



# New Rurality, Events, and Festivals in Selected Places of Rural Spain

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**ABSTRACT** The study of and participation in festivals and celebrations is an area of great interest in the tourism experience. Social situations and a power structure (which is unequal) can be expressed through the events taking place. Also, by studying the organization of events one can identify different ways of articulating local authenticity and socio-cultural processes of rural change in a global context. Using qualitative techniques, the present study focuses on different events affected, to varying degrees, by socio-cultural processes of rural change in a global setting. Events with farming origins have been studied in term of, or associated with, the seasons, or interactions of the seasonal weather with the agriculture. Also of interest are other festivals or events of more recent origins which try to revive the historical roots of an area or recover traditional trades or professions. The events are often a means of setting rural traditions in a different socio-cultural context, and of emphasizing the nature of the rural place. Hence, each celebration has a different function in each place.

**KEY WORDS** Rurality, place, change, community, Spain, events, commoditization

## Introduction

As Irshad (2011: 1) suggests, “events and festivals tourism is one of the fastest growing forms of tourism. They are becoming increasingly popular in rural areas as a means to revitalize local economies” and traditions. According to Picard and Robinson (2009), the observation of and active participation in rural festivals and other community events are relevant parts of the rural tourism experience, and tend to reflect a wide range of social and cultural situations and local micro power relations, which are manifested by single event politics. During the organization of place rural festivals, one can observe different types of (re)negotiation between the place rurality and the complexity of global commoditization processes (Cole 2007; Macleod 2006; Kneafsey 2002), and the magnitude of socio-cultural dynamics can be observed in a wider context. The relevance of the setting and place in cultural expressions has been emphasized in the development and practice of rural festivals (Gibson, et al. 2011). This is important in the context of both historical and contemporary processes of change, as well as social and new sociopolitical changes (Robinson and Smith 2006). The analysis and sophisticated explanation of festivals and rural events are conditioned by the differentiated relevance and intensity of these modifications in each place. Hence, the contextual

configurations of the processes of change in a specific locality (Agnew 2011) have been found to affect, clearly, the constructions and politics of the rural events.

Associated with broader global–local processes of rural restructuring and change, rural tourism and outdoor activities are part of a more complex, scalar, and multiple setting (Shaw and Williams 2004; Hall, Mitchell and Roberts 2003), which includes both places and politics or policies. In addition to a material dimension (Fonseca and Ramos 2012), these processes also have non-representative, symbolic, and mythical elements, sometimes arising from a flexible and ductile relationship between the differentiated urban and rural areas. Clearly, it is in the global context of rural commoditization associated with recreation and tourism activities (Perkins 2006, Cloke 2007). Hence, there is a (re)configuration of symbols and ancestral traditions, in order to make these acceptable to the new rural functions. As Bell (2006: 152) points out, “rituals of village life are re-enacted (and reinvented) in order to keep the drama of everyday country folk alive”. Therefore, the old farming structures, which are losing sociopolitical, economic, and cultural relevance, are (re)invented by events or festivals in order to establish the specific and distinguishing traits of the rural locality, adapted to the new global reality. Rural festivals or events are often the (end) product of permanent (re)articulation within a geographical context of the new comfortable realities of the distinguishing singularities of a particular locality and rural community. The new conceptualizations of acceptable rurality are the consequence of a dynamic combination of a variety of elements (Paniagua 2012). The (new) rurality, through its different, multiple, and conglomerate expressions, is a component of signification and differentiation associated with a particular locality (Cartier 2005), a specific meeting point for the old rural population and the new (seasonal or permanent) residents of urban origin.

The rural festival, or the use of *notions of acceptable rurality* in an event or commemoration, may take place in a variable number of differentiated representations to (re) formulate a (rural) place that has lost its rural traditional identity, to strengthen some mythical aspect of a renovated rurality in the particular history of a specific rural territory, or to reinforce the singular (rural) identity of a rural place. Restoration and consolidation of authenticity and identity is a clear goal of rural events (Macleod 2009). The ideal singularity is a specific purpose in the construction of a rural event. Festivals play a relevant role in changing the perception of local identity, especially in the case of smaller events (de Bres and Davis 2001), which are created in depopulated rural communities of a reduced size. The new festivals have extensive impacts on specific rural communities. Here, festivals and events are key components in the revitalization, structuring, and permanence of local traditions (Boyes 2010). In some cases, events (re)articulate some relevant social goals of reconciliation into a (lost) rural community. However, rural communities, in a context of change, can also use these festivals for different specific goals (Gibson and Connell 2011), within the wider context of notable tensions generated by the change of the economy and territory from one of production to one of consumption (Paniagua 2012). In this line, rural events can contribute, in different ways, to local economic diversification and rural development. This takes place, also, by indirect sources reinforcing the label of attractive places (Mitchell and Roberts 2003), or a changeable value in the construction of local social capital (see Phillips 2016).

