Struggling for Rural Environment: Conflicts between *desires* and *needs* in Portuguese rural areas

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Abstract

Rural areas are increasingly valued, in the contemporary societies, for their environmental functions. Due to the changes in these societies and the widespread growth of *environmentalism*, rural areas (particularly the most *remote* and marginalized by the development processes of urban-industrial type that prevailed until some decades ago) acquire a new symbolism and social meaning as objects of consumption, above all on the part of the urban populations.

In this sense, we intend to discuss the passage of a rural identified for decades with the agricultural activity to a rural increasingly assimilated by its environmental function, without the necessary time to reflect on and to analyse the consequences of a rural space without agriculture. The social identification of the rural with the environment occurs in a moment when rural populations seek to accede to socio-economic development in so-called *urban* terms. This uncoincidence between the *desired* and the *lived* rural environment tends to raise a number of conflicts, the rural becoming stage of concrete *fights* between its residents and its visitors, among different perceptions, interests, needs and desires in view of the same environment.

In this paper we intend to approach the conflicting contours between the rural as a *desired* space by the urban ones, and as a *lived* space by the rural inhabitants, based on a set of interviews and inquiries by questionnaire applied to the social and institutional actors of two Portuguese rural areas – the Natural Park of Montesinho and the 'Serra da Freita'. Based on the empirical information we will emphasise not only the existence of two clearly divergent visions concerning the rural, as essentially the consequences that such a divergence can have for the future of that space.

Key Words

Rural, Rural Environment, Social Conflicts

1. Introduction

This work tries to discuss and provide some reflection material about the rural as a space for struggle and a scenario of conflicts among the interests, the needs and the desires of its *consumers* – the inhabitants and the visitors – and still between these ones and the political-administrative entities responsible for protecting the environment and promoting the development of that same space.

This discussion enrols in the actual and growing socio-institutional valorisation of rural areas as reserves of environmental quality and as spaces that carry out environmental functions nowadays considered vital for society as a whole. On account of the changes that took place in the contemporary societies, in economic, political, social and cultural terms, we witness the widespread growth of what we can designate as *environmentalism*[i] and in parallel an increasing identification among nature, the

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environment and the countryside. In this sense, rural areas (particularly the most *remote* and *marginalized* by the development paradigms of urban-industrial type that dominated until some decades ago) acquire a new symbolism and social meaning as objects of consumption, mainly on the part of the urban populations.

Based on the mentioned transformations, we intend to discuss the passage of a rural identified for decades with agriculture to a rural increasingly assimilated by its environmental function, without the necessary time to reflect on and to analyse the consequences of a rural space without that activity. In parallel, we notice that the social identification of the rural with the environment occurs in a moment when the rural populations try to accede to the socio-economic development from a perspective that we call (due to the lack of a better expression) *urbanised*. This uncoincidence between the rural environment *desired* by the visitors and the rural environment *lived* by the inhabitants tends to raise various conflicts, the rural becoming a scenario to concrete *fights* that often place in opposition different perceptions, interests, needs and desires in view of the same environment.

From a set of inquiries by questionnaire and interviews applied to the social and institutional actors of two Portuguese rural areas – the Natural Park of Montesinho and the 'Serra da Freita' –, we try to analyse the conflicting contours between the rural as a *desired* space and as a *lived* space. Based on the empirical data we will emphasise not only the existence of two clearly divergent visions concerning the rural, as essentially the consequences that such a divergence can have for the future of that space.

2. Rural environment as an object of consumption

Along the last two or three decades the transformations that occurred in the rural areas have been widely and deeply debated, being nowadays relatively clear and consensual that most of these areas undergo a critical and declining period. The crisis of the rural world, as some authors have named it, *"is proteiform and it assumes several aspects that are interrelated, but are also independent. It is at the same time an economic, social, human, political and environmental crisis"* (Sainteny, 1992: 22). Although we cannot qualify this crisis as uniform, given the diversity of rural areas, it reaches mainly the most *remote* rural areas, in other words, those that are more distant from the centers of economic growth and that were marginalized by the development processes of urban-industrial type, for decades. Though this crisis *"dresses differently from one place to another in the remote rural areas"* (Pernet, 1994: 163) its most dominant trait is the loss of social and economic importance of agriculture (e.g. Mormont, 1994a; Jollivet, 1997b).

