

# A RURAL TO LIVE, A RURAL TO VISIT: VISITOR'S AND INHABITANT'S PERCEPTIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT IN TWO PORTUGUESE RURAL AREAS

E. FIGUEIREDO

*Sociologist. Lecturer and Researcher. Environment and Planning Department, University of Aveiro – 3810-193, Aveiro, Portugal.. E-mail: Elisa@dao.ua.pt*

## Abstract

The main argument of this paper is that rural areas are increasingly valued by their environmental function, particularly in Portugal where the urban demands and consumption's of the rural are relatively recent phenomena. So it is argued that from places essentially perceived as food producers, these areas increasingly came to be perceived (social and institutionally) as reserve areas of environmental quality.

Underlying this increasing understanding of the rural areas there are multiple factors, among which we will highlight the greater sensibility and valorisation for and of the environmental questions on the part of the public opinion and also the emergence of a frequent understanding (essentially among the non rural people) that “*the environment is the nature and the nature is the countryside.*”<sup>1</sup>. Another aspect that seems to cause the rural areas in general, and the Portuguese rural areas in particular, to assume a role of environmental reservation, occurs due to its relatively extended marginalisation in view of the development processes of urban-industrial character. By recognising the failure of this type of paradigms, together with the recognition that the rural areas perform vital functions for the society globally understood (e.g. CCE, 1988), a contribution is made to a recoding of the Portuguese rural areas (above all the more marginalized by those processes) from *pre-modern* into *post-modern* (e.g. Reis and Santos, 1995).

In Portugal, at the symbolic-ideological level (e.g. Mansinho and Schmidt, 1997), the rural is still closely associated with the agriculture and to a certain underdevelopment or *delay* in social and economic terms. This image of socio-economic *delay* of the rural areas is associated with the image of a larger contact with nature, as well as the relative permanence of the moral values and the cultural traditions. Another perception of the rural, relatively dominant in Portugal, stands on an emergent symbolism (in the political speech and in certain sectors without – or with already very weakened – rural roots), that is associated with an apparent awareness of the role that the rural world can accomplish in the preservation of the environmental quality (e.g. CCE, 1988; Figueiredo, 1996 and Mansinho and Schmidt, 1997). Based in some empirical results, obtained among residents and visitors of the Natural Park of Montesinho's areas (in the North region of Portugal) and the Mountain of Freita's area (in the Centre region), we will try to analyse the diversified perceptions that residents and visitors of both areas possess relatively to the environment. We will emphasise the existence of two visions clearly divergent – the one that has underlying the rural as life space and the one that understands it as leisure space – that seem to lead to a new rural-urban dichotomy.

Key Words: Rural; Rural Environment; Perceptions; New rural-urban dichotomy

## Introduction

Based upon the results of an inquiry through a questionnaire applied to visitors and residents of the Natural Park of Montesinho (NPM) and the Mountain of Freita's region, located in the North and Centre region of Portugal, respectively, we tried to analyse and debate the emergence of what we can designate as a new rural-urban dichotomy. This is not the old dichotomy that opposed the traditional (rural) to the modern (urban) or that opposed the agriculture to the industry, but it is a new dichotomy that tends to oppose social representations, motivated essentially by differentiated rural and urban perceptions of the environment and also of the social and economic development. This new dichotomy is deeply related with the new functions of the rural space, in the context of *post-modernity*.

In this sense, the problem that we intend to discuss in this paper is intimately related with:

- the question of the emergence of the social identification of the environment with the nature and with the *countryside* in the contemporary societies in general and in Portugal in particular;
- the question of the representations that sustain different perceptions of rural and urban inhabitants in view of the same rural environment;
- The question of the consequences that such representations can have in terms of the rural spaces' development.

Underlying these questions, there is a notion of environment that understands it as the result of Men's interaction with the surrounding natural environment, in other words, it is the landscapes with Men including their material and/or symbolic manifestations and accomplishments. Nowadays, it is the rural landscapes, where nature matches the action and interaction of the rural Man that the non-rural residents increasingly seek and value. This search and this social valorisation enrol in a vaster social movement of demand and consumption of *environmental goods*.

If in countries like Great-Britain or France, these social demands of the environment and nature materialised in the countryside are already observed since some decades ago, in Portugal such demands and consumption's of the rural environment are still in an emergent phase. On the other hand, the Portuguese rural areas are, for the most part, areas in decline and that stayed for some decades away from the modernity and the development models that shaped them (centralist, economicist and of urban-industrial inclination, to say the minimum). Nowadays, they seem to fulfil the conditions that society in general identifies with the *post-modernity*, essentially the ones that are associated with the return to the traditions and the nature, to the authentic and the genuine (e.g. Joaquim, 1994). As Reis and Santos (1995) refer, with the crisis of the agricultural model (reflecting the more general crisis of the development models based essentially on the economic growth) placed upon the mechanisation and the technology, the deficit of the Portuguese family agriculture and the very rural societies tends to attenuate. Therefore, according to the same authors, this situation seems susceptible to lead towards a social and institutional revaluation of the rural that implies its recodification as central areas for the *post-modern* societies.

Bearing in mind the notion that there is not a single rural space, but several and different spaces that we can characterise as such, and making appeal to the typology proposed by Cavaco (1993)<sup>2</sup>, we can refer the areas more demanded and consumed in our country by the 'non rural' inhabitants: they are precisely those regions that this author defines as exceptions to the category of the "*countryside that is about to extinction or abandonment*"<sup>3</sup>, i.e., those that escaped, so to speak, to the scenery of general degradation (of the landscape, of the constructions, of the roads) that characterises them, although they share the same absence or very limited presence of social and economic dynamics. These exceptions comprise the areas delimited as 'protected'<sup>4</sup> and also the commonly designated

'*historical villages*' in recovery process<sup>5</sup>. Both cases make evident the preservation and maintenance of the remote and relatively marginalised rural areas essentially for the benefit of the non rural inhabitants, in order to keep alive the memory of the past and to recreate a certain rurality, either in social terms or in environmental terms.