The objective of this research is to use different types of rural festivals and rural events, or events taking place in rural areas, from a dynamic reflexive and fluid perspective, to study the key interactions with the social, historical, environmental, cultural, demographic, and economic characteristics of local places in which they are recreated, represented, and produced, or which produce them. In this conglomerate perspective, we are trying to break away from the common vision that treats festivals in an (de)contextualized or closed dimension, tackling only intrinsic and single characteristics or specifications. This paper argues that the festivals present different pathways along which celebrations and festivals are adapted, created, or reinvented in the context of processes of rural change in the localities in which they take place. The remembrance of idyllic countryside through commemorations and festivals is not new in the specialized literature (Gibson and Connell 2011). Consequently, this article aims to tackle how place and rural festivals undergo a mutual and progressive process of accommodation in accordance with the local processes of acceptable differentiated rural change. As result, the central question of the paper is to analyze how a differentiated past rural is interpreted and performed in each event, for a selective new construction of acceptable rurality, in a wider context of change in the countryside.

## Rural Festivals, Events and Countryside

### Festivals and the Past Rurality

As Bunce (1994: 5) suggests, the “countryside ideal is a creation of the society within which it has developed”. In this sense, Cloke (2007: 97) points out that rural life is ordered by variable forms of leisure through which rural “attractions” constitute “theatres” of (new) rurality. Usually, the rural events integrate and amalgamate myths – as singular and malleable representations of a perceived reality that persists in historical time and in the same space (Short 2005; Bell 2006; Bunce 1994) – through a variety of mutable experiences in different (rural) spaces or localities. The rural event is a clear contribution to making a renovated affective materialism between the place materialism and local idealism (Anderson and Wylie 2009). The notable idealization of the national countryside, by means of moral values, and the purity, authenticity, and simplicity of rural everyday life are essential components of the development of new, reinvented, or traditional rural festivals. The rural festival is an authentic (new) product of ancestral traditions. These features are in contraposition with the anonymity and cosmopolitanism of the postmodern global city. This is often accompanied by a feeling of nostalgia – or even fear – for the lost rural past, with the countryside being seen as a refuge from the negative effects of the new (post)modernity (Short 2005). Farming is clearly associated with the inherent natural peace and order of the earth and the satisfaction and gratification of human needs. The purity, immaculacy, and rusticity of the rural environment are retained in a complex, sophisticated, and articulated perspective, and are expressed differently, and with specific singularity, in each rural place. The ideal representation of the good farmer has a robust and clear interaction with the expression of the good Christian (Bunce 1994). The mystification of the old and classic countryside as the essence of the rural spirit and rurality is usually renegotiated and consolidated with the complex process of socioeconomic

change, and often with the material loss of the rural territory or place (Short 2005; Woods 2011). Myth and change have a permanent and flexible renegotiation in rural areas in a new and old representation. In response to this, many local leaders want to restore some selected ideal cultural values, rituals, and goals on the basis that cultural change in a place is a complex and refined product of social, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions, arising from relevant processes of global change.