The processes of decline of the rural areas and its consequent transformations, as well as the more global social changes, have originated movements on behalf of the rural areas' preservation. As Jollivet (1997b) refers the rural becomes the place, par excellence, for applying the environmentalist doctrine to the planetary scale. It is so while reserve of natural resources (which places it as object of regulations on the uses of those resources) and it is also while reserve of the biodiversity that often places it as *protected space* (e.g. Chamboredon, 1985, Mormont, 1993b, 1994b and 1994c; Jollivet, 1994 and 1997b). Thus, the rural areas pass from food producers to spaces more and more understood and represented as moral, cultural and environmental *reserves* (e.g. Chamboredon, 1980; Butler and Hall, 1998; Butler, Hall and Jenkins, 1998). Simultaneously the rural passes from monofunctional space (the agricultural function) to space recognized as multifunctional. In the ambit of the rural as multifunctional space the questions associated with the environment have been assuming special relevance[ii]. The environmental functions performed by rural areas proceed from the growing environmental valorisation and social concern. Rambaud (1980) advocates that the social imaginary creates these utopian communities where the centrality of the rural results, in great measure, from situations of crisis and

social rupture *"directing the social actors towards a valorisation of the past, centered in the rural world, so that the townsmen prefer more and more the urbanised village to the touristic city"* (Joaquim, 1994: 45). As Mormont (1984: 145) says *"the rural is seen deeply redefined in the social space: from productive space it becomes symbolic space, from space of the past to alternative space, from space where one comes from to space where one goes to"*. This redefinition of the rural and of rurality it is played essentially by the populations of the more developed, industrialised and urbanised societies which represent the rural as *reserve of memories and of nature* and demand that such a picture must be maintained and protected[iii].

The frequency increase of the rural spaces by urban or *non local* populations enrolls in the social movements and transformations that we mentioned before, resulting in the conception and appropriation of the rural areas as commodities, objects of consumption and patrimony (e.g. Peixoto, 2002). In this sense, the *psychological* or *idilic trips* to a rural landscape that is susceptible of offering, in simultaneous, natural beauty, health and well being and a friendly, close and secure community, have been increasingly sold as commodities to be explored by the new market policies (e.g. Goodwin and Cloke: 1993). This circumstance of setting the rural as a marketable and consumption object has important social effects, since, as Macnaghten and Urry (1998:191) refer *"it implies that the countryside will be increasingly consumed as spectacle. Potent images and symbols become readily transformed into saleable commodities"*. One of the most important consequences of this situation is associated with the *divorce* between the marketable qualities of the rural and its historical and social contexts, as well as to the loss of authenticity of the places and of the traditional forms of social and economic organisation. Thus, the rural areas where this predicament can be observed become spectacles, scenarios managed by market strategies and established as attractions where the environmental qualities become consumable goods as well. *"This scenario may help to explain the recent appeals to 'green' tourism by corporate interest and government tourist boards, and the apparent ease and slight effort involved in presenting a 'green' and environmentally friendly image by corporate leisure interests (…)"* (Macnagthen and Urry, 1998: 191). The consumption of the rural environment and of nature is accomplished essentially through its transformation in *landscape* and not as background of productive activities, but rather to be beautified aiming at its aesthetic appropriation[iv]. In social terms, this establishment of the rural as object of consumption presupposes the denial or minimisation of its productive character, although in institutional terms[v] it is assumed the need of maintaining Men on a part of the territory developing ancestral practices. This need arises not only because the human presence on these *remote* rural territories is fundamental in order to maintain its environmental configuration, but also from the recognition that they are fundamental actors (with their practices) in the *rural scenery* that one intends to market and tries to consume. These conceptions tend to *folklorize* the local cultures and environments[vi] according to a mechanism that doesn't seem to be very distant – although it is implemented today under less evident forms – from that of the establishment of the *Indian reservations* institutionally designed to combat the desertification and the disappearance of the vegetable and animal species and, above all, of a certain type of social and cultural organisation and agricultural practices (e.g. Bontron and Brochot, 1989). In both cases the same type of concern is present– the celebration – by perpetuating it – of a national identity and *heritage.*

In an almost paradoxical way these are the actual redoubts of the authenticity and identity that are demanded and consumed by the non-rural people. It is, in a great measure, a rurality re-created and in which not all the images and representations of authenticity and identity will be correct or genuine, although they are effective and accepted as facts (e.g. Dewailly, 1998). As Butler, Hall and Jenkins (1998: 14) refer this is also due to the fact that *"the overall image of rural areas is a very positive one in most of the developed world. Rurality may be a myth in the terms that many people regard it, a peculiar blend of nostalgia, wholesomeness, heritage, nature and culture, combining the romantic combination of man and nature working in harmony, captured on calendars and Christmas cards throughout the*

developed world, but it is a powerful myth that has created a demand for access to, and in some cases, acquisition of parts of the rural landscape". For the mentioned authors the most significant way of perpetuating rurality are the recreation and leisure activities, particularly the ones fit for tourism. Tourism, recreation and leisure activities largely contributed to the *formation of places*. In this way, these processes appear as the main institutional answers to the transformations that occurred in rural areas and to its relatively widespread declining situation. This predicament is so intense that it induces Butler, Hall and Jenkins (1998: 117) to inquire *"how many heritage trails, pioneer museums and villages, historic houses, roadside produce stalls, authentic country cooking, festivals, country shoppes and Devonshire teas can we stand?"*[vii].