Although important for the 'non rural' people, the recreation of a certain rurality or a certain environment and certain natural aspects doesn't seem, however, to carry the same meaning for the rural residents. Thus, we observe that in some of these areas (such as the Natural Park of Montesinho and the Mountain of Freita) it tend to occurs a duality or a dichotomy in terms of social representations in view of the same territory. In this way, two spaces that co-exist in parallel emerge, meeting occasionally: one that is a life space and another that is a recreation and leisure space. We also stress that the duality of perceptions in view of the same space is culturally determined, not only for the objective characteristics of the two types of people inquired, but also for the different levels of social and economic development that each one of them experiences in everyday life. We try further to analyse the type of implications of that duality for the local development.

### **1. The Environmental Function of the Rural Areas**

We know that, along several decades, the rural space has been marginalised, integrated and valued. These phases correspond, first to a dichotomic situation (the rural defined in opposition to the urban, as its negative), later to a *continuum* situation (that continued to demarcate the two spaces in practical terms, because not all the rural areas were interesting for the dominant development system) and finally, nowadays, as we said, to a situation of increasing social and institutional valorisation that corresponds to the (re)discovery of the rural areas as reserves of unique social, cultural and environmental inheritances and memories (e.g. CCE, 1988; Figueiredo and Rosa Pires, 1992; Figueiredo, 1999a). These different phases correspond equally to different perceptions of the rural areas that in the field of the representations, as noted earlier, go through the understanding of those areas as a denial of the modernity for its attachment to the traditions and the peasant's ways of life, to its understanding as an inheritance to preserve due, paradoxically, to that same attachment to the traditions and the perpetuation of the rural way of life.

The emergence of the social image of the rural world as "environmental reserve" or/as well as "cultural reserve" seems thus to portray a new rural-urban dichotomy, at the level of the representations between rural and urban life styles and organisation systems, the first ones being increasingly valued now. This valorisation results essentially from one of the most outstanding characteristics attributed to the rural areas – the existence and subsistence of a more direct relationship with a nature that is considered more intact. This vision of the rural world no longer as food producer, but rather as keeper of landscapes and memories (e.g. Figueiredo, 1999b; 1999c; 2000), is expressed by the redefinition of the rurality that "*on par with the social visibility of the environmental questions, it is reinforced in the component of what we can designate as reserve of environmental qualification*" (Reis and Lima, 1998). It is also essentially the cities' residents, as we already referred, "*the bearers of this social redefinition of the rurality, which doesn't cease in the environmental dimension, rather also transports dimensions of the defence of the patrimony and the rural culture*" (idem, ibidem).

If the urban inhabitants (and also the very State) see the nature and the rural environment with a vision that can be called aesthetic, those same aspects are usually seen by the rural residents with a vision which, for opposition, we call utilitarian (e.g. Figueiredo, 1996, 2000). As we have noted in previous works, the confrontation of these two visions, that correspond fundamentally to what Mormont (1994) calls diversified "cultures of the nature", can lead to conflicts among the different aspects that constitute each one of them

(namely in terms of interests, aspirations and needs). The urban perspective tends to perceive nature (and by similitude the environment also) as being savage, away from Man and without the impact of his intervention (e.g. Mathieu and Jollivet, 1989). This anti-utilitarian perspective, i.e., that doesn't consider nature as a resource supporting Man's activities but rather as a romantic idealisation, as an aesthetic object of appreciation, tends to sanctify that same nature and, by association, the environment also and the countryside, consequently. Or as referred by Redclift and Woodgate (1994) "*the countryside has been assuming an inheritance status, as the cathedrals, because it displays our past*". As Mormont (1994) tells us, this vision "*is strange to the relationships that the rural inhabitants maintain with their territory that is for them [first of all] a resource on which their life depends.*"

The social demand of the countryside for reasons related with its environmental characteristics (real or idealised) takes place at the same moment when the rural tries to reach the economic and social development. For some authors (e.g. Etchelecou, 1991) this is a fundamental question since it presupposes the existence of a historical lag between the questions of the environment and the socio-economic dynamics of the rural spaces. Obviously, this lag integrates several visions, even opposite ones, of the aspects that should form the development, for rural and urban inhabitants (Figueiredo, 2000). As referred by Marc Mormont (1994) "*the questions of the environment emerge in the heart of the urban and industrial societies, in the great cities and in the areas more strongly industrialised. In its original dynamics, they are not rural questions placed by the rural populations about their life style or their way of development, but they concern the rural space more and more. This paradox is a fundamental key for reading the relationships between environment and rural development, their conflicts but also the opportunities that such relationships originate.*" For the rural population the development tends to materialise through great public works, industrialisation, while for the urban residents the development increasingly involves aspects as the harmonisation between the economic activities and the preservation of nature. It is obvious that these uncoincident visions presuppose the existence of 'development cultures' also diversified and that are essentially related with the levels of social and economic development experienced in daily life (expressed, among others, by the accessibility to goods and services).

In Portugal, in the realm of the social perceptions about the rural, this space still is, first of all, closely associated to the agricultural activity and to a certain underdevelopment or *delay* in social and economic terms. These social representations of the rural are still very conditioned by the ruralist conservatism exalted by the dictatorial regime<sup>6</sup> which, as Mansinho and Schmidt (1997) refer, is still being explored ideologically. The *delay* of the rural areas is combined, as mentioned before, again in the plan of the representations, with the greater connection with nature, as well as the relative permanence of moral values and cultural traditions. Another symbolic conception of rural at the national level resembles more the one that we have been mentioning in global terms. According to Mansinho and Schmidt (1997), it is a symbolism emerging in the political speech and in certain urban sectors without (or with already very weakened) rural roots. This symbolism is associated with an awareness of the rural world's role in the preservation of the environmental quality (e.g. CCE, 1988; Figueiredo, 1996; Mansinho and Schmidt, 1997).

