The new rural residents: emerging sociabilities in Alava, Basque Country

Jose txu Martínez Montoya

The traditional habitat

Alava is one of seven territories of the Basque Country, with an approximate population of three hundred thousand, most living in the capital, Vitoria-Gazteiz, and in a few other urban centres. The rest of the territory is formed by about four hundred villages, most composed of a small number of households (four to five in the smaller villages, twenty to thirty in the larger ones).

Traditionally, Alava was inhabited by local communities formed by peasant families, organised under a council of neighbours, and structured by age, gender, and kinship. Its corporative character was manifest in socio-religious associations (*cofradías*) and in the tight control of territory through geographical limits and spatial and social rituals. Freeman (1968) characterised these associations as ‘mass-feast-meeting-complexes’. As used to be said in the villages, ‘*No hay misa sin mesa, y no hay vereda sin colación así como no hay romería sin cura y sin fiesta*’ (‘There is no mass without table, no common work without lunch, and no pilgrimage without priest and party’). Celebrating belonging gathers together aspects of local society concerned with the sharing of daily issues at the bar, playing cards, visiting the ill or the elderly, and celebrating and enjoying the fruits of labour and the land.

In the recent past communities were strongly localised, deeply rooted in their territory, in which the control of behaviour and thought, of the use of community space and time was one of the main defining features (Martínez Montoya 1996; 2004). Group solidarity was based on respect of tradition and adaptation to the productive and reproductive cycles of the community. Community cooperation, social responsibility, and the resultant way of thinking were a product of this adaptation.

Delocalisation, relocalisation

These long-established territorial units of social organisation began to experience significant de structuring between the 1960s and 1980s. There were at least three important consequences of the deagrarianisation and deruralisation that they suffered: the progressive abandonment of agriculture; migration towards the cities; and the

decline of a traditional means of management and normalisation of rural communities. The rural environment was delocalised. Vitoria-Gasteiz swelled with rural emigrants, producing a population vacuum, which had severe consequences ecologically (environmental impact and imbalance), socially (ageing population), and culturally (loss of heritage and traditional values). Neither domestic nor productive units were renovated. The sense that villages were disappearing became acute, since the traditional means of territorial management were no longer being reproduced.

However, today, the rural environment seems to be showing new signs of vitality. Many regional institutions are becoming interested in the rural environment, while many of its inhabitants who left in the past are now coming back, married and with children, to remodel and reuse the old family house, or to build a new life. Social life is rebuilt; new socio-economic and sociocultural projects emerge.

The Alavan countryside is being reoccupied. Today's neo-rurals are playing a significant role in the changing demographic profile of the till-now ageing rural population. Rural Alava has no longer a mainly peasant population; territory is no longer primarily defined in agricultural terms, but by a variety of functions: residential, recreational, as well as agricultural. These require different, alternative and in many cases, competitive logistics.

The territory has stopped becoming a demographic desert, but has turned into something quite the opposite, for the relationship between the human group and the territory – space – is being redefined. A new sociocultural model for the rural environment is under construction.

The independent variable

Sociologically, the new basic fact in the composition of the new rural populations is the return to the rural environment and its occupation by seasonal or permanent residents whose main activity is not primarily agricultural. At the same time, institutions are implementing a strong interventionist policy to promote the complementarity of primary activities with extra-agricultural activities. The aim is to produce a renovated form of pluriactivity for the rurality and so attempt to correct the pernicious effects of the uniformalising and productivist policies of the 1960s. Since the 1980s the EU, troubled by the abandoning of rural areas, has created a programme for the economic, social, and cultural revitalisation of rural areas. This programme is intended to check the ageing of the rural population and rural emigration by promoting sustainable development based on fostering small enterprises and tourism, and by improving local habitats and rural services. These policies, together with the back-to-the-country movement of those who once lived there, have resulted in permanent and seasonal reoccupation of rural areas. The policies of the institutions and the aims of the returnees are, however, not primarily based on agricultural activity but on leisure and recreation.