#### Festivals and the (Re)negotiation of Rurality

The rural event, or festival, creates particular and differentiated spaces, ultimately distinguishing “this” locality from “other” localities, by producing signs and playing with subjective notions of time (history) and place (space) (Bourdieu 1993). Among the creative urban new social classes, nostalgia for rural authenticity is one of the basic elements of and motivations for their return to the (ideal) countryside (Crouch 2006), and is one of the key signs of the intensity of processes of social change in western rural areas. As Hoggart, Buller and Black (1995: 90) suggest, “over the last century (...) rural areas have come to play a major part in the iconography of many European nations”. The new representation of rurality is a cause and, at the same time a consequence, of renovation in the dimension of the rural. The ideal and bucolic countryside is an exclusive, and partial, vision of the rural (Bell 1997). It is expressed through preservation of the rural patrimony and heritage in multiple ways, including festivals. In some cases, festivals articulate community goals of reconciliation between social groups and conceptions of rurality. Myth and reality, materiality and immateriality, past and present, are combined in the preservation, idealization, and creation of the rural place through the rural festival. In addition, festivals are a factor of attraction for the consumer who spends time at quality leisure and seeks a new experience of place (Fullagar, Markwell and Wilson 2012).

#### Festivals and the New Rurality

In this perspective, rural festivals and other similar events can be used to conserve continuity and authenticity in the rurality, the essence of life in a rural place in the context of relevant social changes that suggest the permanent – and ductile – (re)negotiation of the old life in a new territory. Old and new identities of the rural, traditions, and authenticity may not be encountered in the direction and journey (Crouch 2006). They position the selective essence of rural past times within a socio-cultural context of (post)modernity. The relationships between rural community and place connect in a ductile way, through the notable idealization of a bucolic farming life as part of everyday life in the present global and urban century (Knox 2008). With the celebration of events, the different cultural consumptions – of material and immaterial rurality – of each social group associated with the place can be negotiated. As Everett (2010: 74) suggests, “as sites turned to tourism and promoted their lifestyles as an economic generator, a number of tensions arose”. Cultural customs vary between social groups and the social transformation and change of a rural locality entails a (re)consideration of cultural processes and practices (Urry 1990). Traditional populations have a more

consistent, relevant, and different identity connected to the rural place and a more authentic sense of place than newcomers (Carter, Dyer and Sharma 2007). The desire, or nostalgia, for a new formulation of rurality has introduced different – and even contradictory – formulations. Changes in the visions of the place, and in the acceptable sense of place, produce new perspectives that affect the festival's meaning and relevance (Macleod 2009). Rurality is not a homogeneous product, in response to the social heterogeneity of the rural. Hence, festivals and events are a singular result or product of the specific social composition of the local communities where they arise. When events have a restorative, compensating, or redeeming goal, often more implicit than explicit, they are also a sophisticated way of influencing, articulating, and manipulating the (urban) people attending them, even when they are held in a bid to restore the rural – traditional? – community (Wood and Thomas 2009). Festivals promote a new distinction and rivalry between renovated localities and are a relevant component in the socioeconomic and cultural regeneration of a specific rural place, mainly by attracting urban visitors who want to enjoy the reinvented countryside (Janiskee 1980), the rural lifestyles, or the traditional values (Hall and Sharples 2008). The play between new and old ruralities, new (urban) and old (agrarian) social groups, and new and old symbols, conditions the production and (re)presentation of modern rural festivals.

## Methodology

As Cudny (2014: 138) points out, the study of “festivals should be devoted to an analysis of changes that are ongoing in different dimensions of geographical scale”. There is a global tendency for rural festivals (Picard and Robinson 2009) to try to remake, reproduce, or directly create new realities in response to complex and sophisticated processes of social, demographic, economic, and cultural rural change. A festival negotiates the time-space relation of rurality. A rural festival, or a rural event within a specific historical time and local space, can be used alone for an exclusive perspective, (de)contextualized and (de)territorialized, and/or comparatively, to define a multitude of cultural interactions, social signs, and community discourses. In this way, the rural festival or event, which has often been treated in a rigid, contained, and closed way, is approached with flexibility and fluidity, linked to the particular space and the specific time when it takes place (Elwood and Martin 2000). The local groups play an active role in the development of festivals, in the context of a place's politics of identity (Di Giovine 2009). A festival, or event in a rural area, can be viewed from two different perspectives, as: (1) a remake of the commemoration of social, cultural, and other changes in the geographical area where it takes place, in an attempt to give continuity, in a fluid way, to specific community traditions and place identities, or (2) as an annual event and commemoration that tries to reintroduce traditional rituals or trades that have almost disappeared, or to pay homage, as a rural community, to the historical, distinctive, and emblematic origins of the specific locality. These are, in both cases, clear and consistent pictures of the long process of transition from a traditional farming society to a more pluralistic one, which is not strictly reflected in a place-based economy – in some cases still agricultural and agrarian – but rather in the spatial mobility, the (new) collective values, the individuals and compositional characteristics of the local

population, and the dynamic, voluble, and even daily relationship between the local and global dimensions.