In fact, the aspect of the valorisation of the rural areas is, as mentioned before, quite evident in our country in the government's proposals and measures for the rural development reported on the Plan of the Promotion of Regional Development (PPRD), the National Plan for Economic and Social Development (NPESD), or even in some of the principles of the National Plan for Environment Policy (NPEP). The same can be said about the programs specifically designed for the rural areas, like LEADER for instance,

where we notice that the institutional concerns in this domain derive essentially from 'urban' needs often related with the tourism, recreation and leisure. The same presupposition can be observed, at a more global level, in the proposals of OCDE (1993) emphasising that *“the attention to the natural resources and the natural environment constitutes an important objective for the remote rural areas. They are, among other things, a natural reservation (...). To preserve and to maintain the natural aspects can be a key activity in many rural areas at long term. Further, the public is more and more interested in safeguarding the environment, aesthetically and for other factors, in the remote rural areas, even those with little market value and little national visibility”*<sup>7</sup>.

As mentioned previously, in Portugal most of the rural areas, for its *pre-modernity* characteristics and for the process of economic and social marginalisation that they have suffered, fulfil the requirements set by OCDE and so they seem able to perform the functions that the modern societies increasingly assign them.

## **2. The Perceptions of Visitors and Inhabitants on the Environment in two Portuguese Rural Areas**

### *2.1. The Natural Park of Montesinho and the Mountain of Freita – Brief Characterisation*

In spite of geographically apart the areas of the Natural Park of Montesinho and the Mountain of Freita share many demographic, economic and social characteristics. However, there is a relatively important distinction between both: in fact, the first one is a protected area and the second one does not possess any legal status of protection. We consider this is a fundamental difference, since while NPM is institutionally recognised as an extraordinary rural space on the environmental perspective, the Mountain of Freita is just a vulgar rural space. On the other hand, we believe that the mentioned difference of status is also fundamental in terms of the different perceptions concerning these spaces and their natural environments and elements, as well as concerning their development processes. We further consider that in the case of the Natural Park of Montesinho, for the very nature of the objectives of its creation, the conciliation between the protection of the environment and the promotion of the economic and social development will be more evident.

Both study areas are characterised by heavy losses of population (more than 60%) between the sixties and the present time, by having a small active population and a relatively high percentage of retired population. The predominant economic activities in the two areas are the agriculture and cattle breeding, although often combined with activities outside the agriculture. They are mountainous areas that until quite recently possessed bad accessibility conditions and where the lacks in terms of basic infrastructures and social equipments are evident.

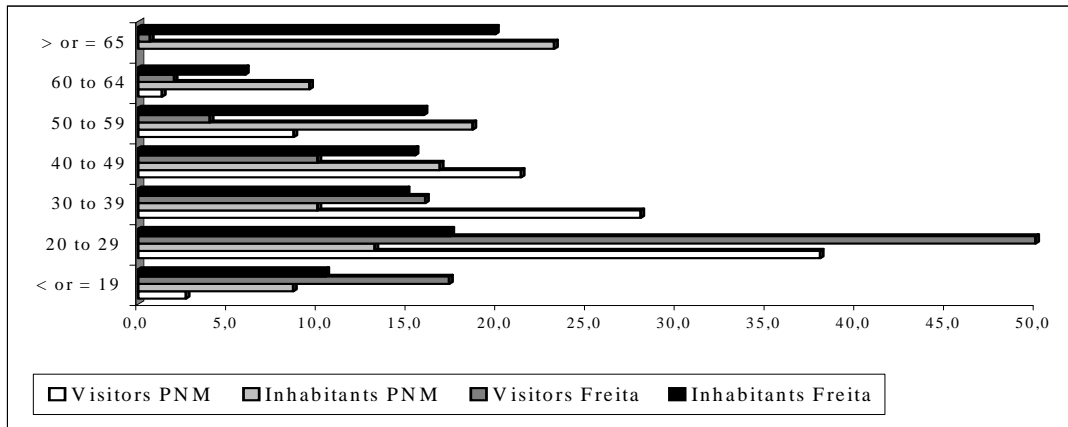
### *2.2 A Rural to Live, a Rural to Visit – the Diversity of Perceptions of Visitors and Inhabitants on the Environment*

In regard to the visitors and residents that we inquired<sup>8</sup>, taking their objective characteristics into account, we can begin by pointing out their obvious differences. In the first place, we see that the visitors of both areas are younger than the residents, they have higher educational levels, they possess larger income levels and they also stand out for defending values of *post-materialistic* type more frequently. As demonstrated in figures 1 to 4, there are some important differences between the visitors of NPM's region and the Mountain of Freita's region, as well.

Concerning the age structure, we observe at once that the Mountain of Freita's visitors are younger than NPM's visitors are. Regarding the residents there are no substantial differences between the two areas taken into consideration. There is a larger homogeneity

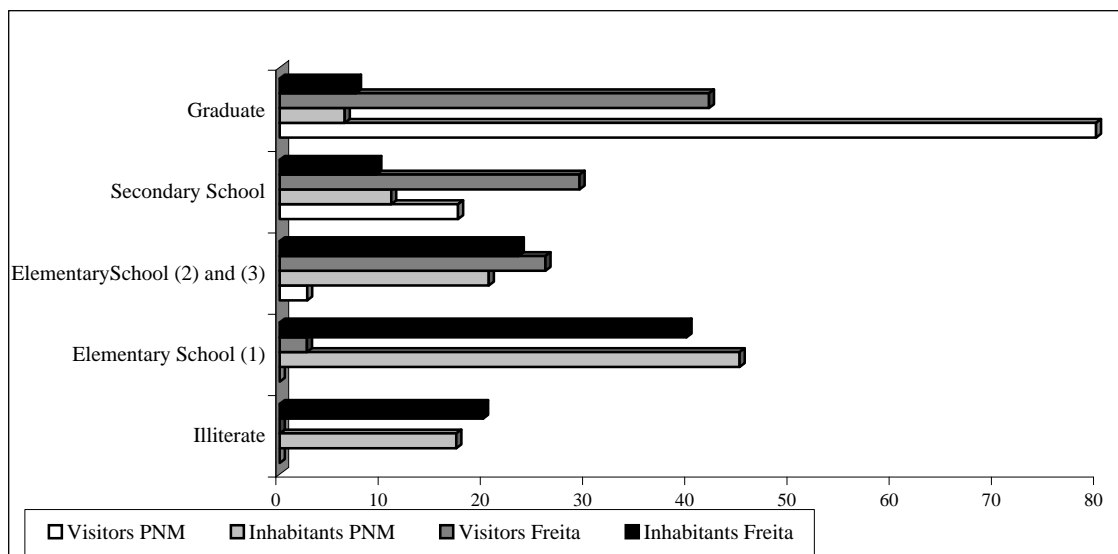
of their distribution among the different age groups than it is observed for the visitors (figure 1).