Rural areas are demanded and consumed essentially by the bearers of the new rurality definition, or as Reis and Lima (1998: 345) say *"the principal bearers of this rurality definition, which doesn't become exhausted in the environmental dimension, rather transports dimensions of defense of the patrimony and the rural culture as well"* are above all the urban or urbanised populations. These areas are set as the post-modern and post-industrial paradigm of the intersection of the contemporary societies with the rural areas and with its environment (e.g. Figueiredo, 2003a). For its presence, for its behavior and, even more important, for the expectations, claims, interests and *desires* that they transport, the urban populations confer to the rural territories they frequent and consume a sense that is not, in most cases, in agreement with the representations and practices of the *local people*. This places important questions that are associated, in the first place, with the identification of the several demands and consumptions of the rural and, secondly, with the (latent or evident) conflicts of representations and practices in view of the same territory and environment. The conflicts can be multiple because as, among others, Larrére (1990) refers it doesn't just exist a type of demand, a type of rural areas, a type of consumptions, a type of nature, but an immense variety of any one of these aspects. As Butler and Hall (1998: 115) refer *"the way people view rural areas is of fundamental importance for the way they use rural areas. There are an increasingly diverse set of viewpoints or perceptions of rural areas, what they are, what they could be, what they should be, and how they could be brought there. Inevitably such a variety of viewpoints can result in disagreement over goals and objectives, and policies and methods of achieving such goals"*. Moreover, the different ways of *seeing*, demanding, consuming and *developing* the rural are hierarquized and hierarquizing, since underlying them there are very unequal power relationships and the unequal and effective materialisation of that same power. The resulting conflicts *"can occur at all levels, including within local communities, as well as between different levels of government and between the public and private sectors"* (Buttel and Hall, 1998: 115) and they can amplify a new subordination of the rural areas and its inhabitants in view of the *external* interests, represented essentially by the State and by the urban visitors. This also occurs because (particularly in the Portuguese context), the inhabitants' point of view is frequently ignored in the measures conceived for rural development.

3. Conflicts between rural environment's desires and needs in Portuguese rural areas

The Natural Park of Montesinho (NPM) is located in the northern region of Portugal and the 'Serra da Freita' (SF) in the central part. In spite of geographically apart these two areas share many social, demographic and economic characteristics. However, there is a relatively important distinction between both – the first one is a protected area and the second one does not possess any legal status of protection. This is, in our perspective, a fundamental difference, since while NPM is institutionally (as well as socially) recognized as an extraordinary rural environment; SF is just an ordinary rural area. On the other hand, we believe that the difference of protection status is also fundamental in terms of the different conflicts we can observe in both areas. NPM and SF areas could be characterised as *remote* and marginalized rural spaces in the Portuguese context. In fact, both areas are characterised by strong

losses of population (more than 50% since 1960) due to outmigration and by having a small percentage of active population. The predominant economic activities are agriculture and cattle breading, although often combined with other (industrial or urban) activities. The two areas can also be characterised for having what we can call a high potential to attract visitors, and in both it is visible the existence of some competition for the environment and territory, as well as some resulting conflicts therefrom[viii].

Based on what we argued in the previous section, a relatively clear distinction has been forming between the rural space *lived* and the rural space *desired* or *consumed* as *visited*. Such distinction is susceptible of giving rise to several conflicts among the different actors and entities in presence in the rural areas. In the previous section we suggested that the *remote* rural areas (as NPM and SF areas) are above all the more demanded and consumed by the non-local users, since they tend to represent the post-modern paradigm of the intersection of the contemporary societies with the environment. The visitors of the rural areas we analysed confer equally to the territories they visit a different meaning from that of their inhabitants. This situation can be systematised in the following:

- the representations and the practices of NPM and SF visitors often neglect the productive character of these areas, what leads to their identification with *nature*. This fact is particularly visible in the visitors of the protected area (i.e. NPM) given the objectives and the legal status that the same possesses;

- the practices and the representations referred tend to provoke several kinds of conflicts, since there are multiple forms of demanding and consuming the rural spaces and their environment. The areas in analysis are such an example, once again for the different protection status that they possess. In this sense, the conflicts occurred in NPM area take root much more in the division rural *lived versus* rural *visited as protected* and those of SF in the dichotomy between the rural *lived* and *visited* as *vulgar* space and open to the most various and uncontrolled actions;

- in both areas we observe the materialisation of the fact that the different ways of demand and consumption are hierarquized and hierarquizing. This means (with larger evidence, once again, for the case of NPM) that there are legitimacies that override others, because more powerful and endowed with more efficient means of effective exercise of that power. Basically they are the *external* legitimacies (i.e., the visitors' ones and the State's ones at various levels) that tend to be imposed to those of the inhabitants of these rural areas[ix]. This fact constitutes an important catalyser of conflicts.