This powerful push towards rural regeneration over the last two decades is the consequence of three sociological realities: (a) the continuing modernisation of the traditional rural project; (b) the reconversion, powered mainly by institutions, of rural space to multifunctional space; and (c) a new sociability linked to a new conception of habitat: 'neo-rurality'. The villages found in the traditional rural space of Alava are, today, the result of those three factors. The greater or lesser influence of any of the three explains the diversity of village identities in Alava today. It is clear, however, that the rural environment has itself been profoundly changed. Today 'rural' could be defined not so much by the concept of community as of locality. The contemporary rural space is a space of multiple presences and functions, in which the management of what is local is both competitive and complementary.

This phenomenon can be best understood by analysing the concerns of rural inhabitants. Until the 1960s life was difficult, they say, and the most important thing was to get ahead and find a good position for one's children (through a job, marriage, etc.). In the 1980s, ageing locals were becoming increasingly worried by the emptying of their village squares. Today, in contrast, worries centre around urban, social, and cultural projects which are perceived as different, and often as aggressive and disrespectful of identity and tradition.

But not all is bad. Many of the immigrants were in fact born or grew up in the villages. Their concerns, presence, and projects give motivation, life, and continuity to what seemed to be dying out. They are the agents of the new sociability and the regenerators of a millennial culture which seemed to have reached its end.

The management of the new rural sociability

I here focus on the management of rural sociability, which was very rich in the past but declined during the years between 1960 and 1980: secular traditions disappeared, forms of social cohesion controlled by religion weakened, community councils faced difficulties trying to maintain the normative schemes of the past. The rural environment, broadly understood, was no longer capable of managing its own sociability, since the territory was losing its more dynamic elements. In effect, machines were chewing up villages' rich organisational tradition.

Nevertheless, as social anthropological work can show in a detailed manner, the territory continues to offer spaces and places of intense conviviality which may foster the growth of a deep sense of belonging. It is here where the new cultural associations, replacing old *cofradías* (religious confraternities) have a key role in energising rural sociability. In particular, festivities are the occasions where the new community comes together and manifests itself, in traditional spaces. Unlike their ritual precursors, these festivities are not linked to fostering fertility, or to the local, cosmological circular logic. Rather, they reveal the felt need to end the decay of social life and conviviality caused by the rise of a competitive and individualist society. 'Natural, ecological life' and 'community life' are in turn the new myths which the promoters

of these rituals attempt to rescue and utilise as energisers of the felt need for social life experienced by members of Alava's new generations.

After a long period of social and normative de-structuration, the social space of the community finds new referents for social legitimacy and makes them appear, or (in the language of Clifford Geertz) textualises them, in the practice of shared sociability and rituality. What, if not this, are communal dinners, community feasts, festivals, the celebration of neighbourhood festivities, the rituals of hunting parties, or other local festivities? Through these rituals, rural immigrants, who were estranged from the spaces of traditional life, can participate in those spaces, and in the process reconstruct and resocialise them in a new manner. In doing so, they rely on memory (heritage) and the spaces of sacredness (which serve to rebond with the cultural past) to insert themselves into the chain of community sociability, otherwise broken by machines and urban progress. The rotations and circuits which once marked the identity of villagers have now to accommodate the new sociability – goods circulation networks, in which traditional spaces can be used to solder the ruptures and the abandonment of spaces in the economic, social, and cultural life of the past.

Why do people come back to the village to perform the rites of passage of their children (e.g. first Holy Communion, confirmation), to live the dream of a life of commitment and happiness (marriage), or to be buried in their grandparents' land, that is to say, in the genealogy of the community? Why do people find identity, personal prestige, and collective identification with people and places which still symbolise to many sacrifice, poverty, inferior status, and the impossibility of realising a full life, things which may, after all, be found in the city?¹

New conflicts in the rural environment: the plaza as a way of life, integration, and resistance

Between January and June 1992 the *Plaza Irekita* (Open Square) Association of the Alava Mountain region held a series of meetings, one apiece in eight villages of the region, so that the new rural residents could share their experiences with the traditional community members. These meetings sought to be an opportunity for new and old residents of the villages to reflect on how they perceived the new situation of their villages, their composition and the degree of integration they enjoyed.