**Figure 1: Age structure of the people inquired in the areas of NPM and Mountain of Freita (in %)**



With regard to the education levels (figure 2), NPM’s visitors have more studies and almost 80% hold a schooling degree equivalent to High School or College.

**Figure 2: Levels of education of the people inquired in the areas of NPM and Mountain of Freita (in %)**



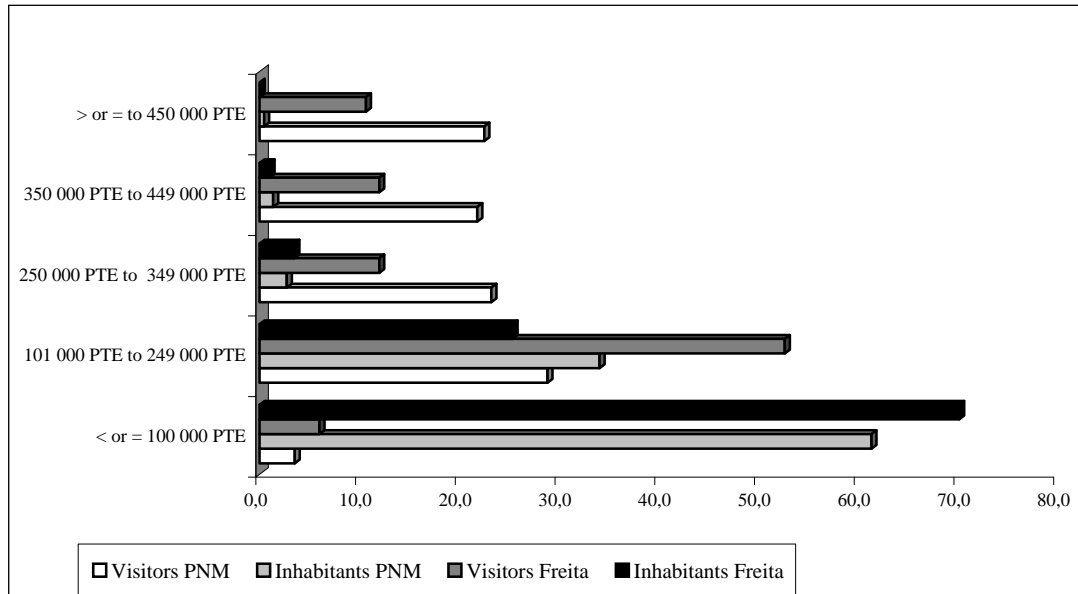
Among the Mountain of Freita’s visitors the percentage of people inquired in these conditions is only 42%, and respectively 26% and 29,3% possess a schooling degree equivalent to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Cycles of the Basic Education and the Secondary Education. Notice the almost total inversion of this reality for the residents in both areas.

Thus, we can see that both in the Mountain of Freita and in NPM, most of the residents only have the 1<sup>st</sup> Cycle of the Basic Education or equivalent.

In terms of income (figure 3) the largest difference observed among the people inquired lies in the fact that the residents of both areas declare that their households possess a monthly income inferior or equal to 100 000 PTE. As to the visitors there is (particularly

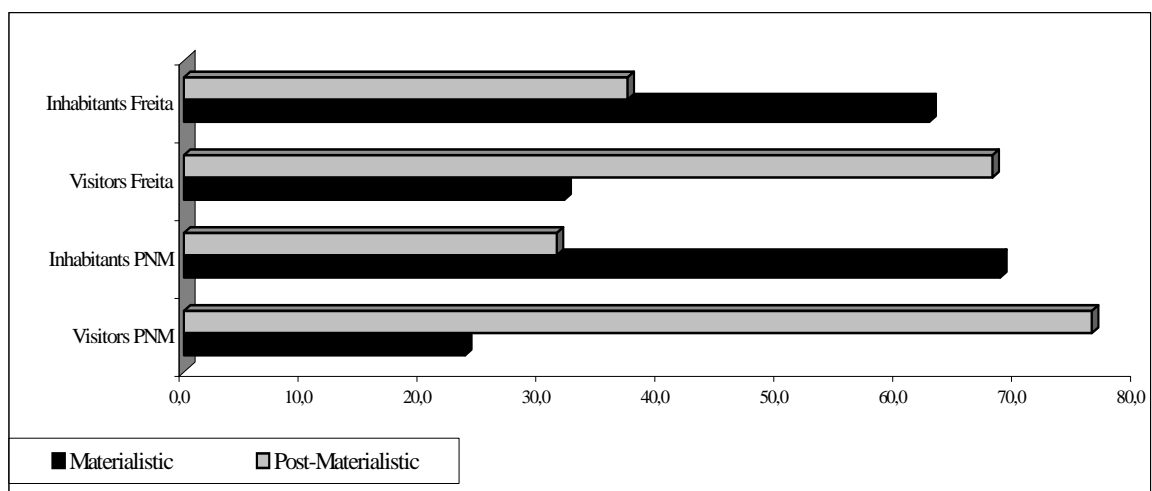
for NPM’s visitors), a more homogeneous distribution among the several proposed income levels.