In this study, different rural festivals have been chosen to establish the connections they may have with the socioeconomic and cultural contexts in which they are constructed and the (rural) communities in which they are contained. Some of these events are strongly traditional and others correspond to festivals or commemorations that try to recover or reintroduce traditions or historic episodes: (1) the commemorations connected with farming involve *the festival of San Isidro el Labrador*, the patron saint of farmers in Spain; (2) historical commemorations include *the Visigoth festival*, which commemorates the Visigoths, the first Spanish kings; and (3) finally, other festivals include *the sheep-shearing festival*, an event intended to revive this traditional activity associated with sheep farming in rural central Spain (see Table 1). These cases encompass a basic typology of rural festivals in Spain: sacred festivals or celebrations, historical commemorations, and festivals associated with agrarian traditions. These reflect the three symbolic spheres of rural festivals: the sacred rural symbolic world, the historical symbolic world, and the agrarian traditional world. By approaching this subject through case studies, it is possible to demonstrate that proven strategies in the use of festivals in rural areas are affected by important processes of change. As Derrett (2003: 43) suggests in a comparative analysis, “each community’s festival provides occasions where a specific mood, tone or spirit, responding to a sense of place, time of year or season is demonstrated”. It also facilitates the study of fluid relationships between place, community, and festival.

**Table 1:** Municipalities, festivals, and celebrations

Municipalities	Festivals or celebrations
Guadalix de la Sierra (Madrid)/Cuevas de Ayllón (Soria)/ and also Valderredible (Cantabria).	San Isidro Labrador
Riaza (Segovia)	Sheep-shearing festival
Guadamur (Toledo)	Visigoth Festival

The municipalities chosen have different socioeconomic and demographic characteristics: Guadalix de la Sierra in the Madrid province, Riaza in the Segovia province, Cuevas de Ayllón in the Soria province, and Guadamur in the Toledo province (see Map 1).

In the context of the new place ethnographies of rural geography, associated with the socio-cultural shift (Cloke et al. 2004), a geo-ethnological perspective has been followed in this research (Crang 2007). In accordance with Hay (2000), the geo-ethnological research method depends on direct field observation in which the researcher is involved closely with a specific community in a particular place, together with producing an account of festivals that occur within a life or a place-community. The observer is a participant in the event (Knox 2008; Cudny 2014). In this research, relevance is attributed to the construction, representation, and visual architecture of a festival as a unique reflection of current socio-cultural perspectives of the (re)constructed and (re)imagined rural locality and environment (Atkinson 2012). This is combined with open and non-structured conversations with some of the main

participants, within the local context of the development and participation in the event, so that each rural festival can be studied in its (new) social, cultural, and economic contexts (Kearns 2003). This method of cultural research allows the construction of an event classification, developing non-material cultures, and the use of local resources in the constructions of festivals (Cudny 2014). The extensive field work took place, mainly, in the spring of 2013, to coincide with the dates of the most significant rural festivals, after a previous pre-selection in the field during 2011 and 2012. With this field work it was possible to become familiar with the selected places and to verify the (non)existence of necessary knowledge and accessible knowledge (Hoggart, Lees and Davies 2002). Complementary to this, a systematic local documentary review and analysis was associated with each festival. This research activity mainly consisted in the collection and study of (1) old images of rural festivals from the first edition, (2) key local-historical documents and pamphlets associated with the origin of the event, and (3) written advertisements for the event celebration. In sum, the data are rooted in participant observation in the life of each festival (one or two days, expending 4–5 hours each day), open interviews with key or relevant participants (two at each festival, six in sum), and (geo)ethnographic documentary sources.

**Map 1:** Rural festival places



## The Rural Festivals, Events, and Commemorations

Representative events from very different socio-cultural contexts were chosen, in an attempt to establish how they are used in the context of (rural) communities affected by processes of change. Different aspects of each were studied: the main characteristics and dynamic of change in each locality, the principal features of each event or festival, and the (new) significance of these in each place.