As we can see in figure 1, most of the residents and visitors of the analysed rural areas do not know of the existence of conflicts between the local population and the *secondary users*[x] of these spaces. The percentage of those that affirm to have knowledge of conflicts is just a little significant among the residents of 'Serra da Freita', so that we can affirm, although in a relatively crude way, that the relations between visitors and inhabitants, in the two considered areas, are essentially peaceful.

Bearing in mind the reasons for the occurrence of conflicts pointed by both types of people inquired, we observe that in 'Serra da Freita' the garbage, the invasion of agricultural properties, the noise and agitation provoked by the visitors constitute the reasons, in the inhabitants' perspective. In NPM area the reasons are very diffuse, none of them possessing the prominence of those mentioned for SF. Once again the difference of status is fundamental to understand these data, since the visitors that travel to NPM are individuals that demand the area essentially because it is a place where nature is protected, while SF visitors demand this area exactly because it is not *protected* and so they can develop there activities such as the practice of motor racing and picnics. The excess of visitors and their uncontrolled actions are, in fact, one of the most important threats to SF rural environment[xi].
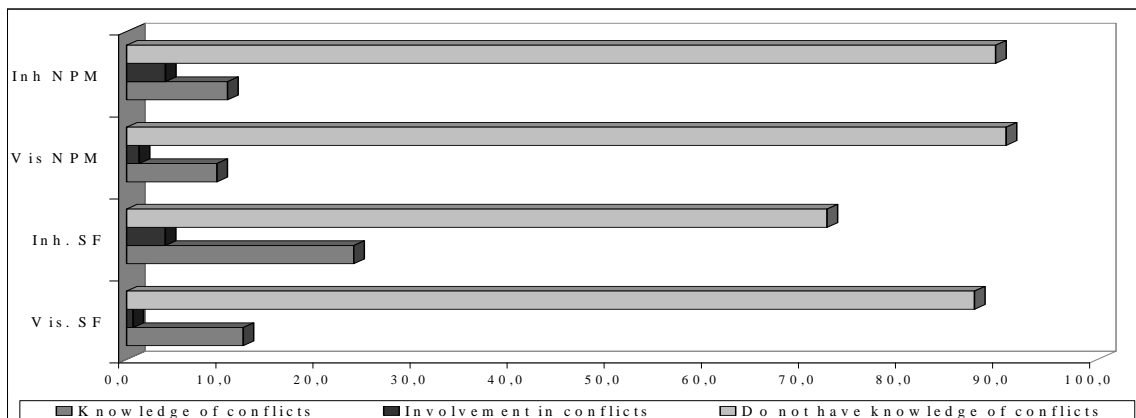
Figure 1 – Knowledge of the existence of conflicts between residents and visitors in NPM and SF areas

Concretely, Oliveira (1994) refers to some aspects directly associated with the external demand and consumption of this area, such as motor rallies, cross-country caravans and *motocross* racings that habitually take place in SF. These activities not only have roused protests on the part of the local populations but they also constitute important risk factors for the natural elements. In the same line Oliveira (1994: 72-73) points out that "*the improvement of the road network, allowing an easy access to some points of landscape interest (…) has been causing an excessive affluence of visitors, some weekends recording, in the Summer, traffic jams and flow troubles on the 'Serra' highways*[xii]". This situation originates conflicts that, in spite of being not evident in the data of the inquiries by questionnaire, are quite salient in the interviewees' speech:

> "*...Because... I also say... it comes thereabout lots of savage people, the youth from these zones near by, from those neighbouring municipalities and near cities come there only to disturb... and they come there at night and I don't know if it is drug or whatever... they make noise and disturb the people that live here in the villages.*" (JF17)

> "*If I was the owner of that space... I would put gates on it, I would close it. And I say why... because the jeeps, the cross-country, the motorcycles, etc. they only do two things: it is noise and they destroy everything that comes in front! The paths, the cultures, they frighten the animals, they scare the persons. People become terrified! They are full of fear, they hate it... and they don't leave there anything, only pollution.*" (ADRIMAG)

> "*Do you know? The visitor that goes to the 'Serra' is the common citizen... and the common citizen unfortunately still has few environmental concerns and he drags behind him a mess.*" (CMc)

> "*The village people when they phone here... they say... 'look! we don't have peace, we are going to close the road... we can't stand this'! Imagine a village where a car doesn't pass and I don't know what else... people come with the cattle and what else and the guys come with the jeeps going through there.... They cross through the fields, they move everywhere (...). Imagine what goes in their mind with this. They ask: 'but what is this?' It is that question we ask: what development? Is this development?*" (CMd)

> "*They come by the thousands.... By the thousands on Sundays.... Mrs...You don't pass... you don't have... the parking in the very approach roads is so chaotic, so ill-done that if there are problems there, for instance, there are situations where not even the firemen go through there.*" (CMd)

> "*They arrive here and they think that everything is theirs... There are situations that... there in the forest zone, in the Summer... they prefer to sit under the trees to lunch and that's OK. But afterwards it is only garbage bags all over the place, the cattle goes there to graze they arrive and eat that.... And there are products, scraps of food.... Everything they can. Sometimes that cattle is ill and we don't known where that came from.*" (JF17)

> "*Tourists?? Tourists is the garbage. The garbage that is made there, that is a shame.*" (JF26).