**Figure 3: Levels of income of the people inquired in the areas of NPM and Mountain of Freita (in %)**



If we pay attention now to the levels of materialism<sup>9</sup>, the division between residents and visitors becomes clearer. As we can see in figure 5, 76,4% and 68% of NPM’s and the Mountain of Freita’s visitors, respectively, defend values of *post-materialistic* type, while 68,6% and 62,7% of NPM’s and the Mountain of Freita’s residents, respectively, defend values of materialistic type. If we bear in mind that (e.g. Inglehart, 1977 and 1990; Watts and Smith, 1980) “are younger and better educated than the materialists and they occupy a higher socio-economic position” (Watts and Smith, 1980) such division (attending to the visitors’ and residents’ characteristics that we explained before) cannot be surprising.

**Figure 4: Levels of materialism of the people inquired in the areas of NPM and Mountain of Freita (in %)**

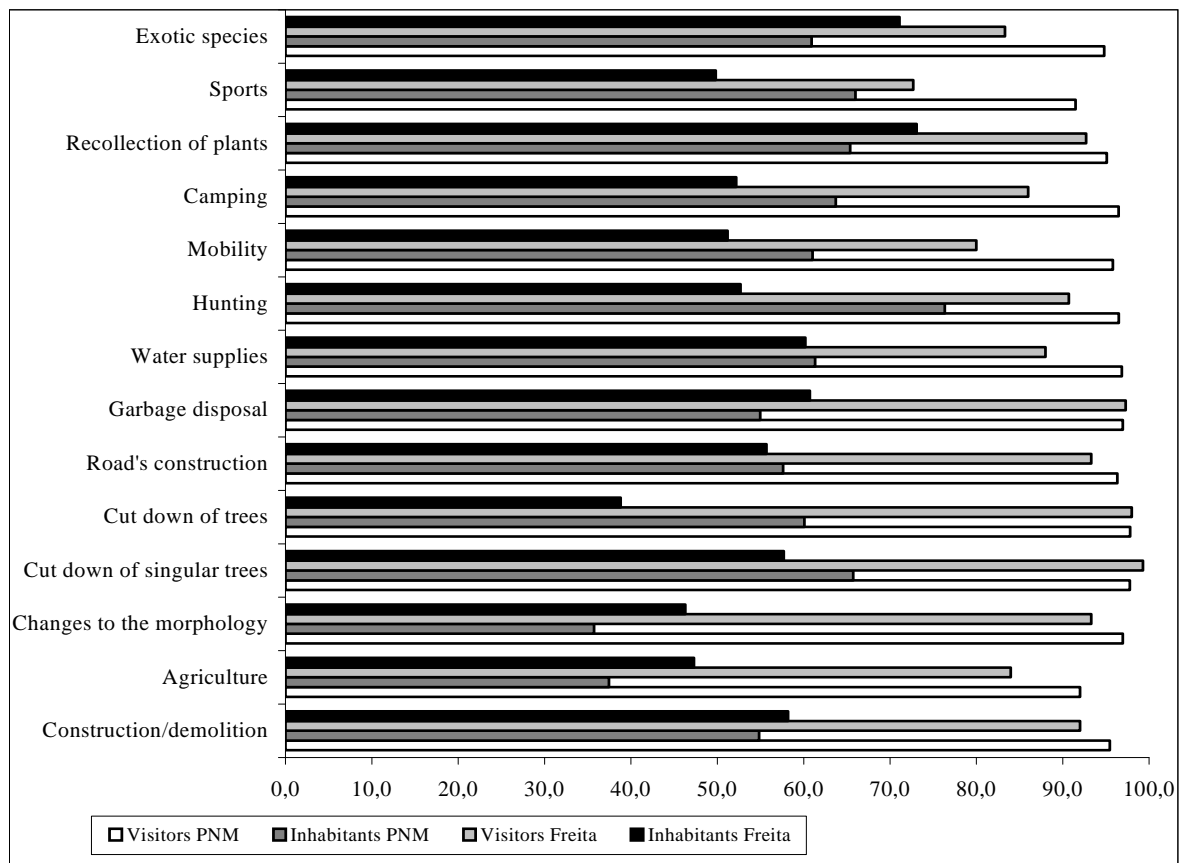


The visitors of both areas are of urban origin predominantly. The Park's visitors have a larger geographical dispersion than the Mountain of Freita's visitors, since these last ones come essentially from the closer urban areas, like S. João da Madeira and Santa Maria da Feira, belonging to the district of Aveiro, and also from the area of Great Porto.

On the other hand, NPM's visitors come mainly from Lisbon and Great Lisbon. These differences in terms of geographical origin are explained by the sort of recreation and leisure developed by the people inquired in the two areas. So, while in the case of the Mountain of Freita we are before visitors that spend only a few hours in the area, in the case of NPM the visitors stay two or three days in this region.

From the objective characteristics of the two types of people inquired it can be noted that we are clearly dealing with two very distinct universes, and this distinction is a decisive factor for considering the rural environment as amenity and as something to preserve. These differences are at once perceptible in the manner as both types of people inquired face the rules and the norms in force in the Natural Park of Montesinho and the eventuality of its existence in the Mountain of Freita's region. In effect, while most of the visitors demonstrate a total agreement with the existence and content of those norms, a very significant part of the residents show their clear disagreement with them, as we can see in figure 5.