### Case 1: The Patron Saint of Farmers

*The context.* The festivals in commemoration of San Isidro Labrador, the patron saint of farmers, are a very common annual practice in rural Spain. Two cases have been chosen that represent the different aspects of this event in different places: Guadalix de la Sierra, a municipality in the Madrid province; and the village of Cuevas de Ayllon in the Soria province. Others were also considered during pre-selection in places where this event has a long-standing tradition, such as Valderredible (Cantabria). In all cases, the participants explained that these celebrations have always taken place, but have acquired, with time, different – and even differentiated – symbolism in each (rural) place, depending on the orientation of the dynamics and context of the changes taking place in each locality. All localities display some examples of differentiated types of dynamics of change (extra metropolitan, depopulated, and exclusive).

A) *The place.* Guadalix de la Sierra is a restructured locality 49 to 50 kilometres from the city of Madrid, a village where the population has increased more than four-fold over the last thirty years (from 1,477 inhabitants in 1985 to 6,057 inhabitants in 2014). This dramatic increase in population has been caused by the notable attraction of the urban “new comer” citizens, comprised of individuals who want to live and reside in a pleasant, low density extra-metropolitan residential area where they can have direct access to and contact with the countryside, in a picturesque Mediterranean rural environment, where small intensive agriculture and traditional extensive livestock farming activities are still viable. The farming population is residual and constituted, in 2014, around 55 inhabitants (quoted from the annual local demographic census).

*The event.* This long-standing festival was recently designated an official annual municipal holiday, in a local political attempt to help this traditional event survive, during a historical period of an increasingly threatened authentic rural spirit. It used to be a relevant date in the town, and today the event is strategically employed to preserve what is perceived as an ancestral local authenticity. This festival is organized, every year, by the local farmers’ association and the council, and is commonly held to ask Saint Isidore, in a commemorative and nostalgic attitude, to look after and protect the harvests. In any case, this event is considered to belong to the place, a (farm) family festival associated with the authenticity and ancestral visions of the locality, and to the older, settled, and long-established rural population. The rituals begin at midday with Mass in the historical town church, which includes a traditional and ancient blessing of the grain. When the Mass is over, a commemorative procession leaves the old church and walks down the two main streets of the traditional village. This is

led by horseback riders, followed by two modern tractors bedecked for the occasion, and, finally, the local farmers follow on foot, passing through the village symbolically – in this moment – sowing wheat for the next harvest, in the municipal square. At lunchtime, free and abundant bread and cheese is handed out, also emblematically, to remember the old sense of community, and barrels of sangria are opened in the central village square. As confirmed by the author's ethnographic fieldwork (Crang 2007), the festival has a huge number of participants. The small numbers of farmers on horseback (20 to 25) and tractors (only two) reflects the weakness, and progressive material decline, of the farming community in the locality, and confers on the event a notable nostalgic spirit; an attempt to remember and revive the village's old and traditional farming history, as explained by one of the local organizers.

*Symbolic contribution to rurality.* Because of the importance of the new service economy's social class in village life – mainly white collar workers of urban and metropolitan origin – the festival serves as a cohesive bridge between its farming (mythical) past and a (new) urban population – in its origin – which prefers to live in the pleasant rural environment. The celebration is a clear expression of the desire of many (urban) people to create a lifestyle which reflects an idealized and nostalgic representation of the more natural and essential rural life of the (recent) past (Cloke, Lapping and Phillips 1996). The celebration (re)articulates the populace (new and traditional) around its common traditions, as a symbolic instrument of social cohesion between the agrarian past and the residential-urban present.

B) *The place.* In other villages, which are strongly affected by depopulation processes, such as Cuevas de Ayllon (18 inhabitants) in Soria (one of the most depopulated Spanish provinces), the event has taken on exceedingly reduced proportions.

*The event.* Despite being moved to the weekend to attract more participants, it has been reduced to a religious event in the village church and a dance at night in a mobile disco, to attract people living in neighbouring villages. The only sign of the event in the village streets is a small poster publicizing the details of the activities. It is a celebration with a few people – 25 to 40 inhabitants (according to the author's visual observations, based on Crang 2007) – in a farming village where the population has gone and the village and the event symbolize the shared agony of this decline. Over the years, the San Isidro celebrations have been dwindling, in both duration and activities, especially in public areas of the village.