The initiative arose from a basic concern: the need, felt by association members, to be more aware of the new social situation of the villages in the territory and the degree of social integration they possessed. In particular, the permanent presence of neo-rurals in the villages brought an unavoidable challenge: is it possible to live in the village in such a way that it remains an open space? The objective of the *Plaza Irekita* initiative was to bring out these new ways of living in the village expressed in the name of the project: 'Open Plaza: the different ways of living in a village'.

The encounters revealed that the presence of new residents is both conflictive and enriching. In some instances newcomers integrated into the local community; in others, they replaced it, and provided alternatives to traditional rural social life. It became clear that a simple dichotomy of old and new residents did not shed much light and failed to reflect the varied social and cultural situations of current rural populations. Alavan villages are today populated by residents whose interests and ways of life and thinking are very diverse (farmers, retired people, technical managers, seasonal residents, etc.) They are all part of the villages, in different ways. They all occupy a space and care for and manage it in different ways. Without older adults, there would be no functioning churches, and without youth, few hopes for the future and no new projects. Without farmers, roads would become unusable, and houses uninhabitable. In the same way, without those who come back periodically, many projects would be untenable and sociabilisation severely damaged. And we mustn't forget services, social programmes for the elderly and development projects, or more important, the permanent institutions which manage communities and make it possible for them to survive. These villages are the result of all these presences. For the young, the village is boring; for a mayor, it's a bag of trouble; for the vacationer, a paradise; and for those who come back after living elsewhere for a long time, a place to be revitalised.

Sometimes these practices collide because they are perceived as problematic and the richness they bring to the community is ignored. The wealth of the villages today lies in this diversity, and in the recognition and valuing of differing practices and ways of living the plaza. There is, however, a presence that is seen by some as problematic: the weekend residents. As some of the returnees complain:

Outsiders are seen as invaders; insiders are closed-minded.
It is difficult to be part of the community, they are very closed-minded people.
It was only when my child went to school that I began to be part of the group.
There are no welcoming or integration committees ... they ignore us.

These are expressions of a deeply rooted tendency in the rural environment: resistance to the non-resident, who is seen as alien. When these non-residents are perceived as a group, stereotypes and barriers of identification and exclusion emerge. There is a kind of patrimonialisation of the territory and a fear that the outsiders are coming to order people around and impose their authority.

And yet, many of those who come back have never been strangers to the village. They think of it as their village; they are its children. Culturally speaking, in their terms, there has been no rupture in the many years they have been physically absent. That is why it is so easy for them to link again into everyday life in the village and also make it richer, because they value and need it to develop fully as individuals. While, as individuals, they are not perceived as strangers (they are children of a home everyone has known all their lives), when they are seen as part of a different, alternate group, they are perceived as strangers against whom local society reacts

to defend itself. This explains the strength of the 'insider/outsider' perception that exists, and even seems prevalent in many villages.

However, such a dualist vision hides a reality which is increasingly present and defining of what constitutes a contemporary village: a place of life, work and residence of differentiated collectivities, with different rhythms and very varied degrees of integration. Today there is a mismatch between perception and sociological reality: we have a population that is increasingly diversified and heterogeneous, but highly polarised and focused on the insider/outsider opposition, due, in part, to what may be called a conflictive management of local identities. Villages are increasingly relationship networks, i.e. something built and permanently renovated. In the minds of their traditional dwellers and some of the newcomers, the corporative vision has primacy. This way of thinking comes out strongly at election times, but is also expressed in the management of sociability and of community spaces and times: church congregations, festivities, bars, etc.