Reading the previous excerpts we remain not only with the notion of the existence of important conflicts between the inhabitants and the visitors, as with the idea of the main activities that the last ones develop in SF. These visitors, as we already mentioned, are different from the ones of NPM area. In effect, in this last area this type of problems is not pointed, nor this type of consumptions, since it is essentially consumed as *extraordinary* space and environment. Actually, in NPM the struggle for the environment is engaged between the inhabitants and the administration of the protected area, in a scale and with a dimension quite more significant than the fight between the different consumptions of this rural area by its inhabitants and visitors. Figure 2 shows precisely the dimension of the conflicts between the populations of the Natural Park and its administration.
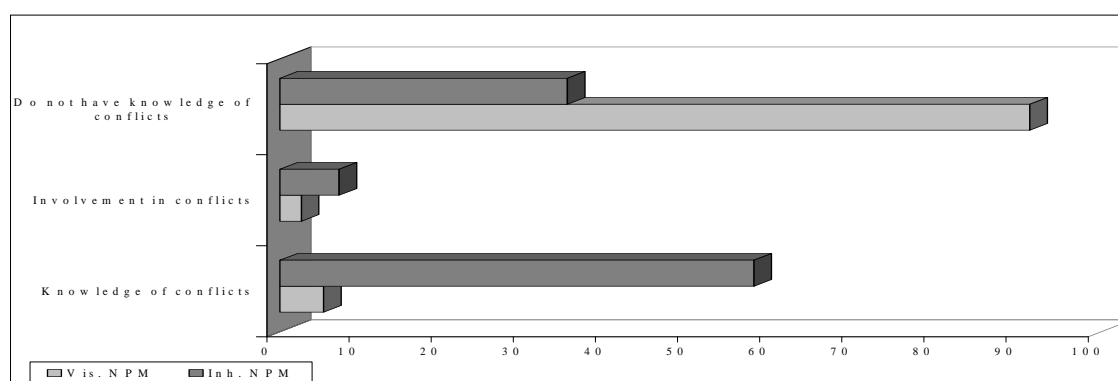

Figure 2 – Knowledge of the existence of conflicts between residents and visitors and NPM administration

We can observe that about 65% of the residents in NPM area know the existence of conflicts between the local populations and the administration of the protected area. However, of these, only 7,2% were directly involved in conflicting situations. As for the visitors (given its nature of *non-direct* and *external* users) most of them don't have any knowledge of the existence of conflicts. As main causes for the existence of conflicts the inhabitants point essentially the restrictions and the regulations that NPM imposes to the exercise of their everyday practices, concerning above all the natural elements[xiii], namely the restrictions to tree felling, killing of wild animals, enlargement of farmings and the construction and reconstruction of buildings without taking into account the traditional materials and outline. The listing of these reasons demonstrates well the situation of struggle for the environment that occurs in NPM area. This fight opposes essentially the *local people* to the *local nature managers*, the interests and the points of view of these last ones (usually) overriding the needs of the first ones.

The speech of the Parish Councils' presidents interviewed reinforces the data respecting the conflicts between the inhabitants and the administration of the Natural Park. Thus, 12 of the 16 interviewees refer both the effective existence of conflicts and situations of disrespect in view of the existing regulations, just as it can be observed in the following excerpts:

> *"here everyone fells* [trees] *at random, even after the Edict... nobody read anything. I still told some people that are felling. 'look, you don't fell cause now there are rules. The Park sent an Edict, you get a fine'... But what they cared more was the fine! They felled all they could... But the Park doesn't allow felling and people say: 'oh and who is the Park to say now that it doesn't allow felling?' And they fell all the same!"* (JF5)

> *"the felling.... Suppose that I have a very large oak grove and that I can even make three or four or five million escudos of firewood and that I have, for instance, a son studying at the university and I do need the money and to fell the trees in order to give the course to my son... why can't I do it? There are rules that are not very appropriate to people's life and there is some rigidity in that."* (JF6)

Besides the felling, the increase of the number of wild animals (e.g. the wolf, the boar, the roebuck), caused by the protection measures, and the negative impact that they have on the farming and cattle breeding activities it is also a reason for conflicts in NPM:

> *"Most people complain about the Park because they sow the lands and the animals destroy... I made a rye seeding in a land that has 6 hectares... and the deer... they got to be eighteen there together and eighteen such animals eat a lot of things and... now practically nobody cultivates anything. And then... they destroy the pasturages and there are some potatoes sowed and they go... and... but that is more the boar... they destroy the potato-field and now it is the Park that is.... And the Park still hasn't got the time to solve that."* (JF11)