*Symbolic contribution to rurality.* In this case, the celebration takes place in only its most essential elements (the religious and the recreational celebration) to proclaim the resistance of a community severely affected by processes of population decline. The celebration expresses the (symbolic) call for the reunification of a spatially dispersed community. It amounts to engaging in traditional activities (the religious celebration and procession) and recreational (urban) activities – the mobile disco – with the purpose of reunification of the old (agrarian) past and the new (mobile) dispersed community. The publicity associated the celebration in “honour” of Saint Isadore with a mobile disco: “tu musikita wapa (lovely music)” (according to the announcement poster of the celebration, 2013). The celebration is a focus

of attraction in the rural county. It constitutes an example of the new local politics of resistance in severely depopulated areas of central Spain.

In Valderredible, a municipality in the north of Spain considered in the pre-selection, the San Isidro celebrations are deeply rooted and constitute an important link among all the villages in the valley, connected by a past and present of planting and livestock farming. Around twenty tractors decorated for the event participate and symbolize the modernization of the countryside and the union of all the farmers in the valley, as the local authorities explain, and which was confirmed by the visual observation of the author (Crang 2007).

In conclusion, one can see, therefore, that the celebrations in honour of the farming community tend to differ depending on the context – including the population size – in which they take place. In small and depopulated villages the celebration is a relevant instrument associated with the permanence of a traditional sense of community and the encounter of dispersed people with their biographical origin in the locality. In more dynamic communities the event is an element of amalgamation of the new local society. In some cases, the event evokes the roots of the village affected by important processes of social change; in others, the agony of a farming society in decline; yet in others, the event expresses the territorial unity of a valley around a dominant planting and livestock farming activity.

#### Case 2: The Sheep-shearing Festival of Riaza (Segovia)

*The context.* Sheep-shearing is a traditional activity in rural Spain that has been gradually fading out, due to the decline in livestock farming and some degree of mechanization of the trade.

*The place.* In recent years, sheep-shearing festivals have started up in an attempt to prevent the loss and disappearance of this activity. One of the most important of these is the Riaza sheep-shearing festival. Riaza is a traditional livestock farming town, which has now been reconverted into a tourist village, with a large number of second homes. This has led to an increase in the population since the 1980s and in 2012 it had around 2,512 inhabitants.

*The festival.* The sheep-shearing festival was the initiative of a local cultural association in Riaza and a couple originally from a family of professional sheep-shearers from Riaza. It commemorates an activity of long-standing tradition in the area, “where the sheep and its products were the driving force of the community” and which gave rise to a “wool washery, a cloth factory and an important migratory drovers’ track – an ancient pathway for the passage of cattle and sheep” – the Real Segoviana (as quoted in the event’s announcement brochure, 2013). The first festival took place in 2006. It is organized by the village sheep shearer’s society and the council. The event consists in shearing 20–25 sheep of different autochthonous breeds using modern and traditional methods. There is also a market that sells homemade products and handicrafts, a small display of traditional machinery, and a dance demonstration to commemorate the traditional way of life. The shearing starts at mid-day and continues until lunchtime, and is attended by around 300–500 people, mainly villagers and weekend visitors (data based on the author’s visual observation and ethnographic

participation, according to Crang 2007). There are stalls that stay open all day selling local produce and handicrafts, which have been set up on the old village allotments, now used as a recreational area. A total of 10–12 sheep shearers participate.

*Symbolic contribution to rurality.* These events try to recover an intangible tradition, which helps people to understand the material heritage of the village, associated with livestock farming: washing the wool, public fountains, tracks, the cloth factory, etc. The educational dimension of this event promotes the historical knowledge and organization of sheep livestock farming. The symbolic revitalization of this traditional activity is used jointly with other folkloric traditions and ancestral rural sports. The results recreate the historical context of livestock farming for the local and visiting populations. The event's publicity builds an image of the human (the shearer) *with* the non-human (the sheep) in a traditional space: the rural "eras". These suggest a vision of the (new) harmony of rurality in the restructuring countryside. The shearing is both a new recreational attraction and an economic activity. This duality engages the rural past with the rural present, more diversified.