Roots, or the consciousness of belonging

The testimonies gathered in the encounters organised by Open Plaza demonstrated the importance that a sense of roots and belonging have for these people. Those who left their home village are not aware of having ever left it. Their experiences, their close ties with the place, family, friends, and memories all make them feel part of the place (*heimat*), of the village where they were born and had to leave physically but not sentimentally. Those who have come back remember that they left because they had no alternative or because they were seeking a better future for their children.

The new residents are really family or friends who once left the village. Now they return to a space and a community they feel part of. They reintegrate into something that they feel as their own and want to update because they care about it. They take part in activities, old and new, that the village offers, with no sense of rupture. They find the space they left and seek to reproduce it after years of crisis and abandonment. They experienced a distancing, but not a cultural rupture. Being from a village has been with them all their lives, and their return is for them, a reintegration into a way of being and living, into a culture: forms of relationships, behaviours, attitudes, feelings, and perception of group life.

However, the classification given to neo-rural people, *domingueros* (Sunday visitors), is not casual, for they do have one foot in the village, and the other outside. That is why some people think that newcomers are simply taking advantage of finding a nice place, which the permanent residents have maintained through the years. But newcomers, in turn, feel they never abandoned the home village. And not only that: having returned, they have helped regenerate the village. And that is difficult to dispute.

There is a strong feeling that living in the village is integrating into it. And so, those who return, having once belonged and having had the village as their reference point,

have hardly any difficulty in being accepted, and feel like members of the large extended family that is the community. They feel at home, and able to exercise their right to it. They are part of the village's history; its past is their past; their shared life experiences make them co-participants of the memory of the place and its particular history.

At the same time, there is a strong cultural resistance against accepting neighbours, residents or inhabitants who use the village as a dormitory or place of leisure, and as nothing else. They exclude themselves from the plaza and its cohesive, centripetal, and formulating powers of group behaviour. They are seen as visitors, i.e. living in the village means being part of the plaza, perhaps in a different way today than in the past, but definitely part of it. And this means working for the village, collaborating and participating in its activities, being integrated into the dynamic of ruling community time and space. The commitment to place assumes that the person feels part of it and is capable of entering the plaza and its integrating dynamic.

It could be said that the village is what people do every day. Today, these everyday activities follow several rhythms. What some say when speaking of a particular village, Lagran, is true – there are three speed gears to living:

- first, Sunday afternoon when visitors leave and the grandparents are at last able to rest, because with the visitors go the noise and the rush.
- second, Friday afternoon when, oppressed by loneliness, grandparents anxiously await the arrival of visitors and the time when the village's population seems to double.
- third, summer when the investment is secure: the village's population will triple.

These three rhythms express three ways of living in the village:

- the first defines the village in terms of management and concern. It is the work of the permanent members of the community, some aged, such as grandparents; others dedicated to the everyday work of agriculture and farming, care of the house and domestic work.
- people who come during the weekend 'live the village' primarily in terms of representation, i.e. as something to be built, or a gap to be filled according to nostalgic models. This way of living the village has been enriched by the presence of seasonal residents, who come with a great desire to relive what they have lost and find again the community in which they were born. This is a two-fold desire: both social and cultural. The richness of the past, the signs of which are still present (festivities, places, monuments, art, etc.) and which acquire special importance; they are endowed with the ability to channel the construction of a new community which is integrated into traditional space, but which, at the same time, partially replaces it. This helps to explain why some people say with complete candour that they have never really left the village and have always lived in it; they carried it with them and as soon as they were able, they returned.

- a third rhythm is the one that takes place during the summer and the longer holidays. In this case, there may be no other element apart from consuming (tourism, leisure, rest).

Villages are made up of all three rhythms. The village square, however, requires that representation and consumerism guarantee management, or it may not be able to survive.