> *"There are people here that the boar destroys their potatoes... 'it is the Park that is to blame because it protects them'... Oh well, since it is the Park that is giving protection to those species, the deer, the boars... people say that if it wasn't the Park they would put an end to all that."* (JF11)

> *"I myself have already criticised the Park once ... I thought there was too much protection to the boar and I even told then (and they took it a little amiss) that for them it would be more important a boar than a person."* (JF6)

> *"Here... for instance... I cannot admit that IP4* [main road to Bragança] *here had to be altered for the sake of protecting half a dozen of queen eagles... that we had here. It seems to me that is to alter the natural... because the bird adapts. I... for instance sometime ago I had a.... It was not a strife, but... the Park Manager asked me not to make a certain opening of a road because it was the mating season of the deer... and I said: 'Oh Mr. Director, the animal is not ashamed to practice the sexual act at the sight of whoever comes, it has no problems'.... And therefore we went on with the road."* (CMb)

In NPM area, another type of problematic situation concerns the absence of information about the protected area and its regulations:

> *"the older people... some say 'at such, in a little while the people of the Park come here and everything belongs to the Park'... there are still many that think it is like this."* (JF13)

> *"The Park began to be more known here last year... when it went to the Parish Council so that we would stop planting and all that.... Before that it had never come here."* (JF15)[xiv]

> *"No... I don't know any rule ... here we are very distant, isn't it?"* (JF14)

All theses excerpts make suppose equally that for some NPM residents the institution of this rural area as *protected* came to collide with their uses of the territory and the natural elements. On the other hand, they also suggest that a good part of the residents considers that also in NPM – to the likeness of what Ojeda-Rivera (1989) suggested about the National Park of Doñana, in Spain – *"a bird is worth more than a person"*[xv].

Another of the conflicting questions in NPM is associated with the perception of the benefits introduced with the creation of the protected area. In effect, most of the inhabitants of this area consider that there is no justice in the benefits' distribution. As we can see in figure 3 most of NPM residents believe that the benefits have just been felt by some groups of the Park's population or by the visitors.

The population groups that the residents refer are constituted essentially by the residents of other places in NPM area, mainly in the villages of Montesinho, Rio de Onor and Moimenta. Even the Director of the protected area recognises, with respect to this, that:

> *"it is a little the logic of 'home where there is not bread'..., isn't it? Feeling that Montesinho took the whole investment, or Moimenta... it is obvious that Moimenta and Montesinho and Rio de Onor have a strategic positioning in terms of example, isn't it? That other villages didn't have.... And therefrom they are clearly privileged villages, what is not anything amazing!".*
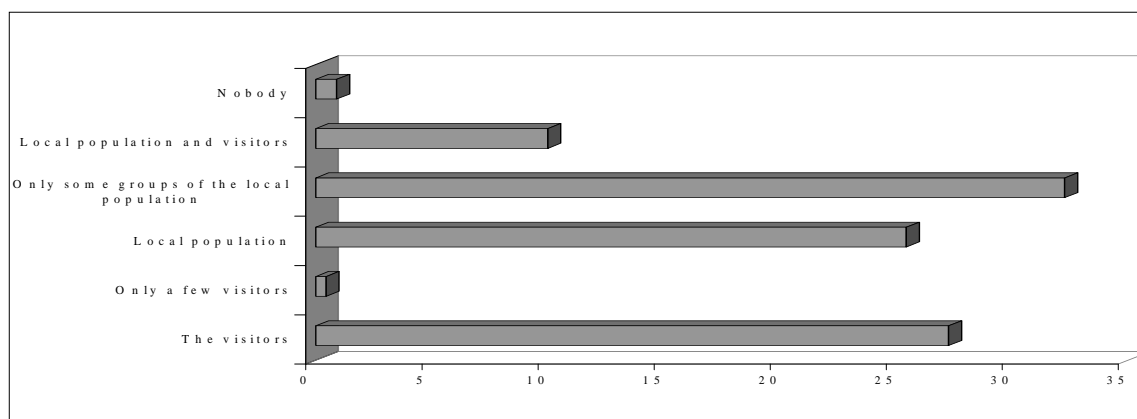
Figure 3 – Principal beneficiaries of NPM creation, according to its residents

In the same sense, but stressing that in many cases the larger access to the benefits depends on the local initiative, one of the local politicians refers:

> *"what happens often is that there are people that have more initiative and many times the people or villages more benefited, where the Park does more things... it is them that go to the Park and ask the things and those were the ones benefited... it is more the people that are more informed. People have the idea that there are villages more benefited than others... but that happens because there are villages that don't have the same dynamism, for instance, than the village of Moimenta... but that is as in everything, the information doesn't arrive everywhere (...). There were few people that knew what the Park was, there were few people that knew what were the supports that the Park could give... and there are few people that still know."* (CMa)

In general, the presidents of the Parish Councils have an opinion quite similar to the one of the local population, as we can observe in these interview excerpts:

> *"Well... here we... the benefit that we have from the Park.... We never had any... it is now only the plantation that they are doing. I think there are others that have been developing more than we here... we are forgotten here (...). One that has developped and it has been protected a lot by the Park it is Moimenta."* (JF15).