Ultimately, the sheep-shearing festivals try to revive, in an emblematic form, old traditions in socially restructured municipalities. These events acquire a different significance depending on the type of municipality. In the smaller ones, they are more authentic and there is more engagement of the village population.

### Case 3: The Visigoth Festival of Guadamur (Toledo)

*The context.* The recreation of mediaeval events in Spain has increased over the past two decades, although historical celebrations have always taken place, such as the famous horse games of Atienza that recreate a historical episode in the town, which took place more than 850 years ago. A unique case of the recovery and recreation of the history of this event takes place in the municipality of Guadamur, closely associated with the disappearance of the Visigoth world and kingdom and the establishment of the Arab world in Spain at the start of the 8th century. The event has been used here as a case study because it takes place in a rural village, relatively close to the city of Toledo, which has experienced important social changes, due to the arrival of new social groups (according to the announcement brochures from 2008 to 2013). The festival gives the village an elitist character, exclusive to the (new) rural community.

*The place.* Guadamur is a rural municipality which had 1,847 inhabitants in 2012, situated 13 kilometres from the provincial capital. Traditionally, the economy was based on farming and the local furniture industry, which enabled it to maintain a stable population. Recently, the municipal population has increased slightly because of the arrival of individuals who have come to live there – new social classes – but who work in the provincial capital, Toledo.

*The festival.* The Guadamur council in Toledo started the Visigoth festival in 2008 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the discovery of the Guarrazar Visigoth Treasure, and 2013 marked the sixth festival (according to the announcement brochure, 2013). The objective is

to contextualize and to make widely known this historical episode, and the Visigoth origins of the population. At the time of the Arab invasion of Spain in 711, the royal crowns and the ornaments of the Visigoth churches were hidden in Guarrazar, in Guadamur. The guards died without revealing the location of the treasures, which were found by people from the village in the 19th century (announcement brochure, 2013).

As my ethnographic study has shown, the celebration centres around the myth of the historical treasure that was found, and a series of activities have been programmed in the “out-standing setting” of the mediaeval castle in the village. Around the castle, the Visigoth world is faithfully recreated and dramatized. The celebration begins with the arrival of the King on horseback to the Visigoth camp in Guadamur, the welcoming of the King and the recreation of a mediaeval tournament, and culminates with the assassination of the King by one of his companions. On this first day of the festival, many of the villagers dress in Visigoth costume and share a traditional supper, to revive one of the most significant episodes in the history of the village. On the next day, there is a market in the same area, a Visigoth camp, and a new King is chosen, followed by traditional dances and a mediaeval tournament. The festivities end with the new king setting out on a journey to (symbolically) visit his possessions.

This historical recreation attempts to evoke the Visigoth history and the Moslem invasion, and its importance in the history of the municipality (quoted from the announcement brochure of 2013, and an interview with a local organizer). There is also a dramatization by the community of its past, in an attempt to strengthen internal bonds. It is a journey in space and time. There are more local participants than there are spectators or visitors, with only 150 spectators at the festival in 2013 (based on the author’s visual observation, 2013).

*Symbolic contribution to rurality.* This event also aims to recall the historical past of the place and involve the entire local community in its development. The place, its history, and (new) populations are all components of an exclusive space: the Visigoth world. The tourism and recreational dimensions are also noteworthy, associated with the proximity of the provincial capital. In this sense, this festival introduces a competitive vision of space between localities in relation to its specific potential touristic image, and promotes an exclusive residential market in the village. In this last sense, the festival is usually used in the council’s marketing of the village.

### **Key Findings Associated with the Case Studies**

The main characteristics and social significance of the events are associated with the direction of the processes of change, their dimensions, and intensity (see Table 2). Localities affected by different processes of (rural) change revitalize different kinds of events.

However, the same kind of event may have a different significance in two localities, as occurs with the celebration of San Isidro: in some cases the event strengthens resistance strategies in places with greatly reduced rural communities. In others, however, it is used to unite a community dominated by newcomers. The preservation of celebrations also helps to strengthen the bonds between neighbouring communities that share a space. The initial agricultural significance is transformed into a territorial-community one, in which there is a huge

participation by the rural community. The villages are empty as everyone goes to the site where the festival is being held.