**Figure 5: Agreement with some existing or possible restrictions in the areas of NPM and Mountain of Freita, by type of people inquired (in %)**

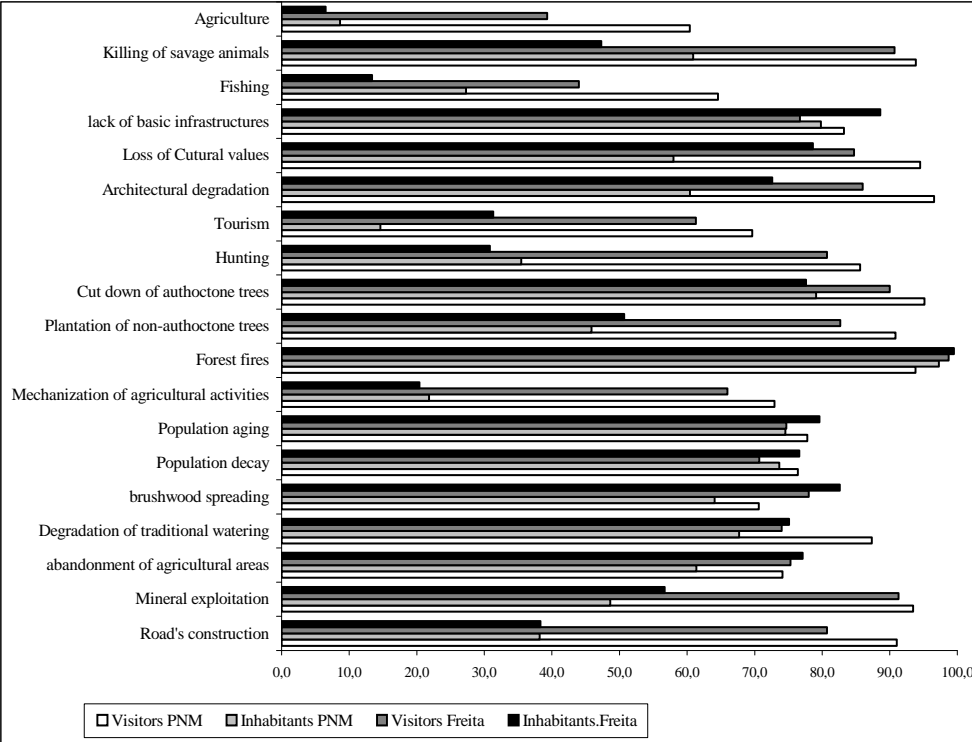


These differences are particularly important when they deal with rules such as the construction of buildings or roads, the felling of trees, the alterations to the morphology of the land or even the rules concerning the expansion or installation of agricultural properties. In this way, two *environments* start to appear – the one that is a recreation and



leisure space and the one that is a life space. In the first case, the rules and restrictions are considered fundamental for the preservation of the recreation space, in the second case they are regarded as obstacles to the everyday activities and, in great measure, to the local development. The great adhesion to the restrictions and rules on the part of the visitors meets the *sacralisation* of nature and the environment that we referred previously, as well as the position quite less agreeing demonstrated by the residents reinforces what we said before about the *utilitarian* vision of the rural people in view of the same nature and the same environment. The Natural Park of Montesinho's visitors are the ones that favour more the existence of rules and restrictions in the Park's area. The Mountain of Freita's visitors come next, with inferior percentages. The smaller adhesion of these visitors can be explained by the fact that here the norms are just a probability. Regarding the non agreement with the real or possible restrictions and rules, in function of the area considered, we observe the opposite, i.e., the visitors (above all the NPM ones) reveal tiny percentages of non agreement, while the residents of both areas declare their disagreement with many of the norms. Among the norms in relation to which the non agreement levels assume larger percentages we find the ones concerning the felling of trees, the increase and/or transformation of the agricultural properties and also those relating to the alterations of the land's morphology. The differences between the two universes become even more evident when we analyse the aspects that the people inquired consider more or less susceptible of degrading the environment in the NPM's area and the Mountain of Freita's area. There is a clear division between the universe of those that consider both areas as leisure territories and those for whom they are life territories. As we can observe starting from figure 6, for most of the referred aspects, most of the visitors consider them susceptible of degrading the environment, while most of the residents don't impute them any responsibility or don't ascribe them great contribution in the degradation of the environment in both areas considered.

**Figure 6: Aspects considered susceptible of degrading the environment in the areas of NPM and Mountain of Freita, by type of people inquired (in %)**

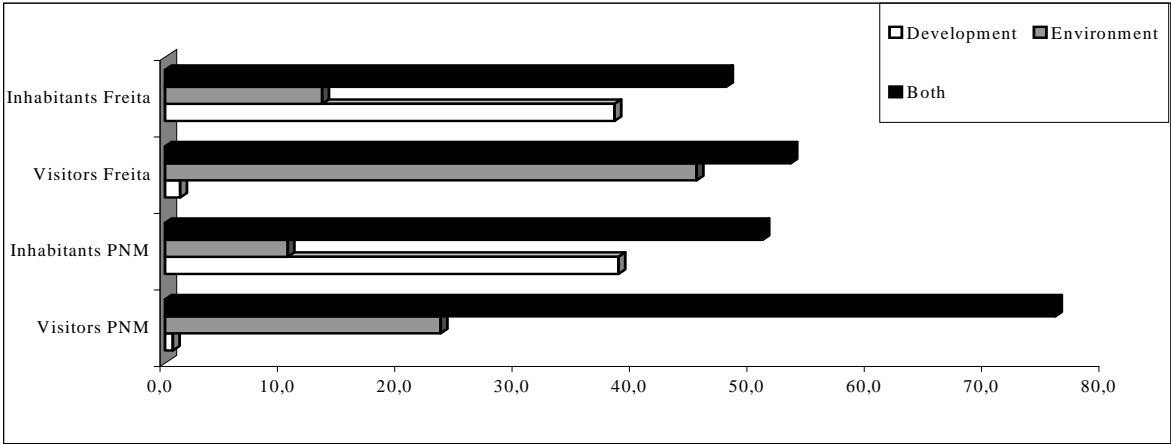


The differences between the two universes of people inquired are once again particularly clear in aspects as the opening of new highways, the mineral extraction, the agricultural activity, the mechanisation of the agriculture, the planting of non-autochthonous trees, the architectonic degradation/alteration, the hunt, the tourism, the fishing and the killing of wild animals. Indeed, the residents do not consider them susceptible of contributing for the degradation of the area in a way so pronounced as the visitors do.