From these three distinct rhythms we are able to see (a) the diversity of presences in village life; (b) the importance people place on living the plaza, on the culture of the plaza, and on the renovation and reconstruction of the plaza as a place of shared expression of culture. Given this, we may talk of different ways of living in the village; but, at a more profound level, the plaza in fact imposes a style, a way of being and sharing that is similar for all. Underlying the concept of Open Plaza is a deeply rooted cultural tendency which limits belonging-to-the-community to those who share residency or those to whom this category is extended, that is, the elements of cohesion and formulation in group behaviour seem to be defined by this criterion.

Thus, although we find different rhythms and presences, or (to put it another way) different ways of living and feeling the village, there exists only one commonly accepted way. How the plaza and the social relations with which it is filled are understood does not seem to leave much room for diverse sensibilities.

The cultural logic of the village as a construction model for a more extended social life

The model of life and integration into the plaza in the village is so deeply rooted that its cultural dynamic is reproduced, at a larger level; in this case at the construction of a new socio-economic project, the reconversion of the Alava Mountain region² into a new space of development.

Each year, the Alava Mountain region celebrates a special day (The Day of the Alava Mountain) to remind everyone that they must work together to achieve integral development in the region. This region more than others has suffered the socio-economic decline within the province of Alava. One particularly depressed municipality, Lagran, was chosen as the site for the celebration in the summer of 1999. Here I analyse this special day in the context in which it took place and the expectations it generated.

The Day is a festive manifestation that celebrates belonging under a new sociological reality, a territorial management construct: that is, a territory subject to external intervention. Because of the imbalance caused by agricultural specialisation during the 1960s, local authorities implemented a number of programmes and actions based on the developmentist philosophy 'integral rural development': in other words, economic pluriactivity, residential viability, fulfilment of services,

and social and cultural revitalisation. The geographical framework of intervention is dubbed a region or shire (see Chaussier 1998). The Alava Mountain was one of those regions.

People from all walks of life became involved in this project (politicians, entrepreneurs, farmers, intellectuals, organisation leaders, etc.), with a single common objective: make the region live, and do so within the logic of continuation and renovation. All of this was done for the purpose of generating an imagined, but also inherited, idea that a landscape, a set of traditions, a mode of social organisation, and a project are shared: in sum, an identity.

Lagran had suffered severe population decline in the 1960s and 1970s, and is an example of the effort that institutions and neo-residents are carrying out to revitalise the village's social life. Regardless of the good quality of its products, younger generations seem unwilling to take on the same occupation as their parents. But even when they have moved to the city, they are not abandoning the village. Lagran does not look like a forgotten place. Houses, buildings, and infrastructure do not speak of decline; rather, of well-being. The children of those who migrated to the city are coming back. They repair the granaries and the houses of elderly parents, or construct newer buildings, so life appears renovated and the buildings well maintained. But this is not all. The golf course in Lagran and Urturi and the recreational complex of the latter (e.g. agro-tourism, restaurants, golf course) have helped re-route development and the possibilities of a region in which potato cultivation renovated the generating capacity of traditional life (coal and cattle), and in which another motor (tourism and seasonal or weekend residence) is attempting to return life to the area again.³

Given these changes, the Day becomes a reflection on what the region aspires to achieve: the construction of a regional space with an identity of its own, which gathers around a common project its six constituent municipalities, in order to energise development programmes. The message communicated by the celebration of this festive ritual within the space of traditional social life, of the village's plaza, is significant. The intention is to inscribe in this space a regional project that overflows but doesn't supplant or replace the village's space. Rather, it follows the logic of community cooperation and reciprocity.

The space of the celebration

The space chosen for the activities of the Day of the Mountain is a good indicator to understand what the organisers sought to express and achieve.

Sunday mass at the parish church opened the Day. It continued in the village's central plaza with folkloric Basque dances and music: *fanfarria* (fanfares played by brass and percussive ensembles), *trikitixas* (accordionists), and *txistularis* (fluteplayers). In the village park, a Basque-speaking troupe engaged children in traditional games. Near the sports centre there were exhibitions and activities of crafts and handmade products: honey, pastries, beans, cheese, and black pudding, each from

a specific village, along with local artisans displaying their products, ready to discuss their manufacture; i.e. the ages-old wisdom of artisanship and the new farming products were the main attractions at the celebration.