> *"I think that some parishes take... so, they take more than others. Ahn... I think that Rio de Onor, I think Montesinho, Moimenta, França are the most benefited villages."* (JF13).

> *"The Park here hasn't done much yet, but there are villages where it did a lot already, more near Bragança and we are also a bit to blame, because we should get together and say: 'no, you are only doing in Bragança'... but no one ever did that and it is necessary to have a 'fanatic'..."* (JF12).

> *"It hasn't... ahn... I think that is more over there near Bragança than round here. I don't know well... in França I think it has done already a lot of things... (...). Here the Park hasn't been quite present till now, I never saw the director here... he shall not know a lot here."* (JF10).

> *"I think there are some villages, as Rio de Onor, França and certain villages that are more integrated even in the part of the Park... Montesinho and Rio de Onor are the most benefited villages, isn't it? Me... I don't quite agree with that."* (JF9).

> *"In the parish of Moimenta... the Park has been working there a lot.... The people of Moimenta have benefits there... they do, they do... Moimenta has many benefits there, the sanitations... the People's House... the house of the Park... all that... it was all the Park. I think that... they could be helping in all the parishes and not only in one... isn't it"?* (JF5).

> *"They have been more benefited on Bragança's side than in Vinhais... and I think that is not right. If we are all protected inside the same zone, I think they should care a little for all. There are really some that have everything, everything, everything from the Park and there are others that don't."* (JF16).

The assessment of the benefits' distribution as essentially unequal is based not only on the capacity of initiative of some Parish Council's Presidents but, as we can see by the previous excerpts, also in the

larger presence of the Park in the group of parishes belonging to Bragança's municipality. Also to emphasise that some of the interviewees understand that such unequal treatment is also due to the unequal conservation conditions and even geographical location of the more benefited villages.

From everything that we have been pointing two different situations take shape in what concerns the strife for the rural environment, in NPM and in SF areas. Thus, in this last case, the conflicts occur clearly between the inhabitants and the visitors, reinforcing the dichotomy between the *lived* and the *visited* rural, between the needs of who inhabits 'Serra da Freita' and the *desires* of who demands it while object of consumption. In NPM area the conflicts do not occur in an evident way between its inhabitants and its visitors, but essentially (and in an expressive manner) between the residents and the administration of the protected area. In NPM, the fight for the rural environment has underlying the dichotomy between the *lived* and the *protected* rural.

4. Conclusion

Along this work we tried to debate the emergence of rural areas as new objects of consumption in the contemporary societies, attempting simultaneously to discuss the type of conflicts (and some of its consequences) that can follow from that situation. The constitution of rural areas as objects of consumption, essentially due to their environmental function, has caused the increase of the demand and frequency of those areas by populations that we define as *non-local*. These usually transport with them interests, expectations, motivations and desires in view of the rural environment that, not rarely, are in dissonance with the needs and aspirations of the local populations. Such situation tends to provoke conflicts or *fights* regarding the rural and its environment that should be paid attention in the development and protection measures for that space, namely because it can have important consequences in terms of natural resources use and preservation.

Based on the empirical data gathered, we observed that the conflicts occurring in NPM area proceed from the differences between what we named as the *rural lived* and the *rural instituted as protected*, i.e., between the residents of the area and its administration. These conflicts have ground on the rejection of the regulations that the protected area came to impose on the residents and on the embarrassments that these rules place to their everyday activities. The conflicts in this rural environment occur equally from a perception of the inequalities of the benefits' distribution from instituting this area as *protected*. This situation have some important consequences in terms of natural resources and landscape's preservation, namely throughout the disrespect of the NPM's regulations, as we observed in the previous section.

In 'Serra da Freita' the conflicts tend to occur between the inhabitants and the residents, being clearly associated with the status of *vulgarity* that this area possesses in institutional terms (i.e., it does not possess any legal recognition of its environmental value or other). Indeed, it is the practices and the unregulated and uncontrolled behaviours of the visitors that originate an important part of the conflicts observed in this area. From here we can infer that while in NPM the conflicts are associated with its status of protected area, in the case of 'Serra da Freita' their association is inverse, i.e., with the absence of regulations. This means that the conflicts occur in a different way in different rural areas, essentially from the point of view of their protection. For these reasons we can say that in 'Serra da Freita' we are clearly before a confrontation between a *lived* rural and a rural that is *visited as not protected*, while in the case of NPM it is a *lived* rural that is opposed to a *protected* rural and that is also *visited* in that quality.