The differences emphasised don't have their roots only in the objective characteristics presented by both types of people inquired, but also in the fact that for the visitors this territory represents "an escape to their everyday life context" (Picon, 1992). For the residents, as we have been referring, this territory is their everyday life picture, their life and activity space. As two of the interviewees refer, synthesising well the opinion of the majority of the residents inquired, "the nature... we were created here, we don't pay much attention to it. People that come from outside find it much more beautiful, because the ones that are here, they are here (...). I don't see them going to the hills just to see the hills" and "people here are so accustomed to this that when somebody says this is beautiful people laugh... it would be the same if we went down there and we said it was beautiful..." The data confirm the visitors' perceptions as *aesthetics* and those of the residents as utilitarian.

The representations about the relationship between the protection of the environment and the promotion of the economic development in the study areas give also rise to some differences between those who visit these areas and those who inhabit them (figure 7). Thus, concerning the NPM's area particularly, we verify that both visitors and residents give priority to the conciliation of both aspects, although a very significant percentage of inhabitants (40%) consider that the priority should just be given to the economic development. In the Mountain of Freita's area, the residents also give priority to the conciliation of those two aspects, but about 40% equally refer the economic development as urgent for this area. The Mountain of Freita's visitors distinguish from the remaining people inquired, since 45% consider that the priority should just be given to the protection of the environment. In both study areas there are a larger percentage of visitors that consider the protection and preservation of the environment as an important objective, essentially for reasons that we can designate as immaterial.

**Figure 7: Priority given to the relation environmental protection/socio-economic development for the areas of NPM and Mountain of Freita, by type of people inquired (in%)**



These reasons can be synthesised as the concern with the future generations, with the preservation of the natural resources for their intrinsic value or even with the very rights of

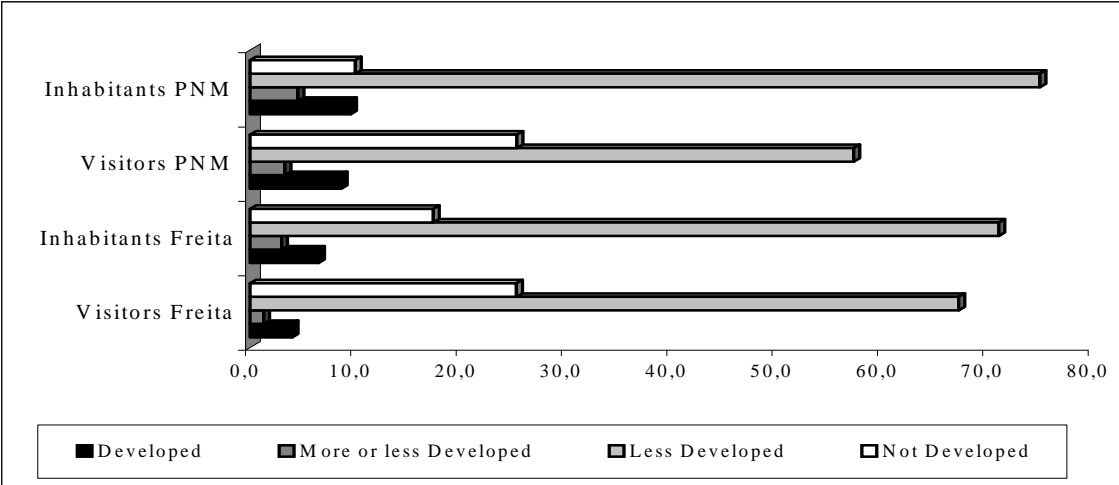
nature. On the other hand, the residents consider also important the preservation of the environment, but the reasons appointed have a more material character, i.e., they favour aspects as the human health, the guarantee of the economic development and they tend to see nature as support of the economic activities essentially. In the same line, there are a higher percentage of residents that consider more beautiful those landscapes altered by Man, in a clear association between nature and the environment with daily life.

The visitors favour the landscapes where the human action is not perceived, confirming in a certain way the thesis that, essentially, the visitors seek in rural areas a *crystallised* and *savage* nature. The reasons given by the visitors for their visits to the NPM's and the Mountain of Freita's regions also confirm these conclusions, since the great majority seeks the beauty of the landscapes; the pure air; the contact with nature; the observation of autochthonous animals and plants, among other less important reasons.

Few visitors refer the aspects related with the rural life or with the characteristics of *humanisation* of the rural spaces as reasons for visiting both areas. We are dealing then with a rural that is understood, sought and consumed as natural space primarily and not as life space of other social actors. Some differences can be emphasised between the visitors of both areas. In this way, there is a larger percentage of people inquired in the NPM's area that refer the contact with nature, as well as the escape to the stress of the city life. On the other hand, the Mountain of Freita's visitors point in larger percentage the possibility of practising sport, as well as the possibility of having a picnic, a reason that is not indicated by any people inquired in the Park's area. In a general way, we can say that the reasons that motivate the NPM's visitors to frequent this region are more directly related with the status of *protected area*.

In regard to the visitors' and residents' perceptions on the levels of economic development of both considered areas we can see in figure 8 that most of the people inquired apprehend them as being little developed (percentages always superior to 57%). It is also important to point out that for 25% of visitors (against 10% of residents) the NPM's region is considered as being not developed. As for the Mountain of Freita, in spite of keeping this difference between residents and visitors, the difference is not so important. However, the main differences between the two universes of people inquired are to be found at the level of the reasons indicated.

**Figure 8: Level of development attributed to the areas of NPM and Mountain of Freita, by type of people inquired (in %)**



Thus, the Park's visitors indicate as reason for the little development of this area, on one side, its isolation and geographical distance relatively to the more important urban centres of the country, on the other hand, they also point out the existence of a harmonious integration between Man and the natural environment in the area. These aspects demonstrate the relationship established previously between the *delay* or the underdevelopment of the rural areas and their increasing environmental symbolism.

The residents of the same area point out, as reasons for its little development, more practical aspects such as the lack of jobs, infrastructures and services and also the population decline. None of the residents inquired associates the area's level of development with the preservation of nature.

