with the elucidation of precise factual data, using modern research techniques”

(E.W. Hoftsee, 1960, p. 3).

“Nowadays, modern planning is one of the democracy’s most important defences against the arbitrary behaviour of both authority and individuals

(Isbary, paper to the 2nd ESRS Conference),

“Rural planning is also limited in its results, because sociological research has several shortcomings”

(Groot, 1962)

Category	Subjects	Vol. I-IV 23 papers	Vol. V-VII 27 papers	Vol. VIII-X 25 papers	Total
1	Rural settlements/the village/ the community/community development	6	5	5	16
2	Adoption/diffusion/extension research	4	5	5	14
3	Rural values/patterns of cul- ture/political views	5	2	4	11
4	Rural social organization	2	5	1	8
5	Rural-urban differences	1	5	1	7
6	Modernization/social change/ rural development	1	4	2	7
7	Farmers' co-operatives/rural organizations	4	—	2	6
8	Demographic trends/migration	2	1	3	6
9	The family	3	1	2	6
10	Development of rural sociology/ the role of the sociologist	2	2	2	6
11	Rural welfare/social work/ health	3	—	—	3
12	Agricultural policy	—	1	2	3
13	Mechanization	—	—	2	2
14	Patronage	—	2	—	2
15	Planning	1	1	—	2
16	Part-time farming	—	2	—	2
17	Recreation/leisure	1	1	—	2
18	Supply and demand of land	—	1	—	1
19	Farming as an occupation	—	—	1	1
20	Rural stratification	—	—	1	1

From
Munters
(1972)

“What has been added since the 19th century to sociological theory in this field is hardly worthwhile”

(Hoftsee, 1970, p. 340)



By placing the development of rural sociology within colleges of agriculture, the organisational content has served to separate rural sociology from ‘general’ sociology and to create an intellectual climate by no means conducive to the long-term benefit of its practitioners

(Newby, 1982, p. 181).



Only a few of the inserted papers were of a more or less contemplative nature. Problems like, e.g., the role of the sociologist in rural development (Weitz, 1970), the past, the present state and the future of rural sociology (Hofstee, 1960; Kotter, 1967), its subject matter, its scope, its concepts (Lupri, 1969), its relation to other branches of social sciences (Roling 1966), etc. have been discussed **only rarely**

(Munters, 1972)

If we look at post-war rural sociology in Europe, we will find that there is a trend from description to the application of modern research methods, from speculation to the testing of hypotheses. This has been called by some observers an ‘Americanization’ of European rural sociology. As necessary as a most refined methodology is, sometimes one has a certain tendency to overstress methods and to forget theory. We are still very far in rural sociology from a solid theoretical framework.

(Kotters, 1967)

As far as I know, it has never been advocated that rural sociology should be a purely theoretical, ‘academic’ discipline. The majority of the papers inserted in *Sociologia Ruralis* demonstrates very clearly that most authors have given first priority to practical research. This dominant orientation constitutes perhaps the very strength of rural sociology in Europe, but in many cases and in a way its weakness as well. [...] The fact is easily overlooked that rural sociologists are challenged not only to contribute to the solution of practical problems, but also to contribute to the advancement of rural sociology and of sociology as such.

Munters 1972

I believe, however, that post-war sociology stands at the cross-roads and that it has to reconsider thoroughly its position as a science and as a means of helping society to overcome the disordered state in which it has arrived ... (Hoftsee, 1970, p.348)

Some sociologists, usually those not hampered by any knowledge of administration and policy making, seem to believe that speculation on the basis of defective and one-sided material could take the place of sound and reliable insight in this respect, but those who have to deal in practice with the problems of sociology in relation to government activities know that sweeping generalisations are of little use for practical policy making (Hoftsee, 1970, p. 341).



“In being so little known in the sphere of rural sociology Weber is therefore not alone; as far as that goes he shares his fate with many other classical and contemporary sociologists”

(Munters, 1972 page 143).

“For too long we have allowed ourselves to be pushed into a cul-de-sac: we were asked to devise ways of ‘helping’ agriculture to adapt to changing circumstances, but did not allow ourselves to take into account all the non-rural forces and interests that had a stake in the outcome”.

(Galjart, SORU vol 13).



In retrospect it seems ironic indeed that the most vigorous and stimulating debate contained in the volumes of *Sociologia Ruralis* should have left rural sociology in Europe in such difficulty. For Pahl took away the very *raison d'être* of the discipline as it had been hitherto organised. Thus we were on the one hand treated to a display of serious academic debate at a high level of theoretical sophistication - and on the other hand to the threatened extinction of rural sociology as a branch of the discipline in its own right.

(Benevuti et al. 1975)

Several members of the European Society for Rural Sociology have felt that, in recent years, a decline has occurred in the enthusiasm of many of those who claim an interest in the sociological aspects of rural life in Europe. This trend is a cause for concern. The changing nature of European rural society implies a variety of important areas which merit scientific study, although these may be different from those which in the past have attracted most attention from rural sociologists. The time is also opportune for forging closer links with workers in several other disciplines who have an interest in rural society, or in certain new approaches to the study of rural life, its changing nature, and its problems.

(Proposal of the Council of the ESRS: SORU 13. Issue 1 1973, pp. 79-81)

“In the western world what goes on within “rural” society is more and more determined by (dependent on) non-rural society and agencies, which does not mean, obviously that in order to analyse “rural” social phenomena one should study non-rural social phenomena, but that it should study the former looking purposely for the linkages these have with factors and processes of larger scope” (1975, p 19)

“I hope not to cause too much of a geographical upheaval by reminding readers that Poland, Russia, Hungary and Rumania lie in Europe and that the first alone has probably produced more works on theoretical and empirical rural sociology than the whole output of their western colleagues. Yet, these are never referred to or considered either as a historical genesis or as an alternative analysis within rural sociology” (Shanin, 1976, page 235)



We found that conventional rural sociology has changed little in the past decade, and *Sociologia Ruralis*, although showing signs of improvement, has articles which are still subject to lack of theoretical development. [...] *Sociologia Ruralis* was found to have most articles dealing with social organization, social change, or social welfare and policy

(Fairweather and Giles, 1982 pages 172-173 and page 175)

“In recent years, we have been able to observe the European Society gradually moving from a society focused mainly on European agricultural problems approached from various disciplines, to a society of rural sociologists who are occupied with agricultural and rural problems the world over. This transition certainly does not imply that we should abandon European problems, but it gives a real opportunity to pay more attention to the comparative aspects of rural sociology”

(Ad Nooij, 980, page 267)

Taken collectively these trends may suggest that *Sociologia Ruralis* is becoming more sociological as the decade has progressed, and has begun to reject an ahistorical, value-free and positivist research style. The former tendency is suggested by the increasingly sociological subject matter, the latter by the changes in data analysis to a style which was more involved with explanation and could perhaps facilitate discussion of critical policy issues.

(Fairweather and Gilles, 1982, Page 178)