If it is not possible to deny that rural areas possess important environmental functions essentially for the *non rural*, those functions can have several negative effects and result in conflicts as the ones that we analysed for the areas of the Natural Park of Montesinho and 'Serra da Freita', namely the ones that are

associated with the dichotomy in terms of social and institutional representations between the rural as *life space 'versus'* the rural as *recreation space* and object of consumption. The dichotomy is now predominantly social, but it also possesses spatial contours since it is in the same space that occured the duality of social representations and practices, susceptible of conditioning the future development paths. The analysis of the empirical information made possible to conclude that legitimacies, representations and several social practices are part of the mentioned dichotomy, and the ones that are transported by the external actors override the ones that are played by the local inhabitants. In view of this conclusion, the wider debate concerning the constitution of the environment as an asset or a constraint for the development of the *remote* rural areas, in Portugal, is not only meaningful but it also becomes inevitable. And this inevitability also comes from the realisation, given by the empirical evidence, that the environmental issues tend to place rural areas in a subordinate position since the *internal* or local logics and legitimacies have not been taken into consideration in the programs and measures for those areas, either in terms of environmental protection or in terms of social and economic development. Moreover, the conflicts we identified in both areas tend to provoke important impacts in terms of landscape and natural resources' preservation, given the situations of disrespect of the regulations (in the NPM's case) and the inexistence of that same regulations (in 'Serra da Freita' case). We consider that further research is needed in order to measure the extent and importance of the conflict's effects on the rural environment, namely taking into account the existence of different status of nature and environment protection in Portugal.

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6. Notes

i   In fact, as referred by Pepper (2000: 445) *"if an 'environmentalist' (says the Oxford English Dictionary), is 'one who is concerned with protection of the environment' (…) nowadays most of us in the West are 'environmentalists' by this simple definition"*.

ii   However, as it is emphasised in a quite recent work of Woods (2003: 272) *"'nature' has long been a keystone in the social construction of rurality. The discursive dualisms of nature-society and nature-civilisation have historically informed the separation of town and country in literature, art, government policy and lay discourse and have fed moral geographies which by aligning rurality with nature have elevated the countryside as pure, nobler and more treasured space than the city"*. On this subject one can also see the works of Macnaghten and Urry (1998) and Cudworth (2003), among others.

iii   We say *rural picture* in a very generic sense since as the works of Macnaghten and Urry (1998) and Woods (2003) demonstrate there are several representations and several understandings of nature and rural environment.

iv   See, among others, the works of Chamboredon (1980, 1985), Lizet (1991), Butler and Hall (1998) and Dewailly (1998).

v   In other words, at the level of the policies, programs and measures for rural development.

vi   And also to constitute those aspects as well as the rural as *museums*.

vii   Based exactly on this interrogation, we presented recently a work where we discussed the tourism's role in rural development, with the title *"how many more 'tipic villages' can we stand?"* (see Figueiredo, 2003b).

viii   For the analysis of the conflicts among the visitors, residents and administrative and political authorities it were applied, in NPM area, 150 inquiries by questionnaire to the visitors and 220 to the residents of 16 of the 35 parishes that integrate this protected area. In this area 20 interviews were also made to the political-administrative entities. In 'Serra da Freita' we applied 150 inquiries by questionnaire to the visitors and 201 to the residents of 10 of the 19 parishes that integrate this area. We made equally 15 interviews to the administrative and political entities. In this section, when we refer to the *visitors*, *residents*, and *entities* we are simply considering the social and institutional actors that were inquired.

ix   The residents we inquired in both study areas are all from rural origin. In fact we can say that the NPM and the 'Serra da Freita' areas have little capacity of attracting new residents, namely ones from urban origin.

x   We are referring to the non-local users of these areas.

xi   The area of 'Serra da Freita' doesn't possess, as we referred, any legal status of protection. However it is included in Biotopes Corine and in the *National List of Sites* in the ambit of *Directive Habitats*. Any of these instruments doesn't have legal relevance as concerns the intervention in the territory and the institution of regulations that seek to control human activities.

xii   There isn't any study on the visitors of this area that allows quantifying them. The works of Valente (2000) and Figueiredo (2003b) only allow characterising some visitors regarding their motivations for visiting this area and their behaviours.

xiii   In what concerns NPM regulations in view of nature, we joined in this category two types of situations: the first one relative to the disapproval on the part of the Park of certain behaviors of the population regarding the natural elements and the second one related with the disagreement of the local population in view of the existing rules concerning the use of those same resources.

xiv   However, we must say that the NPM was created in 1979, 24 years ago.

xv   To this purpose see also Figueiredo's work (2001c), under the title *"Is a boar worth more than a person? The representations of inhabitants and visitors on the Natural Park of Montesinho"*.