**Table 2:** The main characteristics of selected events

	Origin	Duration	Purpose	Participants
The patron saint of farmers	Agrarian celebration	One day	Agrarian transformed place	Local farmers, community
Sheep-shearing festival	Rural festival	One-two days	Rurality place	Regional sheep, (the community)
Visigoth festival	Historical commemoration	One-two days	Particular, exclusive rural place	Members of the community

Source: Author’s elaboration

The last two events considered here have been created recently. They try to reclaim traditional trades and activities, which have almost disappeared (the traditional shearing festival), or to commemorate unique historical events relevant to the municipality (the Visigoth festival), for the purposes of tourism or leisure. They also try to recover unique signs of identity exclusive to the area or locality, affected by the arrival of (seasonal) newcomers. The events are carried out by citizens from the localities, with the help of the councils. They attempt to confer an exclusive character to the space, based on immaterial identifying characteristics.

## Conclusion

Rural festivals in (rural) communities can be used, with fluidity, in different, and even divergent, ways and fulfil different purposes (Woods 2011). The selective and differentiated reconstruction, representation, and rearticulating of local and ancient traditions contributes to the new acceptable and adequate configuration of the authenticity of renovated communities, often aiming to re-establish the historic origins and clearly distinctive traits of a particular place, which is threatened by the passage of relative time and the rural environmental context (Paniagua 2012).

The cases studied here suggest, clearly, a differentiated vision of *rurality* in each place, associated with a characteristic event. In the first cases, there is an acting out of the duality of the process of rural change: rural decline or rural restructuring and progressive urbanization. The (re)construction of a tradition may be part of the process of community resistance or a celebration of reunification between newcomers and traditional populations. In the second case, the community uses the event for recover and reintroduce a (lost) traditional livestock activity in a recreational and festive context. The purpose is to reinforce the traditional rurality label for a rural touristic village. The third case involves the use, in local politics, of an event to strengthen the exclusive character – in the national context – of the (rural) place, mainly in connection with its historical origins. The purpose is both to remake a new spirit of community – the new Visigoth – and to construct an exclusive local terrain.

In a general consideration, this paper suggests some relevant theoretical consequences of the new directions of socio-cultural analysis in rural areas. As Hall, Mitchell and Roberts

(2003) indicate, processes of change in rural areas have generated conflict between land uses associated with recreational activities and tourism with other productive activities. This spatial vision, related to new land uses for tourism and leisure, has resulted in a symbolic and mythical utilization of rurality in the events and festivities of rural villages. This spatial view of tourism is often associated with conflicts in land use, and permits the symbolic and mythical integration of the traditional rurality in new socioeconomic contexts, affected by processes of structural change (as in cases 1, 2 and 3 analyzed in this paper). Festivals and rural events appear in a variety of forms (Gibson and Connell 2011), and in each case are adapted to the dominant process of rural change. This includes the religious celebrations, which tend to have a more stable format (case 1). Hence, resistance strategies can be developed by reduced rural communities (case 1B) and by rural villages affected by processes of socioeconomic change and the arrival of new residents (cases 1A and 3). In this way, the format of events and festivals can be adapted to the (new) rurality within a historical perspective (case 3).

However, (new) festivals are also used to recover a lost rurality, and can confer upon the rural place an unusual, unique, and exclusive character. Newcomers use the mythical nature of rurality, helping to produce or reinvent the lost rural community. This is a new community with symbolic components based on ancient beliefs or customs, but with a new social composition and use of the space. A space which has often (almost completely) lost its ancient agricultural or livestock farming functionality. Therefore, similar celebrations can appear in spatial contexts affected by very different processes of change: extra metropolitan communities, depopulated communities, farming communities, rural communities dominated by newcomers, and rural communities dominated by seasonal newcomers.

The festival, or rural event, is detached from the socio-spatial reality it intends to represent. The purpose of these celebrations is no longer to give thanks, or to ask, for a good harvest or sufficient rain. They are now organized in an attempt to reunite the new community around a new concept of the rural place and an “acceptable rurality”.

Finally, in the context of the tourism literature, apart from the well-established notion that festivals establish new identities for old traditions, this paper suggests the relevance of rural events and festivals in the (re)negotiation of the transition from a traditional rural society to a (new) more pluralistic rural society based on the consumptive perspective of space.

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