Contemporary rural society is manifest in this kind of ritual performance as shown by analysis of three closely intertwined aspects: the human group, the space, and the ritual. The group's ritual activities, temporarily regulated, are marked in the space of everyday sociability and are, here, full of shared meanings. The inhabited space (as opposed to the productive or the natural space) is privileged in this ritual. It engraves the idea of constructing a new community around the spaces of the past to signal the beginning of a desired new reality: the development and recuperation of the population of the region. The location of the activities on this day suggests that the new socio-economic project seeks to be inserted in the form, the spaces, and the cultural logic that used to regulate the traditional life of the villages. This explains why the Church and the Plaza are integrated and take a central role in the festivity, as they used to do in the past and continue doing today in the village's sociability.

These spaces are related to the agricultural world, whose management is simultaneously productive, communal, and cosmological, in the circular community logic. However, this economic foundation is today unable to reproduce the life of human habitat and to maintain territory. The new realities that are emerging (golf course, agro-tourism, restaurants, children and Euskara, handmade products and agricultural elements brought in from outside) speak of emerging realities invading the mountain space. Tradition is not replaced but transformed into a tool to build the new sociability, i.e. into a model and image of social behaviours and cultural tendencies to be transmitted. The presence of traditional artisans and vintage photographs at or near the sports centre communicates the message of the integration of two worlds, one of which is yielding to the other without traumatic ruptures, and makes real, through ritual, the message being communicated.

It is interesting to note that the symbols appearing in this celebration are not those linked to farming (potatoes, cattle) but generated by the new emergent activities of the region. They are, however, symbols and activities that, by integrating into the spaces and rituals of traditional sociability, express and realise at a symbolic level something that the festivities and rituals linked to the villages realise in an exemplary way: local community. This is the performative dimension of the celebration: its success at making the region like a village, in which community members reproduce the solidarity rituals which villages still conserve. This, however, would be impossible to do only through the aged population that inhabits the region permanently, or with the sociability of the *cofradías* and other socio-religious institutions that used to keep the village alive. These do not exist anymore. Setting the new project in action requires new managers and new agents: these are the cultural institutions or associations.

It is through this new social-organising reality of the villages of Alava that the success of the celebration can be explained. It was the work of the local government, together with the cultural associations of Villaverde, Lagran, and Pipaon, which made possible the realisation of this new ritual, with its new messages and the new language in which they are expressed.

The agents of the new sociability

The cultural associations are a new phenomenon in the rural life of Alava. They respond to the reality of a seasonal population that chose to energise the life in the villages and recover the traditions of the past, and to transform these human habitats into centres of sociability and the celebration of leisure time (weekends). In this sense, these associations have replaced the old *cofradías* in their role of giving cohesion to the community life of the villages (Martínez Montoya 1995).

It is thanks to them and through their mediation that physical closeness is transformed into social closeness. This is not just a village-centred closeness but an inter-village one, which in the past was upheld by common use of sanctuaries and mountain hermitages. In this sense the close relationship between cultural associations of the three villages of Lagran, through activities (such as inter-village competitions, fairs, choir, and group excursions) that are staged along the annual cycle, with particular emphasis on important holiday periods (Christmas, Easter, and summer) is remarkable. Activities are not, however, limited to those periods, but continue throughout the year: *Lardero* Thursdays (the last Thursday before Lent), walks to Laguardia and Estíbaliz, special feast days (San Kiliz, Day of the Pensioners, Nature day, Potato Day), talks, etc.

The associations, regarded in cultural terms, have become remarkable global alternatives of sociability. The sociability they energise is based on recovering tradition, heritage, and the cultural scheme of the past while integrating environmental, patrimonial, and relational elements. Those who come back on a seasonal basis seek not only to enjoy a day of leisure, or take advantage of nature, but to recover a way of life that belonged to their elders, and in which many of them were born. Traditional culture and space have been capable of hosting the reconstruction of the deteriorated social situation engendered by years of productivism.