In the case of the Mountain of Freita's area, the visitors also point as reasons the isolation and geographical distance relatively to the great urban centres, the lack of basic infrastructures and still the fact that the Mountain is a rural area<sup>10</sup>. Notice also that only 2% of the visitors inquired in this area refer questions related with the protection of the environment or nature. Once again, it seems that this fact might be explained by the legal status of protection that the Park's area possesses and that tends to form in this sense the opinion of those who visit it. The residents of the Mountain of Freita's region point out, above all, more practical reasons which are mainly related with the needs experienced in everyday life, such as the lack of jobs and industries, the needs in terms of services and basic infrastructures and also the decline and/or the ageing of the population.

From these results, we can consider that there are equally two contrasting visions of development. Thus, NPM's visitors, for the very status of the area they are visiting, tend to consider that the development (or its absence) is related with natural aspects and with the protection of the environment. For the residents of both areas and also for the Mountain of Freita's visitors these aspects seem to have little relationship with the development level that is essentially understood (in the case of the first ones) as being materialised into constructions, industries, jobs and access to goods and services. In the second case, it is clear the identification of the *rural* with the *underdevelopment* and *delay* that we mentioned before.

## Conclusions

Of all the previous empirical and theoretical considerations, it stands out a clear dichotomy between the visions of the rural and the urban people respecting the rural environment and nature, as well as respecting the processes of economic and social development. It also stands out that the environment is, beyond a doubt, the great motor of the external demand and consumption of both studied areas.

From the characteristics of the demands and consumptions of these rural environments it is not surprising that the Natural Park of Montesinho's and the Mountain of Freita's visitors don't consider as serious aspects the emptying of the rural landscape of some of the elements that constitute it and that, in our understanding, are fundamental for its continuity: Man and the agricultural activity. Inversely, for the residents it is the threat of disappearance of some aspects that humanise and shape the landscape of these areas, as we know them nowadays, that is considered more susceptible of degrading the environment. To this perception it is subjacent the vision of the rural environment as being *lived*. On the contrary, to the visitors' perceptions it is essentially underlying its understanding as being *desired* and as an *aesthetic object*.

The rural environment (in this work materialised in the NPM's and the Mountain of Freita's regions) has been establishing itself more and more as a symbol for the urban residents, essentially because they perceive it as *natural*. Many of the visitors inquired see the Park's and the Mountain's landscapes as a reality not manufactured by men, animals

and machines. Here dwells the great motivation of the urban consumption of the rural areas, i.e., as reservation places of environmental quality, more than as places where cultural traditions and memories are preserved and, above all, more than as life places for other individuals. The residents of these areas, as we saw, have a less idealised, more practical and more utilitarian perception of their environment, because more daily lived. The rural nature, as Mathieu and Jollivet (1989) refer, is quite less natural than it looks and it contains important humanisation factors that cannot be neglected, even on behalf of the urban people's needs (e.g. Figueiredo, 1999b, 2001).

If, as we said, the rural possesses an undeniable environmental function today, essentially for the non rural people, but, in the last analysis, for the society globally considered, that same function can have effects that we may qualify as perverse in regions whose population seems to aspire to levels and ways of development based on an urban and/or industrial logic.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Using the expression of Mathieu and Jollivet (1989).

<sup>3</sup> Cavaco (1993) distinguishes for our country three types of rural areas, namely: *the periurban countryside*, characterised by a certain demographic and economic dynamics, subject to various types of pressures of the urban expansion; *the countryside that is about to extinction or abandonment*, characterised by the absence of any type of social or economic dynamics or for a very limited presence; and finally the *intermediate countryside* that, as the very designation indicates, is placed between the two previous situations, in terms of its characteristics.

<sup>4</sup> In Portugal, the National Network of Protected Areas (RNAP) (DL 19/93) includes a National Park, the Natural Parks, the Natural Reservations, the Areas of Protected Landscape and still the Classified Places. It is important to notice that most of the National Protected Areas are precisely located in rural areas that we can characterise as deep and remote. Most of them (with exception of 6) are inhabited, and this aspect is seen as fundamental for the nature's preservation.

<sup>5</sup> As, for instance, Sortelha, Monsaraz, Monsanto, Piódão, Portuguese 'traditional' villages, among others that recently benefited from the support of PPDR (Promotion of the Potential of Regional Development), more specifically the subprogram of Recovery of Historical Villages.

<sup>6</sup> Since 1926 to 1974

<sup>7</sup> Our underlined.

<sup>8</sup> The questionnaires were applied between August 1997 and January 1998 to 150 visitors and 220 residents in 16 parishes of the Natural Park of Montesinho. At the same time, interviews were also made to the presidents of the Parish Councils, to the presidents of the City Councils of Bragança and Vinhais, to the Director of the Natural Park and still to the coordinator of the Association for Local Development – CoraNE. As for the Mountain of Freita, the questionnaires were applied between September 1997 and March 1998. 150 visitors and 201 residents were inquired. Interviews were also made to the presidents of the Parish Councils, to the presidents of the City Councils and to the delegates of the two Associations for Local Development – ADRIMAG and ADDLAP. The sample to the inhabitants, in both areas, was made by setting up quotas according to their objective characteristics, such as age, qualification for work, sector of economic activity and educational level. In the case of the visitors, also in both areas, we made equally a sample by quotas, for the places more visited.

<sup>9</sup> An index of materialism was made based on a set of questions relative to the adhesion to a certain type of values. The forms of the questions and the answer's categories used are an adaptation of what it is proposed by Inglehart (1990). By *materialistic values* we designated a set of values such as the emphasis on the economical growth, the importance given to the existence of a strong army at the national level, the importance given to the physical and material security. By *post-materialistic values* we intend to designate another set of values, such as the importance given to the freedom of speech, the importance of the environmental protection, the emphasis on peace as a goal for the entire world, etc.

<sup>10</sup> 15% of the visitors inquired in the Mountain of Freita's area gave this answer as justification for the inadequacy or absence of socio-economic development of that same area.