This seems to be the logic of the Mountain Day's celebration. The model is the village; the emerging new sociability, the region; the fuelling agents are the cultural associations; the symbols are as multiple as the uses of space, but remarkable among them are the leisure activities through which the cultural associations express themselves. To summarise, it is companionship, the old and renovated ritual of community cohesion, always present in a system in which commensality seals new and old solidarities, which is wrought in the urban-rural space of our territory.

The idea of building a regional community is expressed though the formerly village-based model of circular, reciprocal relationships. This is marked in space and transferred to current socio-economic and sociocultural ways of life that are inserted into the dynamics of the plaza.

Conclusion

In rural Alava, the decade of the 1980s marked a significant turning point. It is a period in which new elements began to consolidate a social and cultural process. One of the most significant elements was the permanent (although seasonal) presence of new rural residents who chose to return to the way of life to which they were born, and to transform it in a space of social and ritual practices which take into account the local traditions, heritage and identity of each village. These villages have had a culture based on valuing permanent residence and consciousness of belonging to a rotating community chain of duties and dues.

The socio-economic changes of the 1960s had broken this cultural logic. Two decades later, new community members – to a large degree children of the village – returned on a seasonal basis and remade social and ritual life based on similar values. The first of these values, permanent residence, is a factor against them: they are seen as alien and invasive. But all in all, progress and economic development have shortened the distances between the rural and urban spaces and transformed them into a spatial continuum of sorts. The classic dichotomy between rural and urban has blurred. It is still there, however, as we have seen, in the resistance to emerging sociabilities, but the new special conditions of the well-communicated Alava territory are beginning to dissolve them. In contrast, the second value, the recovery of tradition and heritage, is these returnees' best card in the strategy they pursue: to rebuild the past's sociability in the space of their elders, reproducing in this manner cultural tradition.

However, neither the identity nor the culture of these new members of the community is the same. The new communities are not defined by adaptation to the productive and biological cycles, as were the communities of the past. We find, in contrast, multiple and fragmented identities. Participation in sociability associations is fragile and elective. Rural festivities and rituals reproduce a time and space that did not condition the behaviour and mentality of individuals. They do not reproduce a community of tradition. The signification of the multiple activities and ritualisations in which the rural environment acts as the subject has to be found in something other than traditional rural logic, which used to reproduce the biological cycle around circular times and spaces (see Martínez Montoya 2001).

The activities of new residents show the cultural tendencies towards the construction of identities in times and spaces that aim to recreate community in a renovated mode. These are times and spaces in which individualism and competition have no place. The new members are not bound to the times and spaces of the past. The bond that links them does not chain their lives around corporative duties. Their times and spaces are urban; however, they have found villages, whether their ancestor's or otherwise, which welcome them and allow them to develop worlds of meaning, which in turn strengthen their otherwise fragile identity. They are in search of ontological security (Revill 1993), and find it via re-traditionalisation

(Thompson 1996), i.e. social phenomena generated by the dynamic of social change through which social groups can re-mould their life projects and fill them with guiding meanings.

Notes

- 1 For an analysis of this re-symbolisation process of rurality, see Martínez Montoya, 2003.
- 2 This is a region of the Historical Territory of Alava. With only a little more than three thousand inhabitants and forty-seven population centres, its traditional activity used to be farming (grains, potato, and cattle). For almost two decades it has been the subject of institutional intervention to revitalise its socio-economic development.
- 3 Post-industrial society seems to be oriented, in our territory, towards a tertiarisation process in which there is a clear separation between residence and work and in which the new rurality is emptied of productive activities to constitute itself as ecological, leisure, labelled, and identity celebration spaces. The relationship between the human group and territory has gone through a significant transformation. The latter appears as a privileged place of multiple and differentiated practices in order to satisfy the new demands of the rural-urban society which inhabits it.

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